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Structure and Energy: Toward a Civilization-Analytic Perspective

Vytautas Kavolis

I

At a recent conference at the University of Southern California, S. Marshall Cohen argued the need for a new theory of the humanities. Modern scholars have been looking, he said, "at individual subjects, such as politics, the law, or even works of art, as separate, unconnected fields."

"It is a feature of 'the modern' to distinguish these particular spheres from one another...to discover what is distinctive in each of them, and to focus theory and study on these distinctive features," he said. And he ended by calling for a "post-modern theory" of the humanities to reestablish the lost connections.

Can civilization analysis provide the common ground for such only in the humanities, but in the social sciences as well?

The comparative study of civilizations is facing uncertainties of its own. At a workshop on the teaching of comparative civilizations held at the University of Chicago, it was pointed out that "in the comparative study of civilizations, the search for a theory not only in the humanities, but in the social sciences as well? project itself....[Yet] during the session no one put forth any comprehensive theory of how and why cultures can be compared."

One can go along with Milton Singer's doubts "whether comparative civilizations is a separate discipline." It is rather, he said, a "framework for cross-cultural study of certain topics....Its function is to permit the comparison of cultures without making premature claims for global correspondences."

This essay was presented as the Presidential Address at the 1978 Annual Meeting of the ISCSC(US) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
The third and fourth paragraphs of page 21 should read as follows:

Can civilization analysis provide the common ground for such theory not only in the humanities, but in the social sciences as well? The comparative study of civilizations is facing uncertainties of its own. At a workshop on the teaching of comparative civilizations held at the University of Chicago, it was pointed out that “in the comparative study of civilizations, the search for a theory of comparison and for certain rules of pertinence is the subject itself....[Yet] during the session no one put forth any comprehensive theory of how and why cultures can be compared.”
If the comparative study of civilizations is not a separate discipline, does it, nevertheless, have a sense of issues more central to it than to other kinds of cross-cultural studies, and a methodology appropriate for considering such issues? Or is any study in which evidence from two or more civilizations is used a *civilizational* study?

II

The questions of Spengler, Weber, Toynbee, Sorokin, Kroeber are not the only questions to which civilization analysts today address themselves. Perhaps, one is tempted to think, it is not by the questions as such, but by the dimensions of analysis that the comparative study of civilizations should be defined. The reference to “civilization” seems to imply two intellectual commitments: first, to search for the largest comprehensible pattern of sociocultural organization, which is what a civilization is, and not to rest content until one has located one’s current problem within this pattern. Second, by referring to civilizations rather than societies or cultures, a scholar gives signs of promising to pay attention to both the symbolic systems and the social structures of which that largest comprehensible unit of sociocultural organization, a civilization, is composed.

One could even argue that the most profoundly civilizational approach would be directed to that which underlies *both* symbolic systems and social structures. The traditional humanities are still immersed mostly in studying individual works of culture and their authors, taking it for granted that the human mind is as it works in the tradition they are studying. The social sciences investigate the collective organization of social activities and processes, usually employing Western categories for analyzing them. Boundary disciplines, such as sociocultural history or sociology of culture, reconstruct the connections between social structures and symbolic systems.

Is there not something else, that which both symbolic systems and social organizations presuppose, a series of changing comprehensions of the basic matrices of existence, that needs to be investigated with more analytical discipline than one finds in some of the few pioneering works of this kind?

III

In search of that which underlies both social organization and symbolic systems, the notion of civilizational designs might be of service. Civilizational designs can be defined as symbolic con-
figurations basic to a historic civilization seen as active forces in their social contexts. Civilizational designs are the "generalized texts" of which the particular texts of a cultural tradition—that which is studied by the humanities—are partial expressions. The particular works of culture fit the generalized texts to the requirements of a genre or a symbolic technology and, especially in modern times, also constitute individualized elaborations of, or offenses against, the generalized text. When viewed in its full particularity, the particular text is, in some degree, a distortion of the generalized texts which make it possible.

But patterns of social activity and the organization of society—studied by social scientists—also constitute partial expressions, or distortions, of civilizational designs. They are, however, partial expressions of generalized texts by being their situational adaptations, adjustments of civilizational designs (or of their fragments, sometimes perhaps only of their vague memories) to practical exigencies. Society is an incomplete symbolic design and, at the same time, more than a symbolic design. But, up to a point, it is possible and helpful to assume that the same fundamental symbolic designs are partially expressed both in the works of culture and in the forms of social organization of a civilization, however much these expressions differ from each other.

The civilizational mode of analysis is a method for uncovering, or evoking, the generalized texts of particular civilizations. The itineraries of these texts can be understood as the "depth-symbolic" levels of historical processes. The comparative study of civilizational designs seeks to identify the configurations and the itineraries of the major alternatives that history has provided for organizing not only whole civilizations, but also the basic elements which they must all contain to be civilizations.

What interests the civilization analyst above all are the mythological paradigms in all thought, the dramatic designs in all action, and the senses of adequation in all perception.

IV

Let me now raise a theoretical issue that emerges, in some way, in the analysis of any civilizational phenomenon—the relations of structure and energy, considered as alternative modes of coherence. A mode of coherence may be viewed as the manner in which the entities or qualities comprehended in a symbolic configuration are sensed, or explicitly stated, to belong together.
Civilizational designs, of whatever scale, appear normally to incorporate, or imply, two contrasting, or interpenetrating, modes of coherence: a "structural" or "architectonic" mode and a "fluid" or "energetic" mode, "form" and "force" (or "life"), puruṣa and prakṛti in Hindu tradition, li and ch'i in Neo-Confucianism, Limit and Unlimited Breath of the Pythagoreans, "law" and "love" in Christianity, "organization" and "spirit" in the sense of Max Weber's study of the institutionalization of modern rational capitalism. It is the distinction, ultimately, between that which stands and that which moves within a civilizational design. The two modes are not necessarily seen as equal in strength.

Several questions immediately arise. (1) If civilizational phenomena normally contain a structure-energy distinguishability, are the approaches which center their attention on "structures," even the "structures of consciousness," capable of grasping the full meaning of any civilizational phenomenon and particularly of a civilizational configuration as a whole? Is structuralism not intrinsically one-sided, inadequate to the "energetic" side of any civilizational complex, to mysticism, emotion, sensibility?

(2) While questions may be raised whether structures exist in the phenomena being observed or are imposed on them by the observer, it can, nevertheless, be assumed that whatever we call "structures" are, in principle, fully and correctly describable. But, in studying what we conceive to exist within the "energetic" mode of coherence, should the assumption not be made that "energies" cannot, even in principle, be both fully and correctly described? Unless they are misperceived as structures, energies can only be, in the phenomenological sense, "interpreted"—at different times in different ways, never definitively, as structures can be definitively described.

(3) Do we therefore need different languages for coming to grips with the structural and the energetic sides of civilizational phenomena? The distinction between the structural and the energetic seems to arise in both experiencing and in speaking about experiences. The structural mode of experience can be conceived of as a "puritan" boundedness to an order of entities with a totally understandable manner of operation; the energetic mode of experience may be thought of as a "profligate" immersion in a movement of forces or qualities, the meaning of which cannot be completely understood or exhausted.

We might expect that to each mode of experience corresponds a
mode of speaking appropriate to it. On this assumption we postulate a distinction between an "exoteric" mode of speaking, related to the structural mode of experience, consisting of a conceptually formulable discursive language through which truths presumed to be demonstrable are precisely stated; and an "esoteric" mode of speaking, related to the energetic mode of experience, consisting of evocative, or shocking, imagery through which intuitions are imperfectly suggested.6

The mode of speaking does not always correspond to the mode of experience. The non-correspondence may be gainful, as when an exoteric language produces a self-critical reserve toward the energetic experiences described in it, a way of "testing" them against a standard of judgment outside of themselves; or when an esoteric language loosens the rigidity of structural experiences, insinuating new possibilities into them. But non-correspondences of language and experience can also be sources of serious deformation when exactitude in recording experiences is at issue. Perhaps any language for speaking about human experiences which is too purely esoteric or exoteric cannot, in the long run, avoid deforming experience more than needs to be the case.

The theoretical possibility of a reconciliation of esoteric and exoteric languages is implicit in the notion of the metaphor as a pointer "to the existence of a given set of abstract relationships hidden within some immediately graspable image."7 It is precisely in civilization analysis—as distinguished from the comparative studies of this or that—that such a reconciliation would seem appropriate.

V

Approaching the issue of the structure-energy differentiation in a comparative civilizational perspective, we notice, first of all, certain gross differences in the way the fundamental relationship between structure and energy is conceived. The structural and the energetic may typically be correlated with each other in a harmonious relationship (as in Confucian China), or arranged in a sequence of alternating temporary domination (as tends to be the case in Hindu mythology), or locked into a hierarchic relationship of control (as in medieval and early modern Europe), or conceived as engaged in a battle until one's destruction by the other (as in Marxist revolutionary theory), or the energetic can be seen as so oppressively contained by an unmodifiable and unremovable structure that only total escape from structure can satisfy (as in
Gnosticism), or the structural may be regarded as the unreal form of the less unreal energetic (as in Buddhism).

Much of the character of the structure-energy relationship can be revealed through inquiries into the symbolic categories with which the structure-energy differentiation is associated in particular traditions. Wolfgang Bauer has pointed out that, contrary to a prominent Western tendency, in China the structural term li is associated with the “inner,” the energetic term ch’i with the “outer.” Instead of energy being contained by structure, as the Western romantic tradition, at least, tends to assume, in China structure is surrounded by energy.

Moreover, Bauer goes on to suggest, the categories “spontaneity, life” belong, together with the structural li, to the “inner,” whereas “order, law” are classified, together with the energetic ch’i, under the “outer.” Can we infer from these categorical correlations that, in the Confucian tradition, “structure” is natural, that which one spontaneously adheres to (and of the adherence to which spontaneity consists), but that, conversely, “energies” are what one is, less naturally, compelled by (as one is compelled not only by artificial law, but also by fits of human passion, which the Confucians have tended to view as originating outside of the normal psychosomatic organization of the individual, as sickness or as an externally generated magic, somewhat in the manner of Tristan’s love potion, thus either “abnormal” or “artificial”)? In this Chinese view, structure is natural and “good,” but energy can be either natural (and “good”), if coordinated with structure, or artificial (and “bad”), if not so coordinated.

The symbolic associations of the structure-energy differentiation reach into all areas of metaphysical, social, or psychological organization. One problem area may be mentioned here. Taoist, Tantric and Western mystical, Romantic, and revolutionary evidence suggests a cross-civilizational tendency to associate structure and energy, on the one hand, with masculinity and femininity and, on the other hand, with some form of the “right-wing,” “left-wing” differentiation. The categories of masculinity-femininity, however, do not appear to be closely linked with the right-left differentiation, but tend to be conventionally correlated with the rationality-emotionality distinction. In the historic civilizations, “rationally disciplined” action, not only the military and the priestly, has been assigned mainly to men, whereas “spon-
taneous," "whole-hearted," and passionate activities have engaged, more equally, both men and women.  

Are masculine and feminine identities (or masculine and feminine components of identities) resonant, on some deep level of culture construction, to the comprehensions of structure and energy on the one hand, and to the imaginations of rationality and emotionality on the other hand, and change as these two sets of categories do? Or are these correlations variables? Do all types of structure and energy, rationality and emotionality relate to masculinity-femininity in the same way? Such questions seem capable of generating more knowledge of the symbolic grounding of masculinity and femininity than Sherry Ortner's initially provocative, but not affirmatively answerable question: "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?".

VI

We might describe each conception of energy in its uniqueness and in particular the language in which it has been formulated by its authors. But we might also construct, as a scaffolding for comparative study, a general typology of basic alternative comprehensions of energy, stated in a cosmopolitan language. Let me suggest a very tentative, not necessarily complete and, no doubt, primitive typology.

Energy has been comprehended, or sensed, as: (1) life-sustaining or "vital" (proliferating fecundity; the fearful instinct of self-preservation, as in Hobbes; a harmonious unfolding of inherent potentialities, as in Goethe), (2) pattern-destroying or "demonic" (thanatos, madness, Durkheim's unlimited, Faustian aspirations), (3) primordial or "dionysian" (a hurricane, revolution in the modern sense, Max Weber's "charisma" at its inception: an out-break that can be either destructive or revitalizing or both at the same time), (4) civilizing or "apollonian" (the drive to build and adhere to symbolic designs, social systems, or rules of "good behavior"), (5) agonistic (the urge for honor, illustriousness, historic or cosmic recognition to be acquired by great deeds in a contest), (6) ethereal (the energy of "moral-aesthetic sensitivity," of responsiveness to suffering or to beauty, arising unpredictably, and with memorable poignancy, within particular acts or experiences; or that of ch'i-yün, "spirit-consonance," through which the
cultivated painters of traditional China sought intuitive communion with the spiritual qualities immanent in all nature), (7) **transcendentalizing** (a pressure to transcend the world, to recall others or to return to the "spiritual home"), (8) **animistic** (a plurality of free-floating, durable bundles of energy, each animating only itself and the phenomena it "chooses" or is "forced" to enter), and (9) **mechanical** (the force of predictable attraction or repulsion due to proximity or composition, as in magnetism or associational psychology).

Each type is viewed here as an image subsuming a range of processes and a set of diverse but partly overlapping theories interpreting these processes. The treatment of energy in particular schools of thought or currents of sensibility may compound several of the analytic types or present the characteristics of one type under the disguise of another. Thus there is much demonic energy under the dionysian appearance of Nietzsche, whereas Blake has clearly distinguished demonic reason from dionysian eros. In the Romantic movement, the energy of Prometheus, which seems to have synthesized civilizing and ethereal elements on a primordial base, has tended to be misperceived as demonic (conflation of Prometheus with Satan). But while agonistic energies were prominently elaborated in Greece (typically in conjunction with the civilizing ones), the demonic were not.

The "unconscious" has been viewed as belonging to the analytical realm of "undivided unity" beyond or within the structure-energy differentiation. (Consciousness," in traditions of rational contemplation, may be conceived as the instrumentality for gaining access to undivided unity; or, in traditions of affective mysticism, it may itself be the chief barrier separating from undivided unity. However, once a rigorous distinction has been made in psychological theory between the "conscious" and the "unconscious," the former tends to be comprehended as structural, the latter as energetic. But through which of the nine fundamental images of energy or their compounds is the unconscious, in particular instances, comprehended? Through which images are the dynamics of sexuality (or of power) perceived? Which types of energy are engaged in the various kinds of "play," and which referred to in the ideologies glorifying "play" as the "sphere of humanization"?

Each civilization or major tradition within it has its own durable but not unchanging symbolic designs for comprehending energy.
Clifford Geertz's interpretations in *Islam Observed* suggest that the energy most distinctive of Indonesian Islam can be identified as ethereal-transcendentalizing (in a style prominent also in Japan), of Moroccan Islam as agonistic-transcendentalizing.\(^\text{13}\)

The prevailing comprehension of energy in historic China approximates the life-sustaining type. For the Confucians, but not for the Taoists, it is continuous with civilizing energy. Ethereal energies—more important than in the classical civilizations of Europe, the Near East, India—have an allocated place in poetry, amateur painting, and the cultivation of friendship (largely reserved to men of the educated class). Popular religiosity, as everywhere else in predominantly agricultural civilizations, is full of animistic energies, not recognized in the dominant traditions of sophisticated thought (as similar conceptions were recognized in Europe). Buddhism has introduced the notion of pure transcendentalizing energy, but it has remained peripheral to the mainstream of Chinese tradition. There is also, in Chinese popular mythology, a category of beings, such as the White Snake Lady or the Monkey in *The Journey to the West*, who represent primordial energies in animal form, evolving, through their own potentialities for compassion and self-sacrifice, either into life-sustaining energy in human form or "to the highest spiritual attainment possible."\(^\text{14}\)

Primordial energy is thus capable of transforming itself into transcendentizing energy: the Chinese conception of "moral evolution."

In India, the basic tendency has been to view energy, *sakti*, as primordial.\(^\text{15}\) In Indian mythology, life-sustaining and destructive energies are distinguished, but they are regarded not as permanently separated, as in the medieval and early modern West, but as aspects of the same processes flowing into each other in an oscillating pattern\(^\text{16}\) (a pattern that is formally similar to the conception of the alternation between conscious and unconscious mental states in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European psychology).\(^\text{17}\) In contrast to the either-or structure of Judeo-Christian mythological paradigms, in Hindu mythology, as Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty has observed, a demon can go "from demonic, to virtuous, to demonic, and finally to virtuous again."\(^\text{18}\) In Indian literature of spiritual guidance, energy becomes either transcendentizing (through contemplation or *bhakti* devotion) or polluting. And in the *bhakti* tradition it becomes available to potentially everyone.
How are the diverse comprehensions of energy distributed through the social organization of a civilization and how does this distribution change over time? In what patterns of meaning are these comprehensions fitted together within the design of the civilizations to which they belong? Do different configurations of the meanings of energy influence the direction in which the various spheres of practical life (politics, therapy, scientific theorizing) develop?

VII

A civilization is likely to contain several major alternative comprehensions of energy, and relationships not only between structure and energy, but also between the different types of energy, become problematic. Some types of structures seem to have the function of separating or of connecting different kinds of energy. The Hindu caste system is a structure that separates the transcendentalizing energy of "purity" and the destructive, or at least infectious, energies of "pollution." In the West, it is not the "stratification system," but the programs of the witch hunters and political extremists that operate in a similar manner.

In the Catholic tradition of medieval Europe, the commanding structure of the law was in a sense interposed between two types of energy: the ultimately transcendentalizing energy of "love," caritas, superior to the law, and the ultimately destructive energy of "lust," cupiditas, inferior to the law. Love and lust were conceived as mutually exclusive, but only lust, like the uneducated in Confucian China, was subjectable to control by the structure of the law.

In a late-Renaissance modality, all energies became subject to structural control. Prospero, in The Tempest, keeps both "nature," the primordial energy of Caliban, and "spirit," the ethereal energy of Ariel, contained, for a short moment, within the magically supported structure of an artificial civilization, an ephemeral design of institutionalized humanism.

To what extent is Shakespeare articulating a change in the fundamental frames of experience and expression, in that which is generally presupposed in arranging particular experiences and expressions, and to what extent is he merely expressing, however compellingly, his own vision (and critique)? How does one identify a fundamental design in a civilization which, no longer a com-
paratively unitary symbolic organization sustaining a limited variety of interrelated texts and performances, is becoming an unlimited variety of autonomous texts and performances projected by a limited multiplicity of mutually evocative modes of discourse?

The latter description applies not so much to Shakespeare as to the "post-modern" civilization now presumably forming. In this case, the methodological problem becomes crucial: How are the generalized texts, and their resonances of mutual evocation, to be inferred from either a single text produced by an individual author or a whole set of such texts? One approach to this question is to begin, in studying them, with analytical elements which all texts, particular and generalized, can be presumed to engage.

VIII

Like energy, structure can be conceptualized in a variety of ways. While structure might be regarded simply as the pattern of interaction among elements constituting, permanently or momentarily, a system, it will be viewed here as differentiated by its presumed relationship to energy. Confusion is bound to arise if structure is analyzed as if this relationship did not matter or if one kind of structure-energy relationship is implicitly assumed, in the very conception of structure, as a universal constant.

The comparative-historical record suggests that four comprehensions of structure constitute the major alternatives:

(1) Structure can be conceived of as a stabilizing and directive container of energies preserved therein, a container that may become an "iron cage" or "prison house" for the energies within it or may even be left devoid of energies, an "empty shell," a mechanism ticking by its own inertia.19 (2) Structure can be comprehended as a mediatorial device, a "language" for transmitting "messages" of energies to each other, a stable, but not necessarily distortion-free, system of signals for energies too mysterious, too protean, too dangerous or too dumb to communicate with each other without such mediation. (3) Structure can be seen as the perennial core of the flow of energies, the stable "axis" of energetic activity. (4) Structure can be regarded as a momentary confluence of interacting energies of one type or of several types, a cross-sectional "slice" of a conjunction of processes.20
We might call these the containing, mediatorial, axial, and confluent (or perhaps Gnostic-Imperial, Dramaturgic, Confucian, and Buddhist-Probabilist, comprehensions of structure. In the first two types, which have been especially prominent in Western traditions, structure is comprehended as extrinsic to energy. In the latter two types, historically more salient in the Asian civilizations—but also in Husserl and in contemporary sociology—structure is intrinsic to energy. (The Hindu tradition employs containing structures on the “social” level, to protect the purity of the higher castes from contamination, and axial structures on the “metaphysical” level, in conceiving of the general relationship between active energetic nature, prakṛti, and passive structural spirit, puruṣa). The first two, but not the latter two, comprehensions of structure imply a need to deal with energies by artificial means, such as the mask that became, in Latin, the etymological foundation of the Western category of the “person,” the type case of mediatorial structure. In Chinese, the “person,” jīn, which stands for “human-heartedness” as well, has originated not, as in the West, as an artificial structure, but as a natural energy, as spontaneous “kindness of the ruler.”

In contemporary sociology, Talcott Parsons represents the axial conception of social structure, with value orientations providing the axis, a different one for each society. The mathematical sociologists (but also, on an entirely different level of historical-analytic sophistication, Max Weber) tend toward a confluent conception of social structure. (In Weber, the mediatorial and containing conceptions of structure are, of course, also present.) Erving Goffman’s image of what he finds interesting in social structure is mediatorial—with human energies reduced entirely to the capacity to stage illusory performances, of which Goffman’s perception of civilization apparently consists. (His dramaturgical sociology therefore has little drama in it.) Durkheim has favored a containing conception of social structure (having defined the social fact by the characteristics of exteriority to and constraint upon the individual’s subjectivity); and this would tend to be the case both with orthodox Marxists and law-and-order conservatives. An adequately developed sociological theory can hardly rely upon a single comprehension even of social structure. Nor can it ignore the social comprehensions of cosmic, natural, and psychic structures.

Structures can also be differentiated by their presumed origins,
from which varying attitudes toward their obligatoriness arise, into: the ordained, as by the Judeo-Christian-Islamic God; the naturally grown, evolved spontaneously either through “material” interactions, as in evolutionary theory, or through “spiritual” congenialities, as in Confucian-Taoist China; and the artificially established, as in Hobbes (or in the Chinese Legalist conception of the law). An ordained structure can be comprehended as either (a) “permanent lawfulness” (Judeo-Christian, though not Puritan): once commanded to arise, it exists for ever and, in extreme cases, is binding even upon its creator, or (b) “instantaneous lawfulness” (Islamic): established by God’s will at each moment, binding upon the creation alone, capable of being changed by God in the twinkling of the eye.

In a critical evaluation of sociocultural structures regarded as artificial or even as naturally grown (i.e., traditional), the question arises: what is optional and what is “objectively necessary” in them? From this point of view, arbitrary structures, which can be produced or eliminated at will (structure as comprehended in ethnomethodology), can be distinguished from grounded structures, the details of which, created by men and women, are placed within fundamental “givens,” whether static or dynamic, that cannot be disregarded without punishment or failure. This is the basic conception of social structure in traditional China, in classical, medieval and, on the common sense level, still in continental Europe and, officially and more rigidly, in the Soviet Union. In contrast, Hindu caste structures are ordained (as was whatever Stalin decided during his dictatorship). Conversely, the Anglo-Saxon (and, generally, liberal) tendency, since the seventeenth century, has been increasingly to treat social structure—with the exception of its legal-constitutional foundation—as wholly constructed, at least until the recent wave of “ecological consciousness.”

Various kinds of structures can be presumed to exist in the same sociohistorical setting, and relationships among different types of structures are as problematic as relationships among diverse energies. Difficulties are compounded when the same “empirical” evidence can be interpreted, by different observers and participants, as arranged into fundamentally different types of structures. Through which image of structure, for example, is a “structure of consciousness” comprehended? Can one type of structure be comprehended by a mind committed to a way of comprehending structures alien to the structure being comprehended? Or must a struc-
tural analyst have a "multi-structural" mind and something beyond all its structures, a daemon perhaps, a sense of adequation at the core of his personality, to warn him or her when not to use a particular comprehension of structure (and indeed when to stop comprehending altogether)?

In some cases, one man's structure can be another man's (or woman's) energy. (Is it then equally valid to study it as structure or as energy?) Civilization itself—and its central component, the history of consciousness (and of sensibility)—can be comprehended either structurally or energetically, "seriously" (in the mode of adherence to structures) or "spiritedly" (in the mode of adherence to energies). Moreover, closer inspection reveals structures within energies and energies within structures, in addition to the predominantly structural standpoint of the analyst, and the prevailing energetic moment of immersion of the interpreter. In Freud (and indeed in most of the major figures of the Western intellectual tradition, to a greater extent than among most non-Western thinkers), the analyst and the interpreter coincide.

IX

The structural-energetic approach provides a basis for the comparative analysis of psychological and sociological theories and of their sources in the taken-for-granted presuppositions of the cultural tradition, or traditions, in which they have been generated. The structure-energy methodology, unfolded in its full comparative civilizational dimensions, should also help us identify what is missing, with serious consequences, in particular theories.

In George Herbert Mead's conception of the self, me is a structural, I an energetic component. A mediatorial structure is associated with culture, a life-sustaining energy with nature, in a manner unlike that in which the structure-energy differentiation has been linked with the nature-culture continuum in Confucianism. But the relationship between I and me is one of almost Confucian-like harmoniousness.

Mead, however, distrusts neither structure nor energy. They are both "good," in contrast to the Confucian tendency to perceive energy as a possible source of corruption (a possibility the more conservative Confucians were more apt to perceive). If I were to have been conceived as primordial energy and me as a containing structure, instead of the peaceful dialogue, Mead would have to
expect a potential explosive battle. But that would no longer be an American social psychology: in this tradition of thought, the energies of nature tend to appear as the energies of a garden, not of wildness.

In the Freudian theory of the personality, we find a more complicated design. Primordial energy (the \textit{id}), associated with nature, later partitioned into the two, mutually antagonistic energies of \textit{eros} and \textit{thanatos}, confronts two structures, both associated, but in different ways, with culture—the communicative structure of the \textit{ego} and the commanding structure of the \textit{superego}, the "bourgeois" and "monarchic" components of the personality.  

Structure is associated by Freud, on the one hand, with the \textbf{sphere of culture and, on the other hand, with the intrapsychic equivalents of imperial authority and of middle-class rationality}. Energy is associated, on the one hand, with the sphere of nature and, on the other hand, with the intrapsychic equivalent of the proletariat (or the savage, or the "eternal barbarian"). The equations in this system of classification suggest that culture lacks energy of its own, but so does the ruling class, which can only exploit lower-class energies and rigidly command until its authority is collectivized (in an authoritarian "collective superego"), and the middle class, which can only transform lower class energies into its rationalizing structures. \textit{Where Id was shall Ego be.} Like Plato, Freud seems to get some elements of his theory, in the Durkheimian manner, from his perception of social stratification. This implies that the conception of the nature-culture relationship in psychoanalytic theory might change radically with a transformation of class relations in society (or of their perception by the theorist), since a nature-culture theory and a theory of social stratification are so intimately intertwined in Freud's theory of the personality.

In contrast to the Confucian and to Mead, not one of the possible relationships among the components of the personality defined by Freud is presumed to be spontaneously cooperative. It is the pressure of a self-contained, Jehovah-like commanding structure in the personality and of conflictual relationships between the two types of energy that constitute the peculiarly Western (Greco-Hebrew) elements in Freud's theory, elements that would most likely have to be modified in an Indian, Chinese or Japanese adaptation of psychoanalysis.

But these elements represent \textit{medieval} conceptions of structure and energy, to which Freud has added the \textit{eighteenth-century com-}
ponent of the ego, the psychological counterpart of the social class of playwrights, scientists and journalists, the carrier of Enlightenment in the modern European sense. What is post-Enlightenment in Freud is the ambivalence toward all structures and energies, an attitude somewhat reminiscent of the more ancient layers of Hindu mythology.

What is the civilizational significance of the decline of the tripartite, social-class oriented frame of consciousness which Georges Dumézil has found to be characteristic of Indo-European mythology and which is still employed by Freud but discarded by Mead and other American social psychologists? Is it a result of the more fluid American society in which classes are no longer firm enough to provide symbolic frames for thought in general, and therefore only the contrasts of nature and culture and of structure and energy remain for draping psychological theories on?

In contemporary sociology the conception of energy, quite in contrast to the conception of structure (and in spite of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber), tends to be shadowy. This may help explain the attractiveness of psychoanalytic theory, which has a strong conception of energy, to social scientists. But even when the Freudian notion of energy is drawn upon by social scientists such as Talcott Parsons, it is impoverished by the explicit or implicit denial of either primordial or destructive energy as independent types. (Primordial energy reemerges, somewhat marginally, in the “strain-stress model”: the assumption that a type of energy that can be either destructive or creative is generated by “deprivations” or “deformations” imposed on life-sustaining energies, which are treated as primary and “normal.” The theory suggests a contemporary “trivialization of the primordial.”)

Most types of energy that civilizationists may be able to identify have no standing in social science theory. Most types of energy that civilizationists may be able to identify have no standing in social science theory. What is left is either mechanical energy of impersonal attraction and repulsion, as in studies of group dynamics, or life-sustaining energy, frequently interpreted, in human beings, as rationally calculating rather than spontaneously impulsive. The tendency to seek a unitary conception of energy can only diminish the power of the social scien-
ces—as well as of psychology—to give justice to the symbolic organization of experience.27

A further tendency may be noted. Energy seems to be relegated by Parsons, in his latest work, to lower levels of “cybernetic control hierarchy”—which is where the medievals would have placed the energy of lust (but not the energy of love).28 Such treatment of energy helps explain the generally “de-energized” character of Parsonian sociology. This limitation might have been avoided by conceiving, in addition to the structural-control hierarchy, as Parsons does, also an energetic-control hierarchy, independent of the first and operating in the opposite direction, with, for example, the passions in dominating position. The two hierarchies could then be seen not as parts of a consolidated circle of control, but as bargaining with each other for shares in determining outcomes, with several hierarchies of each type participating in the process and their potencies varying over time. This, however, would be a polytheistic rather than Parsonian sociology, Weberian rather than Confucian, an approximation to what James Hillman has done to Jungian analysis.29

XI

Can a central aspect of civilization analysis be conceived of as a systematic comparison of the comprehensions of energy and of structure and of relations between them in particular civilizations and in major traditions within them, and of changes over time in these comprehensions and relations?

Do particular circumstances of life produce dispositions to favor particular comprehensions of energy and structure? In what social settings, through what historical processes do the experiences of particular types of energy and structure become especially vivid—gratifying or frightening? In what settings and through what processes do such experiences dissolve or become exhausted (“dissipation of energies, dissolution of structures”)?

Where are the points of tension within a civilizational design between different comprehensions of structure? How do particular kinds of energies come to press violently against established structures of one or another type? How do whole configurations of such comprehensions of structures and energies become established and how do they handle their internal tensions?

Will approaches of this kind help us to understand what a
civilization encompasses (or accentuates), in its various settings, within its symbolic designs, and what it excludes (or suppresses); and to discern what the originality of a creative individual, when set against the pattern of his civilization (or civilizations), consists of?

Does the structure-energy mode of analysis help specify what basic issues are engaged in the social and intellectual struggles of particular periods, in the "crises of consciousness, identity and authority," as Benjamin Nelson has called them, and to explain the choices of policy?

XII

An approach to the depth-symbolic level of historical processes that does its work on this level of generality will have to cut across the established disciplines. It may thus provide a way to reorganize their accumulations of evidence and interpretation around analytic concerns shared by all of them. Approaches of this kind may contribute a range of usable metasymbolic frames and flow tracings for a new grounding of the distinctive theories of the humanities and the social sciences: a common ground not only historical and analytic, but also cross-disciplinary and comparative-civilizational.

Efforts along these lines should also move us a little closer to what I take to be our shared educational goal of creating a multicivilizational universe of discourse in which problems could be formulated both from Western and from non-Western perspectives and comparisons of Western with Chinese or Indian or Islamic or African modes of thought would come, to an educated individual, as easily as references to Plato, Shakespeare, Weber, or the great reductionists, Marx and Freud.

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NOTES


Ibid., p. 21.


- R.E.F. Beck, "The Metaphor as a Mediator between Semantic and Analogic Modes of Thought," *Current Anthropology*, 19 (March, 1978), 84. One is tempted to hypothesize that the structural mode of coherence will favor the spatial, and the energetic mode of coherence the temporal elements in the design of metaphors—a being in the relationship between two or more systems in the first case, a becoming or a disintegrating in one system, but in a manner appropriate to another (e.g., "the birthpangs of a revolution"), in the second.


- Thus in nineteenth-century Russia women radicals had a greater importance among the more "emotional" Populists than among the more "rational" Socialists. Robert H. McNeal, "Women in the Russian Radical Movement," *Journal of Social History*, 5 (Winter, 1971-72), 143-163. The extensive participation of women in the heretical movements within European Christianity is at least in part accountable by the intense emotionality which the former tended to generate. Herbert Moller, "The Social Causation of Affective Mysticism," *Journal of Social History*, 4 (Summer, 1971), 305-338.


- Undivided unity can be comprehended in diverse ways—such as the creative and maternal chaos of Taoism, the eternal spiritual core of Hinduism, the infinite time of Zervanism, the wisdom of omnipotent God, randomization of particles, time-space continuum, the void of Buddhism.


- Sexuality is conceived, when it operates within the restraints imposed upon it by "structure," as life-sustaining in Confucian China, but it is treated as primordial in Indian mythology and in the Tantric tradition. For a provocative view of this con-
contrast, see Octavio Paz, *Conjunctions and Disjunctions* (New York: Viking Press, 1974).


19 Containing structures presumably arise in response to perceived danger either from within the energies being organized by them (e.g., an inherent tendency toward chaos, destructiveness, or dissipation) or from without (e.g., to protect energies perceived as precious but weak, or pure but corruptible, from external threat). Whether inward- or outward-directed (or both simultaneously), containing structures can be judged either unjustifiably oppressive or justifiably practical.

20 A fifth comprehension of structure might be distinguished — structure as a *disease*, a “cancer,” using up the existing energies to expand itself while destroying or contaminating the sources of energy (e.g., Ellul’s *technique*). It would seem that each of the four main comprehensions of structure lends itself to an interpretation as a “disease.”


27 While the explicit concept of human energy tends to be unitary in contemporary sociology, its language—and the language of educated discourse generally—suggests implicit shapes which correspond to the symbolic designs of energy distinguished. Such terms as “sentiment” (except in behaviorist sociology) and “imagination” imply, more or less vaguely, some notion of ethereal energy. “Interests” suggest life-sustaining energies operating in a rationally calculated manner. “Passion,” which Adam Smith “virtually equates... with the interests,” is more usually regarded as a primordial energy of great disruptive potential. Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 110. “Conviction” leads us to expect some transcendentizing energy. These energies are viewed, like political entities, as having conflicting dispositions, but capable of entering into temporary alliances of mutual benefit. Only “passion” and “conviction”—that is, primordial and transcendentizing energies—are sometimes seen, by acknowledged or disguised heirs of the Christian tradition, as interchangeable or identical (e.g., “The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity”). The use of the concept of “soul,” traditionally indicative, to Westerners, of an animistic-transcendentizing energy, to refer to a primordial “passion” in the American...
black rhetoric of the 1960’s also suggests a tendency to fuse, or to confuse, the primordial and the transcendentalizing.
