

# **Sin, Self and Society:**

**A Theological Investigation into  
Structural Evil, drawing especially on  
the works of Thomas Aquinas,  
Heinz Kohut and Anthony Giddens**

*Volume Two*

by

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# **Society is Sustained and Revealed through Action**

This section shifts the focus of interest from potentials to action, as it looks from two angles at society as a going concern. In Chapter Twelve attention is directed to how human interaction both depends upon and maintains a society with its own social structure in a dynamic existence. Instead of focusing on structure as though it were an inert product, as in a building, it describes the process of structuring, which both makes possible and results from human action. As a corollary to this, Chapter Thirteen examines how a society comes to be a unity, at least in some degree, depending upon members identifying themselves with it. The image of their society that members sustain comes in turn to sustain their own sense of self. These chapters take a break from looking specifically at the workings of evil in society.

The justification for this, however, is provided in Chapter Eleven, which shows how evil does not have a dynamism all its own. Nevertheless, it can spread because it as it were uses the dynamism inherent in whatever it corrupts. This chapter is really a transitional one from the last section as it asks what kind of actuality can we accord to such terms as 'structure' and 'evil,' and to their combination 'structural evil'.

Chapter Fourteen draws together the views put forward in the previous three

chapters especially to show how structural evil may be conceived and where it is be located. The characterization offered in terms of distorted rules, deficient resources and misleading images appears abstract. That is because it is not an isolatable entity, one item among others that could be speedily dealt with. Instead, it may pervade any or all of the interactions between people, whether they are aware of it or not.

## A Semantic Approach to 'Structure' and 'Evil'

"People sometimes make a slip, without meaning what they say;  
and which of us has never sinned by speech?" (Sirach 19: 16)

Speaking may sometimes be deceptively easy, as we too quickly presume that some definite entity corresponds to each thing we mention. It is easy to think that when, for instance, Freud discourses on the ego, id and superego or Parsons explains the functional and structural properties of society, they are referring to objects that could be identified in much the same way as the furniture in a room. If we do that, however, we are treating words as labels rather than as tools or signals which can be put to use in many different ways. This is one of the central lessons of linguistic analysis.

This chapter is devoted to examining some of the conceptual problems associated with speaking of 'structural evil.' Attention will be directed first to the concept of 'structure,' how it is used generally and then by Giddens and Kohut in particular. Then, after considering how 'structure' may be a value-laded term, attention will be given to 'evil.' Thomas, together with Augustine and many others before him, had found it necessary to examine closely what we are doing when we

speak of some action, person or situation as evil. Then, by combining Thomas' analysis of evil with Kohut's and Giddens' uses of 'structure,' we should be able to arrive at a preliminary view of 'structural evil.'

### **11.1 Rhetoric and Analysis**

Mention has already been made of how terms, even technical terms, are used loosely but often more imaginatively in rhetoric. ('Rhetoric' is not meant in any pejorative sense, but as the art of drawing upon a particular audience's feelings, perceptions and presumptions to persuade them to accept a new view and/or undertake some action.) The urgency of revealing a situation and pressing people into action gives rhetoric its dynamism, but it is possible to become so caught up in its dynamism that one partially loses contact with reality. Words and images when pressed too far in one direction become ineffective tools. This is why analysis has to complement rhetoric.

Reference has already been made to apocalyptic literature (Part One: Introduction) and its use by Walter Wink and Albert Nolan (3.2.2.1). Chapter Five dealt with the rhetorical incorporation of 'experience distant' terms from social analysis into an 'experience near' cry of defiance and call for action. This was an instance of what Giddens terms the 'double hermeneutic' (NRSM: 146 and CMOD, 15f). Attention was then given to why 'structure,' 'system,' and similar terms had a genuine rhetorical appeal, now further attention must be directed to their use in analyzing first society and then the self.

### **11.2 The Metaphor of Structure**

Many writers have used the notion of 'structure' (or similar terms) to pick out some feature or explain the workings of society, and to a lesser extent to reveal the self. It after all fits the mechanistic root metaphor well. Not all writers, however, use this notion in the same way; it is incorporated into various

theories. So, for instance, neither Talcott Parsons' understanding of social structure nor Alfred Schutz's 'structures of the life-world' are the same as Giddens' view of structure (NRSM: 24ff); nor does Freud's structural model explain Kohut's concern to build up the self-structure of his clients (SS IV: 690). Consequently, the two elucidations of 'structure' are restricted to Giddens' and Kohut's uses of the term, and cannot without further investigation be applied to other authors.

### 11.2.1 Structure on a Societal Level (*Giddens*)

Giddens regards it as a common mistake to set the notion of 'structure' over against that of free agents, as though structures only set limits to free activity. This misconception is evident in the assumption "that 'structure' must refer to something 'outside' the activities of social agents if it is to have any sense at all in social science" (CS: 141). Instead, in Giddens' view structure both enables and in a wide sense directs human activity; but because its enabling power only offers a limited scope for action, it does also have a constraining effect.

In order to present his own understanding of social structures, Giddens distinguishes himself from two prevailing notions, one prevalent in the English-speaking world, the other central to structuralism. Each of these notions induces in its own way a too constraining notion of social structure.

When they [English speaking social scientists] talk of structure, or of 'the structural properties of institutions', they have in mind a sort of visual analogy. They see the structural properties of institutions as like the girders of a building, or the anatomy of a body. Structure consists of patterns or relationships observable in a diversity of social contexts. (STMS: 60)

Such a notion overlooks time, and tends to give the impression that social structures are there irrespective of whether anyone is doing anything or not. It also

implies too static or unchanging an image of what societies are like: because it does not indicate that the patterning of social systems only exists in so far as individuals actively repeat particular forms of conduct from one time and place to another. If we were to use this sort of imagery at all, we should have to say that *social systems are like buildings that are at every moment constantly being reconstructed by the very bricks that compose them.* (1987b: 12)

This image is hardly a helpful one. If one wants a visual image, it is perhaps more helpful to think of society in terms of a cascading fountain, where the constant movement of the many drops of water both keeps it in existence and results in its overall form. A very different notion of structure, however, is proposed by structuralism, particularly in structural linguistics.

Structural features of language do not exist as patterns situated in time and space, like patterns of social relationships; they consist of relations of absences and presences embedded in the instantiation of language, in speech or in texts. Structure here presumes the idea of an absent totality. (STMS: 61)

Thus a speech act or text has to be understood in contrast to and against a background of what was not said, what words were not employed, what tenses, moods, or other verbal configurations were not invoked. While not rejecting this notion entirely, Giddens does not consider that people's actions and interactions can be totally assimilated to an understanding of speech and texts. "The problem with conceptualizing structure as a set of 'presences', is that structure then appears as a constraint which is 'external' to action" (STMS: 61).

Both the mainly-French structuralist and the English-speaking structural-functional approaches propose in their different ways a notion of structure as a set of external constraints to action. Neither manages to overcome fully the division between objective social structures and subjective intentional action. Instead of this dualism, Giddens speaks of the *duality of structure*: structure both enables people to act and results from their action. This insight lies at the heart of his theory of structuration, which will be examined in the next chapter (12.1).

It should, however, be mentioned here that Giddens — unlike Parsons and other



sociologists — does not identify the evident arrangement of an organization — for instance, a church hierarchy, the ranking system in the military or the ladder of advancement ranging from the lowest to the highest position in a corporation — as a structure. These institutions appear to have a certain fixed existence, which remains just about unaffected by the varying day-to-day activities of their members, who over a period of time will themselves be replaced by others. Giddens, however, contends: “The fixity of institutional forms does not exist in spite of, or outside, the encounters of day-to-day life but *is implicated in those very encounters*” (CS: 69). These encounters, although freely undertaken, are neither completely haphazard nor with results that could not be somewhat anticipated knowing the character, abilities and social position of the actors. In other words, they are not devoid of all *rules* nor inexplicable in terms of the *resources* available to the actors. (This does not imply that the course of the encounter is completely predictable or determined.) Giddens identifies social structures with the rules and resources which are not usually averted to but nevertheless guide and enable day-to-day interaction between people to take place. Here he is taking over from linguistics the notion of ‘deep structure,’ as distinct from the surface structure that is evident in a statement. Social structures understood as sets of generative rules and resources have, like deep structures in linguistics, to be inferred from surface manifestations (CS: 16).

The importance of Giddens’ explanation of social structures is that it shows what is involved in changing a society; for instance, in dismantling apartheid, overcoming sexism or giving capitalism a human face. Tinkering around with surface manifestations may be necessary but is not sufficient; one has to bring people as far as possible to operate spontaneously according to different rules and drawing on an altered distribution of resources. For this to happen successfully, however, the new rules and revised resources cannot remain wholly external to them, but have to become part of themselves too. In short, restructuring involves not only society but the self as well.

### 11.2.2 Structure on a Personal Level (*Kohut*)

Unlike Giddens, Kohut does not reflect at any length on his own use of the term 'structure' in connection with the self. Mention (7.3.2) has already been made that he envisages the self as a bi-polar structure, a pole of ambitions and one of ideals, joined by a tension arc of abilities and skills. In Kohut's words:

A firm self, resulting from the optimal interactions between the child and his selfobjects is made up of three constituents: (1) one pole from which emanate the basic strivings for power and success; (2) another pole that harbors the basic idealized goals; and (3) an intermediate area of basic talents and skills that are activated by the tension arc that establishes itself between ambitions and ideals. (SS III: 362)

He recognizes that personal development may be uneven, centred only around one pole or upon the intermediate area. Mention (9.5) has also been made of 'splitting' or how a section of one pole may become split off and disavowed; it continues to operate (as a behavioural disorder) or shape someone's attitude (as a personality disorder) though the person does not truly recognize and accept that it is having an influence. Besides this fragmentation of the self, Kohut also speaks of the self-structure in his patients, and more generally of people in the modern world, as lacking resilience or cohesion, being enfeebled or disharmonious. His concern is that a weakened self will through 'transmuting internalization,' that is by drawing upon the strengths and ideals it has or will gain as selfobjects from others, build up its own structure (SS II: 432). In this connection he speaks of 'compensatory structures,' ones built up late in life that enable a person to cope with earlier deficiencies. Then, with a firm structure, the self is capable of facing and dealing with reality.

For Kohut, speaking of the self in terms of structure is a fairly loose but serviceable metaphor. It is useful as it provides a way of linking various phenomena, but is only a metaphor and so its details should not be taken too seriously. Occasionally he offers a diagram to illustrate some aspect of structure, but does not think that the overall structure of the self could be visually displayed. In

words that could almost have been written by Thomas Aquinas (see 7.2 above), Kohut says: "The self ... is, like all reality ... not knowable in its essence. We cannot, by introspection and empathy, penetrate to the self *per se*; only its introspectively or empathically perceived psychological manifestations are open to us" (RESS: 310-11).

Kohut's notion of self-structure is somewhat akin to Giddens' understanding of social structure. Its actual configuration is hidden or deep, but various aspects of the self are nearer the surface; these are apparent both to the person concerned and to others. Empathy makes it possible for an other to be understood as a self. So, for instance, both in ourselves and in others we can sense the self as the centre for organizing our activities (see ANSE: 120; RESS: xv). Linked to this is a sense of freedom and capacity for taking initiatives that arises from being a self (HDAC: 99). Hence, having a firm self-structure conveys a sense of stability and resourcefulness, the ability to put available resources to good use. In this respect, Kohut's understanding of the self complements Giddens' view of social structure as rules and resources. A resourceful self endowed with stability and freedom can work creatively with the generative rules and make the most of the resources that society offers.

### 11.2.3 Legal Constructions and Second Nature (*Thomas*)

Thomas Aquinas makes no mention of 'structures' considered as relations that have come about historically and whose configurations could not be deduced from nature. The nearest he comes to this idea is in his treatment of law, where he says certain human laws cannot be deduced from natural law as conclusions from principles. Instead, they "are based like constructions (*per modum determinationis*, Iallae 95, 3) on natural law." An instance of the latter would be the highway code; a coherent set of regulations must be made to prevent loss of life, but their exact content is a human construction that varies somewhat from one jurisdiction to another. It is interesting that the metaphor of structure is

invoked by Thomas Gilby when he uses the legal term 'construction' in his translation. He points out, however, that "no abrupt break should be made between the *impetus* of nature, and the *industria* and *adinventio* of reason. There is a *continuatio* between sense and spirit" (1966: 107).

Another precursor to the idea of 'structure' is Thomas' treatment of a habits or dispositions (*habitus*, IaIIae 49). These include skills, mental proficiencies and moral (or immoral) inclinations that are built up through repeated practice. Once acquired they are like a second nature directing us to and making it easier to perform a particular activity; though, unlike nature, if not exercised they can be lost. Thomas recognizes that not everyone has the same combination of innate predispositions or acquired dispositions; people are not all the same. He does not, however, look into how the prevailing culture, social circumstances or family influences may shape (or misshape) the cultivation of dispositions. This he would regard as due to contingency, about which no reliable judgment (*scientia*) can be made (Ia 86 3). Perhaps he was fortunate enough not to have to contend with unstructured meetings, and so overlooked the role structure played!

Despite its being used for various purposes, the notion of 'structure' can be briefly summed up. It is set between the more traditional terms 'nature' and 'contingency.' While it is necessary (a requirement of nature) for human activities to proceed that they be structured, no necessity impels them to be structured just so rather than otherwise. Particular structures result from freely undertaken activities, but in turn give an enabling bent to further activities without however fully determining them. This basic understanding is shared by both Kohut and Giddens.

### 11.3 Value Depicted in the Root Metaphor of Structure

Is it good to be structured? Or, to reverse the question, is evil due to a lack of structure? Sometimes, or always? These are questions about root metaphors.

There is no intrinsic reason why good should be thought of as structured. Structures — at least, surface structures — can after all be experienced as oppressive (see 5.1). Gaining freedom or salvation, both goods to be sought, may have the sense of escaping from whatever is confining. Nevertheless, it might be argued, that one gains freedom from externally confining structures so that the internal or more personally authentic structures of the self or community can be brought into play. Human freedom, after all, does not mean being blown this way and that by the wind, but depends upon having the resilience to set and change one's own course oneself.

Thomas gives some hints of structure as a value — even if he does not use these terms — that are worth examining briefly. He takes over from Aristotle (981a27) the view that the task of the wise person, one who knows the highest causes, is to bring order into affairs. The architect, who practices the principal (*αρχισ*) craft (*τεχνη*), arranges the work of lesser craftworkers into a unity. The ability of the wise person is to relate one thing to another. Thomas, however, points out at the beginning of his commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* that this can be done in two ways: parts may be related to each other to form one whole as in the building of a house (*partes domus alicuius ad invicem ordinantur*); but even more fundamental is the ordering of activities towards a common end (*ordo rerum in finem*, in D'Entrèves 1965: 188). In other words, he sets a higher value on the ordering of activities than the static structure that may result. It must be questioned later (20.6), however, in what sense does society — as distinct from particular organizations — have a single end.

The importance of understanding as the discovery of the dynamic order in creation guides Thomas' writings. Discovering how all things relate or are implicated in one another leads to wisdom, knowledge of the highest causes. He speaks at the beginning of several of his works of the value of searching for wisdom, as it leads even now to our partial sharing in beatitude (*verae beatitudinis iam aliquam partem habet*), and to our becoming godlike (*ad*

*divinam similitudinem accedit*), is useful for attaining the kingdom (*ad immortalitatis regnum pervenitur*, SCG I, 2) and brings joy because of the support (*firmitas*) it gives. The best testimony to the high premium that Thomas places on wisely bringing order into affairs is the care with which he carries it out in the architectonic arrangement of his works. But in laying down his pen, he also affirmed his works were still a metaphor.

#### **11.4 The Reality of Good and Evil**

Throughout Christian theology there have been basically two explanations of evil: the Irenaean one that views it as an inevitable occurrence on the path from immaturity to maturity and the Augustinian one that sees evil as a privation of the good stemming from the abuse of freedom. The theological variations on these basic themes, as well as their interconnections, have been charted by John Hick (1966). It should be added, however, that while Irenaeus takes a narrative approach using an extensive time-frame, Augustine uses a substantialist approach within a confined time-frame. (These two approaches are akin to regarding the self as a narrative and as a substance; see 7.6 above.)

In this chapter use will be made of the Augustinian view, as it was expounded by Thomas, since it shows well how evil is found in individual things and actions. Nonetheless, that is not the whole story; rather, evil still has to be placed within the whole story of divine providence and human history. Some reflections on that from a more Irenaean point of view are reserved till later (Chapter Twenty).

##### **11.4.1 Everything is Created Good**

Thomas is very clear that the creation, all that is, is the doing of God. God's act of creating out of nothing is not in order to get something but to communicate his own perfection and goodness. Creatures in striving for their own perfection seek to reflect the perfection and goodness of God. So whatever good anything seeks,

be it in a rational, animal or natural and unconscious way, God is the ultimate goal sought, for nothing is good or desirable except by having some likeness to God (see Ia 44.4).

In speaking of creation as good, Thomas brings out its dynamism; the goodness of created entities does not lie in their static ornamental value, but in each attaining the perfection or fulfilment proper to it. This they do not in isolation, but within a suitable setting or environment, where lesser entities serve the needs of greater ones. The environment providing for the running of all creation is the providence of God.

The diversity of creatures helps express the goodness of God, for what is lacking in one expression of his goodness can be exemplified in another. There is order, however, throughout the immense diversity of creation, for things are ordered to one another. Not only that, their ordering lies in their issuing from God and each in its own way being directed towards God.

The question inevitably arises: how is evil to be accounted for in such a well ordered creation in which everything in seeking to attain its own perfection exemplifies in some degree the uncreated goodness of God? From whence does evil derive its force, its ability to war against good by preventing things attaining the perfection appropriate to them?

#### **11.4.2 Evil as Privation**

Thomas gives his answer to the first question when he says:

Hence I state that there is no such thing as an evil [existing on its own], but there are things that happen to be evil but only to the extent that evil deprives them of a particular aspect of their good (*in quantum malum privat nonnisi aliquod particulare bonum*). In this way blindness does not exist as something [on its own], but the person who happens to be blind is something. (QD de Malo, 1, 1)

In short, evil is a deficiency in something's being, the lack of some good. This lack may either be a complete deprivation such as death is to life or blindness to sight, or on the way towards it as sickness leads towards death or cataracts to blindness. This latter kind of evil does not take away all good but detracts from it (*non privat totum bonum, sed aliquid de bono removet*, QD de Malo, 1, 1 ad 2).

In explaining evil, Thomas has in mind a world that is dynamic, not a static one nor only a snapshot view of it. In his view, things move or act because they are attracted to the good (*bonum est omne id quod est appetibile*); they tend in its direction. 'Good' is an analogical term; it does not always apply in the same way. Thus, an apple is good because it comes up to the standards of an apple, whereas a good car, a good party or a good artist have each met a different set of standards. There may be some similarity or 'family resemblance' between various set of standards, but they are not interchangeable. After experiencing what is good in fairly simple instances, one learns to discern it in more complicated and ambiguous ones. In Thomas' admittedly optimistic view, things and people naturally strive towards some good. Evil, however, upsets or prevents this tendency because it is the absence of some good (*quaedam absentia boni*, Ia 48. 1) which ought to be there for the apple, car, party or artist to come up to expectations.

Evil is neither a form that rounds something off, nor an ability, as abilities are directed towards realizing some good, nor again is it found as an entity on its own. Hence it must be located in something good (*subjectum mali sit bonum*, Ia 48 3). Nor can anything exist that is totally evil, for if evil totally corrupts something that thing ceases to exist and then it is no longer there to meet with any lack. For instance, a totally rotten apple has ceased to be an apple; the decomposed remains are no longer a bad apple, but good fertilizer. Likewise, a totally evil society would break up so completely that it would no longer be a society at all. If a few survivors were left, there is always the possibility that they would still get together and put their society on a new basis; as long as someone remains, then good is not totally extinguished.



This is in outline Thomas' analysis of evil. While it may seem a sleight of hand or linguistic trick to relegate evil to the mere absence of a good that should be there, experience does corroborate this. At first sight an evil life may appear glamorous or enticing, but when taken seriously it reveals no depth.

The life of the evil man has meaning only at a fairly superficial level. ... Bad, cheap behaviour devalues the structures of human meaning in the way that bad cheap prose devalues the language. ... The point of evil is that it is a deprivation of reality. (McCabe, 1968: 100)

Hannah Arendt (1965) made this clear in her study of Eichmann, the organizer of Hitler's extermination camps, when she found only the banality of evil.

## 11.5 Evil in Actions and Persons

Thomas applies the same analysis in regard to evil to human actions as he does to things. In so far as an action lacks anything that it should have, then to that degree it lacks goodness and is termed bad (*inquantum vero deficit ei aliquid de plenitudine essendi quae debetur actioni humanae, intantum deficit a bonitate, et sic dicitur mala*, IaIIae 18 1). Whether it is morally good or bad depends first of all on what it is directed to, as this makes it the kind of action it is. Certain kinds of act, such as stealing someone else's property or murdering your neighbour, have mis-direction built into their very existence as an action; this is the prime kind of lack. Their mis-direction lies in substituting a lesser and transitory good for the all embracing good. Further deficiencies may also render an action bad, such as it not being appropriate for the circumstances, or done with an unworthy goal in mind (IaIIae 18, 4).

The understanding of will that guides Thomas' discussion of morality, of good and evil in human of actions, is not that of someone facing a fork in the road with one signposted 'good' and the other 'evil.' In his view, one does not choose evil directly, but for the sake of some lesser and perhaps eventually spurious good that it holds out. Instead, he has in mind (see IaIIae 6 prologue) the person

'trying to get it all together,' who is attracted in various and even contradictory way by his or her feelings, who is trying to work out what is possible and really worthwhile, who has higher and lower motives to take into account, who examines the circumstances and weighs one possible outcome against another. A good decision will be suitable for the here and now situation as well as fitting for one's whole life; it will both be appropriate for others and oneself. Reaching such a decision (including following it through in action) depends upon skill, the steady ability or virtue that one acquires through practice.

Even though 'getting it altogether' may sound like cookery, virtue or moral skill (*recta ratio agibilium*) differs from the productive skills (*recta ratio factibilium*, IaIIae 57, 4) exercised in cooking. The cook's skill enables her to produce a tasty meal, not a dog's breakfast. But underlying and permeating that exercise of culinary skill is the moral decision to cook. Usually this presents no moral dilemma in a hungry household, but it might if someone sick also had to be attended to or the uncooked food should be given to a starving neighbour. She exercises moral skill in deciding whether to undertake this, that, or another action. Moral skill, particularly the virtue of practical wisdom (*prudentia*), is concerned with *whether* one should cook, whereas knowing *how* or being able to cook supper depends upon her culinary skill.

Sin (*peccatum*) results when a person does not bring it all together, not because he lacks culinary skill, but primarily because his action has some inherent misdirection within it. In other words, his action is of a type where pursuing a lesser good inevitably blocks the realization of a greater and more demanding good. It might also be deficient due to wrong motivation, insufficient attention being paid to circumstances, being so overwrought by emotion that one loses control, or due to ignorance either about what is going on or of one's obligations. In each of these instances some good that ought to be there is lacking. The person has failed to bring together all the appropriate elements that would have issued in an action that was thoroughly worthwhile.

In naming this failure 'sin,' Thomas is not immediately imputing blame (*culpa*). A person may so be overwrought by emotion, drugged or insufficiently awake so that he is not in control of what he does; the action is then not a human action (*actus humanus*) but rather something that happens to him. Similarly, he may misguidedly be doing his best, but misread the situation or not know what he should be doing (IaIIae 19, 6). In these instances, the action may still be evil and inflict disastrous repercussions (*poenae*) on the person performing and possibly others, even though he is not personally blameworthy.

Matters, however, may not be all that straightforward. Thomas goes on to ask why is a person misguided or not in control of her behaviour. Should the person have known better or more about what she is dealing with, but has been negligent in finding out or not bothered to train properly? Likewise, has the person so frequently given in to her immediate impulses instead of checking them when they result in harm that she has by now lost control over them? Going further, how freely has she brought on her drugged state? Was that deliberate so she would have less awareness and decreased control over her actions? In each of these inquiries, one is trying to identify what deficiency there was in the person's action and where did it stem from. Doing good or ill does not simply result from one's decision at the present moment, but also from previous actions — mainly but not entirely one's own — that have either rendered one now capable of reaching a good decision or have incapacitated one. In the case of the latter, McDermott avers that Thomas considers "that in most cases what affects the will in this way has been voluntarily consented to" (1989: 170). Kohut rather corroborates this (see 16.6.1 below).

This brief overview of what is implicit in a human act (not that it is all averted to every time someone executes a decision) shows that it is feasible to speak of it as 'structured.' A good action, one that is well structured, has brought together in a coherent fashion all the morally relevant elements. A bad or evil action, one that has a deficient structure, results from a failure to bring together all the

requisite elements. This failure may admit of varying degrees of blame.

It should be added that Thomas in his extensive treatment of how in general human beings as originators of their own actions, using their own free wills and power to act (*suorum operum principum, quasi liberum arbitrium habens et suorum operum potestatem*, IaIIa Prologus), journey towards beatitude concentrates his attention on establishing good operative habits (*virtutes*). His theology is one of virtues rather than actions, though he is well aware that good habits are steadily built up through good actions and themselves facilitate good actions in turn. Virtues strengthen basic human abilities and give them a bent towards their fullest activity (O'Brien, 1965: 170); they are thus strengths in a person's character making that person a power for good both for him- or herself and towards others. Again, it is feasible to speak of a virtuous person as someone whose character is strong and well structured; his or her life is all of a piece.

The opposite of this is the person beset by vices, whose various powers and inclinations are bent, some in contradictory directions, towards evil. Although his basic abilities may be strong, we may deduce that his character is morally weak because of his tendency to take the line of least resistance. This may be apparent in several ways: in usually going along with his immediate inclinations such as anger or a desire for sex, food, drink or money; in adopting a thoughtless or escapist lifestyle regardless of its consequences; in the relentless pursuit of some ambition that stops at nothing in order to attain it. In these instances it is also feasible to speak, after the fact, of a weakness in or lack of structure, though not in exactly the same sense as Kohut uses the term.

The morally weak person described above has in effect refused or declined to build up structure, or let it fall into disrepair, by not striving for the good he could do. Saying "he could do" presumes that he already had sufficient psychological self-structure to take charge of his own actions and strive for some good. The psychologically weak person, on the other hand, either totally or in some

areas of life lacks sufficient sound self-structure to take charge of his own actions. It is easy enough in theory to distinguish between moral and psychological weakness, but, except in extreme cases, next to impossible to draw a dividing line in practice. It is not always easy, for instance, for a court to judge whether someone charged with a crime was acting freely or with psychologically diminished responsibility. How much, for instance, might a person's acting irresponsibly in the past — for instance, a culpable refusal to shoulder the obligations of growing up — have led to (psychological) fragmentation in the self (see 9.5 above) so that certain activities are split off and disavowed? Fortunately, while it only sensible to be aware of these various possibilities, we do not have to make any final judgment on one another.

From Thomas' point of view, one based on his insight that insofar as something actually exists then it is good (*bonum et ens sunt idem secundum rem*, Ia 5, 1), evil in things, actions and ultimately in people is due to some deficiency in being. They are lacking a capacity and/or ordering that they should have. Can the same be said of social structures?

## 11.6 Evil in Structures and Systems

Can the grammar of evil as a deprivation of a good that ought to be present also be applied to structures? My suggestion is that it can, though only after a more extensive examination of structures (or structuring) and their relation to systems (Chapter Twelve) will it be possible to say more clearly what this implies. In this view, the persistent recurrence of harmful or evil activities in a society is ascribed to a deficiency or lack in its social structure. The corollary of this is that insofar as a society exists as a structured entity it is good; its structure links its members, enables them to undertake various activities and gives those activities a certain bent. If that were not at least minimally present, there would simply be no society and no capacity for people to interact at all.

The persistent occurrence of evil is due, not to a whim or bad will on the part of an individual member or two, but to a deficiency in its overall structure. More particularly, remembering that Giddens speaks of social structure as rules and resources, structural evil can then be traced to distorted rules and a lack (or imbalance) of resources. Members, though in a position to act because of the sound existing social structure, cannot entirely do good due to deficient resources reducing their abilities and/or distorted rules misdirecting their thoughts, assessments and actions.

Take sexism as an example: that men and women can relate meaningfully at all derives from the existence of a reasonably sound social structure. But that male-female relations so often fall into a machismo-nympho pattern derives in part from a social distortion in the rules by which men and women understand, assess and treat one another. It also stems from a lack of personal resources in the self, and from an imbalance or struggle over resources in society. When examined in terms of rules and resources, it is easier to see that sexism as a prevalent social evil should at root be seen as a deficiency, not as positive entity. It does not have a power all its own, but gains its power from the same sources as do normal, mutually enhancing relations between the sexes. But that power, which will in any case stir people's feelings, aspirations and interactions, when not satisfactorily directed turns into a destructive force.

At first sight, pointing out that structural evil is a lack rather than a real thing may seem only a semantic quibble, but it has important consequences for how one conducts the struggle against evil. Once structural evil is conceived as something with a real social existence of its own, then one identifies it either with a particular aspect or section of society or with the social structure as a whole. One then concludes that overcoming evil is simply a matter of eliminating or fighting against that part of society. A crass example of this kind of thinking runs as follows:

It is right to fight against evil.  
The system (that upholds injustice) is evil.  
The police and government officials are agents of the system.  
Therefore it is right to fight against the police and government officials.

This overlooks the important work that police and government officials can do in maintaining the fabric of society. If that is halted, then society is in danger of further collapse. A more searching analysis is called for. One has to enquire into the particular situated practices they regularly carry out to find out where there are deficiencies in their attitudes, activities, training, orders, organization, and system of accountability, and then find ways of overcoming them.

Likewise in some marxist theory, socio-economic evils might be identified with class division or with the existence and interests of the middle class (bourgeoisie), or with capitalist society as a whole. Once this identification is made it becomes easy to think that structural evil will be overcome by abolishing all class division, eliminating whatever behaviour appears to be middle class (if not the middle class themselves), or doing away with the prevailing social system because it is capitalist. Reifying evil in this way can be disastrous, as it can obscure how evil may have a hold on other aspects of society or even one's own efforts to eliminate it.

No doubt exists that morally and politically speaking apartheid in South Africa, the caste system in India, or the exploitation of labour, have done tremendous damage to people and hence are clearly evil. Alternatives to racial discrimination, economic exploitation, ritual uncleanness, faction fights, systematic campaigns of disinformation and a high degree of mindless violence should be sought. Yet these long-standing evils can only operate and become so pervasive because to a considerable extent these societies actually work; their cohesion and coordination make communication possible and supply a number of its members — though not everyone — with a livelihood.

### 11.6.1 Do 'Structures of Sin' actually Exist?

An objection can be made to Pope John Paul's speaking of 'structures of sin' (see 2.6.3 above), on the ground that he reifies sin, treating it as a positive entity and not seeing it as a deprivation. For instance, in his encyclical on the value and inviolability of human life, he says:

... we are confronted by an even larger reality, which can be described as a veritable structure of sin. This reality is characterized by the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity and in many cases takes the form of a veritable 'culture of death'. This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency. (Evangelium Vitae, 12)

Later in the same document he speaks of the (presumably deficient) moral conscience of society "because it encourages the 'culture of death', creating and consolidating actual 'structures of sin' which go against life (EV, 24). The use of the terms 'veritable,' 'reality,' 'creating' and 'actual' could simply be rhetorical polish. Or it could be a reference to actual organizations whose aim is to promote the spread of euthanasia and abortion. But if the 'of' in 'structures of sin' is taken objectively and they are thought to have their own dynamism stemming from sin as such, then it runs contrary to Thomas' view that "evil as such neither has an active principle nor can it be an active principle, but follows from a defect of some agent" (De Substantiis Separatis, XVI, 87).

For similar reasons Hugues Puel (1991) criticizes Vincent Cosmao for speaking of "the present world as a sinful world, as a world structured in sin" (Cosmao, 1984: 81). He accuses him of

demonizing the industrial revolution, which was a remarkable achievement of human intelligence. ... Many of its aspects are of a mixed quality: certainly there is an excessively narrow pursuit of self-interest and its excessive desires for power and possession, but there is also in its project of mastering nature and its efforts to transform society a wonderful manifestation of the creative power of human reason. Overall there certainly was sin, but to speak of 'a world structured in sin (*un monde structuré dans le péché*)' appears very excessive. (1991: 130).



Cosmao, however, is in good company as he uses 'world' in a similar ambiguous fashion to the writer of the Fourth Gospel. Both are stressing the importance of making a choice, of deciding between good and evil, not asserting a metaphysical dualism.

### 11.6.2 Whence does Evil Derive its Force?

These soundings into the nature of 'structures' and of 'sin' and 'evil' have already begun to give an answer to the second question posed above (11.4.1): whence does evil derive its force? Or to rephrase it: why do evils embedded in a social structure have such power to thwart people in their efforts to act well? A partial answer can be given now, though a fuller explanation must await a closer examination of how structures and systems actually work.

To begin, an obvious point must be made: not everything happens because we decide — rightly or wrongly — that it should. The cosmos is going to go on despite whatever good or evil we may do. Its dynamism neither starts nor stops with human activities, though our wise or foolish decisions do influence the outworking of that dynamism. Human damage to the environment is making this evident. The same applies to the human world and its history, which again we can influence and contribute to but not halt. At no point can people's striving for life and growth in all its many aspects ranging from survival to scientific inquiry and prayerful celebration be completely turned off. It has a pre-personal dynamism; for instance, before we decide whether to eat meat or fish, we want to satisfy our hunger. Likewise, we want to participate with others, assert ourselves, gain understanding and enjoy living. This wanting (*voluntas ut natura*) arises prior to plans and decisions (*voluntas ut ratio*) on our part as to how we might satisfy these basic needs built into our being as humans. All through life we have no choice but to respond to the demands that arise from the conjuncture of ourselves (*Eigenwelt*) with others (*Mitwelt*) in relation to the environment (*Umwelt*). We may take up or miss the opportunities presented at each conjunc-

ture, but even doing nothing or being passive is itself a kind of response.

Thomas locates sin within this schema; instead of seeking what would finally and completely satisfy us, beatitude with God, together with various lesser satisfactions as and when they would assist us along the way towards beatitude, we fix our sights on lesser satisfactions. Sin is thus the introduction of dis-order into the dynamism of living. It does not have a special force all its own, but turns the natural dynamism of people wanting their pre-personal needs satisfied in directions that can only lead to frustration and even destruction. Perhaps the experience in a mis-directed life of never being content, of having no assurance that one was on the right path, of facing continual let-downs or frustrations, may drive a person out of panic or despair more forcefully down his or her ill-chosen path. Even then, this drive draws on the normal dynamism inherent in any human being and most animals to respond forcefully when threatened. It may be intensified because of extreme circumstances, and so appear more dramatic, but is not a special drive that stems from sin as such.

### 11.6.3 The Unjust, the Bad and the Evil person

The above analysis is in line with Thomas' analysis of sin not being initially caused by evil, but deriving from the absence of some good (*peccati primi non est causa aliquod malum; sed bonum aliquod cum absentia alicuius alterius boni*, IaIIae 75, 1 ad 3). But, as was shown by John Langan (see 8.5.3 above), Thomas does not fully account for deliberate malice, where a person deliberately seeks evil. In this vein Rawls distinguishes between the unjust, the bad and the evil person.

... the unjust man seeks dominion for the sake of aims such as wealth and security which when appropriately limited are legitimate. The bad man seeks arbitrary power because he enjoys the sense of mastery which its exercise gives to him and he seeks social acclaim. He too has an inordinate desire for things which when duly circumscribed are good, namely, the esteem of others and the sense of self-command. It is his way of satisfying these ambitions that makes him dangerous. By contrast, the evil

man aspires to unjust rule ... [in order to] manifest his superiority and affront the self-respect of others. It is this display and affront which is sought after. What moves the evil man is the love of injustice: he delights in the impotence and humiliation of those subject to him and relishes being recognized by them as the willful author of their degradation. (Rawls, 1972: 439)

Thomas' analysis accounts well for the unjust person, satisfactorily for the bad person, but hardly for the evil person. Thomas is rather mild in his depiction of evil people. He admitted that a feeling of hatred might arise when someone threatens you; he knew about heretics, tyrants, and murderers, but apparently not about those who would cheerfully will the degradation of those whom they could victimize. Rawls speaks of the bad person being moved by love of injustice; such an assertion would find no place in Thomas' view.

Otto Kernberg — rather than Heinz Kohut — offers an insight into what is taking place with Rawls' 'bad person,' when he speaks of patients with severe pathological narcissism.

They need to devalue whatever they receive in order to prevent themselves from experiencing envy. ... they need so much from others while being unable to acknowledge what they are receiving because it would stir up envy; in consequence, they always wind up empty. (in Morrison, 1986: 221f)

This combination of envy and the need to devalue others helps explain why the bad person turns the love and support he demands from others against them and uses it for their degradation. How far this condition is acted out freely or is beyond a person's control will doubtless vary. But either way it again shows, not the existence of an intrinsically evil power, but the extreme perversion of the ordinary dynamics of needing and expressing love. Kernberg describes this condition as "the simultaneous development of pathological forms of self-love and of pathological forms of object love" (in Morrison, 1986: 216).

In each of these instances, while evil can certainly spread and take on the aspects of a force, it neither exists nor acts on its own. One defect may through the

normal positive dynamism of life, society and human development induce defects elsewhere. This applies from the replication of disorders in minor matters — for instance, one person copying another's spelling mistake — through to major derangements in a person's capacity to receive and give love. Deficient social structures can accentuate this process; that issue, however, will be taken up later (14.8).

### 11.7 **Conclusion: Some Thoughtful Affinities**

Though there is no exact fit between the ways that Thomas, Kohut and Giddens speak about 'structure' in relation to both society and the self, there is certainly a semantic affinity. They are using a similar grammar. In some respects, too, their different contributions complement one another.

Each of them recognizes the limitations of visual imagery. Giddens mentions explicitly that social structures cannot be envisaged as building structures; Thomas likewise contrasts the order of parts to wholes evident in a building, with the more fundamental order brought about when many activities are directed to a common end; Kohut simply says he does not think the self or its structure can be displayed in diagrammatic form. Connected with this is the realization that not everything can be displayed on the surface: for Giddens, evident social activities and systems depend upon 'deep' structures; Thomas and Kohut agree that while people can directly apprehend that they have a mind or are a self, its essence or structure cannot be directly comprehended.

Giddens' analysis of structure into generative rules and resources is somewhat akin to Thomas' view of dispositions as well ordered capacities for action. Both social structures and, at least, good dispositions or virtues enable and guide people's activity. Both virtues and social structures, while they do to some extent constrain, make free action possible; they facilitate free choice without determining its direction. Kohut's positive treatment of 'structure' completes the picture,

as a person with a firm self-structure is creative, able to put available resources to good use.

A lack or weakness in self-structure for Kohut, on the other hand, shows itself in various pathologies. Similarly, for Thomas, morally evil action results from a lack or deficiency in the good that ought to be present. Although their effects may resemble one another somewhat, there is a difference between a pathology beyond a person's control and a sin willingly committed. It frequently takes time to judge, for instance, whether a person is deliberately lying or is incapable of recognizing that reality might be different from the account of it he prefers. Morality, carrying out good or well-ordered actions, generally presupposes and builds upon sound psychological functioning. Morally good action freely and creatively draws a further order out of the psychological ordering of life and experience.

## System, Agency and Structure

“Sons will be yours in place of our fathers” (Ps 45: 16).

Giddens says that “the dualism between objectivism and subjectivism is deeply embedded in social analysis” (STMS: 60). This dualism, however, is not limited to social analysis; it is also found in theology, ethics and in many people’s general outlook. It may take various forms, such as the division between the *facts* that can be known by science and the *values*, whether ethical or religious, that individuals personally accept. Frequently, too, their holding to a set of definite beliefs and rigid moral injunctions comes all of a piece with their acceptance of a religious authority. Its teachings, whether derived from a holy book or living authority, are often taken in a fundamentalist fashion. As they are not part of the objective world, they cannot be questioned by the criteria of science, literary criticism, psychology or sociology. A similar dualism is found within the church between those concentrating on personal spirituality and those concerned with service and liberation; the former (charismatics) want to transform hearts and the latter (politicals) seek to transform social conditions. Yet both may overlook the intimate connection between the two tasks that Deutero-Isaiah presupposes in the first servant song: “I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations” (42: 1). This chapter draws on Giddens’ theory of ‘structuration’ to question the widely held dualism that sets objective social structures over against subjective human agents. In his view “this seeming

opposition of perspectives actually disguises a complementarity" (STMS: 60). But to bring out that complementarity the notions of both 'structure' and 'action' have to be reexamined.

A key to grasping Giddens' contribution is found in his statement that "the fundamental question of social theory ... is to explicate how the limitations of individual 'presence' are transcended by the 'stretching' of social relations across time and space" (CS: 35). Both the activities by which individuals are co-present to one another and by which social relations or systems endure are implicated in each other. "The fixity of institutional forms does not exist in spite of, or outside, the encounters of day-to-day life but *is implicated in those very encounters*" (CS: 69). In other words, interaction between people is only possible because they draw upon enduring social structures which are themselves maintained through those same interactions. Thus, in Giddens' view

Structure is both the medium and the outcome of the human activities which it recursively organizes. Institutions, or large-scale societies, have structural properties in virtue of the continuity of the actions of their component members. But those members of society are only able to carry out their day-to-day activities in virtue of their capability of instantiating those structural properties. (STMS: 61)

Society is thus not something irrespective of people, but is found in people doing something together; it both makes human interaction possible and results from it. The insight is central to Giddens' theory of structuration; its basis and implications will be drawn out in this chapter.

## 12.1 The Theory of Structuration

What structuration theory offers is a revision of our whole way of looking at, investigating and ultimately of participating in society. How each item is to be grasped depends upon seeing its relation to other items and its place in the whole conception; this is why it has provoked some many varied responses.<sup>17</sup> At

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<sup>17</sup> The most substantial and helpful critiques are in Held & Thompson (1989) and Bryant & Jary (1991).

the risk of over-simplifying, it might be said that this theory endeavours to explain society as a fountain rather than as set of boxes.

### 12.1.1 Structures bind Space and Time

Considerable attention has already been given (see 10.3 above) to the stretching of time-space as one of the facilitating conditions of modernity. Correlative to this is the binding of time-space that is necessary for the organization of modern society. Without the general culture of 'clock time' and the timing and spacing of activities both within organizations and across society as a whole, modern society would fall apart (see STMS: 160). The importance of time-space binding is apparent in the dependence of modern society on calendars, timetables, programmes and schedules, which fix the time and place for various interactions. The bigger an organization, and the more extensive its linkage with other organizations, the greater the need for coordinating the siting and scheduling of activities; timetables link the activities of various individuals, offices, departments and even whole regions. Time-space geography goes into the details of how this takes place, but the point to note here is that time and space are not just a neutral environment in which social practices take place and structures exist. Action structures time and space.

Intrinsic to social interaction is the organization of time and the coordination of space. This is why Hägerstrand speaks of social activity as 'a weaving dance through time-space'. The "general importance [of this conception] is that it emphasises the co-ordination of movement in time and space in social activity, as the coupling of a multiplicity of paths or trajectories" (CPST: 205). This leads to the obvious but important point that patterns of social interaction or social structures only exist over time. They are not static entities that could be revealed by a snapshot at one moment of time. Like a dance, "only when examined over time do they form patterns at all" (CPST: 202).



### 12.1.2 The Duality of Structure

In order to grasp what Giddens means by 'duality of structure' it is necessary to realize how his "use of the term 'structure' differs from most previous usage in sociology" (Bryant & Jary, 1991: 7). Also crucial is Giddens' distinction between 'systems' and 'structures': basically the former refer to the surface pattern of interactions, while the latter refer to an underlying order (see 11.2.1 and 12.2 below).

By the duality of structure, I mean the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and 'exists' in the generating moments of this constitution. (CPST: 5; see also SSPT 121ff; CCHM: 27; CS: 25; STMS: 61 & 220f)

In this view, structures are not something external to action, but are both required to carry out social interactions and perpetuated through them. A parallel to the notion of the duality of structure can be found in the saying, attributed to the 19th century economist Alfred Marshall: "Good institutions make good men, and good men make good institutions." What both institutions and the men concerned produce in each other is good structure, but this is not found apart from either. "Structure forms 'personality' and 'society' simultaneously — but in neither case exhaustively" (CPST: 70).

Structures themselves may be analyzed into generative rules and resources, which actors draw on and reproduce in the course of their activities. Both rules and resources are presupposed by the notion of agency. There is no agency without the capability of acting otherwise and making a difference, however great or minimal that might be; in other words, agents must be able to draw on some resources. Furthermore, since agency issues, not just in an erratic jerk, but in some recognizable action, it must be carried out in accordance with some rule. This brings a certain consistency into people's actions.

## 12.2 Structures and Systems

A crucial point of Giddens' structuration theory is the distinction between structures and systems. It has to be admitted that in this area, there are a number of shifts in formulation as Giddens has endeavoured through different publications to specify more clearly and correctly the distinction and the interrelationship between them (see Cohen, 1989: 85). These will not be investigated here, but a best reading will be taken of his works.

An initial point to notice is that what most people refer to as social 'structures', whether sociologists in the structural-functionalist tradition or lay people (including most of the theologians cited in Chapters Three and Four), Giddens calls social 'systems'. But there is an important proviso; people conceive of structures as relatively static entities to which various dynamic functions are annexed; an idea roughly parallel to the division between anatomy and physiology in the study of the human body (or corpse). Giddens offers a different conception: systems are patterns existing through the *longue durée* of time; as with a dance the pattern is only revealed over time, but the steps must be taken one at a time. "Duality of structure connects the *production* of social interaction, as always and everywhere a contingent accomplishment of knowledgeable social actors, to the *reproduction* of social systems across time-space" (CCHM: 27). Social systems are patterns of relationships reproduced by actors across space and time; structures have a "virtual" existence only in the production and reproduction of social systems.

### 12.2.1 Systems and Societies

Giddens makes the tantalizing remark that "all societies *are* both social systems and also *consist* of social systems (structured in time-space)" (CCHM: 45). To grasp what this entails, one might think of, say, a particular university, business firm, or city, being a society. In each case, the members have "an over-all awareness, discursive and practical, of belonging to an inclusive community [or

collectivity] with a certain identity" (CCHM: 45f). Each has a fairly definite 'territory of occupation', which it is entitled to lay claim to. Also, each in its own way draws together and depends upon a cluster of practices: teaching and research in the case of the university; manufacturing and trading in the firm; and myriad practices ranging from public health services to festivals in a city.

From one point of view, each of these societies [or social totalities] can be viewed as a social system. The university, the firm, and the city has its own distinctive pattern of relationships reproduced by actors across space and time. Individual actors come and go, but with various modifications along the way the system carries on.

But from another point of view, each of these societies consists of many regularized social practices; teaching, research, manufacturing, trading, maintaining public health and running festivals have already been mentioned. Each of these forms a system, but not one that can be limited either in theory or practice to a particular society. Each of these regularized social practices is carried on elsewhere too; in fact, if it were not, it would hardly make sense or even be possible to engage in it in any single university, firm or city. Research is part of a whole world of learning, which teaching is meant to open up for students. Manufacturing and trading form part of and depend upon the world economic order. Health services should fit into and uphold national and international schemes. Even entertainment and festivities, although more localized and dependent upon the talents of individuals, draw upon and speak to a wider culture than Pietermaritzburg. In this respect, systems are inter-societal, yet instantiated in various locales by different groups or collectivities.

'Societies' ... are social systems which 'stand out' in bas-relief from a background of a range of other systemic relationships in which they are embedded. They stand out because definite structural principles serve to produce a specifiable overall 'clustering of institutions' across time and space. (CS: 164)

It should be added, however, that each instantiation of an inter-societal system

may be accomplished with more or less adequacy. Universities, firms or cities may or may not be up to standard. But, then, the determination of standards is itself influenced in practice by the capabilities and actual performance of the various collectivities. One of them can set a new standard for the rest, or drag down the whole system.

### 12.3 Social and System Integration

An understanding of time-space distancing and of presence-availability (see 10. 3.1 above) makes it possible to grasp Giddens' important distinction between social and system (or societal) integration.

Social integration means systemness on the level of face-to-face interaction. System integration refers to connections with those who are physically absent in time or space. The mechanisms of system integration certainly presuppose those of social integration, but such mechanisms are also distinct in some key respects from those involved in relation of co-presence. (CS: 28)

When, for instance, a driver has his car filled up with petrol by the garage attendant at the pumps without any alarming incidents, social integration is effected. The driver and attendants are co-present to one another for a period of time. But there is much more involved in supplying cars with petrol than a successful transaction between two or three people for five minutes on a garage forecourt. Supplying petrol involves drilling wells, pumping oil, transporting and refining it, and distributing it to filling stations around vast areas of the world. In order to carry on there must be integration throughout this whole system.

Social integration is founded upon the ability of members to interact and relate meaningfully to one another. As long as people in face to face interactions know 'how to go on' so that they fit in with one another, negotiate differences and even engage at times in limited conflict, social integration is maintained. If someone does not or cannot make any attempt to fit in, he or she ceases to be (or

never was) a member of the same society.

Societal or system integration involves the continued patterning of social relations between actors (or collectivities through the actors that represent them) across time-space, though in the modern world with its low presence-availability few of the actors involved are actually co-present to one another. Societal integration includes much more than people being 'sociable' to one another; it can also involve economic transactions, law, political arrangements, communications and transport, as well as military, police and criminal activity. These are all part of the binding of human activities over space and time into a system.

### 12.3.1 Tight and Loose Systems

Giddens does add that systems are not always very tight; they "should be regarded as widely variable in terms of the degree of 'systemness' they display and rarely have the sort of internal unity which may be found in physical and biological systems" (CS: 377). So, for instance, when considered as systems, the petroleum industry is likely to be more 'systematized' than the manufacturing of toys; Germany is a tighter system than Italy; and in times of crisis a system will become very fluid.

The lower the presence-availability, the greater is likely to be the differentiation between social and system integration. Whereas "in societies of high presence-availability," such as tribal bands, "social integration is obviously largely coterminous with societal integration as a whole" (CCHM: 100). The tribal band holds together because its members continually manage to live and work together in the same locality. In bodies where a majority of members are able to gather together periodically, social and system integration are not so far apart.

But where presence-availability is continually low, and hence time-space distancing high, there emerges a clear distinction between social and system

(or societal) integration. So, for instance, keeping an economic system in running order depends upon much more than individual buyers and sellers, or suppliers and manufacturers, or management and labour, relating satisfactorily to one another when they come together to effect a transaction. If these modes of social integration are to continue they have to be meshed into systems of far great time-space distancing. In this instance, system integration rather than breakdown depends upon continuity in the practices of production, consumption and distribution that link the activities of many absent others across the world. For the economy not to collapse, the system as a whole must be sound, not just the face to face interactions of its members. Though also unless social integration is satisfactorily accomplished in many face to face interactions at various times and many locales, the wider system will be weakened and may even collapse.

The high level of time-space distancing in modern society does not leave everyone isolated. As long a person 'knows the way around' or 'how the system works', as well as having a point of access to it, he or she can both contribute to and benefit from — to a greater or lesser extent — the overall system of modernity. Those either ignorant of how modern society works or — for whatever reason — denied effective access to it are the 'marginalized.'

### 12.3.2 The Compatibility of Integration with Conflict

In speaking of 'integration', Giddens makes it clear that "as employed here at any rate, *integration is not synonymous with 'cohesion', and certainly not with 'consensus'*" (CPST: 76). There can even be considerable conflict in society, for instance, between consumers and suppliers, debtors and creditors, or various religious groups. So long as it does not lead to a total breakdown of the social order, integration is maintained. "'Integration' can be defined ... as regularised ties, interchanges or *reciprocity of practices* [involving relations of autonomy and dependence] between either actors or collectivities" (CPST: 76).

Social integration is found in the ability of actors co-present to one another to carry an interaction through; they do not necessarily agree, but are not totally baffled by the words, actions, gestures and movements of others. Each participant draws on rules and resources to structure his or her behaviour towards the others. But the rules and resources they draw upon, partly knowingly and partly not, are not exclusive to the participants; they have been produced by others before them, and can also be drawn upon by other agents in similar situations. The structuring that agents do in their interaction thus both depends upon and contributes to the overall social system.

### 12.3.3 The Intermeshing of Structures and Systems

The interconnection between system and structure can also be put negatively. If there were no social system, every situation would be totally new and people would each time have to work out from scratch their relations to one another and how to interact. But social systems do not exist on their own apart from what people are doing with some regularity. If groups of people co-present to one another do not carry out some regular practices in similar situations, that social system (or aspect of one) would fall into oblivion. Thus when people stopped using ox-wagons between Cape Town and Pretoria, a social system (or aspect of one) which included the rearing of oxen, building of wagons, training of drivers, maintaining places for outspanning, and the traversing of space at 20 km per day, all ceased to exist.

Giddens sums up how systems and structures are meshed together when he states:

Social systems are composed of relationships between actors or collectivities reproduced across time and space. Social systems are hence constituted of *situated practices*. Structures exist in time-space only as moments recursively involved in the production and reproduction of social systems. Structures have only a 'virtual' existence. (CCHM: 26)

But this leads to the question about how knowledgeable do actors need to be about their society for it to be sustained as a viable social system. Only through examining how human agency operates will an answer to this be forthcoming.

#### 12.4 Human Agency

In giving an account of agency or action, Giddens does not start by considering intentions and free-will, but with agency in general. He begins with what people do, whether they intended, wished or foresaw it or not. In this his approach is different from most ethicists, who concentrate attention on those individual human actions for which a person might be praised or blamed.

The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. (CS: 2)

Drawing upon his analysis of time, Giddens speaks of agency or action not as a series of particular acts. "Human action occurs as a *durée*, a continuous flow of conduct, as does cognition. Purposive action is not composed of an aggregate or series of separate intentions, reasons and motives" (CS: 3). Although sometimes it is important to single out a particular action or act. For instance, tripping over the kerb, signing a cheque or greeting an acquaintance could have special significance or serious consequences. But it has to be seen against the background of a continuous flow of conduct. Such "'acts' are constituted only by a discursive moment of attention to the *durée* of lived-through experience" (CS: 3).

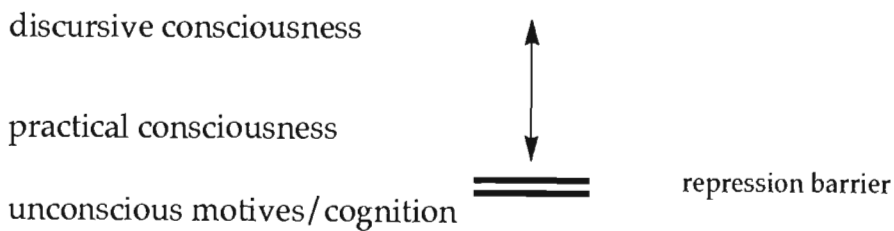
Giddens, however, does insist that "the notion of action has reference to the activities of an agent, and cannot be examined apart from a broader theory of the acting self" (CPST: 55). Agency does not produce just any sort of movement, but "concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently" (CS: 9). Giddens admits that the phrase 'could have acted differently'





These three strata cannot be distinguished as states of mind; rather, they are “subjective *processes* which are sustained by the agent on an ongoing basis” (Cohen, 1989: 48). They can, however, be distinguished as sub-processes, but are not separable.

Giddens also proposes “a ‘stratification model’ of personality, organised in terms of three sets of relations: the unconscious, practical consciousness, and discursive consciousness” (CPST: 2). Discursive consciousness is evident in a person’s ability to give reasons for her conduct. Practical consciousness is shown in a person’s social proficiency, “knowing how to go on”, even if he found it difficult to explain what he was doing and why. The unconscious refers to the sources of a person’s cognition and motivation which they are unaware of. Giddens offers “these concepts in place of the traditional psychoanalytic triad of ego, super-ego and id” (CS:7).



**Fig 12.2** *The Stratification of Consciousness*

There is no rigid distinction between practical and discursive consciousness. Just where the division between the two lies in a person, and with respect to what types of activity, depends considerably on a person’s socialization and learning experiences. Some cultures, or sub-cultures, require their members to attain a greater degree of self-awareness than others.

Even though there is considerable coincidence between the three strata of action and the three of personality, there is no exact fit. Although the reflexive monitoring of action will usually be a matter of discursive consciousness, it may also be carried out at the level of practical consciousness. Likewise, although the underlying motivation of action often remains unconscious, it can also at least in part be brought to full discursive consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

#### 12.4.2 Motivation and Ontological Security

The bottom level 'motivation of action' refers primarily to the wants, the attractions and the aversions, that prompt action. These usually arise prior to any thoughts or decisions about them; in fact people are not always fully aware of all that is impelling them into action. "Motivation refers to potential for action rather than the mode in which action is chronically carried on by the agent" (CS: 5).

Giddens links the motivation of action with the need people have to maintain their basic sense of ontological security; they want to uphold their sense of self-esteem and guard against whatever provokes shame, doubt, guilt, mistrust and other anxieties (see CS: 51-60). Such anxieties are usually kept at bay so long as there is a basic continuity in the social fabric, the object-world and human relationships. Giddens here draws on the works of Erik Erikson to explain how the basic security system develops in the infant through reliable interaction with the mothering agent. The adult finds a similar reassuring continuity in the socially accepted situated practices or routines of society. Familiarity with the routines of society, knowing what is expected and taken for granted by others, enables the adult to negotiate many situations without undue embarrassment or tension.

Routine is integral both to the continuity of the personality of the agent, as he or she

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<sup>18</sup> In not allowing for this possibility, Bryant and Jary (1991: 9) are mistaken in combining Figures 12.1 and 12.2.

moves along the paths of daily activities, and to the institutions of society, which *are* such only through their continued reproduction. An examination of routinization ... provides us with a master key to explicating the characteristic forms of relation between the basic security system on the one hand and the reflexively constituted processes inherent in the episodic character of encounters on the other. (CS: 60)

The person who is able to fit in with the accepted routines of society, for the most part unconsciously or without having to dwell upon them, not only upholds his or her self-esteem but contributes to maintaining these routines as acceptable social practices. Since people accept and follow out many such routines, for instance, conventions of dress, eating, looking at others, conversation and posture, without averting to what they are doing, such conduct is not directly motivated.

“Motives tend to have a direct purchase on action only in relatively unusual circumstances, situations which in some way break with routines” (CS: 6). At these junctures, especially when the normal course of life is disturbed and hence ontological security threatened, regression is likely to occur. Instead of action being consciously monitored, assessed and adjusted, it begins to take its direction more from unconscious motives. Then, especially if the self is not cohesive enough to cope with insecurity, either untamed drives or other split off ambitions that can be realized through merger with a powerful, reassuring figure take over. But their dominant influence goes unchecked since, being below the repression barrier, it is not consciously averted to or avowed (see also 14.7 & 16.6).

### **12.4.3 Routine and Reflexivity**

People can make sense of life, themselves and one another, because their actions and interactions are repeated at regular enough intervals. They develop a routine. This is not to say that every meal, train journey, lecture, shopping trip or holiday is exactly the same. For instance, although something new may be on

the menu, guests may or may not be present, the hour might vary somewhat, having dinner is recognizably the same social practice repeated from day to day. People operate out of a reflexive awareness of what they and others are doing; this enables them to instantiate from one day to the next the social institution<sup>19</sup> of having dinner.

Continuity of practices presumes reflexivity, but reflexivity in turn is possible only because of the continuity of practices that makes them distinctively 'the same' across space and time. 'Reflexivity' here should be understood not merely as 'self-consciousness' but as the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life. (CS: 3)

Monitoring or checking out whatever is going on is a continuous process; people expect it of each other as without it they could not carry on a conversation, effect a business transaction, drive a car in traffic or run a meeting. To bring off any social interaction the participants must be fairly well aware of what is going on, know how to go on themselves and able to moderate their conduct according to how things are going. Exploring all that is involved in face-to-face interactions is the province of ethnomethodology. What is important to note, however, is how reliant people's sense of ontological security is on their being able to interact successfully with others. Many people, if they cannot establish some routine, begin to fall apart.

It should also be noted that in situations where routines break down, or are deliberately abrogated, people often go to pieces. Giddens cites Bettelheim's account of the psychological regression experienced by inmates of concentration camps as the ordinary routines of life were stripped away (see 14.8 below).

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<sup>19</sup> To avoid any possible confusion it should be pointed out that 'institutions' are what Radcliffe-Brown calls 'standardised modes of behaviour' (see CPST: 96). 'Institution' is a more abstract term than either 'association' or 'organization'. Both of the latter involve a specifiable group of persons. So, for instance, marriage is an institution but the household of Mr & Mrs Jones is an association; owning property is an institution while Rand Mine Properties is one of many property managing organizations. The distinction between associations and organizations hinges upon the degree to which they consciously collect and use information to control their future.

#### 12.4.4 Security versus Autonomy: An Amendment to Giddens

But outside such extreme situations, “when security needs are *not* in serious jeopardy, ... other types of motives come into play” Doyle Paul Johnson (1990: 117) notes in his amendment to Giddens. Besides seeking security, Johnson continues

human beings often seem motivated (consciously or unconsciously) to seek to expand their knowledge and skill. ... [This] reflects a need for growth, understanding, challenge, and achievement. But even if the underlying motivation is the need for a higher level of security in the long run, the short-term effects may be disruption of routines and resulting anxiety. (1990: 115)

People wish to gain autonomy, and so are likely to depart from routines. This is especially true of those whose security “is provided more by their internal ego strength than by the routinization of their everyday practices” (Johnson, 1990: 122). While satisfying security needs explains the reproduction of the conditions of social life, people’s seeking to express their autonomy gives a better explanation of how society is modified.

#### 12.4.5 The Rationalization of Action

Distinguishing the second level of action as a process of ‘rationalization’ is somewhat unfortunate. It does not refer to misleading ‘rationalizations’ or the fabrication of plausible excuses to hide one’s real motives. It refers primarily to people’s competence to carry an action through in a sensible and coherent fashion; the action is rational from a practical point of view. Practical consciousness is rather a matter of ‘knowing how’ than ‘knowing that’. In many instances, actors will be able to negotiate a social encounter successfully, but could not give a full account of how they did so. Their practical consciousness will be more extensive than their discursive consciousness. In this way they will draw on stocks of mutual knowledge about their society and its members, but that knowledge will not usually be available in any codified form. “The accounts actors are able to provide for their reasons are bounded, or subject to various

degrees of possible articulation, in respect of tacitly employed mutual knowledge" (CPST: 58).

#### 12.4.6 The Reflexive Monitoring of Action

This third level of action is an agent's ability to take continual account not only of his or her own actions and what is resulting from them, but also of others' actions and their implications. Also "the reflexive monitoring of action includes the monitoring of *the setting of interaction*, and not just the behaviour of the particular actors taken separately" (CPST: 57). An agent will also be monitoring how others are monitoring his or her own monitoring of what is going on. Taken altogether this forms a complex process, where each person's conduct makes a difference to the doings of others.

For instance, during a discussion each speaker will continually be making some assessment of both his own and others' words, gestures and bearing, and the effect all this is having upon not only himself but all the others involved. It is this skill of attending to whatever is going on that enables a disparate set of actors to produce a coherent discussion, even though no one knew beforehand — unlike in a play — just what would transpire.

The reflexive monitoring of action will also be to a great extent a matter of practical rather than discursive consciousness. People may adjust their conduct to the conduct of others without either party averting to the fact that they are doing so. Though at times, agents will spell out for themselves or ask questions of others as to what is going on. Cohen explains that "discursive moments of attention generally occur only when queries are made to clarify the meaning (both semantic and normative) of events and/or circumstances which are not well understood" (1989: 49f).

But the reflexive monitoring of actions is not confined to such moments;

monitoring, like the rationalization and motivation of action, takes place within a continuous flow of conduct.

#### 12.4.7 Doings and Intentions

Ethicists are mainly concerned about specifically intended action and do look at the outcome of action "in terms of phenomena the agent has more or less within his or her control" (CS: 11). Thomas Aquinas, for instance, says that actions should be differentiated by what they are aiming to accomplish, not by what is incidental (*per accidens*); otherwise, all circumstances (*occasiones circumstantes*) would have to be taken into account in specifying any action (see IaIIae 71, 5 & 72, 1). His main aim in discussing voluntary and involuntary actions is to single out those aspects of human activity which people do not have in common with animals, because these are the ones that lead towards beatitude (*propinquius se habent ad beatitudinem actus qui sunt proprie humani*, IaIIae 6 Prologus). He recognizes that voluntary human actions (*actus humanus*) neither are nor should always be devoid of the passions that stir both people and animals into action. Thomas, however, does not go further and inquire into their repercussions; there may be two reasons for this: one theoretical and the other sociological.

As a matter of theory, Thomas thoroughly and consistently adopts Aristotle's teleological analysis of action: every agent necessarily acts to gain an end (*omnia agentia necesse est agere propter finem*, IaIIae 1, 2). This end may be either one they have in view themselves, as in the case of human actions, or one that is embedded in their nature. While this proved a powerful analytic principle, it rather implied that human actions terminated when their end was attained and so any inquiry into their further repercussions simply did not arise.

From a sociological point of view, medieval society in Thomas' time had a far greater presence-availability and less of a distance between social and system



integration than modern society. This meant that there was little difference between what a clearly intended, appropriately planned and properly executed action was aimed at and what it in fact accomplished. Deeds did not regularly ripple through a vast social system, causing many repercussions which could neither be foreseen or intended. They did not extend far beyond the conscious thought and willed decision that inspired them. This is not to say that everyone always acted admirably, or that problems did not occur, but that the personal origins of faults and failures were much more readily apparent than today.

In contrast, speaking of modern society, Giddens explains that "from the point of view of the social sciences, it is hard to exaggerate the importance of the unintended consequences of intentional conduct" (CS 11f). It should also be noted that Thomas is concentrating attention on discrete human actions, while Giddens is primarily concerned with the overall flow of intentional activity from which particular acts may discursively be singled out.

Giddens defines 'intentional'

as characterizing an act which its perpetrator knows, or believes, will have a particular quality or outcome and where such knowledge is utilized by the author of the act to achieve this quality or outcome. If the characterization of agency given above is correct, we have to separate out the question of what an agent 'does' from what is 'intended' or the intentional aspects of what is done. Agency refers to doing [not to the agent's intentions but primarily to his or her capability]. (CS: 10)

Every action is likely to produce various unintended consequences, many of which could not be foreseen, and others which even though foreseen could not be avoided as long as the original intention is pursued. In other words, agents in putting their own stamp on the ongoing flow of events in which they are caught up inevitably do more than they originally intended. Rarely, if ever, does an agent's action accomplish precisely what was intended, no more and no less.

These unintended consequences will vary with circumstances and also depend

upon how well the circumstances are known and the agent's capability of moderating action to suit the given circumstances. Unacknowledged conditions of action, including the agent's lack of self-knowledge, will lead to the action having various unintended consequences. Though these can if necessary be corrected or minimized over time. People learn by experience. Through monitoring the consequences of their conduct over a period of time, agents can become aware of previously unacknowledged conditions that were influencing the outcome of what they were doing. Through a process of feedback they can lessen, if necessary, any discrepancy between what they intended and what actually resulted. On the other hand, they might find the discrepancy beneficial and alter their intention to take advantage of it.

For instance, in the course of a discussion a speaker might find that his words were being taken up in a way he never intended. Through monitoring how others react to what he is saying, he discovers that their assumptions and presuppositions are considerably different from his. Realizing this, he might then reformulate what he wants to say to get his point across better. The other participants in the discussion would presumably be making similar adjustments.

The overall effect is that through the ongoing process of monitoring, rationalization and motivation the unintended consequences are taken up as unacknowledged conditions of action. This may occur on several levels. Discursively, in the instance of the discussion mentioned above, where participants adapt their speech and arguments according to the effects their earlier words have had on the other participants. Often less consciously, when people draw back from pursuing an encounter with others that is becoming too embarrassing or threatening for them; their overall motivation then may be to maintain their self-esteem or keep a sense of ontological security intact. Structurally, where the unintended consequences of action "are systematically incorporated within the process of reproduction of institutions" (CPST: 59). For instance, when buying goods agents reproduce the properties of money as an institutionalized resource;

or in attending school pupils and teachers reproduce the institution of formal education; or through celebrating a birthday people reinforce the cultural tradition of dating years as they pass. In each of these instances, none of the people involved might have any idea of how their action is contributing to the reproduction of social institutions. As Cohen comments:

Indeed, lay agents, unlike social scientists, may have no conception whatsoever that their participation in social routines contributes to social reproduction in the duality of structure by re-enforcing their awareness, and the awareness of others, that this is how social life in given circumstances is actually carried out. (1989: 54)

It is worth pointing out here that although an agent may accomplish an intended action successfully, one cannot say that that is all he or she is doing. The person driving to work is presumably doing what she consciously intends, but in the process is likely to be maintaining her sense of self worth by doing what is expected of her, upholding courtesy at the wheel, adding pollution to the atmosphere, and re-enforcing the social practice of commuting. Intentional action is always implicated in a broader flow of events, whose breadth can be somewhat gauged by examining how the consequences of what is now taking place set the scene for the future.

#### **12.4.8 Do You ever Really Know what you are Doing?**

Having looked in outline at Giddens' analysis of human agency, it is now possible to tackle the question posed above (12.3.3): how knowledgeable must the members of a society be for it to be sustained as a viable social system. His analysis has shown that although a person may be aware of his or her situation, sensibly assess it and act accordingly, there is always more going on than meets the eye. This applies to properly human actions, ones in which people freely and knowingly gear into the reality with which they are involved, even more than it does to those activities in which people do not fully know or cannot control what they are doing. Although the latter may result in strange accidents or terrible incidents, being unfree they lack social significance. An insane killer

from a foreign state will not trigger the political repercussions that an assassin specifically trained and sent on his mission would.

The typical human agent is neither a dupe nor an omniscient sociologist. People usually know quite a bit about their society, how it works, and what kind of behaviour, contribution and responses are expected of them. But even though their own actions are reasonably clear, still their actions always emerge from some unacknowledged conditions and result in some unintended consequences (see 12.4.7 above).

These unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of action are likely to include various facts about other people; for instance, someone in shaping her action, say, arranging flowers around the house, unknowingly draws on the example of her mother and sets a further example for her neighbour's daughter to follow, even though she did not realize her action was being observed and offering a model. Unlike concepts or items of information, actions do not have clear cut starting and finishing points.

Taking this line of thought a stage further (see 12.4.7 above), Giddens postulates that a usually unintended consequence of action is the reproduction of the social system. Someone purchasing a newspaper, for instance, is likely to consider only whether he has the change handy, has time to read it, or if it will be of interest. But in buying it he is reproducing the properties of money as an institutional resource; though neither the buyer nor the vendor usually averts to this. Both are taking for granted, as an unacknowledged condition of action, the social institution of monetary exchange for goods. Yet if both had to think about all the conditions and possible consequences of each action, few newspapers would be bought.

The next diagram (based on Bryant & Jary, 1991: 123) sets out the dynamic relationship between social integration, resulting from agents structuring their

interaction, and system integration, which reproduces a pattern of relationships between actors and collectivities across time and space.

This diagram must, however, be criticized as it gives the impression that the connection between social and system integration is effected only through the unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of action. That is not the whole story, as through the double hermeneutic (see 4.2 above) knowledge about social and economic systems may be incorporated into the structuring of action. Thus Cohen points out that

what may be for agents unintended consequences and unacknowledged conditions of action over a given historical period, may thereafter become discursively acknowledged by agents as ongoing outcomes of and conditions for their own social conduct. (Cohen: 1989: 55)

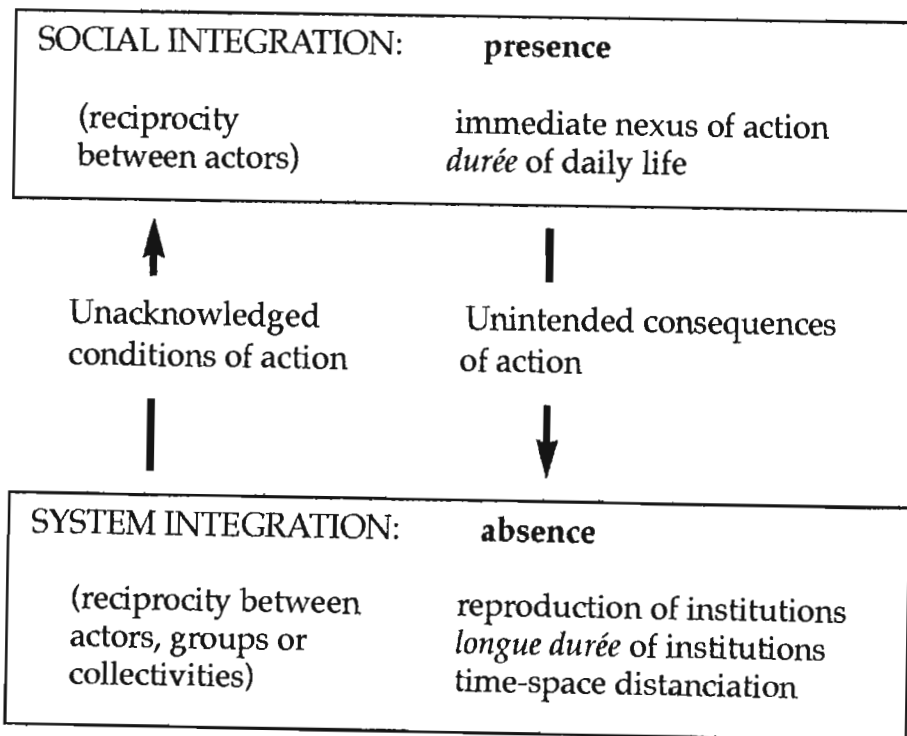


Fig 12.3 Social and System Integration

This in turn opens up possibilities for social change, since

agents who come to realise that their activities contribute to the maintenance of an oppressive or otherwise undesirable set of social institutions may thereafter begin to initiate measures to alter their previous forms of conduct, depending upon available opportunities *in situ*. (Cohen, 1989: 55)

For instance, people may grasp that always buying from the cheapest suppliers without asking any further questions both depends upon and helps maintain a system of worker exploitation.

## 12.5 Structure as Rules & Resources

Mention has already been made (11.2.1) that the social structures an actor both draws upon and reproduces are conceived by Giddens as generative rules and resources. Now, after having examined agency, it is possible to see more closely what kind of rules and resources are implicated in human activities. They not only are called upon when action is consciously monitored, but are operative in both the rationalization and the motivation of action, even if the actor is barely conscious of the latter. Likewise, rules are to some extent affirmed or negated and resources strengthened, shifted or weakened as a result of action, whether or not the actors concerned know, foresee, intend or maybe even deplore and wish to avoid these results.

### 12.5.1 Generative Rules

In speaking of social structures embodying generative rules, several points need to be borne in mind. Giddens is drawing upon Wittgenstein's understanding of human activity as a skill, as a capability of carrying out actions that are normal and sensible for the context. "To know a rule is to know ... what one is supposed to do, and others are supposed to do, in all situations to which that rule applies, or potentially applies" (SSPT: 131). Without the ability to embody such rules in

one's conduct, one's action would simply appear bizarre and no one would know how to respond.

Such generative rules cannot all be formulated in words, still less codified as laws, as one would still need further rules to say how and when they apply.

Formulated rules — those that are given verbal expression as canons of law, bureaucratic rules, rules of games and so on — are thus codified interpretations of rules rather than rules as such. They should be taken not as exemplifying rules in general but as specific types of formulated rule, which, by virtue of their overt formulation, take on various specific qualities. (CS: 21)

Following a rule, or knowing how to go on, is not the same as being able to formulate the rule one is following. So in speaking of social structures as rules, Giddens is certainly not proposing that they can be construed as a collection of regulations or a code of laws. Generative rules can be likened “to formulae, not because they can be expressed in a quasi-mathematical way, but because they specify ‘generalizable procedures’ or if one prefers, conventions, which agents follow” (RMC: 255).

### 12.5.2 Two Aspects of Rules

Giddens rejects any rigid Kantian distinction between purely ‘constitutive’ and ‘regulative’ rules. Instead there

*two aspects of rules ... are implicated in the production of social practices; that related to the constitution of meaning, and that relating to sanctions involved in social conduct. ... Although it is important to separate them out conceptually, these two senses of right and wrong always intersect in the actual constitution of social practices. (CPST: 82)*

Thus if one presses in any given instance rules about demarcating goods as private property one ends up with rules about owners' rights and the prohibition of stealing, or vice versa.

### 12.5.3 Resources

In understanding social structures, attention must be given to resources and the power they deliver as well as to rules. It is not enough to depict social life in terms of rules, both semantic and normative, as that would leave out of account agents' capabilities of engaging in social interaction and bringing about intended or unintended outcomes. Rules alone are insufficient as

the notion of human action logically implies that of power, understood as transformative capacity: 'action' only exists when an agent has the capability of intervening, or refraining from intervening, in a series of events so as to be able to influence their course. The introduction of a theory of action into sociology thus entails regarding power as just as essential and integral to social interaction as conventions are. (CPST: 256)

Nevertheless, Giddens contends that most social thinkers, such as Schutz, Winch, Durkheim and Parsons, "either treat power as secondary to the meaningful or normative character of social life, or ignore it altogether" (CPST: 69). This criticism also holds for Marx, for in connecting power directly to class interests, the inference can be made "that when class divisions disappear, relations of power do also" (CPST: 69). On the other hand

those who have recognised the importance of power, like Nietzsche and Weber, have usually done so only on the basis of a normative irrationalism ... If there is no rational mode of adjudging 'ultimate value' claims, as Weber held, then the only recourse open is that of power or might: the strongest are able to make their values count by crushing others. (CPST: 68)

Mention has been made of these criticisms as the absence of a sound understanding of power, one that would recognize its extensive role but would also be able to differentiate between its rightful use and its abuse, has weakened the efforts of social movements to bring about a better ordering of life. In this vein, suggesting that greater democratization will provide a ready solution to all problems seems to be a way of evading difficult moral, administrative and security issues (see CS: 256f).



To return to Giddens, he distinguishes two types of resources — allocative and authoritative — able when mobilized by agents to effect change or exercise domination in society. ('Domination' here is not necessarily a pejorative term; it may or may not be legitimate.)

Allocative resources refer to capabilities — or, more accurately, to forms of transformative capacity — generating command over objects, goods or material phenomena. Authoritative resources refer to types of transformative capacity generating command over persons or actors. (CS: 33)

Although allocative resources are often 'materially' evident in land, goods, tools and machinery, these only become resources as such, imbued with transformative capacity, "when incorporated within processes of structuration" (CS: 33). When the authoritative resources of society break down, access to a telephone receiver is not much use. "Authoritative resources are every bit as 'infrastructural' as allocative resources are" (CS: 258).

## 12.6 Structures and Freedom

The conception of social structure that Giddens proposes, one that combines constraint and enablement, undercuts several misleading ideas.

The first is the assumption "that 'structure' must refer to something 'outside' the activities of social agents" (CS: 141). Whereas, in Giddens' view, "the same structural characteristics participate in the subject (the actor) and in the object (society)" (CPST: 70).

A second prevalent mistake is to suppose that "microsociology is taken to be concerned with the activities of the 'free agent', ... while the province of macrosociology is presumed to be that of analysing the structural constraints which set limits to free activity" (CS: 139). This overlooks how the structural properties of macro-systems have to be continually reproduced across time and space, and that that only comes about through free agents, whose activities bring

about a range of intended and unintended consequences (see CS: 212).

A third mistake is the identification of structures only with constraints. Instead both the resources enabling action and the rules inherent within it are enabling as well as constraining. Rules, whether semantic or normative, do not just limit action but guide actors in bringing their actions off. Likewise, when resources are used to exercise power this both presupposes and results in relations of both autonomy and dependence.

The notion of a fully integrated person being someone free from all external social structure is in Giddens' terms a fanciful one, as it places the agent in a social vacuum and overlooks the enabling aspects of structure.

*Structure thus is not to be conceptualised as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its production: even in the most radical processes of social change which, like any others, occur in time. The most disruptive modes of social change, like the most rigidly stable forms, involve structuration. (CPST: 70)*

In other words, free from all social structure, an agent would lack the capacity to act meaningfully, and hence could neither develop him- or herself nor effect any change in society.

Giddens' view of structure therefore undercuts any notion of gaining freedom by a process of de-structuration, as Gurvitch and Sartre suggest (see CS: 70). It also deflates the prevalent idea of a mature and free person being someone who can be independent of social structure entirely. Though what these proponents of destructuration are presumably seeking is an alteration in the rules and a shifting of the resources governing the reproduction of society.

## 12.7 Justice as Action and Structure

The interrelationship outlined above between agency and structure as rules and resources throws light on how, for instance, justice is (or is not) maintained in

society. Thomas looks first at justice or social responsibility (*justitia*) as a strength of character (*virtus*) inhering in a person. He describes it as the disposition to render to anyone with a reliable and lasting willingness what is justly his or her's (*habitus secundum quem aliquis constanti et perpetua voluntate ius suum unicuique tribuit*, IIaIIae 58, 1). This presupposes the ability to put personal concerns aside, listen and observe carefully, weigh evidence, assess arguments, grasp implications and settle on a definite decision. Whether done slowly and methodically or as a quick response to blatant injustice, the same strength of character with its concern for the good of others is brought into operation. Thomas goes on to speak of judging as the act of doing justice, and asks whether it is allowable to judge others.

Rendering judgment in a full judicial sense is reserved to an officially appointed judge acting within his authority who as a third party decides impartially between contending parties. The activity of judges provides a paramount example of human agency both drawing upon rules and resources and in turn reproducing them. Judges not only have to follow substantive and procedural law, but must take account of cultural norms as well. Their judgments uphold the law, and may give a further interpretation (or construction) of it, as well as influencing the prevailing cultural norms about acceptable behaviour. Likewise, their position as judges is an authoritative resource giving power to command people; in rendering sound judgments they uphold their position of power. On the other hand, bad laws and poor judgments bring the authority of the whole legal system into disrepute. Law and judgments might be bad, either because they are intrinsically unjust or due to their being contradictory or administered incompetently. The combination of sound judgments and well formulated laws — for instance, encompassing and balancing all human rights — with clear authority and effective procedures is an important step in bringing about a society permeated by justice.

There is a difference of emphasis between Thomas' approach and contemporary

ones. His prime concern was that people, especially those in positions of authority, be capable, willing and constant in rendering justice. Today emphasis has shifted to the legal system: upholding human rights, due process, access to the courts, equitable and workable legislation. Unless the system is sufficiently sound, even the best of judges cannot render justice. Though it is also recognized that in view of constantly changing conditions it is the responsibility of judges, especially in higher courts, to adjust (*ad justitiam*) the system through their rulings and interpretation of the law. There is no point in arguing the merits of judges as agents over against the integrity of the legal system; both require each other. Furthermore, if social interactions are on the whole to be just, then the responsibility for bringing justice into the structuring of society devolves upon many others besides judges and the police.

When either the state or an individual takes a matter to court to be judged by a third party they are turning to the last resort for securing justice. Prior to that, however, if a society is not going to be marked by 'structural/institutional injustice,' then both the generative rules that guide interactions between people and the distribution of resources need to embody a modicum of justice. The phrase 'a modicum of justice' is used, because societies can tolerate a certain level of unjust activities without these becoming the norm. There will, for instance, always be some swindlers in society; we just have to be wary and cope with that. But should financial corruption affect more than around 30% of business transactions, then the overall stability of the economy is threatened. Around that point, everyone in order to survive has to operate by a set of rules at variance with those of fair trade. Similar considerations holds for such interactions as rendering services, spreading information, protecting life and limb, working for and remunerating others. It also holds for the administrative arm of government, which now regulates nearly every sphere of life and frequently runs systems of health, education, welfare, housing, transport and sometimes industries too. In all these areas unless people are in fact operating out of a set of generative rules that are passably fair and sound, then they will feel threatened

by a system of structural injustice. The same applies to the distribution of resources, including who has the power to make the rules and enforce them.

That, however, is only half the story. The modern phenomenon of structural injustice differs significantly from the injustices perpetrated by a tyrant or unjust judge in medieval times. Then, people could be unjustly threatened, coerced and enslaved, but in an obvious manner. Now, when injustice is structural, not only are people subjected to its effects but their deeds may be helping to perpetuate it. The latter is to a considerable degree unavoidable, because of the duality of structure, its being both drawn upon and reproduced through action. In order to survive or improve their lot in life they cannot but draw upon the prevailing social structure, with its distorted rules and deficient resources, but their activities help perpetuate the structure. It is not that everyone wants to perpetuate injustice, or even realizes they are doing so, but it is an unforeseen consequence of their ordinary activities. (Some instances of this will be briefly portrayed in Chapter Fifteen.) This in outline is the crucial difference between injustice in modern and medieval times, and explains the importance today of continually examining how the system works and challenging its deficiencies. (This account of structural injustice still has to be complemented by some examination of how defective structures thwart charity; see 18.5 below.)

## **12.8 Conclusion: The Participative Accomplishment of Structuring Society**

The theory of structuration transcends the dualism of (mechanically predictable) objectivity set over against (whimsically free) subjectivity. It shows that the structuring of a society is a continual accomplishment that results — in ways that can never be fully intended or predicted — from the creative interplay of its members' actions. Besides offering continuity, the seeds of both personal and social change, are — for better or worse — present in each action. The distinction between social and system integration shows how actions effect a double accomplishment: actions in varying degrees both produce the social interactions

that the agents intended and reproduce the wider social system that binds space and time. This occurs because the underlying social structure of rules and resources makes possible both face-to-face social interaction and the widespread binding of space and time. But, although both result from human activity, the latter is much more an unintended consequence of action than a consciously willed achievement.

Both Thomas and Giddens have intricate analyses of human action, though they approach it from different directions. Thomas focuses on the individual agent, looking at what makes action voluntary and what determines whether it is good or bad. Giddens examines more the effect of social conditions, whose influence agents may or may not acknowledge, on the outcome of their actions. He shows, using the notion of the duality of structure, how society makes action possible, shapes it to some extent, and how in turn action comes to sustain and re-shape society. The recursive effect of action produces social systems and reproduces (deep) social structures, but in ways agents do not always intend or realize.

Giddens' theory of structuration thus extends Thomas' analysis of human action so it can take into account its unacknowledged conditions of action and its unintended consequences. Structural evil persists because an unacknowledged (or if acknowledged, inescapable) limitation on action is reproduced as an unintended (or at least unwelcome) consequence, which in turn limits further action.

**12.9 Reflection: What does the Theory of Structuration accomplish?**

Standing back from the admittedly complicated details of the theory of structuration, it must be asked: What does it do? More particularly, what aspect of human existence does it elucidate? What rôle does it play in the history of thought about human conduct? One answer is that it re-instates memory (*memoria*) alongside intellect and will in the process of minding. (The term

'minding' is used as covers activity as well as thought, involvement as well as distance, and affectivity as well as detachment, better than the English 'mind.') Augustine in his *De Trinitate* (X, Ch 4 & XIV, Chs 2-4) used the triad of memory, understanding and will in humans to throw light on the mystery of the Trinity. The term 'memory,' as he uses it, is wider than actively recalled memories (*reminiscentia*); it refers to "the mind's perpetually actual potential [for recall], which is only intermittently activated" (Hill, 1991: 266). By the time Thomas Aquinas was writing, eight centuries later, memory had faded into the background, where it largely remained until the advent of psychoanalysis. In Kant's philosophy the gap left by memory is filled by the schematism which gives the categories a temporal dimension. The memory's rediscovery in psychoanalysis showed that free will and conscious understanding were insufficient to explain much human conduct. The past left its residues, which influenced present conduct in ways not entirely amenable to intellect and will. Memory has its own range of operation; though will and intellect both draw upon it, its sphere of influence extends beyond what is consciously thought or deliberately willed.

To put this very briefly in another idiom: minding does not just involve intellect and will. Their operations are elements within a more encompassing process, the making of a story which both takes up elements from the past and transforms them. Furthermore, the story that each person makes of her or his own life is intertwined with other stories; in fact the very ability to make one's life into a unique story depends upon its being intertwined with other stories. This intertwining, however, takes place not only through conscious agreement or disagreement (intellect) and freely chosen conflict or cooperation (will), but also through appropriating the residues of a common past as resources for action in the present. That action in turn leaves its residue as a possible resource for future action.

Whilst psychoanalysis concentrates on individual stories, Giddens' theory of structuration looks at their intertwining, and how this can take place without the

actors being copresent to one another. It examines how the residue from the intertwining of previous stories, conceived as a legacy of generative rules and resources, is drawn upon in fashioning further stories. This legacy, however, can never be isolated; social structures have a 'virtual' existence, in that they are both hidden yet capable of being effective.

Giddens also refers to structures as 'memory traces'. This should not be taken to mean that a person carries social structures 'in the head'. Rather, it points to how people's perceptions and expectations of what is before them are in part activated and shaped by past experience. "Perception is organized via anticipatory schemata whereby the individual anticipates new incoming information while simultaneously mentally digesting the old" (CS: 46). While memories shape expectations, they are also reshaped as those expectations are met.



## The Bondings of Society

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” (Ps 133: 1).

Attention was directed in the last chapter to the social processes which through the more or less routine interactions of people bind time and space. That analysis brought out ways in which people are linked across extensive social systems without their fully being aware of it. It showed how systems are reproduced as the often unforeseen consequences of people’s actions, but it did not deal with the sense of inclusiveness that people may have through belonging to a particular society, be it their family, business, local community, political party, specialist organization, or nation. The underlying aim of this chapter is to investigate what makes the difference between a heterogenous assortment and a society. What makes society possible and what contributes to its realization in practice? From where do the bonds that members recognize as holding them together arise?

### 13.1 The Ambiguity of Society

Although not a topic he pursues at any length, Thomas Aquinas puts unity or being one (*unum*), that is lacking division, on a par with being (*ens*); hence, you can only claim that any particular thing actually *is*, if its being is not divided (*esse cuiuslibet rei consistit in indivisione*). Hence at some point a broken family or a

tribe rent by faction fighting no longer exists as a unit. He remarks that just as things seek to preserve their being, so they preserve their unity (*unumquodque, sicut custodit suum esse, ita custodit suam unitatem*, Ia 11, 1). When he was writing *Prima Pars* he only spoke of unity as the absence of division, but five or six years later in *Tertia Pars* he puts a more positive value on it. Unity implies completion, the drawing together into an integrated whole of everything required for something to fulfil its purpose (*unum perfectionis ad cuius integritatem concurrunt omnia quae requiruntur ad finem eiusdem*, IIIa 73, 2). On the other hand, not every kind of unity or concord is of value (IaIIae 29, 1); an alliance between thieves or an agreement made under duress does not promote the true purpose of anyone. This point is mentioned as it brings out the importance of examining the level of unity that pertains among members of a society or the kind of order that directs their activities. It is quite possible for an apparently united and well ordered society to hide, even from some of its members, a more fundamental and humanly devastating disorder.

Admittedly, many problems are associated with speaking about 'society,' as societies may range from a handful of people to a widespread international organization. Although for a society to exist there must be some unity and cohesion, these will not take the same form in every case. A family is different from a business; a chess club unlike a rugby club; tribal accord contrasts with a democracy whose members are united by being locked together in civil argument.

Various degrees of difference, contradiction and even conflict can be tolerated within each of these societies before they break up. Hence it would be a mistake to think either that all societies are identical or that belonging has the same meaning for every member. Yet, as Giddens briefly and guardedly mentions, there is

the prevalence, among members of the society, of feelings that they have some sort of common identity, however that might be manifested or revealed. Such feelings may

be manifest in both practical and discursive consciousness and do not presume a 'value consensus'. Individuals may be aware of belonging to a definite collectivity without agreeing that this is necessarily right and proper. (CS: 165)

Although Giddens does not pursue this issue further, Kohut offers a careful analysis of the basic human characteristics that make interaction possible between people and imparts a sense of belonging to one or other society. In Norton's terms (see 1.4.3.4 above), Kohut examines the ways in which a person may respond to 'antecedent sociality' in view of attaining a satisfactory 'consequent sociality.' This would be impossible without empathy; it makes human communication and a sense of belonging possible. Nonetheless, empathy is not magic; approaches and responses may go wrong and produce disastrous results not solely for the individuals concerned but for society as a whole.

## **13.2 Empathy**

All that has previously been said (see 7.3 above) about the emergence and structuring of the self presumes the presence of empathy. Although at each stage in life its form and intensity will vary, empathy is never an incidental adjunct to the self but its normally required state. The rudiments of a human self only begin to be laid down in the infant through the empathic acceptance and support that others provide for it. Without such human contact, no human self would emerge. Likewise, if the human contact provided by the mother and others is lacking or defective in empathy, that will lead to weaknesses and defects in the emerging nuclear self. Kohut, like any other analyst concerned with treating patients with a weak or defective self, looks in great detail at the consequences of various failures in empathy.

### **13.2.1 The Pervasiveness of Empathy**

The unfolding of empathy in all its dimensions is the central tenet of Kohut's psychology. Empathy is not easily defined, but may initially be characterized as

“the resonance of essential human likeness” (SS II: 713) that enables one “to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person” (HDAC: 82). Without it human life could not be sustained. It suffuses the whole of life from “the baby’s first instinctive enmeshment with his human surroundings” (II: 677) to the highest achievements of human creativity and wisdom.

... empathy is not a sex-linked capacity. It is a broad, autonomous mental function, present in all human beings, present at every level of development — from the baby’s first instinctive enmeshment with his human surroundings to those rigorously controlled mental processes that supply the primary data of observation to any science of complex psychological states. (SS II: 676f)

Psychoanalysis is, for Kohut, above all the science of empathy; not only does the analyst require empathy for understanding the analysand, but much of his task lies in building up the latter’s undeveloped or stunted capacity for empathy.

Even then, empathy is not always used positively, as it can be employed to discover others’ weaknesses and play on them. Kohut cites the case of the Luftwaffe fitting sirens to their dive-bombers in order to strike terror into the population they attacked. They knew by fiendish empathy that its wail would frighten helpless people (SS IV: 529). Likewise, the interrogator intent on breaking down a suspect uses empathy to probe the prisoner’s weak points and exploit them. These instances go to show that empathy is not the same as love. It “can be used in the service of either compassionate, inimical, or dispassionate-neutral purposes” (HDAC: 175).

Nevertheless, empathy is to some extent a precondition for personal and social compassion. Having had some vicarious experience of what others are going through puts one in a better position to serve them appropriately. This is the principle underlying various programmes of ‘exposure’ or ‘immersion’ into an alien, and usually deprived, social context. The point of such programmes is, not just learning about different social conditions, but gaining some resonance with those who have to contend with those conditions regularly. Not surprisingly,

this can be threatening to the self, and so arouse all kinds of resistances and defenses.

### 13.2.2 Empathy as a mode of understanding

While Kohut continually reiterates the importance of empathy for psychoanalysis, and indeed for normal human living, he warns against

mythologizing empathy, this irreplaceable but by no means infallible depth-psychological tool. Empathy is not God's gift bestowed only on an elect few. For the average individual, training and learning make the difference, rather than the fact of endowment. (HDAC: 83)

Nevertheless, certain individuals may have a greater than average innate ability to learn to think and feel themselves into the inner lives of others.

Empathy "can be employed either rapidly and outside awareness" as is often the case in everyday life; for instance, when one responds appropriately to another's feelings or state of mind without stopping to think about it. Or it may be employed "slowly and deliberately, with focused conscious attention." Through such "vicarious inspection" the psychoanalyst (also the isangoma, counsellor and confessor) attempts to "experience the inner life of another while simultaneously retaining the stance of an objective observer" (HDAC: 175). Only by keeping her or his distance and not being overwhelmed by the other's inner experience can the analyst grasp what the other is going through, even though it is not open to direct observation (SS II: 451ff).

Empathy operates only within a limited range; its use becomes less apt

as the observed becomes more and more dissimilar to the observer. There is therefore a high degree of empathy when we observe people of our own culture, lesser empathy with people from a different background, still less with animals, hardly existing with plants, and nonexistent with inanimate objects. (SS III: 86)

The fact that empathy is to some extent culture-bound makes it easy for misunderstandings, suspicions and antagonisms to arise between diverse groups. Not knowing a people's cultural background makes it difficult to interpret the psychological import and intent of their words and actions.

This problem is accentuated when empathy is employed beyond the face to face experience of individuals and small groups. The "use of empathy in the observation of the *nonpsychological* field leads to a faulty, prerational, animistic perception of reality and is, in general, the manifestation of a perceptual and cognitive infantilism" (ANSE: 300). It is easy enough to recognize the misapprehension that goes into conceiving every physical object, ranging from rocks to thunderstorms, as having a spirit of its own akin to one's own self.

Sometimes a similar mistake is made in thinking of societies, particularly national groups or states, as having an enduring spirit of their own. Romantic idealism from Herder to Hegel conceived of each society having its own peculiar *Geist*, which is embodied in its own distinctive culture, traditions and institutions. If no more is being claimed than that the culture, traditions and institutions of a society all tend to hold together, no problem arises. But, if it is claimed that a nation or its *Volksgeist* has a life and destiny of its own, then that can lead to suppression of its own members and conflict with other peoples and nations. A fine line has to be drawn between acquiring an empathic understanding of people as they continually constitute and reconstitute social groups, and projecting an animistic perception on to a social group or culture.

### 13.2.3 The Genesis of Empathy

In Kohut's view of the self, empathy and narcissism have the same origins. Both derive from the same proto-experience.

The groundwork for our ability to obtain access to another person's mind is laid by the fact that in our earliest mental organization the feelings, actions, and behavior of

the mother had been included in the self. This *primary empathy* with the mother prepares us for the recognition that to a large extent the basic inner experiences of other people remain similar to our own. (SS I: 451)

Caution, however, is demanded in understanding the connection between empathy and narcissism, because the latter especially is such a slippery notion. It has been conceived and evaluated differently by various writers from Ovid onwards. In many instances, they appear to be exact opposites; narcissism closes oneself off from the other, while empathy opens one to the other. But if narcissism is viewed in a more positive and dynamic fashion, then not all narcissism is pathological per se, but its defects are due to its thwarted or defective development. These are brought about by failures in empathy.

#### 13.2.4 The Development of Empathy

The developmental line from primary narcissism to mature empathy begins with its expression and evocation in a body-close form, in holding and touching and smelling. Next empathy is expressed in facial expressions and later in words. Later still empathy is more subtle and complex; it involves words and silence, memories and expectations; it encompasses shared feelings and understandings, and the sense of a common culture (see SS IV: 533f). Kohut once summed up most of what he understood by 'empathy' in three propositions:

(1) Empathy, the recognition of the self in the other, is an indispensable tool of observation, without which vast areas of human life, including man's behavior in the social field, remain unintelligible. (2) Empathy, the expansion of the self to include the other, constitutes a powerful psychological bond between individuals which — more perhaps even than love, the expression and sublimation of the sexual drive — counteracts man's destructiveness against his fellows. And (3), empathy, the accepting, confirming, and understanding human echo evoked by the self, is a psychological nutriment without which human life as we know and cherish it could not be sustained. (SS II: 705)

He has been criticized (Gay 1988: 766) for giving such an all encompassing meaning to one word; the result is that 'empathy' comes to mean almost

anything. This criticism is in part justified, but what Kohut has put his finger on is the realization that human life is not simply made up of a number of components, however excellent they may be. Nor is empathy just another component; it is the field within which particular components become humanly effective.

No governmental system of regulations, no social apparatus providing for reasonable economic equality, no international unions of nations maintaining world peace, however noble their aims and however efficient their technology can, on the basis of their technological perfection alone, give the fundamental emotional sustenance to man that he needs for his psychological survival. ... Institutions alone [however well designed] cannot sustain man any better than sufficient calories, optimal temperature, and bacteria-free cleanliness can sustain the psychological and biological survival of our babies. (SS II: 715)

All these components are necessary for human life in society, but unless they are provided within a matrix or atmosphere of empathic human responsiveness, no one will flourish.

### 13.3            **The Other as Oneself**

When Kohut's account of empathy is compared with Thomas' treatment of love, several similarities and differences occur. The latter holds that in order that an entity really exist, and not merely be an adjunct of something more real, it needs in itself to be a unity (see 13.1 above). When this principle is allied to a society, we may ask: from where does its unity derive? What makes many different people into members of a single society? Thomas' answer is twofold: good government and sociability.

The most important task of government, which he sees as best exercised by one ruler, is to direct the affairs of all the governed so as to bring about a peaceful unity (*ut pacis unitatem procuret*, RP II). The good of society towards which everyone is inclined cannot be attained without their seeking unity among themselves (*sicut omnia desiderant bonum ita desiderant unitatem sine qua esse*



*non possunt*, Ia 103, 3). This, however, is not to be equated with unanimity, as fellow citizens may hold variant opinions about what best serves the common good (IIaIIae 37, 1).

Sociability (*amicitia*), however, must underlie their differences of opinion, in that each wills the good of the other. The root of sociability is found in the power of love to draw people together (*amor est vis unitiva et concretiva*). If genuine, love always seeks someone's good to someone. So when one loves oneself, then one strives to be united as far as possible with the good one seeks. But when one loves another, then one seeks his good, wanting him to be united with his good as one would with one's own good (*referens bonum ad illum sicut ad seipsum*). Love thus draws the other to oneself, for one relates to or treats him as one does oneself (*amor ... quia alium aggregat sibi, habens se ad eum sicut ad seipsum*, Ia 20, 1 ad 3).

Thomas also points out when discussing love or affection as a passion that it not only culminates in unity when one attains what one desires, but that prior to any movement of desire we already participate in an affective unity (*unio affectiva*) that is found in our having an affinity for and being inclined towards the other (*habet aptitudinem ad alterum et inclinationem*, IaIIae 25, 2 ad 2). His thought here parallels Kohut's views on empathy. Thomas would agree that empathy, as an affinity for and inclination towards others, makes social bonds possible, but that possibility still has to be actualized by going beyond oneself to others. Without a movement of love, where members are in some manner united in seeking good for each other, no society would gel as an existent unity. The phrase "in some manner" is used, not because everyone has to be explicitly loving and even off-puttingly kind, but that their interactions evidence a concern for one another and not merely gaining their own ends.

Thomas does not give an answer to the modern question of whether narcissism should develop into object love, as Freud held, or they both have their own

development lines, as Kohut contends. But Thomas' positive view of self-love (see 7.9 above), unlike Augustine's, does back Kohut's insistence on the importance of narcissism, suitably matured, throughout life.

Kohut is, however, criticized for concentrating such attention on narcissism, almost to the exclusion of object love. It is not that love for others, going beyond oneself or self-giving, is excluded, but that it is simply presumed. Without others' love and care for me, I could not experience their affirmative mirroring or uplifting support and so never draw on such selfobjects at various stages later in life. Kohut focuses on the abiding effect of love rather than its initial expression in an action. He also seems to presume that a firm and cohesive self structure will offer sufficient self-esteem for a person then to relate meaningfully and generously to others. His concern is with building up this capability in general, not with directing its exercise in particular. As long as this is understood, Kohut's attention to narcissism and its flowering in empathy and creativity presents no problem. It would become problematic, however, if his restricted aims as a psychoanalyst were taken as a whole programme for life.

## **13.4 Self Flourishing**

Kohut gives some idea of what he considers a full human life should include, when he speaks of the wholesome transformations of narcissism as empathy, creativity, humour and wisdom (see 9.3 above). These are signs of maturity in the self and among the basic requirements for maintaining the health of society.

### **13.4.1 Creativity**

A society whose members are without creativity — artistically, musically, in dance, drama and cuisine, or scientifically — lacks after a while a basis for going forward. At one end of the scale, there would be no great artists to interpret and display the newly emerging psychological or social issues people have to face (see

7.3.1 above).

What moves society toward health is that of creative individuals in religion, philosophy, art, and in the sciences concerned with man (sociology, political science, history, psychology). These “leaders” are in empathic contact with the illness of the group self and, through their work and thought, mobilize the unfulfilled narcissistic needs and point the way toward vital internal change. It follows that during crisis and periods of regressive identification of the group self with pathological leaders there is an absence of creativity ... There is no one in empathic touch with the diseased group self. (SPHU: 83f)

So, although great art can prepare the way for regeneration and healing in society, it must not be so esoteric that it cannot be diffused to the population at large (SPHU: 239, 241, 246).

At the other of the scale, one finds that in slum conditions the lack of any kind of art — of whatever taste — brings about “a world of cultural emptiness.” People’s diet may have sufficient calories. “But the food was dreary, and that was the important thing. Everything was dreary. There was no artistry in the apartments in which they grew up” (SPHU: 225). This leaves a void, an absence of cultural selfobjects, so the self is undernourished and fragmented.

The absence of all that supportive framework of language, art, music and tradition of all kinds leads to those disintegration problems that Freud considered the essence of man. Then the animal must be domesticated. In that conceptual framework civilization becomes something conceptualized as discontentful. Man wants to kill, man wants to fuck, man wants to eat ravenously. (SPHU: 254f)

There are no creative tasks that can attract their attention or absorb their narcissistic energies. Yet if young people especially coming from deprived backgrounds can be drawn into art, music, dance or drama workshops, they many then begin to discover ‘soul’ not only in their performance but above all in themselves.

What creative art provides is a sense of continuity and inner cohesiveness. Using the example of Tiffany, Kohut explains:

It expresses a unity that comes from the human mind in a form that hangs together. ... [Each art form] has its own meaningful design and approach to the world. ...[It] tells you something about a whole time that was an expression of how people felt about themselves. And as such it is genuine. (SPHU: 243).

But Kohut finds in his patients, in the works of many contemporary artists, and in modern society, no sense of continuity. In each instance, things do not hang together the way they would in the course of a meaningful life.

In mass culture I find the same discontinuity expressed in the frantic need to live only for the moment. There is a deadness in the self. It must be stimulated, enlivened, even if it means going to war. Now nothing in such self-destructive behavior suggests internalized guilt. It is just to feel alive, even if only at the single moment of declaring war. That moment wipes out all fragmentation, the absent past and meaningless future. (SPHU: 220)

We may regard society itself as a creative venture involving millions. So if the sources of its creativity are stifled, then in one way or another destruction ensues.

To prevent creativity being stifled, as well as to bring forth the greatest human achievements in art, science and political action, calls for courage (SS IV: 573). This, Kohut defines, as “the ability to face death and to tolerate destruction rather than betray the nucleus of one’s psychological being, that is, one’s ideals” (SS III: 130). At critical moments various heroic persons drew upon image of an all-powerful figure for support (see also 14.8 below). Similarly, great artists and thinkers at the verge of a new breakthrough have drawn support from an alter-ego figure. Speaking of Pablo Picasso and his relationship to Georges Braque, Kohut says:

The presence of an alter ego and the narcissistic relationship to it, one might speculate, protected the self of the artist from the danger of irreversible fragmentation to which it felt exposed while it was drained of narcissistic energies during periods when the genius-artist allowed the visual universe to break into meaningless pieces before he reassembled them and, in so doing, gave Western man a new perception of the visible world. (SS II: 820)

The same holds for courageous social and political action; important figures in their lives as well as drawing on their own narcissistic constellation can give them the courage to carry through in the face of opposition and danger those actions required for safeguarding society and civilization (see 13.6.6 and 17.6 below). Evil often takes hold in society, because people lack the courage to admit it, face up to it and counter it effectively.

### 13.4.2 Humour

Humour shows the relativity of human achievements; people and societies may have great values and have accomplished much, but they still have their inherent limitations. Humour recognizes these, and prevents people from taking themselves too seriously. "One needs a twinkle of humour as a protection against craziness. Neither the people who followed Rev. Jones into death nor Jones himself had a twinkle in their eye" (SPHU: 249).

Genuine humour is neither self-belittling nor sarcastic towards others, whereas excessive jocularity and sarcasm, especially where jokes are continually made at others' expense, can have a sadistic streak (ANSE: 324). Disillusionment and sarcasm are prevalent in a society that lacks the goals and values that would make people strong. There is an absence of idealized values in the self (SS I: 459), and a lack of acceptance of "the realistic limitations of oneself and of those one admires" (SS III: 142f). Narcissistic rage may be expressed through sarcasm or belittling remarks, in which one attempts to minimize the emotional import of one's own limitations (ANSE: 263). "Hitler could be very sarcastic and make people laugh about his enemies ... He had that kind of humour. But not the true humour of wisdom that knows the limits of the self. He couldn't laugh about his own strut" (SPHU: 249). The lack of humour in a society thus betrays the absence of both ideals and acceptance of its inherent limitations; this will lead to its "extinction, whether the end comes dramatically or via a process of silent diffusion" (SS I: 389).

### 13.4.3 Wisdom

The final transformation of narcissism is found in wisdom. This "is the victorious outcome of the lifework of the total personality in acquiring broadly based knowledge and in transforming archaic modes of narcissism into ideals, humour, and a sense of supraindividual participation in the world" (SS I: 459).

On the one hand wisdom "includes the emotional acceptance of the transience of individual existence" (ANSE: 327), but on the other unfolds in "a cosmic narcissism which has transcended the bounds of the individual" (SS I: 455). Not only does wisdom enable the individual "to contemplate his own end philosophically" (SS I: 457), but it enables him or her to take a wider historical view of social events than a preoccupation with the immediate problems of their own time would allow. The wise person exhibits a more truly disinterested (not uninterested) concern with society. Without in any way denying death or disregarding danger, as those in "an upsurge of extreme, personified patriotic fervor" (SS I: 457) might, he or she faces events with quiet assurance and perhaps sadness, but without anxiety or frenzied excitement. Their overriding concern has been "transferred from the cherished self to the supraindividual ideals and to the world with which one identifies" (SS I: 458).

To draw the perspectives of Giddens and Kohut together: in these 'wholesome transformations' of narcissism — creativity, humour, courage, empathy and wisdom — we can recognize, but this time from the side of the self, some of the 'rules and resources' required for the production and reproduction of society. The resulting quality of society thus depends considerably upon the presence or absence of these 'wholesome transformations' in the self. However, before exploring this linkage between self and social structure, it is necessary to outline Kohut's own thoughts on social cohesion and health.

### 13.5 Facing the Horrors of Social Breakdown

In having to face the reality of his own Austrian background, Kohut had to deal with the question of why Nazism had arisen and become such a destructive force. In a letter written in 1978 he mentions that

my own encounter at that time [the early 1930s] with the gruesome consequences of man's irrationality were a strong determinant in my choice of profession and, especially, in the choice of my subsequent search to understand man's proneness to fall victim to cruel, unforgiving rage. (SS IV: 612)

In particular, what light can psychoanalysis throw on the monstrous historical phenomenon of Nazism? Why did so few people have a sufficiently strong sense of self to resist it? Was there something deep in their nuclear selves that enabled the martyr-heroes to stand firm against Nazi propaganda and threats? Kohut returns in various ways to these issues many times. It is mainly against this problematic background that he provides a number of hints for grasping the relation between self and society. In particular, he gives some suggestions on how the strengths and weakness found either in the self or in society are reflected in each other. The words 'hints' and 'suggestions' are used here as Kohut admits that his self psychology does not provide a full explanation of the interaction between self and society (see SS II: 532ff).

Kohut cautions against looking upon "unconscious psychic factors [with their enormous power] as the decisive, essential, and only valid forces in the life of individuals and of groups" (SPHU: 62). This is a temptation the depth psychologist must above all resist. Hence he is very wary of Freud's identifying certain psychobiological forces in the study of the individual and then applying them to humanity as a whole. Likewise, he mentions, but does not espouse Eissler's view that groups can be studied as though they had a psychohistory like individuals; as though nations could suffer traumata in their early history, which led to repression, and then a bursting forth of pent up aggression (see SPHU: 60-63). Human society is not simply an individual writ large.

## 13.6 Kohut's Postulate of a 'Group Self'

To overcome these problems Kohut postulates the idea of a 'group self.' Admittedly, the status of this postulate is never properly clarified. To begin with, Kohut speaks of it in terms analogous to that of the nuclear self in the individual.

... the group self — the sum total of those clusters of interconnected experiences of each individual that prevail in consequence of his temporary or continuous submer-  
sion into the group — can be conceived of, like the self of the individual, as being  
laid down and formed in the energetic arc between mirrored *selfobject* greatness  
(ambitions) and admired *selfobject* perfection (ideals). (SPHU: 82)

Such an idea corresponds with everyday speaking about teams having energy, organizations living up to their ideals, firms having ambitions and goals, and individuals taking on the ethos — the values and aims — of groups they join. If there were no common bond of experience among its members, no group would exist.

At one point Kohut had hoped that the concept of a 'group self' would explain how groups formed and were held together, sometimes oscillating between fragmentation and reintegration, and why they showed regressive behaviour as they moved towards fragmentation. In his own words:

I am now suggesting that these considerations concerning the influence of the basic unconscious narcissistic configurations in individual existence are valid also with regard to the life of the group, i.e., that the basic patterns of a nuclear group-self (the group's central ambitions and ideals) not only account for the continuity and cohesion of the group, but also determine its most important actions. (SPHU: 206n21)

By the time of his interviews with Strozier, five years later, Kohut's ideas about the group self appear much more tentative. Asked then whether one should think of the group self existing for decades or centuries, Kohut explains that although its beginning cannot be exactly pinned down, it must at some or other time gel. Once, such a group as a nation, has gelled, "it then points into the future and has its own unrolling destiny" (SPHU: 218). The moment when a



group gels is, I take it, when the members become aware of themselves as a group which they wish to sustain. It is not that the members by a deliberate act, such as negotiating a social contract, prior to their being a group, actually create their group; rather they accept they have come to be a group and so go on to formalize and strengthen it (see SPHU: 238).

Light from a different angle is shed on Kohut's understanding of the group self when he explains:

When we talk about the group self, what we mean is a number of individuals who are not necessarily the majority but who determine historical action. That strikes us then as the group. It may be only 30 percent or even only 20 percent of the whole population. But they are the verbal ones; they initiate action and the other follow suit. (SPHU: 227)

In answer to Strozier's question: "Are those 'spokesmen' representative or do they determine the actions of the group?" Kohut hazards a guess that they are representative, in that to some extent they meet all members' varied expectations.

In the final analysis, Kohut rather admits that the idea of a group self is a heuristic concept; it "is no more than a vantage point from which to examine historical phenomena." (SPHU: 219) He is trying to provide "a framework for research, rather than answers to particular research problems" (SPHU: 218). For the moment, however, we will stay close to Kohut's own formulations in our inquiry into how social groups act and maintain themselves.

### **13.6.1 Social Cohesion on the Basis of Shared Ideals, Ambitions, Skills and Talents**

Freud held that group cohesion was maintained by its members holding an ego ideal in common; a group could continue in existence because its members

shared a similar set of values and ideals.<sup>20</sup> Thanks to his bi-polar conception of the self, Kohut is able to add that

group cohesion is brought about and maintained ... also by their [its members'] subject-bound grandiosity, i.e., by a shared grandiose self. Indeed, there are groups that are characterized by the fact that they are held together by this latter bond — crudely stated by their ambitions rather than their shared ideals. (SPHU: 159f)

Not taking a pejorative view of ambitions because of their narcissistic origins, Kohut — writing in 1972 — emphasized the importance of a shared grandiosity for group cohesion. Four years later, however, he puts more emphasis on shared ideals as a safeguard against envy, jealousy and rage being felt or breaking out against other members of one's group, in this case the psychoanalytic profession (SPHU: 178). But by 1977 Kohut had come to see "the relationship between the group self shared idealized imago and its grandiose self not as an either/or choice but in terms of the 'tension gradient' between the various constituents of the group self" (Strozier in Goldberg, ed 1980: 404).

A group or society whose cohesion derives from common ambitions is not necessarily worse than one based on shared ideals and values. Kohut disputes the idea that groups which "have coalesced by dint of the magnetism of a shared grandiose self" are always destructive. He adds

Constructive groups may well hold certain ambitions in common and the heightened self-esteem which the individual derives from feeling himself at one with a group with whose sense of power and pleasurable display of self-confidence he identifies is by no means incompatible with self control, civilized behavior, and creative purpose. (SPHU: 55)

In each case the content of the group's ideals and ambitions would need to be examined. In any case a well functioning group is likely both to be drawn

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<sup>20</sup> This view was taken over by Talcott Parsons and made a central tenet of his structural-functionalist approach to sociology. From there Berger and Luckmann adopted it; their phenomenological approach explained how through socialization the prevailing ideals and values were internalized, and then later externalized in social interaction. Giddens shows the inadequacy of this approach from a sociological point of view; after all many societies have members with conflicting sets of values. People do not always agree with the disvalues of the structural evil, they are reproducing as an unintended, and often unforeseen, consequence of their actions. Meanwhile Kohut has shown the deficiency in Freud's view from a psychological standpoint.

towards its common ideals and pushed by its shared goals. Mediating on a tension gradient between the two poles lies the intermediate area of talents and skills. Here again members of society, or a group within it, recognize their likeness to each other in carrying out similar and complementary tasks.

These processes that bring about group cohesion operate largely on a preconscious level. They are somewhat akin to the mirror, idealizing and alter ego transferences that can be identified in the clinical situation. In each case, there is "the amalgamation of *currently present* remnants of the past with currently active experience" (SS IV: 593). For instance, at the pole of ideals, people find a certain pride in their group or society by upholding its historically given values and standards as their own and vice versa (idealizing transference). They uphold the group and it upholds them. At the pole of ambitions, their mature grandiosity receives approval and support from the group whose goals they echo and seek to realize (mirror transference). Members thus find their own personal goals reflected in and confirmed by their society. Moreover, in the tension arc between these poles lies the area of skills and talents; so in performing similar tasks, members are reassured of their essential likeness (twinship or alter-ego transference).<sup>21</sup>

### 13.6.2 The Mediation of Cultural Selfobjects in Society

It should not be thought that these transferences take place between the individual and society as a whole; they are mediated by cultural selfobjects. These may be persons, familiar places or objects, works of art, emblems, activities or events, which symbolize a particular group or society. For instance, our affinity is not with Pietermaritzburg en masse, but grows upon us through acquaintance with some of its inhabitants and personalities, its one way streets and city hall, the historical associations of its elephant emblem, its mix of activities ranging from

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<sup>21</sup> In regenerating Christian life, community and service, great emphasis is placed on instilling Christian values, or the values of the Gospel. Nolan (1982), for instance, stresses the importance of sharing, human dignity, justice and solidarity. But in view of goals and ambitions, skills and talents, being as psychologically important as values, one must ask whether they are given due place in preaching, counselling and pastoral practice.

supreme court appeals to the Comrades marathon. From a sociological point of view, these are social symbols that express and help make that rather intangible entity 'Pietermaritzburg' present in its particularity. From the point of view of self psychology, these are cultural selfobjects that provide a supportive framework for the growth and maintenance of the self.

You hear the familiar sounds of one's language. You hear the familiar sounds of national music. You hear the voices of those you know. You recognize the habits of those you see. You are nourished by the art, the philosophy, by the political leadership of those you idealize. (SPHU: 254)

Without that supportive framework of language, art, music and traditions of all kinds, people tend to disintegrate; then civilization is reduced to being a curb on their drives for food, sex, aggression and oblivion (see 14.7 below).

### 13.6.3 Archaic and Mature Transferences

The group self may be built upon in two main ways depending upon the kind of transferences members make. Basically, people either identify with their group or society in an archaic (infantile) or in mature fashion. Attempting to merge psychologically or lose the self in the group characterizes the former, while the latter is evident in empathic resonance. In any given group there will be a mixture, so which predominates is crucial for the quality of the group self.

The processes that create and sustain the group may be of two types: on the one hand, sudden gross, archaic, essentially unstable identifications that, for example, require the presence of the leader in order to be maintained and disappear *in toto* when he disappears (or becomes unidealizable via a failure); and, on the other hand, slowly acquired, increasingly mature internal changes ... that will ultimately remain, even when the leader disappears, physically or psychologically. (SPHU: 82f)

In the first case, people may look to a leader, especially one promising 'total liberation,' or another selfobject such as an ideology, economic plan, the attainment of independence, or other (national) symbol, as the solution to all their problems. They quickly turn to a group selfobject as though it would immediate-

ly satisfy all their needs and aspirations. That kind of group identification is archaic, akin to that of an infant expecting total reassurance from a parent selfobject.

In the second case, people basically accept that no quick or easy solutions to their problems are forthcoming. Instead, group cohesion is gradually built up through a saga of continuing dedication, disappointment and rededication. At some moments people experience "self-strength through empathic merger" with the group. Then various let-downs and disappointments, break the empathic bonds of the group and its members are liable to experience self-weakness. Yet at these times by reviewing their actions and renewing their dedication, members work through the group's problems, which they accept as their problems. By feeling the issues that confront others, and tackling them realistically structure is built up in both the group self and the nuclear self of members. This process is akin to the transmuting internalization effected in psychoanalysis.

But unlike in psychoanalysis, building a cohesive group self depends not on one person, but upon many people with a variety of selfobjects. Whereas

archaic and unstable gross identifications in the historical field take place in relation to a single dominant figure who by his presence is able to give instant relief to the diseased group self, while the slow process of working-through that leads to a stable firming of a diseased group self requires the interpretative presence of many active and influential minds. (SPHU: 83)

In the latter situation, the leader will draw out others who can contribute to firming the group self. Kohut thus makes it clear that there are no short cuts in structuring a healthy group self.

#### **13.6.4        Types of Group Self**

By taking Kohut's thought a step further than he did himself, four types of group self can be delineated (see next page). Any group whose cohesion depends upon

archaic identification with a set of ideals (type 1) is not likely to last for long. The ideals may be fine, but totally utopian, and disappointments are liable to occur. How are these narcissistic blows to be dealt with? Either people may turn to a driving leader or party, who still promises them the fulfilment of their ideals but

		<i>Transferences</i>	
		<b>Idealizing</b>	<b>Mirror</b>
<i>Identifications</i>	<b>Archaic</b>	1. Unrealistic Utopian Dreams	2. Pretentious cover for deficiencies
	<b>Mature</b>	3. Corporate realization of values	4. Mobilized around common goals

**Fig 13** *Types of Group Self*

is forced to adopt more and more extreme measures in dealing with the intractable realities of society. In other words, they tend to move from type 1 to type 2 (line A); examples may be found in social movements that attract adherents by their apparently youthful high ideals and yet end up completely intolerant or even totalitarian. For instance

Hitler's programs, though clearly promising the fulfilment of the crudest narcissistic aims of power and domination, were yet disguised, however thinly, as a system of ideals. ... Nazi propagandists ... claimed they were motivated by the highest ideals. The very frenzy, however, with which the leader was extolled, the emphasis on his absolute power and his omniscience, betrayed that he was not a symbol for values but that he represented a concretization of the grandiose self of the masses. (SPHU: 67)

Nazi Germany thus became a prime example of a society with a type 2 group self. There as values declined, people regressed.

The traumatically rapid devaluation of both Christian and traditional tribal values (as embodied in and held by the aristocratic officer caste) contributed strongly to the narcissistic regressions, in particular toward archaic forms of the grandiose self and toward archaic forms of rage. (SPHU: 64)

The alternative is that people may keep their ideals intact while acquiring more realistic expectations of their implementation (line B). This leads towards a type 3 group self. Instead of one leader promising everything, many active and influential minds ranging from artists to statesmen, from community workers to those framing constitutions, are required. Disappointments and disagreements have to be worked through constructively, always keeping in mind the common ideals to which the group is committed. At these times, leaders of all kinds need to be "in empathic contact with the illness of the group self and, through their work and thought, mobilize the unfulfilled narcissistic needs and point the way forward toward vital internal change" (SPHU: 83).

At certain historical junctures, it is crucial that a society takes on a type 4 group self. To meet some threat or deal with a disaster, society must not dither and

hesitate. Its energies must not be spent on internal squabbles, but channelled so they become an effective counter to the threat it faces. "In a moment of crisis and profound anxiety, the nation will turn to ... [a leader who] will satisfy its need to identify with his unquestioned rightness or with his firmness and security" (SPHU: 198). Needless to say, the requisite leader will neither flee from tough realities himself nor hide them from society. With a type 4 group self, social cohesion will be build upon common agreement about accomplishing one central objective and all other considerations are subordinated to that.

### 13.6.5 The Importance of Alterego Transferences (*Detrick*)

Instead of seeing the group self as *analogous* with the individual nuclear self, Douglas Detrick suggests the relation is one of *reciprocity*. In keeping with this, Detrick claims more attention should be paid to the alterego transferences that take place in the intermediate area of skills and talents.

Whereas the individual nuclear self is *bipolar* and is constructed of the ambitions at one pole and the ideals as the other pole with the skills and talents mediating between these two, producing the nuclear program, the group nuclear self is *unipolar* with the alterego dimension of experience central and essential to group cohesiveness and the group boundary. The motivational core of the group is the experience of sameness as a function of the group process as it realizes (is directed by) the ambitions or ideals of the leader. (Detrick in Goldberg, 1985: 254)

This insight might account for the social cohesion or solidarity that is generated by people working together, using their skills and talents in a common project (see HDAC: 203). Those engaged in a different or strange set of tasks are beyond the group "boundary" (Detrick in Goldberg, 1985: 255). Unfortunately, Detrick's article does not elaborate further, so it is unclear whether he is talking about reciprocity between the individual nuclear self and the group self, or between various members of the group.



### 13.6.6 The Continual Task of Sustaining a Healthy Group Self

While a healthy group self may, as it were, gel at some point, it cannot then simply be preserved from then on.

A healthy group self ... is continuously sustained in its course throughout time ... by ongoing psychological work that provides the cohesion and vigor of its changing yet continuous structure with a matrix of selfobjects who are in empathic contact with its changing needs. (SPHU: 88)

Such ongoing work is undertaken by all those who form and develop the group's culture; that may range from generating an accommodating political climate through dramatic and musical performances to the production of fine art works. But artists and other creative leaders can only sustain society so long as they can through empathy discern what is taking place within its members (see 1.5 above, and 14.7ff below). An idea of how a strong cohesive group comes across is given by Kohut when he says:

... from the realm of group psychology, sabre-rattling pronouncements of strength, loud protestations of how strong we are and how different we are, more often betray insecurity than strength. The groups that feel most secure don't need so much overt talking about it. They just are. (SPHU: 238)

In the next chapter attention will be given to the factors that weaken healthy group cohesion and lead to cruel, unforgiving rage. The remainder of this one will try to move beyond Kohut's formulation of a 'group self,' so as to bring out how self and society are interrelating.

### 13.7 Society becomes a Selfobject

Mention has already been made (see 7.3.1 above) of the importance of selfobjects for developing and maintaining a firm, cohesive self-structure. These are not strictly speaking other persons, but the effect or imago left by another person in someone's experience. In a person's early years selfobject experiences are brought about by other persons, usually a child's parents and other caregivers. Through

the particular combination of transferences that the growing child receives it comes to acquire its own unique self-structure. The emerging self imparts a sense of self-worth to the growing child. If, on the contrary, parents and caregivers do not provide a sufficiently responsive and welcoming environment, the self will be marked by a sense of emptiness. All in all, a nuclear self is formed early on in life from their transferences. It gives each person a basic orientation for life, but one that will always require sustenance from suitable selfobjects.

Initially that sustenance is provided through the experience of other persons as they respond, care for and train the growing infant. As life unfolds, a healthy self gains sustenance from other sources, and is not so directly dependent upon the continued presence and attention of others. A person learns to draw self sustenance from — what may broadly be termed — cultural sources, such as games, dancing, reading, enjoying art and music, outings, drama and celebrations. Later in life these may widen out to society as a whole and include scientific endeavours, philosophical insights, economic interests and political ideals. Nevertheless, their connection with the nuclear self still remains.

When the adult experiences the self-sustaining effects of a maturely chosen selfobject, the selfobject experiences of all the preceding stages of his life reverberate unconsciously. When we feel uplifted by our admiration for a great cultural ideal, for example, the old uplifting experience of being picked up by our strong and admired mother and having been allowed to merge with her greatness, calmness, and security may be said to form the unconscious undertones of the joy we are experiencing as adults. (HDAC: 49f)

Exactly how this works out will vary from one person to another, depending in each instance upon the configuration of ambitions, ideals and skills in the nuclear self. In all this, not only are there variations from one individual to another, but also between cultures in the forms that creativity, ideals and expectations of similarity take. The preferred selfobjects of one culture or social stratum are not usually found sustaining by members of other cultures or strata; this factor is not always recognized when they come together.

Taking Kohut's line of thought a little further, we see a shift from personally significant people providing a selfobject experience to cultural activities and even to culture as a whole. This, however, does not mean that persons are forgotten or that culture only makes its appearance later. Right from the start those attending to an infant's needs are mediating their culture. As development occurs, culture moves from background to foreground. This shift is necessary, otherwise people would remain fixated on individuals and not develop a wider interest in life. Life becomes more than a matter of relating to those in one's immediate vicinity; culture brings new types of demands and opportunities. Its demands are not idiosyncratic, as might be those of a household, but have been sedimented and refined through tradition. Yet in measuring up to demands sanctioned by historical usage, new opportunities are opened up. Copying can lead on to improvisation and invention. In mastering an area of culture, albeit to a degree as not everyone will become a virtuoso, a person comes to master him- or herself. In other words, only when culture becomes a selfobject does a person acquire a certain maturity and ability to make his or her own way in life.

Even then it is not culture in the abstract, but culture as displayed by various performers, writers, artists and public figures that sustains people's cohesion and self-esteem. Although Kohut speaks of 'cultural selfobjects' and culture as a selfobject, this should not be understood in a too restrictive sense. Although 'culture' and 'society' can be differentiated analytically, one cannot experience one without the other. He has in mind culture as it actually embodied in a particular society, displayed through its various artifacts, ceremonies, traditions, and projects. This wide sense of culture is evident, when Kohut observes how slum conditions leave their inhabitants empty and dreary. In these instances, although the emphasis varies, cultural and social deprivation amount to the same thing. Likewise, no special distinction should be made between 'cultural' and 'social' selfobjects; both mediate a sense of being part of an encompassing whole.

Overall, the manner in which culture or society comes to be experienced as a selfobject will be as various as people are. This is especially true in the modern world, which offers so many forms of cultural expression and possibilities for engaging in society. No two individuals will appropriate their culture or relate to their society in exactly the same way. Different people's appropriations of it will share something in common, yet there will never be complete coincidence in their views, assessments and interpretations. Previous views will always be open to review, and past assessments to re-assessment. This does not mean that any interpretation goes, but none is final.

Because society and culture is inherently ambiguous, being open to so many interpretations and emphases, having to relate to it puts one on the spot; as I determine what it means to me I am also determining myself in response to it. Even taking the stance of a detached observer is an existential response. How I portray and treat society — as a field of opportunities, a sick joke, a beautiful tapestry, a rip off, a vale of tears, a jumble of loose ends, or whatever — shapes my own self. Yet in each person's life making his or her appropriation of the milieu is a risky step indispensable to self-development. Each person through their various activities has over time to take their own stand vis-à-vis society. Doing this involves drawing upon their selfobjects, selecting which experiences they will let shape their views and attitudes and direct their actions. It involves, Kohut suggests in his example of Tiffany (see 13.4.1 above), finding satisfactory images that enable one to bring one's own life and involvement with others together.

At first sight there seems nothing remarkable about this, until it is grasped that relating to society and building self-structure are but two aspects of the same process. Each aspect in practice emerges in its actual correlation to the other. What makes one group or nation (itself a unity of selves in society) different from others is that they carry out this correlation in their own unique ways; they have different images of themselves to live up to. If such particularities are left

aside, it is possible to theorize about an ideal society, a utopia, but then be unable to find real selves capable of inhabiting it. Conversely, one may advocate a fully mature self devoid of all imbalances, repression and splitting, but still be unable to suggest first steps for improving life in present society. Kohut, however, bring us back to muddled reality.

His notion of selfobjects brings out that just as self-structure is built up (or deteriorates) through experience of society (a self-*selfobject* relationship) so the capacity (or lack of it) to build and maintain society is found in its members' self-structure (a *self*-selfobject relationship). While neither self nor society is devoid of defects, life still goes on. But what is vital is "the quality of the self's relationships, particularly whether its selfobject transferences are archaic or mature" (Alford, 1991: 176). The effects of archaic transferences and their link with deficient social structures will be investigated in the next chapter.

# System Degeneration

*“The beast was once alive and is alive no longer, and is still to come” (Rev 17:8).*

The two previous chapters dealt mainly with the normal workings of society. The first showed how social structures enable both the production of social interaction and the reproduction of social systems across time and space. The second examined the main qualities required in the self for sustaining a healthy society with which its members can identify. In this chapter attention will be given to how society can degenerate or even breakdown altogether. Even though total collapse is rare, a society may continue to function in such a way that the activities that sustain its existence also perpetuate conditions that weaken people’s potential for relating to each other on a human basis or treating one another with justice.

First, a brief description is given of the possibilities for disaster in modern society, and how these are manifested in people’s lives. The remainder of the chapter examines in general terms how these possibilities may become enmeshed in the rules and resources that make up social structures. It looks in particular at the ways rules can be distorted and resources be skewed. When this begins to occur it is easy for psychological regression and social degeneration to reinforce one another. This chapter only offers an overall explanation of how this might

happen; it looks in general terms at what might make for disaster. Subsequent chapters will be more specific, showing the various kinds of system degeneration and personal regression that may result.

### 14.1 Possibilities of System Degeneration

A continual thread running through Giddens' writings is the realization that system degeneration is possible. The high-consequence risks of modernity affect not only individuals, but could lead to breakdowns across the globe that affect millions of people. While there is the prospect of living harmoniously with the environment in a post-scarcity era, there is no guarantee that this will come about. Nor are there evolutionary forces that will automatically banish violence and vindicate human rights universally, yet these are objectives worth organizing around and struggling to attain. What Giddens' works show is that once "we accept in full the contingency of history, we have to accept the possibility that *contradiction can underlie or stimulate retrograde movements of historical change*" (CPST: 143, author's italics). Both individuals and groups find themselves faced with "a dialectic of powerlessness and empowerment" (CMOD: 150). "Such a runaway world" or juggernaut is not the one anticipated by the Enlightenment thinkers; "the generalising of 'sweet reason' [has] not produced a world subject to our prediction and control" (CMOD: 151). Writing after the fall of the Soviet bloc, Giddens remarks:

The world we live in today is not one subject to tight human mastery — the stuff of the ambitions of the left and, one could say, the nightmares of the right. Almost to the contrary, it is one of dislocation and uncertainty, a 'runaway world'. And, disturbingly, what was supposed to create greater and greater certainty — the advance of human knowledge and 'controlled intervention' into society and nature — is actually deeply involved in this unpredictability. (BLR: 3)

Kohut too picks out some of the negative features of modern life. He speaks of "finding oneself in a predominantly nonhuman environment" (SPHU: 222). A leading feature of modern life is to be cut off from others and lacking support

from a matrix of caring selfobjects. If the availability of selfobjects is minimal, the effects of that will show before too long.

The environment which used to be experienced [in the Victorian family] as threateningly close, is now experienced more and more as threateningly distant; where children were formerly *overstimulated* by the emotional (including the erotic) life of their parent, they are now often *understimulated*. (RESS: 271)

Factors contributing to the emotional void that many children find themselves in are "industrialization, ... the increasing employment of women, ... or the father's employment away from home" (RESS: 270), as well as the absence now of servants in the more wealthy families (RESS: 276). All this brings about a dearth of adult selfobjects, particularly idealizable parents or parental figures, who could be a responsive target for the idealizing need of their children. The result is that: "Man of our time is the man of the precariously cohesive self, the man who craves the presence, the interest, the availability of the self-cohesion-maintaining selfobject" (HDAC: 61).

Modern society itself poses new threats and challenges for people to maintain their psychological health. Kohut points out that

... in a world of stabilized populations, of increasing uniformity, of lessened space to roam in, of mass movements and efficient totalitarianism, the individual will be confronted by new problems of psychological survival. A shift from the joys of action to the enriching potentialities of the inner life may well be one of his avenues of escape. (SS II: 681)

Writing in 1977 with considerable prescience, Kohut admits that his reflections are confined to the more or less highly industrialized democracies of the Western world. But he adds his impression that the psychological problems of the West will soon "be felt by populations under totalitarian regimes and in undeveloped areas whose social organizations differ from ours" (RESS: 271n1). It should, however, be added that sectors of industrialized society have also come to experience similar problems to those of undeveloped areas.



The last few decades have shown how intractable are many of the problems. Development decades begun with high hopes have failed; the gap between rich and poor has increased; family breakdown, neglect and abuse of children have spread; genocide has not been banished; political leaders find themselves either without solutions or power to implement them. Even though in a few areas positive developments are evident, the list could be continued. Although blame for these social ills and breakdowns may in some instances be laid directly at the feet of particular individuals, in most cases the fault lies in the whole structuring of world society. Even when corrupt or incompetent individuals can be identified, one still has to ask about the system which gave them so much unchecked power and influence.

#### **14.2 Distorted Rules and Deficient Resources**

An explanation of how various widespread evils become enmeshed in social systems lies in combining Thomas Aquinas' view of evil as a privation (see 11.4.2) with Giddens' view of social structures as composed of generative rules and resources (see 12.5). Social evils become embedded in systems — whether local, national or global — through human agents drawing upon rules that are distorted and making use of resources that are either inherently deficient or unjustly distributed. When people's actions are guided by distorted rules and constrained by deficiencies in the resources they can call upon, then not only are their actions likely to bring harm to themselves and others, but they will also reproduce the same defective social systems.

Knowing a generative rule does not necessarily mean that one can formulate it, but that one knows what to do at each juncture or 'how to go on'; one's behaviour is consistent and socially appropriate. When, however, rules are distorted, people are misguided in their thinking and/or their ability to distinguish good from evil is blurred; lacking in their grasp of reality, inevitably they are misled in their actions. People may quite sensibly follow the accepted conventions of their

society or group without being fully aware of the rules they actually are following, or that these rules are in some way distorted. Their actions will inevitably result in various consequences that they could neither foresee nor intend.

Resources may be deficient either because they have not been built up sufficiently or their unequal distribution results in people being unable to develop their lives and relations as full human beings. The lack of resources, whether material, economic, educational or socio-political, curtails people's life chances and can provoke every kind of animosity in its train. Not only that, a superfluity of resources can also bring harm.

Many people are not fully aware of the distortions in the rules directing their thoughts, perceptions and actions; though they may have an uneasy feeling that something is wrong, yet be unable to explain what. They are likely to be more aware of a lack of resources, but may still be unable to pinpoint exactly why. Resources may have been denied to some section of society or never been built up there, or some combination of both. It is important to know precisely what social resources are lacking, otherwise wrong action may be taken in trying to overcome the lack, and conditions be made worse. For instance, in Ruanda where social organization — itself an authoritative resource in Giddens' terms — has collapsed, much more is required than providing food and medicines, if normal life is to be restored.

The example of Ruanda is obvious enough, but many other social evils are considerably more diffuse. Since social relations are disembedded or lifted out from local contexts of interaction and restructured across indefinite spans of time-space, it is difficult to grasp, even if one wants to, the full implications of one's involvement with anonymous others across the modern world. Buying a hamburger appears to be innocuous enough, but in some instances it is one facet of a global system that has also driven peasants off their land so it may be used for cattle raising. While the harmful and debilitating effects of structural evils are

readily apparent to those who suffer them, any analysis of what makes them so persistent must look into the sets of both rules and resources actually and often globally operative in people's interactions.

### 14.3 The Modalities of Structuration

Speaking of sets of rules and resources, which people draw upon and reproduce through their actions, is to take an 'experience distant' approach. Normally one pursues one's various aims and interests, adjusting to the prevailing situation, without being aware of all the possible rules involved. Likewise, one makes some assessment of what one can accomplish in the given circumstances, but without tabulating all the resources required and how they are distributed. At times it might be useful to isolate a particular social rule or convention for discussion and clarification, but that presumes there is still a shared but tacit understanding of other rules.

Taking a more 'experience near' approach, we find ourselves having to deal with various kinds of social institutions: legal, cultural, economic and political. The term 'institution' does not refer to an identifiable organization, but to the sedimented practices that ordinarily prevail in a particular society. Thus, for instance, owning freehold property, marriage, voting democratically and being a teenager are all social institutions. These institutions set out 'parameters of expectation' defining what a person can, may and sometimes should do. Actual organizations, such as law courts, political parties or music companies, on the one hand operate according to the institutional practices inherited from the past, yet on the other hand endeavour to reshape those practices as they see fit. Other organizations or individuals, however, may for their own reasons contest efforts to reshape social practices. There is never a complete consensus either about what 'is' going on or what 'ought' to be happening.

Each social institution, or bed of sedimented practices, has its own "interlacing of

meaning, normative elements and power,” which actors draw upon in their interactions and in turn reconstitute. Different features of both social structures and people’s interaction can be distinguished according to the rule or resource involved. Giddens thus distinguishes three ‘modalities of structuration’, namely, signification, legitimation and domination. These correspond respectively to the semantic and moral aspects of rules and to the mobilization of resources. “Actors draw upon the modalities of structuration in the reproduction of systems of interaction, by the same token reconstituting their structural properties” (CS: 28).

In other words, every social structure embodies elements of signification, domination and legitimation. Each of these modalities or dimensions of the duality of structure is found in every action, and hence in the sedimented practices that form institutions. But both actions and institutions can be classified according to which modality is predominant. The following differentiation can be made:

Culture, symbolic orders or modes of discourse	S-D-L
Political institutions	D (auth)-S-L
Economic institutions	D (alloc)-S-L
Legal institutions	L-D-S

where S = signification, D = domination, either authoritative or allocative, L = legitimation

(see CCHM:47; CS: 33; CPST: 107).

The usefulness of this scheme lies in its showing that a critique of any institution must pay attention to all three modes of interaction that structure society, though not accord them the same importance.

Again, the term ‘political institutions’ should not be exclusively identified with the apparatus of government, or ‘economic institutions’ with banks and busi-

ness. It is one of the marks of modern, capitalist society — particularly in its British-American form — to separate these, but that is only one possibility. Organizational separation is less in both the social market countries of Europe and many developing countries today, as it was in the class-divided society of medieval times.

The fact that all three modalities of structuration are involved at least to some degree in any social interaction warns against over-compartmentalizing society. Yet in order to get to grips with any issue, it is necessary to make some distinctions.

### 14.3.1 Signification

To some extent every human action involves communication; this may vary from a carefully worded and persuasively delivered speech to the look of satisfaction, glee, malevolence or whatever that an actor does not realize he is expressing. Being able to communicate and to pick up what is being communicated depends upon actors drawing on an interpretative scheme appropriate for their culture. This may take place tacitly or unconsciously, where the mannerisms, gestures, tone of voice, postures, dress and hesitations of actors co-present to one another influence the attitudes people have to each other without anyone averting to what is happening. (It is often the task of a psychological counsellor to lead a client to accept that he or she is responding to such indirect communication in inappropriate or exaggerated ways, and to then to grasp why this is happening.) Meanwhile, at the level of discursive consciousness, human actors can not only monitor their own and others' activities, but are also able monitor that monitoring. They can check out their way of taking up what others are expressing against an appropriate interpretative scheme. Their stock of cultural knowledge is usually sufficient for this, but in cases of doubt dictionaries, encyclopedias, video or sound recordings, or special experts may be consulted.

Any act of communication, when looked at from the point of view of the duality of structure, both draws upon and reinforces the rules of signification or meaning. Or rather, communication is effected through instantiating the constitutive aspect of the rules that structure social interaction and praxis. This same point was made from a different angle by Wittgenstein (1958) when he observed that explanations end in a social practice; language is founded in convention.

Nevertheless, the whole of life in society cannot be equated with linguistic and symbolic codes, or with signification. "The structures of signification are separable only analytically either from domination and legitimation" (CS: 33).

### 14.3.2 Legitimation

The intersection of the structures of signification and of legitimation is evident when one asks of an action "Is it correctly described?" and "Was it rightly done?" If someone has been killed, describing it as an act of murder implies that it was not rightly done. Whereas, describing it as a pure accident implies that no one did wrong. But this presumes that no one was obliged to act in any way that might have prevented the accident, that no negligence was involved. Establishing the facts involves a judgment about what ought to have been done, and vice versa.

This is most evident in the not infrequent contexts of social life where what social phenomena 'are', how they are aptly described, is contested. Awareness of such contestation, of divergent and overlapping characterizations of activity, is an essential part of 'knowing a form of life'. (CS: 29; see CPST: 82)

When Giddens speaks of 'norms' as the modality appealed to in sanctioning — or not sanctioning — particular interactions, he is not referring to ultimate moral values. Norms here refers to what is found acceptable or unacceptable, and hence is enforced in a particular society. Selecting which norms will be enforced and in what manner will depend considerably upon how power is distributed in any given society.

This understanding of norms leaves open the degree to which the structures of legitimation in any society find consensual support among the members of that society. "The mass of the population does not necessarily have to have 'confidence' in the system of rule, only pragmatic acceptance of their obligations in relation to it" (NSV: 202). Those members with allegiance to alternative norms may simply not be in a position of sufficient power to make their norms count. Giddens thus leaves open

a range of possible 'shadings' between acceptance of normative obligations as a moral commitment, the type case of Durkheim, and conformity based on the acknowledgement of sanctions that apply to the transgression of normative prescriptions. (CPST: 87)

The constraints that sanctions impose vary from a raising of the eyebrows, through being publicly exposed or imprisoned, as well as boycotts and stayaways, to violence or the threat of it. But the heavier the sanction, the more it depends upon the exercise of dominative power.

### 14.3.3 Domination

Structures of domination involving the exercise of power are neither necessarily noxious nor can they ever "be 'transcended' in some kind of putative society of the future" (CS: 32). Domination refers to the ability to mobilize allocative and authoritative resources. If this ability were entirely absent, even the most casual social encounter would be impossible, let alone running a country, managing a firm, or settling a civil dispute. Anything said or done would be devoid of lasting consequences.

Power is not, as such, an obstacle to freedom or emancipation but is their very medium — although it would be foolish, of course, to ignore its constraining properties. The existence of power presumes structures of domination whereby power that 'flows smoothly' in processes of social reproduction (and is, as it were, 'unseen') operates. (CS: 257)

This positive aspect of power is brought out in the term 'facilitator', someone who has the 'facility' of enabling conduct to reach an intended outcome. Giddens thus speaks of 'facility' as a modality of structuration; meaning by that either access to structural resources or the capability of reaching a desired outcome in the course of conduct. But, as Cohen comments:

... even where decision-making comes into play in the activities of rulers and others in the higher echelons of power ... actors are not capable of opting for all courses of action. ... [Their] opportunities also are shaped by the limits of resource-based facilities agents do or do not possess to implement decisions. One need only consider the parallel failure of US intervention in Vietnam and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan to illustrate these decision-making limits on a grand scale. (1989: 241)

These examples, as well as the failures of revolutionary governments and newly independent nations to sort out their affairs satisfactorily, bring home how intractable social evils can be.

#### 14.4 Inadequate approaches to change

The immensity of social change that is sometimes sought is brought out by Herbert McCabe, who says of the revolutionary that he

... proposes to change not merely this or that detail within society, but the structure, and hence the values of the society itself. The revolutionary does not propose something that in terms of *this* society is better; he wants to change the terms. He wants history to advance not simply further along established lines, but along new lines. Now such lines extend into the past as well as into the future. I mean that each society interprets its history as leading up to itself, as well as leading forward into the future. (1968: 28)

Put in Giddens' terms, the revolutionary (who need not be violent) is seeking a complete transformation of the generative rules and resources by which society is structured. In view of the deep seated character of social structures, as well as human waywardness to which any individual can give in, it is doubtful how complete a transformation can ever take place. In addition, set-backs may occur



due to accidents, diseases, weather, technical breakdown or a lack of basic materials.

Transforming an unjust society to a just one and providing a new basis on which people can relate to one another requires much more than simply changing the laws or even assuming power. While these may be required, by themselves they are insufficient. It is instructive to examine why.

#### 14.4.1 Legislation comes up against Social Durability

Among the generative rules that direct an society, legislation is the most explicit, but not the only kind. It is usually fairly rigid, in some cases very rigid, and any transgression may incur definite penalties. However, no great penalties are attached to many of the unwritten rules, which are usually fairly flexible. In the latter case “the operations of practical consciousness enmesh rules *and* the ‘methodological’ interpretation of rules in the continuity of practices” (CPST: 68). Somewhat surprisingly the more abstract rules, such as codified legislation, are less influential in shaping social activity than the seemingly trivial procedures that are generally accepted. Most civil law, after all, deals with specialized areas of life, for example, business, property, marriage and labour law. Criminal law really comes into play only when there is a significant and threatening departure from the generally accepted routines of society.

The rules that govern the embedded routines of day-to-day life, although rarely written down, are much more durable and persistent than written ones (see STMS: 221). Such rules often only become apparent when a clash occurs in cross-cultural situations. For example, depending upon whether one’s culture is Western or African, one does or does not look in the eye the person speaking to you. Likewise, in one culture silence means consent, whereas in another it signifies non-acceptance of a proposal. Neither of these rules are written in law books, though perhaps by now in anthropology books, but they are likely to be

held much more intensively than a piece of legislation, which can after all be amended or scrapped at the next session of the legislature.

#### 14.4.2 Power

Some new members of South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU) said after a short while in parliament that they had gained a 'position', but found they had not come into 'power'. Things were not happening the way they wanted them to happen. It appears that their conception of power treated it "as a phenomenon of willed or intended action. Here power is defined in terms of the capacity or likelihood of actors to achieve desired or intended outcomes" (CPST: 88). This the members of the GNU found they were unable to accomplish. Their conception of power was expressed by Max Weber. Giddens criticizes this conception, from a theoretical point of view, since it cannot explain the enduring realities of domination when those in positions of power are not busy making decisions.

An alternative conception of power, expounded by Hannah Arendt and Talcott Parsons, treats it as "specifically a property of the social community, a medium whereby common interests or class interests are realized" (CPST: 89). Here, social domination is treated as "an institutional phenomenon, either disregarding power as relative to the active accomplishments of actors, or treating it as in some way determined by institutions" (CPST: 89). This is akin to what members of the GNU called gaining position. The limitation of this view "is that power is seen as determined by, or emanating from structures, rather than as operating in and through human action" (CCHM: 50).

In Giddens' view, both these conceptions of power are inadequate, but when examined in the light of the duality of structure, they are complementary. Exercising power is not a special type of action, but is "just as essential and integral to [all] social interaction as conventions are" (CPST: 256). Power is both a

condition for action and results from action; “neither aspect of power is more ‘basic’ than the other” (CPST: 257). Agents are able to obtain the outcomes they want to the extent that they can draw upon allocative and authoritative resources, but their exercising power, in which they obtain the outcomes they want, in turn reproduces the relations of autonomy and dependence found in the social structure. In practice this means for GNU members that they have to build up the authoritative or allocative resources, or find the ways and means, to accomplish the ends they want.

Power, in a highly generalized sense, refers to “ ‘transformative capacity’, the capability to intervene in a given course of events so as in some way to alter them” (NSV: 7). Intervention may be intended or not. Not only is there an immediate outcome, but resources are maintained and built up for further action. In this sense, power underlies all action, including that — if it were possible — of an individual operating alone or the activities within a group where there is complete equality of power.

But, unlike well matched games, there is no society with complete equality in power; some are parents and others children; some members have had more training and experience than others, some have come to possess greater allocative resources, some have acquired or been appointed to authoritative positions. Thus some actors have “sway over others, and over the material world they inhabit” (CCHM: 50), others much less. Their relations are marked by various degrees of autonomy and dependence. “Power relations are relations of autonomy and dependence, but even the most autonomous agent is in some degree dependent, and the most dependent actor or party in a relationship retains some autonomy” (CPSR: 93).

Here, however, power is being understood in a more specialized sense; it refers not just to an agent’s capacity to effect the outcome of events, but

to refer to interaction where transformative capacity *is harnessed to actors’ attempts to*

*get others to comply with their wants.* Power, in this relational sense, concerns the capability of actors to secure outcomes where the realisation of these outcomes depends upon the agency of others. (CPST: 93)

Getting others to comply with one's wants is not necessarily exploitative. Presumably, the wants of leaders and their followers generally coincide; the leader's task is to make realizing them more possible. Others' wants may coincide with, be in direct conflict with, at cross purposes with, or indifferent to one's own; or, most likely, combine all four positions. Domination as an aspect of the social structure thus encompasses both coercion and willing compliance, conflict and cooperation. "Power may be at its most alarming, and quite often its most horrifying, when applied as a sanction of force. But it is typically at its most intense and durable when running silently through the repetition of institutionalized practices" (NSV: 9).

The exercise of power, besides drawing upon resources to effect a desired outcome, also reproduces the structures of domination in society. Thus when an order is given and obeyed, authority — not simply one person's position, but throughout society — is both drawn upon and upheld. If it were not obeyed, various sanctions would come into play legitimising the further application of power to ensure compliance. As far as the overall social system is concerned, it does not matter too much whether the order is agreed with or not, willingly accepted or resented, so long as it is complied with. Likewise, when someone takes out a loan, the structured asymmetry of resources, in this case between debtors and creditors is both drawn upon and reconstituted in the deal that they strike. In an honest and competitive society, all power is not in the creditor's hands, as would-be borrowers can look around for better terms elsewhere. Both examples, that of obeying an order and taking out a loan bring out the close conceptual links between power, agency and structure.

## 14.5 Convergence of Generative Rules and Natural Law

There is a considerable convergence between the Giddens' conception of rules and Thomas Aquinas' understanding of law and reason. Each of them recognizes the "double meaning (and origin) of 'law' as both precept of action and generalization about action" (CPST: 244) or that law is a rule and measure of action (*quaedam regula et mensura actuum*, IaIIae 90, 1) fostering certain actions and deterring others. Coming from an empirical approach, which investigates what is taking place, Giddens comes to admit that as far as human society is concerned, account has to be taken, too, of what ought to be happening. "I would want to claim not just a few especially contentious concepts such as these [power, class, ideology, and interests] but the whole conceptual apparatus of social theory is in some sense 'ineradicably evaluative' " (CPST: 90). Coming from the other direction, Thomas, concerned with expounding the way of life people ought to lead, stresses that serious attention must be paid to what people are actually doing. He notes how the repetition of actions establishes customs that have the force of law, since what people regularly do must derive from a well reasoned judgment. This is why custom has the force of law, overrides a law and is the interpreter of laws (*consuetudo et habet vim legis, et legem abolet, et est legum interpretatrix*, IaIIae 97, 3). His reference to 'the force of law' covers both moral suasion and judicial enforcement.

Thomas' flexible treatment of custom and law (IaIIae 90-97), which is also an outline of political theory, parallels that of Giddens' on the modalities of structuration. In seeing law as primarily addressed to the mind and requiring promulgation (IaIIae 90, 1 & 4), Thomas underlines its role in signification. Its participation in and, as far as its particularities are concerned, its derivation from Eternal Law by which God in his providence rules all things underscores its legitimacy. Finally, domination is present in the law, because it has to be enforced; transgressors must bear the consequences, but may only be punished by authorized ministers of the law (*punire non pertinet nisi ad ministrum legis, cuius auctoritate poena infertur*, IaIIae 92, 2 ad 3).

In the contemporary world it is not possible to be as sanguine about the running of society as Thomas was in his times. He certainly recognized that people may commit crimes, that tyrants may oppress, sedition may split a city or kingdom. Though underlying these contingent failures was an enduring order of truth (*verum*), goodness (*bonum*) and unifying power (*unum*). (These three transcendentals, ways in which being (*esse*) was manifested, are respectively echoed in Giddens' speaking about signification, legitimation and domination as modalities of structure.) Today, however, instead of finding in society this enduring order, we find its structuring flawed at an institutional level.

#### 14.6 Flawed Institutions

An institutional analysis places the awareness, moral integrity and skills of social actors in suspension; it treats a social institution as a set of chronically reproduced rules and resources (CS: 375). The reason why a social institution is flawed is because it goes on reproducing rules that are distorted and resources that are in one or other way inadequate for living as full human beings. This kind of analysis does not rule out the activities of individuals who once they become aware of flaws in their society, silently disagree, demonstrably object or work for systemic change. What it does bring out is how difficult it is to change defective social structures, as they are deeply entrenched in the regular running of society.

There are many ways in which social institutions may be flawed. Any particular society would require its own institutional and historical analysis, where details could be looked at and differences from other societies noted. All that can be indicated here are some general possibilities about how defects may occur in each of the modalities of structuration. In other words, how language and culture may mislead, how accepted standards of behaviour may be insufficient, and how intractable problems arise over political and economic resources.

### 14.6.1 Distorted Communication and Understanding

In modern society, quite apart from attempts to deceive on the part of individuals, communication is sometimes inherently misleading because it relies on a distorted process of signification. Language never reveals reality fully, since about any situation or event more can always be said. Well chosen words, however, can give an adequate account of what is happening, so that nothing of importance is overlooked, at least for the time being. Ill chosen words, on the other hand, will conceal crucial aspects of reality, lead to wrong conclusions and misdirect actions. Choosing the right words is not just a matter of selecting the correct terms, but also of finding a satisfactory framework in which to approach the situation under discussion. Furthermore, a too narrow approach will invariably screen out crucial considerations; for instance, a purely economic analysis will disregard medical, environmental and aesthetic issues. The type of approach adopted often enough depends upon the individual or sectional interests that are being pursued. This point is summed up by Schillebeeckx, who writes: "What we experience as objective — what happens to us — is also dependent on our concepts and frames of reference, dependent even on our projects and the interests which are served thereby" (1977: 27, translated by Fergus Kerr). Communication may be distorted because of a failure on any of these counts, though if it is still to be communication it must at least impart some information. Distortions may have various causes, for example: ignorance from poor education; not troubling to check facts or understand; new predicaments that no one yet fully grasps; bias giving slanted reports; concealing evidence; deliberate lies and their repetition by others who take them for the truth. Various organizations from churches to military commands, from show business to academic centres of learning, develop their own language and communicative style. That is only to be expected, but it can lead to various issues or points of view being ruled out from the start as irrelevant or unworthy of a hearing. Furthermore, a telling sign that awkward issues are being glossed over is when an organization continually revises its terminology. It tries as it were to deal with problems by declaring them non-existent.

Explaining this further would require a whole treatise on communication, but these few examples should show how easy it is for misleading information, views and outlooks to be perpetuated in society, and people be taken in by them.

#### **14.6.2 The Canonization of Illegitimacy**

Closely linked to distortions in communication is a warped sense of good and evil. Not only individuals, but societies may invert values. Max Scheler exposed this phenomenon in his treatment of *ressentiment*. But even when people act without malice and harbour good intentions, their actions do not produce all the good fruit they expect. This is due in part to deficiencies in the social process of legitimation, so that moral issues are overlooked or approached without the requisite sensitivity and discernment. On the one hand, what is of genuine value may be overlooked, because nothing effectively brings it to people's attention. On the other hand, worthless or harmful activities may be given an appeal and sanctioned as acceptable behaviour. Once that occurs it is difficult to overcome, as present actions draw upon the social structures reproduced from past actions.

#### **14.6.3 Inadequacies over Resources**

The processes of domination, both over goods and people, are even more problematic in a system with high space-time distancing. Resources are not fixed quantities; a society can build them up or run them down. An increase in effective time-space distancing together with increased acquisition and handling of information, builds up the resources available to any organization, be it a government, a bank, a business or a church. This is largely a matter of efficiency, of being able to coordinate activities over space and time. It is little use having raw materials or machinery, appointed officials or many records, unless they can be accessed.

Yet the larger and more widespread an organization becomes, the more diffi-



culties it runs into on a human level. Even when people genuinely want to be of service, their actions may have unintended, yet harmful repercussions on others of whom they are hardly aware. The more efficient and wide-ranging their organization, the more this is likely. Yet, if they refrained from action, they would let down those dependent upon them. Even bad government or organization may be better than none.

Since resources should both enable and constrain, if they are weak or their distribution is too skewed, the resultant failure is twofold. A total or relative lack of resources makes it impossible for people to direct their lives in a satisfactory manner and to constrain others from harming them. In short, deficient social structures constrain people from doing what is right and enable them to do wrong more easily. This is especially true when distorted rules — both norms and those regulating meaning — further encourage it.

Working out in any given society what allocative and authoritative resources should be built up, how they should be better distributed with requisite checks and balances, how existing inequalities should be limited or reversed, how redress should be made, and how tightly resources should be organized, leads into the basic questions of politics and economics. Such an inquiry, however, will be dealing not with domination alone, but signification and legitimation as well.

Giddens does not spell out what resources are necessary for satisfactory human life. His attention is directed mainly to economic and political resources. This, however, should not be taken in too narrow a sense. More is necessary for a satisfactory human life and community than can be quantified in economic terms or be subjected to political negotiation. Basic human needs are more extensive. They include, according to Manfred Max-Neef (1992), subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom. The resources required to satisfy the need for subsistence and protection

are limited and diminish with use, whereas those that satisfy the other needs increase or intensify with use. Although much more might be said about Max-Neef's scheme, the point to note here is that distress in society may not have a strictly economic or political origin. Strikes, for instance, may ostensibly be about wage rates, but there may be an underlying dissatisfaction about the lack of mutual understanding, of opportunities for creation, or a feeling that one's identity is not recognized. These are not issues that can be treated in terms of power, and so may easily go unrecognized.

#### **14.6.4 A Note on Ideology**

In some social analyses 'ideology' is treated in its own right as another special feature of society. Giddens' approach shows that this is not necessary, since he does not consider it as consisting of 'invalid knowledge claims', whereas science makes 'valid knowledge claims'. In his view, "the chief usefulness of the concept of ideology concerns the critique of domination" (CPST: 187). It is thus "not a particular 'type' of symbolic order or form of discourse" (CS: 33). Instead, communication has become ideological when "dominant groups or classes ... make their own sectional interests appear to others as universal ones" (CPST: 6). In this way, asymmetries of domination are expressed in such a way as to legitimate sectional interests. In this way the privileged may attempt to justify the inequalities inherent in a racially divided society, the class division in capitalism, or the advantages enjoyed by party members in a communist society.

#### **14.6.5 Contradiction and Conflict**

In making a distinction between contradiction and conflict, Giddens helps explain how a society can still hold together even though its members may disagree profoundly and their interests clash. A group of people have an interest in courses of action or states of affairs that make it easier for them to gain what they want. "To be aware of one's interests, therefore, is more than to be aware of

a want or wants; it is to know how to set about trying to realise them" (CPST: 189). Sectional interests arise, not simply from people's own needs and wants, but "by virtue of their membership of particular groups, communities, classes, etc" (CPST: 189). So, for instance, unemployed people share certain interests in common, but their interests may be in contradiction with those employed who are seeking an increase in their wages. Yet by itself this contradiction does not pit the two groups in conflict.

Giddens speaks of structural contradiction "as an *opposition or disjunction of structural principles* of social systems, where those principles operate in *terms of each other* but at the same time *contravene one another*" (CPST: 141). For instance, management, shareholders, wage earners, pensioners and the unemployed are all part of the same economic system, but have different interests and seek not quite compatible outcomes from it. Another instance is the relation between nation-states and multinational companies. To maintain and build up their position both internally and among other states, each nation state seeks to strengthen its position in the world economy. This requires access to finance, technology, information and markets, which is mainly in the hands of multinational companies. So a nation-state has to allow or even invite them to operate in its territory, even though many of their operations escape its control. Yet multinationals in turn depend upon the climate of stability that the nation-state provides.

Many secondary structural contradictions occur when the results of implementing a policy are diametrically opposed to what the policy was designed to bring about. For instance, the high standards of the building code for urban areas were meant to prevent the proliferation of substandard housing in South Africa. But since many people could not afford to put up such high standard houses, they were unable to build permanent homes at all, and so were forced to remain in shacks with no security of tenure.

Although contradiction and conflict may in fact be closely related, they are not identical. Conflict can be understood in two senses: as the *opposition of interests* between individuals or collectivities or as *active struggle* between them (see CCHM: 232). Usually conflicts of interest occur along the fault-lines in a society, where various contradictions are clustered. Such fault-lines are likely to occur, for instance, where contradictions regarding economic, political, racial and religious matters coincide. On the other hand,

the tendency of contradiction to involve conflict is weakened to the degree to which contradictions are kept separate from one another. Conversely, the more there is a fusion or 'overlap' of contradictions, the greater the likelihood of conflict, and the greater the likelihood that such conflict will be intense. (CPST: 144-5)

But even then conflict may be kept in check by direct repression; on this Giddens, writing in 1984, observes:

The use of force may normally be taken precisely as one of the expressions of the occurrence of conflict, but the threat of its use, or certain tactical shows of force, may also equally well serve to prevent sources of dissension from emerging as overt struggle. Anyone who is prone to argue that control of the means of violence cannot be used to dampen conflicts of a profound and deep-lying kind should ponder cases such as that of South Africa. (CS: 319; see also CPST: 145)

The absence of overt struggle, resulting from the enforcement of 'law and order', should not be mistaken for genuine peace where duties are fulfilled and rights are upheld.

#### **14.6.6 The Production and Reproduction of Defects**

Giddens' analysis of social structures in terms of rules and resources, taken together with his further analysis of the modalities of structuration, offers a highly abstract picture of social systems. It brings out that there are various entry-points, as it were, by which social evil can enter society. A deficiency in any of the modes of structuration — signification, legitimation or domination — can, unless corrected, permeate society having its deleterious effect on both the rules

and resources that people draw upon for action and which they reproduce through their actions. Any deficiency in one mode of structuration is soon likely, perhaps because of people's desire for consistency or for an ideological justification for their actions, to result in deficiencies in the other two modes too.

The importance of Giddens' scheme may be appreciated when one considers the various proposals made for overcoming persistent social evils. For instance, some advocate better education, some stress a return to traditional morality (or the adoption of new values), some press for a redistribution of wealth, while others pin their hopes on democratization. None of these is a panacea. At best they are partial solutions, answering respectively to failures in signification, faulty legitimation, disparities in economic and political domination. But, unless all four areas are continually watched and attention given to their interconnections, little progress will be made in combatting social evils.

Speaking on this abstract level, this is as far as Giddens' theory of structuration takes us. It shows how human agents may through their activities reproduce the various flaws in their society and produce harmful effects in each others' lives. But, since the distorted rules and deficient resources they are drawing upon are often among the unacknowledged conditions of action, the resulting harmful effects are usually unintentional and sometimes completely unforeseen.

The usefulness of Giddens' scheme is that it shows the importance in each instance of probing — in terms of signification, legitimation and domination — into how rules are distorted and resources deficient. Although there will be similarities from one society to another, this scheme allows significant differences to appear. The openness of the theory to various historical possibilities enables it to be used as a basis for examining various societies and cultures. Structuration theory, however, does not generate a particular research method; "its concepts should be regarded as sensitizing devices, to be used in a selective way in thinking about research questions or interpreting findings" (ST: 213).

## 14.7 Mislading Social Images

Although structuration theory explains well the working and reproduction of society through human agency, it does not examine how people identify with and have a sense of belonging to a particular society. Not only is society structured by rules and resources, but people resonate with it through images. People are in varying degrees integrated into their society (or societies) by the images they have of themselves, of one another and society (or various societies) as a whole. The positive effects of this were examined in the previous chapter, now its negative aspects must be mentioned.

Mention has already been made of the interplay between self and society, and how this may be mediated by various images, through which people gain a view of who they are, what they can do and might become. The term 'image' is used in a wide sense to include all kinds of cultural products including literary, artistic, musical, architectural as well as dress and design. Some images may be fairly superficial and pass quickly out of fashion, while other more enduring ones provide a basic model or root metaphor for people to place themselves in society and relate to their predecessors, contemporaries and successors.

A healthy group self, as is the case for the healthy self of the individual, is continuously sustained in its course ... by ongoing psychological work that provides the cohesion and vigor of its changing yet continuous structure within a matrix of selfobjects who are in emphatic contact with its changing needs. The sum total of the results of this work that must affect all layers of a people ... we call 'culture.' (SS III: 253)

This, however, does not always work out as well as it might. Two examples might illustrate this.

### 14.7.1 When the Artists left a Void

In the first Kohut gives an account of how the artists of the Weimar period in Germany

failed to understand their [a broad sector of the population's] needs and had failed to portray them with any degree of sensitivity. ... Somehow art needed to express the empty, devitalized, fragmented state of those who had formerly felt alive, strong, and cohesive ... That kind of art did not exist. The great works of the German past could not fill that void" (SS III: 254f).

Nazi-supported art stepped into the void, at least as a pseudocure.

It helped deny the persisting self-defect via sudden and wholesale identifications with symbols of strength and failed to deal with the depressive, devitalized, and fragmented state of Germany. Nazi art fostered regression to archaic symbols of power and unity. (SS III: 256)

At the same time political thinkers "failed to provide the German group self with the needed resonance that would have encouraged development toward a new self-image" (SS III: 256). The people felt their pain and deprivation was meaningless; no image or symbol that the artists, newspaper editors, or political thinkers presented as a possible selfobject brought them a promise of wholeness.

#### 14.7.2 'Guilty Man' and 'Tragic Man'<sup>22</sup>

In a second example, Kohut puts into question the whole intergenerational image of humanity that Freud brought to the fore in his theory of the Oedipus complex. He does not agree that Sophocles' *King Oedipus* "portrays the deepest and most central experience of the individual, man's wish to sleep with his mother and to kill his father." Sophocles was "an archconservative ... [who] held the ingrained view that law and discipline came first and that the individual with his aspirations and experiences came second and last" (SS IV: 561). Freud combined the presuppositions of this "rigidly predetermined" Greek tragedy with "the quasi-biological conception of primary drives which are seen as being processed (discharged, neutralized, put 'on hold,' as it were, etc.) by a mental apparatus" (SS IV: 556). This results in the picture of

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<sup>22</sup> No attempt has been made to use inclusive language for the titles 'Guilty Man' and 'Tragic Man.' First, because they are direct quotations from Kohut. Second, they are dealing by and large with the psychological development of males, rather than females. This also puts their universality into question.

'Guilty Man,' a psychological and moral view of man, ... reluctant to give up his old pleasure aims, however nonadaptive, ... unwilling to allow his aggressive-destructive aims to be tamed, and thus engaging in wars and/or prone to self-destruction. (SS IV: 556)

This, in brief, is the powerful image of humanity portrayed by Freud<sup>23</sup>, which to a considerable degree shaped the outlook and behaviour of an epoch, including its educational systems, social and correctional services. It was "his great ability to mythologize the key concepts of his scientific system and thus plant them firmly, via name and ingrained cultural association, into the minds of the ever-broadening circle of his followers" (SS IV: 559).

Kohut does not deny that oedipal conflicts may sometimes occur, but claims that intergenerational strife and mutual killing wishes "refer not to the essence of man" but are "deviations from the normal." Normally at the oedipal stage, which is not a pathological complex but a step in development, "the parental generation responds with pride, with self-expanding empathy, with joyful mirroring, to the next generation, thus affirming the younger generation's right to unfold and to be different" (SS IV: 558f). Self psychology instead presents a picture of 'Tragic Man' who attempts, yet never quite succeeds, to realize the programme laid down in his nuclear self during the span of his life.

Instead of Oedipus, Kohut proposes the story of Odysseus, "the first would-be draft evader in literature" (SS IV: 562), as an appealing model. His action of turning his plough to avoid injuring his son, even though that gives away the madness he had feigned to escape the Trojan war, provides "a fitting symbol of the fact that healthy man experiences, and with the deepest joy, the next generation as an extension of his own self" (SS IV: 563).

The relation between 'Guilty Man' and 'Tragic Man,' between classical Freudian and self psychology, could be discussed at length. Which is normal? How far are

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23 Gay's *Freud* (1988) shows how family life at that time, and particularly in Freud's own childhood household, would have given him a predilection for choosing Oedipus as a model.



they complementary? Does one supersede the other? But the main point to note here is the shift from a mechanistic root metaphor to an artistic one. The Freudian view of directing and keeping quasi-biological drives in check draws its inspiration from nineteenth century machinery. Self psychology on the other hand adopts a basically artistic metaphor in its description of Tragic Man.

Man's self, once it has been established, is, in its essence, an energized pattern for the future that, lying in the area of free will and initiative, has a significance all its own ... It is this aspect of man, man's self struggling to fulfill its creative-productive destiny, failing or succeeding, hurt and raging or fulfilled and generous, which has been neglected by analysis heretofore. (SS III: 280)

It is not difficult to see that a home, school, business or social service that takes much of its guiding inspiration from self psychology will be very different from one governed by mechanistic images.

### 14.7.3 Deceptive images

These two cases illustrate how influential various images, or the dearth of them, may be in shaping people's assessment of themselves, individually and collectively, and their aspirations for the future. Other influential images or root metaphors are those of the competitive market over against the cybernetic model, the [South African] struggle, and plastic sexuality. They each help explain what is happening, as well as point out and justify what should be happening. But just as rules may be distorted, resources deficient, so too may images be deceptive.

Although no image or root metaphor reveals every facet of reality without concealing anything, some fail because they are not relatively adequate for dealing with the social situation, the culture or personalities involved. They may once have had summed up a situation well, given a sense of immediacy and appealed dramatically to the people of an earlier period. But after a while they are overtaken by events, cultural changes, differences in personality, and new

problems, so they now more mask than reveal reality. They no longer provide, at least without considerable retrieval and re-interpretation, a worthwhile guide for discerning what action should be taken.

Other basic images are deceptive because they fail to illuminate relevant or crucial aspects of life. Lutz and Lux (1988) show, for instance, the inadequacy of both the economic picture of 'rational man' intent on maximizing self-interest and the legal picture of 'reasonable man' who is also concerned about others' welfare. Taken on their own, both these two basic images of humanity are too simplistic. The former, although it speaks of choice, really reduces choosing to arithmetic, the calculation of what is of highest value for me, or self-interest. The latter, however, is prepared to transcend self-interest in the pursuit of higher values and aspirations. Instead of opting for one model, Lutz and Lux propose a concept of the dual-self, who, being both self-interested and caring for values beyond self, has to make real qualitative choices. The dual-self concept "takes in the complete compass of human nature and the human condition" (1988: 126). It paves the way for a new approach to work, economic and human welfare, that goes beyond purely mathematical conceptions.

Images that are subtly misleading are much more dangerous, than those that are patently horrific, grotesque or overexaggerated. The latter's defects are quickly discovered and their appeal falls away. But when an image is only slightly defective, yet still offering a plausible view of both society and self, as well as opening avenues for action, its appeal is likely to remain much stronger. It will then be much more difficult to spot its deficiency, negate its appeal and overcome its harmful effects.

Since basic images both reveal and conceal, no single image or even related set of images is entirely adequate. In the course of life we, both individually and in various collectivities, work with a variety of images or root metaphors. The art is to spot or generate one that is most appropriate for a particular situation or

occasion, but not press it beyond the limits of its applicability. When it is no longer relatively adequate, it is put on hold and alternative conceptions sought. This approach ties in with Fowler's fifth stage of "Conjunctive Faith." At that point a person recognizes the relativity of symbols and stories, not just from one tradition or point of view to another, but "their *relativity* to the reality to which they mediate relation" (1981: 186). It may also be the basis for the Eastern Orthodox practice of *οικονομία*, when church authorities recognize that a particular case falls outside accepted teaching and practice, and so must be dealt with separately.

#### 14.7.4 When Images turn to Idols

Accepting the inadequacy in any image, yet without dismissing it entirely, and having — especially in a pluralist society — to work with or at least allow for various basic images, can be disconcerting. It goes against the grain of those who seek clarity, cohesion and certainty. It also clashes with the Cartesian inheritance of modernity. The desire for a totally adequate master image or root metaphor, that gives rise to a fully comprehensive theory, programme or social system remains strong. In psychological terms, people continue to seek, what Bollas and Jones (see 7.4 above) call, the transforming object relation that will bring about a fully satisfying metamorphosis of the self. Bollas points out that in secular society

we see how hope invested in various objects (a new job, a move to another country, a vacation, a change of relationship) may both represent a request for a transformational experience and, at the same time, continue the 'relationship' to an object that signifies the experience of transformation. We know that the advertising world makes its living on the trace of this object. (1987: 16 quoted in Jones 1991: 123)

Because the drive towards transformation must go somewhere, relatively adequate images are totalized or allowed to become idols. Any object becomes an idol when it "claims to be transformative but is only partially so or is destructively transformative. It evokes and plays on our longing for transformations but

cannot deliver on the promise" (Jones, 1991: 124). Too much may be looked for in an image that may have initially provided a sound basis for a personal ideal or collective programme. If its relativity is never seen or accepted, if no re-assessments are ever made in the light of experience and human needs, or if it is expected to offer salvation in full, then it is turned into an idol. Instead of serving human life and endeavour, it takes control.

Even before the advent of modern theology or psychology, Friedrich Nietzsche noted that, though God is dead, men must have gods and so will make gods of the state, the party, or whatever suits them. ... this drive will latch onto one object or another without regard to whether the object can bear the full weight and range of the experience of the holy or fulfill all social and psychological functions of the sacred. (Jones, 1991: 123)

When this takes place, such goals as national identity, state security, economic growth, party hegemony, religious domination or racial purity are turned into absolutes. Their defence and pursuit is put above all other moral considerations.

#### **14.8 Social Decline and Psychological Regression**

What characterizes the decline of a social system? What signs show that a society, be it a nation-state or a significant portion of one, is degenerating? In many particular instances, this is likely to be a highly contested issue as various people and parties have different interests and expectations. Much will depend upon people's scale of value. For instance, in South Africa today is a highly participatory but not very efficient society better than a highly efficient government running a minimal democracy? Likewise, how is individual freedom in a meritocracy to be weighed against the support given by ties of family, tribe and locality? Would a shift from the latter towards the former be an instance of progress or decline? There are no clear-cut answers; in dealing with these issues many other factors would also have to be taken into account.

Nevertheless, if the question of social decline is examined at a general level, then

it may be said that a society begins to degenerate when its social structuring begins to break down. As rules become inoperative and resources dissipated, the social structure binds a decreasing span of space and time. If communication breaks down so that people have little idea who to believe or trust, and the line between what is commended as worthwhile and abhorred as despicable becomes purely random or arbitrary, then the rules governing signification and legitimation have ceased to operate. What was right (meaningful and moral) at one moment might not be at the next. This disrupts a person's sense of ontological security (see 9.6.1 especially). At this point too authoritative resources, particularly the power to direct people's activities and efforts in a coordinated fashion, will be reduced. Reliable information will not be available to make more than ad hoc responses to immediate crises. As a result of the general lack of reliability, but also in turn contributing to it, allocative resources or the control over goods (raw materials, tools and products) will be run down. As the rules governing possession, fair trade and remuneration break down, combined with a lack of reliable economic indicators, production and distribution cannot be planned. With diminishing resources, both allocative and authoritative, the means for settling conflicts peacefully will be reduced. As violence breaks out, the already precarious social structure is further threatened. Added to the deterioration of rules and resources will be a dearth of appropriate images that could give meaning to life and direct people's efforts in a promising direction.

Structural breakdown is not the same the splitting of a society or organization into smaller units, such as might occur in decolonization, unbundling in business, or reducing the global reach of multinationals. Admittedly, the arm of those individuals in power may be shortened; they no longer control allocative and authoritative resources over such a wide span of space and time. When a society or organization is split into smaller units, its underlying structure may still remain intact as each unit continues to draw on the same generative rules and to access sufficient resources to sustain it. In fact instituting more local control may increase the resources, as each unit can concentrate more and still

gain from links with one another.

However, not every split within countries or organizations is well managed. If it comes through long or violent conflict, not only may resources (both goods and the system of administration) be dissipated but the generative rules required for ensuring clarity, direction, safety and cooperation may be in abeyance. In this case the underlying social structures, which normally sustain a reasonable pattern of life, have begun to fragment.

What people in a society whose social structure is breaking down will experience — again expressed in rather general terms — is the inability to make sense of what has taken place or to put together some plan for managing their future. There is next to nothing they can rely upon. The lack of allocative resources will bring impoverishment, not just the normal hardships of living in a poor region, but one compounded by insecurity, lack of trust and a widespread uncertainty about what to believe or hold on to.

How do people cope with such a state of anomie? Even though few nation-states or regions within them have in recent years declined, like Ruanda or parts of the former eastern Europe and southern Africa, to this state of anomie, in many other areas too the social structure is severely impaired. It is not just that people's expectations of each other in society change, but people know and feel that society holds out no or few expectations for them at all. Giddens, drawing upon Bettelheim's account of his experiences in Dachau, speaks of the unpredictability of life there, but in terms that are applicable to many another disintegrating society:

The feeling of autonomy of action that individuals have in the ordinary routines of day-to-day life in orthodox social settings was almost completely dissolved. The 'futural' sense in which the *durée* of social life ordinarily occurs was destroyed by the manifestly contingent character of even the hope that the next day would arrive. (CS: 62)

Under these conditions each person is thrown back on whatever personal resources he or she may have.

In this situation self-structure is paramount. It is one of the central points of Kohut's work that a firm nuclear self, built up from self-selfobject relations, may provide a person with the ability not to be swept along by the breakdown of understanding and loss of values that mark a declining society. In his essay "On Courage" (SS III & SPHU) Kohut examines how certain individuals have "the ability to brave death and to tolerate destruction rather than to betray the nucleus of one's psychological being" (SS III: 130). He shows how in moments of testing they have created imagery that has supported them in their resolve. He cites the cases of anti-Nazi martyr heroes, who first went through a severe narcissistic equilibrium until they had achieved the complete unification of their personalities under the leadership of the nuclear self, then they experienced a sense of relief and of inner peacefulness and serenity (SS III: 145).

But, besides those who in situations of social decline stand out courageously for their ideals, or even for their ambitions derived from the grandiose self, many people are swept along by events. They take no stand against the social disintegration engulfing them. Instead, faced with uncertainty from without and with no selfobjects to sustain them from within, they may easily regress to an archaic state. Although no single factor explains why this happens, Kohut does outline the kind of social conditions that tend to break people's normal healthy assertiveness and lead them to embrace misleading and even idolatrous imagery.

#### **14.8.1 Social Deprivation leads to Psychological Regression**

A particular set of social conditions neither directly nor inevitably produces the same psychological effects. For instance, one group when faced with economic impoverishment or political domination may respond by redoubling their efforts, while another group slides into apathetic resignation. What accounts for

such different responses and reactions? In this line, Kohut states

... man, as an individual and as a member of a group — perhaps even more empathically when he functions as a member of a group in history — reacts not to raw facts but to the meaning that these facts have for him, i.e., to facts embedded in an emotional matrix. (SPHU: 87)

Thus one group with a healthy selfobject milieu will rise up to fight constructively against deprivation and all the hardships entailed; while another group lacking such a supportive milieu will alternate between outbreaks of rage and lethargic inaction. (Although a 'selfobject milieu,' or a sustaining set of symbols and images, could be categorized under the heading of 'rules and resources,' designating it separately help bring out how people do not just run their society but are bonded with it.)

To illustrate this, Kohut conducts a case study, as it were, of what led Germany under the Nazis "to undertake a supra-individual, nationally organized vendetta or merciless persecution, war, and destruction ... [in its pursuit] of total control over the world" (SPHU: 63). In seeking an explanation for this, he passes over without much comment, but a clear unease, Wangh's suggestion that the youth of Hitler's time were suffering from their fathers' absence during their early years at the time of World War I. Instead, Kohut relies upon his clinical observations regarding regression, where "a specific, well-circumscribed psychological chain of events" occurs.

The frustration of a patient's higher forms of narcissistic satisfaction leads to regression along both axes of the grandiose self and the omnipotent selfobject. But there is also regressive development in aggression from higher levels of controlled aggression that are mobilized in support of a person's ambitions and of his wish for acclaim and success to that specific form of regression experienced in a specifically regressive perception of the environment which I have called narcissistic rage. This regression, especially when it is prolonged, leads to a variety of untoward and potentially dangerous consequences in the life of the individual. (SPHU: 62f)

Kohut is here pointing to the effects of continual blows upon one's self esteem,



especially when they are combined with the persistent weakening of the supportive matrix of selfobjects. Admittedly, no one can escape various narcissistic blows in the course of life's ups and downs, and "the propensity to respond to them with rage is ubiquitous" (SPHU: 63). What makes the difference between rising above blows to one's self esteem with humour and wisdom, and narcissistic regression is the support obtained from self-selfobject relationships. Each selfobject is an imago in the self derived from the experience of other persons, especially a marriage partner and friends, as well as those derived from the artists, writers and other creators of culture. If this selfobject milieu is persistently undermined over a period of time, then regression to archaic state is almost inevitable. The impact of such regression is heightened when this it takes place in a group.

This is especially true in one of history's most destructive agents — the nation. The malignant human propensities are mobilized in support of nationalistic narcissistic rage. Nothing satisfied this fury, neither the achievement of limited advantages nor the negotiation of compromises, however favorable — not even victory itself is enough. (SPHU: 63)

Since the unfolding of the higher forms of narcissism — empathy, humour, creativity and wisdom — was interfered with in Germany, this led to group regression and its consequent rage. "In the area of the grandiose self ... acceptable outlets for national prestige [were blocked]; in the area of the idealized parent imago ... group values, e.g. religious values [were destroyed]" (SPHU: 160). As the development of the nation's shared ambitions and its shared values and ideals was frustrated, regression resulted.

... the loss of national prestige after the defeat in the First World War deprived many individual Germans of a great deal of pride in their self-group (the group established on the basis of a grandiose self held in common). There was in addition the loss of self-esteem for untold millions from unemployment, currency inflation, and decreased social standing for the civil service and for other large parts of the middle class. Like the individual patient whose need for acclaim is not responded to, the potential for regression in the area of the grandiose self must have increased strongly for many Germans in the years after the First World War. (SPHU: 64)

Although some sections of the population, organized labour and certain intellectuals, did improve their social position and gained new pride in themselves, most were psychologically depleted. Added to that was

the traumatically rapid devaluation of both Christian and traditional tribal values (as embodied in and held by the aristocratic officer caste)[, which] contributed strongly to the narcissistic regressions, in particular toward archaic forms of the grandiose self and toward archaic forms of rage. (SPHU: 64)

Another very significant factor contributing to widespread narcissistic regression was the lack of a gifted non-pathological leader in the 1930s who might have led Germany on a different path (see Chapter Seventeen below).

Such regressions become manifest particularly with regard to group aggression, which then takes on, overtly or covertly, the flavor of narcissistic rage in either its acute or, even more ominously, in its chronic form. (SPHU: 160)

Acute rage is shown in sporadic outbreaks of mindless aggression. Whereas chronic narcissistic rage is not mindless, because all the powers of the mind, for instance, the ability to set goals and work out tactics, are utilized to bring about the greatest terror and destruction possible (see 9.2.6 above). Examples of this were all too common.

The Nazis clearly exploited German sensibilities [over their defeat in World War I and having to pay reparations] in order to harness the ensuing narcissistic rage in the service of their vengeful atrocities and a vengeful war. (SPHU: 86)

Kohut, however, pushes his analysis further. These manifestations of rage, he argues, are only secondary symptoms of a more deep seated disorder. Just as an isolated aggressive drive results from the fragmentation of the self, so the atrocities and violence of the Nazi era stems from “the abysmal failure of constructive empathy in Germany and in its European surroundings” (SPHU: 93). Kohut puts his finger on the underlying disorder when he explains:

The disease itself, as would be the case with an individual patient, was silent. What the skilled psychohistorian must look for now, in retrospect, is evidence of a sense of

depression, a lack of vitality, and a sense of discontinuity in time and fragmentation in space. ... the psychological illness of the pre-Hitler Germany was not caused by the external adversities to which Germany was exposed at the time. Of course they mattered ... But the real issue was the absence of an empathic matrix that would have recognized and acknowledged the emotional needs of the German group self exposed to such external adversities. (SPHU: 86)

In the absence of selfobjects appropriate for that time, there was nothing to check the regression taking place in the German group self.

Kohut grants that many historical factors, especially political setbacks and economic hardships, converged to bring about Germany's decline into Nazi hands. These he in no way downplays, but his concern is to show that a people's ability to respond creatively or react destructively to hardship and political setbacks depends upon their degree of narcissistic vulnerability. Once a people's shared ideals and values are lost, and the avenues for attaining their group ambitions are blocked, they then become a psychologically vulnerable group. With nothing to sustain them empathically, many Germans (as would any other people in a similar predicament) fell prey to a leader and political party that seemed to offer them a quick and easy way of dealing with the problems that arose from the disturbances deep in their group self (see SPHU: 83).

Not every instance of social evil leads to the complete collapse of society, as was the case in Nazi Germany, or more recently in Yugoslavia and Ruanda. So, although the case presented by Kohut is in one way extreme, it is instructive as in other societies the same disturbing elements may be present. A similar combination of social deprivation and psychological regression can take hold in any society when a number of structural contradictions overlap.

#### **14.9 Conclusion: The Potentiality for Decline**

What has been offered in this chapter is a description of how past actions can structure an agent's potentiality for future action. People's potential as agents

depends upon what they notice and care about, upon their own ideals, skills and ambitions, upon their inner resourcefulness and courage, upon their capacity for empathic communication, upon the channels available for regulating human affairs and meeting material needs. All of these potentialities, however, will have been built up and strengthened, or neglected and run down, as a result of past actions; these will include not only actions of the persons now concerned but of many others too, not only what they each foresaw or intended, but also to a large extent the unforeseen consequences of their actions.

Particular attention has been given to the ways in which defects, or limitations in potentiality, may be replicated. If these do take hold and spread they usually narrow the scope of what a person or group can accomplish, sometimes reducing their own capacity to think, judge and act freely, and in extreme cases negating it completely.

Since human potentialities — both individual and social — may or may not be actualized, and if actualized then in various creative or destructive ways, the course of human development (or degeneration) cannot be predicted. People may at any time throw a surprise or respond out of character. Though, knowing that human potentialities are shaped by previous activity and example, the repercussions of past actions can be assessed and conjectures made for the future. This is especially so with defective action, whether its defectiveness stems from a lack of resources, sense or morality, as defects narrow the scope for future action.

Understanding how a society and its members might flourish, or degenerate, only really makes sense in terms of an artistic root metaphor. The variety among human cultures has shown that there is more than one way of arranging how people might live together in society. Likewise, there is more than one course which social decline may take. The resulting flaws in society, however, cannot readily be compared to faulty parts in a machine, or diseased organs in a living organism. They are not parts that can be isolated, excised and replaced. Instead,

they are continually generated and spread within the very processes that keep a society in being. But exactly in what form they might be generated and the extent of their spread depends upon the more or less free interplay of human agents going about many of their regular activities. In the course of these, and in ways which may only gradually become apparent, they may increasingly fragment their own selves and weaken the structures of their society.

## Part III — Recapitulation

The discussion in the last four chapters has focussed on two of the four issues central to this study, namely: the interrelation of self and society and how structure accounts for it; and how evil comes to have a persisting effect in society.

Regarding the first issue, these chapters have not provided a single picture of how society works and the place or role of the self (or selves) within it. Instead, they have shown a certain complementarity between the approaches of structuration theory and self psychology. Giddens' words that "actors are at the same time the creators of social systems yet created by them" (ST: 204) is matched by Kohut saying that "wholesome psychological development [which is derived from empathic contact with others] ... lays down functional patterns which, in adulthood, lead to actions that benefit the social environment and will, sooner or later, be accepted by it" (SS III: 267). Though Kohut's words "sooner or later" are important, as at any given moment there may well be tension as well as a sense of identity between self and society.

Thus there is no one model for explaining the fit between self and society. The fit is neither that of parts in a machine nor of organs in a living body. In fact, to a certain degree, a person may reassess and contest the prevailing model of how the self should and does fit into society. As Cohen points out: "Social agents, not social theorists, produce, sustain, and alter whatever degree of 'systemness' exists in social life" (1989: 18). How, for instance, a tax collector sorts out society differs from that of a tourist, a miner or farmer. Each in his efforts to make sense of social life, and in some degree alter it, still has to draw upon the social structure of rules and resources.

Neither self nor society are discrete and fully determined entities, but are always co-related and over time mutually shaped by their manifold interrelations. This

mutual shaping, however, is neither fully determined by social forces to which the self as agent must respond automatically, nor is it the subject of unqualified freedom on the agent's part. Activities and interactions can only take place by drawing upon self and social structure. Both these structures are constitutive potentials that have been built up, shaped and thereby also limited as a result of previous action and interaction. They will also be reproduced, sometimes with minor and occasionally with major variations, as a result of present action and interaction. Every action carries within it the possibility of change both for self and society.

Social structures exhibit a duality: they are drawn upon in the production of action and in turn reproduced through action. Their reproduction, however, is usually more an unintended consequence of action than an intended result. The person spending money wishes to buy an ice cream; her action results in upholding the social system of buying and selling, but that was not her intention. Even when deliberate effort is made to change society, this rarely works out fully as intended, because not all the conditions of action are foreseen and consequently allowed for in the action. Also other actors are likely in some measure to see what is happening and adjust their actions accordingly. In relation to society, no one is in the position of a mechanic or surgeon dealing with an entity separate from himself.

The method of institutional analysis given in Giddens' structuration theory will show what an individual faces in society, but neither his or her capability of dealing with it, nor what he or she will decide to do. As Cohen remarks: the concepts of structuration theory "allow the widest possible latitude for the diversity and contingencies that may occur in different settings" (1989: 17). These concepts allow for an openness to play between self and society, and between self and others, even to a certain extent of their each being reconstituted in the process. The approaches of both structural theory and self psychology only make sense when they are viewed in terms of an artistic root-metaphor, in which in

their various ways self and society work on each other.

The self, likewise, may be described as a structured potential. Its basic structure of ambitions, skills and ideals, is laid down respectively by the mirroring, alter-ego support and merger with others that it received early in life. Its continued vitality depends upon support from its selfobjects, which are derived from empathic contact with others and the overall cultural milieu. A person's ability to respond to and deal with the particularities of each social situation generally depends upon the coherence of its self structure. Nevertheless, certain individuals who ordinarily appear rather abnormal may be better equipped to deal with extreme situations. There is no single standard of adjustment of self to society.

When it comes to action, no predictions can be made about whether, when or how the potentials inherent in self and social structures will be actualized. Agents – either intentionally or not – could have acted otherwise or refrained from a particular course of action. Nevertheless, their potential for action is still finite; it depends both upon their own personal congeries of capabilities, the prevailing understanding and moral expectations of their society, as well as the asymmetrical access to the resources it offers them.

Turning to the question of how evil comes to persist in society, an answer may be given at two levels. First and very simply, since evil, as expounded by Augustine and Thomas, is the lack of some good that ought to be present, then evil persists in a social system because of some deficiency in the structures which are drawn upon for the reproduction of that system. Deficient social structures may take the form of distorted rules and/or a deficiency in the resources, or their distribution, so that a just social system cannot be brought about or upheld. More specifically, there are flaws in how signification, legitimation and domination are incorporated into various social institutions or sets of sedimented practices.

It should be noted that social evil is here located primarily in the structures of



society, not on a more obvious organizational level. The way in which a social system may be organized can be changed, but social evil will still remain unless there is a more deep seated change in people's perceptions and understanding, a better appreciation of what is worthwhile and despicable, an improvement in material resources (goods, equipment and the skills to use them), and a shift in the exercise of authority towards the common good. Unless there is change for the better in the rules and resources operative in people's activity, altering how an organization is run will only reproduce the same social evils in another form.

Added to defective structures may be failures in how people identify with their society. If its representatives, leaders, artists, philosophers, religious figures and entertainers offer no images and symbols to appeal to people's ideals, engage their skills and mobilize the best of their ideals, then they will feel lost and become prone to follow self-assured leaders offering grandiose symbols that hide the emptiness of their promises. Instead of being sustained and acting out of a mature selfobject transference, there is a reversion to archaic mergers. The danger of this becoming widespread increases with a breakdown in the social structures. The deterioration of social conditions and widespread psychological regression can reinforce each other in an overall decline.

Since evil is basically a lack, it does not have a dynamism all its own. It is perpetuated and gains its force, however, from the inherent dynamism in people to strive to develop their lives, living conditions, and relationships. But when the rules and resources that both enable them to strive and give their strivings a particular direction are defective, then the implementation of the ideals that draw them and the ambitions that push them become misdirected and even destructive. This does not always happen consciously or deliberately, as people are not always fully aware of the defects in the rules, resources or imagery that they are drawing upon. The defects may be part of the unforeseen, or at least unavoidable, conditions of action. So, although people's intention may often be directed elsewhere, these defects are nevertheless reproduced as the unintended

consequences of action.

The above gives an answer on a general, and hence experience distant, level to how evil comes to persist in a social system. How in any particular social system, for instance in South Africa, the former Yugoslavia or Ruanda, it came to have such a hold would require detailed socio-historical inquiry. Such an investigation would be more experience near. There is, however, no single scenario that predicts how social decline and system degeneration will take place. It may begin with determined efforts by a few bad or evil persons to gain their objectives at everyone else's expense. It may stem from those in positions of responsibility failing to take timely action. It may be due to a general self-seeking indifference on the part of the population as a whole. Or decline may result from a combination of all these and other factors.

Even though there is no single scenario that will predict the course of social evil in each and every society, certain typical forms can be pointed out that are prevalent in the modern world. Since evil corrupts the institutional order of society, an examination of main features of that order will reveal some of the typical ways in which persistent defects may occur within it. This will be pursued in Part Four, in the hope of typifying the potential for good and evil existing within contemporary society.

# Personal and Institutional Clusterings of Evil

Part Three looked in general at the underlying principles by which the potential for producing persisting evil in self and society may be structured. It showed that this negative potential could be analyzed in the form of distorted rules, deficient resources, misleading images in society and a lack of personal resourcefulness in the self for surmounting them. The following three chapters depict some of the typical ways these structural evils may actually occur in contemporary life. They look at some disquieting features of the contemporary world, which may in whole or part, and in various combinations, pertain in various societies and among their members.

Instead of leaving 'structural evil' as a general concept, the point of these chapters is to show the kinds of structural evils that may occur today. They do not give an exhaustive description, but demarcate areas where widespread institutional evils are likely to build up (Chapter Fifteen) and to show how they both affect and are affected by the self (Chapter Sixteen). Attention is also given to the mediating work done by leaders — for good or ill — between self and society. Although several noteworthy persons are mentioned (Chapter Seventeen), mainly to illustrate ways in which leadership may be abused, this study

does not offer a full psycho-history of them. Nevertheless, through their ideas and deeds, they have had a pervasive influence on history, making them — for better or worse — what Hegel termed ‘world historical figures.’

Each area in which persistent evils are likely to occur could be studied on its own. For instance, economic exploitation or sexism, as well as their dependence and effects upon personality, could be — and in most cases has been — the subject of in-depth study. The aim here, however, is to show that these are not isolated problems, but arise from a range of related issues that arise out of the overall structuring of modern society and societies.

This study, nevertheless, does not analyze any particular society. There local conditions as well as its own history, including both the intended and unforeseen consequences of millions of human agents, will all have imparted their own twists to the structuring of evil. The purpose of these chapters is more limited: to outline a typology of how evil may be structured in the contemporary world.

# Structural Evil in the Institutional Clusterings of Modernity

“They have idols of silver and gold, made by human hands.  
Their makers will end up like them, everyone who relies on them” (Ps 115:4 & 8).

This chapter outlines typical ways in which persistent social evil may occur in the modern world. It might be termed a study in the institutional afflictions (*poenae*) that result from evil actions and lead to further evil activities. The institutions considered in themselves are ambiguous; they are necessary for life in the modern world and so serve a good purpose but may also be warped by evil. Since this warping results from sin and leads to further sin (*quia ex peccato est et ad peccatum inclinatur* : this is the formula used about *concupiscentia* in the Decree on Original Sin of the Council of Trent; D 792; DS 1515) it is the institutional counterpart to concupiscence in the case of individuals (see 3.3.3 above and 18.1 below).

How problems appear largely depends upon the approach brought to them. The attitude in which Giddens approaches the problems of modernity is neither one of sustained optimism nor cynical pessimism, nor again simply one of pragmatic acceptance, but rather one of radical engagement. It accepts that “although we are beset by major problems, we can and should mobilise [through social movements] either to reduce their impact or to transcend them” (CMOD: 137). A social movement can be — and in most cases already is — engaged in contesting each area of risk and exploitation.

Giddens encapsulates his view of the darker sides of modernity, when he states:

there are three main types of exploitative relationships in modern systems besides that of class: exploitation associated with the use of political power, including military domination; with relationships between ethnic groups; and that associated with gender relationships. ... Class relationships are associated with one of the main institutional orderings of modernity, *capitalistic institutions*. *Industrialism*, another major institutional clustering of modernity concerns above all the exploitative relationships between human beings and nature, rather than social relationships as such. Exploitative relationships on the political level here group together *governmental power and control of the means of violence*. (RMC: 265)

Apart from gender and ethnic conflict, the other four types of exploitative relationships he mentions are each associated with one of the institutional clusterings of modernity. Each of these is a necessary but morally ambiguous feature of the modern world as it is presently constituted. While offering a basic support for a just, workable and humane life together, they can also embody activities that are destructive of human life.

## 15.1 The Institutional Clusters of Modernity

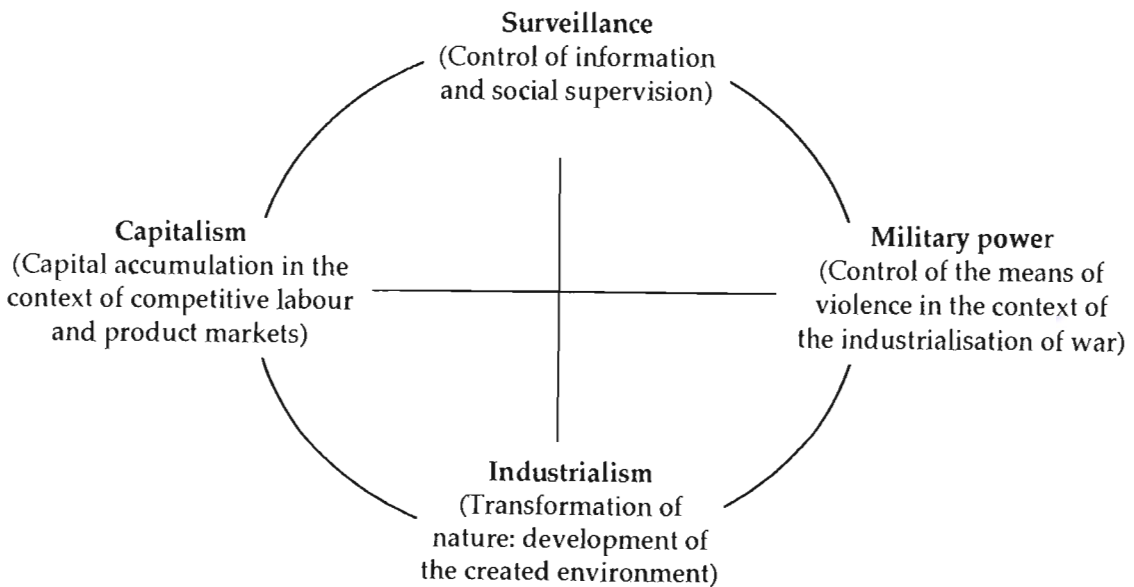
Leaving aside how Giddens arrived at this position, he sums up his overall view of modern society by pointing out:

The dissolution of the traditional world under the impact of modernity is not the result of capitalism, or of industrialism, or even of the concentration of administrative resources in modern states. It is the result of all these in co-ordination with modern means of using military strength and making war. (STMS: 28)

Since all four influences both work in concert and continually modify one another, they are only analytically distinct. Their interrelations are depicted in Figure 15.1 below. The control of the means of violence, for instance, takes on new forms with increased surveillance; something that is made possible by technical improvements in industry and the ability of capitalism to generate funds to pay for it. So in analyzing any given society, it would be important both

to examine each of these four institutional axes separately and to look into the interplay between them.

Each of these institutional axes or clusters has a pervasive and largely impersonal hold over society. Mention has already been made of the facilitating conditions of modernity, namely: its wide time-space distancing (see 10.3 above), the dis-embedding and re-embedding of social practices (10.4), its high level of reflexivity (10.5) and the prevalence of risk (10.6). The overall result is a vast abstract system, which millions of human agents both draw upon so they can act and reproduce as a result of their interactions. But, although the system can in some instances be influenced, it is not directly under human control. This makes many social and moral issues so intractable.



**Fig 15.1** *The institutional dimensions of modernity*  
(CMOD: 59)

## 15.2 Capitalism

A study of how Giddens traces the historical rise, development and workings of capitalism today, noting the shifts in his views, could occupy a whole treatise. Taken overall, Giddens describes capitalism as

a system of commodity production, centred upon the relation between private ownership of capital and propertyless wage labour, this relation forming the main axis of a class system. Capitalist enterprise depends upon production for competitive markets, prices being signals for investors, producers, and consumers alike. (CMOD: 55)

On closer inspection, the main features of capitalism become apparent, namely: the insulation of the economic from the political, the convertibility generated by money operating as the universal standard of exchange value, the capitalist labour contract, its universalizing tendencies, and the dominating effect of financial institutions. Each of these has its shadow side.

### 15.2.1 Economic Affairs become Insulated from Political Control

Looked at historically, the rise of capitalism in Western Europe depended upon a number of factors. Two of the most crucial were the rise of the absolutist state and the aspirations of the bourgeoisie towards civil and particularly economic liberty. Both of these helped break down the restrictive network of allocative and authoritative relations inherent in feudal society. Although many other factors — geographical, religious, technological — played their part.

The monopolisation of the means of violence in the hands of the state went along with the *extrusion of control of violent sanctions from the exploitative class relations in emergent capitalism*. Commitment to freedom of contract, which was both part of a broader set of ideological claims to human liberties for which the bourgeoisie fought, and an actual reality which they sought to further in economic organisation, meant the expulsion of sanctions of violence from the newly expanding labour market. (CCHM: 180)

The newly emergent nation-state through its monopolisation of the means of



violence made provision for purely economic exchanges based on the possessive individualism of the contracting parties. The separation of economic from political institutions “is best described as one of *insulation*, whereby relations between capital and wage-labour are kept ‘non-political’, by the severance of industrial conflict from party struggles within the state” (CCHM: 128). Although insulated in their operations, both the nation-state and the capitalist economy depend upon each other for their operations.

Taken overall, such insulation can prove detrimental to people and the environment. If a state does not provide sufficient direction, whether directly by legislation and supervision or indirectly through fiscal measures, then companies in competition with each other can hardly avoid pressing ahead regardless of externalities in pursuit of profit. When no economic, legal or social penalties are imposed against companies damaging the environment, undermining their workers’ health, or producing goods that take vital resources away from the poor, then those companies cannot afford to attend to such concerns. Paying attention to them would push up their prices and make them less competitive.

The involvement of the state in the economy is an issue that provokes continuing debate. Some kind of dynamic balance between free markets and state direction is called for, but it is beyond the scope of this study to even suggest where the balance, or series of balances, might be attained. But what is clear is that whenever that balance is upset for any length of time, widespread deprivation ensues; no matter whether the upset stems from unchecked greed or a hankering after political power, or from a rigid adherence to ideology.

### **15.2.2 Capitalism turns Everything into a Commodity**

A necessary prerequisite for capitalism to operate is the commodification of not only raw materials and the goods produced from them, but also of land and labour power. When a monetary price can be set upon each of them, they become

commodities that can be brought and sold; monetary exchange enables each of them effectively to be converted into the other.

Prior to the rise of capitalism “those who owned land, and profited from the labour of others on that land, were subject to limitations on how far it could be either legally transferred or sold on a market” (CCHM: 114). Under feudalism, control of land and those who resided upon it were tied down by family inheritance. A feudal lord might be removed by superior force, but he could not be bought out. That society was characterized by a low level alienability (corresponding to the top left-hand corner of Figure 15.2 below); whereas a capitalist society depends upon a high level alienability both of land and people (corresponding to the bottom right corner).

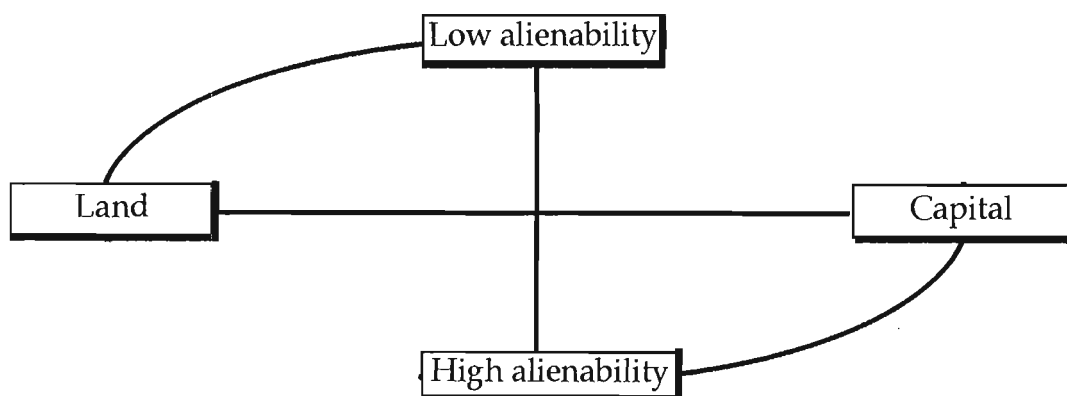


Figure 15.2 *The alienability of land and capital*  
(CCHM: 114)

In feudal and other traditional societies, the local community had high presence-availability; in other words, social activity took place in local contexts where the main agents, or their deputies, were present to one another. But under capitalism, money as “the medium of ‘pure exchange-value’ ... expresses and makes possible the disembedding of social relationships from communities of high presence-availability” (CCHM: 115). When the exchange-value of every-

thing can be expressed in monetary terms, very low presence-availability is required to keep “the cycle of investment–profit–reinvestment characteristic of capitalist enterprise” (NSV: 134) in motion. Investing on the stock market or financing foreign trade, for instance, hardly bring one into immediate contact with those running the business or carrying out its operations. Yet one’s activities can have far reaching ramifications.

The commodification of land and labour can readily lead to both of them being viewed, and subsequently treated, as no more than commodities. When the land on which people dwell and which provides them with a measure of continuity is treated as just another raw material, not only may environmental damage result but also its inhabitants can be psychologically undermined. Furthermore, when people are costed as units of labour-power, in monetary terms they become comparable to inputs of capital, energy and raw materials.

The commodification of labour-power not only permits but demands its consolidation as ‘abstract labour’ ... [which makes] possible the ‘design’ of work processes in ways which integrate labour-power with the technological organization of production. (NSV: 144)

This abstract outlook, which derives from industrialism as well as capitalism (CMOD: 61), makes it all too easy to overlook the humanity of workers, especially when they are located on the far side of the world.

### **15.2.3 Survival Depends upon a Labour Contract**

A corollary to the commodification of goods, and especially land, is the commodification of labour power.

For the first time in history, large segments (eventually the vast majority) of the working population do not directly produce the means of their own subsistence, but contract out their labour to others who, in the form of money wages, provide the wherewithal for them to survive. (NSV: 133)

Arrangements for paying wages do vary, but in each case “there is a purely economic connection of mutual dependency established between employer and worker” (CCHM: 179). Once the work is done and payment made, employer and employee have no further obligations towards one another.

The only sanction, possessed by employers as a whole rather than by individual employers, is the need of expropriated workers to have some form of paid work — *der stumme Zwang*, the ‘dull compulsion’ of economic relations, as Marx described it. (CCHM: 124)

The capitalistic labour contract differs from slavery, a press gang, serfdom and feudal ties as workers are at liberty to sell their labour to whoever agrees to buy it. It must, however, be added that violence was used extensively to bring about situations where people needed to sell their labour in order to survive. The enclosures in England, or the Land Act and the imposition of poll and hut taxes in South Africa, could only be accomplished by the ruling class or the state having control of the means of violence.

All this raises the question of whether capitalism is inherently exploitative. There is no clear cut answer; opponents of capitalism generally point to the widespread deprivation and gross inequalities that occur in capitalist countries, whereas its exponents extol an ideal and then blame evident social ills on factors extrinsic to capitalism. Without directly stating that capitalism is inherently exploitative, Giddens’ treatment of the capitalist labour contract does disclose a weakness at its centre. Unless definite measures are taken to obviate that weakness, then the inherent ‘logic’ of capitalism will drive it in an exploitative direction.

Its central weakness from a moral point of view is not that various employers are mean, out for high profits, and seeking ever-new ways of exploiting their employees. That may be true, but it overlooks the central exploitative feature of capitalism, namely that “the ‘free’ exchange of labour-power and capital in the context of the capitalist market in fact allows the capitalist class coercive power

over wage-labour" (CCHM: 111). Individual capitalists may be mean and rapacious or not, but what is crucial is that

property becomes the organising principle of production at the same time as it is the source of class division. ... Ownership of private property is both the means of appropriating a surplus product .. and simultaneously the means whereby the economic system is mobilised. This is why Marx's stress upon the process whereby labour power itself becomes a commodity is so important; for it is in the labour contract that contradiction and class conflict, in the capitalist mode of production, coincide. (CPST: 163f)

Especially when allowed to run without the restraint of a social compact, capitalism simultaneously makes members of society more and more interdependent while increasing the divisions in wealth and power between them. Also the global character of industrialism along with the expansion of capitalism gives rise to the international division of labour. In the modern world "the industrial and political transformations of nineteenth-century Europe have become transferred to the international plane in the confrontation of rich and poor nations" (PCST: 59f).

#### **15.2.4 Capitalism tends to take Everything Before it**

In pre-capitalist societies a healthy economy could remain in a state of equilibrium, with no overall expansion or contraction. "The capitalist economy, both internally and externally, is intrinsically unstable and restless" (CMOD: 61). To flourish it must continually expand.

The pursuit of profit, which is convertible into all kinds of advantages, gives capitalism its inner dynamism. For profit brings not just a wide range of goods and services, but opens the doors to educational advantages, improved medical treatment, better living conditions, and an improved occupational position (see CPST: 104f). Due to convertibility and the capitalist economy being insulated against political interference, all these advantages can be purchased. So striving

for profit becomes almost synonymous with striving for them. This helps explain why

The economic exchanges involved in capitalism tend to 'strip away' other aspects of the relationships they engender. In other words, in its 'purer' forms at least, capitalism has no place for moral conceptions, social justice or patriotism. In so far as governments legitimate their rule by reference to such ideals, their objectives and interests may clash with those of business leaders. ... In the contemporary world, the global capitalist economy, and what has now become a world-wide nation-state system, stand in continuing tension with one another. (RMC: 273)

This tension probably reaches its highest in the relation, not so much between governments and industrial companies, even transnational ones, but between governments and financial institutions.

The inherent imperative of capitalism to grow so as to avoid economic stagnation also has its effects on the population as a whole. Growth, or the expansion of monetary exchange relations, is promoted by the shaping of consumption patterns and penetration of new market areas.

The spread of capitalism places large sectors (although by no means all) of social reproduction in the hands of markets for products and labour. Markets operate without regard to pre-established forms of behaviour, which for the most part represent obstacles to the creation of unfettered exchange. (MSI: 197)

So, when people are subjected to and fall under the sway of advertised consumption patterns,

the consumption of ever-novel goods becomes in part a substitute for the genuine development of self; appearance replaces essence as the visible signs of successful consumption comes actually to outweigh the use-values of the goods and services in question themselves. (MSI: 198)

New market areas are often sought across national boundaries, especially where it is easier to persuade a less wary population that a novel consumption package will enhance their success or satisfaction.

The overall social effect of marketing is not limited to “the reordering of existing behaviour patterns” (MSI: 199), the sale of more goods, that leave people much the same. Marketing can alter people through its presentation of new life-styles (usually affluent ones) and/or its portrayal of alternative narratives with which the public at large, and consumers in particular, may identify. Instead of actually enhancing the person, providing him or her with greater self-definition, marketing often leads to “momentary assuagement of desires and lasting frustration of needs” (Bauman quoted in MSI: 198). So, although the economic turnover increases, this may be because “the market feeds on the unhappiness it generates: the fears, anxieties and the sufferings of personal inadequacy it induces release the consumer behaviour indispensable to its continuation” (Bauman, 1989 quoted in MSI: 198).

Taken overall, then, the expansion of production and consumption — often hailed as the success of capitalism — may at least in part be accomplished through the undermining of people’s humanity. Fortunately, however, people do learn to be critical, consequently “commodification does not carry the day unopposed on either an individual or collective level” (MSI: 199).

#### **14.2.5 Power is Concentrated in Financial Institutions**

The role that banks and other financial institutions play in shaping society is often overlooked. Capitalism includes money markets, as well as the trading of goods and services (see CMOD: 71f).<sup>24</sup> The operations of financial centres such as the World Bank, the City [of London], New York, Zurich and Tokyo or at times the lack of their interest, often determine whether industry (mining, manufacturing and commerce) will grow in certain areas or not. Particular industries may help shape a society, but whether that industry is to operate at all frequently

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<sup>24</sup> It is estimated that only about 2% of the trading in the world money markets is concerned with actual goods and services. The other 98% is financial speculation in currencies and derivatives, such as futures. The sums involved dwarf the economies of many smaller countries. Losses can sink banks before their management even realizes what is happening.

depends upon decisions made in financial institutions. Industry has to operate within the conditions laid down for credit, mortgages, loans, overdrafts, and interest rates; the margin for operation that these allow is often a predominant influence in determining whether a particular firm can operate, expand or must close down.

If modern industry is considered as a way of stretching time-space distancing through linking particular locales of interaction in an abstract system, then the activities of financial institutions — banks, brokers, stock exchanges, IMF and provisions worked out by the World Trade Organization (formerly GATT), G-7, EEC, Lomé, and various customs unions — form overarching abstract systems within which the former can operate. They are abstract in that their provisions are very general, opening up and closing off possibilities for trade, industry, commerce, and manufacturing, to operate, but very real in their effects, for instance, in increasing or decreasing employment opportunities, rates of pay, costs of commodities and credit. These changes in turn promote or threaten the life-chances of millions of people, invariably those far removed from the decision making circles of banks and international financial institutions.

The above discussion shows the difficulty of assessing capitalism as a whole, taking account of both the benefits it brings and the harm it wreaks. But it is evident that exploitative relations are easily taken into its overall operation. Each of its main features, unless rigorously checked, can have a deleterious effect upon people's lives.

### 15.3 Industrialism

Industrialism is not a strictly technological phenomenon. The Industrial Revolution was brought about not just by the introduction of machinery, but by building up the propensity for disciplined work. People became *industrious* in all areas of life. Only in the nineteenth century when the use of machinery became



much more widespread did 'industry' take on a more restricted meaning. So today in speaking of 'light or heavy industry', one refers to the amount of machinery involved in a particular productive process. This restriction of meaning went along with people in the industrialized countries coming generally to accept organized labour as the norm. Industrial production depends upon regularity at work, the coordination of activities and the organization of social relationships. Once people had acquired industrial habits, most attention then shifted to the development and running of industrial plant. The human factors were simply presumed, and at times came to be overlooked.

The chief characteristic of *industrialism* is the use of inanimate sources of material power in the production of goods, coupled to the central role of machinery in the production process. ...Industrialism presupposes the regularised social organisation of production in order to coordinate human activity, machines, and the inputs and outputs of raw materials and goods. .. No less than to such situations [coal powered heavy machinery], the notion of industrialism applies to high technology settings where electricity is the only power source, and where electronic microcircuits are the only mechanised devices. Industrialism, moreover, affects not only the workplace but transportation, communication, and domestic life. (CMOD: 55f; see also NSV: 138f)

Industrialism should not however be simply equated with factories employing many workers. Production can also be broken down into particular pieces of work that can be 'let out' to individuals working at home or subcontracted to small backyard enterprises. This is taken a step further when manufacturing is broken down to a set of straightforward tasks that can be performed by relatively unskilled labour. It is then feasible, so long as transport and communications are available, to locate manufacturing anywhere in the world; in a capitalist world order this inevitably results in manufacturing moving to those countries, or areas within a country, where labour is cheapest.

### **15.3.1 Nature under the Threat from Technology**

While capitalism, especially its exploitative aspects, is contested by labour and other class-based movements, the excesses of industrialism are now contested by

'green' movements. Although Giddens does not examine at any length the harmful effects of industrialism, he brings out how the relation between nature and humanity has changed.

In conditions of modernity, people live in artificial environments in a double sense. First, because of the spread of the built environment, in which the vast majority of the population dwell, human habitats become separate from nature, now represented only in the form of the 'countryside' or 'wilderness'. Second, in a profound sense, nature literally ceases to exist as naturally occurring events become more and more pulled into systems determined by socialised influences. (MSI: 165f)

At one time nature was a separate domain from human society, but "today we can speak of the 'end of nature' " (MSI: 137). Consequently, nowadays, "the site of struggle of ecological movements is the created environment" (CMOD: 161).

Nature, as the provider both of raw materials and of human effort, has as it were to fit into the time discipline imposed by the spread of industrialism across the globe. For this reason, the 'end of nature' should be seen not just as the extension of 'instrumental reason' but the "emergence of an *internally referential system of knowledge and power*" (MSI: 144). So, whilst preindustrial society was formed within the ambit of what nature offered, modern society increasingly puts its demands on nature to supply materials and energy for it to carry on its own purposes. For instance, vast industries are organized to produce, package and transport consumer goods across the world to satisfy socially induced wants. These "humanly structured systems" derive their "motive power and dynamics from socially organised knowledge-claims" (MSI: 144). But they do not always work out as planned.

Accidents occur; nonrenewable resources become exhausted; waste products cause pollution; renewable resources are destroyed; and overall the earth's capacity to sustain life is diminished. Giddens puts these damaging effects down to two main factors: "design faults" in the processes used and to "operator failure". Regarding the first, he sees no reason why in principle "design faults

should not be eradicated" in dealing with socialised nature. But "unlike design faults, operator failure appears to be ineradicable." After all, Giddens contends, "the root cause of the disaster [at Chernobyl] was a mistake made in the operating of the emergency shutdown systems" (CMOD: 152).

Is this analysis of the damaging effect of industrialism upon the environment sufficient? Does the central problem lie in human knowledge being limited, and people sometimes failing to apply it correctly? Would more knowledge, better system design, and increased backup in case of operator failure, come close to meeting human needs and minimize unwanted end results? Giddens gives a hint that something more is at issue, when he admits that

the logic of unfettered scientific and technological development will have to be confronted if serious and irreversible harm [to the environment] is to be avoided. The humanising of technology is likely to involve the increasing introduction of moral issues into the now largely 'instrumental' relation between human beings and the created environment. (CMOD: 170)

A central moral issue is, not the adequacy of particular technologies, but the overall adequacy of the technological approach for understanding reality and shaping human endeavour at all.<sup>25</sup> It is not just technology that has failed and needs improvement, but human attitudes need to be altered and new lifestyle patterns adopted.

By far the greatest amount of ecological damage derives from the modes of life followed in the modernised sectors or world society. Ecological problems highlight the new and accelerating interdependence of global systems and bring home to everyone the depth of the connections between personal activity and planetary problems. (MSI: 221)

This becomes evident when it realized that consumerism is the other side of expanding industrialism, which in turn has both immediate and long range effects upon the environment. Many environmental problems are caused by the

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<sup>24</sup> I have found the works of David Bohm offer a promising new approach to such issues. They show the value of technology but also its inherent limitations. If the latter are not attended to people fall into fragmentary thinking, ultimately reducing reality to a pile of fragments (see Connor, 1991).

expansion of industrialism to keep up with the ever increasing demands of consumerism. Its demands are in turn stimulated to some extent by the wish to offset the harmful effects of environmental damage. This vicious circle in turn feeds capitalism's inherent tendency to penetrate into more and more areas of living.

Industrialisation, then, is part of the juggernaut of modernity. It is indispensable for sustaining human life for large populations across the globe, but in so doing it poses various threats to the life sustaining capacities of the earth. These threats derive not solely from technological mistakes; they are also due to the imposition of socially induced expectations and practices that treat the whole environment (humankind included) predominantly in an instrumental fashion.

The model for the establishment of factories where hundreds and even thousands of workers were concentrated together was the military. Factories were built, not because they were the only way of harnessing new technology, but because of "a perceived need to discipline wage-labour by submitting workers to direct means of surveillance" (CCHM: 124). This leads us, however, to consider the next institutional clustering of modernity.

#### **15.4 Surveillance**

Another characteristic of modern society, more particularly the nation-state, is the ability to exercise administrative control over the population as a whole. This depends upon the state's surveillance capacity, its ability to collect, analyze, store, and disseminate information, and use it in supervising people's activities.

Modern states, and the modern world system as a whole, involves a tremendous acceleration in the production and organization of information. Although it is commonly supposed that we are only now in the late twentieth century entering the era of information, modern societies have been 'information societies' since their beginnings. (STMS: 27)

Not only is information, gained through one or other kind of surveillance, required for administrative purposes by the government, it is also important for running the industrial workplace and for the workings of modern capitalism. "Surveillance is a medium of power which, whatever its ties to the ownership of private property, does not derive directly from it. The same comment applies to control of the means of violence" (NSV:147).

Surveillance refers to the supervision of the activities of subject populations in the political sphere — although its importance as a basis of administrative power is by no means confined to that sphere. Supervision may be direct (as in many of the instances discussed by Foucault, such as prisons, schools, and open workplaces), but more characteristically it is indirect and based upon the control of information (see CMOD: 58).

Surveillance involves "the collation of information relevant to state control of the conduct of its subject population, and the direct supervision of that conduct" (CCHM: 5). Although this sounds sinister, it is not necessarily so. For instance, a register of births and deaths may be used in planning to meet housing, health and educational needs in the future. On the other hand, surveillance may lead to tapping people's phone calls, recording all their meetings and threatening them against expressing opinions considered detrimental to state security.

The state is not the only body in modern society interested in surveillance. For benign or other reasons, firms employing large numbers of workers adopt various surveillance procedures, which may range from punch cards for clocking on and off to bugging workers' conversations in the toilets. Other forms of surveillance include opinion polls and market research. The latter plays a fairly crucial role in the design, manufacture and marketing of new products.

A number of transnational corporations have taken the gathering and analysis of

information a stage further. Their surveillance extends to examining not only the market, but to the socio-political conditions and economic trends of the countries in which they operate. For instance, Anglo-American Corporation was reputed to have better intelligence on the neighbouring states of Southern Africa than the South African government. Working out projections based on the collation and analysis of information is not a state monopoly.

#### 15.4.1 Surveillance can turn into Subjugation

Without a considerable measure of surveillance no modern society could be effectively administered; essential services — housing, transport, health, welfare, education and protection — would be nonexistent or break down. Nevertheless, surveillance is another site of struggle. Excesses in the gathering and use of personal information, too much supervision and disciplining of people, and restrictive controls are contested by movements for human rights, free speech and democracy. But without some measure of surveillance there would be no informed public opinion, a prerequisite for democracy.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when surveillance increases to such an extent that it becomes excessive, Giddens does however provide a suggestion. Something is clearly wrong when the demands of keeping an administration running take precedence over all other considerations. This occurs when the internal maintenance of the system overrules all the other aims and values that people might hold.

Surveillance plus reflexivity means a 'smoothing of the rough edges' such that behaviour which is not integrated into a system — that is, not knowledgeably built into the mechanisms of system reproduction — becomes alien and discrete. To the degree to which such externalities become reduced to point zero, the system becomes wholly an internally referential one. (MSI: 150)

Those who do not fit in are “categorized by the central authorities and by professional specialists” (NSV: 184), and — one might add — by public opinion too as *deviant*. Horowitz (1972) argues that behaviour which an administration might see as a breach of law and order, and classify, as deviance in need of correction, can also be viewed as the rightful upholding of a moral standpoint or an expression of political opposition. For instance, acts of civil disobedience are purposely designed to challenge and show up the moral shortcomings of the prevailing system of surveillance and control. Each side claims that its view of the ensuing conflict is the legitimate one.

A blatant example of an administration endeavouring to uphold its own system as sensible and legitimate, and at the same time to render the political opposition ineffective, was the practice in USSR of putting ‘dissidents’ in mental asylums. The message is that anyone who questions the system must be insane, and hence there is no point in even listening to them.

The concentrated supervision imposed by various total institutions may be so intense that nearly all freedom and personal initiative are suppressed. Asylums, hospitals, nursing and old age homes may treat their inmates like prisoners, keeping them under constant surveillance and controlling their activities completely. Restrictions, or the manner in which they are applied, go beyond what is necessary for protecting the inmates from harm. Instead they come to be imposed mainly to keep the system running as smoothly as possible regardless of their effect upon the inmates themselves. Such conditions, especially when people are subjected to them for a long period, can be contested as an effective denial of human rights.

In business firms, schools and other modern organizations, where “the individual only spends part of the day within their walls” (NSV: 186) surveillance is

more diffuse. But these less than total institutions do enhance the “internal pacification [of society as a whole] through promoting the discipline of potentially recalcitrant groups at major points of tension, especially in the sphere of production” (NSV: 187). Regularized supervision is applied “in order either to inculcate or to attempt to maintain certain traits of behaviour in those subject to it” (NSV: 184f). To what extent such discipline promotes healthy self-growth in those subject to it, and to what extent it merely keeps an organization running or consolidates the power of those in charge, is frequently a contested issue. But the greater the time-space distancing there is in an organization, the more likely will surveillance tend towards mere system reproduction.

Giddens’ diagnosis of modernity, however, goes further; he says that “much more fundamental is the intensifying of administrative control more generally, a phenomenon not wholly directed by anyone precisely because it affects everyone’s activities” (MSI: 149). When “information-keeping, especially in the form of personal records of life-histories held by the administrative authorities” (NSV: 184) is widespread, everyone is placed under a subtle pressure to conform. People do not want to have a bad record not only with government departments or the courts, but also with their school or college, their bank or insurance company, their doctor or psychiatrist. While this pressure may check crime to some extent, it also can subtly discourage people from speaking out or protesting about issues that should be contested. Nevertheless, there is a counter trend, as mass democracy “is the ‘price’ ruling groups pay for the compliance they seek to secure from those subject to their administrative dominance” (RMC: 274).

Surveillance, as both the gathering of information and its use in controlling people, becomes most sinister when it is undertaken by agencies not subject to any form of democratic or judicial control. This occurs when those charged with “policing the routine activities of the mass of the population” (NSV: 187) are



accorded the almost unlimited power to counter any activity they consider to be deviant, or against state security, or even detrimental to their own organisation. Here surveillance becomes a feature of totalitarian rule (see 15.5.1 below).

In modern society surveillance is indispensable for the effective use of administrative resources, but it remains morally ambiguous.

The intensifying of surveillance operations provides many avenues of democratic involvement, but also makes possible the sectional control of political power, bolstered by the monopolistic access to the means of violence, as an instrument of terror. (CMOD: 172)

This brings us to the fourth institutional clustering, access to the means of violence in society, which now remains to be examined.

## **15.5 Control of the Means of Violence**

Sociologists have paid scant attention to how “the successful monopoly of the means of violence is distinctive to the modern state” (CMOD: 58). The role of police and the military in shaping society has been largely overlooked. It was “supposed that economic exchange transactions, leading to economic interdependence, would replace the militaristic societies of the past” (STMS: 28). But matters have not worked out that way.

War and violence is nothing new to human history, but “the successful monopoly of the means of violence within territorially precise borders is distinctive to the modern state” (CMOD: 58). When this monopoly breaks down, civil war is liable to break out, but this is itself a modern phenomenon; “the very existence of ‘civil war’ presumes a norm of monopolistic state authority” (NSV: 121). Prior to the modern nation-state “the military strength of the ruling authorities

depended upon alliances with local princes or warlords, who were always liable either to break away or directly to challenge the ruling groups" (CMOD: 58). This contrasts with the modern nation-state, where usually the police have the monopoly on legitimate internal violence, and the military on external violence directed against other nation-states.

In certain respects, South Africa is an anomaly because the central government did in some degree let go its monopoly of the means of violence. It misguidedly established homeland armies and police forces, allowed vigilante groups to operate, permitted the widespread carrying of lethal weapons, and set up covert operations with a dubious system of command. Reversing this has not proved easy.

The surveillance capacity of the nation-state has made universal conscription of citizens possible; citizenship "implies acceptance of the obligations of military service" (NSV: 233). Conscription is used not solely for military reasons, but also as a means of imbuing each new generation of citizens with the requisite sense of loyalty to the state.

Industrialism has contributed immensely to the growth of military power. The ability of a nation-state to wage war successfully in modern times depends in large measure on its industrial capacity. Besides armaments, industry has to supply food, clothing, transport, communications instruments and all the other equipment needed to maintain military installations and keep forces in the field. The demands of the military, both for more sophisticated weapons and for general supplies, have in turn stimulated industry.

This raises the question of "how far industrialized countries should really be regarded as 'military-industrial' societies" (NSV: 246). Giddens grants that "both

military leaders and manufacturers are often able to wield considerable influence, directly and indirectly, over certain policies [of government]" and that "military expenditure can help generate favourable conditions of production both for manufacturers and for an overall national economy" (NSV: 248). Or it can cripple it. Industry in the former USSR was so geared to military research and production that once military imperatives fell away many industries collapsed. Writing in 1990 — after the collapse of communist rule and before the breakup of USSR — Sergei Blagovolin states: "The total number of people employed in the manufacturing and mining industries in the Soviet Union in 38,2 million. One-third of them are employed in the military industry" (1990: 62).

A nation-state's might as a military power depends also on the ability to pay for it (see NSV: 102). Modern conventional wars, and hardly even a guerrilla war, cannot be sustained by the expropriation of *products* — not usually surplus ones — from the local population. Sufficient surplus *value* has to be generated to cover military expenditures. Without that, as in the poorer nations of the world, high military expenditures deprive citizens of basic needs and so generate political instability. Today not only the former USSR, but also USA and RSA are in economic decline due at least in part to high military expenditures.

Recognition of the 'security apparatus' as a distinct organisational cluster allows one to perceive the effect on society of low intensity warfare, of being subject to total onslaught and total strategy. These appear above all in that modern phenomenon 'the national security state,' which cannot be merely regarded as a capitalist accessory.

### 15.5.1 Totalitarian Rule

The worst of features of all four institutional axes are combined when rule

becomes totalitarian. Giddens remarks that “there is no type of nation-state in the contemporary world which is completely immune from the potentiality of being subject to totalitarian rule” (NSV: 302). Any country can move to a greater or lesser extent in this direction, so long as “the state can successfully penetrate the day-to-day activities of most of its subject population” (NSV: 302). “Totalitarian” refers not to a type of state, but “rather to a *type of rule*, unstable in major aspects, yet capable of bringing about the most horrendous consequences for the populations that suffer the brunt of its concentrated power” (NSV: 301).

Prior to modernity many rulers and regimes were despotic and brutal, but their surveillance capability was insufficient for them to control the activities of the population as a whole.

The [despotic] ruler may have command over the lives of his subjects in the sense that if they do not obey, or actively rebel, he can put them to death. But the ‘power of life and death’ in this sense is not the same as the capability of controlling the day-to-day lives of the mass of the population, which the ruler is not able to do. (CCHM: 104; see STMS: 175)

Generally they lacked the facilities to collect, codify and communicate information about everyone.

Totalitarianism is, first of all, an extreme focusing of surveillance, devoted to the securing of political ends deemed by the state authorities to demand urgent political mobilization. Surveillance tends to become concentrated (a) in respect of a multiplication of mode of the documenting of the subject population by the state — identity cards, permits of all sorts, and other kinds of official papers, have to be held by all members of the population and used to follow even the most ordinary of activities; and (b) this is the basis of an expanded supervision of those activities, carried out by the police and their agents. (NSV: 303)

Several characteristics, besides surveillance, are evident in a society held in the

grip of totalitarian control. There is a totalist ideology, which may be progressive or conservative and may have a nationalist, racist or economic basis, or combine several of these elements. The ideology is then enforced by a single political party led by a dictator. This does not however preclude arbitrary and erratic decisions that run counter to former policy. The dictates of the party are enforced by a secret police force and an extensive network of informers. Under totalitarian rule, no autonomous bodies or alternative power bases are permitted; all organisations, businesses and the communications media are subjected to strict control.

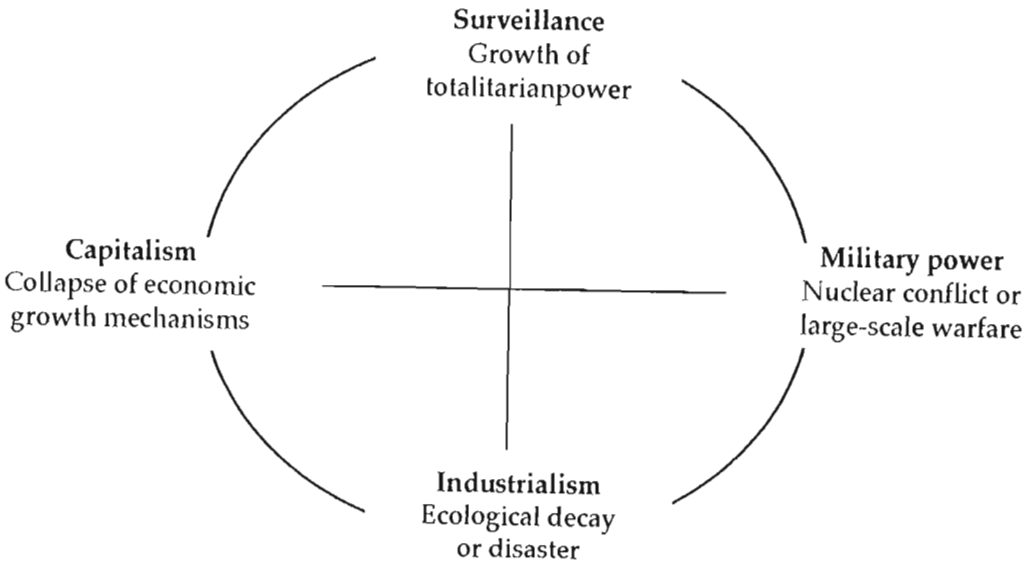
To these characteristics must be added “a reign of terror, using the concerted application of force in pursuit of its designated objectives”, though this “is implicit perhaps in the mention of the role of the secret police” (NSV: 298).

The widespread use of terror, according to Arendt, tends to be integrated with strict control over cultural production, because the point of the threat of violence is not so much to instil fear as to create a climate in which acceptance of propaganda will be facilitated. (NSV: 300)

Totalitarian rulers expect people not just conform but actually to believe in them, and this is why the population is subjected to constant propaganda. Unlike professional military rulers, whose regime may be extremely harsh, the leader figure attempts to generate through a mixture of appealing to people’s pride, making grandiose promises and instilling uncertainty through selective terror tactics, to generate mass support. To accomplish this the leader must echo in some way the people’s aspirations or embody their historical fate (see NSV: 303f). Especially in times of uncertainty “the mass of the population is likely to become vulnerable to the influence of symbols propagated by the leader figure”, who is “trusted because of his very authoritarianism not in spite of it” (NSV: 305). Giddens sums up the resulting moral effect of totalitarian rule, when he says that

“regressive identification with a leader figure leads to a partial suspension of independent moral judgements that individuals in other circumstances might make” (NSV: 305). Coupled with this affective reliance upon the leader figure is “a strong psychological affiliation to an ‘in-group’, which the leader symbolizes, together with an extreme rejection of ‘out-groups’, which fail to possess the special qualities that bind leader and followership together” (NSV: 305). Those depicted as out-groups this century have included fascists, capitalists, communists, Jews, blacks and imperialists.

What Giddens brings out as the main characteristic of totalitarian rule is not the application of violence, brutal though that is, but the heightening of surveillance. This entails that whatever anybody says or does is perceived, evaluated and judged from the point of view of the agency conducting the surveillance; no other viewpoint or contribution is permissible (see STMS: 30).



**Fig 15.3** *High-consequence risks of modernity*  
(CMOD: 171)

### 15.5.2            **Modernity's Problems are Interlocked**

Many of the socio-moral problems mentioned above afflict every society, even though not all decline so far that they become totalitarian. "The 'menacing appearance' of the circumstances in which we live today" (CMOD: 125) which Giddens depicts is corroborated by other analyses. Ekins, for instance, speaks of four interlocking crises — militarisation, poverty, environmental destruction, human repression — "all of which have the potential for the destruction of whole peoples and some of which threaten the extinction of the human race itself" (1992: 1). He adds

taken singly they would be difficult enough to ameliorate, let alone solve. The situation is made far more intractable by the fact that each of the problems actually reinforces the others. ... these interactions [between them] turn the four separately described problems into a single, systemic global problematique of great complexity. (Ekins, 1992: 13)

None of the four institutional clusterings operate on their own; there are various affinities and conjunctions, as well as tensions and conflicts, between them. Their overall effect gives modernity, both within each nation-state and across the globe, its juggernaut quality. Yet even this metaphor has its limits, because "the juggernaut of modernity is not all of one piece" (CMOD: 139) nor does it run along a single path.

### 15.6                **Social Antagonisms Based on Ethnicity and Race**

Not all social antagonisms or forms of exploitation can be encompassed within the four institutional clusterings of modernity. Conflict between ethnic groups, nations and races can also become endemic in society, though not all such conflicts follow a similar pattern, nor can they be explained in terms of class antagonisms. "Other modes of domination may cut across class domination; or

alternatively they may have the effect of accentuating rather than diminishing or weakening it" (CPST: 115). So, for instance, people of all classes may find a common cause in anti-semitism, whereas colonial racial prejudice runs fairly closely to the division between ruling and subservient classes. Considerably different again is the ever changing kaleidoscope of divisions and alliances in South Africa; to understand them account has to be taken of not only racial and ethnic divisions, but also class differences based on wealth, as well as various ideological conflicts and a differential access to the means of violence. Giddens makes no reference to apartheid as such and certainly does not attempt to analyze South African society. He merely remarks generally that

on the level of international relations, the associations between capitalism, the nation-state and nationalism help to explain some of the most virulent forms of racism witnessed in our times. (Do not make the mistake of supposing that racism is an artifact of capitalism, however. There are clear evidences of its pervasiveness in ancient Sumer.) (CCHM: 243)

Giddens recognizes that social divisions based on ethnic (and also gender) differences predate modernity, though they have been somewhat restructured by some modern institutions. He adds, however, that racism "an outlook based on erroneous interpretations of biological inheritance, is in some substantial part a modern phenomenon" (RMC: 265).

Within many modern states "ethnic discrimination serves to create minority ethnic 'underclasses', whose economic circumstances are markedly inferior to those of the majority of the population" (CCHM: 243). New immigrants often can only find unskilled work and so form "a new working class" beneath semiskilled and skilled workers who constitute "the old working class" (See CSAS: 216-9). Trade unions are sometimes responsible for maintaining ethnic and racial barriers to protect their members from competition.



Thus ethnic discrimination in many contemporary countries has the consequence of driving those subject to that discrimination into segmented labour markets, helping to consolidate the formation of distinct underclasses. This is hence a kind of 'double discrimination'. (CPST: 115)

In these instances ethnic 'outsiders' are denied access to certain privileges and opportunities; this Giddens terms 'exclusionary closure'. But the idea of 'social closure' [a term of Weber's] can also be applied to the strategies the 'outsiders' or subordinated groups adopt. Those excluded can also exclude others in

an attempt to break down the exclusion, or otherwise gain a greater share of the resources monopolised by the dominant group or groups. The objective of the underprivileged is to usurp the prerogatives of those to whom they are subordinated. Thus we can refer to two generic types or strategies of social closure: exclusion and usurpation. (PCST: 187f)

Not only black power, but Indian or Italian clannishness would be examples of social closure undertaken with the aim of usurpation.

## 15.7 Gender Conflicts

Gender issues are not new, as "there seems to be no known society, ... in which men do not in some key spheres hold more power than women" (RMC: 265). Nevertheless

the creation of 'everyday life' in capitalist time-space, with its characteristic separation of home and workplace, together with other aspects of the commodification of social relations, have decisively influenced the relations between the sexes, and at least in certain respects served to intensify the exploitation of women. (CCHM: 243)

Furthermore, "for women of ethnic backgrounds subject to discrimination, there

may exist a 'triple discrimination' " (CPST: 115) due to class, ethnic and sexual domination.

Giddens remarks that: "Gender divisions and ethnic schisms are more deeply engraved in human social organization, and human psychology, than are the other forms of exploitative domination" (RMC: 265). They run deeper, because they are primarily concerned with relations between people rather than the interrelating of their actions. They are concerned with what people *are*, rather than what they *do*, and hence are more matters of basic sociability (*amicitia*) than justice (see 8.4.3).

Some men "turn directly to violence against women as a means of shoring up disintegrating systems of patriarchal power" (BLR: 239). The partial successes of women's challenge to patriarchy "have provoked violent reactions; but they have also brought a great deal into the open that was previously hidden, and enforced an interrogation of much that was carried by tradition" (BLR: 239f).

## 15.8 Interreligious Conflict

For completeness, religion must be mentioned as a factor that at times heightens social conflict. Giddens however barely mentions it in his works, though he proposes "at some point to write a book on religion" (ST: 212). He notes in passing the varied influences that religion had in the class divided societies of ancient China, Asoka's India and pre-conquest Mexico. He decisively rejects the Marxist view "that religious belief is no more than the non-material aspect of class domination" (NSV: 72).

To acknowledge that religious beliefs have an 'authenticity' that eludes such a reduction is again to emphasize that religion is not simply ideology — a cloak for

asymmetrical domination — but stands in complex relation to the distribution of power. (NSV: 74)

Only under certain conditions is there an elective affinity between religion and the pursuit of power by violent means.

The modes of behaviour of the warrior have little affinity with the notions of humility, sin and salvation characteristic of Christianity, for example, any more than with the self-negating ideals of the major religions of the East. It is where a belief in an exclusive, universal god is combined with the notion of the moral degeneracy of unbelievers — Weber concentrates particularly on Islam — that religious enthusiasm can be put directly to work in the cause of territorial aggrandizement. (NSV: 72)

A contemporary example of this is the holy war (*jihad*) in Sudan, which the fanatics of the Muslim Brotherhood are waging against religious and ethnic outsiders.

Not only may differences between religions exacerbate class, social and national conflicts, but so can religious excesses within a common religious tradition deepen social divisions. Thomas mentions how superstitious idolatry can take the form of a worship of nature, of humanity or the state, displacing worship of the one true God (IIaIIae 94. 1). Today he would have to turn attention to fundamentalism, which mistakes the humanly conditioned medium for the divine message. In overlooking history and how God may work within and through it “seeks to defend tradition in the traditional way — in circumstances where that defence has become intrinsically problematic” (BLR: 84). What both fundamentalism and superstitious idolatry have in common is the attempt to solve human problems, not in a human way by examination and negotiation, but by invoking a time-bound rule or procedure as though it were an eternal answer.

## 15.9 Time-space Edges divide the First and Third Worlds

From the many books and articles by Giddens and others, on 'modernity' it would be easy to gain the impression that the whole world has become, or shortly will develop into, an advanced industrial and late capitalist society. On this view, all tribal, feudal, despotic and other pre-capitalist societies would just about have ceased to exist. Or if they still existed, they would be by a process of social evolution well on the way to becoming fully modernized societies. When the world is viewed in this perspective, the presumption is made that undeveloped and developing (Fourth and Third World) countries will inevitably by an endogenous process become developed (First World) countries, even if the process is held up for a while due to various exogenous obstacles along the way. Giddens rejects such a view and the evolutionary theory underlying it, which mistakes "the political/economic/military triumph of Western industrial capitalism over the rest of the world for the high point of an evolutionary scheme" (CCHM: 24). There is however no point in examining here the debate that Giddens' rejection of social evolution, of functionalism and its notion of a society 'adapting' itself, has provoked. But the notion of 'time-space edges', which Giddens introduces instead, is important for understanding how certain social inequalities are generated.

Time-space edges refer to the forms of contact — and often of interdependence — between different structural types of society. These are edges of potential or actual social transformation, the often unstable intersections between different modes of societal organisation. (CCHM: 23)

No society exists entirely in isolation; each society is part of an intersocietal system encompassing other societies. Giddens, writing in 1981, says

The contemporary world inter-societal system is not a wholly 'capitalist' one, even if it is true that capitalist mechanisms operating on an international scale have a

dominant part to play — for the advanced capitalist societies exist along a whole series of time-space edges with other types of societal organisation, including now the state-socialist societies. (CCHM: 168f)

Other types of society Giddens mentions are developing countries, as well as class-divided societies and tribal societies, though he expects the impending demise of the latter two (CCHM: 169). But the important question is: Why does capitalism dominate? Why does it have such “a strong tendency to corrode or absorb” (CCHM: 23) other societies? In any encounter between two societies, the one that in which there is a greater stretching of time and space is likely to dominate. It has far more resources — economic, technical, military and supervisory — to call upon, as well as offering various attractions to those who wish to stretch their sphere of influence and experience.

The reorganising of time and space, disembedding mechanisms and the reflexivity of modernity all presume universalising properties that explain the expansionist, coruscating nature of modern social life in its encounters with traditionally established practices. (MSI: 21)

The time-space edge, along which the two societies meet, is likely to be a zone of social inequality (see CS: 164). Furthermore, the extent to which people coming, whether as individuals or groups, from a class-divided or traditional society flourish when they move to an industrial-capitalist one depends upon their ability to cope with and enter into the latter’s stretching of time and space.<sup>26</sup>

Yet even the most underprivileged today live in situations permeated by institutional components of modernity. Possibilities denied by economic deprivation are different, and experienced differently — that is, *as* possibilities — from those excluded by the frameworks of tradition. Moreover, in some circumstances of poverty, the hold of

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<sup>26</sup> This is a hypothesis; it could perhaps be tested by examining the ease and difficulty with which people coming from various traditional or class-divided societies adapt to life in cities or as immigrants in Europe and North America. Why, for instance, do some national groups of immigrants remain an underclass and others quickly become assimilated to their new society? Are there some facets of their cultural background which enable some more easily than others to cope with the facilitating conditions of modernity?

tradition has perhaps become even more thoroughly disintegrated than elsewhere.  
(MSI: 86)

For better or worse, modernity affects everyone; the poor often more than the affluent. It permeates not just the conditions under which people live or their life-chances, but even people's self-identity. Giddens gives the following telling example:

In such situations [of discrimination and deprivation], the reflexive constitution of self-identity may be every bit as important as among more affluent strata, and as strongly affected by globalizing tendencies. A black woman heading a single-parent household, however constricted and arduous her life, will nevertheless know about factors altering the position of women in general, and her own activities will almost certainly be modified by that knowledge. Given the inchoate nature of her social circumstances, she is virtually obliged to explore novel modes of activity, with regard to her children, sexual relations and friendships. Such an exploration, although it might not be discursively articulated as such, implies a reflexive shaping of identity. The deprivations to which she is subject, however, might make these tasks become an almost insupportable burden, a source of despair rather than self-enrichment.  
(MSI: 86)

In such situations, it is not just that nature in the form of an hospitable landscape, with its infertility and harsh climate or the prevalence of disease is hard, but society arranges that hardships continue to fall disproportionately on deprived people; even worse that their socio-economic position denies them the opportunity of meeting the hardships that nature imposes.

### **15.10 The Failures of Social Engineering**

This century has seen several ambitious schemes of social engineering, including various attempts (Russian, Chinese and Yugoslavian) to construct a new society under communism, and the Verwoerdian plan of grand apartheid. These were

attempts to force the juggernaut along a definite path, or to eliminate the risks and uncertainties of modernity. Yet all of these attempts at shaping the future through social engineering failed.

It is possible to ask: What went wrong? What were the flaws in the original design? Or was failure due to the plan not being executed properly? Questions of this type, however, presume that society can in principle be made an object of large scale engineering. But due to the high degree of reflexivity inherent in modern society (see 10.5 above) “we cannot ‘seize’ history and bend it readily to our collective purposes. Even though we ourselves produce and reproduce it in our actions, we cannot control social life completely” (CMOD: 153). Because of the circularity of social knowledge, any attempt to bend history in a particular direction increases the possibilities of it taking a somewhat different route. Once any plan for the future is announced, even if it is a practical one, people respond by circumventing as much as possible the hardships it threatens and taking advantage of the opportunities it offers them. Even prior to that, the collection of information for use in drawing up a social policy is fed back into the environment of action that is being investigated and so contributes towards its reorganisation.

Not only did scientific socialism not take account of institutional reflexivity or the self-involvement of those designing the new society, it was also based on an erroneous assumption about human nature. “Human social life neither begins nor ends in production” since human beings are “mind-making, self-mastering and self-designing animals” engaged in “a search for meaning” (CCHM: 155f).

Whilst communism failed to take account of national and ethnic issues, reckoning they would vanish in a classless society, the architects of apartheid overlooked economic realities. Also due to their very static view of culture and

ethnicity, they made no allowance for the effect that exposure to industrial capitalism would have in reshaping the outlook, aspirations and self-identity of black people.

The root metaphor for communism was the machine; society was to be designed anew as one might a massive industrial process. My impression is that the root metaphor for grand apartheid was of society as an extensive farm.<sup>27</sup> This ties in with the assumption that people could be trained and corralled like domestic animals, and that it was best to keep the cows, horse, poultry and sheep in separate fields. Any idea that others might have ideas, interests and aspirations that they wanted to undertake themselves simply did not enter the picture.

The only way both of these massive social experiments were kept going for so long was through the massive injections of funds, and the widespread deployment of police and military repression as opposition to them grew. Common to them both was the false assumption that our knowledge about human society is sufficient to control its workings. It is important instead to recognize

*both what might be called the theorem of 'knowledgeability' — we are all purposeful, knowledgeable agents who have reasons for what we do — and that social processes at the same time work 'behind our backs', affecting what we do in ways of which we are unaware. (CCHM: 16)*

People are not dupes, not knowing what they are doing or why they are doing it. Nevertheless, the overall society that results from human action goes beyond in various unpredictable ways what we had intended. This can result in an oppressive system becoming established which people have over time brought about through their actions, but no single person or group actually designed.

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<sup>27</sup> This impression was gained after spending a fascinating evening in Hammanskraal in 1974 with Professor Tomlinson. He was a former professor agriculture, who produced the massive report detailing the infrastructure and expenditure required for setting up the homelands as viable economic entities. Planning the grand design of apartheid was basically for him a matter of good land management.



## The Defective Self

“He sees himself with too flattering an eye to detect and detest his guilt; all he says is malicious and harmful, he has turned his back on wisdom” (Psalm 36:2).

The chapter looks at some of the problematic repercussions that the institutional clusters and conditions of modernity (described in the last chapter) have on the self. Many questions could be raised about the effects of capitalism and industrial technology on the self. These are most evident in consumerism, under which “the project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life” (MSI: 198; see also 15.2.4 above). Other questions could be raised about the trauma resulting from exposure to violence, or the effects on the self of living within one or other humanly contrived environment and being cut off from raw nature. All these issues could be investigated at length, and would show many of the intricate interlacings of self and society. Instead of pursuing them here, attention will be given to the ways people cope — or fail to cope — with the risks and dilemmas of living in a world shorn of its traditional supports. While life in the modern world offers many advantages, they do not come without a human price.

This chapter begins by examining (16.1 – 16.2) two related aspects of modern

society, namely, its narcissism and heightened reflexivity. It goes on (16.3) to look at how people screen themselves off from aspects of reality in order to cope with life. Added to this (16.3.1) are a number of dilemmas that arise from having on many issues only an indirect experience, often through the mass media, of events that bear upon their lives. There is much about one's society that is not evident at first sight, and only becomes apparent through reviewing the outcome of one's actions (16.3.2). These considerations prompt the question (16.4) about what kind of morality is required in and for a post-traditional society; not one based on in-group conformity, but a more provisional and reflexive ethic that is sensitive to structure is suggested. Mention is then made (16.5) of a further way in which certain existential issues are repressed in the tight organization of modern society. It should be pointed out that these dilemmas and tribulations of the self are not in themselves wrong, sinful or instances of evil, but for the most part challenges to be addressed. Yet if they are evaded or not adequately addressed, then social and psychological distress is perpetuated; evading them may be a moral fault.

Attention is next drawn (16.6) to the complementarity between Giddens' analysis of how certain aspects of life do not cease but are left out of account in modern society and Kohut's explanation of repression and particularly splitting and disavowal. Through many and various human interactions, but particularly those that shape the nuclear self, these two trends are likely to reinforce each other. A final section (16.7) looks at the repercussions in the self and people's behaviour, not just of modernity, but of a society in serious decline. It examines some of the most horrific and abrasive aspects of human relations, which may both derive from and contribute to the breakdown of social relations.

Although this and the previous chapter trace the repercussions of modern society upon the self, they could have been written the other way around. The

modern self with its particular dilemmas, tribulations and in some instances very abrasive character in its turn contributes to, upholds and may even seek out or generate the problematic institutions described in the previous chapter. The influence is mutual. Although there is a complementarity between self and society, there is also a mutual incommensurability; neither can be completely subsumed under the other, nor can they be fully synthesized without loss of understanding.

### 16.1 The Self in the Modern World

At first sight the overall effect on the self of living in a global society may be one of overwhelming anxiety. Everything appears so vast, complex and even meaningless, that one wonders who one is and what one can do. "The level of time-space distancing introduced by high modernity is so extensive that, for the first time in human history, 'self' and 'society' are interrelated in a global milieu" (MSI: 32). But neither the identity of self nor the nature of global society are themselves very clear; they are no longer simply given. " 'The world' ... is not a seamless order of time and space stretching away from the individual; it intrudes into presence via an array of varying channels and sources" (MSI: 189). Each of these sources opens up not just options about lifestyle and behaviour, but, more fundamentally, discloses variant ways of being open to the world. In short, one no longer fits into a traditionally defined setting, but is as it were summoned not just to take but make one's own stance. In this way self-identity comes to be constructed as "a *trajectory* across the different institutional settings of modernity. ... Each of us not only 'has', but *lives* a biography reflexively organised in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life" (MSI: 14). Finding one's way around depends upon the ability to access and use such information, whether it be financial, technical, psychological, managerial or whatever. "The autonomy which human beings

acquire derives from their capacity to expand the range of mediated experience: to be familiar with properties of objects and events outside immediate settings of sensory involvement" (MSI: 47).

When looked at through pre-modern eyes and abilities, "the world 'out there' " may easily appear "intrinsically alienating and oppressive to the degree to which social systems are either large in scale or spatially distant from the individual" (MSI: 189). But that is not the whole story, as modernity — particularly its system of communications — unifies as well as fragments. "Distant events may become as familiar, or more so, than proximate influences, and integrated into the frameworks of personal experience" (MSI: 189). Nevertheless, the price to be paid for this is a certain sequestration of experience (see 16.5 below).

A more fundamental characteristic of modernity than its size and baffling complexity, that Giddens singles out, lies its being continually organized, re-organized and in the process altered by knowledge about its own processes. This is known as reflexivity, and it applies both to society and the self. Its implications, as well as its close relation to the modern concern about narcissism, need to be examined.

## **16.2 Narcissism and Reflexivity**

The theme of narcissism is central to Kohut's thought, while for Giddens reflexivity (see 10.5 above) is one of the facilitating conditions of life in modern society. Without claiming that the two are exactly equivalent, both concepts do however point to the same problematic area. In Giddens' thought the notion of reflexivity has gradually been expanded and differentiated. Originally depicted as an aspect of life common to all human agency, he has shown how it has become a key feature of life in modern society, particularly importance for grasping the

place of the self and the self-regulation of organizations (CS: 205).

Mention has already been made (see 12.4.1 & 12.4.3 above) of the reflexive monitoring of action. In this sense of reflexivity, “all human beings routinely ‘keep in touch’ with the grounds of what they do as an integral element of doing it” (CMOD 36). Thus “actors not only monitor continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also routinely monitor aspects, social and physical, of the contexts in which they move” (CS: 5). Carrying out this never-to-be-relaxed monitoring draws on “a bewildering range of skills which agents deploy in the production and reproduction of interaction” (CS: 78). Being tactful, and hence putting others at ease, requires proficiency in these skills. In cross-cultural situations this can be especially demanding as one has to recognize different sets of cues. Giddens draws on the work of Goffman to point out that regular failure to accomplish this, for instance by mental patients not caring about their posture, is a sign that they are not fully present. Its successful accomplishment, however, engenders trust and a sense of ontological security; people are at ease and know where they are with one another.

There is nothing particularly modern about this accomplishment. Aristotle in *The Nicomachean Ethics* (1126b10 – 1128b9) spoke of the need in social intercourse to aim at the mean between excess and paucity: in friendship this lies between being obsequious and quarrelsome; the truthful person avoids the extremes of boastfulness or being mock-modest; the tactful person is neither a buffoon nor a boor. But there is no exact rule laying down the mean; finding the right balance is difficult and must be perceived as one goes along. In a similar vein, Thomas locates in prudence the ability through relying upon precedent and experience to deal with particular situations as they occur (*per memoriam et per experimentum ad prompte judicandum de particularibus expertis*, IIaIIae 47, 3 ad 3). The occasion may vary from one where tact is demanded to the firm

handling of a life-threatening situation. The former might only entail a slight adjustment in one's approach as one goes along, while the latter will perhaps call for long and deliberate reflection.

In a remark that applies to Aristotle and Thomas, Giddens points out that "in pre-modern civilizations reflexivity is still largely limited to the reinterpretation and clarification of tradition, such that in the scale of time the side of the 'past' is much more heavily weighed down than that of the 'future' " (CMOD: 37f). The reflexive monitoring of action, common to all human interaction, provides the basis for the constant review of social practices and their being reformed in the light of what that reveals (see CMOD: 38). However, the reflexivity characteristic of modern social life goes further than the ubiquitous monitoring of action done by all human agents in charge of their lives. Examples of the former were examined in Chapter Five, which showed how the experience distant concepts of the social sciences were reincorporated into experience near perceptions of social reality. These were instances of the double hermeneutic, where terminology from meta-languages re-entered ordinary language and so reconstituted the experiences they had originally been formulated to describe.

Modernity's reflexivity refers to the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge. Such information or knowledge is not incidental to modern institutions, but constitutive of them — a complicated phenomenon, because many possibilities of reflection about reflexivity exist in modern social conditions. (MSI: 20)

In pre-modern society experience was measured against accepted tradition. It might over time modify that tradition, but did so by drawing to a large extent by drawing upon that same tradition. In modern or post-traditional society, experience comes to be grasped in terms of an interpretative theory, which feeds back to mould that experience. This occurs on both a social and personal level.

On a social level, Giddens gives the example of Keynesian economics, which worked in the 1940s and 1950s to regulate growth, inflation and unemployment, but began to fail by the 1960s.

Detraditionalization means an acceleration of the reflexivity of lay [that is, non-expert] populations. Keynesianism worked tolerably well in a world of *simple modernization*; but it could not survive in a world of *reflexive modernization* — a world of intensified social reflexivity. Reflexive citizens, responding to a new social universe of global uncertainties, become aware of, and may subvert, the economic incentives that are supposed to mobilize their behaviour. Keynesianism, like some forms of policy which helped structure the welfare state, presumes a citizenry with more stable lifestyle habits than are characteristic of a globalized universe of high reflexivity. (BLR: 42)

A domestic example of this double hermeneutic in action was the effect of Dr Spock's book on child-rearing. While it might have given good advice, as a result of continually referring to it parents showed their own hesitancy and so undermined the assurance they should have given their children.

### 16.2.1 Living with only Provisional Schemata

On both social and personal levels, contrary to the expectation that greater certitude would result when reason and science replaced dogmatic tradition, the very certainty of knowledge came to be undermined.

No matter how cherished, and apparently well established, a given scientific tenet might be, it is open to revision — or might have to be discarded altogether — in the light of new ideas or findings. ... [This] is not only disturbing to philosophers but is *existentially troubling* for ordinary individuals. (MSI: 21)

In a world that is open to multiple interpretations, and in which none can be reckoned as final, it becomes a problem to work out what and who one is. One

can reflect upon oneself in so many ways, but no approach appears to offer a definitive view. Not only is this a reflective problem, but depending upon my awareness of what I am and understanding of what I might become, so various possibilities for action are opened up or closed off. These in turn will feed back to shape who one becomes.

It is in this setting that Giddens explains the import of various forms of psychotherapy and counselling. It is “frequently a crucial part of a process of self-realisation ... but can only be successful when it involves the individual’s own reflexivity” (MSI: 71). Thus it is not like an operation ‘done’ to a patient, still less a repair to a machine. Rather, the therapist acts as catalyst to accelerate a process of self-therapy. He or she “can inform someone about possible modes and directions of self-change, but which must be interpretatively organised by the person concerned in relation to his or her life’s problems” (MSI: 71). In a sense such self-therapy is carried out by anyone today who, without “succumbing to the allure of the present, ... generates the self-understanding necessary to plan ahead and to construct a life trajectory which accords with the[ir] inner wishes” (MSI: 71).

This sounds remarkably close to Kohut saying:

The more deeply an analysis penetrates, the more clearly the analysand recognizes the essence of those deepest of his ambitions and ideals which make up his nuclear self, the narcissistic center of his personality, the more vivid and real becomes the analysand’s experience of being able to choose and to decide, the more certain he feels of possessing access to the capacity of exercising his ‘free will’ — whether he chooses to live in accordance with the demands of the reality-pleasure principle and, regretfully, curbs the expression of a part of his true self (as most of us do), or whether he chooses to transcend the reality-pleasure principle (i.e., to live ‘beyond the pleasure principles’) and disregarding even his cherished body self, i.e., his need for biological survival, strives towards that fulfillment of his nuclear self which, in the symbolism of religion, is celebrated as saintliness and as eternal life. (SS III: 212)



Three observations may be made about this long passage. First, in a traditional society there were certain well-beaten paths which a person might freely adopt in striving for fullness of life. Various leaders, heroes and saints had set an example which threw light on the path that others should follow. Although not easy and always demanding perseverance, the way was clear enough. It was more important to keep one's eyes on the leading figure than be preoccupied with oneself, though if personal problems arose they had to be dealt with.

The second observation is that today finding one's nuclear self and hence the path to one's destiny and fulfilment requires a far greater measure of self-analysis. One has to sort through many conflicting interpretations about who one is and what one is meant to become. The example of earlier figures, whether one's ancestors, secular leaders or saints, is now weighed against alternative modern claims and knowledge that reveals the historical limitations of tradition. Inherited examples and teachings might today be justifiable, "but only in the light of knowledge which is not itself authenticated by tradition" (CMOD: 38). Yet since that knowledge is always open to revision, the task of discovering one's nuclear self and its destiny is even more problematic. This is the reason why Kohut speaking 'Western man' can say:

The musician of disordered sound, the poet of decomposed language, the painter and sculptor of the fragmented visual and tactile world: they all portray the breakup of the self and, through the reassemblage and rearrangement of the fragments, try to create new structures that possess wholeness, perfection, new meaning. (RESS: 286).

Kohut's work too should be seen as an instance of reflexivity in the modern sense, as it offers a language, theory and even myth with which to take apart and then reconstitute oneself in a more firm and coherent fashion.

A third observation or comment is that Kohut still mainly refers to something

given in the past as a guide for self-development. He speaks explicitly about the nuclear self laid down in early childhood. If people fail to develop to develop fulfilling lives, it is because of a lack of suitable selfobjects in the past. Though Kohut does claim that self psychology has “established the actuality of the future,” so, for instance, “the child whose self is stunted by the selfobject’s failures is, in his depression, mourning a not to be lived, unfulfilled future” (SS IV: 481). (In this vein, Jane Rubin (1984) contrasts Kohut’s view of the self with Kierkegaard’s, who argued that failure results, not from what happened in the past, but from a person not committing him- or herself in fear and trembling to a future they cannot at present envisage.) Giddens talks of what one derives from the past and now wishes either to have done with or incorporate into the trajectory of the self as it moves into the future (MSI: 70ff). Even that position does not give full weight to the future, in particular to what Ricoeur terms “the mandated self” (1992: 23), which one is called by an other to become. The importance of this point will be evident in dealing with the theology of social sin (see 19 below).

### **16.2.2 Narcissism as a Modern Condition**

However, returning now to the main point, it becomes evident that the same human condition underlies both Giddens’ understanding of the reflexivity of modernity and Kohut’s view of narcissism. Both recognize that knowledge claims are always revisable (SS IV: 551ff) and that they are fed back to reconstitute and so alter the practices they to some extent explain (SS IV: 497f). Being narcissistic is unavoidable today, at least in the sense that each person must be reflexively concerned with the conditions, the lifestyle, the narratives and activities that would make for a healthy self. No longer are these simply given by the need to wrest a living from nature and fulfil one’s obligations in accordance with traditions of one’s society. Instead we live in a humanly-created environment

and a society which we realize could always have been structured otherwise. In such circumstances one is forced to question what and who one is said to be. Self-identity is not just a given, but in part an accomplishment.

The danger of this modern predicament is that a person might be drawn into tighter and tighter circles of self-preoccupation, not getting beyond his or her own concepts and interests. This may also happen collectively. When, for instance, all the aims and activities of an organization become internally referential (MSI: 150), then its members are wholly bound up in preserving or improving their organization. All external information is weighed only in terms of how it affects them. In the case of an individual, such intense self-preoccupation may lead especially when under threat to archaic narcissism (see 9.2.1 & 9.2.4) or in its milder forms it turns out to be 'an ego trip.'

In modern society there is only a thin dividing line between acquiring self-understanding and falling into unhealthy self-preoccupation.<sup>28</sup> It is necessary to build up sufficient self-esteem necessary for coping with modern life, but not let that boil over into a cult of the self. Sometimes, contemporary psychology has been condemned for fostering the latter. Iris Murdoch too has warned against mistaking self-scrutiny for goodness (1970: 101). In a couple of places Kohut hints at how a healthy self will go beyond itself. Although, he firmly insists, the need for selfobjects is never relinquished, he admits that normally we "see a movement from archaic to mature narcissism, side by side and intertwined with a movement from archaic to mature object love" (HDAC: 208). He also says that in the unfolding part of the life curve is the wish to become a selfobject for others.

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28 An early warning of this condition was given by Martin Luther, who writes in his *Commentary on Romans* that "our nature has been so deeply curved in upon itself (*incurvatus in se*) because of the viciousness of original sin that it not only turns the finest gifts of God in upon itself and enjoys them ... it even uses God Himself to achieve these aims, but it also seems to be ignorant of this very fact. ... The heart is [so perverse], that is, it is so curved in on itself that no man, no matter how holy (if a testing is kept from him) can understand it" (Oswald, ed. 1972: 291).

The peak values of modern man ... guide and sustain him in the attempt to reassemble his self through an increased and guilt-free ability to find appropriate selfobjects and in the attempt to liberate his innate ability to serve — and to serve joyfully — as a selfobject for others. (SS IV: 522; see also SS IV: 498)

In the last paper he wrote he speaks of Odysseus as “a fitting symbol of the fact that healthy man experiences, and with the deepest joy, the next generation as an extension of his own self” (SS IV: 563). In this connection,

### 16.3            **Cocooned against a Culture of Risk**

As far as its effects upon the self are concerned, the most pervasive influence of modernity is that everyone is exposed to institutionalized risks, against which they might reckon their chances, but over which they have minimal influence. These risks are institutionalized, because they are built into the operating system of modernity. Large scale industrial production, for instance, carries within it the possibility of environmental damage that may affect anyone, not just those engaged in a particular industry. “Institutional risk environments link individual and collective risks in many ways — individual life chances, for instance, are now directly tied to the global capitalistic economy” (MSI: 118). What measures or psychological defenses does the self have for coping with the backdrop of risks that can never quite be calculated or still less eliminated? Or, how can people sustain a sense of ontological security not only amid all the possible threats to their physical survival and health, but also against disturbing information undermining their sense of self and social identity?

The answer is to bracket out risks, unless they become so threatening that they are perceived as imminent dangers. As mentioned earlier (10.7.2) people spin a protective cocoon, which “is essentially a sense of ‘unreality’ rather than a firm conviction of security: it is a bracketing on the level of practice, of possible events

which could threaten the bodily or psychological integrity of the agent” (MSI: 40). This mantle of trust renders “the bulk of what goes on ... ‘non-consequential’ so far as that person is concerned. ... [This includes] actual and potential events in the physical world as well as encounters and activities in the sphere of social life” (MSI: 129). The outcome is an ‘uneventful’ world, in which routine gives the assurance that all is okay.

### 16.3.1 The Phenomenal World poses Dilemmas for the Self

Even though people may manage to bracket out the worst risks that modern systems pose, they still at times have to face dilemmas that arise from the ambiguity inherent in their world. The stretching of time-space, reflexivity, the fact that many activities one directly engages in only have meaning as part of a vast system, as well as the variety of second-hand experiences available through the media, all result in the individual living partly in his or her own ‘phenomenal world.’ “Each person reacts selectively to the diverse sources of direct and mediated experience which compose the *Umwelt*” (MSI: 188). For instance, from the whole bevy of information available through newspapers, radio, TV, Internet, as well as specialized publications and in-house communiques, each person imposes his own order on this diversity, selecting what to skip, read, follow up and attend to. To some degree, depending again upon an individual’s resilience, “the appropriation of mediated information follows pre-established habits and obeys the principle of avoiding cognitive dissonance ... [with the result that] routinised attitudes ... exclude, or reinterpret, potentially disturbing knowledge” (MSI: 188).

Maintaining one’s own phenomenal world might on the one hand be regarded as prejudice or stubborn narrow-mindedness, but on the other hand the “avoidance of dissonance forms part of the protective cocoon which helps maintain

ontological security" (MSI: 188). This should last statement should perhaps be qualified to read "the avoidance of *excessive* dissonance." It is good to be shaken out of a mental rut, to be disturbed and challenged about one's stance, but if that is excessive it can freeze all understanding and paralyze action. Again what is excessive will vary with the resilience of a person's self-structure and the need for ever-renewed selfobject affirmation.

Living in a phenomenal world presents the self with various dilemmas, which people will each cope with (or perhaps fail to cope with) in diverse ways. Giddens, in terms which echo Kohut, speaks of the dilemma of *unification versus fragmentation* that a person experiences as he endeavours to put life together as a reasonably coherent self-narrative. One person may draw strength from "being at home in a variety of contexts," while another "constructs his identity around a set of fixed commitments, which act as a filter through which numerous different social environments are reacted to or interpreted" (MSI: 190).

Another dilemma is that of *powerlessness versus appropriation*. Faced with the overwhelming development of capitalist production, international banking, mass communications, and military power, the individual finds that his life is dominated by massive institutions over which she has no control. Yet each of these institutions can also open up opportunities for her. For instance, when favourable they make it possible for her to travel to far-off places or trade with people there with relative ease. In pre-modern times this would have meant long and hazardous voyages. Within the individual a sense of powerlessness intertwines with the reappropriation of limited powers. Maturity lies in recognizing and accepting the scope of each, without either falling into delusions of omnipotence or being "haunted by implacable forces robbing him of all autonomy of action" (MSI: 193).

In a world marked by pluralism — whether cultural, religious, or ethnic — the dilemma arises of *authority versus uncertainty*. Although many specialists do offer advice, “there are no authorities which span the diverse fields within which expertise is claimed” (MSI: 195). Consequently, the lay individual, which everyone is in most fields of life, tends to take a sceptical outlook when assessing the claims of rival authorities. Routine carries people through in most day-to-day situations, but at times radical doubt can break through to challenge both routine and more far-reaching ambitions. A number of individuals, who “find it psychologically difficult or impossible to accept the existence of diverse, mutually conflicting authorities ... seek solace in more overarching systems of authority. ... [They show] a predilection for dogmatic authoritarianism” (MSI: 196). This may take “the form of a slavish adherence to an authority figure, taken to be all-knowing” (MSI: 196). It is also shown in a turning to fundamentalism, which may have a religious, cultural, economic or gender base. Fundamentalists attempt to resist pluralism by insisting on the purity of their own tradition and excluding all dialogue as a form of betrayal (BLR: 84ff).

A further dilemma, that between *personalised and commodified experience*, arises from the extension of capitalism into so many areas of life. Does “the consumption of ever-novel goods ... substitute for the genuine development of self” (MSI: 198)? Not only goods, but also lifestyles, and even programmes of self-development are packaged and distributed according to market criteria. While this makes previously unattainable services readily available, it also fosters ‘conspicuous consumption,’ where appearances outweigh any benefits the services might bring. Judging where to draw the line would in Thomas’ terminology be a matter of moderation (*temperantia*); use of something has to be gauged according to time, place and the exigencies of those with whom one is in living contact (*moderate utitur pro loco et tempore et congruentia eorum quibus convivit*, IIaIIae 141, 6 ad 2). Yet, when one is somewhat in touch with many

social contexts, it is not easy to decide exactly in which one lives.

### **16.3.2 Review of an Action Reveals its Unacknowledged Conditions**

Let us relate this discussion to our earlier examination of human agency (see 12.4 above). These various dilemmas delineate typical ways in which the perception, and hence the full acknowledgement of the conditions of action are limited. As the initial situation is ambiguous, no one can be completely sure what will result from any action. It will produce various unintended consequences. In fact, often only by seeing what is the outcome of one's action will the initial conditions be made apparent. For instance, when expert opinions differ, only by following the advice of one and seeing out it works out in practice, will one gain an insight into their reliability. Only by trying will one gauge the extent of one's power in society. Likewise, only after a while might one assess whether goods that one has purchased do actually enhance one's life and relationships, or that one has fallen for the salestalk and glossy packaging.

This is especially important when one wants to understand and change the structuring of society. Since the structure is a virtual reality, its features cannot be wholly discerned prior to action. They may only begin to become apparent as the unintended consequences of action reveal the initial, yet unacknowledged, conditions that went into shaping the action. Only after a while does one gain a better insight into how allocative and authoritative resources were distributed and which generative rules were in fact operative. This insight is usually gained by reviewing one's actions, looking particularly at how their outcome and repercussions differed from what was originally intended. Then one may find out what were the initial conditions that previously went unsuspected. It is then sensible to take account of these findings, and their theoretical interpretation, when planning future action.



The above outline shows the logic involved in organized groups and/or individuals regularly conducting reviews of their past activities. This is how the reflexive monitoring of action becomes accentuated in modern society. It may take place collectively in an organization that reassesses its overall aims, the goals it has set itself in the light of its performance and changing conditions. It may also be carried out by an individual to reflect on her own life trajectory or by a group seeking to influence their society.

#### 16.4 Shaping a Post-Traditional Morality

Where does morality feature in the reflexivity of modern life? This question is raised by the increasing sophistication with which individuals and organizations are "able to control one's life circumstances, colonise the future with some degree of success and live within the parameters of internally referential systems." Giddens suggests that when this happens "mastery ... substitutes for morality" (MSI: 202). Does being able to negotiate the dilemmas of the self, as and when they arise, lead to the evaporation of morality? Giddens appears to think so when he says: "Morality is *extrinsic* so far as the colonising of the future is concerned" (MSI: 145).

Giddens does not really work out how a post-traditional moral approach can be brought to bear on abstract systems. In several places he mentions how the institutional clusterings of modernity cut through or sweep morality aside (CMOD: 57; RMC: 273; MSI: 198); here, he presumably means one or other kind of traditional morality. But he also claims that "not just a few especially contentious concepts such as these [power, class, ideology, and interests] but the whole conceptual apparatus of social theory is in some sense 'ineradicably evaluative'" (CPST: 90). This is why "moral critique cannot be clearly and absolutely severed from the other tasks of social science" (RMC: 292). But, as his critics rightly

comment, Giddens does not explore very far in this direction. Jary puts his finger on what is missing when he says that

although Giddens makes plain that a theory of 'the good life' ought to be a primary part of social theory, and he is clearly prepared to use terms such as 'exploitation' and 'oppression', all this is undermined since he provides no normative theory capable of ordering the various goodness claims that arise. (Jary, 1991: 156; see also Cohen, 1989; Bernstein, 1989 and Craib, 1992)

In response, it must be asked what kind of 'normative theory' would be adequate for post-traditional society.

At this point, it is necessary to distinguish between two notions of morality, one centred upon conformity, the other concerned with building up 'character.' The first sets out a number of injunctions, mostly negative ones, that regulate interpersonal behaviour. Their force lies in their having the backing of tradition and the evident harm that transgressing them will cause among one's associates. Such honour codes typically maintained loyalty among colleagues, to one's spouse and family, to one's class and country. They functioned well enough in settings where social and system integration were not too distant, where the line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour could be demarcated clearly enough. So, for instance, cheating on one's colleagues or one's wife both upset personal relations and respectively weakened the bonds of association or undermined family ties. Likely enough if a person transgressed such mores, and especially if he was found out, he felt or was made to feel guilty. He was personally affected because his nuclear ideals and ambitions largely coincided with the prevailing mores.

This kind of traditional in-group morality has been steadily disintegrating under the impact of modernization. The purer forms of capitalism have no place for

such moral conceptions, or even for patriotism (RMC: 273). Likewise, the expansion of industrialism takes place through the overcoming of social customs and traditional sets of values. The surveillance mechanisms of modernity too has a universalizing tendency. They encompass more and more people in their ambit, assessing them as 'normal', 'deviant', 'in need of education', 'undeveloped' according to 'modern' criteria rather than in traditional moral categories.

It would be a mistake to think that morality is limited to the regulation of traditional in-group behaviour. Thomas Aquinas, following the Greeks, centred his moral teaching not on behaviour as such, but on potentialities from which actions spring. He elaborated on the range of character strengths (*virtutes*) required to accomplish the good to which one is called on life's journey. In the process he also spelt out the weaknesses of character (*vitia*) that will render one's activities self-defeating. Admittedly, in a plural world marked by the reflexivity, disembedding and high time-space distancing, depicting life's journey is much more problematic than in medieval times. Nevertheless, thinking in terms of character strengths rather than conformity of actions offers a more flexible and searching approach. For Thomas, the virtuous person not only does a right action, but one that is appropriate for the circumstances and with a generous motivation. The ability to sense the good that is here and now required, and to select the most appropriate means at hand for accomplishing it, is itself a character strength. This will at times require daring and ingenuity, and so may be very non-conformist.

Where an ethic of character links with the reflexivity of modern society is that both are built up over time. Character strengths are abilities acquired by repetition and corrective feedback. Likewise, reflexivity includes assessing the consequences of action, discovering its unacknowledged conditions and incorporating those findings in plans for future action. Reflexivity could be limited to mastery,

to the successful colonization of the future. But it could also incorporate a reflective ethical dimension, asking for instance: Are these plans humanly desirable? For whom, and why? Is the way of implementing them at variance with what we want to attain for ourselves? And for others? What human values does our overall aim and policy aim to realize and uphold in the methods it uses? What personal character and communal strengths are we striving to build up? What hidden agendas are at work? In this case one would question the basis upon which conjectures, risk calculations and the weighing costs against benefits are made. Besides incorporating information about how effectively an organization is attaining its objectives as conditions change, reflexivity would be extended to consider whether those objectives are basically worth pursuing at all.

A reflexive ethic of this kind would be more a guide for mobilising groups or social movements (see CMOD: 137) than a set of norms — or list of values — addressed to individuals. It would provide a reflexive method for social movements to analyze, evaluate and effectively contest the dangers inherent in modernity. Nevertheless, to be an ethic it would have to indicate more than tactics; it would have to combine tactics with a reflexive appreciation of the values at stake amid the risks of modernity. Through dealing with absent others, it would lack the immediacy and pathos of inter-personal encounters. While these are important they do not exhaust the domain of ethics; morality may be structural as well as existential.

My suggestion is that instead of relying so heavily on tradition as Thomas — along with his age — did, a reflexive structural ethic would be more future oriented. While recognizing the provisionality of all schemata, it would set out as clearly as possible the human ideals and values it sought to realize. It would also endeavour to spell out what this required both in terms of personal integrity and organizational aims. It would be misleading to say that Thomas stressed the

personal rather than the social, as the tributary systems of his time did not allow that distinction much force. Yet his account of the virtues when read today seems more individualistic than relational or social. So today a reflexive structural ethic will have not just to look at personal moral qualities, but also at how groups and organizations can assist in building such qualities and spreading them throughout society. Here a supportive self-object milieu plays a crucial role.

Those espousing a morality based on in-group conformity are likely to view modernity in very pessimistic terms; for them modernity is altogether too threatening and inherently amoral. But they overlook how modernity, opens up many previously absent opportunities for human cooperation, sharing and solidarity. It provides new opportunities for people to seek out actively their own self-identity through reflecting on their experience; it offers new forms of empowerment; and interaction with abstract systems opens up new ways of appropriating meaning and value in everyday life (see CMOD: 150). In any case, over five billion people could not thrive on this planet without the intermeshing linkages of modernity. Little can be gained from a moral point of view that condemns modernity as such. That only expresses “a nostalgia for ways of life that are disappearing or a negative attitude towards what is to come” (CMOD: 137); neither of which is helpful for engaging with the dangers and risks of modernity.

## **16.5           The Sequestration of Experience**

A further consequences of living in a protective cocoon is what Giddens terms “the sequestration of experience.” Various areas of life, particularly those that are more closely ‘biological,’ are for most people shunted to a siding. Many ordinary people, for instance, lose regular contact with sickness and death, or rather the

experience of it becomes repressed as it does not fit into their life-plans. The treatment of the sick, dying and dead is left in the hands of experts, the nursing and medical professions and undertakers. In comparison, everyone else is a lay person. Likewise, various types of disturbing behaviour, whether on the part of political protesters, the homeless, the mentally ill, and those with variant sexual proclivities, are ruled out as 'deviance.'

None of these concerns fit in with the abstract and reflexively organized systems that "play an increasingly pervasive role in coordinating the various contexts of day-to-day life" (MSI: 149). People do not know how to relate to events and people that fall outside the normal systems of institutional control. Their ontological security is upset, and they are presented with moral and existential dilemmas, but with which they lack the psychic and social resources to cope. Such experiences occur at "faultlines, full of tensions and poorly mastered forces," which easily become "battlegrounds, sometimes of a directly social character, but often within the psychological field of the self" (MSI: 168).

The overall result is that

existential questions become institutionally repressed at the same time as new fields of opportunity are created for social activity and for personal development. The sequestration of experience is in some part the contrived outcome of a culture in which moral and aesthetic domains are held to be dissolved by the expansion of technical knowledge. In some considerable degree, however, it is also the unintended outcome of the endemic structuring processes of modernity, whose internally referential systems lose contact with extrinsic criteria. (MSI: 164f)

The effect on the average individual is that one endeavours to keep to routine, to do one's job and not ask too many questions, to maintain the protective cocoon around one. There have always been people who turn a blind eye to the wrong doings of others, particularly those who might make trouble for them.

But under conditions of modernity, a certain level of blindness is required — you cannot know all that is going on or all the implications of one's own actions. Life is too complicated and depends upon trust in various expert systems. So to raise awkward moral questions about how people's lives might be adversely affected brings one into double trouble.

First, it exposes one to attack and abuse from those one directly or indirectly criticizes. But second, it places one's own self and social position in doubt; instead of casting oneself in the role provided by society, one has to redefine oneself anew. In other words, questioning the operation of one's society also raises awkward issues concerning oneself, as self and society are reflexively intertwined.

Such sequestration is the condition of the establishing of large tracts of relative security in day-to-day life in conditions of modernity. Its effect, which as we have seen should be regarded as an unintended consequence of the development of modern institutions, is to *repress a cluster of basic moral and existential components of human life* that are, as it were, squeezed to the sidelines. (MSI: 166f)

Capitalist expansion, along with technology and widespread surveillance, evident in modern communications and continuous flow of information, opens up many possibilities, but is combined with a impoverishment of experience in other areas. This has led to what Giddens terms "the return of the repressed" (MSI: 202ff). This is evident when sickness, accident, death break through or issues connected with personal relations, sexuality, sanity and the birth of new life confront people. These have once again brought 'life politics' and bioethics to the fore in a world that, because of its being so highly self-referential, lacks the means for dealing with them.

## 16.6 Conditions for Splitting

All the above discussion about reflexivity and narcissism, the dilemmas of the self and the sequestration of experience has been about conditions. There is no inevitability about how any person will experience, let alone grapple with, retreat from, or even thrive upon, these conditions. They are not forces, which by some kind of mechanical necessity will always lead to a predetermined outcome. Rather, each situation carries within it a combination of opportunity and challenge, but offers no guarantee that a person will perceive the opportunity and then rise to the challenge. Each dilemma reveals a way in which contemporary situations are ambiguous and hence open to varied responses. What the response will be not only depends upon a person's capabilities — the socially available rules and resources which he personally is able to draw upon — but also results from his free decision to exercise his capability in a determining way.

Nevertheless, inherent in the conditions of modernity is an underlying trend towards exclusion and disavowal. The socially induced need to maintain a protective cocoon to shore up ontological security, the sequestration of 'biological' experience, and the maintenance of organizations as internally referential systems, all lead to leaving areas of life out of account. How far any individual will simply be unaware of them or explicitly judge them as non-consequential will doubtless vary. Either way, these excluded areas of life will still make their demands. But, so long as they are not avowed or accepted as part of the dynamism of one's life and relations with others, they will continue to go their own way and cause various tensions.

For instance, communism as an internally referential system of theory and practice left ethnic rivalries out of account. This did not resolve them; they continued; when on occasion they broke out they were not recognized as such but were interpreted in class and anti-revolutionary terms. Once, however,



communist control ceased the pent-up rage derived from earlier narcissistic injuries burst forth. It could not be controlled or calmed as there was no common vocabulary for understanding it nor channels for negotiating an end to rivalries. Although this account is over-simple, it goes some way to explaining the wars in Bosnia, Chechnya and Georgia.

Another example, this time in capitalist society is the dubious role of 'self-help books.'

[They] stand in a precarious position with regard to the commodified production of self-actualisation. In some ways such works break away from standardised, packaged consumption. Yet in so far as they become marketed as prepackaged theorems about how to 'get on' in life, they become caught up in the very processes they nominally oppose. (MSI: 198)

This is a telling example of how the self is structurally caught; even in attempting to escape commodification it to some extent reinforces it.

There is a certain complementarity between Giddens' account of the social trend in modernity to exclude areas of life from experience and Kohut's account of vertical splitting. Although the latter is dealing with individual analysands each with their own family history, he also recognizes that "the prevalent personality organization of our time is ... enfeebled, multifragmented (vertically split), and disharmonious" (HDAC: 60). This is explicable because "the mores, predilections, and social conditions of the time will decisively influence the behavior of adults toward their children and thereby produce the milieu in which the personality of the child is formed" (HDAC: 60). Determining to what extent this holds in the case of any given child would require long and careful analysis; many other factors would have to be weighed. But taken as an overall trend, it helps explain the prevalence of vertical splitting and the consequent concern to become a

coherent self.

If parents and other parental figures are living within a protective cocoon, and have life-plans that overlook significant areas of experience, it is not surprising that they will offer inadequate mirroring to aspects of their child's normal assertiveness or fail to provide a well-rounded ideal of strength and calmness with which the child can merge. Such rejection will first greatly intensify the need for mirroring and merging and probably distort it. Then "in this intensified and distorted form, [it is] either repressed or split off and disavowed" (SS II: 555) as it is too much to tolerate consciously. If this frustrated need or wish is horizontally repressed it will lead to the personality disorders of depression, shame and social isolation. If it is split off vertically it remains active, but is disavowed, showing itself in the behavioral disorders of over-assertiveness, noisy demands and intense activity in the social field (see SS III: 381fff). Exactly how and to what extent these disorders of the self will appear in an individual cannot be predicted from the overall state of society. As in an analysis, one has to examine closely the accumulated experience of the individual, evident in his or her self-structure, and treat that in all its particularity. Nevertheless, parents and others are right from the start of life not simply expressing themselves to the next generation but are through that mediating their society. They are conveying a sense of the expectations, hopes, ideals and inclusive support, or lack thereof, that characterizes their society. This is not carried out consciously and deliberately, but is another instance of unacknowledged conditions of action having unforeseen consequences. But is this the whole story?

### **16.6.1 How Intentional is Splitting?**

Kohut gives an instance of another kind of splitting; this time between the desire for a particular outcome, yet without the acceptance of any moral responsibility

for this desire.

The apparently passive tolerance in larger groups of the takeover of leadership and initiative by smaller groups may actually be more active than meets the eye. Thus, small pathological, or otherwise highly special and unusual, aberrant groups may be 'passively' permitted to assume leadership in order to reach a goal which the majority may wish to disown yet also to reach. For example, people motivated by 'normal' competitiveness and jealousy may tolerate the merciless killing of the competitor by a paranoid group which, after it has done its work, is itself condemned and removed from the scene. (SS III: 105)

He goes on to apply this to the situation in Germany during and after the Nazi regime. Yet it is also applicable to the 'tacit support' given to Third Force and hit squad activities in South Africa. This attitude of condemning the sinner, but not the sin, is maintained in order to uphold by contrast one's own moral rectitude (see also 18.8ff below).

\* \* \*

The above account is not meant to give the impression that everyone, due to modern social conditions, is seriously disturbed psychologically or half-mad. However, what it does bring out is that there are always limitations in people's grasp of reality and defects in their response; their activities are not always fully guided by the ideals and ambitions they consciously express; they do not always grasp exactly how they are affected by or affecting others; they may inexplicably fly into a rage or be depressed; they may be deceiving themselves. Yet at other times none of these limitations and defects may be apparent. People may also in varying degrees recognize, accept and take responsibility for overcoming or at least minimizing the harm brought about by this fragmentation of the self. On the other hand, conditions may seem so bad that they either cannot or will not.

Then begins the decline, where social breakdown and a regression to archaic narcissism reinforce one another with dreadful consequences. People's normal healthy assertiveness is then broken and they bring upon themselves "a lifetime of abrasiveness, bitterness, and sadism that cannot be discharged" (RESS: 130).

### **16.7 Further Social Consequences of Archaic Narcissism**

Apart from his various reflections on Germany during Nazi times (see 14.8 above), Kohut mentions several other instances of social pathology. Although none are examined in detail, he shows their correlation with archaic narcissism.

It should be stressed at this point that not all forms of assertiveness, aggression and even conflict are derived from narcissistic injury or are manifestations of narcissistic rage. The overcoming of narcissistic injury in individuals will not lead to a society devoid of all differences of opinion or every clash of interests, where no one would ever feel threatened or challenged. Life will never be without its knocks, which to a greater or less degree threaten the self. "Narcissistic blows are unavoidable and the propensity to respond to them with rage is ubiquitous" (SPHU: 63).

In responding to the knocks life brings, assertiveness often and aggression at times will be called for. Both need to be mobilized on occasion if one is to overcome obstacles preventing one reaching one's goals. Normal healthy aggression, however, is characterized "by the absence of the need to hurt the opponent unnecessarily and the subsiding of aggression when the goal in question is reached." Whereas narcissistic rage "is characterized by unforgiving hatred and cruelty" (HDAC: 53) that does not relent once one's goal is attained. Indeed, the original goal or cause is frequently forgotten as the vendetta is relentlessly pursued.

Besides relentless animosity and hatred, there are several other characteristics of narcissistic hurt and rage, which we shall now turn attention to.

### **16.7.1 No Respect for Otherness**

The person weakened by narcissistic injury and regression basically perceives all reality as an extension of his or her self. They expect everyone else to be as subservient to them as their own limbs; others are expected to be no more than extensions of themselves. When matters inevitably do not turn out like that, the defects in their own self lead them to view any difference of opinion or interest as an offence against them; no allowance can be made for others.

The offender is experienced as a foreign body in an archaic world that must be populated only by obedient selfobjects. He regards the offender's mere otherness as an interference with his own omnipotent control of a narcissistically experienced world. (SPHU: 63)

Often enough, whatever the other person may do, whatever gestures they make, whatever actions they undertake, they are perceived as a threat or offence. Although someone may take exception to what the other person says or does, to his or her particular actions, at root what enrages the archaic self is the mere presence of a centre of initiative independent from him or her. Yet, Kohut continues,

closer scrutiny always reveals that the enraged person harbors only a vague concept of "the enemy," who in the logic of primary process thinking, is replaceable. The goal remains the total extinction of an enemy, who is experienced as absolute at each moment in time. No appeal to reason or pity can interfere with this goal, because there is no capacity to be empathic with the enemy, to see a fellow human in him. (SPHU: 63)

This refusal to allow others to be others, or the inability to respect fellow humans in their otherness, has also been dealt with in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. He speaks of the same and the other.

Put simply, the realm of the same is my own world with my set of ideas and preoccupations. This is necessary for securing an identity of one's own. But, if everything is interpreted as merely a moment with the realm of the same, that leads to *totality*, to the imposition of a comprehensive panoramic vision of reality upon everyone. No allowance is made for different points of view, for pluralism, or for dialogue. This leads ultimately to imperialism and war. In this view

Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals (invisible outside of this totality) is derived from the totality. The unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to to bring forth its objective meaning. For the ultimate meaning alone counts; the last act alone changes being into themselves. (Levinas, 1969: 21f)

Here Levinas criticizes, amongst others, the totalizing philosophy of Hegel who makes individuals into moments in the unfolding of the Spirit, of Marx who makes individuals into factors in the eventual production of a classless society, and Heidegger for whom the individual (*Dasein*) is in its authentic existence only a locus for the manifestation of Being (*Sein*).

Levinas says that only through "the breach of totality" do we open up to infinity. The breach is accomplished above all in welcoming the Other, the Stranger. I would not, however, be welcoming the Stranger if I simply fitted him or her into my scheme of things, the realm of the same. The other is not another item to add to my collection.

He and I do not form a number. The collectivity in which I say 'you' or 'we' is not a plural of the 'I.' ... [He] disturbs the being at home with oneself. But the Stranger also

means the free one. Over him I have no *power*. He escapes my grasp by an essential dimension, even if I have him at my disposal. He is not wholly in my site. ... We are the same and the other. (Levinas, 1969: 39)

The relation between the same and the other, a relation which respects otherness, is founded upon discourse. In discourse, as opposed to mere rhetoric, there is not just the imparting of information but self revelation, "a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses" (Levinas, 1969: 66). This is most evident in the irreducible relation of "the *direct and full face* welcome of the other by me. This conjuncture is irreducible to totality; ... the Other continues to face me, to reveal himself in his face" (Levinas, 1969: 80f). For Levinas ethics is not derivative from ontology, but founds it. The primordial welcoming of the other through discourse is primarily an ethical relation, and it is only in this relation that the truth of reality is apparent. "The relationship between the same and the other, is the ultimate fact, and in it the things figure not as what one builds [science, ontology] but as what one gives [ethics]" (Levinas, 1969: 77). Without respect for the other, justice - the rendering what is due to the other - is impossible.

Both Kohut and Levinas are speaking from their respective disciplines about the same reality. Archaic narcissism is one way of being locked in the totality of the same. The unrelenting character of chronic narcissistic rage is picked up by Levinas' insight into hatred.

To inflict suffering is not to reduce the Other to the rank of object, but on the contrary to maintain him superbly in his subjectivity. In suffering the subject must know his reification, but in order to do so he must precisely remain a subject. Hatred wills both things. Whence the insatiable character of hatred; it is satisfied precisely when it is not satisfied, since the Other satisfies it only by becoming an object, but can never become object enough, since at the same time as his fall, his lucidity and witness are demanded. In this lies the logical absurdity of hatred. (Levinas, 1969: 239)

By contrast, mature self-selfobject relationships breach a totality, and open up an unlimited richness of culture and meaning (Kohut) that corresponds somewhat to the pluralism of infinity (Levinas).

### 16.7.2 Inflexibility

Another feature of archaic narcissism is the tendency to be inflexible, to hang on to entrenched positions even when evidence of their shortcomings is presented. Whenever new ideas threaten a group's social cohesion or its members' position, they tend to be rejected. Kohut himself suggests this as an explanation for the classical psychoanalytic movement's unreadiness to accept the findings of self psychology. In this instance

new ideas which question the unalterability of the basic scientific tenets or set limits to the validity or the relevance of the idealized teacher-figure's [Freud's] scientific formulations will be perceived instinctively as inimical because they seem to diminish the sense of strength that its members derive from it. (ADVS: 548)

This repeats the pattern set earlier by the neuropsychiatric establishment when it rejected the Freud's new ideas. In each instance, people are striving to achieve a state of psychic well-being through "the permanent espousal of a set of basic beliefs and an unbroken attachment — in submission or rebellion — to an idealized leader figure" (HDAC: 210). Their being set in this way leaves them no room for 'creative mobility.' Various narcissistic factors are at work including "threatened professional and religious prestige and power" (HDAC: 63). It is easy to see how this brings about or reinforces the closed mindedness of a group, whether it be a political party, a military unit, a religious sect (within or outside of an established church), or an ethnic minority.



### 16.7.3            **Emptiness**

Mention has already been made (9.1.6.1) of Kafka's depiction of the future Mr. K., or Everyman, whom Kohut discerns as already present amongst us. He is a wanderer in a flat, empty world, yet yearning for empathic response. "To the unreachable judges of the trial and to the unreachable rulers high up in the castle he has become a number, rejected without even an attempt to justify his rejection in individual terms" (SS II: 680f).

Those whose lives have been undernourished as children or find themselves in a situation devoid of supportive selfobject are

the easy prey of any seducer who promises to relieve their sense of emptiness, of any make-believe that will, even if only temporarily, given them that feeling of being empathically valued and accepted ... If this feeling is lacking, then any relief is welcome — whether it is provided by drugs and wordless touching in encounter groups or by nationalistic ecstasy and merger into mystical experience. (SS II: 713)

This helps explain why social evil may get a grip on various persons or even large sections of a population that are deprived of empathic support by appropriate selfobjects (see 10.2.1 above).

### 16.7.4            **Pervasive Suspicion**

Another instance of the interrelation between personal and social pathology is found in the effects produced by electronic bugging and wiretapping, or even in reports that this is taking place.

[T]he ominous quality of the use of these devices stems from the fact that they constitute a replica in the social field of the dehumanized corruption of empathy that plagues the psychotic patient who suffers from the delusion of being observed. The delusion portrays the transformation of empathy into a force that coldly and inimically intrudes into the patient's self instead of modulating its responses to his

needs. (SS II: 721)

Although such practices as wiretapping and intercepting mail may yield information for security purposes, on another level they actually undermine people's sense of security. They bring about a social environment, which "instead of being benevolently responsive to the individual, ... has become a hostile force trying to penetrate into his most private communications and thus into his thoughts" (SS II: 721). When security services undertake these kinds of activity, they often — wittingly or unwittingly — bring about or increase the general insecurity in a country and so provoke upheaval.

#### **16.8 Narcissism in a Personal/Social Dialectic**

From these examples of a lack of respect for otherness, inflexibility, emptiness and pervasive suspicion, we see that social breakdown is both a cause and a consequence of archaic narcissism. The pathology of the self and of society can easily reinforce one another. An insufficiently empathic family and a society marked more by indifference than support does not allow the building up a cohesive self. The needs of a weak or fragmentary self then appear as crass arrogance and enraged demandingness. But these are "no more than a cover, barring access to the legitimate demands for the empathic selfobject environment of which they were deprived as children" (SS IV: 577). But their rage, arrogance and other asocial attitudes are frequently not understood, especially by those who are themselves narcissistically vulnerable. Consequently, the apparently asocial attitudes of others are "rejected coldly, angrily, patronizingly, or contemptuously by those who cannot discern the rightful demands that have gone into hiding" (SS IV: 577). Their being rejected, however, only increases "the helplessness and despair of those who have almost given up all hope of getting the response they needs for their psychological survival" (SS IV: 577). Without

empathy, insight and patience it is impossible to break out of this vicious circle.

Although these examples do indicate an interplay between social and personal psychology, between the weakening of society and of the self of its members, they also underline the importance of the way society is mediated to each member. People do not experience society en bloc, but through various representatives which make society with all its qualities and deficiencies present to them. Society is represented to the person through various selfobjects, whether personal or cultural. In dealing with society, the most important selfobject transferences are those derived from people's experience of their leaders. This is the topic to which we now turn.

## Pathological Leadership

“Now Rehoboam son of Solomon reigned in Judah  
... Judah did what is displeasing to Yahweh, arousing his resentment  
more than his ancestors by all the sins which they had committed” (I Kings 14: 21-22).

A topic that is often neglected, supposedly because it falls into the gap between psychology and sociology, is the influence of leaders, whether rulers or other ‘cultural figures,’ on society. While psychologists look at individuals, sociologists at large collectivities, neither pays much attention to a prominent bridge that spans the two: leadership. For instance, although Giddens has examined the role of elites in society (1974), he says next to nothing about leadership. Kohut, by contrast, comes back many times in his writings to the question of why certain sick persons manage to lead millions of seemingly normal people astray. This form of structural evil is different from situations where through a combination of surveillance and control of the means of violence someone in command coerces compliance on a subject population (see 15.4 & 15.5 above). Under what conditions do ordinary people willingly accept and follow a ruling figure who can only bring them disaster? This chapter draws mainly on Kohut to examine that issue, but a quotation from Thomas helps lay out the problem.

He speaks (QD de Caritate, 2) of the two kinds of love that a person may have for the good of his city. To love its good so that it may be held and possessed (*ut habeatur et possideatur*) does not bring about its political wellbeing. In this fashion a tyrant loves the good of a city in order that he may dominate it; he loves himself more than the city, for he desires its good for himself, not for the sake of the city. This contrasts with loving its good that it might be maintained and defended (*ut conservetur et defendatur*); that true kind of love brings its political wellbeing about. Then, in so far as the good of the city demands that it be defended or extended, some will expose themselves to the danger of death and put their own private wellbeing aside (*negligant privatum bonum*).

There is no difficulty about understanding the contrast Thomas makes between these two kinds of love: a self-love that seeks to possess and dominate, and a disinterested love that will sacrifice oneself for a greater good. Our problem with pathological leadership is different: under what conditions can a dictator convince the people that his own self-interested love (or archaic narcissism) is love for them and hence they should trust and follow him? What type of transference is involved?

This transference does not take place through rational argument in terms of values and norms; it may be assisted by people perceiving some practical advantages for themselves, but in the main it takes place unconsciously or in such a way that people are not really aware of what is happening to them. It affects people at the level of motivation, because — in Giddens' terms (see 10.7.2, 12.4.2 and 16.3) — they are assured of their ontological security.

## 17.1 Leaders and Society

Kohut offers, not a full account of the various types of leadership, but some

insights into the bonding of leaders and followers on a psychological level. He deals mainly with cases where the bonding is more intense, rather than those where the leader simply functions in an official capacity or takes up an inherited position. In other words, he is dealing with what Max Weber terms 'charismatic authority,' rather than inherited 'traditional authority,' or 'the routinization of charisma' where officials are appointed. The latter two types are insufficient during times of crisis when society is threatened by an external danger or on the brink of breaking apart internally. At these moments the charismatic leader creates or demands *new* obligations that people recognize as obliging them. Kohut would endorse Weber's statement: "The corporate group which is subject to charismatic authority is based on an emotional form of communal relationship" (1964: 360). Nevertheless, their approaches are different; Weber endeavours to construct an 'ideal type,' whereas Kohut seeks an indepth understanding of a few selected cases. Though he examines not just political leaders, but others influential in shaping culture and civilization.

## 17.2 Reliance upon an Idealized Selfobject

Kohut's insights into the psychological bonding between leaders and followers derive in large part from his study of the bond formed between a vulnerable, creative individual and a strong figure who provides support during the stresses of intense creativity. The heightened awareness required for a new discovery in science or a creative breakthrough in art leads the self into a frightening isolation.

During creative periods, the self is at the mercy of powerful forces it cannot control; and its sense of enfeeblement is increased because it feels itself helplessly exposed to extreme mood swings which range from severe precreative depression to dangerous hypomanic overstimulation, the latter occurring at the moment when the creative mind stands at the threshold of creative activity. (SS II: 818)

A number of creative individuals have during these periods turned to a strong figure for support. The creative genius “feels humble toward and dependent upon this idealized protector, mentor, and judge, who is in essence his own creation” (SS III: 132). Freud, for instance, at the time he was undertaking his own self-analysis turned to Wilhelm Fliess. Fliess himself was something of a crank as a doctor, but lacked any self-doubt and possessed enormous self-confidence. Because of his paranoid personality with his absolute conviction of being right, Freud experienced him as an idealized omnipotent selfobject on whom he could lean. There was a temporary regression “to the idealization of an archaic omnipotent figure” (SS II: 818). This regression in the case of Fliess was temporary as Freud eventually realized his limitations and broke with him (see Gay, 1988 for a full account).

But it is often the Fliesses of the world, who lacking any self-doubt, set themselves up as leaders. When a group or society reaches a crisis point it looks for, in Weber's terms, charismatic authority.

During these periods of collective narcissistic enfeeblement and tension, a desperate group need for merger with an idealized selfobject creates the political base from which the support of strong, charismatic, narcissistic leaders issues. (Strozier, 1980: 403)

These are the times when leaders may exert the greatest social influence, either for good or ill.

### **17.3 Some Types of Leadership**

Speaking of the correlation between a leader and followers, Kohut distinguishes between charismatic and messianic types (SS II: 828n; see also Detrick in Goldberg, 1985: 254; both these types would be classed as “charismatic” by Weber).

These correspond to the two poles of the self. To a certain extent, in each case, there is a moulding of the group self by the leader and vice versa. The self of a charismatic leader largely becomes a carrier of the grandiose self of the group; so the group is drawn along by the direction-setting, stimulating enthusiasm of its leader. In this instance, the leader encapsulates the group's ambitions and boosts the energy of followers to strive for their realization. Messianic leadership, on the other hand, centres upon the goal-setting, calming certainty provided by the leader. The group experiences in its leader the ideals and values it wishes to uphold and which sustain it.

There are other leaders who have neither a messianic nor a charismatic personality, but who are chosen or followed because of their ability to carry out effectively the administrative tasks the group requires. This type of leadership corresponds to the intermediate area of skills and talents between the two poles of the self.

Finally, in groups where no definite leader is chosen or appointed — so-called “leaderless groups” — frequently the most disturbed member emerges as the person with the greatest influence. With no formal checks and balances it is difficult for an unorganized group to resist the paranoid self-certainty and assurance that he or she brings to bear.

#### **17.4           Qualities of Leadership**

The main determinant of whether leadership will be sound or pathological depends, not on whether it centres around ambitions (charismatic) or upon ideals and values (messianic), but upon the quality of the transference involved. It is a “biased value judgment [to regard] ideals as morally superior to ambitions” (SPHU: 55). What is crucial is the relative archaism or maturity involved in the



followers' identification with their leader and his or her way of identifying with them. Again by taking Kohut's ideas a little further than he did himself, the predominant qualities in four styles of leadership can be delineated (see figure on next page).

When a group expects its present or future leader to solve all its problems and usher in a state of peace where the highest ideals are upheld by everyone (type 1), it is living an illusion. Yet by continually hoping that next time there will be a better ruler, a better government and a better society, it can defer action for a long time. So long as no major crisis occurs, this kind of leadership-cum-followership can continue. But when society hits a major crisis, experiencing setbacks that undermine its social organization as well as the psychological balance of its members, usually a new leader emerges who will shift attention from ideals and values to goals and ambitions (types 2 or 4).

The most constructive yet the least obtrusive type of leadership is that of the facilitator (type 3), whose calming presence and personal embodiment of society's values sets the scene for everyone to make their own constructive contribution towards the common good. Sufficient guidance and direction is given so that efforts are coordinated, but not so much that initiatives are stifled. This is the quality of leadership Aristotle had in mind when he spoke of a ruler of free people requiring much more strength of character than ruling over slaves (1333b/25-3, and see also 1277b/8-10). Attaining leadership of this quality depends, however, not only upon finding a suitable person as leader, but upon the maturity of the members of society. Maturity here is a matter of having a sufficient degree of ego-dominance over narcissistic structures (SPHU: 55), or, put more simply, on people being able to exercise self-restraint.

The quality of charismatic leadership depends on the content of the aims and

<i>Leadership Types</i>		
<i>Identifications</i>	<b>Messianic</b>	<b>Charismatic</b>
<b>Archaic</b> <i>(merger)</i>	1. Expected Hero/ Saviour to solve all problems	2. Demanding totalizing subservience
<b>Mature</b> <i>(relation)</i>	3. Facilitator for constructive initiatives	4. Stirring challenge to attain goals

**Fig 17** *Predominant Qualities in Leadership*

ambitions they epitomize, and on how followers identify with them. When followers attempt an archaic merger of themselves with the grandiose self of an omnipotent leader (type 3), they are entering into a danger area.

... most culture-destroying forms of mass behavior — e.g., of those masses under the sway of the dictatorships of our century — emanated from groups which were predominantly amalgamated by the identity with the archaic grandiose self. Even here there are undoubtedly exceptions. Individual members of these groups relate to the leader in mystical religious devotion, betraying the presence of archaic forms of the omnipotent object; others use overt idealization as a cover of their reactivated archaic power-grandiosity; and still other mobilize truly idealizing cathexes. (SPHU: 55)

The exceptions Kohut notes might be those instances where leaders tactically accept identification and adulation from their followers, but use that as a way of drawing them into learning and discovering things for themselves. The truly educative leader endeavours to build up his or her followers' ego-dominance over their narcissistic tendencies. He or she imposes discipline so that self-discipline may be acquired as the self is firmed. As the followers gain experience and so build up their own self structure, they come to a more relational identification with their leaders (type 3 or 4).

This educational approach is vastly different from those mass movements that are formed around a shared archaic grandiosity; there discipline and restraint are relaxed. This takes place

after the previously existing aim-inhibiting and ego-controlled shared form of self-confidence (national prestige) and the previously existing aim-inhibited and ego-controlled communal ego-ideal (religious values) have been destroyed or debased. (SPHU: 55f)

In such a society (type 2), one that lacks support from selfobjects that should give

it meaning and value, the only kind of support many of its members can find derives from the grandiose ambitions of a leader convinced of his or her own mission, no matter how bizarre or destructive that might be. This prime example of this kind of sick leadership is that of Hitler (see 17.5.2 below).

Nevertheless, not all groups and societies that coalesce around a shared grandiose self are sick. They may well be sound when the leader by embodying the grandiose self of the group stirs its members into action to realize a common constructive aim (type 4). This type of leadership is especially important when it is a matter of firming the group's determination and mobilizing all its resources to triumph over adversity (see 17.6 below).

Constructive groups may well hold certain ambitions in common and the heightened self-esteem which the individual derives from feeling himself at one with a group whose sense of power and pleasurable display of self-confidence is by no means incompatible with self control, civilized behavior, and creative purpose. (SPHU: 55)

Leaders in this instance rouse, encourage and challenge followers to realize the ambitions of the group. This works well in times of disaster, crisis or war, where the overriding aims of the society are clear and the leader embodies the resolve to attain them.

Any leader of whatever type may make errors of judgment or fail to live up to his or her responsibilities. But over and above individual faults and failures, the most likely recipe for social disaster is when the archaic narcissism of leader and followers resonate with each other (type 2). They then bring the worst out of each other; a scenario we need to examine in more detail.

## 17.5 The Pathological Merger of Leader and Followers

It has been repeatedly observed (O'Dea, 1970; Stark, 1967; Wilson, 1973) that in times of social disintegration, which brings about considerable stress and uncertainty, people turn to all kinds of fringe groups and pseudo-religious cults to sustain or save them. In this kind of anomic situation people are also likely to look to or accept some strange and yet very demanding leaders (type 2). What Kohut offers here is a short delineation of what goes on from a psychological point of view. He recognizes the convergence of many factors, including non-psychological ones, and says too that: "the presence, for example, of a gifted pathological leader or the absence of a gifted non-pathological leader might well decisively influence the course of events" (SPHU: 63). But in either case, various social factors such as unemployment and high inflation, cultural deprivation, a high rate of crime, inefficiency, and incessant political infighting, are likely to lead to — as well as be manifestations of — psychological regression. What happens to people under these conditions, when the world that formerly supported them is falling apart?

There is a first state of painful increase of narcissistic tension with propensity toward shame, hypochondria, and depression. This is followed by a regressive movement in the narcissistic realm, manifested partly in the sector of the idealized omnipotent parent imago and partly in the sector of the grandiose self. The first line of regression lead to such manifestations as inclinations toward vague mystical religiosity (the following of sects at the fringe of true religion, for example) and the search for an external embodiment of the omnipotent selfobject into whom one can merge. (SPHU: 63f)

Because people feel everything is getting them down and they are getting nowhere, there is a regression in the self from more or less mature and responsible relations with others to archaic narcissism. They long for and seek a cause, a group, a movement, a person with whom they can merge. To begin with they will retain some of the ideals and values that formerly were prominent in their

society. This people may be initially attracted and form religious-cum-cultural movements which extol a past golden age. But matters do not stop there.

The second line of regression leads to the reinforcement of archaic grandiosity, attitudes of intolerant certainty, arrogance, and the extolling of an external embodiment of the grandiose self in the nation[, the party, the movement or some other grouping]. Ultimately the stage is set for the coalescence of both tendencies: The individual finds triumphant relief from the narcissistic tension as his grandiose self expands into the powerful group and as the leader becomes the omnipotent selfobject with whom the individual merges. (SPHU: 64)

As the extravagant ambitions deriving from archaic grandiosity rise to the fore, there is a transition in such groups from cultural activities to a more militant stance. Organizations that began by fostering ethnic identity, for instance, become armed resistance movements.

This may be somewhat baffling to outsiders, as they cannot comprehend why people should be so fanatical and uncritical of themselves. But what Kohut puts his finger on is the enormous sense of relief and exhilaration that people whose world was falling apart feel through their total identification with such a movement.

Individuals seek to melt into the body of a powerful nation (as symbolized by a grandiose leader) to cure their shame and provide them with a feeling of enormous strength, to which they react with relief and triumph. Old fantasies of omnipotence seem suddenly to have become reality; all are proclaiming the invincible strength of the nation, and he who dares to question the omnipotence of the group and omniscience of its leader is an outcast, an enemy, a traitor. (SPHU: 57)

Kohut's explanation about the effect of melting into the body a powerful movement or nation corresponds to Robert Jay Lifton's account of the psychology of totalism.

Ideological totalitarianism itself may offer a man an intense peak experience: a sense of transcending all that is ordinary and prosaic, of freeing him from the encumbrances of human ambivalence, of entering a sphere of truth, reality, trust, and sincerity beyond any he had ever known or even imagined. ... Rather than stimulating greater receptivity and "openness" to the world, they [totalizing movements] encourage a backward step into some form of "embeddedness" — a retreat into doctrinal and organizational exclusiveness, and into all-or-nothing emotional patterns more characteristic of the child than of the individual adult. (quoted in Lynch, 1965: 283)

Lifton adds that within such a totalizing group or movement, language become impoverished; it ceases to be a means for communicating with and hence learning from those who are different. Instead, it is reduced to clichés and slogans, and so only comes to mean what the movement wants it to mean. It ceases to open up for them a fresh view on reality or provide them with alternative lines of action from which they must choose. This tendency is evident above all in the rhetoric espoused by the leader of a totalizing group or movement.

What enables someone to fill such a leadership position? Why is someone acceptable as leader of a totalizing group? What psychological features must he or she possess to embody its omnipotence and be seen as omnipotent? A special kind of personal pathology is required for this. While he or she is crippled in not being able to establish normal relations with others as a friend and companion, the leader "develops a heightened sensitivity to the anonymous groups and its motivations and is able to relate to it intensely" (SPHU: 56). Although unable to relate to individuals, he or she has "a heightened grasp of the unconscious and preconscious tension states, of the fantasies, wishes, and fears of the group" (SPHU: 56).

Because the self of such a leader is formed around archaic grandiosity alone, there is no question of distinguishing his or her own ambitions and strivings from those of the movement. He or she is totally identified with its aims. Also,

through being devoid of mature empathy that would show respect for others and listen to their opinions, there is no reason to doubt the rightness of his or her own opinions, judgments and orders. Yet, since within limits this kind of leader experiences what affects others as part of the self, he or she can be very responsive to what others are going through. The leader merges his personality with the followers, and the followers with the leader.

The more intense such an archaic merger, the more precarious it becomes. The leader's empathy, after all, is limited to those who share a narcissistic injury and deprivation similar to his or her own. It does not extend to those of another culture, or whose social situation and consequently experience is different. His or her injury is likely to be more acute as it derives from the empathic deprivation experienced in their family upbringing, while that of the followers is due more to psychological regression resulting from social deprivation. The leader can only pick up the fears and fantasies of followers that are similar to his or her own.

[This] inability to perceive and to understand human reactions beyond a certain range is not recognized by him as a limitation, even though it is a serious shortcoming that often contributes to his ultimate downfall. He declares as contemptible motivations and attitudes which are not identical with his own. Thus he develops along with his great understanding of the masses a steadily increasing contempt for them. (SPHU: 57)

Due to his narcissistic fixation, as well as the inability to listen and learn from others through normal discourse, the pathological leader relentlessly follows an inflexible course. The ability to make pragmatic adjustments is absent. So when she or he detects that the followers are "wets" deviating from the "true doctrine" they are dismissed with contempt. The example of sick leadership that Kohut frequently turns to is that of Adolf Hitler, but it might be instructive to look first at the extension of Hendrik Verwoerd's personality into the grand design of apartheid.



### 17.5.1 Verwoerd and Apartheid

An instance of a strong leader taking a nation on a humanly destructive course is that of Hendrik Verwoerd's role in the imposition of grand apartheid. Segregation and *baasskap* long pre-dated apartheid, but what Verwoerd and his associates did was to transform these fairly crude white ambitions into apartheid, which was portrayed with utmost sincerity as a moral ideal. Verwoerd especially was a key figure in presenting the plan of grand apartheid as the solution to South Africa's race problems, and as the best way of ensuring protection and development for every race group. In propagating apartheid and putting it into effect, what kind of leadership was Verwoerd successively exercising as a professor of sociology, newspaper editor, minister of native affairs, and then as prime minister? What enabled him to convince so many white South Africans, and some members of other races too, that rightness lay along the path of grand apartheid?

There were certainly many more factors than Verwoerd's own personality, but the combination of great intellectual ability, complete self-assurance, a rigid set of ideas, a complete lack of empathy with what others — particularly non-Afrikaners — were experiencing, and enormous energy and ambition enabled him to be the leader destined to put apartheid into effect. A recent assessment of his personal abilities and qualities has been made by Edward Higgins, who writes: "Friend and foe alike have testified to the fact that Dr Verwoerd came across as someone who *never experienced even a shadow of self-doubt*" (1991: 146, italics added). His great self assurance provided his followers with enormous support. Although his speeches were long-winded and full of detail, he was "nevertheless was a popular speaker, most probably because of *his aura of omniscience and his impressive personality.*" (Higgins, 1991: 148, italics added).

Intellectually, he stood head and shoulders above most of his parliamentary

supporters, while his self-assurance and his didactic manner led many to believe that *he could really wish into being the political objectives of his fertile imagination*. Relatively few parliamentarians ... queried his genius (Davenport, 1977: 281, italics added).

The effect of Verwoerd's personality was brought home to me on a visit to a farm near Stellenbosch in 1964, where it was pointed out that Afrikaners were not worried about their position. "They have their machine gun, and Dr Verwoerd." In other words, they are well armed to fight, and the prime minister will answer all questions arising in international politics as well as still their own inner doubts. A few years later Archbishop Denis Hurley, recalling his meetings with Dr Verwoerd, remarked to me: "He was a man who enjoyed the luxury of never doubting the rightness of his own judgment."

It is beyond the scope of this study to present a psychobiography of Verwoerd. But all the evidence points to a self of immense, archaic grandiosity with a total inability to appreciate others' point of view or respond empathically to them. His grandiosity combined with great intellectual ability enabled him to weld together the various factions amongst Afrikaners and to impose *the final solution* to the complex race problems of South Africa. The integrity of his personal life and the sincerity with which he advanced his grand plans for social engineering is not doubted. But despite that, his lack of empathy and hence consideration for others - as they sensed themselves to be, not just as the objects of his theory — made him into a leader taking South Africa down a destructive path. His grand design was at root an attempt to make a lack of empathy and an unwillingness to support others, whether personally or socially, into an ideal. This, it should be reiterated, is not the whole story; there were many social, political and economic factors involved. But the way apartheid in theory and practice denied the need for empathy with people of another race made it, not just an unsuccessful political policy, but an affront to human dignity worldwide.

## 17.5.2 The Personality and Leadership of Adolf Hitler

Conditions in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s facilitated the rise of the Nazis; in particular, a combination of social factors led to widespread narcissistic regression amongst the population. This explains the desperate longing the German people had for a selfobject that would give them vitality as a nation again. What has to be examined now is how the formation of Hitler's personality enabled him to fulfil that role, but with such disastrous consequences. What enabled him, such an unlikely candidate for leading a sophisticated nation, to be in such "total resonance with the disease of the German self" (SPHU: 91)?

The lack of empathic support in childhood left Hitler as a young adult with massive narcissistic injury. He tried to overcome his narcissistic tensions through art, but when that failed he "lapsed into a period of lonely brooding and hypochondriacal preoccupation, from which he emerged with the conviction that the Jews had invaded the body of Germany and had to be eradicated" (SPHU: 54). This conviction was fed by his reading cheap, anti-Semitic stories. Here he was repeating his own cure, first worked out in his childhood, and then again in his adolescence and early adulthood, for overcoming the divitalization and fragmentation of his nuclear self. Relinquishing the selfobjects that had failed him, his personality came to centre around an archaic grandiose self. In Hitler's case

the core of the self, except for one nucleus of infantile grandiosity, [was] lost. Thus the personality, however extensive its growth in the many layers that [were] acquired around the archaic core, [remained] cold. ... it never [acquired] the capacity for modulated empathy with others. Such a personality is characterized by a near-total absence of compassion, except where total identification is concerned, when the 'other' is totally experienced as part of the self. (SPHU: 91f)

Hitler thus acquired a self-sufficient personality, that no longer required

selfobject support. But instead of being cut off and out of touch with people, he experienced his social surroundings as part of himself. A foreign diplomat around 1936 approached Hitler to warn him that the violence he was causing was excessive, and matters were going too far. Hitler replied that it was not him but the people who were pressing matters along. The fluidity of Hitler's self not only led him "to perceive impersonal and accidental occurrences as personal slights," but also made him especially sensitive to "similar motivations in others" (SPHU: 54). This had two consequences.

First, if any group, nationality or race did not react as he expected them to react that was "a deep personal affront, a frightening, inimical disturbance of [his] solipsistic universe. The situation can only be remedied by wiping out those who dare to be different" (SPHU: 54). This was the fate of the Jews and many others, whom he did not recognize as fellow humans.

Second, Hitler's perception of emotional identities was heightened. This enabled him to

discover similar small or dormant motivations in others, which he [used] skilfully by identifying with them and bringing about an identification with him. He [melted] them into his personality so to speak and [brought] them and their actions under his control as if they [had been] his limbs, his thoughts, and his actions. (SPHU: 54)

The overall effect was that Hitler suddenly presented himself to

the culturally disenfranchised masses in Germany who were yearning for somebody who would turn to them and talk to them and talk for them ... [as a person who was] strong, unafraid, utterly convinced of his — and our — greatness. All of a sudden people were willing to die for that marvellous image they got of themselves via this particular person. (SPHU: 229)

Those who underestimated and ridiculed Hitler, whether themselves Germans or not, were totally out of touch with the sense of deprivation and narcissistic regression that many in Germany were experiencing at the time. It was not that everyone was in exactly the same position, as

the followers of Hitler were originally composed of all kinds of groups: the industrialists who wanted to see the economy revived; the lower middle class who wanted to get uplifted from their suddenly lowered status; the unemployed who wanted jobs; and those for whom national defeat was the major sore that needed to be healed. And yet, for all of that, Hitler was an unquestioned figure of inner security and power. (SPHU: 227)

In other words, Hitler's archaic grandiosity drew people along for somewhat different reasons; or rather, his appeal did not derive from a reasoned political programme, but more from his invitation to the German people to participate in the blissful self-image he portrayed through merger with him (SPHU: 204). The same held true for the 800 followers of the religious cult leader, Jim Jones, in Guyana who committed suicide together with him on his orders (SPHU: 249).

Strozier, in his introduction to Kohut's work, adds that

this bonding of leader and follower can only occur where there is complete affinity culturally and psychologically between the fantasies of the group and its chosen messianic and/or charismatic leader. Neither party, so to speak, can diverge from the original pact. (SPHU: xxviii)

To begin with there was complete affinity between Hitler's peculiar personality and his followers' needs, later that began to break down. Yet Hitler remained as relentless and inflexible as ever. When he "sensed the Germans were pulling back psychologically from their merger with him, he became sneeringly contemptuous of them. In the final debacle he even ordered Albert Speer to destroy

German economic life" (Strozier, SPHU: xxviii). His refusal to surrender even though defeat was certain brought the fullest destruction on his own people.

### 17.5.3 **Where does the Fault Lay?**

Was it all Hitler's fault? To what extent were the Germans — their earlier leaders, the Nazis, the military and the common people — guilty? Does the guilt stop there, and not extend to the Allies too? These questions return us to the discussion of collective guilt that took place at the close of World War II (see 3.2.1 above). They find their counterpart today in the South African discussion on who is guilty for apartheid. While not answering all these questions directly, Kohut's diagnosis bears repeating: "It was the abysmal failure of constructive empathy in Germany and in its European surroundings that made Hitler possible" (SPHU: 93). This failure in empathy was evident in the lack of empathic selfobjects in the upbringing of Hitler and many of his associates. It was evident too in the way many of Germany's political leaders, artists and other public spokespeople were out of touch with the barrenness experienced by large sections of the population. Kohut does not excuse the psychoanalytic movement on this count.

What might have happened if analytic insights, filtering through the intelligentsia toward men in positions of political leadership and towards artists and journalists, had provided at least a dawning insight into the state of the broken self of individuals who were suddenly deprived of the two major constituents of their selves? We do not know. (SPHU: 93)

But it is possible for ideas and insights to spread rapidly, for awareness to filter through (see SPHU: 241), so if the psychoanalytic movement had provided a better empathic understanding of the conditions that made Hitler and the Nazis possible, history might have been different. A similar lack of empathic support

was also prominent in the lack of understanding and the treatment shown to Germany by other nations in Europe. All in all, the failure in empathy that Kohut speaks of put everyone in some way at fault. In reaching this conclusion, Kohut concurs with Levinas, who is prepared in the last analysis to say: "I am responsible even for the Other's responsibility" (1985: 99).

## 17.6 Grandiose yet Healthy Leadership

Because of the massive human destruction wrought by sick leaders such as Hitler and Verwoerd, the very idea of leadership and authority has come in for severe questioning. Is all leadership and power inevitably corrupt? Is it impossible for someone in a position of power to combine moral integrity with political efficacy? Kohut does not think so.

I think it is part and parcel of good human equipment to be able to be enthusiastic for the great. In some people this capacity needs to be liberated rather than curbed. The capacity to admire a great leader figure, even a messianic and charismatic one, is not pathology. ...[But] there must be insight. It is like the difference between paranoia and normality. (SPHU: 249)

Leaders with immense drive and embodying great ambitions for their followers can be great, but they must have a sense of humour to safeguard them (see 13.4.2 above). Without humour and hence the humility not to take themselves too seriously, they would become dangerous fanatics.

During those periods when a society or group is under intense pressure or its survival as a whole is threatened, a gifted leader may enable it to pull through, because he or she can rally support and give clear direction. "The gifted and successful leader experiences danger on a personal level but can realize and express that danger on the group level," (SPHU 259) because he or she has gone

through a similar experience beforehand. Due to a lack of selfobject sustenance as a child or adolescent, he or she will have undergone phases of near fragmentation in the self. But if the self has been reconstituted with ideas and ambitions that later coincide with those required by the group, he or she has leadership potential for tackling the task on hand. Such a person has gone

through phases of near fragmentation ... [and then reassembled] himself with a set of creative ideas that happen to fit the overall needs of the group. He and the group then become each other's selfobjects. They come to form a unit that is exhilarating and full of vitality. The self that was fragmented clicks firmly back into place. It is for these experiences that people gladly will die. Biological survival is nothing by comparison to this experience. (SPHU: 259)

Having him- or herself overcome fragmentation, the leader imparts the confidence to followers that they too can triumph over whatever threatens them with disintegration. Hence their exertions and sacrifices for the group will not be in vain.

### **17.6.1 The case of Winston Churchill**

A prime example for Kohut of leadership based on grandiosity, rather than upon ideals and values was that of Winston Churchill during World War II. His early years had prepared him for the leadership task he was to perform. An incident in his boyhood gives a glimpse of his driving unconscious grandiose fantasy. When being hunted in a game with two other boys, he was running across a bridge over a ravine only to find his pursuers closing in on him from both ends.

"capture seemed certain" he wrote [in his autobiography], "But in a flash there came across me a great project." He looked at the young fir trees below and decided to leap onto one of them. He computed, he meditated. "In a second, I had plunged," he continues, "throwing out my arms to embrace the summit of the fir tree." (SS I: 444)



It was several months before he recovered. At this stage his unconscious grandiose fantasy was not integrated with a firm grasp of reality. But “luckily, for him and for the forces of civilization, when he reached the peak of his responsibilities the inner balance had shifted” (SS I: 444). All his life, including his capture by the Boers near Colenso, Churchill

had a compelling need to be entrapped in order to prove his ability to escape, that is, to fly off. Furthermore, his personality appears in general much less characterized by devotion to lofty ideals than by the conviction that he possessed unconquerable power. This he communicated effectively. (SPHU: 12)

His courage which others identified with during World War II was not centred upon promoting values, but on combatting the menace of Nazism. In being able to put his oratory, his civilized anger, and his organizing abilities into this one cause the pattern of his nuclear self reached narcissistic equilibrium.

He experienced a sense of great inner calm and relief when he became Prime Minister. It seems a state of narcissistic equilibrium established itself when he had the opportunity to live out again, in ultimate fulfilment, the deepest purposes of his self. He could then reenact in the arena of the whole world the apotheosis of a grandiose fantasy he retained from childhood: that of gaining freedom from encirclement by blissfully soaring into the air. (SPHU: 12f)

He was able to place his courage and risk-taking, which were present throughout his life, “in the service of the goals of a nuclear self that wanted to gain fame by rescuing the civilization with which he identified himself” (SS IV: 639). While these observations give some insight into the effectiveness of Churchill's leadership, as well as the eventual ineffectiveness of Hitler's, many other personalities and factors contributed to the outcome of World War II. Yet how these other factors were experienced depended to a considerable extent on “the climate of opinion” (see SS IV: 559) these leaders established.

## 17.7 Political Savvy

It is sometimes stated that followers get the leaders they deserve; while not a complete truth, this saying underlines the importance of people recognizing what kind of leadership they require at any particular time and discerning what a potential leader might offer. The acceptance of appropriate leaders, and rejection of the unsuitable ones, is of paramount importance in building up and defending civilized society. Kohut suggests that psychoanalytic historians might look into "the political genius of a people, i.e., its skills, its political savvy, as manifested in its capacity to choose the right kind of leader in various historical situations" (SS II: 828n19).

He reminds us that Churchill, whose courageous stand he obviously admires, was nevertheless "unacceptable before the crisis [of World War II], filled his role to perfection during the crisis and was the unquestioned leader of the nation. Yet he was discarded after the crisis had subsided" (SPHU: 198f). The British people were ready to rally behind him to win the war, but found in him neither the human ideals nor the calming assurance required for rebuilding their society after it. The fact that his leadership was accepted but only for the time being, while the war was on, shows an archaic merger of followers with their leader did not predominate in British society at large.

A group or society with political savvy will turn to a messianic or charismatic personality during a time of difficulty

not primarily because it has recognized his skills and his efficiency, but because it realizes that he will satisfy its need to identify with his unquestioned righteousness or with his firmness and security [respectively]. (SPHU: 198)

The importance of political savvy is evident too in contemporary South Africa. The kind of leadership-cum-followership suitable for attacking the injustices of

apartheid, one that thrived on courageous denunciation, is inappropriate for a post-apartheid era in which the positive yet diverse contributions of all have to be welded into a new society.

### 17.8 When Leadership Counts

Although not mentioned by Giddens, there are certain historical events in which both social systems and structures are transformed. The commonly accepted situated practices of the social system are not followed, as people no longer keep within the limits of what is expected of them. The balance between autonomy and dependence changes. This arises from some people involved in a given situation suddenly bending the rules and altering the distribution of resources. Admittedly, every criminal or 'way out' person tries this, but the resources (access to power) and rules (especially sanctions) that others draw upon do not usually allow their deviance to extend very far. But there are historical instances, where "both structural and systemic patterns are redirected, reconfigured, or replaced" (Cohen, 1989: 90). This may be for either better or worse.

An example of the former is when Rosa Parks decided on December 1, 1955 not to obey a bus driver's order to give up her seat to a white passenger who had boarded the bus after her. This took place in Montgomery, Alabama, where Martin Luther King Jr was a newly appointed pastor. Her action was taken up and supported by others, and so sparked the civil rights movement of the American South. It was an instance where a departure from the usual structuring of a face-to-face situation led to change coming over the whole social system.

A recent example was the drama being played out between President Yeltsin and his supporters, the conservatives in the Russian parliament, the supreme court and the people on the streets. It is likely that the outcome of this face-to-face

showdown, where rules are being stretched and resources contested, will considerably affect the overall social system of Russia. What is at stake is not just the political fortunes of a few individuals, but the country's whole political system. At this point, the destiny of both is intertwined.

This, incidentally, explains why attention to the 'founding history' is so important for understanding a social system, whether this is a political system, a religious denomination or order. The activities of social reformers, revolutionaries and religious founders are continually examined and recounted, so as to provide guidance and justification for the present. Furthermore, insofar as the resulting system remains a subject of controversy, disputes will continue about the founding history, in particular, about what the leading figures meant or intended and what were the unintended consequences of their actions.

In each case the unintended consequences of a particular action led, not to the reproduction of the social system as it was more or less before, but to a very extensive and unforeseen realignment of it. Although the actors involved did not fully know it at the time, their social interaction carried the seeds of a different social system.

## Part IV — Recapitulation

These last three chapters have fleshed out the overall theory presented in Part III. They have outlined the most prevalent types of social evil found in the modern world, and how these can reinforce one another. But, as far as explaining how social evils persist, they show that no single scheme accounts for them all. They do not all have a common structure. These chapters have also addressed the interrelation of self and society, and how the effects of evil persist.

As far as justice, communal support and the enhancement of human life are concerned, widespread and persistent flaws may occur in any or all of the four institutional clusterings of modernity — capitalism, industrialism, surveillance and the state control of violence. Considered abstractly, flaws are not intrinsic to the structuring of modern society. Though, unless trends inherent within each of these institutional axes are kept well in check, many people will be adversely affected and the development of their lives and relations curtailed.

Although a state monopoly on the control of violence is preferable to a country divided among war-lords, this may lead not only to unchecked aggression on the part of the police and military authorities, but to their outlook and ambitions coming to dominate society and even direct the economy. When this is further combined with the use of technically sophisticated surveillance systems, then the whole population may be brought under totalitarian rule. Although unstable in many respects, as it cannot cope with all the variant demands of modern society, totalitarian rule may still continue as a single political party led by a dictator enforces it with a reign of terror.

Under these conditions, there is no social check for the worst manifestations of

archaic narcissism. In fact, relentless animosity and hatred may even be openly encouraged. The worst effects of narcissistic hurt and rage, namely, a lack of respect for otherness, inflexibility, emptiness and pervasive suspicion, also become prevalent. A totalitarian dictatorship fosters and plays upon these weaknesses in the self in order to keep people's fearful allegiance. It does not recognize any other human qualities as socially beneficial.

Similar manifestations of narcissistic rage will occur when a society is deeply divided or its economy is collapsing, as each fragmented unit will think first of its own physical and psychological survival. Even in more normal times a large number of people have suffered narcissistic injury, due to a combination of slights, neglect, rejection on a personal level, as well as cultural deprivation and living conditions that offer nothing worth aspiring to. The resulting fragmentation in the self may be capitalized upon either by a pathological leader or through consumerism.

When people have no selfobject milieu to sustain them and consequently lack self-esteem, they long for a cause or leader with whom they can merge. They seek a movement that will make them feel great and important. In their regression to archaic narcissism, they are drawn to someone whose self is formed around archaic grandiosity alone. This gives him or her a heightened sensitivity to the wishes, fantasies and fears of people in their anonymity. While seeming to offer them a way forward, such a pathological leader ultimately fails them as he or she is completely out of touch with other aspects of reality.

Consumerism plays particularly on the emptiness of self experienced by many. Their unsatisfied and largely unrecognized yearnings for autonomy, identity, relationships and personal maturity are presented, often through advertising and conspicuous consumption, as the need to acquire, possess, display and use an

ever-novel variety of goods and services. The gap between satisfying fundamental human needs and the momentary assuagement of desires is never closed, so people remain frustrated and seek relief in purchasing another round of attractive goodies.

While surveillance, the collection, storage and analysis of information about people is necessary for normal administration in a state or province, it can become excessive. Especially when combined with the threat of violence or administrative sanction it can lead to the curtailment of free speech, democracy and other human rights. The tendency of surveillance is to either disregard needs that do not fit into its system or label and treat associated activities as deviant. This tendency may gain a momentum of its own, and not be directly under anyone's control. People continue to collect and marshal information as without it state administration would collapse, but no one knows quite what has been collected about them or how it might be used.

Related to widespread surveillance is the feedback of information and theories about how a society runs into conscious direction of activities within that society. In this process of reflexivity, one is not just reinterpreting more or less settled tradition to fit new circumstances, but applying the provisional insights gained from science to reconstitute those same circumstances. Instead of offering more certainty about the workings of society, reflexivity makes it less clear what should be done to improve the economy and social conditions. Since people are less fixed in one lifestyle, their response to any proposed measure and/or its expected results may easily subvert those results. This helps reveal why certain social evils are so intractable.

Reflexivity also helps explain why ambitious schemes of social engineering fail. Because of the circularity of social knowledge or 'double hermeneutic' any attempt to direct social progress along a pre-determined path only increases the

likelihood that it will follow a different route. When this is not realized and instead even more determined efforts are made to push people along the theoretically determined route, then massive repression and needless suffering result.

This brings out how society works neither as a vast machine nor as massive organism, certainly not one which you can control from outside as an operator or operate on as a surgeon. Even speaking in artistic terms is only helpful, as long as it is remembered that the artists (and in various ways that is all of us) are themselves being reconstituted by their interactive involvement in the art work. We are not just sculpting a fresco, but are also figures being sculpted in the fresco ourselves, and we respond both consciously and in ways we don't always avert to to the changes going on both within ourselves and in others. The overall result is that we are all reflexively reassessing and redesigning the fresco, ourselves included, as we go along. Not only that, when one figure makes a slip with a chisel, others not knowing better may readily copy it, or they try to ignore, accommodate or counter it. The overall result is that one is involved not only with the original slip of the chisel, but reflexively with other's positive and negative reactions to it and one another too. This metaphor may help show that in society there is no end to the convoluting and looping back that can take place. Like art it is recursive, but open-ended.

To a considerable extent, the same may be said of the self. As a reflexive project, it is not only concerned with conditions and objects, but re-incorporates knowledge about its past and reflections of its own dynamics into its own self-understanding. In a post-traditional society, where both activities and knowledge about them are continually being recast, any perception of who one is remains continually open to revision. This not just an academic problem, but a troubling personal issue. That is why in modern society, self becomes such a continual



concern of self. Narcissism ceases to be exceptional, as the self has always to reincorporate its own past narrative reflexively into a viable project. Usually the more it has been sustained in the past, so as to gain a firm self-selfobject relationship, the more easily it can accomplish this in the present. But if weakened or fragmented by past experience, the less realistically can it accomplish this now. Instead it may readily turn to archaic identifications with leader figures and movements that cannot deliver the security they so grandiosely projected.

These vicissitudes of the self take on a more than individual character in situations of ethnic, national and gender conflict. There one is demeaned, slighted, exploited or attacked, not because of what one does or has, but due to some inherited characteristic which is inherently part of one's self. Such narcissistic injuries can distort the whole way one understands oneself, one's people and their relation with others. Contradictions along these lines may be allied with the division of labour, ownership of property, occupation of territory, asymmetries of authoritative power, and contradictions concerning who legitimates what kind of behaviour. When these fault lines coalesce, instead of cutting across one another, then the ensuing conflict is likely to very deep-seated.

This also occurs along time-space edges, where two societies or cultures with vastly different power for organizing time and space meet. The one capable of organizing across a wider span of time-space is likely to dominate the other society, which has less access to resources, more restricted sources of information, and if it comes to the worst less fire-power.

The spread of industrial technology both offers opportunities for human development, new forms of life, travel, communication and cooperation. Communications technology makes us all one world, where local problems become inextricably intertwined with distant or global arrangements. Resulting

from this is not an increasingly transparent world, but one where ontological security depends upon screening out possible sources of disturbing information. Besides the fact that no one could assimilate the mass of information available, much of it of doubtful quality and relevance, it would be too disturbing to weigh all the alternative viewpoints, consider every risk they indicate, and assess each suggestion for action. Without being unduly prejudiced or narrow-minded, one has to limit oneself, if anything in life is going to be accomplished. This leads to various dilemmas for the self, where a person is neither sure what she or he could or should do.

When, however, this necessary limitation of outlook is combined with social reflexivity, it can lead to an internally referential approach to reality. Only what fits in with the driving forces of society, namely, with the inherent logic of capitalism, industrialism, surveillance and the control of violence, is treated as worthy of attention. The result is that the traditional bonds of families, associations and local communities are dissolved, and the values enshrined in them are lost. A further result is the sequestration of experience, in which areas of life, such as illness, suffering, insanity, death and mourning that cannot be commodified are left out of account. Insofar as the poor are noticed at all, their problem — not ours — is taken to be lack of commodities. (Just as I am checking this, the doorbell rings and a young man is there hungry begging for a slice of bread.) This limited approach to life leaves people humanly impoverished as they no longer know how to cope and grow through these experiences.

Capitalism is the most widespread and deeply penetrating institution of the modern world. This is only in part due to its reliance upon spreading consumerism. It also stems from its way of converting not only movable goods, but land and labour power too into monetary values. Land with all its human attachments can then be alienated. Labour, although freed from direct coercion, is still

subject to the necessity of entering into a labour contract with one or other employer who has much more allocative power, and in fact is usually backed by the authoritative power of the state. While the play of a free market might provide the best indicators of supply and demand, capitalism left to its own internal logic is totally insensitive to other indicators of human well-being, such as communal memories, solidarity, health, sanity, affection and celebration.

All these points could be elaborated ad infinitum, but that would still not provide one comprehensive theory of modern society and its ills. In fact, the roots of many social evils only become apparent when social movements engage with society in order to assist in its transformation. Only through reviewing the outcome of their actions, which rarely turn out fully as intended, they then reveal something more of the social structure than was previously known and therefore unacknowledged. Only when one, or rather a group, seeks to transform society do they begin to understand its structuring and how firmly embedded are many of its flaws. They are reproduced, typically in some of the forms mentioned, above as people draw upon the prevailing social structure to produce action.

# Theology of Social Sin

In this last section there is a return to more explicitly theological issues, but let us hope enriched by drawing upon insights from the human sciences. A full theological discussion of social sin would not limit itself to describing its origins and workings in the self and social process, as this study has done, but go on to show how it might be overcome. While the recognition of sin is integral to Christian faith, it does not stop there. Faith also holds out a redemptive hope for both self and society to be transformed. Only some hints, however, are given on that in this concluding section.

The shift between this and the previous sections is from speaking of 'structural evil' to 'social sin.' Briefly, to speak of a 'structural evil' is to point to a persistent degrading on a collective scale of human life. It is a condition in which people cannot fully sustain the level of justice and sociability necessary for supporting and giving a true direction to one another's lives. Structural evil stands in ethical opposition to the common good. It is not simply a conjectural term removed from experience, but one that can be used to name and decry, for example, the bloody and longstanding antagonism endemic in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, the economic system which steadily increases the gap between rich and poor across the world, or the way in which so many women and men find they can only bring the worst out of each other in their inter-relations. Abhorrence at these structural evils is not limited to members of any

one faith or theological school. Anyone can recognize and condemn them simply as anti-human, though discussion would still need to continue about the most appropriate terms and standards to apply. To find a clearer language in which to understand 'structural evil,' and not leave it as an unexamined residual term, this study has turned to psychology and sociology for insight. Another study might have drawn on contemporary literature or relied more on news reports, and so illuminated 'structural evil' from a different viewpoint. Whatever viewpoint is taken, any investigation of 'structural evil' — whether it concentrates on particular instances or looks for an underlying theory as this study does — is in principle open to normal human experience, reflection and ethical discussion.

A further step is being taken when one speaks of 'social sin.' Although dealing with the same reality, the approaches of ethics — that is ethics not exclusively linked to any religious belief — and Christian theology are somewhat different yet also complementary. This study does not take the view that the *content* of Judaeo-Christian ethics has descended from on high, as though it were imposed as an extra grid over the usual human experience and argument about how people ought to live together. However, it recognizes that Christian community must always *critically appraise* the socially accepted views on how people should live. This appraisal is made in the light of its tradition of faith, not in order to replicate the past, but so that it might discover anew the teaching and witness of the prophets, of Jesus and his followers. That will involve discerning closely what is evil in accepted structures, outlooks and activities to denounce it, whatever inadequate to supplement it, whatever good to ratify and extend it. In short, it sees the dialogue-cum-interaction among human beings as an inner moment within the dialogue-cum-interaction between God and humanity. Both these dialogues encompass every human being both personally and collectively. Hence in working out how people should live together and what measure of

support they should give each another, one's response must be appropriate for both these dialogues. To put this in a simple formula: our ethical obligations as human beings arise from our having a responsibility to God for one another. So in failing one another we sin against God.

This is not the place to justify this position, but it is not one without precedent. Old Testament writers entered into a dialogue with the laws and ethical opinions of the Babylonians and Egyptians, ratifying some and correcting others in view of their faith in Yahweh. Paul did much the same with the mainly Stoic outlook of his time. Thomas continued this practice by taking over and adapting the newly re-discovered writings of Aristotle to give them a Christian perspective. The social teaching of the Catholic Church derives from examining current social issues and attempting to discern where within them the Holy Spirit is leading towards a fuller humanity. As new issues arise this process of reflection, dialogue and critical appraisal has to continue. Overall it comes to form a tradition of teaching, in which later statements and writings may clarify, but can also obscure, earlier positions.

It should hardly need to be pointed out that this approach is markedly different from the fundamentalist one. Fundamentalist ethics — whether Jewish, Christian or Moslem — regards what is written as a divine injunction valid for all time and places. It makes no distinction between spirit and letter, content and ratification, immediacy and tradition.

In speaking about sin, a proviso has to be made. Judging in any given instance exactly who has committed sin and their degree of guilt has to be left to God. No science or human authority is in a position to make that condemnation in any final sense. One can and at times should point out that certain activities or that promoting a particular policy are sinful, but the final judgment on persons is not

ours to make. This is one reason why speaking of sin differs from a psychological diagnosis of pathology, or the assessment of a social situation. The human sciences, useful as they are for counselling individuals and guiding social action, do not themselves anchor people's deepest assumptions. Nor do they inspire, though they might cast some light upon, people's ultimate aspirations. That anchoring and inspiration, which theology tries to elucidate, derives from a trust in God who is revealed in the Word and actively given to humanity in the dynamism of the Holy Spirit.

A classical way of describing how that combination of divine revelation and involvement in human affairs works itself out is in terms of faith, hope and charity. Many other aspects could be explored, such as the role of the Christian community, or the accomplishment, example and continuing influence of Jesus Christ. These, however, will have to remain in the background as this study concludes with a consideration of how social sin relates to charity, faith and hope.

In Part One questions were raised about the theological propriety of speaking about 'social sin,' especially since only an individual human being could be a perpetrator of sin. This question, along with that of individual culpability for social sin, is tackled in relation to charity or self-giving (Chapter Eighteen). Social sin, besides resulting from injustice, a lack of sociability or the absence of the normal give and take of charity, also derives from a lack of faith. This is particularly so when people out of pride set their human projects up as a way of developing their lives and world without God (Chapter Nineteen). However, this lack of faith is not simply due to the pride of individuals, it also has a social origin. It stems from the widely held hope of Western society that by our own human efforts within time paradise on earth may be regained. This optimistic hope, which Giddens terms a 'providential outlook,' has with the coming of

high- (or post-) modernity been deconstructed. This makes way for a renewed but less calculative understanding of God's providential care for those called to become his people (Chapter Twenty). Although the prevalence of social sin prevents the straightforward expression of that care, it does not thwart it completely. By continuing to witness to God's care for all people, especially the most vulnerable to structural evil, the hold of social sin may over time come to be lessened.



## Social Sin & Culpability

“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer,  
he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror;  
for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like” (James 1:23-4).

The digest of church statements and theological documents (Part One) brought to light the controversy of speaking about ‘social sin.’ The central objection was that sins resulted from the free, knowing and deliberate action of individuals people decisively rejecting the good that led to or maintained their unity with God. Society, on the other hand, did not undertake actions and so was incapable of committing sin. Those making this objection “accuse this language of denaturing what is most profound in sin — that it is the fruit of a personal and responsible freedom;” to this González Faus replies:

Sin also means that which God rejects and cannot accept in any way. Therefore denying the notion of structural sin is equivalent to saying that the present situation of the world (and in particular the third-world countries) is not a situation that arouses God’s rejection and anger. Accepting the notion of structural sin means we are saying that the relationship of all humanity with God has been degraded, precisely because of the degradation in the relationships of human beings to one another. (1993: 538)

This is not just an academic question, but undergirds a political and existential

stance that bears upon one's personal activities and the direction of church policies. As Faus indicates, probably the best way of clarifying whether 'social sin' is a legitimate term is by examining what it is opposed to. Does it throw light on the human rejection of God and his purpose? Before looking at that, however, help can also be found in the long controversy over *concupiscentia*, a term which operates with a similar logic.

### 18.1. A Parallel with the Controversy over Concupiscence

The disputes in recent decades over whether the term 'sin' can rightfully be applied to the structures of society echo earlier theological disputes over the nature of 'concupiscence' and its relation to original sin. At root is the interpretation of Paul's letter to the Romans. These disputes began with Augustine's controversy with Pelagius, continued with the tussle over semi-Pelagianism and later in arguments between the medieval schools, reached their height with Luther and the Council of Trent, and lingered on in responses to the teachings of Baius and Jansenius. With such a long irritating history (see Vanneste 1975, Rahner 1961, Jedin 1961), it is not surprising that some theologians have been acutely sensitive about extending the notion of sin to include social structures.

The extreme Augustinians, for instance, took the view that human freedom was completely destroyed by the sin of Adam; concupiscence took control because humans had become slaves of the devil. This was most evident in, though not limited to, sexual passion. At the other extreme were the Pelagians, who held that after the fall human freedom still remained intact. An intermediate position was adopted in 529 at the Council of Orange, which declared that through the sin of the first man human freedom is bent and diminished (*per peccatum primi hominis ita inclinatum et attenuatum fuerit liberum arbitrium*, DS 396). The positions are somewhat comparable to those who at one extreme see human

beings as completely dominated by sinful social structures, or at the other those who regard people as totally free agents. In between are those who recognize the limitations that structures impose.

In medieval times, Anselm of Canterbury defined original sin as the absence of the original justice (*privatio justitiae originalis*) that ought to be present in humanity. Taking a more Augustinian line, Peter Lombard identified original sin with the fiery stirrings of sin or concupiscence (*fomes peccati, scilicet concupiscentia vel concupisibilitas*, both quoted in Vanneste, 1975: 120n). Thomas Aquinas combined these views by saying that materially original sin is in a certain way concupiscence, but formally speaking it is truly the lack of original justice (*peccatum originale materialiter quidem est concupiscentia, formaliter vero est defectus originalis justitiae*, IaIIae 82, 3). The appropriateness of applying Aristotle's distinction of matter and form is doubtful, but his main point is that a lack of order in one's relation to God results in one's human powers becoming disordered too. In a somewhat similar fashion, the lack of a right relation to God results in various persistent social disorders.

Mention (see 3.3.3 and 15 intro above) has already been made of how the phrase "arising from sin and conducing to sin" (*ex peccato est et ad peccatum inclinatum*), originally coined by Augustine to characterize concupiscence and then taken up by the Council of Trent (DS 1515) can also be applied to social sin. This formula anticipates what Giddens speaks of as the 'duality of structure.' (Unfortunately, Augustine's phrasing was not always so measured and clear, with the result that his rhetorical warnings against passion have sometimes been taken up too literally.)

The Council of Trent recognized that concupiscence remains after baptism as a form of testing, which does not harm those who by the grace of Christ do not

consent but resist it strongly (*ad agonem relictā sit, nocere non consentientibus et viriliter per Christi Jesu gratiam repugnantibus non valet*). It also points out that in those regenerated by grace concupiscence has never in a true and proper sense been termed 'sin' (*nunquam intellexisse, peccatum appellari, quod vere et proprie in renatis peccatum sit*, DS 1515). Likewise, social structures cannot be called sinful in the full sense of the word. Nevertheless, unless a person at times refuses to go along with the prevalent trends in society, he or she will be led into sin. Being regenerated is not solely a matter of grace working internally, but of identifying oneself with a new community that attempts to draw upon rules and resources different from those of society at large.

Many of the theological difficulties over concupiscence stem from the confusion between two ways of speaking: experience-near confession and admonition over against an experience-distant inquiry into the dynamism of human life. Karl Rahner comments:

If from the first point of view concupiscentia appears as a power opposing man in his very depths [with all the shattering impetus attested to by St Paul, St Augustine and Luther], and driving him on to moral transgression, from the second point of view it presents itself as something immediately given with human nature, and so really a matter of course, 'harmless', indeed almost necessary. (1961: 348)

The second aspect is apparent when one considers that the arising of desires, whether for food, affection, warmth, sexual relations or social accomplishment, is in itself perfectly natural and normal. Without that dynamism, life would hardly keep going. But the arising of desire never occurs simply 'in itself' or in the abstract; it always attracts us existentially to particular persons and things. Actual desires or experiences of concupiscence are never morally neutral; they are either inclining us towards what is wholesome in life and good for human relations or leading us away from that. In the latter instance, that of sinful

concupiscence, particular desires become intensified and even obsessive; satisfying them comes to preclude the wellbeing of the person as a whole and relations with others (see 8.5.2 above).

Here again the discussion over concupiscence parallels the conflict of views between Freud and Kohut over the Oedipus complex (SS III: 334ff). In Freud's view this is an inevitable phase in life when it is crucial for the growing boy to curtail and eventually sublimate his drives of lust and aggression. Freud's whole mechanistic view of human beings presents these drives as having a force all their own. In some instances that will doubtless be close to experience. Kohut, however, does not leave matters there. He grants that an oedipal phase occurs, but says that it will only develop into a complex with all the conflicts Freud depicts if there is a more fundamental weakness in the structure of the self. Due to a lack of selfobject support, normal displays of affection and assertion are reduced to drives with a power all their own. In other words, such drives are not the normal human condition, but — no matter how prevalent — are in fact products of the disintegration of the self.

Nevertheless, it must be added that sinful concupiscence is not confined to the dynamism of the sensitive appetites, to the disordering of affection and aggression. Nor is it limited to the rebellion of what is 'lower' in human nature against what is 'higher.' As Rahner warns, "there is just as much danger from the Luciferan heights of the spirit as from the dark depths of the purely sensitive" (1961: 354). Similarly, sinful social structures are not limited to those that promote debauchery and brawling. They may also result from and in turn encourage excessive pride in the high and exclusive culture of one's society, or be evident in a prevailing atmosphere of cynicism, despair or self-righteousness.

## 18.2 An Analogical Understanding of Sinful Structures

Although the Council of Trent did not mention Thomas' views on analogy, it left room for them. This is evident in its declaring that although concupiscence may be spoken of as sin, following Paul in his Letter to the Romans<sup>29</sup>, this is not understood to be sin in the true and proper sense of the term (*vere et proprie*, DS 1515). In other words, it is not the prime analogate.

For Thomas, analogy differentiates the senses in which a term may be applied, but brings out the connection between the various applications (Ia 13, 6). For instance, the prime analogate of 'health' is a healthy person, but one can meaningfully speak of 'healthy exercise,' a 'healthy diet,' 'healthy urine,' a 'health resort,' and a 'healthy complexion'; all of which either contribute to or manifest the health found in a person. However, to speak of a 'healthy bank balance' might over-stretch the analogy.

Regarding sin, the prime analogate is deadly sin. This results from an action knowingly and freely committed (or omitted) that in severing the bond of charity between ourselves and God cuts us off from the source and goal of our life (*Unde quando anima deordinatur per peccatum usque ad aversionem ab ultimo fine, scilicet Deo, cui unimur per caritatem, tunc est peccatum mortale*, IaIIae 72, 5). On the other hand, if an action is only defective in charity and stops short of cutting us off from God, then it is a venial or non-fatal sin (*quando vero fit deordinatio citra aversionem a Deo, tunc est peccatum veniale*, IaIIae 72,5). Thomas makes the point that deadly and non-fatal sin, like death and a bout of flu, are not different species within the same genus, but are related analogously. The full weight of sin is not found in non-fatal sin, though it is still related to deadly sin (*Peccatum autem veniale dicitur peccatum secundum rationem*

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<sup>29</sup> Rahner rightly questions the adequacy of Trent's interpretation of Paul. "Certainly it is very doubtful whether it is really concupiscentia as such alone which St Paul calls ἀμαρτία. ... [though it] includes concupiscentia as an element [or partial factor] in its concrete concept ... and even stands in the foreground" (1961: 347ftn).

*imperfectam, et in ordine ad peccatum mortale*, IaIIae 88, 1 ad 1). Likewise, original sin may rightly be called sin by analogy with deadly sin; although inherited rather than the result of one's action, it too cuts one off from God. Like deadly sin, original sin cannot be overcome by any purely human effort, but only by the power of God (*reparari non potest per aliquod principium intrinsecum, sed solum per virtutem divinam*, IaIIae 88, 1). Regarding both original and personal deadly sin, we all stand in need of redemption.

So long as account is taken of the difference between univocal and analogous ways of speaking, there is nothing wrong in speaking of 'social sin.' Care has to be taken to avoid giving the impression that society as such could be an active subject of sin, as persons can. Bertuletti (see 4.9 above), forgetting that persons never exist on their own without any relation to society, is therefore wrong to speak of it as a theological 'impertinence.' John Paul II has tradition behind him when he says that "situations of sin ... obviously have an analogical meaning" (R&P, 16; see 2.6.2 above). Though account must also be taken of the proviso about not taking his speaking of "a veritable structure of sin" (EV, 12; see 11.6.1 above) in too objective a fashion.

### 18.3            **The Force of Speaking in Terms of 'Sin'**

Recognizing a dreadful situation to be the result of social sin is not a neutral description. It is not just an inevitable misfortune or merely a physical evil — such as a tornado or earthquake — that one must cope with as best one can. Precisely because and insofar as it is *sin*, one has the duty to resist it with all the ability one can muster. Or rather (so as not to sound too Pelagian), one is called to witness effectively to the redemptive power of God and be an agent of reconciliation. This will initially involve the non-acceptance of misleading images, distorted rules and defective resources. That in turn may lead on to active

measures to change the prevailing images, rules and resources that people draw upon for their actions. If, by contrast, one does not put up any resistance to what one recognizes as social sin then one inevitably begins to take on and align oneself with its destructive dynamism. Once the sinfulness inherent in social structures is recognized, neutrality is no longer possible. So, although one is usually not guilty of having brought sinful social structures about, one would become guilty of sin (*culpa*) if one simply accepted them without question.

#### 18.4 Sin as a Denial of Love

Since sin is at root a lack (see 11.4 above), its true quality (or absence thereof) is brought out by considering its opposite, namely charity. Thomas is quite clear that the very character of deadly sin lies in its opposition to charity, which consists in loving God above all things through disposing oneself and directing all that is one's own towards him (*actus peccati mortalis contrariatur caritati secundum propriam rationem, quae consistit in hoc quod Deus diligatur super omnia, et quod homo totaliter illi se subjiciat, omnia sua referendo in ipsum*, IIaIIae 24, 12). The attainment of perfect charity is found in reaching and dwelling in God without seeking anything from God for ourselves (*caritas attingit ipsum Deum ut in ipso sistat, non ut ex eo aliquid nobis proveniat*, IIaIIae 23, 6). This greatest of all divine gifts is not perfectly achieved all at once, but by a process of growth. One act of charity prepares the way for charity to grow by further inclining a person to act charitably next time (*quilibet actus caritatis disponit ad caritatis augmentum, inquantum ex uno actu caritatis homo redditur promptior iterum ad agendum secundum caritatem*, IIaIIae 24, 6). But the full flowering of charity, when a person is actually drawn at all times with the whole heart into the love of God (*totum cor hominis actualiter semper feratur in Deum*, IIaIIae 24, 8) is impossible in this life due to human finitude; a person also has at times to attend to the necessities of maintaining life and health.



In English a difficulty arises as soon as one speaks about 'charity,' as it evokes images of fund raising, handouts, soup kitchens and jumble sales. 'Recipients of charity' may feel held at a distance and protest that their impersonal treatment is 'as cold as charity.' The original richness of *αγάπη* and *caritas* has been lost and now needs to be reclaimed. How best can these terms be translated? The word 'love' has its own set of problematic connotations. Also, it does not allow one to distinguish *amor* as a passion from *caritas* as a quality enlivening all one's activities. So, following Leslie Dewart's suggestion (1969: 371 fn 20), I will usually speak of 'self-giving.' Although this term does not catch every nuance of *caritas*, it brings out well how *caritas* flows from and reaches to the depths of a person. It avoids the impression that 'acts of charity' are simply one kind of activity on a par with others. Self-giving, instead, can suffuse, enliven and give a lasting depth to all kinds of well-directed activities. This is why Thomas speaks of it as the fulfilment of the law (*per caritatem tota lex impletur*, IaIIae 65 3sc). It enlivens the virtues (*forma aliarum virtutum ... effective*, IaIIae 23, 8 ad 1; see also 8.4 above), so their exercise is other-directed.

It is impossible to wrap *caritas* up in a neat definition, because both the demands it makes and the benefits it brings continually open out as a person grows in self-giving. Nevertheless, as far as relations with our fellow human beings are concerned, it may be characterized as that self-giving which enables the other — whether a person, partnership, group, community or society — to grow in their own life and being. This view is in line with Paul's view of *αγάπη* as upbuilding (Romans 14:19; 15:2). Though it must be added that the capacity to give ourselves depends upon our first having received from others' self-giving: a Johannine teaching (I John 4:10) borne out by Kohut.

Opposed to self-giving is sin, which thwarts the creative budding forth of life and so distorts human development. To use an electrical metaphor, the effect of sin

is not like switching the current off, but leaving the wiring intact. It is more like a power surge that half-burns out the wiring to leave a live but malfunctioning circuit. This is much more dangerous and difficult to handle than a dead circuit. In a similar fashion, sin does not just halt human growth or turn social development off; instead of these forces being creative and life-enhancing, they become destructive. All the concern, energy, attention, application that would otherwise go into bringing the best out of oneself, others and one's situation is now directed to selfish pursuits at others' expense, even their deliberate suffering and destruction.

### 18.5 Structures that Thwart Self-giving

Thomas likens the effect within a person of committing deadly sin to that of drawing the blinds so that sunlight is instantly excluded. In the same way the sinner is immediately cut off from the welling forth of God's love (*caritas statim deficit esse in anima per hoc quod obstaculum ponitur influentia caritatis a Deo in animam*, IIaIIae 24, 12). God's love does not cease, but the deliberate sinner refuses to respond to it. Either by locking on to a lesser good, or exalting the spontaneity of the self as something to be pursued for its own sake (see Ernst, 1954: 68f), he or she rejects the divine self-giving. It should be added, to distinguish this view from situation ethics, that although the core of deadly sin is found in the refusal to respond to God's love, other moral criteria are needed for determining which actions are (or are not) actually sinful.

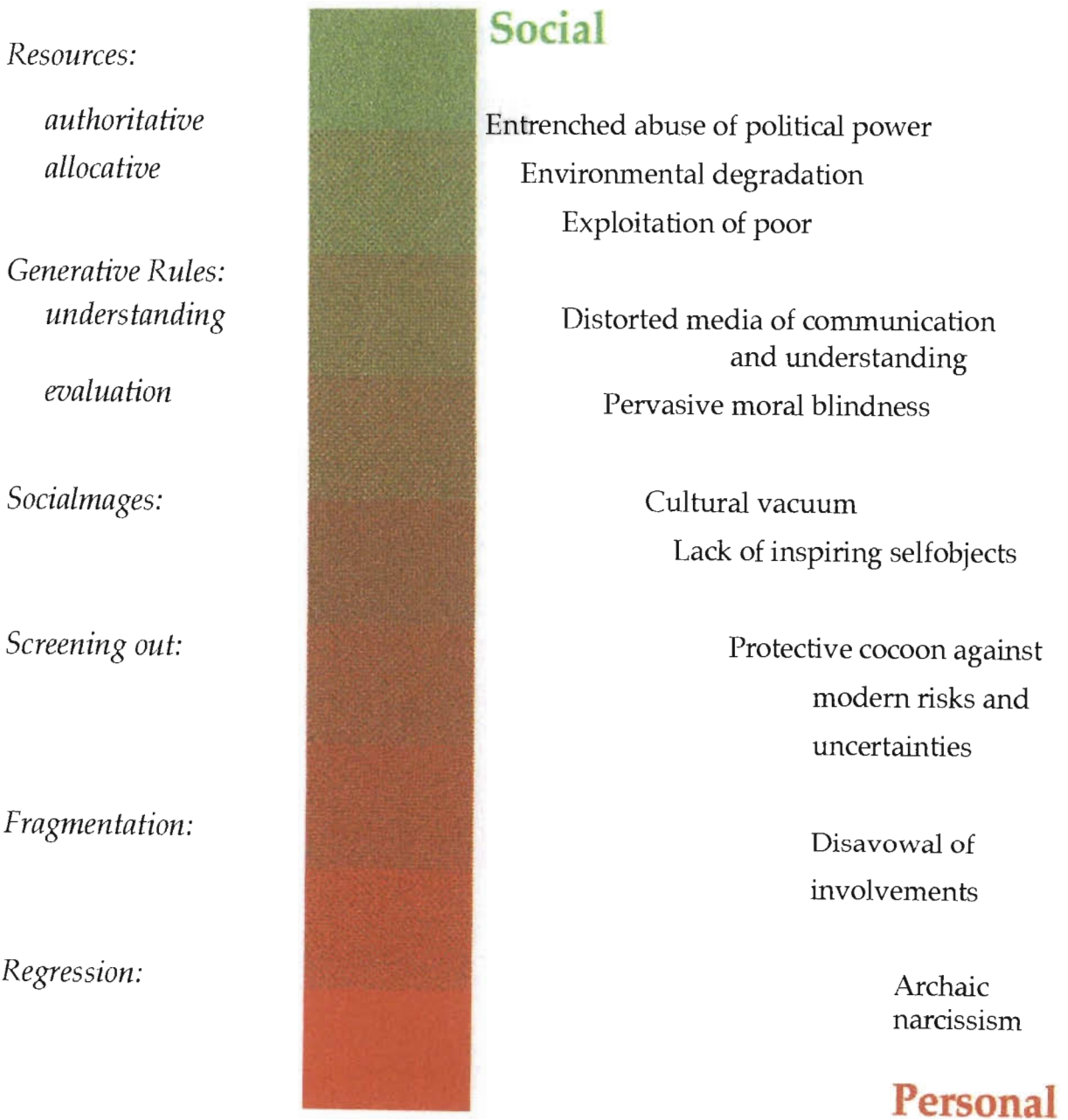
The effect within a person of social sin might be likened to being only able to see through opaque glass. It lets some light through, but distorts the images. Due to social sin, none of the requirements of God's love can be either seen clearly or handled correctly. Yet darkness is not total. Consequently, there is an inability — though not a refusal — to give oneself in such a way that others are built up in

their lives and among themselves. Presuming that a person does not connive with social sin but acts in good will, social sin nevertheless weakens that person's action from within. His or her actions are debilitated by their having to draw upon defective structures in order to produce them. Their defectiveness is over and above the ordinary limitations of human ability; for example, that no one knows everything or can acquire every skill. Instead, it stems from wounds and distortions introduced by past sins, whether of neglect, weakness or malice. Consequently, insofar as the self is wounded or its ability to give twisted, it cannot but reproduce defective structures for others singularly and collectively. This accords with the principle that no one can give what he does not have (*nemo dat quod non habet*, see IaIIae 81, 3 arg 2), but in the case of self-giving it refers not to an external possession like money for alms, but to the wholesome communication of self.

To make this more concrete, attention will be given to the ways in which the various kinds of structural defects are likely to undermine from within people's ability to be self-giving. Defects already noted on an institutional level could be traced back to distorted rules and deficient resources. These might be linked and compounded by misleading social images, which both result from and encourage an archaic identification of self with society. In addition, fragmentation within the self is partly a result of the very complexity and vastness of modern society, and contributes to its incomprehensibility. All of these structural defects, which are drawn upon and reproduced as people interact with one another, can weaken, thwart or misdirect people's ability to give of themselves so that others may develop as full human beings called to show forth the image of God.

The following sections dealing with how social sin thwarts love thus provide a résumé of its manifestations. These, as it were, can be arranged across a spectrum ranging from institutional factors that are more social and external to the

individual to personal factors more internal to the self. But just as all bands in the spectrum combine to produce white light, so all these factors are combined in any situation of social sin.



**Fig 18** *The Spectrum of Social Sin*

### 18.5.1 Inadequacies over Social Resources

The maldistribution of allocative resources — whether land, housing, raw materials, equipment or produced goods — is usually the most evident and immediately felt manifestation of social sin. The lack of sufficient resources curtails self-giving in two ways. The first is obvious in that you cannot support others effectively, if you do not have the wherewithal to do it. The very obviousness of this truism can easily obscure a deeper problem. Although shortages occur due to harsh conditions, floods, fires, drought and various accidents, persistent mass poverty is mainly due or certainly heightened by social injustice. This is why the poor often rightly demand, “Justice, not charity!” when it comes to providing the necessities of life. But that is not the whole story, because the insatiable demand for goods and possessions may arise from a more fundamental breakdown in people’s sense of self and solidarity with others. This is not always averted to. Widespread consumerism can foreshorten the perspective of both rich and poor, so that increased production and wider distribution appear to be the answer to all social problems. Without denying the need in many instances for more goods, concentrating upon them alone can be a way of escaping the patient self-giving required to build up identity, creativity, participation and affection among people. Unlike allocative resources, these resources are increased by use and sharing. That, however, is more demanding on the self.

Many examples of injustice are evident in the systematic abuse of authoritative resources, in which power over people is exercised to their detriment. This may be backed at a high level by the system of government or locally by prejudice and malicious gossip. Addressing this evil is certainly but not only a matter of justice. If justice alone is sought, then one is for ever taking action against the other who has infringed one’s rights, countering threat by further threat. Oneself and the other forever remain at loggerheads with little scope for the self-giving that

offers to accept the other. The prevailing social set-up lacks the resources — avenues in which self-giving may be recognized and reciprocated — for breaking out of this double-bind. Usually only an outside party, or occasionally a highly exceptional individual, can overcome the mutual antagonism and enable each side to begin to trust the other.

While the just distribution and interchange of resources, both allocative and authoritative ones, between members of society is necessary for it to function properly, that is not enough. It lacks that underlying acceptance of each other that provides a suitable setting for trading in a free market, making contracts and defending one's own rights. It overlooks the sociability (*amicitia*) that must temper competition, the striking of deals and litigation, if society is not going to be torn apart by individualism. Account also has to be taken of the rules and images that bind society.

### **18.5.2      Distorted Understanding Leads to Misguided Love**

For self-giving really to benefit and not undermine others, actions must be guided by insight and understanding; good will and fine intentions by themselves are insufficient. If the generative rules that give rise to meaning are socially distorted (see 12.5.2 and 14.6.1 above), then people cannot reliably communicate, understand one another correctly or plan effectively. An instance of this is when people rush in to alleviate others' distress with the wrong kinds of help; by throwing money at social problems, or by supplying arms, they usually aggravate instead of tackle the underlying issues. This approach is the opposite of the 'intelligent love' that Lebret says is required if people are to be helped to develop their own lives and society. Denis Goulet explains Louis-Joseph Lebret's view that

...intelligence without love can only breed a brutalizing technocracy which crushes men, whereas love without disciplined intelligence is inefficient, leading to amateurism, well-intentioned bungling, and, ultimately, catastrophe. The reason is that chronic structural evils cannot be corrected by subjective good will, but only by a concerted transformation of structures, a task which presupposes a rigorous and detailed understanding of how structures work. Lebreton refused to accept the simplistic choice: *either efficiency or humanization*. He understood that efficiency was indispensable; but he also knew that it had to be redefined so as to serve human values. (1974: 33)

Centuries earlier Thomas had brought out the strong connection between practical wisdom (*prudentia*) and self-giving. The notion that love is a blind and rather arbitrary surge of affection is far from his view of self-giving. He emphasizes the strong link between self-giving, by which we attune ourselves to God as our ultimate end, and practical wisdom, which gives direction to all moral activity (*Ad rectam autem rationem prudentiae multo magis requiritur quod homo se habeat circa ultimum finem, quod fit per caritatem, quam circa alios fines, quod fit per virtutes morales, IaIIae 65, 2*). Thomas, however, does grant that even without the self-giving that directs us towards God, a person can still strive for good but limited ends, such as maintaining civic wellbeing (*Si vero illud bonum particulare sit verum bonum, puta conservatio civitatis vel aliquid huiusmodi, erit quidem vera virtus, sed imperfecta, nisi referatur ad finale et perfectum bonum, IIaIIae 23, 7*). Undertaking this even when no special difficulties arise will still require practical wisdom. When, however, great difficulties do arise and times are not normal — if they ever are! — then each citizen and especially those in positions of authority will need to be guided and sustained by more than their humanly acquired abilities. In dark times they will need to be continually drawn onwards step by step by a sense of the community and self-giving that God's love makes possible. Their generosity and concern for others will lead them to analyze the situation and seek out what can best within the given circumstances be undertaken.

Genuine self-giving that has others' good at heart and practical wisdom continually build upon each other. The first leads one to inquire what will really benefit others, while the more their situation is understood the more complete and effective can one's self-giving become. The interplay between the two need not always be fully conscious; at times it may be worked out discursively, but it may result from a more or less unconscious deepening of one's motivation (see 12.4.1 above). Empathy is both developed and put at the service of others (see 13.2 above). Furthermore, the more a person has the ontological security that she is supported by the self-bestowal of God and neighbour, the further she will dare go in both inquiry and action (see 12.4.2 above).

In human affairs, no situation is ever so clear that when action is undertaken no unforeseen and undesirable consequences can arise. Self-giving requires that one be on the watch for them, ready to revise one's understanding and generous enough to correct one's action instead of carrying on regardless. If, however, people have no inkling that the socially accepted ways of understanding they rely upon might be distorted or deficient, then even their best efforts to do good for others will still not bear much good fruit. One is obliged not simply to be sincere and do one's best, but also bound to search for the truth about one's situation. Finding it may be disturbing as it breaks open the protective cocoon that one has spun in order to screen out too much reality. Prophets are unpopular as they bring into focus aspects of reality, that society has over time carefully screened out.

### **18.5.3 Pervasive Moral Blindness**

Much the same can be said about socially induced misperceptions of good and evil (see 14.6.2 above). If the generative rules that people draw upon to conduct



themselves in ways society approves are confused or misleading, then even with good will they are likely to result in their harming one another. So long as someone takes on the outlook of a society that sets no great store on honesty in speech or over possessions, or does not encourage respect for the life, sexuality and good name of others, then he or she is unlikely to acquire any sense of caring for others. Without the elements of justice and respect, self-giving is impossible.

Even though a society may not be morally bankrupt or verging on anarchy, it is likely to have number of blindspots. In course of carrying out their usual activities, its members draw upon and reproduce rules that exploit sections of the population or generally demean certain areas of life generally. The poor stake that many rural workers have in the economy would be an example of the former, or the inability to stick to any commitment an instance of the latter. If this the condition that everyone routinely experiences, it is unlikely to occur to anyone that their society could draw upon different examples and follow another routine. Although a useful distinction can be made between the interpretive and normative defects in the rules that structure society, the two actually go hand in hand. A society has blind spots when people are unaware both of what they might do and the good effect it could have. These may even be enshrined in inept and/or morally perverse legislation.

#### **18.5.4 Social Selfobjects that Paralyze**

Since society, or at least some of its dominant cultural aspects, comes to form a selfobject for many of its members, it helps shape a people's 'group self', their particular combination of ideals, ambitions, skills and talents (see 13.6 above). This is not to say that being a member of a society is for everyone like being a pea in a pod. There is usually plenty of personal variation due to the influence of significant individuals — initially parents, teachers, siblings, and later friends,

spouses and social leaders. Nevertheless, all these individuals themselves draw upon and portray aspects of their society which extend beyond their own personalities. In expressing themselves, they mediate their culture in its actual richness or poverty, its health or pathology, its human values or dearth of them, its sensitivity or crassness. Whether the former or latter of these alternatives predominate in a society depends upon whether or not its artists, interpreters and political leaders are in empathic contact with the experiences, needs and strivings of its members (see 13.6.6 above).

Even relatively stable cultures, quite apart from those breaking down, have their weak spots in that the possible selfobject they offer is inadequate for building up a firm, cohesive and well-rounded self. This puts a constraint within the self upon people's ability to be self-giving. For instance, male and female members of a society whose culture exalts a machismo image for men and spiteful bitch one for women will have difficulty relating to one another. There are no channels or cultural forms that would allow them to get in contact with and cultivate within themselves, or appreciate in others, anything but an exploitative relationship.

Some of Kohut's followers have used self psychology to examine how socio-cultural factors lead to an impoverishment of the self. Marvin Zonis looks at "certain patterns of childrearing in the Arab world that might be expected to result in an array of narcissistic imbalances among Arab males" (1980: 443). Mark Gehrie (1980) touches on the difficult position of Japanese women and how they cannot always give phase-appropriate mirroring for their children. Kohut himself mentions (SS IV: 572) the impossible ideal, fostered by Western individualism and backed by Freudian theory, of the self attaining complete independence so it ceases to rely upon any nurturing support from others (see also Olthuis, 1989). To do each of these cultures justice would require much more investigation, but the overall point holds: culture as it is actually portrayed in

any given society is not always a fully satisfactory selfobject for the development of the self. In those areas in which a society is deficient, there will also occur weaknesses in the self. These weaknesses will in turn make it difficult for a person to be in empathic contact with others and their needs, and hence inhibit the ability to be self-giving in a way that would enhance others' lives.

### 18.5.5 Screening out the Other

Self-giving in which one supports another requires that one has something in common (*mutua benevolentia fundatur super aliquam communicationem*, IIaIIae 23, 1), that one recognizes others to be present as human beings. Not only might they be perceived as having needs, but also appreciated as a potential gift to oneself; not just as beggars, but possible cooperators, friends and fellow celebrants in life. However, in order to cope with life amid all the conflicting messages, cries, appeals, rumours, information that might impinge upon one, certain concerns must be screened out (see 16.3 above); one along with others in a similar social position spins a protective cocoon. One cannot take on all the risks and burdens that people may experience. To attempt that would be counter-productive. This means that one's self-giving to others must be selective, but therein lies the danger of screening out people who really need one's help and support.

Thomas, speaking of almsgiving in his much more circumscribed society, recognizes that one cannot be expected to provide for the needs of everyone, but that we should attend to those who would go without aid if we did not help them (*illa sola sine qua is qui necessitatem patitur sustenari non potest*, IIaIIae 32, 5). This poses a challenge today to look out for those who would otherwise be overlooked by social welfare and aid agencies.

### 18.5.6 The Fragmentation of Self-giving

As has been mentioned, splits in the self may be of three kinds: vertical splits in which some activity is carried on but disavowed, horizontal ones that lead to the repression of guilt feelings, and that between wanting or seeking an outcome while refusing to take moral responsibility for it (16.6.1). When extreme, these splits will lead respectively to what are classified as 'behavioral disorders,' 'personality disorders' and 'sociopathic personalities.' They may be so pathological that the individual is either cut off from or a recognized danger to the regular running of society; these instances can be left aside here. What is of concern here, however, are not the extreme cases, but that large number of people with a somewhat fragmented self who for the most part function normally in society. Through their regular interactions, they both help shape society and are in turn shaped by it. The overall result in society of any splitting in the self is the sequestration of experience or the systematic overlooking of areas of moral concern. This in turn, particularly when an area of experience appears too threatening, may reinforce and appear to normalize splits in the self.

As far as self-giving is concerned, the overall effect of any split within the self can be fairly easily delineated in general terms, though when it comes to particular instances the effects will be infinitely varied. Splitting affects both a person's ability to bestow *self* and relate to *others*. Within the self, a split both leads to a person having an unreal image of self and prevents the drawing together of all his or her potential in concerted action. In relation to others, a split can screen out some categories of people or aspects of their lives so they are neither appreciated nor treated as others in their own right. The biblical injunction that one must love with all one's heart, soul, strength and mind (Luke 10:27 and parallels) underlines the importance of striving to overcome any splitting within the self.

### 18.5.7 Regression into Self

The complete contrary of self-giving is evident in archaic narcissism (see 16.7 above), where a person ceases to have any respect for others and treats them with pervasive suspicion and inflexibility. In this condition, any genuine self-love is lost as the person is emptied of self-esteem. Regression to this state is not simply due to difficult social conditions, which a resilient self — sustained by a suitable selfobject matrix — could fight against. Regression is also due to narcissistic wounds that have already undermined a group sense of self-worth.

### 18.6 Social sin: A Limitation on and Spur to Self-giving

In human affairs, no single action will make a person's life — let alone a whole society's — come completely right or go totally wrong all at once. Reorienting all one's attitudes, abilities and activities takes place gradually and cumulatively. Each action both draws upon the existing social structure and reproduces it. Though each action in reproducing the social structure may also modify it for better or worse, making it more or less easy to be self-giving so that others' lives, selves and relations are built up. So, although someone may spontaneously decide to be self-giving instead of exalting himself or pampering herself at others' expense, he or she cannot accomplish this fully and effectively through one decision.

Thomas points out that the acquisition of a strength (or weakness) in one's character comes not through one, but many repeated actions (*habitus virtutis non potest causari per unum actum, sed per multos*, IaIIae 51, 3). Though the gift of charity, the disposition towards self-giving, may be acquired in a moment of conversion, it still has to grow in intensity and effectiveness. Those who love let themselves increasingly come under its influence and are drawn more and more to express it through their actions and (*subjectum magis et magis participat*

*caritatem, idest secundum quod magis reducitur in actum illius ac magis subditur illi, IIaIIae 24, 5*). This will entail struggling with all one's tendencies, whether dangerous passing emotions (*passiones*) or deeply rooted weaknesses of character (*vitia*), that incline one against self-giving. On the other hand, one deadly sin, though it does not take away all ability to do good, is an action that marks a halt in the personal attuning of all one's life and abilities with God's love. All in all, human character strengths — the ready ability to act sensibly (*prudentia*), treat others fairly (*justitia*), tackle difficult tasks (*fortitudo*) and keep one's balance (*temperantia*) — are built up or lost gradually. Which will occur, largely depends upon whether or not a person is self-giving enough to persevere through many seemingly inconsequential activities in self-giving.

A similar interplay occurs in relation to social structures. Although people may each personally endeavour to give of themselves for others' benefit, they are all likely to be somewhat hampered in their efforts due to the sin embedded in the social structures that they have to draw upon in order to act at all. The condition of their society, of which they are also part, lets them neither perceive fully nor express completely in action the state of mutual self-giving they might aspire to. In this respect, social sin distorts and even blocks the expression of genuine self-giving. As it is patterned into the way one as a person must relate to others, it is to a certain extent inescapable. Nevertheless, seeds of social change are present even within seemingly insignificant actions. No one action can alter everything, but since any action does involve the exercise of power, however minimal, it can be carried out in such a way that it may slightly alter the conditions under which subsequent action — one's own as well as that of others — will take place. For instance, a lone protest against authoritarianism or entrenched exploitation may effect nothing immediately, yet still inspire others, now or later, to combine against it.

Still, challenging a situation of social sin requires considerable courage, an understanding of how the system works and its weaknesses, and a willingness to accept suffering. But that is only enough to defy it, not transform it. If its underlying rules, resources and empowering images (selfobjects) that people draw on to produce their actions and reproduce social institutions are not changed for the better, then social sin will remain. Overcoming social sin will involve bringing about a more equitable distribution of resources, living by rules that are less deceptive, and putting forth new images of personal worth and social cohesion. Participating in such a 'redemptive' endeavour will require both intense and persevering self-giving. Examining how one might in this way share in God's work of transforming society must be left to a later study, but enough has been said to indicate that social sin may not merely thwart self-giving but also be a spur or challenge to its ever-renewed expression.

### **18.7 A Lock on Self-giving**

Another way of depicting the effect of social sin on self-giving is to regard it as a bind that locks the variant movement of freely and responsively directed activity into an inflexible pattern. In this vein David Bohm has observed that: "if any pattern of movement is established and starts to become repetitive, then that is a kind of disharmony. ... [unlike electrons] it's not part of the harmony of human beings to continually repeat a pattern" (1985: 57). Charity or self-giving requires that at times one must repeat what one has done before, but at other times innovation is required; social sin demands either deadly conformity or mindless innovation. Self-giving requires a respect for otherness to be balanced against treasuring similarity amongst people; the social sin of apartheid was to exclude otherness, while that of treating people only as 'masses' imposes a conformity that rules out genuine difference. Forgiving and asking forgiveness are part of self-giving on a social as well as collective scale; the attitude of denying that the

latter are necessary, because past wrongs were simply miscalculations or carrying out one's duty, is a manifestation of social sin. Another instance of where social sin locks people into almost compulsive behaviour is consumerism; the cycle of production–distribution–consumption becomes so accelerated, not in order to benefit people but for the sake of accelerating the cycle still further. The double binds that stereotyping along lines of age, sex, class, race, or nation bring about are other instances. In each case, people are locked into a bind that precludes responding creatively, for the development of their own and the enhancement of others' lives, to their circumstances.

## **18.8 Self-giving and Culpability**

One question has dogged this whole study, namely: how blameworthy or culpable are individual persons in relation to the sinful structures of their society? How can this be judged? Dealing with these questions has been delayed until now, because it is only in the context of self-giving that one can begin to offer an adequate answer. Here it is necessary to distinguish whether one is judging a person as a whole, or only their involvement in some specifiable wrong.

### **18.8.1 The Unique Story of Each Person**

Although many people's stories of their lives may share a common social background, without which they would not make sense, still each person has her or his own story to tell different from those of others. Each story, however cowardly or heroic, is unique; it is never just another instance of the same collective tale. Each person with varying degrees of insight and freedom can relate his or her own self to society in different ways. Not realizing this was the mistake d'Harcourt (1946; see 3.2.1 above) made in branding the average German



— that is more or less everyone — with the ‘collective guilt’ of the Nazi crimes. There is no one formula for settling everyone’s degree of guilt in relation to apartheid, Yugoslavian ethnic cleansing, Rwandan genocide, or complicity in economic exploitation. Each person has his or her own story, mixed with stories of their families, neighbours, fellow workers, colleagues, with the tales of their relations with superiors, subordinates, leaders, teachers and dependents. Each story is likely to recount moments of awareness or of blindness, of a willingness to face uncomfortable realities or attempts to evade them. Probably it will tell of escapism and procrastination as well as definite efforts — for a longer or shorter period — to find out and do the truth. Each story will thus begin to reveal how and to what extent a person was involved in social sin, as a willing or unwilling collaborator, or as an innocent or not-so-innocent victim.

The words “begin to reveal” are used, because no one is likely to be able to tell their full story with complete accuracy. As mentioned earlier (7.5) each person can only construct a self-narrative out of the rules, resources and enabling images or selfobjects that their society provides. If these are deficient, a person will not have the language, insight or confidence to grapple with all that is at issue. Furthermore, each story is still unfinished in a double sense. First, the individual through this exercise of reflexivity is actually recasting his or her self, with varying degrees of ability and honesty. Second, the repercussions of one’s actions in others’ lives are not yet complete. As Thomas points out when speaking of the necessity of a general judgment at the end of time, even though a person’s life ends in death, his or her memory, reputation (sometimes a false one), descendants, example, teaching, possessions and artifacts continue to affect others. All this is to pass under divine judgment, but that can happen on the last day when whatever pertains in any way to each person will be clearly and completely revealed (*finale iudicium in novissimo die, in quo perfecte id quod ad unumquemque hominem pertinet quocumque modo, perfecte et manifeste*

*diiudicetur*, IIIa 59, 5). At this judgment — however it might be envisaged — it is not collectivities as such, but individual persons in all their manifold relations to others, and with all their hidden thoughts and emotions, that will be judged. At present, however, no final verdict can be given about any individual as a whole. Certainly, people may not rightly all be branded or exonerated en masse, because of their belonging to a sinful society.

### 18.8.2 Judging Particular Actions and Omissions

It is sometimes necessary for a society to come to grips with its past, to recognize where it went wrong, find out who — if anyone — is blameworthy, learn from its mistakes, and heal the wounds where possible. Courts and commissions of inquiry, including the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa, are set up for this. As long as they do not attempt too much, they can serve a useful purpose. They can neither discover the whole truth in all its ramifications nor render a judgment on any person as a whole. They might, however, be able to make a judgment on a person's behaviour during a particular incident. Once it is established what a person did, or omitted to do, then as far as social sin is concerned, it must be asked whether he could reasonably have been expected to do otherwise. Or did the deficiencies embedded in the rules, resources and enabling images of society, together with any weakness in self structure, rule this out. Account here has to be taken of a person's upbringing, education, training, experience, position and background, to assess whether she could have used her power to act in any morally significantly different way. Inquiry also has to be made into whether or not a person took the trouble to try to find out what he was involved in; maybe he was kept in ignorance by others or maybe he kept himself ignorant. Consideration too is needed of how much she was emotionally swept along by events, or could have risen above her feelings. On these points there are no indisputable tests, but how a person

manages in other areas of life would give an indication of her or his personal abilities and freedom in relation to society.

In judging whether someone personally engaged himself in perpetuating a social evil, or was merely a victim caught up in it, two pieces of advice might well be heeded. In the first, Thomas stresses that anyone accused should be given the benefit of the doubt whenever hard evidence is lacking. It is better to be frequently mistaken in having good opinions of bad people than to be occasionally mistaken in forming a bad opinion of a good person. In the second instance injury is done to someone, not in the first (*Sed melius est quod aliquis frequenter fallatur habens bonam opinionem de aliquo malo homine, quam quod rarius fallatur habens malam opinionem de aliquo bono, quia ex hoc fit iniuria alicui, non autem ex primo* (IIaIIae 60, 4 ad 1).

The second piece of advice comes from an observation of Giddens.

As a leading theorem of the theory of structuration, I advance the following: *every social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he or she is a member.* ... But it is one that needs to be carefully elucidated. There are various modes in which such knowledge may figure in practical social conduct. One is in unconscious sources of cognition: ... [since] the mobilisation of unconscious desire normally involves unconscious cognitive elements. [Of significance too] ... are the differences between practical consciousness, as tacit stocks of knowledge which actors draw upon in the constitution of social activity, and what I call 'discursive consciousness', involving knowledge which actors are able to express on the level of discourse. All actors have some degree of *discursive penetration* of the social systems to which constitution they contribute. (CPST: 5)

Here Giddens challenges the easy excusing or explaining away of the harmful actions people do as being due to impersonal social structures. This leaves us, and the judges or commission members, with the question as to how far should

a person reflect on their tacit stocks of knowledge. How much ought a person look into the moral implications of their routine activities, which they easily and regularly carry out without having to stop to think about them? This question, however, can only be tackled —if not fully answered — with a context of self-giving.

### 18.8.3 Altruism not Meant to be the Whole Story

In order not to misunderstand the relation of culpability to self-giving, a word must be said about 'altruism.' Several times in his works, Kohut mentions that "the deeply ingrained value system of the Occident (pervading the religion, the philosophy, the social utopias of Western man) extols altruism and concern for others and disparages egotism and concern for one's self" (SS II: 619). He asks whether in neglecting, or even condemning, all narcissism or concern for the self, too high a demand is being put upon people. "The psychological demands which Christian ethics have made upon Western man may very well be considered as excessive, or at least as traumatically premature" (SS III: 124f). He then quotes Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Paul's first letter to the Corinthians as evidence that "Christianity insists on the complete neutralization of the grandiose self and of the egotistical purposes of the personality" (SS III: 125).

Undoubtedly, some Christian writers and preachers have given this impression, particularly when their words are quoted without regard for the audience. Telling those who are well-off, have the benefit of education, are in reasonable health and with a secure social position, to serve others and not be preoccupied with themselves is one thing. It is another to take that exhortation as a reason for persistently neglecting to strive for greater psychological maturity, educational advancement, cultural accomplishment and healthy living conditions. In times of crisis, admittedly, these benefits may have to be foregone for a while, but that

should not be taken as the norm.

It is surprising that Kohut can say that “for nearly 2000 years we have lived in a culture, particularly Western culture, in which altruism is the height of all virtue” (KS: 9). After all, the word ‘altruism’ was coined only in the nineteenth century by Auguste Comte to mean “the discipline and eradication of self-centered desire, and a life devoted to the good of others” (quoted in Lutz and Lux, 1988: 109). Its late naming does not mean that the idea was entirely absent before, though it is likely that Kohut is reading a recent notion back into earlier writings, particularly in view of his repeated insistence that narcissism has its own valid line of development and is not meant to turn into object love.

Thomas, for instance, does not say that one kind of love should banish another, but that loves should be ordered to the final goal of all people, namely their attaining beatitude with God. In this way God is to be loved as the source of beatitude, oneself as a sharer in it, one’s neighbour as a fellow participant in it, and one’s own body in that it will be taken up in glory (QD de Caritate, 7). This view sets out priorities for love in view of a fullness of life — for oneself and others — still to be granted. The basic criterion for a true exercise of love is not whether it is directed towards oneself or others, but whether it leads the loved one towards beatitude (see also 7.9 above). This will include recognizing in myself, in others and in my relations to others — including any clash of interests, enmity or antagonism — whatever might block our coming to a greater fullness of life.

As with any journey, it is no use ignoring blocks out of anger or frustration and driving on regardless. Even if they ought not to be there, one disregards them at one’s and often others’ peril. Once their reality is recognized and accepted, one can then find ways of avoiding, overcoming, or eventually removing them. That

in the end is more vital than seeking out the person who caused the blockage and cursing him. This, however, requires some patient self-giving.

### **18.9 Accepting Responsibility and Seeking Forgiveness**

Dealing with the long-standing social injustices and antagonisms that manifest social sin is more demanding than negotiating any blocks on a road. In this case, the obstacles are not entirely outside oneself, nor just found in others, but are part of one's society and one's own self too. All that one considers oneself and one's own — one's cultural inheritance, the historical accomplishments of one's people, social position and family upbringing — are to some degree marked by distorted rules, deficient resources and disabling social images. Unless one takes on a preparedness to recognize, accept and do one's best to overcome these obstacles, they will persistently undermine one's self-giving and be perpetuated in society. It is not that all social sin can be eradicated or all obstacles cleared away in a single clean sweep. But that as and when blocks become manifest in particular misunderstandings, suspicions, antagonisms, arrangements or institutions, they can each be dealt with. This will entail naming the evil plainly, admitting where it has had a grip on oneself and one's society, asking forgiveness of those harmed by it, and working out how to change the conditions that give rise to it. When that is achieved, probably other evils will become evident and so can now be dealt with. What is required is a general attitude of preparedness to admit and not evade evils when and wherever they might be found so that one can help build up the lives of others as well as oneself.

The necessity of asking forgiveness is often questioned. Why should I ask forgiveness for an action I personally did not do? If we as human beings were entirely separate individuals that objection would stand. However, besides being personal agents, we are also representatives of one another. In various ways we

belong to each other, and so can speak on others' behalf. A family descendant can apologize for the atrocities committed by long dead ancestors. A new leader of a nation may ask pardon for his or her country's attacking another, even though he or she was not yet born, only a child or in exile at the time.<sup>30</sup> In these instances, the person asking forgiveness is not admitting personal culpability; that would distort the whole notion of personal accountability for one's own actions. Nevertheless, when there is social animosity of longstanding if someone could but fails to render an apology, then he or she also become guilty of perpetuating the animosity. Though you are not the originator of an evil, you still have some obligation to avoid perpetuating its effects. After all, if you inadvertently walk into somebody as you both come around a blind corner, you normally apologize; not doing so would be taken as an affront. How much more important it is to make some gesture towards reconciliation when one has inherited a situation of suspicion and antagonism? This is not an obligation that can be weighed in terms of justice, but one that arising from charity or sociability.

In most instances exactly where personal culpability lies is not very clear cut. At one extreme, structural evils may have resulted from a deliberate intent to set up an organization in which people seek to assert themselves at others' expense. At the other extreme, rapid changes may have brought about the many "imbalances and contradictions" that the Vatican Council (G&S, 8) spoke of. In the first case, one can still ask why were people so embittered, or narcissistically injured, that they organized themselves to act out their hatred and malice. In the second, one may inquiry into whether in introducing changes people were culpably negligent. Were they simply taken by surprise, or could and should they have inquired further into the conditions of action that brought about the undesirable and unforeseen consequences? Did they act too precipitously and without

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30 There are problems here about who is entitled, officially or unofficially, to represent what group, and how much there needs to be prior or subsequent group consent. To purport to represent a group to which one did not belong, or on whose behalf one was not entitled to speak, would be regarded as an impertinence. These problems might be investigated in a study that looks into the transformation of social structures.

sufficient forethought?

In between these two extreme cases, many other questions about culpability might be asked. Was there inadvertence in an particular instance? Did someone or a group only think of their exclusive advantage? Did a key person fear to inquire further, or having inquired lacked the courage to challenge what was going on? Was people's thinking too restricted and consequently their capacity for action too confined to grasp what was taking place? Was that due to their not bothering to find out or their inability to sense the problem because of earlier negligence in their upbringing, education or training? When they did find out that previously unbeknown to themselves they were caught in perpetuating harm to others, what did they do about it? Did they still go along with injustice, even though they did not initiate it, as it brought them advantages? What, considering their own psychological resilience, were they capable of? Such questions could be pursued without end. To every answer further questions could be raised about either a person's freedom or ability to do otherwise — or the ability of those who influenced that person. But in practice the whole tangled skein cannot be unwound; we cannot reveal the precise degree of guilt of each participant throughout history.

Even with one's own self, we can seldom judge exactly where psychological incapacity shades into moral weakness. The dividing line between being a victim and a perpetrator of social sin is frequently blurred. Nevertheless, both states perpetuate harm to others as well as oneself, and so need to be recognized and struggled against.<sup>31</sup> What is important is not discerning the precise degree of personal guilt or innocence, but that one owns or avows that one has done evil. By facing that as an obstacle from within oneself, one has a chance of circum-

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<sup>31</sup> Caruso (1964) spoke of neurosis as material guilt. The person is not formally guilty, as she would be if she freely and deliberately committed the wrong, but is suffering and causing others to suffer the repercussions of a wrong not freely willed.



venting and eventually nullifying its influence. Disavowal, on the other hand, prevents healing from psychopathology, forgiveness of sin and blocks recovery from social evils.

There are times when it is important to separate the effects of psychopathology, personal and social sin, and other times — as outlined above — when trying to do so would be counterproductive. Concerning the former, but without going into a whole strategy for transforming people and society, one still has to make allowance for three types of failure. Even if social institutions were flawless — an enormous ‘if’ admittedly — each person still has the freedom to decide spontaneously to sin. She may without an provocation or excuse take unfair advantage of others, or he out of a lust for power and personal exaltation do others down. No institutional arrangement or modalities of structuration, such as the Garden of Eden, can obviate this eventuality entirely. Conversely, with no personal sin or ill will as a lingering effect — again an enormous ‘if’ — people may fail to cooperate and find themselves at loggerheads due to institutional or psychological deficiencies. In this case, social reconstruction or psychological counselling is called for rather than preaching conversion. Although all three might be linked, they cannot be collapsed into each other.

In this perspective, in which one seeks the ultimate wellbeing of both self and others, along with all that leads to it, culpability and past failures take on a different hue. Instead of trying either to establish one’s own guilt or maintain one’s innocence — or that of others — one accepts the past with all its faults as one’s own in order to work on and help redeem it. This could not be done, if one held oneself apart from past faults and failures as “nothing to do with me.” Nor does simply wallowing in guilt help, because that is often a form of self-pity that precludes effective action. Justification, in Thomas’ view, involves a turning to God and — it should be made clear — all that leads towards God as well as the

detesting of sin (*motus liberi arbitrii in Deum ... in peccatum, propter hoc enim ille qui justificatur, destestatur peccatum, quia est contra Deum, IaIIae 113, 8*). If one only goes on condemning or lamenting a past evil, and does not take on accomplishing whatever good one could do, one still remains tied down by it.

# Pride in a Godless World

“The form of this world is passing away” (I Cor 7:31).

This chapter is different from previous ones as it is not primarily concerned with moral failure, with sins of injustice and a lack of compassion for others. It looks instead at how weak or defective faith in God will lead to too close an attachment to society. This may be society as it is presently constituted, or a putative future society. The Vatican Council mentions the latter when it says:

Thinking that they have found serenity in an interpretation of reality everywhere proposed these days, many look forward to a genuine and total emancipation of humanity wrought solely by human effort. They are convinced that the future rule of man over the earth will satisfy every desire of his heart. (G&S: 10)

At the time of writing (1965), this statement would have applied preeminently to communism. Thirty years later, however, it is more applicable to those who with religious zeal advocate capitalism as the solution to all the world’s problems.

## 19.1 A Deeper Sense of Sin: Beyond Morality

The discussion of pride, especially of even good actions being interiorly corrupted by it, raises the question of whether the self is not implicated in sin in a

deeper way than through perpetrating evil actions. If even a sound character and good actions can be at least the occasion for pride (*superbia non oritur ex virtutibus sicut ex causa per se, sed sicut ex causa per accidens*, IIaIIae 162, 5 ad 3), there must be a more fundamental possibility of wrong in human affairs than the various sins people commit. Sebastian Moore, a contemporary Benedictine monk, gives a sense of this when he writes:

There is an ambiguity in the concept of sin that creates untold confusion. The two senses in the word 'sin' are: a defect that is predicted *of* the human condition; and a defect observed *within* the human condition, by some people in others, by some people in themselves, taking an enormous number of forms. The first sense has for its point of reference some order embracing the whole of reality and equated by the believer with the mind of God: in relation to this order it makes sense to say that 'man' fails, resists, refuses. The second sense has for its point of reference the *human* order as expressed in this or that culture, with the possibility that we may find a few offenses recognised as such by all cultures: in this order all offenses are judged in relation to the world of meaning constituted by man. (Moore, 1981: 32, italics in original)

In this passage Moore, admittedly, has personal rather than social sin in mind, but his point also applies to social sin. In distinguishing two senses of 'sin', he is not speaking about distinct types of actions, but two different horizons of meaning against which an action can be seen as sinful. He gives the following example:

On the one horizon of meaning, rape is the action of a man choosing his own gratification in despite of the dignity of another, of himself, and of the whole social order. On the other horizon, it is the action of a man choosing himself as he immediately experiences himself, against all possible and conceivable reality, against God. (1981: 33)

The first horizon of meaning depicts a world in which humanity is the centre;

each and every person is expected to uphold human values. Murder, rape, robbery and other such crimes are offenses against the world of meaningful relations that human beings have historically brought about. This world rightly centres upon humanity.

The second or ultimate horizon of meaning, however, depicts a world of which God, not humanity is the centre. Sin, in this sense, lies in the attempt to make humanity and even oneself the centre of everything, of all creation. Sin here is “the unreality of God” for the sinner. It is “the unreality of life other than the small portion of it that one calls one’s own and builds into immobility.” The sinner shows “a monumental indifference to the totality [of creation] of which one is a part” (Moore, 1981: 33).

In some cases these two horizons coincide, as in such socially condemned sins as murder, rape and robbery; these are quite evidently, though with some cultural variations, offenses against one’s fellow humans and transgressions of God’s whole purpose. Moore observes of such cases:

The human sense of self-centrality [over against God] is *more clearly recognisable* in some attitudes and actions than in others -- that is to say, in those attitudes and actions that society recognises as bad. It being always understood that society has some huge blind spots. (1981: 32f; *italics his*)

Moore’s distinction between two senses of ‘sin’ can be used, however, to throw light on those attitudes and actions that society does not recognize as bad. Society’s huge blind spots lead to and are maintained by social sin. All the instances of social sin outlined in previous chapters are of persistent failures to bring about a satisfactory human order in the modern world. They are thus defects within the human condition, but that is not the whole story as their persistence stems from people hanging on to a world of their own making, and a

very imperfect one at that, in preference to the world that God is bringing about.

Social sin involves a doubly sinful self-centrality: a failure both in morality and in faith. A system of economic exploitation or a culture of machismo, for instance, is within one horizon of meaning a moral failure; it degrades both rich and poor, males and females as human beings. Sin in this sense is the failure to strive for a world that benefits humanity as a whole. Instead, it brings about a world variously divided against itself. In going along with such social sins people are giving their support, with admittedly varying degrees of awareness and consent, to a social order that upholds their immediate sense of who they are. They are not letting their sense of self, derived from the prevailing social order, be disturbed by any consideration of the purpose of God. This second failing is one of faith; they take the prevailing society for granted, not daring to question its demands on them. They become captive to, what Moore terms, "the objects of our [their] expectations" (1981: 87), unable to come to terms with the transitoriness of both their own lives and their society.

To complete the picture, it must be pointed out that people can also fail in faith by totally identifying themselves with the best of their culture and civilization. While identification with a culture and civilization is necessary for human development, total merger with it becomes a way of not having to face the transitoriness of life and their own impending death. Their taking so much pride in human achievements, all of which might in their own right be commendable, becomes a way of psychologically denying their own creaturehood and contingency. By concentrating all attention on the conscious world of which humanity is the centre, they avoid facing up to that larger reality of creation in which humanity is not the centre. The most telling sign for a human being that humanity is not the centre is his or her impending death. This, like the involvement of human life in the ecological life process, can neither be fully understand

nor brought under human control. Faced with this prospect, “our egoistic self-importance leads us to see death, which is in reality simply part of the life process, as the end of what we consider as alone significant, the works of the ego” (Moore 1981: xi-xii). By “works of the ego” Moore is referring to any idolatrous attachment to the cultural products of society: the arts, law, politics, technology and even religion.

For this insight Moore draws on the work of the Ernest Becker. He recounts the effect on him of reading Becker’s book, *The Denial of Death*:

Becker showed me that the root [of all human evil] is in the very constitution of man as that evolutionarily bizarre phenomenon, the conscious animal: the animal who, *knowing* his total contingency, turns from it in fear and builds the idolatrous image of himself. ... Here was the validation ... of that sense of the human as less than human, of that subhumanity of culture, that has fascinated me for a decade. (Moore, 1981: xi)

Once the cultural products of a society are accepted and held on to as though they offered all meaning to life, they draw people down to a less than human level. They become a point of resistance to the love of God, which embraces death as well as life, failure as well as achievement, change as well as continuity, sacrifice as well as possession. On this horizon of meaning, sin lies in substituting the current world centred upon humanity for the world centred upon God. This is another instance of pride, the temptation for human beings to elevate themselves into gods. Pride in this way, not only manifests itself in moral evil, but corrupts good deeds and genuine cultural achievements. In presenting his view, Moore is echoing Augustine’s contrast between the humility of the City of God in which the love of God is predominant, and the pride of the earthly city where love of self dominates (*City of God*, XIV, 13).

Another manifestation of human self-sufficiency was the theological postulate of ‘a state of pure nature.’ According to this theory, in an unfallen world because

humans were created with the capacity of seeing God, then — quite apart from divine grace — God in a strict sense owed them this fulfilment.

In the 'purely natural world' where this creature lives, all idea of God's free gift is lost. ... Is there any real difference between such a hypothesis and the ideal of 'rational sufficiency' against which, when it first reared its head clearly in a Christian society, about the beginning of the thirteenth century, [Chenu declared] 'the Christian soul felt an immediate shock of horror, as faced with the concupiscence of the mind which was the completion of original sin'? (de Lubac, 1967: 62)

This was the issue facing Thomas Aquinas. He, speaking of this actual economy in which real people are situated, not just of a hypothetical pure state of nature, said that the vision of God, bestowed as God's gift, was not something arising from within human nature, but a completion given to nature (*Non est aliquid naturae, sed naturae finis*, Ia 62, 1).

Before proceeding with Moore's account of sin and its consequences, some suggestions in this line from Kohut need to be examined.

## 19.2 'Guilty Man' and 'Tragic man' in Kohut

A parallel to Moore's distinction between sin as a defect *within* the human condition and as a defect observed *of* the human condition is Kohut's differentiation between Guilty Man and Tragic Man. In moving beyond Freud's account of human life "in terms of forces (drives), counter-forces (defenses), and interaction of forces (compromise formations, such as the symptoms of the psychoneuroses) within a hypothetical space (the psychic apparatus)" (RESS: 223), Kohut brings out the other problems people face, besides those arising from seeking for pleasurable satisfaction amid moral censure and inhibition.

... these theories [Freud's] fail to do justice to the experiences that relate to the



crucially important task of building and maintaining a cohesive nuclear self (with the correlated joy of achieving this goal and the correlated nameless mortification of not achieving it) and, secondarily, to the experiences that relate to the crucially important striving of the nuclear self, once it is laid down, to express its basic patterns (with the correlated triumph and rejection at having succeeded or failed in this end). ... drive theory and its developments explain Guilty Man, but they do not explain Tragic Man. (RESS: 224)

Kohut explains that the tensions people experience in managing, and very often mismanaging, their drives towards pleasure in the face of external pressure from others and their own inner conflicts led him to speak of *Guilty Man* (see RESS: 132). "The (sexual and destructive) id and the (inhibiting-prohibiting) superego are constituents of the mental apparatus of Guilty Man" (RESS 243). In classical Freudian theory, the Oedipus complex with all its repercussions is central to the life of Guilty Man. Kohut does not dismiss this, but says it is not the whole story. Attention must also be given to

Tragic Man ... [who] seeks to express the pattern of his nuclear self; his endeavors lie beyond the pleasure principle. Here, too, the undeniable fact that man's failures overshadow his successes prompted me to designate this aspect of man negatively as Tragic Man rather than "self-expressive" or "creative man." (RESS: 133)

The special contribution of self psychology lies in its drawing attention to a person's seeking to attain the ambitions and fulfil the ideals laid down in the nuclear self. Between these two poles "stretches the tension arc that forms the center of the pursuits of Tragic Man" (RESS: 243).

The similarity between the Christian view of faith and hope and Kohut's Tragic Man is that both stress the importance of living in relationship to some source of power outside of themselves. Greenlee (1986) has examined the pattern of "relatedness-fall-restoration" common to both self psychology and Christian theology. Likewise, Olthuis states: "Self psychology's concern with the relational-

communal nature of the fragmented human self fits well with faith's concern with love, community, wholeness and healing of brokenness" (1989:315). It is not too difficult to see in the following passage echoes of faith, hope and love. In one of his last papers, Kohut describes Tragic Man as

an abiding self in need of nutriment for its establishment and maintenance and endangered by the flawed responses of selfobjects throughout life, a self falling ill (the fragmented, enfeebled, or disharmonious self) when the gap between the need for sustenance from selfobjects and the actual performance with which they respond becomes too great, or able to maintain itself courageously, despite selfobject failure, on the basis of sustaining responses it has experienced in the past and the confident expectation of renewed selfobject availability in the future. (SS IV: 521)

When the self is inadequately sustained through the lack of response and self-giving from others (failure in love), a living memory of sustenance received (faith) can offer the confident expectation of renewed relatedness (hope of life restored) in the future. It is not that faith, hope and love as gifts of God are no more than psychological states, but that while transcending the dynamism of human psychology they still operate within it.

### **19.3 Security rather than Faith**

Both the descriptions of people remaining within a protective cocoon so as to avoid risks and of a person not pressing forward to realize the aspirations, ideals and abilities laid down in the nuclear self are akin to a failure in faith. Taking a very general view, Raymond Panikkar speaks of faith as

this aspect of man which moves man toward his fullness, this dimension, as a result of which man is not closed up in his present state, but open to perfection, to his goal or destiny ... it is manifest as a fundamental act which opens us to the possibility of perfection, permitting us to attain to what we are not yet (1971 : 239)

In this view of faith, one that rather includes hope too, it is seen as orthopraxis, neither simply as belief in correct doctrine (orthodoxy) nor moral deportment (orthopoiesis). While both assent to well formulated teaching and moral integrity are necessary, they are not enough. A person can also fail by not going forward, by not welcoming and responding to what he or she is called to be, by not venturing beyond what has already been acquired. How much of such timidity or despondency may be due to sheer inability for which the individual cannot be blamed, or results from previous action and especially inaction will vary in each case. But even if no or little blame attaches to the individual, in many instances those responsible for his upbringing or for inflicting psychological damage will be blameworthy. Ordinarily, however, it is through faith that a person is both called and enabled to move beyond his present state and reach out towards greater wholeness.

This is made more explicit in Johann Baptist Metz's political theology. He says it is essential to Christian faith that believers challenge and move beyond the very individualized definition of self that Western society imposes upon its members. In his view: "The faith of Christians is a praxis in history and society that is to be understood as hope in solidarity in the God of Jesus as a God of the living and the dead who calls all people to be subjects in his presence" (Metz, 1980: 73). Faith calls believers to seek and realize through both action and reflection a new identity for themselves; no longer purely individually but in support of one another; no longer to be categorized solely by their function in society but as part of a wider movement embracing the dead (and — we might add — future generations) as well; no longer content with the role and value society assigns them but discovering each other and hence themselves as a new people before God. This kind of faith, as distinct from purely notional assent, offers a basis for making a critique of society and working effectively to overcome its shortcomings.

One of society's central shortcomings, its being too confining for the full flowering of human life and society, is pin-pointed by Panikkar when he says:

Modern culture is too accustomed to manipulating with ideas, parameters, people, ... and feels an understandable resistance to accept that there are absolutely non-negotiable, non-manipulable factors in life, because the very intention at somehow handling them destroys their very nature. The principle of property is not the supreme principle. There are things which we cannot 'have' because the having would amount to their radical annihilation. Faith belongs to those factors. We cannot have faith, as we have anything which we can have. (Panikkar, 1971: 254)

Faith is not a possession and does not offer the kind of security that possessions are expected in Western society to provide. Yet, out of fear of what the future will bring, many cling to possessions as they appear to offer some security against the unknown.

#### **19.4 When Adam meets Narcissus**

This century's discovery of social sin, together with the weakening of cultural assumptions under the impact of pluralism, has led to people questioning their culture and not going along automatically with the prevailing social arrangements. This has made possible a new perception of sin in the modern world:

With the cumulative loosening of cultural assumptions it is becoming possible to see the whole human project from the outside as a necessary denial of an equally undeniable contingency, and so to see our whole history as characterised by this denial. ... Evil is operative in us as the denial of our contingency through fear, and as the cognate fascination with ourselves. It is the inescapable narcissism of consciousness. (Moore 1981: 35)

This is evident in people wanting to make a name for themselves, as they did in building the tower of Babel (Gen 11: 4), a construction that was meant to put

them centre-stage.

Thus the myth of Adam, out of which the Christian tradition of self-understanding has spun its yarn, becomes wedded to the myth of Narcissus, in which the psychoanalytic tradition of self-understanding has seen the human trauma in its working-out. As the narcissistic interpretation of man breaks ... onto the ontological level, it pairs with the myth of Adam: the myth of Adam showing the price of *becoming* conscious, the Narcissus myth showing how that price is paid. (Moore, 1981: 35f)

In a world that is increasingly dominated by human effort and activity, in which most activity is reflexively organised, it is easy to humans to become self-absorbed, to be preoccupied with their own autonomy and self-actualization. Everything else, including even (suitably privatized) religion, becomes an adjunct to our becoming as gods — the original temptation put to Eve!

### 19.5 Ego rather than Self-transcendence

Another repercussion of a failure in faith is that a person refuses to move forwards to any greater perfection, but remains self-absorbed or closed up within himself. This is in line with Luther's description of sin as becoming turned in on oneself (*incurvatus in se*). Moore describes this condition and its frightening consequence:

The will-not-to-be desires to undo the order of being that represent this power [that calls man to being, to identity, to personhood, to himself], to make it not the case that man is called to an ever-greater intensity of selfhood. ... The most passionately protected thing in us is our mediocrity, our fundamental indecision in respect of life. Its protection will require, and will not stop at, murder. (Moore, 1981: 13)

This is one reason why people can be so fanatical and violent, when any person or programme threatens to expose the mediocrity and shortcomings of a society or social system with which they strongly identify.

## 19.6 The Inability to Forgive and Accept Forgiveness

Another reason why people identify with, hold on to and defend — both verbally and violently — a structurally deficient social order is due to the difficulty they experience in forgiving. They find it difficult to forgive not only others but themselves too, nor do they want to accept forgiveness from others. Forgiving is difficult because it breaks into one's self-esteem, it ruptures the protective cocoon of social expectations that have come to protect a person against too much reality.

This appears to be an underlying fear in those opposing a truth commission that will bring into the open the crimes committed in the struggle of defending and opposing apartheid. The issue is further complicated by fears about prosecution and revenge. But having to admit to oneself and acknowledge to others, not simply that one lost a battle, but that the whole social system upon which one relied to uphold one's identity and self-esteem was an inhuman sham, is a tough demand. Moore lays his finger on this when he states: "the deepest, most obscure and most unavowed obstacle to a total surrender to God's forgiveness lies in the way I look at other people, lies in the system, built up over the years, of expectations and evaluations and projections" (Moore 1981: 83).

A corresponding difficulty faces those who have been wronged, by either side, in the struggle. Their self-esteem as wronged persons or as victims may have come to depend upon regarding their attackers as people who could be nothing but attackers. It is crucial then to their own sense of self to immobilize the others. Whether it is a case of apartheid, industrial or national conflict, or sexism, we find that

the captive self imprisons others in the categories of 'objects of our expectation'. Even before they are judged unforgivable, they are extensions of my system of self-esteem. And this system, which totally breaks down when I receive the grace to

forgive an enemy, already is trembling in the balance when I understand that my expectations of others are stemming from what I am doing to myself. (Moore 1981: 87f)

What the person is doing to himself is trying to immobilize and secure his own self; trying to put himself in a position where he does not have to change. He either seeks a position where he is beyond criticism and so does not need to change, or abases himself as so evil and hopeless that he is incapable of change. An aggressor might readily adopt the latter option, as then he does not have to admit the good in himself that he is suppressing, whether deliberately or as an accomplice of the system, in harming others. It can be even harder to face and admit the injury to others that one has been involved in unconsciously, through going along with unjust social practices, than the conscious, deliberate injuries that one has oneself perpetrated. Conceding that one has been duped and neglected others, where one reveals evident deficiencies in the self, can be more disturbing than admitting self-assertive wrong-doing. But in either case, as Moore observes: "When you hurt another person, your true self, the lover in you, goes into hiding, and uses every possible ruse to stay in hiding. Even abject apology!" (1981: 98).

Without going into the whole dynamic of forgiveness, the point of interest here is that forgiveness breaks through previous ways of viewing and relating oneself to others. This holds both for those forgiving and those being forgiven. Forgiveness awakens both the offender and the one offended against, though not necessarily at the same time, to a person's true being that the offender rejected in committing his crime or even going along unknowingly with an unjust social system.

... the opening of a person to God's forgiveness, and the yielding of that person's basic stance in respect of others, may be experienced and understood as one same breaking-down of the normal system of self-esteem and self-denigration. To forgive

an enemy is to risk my whole system. To open myself to the forgiveness of God is to risk my whole system. It is the same risk. (Moore 1981: 88)

Since, however, asking forgiveness and forgiving others entails letting go of a known and somewhat secure past, and opening themselves up to new demands in their relations to one another, people are not always willing to risk it. They prefer to live within the prevailing system with all its attendant evils. Their failure has moral consequences but is at root a lack of hope, an unwillingness to go forward to the unknown future that God is preparing.

### **19.7 Pride Distorts the Understanding of Social Sin**

The double hermeneutic, in which technical terminology becomes reincorporated into people's everyday and personal understanding of their own lives, can occur with theology as well as the social sciences. Speaking of 'social sin' may be very helpful in that it enables people to see what forces they are up against and how deeply rooted they may be. But it can also become a way of justifying oneself, of distancing the innocent self from sinful society. With sin and evil being regarded as located elsewhere, one then has an excuse for not doing anything about oneself. All problems are seen as social and so no effort is made to change oneself; the self remains unconverted. This is another instance of how pride corrupts even good deeds. Any recognition of social sin should be an occasion for revealing and examining the deficiencies of one's own self-understanding, relationships and aspirations, so that one neither draws upon nor supports the sin embedded in the structures of one's society. Instances of this embedded sin are not limited to injustice and want of self-giving, but may also stem from a deficient faith leading to a misplaced hope (an issue to be discussed in Chapter Twenty).



## 19.8            Death and the Self

A further reason why people do not question or challenge the structural inequities of society is their inability to cope with the fact of their impending death. This may be obvious enough, when people do not rebel against a harsh military occupation, a totalitarian regime or rule by drug lords out of a wish to survive. Even if people have few illusions about the inherent evil of the polity and economy imposed upon them, many will simply put up with it as best they can. Not everyone is ready to risk their lives or livelihood either in an violent attempt at overthrowing those in power or even in working politically at undermining the prevailing order and replacing it.

Much more subtle, however, is the acquiescence given to the evils that are kept hidden below the surface in some affluent, consumer societies. Probing into their workings, asking about where and how it obtains its wealth, inquiring into how law and order are kept, often raises too many uncomfortable questions about the self. When the self is defined solely in terms of the predominant social order, when the construction of self-narratives is limited to what the prevailing consumer culture can offer, it is hardly in a position to question that society. Instead of facing the whole mystery of life which includes illness, suffering and eventually death, many people retreat into the protective cocoon that an affluent society offers. Moore describes what then takes place:

This is what is meant by the scripture's description of man as 'under the shadow of death'. It does not mean 'man knowing he will die' but 'what man *does* and *becomes* under this knowledge.' It is not to our mortality, our animality, that scripture offers a remedy. It is to the death that we become in our self-absorption. It is to what we allow death to become in us by fleeing from it in the hopeless pride of man. (Moore 1981: 70)

This fleeing from death is structured into many modern, affluent societies; it is a

negative aspect of the social structure, which is continually reproduced through the absence of resources to cope with it. The self has no place for death or anything reminding one of it on its career path. Modern society, which has lost many rituals for coping with the approach of death, the event itself and mourning, relegates it to being a private event, confined to hospitals, old-age homes and other places for the old and sick. The mutually reinforced result is that both self and society are out of touch with death and all that is associated with it.

A symptom of this is evident in the way modern culture centres upon the body as a symbol of the self, it places unprecedented value on “the youthful, sexual and trim body” (Mellor and Shilling, 1993: 413). A widespread expectation is that people will remain youthful, full of vitality and always capable of considerable achievement. Self-narratives are continually being rewritten to encompass past accomplishments (or to explain away failures) and to prepare for further achievements. But, as Mellor and Shilling remark:

the presence of death appears especially disturbing in this context [described by Giddens] of reflexively constructed self-narratives which have at their centre a concern with the body. After all, what could more effectively signal to the body-conscious individual the limitations of their reflexive ordering of self than the brute facts of their thickening waistlines, sagging breasts, ageing bodies and inevitable deaths? (1993: 413)

Much of modern culture, which draws people into a preoccupation with their own bodily selves, makes it almost impossible to view the self as part of a greater mystery that also encompasses failure, declining health, suffering, aging and death. Moore using slightly different terms sees this kind of self-absorption as the flight from death. “Man’s self-absorption is his choice of self-awareness as against his animality. It is the desperate and unavoidable choice of only one of the two poles of existence” (Moore 1981: 69). This choice — the exaltation of vitality at the cost of denying vulnerability — Moore adds, operates not only individually but

collectively. "The human race thinks it can go on with all its Narcissistic human normalities, of war, of politics, of religion, and that somehow the vast *other* side of the picture will look after itself" (1981: 69f). On the other side of the picture is all that is beyond the socially spun protective cocoon which protects the infantile narcissism fostered by modern culture.

The person graced with accepting that her self-worth and self-esteem does not derive solely from conforming to prevailing social expectations is free to question any shallowness in them. Their shallowness is cultural first of all as vitality is exalted but vulnerability shunned, independence exalted and dependence denigrated, self-absorption promoted but not self-transcendence. But when this shallowness remains unchallenged, faith too is weakened in several respects. Metz (1980) has shown that if Christian faith is to be genuine it must challenge the prevailing assumptions and outlook of bourgeois society. Otherwise society's presence to the subject (self) replaces God's presence; God becomes only a god of those currently living; without hope the striving for solidarity with others is lost. To put this another way, when the Reign of God provides the ambit for a person's self-understanding and is the source of her self-esteem, then she is not restricted to the role and self-understanding society offers her. This restriction may either be explicitly ordered and programmed, for instance in an educational system, or latent in the whole structuring of society.

Living in hope of the coming Reign of God transforms the rules and enlarges the resources, so that not only vitality and accomplishment but also death and all that leads up to it can become of value. Only through faith can a person and community live out what Moore calls "the blazing contrast between God-made-man and man-made man" (Moore 1981: 78).

## **The Deconstruction of an Idolatrous Trust in Providence**

“Come let us build a city and a tower with its top reaching heaven.

Let us make a name for ourselves,

so that we do not get scattered all over the world” (Gen 11:4).

The quality of one’s faith is shown in action, in particular in what one puts one’s hopes in and strives to accomplish. Likewise, any deficiency in faith becomes evident in misplaced aims and ambitions; either — to use a Pauline image — one holds back from stepping into the good works that God opens ahead of us or one reckons that salvation comes as the result of what one does oneself (Ephesians 2: 9f). The purpose of this chapter is not to discuss the relation of faith and works, but to examine how hope becomes socially misplaced when it is based upon an excessive vision of human abilities alone. The misplacing of hope is due, not simply to pride within individuals (examined in the previous chapter),

it also has a social origin. It stems from the widely held hope of Western society that by our own human efforts within time paradise can be regained on earth. The origins and growth of this optimistic social hope, or 'providential outlook,' have been traced in detail by Bob Goudzwaard in his book, *Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society*. This is a study of the root metaphors and hence enabling images from which Western society in general, and capitalism in particular, have drawn so much self-confidence, energy and direction. Yet, as Giddens indicates, this providential outlook is now collapsing as its own internal contradictions come to the fore; human effort and activity on a vast scale have not brought paradise within reach on earth. However, before dealing with these questions, some attention must be given to hope and how we might relate to it. It should also be noted that the discussion here focuses on temporal hopes, and does not examine how all hope might be fulfilled in eternity when all sin is overcome.

## 20.1 Imaging our Human Hopes

When it comes to thinking about hope and the future, we are more dependent than ever upon images and metaphors. Thomas explains that while we are still pilgrims the human heart cannot rise to grasp fully what eternal beatitude will be, it can only gain an general idea of it (*beatitudo aeterna perfecte quidem in cor hominis non ascendit, ut scilicet cognosci possit ab homine viatore quae et qualis sit, sed secundum communem rationem, IIaIIae 17, 2 ad 1*). Even when one thinks about the future in time, let alone eternity, any final description about what is going to happen would be an imposition on freedom. If we could not change our minds and act differently after hearing a prediction about the future, we would not be free. But if we do behave differently, the prediction will not come true. Consequently, expressions of hope do not give detailed descriptions of what the future will be like. Instead, their purpose is to help us orientate

ourselves so we may freely and with confidence deal with present realities in ways that respond to the brighter possibilities they hold out.

Nonetheless, even though we may be imbued with hope we can still fail to respond at all or do so in an inappropriate fashion. If we do not attain eternal beatitude, that is due not to any failure in the power and mercy of God upon which our hope is based, but because our free decision to sin prevents that hope from being realized (*aliqui habentes spem deficiant a consecutione beatitudinis, contingit ex defectu liberi arbitrii ponentis obstaculum peccati; non autem ex defectu divinae potentiae vel misericordiae, cui spes innititur, IIaIIae 18, 4 ad 3*). Images of hope, while enabling, do not depict eventual inevitabilities.

In his treatment of hope, Thomas cautions against the extremes of both presumption and despair. Both derive from a wrong understanding of what we can expect and achieve. Presumption arises when someone pursues some good that is beyond his or her ability to attain (*presumptio ex hoc quod aliquis tendit in aliquod bonum ut sibi possibile quod suam facultatem excedit, IIaIIae 21, 1*). While total disbelief gives up all faith and hope in God, despair is more particular: it is the non-acceptance in a particular case that anything good can be brought about. It is a practical denial of the effectiveness both of God's saving power and of human effort. Between these extremes lies hope, by which a person has confidence in his or her own gifts and abilities (*circa spem per quam aliquis de propria virtute confidit, IIaIIae 21, 1*).

These considerations provide a perspective in which to interpret any image of the future. Furthermore, since this final section compares and assesses several root metaphors that open or close off whole vistas for thought and action, it tends to be rather sweeping. It is not looking in detail at particular hopes and how they might or might not be realized. Instead, it tries to offer a valid frame-

work in which hope and social sin, which to some degree counters the realization of hope, may be given due place.

## 20.2 An Irenaean Perspective On Evil

This study has largely adopted the view of Thomas Aquinas that evil is a lack of the good that ought to be present, but that no being is totally evil. Before him, Augustine forcibly expressed this view, especially because it had enabled him to refute the teaching of the Manichees. He took it over from the Neo-Platonists, who had in their turn refined the views of Plato and Aristotle. Seen in this perspective, Adam's sin led to the fall from original justice, so that he could pass on neither full human integrity nor the special gifts that God had endowed him with to his descendants. What he now lacked, he could not bequeath to others.

The Augustinian view, mentioned above, does not exhaust the Christian tradition. It also maintains another view of Adam's fall and evil, that expressed by Irenaeus in the second century. John Hick sums up the contrast between the two views.

Instead of the [Augustinian] doctrine that man was created finitely perfect and then incomprehensibly destroyed his own perfection and plunged into sin and misery, Irenaeus suggests that man was created as an imperfect, immature creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his Maker. Instead of the fall of Adam being presented, as in the Augustinian tradition, as an utterly malignant and catastrophic event, completely disrupting God's plan, Irenaeus pictures it as something that occurred in the childhood of the race, an understandable lapse due to weakness and immaturity rather than an adult crime full of malice and pregnant with perpetual guilt. And instead of the Augustinian view of life's trials as a divine punishment for Adam's sin, Irenaeus sees our world of mingled good and evil as a divinely appointed environment for man's development towards the perfection that represents the

fulfilment of God's good purpose for him. (Hick, 1966: 220f)

Due to the theologically dominant position of first Augustine and then Thomas in most of Western Christianity, this Irenaean perspective has not been explored extensively. However, Segundo's attempt (1974, see 4.8 above) to explain the origin and significance of evil in evolutionary terms does take on some features of this providential perspective.

One striking difference between these two views lies in their adoption of different approaches to time and events. The Augustinian explanation of evil concentrates much more on the present, on what is now lacking and what more or less immediately should be done or not done. Irenaeus takes a much longer view and looks at what might grow out of the experience of past failings. His attitude is rather that of a grandparent who has already seen a generation of children making mistakes, getting hurt yet learning by the experience. The Augustinian attitude is more that of a parent warning his teenagers not to fall for the temptations now pressing upon them, as he once did: although they now appear alluring, you will soon discover their emptiness. Needless to say, both these approaches have their validity; neither makes the other redundant nor tells the whole story.

An attribute of human existence is the ability to relate our selves to time in several ways; for instance, dealing with each event as it comes, as well as taking a long term view, or joining in the rhythm of creation — daily, weekly and yearly. It should be pointed out that neither Augustine nor Irenaeus thought in Newtonian terms of time as an indefinitely extended but empty dimension within which events took place, but which itself remains unaffected by those same events. Irenaeus's calmer and more detached approach allows him to be more optimistic about human development and spiritual growth than Augustine. So for instance, Irenaeus can write:



By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God — the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, The Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. ... No! it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. (*Against Heresies*, IV, 38, 3 quoted by Hick 1966: 219)

Although Augustine is confident that the City of God will finally supersede the earthly city, he would never simply subsume sin and recovery from it into a process of growth. Irenaeus' perspective, however, is only plausible as long as one is not too close to the immediate degradation, despair and pain that sin engenders.

### 20.2.1 Situating Ourselves within Irenaeus' Picture

Without dealing with the whole theology of history, of how time emerges from and is taken up into eternity, or how both human achievements and pains are finally transformed, some attention will be given to how social sin appears within an Irenaean perspective. Is it a stage through which humanity must grow in the course of its development? Before answering 'yes' to this question, some more basic and interrelated questions must be posed: How developed in fact are we? Are we innocent children, anxious parents or wise grandparents? Is it possible for us to view the course of human development as a whole from outside? Or do we now only have a partial view of it from inside, much like that of a riverboat's crew watching out for snags in the water while admiring the ever

changing scenery along the banks?

Concerning our stage of development, it is probably best to presume that we are like teenagers: full of great ideals, but easily disappointed when they are not quickly realized; eager to take on responsibility, but unaware of the growth and discipline still required. The experience after only a year of trying to initiate a programme for developing South Africa, as well as the tangle of unforeseen consequences that development efforts elsewhere have invariably run into, show that neither the concept of 'development' (Gutierrez, 1973) nor its implementation (Goulet, 1971) are straightforward. Nor is success inevitable. Many testimonies could be given of this sobering realization, but one must suffice. It comes from Immanuel Wallerstein, the chief exponent of world-system theory. Speaking at a conference on "A Road to Development: Africa in the 21st Century," he concluded his address with a warning-cum-encouraging challenge:

I do not say Africa will inevitably succeed, as it tries. Africa has, we all have, at best a 50-50 chance of coming out of this transition with something better. History is not necessarily on our side, and if we think it is, this belief will work against us. But we are all very much an important and integral part of this process. And if we engage in it in the right way, we may indeed achieve the kind of world-system we want. It is around this realization that the road is hard, the outcome uncertain, but the struggle worth it, that we must organize our collective efforts. (in Olukoshi and Wohlgemuth, eds 1975: 84)

Like all teenagers, we will only grow up to the degree that we learn from both our own experience and take note of what others have gone through. Even then, although the past may be used for guidance, it does not guarantee the future. This sobering experience, together with the realization that our view is partial — both a limited, passing one and with our own interests in mind — undercuts any naive optimism we might have about human history.

It is impossible to resolve these problems conclusively, it is possible to sort out the grounds for our hope that sin and evil will not finally triumph. Since we are dealing not with calculation but hope, proofs cannot be offered. There is no way of proving with certainty that social evil will not increasingly engulf us so that the whole human project turns out to be an unmitigated catastrophe. There is no way of completely ruling that out as an impossibility, but the following reflections might help to show that it is not a necessity.

### 20.3            **The Deconstruction of Providential Outlooks**

The thoughts offered by Moore warn against a simplistic adoption of Irenaeus' view of sin or a too hasty conclusion that social sin is an almost necessary stage in the unfolding of divine providence within human history. This image of humanity growing up and learning by its mistakes, or Augustine's one of the City of God eventually triumphing over the earthly city ruled by pride, are examples of what Giddens terms "providential outlooks." He holds that since Nietzsche's break with foundationalism there has been "a significant divide in philosophical thought;" the providential unfolding of history has been deconstructed. He outlines what has taken place:

Enlightenment thought, and Western culture in general, emerged from a religious context which emphasised teleology and the achievement of God's grace. Divine providence had long been a guiding idea of Christian thought. Without these preceding orientations, the Enlightenment would scarcely have been possible in the first place. It is in no way surprising that the advocacy of unfettered reason only reshaped the ideas of the providential, rather than replacing it. One type of certainty (divine law) was replaced by another (the certainty of the senses, of empirical observation), and divine providence was replaced by providential progress. Moreover, the providential idea of reason coincided with the rise of European dominance over the rest of the world. The growth of European power provided, as it were, the material support for the assumption that the new outlook on the world

was founded on a firm base which both provided security and offered emancipation from the dogma of tradition. (CMOD: 48)

Now this outlook has largely collapsed. Giddens adds that not only philosophers, but many ordinary people too, sense that modernity is enigmatic at its core. "A general awareness of the phenomenon filters into anxieties which press in on everyone" (CMOD: 49). The most conspicuous features of this loss of a providential outlook lie in

*the dissolution of evolutionism, the disappearance of historical teleology, the recognition of thoroughgoing, constitutive reflexivity, together with the evaporating of the privileged position of the West — [all of which] move us into a new and disturbing universe of experience. (CMOD: 52f; author's italics)*

These considerations put many of our hopes in doubt. Has human progress come to a halt? Was it all along a delusion useful for justifying the activities of colonizers, technocrats and estate agents? The underside in terms of human degradation and suffering of so many achievements is now becoming apparent. How might we come to terms with, to adapt an image of Giddens, the juggernauts of modernity whose possible collision courses we cannot wholly predict; so our trying to avert a collision may actually cause one?

### **20.3.1 A Failure of Nerve or a Challenge to Renew Hope**

A possible response is to assert that these rumblings of modernity are no more than a massive failure of nerve. On this view, it is claimed that people have simply lost confidence in themselves, in one another and their abilities. This crisis of confidence may also be traced back to a great apostasy from religious belief and practice. This was the kind of response Leo XIII initially made, in 1878 just after he was made pope, to the evils of his society (see 2.1.1 above). It is also

the line taken today by fundamentalism, whether Christian or Islamic, by Marxists or members of the New Right. This 'back to basics' view in effect treats modernity, or some significant aspect of it, as the great sin from which all decline follows.

This may be a possible response to those adopting a position of complete relativism, who are unable to find anything worth saying or cause worth taking up, and who are sunk into pervasive despair. This is the cynical position of 'deconstructive post-modernism.' It rather takes the view that because the world is not as certain as Descartes demanded and not as rational as science predicted, then no credence can be placed in any statement or theory. This position is well summarized by Danah Zohar:

Deconstructive post-modernity is a rejection of unity and reason in favour of disunity, fragmentation, the irrational and the unpredictable. Where modernity (Descartes and Newton and their followers) said there is only one objective point of view, only one truth, only one reason, the deconstructive post-modern writers and philosophers say there are many points of view, but all are subjective, many 'truths', but all are relative. They say that reason is a myth and that all the constructs of reason are mere façades. At the centre of post-modernity is the fragmented self, fragmented consciousness. (1994: 111)

Total dogmatism or complete relativism, fundamentalism or incoherence, are not in fact the only options. Between these extremes it is possible with a combination of rigorous investigation and disciplined imagination to work out standpoints that are relatively adequate. Both are necessary as "rigour alone is paralytic death, but imagination alone is insanity" (Bateson, 1980: 233). They together, without claiming to display the ultimate structure of reality, can be more or less sufficient for grasping reality and guiding action. Though, as new questions arise, any such standpoint will come to need revision.

Giddens distinguishes his own position, that of 'radicalised modernity' from the 'deconstructive post-modernism' exemplified by Fukuyama, Lyotard and Baudrillard (CMOD, 150ff; MHD: 290). While they see only fragmentation, emptying, dissolution and dispersal, Giddens sees integration as well as fragmentation, new appropriation as well as loss or emptying, the possibility of grasping why previous forms of knowledge are dissolved in favour of new understanding, and the forces of integration working dialectically with those of dispersal. This list could be extended, but what is interesting is how Giddens' outlook coincides with that of Kohut. The latter speaks of the works of Picasso and Alban Berg "depicting the broken-up self and its artistic re-creation" (SS III: 331). Kohut himself made this — the taking apart and reassembling of the self — into an enabling image or selfobject for his own life and work as founder of self psychology.

Neither Giddens nor Kohut presume that all will inevitably come right, nor do they downplay 'the darkside of modernity.' On the other hand they do not think everything is so hopeless that it is not worth mobilizing in social movements (CMOD, 158ff) or through applied psychoanalysis (SS III: 275ff; HDAC, 38ff) to take up the challenges of modernity. However in doing so, it might be helpful to examine some of the reasons that Giddens advances for the dissolution of providential outlooks.

#### **20.4 The Position of the West**

Giddens's statement that the West no longer has a privileged position in the world needs to be taken dialectically. While the Western nations of Europe and North America have less of a dominant position, this is in part because other nations, particularly in South East Asia, have taken on many Western ideas and practices adapting them in the process for their own use. The institutional

clustering of modernity — capitalism, technology, surveillance and control of the means of violence — are now spread across the globe. Each clustering in a varied degree both brings benefits and inflicts deprivations; each embodies sound practices as well as structural evils. Today the main divisions in the world fall, not along geographical or national boundaries, but along time-space edges (see 15.9 above). The great division is between those with power to stretch their influence over time-space and those lacking that power.

Nevertheless, even those able to exercise the wide influence — economic, technical, military and supervisory — over space and time are still not in complete control. Risks cannot be excluded; as time-space is stretched so do the unacknowledged conditions of action increase; increased reflexivity enters in to alter the outcome of their plans. Wholesale social engineering, whether capitalist or socialist, has not worked out well (see 15.10 above). This has undermined the view that if one could understand how society works, one could then provide it with better structures — whether legal or educational — so that all social problems would be solved. That dream of reshaping humanity simply by improving the structures of society, which initially inspired much of the sociological quest, has — especially when applied too strictly — turned into a nightmare.

## **20.5 Evolutionism neither an Explanation nor a Justification**

Giddens' objection to evolutionary theories explaining all social change is twofold. First, by presuming that there is some inherent tendency within society by which it will necessarily develop from one form to the next, evolutionary theories do not give due weight to what actors know about their society or about world-history. "All causal connections in human social life are mediated in one way or another by agents' knowledgeability and agents' reasons" (STPPF: 206). He

points out that as part of the double hermeneutic “there is no mechanism of social organization or social reproduction identified by social analysts which lay actors cannot also get to know about and actively incorporate into what they do” (CS: 284). As people find out where their society might be heading, they may deliberately attempt to check, reverse or encourage the process, though with varying degrees of success.

Second, evolutionary theory tends to presume that what comes later is necessarily better; modern societies are therefore ethically more advanced than primitive ones. Giddens, in what he terms his ‘critical critique’ of Habermas, emphasizes instead the ambiguity of developments.

Oral cultures are not made up of individuals who have not yet undergone the ‘learning processes’ that bring enlightenment. On the contrary, the introduction of writing and the other paraphernalia of civilization is an unlearning process — a process of cultural destruction. The division we make between nature and culture is one that dissolves the intimacy with nature which is one of the richest forms of human experience. Finally, norms which are founded upon debate and discussion, it might be argued, are not just new forms of tradition. They mark the undermining of tradition — the security of time-honoured practice as such. (STMS: 249).

In each case the human costs and benefits, as well as the likely ethical value, of any ‘development’ needs to be assessed on its own merits. Evolutionism or developmentalism as an overall theory is too sweeping; it can be used to justify any change in society or condemn any lack of change. This lack of precision is evident in the statement of the Vatican Council that: “The headlong development of the world and a keener awareness of existing inequalities beget and aggravate contradictions and imbalances” on a personal, a family and a social level (G&S, 8; see 2.2.2 above). The Council here is drawing upon the theory of uneven development, and appears to presume that if development was more balanced then problems would be overcome. This statement, however, is really



no more than a truism.

## 20.6 The Teleology of History

Whether or not human history has a finality or inner directedness running through it is a key issue for the grounding of hope. If history has no attainable goal, why should we hope that anything worthwhile or lasting can ever be achieved? Does the course of human life and society draw to a climax, and if so of what kind? Or, as Giddens muses, once "all residues of tradition and dogma [are stripped away] from rational thought ... modernity turns out to be enigmatic at its core, and there seems no way in which this enigma can be 'overcome' " (CMOD: 49). Here Giddens has put his finger on, though not thoroughly examined, an issue central to self-doubt and self-confidence.

This dilemma may be expressed in another way. Once it was wondered how human freedom could fit into the planning of divine providence. The architectonic structure of Thomas' theology seemed, especially when a conservative or narrow interpretation of his works (see 8.6 above) was taken, to leave too little room for human initiative. He had to clarify how the working out (*gubernatio*) of divine providence left room for free decisions, or for people themselves to choose between good and evil (Ia 103). In Thomas' theology there is a tension between his fitting humanity into the cosmic pattern of creation and his stress on how humans are unique in their calling.

Today in view of the range of human freedom and the surprising developments in history, providence is now more put in question. Its questioning, however, is double edged as not only is the scope of human freedom vastly increased, but its outcome is less predictable than ever. In a complex and highly reflexive world, the unforeseen consequences of human activities are much greater than in

traditional societies. It is much less evident today than when Augustine or Thomas were writing whether God has anything that we might call a plan for human history.

In order to tackle this question, even briefly, it is important to distinguish between the teleology inherent within normal human activities, that exhibited by a particular organization, that underlying society as a whole, and the overall directness of history. Giddens analyses help show that these four postulated instances of teleology are not part of a seamless fabric.

### **20.6.1 Thomas' teleology**

Teleology, the directedness of action towards a goal, runs as a consistent theme throughout Thomas' works. One of his recurrent images is that of the arrow flying towards the target exhibiting the directedness that the archer has imparted to it. Non-human creatures act for the specific ends inherent in their respective natures, whereas it is central to human nature to act knowingly and freely. Human beings objectify the ends to which they are drawn, adopting them as their own aims, and choose the means to attain them. Accomplishing this successfully requires training and discipline, otherwise one may substitute something inferior for the good that one is actually drawn to or choose unsuitable means to attain it. The picture Thomas has at the back of his mind is not that of an individual in isolation, not merely an isolated specimen of humanity, but that of a mature person participating in — by our standards — a not very large society. He or she would be first a recipient from and then a contributor to the ongoing and life-sustaining activities of the society. Both its size and the scale of public administration would have been much less than in a modern nation-state. Within this context, Thomas can plausibly say that the wise ruler could direct society towards a definite and worthwhile end (see 10.1.1 above).

Both Kohut and Giddens have explained how matters are not all that simple. Kohut has shown that people act not only because they are drawn by ideals or values, but also because they are pushed by ambitions or identify with others through exercising similar skills. Giddens has brought out how the outcome of an action often differs from what was intended due to its prior unacknowledged conditions. This gap between intention and outcome is heightened by the high reflexivity of modernity; people respond not just to laws and directives coming from government but also to what they estimate — maybe with the help of the social sciences — will be their effect. Consequently, although the shaping of society results from human interactions, the resultant shape is often one that nobody exactly intended or could predict.

This is not to say that it is useless for individual persons and social movements to clarify their aims, set goals, sort out their motivations, work out tactics, plan activities and then review their outcome. Doing this today is more important than ever; unless it is continually carried out by many organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, modern society would not be sustained. It must however be recognized that the teleology inherent in the whole process of reproducing society through social interaction is much looser than Thomas supposed. He spoke of all the activities of people in society being directed to a single end (D'Entrèves 1965: 188; see 11.3 above). The need for this was not due to sin, as — even in the innocence of paradise prior to all sin — social life embracing many people would be impossible without someone presiding and guiding everything towards the common good (*Socialis autem vita multorum esse non posset, nisi aliquis praesideret, qui ad bonum commune intenderet*, Ia 96, 1). Giddens brings out how there is a gap between the aims of an individual, even a powerful ruler, and the order resulting in society. Although the ordering of society does result from people's action, not just the ruler's, it is in part an unintended consequence, which no one could completely foresee due to the

unacknowledged conditions under which action takes place. The further one moves away from individual human actions taking place within limited circumstances, to encompass interactions within organizations, societies and global society as a whole, the more tenuous becomes a purely teleological explanation. Social sin can be maintained by a multiplicity of interactions undertaken by individuals, none of whom either might foresee or have intended the overall result.

Unlike Augustine, Thomas does not adopt any scheme setting out the stages of history. He rejects as emptiness (*vanitas*) the view of Joachim of Fiore († 1202) that the present age will give way to a third age of the Holy Spirit when spiritual men will reign (*status tertius Spiritus Sancti, in quo spirituales viri principabuntur*, IaIIae 106, 4 obj 3 et ad 3). Instead, he affirms that human life now on earth is on the way (*in via*), having not yet attained the beatitude held out for it as a gift of God (*in patria*). The working out of divine providence does not exclude contingency or chance; nor does it rule out all evil. What Thomas emphasizes is how each decision for good or ill relates its agent now — not just at the end of time — to the overall purpose of all. Thus he explains that any evil due to affliction (*malum poenae*) or a defect in nature (*defectus naturalis*) occurs because one part of the universe is directed against or clashes with another part. The evil of guilt, however, runs counter to the ordering of the whole universe towards its ultimate end; this is because the will, in which fault or guilt resides, ceases through its committing evil to take its orientation from the very ultimate purpose of the universe (*sed malum culpae est contra ordinem totius universi ad finem ultimum, eo quod voluntas, in qua est malum culpae, ab ipso ultimo fine universi deordinatur per culpam*, QD de Potentia 6, 1 ad 8). Thomas does not presuppose that each person contributes remotely to the ultimate purpose of all creation through his or her actions being linked with others, so that either cumulatively or gradually throughout history the overall purpose of the

universe is accomplished. Instead the overall purpose is a given, which will be accomplished by the power of God, but it is not remote from anyone. Each person must at some definite point — amid the to and fro of life with others — freely decide whether or not to align her- or himself personally with God's law or purpose. The fact that divine law is particular, addressed to individuals in their particular circumstances, underlines the equal dignity of each person; he or she does not derive importance from the rôle he or she plays in human society. Yet does this view not play down the possibility of their making their own limited but yet unique and valuable contributions to the working out of God's plan for humanity? Does it not in the final analysis simply reduce all human decision-making to consent to a foregone conclusion?

### 20.6.2 The Ambiguity of Providence

The origins of this dilemma are not new; they can be traced back to the Greek understanding of 'providence.' Leslie Dewart sums up centuries of thought:

The very name *Providence* is derived from  $\pi\rho\nu\nu\omicron\iota\alpha$ , a Greek term meaning literally pre-intellection, that is, *pre-vision* or *foresight*. ... according to most Greek thinkers whatever happens happens necessarily. Events are intelligible only in the light of their necessary causes. Fate rules over all cosmic and human events.

Though any part of the cosmic process might not make sense by itself, the cosmic process as a whole must be supposed to be meaningful and to fulfill a purpose immanent in its very reality. Human wisdom is but the application of our finite reason to our finite decisions, so that our life will accommodate itself to the otherwise inscrutable purposes of an infinitely wise nature. For if we struggle against fate we cannot but reap utter unhappiness. ... reconciliation to Fate is the only road to happiness. (Dewart, 1970: 134f)

This basically was the notion that Thomas was trying to square with the Judaeo-

Christian notion of God making a covenant with humankind, of God's concern about human activities, interests and feelings, and who comes to save humanity from its sinful plight.

... the Stoic doctrine of cosmic providence [was transformed] into the Christian doctrine of Divine Providence ... [by holding] that the *λογος*, or intrinsic rationality of the world, was not created, but divine. ... God benevolently orders all things wisely, co-ordinating the natural finality of all things into the finality of creation as a whole. In this manner he fosters and infallibly achieves the good of the whole world, and in particular the good of man. (Dewart, 1970: 136)

Explaining in comprehensive detail how these Greek and Judaeo-Christian conceptions came together in one synthesis was Thomas' great achievement. His explanation is based on the view that whatever has being (*esse*) — not just kinds of things but each particular one — derives its being from the causality of God, which imprints its directedness to it. Since divine providence is nothing other than the plan directing things to their end, then everything to the extent that it participates in being is to that extent subject to divine providence (*omnia quae habent quocumque modo esse, ordinata esse a Deo in finem ... necesse est omnia, inquantum participant esse, inquantum subdi divinae providentiae*, Ia 22, 2). Divine providence extends to human activity too, as our very action of making a free decision itself derives from God's causality; our planning our activities likewise falls within God's plan.

Despite the extreme care and subtle balance with which Thomas explains the relation of human freedom to divine providence, the question still remains whether human life and history are ordered according to a pre-conceived divine plan. If they are, then genuine originality would be ruled out. Dealing with this question sends us back to look at the different root metaphors used for grasping how human life, action and society relate to God and his creation.

### 20.6.3 **Fateful and Hopeful Metaphors**

The organismic, mechanistic and artistic conceptions each hold out their own distinctive prospects. When the organismic metaphor is applied to human society, it does not really allow for anything really new or original to occur as the basic pattern for human relations is laid down in advance. Variations will occur due to circumstances, different emphases or chance, but the underlying pattern by which parts are related to the whole remains. In many respects the mechanistic model of society is even more rigid, as each part must interlock closely with the next so the running of the whole will not break down.

Much the same applies when the organismic and mechanistic models are used to explain change over time. With the former metaphor society evolves, while with the latter its mechanism becomes more advanced and complicated. The difficulties of envisaging social evolution have already been mentioned (20.5). Alternatively, if a mechanistic model is adopted, then all hope for the future tends to be placed in the advance and spread of technology. The more society comes to resemble a huge computer, a spacecraft or perhaps an oilrig, the more advanced and hence better it must be. This model selects one of the institutional clusterings of modernity, namely technology, as the norm for the other three — capitalism, surveillance and control of violence (see Chapter 15). It ends by evaluating all human activities in terms, not of the benefit they bring to all dimensions of people's lives and relations, but of how they promote the efficient running of society.

A mechanistic model of development offers no way of balancing economic efficiency, tight surveillance and the effective control of violence, against human rights and people's need for meaning, identity, spontaneity and participation. Although this criticism when stated so baldly may appear far-fetched, it is a fundamental issue in the very conception, design, running and assessment of

development programmes. The reason so much development fails to meet real human needs is because — somewhere along the line — people are thought of and treated as little more than cogs in a machine. As Peter Berger (1974) has argued, it makes little difference whether the machine has a capitalist or socialist design. A related problem is at the heart of South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme. It aims at being people-centred and people-driven, but is expected to run as a power-driven machine and deliver benefits efficiently to people.

Some instances have already been given (1.5) of how the post-modern artistic metaphor allows people, personally and in various groupings, to develop their own lives, relations and surroundings. This approach was adopted in the Council's call for people today "with the needed help of divine grace [to become] ... truly new and artisans of a new humanity" (G&S, 30) and "witnesses of the birth of a new humanism, one in which humanity is characterized first of all by people taking responsibility for their fellow human beings and towards history" (G&S, 55). Instead of viewing the divine plan for humanity as a kind of Christianized Fate, the Council stressed that it is a mystery (G&S, 10), signs of which may through faith be deciphered in the happenings, needs and desires of the world today (G&S, 11). "Manifested at the beginning of time, the divine plan is that humanity should subdue the earth, bring creation to perfection, and develop itself" (G&S, 57). As people gain insight into truth, goodness and beauty and their judgments embody universal values, they are "more clearly enlightened by that marvellous Wisdom which was with God from all eternity" (G&S, 57). Accomplishing all this requires breaking "the stranglehold of personified Evil, so that this world might be fashioned anew according to God's design and reach its fulfillment" (G&S, 2).

All this is in keeping with the artistic root-metaphor, as long as it is remembered



that throughout the whole process human beings are both helping to shape one another and coming to find themselves. We are artwork as well as artists. As yet, however, the artwork — particularly that of fashioning and refashioning a self-narrative (see 7.5 above) — is still unfinished. On this Giddens' view echoes the Johannine insight that "we are already God's children, but what we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed" (I John 3: 2).

Exploring this metaphor further: in carrying out any original work of art, one needs space, scope to explore various portrayals, latitude to experiment with different renderings, until one both discovers and creates the one appropriate for both self and circumstances. However it is not an empty or indifferent space that is required, but a setting that provides encouragement, that draws the best out of oneself, that evokes hope. Mistakes can still be made within such a setting, but when recognized and accepted for what they are, not hidden or denied, they can then be incorporated into the whole artistic process. Accomplishing this successfully places new demands, but can enrich the whole process in novel ways. Thinking in this vein brings us close to Irenaeus' hopeful view of human history and development.

## **20.7 Grandiose Expectations**

While this elaboration of Irenaeus' outlook may sound wonderful as an image, to what extent can sin be overcome in practice? What can be accomplished within human history? Can human beings, with or without divine assistance, restructure the world so that within time it becomes a paradise again? Or are all our efforts at restructuring ultimately futile?

By transposing Thomas' warning against presumption on to a collective level, we might sort out our expectations of what can be accomplished in human

history. The idea that the world and humanity too may in time be completely restructured through knowledge, ingenuity and hard work to eliminate all evils, personal and social, physical and moral, is too presumptuous. The rise of this expectation of progress has been explored by Goudzwaard (1979). He traces its origin to the Renaissance. Pico della Mirandola, writing in 1486 in his dialogue between the Creator and Adam, has the Creator say:

I created thee a being neither heavenly nor earthly ... that thou mightest be free to shape and to overcome thyself. ... To thee alone is given a growth and development depending upon thine own free will. Thou bearest in thee the germs of a universal life. (Quoted in Goudzwaard, 1979: 14)

Leonardo da Vinci, around the same time, "declared that experimental research alone would be the proper interpreter between man and nature, and linked this to the Renaissance prayer: 'Thou, O God, does sell us all things at the price of labour' " (Goudzwaard, 1979: 12). This optimistic outlook spread northwards, so by 1671 John Milton was suggesting that the paradise lost by Adam's fall might now be regained.

A fairer Paradise is founded now  
For Adam and his chosen sons, whom thou,  
A Saviour, art come down to instal,  
Where they shall dwell secure, when time shall be,  
Of tempter and temptation without fear. *Paradise Regained*, IV: 613-17

By dint of insight into nature and applying their knowledge people might now regain on earth what they had lost. This outlook, Goudzwaard shows, drew together ideas from the Renaissance, deism, competition in a free market and utilitarianism. It provided the motivating force for technical development and the capitalist pursuit of profit. Once this outlook is adopted it becomes self-justifying, as whatever can be classed as maximizing utility — above all the increasing acquisition of goods — cannot but be a development and therefore

justified. The purpose of law and morality is not to assess developments or criticize competition, but to keep them going. When Western man (particularly the male) no longer considered himself held back by the barrier of paradise on earth having been irredeemably lost, then belief in progress became a secular faith. The resulting transformation in outlook is summed up by Goudzwaard:

The motif of progress becomes a program for progress! That is the deeper significance of these new and striking paradise images. Consciousness of progress has matured into a faith which, for the sake of the future of mankind, can summon ... man to deeds; and the breathtaking 'splendor' of these deeds parallels the moving of mountains, including the mountains of the western social order. Faith in progress has become a faith capable of transforming its adherents into revolutionaries of the first order, for who would not follow the direction of an infallible guide which resolutely points the way to paradise regained? (1979: 41f)

It is this basic image and conviction of providential progress that, according to Giddens, has been dissolved. As no knowledge is completely reliable, there is no point from which one can indubitably measure progress.

### 20.7.1 'Makers of our own History'

These considerations also put in question the aspiration voiced by some liberation theologians that people should become "makers of their own history" or even "masters of their own destiny" (see for instance Gutierrez, 1969, 1973 and Hugo Assmann, 1975 and Paulo Freire, 1970). These sayings may be taken in a *relative* sense, as assertions that people should try to counter defects *within* the human condition. In particular, that the vulnerable should not be so dominated by the powerful that they become mere objects in their power games. These sayings, however, may also be given an *absolute* sense, in that people should endeavour to overcome the defects *of* the human condition. This distinction is derived from Sebastian Moore (1981: 32, quoted in 19.1 above).

Speaking relatively, no problem occurs, if the saying “makers of our own history” simply means that no people should be so economically dependent upon, politically dominated by or psychologically in thrall to others that they are allowed no effective say in the shaping of their own lives and society. This occurs not only when people are formally enslaved, but also when they are so instrumentalized that they cannot regard themselves as more than cogs in someone else’s wheel. Struggling against such conditions of injustice and degradation within human history, ones brought about by human fault and failure, is called for as an expression of faith and self-giving. Part of this struggle is the attempt to change the structures that people draw on to act and interact, so that they can, yet are not forced to, live in a way that reflects their dignity as creatures made in the image of God. This is a matter of acting oneself in such a way that the underlying rules, resources and enabling images of one’s society come to be transformed.

If, however, becoming “makers of our own history” is taken in an absolute sense, then one is endeavouring to overstep the limitations *of* the human condition; one then aspires to be as gods. Here one endeavours not just to do one’s limited best for others within the given circumstances, but to banish the limitations of human finitude altogether. This was the grandiose vision of some Enlightenment thinkers; William Godwin, for instance, writes:

There will be no war, no crimes, no administration of justice, as it is called, and no government. Besides this, there will be neither disease, anguish, melancholy, nor resentment. Every man will seek, with ineffable ardour, the good of all. Mind will be active and eager, and yet never disappointed. (quoted in Goudzwaard, 1979: 41)

As Goudzwaard shows at length, thinking of regaining paradise was not meant as a utopian dream, but as a historically realizable project. The elimination of all suffering would be attained by the advance of science bringing man complete

technical control over nature. Social problems would be overcome through instituting proper systems of law and education. Once the right social structures were in place all human life and relations would take on a new form devoid of all imperfection; a 'new man' would emerge. Though there has been immense disagreement over what 'the right social structures' would be; communists and capitalists have each had their own views, but both have shared a belief in human progress and perfectibility. This belief in progress — certainly when expressed in terms comparable to Godwin's — departs from Christianity, at the point where it rejects human finitude, the inherent limitations of the human condition.

A crucial point where thinkers like Godwin overlook, or even deny, human finitude is their non-recognition that people may commit faults which require forgiveness. They want to alter structures so innocence may be regained without having to admit any sinfulness. Kerans contrasts this striving to return to paradise with the Christian view of the gravity of sin: "The Enlightenment sought innocence; Christianity began with belief in God's promise of pardon" (1974: 25), pardon even for the sin and evil which human efforts could not remedy. Kerans continues:

Grandeur and courage were required to adopt this ethical vision [of trying to understand freedom and evil in relation to each other]: it is to insist that man and man alone is responsible for the evils of society and of history. It is to insist on man's moral autonomy, on his responsible adulthood. We are all heirs to this vision; upon it is based our historical-mindedness. (1974: 25)

It is not my contention that Gutierrez, Cosmao and other liberation theologians have understood 'taking charge of human destiny' in an absolute sense. Though Goulet warns: "some theologians of liberation seem to fall into a simplistic Rousseauism as they preach the merits of new institutions" (1974: 118). Even

Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio* speaks of "building a world where every man ... can live a fully human life, freedom from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has not sufficient control" (PP, 47). These statements cannot rightly be treated as equivalent to those made by the philosophes of the Enlightenment, but they are open to misinterpretation when taken on their own or used as slogans.

Viewed in this light, the SODEPAX Consultation on the theology of development held at Cartigny, Switzerland in November 1969 could have benefitted from Moore's distinction. Development *within* the human condition, that is, improving socio-economic relationships among peoples, and between them and nature, would not have been confused with the idea of development *of* the human condition in relation to God. The limitations of human finitude would still have been respected.

A quarter of a century later, during which the world has not developed as expected nor come right politically, there are fewer doubts about finitude and human limitations. Though they cannot be demarcated exactly, no amount of progress has come near to banishing the disease, anguish, melancholy, and resentment spoken about by Godwin. It might even be argued that in some cases efforts to eradicate these have only made matters worse. While some dangers to life and limb have been reduced, since Godwin wrote, we now live much more in a 'risk society,' in which we have to be open to both positive and negative possibilities (MSI: 28, and 10.6 above). Disappointments have not been overcome; magnificent plans have turned out disastrously. The effects of industrial growth have shown us that the environment is not infinitely resilient. Additionally, instead of thinking in terms of a universal 'man,' we now are brought face to face with sexual difference, social marginalization and the otherness of cultures (see 2.8.4 for the mention of this at Santo Domingo). Above all, death remains

inevitable. Although modern conditions may in some areas have pushed back the boundaries of human finitude, its presence is felt more keenly in others. Giddens warns that

On the other side of modernity, as virtually no one on earth can any longer fail to be conscious, there could be nothing but a 'republic of insects and grass,' or a cluster of damaged and traumatised human social communities. No providential forces will inevitably intervene to save us, and no historical teleology guarantees that this second version of post-modernity will not oust the first [a world of multilayered democracy, demilitarisation, post-scarcity economics and the humanisation of technology]. Apocalypse has become trite, ... like all parameters of risk, it can become real. (CMOD: 173)

Current experience throughout the world, whether expressed in post-modernist thinking or in Giddens' views about radicalised modernity, has undercut the temptation to historical presumption. The mobilizing vision of remaking paradise and regaining innocence has been deconstructed.

Our human finitude, however, is not limited to a lack of knowledge and strength, even to our having to face otherness — both personal and cultural — and eventually death. As mentioned earlier, it crucially manifests itself in the propensity to sin. Here, as Moore points out (see 19.1 on p 600 above), there is a fusion of horizons against which an act is seen as sinful. In sin we both endeavour to overstep the limitations of our human condition (the ultimate horizon) and wreck relations within the human condition (the nearer horizon).

Most societies make clear — on the nearer horizon — the sinfulness of rape, and other crimes such as murder and theft. "The human sense of self-centrality is *more clearly recognisable* in some attitudes and actions than in others ... in those ... that society recognises as bad" (Moore, 1981: 33). There is, however, also sinful self-centrality when a person, or more likely a group, turn their own work and

historical effort into an absolute idol. Though their project may be well intentioned on the nearer horizon, it is sinful on the ultimate horizon, as it asserts human striving and effort to the exclusion or even against God. Goulet, dealing with the question of how Christians can be 'makers of history,' warns that for mankind "to erect its own historical efforts as an absolute idol constitutes collective hubris analogous to Adam's personal sin" (1974: 119).

## 20.8 The Sin of Despairing of all Providence

The previous sections have shown how certain providential outlooks, particularly those associated with evolution, historical teleology and the dominant position of the West, had dissolved. The deconstruction of these outlooks, particularly the association of progress with our eventually regaining a lost innocence in a humanly constructed paradise, is in the main a dethroning of idols. This is more a boost to Christian hope than a threat. Yet in rejecting the optimism of rational modernity, one does not have to go to the other extreme of non-rationality, throw out all discourse and embrace hopelessness. Finding that we are unable to understand, plan and control everything and bring absolutely all reality into one comprehensive scheme does not mean that all understanding and provision for the future is absurd. Danah Zohar warns against this despairing attitude:

Deconstructive post-modernity is a style of thinking in which there are no winners or losers but only unrooted conventions, all equally valid (or invalid) and all equally devoid of meaning. ... Supposedly objective criteria [in science] for deciding what is real and what is not are temporary resting places constructed for utilitarian ends. ... we can have religious 'feeling' though we believe nothing. ... the historical [is reduced] to a collection of mere nostalgias. ... All things post-modern in this deconstructive sense share a sense of the 'used-upness' of past form with a sense that nothing new can ever happen. (1994: 113, see also 20.3.1 above)



This kind of mood is not entirely new. Thomas, drawing on experiences recounted by the Desert Fathers, speaks of torpor or apathy (*acedia*) as the vice opposed to the joy God grants to the person who gives of him- or herself. It is a kind of extra heaviness or depression that undermines the human spirit preventing it from freely engaging in anything worthwhile (*quaedam tristitia aggravans ... deprimit animum hominis ut nihil ei agere libeat ... torpor mentis bona negligentis inchoare*, IIaIIae 35, 1). While Thomas saw giving in to this feeling as a temptation each individual might face, its appearance may now be more pervasive. It goes deeper than the 'noonday devil' (Ps 91: 6), mentioned by the desert monks. Whole peoples can be sunk in depression. Kohut mentions the depression Native Americans suffer from because they have lost the continuity of their culture. "The children grow up with fathers who have no means and no strength worthy of idealization. ... You kill people when you take [away] their culture" (SPHU: 255f). Another tragic example of a nation, a society and its members falling apart is given in Poewe's study (1985) of the Herero of Namibia. In both these instances, the individual may not be able to break out of the prevailing socio-cultural despondency, because there are no cultural resources available as selfobjects. Their political leaders, religious figures and artists have been unable to sustain a healthy group self (see 13.6.6 and 14.7 above). This kind of malaise, since it blocks the exercise of joyful self-giving so that others may grow and benefit in their lives, is another instance of social sin. The prevailing malaise is both the source and outcome of the deficient interactions among these peoples.

A somewhat similar malaise is felt in some areas of the previously optimistic and expansionist society of the West. The culture of totally deconstructive post-modernism, at least as depicted by Zohar, is another instance of the failure among its artists, thinkers and cultural leaders to foster a healthy group self. When human limitations are harped upon too frequently, people become

dismissive of others and their efforts. They then show no appreciation for others' limited but genuine contributions. Without going into details, mention can be made here of two articles, both published in *The Tablet*, that reveal aspects of this prevailing malaise. These two are chosen from many others, because — judging from the widespread response they evoked — they have obviously struck a chord.

In the first, Donald Nicholl tells of his reply to a Palestinian liberation theologian, who asked if Britain needed a theology of liberation. "Yes", he said. When pressed further about what Britain needed to be liberated from, Nicholl said the answer came spontaneously to him, in one word "Contempt." He describes it as a rot that spread from the head to all levels of British society.

Margaret Thatcher, the head of the British government, held her ministers in contempt. They in their turn behaved with contempt towards those below them. So over the years we have witnessed the extraordinary state of affairs in which virtually all the ministers in charge of the departments of state have displayed contempt for the very people upon whom they and we depend for the well-being of our society. (1993: 1422)

The root cause of this corruption is that "our society no longer holds to the tradition that every human being, simply by being human, has to be accorded dignity," Nicholl points out. "A further aspect of such dignity ... [is that each person] is under judgement — indeed [he or she] has a *right* to be judged — and, if necessary, to be punished for moral failure" (1993: 1444). He suspects that "many in Western society no longer believe nowadays in a world beyond death is precisely because that relieves them of a fear of a judgement at which all will be revealed." Overcoming these misconceptions people have of themselves, Nicholl concludes, will call for "an even more arduous struggle than that of any other liberation movement" (1993: 1444).

In the second article, Timothy Radcliffe contrasts the story of the film *Jurassic Park*, in which humans can only reply to violence with further violence, with the story of the Last Supper. There, instead of struggling for the survival of the fittest, “we build communion and heal wounds ... by using words that create communion, that welcome the stranger, that overthrow distance” (1994: 762). Although there is much grunting and roaring among the dinosaurs, “words are not so very important in *Jurassic Park*” (1994: 761). Radcliffe explains:

The dominant model of arriving at truth [in our culture] is that of exposure, of showing up someone’s sins. ... one must ask: What is really exposed? What is discovered and revealed? The truth of another human being — the virtue and vice, the goodness and badness — can be attained only through patient attentiveness. One must listen carefully, and let the other disclose himself. The truth is given not through exposure but in a moment of revelation. It needs tenderness and not denunciation. The truthful eye is always the compassionate eye, even the loving eye, for as St Thomas taught us, the truth and the good are the same. (1994: 762)

Merciless exposure is one aspect of contemporary culture, but another is concern for the *other*. This concern runs through all Kohut’s attempts to bring people to a mature narcissism that does not attempt to make the other person merely an adjunct of the self (see 9.2 above). It was also voiced explicitly in church circles at Santo Domingo in 1992 (see 2.8.4 above), when attention was paid to the plight of women and native peoples. Central to the works of Levinas is the contrast between the *same*, our own schemes and plans, and the *other*, who does not fit into them (see 16.7.1). Many doubts and fears arise in approaching those who are other, due to sex and gender, to race and nationality, to religion and culture, to age and ability, to wealth and class, to power and status. Even if all these differences could be bridged, there is still the irreducible otherness of each individual person; no one is entirely alike another.

These various considerations point to, what might be termed, the cultural sin

inherent in deconstructive post-modernity. This overall outlook arises from the frustration of being unable to comprehend and so control everything. It displays an impatience with limited human beings, substituting contempt for appreciation, and exposing them for understanding. When taken to the limit, violence against others banishes any attempt to build communion by dialogue; even the ability to listen to the other is lost. What is at stake here is not the securing of human rights in the face of one or other injustice, but the presence of a culture or social atmosphere in which respect for human dignity and the rights that flow from it could make sense at all.

The sinfulness of going along with this outlook lies in its deflating any attempt to give of oneself perseveringly so that the other may benefit and grow in her or his life. It says that because one's effort and sacrifice will not solve all problems, nothing is worth attempting. Perseverance in charity or self-giving requires faith and hope: the faith to continue even though one does not know just how or when one's action might benefit others; the hope to put oneself at risk and sustain one's action through disappointments and pain. The non-acceptance of uncertainty and risk involved in supporting the other — the stranger who differs in race or gender, in wealth or power — leaves one deflated, and cuts one off from any rejoicing over God's love becoming manifest among us (*quando contristatur in his quae ei imminent facienda propter Deum*, IIaIIae 35, 3 ad 2).

## 20.9 The Providential Character of Structuring

It is possible to hold a third position between the two extremes of seeking to regain a lost innocence in a humanly constructed paradise and rejecting all human plans and effort as ultimately valueless. This is what Giddens does in opting for a *radical engagement*, which mobilizes social movements to reduce the impact of the inherent dangers of modernity or to transcend them. This

practical attitude is distinct both from the *sustained optimism* associated with the Enlightenment and from the *cynical pessimism* that may lead either to a humorous or a world-weary response to the high-consequence dangers of modernity (CMOD: 136f). Radical engagement does not put any reliance upon the former providential outlooks, that have been deconstructed through a thorough-going acceptance of modernity. Nevertheless, that does not mean that all talk of providence in any form is absent.

If there was no providence, no providing for what is to come, no connection of past with future, everything would be subjected to pure caprice or blind chance. There would be no reason why people would expect anything definite from one day or hour to the next. Making promises, entering into contracts, holding ambitions or planning for the future would be absurdity. This, however, is not the outlook we generally adopt; we usually have some measure of confidence that there is something worth striving for, even if we are not sure what. Though having that confidence does itself depend in large part on our having experienced reliable support from others; the self has acquired sufficient self-object support to deal with the future as it comes, taking what it provides and not being overwrought by its unexpected demands. If, on the contrary, sufficient self-esteem and confidence have not been built up, then one has a fragmented self faced by an incoherent world.

My point is that the language of structure, whether describing the structuring of self (Kohut) or of societies and social systems (Giddens), is at base a 'providential' one. It describes the construction and maintenance of a world that more or less provides, that draws a reasonably coherent future out of the past. Since structures are potentials that can be actualized in different ways, they never completely determine outcomes but they do set limits to what they might be. For instance, the self structure of a growing child will in large part be derived from what

parents provide, but there is no predicting exactly how the child will develop. If there was no building of structure, the child would not develop at all. Likewise on a social level, people in producing actions may freely adapt the structures — the resources and generative rules — they draw upon, but not to such an extent that their actions are totally unlike what has been done before. Structures both maintain continuity in daily actions and allow for change.

The sounder the structures of both self and society are, the more change they make possible, as they give the assurance that a different future can be dealt with smoothly enough. The weaker structures are, the less capability there is for coping with any change; a clump of traumatised individuals, who have not come together as a coherent group, will not be able to cope with changing conditions and are liable to produce all kinds of bizarre and inappropriate reactions.

Although there is a time lag, people through their action gradually come to shape the structures — the rules, resources and enabling images — they and their successors will draw upon to live by. The shaping is rarely direct, as the outcome of any action — including the structure it reproduces — depends upon various unacknowledged conditions of action. Also, people are liable to take up, again with varying degrees of insight, whatever one does in ways that suit their own aims and purposes. There is no way of telling exactly what will be the repercussions of one's action or even a consistent policy. Often, in fact, the way an action is engaged in will have a more lasting personal and social effect than its stated aim. Nevertheless, even though the process is neither directly linear nor fully under anyone's control, we do by a process of feedback come to shape for better or worse the structures we and others live by. We cannot avoid structuring both society and selves, but whether or not we do so in ways that will provide a reasonable chance for ourselves and others to enjoy a fully human life depends

in large part upon the many choices and responses we make from day to day. The quality of our decisions will come to bear upon the structures that remain after our actions are completed.

So, without speaking of taking charge of history or being makers of our own destiny, it is still possible to claim that human beings share in the shaping of providence. Each action may (or may not) help build up or at least conserve resources for future action. By exemplifying rules, both of intelligence and morality, it may open up clear and worthwhile opportunities for other actions to follow. Alternatively, it may only serve to increase confusion. By drawing upon and expressing enabling imagery, it can catch others' imagination and stir them into action. Much however depends upon the integrity of that imagery, whether it helps people to face reality creatively or to flee from it by regression. Taken together all these aspects of structure — resources, rules, and enabling images — give a shape to what life offers; to the extent that they are defective they thwart or delay a person from gaining what life might provide. In this modest sense, then, we help shape and so have to take responsibility for the unfolding of providence, the providing of a hopeful future from out of the past.

This leads us to inquire into what quality of events, and particularly what kind of human actions, are consonant with God's loving purpose; even though we do not know how it will work out, through hope we can trust that it will. In this vein, John Paul II in his follow up to the African Synod of 1994 sets Christians the task of bringing "to bear upon the social fabric an influence aimed at changing not only ways of thinking but also the very structures of society, so that they will better reflect God's plan for the human family" (EIA, 54). What we have to look out for is the real yet necessarily limited contribution we can make through radical engagement, but not to presume we can unravel the whole plan of God. After all, it is one thing to put one's faith in the One whose plan guides all

events (see Ephesians 1: 9-12), and quite another to identify various historical happenings — many favourable to oneself and one's nation — with that plan.



# A Provisional Conclusion

The point of delineating how evil is structured, and whether it deserves the term 'social sin', is ultimately to offer a way of combatting it more effectively. To accomplish that with any chance of success would require three further kinds of contributions than that presented in this study. The first would be an acceptance of responsibility for the state of one's society and the consequent obligation to struggle against whatever longstanding faults one can. This is the opposite of disavowing one's involvement, or of even overlooking the existence of dehumanizing social conditions. One accepts responsibility, not because one has brought dehumanizing conditions about, but out of concern for others and one's own integrity. The second contribution would be a socio-historical analysis of the particular situation or recurring problem that has to be dealt with. The third would be a far more extensive treatment of the ethical issues involved. The ethical treatment would to a considerable extent be intertwined with the socio-historical analysis, as the latter's purpose and terminology would be evaluative as well as descriptive. In this study, however, only a mention has been made of the ethical problems that are raised, for instance, by modern technology, gender or division between societies. No actual instance of 'structural evil' has been examined in any depth. This is why this conclusion must be termed 'provisional' rather than 'final'; yet in another sense it brings some 'provisions' or 'provides' some clues as to how structural evil may be combatted. These may be briefly outlined up in relation to the four main issues isolated from previous literature (Chapter Six), namely:

- \* the theological problem of speaking about sin in social terms;
- \* the interrelation of self and society and how structure explains this;
- \* the persisting effect of evil in society;

- \* whether and how one might as a member of society be implicated in its evils.

Although the investigations into these issues cannot be completely distinguished from one another, we will see what each provides as a guide to action (addressing them, however, in a different order).

### 1. 'Structure', a Heavy Duty Term

This study brings out how the term 'structure' is made to do heavy duty; it is used both in relation to society and to the self to explain how the present emerges from the past and our expectations for the future are shaped. It shows how human potentialities are shaped through social history and personal biography. As a 'duality', it is also both the medium and outcome of human agency, accounting for the production of human action and the reproduction of society. It also helps explain the loose complementarity between self and society. Every activity and interaction involves them both, but not in equal degrees. Only some relationships of self with others or with society at large have a lasting impact on the self, providing or sustaining it with selfobject support. Other interactions are not always so consequential for the self, though they are still part of the reproduction of society.

Speaking about 'structure' also becomes necessary as society becomes more complex and globalized. Only when the differentiation between social integration (in a given situation) and system integration (across a society as a whole or even the world) widens extensively does one have to take into account both the obvious and hidden structures that widespread social systems draw upon for their continued organization. When sorting out a problematic issue in modern society, it is not usually enough to find a capable person with the right human

qualities to deal with it fairly; one also has to put right whatever in the system caused it. Thomas in his time could easily enough speak of a judge dispensing justice to others, because having the virtue of justice informed by charity, he could with the others' wellbeing in mind discern and award what was due to them. Today, when addressing questions about employment, trade, technological innovation, or race relations, one has to think of what features a just system would embody and what structures should compose it.

To some extent structures are evident, as people have a fair idea of what is happening in one another's lives and in society, all of which they with varying degrees of attention take account of in their interactions. Yet unacknowledged conditions of action will result in unintended consequences. Greater knowledge does not resolve this problem as it also complicates the action. The more the ramifications of any action are uncovered, the more its outcome is seen to rest upon other as yet unspecified factors. Psychological and social insight can shift the boundaries of awareness, but insight brings further (still hidden) structures into operation.

In short, human 'structure' is a very complicated notion; only partly obvious and never entirely isolatable. Unlike an anatomical or building structure it cannot be separated from process. Through our activities and interactions we inescapably both take part in structuring our society and one another. The overall result of any naive attempt to change structures would be akin to tilting against windmills!

Fortunately, both Giddens and Kohut analyze structures. The former speaks about social structures being analyzable into generative rules for understanding and evaluation, and into authoritative and allocative resources. The latter shows how the self is basically built around a pole of ambitions and another of ideals

joined by a tension arc of skills and talents. In any individual, however, this structure may be weakened; one element may more developed than others, parts may be split off with an unacknowledged life of their own.

By using their analyses as tools, one is able to investigate a little below the surface of both society and people's personalities. How for instance in a given society do its members depict their ambitions and ideals to themselves? Is there something going on that is unacknowledged? What are the generative rules they acknowledge and how do these differ from those actually in operation? Is this a cover up for the way resources are distributed? Then one might go on to ask: If resources are to be more justly distributed and used, then how will ambitions have to be changed? The point is not that either Giddens' theory of structuration or Kohut's self psychology provides answers, but that they help one raise pertinent questions.

## **2. The Persisting Character of Evil**

In his analysis of evil, Thomas distinguishes between faults and afflictions. While a fault may be committed at a particular moment, its repercussions may continue as afflictions for a long while. A fault is a wrong action (or omission) done by a free agent who knows what he or she is about. Even though the guilty person, the one who committed the fault, may be sorry and forgiven, its repercussions in his, hers or others' lives may remain. What particularly Giddens but also Kohut have done is to show how extensive might be the circles of damaging afflictions that arise from faults. Self psychology has shown how the self does not emerge even potentially whole and entire in the young, but already bears to a considerable extent both the strengths and *weaknesses* of those early mirroring and idealizing transferences, and later the twinship ones, that came from parents and significant others. Although the self may long for wholeness, it easily

invests that longing in objects that cannot provide it; even to the extent of idolizing them.

An evil is structural because it is continuously replicated. When people only have defective structures to draw upon, they inevitably produce defective actions and reproduce defective structures. If as members of society, they have no option but to rely upon its defective rules, both those governing communication and evaluation, consequently their outlook and actions are bound to be distorted. Harnessing defective or unjustly distributed resources, they cannot but poorly provide or insufficiently care for one another; usually in a manner that benefits some at others' expense. It should also be added, that if people only have and identify with misleading images of themselves, ones offered by those who want to play upon or exploit the weaknesses of the self, then acting them out will only compound their ruin.

Why cannot people stop drawing upon and reproducing evil structures? Here it is important that evil structures are not hypostatized, that rhetoric — important as it is — be not mistaken for analysis. Evil as a defect is parasitic upon the good. Structures can only perpetuate evil because basically they sustain some good; without that they would collapse entirely. A practical implication of this is that one cannot simply 'dismantle' apartheid, economic exploitation, colonialism, sexism or ageism en bloc. Instead one has to watch out for and pinpoint where particular images disable, accepted rules actually distort, resources are deficient or wrongly apportioned. Having done that, then one has to imagine better images, to seek for improved rules, to build up human and material resources as well as reapportioning them. This will involve reshaping the whole society, not merely a little area within it.

### 3. The Sinfulness of 'Social Sin'

At first sight the argument over whether structural evil should bear the term 'social sin' appears to be a semantic quibble of the sort that has given theology a bad name. There is, however, more to it than that. If structural evils were like tornadoes, lightning strikes or chance accidents, over which no one had any control, then the only sensible course of action would be to protect oneself as best one could. This would in fact equate them with what the law and insurance companies call 'acts of God.' No one is expected to stand up against them.

Naming structural or social evil(s) as 'sinful' casts them in a very different light. Social sin is analogous to deliberate personal sin, not because society as such (instead of an individual person) actually commits it. The analogy holds for three main reasons: 1) like concupiscence, it derives from and leads to personal sin; 2) it thwarts, though never completely, the effective exercise of charity or that self-giving which builds up the other person or group in their lives; and consequently 3) it is a condition we need to be redeemed from. Treating structural evils as 'acts of God', which we must just humbly or fatefully accept, only compounds the problem.

The practical implication is that as far as social sin is concerned one cannot remain neutral or a spectator. Since no place, occupation, culture or social position can entirely escape its influence, each person will at some point have to make a choice. Either one allies oneself with efforts to overcome the damaging effects of social evil in both one's own and others' lives, or one goes along with it. Each person either endeavours to find how he or she can best share in the redemption of the world from its persisting evils and follow that out personally, or he or she does not bother to go beyond a purely individual form of life. Finding out how 'he or she can best share' is not a once-for-all task, as it will involve assessing and at a later date reassessing the qualities of one's self, one's

abilities, social position and influence, as well as discerning one's sense of calling, mission and witness.

#### **4. Working With and Within the Metaphor**

Finally, it is important to be guided by a suitable root metaphor that depicts a relatively adequate view of reality, in particular of how self is in society and society in self. Both Kohut and Giddens found that conceiving of people in terms of forces being mechanically checked or channelled did not allow them to account for the subtleties of human life and relations. In particular, it did not account for how a person might reflexively take stock of his or her own self or position in society, and incorporate any insights gained thereby in the re-orientation of his or her aims. For instance, having seen where acceptance of conformity might lead, he or she can decide to object, rebel, break away or simply conform anyway. This process may take place, not just once but continually, as a person proceeds in ever varying ways to draw upon selfobject support, derived from past and current experience, and reconstrue his or her own self-narrative in response to changing perceptions and circumstances. Doing this, furthermore, is not a prerogative limited to one group of persons: the elite, leaders, experts, social engineers, or religious personnel.

The organismic metaphor brought out the value of interdependence and showed that one had a particular task as a member of the social body to uphold in relation to the whole. It held in a past age when no one conceived of redesigning the human body and few of reshaping society. The mechanistic metaphor was more ambivalent as it tried to combine freedom for individuals in an overall social order. It gave rise to a search for the social laws, analogous to the laws of mechanics, that governed the workings of society. If these could be found and applied, then a suitably redesigned social structure could be imposed — whether

by law or through education — so that people would turn out differently. As long as the right structure was put in place people could then exercise their individual rights and freedoms, particularly those centred upon the acquisition and use of property, without doing harm to one another. Other freedoms and even basic needs — ones that could not easily be quantified — took a secondary place, so those without property had in practice little freedom. In view of the resulting economic oppression of the poor, the Church initially reacted by trying to restore a more corporate vision of society.

The mechanistic root metaphor, like any other, has its blindspots. It really only depicts structure as a constraint upon individual freedom, or at best a channel for its expression. It overlooks how the exercise of human rights, the workings of democracy and the mechanisms of exchange draw for their operation upon an underlying sense of solidarity, of belonging to a united social body. But if each individual only thinks of his or her self-interest, without ever adverting to or caring for the social conditions that promote it, then their consequent neglect will steadily erode the social foundations upon which individual freedom rests.

Another shortcoming is that those designing new structures for society may easily assume that they are positioned outside society like mechanics repairing an engine. They do not grasp how their efforts to redesign and re-engineer society do take place within society. Without the opportunities that society provided them, they would be unable undertake any social engineering at all. Failure to identify their own position and its implications, or even their spinning a protective cocoon so they would not be too disturbed, easily prevents them from having to face how their activities are in fact contributing to the social problems they are endeavouring to solve. For instance, one person's relentless quest for security increases insecurity for all.



The artistic root metaphor differs from its predecessors in being more concerned with *process* than product, with appropriate action now than with the final artwork still to be completed. It does not depict any finished artwork, any model of an ideal society, but brings out how people should endeavour through their interactions to bring out the best in each other, much as the ever varied shapes, colours and tones in a painting enhance one another. While artwork can learn from its past mistakes, it is not tied by its conventions, but must experiment. Depending upon the sensitivity and discipline with which this process is carried out at each stage of the way, and upon how the emerging whole is continually weighed in relation to its parts and vice versa, so will a fine or dreadful artwork result.

In a sense this metaphor breaks down as members of society are never separate from the society they constitute, unlike artists who can stand back from and let their works go. Each participant in society is both helping to shape and being shaped by the whole social process; no one is outside society, nor does anyone have a purely spectator's view of all that is going on. This, however, does not mean that because a person cannot grasp everything or foretell the final outcome, there is nothing worthwhile he or she can usefully contribute.

Whether or not one accepts this last statement, especially when social evils appear to be overwhelming, is not at root a matter of sociology or social planning but of *faith*. Whether or not one lives it out, especially when social evils threaten one's livelihood and even life, is not basically a psychological issue but one of *hope*. Actually putting it into effect — especially in threatening times — expresses not only one's own *self-giving*, but above all the *love* of God at work among us. After all, as Paul — reversing the artistic paradigm — reminds us: “we are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life” (Eph 2: 10).

# Heinz Kohut: The Man and His Work

In view of Heinz Kohut being relatively unknown outside the circles of psychology and psychiatry, a short account of his life, work and outlook will be given. This, it is hoped, will be useful to theological readers to follow his preoccupations and understand his views.

## **1 The Life of Heinz Kohut (1913-1981)**

Born just before World War I in Vienna, Heinz was an only child. With his father away on the Russian front during his early years, and taken up with social functions during his later years, his childhood was rather sad and lonely. Nevertheless, he did well at school in both studies and athletics. Graduating from the gymnasium in 1932, he went to study medicine at the University of Vienna. In the midst of his course, he went off to Paris to experience French medicine from the inside of their hospitals.

After completing his degree, Kohut was attracted to psychoanalysis and underwent an analysis with August Aichorn, who besides being a close collaborator of Sigmund Freud is considered a giant in his own right. Kohut's single glimpse of Freud took place at the railway station, when Freud was leaving Nazi occupied Austria. As the train pulled out Freud looked out the window, the young Kohut raised his hat; Freud did so in return. Soon Kohut was himself a refugee, going first to England and then in 1940 on a wartime convoy to the United States.

Kohut settled in Chicago. After completing his internship, he took a residency in neurology. But by 1947, he had — like Freud his model — moved over exclusively to psychiatry. He underwent a second analysis with Ruth Eissler. The impression given by Strozier (1985, upon which this section is mainly based) is of someone with a definite sense of purpose, neat and meticulous, cultured but with a mischievous streak. An indication of his excellence is apparent in his becoming a member of the faculty of the Institute for Psychoanalysis immediately after graduating there. He kept his university appointment only until 1950, but remained on the faculty of the Institute for the rest of his life.

What made Kohut outstanding as an analyst was not just his competence, but his ability to grasp what something meant to the analysand. For him “the analyst’s job [is] to listen and to comprehend the patient’s feeling state and the meaning of that state empathically” (Miller, 1985: 30). He stressed the importance of gaining an empathic understanding of the patient, before offering any interpretation. Even if the latter were correct, but were given prior to establishing a bond of empathy with the patient, it would still be unacceptable and so not helpful. Without asking a lot of questions, Kohut took the analysand’s presentation ‘straight,’ assuming first of all that it meant what it seemed to mean. He “felt the tendency of analysts to look first for a hidden meaning and to ignore the simple and more manifest meaning was a mistake” (Miller, 1985: 15). Also, instead of fastening on details, such as slips of the tongue, unless their importance became apparent for some special reason, he sought a broad understanding of the self of his patients. Questioning them about little details might easily rekindle the distrust that had contributed to their pathology.

Both as a teacher and as an active member and office bearer in the American Psychoanalytic Association, Kohut sought to influence the development of the

psychoanalytic movement. "Before 1965 Kohut was Mr Psychoanalysis, the most eminent spokesman for classical Freudian thought, conservative and widely respected" (Strozier, 1985: 10). But, much to the disdain of many of his colleagues, the development of his thought could not be contained within the prevailing orthodoxy. The removal of an emotional obstacle enabled him to express clearly and opening what he had previously only alluded to (III: 228f). His investigations into narcissism and its growth into empathy led him to formulate what has come to be known as 'self psychology'.

Both Kohut and his new ideas were viciously attacked. Famous is his controversy with Otto Kernberg during the 1970s over the analyzability of certain patients with narcissistic personality disorders. Kohut took a much more optimistic line than Kernberg (see III: 303).

For Kohut narcissism is a developmental thread running through everyone's life. This thread can develop in either a healthy or pathological direction. For Kernberg, on the other hand, narcissism is per se a pathological concept. (Alt, 1988: 64)

Kernberg gave much more emphasis "to the dangerous level of destructiveness, both to themselves and others, which lurks in the more pathological people" (Alt, 1988: 91). In making any assessment of this controversy, attention would have to be given to whether they were each treating patients with a similar degree of pathology. Also, since Kohut was working out a new theory of his own while using traditional words, it is questionable how much they were speaking about the same set of conditions.

Many former colleagues looked upon Kohut's 'revisionist' ideas with bewilderment and rejected them. Psychoanalysts, no less than other professionals, are quite capable of — in lay language — rubbing one another up the wrong way. Westen relates an incident at a case presentation where he suggested to a senior

psychoanalyst that Kohut's theory might provide an insight into the dynamics of a unwanted child, tossed from relative to relative. "To this he replied, with the manner of a bishop gently reminding an errant priest of his duty to the church, 'You know, we don't *believe* in Kohut here.' " (1985: 370)

It is evident that from the 1960s onwards, Kohut's circle of friends changed as younger colleagues grouped themselves around him to learn from him and support him in his work. This circle went over the material for his books prior to their publication. It has also organized the annual Self Conferences, which have continued after Kohut's death. At the end of the first conference, Kohut gave his reflections on the papers, and spoke of his hopes and fears for the future of self psychology.

... our findings and theories have found many supporters who praise the usefulness of our ideas... [But they have also] aroused a good deal of antagonism, directed not only toward our experience-distant formulation but at our clinical practice. (1980: 546 & III: 350)

Kohut goes on to ask:

What then can we expect from the future? Will our discoveries be accepted for the benefit of the patients who undergo treatment, whether in the form of psychotherapy or in the form of analysis? Will our ideas take hold? (1980: 549 & III: 353)

Although confident that they will gradually take hold, Kohut suspects that appropriate credit is not so likely to be awarded to their originators. But, compared with other explanatory systems, Kohut claimed

they supply vastly more significant explanations of the phenomena that are actually encountered by the psychoanalyst, both inside and outside his office, i.e., as regards our patients in therapy and as regards man *in vivo*. (1980: 549 & III: 353)

This is a bold claim. But then, as Arnold Goldberg, one of Kohut's closest collaborators, said of him:

Like him or dislike him, you just don't often find that kind of person ... And he knew he was special. Most of his critics weren't playing the same game he was playing. ... There was just no one in his league. (reported in Strozier, 1985: 12).

However Kohut's contribution to psychology might finally be judged, his importance lies in his having first mastered and then breaking out of a narrow Freudian orthodoxy. Strozier, who interviewed Kohut on various topics going beyond purely clinical concerns, says of him:

No great thinker is humble; and it took real courage and fortitude to move away from a tradition — at least as perceived by those responsible for orthodoxy within that tradition — that was so completely a part of Kohut's soul. (1985: 11)

In his last years, Kohut struggled despite increasing illness to sketch out his paradigm of self psychology. As Paul Ornstein reports: "He would often say to me, in the midst of physical pain: 'But I still have ideas! As long as I can think and have ideas, it's worth it' to live." (III: 2)

So, just days before he died (October 8, 1981), he travelled to San Francisco and addressed a large audience on empathy at the annual 'Self Conference.' These conferences have continued to develop his line of thought and investigation.

## **2 Kohut's View on Religious/Christian Belief**

There are three possible ways of assessing the relationship of a writer such as Kohut to religion and hence to theology: in his life, in his treatment of religious themes, and in the affinity between his thought and a theological understanding of humanity.

## 2.1 Kohut's own 'Religion'

The first is to look into any formal religious adherence and belief. Seemingly, there was none during Kohut's adult life. At one point he was hostile to what he called "dogmatic religion," to those who have become serious as "defenders of the truth" because they consider their joyful search for it has ended (RESS: 207).

The nearest one comes to understanding Kohut's own position is when he speaks of Dag Hammarskjöld as an instance "of heroic men of constructive political action who have achieved a transformation of their narcissism into a contentless, inspiring personal religion" (SPHU: 71). Though, in the absence of further documentation, one cannot be sure how much Kohut would identify with this position himself.

## 2.2 The Treatment of Religious Themes in Kohut's Writings

One can examine his few explicit statements on religion or allusions to religious beliefs made in the course of his psychological studies. A few references are worth following up in Kohut's case.

In his earlier writings, Kohut remarks how in certain personality disorders, instead of someone having a healthy admiration for others and an enthusiasm for life, the self becomes fragmented and regresses. This "may manifest itself through the expression of vague and mystical religious preoccupations with isolated awe-inspiring qualities which no longer emanate from a clearly delimited, unitary admired figure" (SAPT: 85). Kohut sees an analogue, but not identity, between the relationship in adulthood of a true believer wanting to merge with his omnipotent God and the idealized parent imago formed in childhood (SAPT: 106 n1). These observations bring out how easy it is at first sight to confuse certain aspects of a disintegrating human self with real faith. Not

everything that appears religious is always sound; instead people should be judge by the fruits they produce (see Mt 7: 15-20 & Lk 6: 43-45).

Kohut does grant that in certain instances religious experiences do produce good fruit. Even what for him are hallucinations — religious or otherwise — may in times of enormous stress play a very positive role.

One striking characteristic of unusually courageous individuals is that at certain critical moments or stages of their lives they create imagery concerning an all-powerful figure on whom to lean for support. This idealized figure may be a personified god or a prototypical historical figure or a charismatic person who is living in the present. (SPHU: 6 & see HDAC: 76)

As instances of the former, Kohut cites in his study “On Courage” the examples of Franz Jägerstätter, and of Hans and Sophie Scholl, Germans who were executed by the Nazis for their resistance to the regime. In their cases, there was

the hallucinatory conjuring of the presence of the idealized Godhead which enables certain individuals to carry out acts of supreme courage not only without the aid of a supportative group, but even in the face of near-total social disapproval. (HDAC: 76)

Similar experiences have protected people in solitary confinement from being permanently damaged psychologically. Kohut is at pains to point out how different these martyr heroes were from psychologically disturbed persons. In the former there is a total blending of the personality with the values of the nuclear self.

... the martyr hero has a sense of profound inner peace (narcissistic equilibrium) and even the experience of conscious pleasure that his ideals and his total personality have now become one. ... We see neither the fuzzy mysticism which characterizes certain regressive swings in narcissistic personality disturbances nor, of course, the anxious and bizarre mental state surrounding the delusional contacts with a bizarre



god and with other distorted omnipotent figures which we encounter in the psychotic. (SPHU: 20)

In total contrast is the calm and peace of the martyr heroes, who were each living out the pattern of the nuclear self and loyal to it in death. "He will die without a trace of fear, dies as a matter of fact proudly. He knows that he has supported his real self, which lives on." (SPHU: 263)

There is a kind of functional equivalence between Kohut's pattern of the nuclear self and the calling a Christian fulfils in faith. Still, it is difficult to work out fully what Kohut understands by the nuclear self and how it arises, as he himself admits (SPHU: 26). He does not explain "how a self self-organizes itself out of simpler components" (Corbett and Kugler, 1989: 202) or whatever. What is important for grasping Kohut's view of religion is his linking the fulfilment of the deepest pattern of the nuclear self with an explicit religious motif. "It is indeed my conviction that the tragedy of man forms the very center of the stories told by the evangelists" (SPHU: 45) In psychological terms, "seeming defeat is actually a narcissistic triumph" (SPHU: 44). This allows Kohut to interpret the Jesus' death as follows:

The Mary's faint and cry; the Pharisees, the men of work and love and everyday morality, sneer at the hero; Pilate, the wielder of worldly power, will not interfere with the unrolling of the predestined life, despite his wife's dreams. The hero's friends detach themselves one by one in order to survive as death approaches. And then, after one last weakness and doubt, as in all great tragedy, there comes the final fulfilment and the ultimate consummation of the nuclear self of the hero. The rest — the mythological details of the moment of death, the empty tomb, the reappearances — is symbolism. These are secondary additions, yet they remain in meaningful symbolic contact with the essence of the story, for they tell in various ways of the hero's narcissistic triumph, of his immortal divinity. (SPHU: 45)

In speaking about the Pharisees as "the men of work and love and everyday

morality," Kohut is echoing Freud's description of psychological health as the ability to love and work. In this view, people are called to live by everyday morality; they fail and so bear the burden of guilt. Whereas, Jesus and other heroes have another life curve to follow, one that goes "beyond the pleasure principle" and is not constrained by fear and guilt. Although they meet opposition and death, the tragic hero can die without regret as the aims of his nuclear self are realized. Kohut's insight here hinges upon the distinction he brings out between Guilty Man and Tragic Man.

One might sum up Kohut's attitude to religion, specifically Christian belief, as being an important contribution to psychology, but hardly vice versa. What a believer would speak about as one's calling and destiny in faith, Kohut would call the fulfilment of the pattern and ideals given in the nuclear self. Unlike Freud, Kohut does not dismiss religion as merely irrational dogma, but he agrees with Freud in saying:

It is poor science. But if it's good, it may be outstanding psychology. In its best and central part, religion puts into words an awareness of what is in people. When you talk about paradise, the idea is that there is something greater than the individual life. Although some ideas become debased and vulgarized and popularized in terms of very specific concrete images, like hymn-singing angels, I think in the eyes of a deep searcher for religious truths these things fall by the wayside. (SPHU: 264)

### **2.3 Affinities between the Self Psychology and Theology**

One may also work out the general affinity between his view of human existence, life, activity and destiny, and the views upheld in one or other theology. To what extent do they share common principles, use compatible images to portray the meaning of life, or draw on similar root metaphors? Any conclusions about this could only be advanced after a thorough study of Kohut's self psychology. This task of comparison has already been initiated, at least in part, by Kill (1986),

Browning (1987), and Olthuis (1989).

Browning (1987: 6) notices “most affinity” between Christian thought and the culture of *care* evident in Kohut’s self psychology and also in Erikson’s approach to identity, than the culture of *detachment* (Freud), of *control* (Skinner), or of *joy* (Rogers, Maslow, Perls and Jung) that characterizes other psychologies. In the field of pastoral psychology, both Mason and Scharfenberg (in Goldberg, 1980) relate how helpful they have found the theory and approaches of self psychology in their pastoral practice.

On a more theological level, Olthuis suggests that

‘covenanting’ as a depth metaphor of the Christian faith comports well with ‘being-with’ as a depth metaphor of [Kohut’s] psychotherapy. ... Self psychology’s concern with the relational-communal nature of the human self and the restoration of the fragmented human self fits well with faith’s concern with love, community, wholeness and healing of brokenness. (1989: 314f).

The positive nature of these comparisons gives some assurance that drawing Kohut’s thought into contact with Christian theology will not result in an impossible dialogue.

Furthermore, Olthuis proposes that self psychology should widen its interest beyond the early years of human development, so as to show the dynamics of relational interdependence throughout life. So, in line with the concerns of this study, Olthuis suggests that

Self psychology would enrich itself — and society as a whole — by developing its interrelational dynamic with reference to these wider social, institutional and environmental matrices of relations which make up the thick, heavily textured fabric of life. ... Such an enrichment, demanded by the covenantal metaphor of faith, could

be aided and abetted by the abundant resources of liberation theology and all other movements aligned against racism, sexism and oppression of any kind. (1989: 324)

### 3 Society and Kohut's Psychology of the Self

For understanding the self, Kohut's works can hardly be passed over. But why is he chosen, rather than other psychologists, to contribute to understanding society? After all, he does not provide an elaborated theory of the relation between self and society, only a number of passing hints and asides (see 9.1.5 below). Yet what Kohut offers is a sophisticated theory of the self, one that leaves space for investigating its linkage with society. There are several reasons for this.

First, Kohut delineates the structures of the self that are built up very early in life, and so are basically common to everyone. These structures may be well developed and sound, or partially developed and weak. What exactly will be the repercussions for each individual of these strengths and weaknesses will vary enormously as they meet life's vicissitudes. But the extent to which a person is able to respond and contribute positively to others, and ultimately to society, depends mainly upon the basic strengths and weakness in her or his self structure.

Second, because Kohut is dealing with very basic structures, his insights are less culture bound than those dealing with the later stages of development. For instance, the Oedipus/Electra complex that Freud treated so extensively occurs slightly later in life, and is tied more closely to the developmental problems of certain societies. Whereas Kohut's explanation allows for both cultural and personal differences to emerge as people shape their own ambitions, talents and ideals in response to others around them (also see Alt, 1988: 88).

Third, a psychology of severe mental disorders is not likely to have much bearing upon social issues. Highly pathological or psychotic persons are rather beyond the reach of society; in Greek *ιδιωτης*, people on their own cut off from society. Most of Kohut's analysands, at least the cases he draws on in his writings, exhibit a less severe pathology. He is dealing with people who in many respects can function normally, and so are generally accepted by others, but whose personality disorders contribute to the weakening of society. Kohut throws light on how weaknesses in the structure of the self, which to some degree everyone suffers from, are likely to have repercussions in personal relations and society as a whole.

Four, leadership and the influence of a leader's personality are not prominent themes in sociological studies, such as those of Giddens. How much do certain figures shape society for good or will? Who rises to prominence and why? Kohut, as well as other psychologists, do address these issues. He shows why certain pathological figures attain leadership positions, and hence enormous power, because they present an illusory solution to the social ills and problems that people are facing (see Chapter Seventeen).

Finally, many of Kohut's investigations deal with narcissism, or — put simply — the quality of a person's self-regard; depending upon the quality it attains, a person may either open out to others in genuine empathy or remain touchy and boastful. The latter both needs others to bolster her self-esteem, yet at the same time is threatened by them. A healthy society cannot be formed if the latter predominates over the former. As Kohut observes:

The years that I devoted to organizational tasks in psychoanalysis have made me more keenly aware of the role of narcissism in the public realm: as a spur for constructive planning and collaborative action, if integrated with and subordinated to social and cultural purposes; and as a source of sterile dissension and destructive

conflict, if in the service of unneutralized ambition or of rationalized rage. (SPHU: 51)

Admittedly the term 'narcissism' has been applied, usually in a negative sense, too freely to individuals and societies, so it becomes evacuated of meaning. But Kohut's careful delineation of its origin and development as well as its positive and negative qualities, allows one to make a more discriminating assessment of its effects in society.

#### 4 Stages of Kohut's Thought

As might be expected from the outline of Kohut's life, his thought changed and developed steadily. This has been carefully charted by Ornstein in his introductions to Kohut's selected writings (I: 1-106 & III: 1-82). He distinguishes four periods in the development of Kohut's thought from 1950 to 1981; the details need not detain us here. But two points are of interest for this study, namely, his abiding interest in issues that go beyond a purely clinical setting (see 9.1.5 below), and his continual coming back to clarify points of theory. His writing thus exhibits a sustained effort to forge a new set of psychoanalytic concepts, ones that maintain continuity with the classical Freudian vocabulary but will also embody his new insights.

His first book, *The Analysis of the Self* in 1971, attempted within the limits of classical theory to express his newly emerging conception of the self. Kohut later described it as an attempt to "pour new wine into old bottles" (Stororow in Goldberg, 1988: 63). But his divergence from classical theory only became fully evident with the publication of *The Restoration of the Self* in 1977 and the first two volumes of collected papers, *The Search for the Self*, in 1978. There his vocabulary becomes less cumbersome and more direct, as he has grown into his own terminology. His last book, *How does Analysis Cure?* which he had finished just before he died in 1981, and the second two volumes of collected papers

(published posthumously in 1990 and 1991), show him revising his terminology and correcting misconceptions that had arisen from his earlier works. As he was now more sure what he wanted to say, and was no longer dependent upon classical theory, he could state his own views much more clearly. In short, to grasp his central ideas it is best to read his later works first.

So throughout this study greater use has been made of Kohut's later writings. Not only are they easier to read, but they present a more coherent theory of the self. Though at times earlier works have also been drawn upon as the examples and case studies there throw light upon the relation of self to society. In any case, the purpose of this study is to draw out from his writings the ideas and suggestions most helpful for understanding social evil, rather than examining the intricacies of Kohut's thought in its different formulations for their own sake. Many of Kohut's ideas, especially those dealing with strictly clinical issues, have not been touched upon in this study. Though his followers' works, especially their contributions to the Self Conferences, have also been used occasionally to fill out our understanding.

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