

The Hierarchy of Ends

Even at the physiological level, means-end relationships serve to integrate behavior. At this level muscular tensions are coordinated for (as a means of) the performance of simple physiological acts—walking, reaching and grasping an object, turning the eyes toward an object. In the adult, these simple movements are largely unconscious and automatic, but the child must with great difficulty learn them and this learning, though not at a reflective level, is not at all unlike the learning of an adult in a means-end situation.

But the taking of a step, the grasping of an object, is usually itself a means to a broader end. An end may be sought, therefore, not for its own sake, but as a means to a more distant end. The clearest way of determining which ends are sought for their own sake, and which for their usefulness as means to more distant ends, is to place the subject in situations where he must choose between conflicting ends.

The fact that goals may be dependent for their force on other more distant ends leads to the conception of a hierarchy of goals—each level to be considered an end relative to the levels below it and a means relative to the levels above it. Under this conception, rationality can refer to ends as well as means—to all ends, that is, save those on the highest level of the hierarchy. In this context, again, rationality refers to the appropriateness of means to ends, since the desirability of the final goals themselves is not a factual question.

Through the hierarchical structure of ends, behavior attains integration and consistency; for each member of a set of behavior alternatives can be weighed in terms of a comprehensive scale of values. In actual behavior, a high degree of conscious integration is seldom attained. Instead of a single branching hierarchy, the structure of con-

scious motives is usually a tangled web, or more precisely, a disconnected collection of elements only weakly and incompletely tied together and the integration of these elements becomes progressively weaker as the higher levels of the hierarchy—the more final ends—are reached.

A perfectly rational and integrated behavior pattern is represented in Figure 1, where the vertical lines mean "in order to;" that is, A is selected in order to attain E, which is a means toward N, and N toward W. An incompletely integrated behavior pattern is represented in Figure 2; here a common denominator is lacking whereby the claims of E can be measured against the claims of F.

Figure 1

An Integrated Hierarchy of Motives

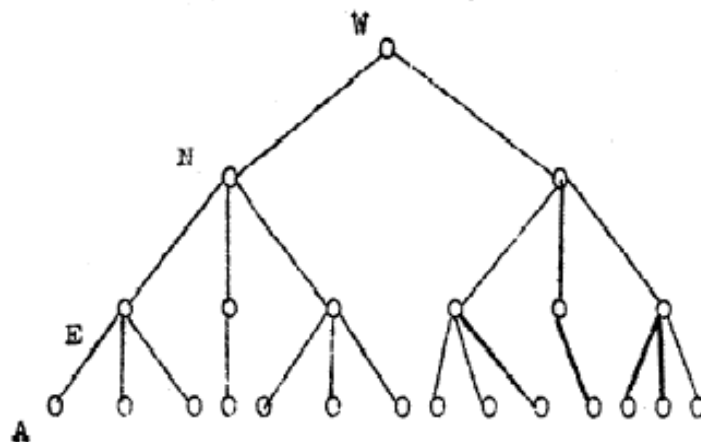


Figure 2

An Incompletely Integrated Hierarchy of Motives

