

SECTION II: THE RESPONSE IN EDUCATIONAL THINKING

CHAPTER ONE

The Knowledge Needed for International Understanding

A PLAIN enough expression, one might think—'international understanding'. Yet its meaning is not always the same. Quite commonly, when people speak of international understanding it is of happy official relations between countries as represented by their governments that they are thinking. The creators of the old League of Nations, for instance, referred, in what became the famous Article Eleven of the Covenant, to "that good understanding between peoples upon which peace depends". This use of words has only a very little to do with the question of mutual intelligibility as between the diplomats through whom countries communicate. Rather does it refer to the sort of assumptions regarding one another's intentions with which countries do their thinking for the immediate future. International understanding, in this context, means an absence of excessive distrust rather than mere success in the finding of a common language. And whether any improvement in educational systems could be expected to make any difference to international understanding in this particular sense is a nice question which will not be examined here. As well might one attempt to assess the degree in which squabbles between husbands and wives were attributable to deficiencies in their linguistic equipment. Is it not sometimes their very capacity for expressing themselves with point and precision that accounts for so much of their trouble?

It is, at any rate, with a different sense of the term 'international understanding' that we shall be concerned. A man may feel that while in the ordinary course of things he has little difficulty in understanding and being understood by others, this is not always quite so easy when it is with foreigners that he is having to deal. Even where his, and their, command of a common vocabulary presents no problem, something seems nevertheless to impede their interchange of meanings. Something usually 'gets across' all right, but not what was really intended. Not that he is shy or indifferent. Indeed, he would like

to be 'good' with foreigners. Some people, he may feel, seem to have a gift for it, and he wonders what their secret can be. The question here to be considered is whether, and in what ways if at all, formal education can be directed to equipping the student with that mysterious facility for the lack of which he might well be loath to accept such a kind of employment as must bring him often into personal touch with those from other countries. And is there in particular some body of knowledge to be transmitted, or is it mainly a matter of the disciplining of a person's emotions, an enlarging of his sympathies, an exorcizing of some hidden inhibitions?

The Intellectual Content of Understanding

The assumption here will be that, while training for international understanding has indeed its emotional as well as its moral aspects, it can also be held to include an important intellectual component—and that more might well be done than commonly is done to provide young people with a quality of enlightenment which should ease their acquiring of the art, for an art in a sense it is, of making the most of what opportunities they have, whether at home or abroad, for enjoying the society and perhaps picking the brains of those brought up in a different country, and so in a sense a different world. Granted that a man may have difficulty enough in his inter-personal relations with a fellow-countryman of different age-group, family background, vocation, or social class, what can academic instruction do in respect of the sort of additional difficulty that he may experience when 'the other' is not his fellow-countryman at all?

One is ignoring here, as in essence not intractable, the problem of a specifically linguistic barrier. The man who needs some Spanish must set about acquiring it. And this no doubt he will. What has here to be considered is how, and how far, he may be spared the embarrassment that may occur when though fluent enough in Spanish he finds his Spanish interlocutor difficult to 'feel at home with' in anything more than the conventionalities of polite and probably trivial conversation.

The subject is a large one, and at least as old presumably as the Tower of Babel. And there are those who have made a special study of it and whose writings it would be pertinent to quote. But all that will be offered here is such thoughts as have suggested themselves on the subject to one whose concern with it has been that of a teacher of international relations, a discipline within the ambit of which there obviously belongs the elucidating of the attitudes and the probing of the mental backgrounds of those whose participation in an international dialogue fails to get them very far. What in particular, he will ask himself, might a teaching to them of international relations as such

have contributed towards obviating the trouble they are in? An answer to this question could be of interest to those specializing in the subject, whether or not it made new friends for the subject among academic powers that be.

This is not, of course, to say that the case for a teaching of international relations, or even of the social cosmology which serves it so well as a propaedeutic, is dependent upon its conduciveness to international understanding. Apart from their high intrinsic educational value, these subjects have their obvious claim to a place in the curriculum of anyone proposing to go into public life, as also indeed of anyone who as a citizen would wish to be wise and not merely emotional in his judgment of what his leaders do and say, as well as in his personal participation in the discussion of world affairs. This case must surely be by now no longer in need of argument, however little may as yet have been attempted in some colleges to find place for these subjects in an old-established curriculum.

A word first, before broaching the principal topic, about the general question of misunderstanding between men. There is nothing surprising about it. It is even wise, perhaps, to think of non-understanding as the norm and near-understanding the special achievement. All men may no doubt be brothers, but they are seldom identical twins. Even between the most alike-looking of brothers there may be wide differences of temperament, outlook, and affinities. Two men, though living through the same period, may experience it in contrasting ways. The gap between the generations may be due to their having lived through different wars; but the gap may be just as great between those who have been on different sides, or even on the same side, in the same one. What is it that opposes the high-minded nuclear disarmament to his no less estimable critic? Essentially it is that neither believes that the other understands what the world is like; and each in his fashion may be right. Though their images of social reality be different, each may be equally a travesty of the truth. And it is of course in terms of his private image of reality and not of things as they actually are that man confronts the challenge of his day. The behaviourist may be content to look upon the outward appearance. He is concerned to weigh and measure. But here we are discussing the attempt to understand. While noting the outward appearance, it is the content of the inner imagination that we must wish to divine.

To understand how it is that another sees a given issue as he does, it may be necessary to consider the historical, cultural, and sociological context in which he has come to do so. And just as parents must be aware that they can hardly hope ever fully to understand their children or be understood by them, so with every other such imperfectly

bridgeable inter-personal gulf—between believer and infidel, have and have-not, employer and employee, black man and white. To understand my neighbour I must not merely know his position. I must understand it. And not merely think I do.

The bitterness of anti-colonialism is to be appreciated only by those who know the story of colonial expansion as developed in the memories of peoples to whose ancestors it brought the blessings of civilization. Nowadays, indeed, the understanding of a problematic mood may well be recognized as a question for socio-psycho-somatic diagnosis. It may be difficult enough to understand a man's position even when the context in which he comes to it is fully understood. Without that understanding it may be impossible. And except within the wider context of an overall situation, the immediate context may in turn be difficult to understand. Who would think to indicate the context in which Shylock demanded his pound of flesh except against the background of a world in which anti-Semitism was endemic and traditional. We do not understand our Shylock unless we know the conditions in which he suffered and the emotions which that suffering engendered in him. To understand and to sympathize is not necessarily to admire. Insight is in principle emotionally neutral. The doctor, the psychiatrist, the solicitor, the priest, the friend—do these necessarily admire?

Do they even ever completely understand? It may be doubted. Man is at least as unfathomable to others as he can be to himself. Life, it has probably been said, is a matter of making adequate decisions on the basis of inadequate information. What cannot be known may have to be guessed at. That we do not perfectly understand our neighbour no more absolves us from having dealings with him than a doctor's uncertainty as to his patient's condition permits him to leave him unattended. And it may indeed be better to know ourselves as guessing than to persuade ourselves that our surmise is a certitude. Have we never ourselves been misinterpreted, never had our acts attributed to motives of which we were unaware? Safest is it to recognize that even in the simplest-looking personal stance one must expect to encounter some component of incomprehensibility. The problem is to minimize incomprehension. Its elimination is not on the agenda.

The Role of a Formal Study of International Relations

It is here that it becomes relevant to touch on the formal study of international relations. For towards our minimizing of our misunderstanding of the international 'other', the foreigner, nothing is more important than a knowledge of how he is placed. How is he situated? How do things in general look to him? One thing that we can probably guess about with confidence is the dependence of the other's situa-

R +
Soc Science

tion on the situation of his country. If his country has a grievance, so one may suspect will he. This is no more than a crude hypothesis, but one with which it seems reasonable to begin. Whether he is aggrieved about it or not, his personal situation is likely to be affected by the situation of his people. To understand the Irishman the Englishman has always needed not just an image of his own with respect to the Anglo-Irish past, but an awareness of the current Irish image of that past. If, in respect of this communal or public image, the particular Irishman is a deviator from the norm, the nature of his deviation can be appreciated only in comparison with the norm. And the significance of that current Irish image can be appreciated only in a comparison with a presumptively objective truth about the past. There is in short no resting-place for the would-be connoisseur of the Irish situation short of a sufficient grasp of modern history and an awareness of the overall situation of to-day. A connoisseurship, whether of Irish or Japanese or Nigerian attitudes, requires a connoisseurship of the affairs of all the world!

All that is being asserted is that a man's predicament, as he sees it, is in some way bound up with the predicament of his country as he sees it; and that if an understanding of the man presupposes an understanding of how he understands his position, it ultimately presupposes an understanding of his understanding of the position of his country. And what this in turn presupposes has perhaps been by now sufficiently implied.

The question is not whether the would-be artist in international understanding need seek to make himself a connoisseur of international politics, but how such connoisseurship should be sought. What is that knowledge which is needed for the understanding of the predicament, both as it is and as it is seen by its citizens, of any given country at any given time?

Exhaustively to answer this question would be to delineate a full-blown time-table for the university teaching of international relations, with the necessary illumination as well of its general as of its specialized aspects—political, economic, geographical, strategic, psychological, juristic, institutional, philosophical—and with attention also to regional variations, and to novelties consequent on the contemporary emergence of so numerous a crop of eagerly self-assertive new sovereign states. There would have to be reiteration of what is suggested as to the cardinal importance, as basis for such studies, of the study of the social universe as such.¹ If world affairs may be compared to indigestion, social cosmology is then the physiology of the stomach. It is im-

¹ See Section II, Chapter 2.

portant to know about that—if the pains are not simply to be suffered but so far as possible understood. And it perhaps needs adding that along with a study of international relations there should be due attention given to such companion disciplines—the 'underpinners' we may call them—as international history, economics, comparative government, and international law.

Too much—much too much? It is certainly a daunting assignment. But it is difficult to see by what short cut to erudition it could in theory be evaded. It is not, of course, to be expected of the novice in such studies that he bring his pursuit of so many varieties of semi-expertise to its fruition during his period at a college. What he can, indeed, be given at college and be thankful for is an idea of the nature, the length, and the desirability of the journey that awaits him, and of the modes of travel by which he may usefully hope to continue it under his own direction and steam. What would some, now in later life, not give to have had in their youth the opportunity to lay such propitious foundations for their subsequent activities in the field! At least it might have left them with a better conception of what they yet needed to know. Connoisseurship has its degrees of incompleteness; and it is a superior form of incomplete connoisseurship which appreciates the senses in which it is so incomplete. Too often we tend to undervalue those aspects of a subject to which our personal connoisseurship does not happen to extend. We are like the physician who familiar with but three diseases will not permit his patients to have any more.

Understanding of the other man, then, especially if he is a foreigner, must always be imperfect, always a matter of degree. A lifetime is not long enough for acquiring all the knowledge with which one should wish to have begun. But artistry, besides being based on book-work, is above all a matter of practice, the practice of the relevant art. To become 'good' with foreigners is a question of becoming progressively better. And this, as has already been implied, may involve an element of moral and emotional self-mastery for which a merely academic preparation need be no preparation at all. All that a lecturer can provide is a theoretical acquaintance with some of the disabilities to be overcome.

Psychological, Sociological, Cultural, and Moral Impediments to Understanding

Apart from the disability to which the would-be virtuoso in international understanding may be subject through his insufficient understanding of the world, there seem to be at least four further categories of personal impediment of which he should be grateful to be warned. These one may distinguish as the strictly psychological, the sociolo-

MR as
context relating
to int'l understanding

SEC.
GSMO

gical, the cultural, and the moral. To be forewarned of the influence of these impediments should mean to be forearmed against it, and also in a position to identify their effects upon the attitudes of another. None of them is peculiar to the international form of the inter-personal situation. But it is in considering that type of situation that they can perhaps least of all be safely left out of account.

It was a Frenchman who remarked, anent the Americans in 1943, that if the war went on for long it would be easier for them to maintain their standards of living than their standards of thinking. In so far as his apprehensions might have been justified, the explanation would have been partly psychological, partly sociological, partly moral. Psychological in so far as in the individual American there would presumably have become further developed those elements of bias, prejudice, inhibition, predilection congenial to his condition as a partisan and a participant in war; sociological in so far as the communal thinking and feeling, specific to the social milieu in which he existed, would similarly have been rendered more extreme by the persistence of the we-they situation in the most dramatic of its manifestations; and moral, in so far as though conscious of the intrinsic irresponsibility of his attitude in this matter to truth, he, like any Frenchman or Englishman or anyone else, would probably not allow himself the luxury of self-criticism if, in the interests of the war-effort, it were better that he do his thinking 'with the boys'. For in wartime, even as in ordinary domestic politics, there can be seen everywhere at work the aforesaid iron law of partisanship. To say that this last sort of disability is a moral one is not to say that to yield to the pressures of the climate of opinion in such conditions the immoral thing to do. Loyalty to one's party in peace or war may on one view be more important than jealousy for one's intellectual self-esteem. All that is being asserted is that a man cannot always have it both ways. If in order to get the best out of himself in the shape of cheerful service to his side it is necessary that he make a virtue of wishful thinking, it may be that there will be virtue in making of it such a virtue. But he cannot have it both ways. He may perhaps halt between two opinions. But he can hardly hold them firmly both at once. Of one or the other he will have to let go. And the moral choice is—which?

What this would seem to come to is that in an international situation at the inter-personal level, where, could both parties permit themselves to transcend their psychological and sociological distortions and make the needed moral choice, they need have little serious difficulty in finding a common interpretation of essential facts, an understanding may nevertheless in practice be out of the question. Not only where they are meeting in representative, and therefore restrictively official,

capacities, and bound therefore to affect greater difficulty than in fact they need have in seeing each other's points—not only in those cases, but equally in more strictly personal situations where one or other of the parties has pride, or past utterances, or social status, or dogmatic vested interests to safeguard, an apparent misunderstanding may be consciously kept alive by a cultivated imperviousness to the truth. No one likes to admit that he himself has had experience of such embarrassments. Do we not in all our disputations preserve an open mind? Maybe we do. But others mostly don't. The fact is that it is commonly more congenial, more expedient, more socially approved not fully to understand 'the other'. Is it, for instance, in the Arab world quite the 'done' thing to show an understanding of the Israeli point of view? Are there not fashionable, communal, class, and national convictions which we feel constrained to reiterate with all the greater appearance of sincerity for fear lest in our hearts there should be born a suspicion that they are not so unimpeachably fair, or so disinterested, or so adult, after all. And as regards the fairness of our attitude, who is better able than we to judge of that?

Tricks of personal psychology apart, there is still the sociological aspect. Man lives, as a rule, in some specific social milieu from the perspective of which he looks forth upon the world. The class-conscious proletarian may be as little conscious of his consciousness as a bee presumably is of the instinct she instinctively obeys. Class thinking, born of class feeling, may in the individual pass for independent thinking of his own. There is, in short, a 'sociology of appreciation' no less pertinent than is the 'psychology of appreciation' in any assessment of the intrinsic defensibility of individual views. Party feeling, race feeling, national feeling blend with class feeling to form an emotional amalgam specific to the person concerned.

But even though by an heroic *tour de force*—and it takes two, of course, to make a common mind—the disabilities so far considered could be overcome, there yet might remain, more especially in the international sort of situation, the further great divisive influence of culture. Cultures and sub-cultures-within-cultures—the social universe is a veritable breeding ground of these. When a Karl Marx distinguishes bourgeois morals from proletarian, when Muslim and Christian ideas on marriage are compared, when African or Oriental are contrasted with Western conceptions of the dignity of the person or the value of life, it is the diversity of cultures that is being underlined. And though distinctively national cultures are not the only significant kind, it is clear that cultural differences, no less than those of social class and individual experience and commitment, contribute to that complex of logically impertinent ingredients which serves to render the other man's

multi-
dimensional
world

reaction to the selfsame developments so bafflingly incongruent with our own. It is indeed particularly important to insist upon this cultural aspect of the matter, for more than any other is it liable to be overlooked, or at least to be under-valued. Multi-national, multi-racial, multi-credal—the social universe is all of these, but for the inquirer into the roots of misunderstanding it is before everything else to be recognized as multi-cultural, too. The other above-mentioned classes of impediment, once appreciated, should allow of being allowed for and corrected for and with the necessary goodwill largely overcome. But culture is a tougher nut to crack. If there is anyone who does not know that the French mind differs from the British, it can only be because he can never have had occasion to notice it. The better the French and British come to understand one another the better do they understand how little they do. And this of course is the key to their problem of mutual misunderstanding; to perceive that they are different and to strive with intelligence, patience, and magnanimity to bridge the difference, and not to suppose that with magnanimity alone they should be able to conjure the difference away. No use the Englishman supposing that the French are merely retarded and that presently by overhauling their educational system they should be able to overtake the lag. It is all too easy to persuade oneself that that which one finds unintelligible is also *eo ipso* absurd. "All the world is queer..." The fact is that anyone who imagines that as a source of misunderstanding cultural differences present no very serious problem should consult an anthropologist.

What men, indeed, can do is to take this serious problem seriously, and make full use of those exceptional people—the Ruth Drapers?—who have an existential insight into more cultures than their own. Keep the cultural differences and even be glad of them—since there they ineradically are—and allow the best interpreters the status they deserve. They will have plenty to do.

"Know thyself!" said the ancient man of wisdom. No less than for presenting human societies to one another, interpreters are needed for showing them to themselves. Every human society, every independent or dependent people, is in a significant degree a product of its past. That past it did not choose. And, rationally and realistically speaking, it is not to blame for it. Yet social man is not so realistic as not to hold his neighbour answerable for what his neighbour's father did. Resentments are persevered in long after their natural targets are dead and gone. And the settling of old scores is for ever creating new ones. Unto the third and fourth generation the children of to-morrow will be paying the penalties, although by no means doing penance, for what their parents do to-day. And in this we must discern another

major source of international misunderstanding. For what A's forbears did A is content to take the credit, but not the blame, whereas B is more disposed to give him the blame and not the credit. And conversely, for A's attitudes to B. This reciprocal want of fairness goes far to vitiate relations between A and B, and to preclude the understanding by each of each. Neither can stomach, neither can fully comprehend, the irrationality of the other's unrealism.

And as no people ever chose its past, neither did it choose the style of thought and living which that past has left it as a legacy. Every independently thinking individual tends to develop from his reflections on his personal experience a personal philosophy of life. And every people, whether independent or not, is, as though by definition, an independently thinking people. Out of its own distinctive experience a people is likely to distil its own distinctive outlook or set of outlooks, its own philosophical school or schools. It is in the light of English experience that English social and political philosophies have been conceived; and in the light of those distinctively English philosophies that English ways of living have been sanctified and consolidated. So much so that to the Englishman the English ways of thinking and of living are apt to figure as the only really sensible ways, and the English are apt to evaluate the ways of others by the test of their similarity to their own. Not until quite recently was it reluctantly conceded that common membership in a Commonwealth did not necessarily imply the sharing of a common way of political life. It still is within the bounds of psychological possibility that Englishmen should barely even care to consider whether the Pakistanis or the Ghanaians may not possibly have discovered for themselves a better than the English way. Even to be asking such a question is almost to convict oneself of absurdity, or perversity, or worse. No one is willing to submit his own way of life to validation by reference to another's yardstick. But it remains as a major source of international misunderstanding that each tends to judge the other's values by the yardstick of its own. A politically literate people, cosmologically minded, would see the logic of this habit for what it was. If it was inevitable that Communism, however ruthlessly imposed, would give itself or be given in Russia a distinctively Russian form, why should not the corresponding manifestation have been expected as equally inevitable in Yugoslavia? Yet the two comradely systems very nearly went to war! Christians are enjoined to pray for their enemies. They are liable to pray with hardly less sorrow and solicitude for those who happen not to see eye to eye with them. Toleration is easy in theory, even with those we don't agree with; but in practice it is hard. And if you start praying for me, it will serve you jolly well right if I begin praying for you!

division of
the world

M's view of
separation of
cultures --
and in next
page

Conclusion

To sum up. Understanding between man and his neighbour is an unattainable but not an unapproachable ideal. Partly it is a question of the disposition of the will. As men may the better understand because they want to, so may they the less well understand because they don't. Where there is on both sides the desire for understanding, there may be obstacles, psychological, social, cultural, which themselves being better understood might cause less misunderstanding than they do. Cultural differences, as a cause of major difficulties, may well be the most difficult to overcome. Hope lies in a more general understanding of the nature of the general difficulty—the difficulty of the world's consisting of such different sorts and conditions of men, so differently placed. Given that each has his private predicament, all share a public one—the predicament of existing in a social cosmos within which each has a private predicament. If the nature of this universe and of the predicament it creates were more generally understood, the sense of community, the sense of sharing in this universal human predicament, might go far to take the poison out of those situations in which no one understands another's private point of view. And since it is to the nature of the universe that each private predicament is owing, the road towards a better understanding between men may well be found to lie through their better understanding of the world, their better understanding, that is, of their common social universe and of the guises in which it so variously presents itself to them. Two men who, being well enough aware of the nature of the world, appreciate why they cannot hope to feel, and see, and think alike are already near to doing so. Let men meet and, if need be, differ in their understanding of their situation, but be at one in their understanding of why they do. Could men of goodwill the world over think less of their common humanity and more of their common predicament, their humanity might well become apparent on its own. And so, for them of to-morrow, a better world?

C. A. W. MANNING.

divided
social cosmos
problem of
cooperation,
order +
need for
teaching of it