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COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN AMERICA

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Contents

Chapter One

Introduction: The Meanings of Community

The notion of community has been central to the analysis of social and political life at least since Plato and Aristotle inquired into the character of the Greek polis, but the concept as found in modern scholarship is of more recent origin. The problem of community was one of the central concerns of the nineteenth-century social thinkers who were among the founders of sociology in Europe and the United States. Modernity, urbanization, and capitalism all seemed to threaten traditional patterns of social life. As they observed these processes, social analysts and philosophers began to discuss the problem of community in a way that raised a historical issue. How complete was the break with the past? What was the nature of that break? What form, if any, might community take under these radically new social circumstances? This concern, needless to say, has continued unabated into our own time, inside and outside of academic circles.

In both popular and academic discourse, the word *community* has quite positive connotations that are associated with visions of the good life. Yet there is, and always has been, an undercurrent of fear associated with the idea of community. Modern Americans fear that urbanization and modernization have destroyed the community that earlier shaped the lives of men and women, particularly in the

small towns of the American past. Many popular discussions of alienation, anomie, and other supposed evils of modern urban life are extensions of this general worry about community. These popular concerns have been abetted, if not actually stimulated, by the writings of historians and sociologists that are laced with references to the "erosion," or the "decline," or the "breakup," or the "eclipse" of community under the impact of urbanization and modernization.

Has modern life in fact brought such a collapse? Can a historical perspective help us better to define our present situation? The historian can say definitely that if community is defined as a colonial New England town—and it frequently is defined that way—then the prospect of community today is indeed dim. Yet the historian should also note that to define community in such static terms is to ignore the process of history. Such a definition, moreover, tends to confuse a particular manifestation of community with its essence; its effect is to preclude the possibility of finding community in other times and places. Historical inquiry may enable us to clarify the precise character of the contemporary problem of community. In working toward this insight, the first task is the formulation of a definition of community that can accommodate historical change.

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Most thinking about community, whether in academic social science or in popular attitudes, embodies a curious paradox. Statements about community assume a very definite past, but they are seldom genuinely historical in character. There is in such observations hardly any sense of the changing configurations of community over the course of American or European history. Very little attention is devoted to a consideration of the details of the actual processes of change in the structure and meaning of community over time. Instead a rather simple and direct relationship between past and present is assumed: In the past, there was community; in the present it has been (or is being) lost. Social change, for modern Americans, has come to mean the destruction of community. Perhaps one might find this process regrettable, but it is assumed nonetheless to be inevitable.

Within this rather closed logic of social explanation, there is really very little space for historical inquiry. By supplying an a priori answer to the problem of social change and community, this logic effectively defeats historical curiosity. Unfortunately, or fortunately, the processes of history are more complicated than these assumptions allow. Indeed, the more one tries to describe community in the present or in the past, the more important a historical consideration of the problem seems. When social analysts ignore the historical dimension, the result is a simplification and schematization of social change that weakens the explanatory power of even the most sophisticated theory. Any understanding of the fate of community in America today or at any time in the past depends upon an expansion of social theory to incorporate the concrete data of historical change into social explanation. For this to happen, however, we need a more complex and historically grounded account than we presently have of the American experience of community over a long period of time.

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The concept of community is, according to a recent historian of sociological theory, "the most fundamental and far-reaching of sociology's unit-ideas,"[1] yet it is also one of the most difficult to define. When a scholar undertook in 1955 to inspect and compare the definitions of community used in the literature of the social sciences, he found no fewer than ninety-four meanings given to the term.[2]

The most common sociological definitions used today tend to focus on a community as an aggregate of people who share a common interest in a particular locality. Territorially based social organizations and social activity thus define a community. A community is assumed to be a localized or microcosmic example of the larger

1. Robert Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic, 1966), p. 47.
2. George A. Hillery, Jr., "Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement," RS, 20 (1955): 118.

society.[3] The literature is not precise about the size of this territory. Apparently, it can range from a neighborhood, to a town, to a medium-sized city. In fact, there is no logical bar to making reference to New York City as a community. Although this definition has produced some very useful research, particularly in respect to locality-based social welfare organizations, the notion of New York City, or any other whole city in modern America, constituting a single community makes one pause.

Americans seem to have something else in mind when they wistfully recall or assume a past made up of small-town communities. This social memory has a geographic referent, the town, but it is clear from the many layers of emotional meaning attached to the word *community* that the concept means more than a place or local activity. There is an expectation of a special quality of human relationship in a community, and it is this experiential dimension that is crucial to its definition. Community, then, can be defined better as an experience than as a place. As simply as possible, community is where community happens.

Of course, a locality can be this kind of community. In colonial America, the town was a container of such communal relations, but there are other contexts for community besides the town and other territorial units. Territorially based interaction represents only one pattern of community, a pattern that becomes less and less evident over the course of American history. A preoccupation with territory thus ultimately confuses our understanding of community.

Even though community has been torn from its territorial mooring over the past three centuries of American history, the experience of community did not come to an end with this transformation in American social organization. To make this argument is not to deny the possibility of fundamental changes in the meaning and signifi-

3. For the best examples of this dominant approach to community studies, see Roland Warren, *The Community in America* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963); Albert J. Reiss, "Some Sociological Issues about American Communities," in *American Sociology*, ed. Talcott Parsons (New York: Basic, 1968), pp. 66–74; Talcott Parsons, *Structure and Process in Modern Societies* (New York: Free Press, 1960), pp. 250–279; and Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, *Culture and Community* (New York: Harcourt, 1965).

cance of community for Americans; rather it is a way of documenting these changes by working toward a historically relevant and usable definition of community.

Community, which has taken many structural forms in the past, is best defined as a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds.[4] This network, or what Kai T. Erikson refers to as the "human surround," is the essence of community, and it may or may not be coterminous with a specific, contiguous territory.[5] The New England town was a community, but it was not a definition of community. Similarly, a family, a neighborhood, a group of friends, or a class can be a community without providing a definition of the concept. One must keep an open stance toward the various structural forms that might contain community. A definition of community must, therefore, be independent of particular structures.

A community involves a limited number of people in a somewhat restricted social space or network held together by shared understandings and a sense of obligation. Relationships are close, often intimate, and usually face to face. Individuals are bound together by affective or emotional ties rather than by a perception of individual self-interest. There is a "we-ness" in a community; one is a

4. In the following preliminary definition, only direct quotations have specific citations. The position outlined in the next few paragraphs owes most to the following works: Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, trans. Charles P. Loomis (New York: Harper, 1963); Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1964); Robert M. MacIver, *Community: A Sociological Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1936); Robert Redfield, *The Little Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1955); Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (New York: Free Press, 1951); idem, *Structure and Process in Modern Societies*; Roland Warren, ed., *Perspectives on the American Community* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966); Rene König, *The Community* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968); Charles Tilly, *An Urban World* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974); Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); idem, *The Social Bond* (New York: Random House, 1970); idem, *The Sociological Tradition*; Wilson Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1973); and Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949).

5. See Kai T. Erikson, *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), esp. Introduction and pt. III.

member. Sense of self and of community may be difficult to distinguish. In its deepest sense, a community is a communion. Martin Buber captured this quality when he wrote: "A real community need not consist of people who are perpetually together; but it must consist of people who, precisely because they are comrades, have mutual access to one another and are ready for one another."[6]

Men and women in a community share a fairly wide spectrum of their lives, though not necessarily everything. A community is people who, in the words of Robert MacIver, "share, not this or that particular interest, but a whole set of interests wide enough and complete enough to include their lives."[7] Hence communal relationships are diffuse in their concerns. They are not segmental relationships, and they are not oriented to narrow or specific ends. While a community is part of broader social aggregates, it remains a distinct social grouping. Far from being a microcosm of the whole society, it has a special quality that may result in tension with larger social aggregates. One's network of community, although it may not supply all the warmth and emotional support one needs, is an elemental fact of one's emotional life.

The solidarity that characterizes communities does not mean, however, that all is unity and harmony within. Many commentators err, I think, by insisting that absence of conflict be a part of the definition of community. Communal conflict, like the family conflict we all know, is real, though it differs from, say, market competition, in being mediated by emotional bonds.[8]

A community is an end in itself: It may offer aid or advantage to its members, but its value is basically intrinsic to its own existence. It does not exist to serve external or instrumental purposes. This

6. Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, p. 145.
7. Robert M. MacIver, *Society: Its Structure and Changes* (London: Long and Smith, 1932), pp. 9–10.
8. Weber saw community as the "antithesis of conflict" (Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, p. 137). Charles H. Cooley, however, admitted that conflict existed in what he called "primary groups" and that the competition, passions, and conflicts that emerged in these groups were "socialized by sympathy" (Charles H. Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* [New York: Scribner's, 1909], p. 23).

characteristic of community is related to a particular kind of social behavior identified by Max Weber as distinctively communal. He labeled a social relationship "communal" if its "orientation of social action . . . is based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together." He contrasted this with "associative" relationships, characteristic of modern political and economic institutions, that are based upon rational calculation of self-interest.[9]

No contemporary sociologist has written more frequently or more perceptively on community than Robert Nisbet. Perhaps it is therefore appropriate to conclude this preliminary definition with a quotation from him.

> Community is founded on man conceived in his wholeness rather than in one or another of the roles, taken separately, that he may hold in a social order. It draws its psychological strength from levels of motivation deeper than those of mere volition or interest. . . . Community is a fusion of feeling and thought, of tradition and commitment, of membership and volition. . . . Its archetype, both historically and symbolically, is the family, and in almost every type of genuine community the nomenclature of family is prominent.[10]

This definition, which harks back to the work of the classic nineteenth-century sociologists of community, captures an important dimension of popular attitudes, but it does not, as I have already noted, often turn up in the research reported today under the rubric of community sociology. Such bonds do not ordinarily characterize local social organization, so many sociologists, encouraged by aspects of modern social theory discussed in the next chapter, have assumed that modernization and urbanization have rendered this sort of community a thing of the past. This assumption has allowed research on locality-based action to be called "community sociology." Inasmuch as the local social relationships uncovered by this research are not community in the traditional sense, sociologists have developed a new term for these friendly but essentially casual

9. Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, p. 136.
10. Nisbet, *Sociological Tradition*, pp. 47–48.

relationships: *community of limited liability*. Of course, there is nothing inappropriate about the development of this academic specialty that studies local life, but there is a curious, perhaps even pernicious, side effect. The identification of community with locality and communal experiences with rather casual associations has quietly redefined community in a way that puts it at odds with its historical and popular meaning.[11] This academic definition drains the concept of the very qualities that give the notion of community cultural, as opposed to merely organizational, significance.

The approach to community most often found in community sociology tends to divert attention away from the bonds of mutuality and sentiment that historically define the experience of community. Attention is instead focused on localities. This orientation is in part the product of a historical association dating from the 1920s linking community studies and rural sociology. Within the context of this sociological tradition, rural towns and farm neighborhoods were studied as communities. The assumed connection of rural towns with community was often supported by social experience, and it was universally compatible with the small town mythology that has been so influential in American history. But the assimilation of rural sociology into community sociology misdirected scholarship to a consideration of territory, rather than to the experience of community, as the object of sociological inquiry.

Because, as Kenneth Burke has observed, "A way of seeing is always a way of not seeing," this territorial image of community has consequences. It makes it difficult to see the networks of experience that in fact define community. If, by contrast, one assumes a different angle of vision that takes communal networks where one finds them, whatever their territorial arrangement, the chances of understanding the place of community in modern society and in American history are much enhanced. My intention is to suggest such new ways of seeing community.

11. On the notion of a locality-based community of limited liability, see Morris Janowitz, *The Community Press in an Urban Setting*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967). For a slightly broader usage, derived in part from the work of Janowitz, see Scott Greer, *The Urbane View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

Once the notion of community is understood as a social network characterized by a distinctive kind of human interaction, it becomes possible to take community seriously as a historical phenomenon. One can talk about change without being trapped by the logic of collapse, and a number of interesting historical and sociological questions then open up. What structural forms have contained the experience of community in American history? How long and in what sense was the town a community? What form or forms does community take when the town no longer provides the primary context for community? What is the relationship of community to political and economic institutions? How do those relationships change with large-scale transformations in the structure of society?

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My method of pursuing these and similar questions has been consciously interdisciplinary. Historical scholarship is used as a fulcrum for critical analysis of social theory, while my historical narrative is explicitly attentive to theory. If, as I have indicated, much thinking about community is shaped by a paradigm of social change that is fundamentally ahistorical, I have tried to link theory and history more effectively. In line with Michael Katz's recent call to social historians, I am seeking to "formulate questions that will guide research in ways not only theoretically fruitful but historically appropriate."[12] The major theoretical fruit of this effort, if I have succeeded, is a historically grounded concept of community, while its historical contribution is an image of the past that enables us to see new dimensions of community and patterns of change in the experience of community.

The argument on the following pages is speculative and tentative. The evidence offered is illustrative and suggestive rather than definitive. It is an essay in hypothetical history, after the fashion of Bernard Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society*.[13] My goal has been to use what we know about community in order to

12. Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1975), p. 9.
13. Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (New York: Random House, Vintage, 1960).

develop new perspectives that will expand our knowledge of community in ways that can stimulate new understandings of the place of community in the past and present.

One observation concerning the historical generalizations I have made about Americans seems appropriate here. My references are to the vast majority of Americans who lived in towns, rather than to the small minority who lived in large cities. As late as 1870, the point where I begin referring to metropolitan experiences, there were only twenty-five places with a population of fifty thousand or more. Fewer than one-in-four Americans lived in places of twenty-five hundred or more. I hope, moreover, that my acknowledgments of possible alternative patterns of life deriving from class position or cultural heritage will protect me from the charge of homogenizing the past, for I have tried, admittedly, to describe modal patterns. Given the constraints of space, and the scholarship available, it is impossible to handle this problem otherwise. Readers, I expect, will easily see how my argument would apply to aspects of our past not specifically considered here.

This study emphasizes the changes in the structure of social relations much more than the changes in meaning that people gave to these structures. Wherever possible, I have suggested, even if in rather broad terms, these shifts in consciousness. The interaction of belief and social structure is very complex, however; it can be understood, if at all, only through detailed studies impossible in a brief book attempting to fill a broad canvas. In a subsequent study I plan to undertake such a cultural history. I note this problem here so that the reader will not infer from the emphasis in what follows that structural matters constitute the whole, or even the most important part, of the study of community in the past.

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Briefly, I develop my argument as follows. In Chapter 2, I consider aspects of the development of American social theory in the twentieth century, an appropriate starting point because this theory has largely shaped our sense of the relationship of community to the processes of social change in the past. After laying out the basic

logic of this theory, I argue that its most common formulations, the ones best known to historians, have serious limitations as a guide to the understanding of community in American history or, for that matter, in the present. In contrast, by returning to the nineteenth-century origins of this theory, particularly to Ferdinand Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft* typology, one finds a surprising complexity and sensitivity to actual historical processes that is absent in many modern theories that derive from the work of Tönnies. It is possible, I propose, to recover these qualities and give them their due in modern social theory in a way that opens up fruitful lines of historical and sociological investigation.

With this theoretical work accomplished, I turn in Chapter 3 to the historiography and history of community in America. Much of the current historiography has weaknesses similar to those found in modern social theory, but reformulation is possible, and it becomes the task of this chapter. The theoretical orientation developed in Chapter 2 provides a perspective from which to sketch a history of the changing structure and meaning of community over a long period of time, from 1600 to 1900, in a way that opens up new and interesting historical questions about community while providing historical detail that adds richness to the theory. Chapter 4 builds upon this overview, or macroanalysis, of the changing place of community in American society, but the focus shifts to the individual and the family unit in my attempt to locate the various contexts of community available to the people within the social networks that provide the social texture of their lives. The epilog offers some observations on how the history and theories of community offered here relate to the search for community in contemporary America.

Chapter Two

Social Theory and the Problem of Community

Whether used as an analytical device for classifying social aggregates or as a normative judgment on social life, the concept of community never stands alone.[1] Rather, it is consistently used as one pole of a typology of social forms that implicitly or explicitly contrasts communal with noncommunal patterns of life, or more generally, premodern with modern society. This contrasting technique of defining modern society in relation to what went before dates back at least to the Renaissance,[2] but during the nineteenth century, coincident with the emergence of sociology, the technique was turned explicitly to the problem of explaining the social changes associated with urbanization and industrialization.

Within this intellectual tradition, urbanization is treated, virtually by definition, as disruptive of communal patterns of social life.[3] History from this perspective unfolds an inevitable social thesis: Social unity is shattered and communal solidarities are re-

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1. This problem of usage is considered by Colin Bell and Howard Newby, *Community Studies* (New York: Praeger, 1972), chaps. 1–2.

2. See Frederick J. Teggart, *Theory of History* (New Haven: Yale University, 1925), chap. 8.

3. The definition of urbanization used here is a general one; many would equate it with modernization, as I essentially do in the following discussion. Charles Tilly expresses what I have in mind when he writes: "Urbanization implies changes . . . that follow from the increased involvement of the members of rural communities in sets of activities, norms, and social relationships that reach beyond the limits of their own localities" (Tilly, *The Vendée* [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1976], pp. 11–12).

placed with associations based upon interest. Conventional theory and, for that matter, much Marxist analysis find their underlying structure in this logic. The result is often an approach to social change that is fundamentally ahistorical. Although sociology has from its inception taken on the task of explaining a historical problem—the emergence of modern urban and industrial society—its sense of the past is made up of ideal types linked only by logical necessity. This logic conveniently supplies a history without obligating the theorist to analyze structural change as a temporally and culturally situated process.[4] The manner in which this logic eludes engagement with history warrants detailed consideration.

Typological Theories of Social Change

It is difficult to establish the precise beginnings of this tradition of sociological thought. Most histories of social theory, however, credit Sir Henry Maine with first formulating contrasting ideal types as a device for studying social change. Maine undoubtedly deserves the credit he has been given; his distinction between societies based upon "status" and those based upon "contract" was systematically worked out and imaginatively applied to the historical record. Yet when Maine wrote in his classic *Ancient Law* (1861) that "the movement of the progressive societies has hitherto been a movement *from Status to Contract*,"[5] his concern was less with the new pattern of *social* relationships that had emerged in the nineteenth century than with questions of law and political economy. His argument that modernity brought a shift in the bases of social organization from kinship, status, and joint property rights to territory, contract, and individual rights was a way of reading history so that the legal and economic ideas of liberal capitalism identified with Victorian England could be linked to and justified by the idea of progress.[6]

4. Philip Abrams, "The Sense of the Past and the Origins of Sociology," *PP*, no. 55 (1972), p. 20.
5. Henry Maine, *Ancient Law*, 10th ed., cheap ed. (London: Murray, 1905), p. 151.
6. This was obvious to the Progressive intellectual Mary Parker Follett who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in arguing for a more collectivist political

Maine's *Ancient Law* and its sequel, *Village Communities in the East and West* (1871), found wide readership, and his concept of societal evolution was enormously influential. Eventually it was taken up by Ferdinand Tönnies, a young German scholar who was seeking to develop sociological concepts that would explain the changes in social relations that were associated with capitalism and the urbanization of society. Tönnies recognized in this typology analytic possibilities that offered a way of giving sociological form to Karl Marx's depiction of social change in the urban-industrial era as a process whereby "natural relationships" were dissolved "into money relationships."[7] In 1887, at the age of thirty-two, Tönnies offered his own ideal types when he published *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. With this publication, Tönnies introduced into the sociological literature a typology that has proven to be one of the discipline's most enduring and fruitful concepts for studying social change.

There are no exact English equivalents for *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft*, but they can be translated roughly as "community" and "society." Tönnies's definition of *Gemeinschaft* corresponds to the historical and popular notion of community; he offered family, kinship groups, friendship networks, and neighborhoods as examples of *Gemeinschaft* patterns of group solidarity. *Gemeinschaft*, he wrote, is characterized by "intimate, private, and exclusive living together." *Gesellschaft*, which he identified with the city, is an "artificial construction of an aggregate of human beings," characterized by competition and impersonality. Summing up the difference between these two forms of social relationships, he observed that in *Gemeinschaft*, people "remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in *Gesellschaft* they are essentially

economy, contended that society had already gone from "status to contract" and was beginning to move from "contract to community." See Follett, *The New State* (New York: Longman's, 1920), p. 125.
7. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, ed. R. Pascal (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 57. For the influence of Maine, see Louis Wirth, "The Sociology of Ferdinand Tönnies," *AJS*, 32 (1926): 416.

separated in spite of all uniting factors."[8] Capitalist industrial production and the urbanization of society, he thought, involved an evolution from a predominantly *Gemeinschaft* pattern of social relations to one dominated by *Gesellschaft*.

Since Tönnies and Maine wrote, similar dichotomies, with different terminology, have been common in sociological thinking concerned with the urbanization and modernization of societies. Emile Durkheim referred to the shift from "mechanical solidarity" based upon psychological consensus to "organic solidarity" founded upon the interdependence resulting from the division of labor in modern urban society. Among Americans, Charles Horton Cooley observed early in the twentieth century that urban society is characterized by impersonal "secondary" relationships that are analytically distinct from the "primary," or face-to-face, relationships of the small village or the family. More recently, Robert Redfield developed a typological distinction between "folk" and "urban" cultures.[9]

These dichotomies in their various forms, often subsumed under the general rubric of the community-society continuum, became central to the study of community in urbanizing societies.[10] The turn-of-the-century founders of the academic discipline of sociology in the United States were particularly interested in understanding how the nation's burgeoning cities differed as social settings from the small towns of American tradition and, in most cases, of their own childhoods.[11] Their "programmatic question," as a recent critic has put it, echoed that of their European predecessors: "How can the moral order of society be maintained and the integration of its

8. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, trans. Charles P. Loomis (New York: Harper, 1963), pp. 33, 64, 65.

9. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1933); Charles H. Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Scribner's, 1909), chap. 3; and Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1941).

10. They are all discussed under this rubric in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills, 17 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

11. On the small-town origins of early American sociologists, see Roscoe Hinkle and Gisela Hinkle, *The Development of Modern Sociology* (New York: Random House, 1954), pp. 3, 17n.

members achieved within a highly differentiated and technological social structure?" It was "the problem of community in the New Age."[12]

As they probed the consequences of urbanization for community life as small-town Americans had known it, these scholars found Tönnies's conceptual framework useful. Identifying gemeinschaft with a somewhat idealized image of the small town, as Tönnies himself often did, American sociologists recognized what Tönnies defined as gesellschaft in New York, Chicago, and many lesser cities. The typological approach seemed to offer insight into the social transformation they were living through.[13] Robert Park, one of the early members of the sociology department at the University of Chicago and a founder of urban sociology, observed, for example, that the diverse terminology used to express the community–society continuum revealed that the concept was as yet unrefined, but he insisted that "the differences are not important. What is important is that these different men looking at the phenomenon from quite different points of view have all fallen upon the same distinction. That indicates at least that the distinction is a fundamental one."[14]

This tradition of urban theory culminates, in conventional accounts,[15] in the comprehensive statement on urban and community life contained in Louis Wirth's classic essay, "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (1938).[16] The typological approach developed by Tönnies

12. Claude S. Fischer, "The Study of Urban Community and Personality," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1975, pp. 67–68.

13. On the place of gemeinschaft–gesellschaft theory in twentieth-century sociology, see Edward Shils, "The Contemplation of Society in America," in *Paths of American Thought*, ed. Morton White and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), pp. 397–400; and Werner J. Cahnman, "Toennies in America," *HT*, 16 (1977), 147–167. For a brief discussion of its use at Chicago, see Robert E. L. Faris, *Chicago Sociology, 1920–1932* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1967), pp. 43–48.

14. Quoted in Carle C. Zimmerman, *The Changing Community* (New York: Harper, 1938), p. 81.

15. For such an account, see Brian J. L. Berry, *The Human Consequences of Urbanization* (New York: St. Martin's, 1973).

16. Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," *AJS*, 44 (1938): 1–24; reprinted in Albert Reiss, Jr., ed., *Louis Wirth on Cities and Social Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964), pp. 60–83.

provides the organizing framework for the essay.[17] At the outset, Wirth announced his perspective: He was going to view "urban-industrial and rural-folk society as ideal types of communities."[18] He then proceeded in the body of the essay to portray urbanization as a powerful social force modifying social relations in ways compatible with Tönnies's theory. Under the impact of the demographic variables he identified with urbanization (population, density, and heterogeneity), Wirth argued that communal ways broke down and were replaced by a new pattern of life that Tönnies had called Gesellschaft and that Wirth labeled "urbanism."

Under urban conditions, Wirth explained, social relations are "impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental." Functional roles are highly specialized and interdependent. "The distinctive features of the urban mode of life," Wirth insisted, are "the substitution of secondary for primary contacts, the weakening of bonds of kinship, and the declining social significance of the family, the disappearance of the neighborhood, and the undermining of the traditional basis of social solidarity." With this collapse of gemeinschaft, Wirth supposed that "competition and formal control mechanisms [would have to] furnish the substitute for the bonds of solidarity that are relied upon to hold a folk society together." Finally, he noted a "levelling influence" characteristic of urbanism. With the emergence of a common urban way of life, differences in life-styles based upon distinctive subcultures and preurban heritages (e.g., ethnic groupings) might be expected eventually to disappear.[19]

Wirth's essay is now nearly forty years old, yet no alternative theory has seriously challenged its ascendancy among students of community and urban life. Claude S. Fischer, in a recent assessment of community research in the social sciences, concludes that "Wirth's presentation remains the most explicit, seminal, and comprehensive framework for the study of Community and personality.

17. It might be noted that Wirth's first scholarly publication was a sympathetic assessment of the sociology of Ferdinand Tönnies (Wirth, "Sociology of Ferdinand Tönnies").
18. Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," in Reiss, p. 62.
19. Ibid., pp. 71, 79–80, 70, 76.

Though 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' has been extensively criticized, no other theory comprehending the nature of urban life has been advanced which is as significant, as compelling, and as consonant with both Western thought and classical sociology."[20]

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The other major contemporary theory deriving from the gemeinschaft–gesellschaft typology is identified with Talcott Parsons. His famous "pattern variables" are derived from Tönnies's formulation.[21] What Parsons did, however, was to expand Tönnies's single Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft dichotomy into four parallel dichotomies:[22]

Affectivity versus affective neutrality
Particularism versus universalism
Ascription (quality) versus achievement (performance)
Diffuseness versus specificity

Parsons argues that in any situation calling for "social action" the "actor" must decide which of the two "orientations" present in each of these dichotomies is an appropriate basis for acting. For example, when greeting one's mother at a holiday reunion, an expression of affectivity may be appropriate, but when introducing oneself at the Internal Revenue Service office during a tax audit, affective neutrality may be in order. In every situation, then, the individual must decide whether his or her orientation to a particular other will be affectively neutral or not; whether to relate in terms of universalistic criteria or in terms of a particular or special relationship that may exist; whether to accept ascriptive bases of status, qualities essentially products of birth (e.g., family background or racial identifica-

20. Fischer, "Study of Urban Community," p. 72.
21. On the close association of this formulation with Tönnies's typology, see Talcott Parsons, Robert Bales, and Edward Shils, Working Papers in the Theory of Action (New York: Free Press, 1953), pp. 207n–208n. See also Marion Levy, Jr., Modernization and the Structure of Societies (Princeton: Princeton University, 1966), p. 136n.
22. In early formulations, Parsons had five dichotomies. The fifth was self-orientation versus collectivity orientation.

tion), or to accept achievement (e.g., professional certification) as the only basis of status; and, finally, whether to respond diffusely to the whole person (as to a spouse) or to that specific portion of the total person that is expressed through some specialized functional role (as to a store clerk).[23]

When Parsons explains these pattern variables, they simply define alternative orientations to social action available in every social situation. They do not suggest, as Maine's dichotomy explicitly did, anything about the direction of historical change. Yet when Parsons and his followers apply the pattern variables to the analysis of social change, the evolutionary assumptions underlying the typological approach become apparent.[24] Here the dichotomies do not stand as the characteristic dilemmas of modern society; rather, they stand as ideal types representing stages of historical evolution. All of the orientations in the left-hand column of the list of Parsons's dichotomies are identified with "traditional" or communal orientations to social action, whereas those in the right-hand column represent a modern orientation. When Parsons first devised the scheme, he was attempting to explain the distinctive role and cultural style of professionals in American society, so his studies involved him in an examination of the interplay of the two orientations within society.[25] Gradually, however, his attention shifted from considerations of individuals and groups within a society to considerations of whole societies and whether their value systems were characterized by affectivity, particularism, ascription, and diffuseness or by affective neutrality, universalism, achievement, and specificity.[26]

23. See Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (New York: Free Press, 1951), pp. 58–77; Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, *Toward a General Theory of Action* (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 76–88; and Talcott Parsons, "Pattern Variables Revisited: A Response to Robert Dubin," *ASR*, 25 (1960): 467–483.

24. On this and the shift in Parsons's interests noted at the end of the paragraph, see the brief discussion in Robert Nisbet, *Social Change and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 262–266.

25. See Talcott Parsons, "The Professions and the Social Structure," *Social Forces*, 17 (1939): 466–467.

26. For reasons that should become apparent as the discussion progresses and in the following chapters, the theory is more fruitful when used to investigate specific groups or institutions within the larger society than when used in discussions of whole societies. Parsons's investigations of the family and the professions are more interesting, for example, than his more general discussions of nation-size social systems.

The increased interest in developing nations in the years following World War II encouraged Parsons and other American social scientists to use the pattern variables as indexes for comparing the relative "modernity" of developing nations.[27] These psychological traits were associated with the movement from simple to more complex and differentiated social systems. As in Wirth's theory, specific social-psychological patterns were correlated with the process of specialization and the division of labor. This process of change was explained by Parsons in terms of the functional requirements of the structure or social system itself. According to this so-called structural-functional approach, the pattern of social change can be deduced logically from the structure itself, independent of time, place, or context; independent, in short, of history.

The major theoretical fruit of this endeavor was the development of a comprehensive theory of social change based upon the traditional–modern dichotomy initially formulated by Tönnies.[28] Modernization theory, as this approach to comparative history came to be called, emerged as the dominant explanation of societal change during the 1960s. According to its logic, the progressive movement of history involved the replacement of community and communal ways (those orientations labeled by Parsons ascriptive, affective, particularistic, and diffuse) by modern ways. Historians going to the social sciences in the hope of enriching their stock of conceptual tools usually picked up one or another version of this theory. Few of these historians, however, sought to test the theory with historical materials; instead they rather mechanically inserted historical data into the framework supplied by the essentially ahistorical logic of change offered by modernization theory.[29]

27. For Parsons's emerging interest in total societies, see Parsons, *Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966). See also Shils, "Contemplation of Society in America," p. 407.

28. On this explicit derivation, see the statement by Levy, *Modernization and the Structure of Societies*, pp. 135–136.

29. For a recent effort to direct historians to Parsons, see Louis Galambos, "Parsonian Sociology and Post-Progressive History," *Social Science Quarterly*, 50 (1969): 25–45. Two ambitious attempts at historical synthesis based on modernization theory are Cyril E. Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization* (New York: Harper, 1967), and Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600–1865* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976).

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In respect to community and social change, then, one finds remarkable agreement between the two dominant social theories of contemporary American social science. Both are essentially linear or evolutionary models of societal change in which community is replaced by association and formal organization. They are distinguished from one another only by the effort of urban theory to relate the shift from gemeinschaft to gesellschaft to changes in human settlement patterns, yet even here, Wirth was explicit in pointing out that the changes he associated with urbanism extended out beyond the compact city to transform the whole society.[30] This convergence of the two theories should not, perhaps, be surprising. Both theories derive from the *Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft* distinction formulated by Tönnies. Indeed, they might plausibly be interpreted as domestic and foreign policy versions of the same sociological idea.

For all their logical coherence and rhetorical power, however, these formulations of social theory leave many social scientists uneasy. Tom Bottomore, for example, has recently pointed out that sociologists are repeatedly surprised by the continuing importance of traditional values and communal bonds among the peoples of developing nations and by the persistence of significant kinship and other primary groupings in modern urban society.[31] Gerhard Lenski's observation on the gap between theory and the survey data he collected for Detroit is typical in form as well as in content:

> What is startling about our present study is the finding that communalism survives, and even thrives, in the heart of the modern metropolis, though admittedly in a guise which makes its recognition difficult for those accustomed to associating communalism with geographically isolated and numerically small populations.[32]

30. See Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," p. 64.

31. Tom Bottomore, *Sociology: A Guide to Problems and Literature* (New York: Random House, Vintage, 1972), p. 105.

32. Gerhard Lenski, *The Religious Factor: A Sociological Study of Religion's Impact on Politics, Economy, and Family Life*, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Anchor, 1963), p. 328.

The purpose of a social theory or a metaphor of social change is to provide manageable conceptual handles that bring enough order to the chaos of social experience to enable us to grasp the actual structure of society. It is evident that the most common formulations of Tönnies's theory in the middle of the twentieth century fail us in this respect. The cause of this failure is related, at least in part, to the schism that has developed between sociology and history during recent decades. These theories lack a firm attachment to the historical record of social change over the course of American history and as a result, offer a logic of history rather than a historically grounded account of social change.

Evidence, Logic, Theory

Empirical evidence contrary to Wirth's hypothesis has been building up for decades. As early as 1952, Oscar Lewis, in an article titled "Urbanization without Breakdown," reported that in his study of social life in a Mexican city he found traditional forms of solidarity persisting. He speculated, moreover, that the family might even be strengthened, or made more rather than less significant, during the urbanization process. Lewis also raised another important issue: the possibility that Wirth's theory was culture bound and thereby valid only for Western Europe and the United States. The Mexican data, according to Lewis, suggested that "urbanization is not a simple, unitary, universally similar process, but that it assumes different forms and meanings depending upon the prevailing historic, economic, social, and cultural conditions." A few years later, Richard Morse, a historian, assembled historical and sociological evidence from a broader range of Latin American societies in order to make the same point. He did not find in Latin American cities that primary relations and personalistic forms of social cohesion were being replaced by voluntary associations and rationalistic and depersonalized forms of social organization.[33]

If Wirth's theory was not a universal explanation capable of ex-

33. Oscar Lewis, "Urbanization without Breakdown," *The Scientific Monthly*, 75 (1952): 39; Richard Morse, "Latin American Cities: Aspects of Function and Structure," *CSSH*, 4 (1959): 473–493.

plaining urbanization in all cultures, was it able to describe the process accurately in the United States alone? Here, too, contradictory evidence began to emerge beginning in the 1950s. Perhaps the first important empirical challenge was Donald Foley's discovery in 1952 of "neighborly" bonds in a Rochester, New York, residential district, where, it turned out, urban life had not totally assumed the qualities that Wirth identified with urbanism.[34] Over the years, social surveys undertaken by Wendell Bell, Scott Greer, Morris Janowitz, and others revealed that social relationships that might be communal remained important even in the largest cities.[35] Eugene Litwack, Marvin Sussman, and others demonstrated that the nuclear family was neither isolated nor insignificant in modern urban life; Herbert Gans, Gerald Suttles, Joe Feagin, Carol Stack, and Marc Fried showed that ethnic, class, and racial neighborhoods persisted in the city and that primary relationships provided the social foundation for them.[36] Claude Fischer has suggested that cultural

34. Donald L. Foley, *Neighbors or Urbanites? The Study of a Rochester Residential District,* University of Rochester Studies of Metropolitan Rochester, no. 2 (Rochester, N.Y., 1952).

35. I emphasize that they *might* be communal because these scholars, although they refer to ties of community, seem to lump together a rather wide range of relationships, from casual to intimate, as evidence contrary to Wirth. Some of the relationships they have uncovered do, however, seem to fit my rather restrictive definition of community. See Wendell Bell and Marion D. Boat, "Urban Neighborhoods and Informal Social Relations," *AJS,* 62 (1957): 391–398; Scott Greer, *The Urbane View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); and Morris Janowitz, *The Community Press in an Urban Setting,* 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967).

36. Eugene Litwack, "Occupational Mobility and Extended Family Cohesion," *ASR,* 25 (1960): 9–21; idem., "Geographical Mobility and Extended Family Cohesion," ibid., pp. 385–394; Eugene Litwack and Ivan Szelenyi, "Primary Group Structures and Their Functions: Kin, Neighbors, and Friends," ibid., 34 (1969): 465–481; Marvin B. Sussman, "The Isolated Nuclear Family: Fact or Fiction," *Social Problems,* 6 (1959): 333–340; Marvin Sussman and Lee Burchinal, "Kin Family Network: Unheralded Structure in Current Conceptualizations of Family Functioning," *Marriage and Family Living,* 24 (1962): 231–240; Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (New York: Penguin, 1962); Bert N. Adams, "Isolation, Function, and Beyond: American Kinship in the 1960s," *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 32 (1970): 575–597; Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers* (New York: Free Press, 1962); Gerald D. Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968); Joe R. Feagin, "The Social Ties of Negroes in an Urban Environment: Structure and Variation" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 1966); Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper, 1974); Marc Fried, *The World of the Urban Working Class* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973).

diversity and subcultural identification might be enhanced in the city. Others have revealed, as Weber had predicted, that, even in the largest bureaucracies—those most prominent symbols of urbanism—strong personal relationships between whole people can be formed.[37]

Community is apparently more pervasive than urban theory would predict. Although not all of these empirical studies agree in their definition of community, collectively they offer a formidable body of contrary evidence for Wirth's theory. Morris Janowitz and John Kasarda, in a recent survey of the empirical data available on urban life-styles, conclude that the Tönnies–Wirth model of social change might be faulted for being essentially a "reasoned moral position" rather than a plan "for empirical research," but its most serious problem is "that it fails to explain the extent and forms of community organization found in modern society."[38] Curiously, however, these empirical challenges to Wirth's theory have not produced an alternative one that more effectively orders the available empirical data. As a result, urban theory is, in the words of Claude Fischer, "at an impasse," and no one can read the growing number of criticisms of modernization theory without concluding that it, too, is at an impasse.[39]

Negative findings in empirical studies are often treated either as lingering vestiges of community that will soon disappear or as

37. Claude S. Fischer, "Toward a Subcultural Theory of Urbanism," *AJS,* 80 (1975): 1319–1341; Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization,* trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 137; Edward Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties," *British Journal of Sociology,* 8 (1957): 130–145; S. N. Eisenstadt, "The Relations between Sociological Theory and Anthropological Research," in his *Essays in Comparative Institutions* (New York: Wiley, 1965), p. 90; and George C. Homans, *The Human Group* (New York: Harcourt, 1950), pp. 150–151. In a relatively stable economy, enduring business relationships can assume communal kinds of interaction. See Wilbert E. Moore, *Social Change* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 107–108.

38. John Kasarda and Morris Janowitz, "Community Sentiment in Mass Society," *ASR,* 39 (1974): 329.

39. Fischer, "Study of Urban Community," p. 73. On modernization theory, see, for example, Joseph Gusfield, "Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change," *AJS,* 72 (1967): 351–362; Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies," *CSSH,* 15 (1973): 199–226; and L. E. Shiner, "Tradition/Modernity: An Ideal Type Gone Astray," ibid., 17 (1975): 245–252.

puzzling exceptions. Even when they are taken as negative evidence bringing existing theory into question, these findings have not yet forced a reformulation of social theory. Although theories of urbanization and modernization do not connect very well to the actual processes of historical change, they remain the most pervasive theories of history available in contemporary social thought.

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How can we account for this dissociation of fact and theory? One might argue that the problem is more apparent than real. Wirth and Parsons both used versions of the ideal-type methodology developed by Max Weber. Typological constructs, Weber explained, need not perfectly reflect any existing society. Their purpose is to provide definitions, partly arbitrary, that are fruitful in investigating and theorizing about actual societies. Some empirical contradictions are therefore to be expected.[40] Even if we acknowledge this, however, a serious problem remains. The versions of the gemeinschaft–gesellschaft typology found in contemporary social theory seem to have had only marginal success in describing and explaining the actual processes of historical change associated with urbanization and modernization.

Whatever the virtues or defects of ideal-type methodologies, the problem with these theories lies elsewhere. We must look at them first as forms or logics of historical explanation. Both theories are burdened with important assumptions that give them rhetorical force, but at the cost of diverting attention from the actual processes of historical change.

The gemeinschaft–gesellschaft, rural–urban, traditional–modern dichotomies are used, as I have already noted, to characterize whole societies. Change is perceived in totalistic terms: A society is either modern or traditional, urban or rural. This change, moreover, is sequential. One kind of society succeeds another, and this pattern of change is viewed through lenses that have a progressivist tint. Evolution from one pole to the other is seen as reflecting the pro-

40. See Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, pp. 109–112.

gressive direction of history. Within these linear models, movement is not only directional, but is usually treated as unilinear, with all urban and modern societies converging as a single societal type where gemeinschaft is replaced by gesellschaft. Most important of all, perhaps, the urbanization and modernization process is treated as a zero-sum equation, which is to say that any growth in gesellschaft requires an equivalent diminution of gemeinschaft until ultimately the society under study is completely transformed.[41]

Although the substance of this formulation is new and distinctive to American social theory in the mid-twentieth century, as a form of historical explanation, it is old.[42] It is similar to what J. H. Hexter, in a classic historiographical essay, found in A. F. Pollard's *Factors in Modern History* (1907). It may be easier to understand the problems with contemporary theory if we begin with this distant example. Hexter isolated two underlying assumptions in Pollard's book that, he argues, actually diverted Pollard from historical research. One was the book's progressivist or evolutionary assumption; the other was what Hexter called the law of the "conservation of historical energy."

History, Pollard assumed, moved in a straight line toward the present. If the middle class was significant in Victorian England but not in the tenth century, then the intervening centuries of history could be written in terms of the "rise of the middle class." Given his commitment to evolutionary theory, what better way to connect the tenth and nineteenth centuries than with a straight line showing the progressive ascendancy of the middle class? "In fact," Hexter points out, "there is no reason to assume that the slopes or the curves of ascent of the middle class . . . during more than half a millennium were straight lines, or even that they trended continuously upward over their whole course." The task of the historian is precisely to

41. For discussions of this point in respect to urban and modernization theory, see, respectively, Gerald D. Suttles, *The Social Construction of Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1972), p. 258; and Shiner, "Tradition/Modernity," p. 252.

42. Robert Nisbet has traced the basic idea back to the origins of Western thought. For his critique, see his *Social Change and History* and *The Social Bond* (New York: Random House, 1970), chaps. 13–14.

develop empirical methods for determining the changing fate of the middle class. Pollard, however, "was not aware that his views involved any empirical problem of measurement." The straight line was, Hexter observes, "wholly *a priori*, a purely imaginary construction that does not set historical facts in order, but altogether escapes and soars above their dreary restrictions."[43]

The assumption of the conservation of historical energy relates to the way Pollard and other historians and social scientists use dichotomies to explain social change. Hexter states the idea abstractly and then provides an example: "The idea is that in a given society the energy expended on a single pair of polar elements is fixed, so that any flow of social energy in the direction of one such pole can only take place by way of subtraction from the flow of energy to the opposite pole."[44] Hexter offers Pollard's treatment of religion and secularism in the sixteenth century as an example: When Pollard found an increase of secular activity, he assumed that there must have been a corresponding decrease in its opposite, religious activity. Although this may have been true, to assume it is true is to fall into an intellectual trap. The logic of this form of historical explanation encouraged Pollard to overlook, or explain away, empirical evidence of significant religious activity in the sixteenth century. Whatever the logic of polar dichotomies, there is no reason why the historical record might not show a simultaneous increase in such opposites as secularism and religion.

Just as the underlying logic in Pollard's chosen forms of historical explanation obscured the actual historical record of religious activity in the sixteenth century, so the narrative structure one finds in contemporary formulations of the gemeinschaft–gesellschaft distinction diverts attention from the actual place of community in modern urban society. The assumptions that underlie contemporary applications of the gemeinschaft–gesellschaft notion must be examined as Hexter examined Pollard's assumptions. Is it empirically true that the relation of gemeinschaft and gesellschaft is sequential?

43. J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (New York: Harper, 1963), p. 39.
44. Ibid., p. 40.

Is change along this continuum (or dichotomy) uniform and total? Is change really unilinear and unidirectional, as most formulations imply?

To escape the constraints of the gemeinschaft–gesellschaft logic, what we need is a notion of differential change.[45] Perhaps certain modern social developments might even reenforce or invigorate other traditional patterns of social relations in the same society.[46] Why cannot gemeinschaft and gesellschaft simultaneously shape social life? Why must we assume that there is a single direction of change in a single society, or in a single social process? Recent research on urbanization suggests that there is no uniform direction in the effects of urbanism on patterns of cultural life. It does not necessarily spawn secular, rationalistic values and behavior. Indeed, it appears that in some cases urbanization can actually increase ethnic identification and what sociologists call "primordial ties."[47]

The Amish in the United States provide an illuminating example of differential social change. Living within the most modern and urbanized of societies, they continue their intense religious communalism. In his excellent study of the Amish, John Hostetler concludes that their history has important implications for general social theory. Social change among the Amish, he writes, "does not necessarily proceed from the simple to the complex, nor do all societies go through certain presumed stages in the social evolutionary process. Changes in Amish society are not predestined to proceed from the sacred to the secular. . . . Not only have we found in our

45. This argument is made by Clifford Geertz in *Peddlers and Princes: Social Change and Economic Modernization in Two Indonesian Towns* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), pp. 143–153. See also Daniel Rodgers, "Tradition, Modernity, and the American Industrial Worker: Reflections and Critique," *JIH*, 7 (1977): 655–681; and Brown, *Modernization*.
46. See, for example, Charles P. Loomis and Olen Leonard, *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: El Cerrito, New Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1941). See also Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies," p. 215; Gusfield, "Tradition and Modernity," p. 20; and Kai T. Erikson, *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), pt. II.
47. See Fischer, "Toward a Subcultural Theory of Urbanism," p. 1335. See also Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties," p. 131.

observations a number of instances of secularization, but also the process of becoming more and more sacred."[48] Some Amish, for example, adhere to stricter religious regulations now than one hundred years ago. It would be a mistake, then, to assume that all change stimulated by interaction of a small community with larger society is in the direction of conformity to the external world.[49]

Scholars wrestling with the contradictions emerging from the application of urbanization and modernization theories to nonwestern societies are beginning to question their earlier unidirectional and unilinear assumptions. Brian J. L. Berry, a geographer deeply involved with the development of urban policy, has recently recanted his former beliefs. He no longer accepts the "conventional wisdom" that urbanization is a "universal process, a consequence of modernisation that involves the same sequence of events in different countries and that produces a progressive convergence of forms." He also rejects the view that "there may be several culturally specific processes, but that they are producing convergent results because of underlying technological imperatives of modernisation and industrialisation."[50] Modernization theorist S. N. Eisenstadt has moved in a similar direction in his recent work. He stresses the "historical dimension" of modernization and denies that it is a universal process with its own logic. He also denies that there is a convergence of societies or a fixed plateau toward which progressive societies are moving.[51] The fate of community, in other words, might well be decided by specific historical circumstances rather than by the inexorable logic of urbanization and modernization.

The Double Heritage of Tönnies

However critical I have been of urban and modernization theory, I am not proposing that we abandon theory and concentrate entirely

48. John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1963), p. 307.
49. Ibid., p. 294. Canadian Mennonites similarly preserved communalism in the city. See Leo Drieger, "Canadian Mennonite Urbanism: Ethnic Villages or Metropolitan Remnant?" *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 49 (1975): 226–241.
50. Berry, *Human Consequences of Urbanisation*, p. xii.
51. S. N. Eisenstadt, *Tradition, Change and Modernity* (New York: Wiley, 1973), p. 358.

upon the concrete and particular. Rather, we must strive to cast our theory in terms that can accommodate the concreteness of context and the particularity of change over time, and I propose that the theoretical tradition we have been considering is easily adapted to such historical reconstruction. Most current formulations of Tönnies's theory overlook an exciting potential for historical scholarship and for a richer understanding of community and social change that the initial formulation of the theory contained but that has been given insufficient attention by sociologists and historians of community.

Simply placing Tönnies and his development of the *Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft* typology into proper historical context begins to reveal the real meaning of his concept and its usefulness for the study of community. Tönnies wrote at a time when the small towns of Germany and the people from them who valued small-town patterns of community were being integrated into larger structures of society that had emerged with the growth of cities, industrial capitalism, and the centralized national state.[52] Tönnies formulated his *Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft* distinction at a time when men and women were intensely conscious of being involved in two kinds of human interaction. His terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* described these two patterns of social relations that coexisted in everyone's social experience. *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* were not places; they were forms of human interaction.

These two kinds of interaction constituted the social alternatives available in modern society. Moreover, he anticipated that both of these forms of interaction were likely to be permanent aspects of all social life. Whereas he indicated that *Gesellschaft* was gaining significance in people's lives, he did not say that *all* relationships were or would become what he called *Gesellschaft*. "The force of Gemeinschaft persists," he wrote, "even within the period of Gesellschaft."[53] Tönnies, in other words, used his dichotomy in two

52. For the social background of German social philosophy, see the brilliant book by Mack Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, State and General Estate* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1971).
53. Tönnies, *Community and Society*, p. 232. In fairness to those who have read Tönnies differently than I read him, it must be acknowledged that he is occasionally

ways: to denote the character of a whole society in a particular historical period and to describe two patterns of human relationships within that society.[54]

This second aspect of Tönnies's theory has never been entirely neglected by students of community, but neither has its potential been fully exploited to develop a complex understanding of the process of social change within a single society. If the first aspect of Tönnies's theory is liable to lead to ahistorical or purely logical depictions of the shift from community to association as the basis of society, his second point suggests the possibility of a rigorous empirical account of the changing structure and meaning of community over time. The recovery of this dual aspect of Tönnies's theory offers an analytical concept for examining the social processes involved in the emergence of modern society.

Other social theorists of Tönnies's generation had the same dualistic conceptions of the ideal-type dichotomies they and Tönnies developed. Weber, for example, used Tönnies's terms to designate different "interactive tendencies" within single societies rather than to describe whole societal types. Durkheim, who apparently developed his concepts of "mechanical" and "organic" solidarity independent of Tönnies, similarly believed that modern society contained both of them simultaneously. He perceived the advent of organic solidarity as Tönnies viewed the emergence of *Gesellschaft*: it was a historical event in modern society that produced two closely interrelated but distinct patterns of social interac-

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contradictory on this point. Compare the following statement: "But as the town lives on within the city, elements of life in the Gemeinschaft, as the only real form of life, persist within the Gesellschaft, although lingering and decaying. . . . On the other hand, the more general the condition Gesellschaft becomes in the nation or a group of nations, the more this entire 'country' or the entire 'world' begins to resemble one large city" (ibid., p. 227). See also ibid., p. 198 (addendum written in 1912).

54. This point, ignored by most commentators, is noted with exceptional clarity by Bottomore, *Sociology*, pp. 100–101. In his work on the family and the professions, Parsons seems to use his pattern variables in a way that is sensitive to this complexity of social interaction, but this is not the case when he talks about total societies. See especially Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales, *Family, Socialization and Interaction* (New York: Free Press, 1953), pp. 11–12, 19; Parsons, "Professions and the Social Structure," pp. 466–467.

tion. These "two societies," Durkheim wrote, "really make up only one. They are two aspects of one and the same reality, but none the less they must be distinguished." If Tönnies noted that the town lives within the city, Durkheim believed that "there is a social life outside of the whole division of labor, but which the latter presupposes."[55]

In the United States, Edward A. Ross, one of the Progressive era's most influential social theorists, rejected (or failed to see) Tönnies's dualistic notion and offered a linear model of change that anticipated Wirth and the modernization theorists. In *Social Control* (1901), his most important book, Ross argued that "powerful forces are more and more transforming *community* into *society*, that is, replacing living tissue with structures held together by rivets and screws." He informed his readers in a footnote that this community–society contrast was similar to that made by Tönnies in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, but he insisted that he had formulated his own idea before he became acquainted with the work of Tönnies. Whether he actually borrowed the notion from Tönnies is less important than the difference between the two men's theories. We find in Ross no sense of communal and associational patterns of social relations coexisting in modern society. He offers instead an early version of the community breakdown theory that culminates in Wirth's essay on urbanism. For social theorists concerned about social order, Ross's interpretation of social change had important public-policy implications that are clear in the book's title, *Social Control*. With the erosion of all traditional or communal forms of social cohesion in modern urban society, it was essential, Ross argued, to develop artificial or formal institutional mechanisms of social control.[56]

Much of the concern for social control that historians have found in their studies of Progressive reformers stems from such interpreta-

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55. Max Weber, *The City*, trans. Don Martindale and Gertrude Neuwirth (New York: Free Press, 1958), p. 106n; Durkheim, *Division of Labor in Society*, pp. 129, 277. See also ibid., pp. 227–229.

56. Edward A. Ross, *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1969), p. 432.

tions of modern society. Beyond the obvious concern for social control, this notion has an important, if not immediately apparent, political aspect. It implicitly denies legitimacy to particularistic sources of political power based upon sentiment and upon such solidarity groups as neighborhood, ethnic cultures, or even class. The only legitimate political allegiance was to the abstract and rationalistic notion that replaced the old experiential community: the public interest.[57]

If in American social science there was a clear tradition extending from Ross to Wirth that emphasized one aspect of Tönnies's theory and denied or de-emphasized the other, there was also an important group of Progressive social theorists who maintained the dual perspective of Tönnies. Although acknowledging that the advent of modern, urban society meant more gesellschaft, they agreed with Tönnies and Durkheim that community was still vital. The obvious diminution of the extent of community in modern society seemed to require less attention than the interplay and interrelations between remaining contexts of community and larger structures of society. These communitarian social thinkers include Charles Horton Cooley, Jane Addams, Robert Park, Mary Parker Follett, and John Dewey.[58]

Cooley, for example, believed that, even in modern cities, primary

57. See Michael H. Frisch, "Social Particularity and American Political Culture: The Two Edged Sword of Community," in *The City and Sense of Community,* ed. Sander Gilman (Ithaca, N.Y.: Center for Urban Development Research, 1976), pp. 32–37. The work of Samuel P. Hays has shown how particularistic sources of political power were eroded by the advent of broader notions of the social order or the public interest. See his "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly,* 55 (1964): 157–169; idem., "Political Parties and the Community–Society Continuum," in *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development,* ed. William N. Chambers and Walter D. Burnham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 152–181.

58. See David E. Price, "Community and Control: Critical Democratic Theory in the Progressive Period," *APSR,* 68 (1974): 1663–1678. See also Jean B. Quandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community: The Social Thought of Progressive Intellectuals* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University, 1970), for, although it is a sustained attack on communitarian thought from a position that sees community as anachronistic or incompatible with the "functional organization" of modern society (p. 158), it nonetheless contains much useful material on Addams, Cooley, Dewey, Follett, and Park.

relations provided the context for everyone's first social experience and for the shaping of everyone's social consciousness; the "more elaborate relations" of the larger society were formed on the foundation of primary relations. In his study of social organization, Cooley reflected on the prospects of primary groups in the city: "In our own cities the crowded tenements and the general economic and social confusion have sorely wounded the family and the neighborhood, but it is remarkable, in view of these conditions, what vitality they show; and there is nothing upon which the conscience of the time is more determined than upon restoring them to health." He also believed that such a reinvigoration of informal and intimate groups in the city would involve "trusting democracy more rather than less."[59]

This social and political task was embraced by Jane Addams, who sought, through the settlement house she established in Chicago, to enhance democracy while making the local neighborhood a community within the city. Mary Parker Follett of Boston theorized about the necessity of revitalizing the neighborhood as a social and political group that might counterbalance the modern tendency toward bureaucratization and centralization.[60] Both social forms existed; both had their positive uses.

Robert Park is especially interesting because he was Wirth's teacher at the University of Chicago. It is illuminating to contrast Park's classic essay on the city with Wirth's. In "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environment," published in 1915, Park presented a complex mosaic of social forms and patterns of social interaction in the city that stands in sharp contrast to Wirth's stark portrayal of relentless movement from community to association in the modern city. Park accepted the notion that urbanization brought with it an increase in gesellschaft and a reliance upon "positive law," but he was also intrigued

59. Cooley, *Social Organization,* pp. 26–27; idem. *Social Process* (New York: Scribner's, 1918), p. 149.

60. For Addams's notion of community in the modern city, see her *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York: Macmillan, 1910; New York: New American Library, Signet, 1961); for Follett, see her book *The New State.*

by the diversity of social worlds that continued to exist and inter-
penetrate, each of them small communities or "moral regions"
within the larger city. In its sensitivity to the coexistence of both
gemeinschaft and gesellschaft in the city, Park's urban thought was
"double visioned."[61] It was not one type replacing another; it was
each individual being involved in alternate forms of human interac-
tion.

With this perception of urban social patterns, it might have been
possible to reorient urban research to focus on the interplay of
different patterns of social groupings rather than simply to record
the decay predicted by the linear model, yet Park never developed
this notion. During the 1920s, his interests shifted toward human
ecology, and by the 1930s, he seems to have abandoned his earlier
concern for community in the city.[62]

In the late 1920s, John Dewey made his strongest plea for revital-
izing community in modern society. Denying the existence of any
inevitable evolution of society from individualism to collectivity or
any other social form, Dewey insisted that social change "has con-
sisted in a continuous redistribution of social integrations." He as-
serted that "there is nothing intrinsic in the forces which have
effected uniform standardization, mobility, and remote invisible re-
lationships that is fatally obstructive to the return movement of
their consequences into the local homes of mankind."[63]

Modern life, by drawing people into larger associations, freed
them, Dewey maintained, from the constriction of the traditional
small town, yet within this larger society, he insisted, the small
community remains vital. If parochial communities are prone to

61. Robert Park, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior
in the City Environment," *AJS*, 20 (1915): 593–600. The phrase "double visioned" is
from Park Dixon Goist, "City and 'Community': The Urban Theory of Robert Park,"
AQ, 23 (1971): 47.

62. See Quandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community*, pp. 153–154. One
can see the beginnings of this shift by comparing the revisions Park made in his 1915
essay on the city when he republished it in 1925. Cf. "The City: Suggestions for the
Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment," in *The City*, Robert
Park and Ernest W. Burgess (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), pp. 1–46.

63. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Holt, 1927), pp. 193,
215.

deadness and intellectual stagnation, the intrusion of the larger so-
ciety's institutions promise a "variegated and many-hued experi-
ence." Community and society, in their creative interplay, provide
the basis for a more intelligent and effective democracy. "In its
deepest and richest sense," Dewey observed, "a community must
always remain a matter of face-to-face intercourse. . . . The Great
Community, in the sense of free and full intercommunication, is
conceivable. But it can never possess all the qualities which mark a
local community. It will do its final work in ordering the relations
and enriching the experience of local associations." Expressing his
hopes for America, he concluded: "Whatever the future may have in
store, one thing is certain. Unless local communal life can be re-
stored, the public cannot adequately resolve its most urgent prob-
lem: to find and identify itself."[64]

The double focus of Tönnies's sociology persisted into the 1930s.
Carle Zimmerman, in discussing the tasks of community sociology in
his textbook, *The Changing Community* (1938), gave both aspects
of Tönnies's theory their due.[65] In the same year, however, Louis
Wirth published "Urbanism as a Way of Life." In this article, called
by one scholar "maybe the most influential article ever to appear in
a sociological journal,"[66] Wirth emphasized the first aspect of
Tönnies's formulation to the practical exclusion of the second. With
the dualistic perspective of Tönnies largely submerged in Wirth's
evolutionary formulation, a complex theory with rich possibilities
for historical research was transformed into a simplistic typology of
social change. Indeed, the complexities that remained in Wirth's
statement were typically ignored in the brief summaries of it that
appeared when it was cited later in sociological journals.

It is difficult to determine why one aspect of Tönnies's theory was
so de-emphasized by most sociologists after World War II. One
possibility, of course, is that Wirth expressed his theory with such

64. Ibid., pp. 216, 211, 216.

65. Zimmerman, *Changing Community*. The theme runs through the whole book,
but see pp. 83, 114.

66. R. L. Simpson, "Sociology of the Community: Current Status and Prospects,"
RS, 30 (1965): 133.

stunning elegance that he drove out all competition, yet I expect that this is only a partial explanation that does not account for later simplifications. The historical setting for Wirth's essay suggests reasons both for its reception and for the summaries of it in the sociological literature that made it even more unilinear than it actually was: Wirth's theory entered American social science at a time when Americans were beset by tensions in domestic life and in international affairs.

Like Ross's earlier formulation, Wirth's theory of community breakdown was supportive of "liberal" efforts to achieve order and unity in social and political life. Particularistic bases of political or social action, whether based on ethnicity, class, or locality, were interpreted as nostalgic, irrelevant, and logically destined to disappear.[67] For men and women with fresh memories of Hitler's perversion of community, with numerous indications of racial and labor-union unrest in the United States, and with exaggerated fears of domestic subversion and international Communism, a vision of unilinear and inevitable progress toward a rationalized and homogenized world might have been encouraging, even if it was tinged with nostalgia for the vanishing community.

These speculations gain added weight by the coincidence that modernization theory, the foreign policy version of Wirth's theory, was developed during these same years. Here the public-policy goal was explicit: The intention was to facilitate the "development" of Third-World nations in ways that would avoid the sort of political instability that might strengthen the Communist World at the expense of the Free World.

Recovery and Reformulation

Whatever the reasons for the transformations of Tönnies's theory after World War II, most literature in the social sciences described a great change that fatally wounded community and gave birth to

67. Recall that it was during this period that Daniel Bell formulated his famous notion that ideology was irrelevant in modern society. See Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1962).

modern society. Although such analysis was obviously correct in the broadest sense, it lacked historical specificity and, by being so global, left little for historians to investigate within its terms. A notable exception, however, is the work of Robert Redfield, who did his graduate work at Chicago with Park and later taught there with Park and Wirth. He began his career with an orientation similar to Wirth's, but in the course of time, he reached beyond (or behind) Wirth to recover Tönnies's original usage of the *Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft* distinction.

Redfield's intellectual journey is in itself interesting. His initial formulation of the urban–folk continuum was based on field research first undertaken at Tepoztlán, Mexico, in 1926. After publishing an ethnographic account of his findings, he used his data to formulate a very tentative and preliminary version of the folk–urban continuum, which he published in 1934. In 1941, after extensive field work in four settlements in Mexico that stood at different points on his continuum, he offered a fully developed version of his theory in the last chapter of *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*. His conception of the urban–folk typology derived, he wrote, from his reading of Maine, Durkheim, and, especially, Tönnies.[68] It was basically a linear model similar to Wirth's theory of urbanization, stressing the harmony of the preurban community and the breakdown of community under the impact of urbanization.

In the early 1950s, however, Oscar Lewis restudied Tepoztlán, the community where Redfield had first developed his ideas on folk and urban cultures.[69] The evidence that Lewis presented challenged both the beginning and the end point of Redfield's analysis. Lewis denied that the preurban community was nearly so isolated or so well integrated as Redfield had indicated, and he did not find the breakdown after urbanization that was predicted by both

68. Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlan: A Mexican Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1930); idem., "Culture Change in Yucatan, *AA*, 36 (1934): 57–59; idem., *Folk Culture of Yucatan*. On this borrowing, see ibid., p. x.
69. Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Restudied* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1951); idem., "Tepoztlán Restudied: A Critique of the Folk-Urban Conceptualization of Change," *RS*, 18 (1953): 121–134.

Wirth's and Redfield's theories. Redfield's response to Lewis's criticism was impressive. He did not ignore Lewis, nor did he claim that he was right and Lewis wrong. Neither, incidentally, did he admit, as Lewis suggested he ought, that he himself was wrong, misled by his own antiurban bias. Instead he attempted to rework the theoretical framework so that it might better explain both his own and Lewis's empirical findings. The result was a more complex and interesting theory.

In his reformulation, Redfield retained the general notion of sequential change that was associated with the process of urbanization, but he now speculated that folk and urban ways coexisted in the same society. Tönnies, Redfield now realized, "conceived of two imaginably distinct and contrasting aspects of all societies." He and Lewis, each with his own bias, had stressed one of the two dimensions of all social entities. Hence their work was not so much contradictory as it was complementary.[70]

Extending his new formulation, Redfield turned from Lewis's work to Helen and Robert Lynd's study of Muncie, Indiana in the 1920s. Comparing his own study of Chan Kom, a Mexican village, with the Muncie data, he observed that folk ways and urban ways were apparent in both. They are "both present in important degrees and in an interpenetration that demands analysis." The question of community required more than observation of the undeviating decline of community according to the law of the conservation of historical energy. Instead it became a task of empirically assessing the nature of the interpenetration of community and society in particular places at particular times. The student of community, Redfield suggested, needs "two lenses for seeing a compound reality." He proposed that the anthropologist (or historian) of community think of Middletown or any other local society "as an interpenetration of two opposite kinds of living, thinking, and feeling" that are simultaneously analyzable in two ways: as "an isolated, homogeneous, sacred, and personal community . . . and . . . as . . . the

70. Redfield, *The Little Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1955), pp. 141–142. Cf. Rene König, *The Community* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 128–129.

heterogeneous, secular, and impersonal community that we find approximated in cities."[71]

From this perspective, community is not a specific space or a mere base line for historical change; it is a fundamental and enduring form of social interaction. Thinking of gemeinschaft and gesellschaft in terms of sequence is thus erroneous. They represent instead "two kinds of human collective living" in which all individuals are involved. The focus of analytical interest becomes, therefore, the interaction and interplay of communal and noncommunal ways in the lives of all.[72] Redfield's theoretical breakthrough thus offers what is, to me, precisely the vantage needed for fruitful research on community in American history.

Instead of a continuum or a sequential theory, historians seeking interesting and empirically answerable questions need a contending theory of the relation of community and society. The task of the cultural historian or critic is not to date the moment when one of the worlds of social relations is replaced by the other; it is to probe their interaction and to assess their relative salience to people's lives in specific situations. This approach makes it both easier to recognize changes in salience toward either pole of the continuum and logically possible to accept them. What we need is a perspective that will enable us to take an overview of the simultaneous polarity and reciprocity of these two patterns of human interaction. When we do this, the conceptual framework we use to guide our research will no longer supply a priori answers to the relevant historical questions. Questions of time, place, pattern, interplay, and significance will invite historical inquiry. The way will be open to empirical measurement and historical assessment of the interaction of community and society in American history.

71. Redfield, ibid., pp. 146–147.
72. Ibid., p. 147.