

CHAPTER VII

POND-BOTTOM PURVIEW

The Proper Study

Communal willing, communal judging, communal feeling—the social cosmologist must at all times have as a staple pre-occupation the ‘sociology of knowledge’ in its relevance to these. And in this matter let him not be baulked by names. Since names are a question merely of convention, it does not essentially matter which names we employ. But our subjects of study themselves are essentially, and not just conventionally, whatever it is that they are. If conventionally given a different nature, a subject becomes a different subject: whereas, though conventionally given a different name, the subject may stay the same. And the subject which is the subject of this essay stays the same one, however we may choose to name it. Essentially, with whatever name, it remains a study of men behaving, in society which conditions their behaviour, on assumptions which are revisable, and to ends which tend endemically to conflict. It is thus the study of man: and on the face of it, one might suppose, it must therefore be a kind of ‘anthropology’. But if so, it is anthropology with a difference: as being studied in a particular period, for a distinctive purpose, and with its focus on selected elements, aspects, strands, levels in that reality which is the life, in co-existence, globally considered, of social man. We might, even so, be content to call it a kind of anthropology, had we not, for specifying its purpose and its focus, a choice of more distinctive names. ‘Social cosmology’ is one such name.

Globally considered, human society is at once a compresence of people, of peoples, and of communities of other kinds: as also of organisations of all kinds, and of associations, of movements and of groups. Recognition of this, and of what it comes to, means awareness of the insufficiency of any analysis in terms of

countries only, or peoples only, or organisations only, or only of beings of flesh and blood.

Multi-dimensional Matrix

Consider the archipelago. We may see it as so many islands, their coasts washed by the waters of a single sea. Or, as a single sea, its surface interrupted by so many islands. In terms of land, it is plural; in terms of water, one. So is it, in a sense, with the social universe. In terms of sovereignties it is plural. Of social substance, one. Socially it is a single non-compartmented jelly. It takes the whole of today's world situation fully to characterise any part of it; and it takes the whole of yesterday's world situation partly to account for the whole of today's.

There is however this decisive point of difference. The water of the archipelago we might imagine drained away, leaving an uninterrupted land-surface. Or we might alternatively imagine all the islands becoming submerged beneath the sea. But we cannot conceive the diplomatic set-up as surviving the disappearance of its social infra-structure. Sovereign statehood might in theory be transcended. Social co-existence hardly. The conditions of such co-existence: these may improve, or they may worsen. But, while men co-exist, a social co-existence theirs will be. It is the conditions of this co-existence, these conditions as obtaining now, that have to be studied and understood if we are to understand a situation obtaining now. And foremost among the conditions is the very texture of the social cosmos as such. Not just its legal structure, nor its political, or economic, but its social, cultural, and psychological structure too. Which of us can claim to have been born with a comprehensive, or even a barely adequate, understanding of these—or to have acquired such an understanding simply in the process of his growing up?

Group Appreciations

'Birds of a feather . . .' But there are feathers and feathers. The flocking together may be that of persons with a common object of worship, or taste in fun, or objection to being pushed around. But especially there occurs the flocking together of those with a common interest to sustain and defend. For

instance those who care in common for the countryside, or the traditional Sunday, or the fate of captive peoples. The important distinction here is the one between the non-organised, and the organised, groups. Voegelin writes of a people becoming 'articulated for action', and being consequently in a condition to be spoken for by a representative. In the life political—a life which belongs to the stratum of public experience lying as it were next above that of individual existence, and below the formalized procedures of the state—there are many significant factors, but none more significant than the pressure-group, with its authorised, possibly salaried, spokesmen, and its common, or even communal, standpoint, which its spokesmen have it as their office to assert. A pressure-group is an organisation, with the qualities of a going concern. Its going is on largely predetermined lines, lines determined by its purpose. And, in a world of competing purposes, it is for the service of their own particular purposes that such organisations exist at all. A pram factory may be convertible to the making of weapons: but a trade union to the fight against restrictive practices, surely not. The expression 'non-partisan pressure-group', were anyone to think of using it, would therefore be a contradiction in terms.

But the organised pressure-group is merely a familiar example of something met with in a wider field. For a given judgment there are at least four sorts of status. It may be purely personal; or it may be prevalent; or communal; or official. Official statement: 'He's a jolly good fellow.' Communal echo: 'And so say all of us.' Prevalent opinion: 'He is, isn't he?' Personal thought: 'I can't say that I've ever been able to see it.'

Boys and Blood and Fishes

When Aristotle so sweepingly announced that man was a *politikon zoon* (a polis-maintained and polis-maintaining creature, shall we say?) he was, in a sense, setting a bad pattern for us all: for he was enunciating, as of man as man, what he had noted respecting the free citizen of the Athens of his day. The *polis* as he in his day had known it was a set of arrangements far from typical of what, whether thereabouts or anywhere else, had occurred in the world up to then. What was

valid of man as citizen in the *polis* was not necessarily assertable of man as man. Nevertheless Aristotle has at least the virtue of having excluded the idea that man was by nature a hermit. However autonomous in principle, man does indeed relate his living to that of other men. Men think, judge, behave in relation with their like. They consort, they condone, they condemn with 'the boys', or, as Hitler expressed it, 'with the blood'. And as there are feathers and feathers, so is there blood and blood. If A's associates think one way and B's another, A and B will be predisposed, almost as by iron necessity, to differ. For their perspectives will not be interchangeable.

Let there be no mistake about it: social cosmology is a monstrous, non-natural sort of subject. The gymnastics which it calls for—emotionally, intellectually, perhaps even morally—are such as can be congenial to none but a few, to many would be distressing and to some would be beyond their power. Ordinarily, we humans originate and mature as dwellers in some particular pond. From ours into other ponds there may be ways of passing, but, whereas in ours we should know ourselves at home, in others we less probably can. Nor would we feel at ease were we not in any water at all, but for ever looking down upon our pond, and those of others, from the sky. Ours normally is the viewpoint of those among whom we were born, the perspective, that is, of our particular pond-of-origin. Everything else is 'out there'. Where we belong is 'in here'.

Eels' Eyes and Eagle's Eye

Now social cosmology is in principle committed to observing all the ponds alike as though from the sky. Though getting occasional glimpses of what is within them, all that it sees distinctly, and characteristically considers as from the outside, are the ponds. The layman's way, by contrast, of regarding international matters is to see them as belonging 'out there', and their study as involving a sort of excursion deliberately undertaken from 'in here'. The supposition might naturally be that it was the peoples, living separately their collective lives each in its particular pond, that will have developed a system of relations *inter se*. Historically, however, we know that that was not how it went. Our international 'society'

began, rather, as an 'international', not of peoples but of princes. And, spiritually at least, these, the princes, may have been even more at their ease in the company of their fellows 'out there' than when together with their peoples at home. When speaking as prince unto prince, the typical prince might have had the sense of being above, rather than in, his patrimonial pond. Though the princes might differ much, and the populations more, from one another, the ponds, as seen from the air, might have differed very little at all. And the fact that in their communal mentalities the peoples may vary so profoundly is not insisted upon, if indeed it is noticed, in the theory either of diplomacies or of international law. This is because, in the place of the princes, it is rather the ponds than the people within them that now compose the society in question. No doubt, it is now, in principle, the populations that mainly determine the behaviour of the ponds, but it is as between the ponds, not the populations, that officially the relationships obtain.

Looking out, therefore, from 'in here', at international affairs, there is little to inform, or remind, us of the way things may look from inside the other ponds. We may know a bit about it. But imagination is a sluggish affair. We are few of us aware of it enough.

Every pond has its view of the sky, and its distinctive prevailing picture of how things are 'out there'. But what of the inside of another pond? It is as difficult explicitly to reckon with what in a neighbouring pond may be taken for granted as it is to appreciate how relative to our own local history are things that go unquestioned in our own.

Home-embroidered Mental Habits

By most of the world's people for most of the time the affairs that we class as international are seen as in the perspective of persons who have never except in imagination gone far beyond their pond. This applies even to how issues are envisaged by some who may have travelled much and far. For it is with their cast of mind and forms of thinking, not with the condition of their passports, that we here are concerned. The thinking here in point is collectively, not individually, pursued. It may be merely prevalent, it is probably to all intents collective, and

it may even have the status and the traits of what we have called a 'communal' mode of thought. As Marx was chiefly interested in the consciousness of classes as such, and as Hitler addressed his message to the masses, not the few, so those whose study is the social cosmos will be wise to reckon with the typically Ruritanian view of Utopian policy, rather than with the insights of some exceptional Ruritanian who happens personally to have made a study of Utopian affairs.

When Ruritanians consider collectively their external relations, theirs is no academic undertaking. Typically their purpose is to develop a consensus, on a line. At a council of war, the one question is: What tactics? Not: Have the enemy a case? Talk in a party caucus is certain to be partisan. What Butterfield has so magisterially referred to as the 'embattled systems of self-righteousness' are maintained in vital being on the premise that the question of their righteousness is not going to be reopened while the struggle is on. The smugness, the moral self-pluming: these are merely the self-administered shot-in-the-arm which, to the pond-population, gives the unity which gives the strength which gives the survival-value for a tomorrow full of perils yet unknown.

Existential Sovereignty?

The collective cause is the cause of collective non-extinction. The collective memory may on some points be a long one, and on future possibilities the collective prevision may be persevering to a degree. To follow understandingly the thought-process in a neighbouring pond one would want not only to enter into the lessons and resentments there inherited from the past but also into the fears of possible evils that threaten in the time to come. In form, the relevant relationships are those between states. States themselves, however, have neither bogies nor nightmares nor stereotypes nor myths. It is at the level of the peoples that these elements occur. For the states there speak the leaders. Of husband and wife in England it formerly was said that, in the eyes of the law, they two were one person, and he that person. Sometimes of a given household it may, with point, be asked, Who, here, wears the trousers? Who, now, wears the trousers in the countries of the cosmos? The position may vary a lot. Here it is the dictator. Here

the Party—which means those who within the Party wear the trousers. But who in the democracies, that is, the *free* ones? If we take the garment as symbolic not of the intelligence but of the will, then in the free democracies, though others wear the thinking caps, it is the people that wear the pants. In terms of willing, as opposed to thinking, had the leader and the people to be seen as one person, the people would be it. Anyhow, not a Führer. Not, in the free democracies.

Actually there are within the ponds two sorts of cap, the one for facing problems as they exist, the other for rationalising the collective feeling and for matching so to say the pants. Duly to understand a country demands an appreciation not merely of the logic of the studies pursued in cap number-one, but the illogic, or, as some would say, the 'psycho-logic', of the passions developed in cap number-two. And the feeling and the thinking both occur, we remember, deep down at the bottom of the pond. A treatment of international issues which was a distillation, however reasonable in style and phrasing, from that local line of thinking could hardly be acceptable as socio-cosmological lore.

The Stuff of Society

To the anthropologists, 'acculturation' is a long familiar concept. For the social cosmologist, too, its importance is great. Like the recruit in the army, the new boy in a school may even be put into uniform, so that it becomes harder to tell him apart from the other boys. Uniform is merely an outward sign, but what it shows is that the wearer is now no longer just a distinct individual, but one of a category whose members are for important purposes interchangeable, or, as a lawyer might put it, 'fungible things'.

The newcomer, however, who has merely put on his regulation clothing cannot as yet be considered effectively to have settled in. It is necessary that he acquire also as it were a standard-pattern mind.

The difference presumably between the 'free' world and the world of the 'people's democracies' is that in the non-free world, except within a strictly delimited area of public debate, there is officially no right of private judgment. The communal viewpoint is not something generated from below. It is

fostered, by hothouse methods, from above. The communal orthodoxy is not something that was previously merely prevalent. It is what is to be *made* prevalent now.

Sometimes, of an army, it may be questioned whether it is controlled by, or controls, the state which it ostensibly is there to serve. So likewise one may wonder, of a political party, whether it shapes or is shaped by the doctrine that it exists to apply. As Mirabeau saw Prussia not as a state having an army, but as an army with a state, so has the U.S.S.R. been seen as a doctrine having a party, the party having a state, and the state a bomb. It is because those going concerns, the states, are as organisations so powerful, and so powerfully entrenched, that they have of necessity to occupy the forefront of our stage. But the fact that they are so far from being the only organisations so entrenched—this is what makes our subject so complex, and so demanding upon the mind. For while, in form, the relations are those between the states, and while in reality the behaviour is that of individuals, in effect it is in the organisations and collectivities that the thoughts and feelings which determine the behaviour and the relationships chiefly have their seat. For the behaviour of the individuals is a function of their feelings, and these the feelings of individuals are conditioned by how the collectivities feel.

The fact, of course, is that at the social level it may here be class, there religion, there race, there tribal affinity, which gives its flavour to the rivalry and competition that are the stuff of social life. It might suit Marx's purpose to focus on the element of class, and indeed that might have been all that he himself was sufficiently aware of. But his interpretation of history never was sacrosanct, even among his ideological brood. Other observers will note the multiplicity of different 'publics' which together compose what too commonly is comprehensively referred to as public opinion. Rare must be the situation in which the single state is sustained by a single public, with a single communal stance. The problem of the symbiosis of mutually allergic cultures occurs as well within states as across the boundaries between them. Misunderstanding between the cultural groups within a single country may in fact be hardly less serious and less demanding of attention than as between countries as such. Peaceful co-existence as between

the cultures may be as much of a problem for the future as is that between the states.

It would not indeed be inappropriate to see the social cosmos as a multi-state society existing, paradoxically, in what is primarily a multi-cultural world. It is largely in terms of cultural influences playing upon them that individuals react to situations as they do. If of religious experience there is a distinct epistemology, so is there also of political experience: and for the peculiarities of that experience in a given civilisational setting it is cultural factors that are accountable in the main. What gives their quality to the inter-state relationships is by no means only the interests whether of individuals or of groups, but the ideas collectively cherished and the emotions collectively felt. The socio-psychological map of the world may be thought of as largely reducible to a cultural map.

Pluralistic Clubmanship

Acculturation is largely a matter of the 'internalising'—or assimilating—of a folklore. 'When I was a child I thought as a child.' 'Now that I am a man . . .' And there are men, and men, Prooshians and Rooshians and Turks and I-tal-ians! Always no doubt there are the deviants. But no functioning society is founded upon them.

For the individual, in a free world, there may be safety in numbers. Joining more clubs than one, he may move from social circle to social circle, his idiom, his bearing, his very way of feeling changing with every move. The point is that it is he that has to change. His milieux remain tradition-bound. And the tradition is that the individual do conform to the local type, quaint though it be.

Sub-cultural Thoughtways

And quaint indeed may it be when it comes to modes of thinking and of judging. Types of thinking have a way of being stereotypes. The proverbial Frenchman's idea of the Englishman, the Englishman's of the heathen Chinese: exaggerations these were, yet of something sufficiently real, the tendency, namely, as an element in the folklore valid within a given community, for images to become implanted which

have little necessary relation to that for which they stand. And acculturation includes the acceptance into a person's private portrait-album of those versions, often travesties, of the truth which in a given social circle are the stock-in-trade of those who set the talking tone on matters of common concern.

So, at a school, might the 'new boy' consider coolly how to brief himself for the 'doing' of his 'stuff'. For this involves saying his stuff, and presupposes knowing his stuff: and, if people in general did not know, and do, and say, their stuff, how could society continue as a going concern? Conformism, even in ways of thought, may moreover be not only convenient. Commonly it is also congenial to the human mood. The explanation for this may well be Darwinian: the survival value of not becoming a deviant, a straggler from the herd. When the leader cries: Let's! the expedient reply is: Yes, let's!!

Dressing safe

Who is the educated man, the man of culture, the cultivated man? Not seldom he is the man who has acquired a particular culture. Too often, that is, for the interests of general enlightenment, of insight and of truth. Ours is a multi-cultural world. If now no longer literally, then mentally and temperamentally, our fellows, and conceivably we, are given, on public occasions, to appearing in national attire. This multiplicity of mental costumes may make a pretty sight. But what hope of world community if men's minds are all laced up and buttoned up—the unprotesting prisoners of communal ways of thought? Nor is it for public appearances only that we so strangely get ourselves up. Some of us seem as if we slept in our office attire. Uneasy indeed would lie the head that wore a crown, upon the pillow. Why is it that so many do their better thinking in their bath? Why have men withdrawn into the desert?

Sometimes, if only for our self-esteem, we might do some reality-thinking. First, we might lower the lights, lest we be seen as if in thought. Whether we shall publicise tomorrow the results of our adventure, we need not now decide. The good rule appears to be: Don't. Not if you value your standing in your cultural tribe.

The Cave-man in Us

Of the de-parochialising of collective thought there can be little prospect. What social cosmology perhaps will ensure is the momentary readjustment of the thinking of the adult-minded seeker after insight into all that is. Others may in general be content with what is current in the pondy deep. They will hardly see very much of the cosmos from there below. Like Plato's sage, the social cosmologist may need to commute between the daylight and, dare we say, the darkness—accepting the pain of seeing nothing very plainly until his eyes have re-accommodated themselves now to the one perspective, now to the other. If the pond be deep enough, those for whom it is their habitat may have lost the very possibility of distant sight. Sometimes some national ponds seem deep enough for that.