CHAPTER XIII

SORTS OF GAMES

Clubs of a Kind

If then the functioning of the United Nations is of such potential importance, how in the world, as we know it, has this remarkable thing come to be?

In its endeavour to assist the reader in his private conceptualising of the existing global social order, this discussion, as he will certainly have noticed, has leaned heavily upon the arm of friendly metaphor. For the sterner sort of critic the metaphor is always an easy target. At this immediate point for instance he has merely to remark that essay-dissecting is one thing and target-shooting another: with which objection he scores of course a bull's eye, holing out, as it were, in one!

It is at any rate too late at this stage to renounce this particular aid. After all, there are other such everyday devices—fire, for instance, and aspirin, and the scooter—which are safe only if availed of with common sense and moderation. One has to live, and communicate, dangerously, to find any fulfilment at all.

Granted that any given metaphor, and all analogies, if accepted without realism and restraint, may lead the innocent astray. One remedy is not to eschew them altogether but to multiply them sufficiently to leave none with a monopoly of the field. In the present chapter for instance, besides the now accustomed figure of the game, reliance will perhaps in equal measure be put upon the club, and maybe also, if in lesser measure, on the drama. Each of these several analogies, it will be noticed, implies the willingness of a plurality of independently self-determining participants to maintain in concert a certain sort of system in being as a 'going' concern; going, moreover, on the basis of a necessary corpus of shared dogmatic affirmations. On the status, moreover, of these necessary dogmatic affirmations there is, in the case we are considering,

the case namely of our social cosmos—and indeed there can be—no debate. For it is of the essence of any orthodox dogma that its status—*qua* orthodox—is treated as beyond debate. (On their interpretation, as distinct from their status, there may indeed be debate, but that is another question.)

The 'club' analogy has for the present chapter its special attractions—in suggesting, for instance, not too much about common purposes, as distinct from a mere common preference for having, rather than not having, such a rendezvous for their regular consorting with each other. The 'game' analogy has by contrast the merit of suggesting something more specifically purposive, a shade more contrived and artificial, a bit more dependent upon the disposition and capacity, of those involved, for the enactment of a role; their aptitude, that is, for doing the 'stuff' required of them by the given occasion. It implies their disposition to make the appropriate gestures, to express the accustomed sentiments, to observe the established rituals. About an unfamiliar game almost the first question to be asked is, What is the point? With respect to a mere club there is by contrast less need for the visitor-from-Mars to be inquiring what exactly is the point, the big idea, the rationale, of the business. Though there are clubs and clubs, the general point in having clubs is no particular mystery.

Games of Sorts

With games it is otherwise. There are games, and there are games. Only by discovering the point of the particular game in progress can the newcomer hope to follow intelligently the progress of that particular game. And if this is true of the playing of a game, how much truer of the acting of a play. (In *Hamlet*, itself a play, there occurs incidentally the playing of a play. A play within a play. Why not?—only it does need explaining. For, if there can be a playing at living, why should there not be a playing at playing at living?) All these analogies may in this chapter be with advantage kept in kind.

Sub-world Within a World

Actually it is this analogy of the game that seems at first sight the more helpfully pertinent for the appreciating of what, at a meeting, say, of N.A.T.O. or of the I.L.O. or of the

U.N.O., everything is all about. As, during a game in progress, what one has is a kind of sub-civilisation, with a specific ethos, unlike that developed in the playing of any other game that ever was, so, in the functioning of any of these several organisations, there develops a kind of miniature civilised world in which the indigenous peoples are pretty well at home, but where, in the absence of a guide, a visitor from Mars must needs feel lost.

Moral Conscripts

And yet, even in considering such a set-up as now exists in New York, it is well not to lose sight of that other analogy, the analogy of the club. For, whereas there will be some such organisations which states feel diplomatically at liberty to join or not to join at will, others there may be which, as living inescapably within the given milieu, the social cosmos of the day, they may not feel effectively free *not* to want to join. As, on a liner at sea, the initially least enthusiastic passengers may presently find themselves joining willy-nilly in the organised deck-sports, so in the international society there may be started enterprises 'on' which from the outset most states may feel that they had better be 'in'. The psychology of their participation is almost self-explanatory. We many of us belong, do we not, to societies which, if they cost us little beyond our annual dues, cannot be seen to bring us personally very much that we could not easily have done without?

In such cases the question for consideration is not: Whence the membership, but: What the originating idea? There surely must have been some point in starting this particular game, over and above the fact that enough potential players were willing for a game of some sort or other to be played.

About the origins in general of international organisations, there is comparatively little that can usefully be said. Of the few such significant generalisations the most obvious seems to be that, when once those persons who matter have in common hit upon the particular game that is to be played, the others will behave in the main as if this particular game were for their purposes as suitable as any other. In the drawing-room at a Christmas party it is the master of ceremonies who ordinarily decides what game shall next be played, and it is the mark of a

well-conducted guest that he forthwith discovers that there is nothing he would rather be doing than playing precisely that. (One is reminded of the old revolutionary doctrine of consciousness-before-spontaneity!) The school, moreover, in which the children are told to do just what they choose is not certain to be a happy one. How can they know what they want to play if they haven't been told what to play?

The Dumbarton Oaks Conference met in 1944 in order that on an appropriate occasion the generality of those already members of the United Nations, an association formed in 1942 for the winning of the war, might be told in all but minor details what game in the post-war period they would all be wanting to play. And somewhat the same task had been performed in 1919 by the Covenant-drafting committee, for whose members incidentally Woodrow Wilson and others had very largely done the thing already in advance.

Minority Rule

A majority of the United States Senate had in 1920 voted in favour of treaty-ratification, and with it of United States membership of the League. But it was not quite the needed majority, of two thirds. Had it then been with certainty predictable that the Senate's decision would never be reversed it seems more than possible that the experiment might, there and then, have been abandoned out of hand. But who could tell? The vacant American seat was always ready, and, while attitudes in Geneva were often affected by a desire not to embarrass those who, in Washington, were working to get it filled, processes in Geneva were also affected by the need to adapt the playing of the game to the absence of that most important of those who had been expected to be players. Had it been a game originally devised to be played by the others only, it is hardly conceivable that the rules would have been worded exactly as they were.[1]

The Morning After

Having done in this way what in the first place they might never wittingly have elected to do, it was now perhaps inevitable that the players should presently be engaged in re-interpreting what it was that they had done. They must not appear to have promised too much more than in the altered conditions they could now be hoping to fulfil. If their words could be given a new meaning—and who in this matter was to say them nay, for was it not their game, and who but they, the players, were to say what their rules were to be understood to mean?—the different meaning would in effect be substituted for the one to which they no longer could realistically subscribe. Throughout the history of league-of-nations number-one, a debate was to continue on what the Covenant should be taken as requiring, concurrently with a debate on what was to be substituted in its place. But there was now no Woodrow Wilson present, and, the players having each his own ideas, the game went disconsolately on with no referee, and with rules which the players were frankly unwilling any longer to understand *au pied de la lettre*.

[1] Nor of course would the Treaty framework have been constructed as it was had not the continued presence of Wilson's country as its guarantor been by all concerned assumed as virtually foreordained.

The Undesirability of a Winding-up

What will in such conditions have accounted for that measure of success which was nevertheless to be achieved was probably less the foresight of the draftsmen of 1919, for they had been far from contemplating these conditions that were to supervene, but rather the prevalence, among the tone-setting élite of the membership, of the impression that in the changed conditions the continuation of the game was probably a less unfortunate alternative than its formal abandonment, at any particular juncture, would have been. Many a couple, though having come to repent them of their marriage, have forborne to think of a divorce. (Time tomorrow for a divorce if we should still be wanting one then.) What was virtually certain was that, once abandoned, the game could never have been resumed, unless in the sufficiently exceptional circumstances of the ending of another universal war. And incidentally it seems at the diplomatic level to be almost a kind of 'law' that, when once there has got started something which, unless formally objected to, is able to recharge its own batteries and generate its own propellant, the thing takes on as it were a life, even a potential immortality, of its own.

The Alternative: a Watering-down

Woodrow Wilson, the moment the Covenant-drafting Committee had completed its task, declared, perhaps a shade prematurely, that 'a living thing' was born. Any new organ may be called a living thing, but with some such things it is less invidious than it is with others formally to propose their winding up. Not until the United Nations was itself a going concern did the self-liquidation of league-of-nations number-one become inevitable. Meanwhile there had been a fair amount of what some have come to call the *de facto* revision of the Covenant: meaning by this a *de facto* supplementation, for a distinction should submittedly be recognised between mere reinterpretations of the wording, and developments accepted in admitted disregard thereof. No one could well pretend that the announcement by so many members in 1936 that their fulfilling of their obligations would thenceforth be treated by them as a matter for their free discretion was merely yet a new way of interpreting the Covenant's unequivocal terms.

The Non-Security Organisation

The story of league number-two has been different. The perspicacity of Brierly's famous comment—that not only, like the Covenant, might the Charter not work, but that, unlike the Covenant, it *could* not work—has amply been confirmed. Yet the club lives irrepressibly on. What this seems to suggest is that why the Charter originally came into being will really have been because the states judged it propitious to have a club of some sort, and that on this point they do not happen since then to have changed their view. It almost is as if the constitution of the United Nations had existed rather in the minds of those who had the working of it than in the wording of a text. In both cases what the world was given was not an organisation only, nor an association only, but a club.

In its character as a security game, the United Nations has hardly yet become a going concern. Assume that there are different kinds of polo. Why don't you boys play polo? Answer: (*a*) Because we all like different kinds of it, and (*b*) because all kinds of it are played on ponies, and we haven't any ponies. The United Nations Charter presupposed something, and it anticipated something. Of neither of these two postulated somethings was it able to be certain. For neither was it able itself to provide. And neither of them was to materialise. This contributes to explaining why the Charter has not been working according to its verbal plan. Presupposed was an unattainable concurrence among the boys with respect to which polo they should play. Anticipated was an unattainable availability of the indispensable mounts. No ponies, no polo. No armed forces, no armed force. The Charter did not itself give to the Security Council those forces which, if it was to function as foreseen, it would require. It merely assumed that those forces would be forthcoming. They have not been. Nor in any case has there existed among the élite the requisite unanimity on the uses to which the forces, had they been there, would have been put. Yet the club still exists, the 'town meeting of the world' still meets. Issues are debated, arguments sifted, and sometimes an approximation to some sort of a consensus is found to emerge. Could the club require any better justification than that? A better justification it is not at any rate likely to show. 'Jaw jaw,' says Sir Winston, 'is better than war war.'

The Bones of the Matter

What the reader will do well to recollect is that, whereas men when they organise for a purpose commonly have indeed a common purpose for which likemindedly to labour, the league-of-nations experiments, both of them, were launched within a difficult world, precisely for the purpose of rendering less impossible the peaceful co-existence of those whose purposes were far from certain to be readily harmonisable and whose mistrust of one another was unlikely to be much affected by their common commitment to participation in a game.

Ordinarily, in a game, it is as if the players were interested in their game, their whole game, and nothing but their game. Far otherwise is it when on the stage of the diplomatic theatre the members of international society are drawn by historical circumstances into the playing of a play within a play. For an understanding of the way things happen, it may then be less important to note what the book appears to call for than to divine with what reserves particular players must be suspected

of originally having joined in the writing and the playing, as so worded, of the drama. It may equally be necessary to note the changed conditions in which a game which had started under a bright blue sky has been continued into a period of gathering storm. And condition number-one, with league number-one, had been the hoped-for accession of member number-one, an accession the prospect of which was steadily to dwindle as the years went by.

The Party Pattern

It is pertinent here to consider further what happens at a party. It can hardly be said that at Christmas the involvement of the guests in the playing of a particular game is necessarily a sign of their having in that participation any fervently entertained common purpose, beyond the purpose of supporting their hostess in her disposition to keep the party moving as a successfully going concern. All, she hopes, will be able subsequently to recollect that a good time was had by all. Not perhaps by each and all individually, but collectively by all.

In 1919 there was indeed an identifiable host, President Wilson, who in effect acted as his own master of ceremonies. And those at the party comported themselves as well nigh perfect guests. In 1945 the position was broadly similar, with the difference, however, that the host himself was by the hand of death prevented from being there. But that was not the only difference. Further differences lay in the nature of the game in prospect, and, also, in the identity and the mood of those volunteering to play.

Of the 1919 experiment it can be said that the object of the exercise was rather readily specifiable, and that the general willingness to pursue it was not in any obvious doubt. In 1945, by contrast, the picture was in both these respects less clear.

At Christmas the guests might reflect: We knew what we would be in for. She invited us: and we need not have come. As in 1919, so again in 1945, the corresponding thought would by contrast have been: History put us where we are. We had no effective option. What we may be in for we do not precisely know. We must at least do whatever we can in advance to protect ourselves from various disagreeable possibilities. And, for the rest, we must wear the social masks of happy guests, and wait and see.

Other Times Other Games

There had in 1919 been many conceptions in the air on the possible character of a possible post-war game. But, the host having so to say the whip hand and clear enough notions of his own, a clear enough programme emerged. Malcontents, if any, will have kept their disappointment to themselves. The key idea was the one which Wilson had accepted from the British Phillimore Committee, having as the core of it a procedure for the attempted peaceful settlement of certain sorts of dispute. At Dumbarton Oaks in 1945 it was at first not obvious that the syndicate of architects had had the pacific settlement *motif* vividly in mind at all. Something relatively specific on that point had to be worked in almost as an afterthought at San Francisco. In 1919 the keynote had been the idea of Philip sober arranging for the restraining of Philip drunk. Supposing one of us should so far forget himself as to . . ., what shall the others of us undertake in that case to do? Whereas in 1945 it had rather been: Supposing one of *them* . . ., with very little stressing of the supposing-one-of-us. A game having the emphasis on this latter theme might not have got going at all. Guests might have recollected that they had a long way to travel before getting home through the snow.

While therefore, as being both of them games, those of 1919 and 1945 are deserving of consideration, comparatively, together, this had better not be done with any too confident expectation of finding that the rules, the setting, the preoccupations of the players, or the mood of the admiring crowd will on the two occasions have been nearly akin. For the fact is that they differed rather radically in all these respects.

Doctrinal Sine qua non

One important, nay indispensable, prerequisite was, however, in each case given. The floor on which the players were to assemble was well and truly laid. If anyone wishes to question the persisting importance in the world of today of the system of international law, let him consider how otherwise than in terms of their common subjection to the standard of

that system such a mixed assortment of guests could ever have been assembled for the playing of any game at all. Who would ever resort, as do so many, to a race-meeting save on the safe enough assumption that the procedures will be as usual and that as usual few if any of the bookies will slither away, with the stakes, through the crowd? As the assumptions behind a race-meeting are found in practice to hold good, so are those with respect to the ostensible submission of sovereign states to the expectations of international law. Each, when entering, in proper legal form, into the playing of the new kind of game, could posit with quite sufficient confidence that this, whatever its form, would by others also be played on the whole in compliance with the rules—as interpreted, that is, by themselves. For it is one thing to have one's own peculiar way of interpreting one's commitments (and all states tend to do that): it is another thing to deny, or to repudiate out of hand those commitments (and this states will seldom or never be known to do).

Laws as Uniformities versus Laws as Norms

The game within the game: it is with the aid of this analogy that the quality whether of the Geneva process or of the one in New York may thus be conveyed. In common the two have beneath them the firmness, and the artificiality, of the drawing-room floor. This floor is to be seen, not in the degree of faithfulness wherewith states discharge their international duties, but in the consistency with which they profess to be taking them seriously—as seriously indeed as they look to others to fulfil their obligations to them. Some people sometimes appear to have difficulty in thinking of law as binding, given the way it is broken, on occasion, by those whom it purports to bind. Such people overlook the most elementary point: namely, that only by those on whom it indeed is binding is it logical to speak of a law's getting broken at all. If the so-called 'laws' of physical nature are thought of as unbreakable this is because in principle they are simply statements to whose validity no clear exception has so far been observed. In principle they are summary reports on past experience, and if rendered obsolete by new experience may be replaced by new reports. By contrast, norms of conduct are statements of what ought to be done, rather than of what invariably has

been done. The doing of what ought not to be done is a breaking of the rule, and not a negating of its status as something that binds. That international law is binding no more presupposes that states are unable to break it, than the existence of the criminal law implies the impossibility of crime.

A Distinction with Indeed a Difference

Just as man has always that freedom in the abuse of which he may sin, so states have that sovereignty in the exercise of which they are ever technically in a position to contravene the law. The question is not: Why do they sometimes do it? but: Why do they not do it more often? And to this the answer partly is that the field of their still unaffected legal freedom is still so wide. Construing for themselves such limitations upon their legal liberty as, in entering into a game, they will admittedly have accepted, they are under relatively little temptation to do what even their own tame jurists—whom they will normally have consulted in advance—will be at a loss to defend as being within an arguable interpretation of the rules.

Between, however, the respectable member of domestic society on the one hand and of international society on the other, the difference is that, while both alike may pose as law-abiding, the latter need defer to no third-party judgment on the validity of his pose. Not, that is, unless by his own act he has agreed freely in advance to accept the compulsory adjudication of any such issue should it arise. Neither in 1919 nor in 1945 was such an agreement in advance made a condition for participation in the proposed new game. The Statute of the Hague Court, whether in its earlier or its present-day form, is rather in the nature of a convenience at the players' disposal than a denial in principle of the primordial freedom of each to proceed upon his personal understanding of what it is that he has promised not to do. It is by his diplomatic relationships, and by his concern for what folks might say, that a player is inhibited, rather than by any prospect of an adverse verdict of a referee.

It is remarkable what doubts and disputations may arise on ostensibly technical points during the playing of a game without a referee, especially if the rules are loosely worded. If the rules have themselves been the embodiment of a compromise

between opposing ideas as to what they should say, the opening for this is all the greater. And, if not all the preferences of the relevant 'Woodrow Wilson' have been generally shared by the rest of the rule-makers, some of these having reservations on even the very nature of the game, the seeds will from the first have been sown for some wrangles in the time to come. And this is what may be considered to have happened with both of the league-of-nations games, to the disenchantment of those who had chosen to believe that every word in the founding document could only have meant what they, in their simplicity, had privately supposed that it did. To the disappointment also of those who, though not up to understanding the realities of the game, had given their enthusiasm to a simplified alternative, an image of their own creating, a figment of their wishful mind.

Scientific Angst

Social and diplomatic processes are not all of them self-explaining. And the interplay of myth and reality, of theory and fact, of form and substance, in the logic of their movement, puts them beyond the comprehension of anyone diffident with respect to the analysing of the hallowed or obscure. And for all that, or, probably even thanks to that, they perceptibly work. But would they equally do so were they more generally understood? Who knows? To publish the secret of their functioning might even be—might it not?—to bring them to a halt. In short, the social scientist is not so altogether different in his moral predicament from his counterpart on the natural sciences side. Who knows but what the success of his humble inquiries may bode for humanity more of evil than of good? Folklore, if by him identified as folklore, might no longer serve so efficaciously as folklore. Myth, recognised as myth, might no longer remain dynamically alive as myth.

All, perhaps, that one here can say is that, thus far at any rate, man the mystic has had little apparent difficulty in defending his inheritance against the nihilists. Or, if anyone prefers it, the pleasure-principle in the collective psyche continues to hold the reality-principle effectively enough at bay. Anyway, the social cosmologist's immediate concern is not to foretell the future, but simply to shed light on what is occurring now.

The Gentlemen and the Players

It is probably true of any on-going process of large-scale social collaboration that it profits by the active self-involvement of some, possibly many, who themselves may yet not fully understand it. Consult your typical bureaucrat on the staff of any international organisation. Ask him whether the delegates to whom he pays such studied deference are in general particularly knowledgeable regarding the organisation as such. Only superficially can the processes of world-scale co-operation be said to mirror those, in any country, on the domestic level. Yet the teamwork commonly obtained from the national representatives would be less easy to secure were they not somehow beguiled into feeling themselves more or less as if at home. Each probably tends to construe such fragment of the proceedings as he may happen to witness in terms of his own domestic experience. The full reality of what has happened, when in say New York a contested resolution 'gets through', is likely to be so different from the full reality of anything that happens in any parochial setting that the more self-explanatory the newcomer thinks he has found it the less likely is he to have fathomed what at bottom it was all about. But officialdom as a whole is presumably sufficiently in the picture, and privy to what is afoot. The babes in the international kindergarten[1] are not all of them babes in the wood.

When the resolution is adopted, this is the resultant of the concurrent manifestings of attitude of a plurality of governments. Officially—in terms, that is, of the doctrine of the matter—a judgment, or a hope, or a decision, gets imputed to the entity hypostatically posited as the seat and bearer of that will to which expression is being given in the wording so endorsed.

The official theory: this is what, were the functionaries mere babes in the wood, must presumably be serving, with them, like a folklore—such a built-in belief-system, namely, as might suffice to sustain and safeguard the organisation's continuance as a going concern. Folklore, it was however noted,

[1] It was Sir Robert Borden, veteran Canadian statesman as he was, who, in an imperishable dictum, offered from the Assembly rostrum, depicted the Geneva milieu as 'the kindergarten of peace'. What profounder comment was ever uttered on those endeavours?

might lose its potency as folklore proper if, as folklore, it was generally seen through. What, then, if it had never even initially had the status of folklore proper—but only that of a pseudo-mythology officially entertained? What then, indeed? The fact at all events is that the U.N.O. is there already, and palpably a going concern. The explanation? Perhaps one will have to reply that, at the sophisticated, world-aware, diplomatic, level, as opposed to the primitively social, the prerequisites, for a 'going', need not be—nay, cannot be—quite the same. Perhaps, in short, it is after all not so much to man the believer (*homo credens*) as to man the make-believer (*homo ludens*) that we shall do best to be looking, to keep the fuel flowing and the lights aglow, even through the heaviest of the peak periods, periods of spreading doubt and disillusionment, and of mounting stress and strain.

For skilled and successful playing of what we have seen to be a game within a game it is best to be dependent on those who know it for a game, and themselves for players.