To Conquer Fear is the Beginning of Wisdom

A Selection of Essays from *Routledge Classics*
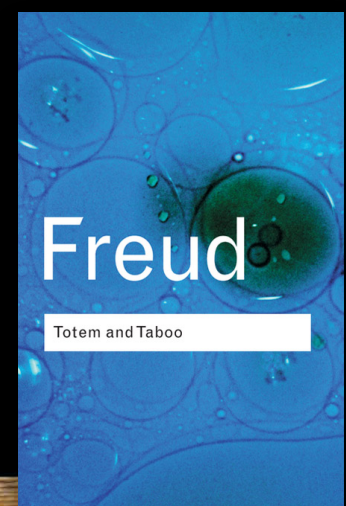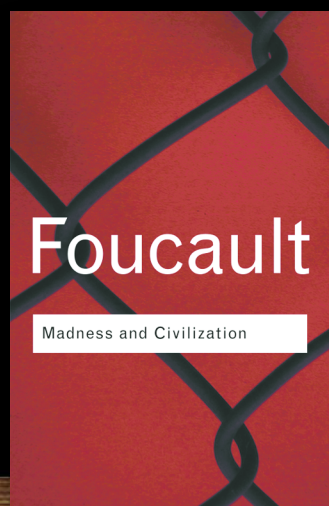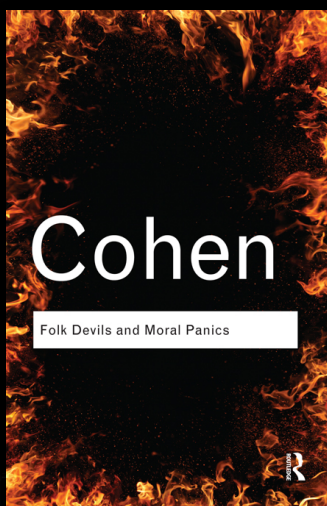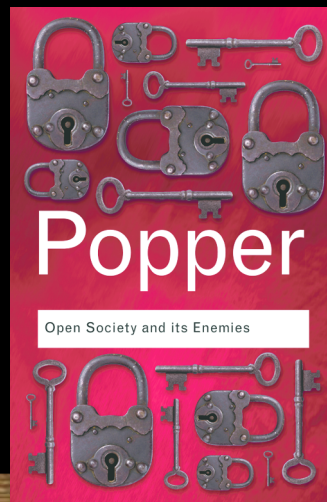
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Introduction

The following chapters, selected from five different titles in the *Routledge Classics* series, provide a brief taste of what some great writers of the Twentieth century have said about both hope and fear, the theme of the 2016 Being Human festival.

Bertrand Russell's classic essay *Why I am Not a Christian* (1927) caused great controversy on its publication and was a factor in Russell's later dismissal from his position at the College of the City of New York in 1940. Why should anyone want to be a Christian? Russell argues that the real reason people accept religion has little to do with argumentation and much more to do with emotion, especially fear. For Russell, fear is the very basis of religion: 'Fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death'. The way out of such self-imposed fear, according to Russell, was to cultivate an open-minded outlook, a free intelligence and hope for the future.

Where Russell sees religion as a source of fear, Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (1966; Routledge Classics 2002) is one of the great anthropological studies of religion and ritual. In her Introduction to this work, reprinted here, Douglas challenges the idea of primitive religion as governed by a simple opposition between purity and defilement. Not only does this present a false picture of religious belief but of attitudes towards dirt-avoidance generally. Far from being unreasonable, activities such as removing dirt, papering, and decorating create symbolic patterns and public displays, imparting a unity to the complexity of human experience. Dirt concerns the relation of order to disorder, form to formlessness and life to death. As such, the rules of purity are an ideal means of studying religion, which is what Douglas sets out to do.

Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) is one of the great critiques of the intellectual architecture behind totalitarian systems. "If our civilisation is to survive," Popper writes in the Introduction, reprinted here, "we must break with the habit of deference to great men." For Popper these men are Plato, Hegel and Marx. Popper argues that whilst they had vast influence, their arguments are fundamentally flawed – and dangerous. They are utopian in assuming they have grasped the 'laws' of history and, crucially for Popper as a philosopher of science, they are dangerous because they ignore the distinction between prediction and prophesy. Popper spells out how every utopian idea contains the seeds of totalitarianism in this great work, hailed by Bertrand Russell as 'a profound defence of democracy' and hailed by the Guardian as one of the 100 Best Non-Fiction Books of All Time.

Published a few years prior to *The Open Society and Its Enemies* Erich Fromm's *The Fear of Freedom* (1942) is one of the founding works of political psychology. A psychoanalyst and member of the famous Frankfurt School Fromm asks why, despite a long history of hard-won social and political liberties, human beings have so readily given up their freedom and submitted to authority. For Fromm, it is because human beings are caught in an inescapable paradox: We are drawn towards community and belonging as a desire

to be part of society, but at the cost of surrendering the freedom to be individuals. The consequences, as Fromm himself as a Jew in Germany in the 1930s, can be devastating.

The final excerpt is from Stanley Cohen's landmark sociological work *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972; Routledge Classics 2011). Cohen argues that a moral panic occurs when "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests". Through a compelling study of the subcultures of mods and rockers Cohen argues that as soon as they are created, frequently by the media, moral panics are then capitalised on by 'moral entrepreneurs' – editors, politicians and the police who proceed to condemn a group and its behaviour. In a contemporary climate of moral fear and condemnation surrounding welfare cheats, single mothers, and refugees and asylum seekers Cohen's insights remain as relevant today as on the book's first publication.

TONY BRUCE
Senior Publisher
Philosophy & Routledge Classics

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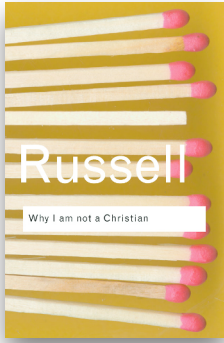
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Why I am not a Christian

1. WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN

Bertrand Russell *(1872-1970). A celebrated mathematician and logician, Russell was and remains one of the most genuinely widely read and popular philosophers of modern times.*

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This lecture was delivered on March 6, 1927, at Battersea Town Hall, under the auspices of the South London Branch of the National Secular Society.

As your Chairman has told you, the subject about which I am going to speak to you tonight is 'Why I am not a Christian'. Perhaps it would be as well, first of all, to try to make out what one means by the word 'Christian'. It is used these days in a very loose sense by a great many people. Some people mean no more by it than a person who attempts to live a good life. In that sense I suppose there would be Christians in all sects and creeds; but I do not think that that is the proper sense of the word, if only because it would imply that all the people who are not Christians—all the Buddhists, Confucians, Mohammedans, and so on—are not trying to live a good life. I do not mean by a Christian any person who tries to live decently according to his lights. I think that you must have a certain amount of definite belief before you have a right to call yourself a Christian. The word does not have quite such a full-blooded meaning now as it had in the times of St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. In those days, if a man said that he was a Christian it was known what he meant. You accepted a whole collection of creeds which were set out with great precision, and every single syllable of those creeds you believed with the whole strength of your convictions.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

Nowadays it is not quite that. We have to be a little more vague in our meaning of Christianity. I think, however, that there are two different items which are quite essential to anybody calling himself a Christian. The first is one of a dogmatic nature—namely, that you must believe in God and immortality. If you do not believe in those two things, I do not think that you can properly call yourself a Christian. Then, further than that, as the name implies, you must have some kind of belief about Christ. The Mohammedans, for instance, also believe in God and in immortality, and yet they would not call themselves Christians. I think you must have at the very lowest the belief that Christ was, if not divine, at least the best and wisest of men. If you are not going to believe that much about Christ, I do not think you have any right to call yourself a Christian. Of course there is another sense which you find in *Whitaker's Almanack* and in geography books, where the population of the world is said to be divided into Christians, Mohammedans, Buddhists, fetish worshippers, and so on; and in that sense we are all Christians. The geography books count us all in, but that is a purely geographical sense, which I suppose we can ignore. Therefore I take it that when

I tell you why I am not a Christian I have to tell you two different things; first, why I do not believe in God and in immortality; and, secondly, why I do not think that Christ was the best and wisest of men, although I grant Him a very high degree of moral goodness.

But for the successful efforts of unbelievers in the past, I could not take so elastic a definition of Christianity as that. As I said before, in olden days it had a much more full-blooded sense. For instance, it concluded the belief in hell. Belief in eternal hell fire was an essential item of Christian belief until pretty recent times. In this country, as you know, it ceased to be an essential item because of a decision of the Privy Council, and from that decision the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York dissented; but in this country our religion is settled by Act of Parliament, and therefore the Privy Council was able to override Their Graces and hell was no longer necessary to a Christian. Consequently I shall not insist that a Christian must believe in hell.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

To come to this question of the existence of God, it is a large and serious question, and if I were to attempt to deal with it in any adequate manner I should have to keep you here until Kingdom Come, so that you will have to excuse me if I deal with it in a somewhat summary fashion. You know, of course, that the Catholic Church has laid it down as a dogma that the existence of God can be proved by the unaided reason. That is a somewhat curious dogma, but it is one of their dogmas. They had to introduce it because at one time the Freethinkers adopted the habit of saying that there were such and such arguments which mere reason might urge against the existence of God, but of course they knew as a matter of faith that God did exist. The arguments and the reasons were set out at great length, and the Catholic Church felt that they must stop it. Therefore they laid it down that the existence of God can be proved by the unaided reason, and they had to set up what they considered were arguments to prove it. There are, of course, a number of them, but I shall take only a few.

THE FIRST CAUSE ARGUMENT

Perhaps the simplest and easiest to understand is the argument of the First Cause. (It is maintained that everything we see in this world has a cause, and as you go back in the chain of causes further and further you must come to a First Cause, and to that First Cause you give the name of God). That argument, I suppose, does not carry very much weight nowadays, because, in the first place, cause is not quite what it used to be. The philosophers and the men of science have got going on cause, and it has not anything like the vitality it used to have; but, apart from that, you can see that the argument that

there must be a First Cause is one that cannot have any validity. I may say that when I was a young man and was debating these questions very seriously in my mind, I for a long time accepted the argument of the First Cause, until one day, at the age of eighteen, I read John Stuart Mill's Autobiography, and I there found this sentence: 'My father taught me that the question, "Who made me?" cannot be answered, since it immediately suggests the further question, "Who made God?" ' That very simple sentence showed me, as I still think, the fallacy in the argument of the First Cause. If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God, so that there cannot be any validity in that argument. It is exactly of the same nature as the Hindu's view, that the world rested upon an elephant and the elephant rested upon a tortoise; and when they said, 'How about the tortoise?' the Indian said, 'Suppose we change the subject.' The argument is really no better than that. There is no reason why the world could not have come into being without a cause; nor, on the other hand, is there any reason why it should not have always existed. There is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all. The idea that things must have a beginning is really due to the poverty of our imagination. Therefore, perhaps, I need not waste any more time upon the argument about the First Cause.

THE NATURAL LAW ARGUMENT

Then there is a very common argument from natural law. That was a favourite argument all through the eighteenth century, especially under the influence of Sir Isaac Newton and his cosmogony. People observed the planets going round the sun according to the law of gravitation, and they thought that God had given a behest to these planets to move in that particular fashion, and that was why they did so. That was, of course, a convenient and simple explanation that saved them the trouble of looking any further for explanations of the law of gravitation. Nowadays we explain the law of gravitation in a somewhat complicated fashion that Einstein has introduced. I do not propose to give you a lecture on the law of gravitation as interpreted by Einstein, because that again would take some time; at any rate, you no longer have the sort of natural law that you had in the Newtonian system, where, for some reason that nobody could understand, nature behaved in a uniform fashion. We now find that a great many things we thought were natural laws are really human conventions. You know that even in the remotest depths of stellar space there are still three feet to a yard. That is, no doubt, a very remarkable fact, but you would hardly call it a law of nature. And a great many things that have been regarded as laws of nature are of that kind. On the other hand, where you can get down to any knowledge of what atoms actually do, you will find they are much less subject to law than people thought, and that the laws at which

you arrive are statistical averages of just the sort that would emerge from chance. There is, as we all know, a law that if you throw dice you will get double sixes only about once in thirty-six times, and we do not regard that as evidence that the fall of the dice is regulated by design; on the contrary, if the double sixes came every time we should think that there was design. The laws of nature are of that sort as regards a great many of them. They are statistical averages such as would emerge from the laws of chance; and that makes this whole business of natural law much less impressive than it formerly was. Quite apart from that, which represents the momentary state of science that may change tomorrow, the whole idea that natural laws imply a law-giver is due to a confusion between natural and human laws. Human laws are behests commanding you to behave a certain way, in which way you may choose to behave, or you may choose not to behave; but natural laws are a description of how things do in fact behave, and being a mere description of what they in fact do, you cannot argue that there must be somebody who told them to do that, because even supposing that there were you are then faced with the question, 'Why did God issue just those natural laws and no others?' If you say that He did it simply from His own good pleasure, and without any reason, you then find that there is something which is not subject to law, and so your train of natural law is interrupted. If you say, as more orthodox theologians do, that in all the laws which God issues He had a reason for giving those laws rather than others—the reason, of course, being to create the best universe, although you would never think it to look at it— if there was a reason for the laws which God gave, then God Himself was subject to law, and therefore you do not get any advantage by introducing God as an intermediary. You have really a law outside and anterior to the divine edicts, and God does not serve your purpose, because He is not the ultimate lawgiver. In short, this whole argument about natural law no longer has anything like the strength that it used to have. I am travelling on in time in my review of the arguments. The arguments that are used for the existence of God change their character as time goes on. They were at first hard, intellectual arguments embodying certain quite definite fallacies. As we come to modern times they become less respectable intellectually and more and more affected by a kind of moralising vagueness.

THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

The next step in this process brings us to the argument from design. You all know the argument from design: everything in the world is made just so that we can manage to live in the world, and if the world was ever so little different we could not manage to live in it. That is the argument from design. It sometimes takes a rather curious form; for instance, it is argued that rabbits have white tails in order to be easy to shoot. I do

not know how rabbits would view that application. It is an easy argument to parody. You all know Voltaire's remark, that obviously the nose was designed to be such as to fit spectacles. That sort of parody has turned out to be not nearly so wide of the mark as it might have seemed in the eighteenth century, because since the time of Darwin we understand much better why living creatures are adapted to their environment. It is not that their environment was made to be suitable to them, but that they grew to be suitable to it, and that is the basis of adaptation. There is no evidence of design about it.

When you come to look into this argument from design, it is a most astonishing thing that people can believe that this world, with all the things that are in it, with all its defects, should be the best that omnipotence and omniscience has been able to produce in millions of years. I really cannot believe it. Do you think that, if you were granted omnipotence and omniscience and millions of years in which to perfect your world, you could produce nothing better than the Ku-Klux-Klan or the Fascists? Moreover, if you accept the ordinary laws of science, you have to suppose that human life and life in general on this planet will die out in due course: it is a stage in the decay of the solar system; at a certain stage of decay you get the sort of conditions of temperature and so forth which are suitable to protoplasm, and there is life for a short time in the life of the whole solar system. You see in the moon the sort of thing to which the earth is tending—something dead, cold, and lifeless.

I am told that that sort of view is depressing, and people will sometimes tell you that if they believed that they would not be able to go on living. Do not believe it; it is all nonsense. Nobody really worries much about what is going to happen millions of years hence. Even if they think they are worrying much about that, they are really deceiving themselves. They are worried about something much more mundane, or it may merely be a bad digestion; but nobody is really seriously rendered unhappy by the thought of something that is going to happen to this world millions of years hence. Therefore, although it is of course a gloomy view to suppose that life will die out—at least I suppose we may say so, although sometimes when I contemplate the things that people do with their lives I think it is almost a consolation—it is not such as to render life miserable. It merely makes you turn your attention to other things.

THE MORAL ARGUMENTS FOR DEITY

Now we reach one stage further in what I shall call the intellectual descent that the Theists have made in their argumentations, and we come to what are called the moral arguments for the existence of God. You all know, of course, that there used to be in the old days three intellectual arguments for the existence of God, all of which were

disposed of by Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; but no sooner had he disposed of those arguments than he invented a new one, a moral argument, and that quite convinced him. He was like many people: in intellectual matters he was sceptical, but in moral matters he believed implicitly in the maxims that he had imbibed at his mother's knee. That illustrates what the psychoanalysts so much emphasise—the immensely stronger hold upon us that our very early associations have than those of later times.

Kant, as I say, invented a new moral argument for the existence of God, and that in varying forms was extremely popular during the nineteenth century. It has all sorts of forms. One form is to say that there would be no right or wrong unless God existed. I am not for the moment concerned with whether there is a difference between right and wrong, or whether there is not: that is another question. The point I am concerned with is that, if you are quite sure there is a difference between right and wrong, you are then in this situation: is that difference due to God's fiat or is it not? If it is due to God's fiat, then for God Himself there is no difference between right and wrong, and it is no longer a significant statement to say that God is good. If you are going to say, as theologians do, that God is good, you must then say that right and wrong have some meaning which is independent of God's fiat, because God's fiats are good and not bad independently of the mere fact that He made them. If you are going to say that, you will then have to say that it is not only through God that right and wrong came into being, but that they are in their essence logically anterior to God. You could, of course, if you liked, say that there was a superior deity who gave orders to the God who made this world, or could take up the line that some of the gnostics took up—a line which I often thought was a very plausible one—that as a matter of fact this world that we know was made by the devil at a moment when God was not looking. There is a good deal to be said for that, and I am not concerned to refute it.

THE ARGUMENT FOR THE REMEDYING OF INJUSTICE

Then there is another very curious form of moral argument, which is this: they say that the existence of God is required in order to bring justice into the world. In the part of this universe that we know there is great injustice, and often the good suffer, and often the wicked prosper, and one hardly knows which of those is the more annoying; but if you are going to have justice in the universe as a whole you have to suppose a future life to redress the balance of life here on earth. So they say that there must be a God, and there must be heaven and hell in order that in the long run there may be justice. That is a very curious argument. If you looked at the matter from a scientific point of view, you would say: 'After all, I know only this world. I do not know about the rest of

the universe, but so far as one can argue at all on probabilities one would say that probably this world is a fair sample, and if there is injustice here the odds are that there is injustice elsewhere also.' Supposing you got a crate of oranges that you opened, and you found all the top layer of oranges bad, you would not argue: 'The underneath ones must be good, so as to redress the balance.' You would say: 'Probably the whole lot is a bad consignment'; and that is really what a scientific person would argue about the universe. He would say: 'Here we find in this world a great deal of injustice and so far as that goes that is a reason for supposing that justice does not rule in the world; and therefore so far as it goes it affords a moral argument against deity and not in favour of one.' Of course I know that the sort of intellectual arguments that I have been talking to you about are not what really moves people. What really moves people to believe in God is not any intellectual argument at all. Most people believe in God because they have been taught from early infancy to do it, and that is the main reason.

Then I think that the next most powerful reason is the wish for safety, a sort of feeling that there is a big brother who will look after you. That plays a very profound part in influencing people's desire for a belief in God.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

I now want to say a few words upon a topic which I often think is not quite sufficiently dealt with by Rationalists, and that is the question whether Christ was the best and the wisest of men. It is generally taken for granted that we shall all agree that that was so. I do not myself. I think that there are a good many points upon which I agree with Christ a great deal more than the professing Christians do. I do not know that I could go with Him all the way, but I could go with Him much farther than most professing Christians can. You will remember that He said: 'Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' That is not a new precept or a new principle. It was used by Lao-Tze and Buddha some five or six hundred years before Christ, but it is not a principle which as a matter of fact Christians accept. I have no doubt that the present Prime Minister,[1] for instance, is a most sincere Christian, but I should not advise any of you to go and smite him on one cheek. I think you might find that he thought this text was intended in a figurative sense.

Then there is another point which I consider is excellent. You will remember that Christ said: 'Judge not lest ye be judged.' That principle I do not think you would find was popular in the law courts of Christian countries. I have known in my time quite a

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[1] Stanley Baldwin

number of judges who were very earnest Christians, and they none of them felt that they were acting contrary to Christian principles in what they did. Then Christ says: 'Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.' That is a very good principle.

Your Chairman has reminded you that we are not here to talk politics, but I cannot help observing that the last general election was fought on the question of how desirable it was to turn away from him that would borrow of thee, so that one must assume that the Liberals and Conservatives of this country are composed of people who do not agree with the teaching of Christ, because they certainly did very emphatically turn away on that occasion.

Then there is one other maxim of Christ which I think has a great deal in it, but I do not find that it is very popular among some of our Christian friends. He says: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor.' That is a very excellent maxim, but, as I say, it is not much practised. All these, I think, are good maxims, although they are a little difficult to live up to. I do not profess to live up to them myself; but then after all, it is not quite the same thing as for a Christian.

DEFECTS IN CHRIST'S TEACHING

Having granted the excellence of these maxims, I come to certain points in which I do not believe that one can grant either the superlative wisdom or the superlative goodness of Christ as depicted in the Gospels; and here I may say that one is not concerned with the historical question. Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him, so that I am not concerned with the historical question, which is a very difficult one. I am concerned with Christ as He appears in the Gospels, taking the Gospel narrative as it stands, and there one does find some things that do not seem to be very wise. For one thing, He certainly thought that His second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time. There are a great many texts that prove that. He says, for instance: 'Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come.' Then He says: 'There are some standing here which shall not taste death till the Son of Man comes into His kingdom'; and there are a lot of places where it is quite clear that He believed that His second coming would happen during the lifetime of many then living. That was the belief of His earlier followers, and it was the basis of a good deal of His moral teaching. When He said, 'Take no thought for the morrow,' and things of that sort, it was very largely because He thought that the second coming was going to be very soon, and that all ordinary mundane affairs did not count. I have, as a matter of fact, known some Christians who did believe that the second

coming was imminent. I knew a parson who frightened his congregation terribly by telling them that the second coming was very imminent indeed, but they were much consoled when they found that he was planting trees in his garden. The early Christians did really believe it, and they did abstain from such things as planting trees in their gardens, because they did accept from Christ the belief that the second coming was imminent. In that respect clearly He was not so wise as some other people have been, and he was certainly not superlatively wise.

THE MORAL PROBLEM

Then you come to moral questions. There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment. Christ certainly as depicted in the Gospels did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching—an attitude which is not uncommon with preachers, but which does somewhat detract from superlative excellence. You do not, for instance, find that attitude in Socrates. You find him quite bland and urbane towards the people who would not listen to him; and it is, to my mind, far more worthy of a sage to take that line than to take the line of indignation. You probably all remember the sort of things that Socrates was saying when he was dying, and the sort of things that he generally did say to people who did not agree with him.

You will find that in the Gospels Christ said: 'Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?' That was said to people who did not like His preaching. It is not really to my mind quite the best tone, and there are a great many of these things about hell. There is, of course, the familiar text about the sin against the Holy Ghost: 'Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven him neither in this world nor in the world of come.' That text has caused an unspeakable amount of misery in the world, for all sorts of people have imagined that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and thought that it would not be forgiven them either in this world or in the world to come. I really do not think that a person with a proper degree of kindliness in his nature would have put fears and terrors of that sort into the world.

Then Christ says: 'The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth'; and He goes on about the wailing and gnashing of teeth. It comes in one verse after another, and it is quite manifest to the reader that there is a certain pleasure in contemplating wailing

and gnashing of teeth, or else it would not occur so often. Then you all, of course, remember about the sheep and the goats; how at the second coming to divide the sheep and the goats He is going to say to the goats: 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.' He continues: 'And these shall go away into everlasting fire.' Then He says again: 'If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.' He repeats that again and again also. I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; and the Christ of the Gospels, if you could take Him as His chroniclers represent Him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that.

There are other things of less importance. There is the instance of the Gadarene swine where it certainly was not very kind to the pigs to put the devils into them and make them rush down the hill to the sea. You must remember that He was omnipotent, and He could have made the devils simply go away; but He chooses to send them into the pigs. Then there is the curious story of the fig-tree, which always rather puzzled me. You remember what happened about the fig-tree. 'He was hungry; and seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, He came if haply He might find anything thereon; and when He came to it He found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it: "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever," . . . and Peter . . . saith unto Him: "Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away".' This is a very curious story, because it was not the right time of year for figs, and you really could not blame the tree. I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history. I think I should put Buddha and Socrates above Him in those respects.

THE EMOTIONAL FACTOR

As I said before, I do not think that the real reason why people accept religion has anything to do with argumentation. They accept religion on emotional grounds. One is often told that it is a very wrong thing to attack religion, because religion makes men virtuous. So I am told; I have not noticed it. You know, of course, the parody of that argument in Samuel Butler's book, *Erewhon Revisited*. You will remember that in *Erewhon* there is a certain Higgs who arrives in a remote country, and after spending some time there he escapes from that country in a balloon. Twenty years later he comes back to that country and finds a new religion, in which he is worshipped under the name of the 'Sun Child', and it is said that he ascended into Heaven. He finds that the

Feast of the Ascension is about to be celebrated, and he hears Professors Hanky and Panky say to each other that they never set eyes on the man Higgs, and they hope they never will; but they are the high priests of the religion of the Sun Child. He is very indignant, and he comes up to them, and he says: 'I am going to expose all this humbug and tell the people of Erewhon that it was only I, the man Higgs, and I went up in a balloon.' He was told: 'You must not do that, because all the morals of this country are bound round this myth, and if they once know that you did not ascend into heaven they will all become wicked'; and so he is persuaded of that and he goes quietly away.

That is the idea—that we should all be wicked if we did not hold to the Christian religion. It seems to me that the people who have held to it have been for the most part extremely wicked. You find this curious fact, that the more intense has been the religion of any period and the more profound has been the dogmatic belief, the greater has been the cruelty and the worse has been the state of affairs. In the so-called ages of faith, when men really did believe the Christian religion in all its completeness, there was the Inquisition, with its tortures; there were millions of unfortunate women burnt as witches; and there was every kind of cruelty practised upon all sorts of people in the name of religion.

You find as you look around the world that every single bit of progress in humane feeling, every improvement in the criminal law, every step towards the diminution of war, every step towards better treatment of the coloured races, or every mitigation of slavery, every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organised Churches of the world. I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organised in its Churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world.

HOW THE CHURCHES HAVE RETARDED PROGRESS

You may think that I am going too far when I say that that is still so. I do not think that I am. Take one fact. You will bear with me if I mention it. It is not a pleasant fact, but the Churches compel one to mention facts that are not pleasant. Supposing that in this world that we live in today an inexperienced girl is married to a syphilitic man, in that case the Catholic Church says: 'This is an indissoluble sacrament. You must stay together for life.' And no steps of any sort must be taken by that woman to prevent herself from giving birth to syphilitic children. That is what the Catholic Church says. I say that that is fiendish cruelty, and nobody whose natural sympathies have not been warped by dogma, or whose moral nature was not absolutely dead to all sense of suffering, could maintain that it is right and proper that that state of things should continue.

That is only an example. There are a great many ways in which at the present moment the Church, by its insistence upon what it chooses to call morality, inflicts upon all sorts of people undeserved and unnecessary suffering. And of course, as we know, it is in its major part an opponent still of progress and of improvement in all the ways that diminish suffering in the world, because it has chosen to label as morality a certain narrow set of rules of conduct which have nothing to do with human happiness; and when you say that this or that ought to be done because it would make for human happiness, they think that has nothing to do with the matter at all. 'What has human happiness to do with morals? The object of morals is not to make people happy.'

FEAR THE FOUNDATION OF RELIGION

Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown, and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing—fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of cruelty, and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion has gone hand-in-hand. It is because fear is at the basis of those two things. In this world we can now begin a little to understand things, and a little to master them by help of science, which has forced its way step by step against the Christian religion, against the Churches, and against the opposition of all the old precepts. Science can help us to get over this craven fear in which mankind has lived for so many generations. Science can teach us, and I think our own hearts can teach us, no longer to look round for imaginary supports, no longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look to our own efforts here below to make this world a fit place to live in, instead of the sort of place that the churches in all these centuries have made it.

WHAT WE MUST DO

We want to stand upon our own feet and look fair and square at the world—its good facts, its bad facts, its beauties, and its ugliness; see the world as it is, and be not afraid of it. Conquer the world by intelligence, and not merely by being slavishly subdued by the terror that comes from it. The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men. When you hear people in church debasing themselves and saying that they are miserable sinners, and all the rest of it, it seems contemptible and not worthy of self-respecting human beings. We ought to stand up and look the world frankly in the face. We ought to make the best we can of the world, and if it is not so good as we wish,

after all it will still be better than what these others have made of it in all these ages. A good world needs knowledge, kindliness, and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past, or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men. It needs a fearless outlook and a free intelligence. It needs hope for the future, not looking back all the time towards a past that is dead, which we trust will be far surpassed by the future that our intelligence can create.

2 Ritual Uncleanness

2. RITUAL UNCLEANNESS
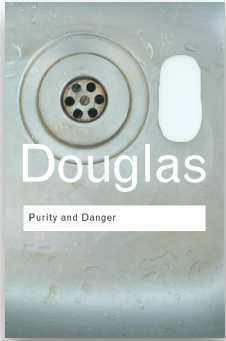
Our idea of dirt is compounded of two things, care for hygiene and respect for conventions. The rules of hygiene change, of course, with changes in our state of knowledge. As for the con-ventional side of dirt-avoidance, these rules can be set aside for the sake of friendship. Hardy's farm labourers commended the shepherd who refused a clean mug for his cider as a 'nice unparticular man':

> 'A clane cup for the shepherd,' said the maltster commandingly.

> 'No - not at all,' said Gabriel, in a reproving tone of considerateness. 'I never fuss about dirt in its pure state and when I know what sort it is . . . I wouldn't think of giving such trouble to neighbours in washing up when there's so much work to be done in the world already.'

In a more exalted spirit, St. Catherine of Sienna, when she felt revulsion from the wounds she was tending, is said to have bitterly reproached herself Sound hygiene was incompatible with charity, so she deliberately drank of a bowl of pus.

Whether they are rigorously observed or violated, there is nothing in our rules of cleanness to suggest any connection between dirt and sacredness. Therefore it is only mystifying to learn that primitives make little difference between sacredness and uncleanness.

For us sacred things and places are to be protected from defilement. Holiness and impurity are at opposite poles. We would as soon confound hunger with fullness or sleeping with waking. Yet it is supposed to be a mark of primitive religion to make no clear distinction between sanctity and uncleanness. If this is true it reveals a great gulf between ourselves and our forefathers, between us and contemporary primitives. Certainly it has been very widely held and is still taught in one cryptic form or another to this day. Take the following remark of Eliade:

> The ambivalence of the sacred is not only in the psychological order (in that it attracts or repels), but also in the order of values; the sacred is at once 'sacred' and 'defiled'.

> (1958, pp. 14-15)

The statement can be made to sound less paradoxical. It could mean that our idea of sanctity has become very specialised, and that in some primitive cultures the sacred is a very general idea meaning little more than prohibition. In that sense the universe is divided between things and actions which are subject to restriction and others which are not; among the restrictions some are intended to protect divinity from profanation, and others to protect the profane from the dangerous intrusion of divinity. Sacred rules

are thus merely rules hedging divinity off, and uncleanness is the two-way danger of contact with divinity. The problem then resolves into a linguistic one, and the paradox is reduced by changing the vocabulary. This may be true of certain cultures. (See Steiner, p. 33.)

For instance, the Latin word sacer itself has this meaning of restriction through pertaining to the gods. And in some cases it may apply to desecration as well as to consecration. Similarly, the Hebrew root of k-d-sh, which is usually translated as Holy, is based on the idea of separation. Aware of the difficulty translating k-d-sh straight into Holy, Ronald Knox's version of the Old Testament uses 'set apart'. Thus the grand lines 'Be ye Holy, Because I am Holy' are rather thinly rendered:

> I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt; I am set apart and you must be set apart like me.

> (Levit. 11.46)

If only retranslation could put the whole matter right, how simple it would be. But there are many more intractable cases. In Hinduism, for example, the idea that the unclean and the holy could both belong in a single broader linguistic category is ludicrous. But the Hindu ideas of pollution suggest another approach to the question. Holiness and unholiness after all need not always be absolute opposites. They can be relative categories. What is clean in relation to one thing may be unclean in relation to another, and vice versa. The idiom of pollution lends itself to a complex algebra which takes into account the variables in each context. For example, Professor Harper describes how respect can be expressed on these lines among the Havik peoples of the Malnad part of Mysore state:

> Behaviour that usually results in pollution is sometimes intentional in order to show deference and respect; by doing that which under other circumstances would be defiling, an individual expresses his inferior position. For example, the theme of the wife's subordination towards the husband finds ritual expression in her eating from his leaf after he has finished...

In an even clearer case a holy woman, sadhu, when she visited the village, was required to be treated with immense respect. To show this, the liquid in which her feet had been bathed:

> was passed round to those present in a special silver vessel used only for worshipping, and poured into the right hand to be drunk as tirtha (sacred liquid), indicating that she was being accorded the status of a god rather than a mortal. ...The most striking and frequently encountered expression of respect- pollution is in the use of cow-dung as a cleansing agent. A cow is worshipped daily by Havik women and on certain ceremonial occasions by Havik men.... Cows are sometimes said to be gods; alternatively to have

more than a thousand gods residing in them. Simple types of pollution are removed by water, greater degrees of pollution are removed by cow-dung and water. Cow dung, like the dung of any other animal, is intrinsically impure and can cause defilement - in fact it will defile a god; but it is pure relative to a mortal . . . the cow's most impure part is sufficiently pure relative even to a Brahmin priest to remove the latter's impurities.

(Harper, pp. 181-3)

It is obvious that we are here dealing with symbolic language capable of very fine degrees of differentiation. This use of the relation of purity and impurity is not incompatible with our own language and raises no specially puzzling paradoxes. So far from there being confusion between the idea of holiness and uncleanness, here there is nothing but distinction of the most hair-splitting finesse.

Eliade's statements about the confusion between sacred contagion and uncleanness in primitive religion were evidently not intended to apply to refined Brahminical concepts. To what were they intended to apply? Apart from the anthropologists, are there any people who really confuse the sacred and the unclean? Where did this notion spring from?

Frazer seems to have thought that confusion between uncleanness and holiness is the distinctive mark of primitive thinking. In a long passage in which he considers the Syrian attitude to pigs, he concludes:

Some said it was because pigs were unclean; others said it was because pigs were sacred. This . . . points to a hazy state of religious thought in which the idea of sanctity and unclean ness are not yet sharply distinguished, both being blent in a sort of vaporous solution to which we give the name ta boo.

(*The Spirits of the Corn and Wild*, II, p. 23)

Again he makes the same point in giving the meaning of taboo:

Taboos of holiness agree with ta boos of pollution because the savage does not distinguish between holiness and pollution.

(*Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, p. 224)

Frazer had many good qualities, but originality was never one of them. These quotations directly echo Robertson Smith to whom he dedicated *The Spirits of the Corn and Wild*. Over twenty years earlier, Robertson Smith had used the word taboo for restrictions on 'man's arbitrary use of natural things, enforced by dread of supernatural penalties' (1889, p. 142). These taboos, inspired by fear, precautions against malignant spirits, were common to all primitive peoples and often took the form of rules of uncleanness.

> The person under taboo is not regarded as holy, for he is separated from approach to the sanctuary, as well as from contact with men, but his act or condition is somehow associated with supernatural dangers, arising, according to the common savage explanation, from the presence of formidable spirits which are shunned like an infectious disease. In most savage societies no line seems to be drawn between the two kinds of taboo.

According to this view, the main difference between primitive taboo and primitive rules of holiness is the difference between friendly and unfriendly deities. The separation of sanctuary and consecrated things and persons from profane ones, which is a normal part of religious cults, is basically the same as the separations which are inspired by fear of malevolent spirits. Separation is the essential idea in both contexts, only the motive is different - and not so very different either, since friendly gods are also to be feared on occasion. When Robertson Smith added that: 'to distinguish between the holy and the unclean marks a real advance above savagery', to his readers he was saying nothing challenging or provocative. It was certain that his readers made a big distinction between unclean and sacred, and that they were living at the right end of the evolutionary movement. But he was saying more than this. Primitive rules of uncleanness pay attention to the material circumstances of an act and judge it good or bad accordingly. Thus contact with corpses, blood or spittle may be held to transmit danger. Christian rules of holiness, by contrast, disregard the material circumstances and judge according to the motives and disposition of the agent.

> . . . the irrationality of laws of uncleanness from the stand point of spiritual religion or even of the higher heathenism, is so manifest that they must necessarily be looked upon as having survived from an earlier form of faith and of society.

(*Note* C, p. 430)

In this way a criterion was produced for classing religions as advanced or as primitive. If primitive, then rules of holiness and rules of uncleanness were undistinguishable; if advanced, then rules of uncleanness disappeared from religion. They were relegated to the kitchen and bathroom and to municipal sanitation, nothing to do with religion. The less uncleanness was concerned with physical conditions and the more it signified a spiritual state of unworthiness, so much more decisively could the religion in question be recognised as advanced.

Robertson Smith was first and foremost a theologian and Old Testament scholar. Since theology is concerned with the relations between man and God, it must always be making assertions about the nature of man. At the time of Robertson Smith, anthropology was very much to the fore in theological discussion. Most thinking men in the second part of the nineteenth century were perforce amateur anthropologists. This comes out very clearly in Margaret Hodgen's *The Doctrine of Survivals*, a necessary guide

to the confused nineteenth-century dialogue between anthropology and theology. In that formative period anthropology still had its roots in the pulpit and parish hall, and bishops used its findings for fulminating texts.

Parish ethnologists took sides as pessimists or optimists on the prospects of human progress. Were the savages capable of advancement or not? John Wesley, teaching that mankind in its natural state was fundamentally bad, drew lively pictures of savage customs to illustrate the degeneracy of those who were not saved:

> The natural religion of the Creeks, Cherokees, Chickasaws and all other Indians, is to torture all their prisoners from morning to night, till at length they roast them to death. . . . Yea, it is a common thing among them for the son, if he thinks his father lives too long, to knock out his brains.

> (*Works*, vol. 5, p. 402)

I need not here outline the long argument between the progressionists and degenerationists. For several decades the discussion dragged on inconclusively, until Archbishop Whately, in an extreme and popular form, took up the argument for degeneracy to refute the optimism of economists following Adam Smith.

> 'Could this abandoned creature,' he asked, 'entertain any of the elements of nobility? Could the lowest savages and the most highly civilised specimens of the Europea n races be regarded as members of the same species? Was it conceivable as the great economist had asserted, that by the division of labour these shameless people could 'advance step by step in all the arts of civilised life'?'

> (1855, pp. 26-7)

The reaction to his pamphlet, as Hodgen describes it, was intense and immediate:

> Other degenerationists, such as W. Cooke Taylor, com posed volumes to support his position, assembling masses of evidence where the Arch bishop had remained content with one illustration . . . . Defenders of the eighteenth century optimism appeared from all points of the compass. Books were reviewed in terms of Whateley's contention. And social reformers everywhere, those good souls whose newly acquired compassion for the economically downtrodden had found a comfortable solvent in the notion of inevitable social improvement, viewed with alarm the practical outcome of the opposite view. . . . Even more disconcerted were those scholarly students of man's mind and culture whose personal and professional interests were vested in a methodology based upon the idea of progress.

> (pp. 30-1)

One man finally came forward and settled the controversy for the rest of the century by bringing science to the aid of the progressionists. This was Henry Burnett Tylor (1832-

1917). He developed a theory and systematically amassed evidence to prove that civilisation is the result of gradual progress from an original state similar to that of contemporary savagery.

> Among the evidence aiding us to trace the course which the civilisation of the world has actually followed is the great class of facts to denote which I have found it convenient to introduce the term 'survivals'. These are processes, customs, opinions and so forth, which have been carried by force of habit into the new society . . . and . . . thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has evolved.

(p. 16)

> The serious business of ancient society may be seen to sink into the spirit of later generations and its serious belief to linger on in nursery folklore.

(p. 71)

(*Primitive Culture I*, 7th Ed n.)

Robertson Smith used the idea of survivals to account for the persistence of irrational rules of uncleanness. Tylor published in 1873, after the publication of *The Origin of Species*, and there is some parallel between his treatment of cultures and Darwin's treatment of organic species. Darwin was interested in the conditions under which a new organism can appear. He was interested in the survival of the fittest and also in rudimentary organs whose persistence gave him the clues for reconstructing the evolutionary scheme. But Tylor was uniquely interested in the lingering survival of the unfit, in almost vanished cultural relics. He was not concerned to catalogue distinct cultural species or to show their adaptation through history. He only sought to show the general continuity of human culture.

Robertson Smith, coming later, inherited the idea that modem civilised man represents a long process of evolution. He accepted that something of what we still do and believe is fossil: meaningless, petrified appendage to the daily business of living. But Robertson Smith was not interested in dead survivals. Customs which have not fed into the growing points of human history he dubbed irrational and primitive and implied that they were of little interest. For him the important task was to scrape away the clinging rubble and dust of contemporary savage cultures and to reveal the life-bearing channels which prove their evolutionary status by their live functions in modern society. This is precisely what The Religion of the Semites attempts to do. Savage superstition is there separated from the beginnings of true religion, and discarded with very little consideration. What Robertson Smith says about superstition and magic is only incidental to his main theme and a by-product of his main work. Thus he reversed the emphasis of Tylor. Whereas Tylor was interested in what quaint relics can tell us of

the past, Robertson Smith was interested in the common elements in modern and primitive experience. Tylor founded folklore: Robertson Smith founded social anthropology.

Another great stream of ideas impinged even more closely on Robertson Smith's professional interests. This was the crisis of faith which assailed those thinkers who could not reconcile the development of science with traditional Christian revelation. Faith and reason seemed homelessly at odds unless some new formula for religion could be found. A group of philosophers who could no longer accept revealed religion, and who could not either accept or live without some guiding transcendental beliefs, set about providing that formula. Hence began that still-continuing process of whittling away the revealed elements of Christian doctrine, and the elevating in its place of ethical principles as the central core of true religion. In what follows I am quoting Richter's description of how the movement had its home in Oxford. At Balliol, T. H. Green tried to naturalise Hegelian idealist philosophy as the solution to current problems of faith, morals and politics. Jowett had written to Florence Nightingale:

> Something needs to be done for the educated similar to what J. Wesley did for the poor.

This is precisely what T. H. Green set out to achieve: to revive religion in the educated, make it intellectually respectable, create a new moral fervour and so produce a reformed society. His teaching had an enthusiastic reception. Complicated though his philosophic ideas were and tortuous their metaphysical basis, his principles were simple in themselves. They were even expressed in Mrs. Humphrey Ward's best-selling novel, *Robert Elsmere* (1888).

Green's philosophy of history was a theory of moral progress: God is made incarnate from age to age in social life of ever greater ethical perfection. To quote from his lay sermonman's consciousness of God:

> . . . has in manifold forms been the moralising agent in human society, nay the formative principle of that society itself. The existence of specific duties and the recognition of them, the spirit of self-sacrifice, the moral law and reverence for it in its most abstract and absolute form, all no doubt presuppose society, but society of a kind to render them possible is not the creature of appetite and fear. . . . Under this influence wants and desires that have their root in the animal nature become an impulse of improvement which forms, enlarges and recasts societies, always keeping before man in various guises according to the degree of his development an unrealised ideal of a best which is his God, and giving divine authority to the customs or laws by which some likeness of this ideal is wrought into the actuality of life.

> (Richter, p. io5)

The final trend of Green's philosophy was thus to turn away from revelation and to

enshrine morality as the essence of religion. Robertson Smith never turned away from Revelation. To the end of his life he believed in the divine inspiration of the Old Testament. His biography by Black and Chrystal suggests that in spite of this belief he came strangely close to the Oxford Idealists' notion of religion.

Robertson Smith held the Free Church Chair of Hebrew in Aberdeen in 1870. He was in the vanguard of the movement of historical criticism which for some time earlier had been making upheavals in the conscience of Biblical scholars. In 1860 Jowett himself at Balliol had been censured for publishing an article 'On the Interpretation of the Bible', in which he argued that the Old Testament must be interpreted like any other book. Proceedings against Jowett collapsed and he was allowed to remain Regius Professor. But when Robertson Smith wrote the article, 'Bible', in 1875, for the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the outcry in the Free Church against his heresy led to his suspension and dismissal. Robertson Smith, like Green, was in close touch with German thought, but whereas Green was not committed to Christian revelation, Robertson Smith never wavered in his faith in the Bible as the record of a specific, supernatural Revelation. Not only was he prepared to treat its books to the same kind of criticism as other books but, after he was dismissed from Aberdeen, he travelled in Syria and brought informed fieldwork to its interpretation. On the basis of his first-hand study of Semitic life and documents he delivered the Burnett lectures. The first series of these was published as The Religion of the Semites.

From the way he wrote it is clear that this study was no ivory-tower escape from the real problems of humanity of his day. It was important to understand the religious beliefs of obscure Arab tribes because these shed light on the nature of man and on the nature of religious experience. Two important themes emerged from his lectures. One is that exotic mythological happenings and cosmological theories had little to do with religion. Here he is implicitly contradicting Tylor's theory that primitive religion arose from speculative thought. Robertson Smith suggested that those who were lying awake at night trying to reconcile the details of the Creation in Genesis with the Darwinian theory of evolution could relax. Mythology is so much extra embroidery on more solid beliefs. True religion, even from the earliest times, is firmly rooted in the ethical values of community life. Even the most misguided primitive neighbours of Israel, bedevilled by demons and myths, still showed some signs of true religion.

The second theme was that Israel's religious life was fundamentally more ethical than that of any of the surrounding peoples. Let us take this second point quickly first. The last three Burnett lectures, given in Aberdeen in 1891, were not published and little now survives of them. The lectures dealt with apparent Semitic parallels with the cosmogony of Genesis. The alleged parallel with the Chaldean cosmogony was held by Robertson Smith to have been much exaggerated, and the Babylonian myths were

classed by him as more like the myths of savage nations than those of Israel. The Phoenician legend, again, superficially resembles the Genesis story, but the similarities serve to bring out the deep differences of spirit and meaning:

> Phoenician legends . . . were bound up with a thoroughly heathen view of God, man and the world. Destitute as these legends were of ethical motives, no believer in them could rise to any spiritual conception of Deity nor any lofty conception of man's chief end . . . The burden of explaining this contrast {with Hebrew ideas of deity) does not lie with me. It falls on those who are compelled by a false philosophy of Revelation to see in the Old Testament nothing more than the highest point of the general tendencies of Semitic religions. This is not the view that study commends to me. It is a view that is not commended, but condemned by the many parallel isms in detail between Hebrew and heathen story and ritual, for all these material points of resemblance only make the contrast in spirit the more remarkable. . . .

> (Black & Chrystal, p. 536)

So much for the overwhelming inferiority of the religion of Israel's neighbours, and heathen Semites. As for the basis of heathen Semitic religions, it has two characteristics: an abound-ing demonology, rousing fear in men's hearts, and a comforting, stable relation with the community god. The demons are the primitive element rejected by Israel; the stable, moral relation with God is true religion.

> However true it is that savage man feels himself to be environed by innumerable dangers which he does not understand and so personifies as invisible or mysterious enemies of more than human power, it is not true that the attempt to appease these powers is the foundation of religion. From the earliest times religion, as distinct from magic and sorcery, addressed itself to kind red and friends who may indeed be angry with their people for a time, but are always placable except to the enemies of their people or to renegade members of the community. . . . It is only in times of social dissolution . . . that magical superstition based on mere terror or rites designed to placate alien gods invade the sphere of tribal or national religion. I n better times the religion of the tribe or state has nothing in common with the private and foreign superstitions or magical rites that savage terror may dictate to the individual. Religion is not an arbitrary relation of the individual man to a supernatural power; it is a relation of all the members of a community to the power that has the good of the community at heart.

> (The Religion of the Semites, p. 55)

It is clear that in the 1890s this authoritative pronouncement on the relation of morals to primitive religion would be warmly welcomed. It would bring together in happy combination the new ethical idealism of Oxford and ancient revelation. It is plain that Robertson Smith himself had fallen entirely for the ethical view of religion. The compatibility of his views with those advanced in Oxford is nicely confirmed in the fact

that when he was first dismissed from the Chair of Hebrew in Aberdeen, Balliol offered him a post.

He was confident that the pre-eminence of the Old Testament would stand above the challenge, however close the scientific scrutiny. For he could show with unrivalled erudition that all primitive religions express social forms and values. And since the moral loftiness of Israel's religious concepts was above dispute, and since these had given way in the course of history to the ideals of Christianity and these in turn had moved from Catholic to Protestant forms, the evolutionary movement was clear. Science was thus not opposed but deftly harnessed to the Christian's task.

From this point onwards the anthropologists have been saddled with an intractable problem. For magic is defined for them in residual, evolutionary terms. In the first place it is ritual which is not part of the cult of the community's god. In the second place it is ritual which is expected to have automatic effect. In a sense, magic was to the Hebrews what Catholicism was to the Protestants, mumbo-jumbo, meaningless ritual, irrationally held to be sufficient in itself to produce results without an interior experience of God.

Robertson Smith in his inaugural lecture contrasts the intelligent, Calvinist approach with the magical treatment of the Scriptures practised by the Roman Catholics who loaded the Book with superstitious accretions. In the same inaugural lecture he drives home the point. 'The Catholic Church', he argued:

> . . . had almost from the first deserted the Apostolic tradition and set u p a conception of Christianity as a mere series of formulae containing abstract and immutable principles, intellectual assent to which was sufficient to mould the lives of men who had no experience of a personal relation with Christ. . . . Holy Scripture is not, as the Catholics tend to claim, 'a divine phenomenon magically endowed in every letter with saving treasures of faith and knowledge'.

(Black & Chrystal, pp. 126-7)

His biographers suggest that the association of magic with Catholicism was a canny move to shame his die-hard Protestant opponents into more courageous intellectual dealings with the Bible. Whatever the Scot's motives, the historical fact remains that comparative religion has inherited an ancient sectarian quarrel about the value of formal ritual. And now the time has come to show how an emotional and prejudiced approach to ritual has led anthropology down one of its barrenest perspectives - a narrow preoccupation with belief in the efficacy of rites. This I shall develop in Chapter 4. While Robertson Smith was perfectly right to recognise in the history of Christianity an ever-present tendency to slip into purely formal and instrumental use of ritual, his evolutionary assumptions misled him twice. Magical practice, in this sense of automatically effective ritual, is not a sign of primitiveness, as the contrast he himself

drew between the religion of the Apostles and that of late Catholicism should have suggested. Nor is a high ethical content the prerogative of evolved religions, as I hope to show in later chapters.

The influence which Robertson Smith exerted divides into two streams according to the uses to which Durkheim and Frazer put his work. Durkheim took up his central thesis and set comparative religion in fruitful lines. Frazer took up his incidental minor thesis, and sent comparative religion into a blind alley.

Durkheim's debt to Robertson Smith is acknowledged in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (p. 61). His whole book develops the germinal idea that primitive gods are part and parcel of the community, their form expressing accurately the details of its structure, their powers punishing and rewarding on its behalf in primitive life:

> Religion was made up of a series of acts and observances, the correct performance of which was necessary or desirable to secure the favour of the gods or to avert their anger, and in their observances every member of society had a share marked out for him either in virtue of being born within the family and community or in virtue of the station within the family and community that he had come to hold . . . Religion did not exist for the saving of souls but for the preservation and welfare of society . . . A man was born into a fixed relation with certain gods as purely as he was born into a relation with his fellow men; and his religion, that is the part of conduct which was determined by his relation to the gods, was simply one side of the general scheme of conduct prescribed for him by his position as a member of society . . . Ancient religion is but part of the general social order which embraces gods and men alike.

Thus wrote Robertson Smith (pp. 29-33). But for differences of style and the use of the past tense, it could have been written by Durkheim.

I find it very helpful to understand Durkheim as engaged initially in an argument with the English, as Talcott Parsons has suggested (1960). He was concerned with a particular problem about social integration posed for him by the shortcomings of English political philosophy, particularly represented by Herbert Spencer. He could not subscribe to the utilitarian theory that the psychology of the individual would account for the development of society. Durkheim wanted to show that something else was necessary, a common commitment to a common set of values, a collective conscience, if the nature of society was to be correctly understood. At the same time another Frenchman, Gustav le Bon (1841-1931) was engaged also in the same task of correcting the prevailing Benthamite tradition. He proceeded by developing a theory of crowd psychology which Durkheim also seems to have freely drawn upon. Compare Durkheim's account of the emotional force of totemic ceremonies (p. 241) with le Bon's account of the suggestible, emotionally savage or heroic 'crowd mind'. But a better instrument to Durkheim's purpose of convicting the English of error, was the work of

another Englishman.

Durkheim adopted in its entirety Robertson Smith's definition of primitive religion as the established church which expresses community values. He also followed Robertson Smith unquestioningly in his attitude to rites which were not part of the cult of the community gods. He followed him in dubbing these 'magic' and defined magic and magicians as beliefs, practices and persons not operating within the communion of the church and often hostile to it. Following Robertson Smith and perhaps following Frazer, the early volumes of whose Golden Boug1: were already published when *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* came out in 1912, he allowed that magic rites were a fonn of primitive hygiene:

> The things which the magician recommends to be kept separate are those which, by reason of their characteristic properties, cannot be brought together and confused without danger . . . useful maxims, the first forms of hygienic and medical interdictions. (p. 338) Thus the distinction between contagion and true religion was confirmed. Rules of uncleanness lay outside the main stream of his interests. He paid them no more attention than did Robertson Smith.

But any arbitrary limitation of his subject draws a scholar into difficulty. When Durkheim set aside one class of separations as primitive hygiene and another class as primitive religion he undermined his own definition of religion. His opening chapters summarise and reject unsatisfactory definitions of religion. Attempts to define religion by notions of mystery and awe he dismisses, and likewise Tylor's definition of religion as belief in spiritual beings. He proceeds to adopt two criteria which he assumes will be found to coincide; the first, we have seen, is the communal organisation of men for the community cult, and the second is the separation of sacred from profane. The sacred is the object of community worship. It can be recognised by rules expressing its essentially contagious character.

In insisting on a complete break between the sphere of the sacred and the sphere of the profane, between secular and religious behaviour, Durkheim is not following in Robertson Smith's footsteps. For the latter took the opposite view and insisted (p. 29 seq.) that there is 'no separation between the spheres of religion and ordinary life'. A total opposition between sacred and profane seems to have been a necessary step in Durkheim's theory of social integration. It expressed the opposition between the individual and society. The social conscience was projected beyond and above the individual member of society onto something quite other, external and compellingly powerful. So we find Durkheim insisting that rules of separation are the distinguishing marks of the sacred, the polar opposite of the profane. He then is led by his argument into asking why the sacred should be contagious. This he answers by reference to the fictive, abstract nature of religious entities. They are merely ideas awakened by the

experience of society, merely collective ideas projected outwards, mere expressions of morality. So they have no fixed material point of reference. Even the graven images of gods are only material emblems of immaterial forces generated by the social process. Therefore they are ultimately rootless, fluid, liable to become unfocussed and to flow into other experiences. It is their nature always to be in danger of losing their distinctive and necessary character. The sacred needs to be continually hedged in with prohibitions. The sacred must always be treated as contagious because relations with it are bound to be expressed by rituals of separation and demarcation and by beliefs in the danger of crossing forbidden boundaries.

There is one little difficulty about this approach. If the sacred is characterised by its contagiousness, how does it differ from non-sacred magic, also characterised by contagiousness? What is the status of the other kind of contagiousness which is not generated from the social process? Why are magical beliefs called primitive hygiene and not primitive religion? These problems did not interest Durkheim. He followed Robertson Smith in cut- ting off magic from morals and religion and so helped to bequeath to us a tangle of ideas about magic. Ever since, scholars have scratched their heads for a satisfactory definition of magic beliefs and then puzzled over the mentality of people who can subscribe to them.

It is easy now to see that Durkheim advocated an altogether too unitary view of the social community. We should start by recognising communal life for a much more complex experience than he allowed. Then we find that Durkheim's idea of ritual as symbolic of social processes, can be extended to include both types of belief in contagion, religious and magical. If he could have foreseen an analysis of ritual in which none of the rules which he called hygienic are without their load of social symbolism, he would presumably have been happy to discard the category of magic. To this theme I shall return. But we cannot develop it without first rubbing the slate clean of another set of preconceptions which derive also from Robertson Smith.

Frazer was not interested in the sociological implications of Robertson Smith's work. He seems indeed not to have been very interested in its main theme at all. Instead he fastened on the magical residue which was thrown off incidentally, as it were, from the definition of true religion. He showed that there were certain regularities to be found in magical beliefs and that these could be classified. On inspection, magic turned out to be much more than mere rules of avoiding obscure infection. Some magic acts were intended to procure benefits and others to avert harm. So the field of behaviour which Robertson Smith labelled superstition held more than rules of uncleanness. But contagion seemed to be one of its governing principles. The other principle was belief in the transfer of properties by sympathy or likeness. According to the so-called laws of magic, the magician can change events either by mimetic action or by allowing

contagious forces to work. When he had finished investigating magic Frazer had done no more than to name the conditions under which one thing may symbolise another. If he had not been convinced that savages think on entirely different lines from ourselves, he might have been content to treat magic as symbolic action, neither more nor less. He might then have joined hands with Durkheim and the French school of sociology and the dialogue across the channel would have been more fruitful for English nineteenth-century thought. Instead he crudely tidied up the evolutionary assumptions implicit in Robertson Smith and assigned to human culture three stages of development.

Magic was the first stage, religion the second, science the third. His argument proceeds by a kind of Hegelian dialectic since magic, classed as primitive science, was defeated by its own inadequacy and supplemented by religion in the form of a priestly and political fraud. From the thesis of magic emerged the antithesis, religion, and the synthesis, modern effective science, replaced both magic and religion. This fashionable presentation was supported by no evidence whatever. Frazer's evolutionary scheme was only based on some unquestioning assumptions taken over from the common talk of his day. One was the assumption that ethical refinement is a mark of advanced civilisation. Another, the assumption that magic has nothing to do with morals or religion. On this basis he constructed the image of our early ancestors, their thinking dominated by magic. For them the universe was moved by impersonal, mechanistic principles. Fumbling for the right formula for controlling it, they stumbled on some sound principles, but just as often their confused state of mind led them to think that words and signs could be used as instruments. Magic resulted from early man's inability to distinguish between his own subjective associations and external objective reality. Its origin was based on a mistake. No doubt about it, the savage was a credulous fool.

> Thus the ceremonies which in many lands have been performed to hasten the departure of winter or stay the flight of summer are in a sense an attempt to create the world afresh, to 'remould it nearer to the heart's desire'. But if we would set ourselves at the point of view of the old sages who devised means so feeble to accomplish a purpose so immeasurably vast, we must divest ourselves of our modern conceptions of the immensity of the Universe and of the pettiness and insignificance of man's place in it . . . To the savage the mountains that bound the visible horizon, or the sea that stretches away to meet it, is the world's end. Beyond these narrow limits his feet have never strayed . . . of the future he hardly thinks, and of the past he only knows what has been handed down by word of mouth from his savage forefathers. To suppose that a world thus circumscribed in space and time was created by the efforts or the fiat of a being like himself imposes no great strain on his credulity; and he may without much difficulty imagine that he himself can annually repeat the work of creation by his charms and incantations.

It is hard to forgive Frazer for his complacency and undisguised contempt of primitive society. The last chapter of Taboo and the Perils of the Soul is entitled, 'Our Debt to the Savage'. Possibly it was inserted in response to correspondents who pressed him to recognise the wisdom and philosophic depth of primitive cultures they knew. Frazer gives interesting extracts from these letters in footnotes, but he cannot adjust his own preconceived judgements to take them into account. The chapter purports to contain a tribute to savage philosophy, but since Frazer could offer no reason for respecting ideas which he had massively demonstrated to be childish, irrational and superstitious, the tribute is mere lip service. For pompous patronage this is hard to beat:

> When all is said and done, our resemblances to the savage are still far more numerous than our differences . . . after all, what we call truth is only the hypothesis which is found to work best. Therefore in reviewing the opinions and practices of ruder ages and races we shall do well to look with leniency upon their errors as inevitable slips made in the search for truth . . . .

Frazer had his critics and they gained some attention at the time. But in England Frazer undoubtedly triumphed. For is not the Golden Bough abridged edition still bringing in an income? Is not a Frazer Memorial Lecture regularly delivered? Partly it was the very simplicity of his views, partly the tireless energy which brought out volume after volume, but above all the gold and purple style of writing, which gave such wide circulation to his work. In almost any study of ancient civilisations you will be sure to find continual references to primitiveness and to its criterion, magical non-ethical superstition.

Take Cassirer, for example, writing about Zoroastrianism, and recognise these themes from the Golden Bough:

> Even nature assumes a new shape, for it is seen exclusively in the mirror of ethical life. Nature . . . is conceived as the sphere of law and lawful ness. In Zoroastria n religion nature is described by the concept of Asha. Asha is the wisdom of nature that reflects the wisdom of its creator, of Ahura Mazda, the 'wise Lord'. This universal, eternal, inviolable order governs the world and determines all single events: the path of the sun, the moon, the stars, the growth of plants and animals, the way of winds and clouds. All this is maintained and preserved, not by mere physical forces but by the force of the Good . . . the ethical meaning has replaced and superseded the magical meaning.

(1944, p. 100)

Or, to take a more recent source on the same subject, we find Professor Zaehner noting sadly that the least defective Zoroastrian texts are only concerned with rules of purity and therefore of no interest:

... only in the Videvdat with its dreary prescriptions concerning ritual purity and its listing of impossible punishments for ludicrous crimes do the translators show a tolerable grasp of the text.

(pp. 25-6)

This is certainly how Robertson Smith would consider such rules, but over I 00 years later can we be sure that this is all there is to be said about them?

In Old Testament studies the assumption is rife that primitive peoples use rituals magically, that is in a mechanical, instrumental way. 'In early Israel the distinction between what we call intentional and unintentional sin, as far as God is concerned, scarcely exists' (Osterley & Box). 'For the Hebrews of the fifth century B.C.', writes Professor James, 'expiation was merely a mechanical process consisting of wipmg away material uncleanness' (1938). The history of the Israelites is sometimes presented as a struggle between the prophets who demanded interior union with God and the people, continually liable to slide back into primitive magicality, to which they are particu-larly prone when in contact with other more primitive cultures. The paradox is that magicality seems finally to prevail with the compilation of the Priestly Code. If belief in the sufficient efficacy of the rite is to be called magic in its late as well as in its earliest manifestations, the usefulness of magic as a measure of primitiveness would be lost. One would expect the very word to be expunged from Old Testament studies. But it lingers on, with Tahu and mana, to emphasise the distinctiveness of the Israelite religious experience by contrast with Semitic heathenism. Eichrodt is particularly free with these terms (pp. 438, 453).

> Mention has already been made of the magical effect ascribed to Babylonian rites and formulas of expiation, and this becomes especially clear when it is remembered that the confession of sin actually forms part of the ritual of exorcism and has *ex opere operato* efficiency.

(p. 166)

He goes on to cite Psalms 40, 7, and 69, 31, as 'opposing the tendency of the sacrificial system to make forgiveness of sins a mechanical process'. Again, on p. 119, he assumes that primitive religious concepts are 'materialistic'. Much of this otherwise impressive book rests on the assumption that ritual which works *ex opere opemto* is primitive, prior in time compared with ritual which is symbolic of internal states of mind. But occasionally the unattested a priori nature of this assumption seems to make the author uneasy:

> The commonest of all expressions for ma king atonement, kipper, also points in this direction if the original meaning of the term may be defined as 'to wipe away' on the basis of the Babylonia n and Assyrian parallels. Here the fundamental concept of sin is

of a material impurity, and the blood, as a holy substance endowed with miraculous power, is expected to remove the stain of sin quite automatically.

Then comes an illumination which would cause much rewriting if taken seriously:

> Since, however, the derivation based on the Arabic, giving the meaning 'to cover' seems equally possible, it may well be that the idea is that of covering up one's guilt from the eyes of the offended party by means of reparation, which would by contrast emphasise the personal character of the act of atonement.

<div align="right">(p. 162)</div>

So Eichrodt half relents towards the Babylonians - perhaps they too knew something of true interior religion; perhaps the Israelite religious experience did not stick out in the surrounding pagan magic with such unique distinctiveness.

We find some of the same assumptions governing the interpretation of Greek literature. Professor Finley, in discussing the social life and beliefs of Homer's world, applies an ethical test for distinguishing earlier from later elements of belief (pp. 147, 151, 157).

Again, a learned French classicist, Moulinier, makes a comprehensive study of ideas of purity and impurity in Greek thought. Free of the bias of Robertson Smith, his approach seems excellently empirical by current anthropological standards. Greek thought seems to have been relatively free of ritual pollution in the period which Homer describes (if there was such a historical period), while clusters of pollution concepts emerge later and are expressed by the classical dramatists. The anthropologist, weak in classical scholarship, looks round for specialist guidance on how much reliance can be placed in this author, for his material is challenging and, to the layman, convincing. Alas - the book is roundly condemned in the Journal of Hellenic Studies by an English reviewer who finds it wanting in nineteenth-century anthropology:

> . . . the author needlessly handicapped himself. He appears to know nothing of the great mass of comparative material which is available to anyone studying purity, pollution and purification . . . a very modest amount of anthropological knowledge would tell him that so old a notion as that of pollution of shed blood belongs to a time when the community was the whole world . . . on p. 277 he uses the word 'tabu' but only to show that he has no clear idea of what it means.

<div align="right">(Rose, 1954)</div>

Whereas a reviewer unburdened by dubious anthropological knowledge recommends Moulinier's work without reserve (Whatmough).

These scattered quotations collected very much at random could easily be multiplied. They show how widespread Frazer's influence has been. Within anthropology too, his

work has gone very deep. It seems that once Frazer had said that the interesting question in comparative religion hinged on false beliefs in magical efficacy, British anthropologists' heads remained dutifully bowed over this perplexing question, even though they had long rejected the evolutionary hypotheses which for Frazer made it interesting. So we read through virtuoso displays of learning on the relation between magic and science whose theoretical importance remains obscure.

All in all, Frazer's influence has been a baneful one. He took from Robertson Smith that scholar's most peripheral teaching, and perpetuated an ill-considered division between religion and magic. He disseminated a false assumption about the primitive view of the universe worked by mechanical symbols, and another false assumption that ethics are strange to primitive religion. Before we can approach the subject of ritual defilement these assumptions need to be corrected. The more intractable puzzles in comparative religion arise because human experience has been thus wrongly divided. In this book we try to reunite some of the separated segments.

In the first place we shall not expect to understand religion if we confine ourselves to considering belief in spiritual beings, however the formula may be refined. There may be contexts of enquiry in which we should want to line up all extant beliefs in other beings, zombies, ancestors, demons, fairies - the lot. But, following Robertson Smith, we should not suppose that in cataloguing the full spiritual population of the universe we have necessarily caught the essentials of religion. Rather than stopping to chop definitions, we should try to compare peoples' views about man's destiny and place in the universe. In the second place we shall not expect to understand other people's ideas of contagion, sacred or secular, until we have confronted our own.
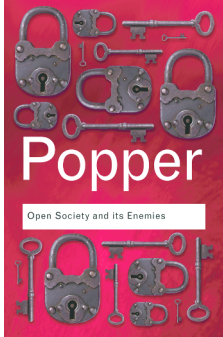
3

Introduction

Sir Karl Popper *was one of the foremost philosophers of the Twentieth century. Born in Vienna, Popper grew up in a city witnessing great intellectual ferment. His relationship with the philosophers and scientists led to his first book,* The Logic of Scientific Discovery, *published in 1934. On its publication in English in 1959 it was described by The New Scientist as 'one of the most important documents of the twentieth century'. On the eve of World War Two Popper was forced to flee to New Zealand, where he took up a teaching post at Canterbury University College at Christchurch. It was there, reflecting on the tyranny sweeping through Eastern Europe, that he wrote* The Open Society and Its Enemies, *published in 1945. In 1946 Popper moved to the London School of Economics, where he taught until his retirement in 1969. This period saw the publication of* The Poverty of Historicism, *described by the* Sunday Times *as 'probably the only book which will outlive this century'. He was knighted in 1965 and appointed Companion of Honour in 1982.*

I do not wish to hide the fact that I can only look with repugnance ... upon the puffed-up pretentiousness of all these volumes filled with wisdom, such as are fashionable nowadays. For I am fully satisfied that ... the accepted methods must endlessly increase these follies and blunders, and that even the complete annihilation of all these fanciful achievements could not possibly be as harmful as this fictitious science with its accursed fertility.

KANT.

This book raises issues which may not be apparent from the table of contents.

It sketches some of the difficulties faced by our civilization—a civilization which might be perhaps described as aiming at humaneness and reasonableness, at equality and freedom; a civilization which is still in its infancy, as it were, and which continues to grow in spite of the fact that it has been so often betrayed by so many of the intellectual leaders of mankind. It attempts to show that this civilization has not yet fully recovered from the shock of its birth—the transition from the tribal or 'closed society', with its submission to magical forces, to the 'open society' which sets free the critical powers of man. It attempts to show that the shock of this transition is one of the factors that have made possible the rise of those reactionary movements which have tried, and still try, to overthrow civilization and to return to tribalism. And it suggests that what we call nowadays totalitarianism belongs to a tradition which is just as old or just as young as our civilization itself.

It tries thereby to contribute to our understanding of totalitarianism, and of the significance of the perennial fight against it.

It further tries to examine the application of the critical and rational methods of science to the problems of the open society. It analyses the principles of democratic social reconstruction, the principles of what I may term 'piecemeal social engineering' in opposition to 'Utopian social engineering' (as explained in Chapter 9). And it tries to clear away some of the obstacles impeding a rational approach to the problems of

social reconstruction. It does so by criticizing those social philosophies which are responsible for the widespread prejudice against the possibilities of democratic reform. The most powerful of these philosophies is one which I have called *historicism*. The story of the rise and influence of some important forms of historicism is one of the main topics of the book, which might even be described as a collection of marginal notes on the development of certain historicist philosophies. A few remarks on the origin of the book will indicate what is meant by historicism and how it is connected with the other issues mentioned.

Although I am mainly interested in the methods of physics (and consequently in certain technical problems which are far removed from those treated in this book), I have also been interested for many years in the problem of the somewhat unsatisfactory state of some of the social sciences and especially of social philosophy. This, of course, raises the problem of their methods. My interest in this problem was greatly stimulated by the rise of totalitarianism, and by the failure of the various social sciences and social philosophies to make sense of it.

In this connection, one point appeared to me particularly urgent.

One hears too often the suggestion that some form or other of totalitarianism is inevitable. Many who because of their intelligence and training should be held responsible for what they say, announce that there is no escape from it. They ask us whether we are really naïve enough to believe that democracy can be permanent; whether we do not see that it is just one of the many forms of government that come and go in the course of history. They argue that democracy, in order to fight totalitarianism, is forced to copy its methods and thus to become totalitarian itself. Or they assert that our industrial system cannot continue to function without adopting the methods of collectivist planning, and they infer from the inevitability of a collectivist economic system that the adoption of totalitarian forms of social life is also inevitable.

Such arguments may sound plausible enough. But plausibility is not a reliable guide in such matters. In fact, one should not enter into a discussion of these specious arguments before having considered the following question of method: Is it within the power of any social science to make such sweeping historical prophecies? Can we expect to get more than the irresponsible reply of the soothsayer if we ask a man what the future has in store for mankind?

This is a question of the method of the social sciences. It is clearly more fundamental than any criticism of any particular argument offered in support of any historical prophecy.

A careful examination of this question has led me to the conviction that such sweeping

historical prophecies are entirely beyond the scope of scientific method. The future depends on ourselves, and we do not depend on any historical necessity. There are, however, influential social philosophies which hold the opposite view. They claim that everybody tries to use his brains to predict impending events; that it is certainly legitimate for a strategist to try to foresee the outcome of a battle; and that the boundaries between such a prediction and more sweeping historical prophecies are fluid. They assert that it is the task of science in general to make predictions, or rather, to improve upon our everyday predictions, and to put them upon a more secure basis; and that it is, in particular, the task of the social sciences to furnish us with long-term historical prophecies. They also believe that they have discovered laws of history which enable them to prophesy the course of historical events. The various social philosophies which raise claims of this kind, I have grouped together under the name *historicism*. Elsewhere, in *The Poverty of Historicism*, I have tried to argue against these claims, and to show that in spite of their plausibility they are based on a gross misunderstanding of the method of science, and especially on the neglect of the distinction between *scientific prediction* and *historical prophecy*. While engaged in the systematic analysis and criticism of the claims of historicism, I also tried to collect some material to illustrate its development. The notes collected for that purpose became the basis of this book.

The systematic analysis of historicism aims at something like scientific status. This book does not. Many of the opinions expressed are personal. What it owes to scientific method is largely the awareness of its limitations: it does not offer proofs where nothing can be proved, nor does it pretend to be scientific where it cannot give more than a personal point of view. It does not try to replace the old systems of philosophy by a new system. It does not try to add to all these volumes filled with wisdom, to the metaphysics of history and destiny, such as are fashionable nowadays. It rather tries to show that this prophetic wisdom is harmful, that the metaphysics of history impede the application of the piecemeal methods of science to the problems of social reform. And it further tries to show that we may become the makers of our fate when we have ceased to pose as its prophets.

In tracing the development of historicism, I found that the dangerous habit of historical prophecy, so widespread among our intellectual leaders, has various functions. It is always flattering to belong to the inner circle of the initiated, and to possess the unusual power of predicting the course of history. Besides, there is a tradition that intellectual leaders are gifted with such powers, and not to possess them may lead to loss of caste. The danger, on the other hand, of their being unmasked as charlatans is very small, since they can always point out that it is certainly permissible to make less sweeping predictions; and the boundaries between these and augury are fluid.

But there are sometimes further and perhaps deeper motives for holding historicist beliefs. The prophets who prophesy the coming of a millennium may give expression to a deep-seated feeling of dissatisfaction; and their dreams may indeed give hope and encouragement to some who can hardly do without them. But we must also realize that their influence is liable to prevent us from facing the daily tasks of social life. And those minor prophets who announce that certain events, such as a lapse into totalitarianism (or perhaps into 'managerialism'), are bound to happen may, whether they like it or not, be instrumental in bringing these events about. Their story that democracy is not to last for ever is as true, and as little to the point, as the assertion that human reason is not to last for ever, since only democracy provides an institutional framework that permits reform without violence, and so the use of reason in political matters. But their story tends to discourage those who fight totalitarianism; its motive is to support the revolt against civilization. A further motive, it seems, can be found if we consider that historicist metaphysics are apt to relieve men from the strain of their responsibilities. If you know that things are bound to happen whatever you do, then you may feel free to give up the fight against them. You may, more especially, give up the attempt to control those things which most people agree to be social evils, such as war; or, to mention a smaller but nevertheless important thing, the tyranny of the petty official.

I do not wish to suggest that historicism must always have such effects. There are historicists—especially the Marxists—who do not wish to relieve men from the strain of their responsibilities. On the other hand, there are some social philosophies which may or may not be historicistic but which preach the impotence of reason in social life, and which, by this anti-rationalism, propagate the attitude: 'either follow the Leader, the Great Statesman, or become a Leader yourself'; an attitude which for most people must mean passive submission to the forces, personal or anonymous, that rule society.

Now it is interesting to see that some of those who denounce reason, and even blame it for the social evils of our time, do so on the one hand because they realize the fact that historical prophecy goes beyond the power of reason, and on the other hand because they cannot conceive of a social science, or of reason in society, having another function but that of historical prophecy. In other words, they are disappointed historicists; they are men who, in spite of realizing the poverty of historicism, are unaware that they retain the fundamental historicistic prejudice—the doctrine that the social sciences, if they are to be of any use at all, must be prophetic. It is clear that this attitude must lead to a rejection of the applicability of science or of reason to the problems of social life—and ultimately, to a doctrine of power, of domination and submission.

Why do all these social philosophies support the revolt against civilization? And what is the secret of their popularity? Why do they attract and seduce so many intellectuals?

I am inclined to think that the reason is that they give expression to a deepfelt dissatisfaction with a world which does not, and cannot, live up to our moral ideals and to our dreams of perfection. The tendency of historicism (and of related views) to support the revolt against civilization may be due to the fact that historicism itself is, largely, a reaction against the strain of our civilization and its demand for personal responsibility.

These last allusions are somewhat vague, but they must suffice for this introduction. They will later be substantiated by historical material, especially in the chapter 'The Open Society and Its Enemies'. I was tempted to place this chapter at the beginning of the book; with its topical interest it would certainly have made a more inviting introduction. But I found that the full weight of this historical interpretation cannot be felt unless it is preceded by the material discussed earlier in the book. It seems that one has first to be disturbed by the similarity between the Platonic theory of justice and the theory and practice of modern totalitarianism before one can feel how urgent it is to interpret these matters.

4

Freedom — a Psychological Problem?

4. FREEDOM—A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM?

Erich Fromm *(1900-1980) Psychoanalyst and author. Fromm is arguably one of the most outstanding figures of 20th Century humanism.*

Modern European and American history is centred around the effort to gain freedom from the political, economic, and spiritual shackles that have bound men. The battles for freedom were fought by the oppressed, those who wanted new liberties, against those who had privileges to defend. While a class was fighting for its own liberation from domination, it believed itself to be fighting for human freedom as such and thus was able to appeal to an ideal, to the longing for freedom rooted in all who are oppressed. In the long and virtually continuous battle for freedom, however, classes that were fighting against oppression at one stage sided with the enemies of freedom when victory was won and new privileges were to be defended.

Despite many reverses, freedom has won battles. Many died in those battles in the conviction that to die in the struggle against oppression was better than to live without freedom. Such a death was the utmost assertion of their individuality. History seemed to be proving that it was possible for man to govern himself, to make decisions for himself, and to think and feel as he saw fit. The full expression of man's potentialities seemed to be the goal towards which social development was rapidly approaching. The principles of economic liberalism, political democracy, religious autonomy, and individualism in personal life, gave expression to the longing for freedom, and at the same time seemed to bring mankind nearer to its realization. One tie after another was severed. Man had overthrown the domination of nature and made himself her master; he had overthrown the domination of the Church and the domination of the absolutist state. The *abolition of external domination* seemed to be not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition to attain the cherished goal: freedom of the individual.

The World War was regarded by many as the final struggle and its conclusion the ultimate victory for freedom. Existing democracies appeared strengthened, and new ones replaced old monarchies. But only a few years elapsed before new systems emerged which denied everything that men believed they had won in centuries of struggle. For the essence of these new systems, which effectively took command of man's entire social and personal life, was the submission of all but a handful of men to an authority over which they had no control.

At first many found comfort in the thought that the victory of the authoritarian system was due to the madness of a few individuals and that their madness would lead to

their downfall in due time. Others smugly believed that the Italian people, or the Germans, were lacking in a sufficiently long period of training in democracy, and that therefore one could wait complacently until they had reached the political maturity of the Western democracies. Another common illusion, perhaps the most dangerous of all, was that men like Hitler had gained power over the vast apparatus of the state through nothing but cunning and trickery, that they and their satellites ruled merely by sheer force; that the whole population was only the will-less object of betrayal and terror.

In the years that have elapsed since, the fallacy of these arguments has become apparent. We have been compelled to recognize that millions in Germany were as eager to surrender their freedom as their fathers were to fight for it; that instead of wanting freedom, they sought for ways of escape from it; that other millions were indifferent and did not believe the defence of freedom to be worth fighting and dying for. We also recognize that the crisis of democracy is not a peculiarly Italian or German problem, but one confronting every modern state. Nor does it matter which symbols the enemies of human freedom choose: freedom is not less endangered if attacked in the name of anti- Fascism or in that of outright Fascism.[1] This truth has been so forcefully formulated by John Dewey that I express the thought in his words: "The serious threat to our democracy", he says, "is not the existence of foreign totalitarian states. It is the existence within our own personal attitudes and within our own institutions of conditions which have given a victory to external authority, discipline, uniformity and dependence upon The Leader in foreign countries. The battlefield is also accordingly here—within ourselves and our institutions."[2]

If we want to fight Fascism we must understand it. Wishful thinking will not help us. And reciting optimistic formulæ will prove to be as inadequate and useless as the ritual of an Indian rain dance.

In addition to the problem of the economic and social conditions which have given rise to Fascism, there is a human problem which needs to be understood. It is the purpose of this book to analyse those dynamic factors in the character structure of modern man, which made him want to give up freedom in Fascist countries and which so widely prevail in millions of our own people.

These are the outstanding questions that arise when we look at the human aspect of freedom, the longing for submission, and the lust for power: What is freedom as a human experience? Is the desire for freedom something inherent in human nature? Is it

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[1] I use the term Fascism or authoritarianism to denote a dictatorial system of the type of the German or Italian one. If I mean the German system in particular, I shall call it Nazism.

[2] John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1940.

an identical experience regardless of what kind of culture a person lives in, or is it something different according to the degree of individualism reached in a particular society? Is freedom only the absence of external pressure or is it also the *presence* of something—and if so, of what? What are the social and economic factors in society that make for the striving for freedom? Can freedom become a burden, too heavy for man to bear, something he tries to escape from? Why then is it that freedom is for many a cherished goal and for others a threat?

Is there not also, perhaps, besides an innate desire for freedom, an instinctive wish for submission? If there is not, how can we account for the attraction which submission to a leader has for so many to-day? Is submission always to an overt authority, or is there also submission to internalized authorities, such as duty or conscience, to inner compulsions or to anonymous authorities like public opinion? Is there a hidden satisfaction in submitting, and what is its essence?

What is it that creates in men an insatiable lust for power? Is it the strength of their vital energy—or is it a fundamental weakness and inability to experience life spontaneously and lovingly? What are the psychological conditions that make for the strength of these strivings? What are the social conditions upon which such psychological conditions in turn are based?

Analysis of the human aspect of freedom and of authoritarianism forces us to consider a general problem, namely, that of the rôle which psychological factors play as active forces in the social process; and this eventually leads to the problem of the interaction of psychological, economic, and ideological factors in the social process. Any attempt to understand the attraction which Fascism exercises upon great nations compels us to recognize the rôle of psychological factors. For we are dealing here with a political system which, essentially, does not appeal to rational forces of self-interest, but which arouses and mobilizes diabolical forces in man which we had believed to be non-existent, or at least to have died out long ago. The familiar picture of man in the last centuries was one of a rational being whose actions were determined by his self-interest and the ability to act according to it. Even writers like Hobbes, who recognized lust for power and hostility as driving forces in man, explained the existence of these forces as a logical result of self-interest: since men are equal and thus have the same wish for happiness, and since there is not enough wealth to satisfy them all to the same extent, they necessarily fight against each other and want power to secure the future enjoyment of what they have at present. But Hobbes's picture became outmoded. The more the middle class succeeded in breaking down the power of the former political or religious rulers, the more men succeeded in mastering nature, and the more millions of individuals became economically independent, the more did one come to believe in a rational world and in man as an essentially rational being. The

dark and diabolical forces of man's nature were relegated to the Middle Ages and to still earlier periods of history, and they were explained by lack of knowledge or by the cunning schemes of deceitful kings and priests.

One looked back upon these periods as one might at a volcano which for a long time has ceased to be a menace. One felt secure and confident that the achievements of modern democracy had wiped out all sinister forces; the world looked bright and safe like the well-lit streets of a modern city. Wars were supposed to be the last relics of older times and one needed just one more war to end war; economic crises were supposed to be accidents, even though these accidents continued to happen with a certain regularity.

When Fascism came into power, most people were unprepared, both theoretically and practically. They were unable to believe that man could exhibit such propensities for evil, such lust for power, such disregard for the rights of the weak, or such yearning for submission. Only a few had been aware of the rumbling of the volcano preceding the outbreak. Nietzsche had disturbed the complacent optimism of the nineteenth century; so had Marx in a different way. Another warning had come somewhat later from Freud. To be sure, he and most of his disciples had only a very naïve notion of what goes on in society, and most of his applications of psychology to social problems were misleading constructions; yet, by devoting his interest to the phenomena of individual emotional and mental disturbances, he led us to the top of the volcano and made us look into the boiling crater.

Freud went further than anybody before him in directing attention to the observation and analysis of the irrational and unconscious forces which determine parts of human behaviour. He and his followers in modern psychology not only uncovered the irrational and unconscious sector of man's nature, the existence of which had been neglected by modern rationalism; he also showed that these irrational phenomena followed certain laws and therefore could be understood rationally. He taught us to understand the language of dreams and somatic symptoms as well as the irrationalities in human behaviour. He discovered that these irrationalities as well as the whole character structure of an individual were reactions to the influences exercised by the outside world and particularly by those occurring in early childhood.

But Freud was so imbued with the spirit of his culture that he could not go beyond certain limits which were set by it. These very limits became limitations for his understanding even of the sick individual; they handicapped his understanding of the normal individual and of the irrational phenomena operating in social life.

Since this book stresses the rôle of psychological factors in the whole of the social process and since this analysis is based on some of the fundamental discoveries of

Freud—particularly those concerning the operation of unconscious forces in man's character and their dependence on external influences—I think it will be helpful to the reader to know from the outset some of the general principles of our approach, and also the main differences between this approach and the classical Freudian concepts.[3]

Freud accepted the traditional belief in a basic dichotomy between men and society, as well as the traditional doctrine of the evilness of human nature. Man, to him, is fundamentally anti-social. Society must domesticate him, must allow some direct satisfaction of biological—and hence, ineradicable—drives; but for the most part society must refine and adroitly check man's basic impulses. In consequence of this suppression of natural impulses by society something miraculous happens: the suppressed drives turn into strivings that are culturally valuable and thus become the human basis for culture. Freud chose the word sublimation for this strange transformation from suppression into civilized behaviour. If the amount of suppression is greater than the capacity of sublimation, individuals become neurotic and it is necessary to allow the lessening of suppression. Generally, however, there is a reverse relation between satisfaction of man's drives and culture: the more suppression, the more culture (and the more danger of neurotic disturbances). The relation of the individual to society in Freud's theory is essentially a static one: the individual remains virtually the same and becomes changed only in so far as society exercises greater pressure on his natural drives (and thus enforces more sublimation) or allows more satisfaction (and thus sacrifices culture).

Like the so-called basic instincts of man which earlier psychologists accepted, Freud's conception of human nature was essentially a reflection of the most important drives to be seen in modern man. For Freud, the individual of his culture represented "man", and those passions and anxieties that are characteristic for man in modern society were looked upon as eternal forces rooted in the biological constitution of man.

While we could give many illustrations of this point (as, for instance, the social basis for the hostility prevalent today in modern man, the OEdipus complex, the so-called castration complex in women), I want only to give one more illustration which is particularly important because it concerns the whole concept of man as a social being. Freud always considers the individual in his relations to others. These relations as Freud sees them, however, are similar to the economic relations to others which are characteristic of the individual in capitalist society. Each person works for himself,

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[3] A psychoanalytic approach which, though based on the fundamental achievements of Freud's theory, yet differs from Freud in many important aspects is to be found in Karen Horney's *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*, Kegan Paul, London, 1939, and in Harry Stack Sullivan's *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry—The First William Alanson White Memorial Lectures*, Psychiatry, 1940, Vol. 3, No. I. Although the two authors differ in many respects, the viewpoint offered here has much in common with the views of both.

individualistically, at his own risk, and not primarily in co-operation with others. But he is not a Robinson Crusoe; he needs others, as customers, as employees, or as employers. He must buy and sell, give and take. The market, whether it is the commodity or the labour market, regulates these relations. Thus the individual, primarily alone and self-sufficient, enters into economic relations with others as means to one end: to sell and to buy. Freud's concept of human relations is essentially the same: the individual appears fully equipped with biologically given drives, which need to be satisfied. In order to satisfy them, the individual enters into relations with other "objects". Other individuals thus are always a means to one's end, the satisfaction of strivings which in themselves originate in the individual before he enters into contact with others. The field of human relations in Freud's sense is similar to the market—it is an exchange of satisfaction of biologically given needs, in which the relationship to the other individual is always a means to an end but never an end in itself.

Contrary to Freud's viewpoint, the analysis offered in this book is based on the assumption that the key problem of psychology is that of the specific kind of relatedness of the individual towards the world and not that of the satisfaction or frustration of this or that instinctual need *per se*; furthermore, on the assumption that the relationship between man and society is not a static one. It is not as if we had on the one hand an individual equipped by nature with certain drives and on the other, society as something apart from him, either satisfying or frustrating these innate propensities. Although there are certain needs, such as hunger, thirst, sex, which are common to man, those drives which make for the *differences* in men's characters, like love and hatred, the lust for power and the yearning for submission, the enjoyment of sensuous pleasure and the fear of it, are all products of the social process. The most beautiful as well as the most ugly inclinations of man are not part of a fixed and biologically given human nature, but result from the social process which creates man. In other words, society has not only a suppressing function—although it has that too—but it has also a creative function. Man's nature, his passions, and anxieties are a cultural product; as a matter of fact, man himself is the most important creation and achievement of the continuous human effort, the record of which we call history.

It is the very task of social psychology to understand this process of man's creation in history. Why do certain definite changes of man's character take place from one historical epoch to another? Why is the spirit of the Renaissance different from that of the Middle Ages? Why is the character structure of man in monopolistic capitalism different from that in the nineteenth century? Social psychology has to explain why new abilities and new passions, bad or good, come into existence. Thus we find, for instance, that from the Renaissance up until our day men have been filled with a burning ambition for fame, while this striving which to-day seems so natural was little

present in man of the medieval society.[4] In the same period men developed a sense for the beauty of nature which they did not possess before.[5] Again, in the Northern European countries, from the sixteenth century on, man developed an obsessional craving to work which had been lacking in a free man before that period.

But man is not only made by history—history is made by man. The solution of this seeming contradiction constitutes the field of social psychology.[6] Its task is to show not only how passions, desires, anxieties change and develop as a *result* of the social process, but also how man's energies thus shaped into specific forms in their turn become *productive forces, moulding the social process*. Thus, for instance, the craving for fame and success and the drive to work are forces without which modern capitalism could not have developed; without these and a number of other human forces man would have lacked the impetus to act according to the social and economic requirements of the modern commercial and industrial system.

It follows from what we have said that the viewpoint presented in this book differs from Freud's inasmuch as it emphatically disagrees with his interpretation of history as the result of psychological forces that in themselves are not socially conditioned. It disagrees as emphatically with those theories which neglect the rôle of the human factor as one of the dynamic elements in the social process. This criticism is directed not only against sociological theories which explicitly wish to eliminate psychological problems from sociology (like those of Durkheim and his school), but also against those theories that are more or less tinged with behaviouristic psychology. Common to all these theories is the assumption that human nature has no dynamism of its own and that psychological changes are to be understood in terms of the development of new "habits" as an adaptation to new cultural patterns. These theories, though speaking of the psychological factor, at the same time reduce it to a shadow of cultural patterns. Only a dynamic psychology, the foundations of which have been laid by Freud, can get further than paying lip service to the human factor. Though there is no fixed human nature, we cannot regard human nature as being infinitely malleable and able to adapt itself to any kind of conditions without developing a psychological dynamism of its own. Human nature, though being the product of historical evolution, has certain inherent mechanisms and laws, to discover which is the task of psychology.

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[4] Cf. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1921, p.139 ff.

[5] *op. cit.*, p. 299 ff.

[6] Cf. the contributions of the sociologists J. Dollard, K. Mannheim and H. D. Lasswell, of the anthropologists R. Benedict, J. Hallowell, R. Linton, M. Mead, E. Sapir and A. Kardiner's application of psychoanalytic concepts to anthropology.

At this point it seems necessary for the full understanding of what has been said so far and also of what follows to discuss the notion of *adaptation*. This discussion offers at the same time an illustration of what we mean by psychological mechanisms and laws.

It seems useful to differentiate between "static" and "dynamic" adaptation. By static adaptation we mean such an adaptation to patterns as leaves the whole character structure unchanged and implies only the adoption of a new habit. An example of this kind of adaptation is the change from the Chinese habit of eating to the Western habit of using fork and knife. A Chinese coming to America will adapt himself to this new pattern, but this adaptation in itself has little effect on his personality; it does not arouse new drives or character traits.

By dynamic adaptation we refer to the kind of adaptation that occurs, for example, when a boy submits to the commands of his strict and threatening father—being too much afraid of him to do otherwise—and becomes a "good" boy. While he adapts himself to the necessities of the situation, something happens in him. He may develop an intense hostility against his father, which he represses, since it would be too dangerous to express it or even to be aware of it. This repressed hostility, however, though not manifest, is a dynamic factor in his character structure. It may create new anxiety and thus lead to still deeper submission; it may set up a vague defiance, directed against no one in particular but rather towards life in general. While here, too, as in the first case, an individual adapts himself to certain external circumstances, this kind of adaptation creates something new in him, arouses new drives and new anxieties. Every neurosis is an example of this dynamic adaptation; it is essentially an adaptation to such external conditions (particularly those of early childhood) as are in themselves irrational and, generally speaking, unfavourable to the growth and development of the child. Similarly, such socio-psychological phenomena as are comparable to neurotic phenomena (why they should not be called neurotic will be discussed later), like the presence of strong destructive or sadistic impulses in social groups, offer an example of dynamic adaptation to social conditions that are irrational and harmful to the development of men.

Besides the question of what *kind* of adaptation occurs, other questions need to be answered: What is it that forces man to adapt himself to almost any conceivable condition of life, and what are the limits of his adaptability?

In answering these questions the first phenomenon we have to discuss is the fact that there are certain sectors in man's nature that are more flexible and adaptable than others. Those strivings and character traits by which men differ from each other show a great amount of elasticity and malleability: love, destructiveness, sadism, the tendency to submit, the lust for power, detachment, the desire for self-aggrandizement, the

passion for thrift, the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, and the fear of sensuality. These and many other strivings and fears to be found in man develop as a reaction to certain life conditions. They are not particularly flexible, for once they have become part of a person's character, they do not easily disappear or change into some other drive. But they are flexible in the sense that individuals, particularly in their childhood, develop the one or other need according to the whole mode of life they find themselves in. None of these needs is fixed and rigid as if it were an innate part of human nature which develops and has to be satisfied under all circumstances.

In contrast to those needs, there are others which are an indispensable part of human nature and imperatively need satisfaction, namely, those needs that are rooted in the physiological organization of man, like hunger, thirst, the need for sleep, and so on. For each of those needs there exists a certain threshold beyond which lack of satisfaction is unbearable, and when this threshold is transcended the tendency to satisfy the need assumes the quality of an all-powerful striving. All these physiologically conditioned needs can be summarized in the notion of a need for self-preservation. This need for self-preservation is that part of human nature which needs satisfaction under all circumstances and therefore forms the primary motive of human behaviour.

To put this in a simple formula: man must eat, drink, sleep, protect himself against enemies, and so forth. In order to do all this he must work and produce. "Work", however, is nothing general or abstract. Work is always concrete work, that is, a specific kind of work in a specific kind of economic system. A person may work as a slave in a feudal system, as a peasant in an Indian pueblo, as an independent business man in capitalistic society, as a sales-girl in a modern department store, as a worker on the endless belt of a big factory. These different kinds of work require entirely different personality traits and make for different kinds of relatedness to others. When man is born, the stage is set for him. He has to eat and drink, and therefore he has to work; and this means he has to work under the particular conditions and in the ways that are determined for him by the kind of society into which he is born. Both factors, his need to live and the social system, in principle are unalterable by him as an individual, and they are the factors which determine the development of those other traits that show greater plasticity.

Thus the mode of life, as it is determined for the individual by the peculiarity of an economic system, becomes the primary factor in determining his whole character structure, because the imperative need for self-preservation forces him to accept the conditions under which he has to live. This does not mean that he cannot try, together with others, to effect certain economic and political changes; but primarily his personality is moulded by the particular mode of life, as he has already been confronted with it as a child through the medium of the family, which represents all the

features that are typical of a particular society or class.[7]

The physiologically conditioned needs are not the only imperative part of man's nature. There is another part just as compelling, one which is not rooted in bodily processes but in the very essence of the human mode and practice of life: the need to be related to the world outside oneself, the need to avoid aloneness. To feel completely alone and isolated leads to mental disintegration just as physical starvation leads to death. This relatedness to others is not identical with physical contact. An individual may be alone in a physical sense for many years and yet he may be related to ideas, values, or at least social patterns that give him a feeling of communion and "belonging". On the other hand, he may live among people and yet be overcome with an utter feeling of isolation, the outcome of which, if it transcends a certain limit, is the state of insanity which schizophrenic disturbances represent. This lack of relatedness to values, symbols, patterns, we may call moral aloneness and state that moral aloneness is as intolerable as the physical aloneness, or rather that physical aloneness becomes unbearable only if it implies also moral aloneness. The spiritual relatedness to the world can assume many forms; the monk in his cell who believes in God and the political prisoner kept in isolation who feels one with his fellow-fighters are not alone morally. Neither is the English gentleman who wears his dinner jacket in the most exotic surroundings nor the petty bourgeois who, though being deeply isolated from his fellow-men, feels one with his nation or its symbols. The kind of relatedness to the world may be noble or trivial, but even being related to the basest kind of pattern is immensely preferable to being alone. Religion and nationalism, as well as any custom and any belief however absurd and degrading, if it only connects the individual with others, are refuges from what man most dreads: isolation.

The compelling need to avoid moral isolation has been described most forcefully by Balzac in this passage from *The Inventor's Suffering*:

> But learn one thing, impress it upon your mind which is still so malleable: man has a horror for aloneness. And of all kinds of aloneness, moral aloneness is the most terrible.

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[7] I should like to warn against one confusion which is frequently experienced in regard to this problem. The economic structure of a society in determining the mode of life of the individual operates as *condition* for personality development. These *economic conditions* are entirely different from *subjective economic motives*, such as the desire for material wealth which was looked upon by many writers, from the Renaissance on up to certain Marxist authors who failed to understand Marx's basic concepts, as the dominant motive of human behaviour. As a matter of fact, the all-absorbing wish for material wealth is a need peculiar only to certain cultures, and different economic conditions can create personality traits which abhor material wealth or are indifferent to it. I have discussed this problem in detail in "Ueber Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie", *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Hirschfeld, Leipzig, 1932, Vol. I, p. 28 ff.

The first hermits lived with God, they inhabited the world which is most populated, the world of the spirits. The first thought of man, be he a leper or a prisoner, a sinner or an invalid, is: to have a companion of his fate. In order to satisfy this drive which is life itself, he applies all his strength, all his power, the energy of his whole life. Would Satan have found companions without this overpowering craving? On this theme one could write a whole epic, which would be the prologue to *Paradise Lost* because *Paradise Lost* is nothing but the apology of rebellion.

Any attempt to answer the question why the fear of isolation is so powerful in man would lead us far away from the main road we are following in this book. However, in order not to give the reader the impression that the need to feel one with others has some mysterious quality, I should like to indicate in what direction I think the answer lies.

One important element is the fact that men cannot live without some sort of co-operation with others. In any conceivable kind of culture man needs to co-operate with others if he wants to survive, whether for the purpose of defending himself against enemies or dangers of nature, or in order that he may be able to work and produce. Even Robinson Crusoe was accompanied by his man Friday; without him he would probably not only have become insane but would actually have died. Each person experiences this need for the help of others very drastically as a child. On account of the factual inability of the human child to take care of itself with regard to all-important functions, communication with others is a matter of life and death for the child. The possibility of being left alone is necessarily the most serious threat to the child's whole existence.

There is another element, however, which makes the need to "belong" so compelling: the fact of subjective self-consciousness, of the faculty of thinking by which man is aware of himself as an individual entity, different from nature and other people. Although the degree of this awareness varies, as will be pointed out in the next chapter, its existence confronts man with a problem which is essentially human: by being aware of himself as distinct from nature and other people, by being aware—even very dimly—of death, sickness, ageing, he necessarily feels his insignificance and smallness in comparison with the universe and all others who are not "he". Unless he belonged somewhere, unless his life had some meaning and direction, he would feel like a particle of dust and be overcome by his individual insignificance. He would not be able to relate himself to any system which would give meaning and direction to his life, he would be filled with doubt, and this doubt eventually would paralyse his ability to act—that is, to live.

Before we proceed, it may be helpful to sum up what has been pointed out with regard to our general approach to the problems of social psychology. Human nature is neither

a biologically fixed and innate sum total of drives nor is it a lifeless shadow of cultural patterns to which it adapts itself smoothly; it is the product of human evolution, but it also has certain inherent mechanisms and laws. There are certain factors in man's nature which are fixed and unchangeable: the necessity to satisfy the physiologically conditioned drives and the necessity to avoid isolation and moral aloneness. We have seen that the individual has to accept the mode of life rooted in the system of production and distribution peculiar for any given society. In the process of dynamic adaptation to culture, a number of powerful drives develop which motivate the actions and feelings of the individual. The individual may or may not be conscious of these drives, but in any case they are forceful and demand satisfaction once they have developed. They become powerful forces which in their turn become effective in moulding the social process. How economic, psychological, and ideological factors interact and what further general conclusion concerning this interaction one can make will be discussed later in the course of our analysis of the Reformation and of Fascism.[8] This discussion will always be centred around the main theme of this book: that man, the more he gains freedom in the sense of emerging from the original oneness with man and nature and the more he becomes an "individual", has no choice but to unite himself with the world in the spontaneity of love and productive work or else to seek a kind of security by such ties with the world as destroy his freedom and the integrity of his individual self.[9]

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[8] In an appendix I shall discuss in more detail the general aspects of the interrelation between psychological and socio-economic forces.

[9] After completion of this manuscript a study on the different aspects of freedom was presented in *Freedom, Its Meaning*, planned and edited by R. N. Anschen, Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1940. I should like to refer here especially to the papers by H. Bergson, J. Dewey, R. M. McIver, K. Riezler, P. Tillich. Also cf. Carl Steuermann, *Der Mensch auf der Flucht*, S. Fischer, Berlin, 1932.
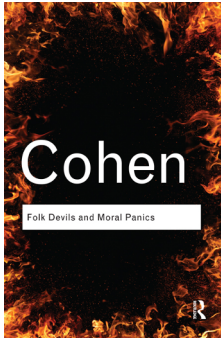
CHAPTER

5

Deviance and Moral Panics

5. DEVIANCE AND MORAL PANICS

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Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself.

One of the most recurrent types of moral panic in Britain since the war has been associated with the emergence of various forms of youth culture (originally almost exclusively working class, but often recently middle class or student based) whose behaviour is deviant or delinquent. To a greater or lesser degree, these cultures have been associated with violence. The Teddy Boys, the Mods and Rockers, the Hells Angels, the skinheads and the hippies have all been phenomena of this kind. There have been parallel reactions to the drug problem, student militancy, political demonstrations, football hooliganism, vandalism of various kinds and crime and violence in general. But groups such as the Teddy Boys and the Mods and Rockers have been distinctive in being identified not just in terms of particular events (such as demonstrations) or particular disapproved forms of behaviour (such as drug-taking or violence) but as distinguishable social types. In the gallery of types that society erects to show its members which roles should be avoided and which should be emulated, these groups have occupied a constant position as folk devils: visible reminders of what we should not be. The identities of such social types are public property and these particular adolescent groups have symbolized – both in what they were and how they were reacted to – much of the social change which has taken place in Britain over the last twenty years.

In this book, I want to use a detailed case study of the Mods and Rockers phenomenon – which covered most of the 1960s – to illustrate some of the more intrinsic features in

the emergence of such collective episodes of juvenile deviance and the moral panics they both generate and rely upon for their growth. The Mods and Rockers are one of the many sets of figures through which the sixties in Britain will be remembered. A decade is not just a chronological span but a period measured by its association with particular fads, fashions, crazes, styles or – in a less ephemeral way – a certain spirit or *kulturgeist*. A term such as 'the twenties' is enough to evoke the cultural shape of that period, and although we are too close to the sixties for such explicit understandings to emerge already, this is not for want of trying from our instant cultural historians. In the cultural snap albums of the decade which have already been collected[1] the Mods and Rockers stand alongside the Profumo affair, the Great Train Robbery, the Krays, the Richardsons, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Bishop of Woolwich, *Private Eye*, David Frost, Carnaby Street, The Moors murders, the emergence of Powellism, the Rhodesian affair, as the types and scenes of the sixties.

At the beginning of the decade, the term 'Modernist' referred simply to a style of dress; the term 'Rocker' was hardly known outside the small groups which identified themselves this way. Five years later, a newspaper editor was to refer to the Mods and Rockers incidents as 'without parallel in English history' and troop reinforcements were rumoured to have been sent to quell possible widespread disturbances. Now, another five years later, these groups have all but disappeared from the public consciousness, remaining only in collective memory as folk devils of the past, to whom current horrors can be compared. The rise and fall of the Mods and Rockers contained all the elements from which one might generalize about folk devils and moral panics. And unlike the previous decade which had only produced the Teddy Boys, these years witnessed rapid oscillation from one such devil to another: the Mod, the Rocker, the Greaser, the student militant, the drug fi end, the vandal, the soccer hooligan, the hippy, the skinhead.

Neither moral panics nor social types have received much systematic attention in sociology. In the case of moral panics, the two most relevant frameworks come from the sociology of law and social problems and the sociology of collective behaviour. Sociologists such as Becker[2] and Gusfield[3] have taken the cases of the Marijuana Tax

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[1] The term 'moral panic' was first used by Jock Young in 'The Role of the Police as Amplifiers of Deviancy, Negotiators of Reality and Translators of Fantasy', in S. Cohen (Ed.), *Images of Deviance* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 37. We both probably picked it up from Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*, published in 1964.

[2] Between 1984 and 1991 (inclusive) there were about 8 citations of 'moral panic' in UK newspapers; then 25 in 1992, then a sudden leap to 145 in 1993. From 1994 to 2001, the average was at 109 per year.

[3] Kenneth Thompson's *Moral Panics* (London: Routledge, 1998), appeared in the Routledge 'Key Ideas' series. For definitions, see Allan G. Johnson, *Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) and

Act and the Prohibition laws respectively to show how public concern about a particular condition is generated, a 'symbolic crusade' mounted, which with publicity and the actions of certain interest groups, results in what Becker calls *moral enterprise* : '. . . the creation of a new fragment of the moral constitution of society.'[4] Elsewhere[5] Becker uses the same analysis to deal with the evolution of social problems as a whole. The field of collective behaviour provides another relevant orientation to the study of moral panics. There are detailed accounts of cases of mass hysteria, delusion and panics, and also a body of studies on how societies cope with the sudden threat or disorder caused by physical disasters.

The study of social types can also be located in the field of collective behaviour, not so much though in such 'extreme' forms as riots or crowds, but in the general orientation to this field by the symbolic interactionists such as Blumer and Turner.[6] In this line of theory, explicit attention has been paid to social types by Klapp,[7] but although he considers how such types as the hero, the villain and the fool serve as role models for a society, his main concern seems to be in classifying the various subtypes within these groups (for example, the renegade, the parasite, the corrupter, as villain roles) and listing names of those persons Americans see as exemplifying these roles. He does not consider how such typing occurs in the first place and he is preoccupied with showing his approval for the processes by which social consensus is facilitated by identifying with the hero types and hating the villain types.

The major contribution to the study of the social typing process itself comes from the interactionist or transactional approach to deviance. The focus here is on how society labels rule-breakers as belonging to certain deviant groups and how, once the person is thus type cast, his acts are interpreted in terms of the status to which he has been assigned. It is to this body of theory that we must turn for our major orientation to the study of both moral panics and social types.

Karim Murji, 'Moral Panic' in *Dictionary of Criminology*, London, Sage, 2001.

[4] Blake Morrison, *As If* (Cambridge: Granta, 1997).

[5] Sir William Macpherson, *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* (London: HMSO, 1999).

[6] Two useful examples: Eugene McLaughlin and Karim Murji, 'After the Stephen Lawrence Report', *Critical Social Policy 19* (August 1999), pp. 371–85; Alan Marlow and Barry Loveday (Eds), *After Macpherson: Policing After the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* (Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing, 2000).

[7] McLaughlin and Murji, op. cit. p. 372.

THE TRANSACTIONAL APPROACH TO DEVIANCE

The sociological study of crime, delinquency, drug-taking, mental illness and other forms of socially deviant or problematic behaviour has, in the last decade, undergone a radical reorientation. This reorientation is part of what might be called the *sceptical* revolution in criminology and the sociology of deviance.[8] The older tradition was *canonical* in the sense that it saw the concepts it worked with as authoritative, standard, accepted, given and unquestionable. The new tradition is sceptical in the sense that when it sees terms like 'deviant', it asks 'deviant to whom?' or 'deviant from what?'; when told that something is a social problem, it asks 'problematic to whom?'; when certain conditions or behaviour are described as dysfunctional, embarrassing, threatening or dangerous, it asks 'says who?' and 'why?' In other words, these concepts and descriptions are not assumed to have a taken-for-granted status.

The empirical existence of forms of behaviour labelled as deviant and the fact that persons might consciously and intentionally decide to be deviant, should not lead us to assume that deviance is the intrinsic property of an act nor a quality possessed by an actor. Becker's formulation on the transactional nature of deviance has now been quoted verbatim so often that it has virtually acquired its own canonical status:

. . . deviance is created by society. I do not mean this in the way that it is ordinarily understood, in which the causes of deviance are located in the social situation of the deviant or in 'social factors' which prompt his action. I mean, rather, that *social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance* and by applying those rules to particular persons and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is *not* a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label.[9]

What this means is that the student of deviance must question and not take for granted the labelling by society or certain powerful groups in society of certain behaviour as deviant or problematic. The transactionalists' importance has been not simply to restate the sociological truism that the judgement of deviance is ultimately one that is relative to a particular group, but in trying to spell out the implication of this for research and theory. They have suggested that in addition to the stock set of *behavioural* questions

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[8] As *The Sun* 's front page proclaimed: 'Britain Backs Our Bobbies: Sun Poll Boosts Under-Fire Cops' (1 March 1999).

[9] Karim Murji, 'The Agony and the Ecstasy: Drugs, Media and Morality', in Ross Coomber (Ed.), *The Control of Drugs and Drug Users: Reason or Reaction?* (London: Harwood Publishers, 1998).

which the public asks about deviance and which the researcher obligingly tries to answer (why did they do it? what sort of people are they? how do we stop them doing it again?) there are at least three *definitional* questions: why does a particular rule, the infraction of which constitutes deviance, exist at all? What are the processes and procedures involved in identifying someone as a deviant and applying the rule to him? What are the effects and consequences of this application, both for society and the individual?

Sceptical theorists have been misinterpreted as going only so far as putting these definitional questions and moreover as implying that the behavioural questions are unimportant. While it is true that they have pointed to the dead ends which the behavioural questions have reached (do we really know what distinguishes a deviant from a non-deviant?), what they say has positive implications for studying these questions as well. Thus, they see deviance in terms of a process of becoming – movements of doubt, commitment, sidetracking, guilt – rather than the possession of fixed traits and characteristics. This is true even for those forms of deviance usually seen to be most 'locked in' the person: 'No one', as Laing says, 'has schizophrenia like having a cold.'[10] The meaning and interpretation which the deviant gives to his own acts are seen as crucial and so is the fact that these actions are often similar to socially approved forms of behaviour.[11]

The transactional perspective does not imply that innocent persons are arbitrarily selected to play deviant roles or that harmless conditions are wilfully inflated into social problems. Nor does it imply that a person labelled as deviant has to accept this identity: being caught and publicly labelled is just one crucial contingency which *may* stabilize a deviant career and sustain it over time. Much of the work of these writers has been concerned with the problematic nature of societal response to deviance and the way such responses affect the behaviour. This may be studied at a face-to-face level (for example, what effect does it have on a pupil to be told by his teacher that he is a 'yob who should never be at a decent school like this'?) or at a broader societal level (for example, how is the 'drug problem' actually created and shaped by particular social and legal policies?).

The most unequivocal attempt to understand the nature and effect of the societal

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[10] Phillip Jenkins, *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998).

[11] See Phillip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

reaction to deviance is to be found in the writings of Lemert.[12] He makes an important distinction, for example, between primary and secondary deviation. Primary deviation – which may arise from a variety of causes – refers to behaviour which, although it may be troublesome to the individual, does not produce symbolic reorganization at the level of self-conception. Secondary deviation occurs when the individual employs his deviance, or a role based upon it, as a means of defence, attack or adjustment to the problems created by the societal reaction to it. The societal reaction is thus conceived as the 'effective' rather than 'original' cause of deviance: deviance becomes significant when it is subjectively shaped into an active role which becomes the basis for assigning social status. Primary deviation has only marginal implications for social status and selfconception as long as it remains symptomatic, situational, rationalized or in some way 'normalized' as an acceptable and normal variation.

Lemert was very much aware that the transition from primary to secondary deviation was a complicated process. Why the societal reaction occurs and what form it takes are dependent on factors such as the amount and visibility of the deviance, while the effect of the reaction is dependent on numerous contingencies and is itself only one contingency in the development of a deviant career. Thus the link between the reaction and the individual's incorporation of this into his self-identity is by no means inevitable; the deviant label, in other words, does not always 'take'. The individual might be able to ignore or rationalize the label or only pretend to comply. This type of face-to-face sequence, though, is just one part of the picture: more important are the symbolic and unintended consequences of social control as a whole. Deviance in a sense emerges and is stabilized as an artefact of social control; because of this, Lemert can state that '. . . older sociology tended to rest heavily upon the idea that deviance leads to social control. I have come to believe that the reverse idea, i.e. social control leads to deviance, is equally tenable and the potentially richer premise for studying deviance in modern society.'[13]

It is partly towards showing the tenability and richness of this premise that this book is directed. My emphasis though, is more on the logically prior task of analysing the nature of a particular set of reactions rather than demonstrating conclusively what

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12 For two different, but complimentary, views see Beatrix Campbell, *Unofficial Secrets: Child Sexual Abuse – The Cleveland Case* (London: Virago, 1989) and Nigel Parton, *Governing the Family: Child Care, Child Protection and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1991), especially Chapter 4 'Sexual Abuse, the Cleveland Affair and the Private Family'.

13 For an analysis of newspaper coverage of the series of 'anti-paedophile crowd actions' in Britain over summer 2000, see John Drury, ' "When the mobs are looking for witches to burn, nobody's safe" talking about the reactionary crowd', *Discourse and Society 13*, 1 pp. 41–73.

their effects might have been. How were the Mods and Rockers identified, labelled and controlled? What stages or processes did this reaction go through? Why did the reaction take its particular forms? What – to use Lemert's words again – were the 'mythologies, stigma, stereotypes, patterns of exploitation, accommodation, segregation and methods of control (which) spring up and crystallize in the interaction between the deviants and the rest of society'?[14]

There are many strategies – not mutually incompatible – for studying such reactions. One might take a sample of public opinion and survey its attitudes to the particular form of deviance in question. One might record reactions in a face-to-face context; for example, how persons respond to what they see as homosexual advances.[15] One might study the operations and beliefs of particular control agencies such as the police or the courts. Or, drawing on all these sources, one might construct an ethnography and history of reactions to a particular condition or form of behaviour. This is particularly suitable for forms of deviance or problems seen as new, sensational or in some other way particularly threatening. Thus 'crime waves' in seventeenth century Massachusetts,[16] marijuana smoking in America during the 1930s,[17] the Teddy Boy phenomenon in Britain during the 1950s[18] and drug-taking in the Notting Hill area of London during the 1960s[19] have all been studied in this way. These reactions were all associated with some form of moral panic and it is in the tradition of studies such as these that the Mods and Rockers will be considered. Before introducing this particular case, however, I want to justify concentrating on one especially important carrier and producer of moral panics, namely, the mass media.

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[14] On the history of media panics about the appearance of new forms of media, see Kirsten Drotner, 'Modernity and Media Panics', in M. Skovmand and K.C. Schroder (Eds), *Media Cultures: Reappraising Traditional Media* (London: Routledge, 1992) and 'Dangerous Media? Panic Discourses and Dilemmas of Modernity', *Pedagogica Historica 35*, 3 (1999), pp. 593–619.

[15] Drotner, op. cit. p. 52.

[16] For a recent review (concentrating on highly publicized violent crimes) see Martin Barker and Julian Petley (Eds), *Ill Effects: The Media-Violence Debate* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[17] Grainne McKeever, 'Detecting, Prosecuting and Punishing Benefit Fraud: The Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act 1997', *Modern Law Review 62* (March 1999), p. 269.

[18] Angela McRobbie, 'Motherhood, A Teenage Job', *Guardian* (5 September 1989).

[19] A. Ward, *Talking Dirty: Moral Panic and Political Rhetoric* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 1996).

DEVIANCE AND THE MASS MEDIA

A crucial dimension for understanding the reaction to deviance both by the public as a whole and by agents of social control, is the nature of the information that is received about the behaviour in question. Each society possesses a set of ideas about what causes deviation – is it due, say, to sickness or to wilful perversity? – and a set of images of who constitutes the typical deviant – is he an innocent lad being led astray, or is he a psychopathic thug? – and these conceptions shape what is done about the behaviour. In industrial societies, the body of information from which such ideas are built, is invariably received at second hand. That is, it arrives already processed by the mass media and this means that the information has been subject to alternative definitions of what constitutes 'news' and how it should be gathered and presented. The information is further structured by the various commercial and political constraints in which newspapers, radio and television operate.

The student of moral enterprise cannot but pay particular attention to the role of the mass media in defining and shaping social problems. The media have long operated as agents of moral indignation in their own right: even if they are not self-consciously engaged in crusading or muck-raking, their very reporting of certain 'facts' can be sufficient to generate concern, anxiety, indignation or panic. When such feelings coincide with a perception that particular values need to be protected, the preconditions for new rule creation or social problem definition are present. Of course, the outcome might not be as definite as the actual creation of new rules or the more rigid enforcement of existing ones. What might result is the sort of symbolic process which Gusfield describes in his conception of 'moral passage': there is a change in the public designation of deviance.[20] In his example, the problem drinker changes from 'repentant' to 'enemy' to 'sick'. Something like the opposite might be happening in the public designation of producers and consumers of pornography: they have changed from isolated, pathetic – if not sick – creatures in grubby macks to groups of ruthless exploiters out to undermine the nation's morals.

Less concretely, the media might leave behind a diffuse feeling of anxiety about the situation: 'something should be done about it', 'where will it end?' or 'this sort of thing can't go on for ever'. Such vague feelings are crucial in laying the ground for further enterprise, and Young has shown how, in the case of drug-taking, the media play on the normative concerns of the public and by thrusting certain moral directives into the

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[20] P.M. Evans and K.J. Swift, 'Single Mothers and the Press: Rising Tides, Moral Panic and Restructuring Discourses', in S.M. Neysmith (Ed.), *Restructuring Caring Labour: Discourse, State Practice and Everyday Life* (Oxford, OUP, 2000).

universe of discourse, can create social problems suddenly and dramatically.[21] This potential is consciously exploited by those whom Becker calls 'moral entrepreneurs' to aid them in their attempt to win public support.

The mass media, in fact, devote a great deal of space to deviance: sensational crimes, scandals, bizarre happenings and strange goings on. The more dramatic confrontations between deviance and control in manhunts, trials and punishments are recurring objects of attention. As Erikson notes, 'a considerable portion of what we call "news" is devoted to reports about deviant behaviour and its consequences'.[22] This is not just for entertainment or to fulfil some psychological need for either identification or vicarious punishment. Such 'news' as Erikson and others have argued, is a main source of information about the normative contours of a society. It informs us about right and wrong, about the boundaries beyond which one should not venture and about the shapes that the devil can assume. The gallery of folk types – heroes and saints, as well as fools, villains and devils – is publicized not just in oral tradition and face-to-face contact but to much larger audiences and with much greater dramatic resources.

Much of this study will be devoted to understanding the role of the mass media in creating moral panics and folk devils. A potentially useful link between these two notions – and one that places central stress on the mass media – is the process of deviation amplification as described by Wilkins.[23] The key variable in this attempt to understand how the societal reaction may in fact *increase* rather than decrease or keep in check the amount of deviance, is the nature of the information about deviance. As I pointed out earlier, this information characteristically is not received at first hand, it tends to be processed in such a form that the action or actors concerned are pictured in a highly stereotypical way. We react to an episode of, say, sexual deviance, drug-taking or violence in terms of our information about that particular class of phenomenon (how typical is it), our tolerance level for that type of behaviour and our direct experience – which in a segregated urban society is often nil. Wilkins describes – in highly mechanistic language derived from cybernetic theory – a typical reaction sequence which might take place at this point, one which has a spiralling or snowballing effect.

An initial act of deviance, or normative diversity (for example, in dress) is defined as being worthy of attention and is responded to punitively. The deviant or group of

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[21] J. Doly et al., *Refugees in Europe: The Hostile New Agenda* (London: Minorities Rights Group, 1997).

[22] Robin Cohen, *Frontiers of Identity: The British and the Others* (London: Longman, 1994).

[23] Ron Kaye, 'Redefining the Refugee: The UK Media Portrayal of Asylum Seekers', in Khalid Koser and Helma Lutz (Eds), *The New Migration in Europe: Social Constructions and Social Realities* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 163–82.

deviants is segregated or isolated and this operates to alienate them from conventional society. They perceive themselves as more deviant, group themselves with others in a similar position, and this leads to more deviance. This, in turn, exposes the group to further punitive sanctions and other forceful action by the conformists – and the system starts going round again. There is no assumption in this model that amplification *has* to occur: in the same way – as I pointed out earlier – that there is no automatic transition from primary to secondary deviation or to the incorporation of deviant labels. The system or the actor can and does react in quite opposite directions. What one is merely drawing attention to is a set of sequential typifications: under X conditions, A will be followed by A1, A2, etc. All these links have to be explained – as Wilkins does not do – in terms of other generalizations. For example, it is more likely that if the deviant group is vulnerable and its actions highly visible, it will be forced to take on its identities from structurally and ideologically more powerful groups. Such generalizations and an attempt to specify various specialized modes of amplification or alternatives to the process have been spelt out by Young[24] in the case of drug-taking. I intend using this model here simply as one viable way in which the 'social control leads to deviation' chain can be conceptualized and also because of its particular emphasis upon the 'information about deviance' variable and its dependence on the mass media.

THE CASE OF THE MODS AND ROCKERS

I have already given some indication of the general framework which I think suitable for the study of moral panics and folk devils. Further perspectives suggest themselves because of the special characteristics of the Mods and Rockers phenomenon, as compared with, say, the rise of student militancy or the appearance of underground newspaper editors on obscenity charges. The first and most obvious one derives from the literature on subcultural delinquency. This would provide the structural setting for explaining the Mods and Rockers phenomenon as a form of adolescent deviance among working-class youth in Britain. Downes's variant of subcultural theory is most relevant and I would substantially agree with his remarks (in the preface of his book) about the Mods and Rockers events intervening between writing and the book going to press: 'No mention is made of these occurrences in what follows, largely because – in the absence of evidence to the contrary – I take them to corroborate, rather than

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24 See the report by Oxfam's UK poverty programme in Scotland, *Asylum: the Truth Behind the Headlines* (Oxfam, February 2001). This project monitored six Scottish papers over a two-month period (March–April 2000): a total of 263 articles on asylum and refugee issues.

negate, the main sociological argument of the book.'[25] At various points in these chapters, the relevance of subcultural theory will be commented on, although my stress on the definitional rather than behavioural questions precludes an extended analysis along these lines.

Another less obvious orientation derives from the field of collective behaviour. I have already suggested that social types can be seen as the products of the same processes that go into the creation of symbolic collective styles in fashion, dress and public identities. The Mods and Rockers, though, were initially registered in the public consciousness not just as the appearance of new social types, but as actors in a particular episode of collective behaviour. The phenomenon took its subsequent shape in terms of these episodes: the regular series of disturbances which took place at English seaside resorts between 1964 and 1966. The public image of these folk devils was invariably tied up to a number of highly visual scenarios associated with their appearance: youths chasing across the beach, brandishing deckchairs over their heads, running along the pavements, riding on scooters or bikes down the streets, sleeping on the beaches and so on.

Each of these episodes – as I will describe – contained all the elements of the classic crowd situation which has long been the prototype for the study of collective behaviour. Crowds, riots, mobs and disturbances on occasions ranging from pop concerts to political demonstrations have all been seen in a similar way to *The Crowd* described by Le Bon in 1896. Later formulations by Tarde, Freud, McDougall and F. H. Allport made little lasting contribution and often just elaborated on Le Bon's contagion hypothesis. A more useful recent theory – for all its deficiencies from a sociological viewpoint – is Smelser's 'value added schema'.[26] In the sequence he suggests, each of the following determinants of collective behaviour must appear: (i) structural conduciveness; (ii) structural strain; (iii) growth and spread of a generalized belief; (iv) precipitating factors; (v) mobilization of the participants for action; (vi) operation of social control.

Structural conduciveness creates conditions of permissiveness under which collective behaviour is seen as legitimate. Together with structural strain (e.g. economic deprivation, population invasion) this factor creates the opening for race riots, sects, panics and other examples of collective behaviour. In the case of the Mods and Rockers, conduciveness and strain correspond to the structural sources of strain posited in

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[25] E. El Refaie, 'Metaphors we Discriminate by: Naturalized Themes in Austrian Newspaper Articles about Asylum Seekers', *Journal of Sociolinguistics 5*, 3 (August 2001), pp. 352–71.

[26] Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).

subcultural theory: anomie, status frustration, blocked leisure opportunities and so on. The growth and spread of a generalized belief is important because the situation of strain must be made meaningful to the potential participants. For the most part these generalized beliefs are spread through the mass media. I have already indicated the importance of media imagery for studying deviance as a whole; in dealing with crowd behaviour, this importance is heightened because of the ways in which such phenomena develop and spread. As will be shown, sociological and social psychological work on mass hysteria, delusions and rumours are of direct relevance here.

Precipitating factors are specific events which might confirm a generalized belief, initiate strain or redefine conduciveness. Like the other factors in Smelser's schema, it is not a determinant of anything in itself – for example, a fight will not start a race riot unless it occurs in or is interpreted as an 'explosive situation'. While not spelling out in detail the precipitating factors in the Mods and Rockers events, I will show how the social reaction contributed to the definition and creation of these factors. Mobilization of participants for action again refers to a sequence present in the Mods and Rockers events which will only be dealt with in terms of the other determinants.

It is Smelser's sixth determinant – the operation of social control – which, together with the generalized belief factors, will concern us most. This factor, which 'in certain respects . . . arches over all others'[27] refers to the counter forces set up by society to prevent and inhibit the previous determinants: 'Once an episode of collective behaviour has appeared, its duration and severity are determined by the response of the agencies of social control.'[28] So from a somewhat different theoretical perspective – Parsonian functionalism – Smelser attaches the same crucial importance to the social control factors stressed in the transactional model.

A special – and at first sight somewhat esoteric – area of collective behaviour which is of peculiar relevance, is the field known as 'disaster research'.[29] This consists of a body of findings about the social and psychological impact of disasters, particularly physical disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes and floods but also manmade disasters such as bombing attacks. Theoretical models have also been produced, and Merton argues that the study of disasters can extend sociological theory beyond the confines of the

[27] For example, Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

[28] See Selected Reading List for references on constructionism.

[29] Robert Reiner, 'The Rise of Virtual Vigilantism: Crime Reporting Since World War II', *Criminal Justice Matters 43* (Spring 2001).

immediate subject-matter. Disaster situations can be looked at as strategic research sites for theory-building: 'Conditions of collective stress bring out in bold relief aspects of social systems that are not as readily visible in the stressful conditions of everyday life.'[30] The value of disaster studies is that by compressing social processes into a brief time span, a disaster makes usually private behaviour, public and immediate and therefore more amenable to study.[31]

I came across the writings in this field towards the end of carrying out the Mods and Rockers research and was immediately struck by the parallels between what I was then beginning to think of as 'moral panics' and the reactions to physical disasters. Disaster researchers have constructed one of the few models in sociology for considering the reaction of the social system to something stressful, disturbing or threatening. The happenings at Brighton, Clacton or Margate clearly were not disasters in the same category of events as earthquakes or floods; the differences are too obvious to have to spell out. Nevertheless, there *were* resemblances, and definitions of 'disaster' are so inconsistent and broad, that the Mods and Rockers events could almost fit them. Elements in such definitions include: whole or part of a community must be affected, a large segment of the community must be confronted with actual or potential danger, there must be loss of cherished values and material objects resulting in death or injury or destruction to property.

In addition, many workers in the field claim that research should not be restricted to actual disasters – a potential disaster may be just as disruptive as the actual event. Studies of reactions to hoaxes and false alarms show disaster behaviour in the absence of objective danger. More important, as will be shown in detail, a large segment of the community reacted to the Mods and Rockers events as if a disaster had occurred: 'It is the perception of threat and not its actual existence that is important.'[32]

The work of disaster researchers that struck me as most useful when I got to the stage of writing up my own material on the Mods and Rockers was the sequential model that they have developed to describe the phases of a typical disaster. The following is the sort of sequence that has been distinguished:[33]

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[30] Richard L. Fox and Robert Van Sichel, *Tabloid Justice: Criminal Justice in an Age of Media Frenzy* (Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers, 2001).

[31] David Garland, *The Culture of Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[32] Sheldon Unger, 'Moral Panic versus the Risk Society: Implications of the Changing Sites of Social Anxiety', *British Journal of Sociology 52*, pp. 271–92.

[33] Mary Douglas's main publications on the subject (*Risk and Culture and Risk and Blame*) are presented in Richard Farndon, *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 144–67.

1. *Warning* : during which arises, mistakenly or not, some apprehensions based on conditions out of which danger may arise. The warning must be coded to be understood and impressive enough to overcome resistance to the belief that current tranquillity can be upset.
2. *Threat* : during which people are exposed to communication from others, or to signs from the approaching disaster itself indicating specific imminent danger. This phase begins with the perception of some change, but as with the first phase, may be absent or truncated in the case of sudden disaster.
3. *Impact* : during which the disaster strikes and the immediate unorganized response to the death, injury or destruction takes place.
4. *Inventory* : during which those exposed to the disaster begin to form a preliminary picture of what has happened and of their own condition.
5. *Rescue* : during which the activities are geared to immediate help for the survivors. As well as people in the impact area helping each other, the suprasystem begins to send aid.
6. *Remedy* : during which more deliberate and formal activities are undertaken towards relieving the affected. The suprasystem takes over the functions the emergency system cannot perform.
7. *Recovery* : during which, for an extended period, the community either recovers its former equilibrium or achieves a stable adaptation to the changes which the disaster may have brought about.

Some of these stages have no exact parallels in the Mods and Rockers case, but a condensed version of this sequence (*Warning* to cover phases 1 and 2; then *Impact* ; then *Inventory* ; and *Reaction* to cover phases 5, 6 and 7) provides a useful analogue. If one compares this to deviancy models such as amplification, there are obvious and crucial differences. For disasters, the sequence has been empirically established; in the various attempts to conceptualize the reactions to deviance this is by no means the case. In addition, the transitions within the amplification model or from primary to secondary deviation are supposed to be consequential (i.e. causal) and not merely sequential. In disaster research, moreover, it has been shown how the form each phase takes is affected by the characteristics of the previous stage: thus, the scale of the remedy operation is affected by the degree of identification with the victim. This sort of uniformity has not been shown in deviance.

The nature of the reaction to the event is important in different ways. In the case of disaster, the social system responds in order to help the victims and to evolve methods to mitigate the effects of further disasters (e.g. by early warning systems). The disaster

itself occurs independently of this reaction. In regard to deviance, however, the reaction is seen as partly causative. The on-the-spot reaction to an act determines whether it is classified as deviant at all, and the way in which the act is reported and labelled also determines the form of the subsequent deviation; this is not the case with a disaster. To express the difference in another way, while the disaster sequence is linear and constant – in each disaster the warning is followed by the impact which is followed by the reaction – deviance models are circular and amplifying: the impact (deviance) is followed by a reaction which has the effect of increasing the subsequent warning and impact, setting up a feedback system. It is precisely because the Mods and Rockers phenomenon was both a generalized type of deviance and also manifested itself as a series of discrete events, that both models are relevant. While a single event can be meaningfully described in terms of the disaster analogue (warning–impact–reaction), each event can be seen as creating the potential for a reaction which, among other possible consequences, might cause further acts of deviance.

Let me now return to the original aims of the study and conclude this introductory chapter by outlining the plan of the book. My focus is on the genesis and development of the moral panic and social typing associated with the Mods and Rockers phenomenon. In transactional terminology: what was the nature and effect of the societal reaction to this particular form of deviance? This entails looking at the ways in which the behaviour was perceived and conceptualized, whether there was a unitary or a divergent set of images, the modes through which these images were transmitted and the ways in which agents of social control reacted. The behavioural questions (how did the Mods and Rockers styles emerge? Why did some young people more or less identified with these groups behave in the way they did?) will be considered, but they are the background questions. The variable of societal reaction is the focus of attention.

Very few studies have been made with this focus and the term 'reaction' has become reified, covering a wide range of interpretations. Does 'reaction' mean what is *done* about the deviance in question, or merely what is *thought* about it? And how does one study something as nebulous as this, when the 'thing' being reacted to covers juvenile delinquency, a manifestation of youth culture, a social type and a series of specific events? Using criteria determined by my theoretical interests rather than by how concepts can best be 'operationalized', I decided to study reaction at three levels, in each case using a range of possible sources. The first was the initial on-the-spot reaction, which I studied mainly through observation, participant observation and the type of informal interviewing used in community studies. The second was the organized reaction of the system of social control, information about which I obtained from observation, interviews and the analysis of published material. The third level was the transmission and diffusion of the reaction in the mass media. A detailed description of

the research methods and sources of material is given in the Appendix.

To remain faithful to the theoretical orientation of the study, my argument will be presented in terms of a typical reaction sequence. That is to say, instead of describing the deviation in some detail and then considering the reaction, I will start off with the minimum possible account of the deviation, then deal with the reaction and then, finally, return to consider the interplay between deviation and reaction. In terms of the disaster analogue this means starting off with the inventory, moving on to other phases of the reaction and then returning to the warning and impact. The book divides into three parts: the first (and major) part traces the development and reverberation of the societal reaction, particularly as reflected in the mass media and the actions of the organized system of social control. This consists of three chapters: the *Inventory* ; the *Opinion and Attitude Themes* and the *Rescue and Remedy Phases* . The second part of the book looks at the effects of the reaction and the third locates the growth of the folk devils and the moral panic in historical and structural terms.

Organizing the book in this way means that in the first part, the Mods and Rockers are hardly going to appear as 'real, live people' at all. They will be seen through the eyes of the societal reaction and in this reaction they tend to appear as disembodied objects, Rorshach blots on to which reactions are projected. In using this type of presentation, I do not want to imply that these reactions – although they do involve elements of fantasy and selective misperception – are irrational nor that the Mods and Rockers were not real people, with particular structural origins, values, aims and interests. Neither were they creatures pushed and pulled by the forces of the societal reaction without being able to react back. I am presenting the argument in this way for effect, only allowing the Mods and Rockers to come to life when their supposed identities had been presented for public consumption.