

CONVENTIONAL 'CONVICTIONS'

Why think?

Among the curiosities of language is the way in which a verb may occur in senses both transitive and intransitive, and distinct. 'To reflect' is a case in point. It would seem that man's addiction to reflecting in the one sense is what saves him from overmuch reflecting in the other. Why if you can read editorials should you yourself do any thinking? Such might be the motto of the talker.

For in many matters man seems content for his mind to function like a faulty mirror, giving back what impinges upon it blurred and distorted, if in principle unimpaired—but incidentally unimproved. That it has been given to him in order that he may find his own intellectual salvation, is a truth which comes home to him only if he pauses to reflect: and, since this he so little does, he does not see the need to do it.

Those who would wish to change the world by leading others to think differently have first to find a way of leading them to think. The opinions that men hold are commonly not a result of any thinking, on their personal part, at all. Rather they are the reflection in their minds of other men's reflections.

There are in short two main ways in which our situation, economic, social, political, conditions what we do and say: by affecting such thinking as in fact we do, and by virtually determining whose opinions we accept. Sociology has a branch, the sociology of knowledge, which shows us how strongly our own opinions are affected by where and how we are placed. The worker, for instance, tends spontaneously to see things from the angle of 'the' worker. That he merely tends to do so is partly because he at the same time tends to see them from other angles too. Today's pedestrian, being tomorrow's motorist, does not take the purely pedestrian view

of the traffic problem, even while going on foot. He who, while the importer of some things, is at the same time the exporter of others, may be ambivalent in his thinking on tariffs, and the like. And the same sort of sociology also helps us to see in what way, and whence, men's derivative opinions are typically derived.

The question of the way in which men independently think is noticed here partly to stress its complexity, but chiefly to underline its relative unimportance, given that in practice so little of man's thinking is independently done. This chapter is concerned less with how men think, or think they think, than with how they manage to manage without thinking very much. It may be that if men's opinions are to be altered it will not be merely a matter of leading them to think.

Autonomy and Other-directedness

'If you want my advice, there it is: but of course it's for you to decide.' Thus many a candid friend to many a troubled soul in many a moment of indecision. There comes indeed a stage in life when even the person reared as the member of a Church has need to use his individual judgment and make his own decision as to how far he will continue to defer to the hierarchy: whether to subordinate his judgment to that of the institution is thus itself a question for his judgment. Or, in a now familiar jargon: whether he is to remain 'other-directed' becomes a matter for 'inner-directed' choice. For ultimately it is on our own judgment, ours personally alone, that our behaviour is based—for how else, as being indeed *our* behaviour, could it indeed be ours? Though you threaten me with death if I disclose not my secret, it still is for *me* to decide. What is done under duress is in this sense freely done in as much as it is done at all. (*Coactus volui*. Though under constraint, I did indeed consent.)

And if our decisions are ours alone, what then of our opinions? Are these all of them in the same degree ours? In a sense of course they are ours as though by definition. But in a more important sense they may well be so only in form. For simply to say that an opinion is ours may be to obscure a gamut of distinctions.

What is it that makes my opinion distinctively mine?

Surely, the fact of my having arrived at it independently. And this may be only quite exceptionally the position. There are so many matters on which I may prefer to think as those around me seem to think rather than make my own approach. This is the case of simple 'other-directedness'. Or again, I may live in a milieu where some particular opinion is not prevalent merely, but orthodox: in which case I may feel bound to be satisfied with that. Or, it may be a question not merely of a milieu, but of an institution to which I belong and whose official 'line' is mandatory upon me as the well-conducted member. Fifthly, there is the curious case in which an opinion wins acceptance by others and by me, because, although no one in particular may be known to have held it, it has come to be ascribed to what only notionally and as by imputation has a mind. 'This is the voice of America.' 'London rejoices to hear . . .' 'England expects . . .'

Picking up the Moral Tune

If therefore we take some such specific example as my view, say, that democracy is good, this may be either (a) privately mine, or (b) found current by me among those I consort with, or (c) communal in a sub-culture that I belong to, or (d) official in the organised set-up to which I belong, or (e) attributed, by the paper I read, to 'the Public'. Of particular interest, under (c), is the case of the young trade unionist, or the novice in a religious order, or the new recruit. In each such case the tyro may typically be alert to learn the attitudes appropriate to the middle-of-the-road exponent of the sub-culture into which he has moved. What, he may almost be heard to inquire, is it the 'done' thing to feel, think and say, about this or that? What, in short, in this corner of the canteen, this common room, or whatever it be, is the 'line'? He may of course be mistaken in supposing that there really is such a line, in the sense of either (c) or (d). But, thinking to detect a (b) and being in fact influenced only by an (e), he may suppose himself to have evidence of a (c).

The Heteronomy of 'Private Judgment'

The prestige of a possibly unprepossessing point of view gets presumably a certain reinforcement if plausibly attributed to

some such holy abstraction as The Public, or The Establishment, or The City. The politician who dismisses a suggestion on the premise that 'the Country would not stand for it', may have in mind nothing more than a handful of marginal voters, but what in terms he in effect is doing is endorsing the myth on which democracy in theory rests. Is 'the Country' more strictly self-existent than was that *Volk* in conformity with whose requirements Adolf Hitler went upon his way? Explicitly, Hitler professed to rely on a partnership of minds, the People's and his own, or rather, his own and the People's, so intimately interwadded as invariably to think as one. A mystical body, that *Volk*, as he would walk and talk with it: certainly no dull plurality of bovine individuals. For the members of the Party, what resulted was a duty, not merely to act, but to think, feel, and speak, accordingly. No mere matter, this, of voting as directed in a three-line whip. Though the Nazi might claim credit for the correctness of his views, others knew, and so did he, how little he would himself have dreamed of doing any independent thinking. That would indeed have been almost unthinkable. Not merely for him as one of the Party rank-and-file: but simply, one almost might say, as modern man.

Meeting the modern man, the student of politics should ever be ready to ask himself: Is this that I am hearing the frank avowal of a personal conviction? Or is it some 'party line'? And he will recollect that such 'lines' are not those of the bigger parties only. There may even be individuals who talk like one-man parties in themselves. It is as if they had a pre-formulated programme attachment to which, despite dawning doubts as to its wisdom, was felt as a matter of loyalty, to self. As in public life, moreover, so also in everyday social affairs, there are those who live in terms as it were of a private 'official' doctrine. Not: What is the truth on this point? but: What on this point is my line? That is what they seemingly ask themselves before 'taking', even independently, a position on anything at all. But mostly it is by their achieved and cherished solidarity with others that people are precluded from reappraising situations towards which their 'official' attitude is becoming difficult to sustain. Opinion among, say, the miners, on what touches their interests as the miners, is likely to be the

opinion not just of individual miners: but rather that 'communal' among a miner 'public', an opinion which the miners individually may well be heard affirming with all the personal fervour of zealots reciting a creed. And what matters in the life political is not simply the arguments of the intellect. It is the faith which puts vitality and venom into the activity of the individual as a sharer in the life and attitudes of the group.

The Unfree Mind of the Unfree Man

As a case in point, we may recall Mr. K., on capitalism as depicted by Marx, and, as displayed to him by Mr. Lodge during his visit to the U.S.A. What differences there might be, between the two sorts of capitalism, Mr. K. professed not to see. Was this his mere obtuseness? Not necessarily. Was it not simply his reiterating of the party line? Given the nature of his party, Mr. K. could scarcely have confessed himself a convert to that capitalism with which communism was still in principle at war. For, whereas one might often be warranted in supposing that a nobody was speaking the truth precisely as he saw it, one should never too confidently expect this of a public man. Certainly not of a Kremlinite when, with everyone's eyes upon him, he is on a mission to the West. Whereas one might normally expect to be told: 'You can't say that. It isn't true', one is, in public life, more likely to be told: 'You can't really say that sort of thing however true you may think it.'

This is why some see so little magic in the idea of a meeting at the summit. The very expression 'at the summit' has an ironic aptness; since it is of the sitter on a summit that it may be most tempting to ask that he 'come off it'. It is difficult to conceive of individuals meeting on a summit, and appealing to one another to do that: but oddly enough this is just what they presumably are expected to do!

The Substance of Society

In so far as society functions with success this is partly because it is formed of individuals so emotionally and psychologically constituted as to lend themselves to social co-existence. Not all of them may do this with equal freedom from spiritual unease. But society functions as it does because enough of its

members have sufficiently little difficulty in behaving as is conducive to its functioning. In behaving, that is, congenially: doing their social 'stuff'. And this without distress: because feeling congenially, thinking congenially, understanding, interpreting, pronouncing congenially. Doing, that is, and thinking, and feeling, and talking, their social stuff.

The thing about congenial thinking is, of course, that it may or may not be sound. Its content may or may not have a likeness to what is true. Freud in his analysis of our thought drew a distinction between the 'pleasure', and the 'reality', principles. Congenial thinking is related not to reality but to the convenience—that is, in the Freudian sense, to the pleasure—of the group. And, commonly enough, it is in terms not of testable truth but of mythological doctrine that such thinking is typically pursued.

Whereas the seeking and finding of truth requires use of the intellect, what socially congenial thinking demands is deference to the group. In Hitlerian language, it is thinking 'with the blood'. In ours, 'with the boys'.

Myths Good and not so Good

As doctrinal sustenance for the rising Nazi movement, Hitler and his aides developed, deliberately, a communal mythology. It was not necessary that the votaries of anti-semitism should personally have encountered, or had cause to dislike, a Jew. The disciples were fortified in their folkish solidarity by an image of themselves as threatened in their communal existence by a supposedly identified foe. What anti-semitism meant to the Nazis, anti-this or anti-that or anti-something-else may mean to many an ardent young political bulldozer of today. The matter is however much too delicate to bear closer consideration, except by the individual reader in the privacy of his self-examining heart.

Before dismissing as irrational, self-deceiving, and therefore contemptible, the intellectual practice of what Hitler recommended as thinking 'with the blood', it behoves us to consider whether this is other than just a special case of something to which many besides the Nazis have at all times and in all societies been only too commonly prone. It was as trees walking that in the Gospel narrative the man born blind

first glimpsed his fellow men. It was as bees buzzing that we probably all of us first got accustomed to hearing them. Change the bees into B's, and a range of illustrations is provided for our theme. 'B' stands for so many apposite categories of our contemporaries. If the curate feels no compulsion to think with the bishops, the employee may be tempted to think with the boss, many a rank-and-filer with Big Brother, many a climber with the best people, or with the bright-young-people (*alias* possibly in these days the beatniks), or simply, as we saw, with 'the boys'. Yes, especially with the boys. Whether, for the world and for its hopes of happiness, regrettably, or not, the disposition to conformism in thinking-practice is hardly less prevalent in what Frenchmen call the *évolué* (the no longer primitive tribesman) than in the typical member of the tribe. The one kind of B-thinking for which we can, it would seem, look with least confidence among our fellows is thinking with the brain. There was something disconcertingly human about those Nazi enthusiasts.

The Law of the Community as the Lore of the Few

Less irksome it is, and so more congenial, to preserve one's group-orthodoxy unimpaired no less in thought than in expression: to blink, that is, the distinction between what is matter of fact and what matter of doctrine; and to treat the socially reiterated as if objectively true. Yet the difference between the orthodox and the proven or self-evident is obvious enough, however unorthodox the attitude of those who harp on it 'out of their turn'.

As perhaps our best instance of an orthodoxy, we may take the sufficiently familiar example of the law. 'The' law is that obtaining in a particular society. The study of it means the acquiring of a corpus of concepts, standards of appreciation and points of view which for the relevant purposes are in the relevant milieu the stylised and institutionalised substitute for a fresh examination of the given. Not all legal systems are equally sensible, or equally not. But in the case of every legal system there can be little room for deviants on the Bench, or among those aspiring to sit there. Not: How does this strike me? but: How do things stand in contemplation of the law? is what the judge is concerned to consider.

The legal profession is a fair example of what by some would presumably be called a 'sub-culture'. And the sort of thing the members of that profession share, namely an esoteric orthodoxy, is what those of other sub-cultures may similarly be found, amongst themselves, to share. This is just the point of our calling them a sub-culture. A farmer may have bred a special strain of cattle, or a gardener of peas. So, in any given sub-culture, there is maintained in vigorous vitality a peculiar breed of preconceptions, prejudices, partisan points of view. Occasionally into the herd there may be born a queer exception. A monster we may call him. If a 'sport', then hardly a 'good' one. An outsider, really. Out then with him! *Raus!* The swastika-dauber is alas only an extreme exponent of a mood which in less recognised forms has its parallels elsewhere. Which of us is not conscious of antipathies that we harbour as being what it is the 'done', rather than the strictly fair and reasonable, thing to entertain?

Politically Sealed Lips

Given that a particular evaluation has become so to say canonised in the local tribe, while few can afford to show uncertainty about it, there is one, namely, the politician, for whom it is as law. Nearly everything of any importance that is said politically is said by someone speaking in a 'role'—as the spokesman, for instance, of some section of opinion. That things said in that capacity may be other than objective is sufficiently plain. They are virtually certain to be other than objective. One might indeed speak of there applying in politics an 'iron law' of partisanship. Especially instructive to look out for will be those truths which by their nature are such that, while there are those who cannot officially afford to perceive them, there equally are others who can ill afford not to, at every opportunity. The Oder-Neisse frontier, for instance, is still technically provisional. This fact the Polish Premier cannot afford to mention, whereas the West German Chancellor can scarcely afford not to.

The difference between the roles of the politician and the analyst is as that between the two uses of 'reflect'. The social cosmologist, being *par excellence* an analyst, and not a politician, has a special responsibility for reflecting upon such truths as,

in a given milieu, no politician can afford publicly to perceive. Also, for not exercising this his special responsibility irresponsibly. Indeed, his judging of judgments has need to be practised with special anxiety on judgments of his own. If, with the psalmist, he may pray to be given understanding that he 'may live', he should supplement this with a further prayer, for judgment, that he may have a better understanding, that he may live to better purpose.

One Man, One Justice?

Group thinking has typically its roots in the specific historical experience and the given social milieu. There it develops concepts which tend to be taken as having reference to the ontologically real. As, from his inspection of certain shapes, the geometer abstracts his idea of 'the' triangle, and goes on then to posit 'the' triangle as a form laid up, so to say, in the heaven of things intelligible, so may the moralist picture 'justice' as an essence, for the 'true' definition of which he may proceed to seek. The practice of conceptual analysis is generally indispensable to those who in common would wish to think things through. 'You try to verbalise your conception, and I will mine, so that, comparing them, we may together approach the true definition of justice as she is.' She, justice, is the projected image, the reified embodiment, of man's *idea* of justice, an idea born of his experience. Positively it may be difficult to show man's idea of justice as everywhere identical. But negatively justice should at least be the opposite of injustice, an idea derived from an emotional experience which presumably is everywhere sufficiently the same.

What is the Norm of Normality?

A comparison between ideas of justice can be instructive to anyone, both in showing him the diversity of men's understandings of life, in exposing the relativity even of his own idea, and in clarifying for him its implications. What must vitiate any such search for philosophical insight is a disposition on anyone's part to suppose that there is necessarily a true definition, and that it happens to be his. That would be like assuming that English, not being foreign in England, cannot anywhere, or for

anybody, have the aspect of a foreign language. It would be like supposing that man is typically man, so that woman is an inferior form of man. Or, that British democracy is democracy proper, so that anything differing from it is called democracy only by courtesy at best. When polygamy is rejected as not just relatively but absolutely wrong, or eggs and bacon seen as 'the' authentic breakfast, a pattern of social thinking developed in given conditions is used for the discrediting of social arrangements obtaining, however successfully, in the conditions of some other social milieu.

One had better give thought to what this means. The French word *mentalité* is useful here. What gives to any communal opinion its endurance value is its attunement to a mentality that is communal, and not just prevalent only. It is owing to the inadequacy of our insight into others' mentalities that we find it hard to fathom the attitudes that we meet with in them and with which we may have to deal. Too readily do we ascribe to others what we would consider a normal mentality, meaning something not unlike our own.¹ If Mr. Neville Chamberlain may be taxed with having revealed, in 1938, a lack of anything, it was not a lack of courage; but rather perhaps of the ability, or even the urge, to get on proper talking terms with those with whom at a critical juncture it fell to him to parley. Advisers whom he might have expected to understand better than he himself did the mentality of a Hitler he seems to have brushed aside. The two men seem scarcely to have found a common wavelength: and for this the blame may not have been Hitler's only.

Patriotism is not Prosy Enough

Hitler was *par excellence* the bulldozer. He was born to change things, to smash and build anew, to do battle for a cause, the cause, as he construed it, of his *Volk*. It is not just the emotions of men individually that make the world go round. It is group emotions chiefly, those, that is, of men in their

¹ Utopian as it perhaps must remain to be wishing for a world in which at long last the peoples will have come to understand one another, it may yet be not beyond the limits of the realistic to be striving, and contriving, for a state of things in which they do at least appreciate that they don't. And what a progress that would be towards the target of an eventual all-round limitation and reduction of misunderstandings!

multitudes reacting collectively to group situations. To reason the world out of its susceptibility to nationalism would be almost as impracticable as to argue the eternal mother out of her feeling for her child. The nationalistic passion is not something whipped up to serve a purpose defined by reason. Reason is on the contrary called in to serve the cause that passion has espoused. Between the oratory, and the poetry, of patriotism there are obvious affinities, and the status of what either has to say is scarcely that of scientific 'truth'. The critic who assesses poetry in terms of its testable-truth-content is off the point: and so is the sociologist who shows surprise at the interlarding by politicians of their analyses of the outlook with an admixture of myth. Political edification and academic enlightenment are different things, serving different objects. To measure the one by the standards of the other is a category mistake.

Nationalism may well have been a cause of war, as has vitality of dog fights: but we have not abolished the dog. Whether we find good in it or not, nationalism is a fact of our environment, like the warmth of the sun. We have air-conditioned offices—but not yet a reason-regulated cosmos. Even at its worst nationalism is a social malady with which at the best we may long have to live. Not that it is altogether beyond treatment. It may, moreover, become, on the other hand, an element of social health.

But even so the forms it takes can be repellent to the unsympathetic. He may be tempted to call it a form of madness. Yet that it is not. Nationalism is an emotion developed by individuals collectively. For while the feelings of a man are some of them distinctively his, others he derives rather from his rootedness in a group. To explain a given display of national feeling we need to know the occasion of it. This has only to be such that members of the group have come to competing with one another as exponents of the *Geist*, and mere emulation will do the rest. Who among them really has what emotions in his heart is almost an independent question. The play, as such, is the thing. What a terror Adolf Hitler might have been on the stage! The student of affairs should note the great variety of worlds and should see the world of diplomacies, and within it the several sub-worlds of international organisation,

as so many environments, the breeding grounds of cultures and sub-cultures of their own.¹

Whose are the Normal Norms?

Of Frenchmen such as are accustomed to assuming that every anglophobe manifestation in the Paris Press must have been 'orchestrated' by the Quai d'Orsay, how can it be hoped that they will not make similar assumptions when criticism of French policy appears in the London papers? As a better-informed Frenchman once said on the air: 'I explain all that to my countrymen, but the truth is, they just don't believe me.' The reader may be too young to remember the alleged remark of the Yugoslav when in 1945 Churchill had lost the election: 'I suppose they'll shoot him now?'

The sobering aspect of the use by African leaders of the one-man-one-vote slogan is not that they should be clever enough to use it, but the readiness of so many reasonable people in England to find it reasonable that they should. For these tend to define 'the reasonable' as 'what we are used to here'. Man may presently get to the moon. Then, who knows, his very notion of the reasonable may well be rejected. He'll be asked, perhaps, not to talk that earthshine here.

Travel, as ordinarily understood, takes place within the earth's gravitational field. Space travel becomes realistically thinkable only when thought of in conditions not ordinarily applying to travel. This means, not that the intending space-traveller must correct his assumptions about ordinary travel: what it means is that he must relativise his idea of the 'ordinary', and hold together in his mind the ideas of two different kinds of travel, each as ordinary, in its own conditions, as the other.

The Foreignness of English

And what thus applies to thinking about travel applies comparably to thinking about politics in areas beyond a given country's jurisdiction. If, say in Ruritania, the jury system is not found to work well, this is not necessarily a reflection on Ruritania. If in revolutionary France a democracy was

¹ Each such milieu may be marked, in Wittgensteinian jargon, by one independent 'language game' or 'form of life'. 'When in Rome . . . Remember Bernard Shaw's . . . their tastes may be different'.

understood to mean a homogeneous society based not on tradition but on abstract ideas, this was no condemnation of a form of government rooted in centuries of British experience. The man, it has been said, whose only speech is English is obliged, when he goes abroad, to shout: for how else is he to become intelligible to those who fail to follow what he says in normal tones? Anyone whose patterns of social thought are strictly parochial must needs discuss matters international in terms of these, irrelevant though they be, for how otherwise can he hope to contribute to a debate? The physics teaching, however, which shows the earth's as but one instance of a gravitational field, or the language teaching which shows English as no less foreign a language than any other, does for the child's education rather what social cosmology should do on the validity and status of those concepts which he uses in his 'ordinary' political thinking.

The Relativity of the Commonsensical

The concepts of classical physics and of common sense have not, it seems, to be abandoned even by the pioneer in quantum-theoretical inquiry: but he does have to do without them, and use others, rather odd ones, we are told, when at work in that special field. So too, the social scientist, when exploring the relationships between the notional and the true, must accept the experience of wearing an unfamiliar thinking-cap without discarding his ordinary one. He must not so extrapolate from the findings he has come to with the old one on as to prejudge what shall result from his wearing of the new. And similarly with the dualism of the domestic and the diplomatic systems of social arrangements. If, for instance, he is, in discussion of international procedures, to use the term 'democracy' at all, he should explain in what, necessarily very special, sense he deems it helpful to use, in that context, such a term as democracy at all. So, also, if he is to use in an International Relations context the term 'the rule of law'.