

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

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oblivious to the moral significance of their actions. What follows in practice is that they may refrain from actions which moral responsibility would have prompted them to take, and engage in actions which moral responsibility would have barred them from performing. Thanks to the rules of civil inattention, strangers are not treated as enemies and most of the time escape the fate which tends to befall the enemy; they are not a target of hostility and aggression. And yet, not unlike the enemies, the strangers (and this includes ourselves, inasmuch as all of us are part of the 'universal strangerhood') are deprived of that protection which only moral proximity may offer. It is but a short step from civil inattention to moral indifference, heartlessness and disregard for the needs of others.

Chapter Four

Together and Apart

It has probably occurred to you, more than once, to start your speech with the phrase 'As all of us agree ...' I am sure you have heard other people saying this. Or you will have read this expression in newspaper articles — particularly in the editorials, which are, indeed, a sort of editor's speech addressed to the newspaper's readers. But have you ever asked yourself *who* these 'all of us' who 'agree' were?

Were I to use phrases like 'As we all know ...' or 'As we all agree ...', I would refer to an unspecified collection of people who think like me. But I would imply more than this: that I have selected such people, and set them apart, from all the others who may think differently; that this selected collection is one which counts (to me, at any rate); and that it is precisely this selected group and no other that counts, that the shared opinion of its members lends authority — a sufficient, trustworthy and credible authority — to what follows. By using the phrase, I would establish an invisible link of *mutual understanding* between myself and my listeners or readers. I would suggest that we are united by the views we share, by the fact that we see the topic of our conversation in the same way and from the same angle. All these implied meanings would tacitly accompany my use of the phrase without my ever spelling them out. It is as if both the unity of 'us all' who agree, and our shared disregard for those who do not, seemed too 'natural' to me (and, so I hope or take for granted, to my audience) for me to argue about it or seek and supply the proof that it is, indeed, the case.

It is such a collection of people (not at all clearly defined or circumscribed), who agree to something that other people presumably

reject, and such an authority bestowed upon the agreement in disregard and defiance of anything else, which we have in mind whenever we speak of *community*. However we try to justify or explain the 'togetherness' of the community, its unity, its genuine or merely desired persistence, it is the *spiritual* unity, subject to a shared spiritual authority, that we have in mind first and foremost. Without it, there is no community.

One shared view which underlies and conditions the sharing of all other views is the agreement that the collection under discussion is indeed a community — that is, that inside its boundaries views and attitudes are, or ought to be, shared, and that agreement can and should be achieved if any of the views (merely temporarily, one believes) differ. Agreement, or at least the readiness to agree, is assumed to be the primary, natural reality of all community members. A community is a group in which factors which unite people are stronger and more important than anything which may divide it; the differences between members are minor or secondary by comparison with their essential — one is tempted to say overwhelming — similarity. Community is thought of as a *natural* unity.

If we can get away without explaining precisely who the 'all of us' are, and without proving that the views we allegedly share are indeed true and proper and thus deserve to be treated with respect and believed, it is mostly because of that 'naturalness' of the implied bond. The community type of belonging comes about as if of itself, like other 'facts of nature'; it need not be laboriously constructed, maintained and serviced. The community type of belonging is at its strongest and most secure when we believe just this: that we have not chosen it on purpose, have done nothing to make it exist and can do nothing to undo it. For the sake of their effectiveness, their hold over reality, it is better that the images and postulates implied by the phrase 'as we all agree' are never given in detail, never come into focus, are never written down in a formal code or turn into an object of conscious effort. Their hold is all the stronger the less they are spoken about or even noticed. Only as long as they stay silent is the community what we believe it to be: 'naturally' united. Sharing of beliefs comes naturally as long as it is not argued about and thus stays unchallenged.

Ideally, such sharing would be at its fullest among isolated people who conduct all their life-business, from birth to death, in the same company, who neither venture into other places nor are visited by members of other groups who practice different styles of life. Such people would have no occasion to contemplate their own ways and means 'from outside', to see them as something strange and baffling, needing an explanation or argument. Neither would such people be pressed to justify and explain why they are living in their particular fashion, sticking to one way of life rather than another. (Note that we are considering here an ideal case. Situations that truly meet such ideal conditions hardly ever exist. It is sometimes assumed that the old-time isolated villages or far-away islands came relatively close to fulfilling such conditions, though even this supposition rarely stands up to closer scrutiny. More than often not, community is a *postulate*, an expression of desire, a clarion call to close the ranks, rather than a reality. In the memorable words of the great British scholar Raymond Williams, 'the remarkable thing about community is that it always has been'.) Even if it ever existed in the past, community certainly does not exist any more, not in its imaginary idealized form, the moment it is spoken about. People are most eager to invoke the unshakeable powers of 'natural' unity when they confront the practical task of creating unity artificially or rescuing by conscious effort the crumbling unity of the past.

When we use a phrase like 'As we all agree ...' we attempt, therefore, to bring to life, or keep alive, or resuscitate a community of meanings and beliefs which has never existed 'naturally', or is already about to fall apart, or is to rise again from the ashes. We do it under conditions admittedly unfavourable for the existence and survival of 'natural' communities — in a world in which contradictory beliefs coexist, different descriptions of reality compete with each other, and each view has to defend itself against the arguments of the other side. In practice, the idea of community as 'spiritual unity' serves as a tool for drawing as yet non-existent boundaries between 'us' and 'them'; it is an instrument of *mobilization*, of convincing the group to which the appeal is made of its common fate and shared interests, in order to solicit a unified action.

Let us repeat: the reference to the 'naturalness' of community is

itself a factor in making the appeal to unity effective. Most powerful (and, as it were, the most effective) community-building efforts allude paradoxically to factors seen as 'beyond human power', as things one can neither choose at will nor reject: traits like 'common blood', hereditary character and a timeless link with the land, which allegedly bind a *race* to its fate and mission; or the shared historical past, the joint record of victories and defeats, 'our common historical heritage' which made the *nation* into a separate entity bound together for ever, for better or worse; or common *religion*, which in the distant past was born of a revelation received by the forefathers, attracted persecution later, and hence made the ancestors' beliefs sacrosanct and venerable, and the survival of their heritage a sacred cause and duty of the descendants. What makes the appeal to such ostensibly objective 'facts of the case' particularly useful for community-building is that the invoked facts remain steadfastly beyond the control of the people to whom the appeal is being made. The reference to such facts effectively hides the element of choice and arbitrariness involved in the choice. To induce the targets of community-building appeals to make their choice, they are told that they find themselves in a *non-choice* situation – that the decision has already been made for them by their ancestors or by providence. Under such circumstances unwillingness to join forces cannot but be treated as an act of treason. Those who commit such an act betray their own nature, memory of the ancestors, their calling, etc.; they are renegades, or fools, arrogant enough to challenge the decision already made for them by history.

Not in all cases, however, can the community-building efforts refer to necessities beyond control and thus conceal their arbitrary character. Many political and religious movements openly proclaim their intention to create a community of beliefs or faith by converting (*proselytizing*) people to new ideas of which they have not been aware or which they used to reject at their own peril. They aim at creating a community of the faithful – people united by common attachment to the cause revealed to them by the saintly founder of the religious sect or by a perceptive, far-sighted political leader. In this kind of community-building exercise, the language used is not that of sacred tradition, historical fate or class mission, but one of good news, eye-

opening, of 'being born again', and, above all, of *truth*. Appeal is made not to the allegedly non-choice situation, but, on the contrary, to the noble act of choosing truth over falsehood, of embracing the true faith while rejecting superstition, illusion or ideological distortion of reality. People are asked to join the community, rather than stay in one to which they belong 'naturally'. Joining is presented as an act of liberation and the beginning of a new life; it is spoken about as an act of free will – indeed, the first true manifestation of one's freedom. What is concealed this time is the pressure which from now on will be exerted on the converts to remain obedient to the newly embraced faith and to surrender their freedom to whatever the cause may demand. Such demands may be no less excessive than those which invoke historical tradition as their legitimization.

Communities of faith cannot limit themselves to *propaganda* – to the preaching of a new creed intended to unite the future devotees. Devotion to the articles of faith would never be really secure unless supported by *ritual*: a series of regular events (patriotic festivals, party meetings, church services) in which the faithful are called to participate as actors so that their common membership and commonality of fate may be reasserted and devotion reinforced. Communities of faith differ, however, in the stringency and volume of demands they make on their members.

Most political parties, for example (with the important exception of those which pursue radical – revolutionary or reactionary, left-wing or right-wing – ends, treat their members as fighters and thus demand unswerving loyalty and total subordination), seek no more unity of thought than is necessary to secure regular electoral support and a modicum of voluntary 'missionary' activity on behalf of the party programme. They would leave the rest of the members' lives to their own discretion and would refrain from legislating about, say, the family life or the choice of occupation.

Religious sects, on the other hand, are on the whole more demanding. They would not settle for the participation in periodic cult rituals; the *whole* of the members' lives will come into their area of concern. As the sects are, by definition, minorities exposed to outside pressure and hence constantly under siege, they need not merely an agreed set of beliefs, but a uniformity of the whole way of

life. They would aspire to a complete reform of the way the faithful conduct their daily business in all its aspects. They would also command obedience in the aspects of behaviour ostensibly indifferent to the question of faith. By making the whole of life into a profession of faith and manifestation of loyalty, sectarian communities would attempt to defend their members' commitment against the scepticism or outright hostility of the environment. In extreme cases, attempts are made to cut off the community altogether from the 'ordinary' flow of social life; not only to embrace the whole of the members' lives fill all their time, cater for all their needs (or deny the worthiness of needs which are not provided for), but to isolate the members from all other, unsupervised, contacts. The creed to which the members are asked to remain loyal has the condemnation and rejection of the ways and means of the 'ordinary' society among its central tenets. 'Normal' society is censured for its unsaintliness or sinfulness, for being dominated by selfishness and greed, for substituting material concerns for spiritual ones, for trampling upon freedom of the individual, for destroying intimacy and mutual sympathy among people, for causing inequalities between people and rampant injustice, for encouraging and demanding rivalry and competition, etc.

Which of the many possible charges is used depends on the rules of life the community intends to promote. The members may be invited to run away from the abominations of mundane life to a hermit community, dedicated fully to prayer and contemplation. Or they may be enjoined to opt out from the 'rat race' and enter instead a group in which all members are equal, no one wishes to stand above the others, and relations are based solely on mutual intimacy, sincerity and trust. Members are normally also asked to turn their backs on the attractions of consumerism and reconcile themselves to a life of modesty and austerity. Communities of this type (frequently described as *communes*) confront their members with a formidable task: to sustain their shared life, in all its aspects, by the power of affection alone. Neither habit nor contractual obligation provides the second line of defence if mutual animosities or sheer lack of consensus tear the community apart. Mutual love becomes the sole adhesive — the only, and hence indispensable, condition of the

commune's survival. All dissent constitutes therefore a mortal threat; tolerance is a luxury a commune can ill afford. For this reason, the more *comprehensive* are the communities, the more *oppressive* they tend to become. Oppression cannot but generate tensions which make communes the most fragile and vulnerable of communities.

Communities differ widely in the extent of the uniformity they demand (that is, in the relative size of the portion of life they ask their members to subordinate to the shared doctrine). In most cases, however, stipulations tend to be diffuse, ill defined and impossible to determine in advance. Even if the advocates of communal unity declare neutrality regarding non-spiritual aspects of members' lives, they still claim priority and supreme importance for the beliefs they advocate. Potentially, such a claim may lead to interference in matters previously declared indifferent, should they come to clash, or be seen to be at odds, with the shared creed.

Sharply different in this respect from all communities (both the ostensibly 'natural' and those admittedly 'made up') are such groups as bring their members together solely for the sake of a single, on the whole clearly defined, task. As the purposes of such groups are limited, so are their claims on their members' time, attention and discipline. By and large, such groups admit that they have been created on purpose. Here the purpose plays a role similar to the one played by tradition, common fate or truth in the case of communities. It is in terms of the purpose, or of a task to be performed, that the discipline and commitment of the members are claimed. One can therefore speak in this case of **purpose groups**, or **organizations**. A deliberate and openly declared self-limitation is perhaps the most salient and decisive distinctive feature of organizations. Most organizations have written statutes which detail the areas in which the members must abide by the organizational rules (implying by the same token that other, unnamed areas of members' lives are free from organizational interference). Note that if the presence or absence of self-limitation, rather than of consensus of beliefs, is taken as the main difference between communities and organizations, then some of the communities discussed above ought to be, contrary to their own claims, counted rather among organizations.

The partial nature of members' involvement in the organizational

activity may be expressed in a different way: members do not enter an organization as 'whole persons' — they merely play *roles*. 'Role' is, of course, a word drawn from the language of the theatre. A stage play, with its plot decided in advance and written up in the scenario, which assigns different lines to every actor in the cast, offers a pattern by which the organization runs its life. The theatre may be seen as a prototype also in another respect: stage actors do not 'exhaust' themselves in the roles they have been assigned; they 'enter' the prescribed character only for the duration of the performance and are free (indeed, expected) to leave afterwards.

As the organizations are specialized from the point of view of the tasks they perform, so are their members specialized from the point of view of the contribution they are expected to make to the performance of this task. Each members' role is set apart from the roles played by other members of the same organization, as well as from other roles the same person may play in other organizations. For part of the day I am a teacher of sociology; in the school where I teach, my role is different from that of the teacher of physical education or any other teacher, for that matter, as well as from that of the headmaster, or the librarian, or the cook. But my role as teacher also calls for different skills and actions from those demanded by other roles I play at other times of the day or on other days of the week. Thus I sit on the council of the local camera club; I am a member of the tenants' committee in the block of flats in which I live; I also belong to a charity society, to an *ad hoc* committee created in the neighbourhood to fight the project of a motorway by-pass, and to the local branch of a political party. I play a number of roles, at different places and times; each role is played among somewhat different groups of people. None of those groups knows me well in any of my other roles. In most cases, none is interested in such other roles; each wants me to identify myself fully with the role in which I participate in their particular activity and contribute to the task they join forces to perform. I may risk being frowned upon, or ridiculed, or reprimanded if, for instance, I bring my photographic concerns to the 'Fight and By-pass' citizens' committee, or confuse my teaching duties with my tasks as an active member of the political party.

Let us repeat: unlike the community, which we think of as a

group to which its members belong (or ought to belong) 'body and soul', the organization absorbs only part of the persons involved; indeed, we will better understand the way it works if we think of it as consisting of roles, not persons. People involved in an organization are expected to *embrace* their roles (that is, to dedicate themselves fully to their performance while working in and for the organization, to identify themselves completely with the role they are performing at that moment), yet at the same time to *distance* themselves from them (that is, to remember all along that it is merely a role they are playing — so that they do not confuse the right and duties attached to this particular role with those belonging to another activity or place). In fact, a particular arrangement of roles is the only aspect of the organization which remains relatively stable over a period of time, and which identifies the organization as such. Incumbents of the roles may come and go, yet the roles remain. People join and leave the organization, are hired and fired, admitted and expelled; yet the organization persists, and though the specific colouring that particular persons give to the performance of the role may change over time, the organization remains basically the same. People are interchangeable and disposable; what counts is not them as persons, but the skill they have to perform the job and the will they show to perform it.

Max Weber, one of the founders of sociology, saw the proliferation of organizations in contemporary society as a sign of the continuous rationalization of social life. Rational action (as distinct from both traditional action — an unreflective acting out of habit or custom — and affective action — an uncontrolled act, triggered by a momentary emotion and perpetrated without consideration of the consequences) is one in which the *end* to be achieved is clearly spelled out, and the actors concentrate their thoughts and efforts on selecting such *means* to the end as promise to be most effective and economical. To Weber, organization (Weber himself used the term 'bureaucracy' — 'the rule of the office') is the supreme adaptation to the requirements of rational action; it is, in fact, the most proper method to pursue ends in a rational way, that is, the way which is simultaneously the most effective and the least costly. In his famous description of the *ideal*

type of bureaucracy (bureaucracy as it would be were it fully adjusted to its acknowledged purpose and free from any distractions), Weber listed the principles which must be observed in members' actions and in relations between them, so that an organization could indeed be such an instrument of rationality. Let us name some of these principles.

First of all, inside the organization people must act solely in their 'official capacity', which has been defined by the rules attached to the roles they perform (so that other aspects of their social identity — for instance, their family connections, business interests, private sympathies and antipathies — are not allowed to interfere with what they do, how they do it, and with the way other people treat their actions). Roles ought to be logically divided and kept separate. This means, first, that a truly rational organization should split the overall task into simple and elementary activities, so that each participant in the common effort could become an expert in doing his or her own job; second, that someone ought to be responsible for every element of the overall task, so that no part of the task remains unattended; and third, that for every part of the task it must be clear who is in charge — so that the competences do not overlap and hence the danger of confusion arising out of contradictory decisions is averted. In performing their respective roles, the officials ought to be guided by abstract rules such as bear no regard to personal peculiarities (see chapter 5 on the principles guiding impersonal relationships). The officials themselves should be appointed to their offices and promoted or demoted solely according to the estimated 'fit' of the skills they possess to the skills required by the office; all other considerations (noble or plebeian origin, political or religious beliefs, race, sex, etc.) must be emphatically declared out of court and not allowed to interfere with the personnel policy. There ought to be continuity in both the activity of the organization as a whole and in the organizational life of its members; the official must view the job done in the organization as part of a life-career, so that he or she may build up the skills and accumulate practical experience; the organization, on the other hand ought to be bound by the precedents — decisions made in the past in its name — even if the officials which made them at the time have since left or moved to other tasks.

The history of the organization is made of its files, and hence is independent from personal memories or the loyalties of individual officials.

These are not the only requirements of the organized rational action, however. Not only must the roles be divided and kept apart; they also ought to be arranged in a *hierarchy* which corresponds to the internal division of the overall task. The further down one moves in the hierarchy, the more specialized, partial, focused and minute are the tasks and the jobs; the higher up one moves, the wider becomes the vision, and more of the overall purpose comes into view. To achieve this situation, the flow of two things must be maintained: information ought to pass from the lower to the higher rungs of the hierarchical ladder, becoming on the way ever more comprehensive and synthetic, while commands should flow from the top to the bottom, becoming as they travel ever more specific and unequivocal. *Control* from the top needs to be reciprocated by *discipline* from the bottom.

What unites all the principles in the ideal model of the rational organization is the postulate that everybody's decisions and behavioural choices should be subordinated to the task the organization has been called to perform. All other considerations should be declared irrelevant, and thus not allowed to influence decisions; they are best eliminated, but in any case neutralized or disregarded. The officials should, so to speak, leave all their private concerns and outside commitments in the cloakroom, and enter their offices dressed in their official role alone. The organization as a whole should surround itself with thick and impenetrable walls with just two gates left: the 'input', through which the task the organization is expected to perform is fed in, and the 'output', which lets out the results of the organizational processing of that task: the actions aimed at the fulfilment of the task. Between the feeding in of the task and the production of results, all outside influences ought to be barred from intervening (hence the strict requirement of organizational secrecy); nothing should interfere with the strict application of organizational rules and the selection of the most effective and economical means to the declared end.

Hardly any organization meets, however, such conditions. The

postulate which underlies Weber's ideal model of rational action remains by and large unfulfilled; the question is, can it *ever* be fulfilled. A person reduced to just one role is a fiction which no reality can match; and so is a single-task action unaffected by other concerns and apparently unrelated to other human bonds. Members of the organization are naturally concerned with their own well-being, which may be adversely affected by risks involved in any decision-making. Hence the widespread tendency to avoid taking decisions on dubious and controversial matters – the notorious phenomenon of the hot potato, a popular name for the tendency to elude responsibility by shifting an urgent file onto somebody else's desk. Concern with one's own well-being (self-preservation, survival in terms defined by the organization) includes also the tendency to undermine the position of potential competitors for promotion, through obstructing their work or discrediting their decisions. But a member of the organization may also find that a command received from superiors cannot be squared with his or her moral beliefs; the choice is between organizational obedience and loyalty to moral principles. Other members may believe that the requirement of secrecy put to them by superiors may endanger public welfare or some other cause they believe to be equally valid or even more important than organizational efficiency. On the other hand, members may bring into their work the prejudices they hold in their daily lives. A man, for instance, may find it difficult to accept a command coming from a woman; or someone may resent orders received from a person of a different race.

Furthermore, no impervious walls protect the organization against the pressures and influences coming from places ostensibly unrelated to its tasks and hence denied authority in organizational decision-making. Most organizations must be concerned with their public image – a consideration which may prevent them from actions that pass muster as rationality when calculated in technical terms alone, but are likely to arouse public concern and anger, particularly in the circles which wield enough influence to damage the standing of the organization. Pressures too may come from other organizations, working in apparently remote and unrelated fields, which nevertheless

find certain actions inconvenient or harmful for their own area of operation; their resistance would again put a limit on the priority given to 'pure rationality' of action.

Let us suppose for a moment, however, that the postulates entailed in the ideal model have been – miraculously – met: that the persons involved in the organizational division of tasks have indeed been reduced to the roles they have been assigned, and the organization as a whole has been at the same time effectively fenced off from all concerns and influences irrelevant to its declared purpose. However improbable such conditions, would they guarantee the *rationality* of organizational activity if put in practice? Would an organization which fully conforms to the ideal model behave indeed as rationally as Weber hoped it should? There are strong arguments that this would not happen; that the ideal recipe for rational action will generate, on the contrary, numerous obstacles to rationality.

To start with: in the hierarchy of command the model suggests, equal weight has been ascribed to the authority of the office and that of the relevant technical skill – without, however, pointing out why the two differently grounded authorities should coincide and remain in harmony. In fact, it is more than likely that the two will tend to clash (for instance, the established right to the job may be threatened by novel technical skills which the current incumbents of the office do not possess, and as a result the authority of office may be deployed to arrest or at least delay the introduction of the skills which the rationality of action demands). Nor is the principle of minute division of labour beyond reproach. Allegedly a factor boosting efficiency and expertise, it tends in fact to produce the phenomenon called *trained incapacity*. Having acquired expertise in a quick and efficient performance of narrowly circumscribed tasks, members gradually lose sight of the wider ramifications of their job and will fail to note adverse consequences of the activity which in the meantime has turned into mechanical routine. Because of the narrowness of their skills, members are also ill prepared to adjust their routines to changing circumstances and to react to unfamiliar situations with the necessary speed and flexibility. The organization as a whole, in other words, falls prey to its own pursuit of perfect

rationality. It becomes stiff and inflexible, and its methods of work fail to adapt quickly enough to changing circumstances. Sooner or later, it may well turn into a factory of increasingly *irrational* decisions.

Last but not least, the ideal model of action subjected to rationality as the supreme criterion contains an inherent danger of another deviation from that purpose – the danger of so-called **goal displacement**. For the sake of their effectiveness, all organizations ought to reproduce their capacity to act: come what may, an organization must be continuously ready to make decisions and take actions. Such a reproduction calls for an effective mechanism of self-perpetuation, immune to outside interference. The trouble is that eventually the goal itself tends to fall among such outside interferences. There is nothing in the ideal model to prevent that mechanism from outliving the task the organization had been called to fulfil in the first place. Everything, on the other hand, points to the likelihood (indeed, desirability) that the concern for self-preservation should prompt the endless expansion of the organizational activity, of its resources and the scope of its authority. It may happen in effect that the task originally seen as the reason to establish it is relegated to a secondary position by the all-powerful interest of the organization in self-perpetuation and self-aggrandizement. The survival of the organization, however useless it may have become in the light of its original end, becomes the purpose in its own right: the new end against which the organization tends to measure the rationality of its performance.

And so we have found both models of human groupings wanting; neither the image of community – that total union of human *persons* – nor the model of organization – that coordination of *roles* in the service of the rational pursuit of a task – describes adequately the practice of human interaction. The two models sketch artificially separated, polar models of action, with separate and often opposite motives and expectations. Real human actions, under real circumstances, resent such a radical division.

There is a permanent and ineradicable tension between the 'conceptual frameworks' of our actions and our practical performances. By representing the action 'as if' it served one cohesive need or purpose, the model frameworks display an inherent tendency to

streamline the action, which in practice cannot but be complex and convoluted; there is a tendency to purify the action which in practice is always split by many needs and motives.

As 'pure' types, the models of community and organization may be seen as extreme points of a continuum on which all practical human interactions can be plotted. Real interactions are torn between two gravitational forces, each pulling in an opposite direction. Routine interactions are, unlike the extreme models, mixed: they are *heterogeneous*, that is, subject simultaneously to logically contradictory principles. For instance, the family – this epitome of the community-like interaction pattern – is hardly ever that heaven of fully personal relationships one would expect it to be; there are tasks to be performed inside the family as in any other group of cooperating people, and it is unlikely that even a modicum of explicitly impersonal, organization-like criteria of performance would not defile the purity of the 'whole-person' relations with their characteristic particularity and diffuseness. On the other hand, in every organization the members can hardly avoid developing personal links with people with whom they join forces for a protracted period. Much of their time is spent in the company of others; they exchange services, communicate, find topics of common interest, help or fight each other, come to like or dislike each other. Sooner or later an *informal* pattern of interaction would emerge – an invisible network of personal relationships which may or may not overlap with the official chart of *formal* relationships of command and subordination. People involved in such patterns would find their interest in the organization richer than the one-role and one-task principles would imply; they seek, and find, the satisfaction of such needs of personal communication as the organization is resolutely and ostentatiously unconcerned with. This tendency is more often than not deliberately used and boosted by the people in command of the organization.

Contrary to what the ideal model would suggest, it is found in practice that the task-oriented performance may considerably benefit if the interaction is *not* reduced to specialized roles only. School is, on the face of it, a typical organization – concerned with the well-defined task of imparting knowledge and skills and evaluating its effects on the learners; yet the task would certainly suffer if the

school failed to develop a feeling of community and belonging among its pupils or students. Many industrial, merchandising or financial companies set about soliciting the deeper commitment of their employees through bringing more of their concerns and interests within the orbit of the organization. They offer, for example, recreation and entertainment facilities, shopping services, even living accommodation. None of these extra services is logically related to the explicit task of the organization and the one specialized role they need their employees to perform; but all of them together are hoped to generate 'community feelings' and to prompt members to identify themselves with the company. Such emotions, apparently alien to the organizational spirit, are deemed to boost the members' dedication to the ends of the organizations and thus neutralize the adverse effects of the purely impersonal setting suggested by the criteria of rationality.

Communities and organizations alike assume freedom of their members; coming together is admittedly a voluntary act, at least in the sense that it can be revoked: one can go back on one's decision. Even if in some cases (remember the so-called natural communities) joining the group was not originally the result of a free choice, members are still credited with the right to leave (though they may be pressed, as we have seen before, to refrain from exercising it). There is one case, however, when the organization explicitly denies freedom to leave, and the people are kept under its jurisdiction by force: this is the case of **total institutions** (a name coined by Erving Goffman). Total institutions are *enforced communities*: there the totality of members' lives is subjected to scrupulous regulation, their needs are defined and catered for by the organization, their allowed and disallowed actions are regimented by organizational rules. Boarding schools, army barracks, prisons, mental hospitals approximate in varying degrees the model of total institutions. Their inmates are kept under surveillance day and night (or at least they are put in such conditions that they cannot be sure that they are not under observation) so that all deviation from the rules can be spotted in time and punished, or better still prevented. Total institutions depart radically from the community model in that the members are actively discouraged from developing on their own a network of

personal relationships. The involvement of the total personality is combined with the requirement of totally impersonal relationships. It is, arguably, the very incongruence of such a combination which explains the formidable role played in total institutions by coercion. Neither spiritual dedication nor the hope of material gains can be appealed to in order to elicit desirable behaviour and secure the members' will to stay together and cooperate. Hence another feature of total institutions: the strict divide between those who set the rules and those who are bound by them. The effectiveness of coercion, as the only substitute for absent emotional commitment and calculated self-interest, depends on the gap between the two sides of the division remaining unbridgeable. (Note that the practice, here as elsewhere, differs from the ideal model. Personal relationships do develop inside total institutions, often spanning the gap between the supervisors and the inmates. Again, it is in no way clear that they weaken the general performance and stability of the institution. They nevertheless make the framework of interaction no less flexible and vulnerable to change than in groups of other types.)

I suppose the most striking impression one gets from the survey of human groupings is their diversity. With all their diversity, however, they are all forms of human *interaction*. In fact, there is no more to the existence of the group than a persistent network of interdependent actions of its members. The assertion 'there is a college' refers to the fact that a number of people come together to engage in a routine called a lecture (that is, a communicative encounter, structured in such a way that one person speaks while others, facing that person, listen and take notes), or seminar (a verbal interaction which consists of a number of people sitting around a table and speaking in turn), or tutorial (an interaction which consists of one person asking questions to which others respond), and a few other, on the whole regular and periodically repeated, patterned interactions. In their interactions group members are guided by their image of what the right conduct specific to the group ought to be. Yet the image is never complete, and hardly ever provides the unambiguous prescription for any situation which may arise in the course of interaction. The ideal framework is constantly interpreted and reinterpreted, and the practical actions of the members

are such interpretations. Interpretation cannot but feed back on the image itself. Ideal framework and routine practices incessantly inform and transform each other.

The self-preservation and continuity of a group as a distinct entity is hence a question identical with that of maintaining the routine actions of its members, conforming to a shared mental image of the group's patterns of the right conduct.

Chapter Five

Gift and Exchange

Reminders from my creditors pile up on my desk. Some bills are most urgent; still, there are things I must buy — my shoes are in tatters, I cannot work late without a desk lamp, and one needs to eat every day ... What can I do?

I can go to my brother and ask him for a loan. I'll explain my situation to him. Most probably, he'll grumble a little, and preach to me about the virtue of foresight, prudence and planning, of not living above one's means; but he'll reach into his pocket in the end and count his money. If he finds some, he'll give me what I need. Or at least a part he can afford.

Alternatively, I may go to my bank manager. But it would make no sense to explain to him how dreadfully I suffer. What does he care? The only question he'll ask me is what guarantee I can offer that the loan will be repayed. He'd like to know whether I have a regular income large enough to afford the repayment of the loan together with the interest. So I'll have to show him my salary slips; if I had a property, I'd have to offer it as collateral — a second mortgage, perhaps. If the manager is satisfied that I am not too excessive a risk and that the loan is likely to be duly repaid (with handsome interest, of course), he will lend me the money.

Depending on where I turn to solve my problem, I can expect two very different kinds of treatment. Two different sets of questions, referring obviously to two different conceptions of my right (my entitlement) to receive assistance. My brother is unlikely to inquire about my solvency; for him, the loan is not a matter of choice between good and bad business. What counts for him is that I am his brother; being his brother and being in need, I have sufficient

his possession, is parted with and transferred to somebody else's control. The apparently impersonal contract reaches far beyond the limits proper for transactions of exchange.)

Love and exchange are two extremes of a continuous line along which all human relations may be plotted. In the form we have described them here they seldom appear in your or my experience. We have discussed them in a pure form, as models. Most relationships are 'impure', and mix the two models in varying proportions. Most love relationships contain elements of business-like bargaining for the fair rate of exchange in the 'I'll do this if you do that' style. Except for a chance encounter or one-off transaction, the actors in exchange relationships seldom remain indifferent to each other for long, and sooner or later more is involved than just money and goods. Each extreme model, however, retains its relative identity even if submerged in a mixed relationship. Each carries its own set of expectations, its own image of the perfect state of affairs – and hence orients the conduct of the actors in its own specific direction. Much of the ambiguity of the relationships we enter with other people can be accounted for by reference to the tensions and contradictions between the two extreme, complementary yet incompatible, sets of expectations. The model-like, pure relationships seldom appear in life, where the ambivalence of human relationships is the rule.

Our dreams and cravings seem to be torn between two needs it is well nigh impossible to gratify at the same time, yet equally difficult to satisfy when pursued separately. These are the needs of *belonging* and of *individuality*. The first need prompts us to seek strong and secure ties with others. We express this need whenever we speak or think of togetherness or of community. The second need sways us towards privacy, a state in which we are immune to pressures and free from demands, do whatever we think is worth doing, 'are ourselves'. Both needs are pressing and powerful; the pressure of each grows the less the given need is satisfied. On the other hand, the nearer one need comes to its satisfaction, the more painfully we feel the neglect of the other. We find out that community without privacy feels more like oppression than belonging. And that privacy without community feels more like loneliness than 'being oneself'.

Chapter Six

Power and Choice

Why do I do what I do? Unless I happen to be in a philosophical mood, this looks too simple a question to bother with. Is the answer not obvious? At least, so it seems. Of course, I do it *because* ... (I rush to the tutorial because I was reprimanded by the tutor for missing the last one; I stop at the lights because there the cross-traffic is heavy; I cook my dinner because I feel hungry; I wear jeans because this is the thing one wears nowadays.) What makes my explanations seem so simple – indeed, self-evident – is that they conform to a habit we all share: the habit of explaining events by pointing out that they are *effects* of a *cause*.

In most cases, when it comes to explain things we do or things that happen to us, our curiosity is by and large sated when we satisfy ourselves that provided something else has happened, the event we wish to explain must have happened; it was, in other words, inevitable, or at least highly probable. Why was there an explosion in that house down the road? Because there was a leak in the gas pipes. Well, gas is a highly inflammable substance and a spark is enough to ignite it. Why did no one hear the burglar breaking the window? Because everybody was asleep. Well, people do not normally hear sounds when they are asleep. And so on. Our search for the explanation grinds to a halt once we have found an event or a state of affairs which the event we wish to explain always follows (we speak then of a *law*, a link with no exceptions), or follows it in most cases (we speak then of a *norm*; a link will show itself in most, though not in all, cases). Explanation consists, therefore, of representing the event we want to explain as a proposition which may be deduced from another, more general proposition or set of propositions. Because

we can represent the event in such a fashion, we see it as essentially predictable: given the general law or norm and the presence of certain circumstances in which the law or the norm manifest themselves, the event must have occurred and it could not be replaced with any other event. Explanation does not allow the possibility of a choice, a voluntary selection, an arbitrary sequence of events.

When applied to human conduct, however, this habitual explanation leaves something important unsaid. What it leaves out is the fact that the event we wish to explain was someone's action, and the person whose action it was had a choice. He or she could have behaved differently. There was more than one way of acting, yet only one was selected, and this is precisely what ought have been explained – but was not. This event was in no way inevitable. There is no set of general propositions from which it could be deduced – not with any certainty anyway. It was not, therefore, predictable. We can try to comprehend this event after it occurred; retrospectively, with the benefit of hindsight, we can *interpret* the event – this action – as an outcome of certain *rules* which the actors must have followed to do what they did. These rules, however, might have generated more than one kind of behaviour. And there was no need for the actor to follow them.

In the case of human conduct, explanations of the kind given above do not satisfy us as being the whole story, everything there was to know. We know from our own experience that things are done by people with a purpose. Men and women have *motives*; like myself, they do what they do *in order* to create or achieve a situation which for one reason or another seems to them preferable (thus I come to the tutorials regularly in order to avoid the tutor's reprimands or in order to follow the course in its entirety; I watch the traffic carefully in order to escape accidents and remain alive; I cook dinner in order to satisfy my hunger or to entertain my guest; I wear jeans, a thing most people around me do, in order not to stick out and be conspicuous).

And so there is nothing inevitable in my sitting in my tutor's room at the appointed hour simply because the attendance of tutorials is required by the university authorities; I am sitting there because I want to comply with the regulation – for one reason or another I

consider it the right thing to do. There is nothing inevitable in my stopping and waiting for a green light to show – even if, quite sensibly, I want to avoid an accident; I obviously also believe that the system of changing lights makes sense as a means of avoiding accidents and ought to be followed for this reason. To everything I do, there is always an alternative, a choice. Plainly speaking, I could do something else instead.

Human actions could be different from what they were even if the circumstances of action, and the motives of the actors, remained the same. Circumstances could be disregarded, motives discarded, different conclusions could be drawn from both. Therefore, pointing to external circumstances, or to more general laws, does not satisfy us as fully as in the case of events which are not concerned with human actions. We know well that this man or that woman could have behaved differently in objectively identical circumstances (which would not be identical to them subjectively, since the relevance they attach to them varies, as does their very perception of them). If we wish to know why this rather than that form of action has been selected, we would therefore do better to think of the decision made by the actor. We cannot avoid thinking of the actor as a decision-maker, and the action itself as an outcome of the **decision-making process**.

We can conceive, to be sure, of a human conduct in which the decision-making does not play an important role. Some actions are **virtually unreflective** – that is, alternatives are not consciously pondered, do not become a topic for consideration. One can point out two types of such an unthinking conduct.

Habitual (sometimes, less aptly, called traditional) behaviour is one of them. I normally wake up at the same hour every day, as if I had an alarm clock built into my body . . . Still half asleep, I go through the motions of my morning routine – I wash, brush my teeth, shave. I do not remember making decisions to follow that routine; as a matter of fact, I probably think of something else while following it (often I must look in the mirror to check whether I have indeed shaved, since I did it without paying any attention). Every day I feel hunger at the same regular hours, precisely at the time I usually have my meal. When I come back home in the evening, I

switch on the light, so to speak, automatically. I do not notice the darkness, do not ponder the advantage of light over darkness, do not give one preference over the other; I hardly think at all about the substance and the purpose of my action. But I do start thinking if upon my return I see that the lights in my room are already on, though usually they are not . . . I notice them, because they break the daily routine: something *unusual* must have happened — perhaps guests have arrived unexpectedly, or, worse still, burglars are inside . . . The normal sequence of events, of which one could afford not to think at all, has been broken. The habitual actions would not do, and so I am forced to think about my next step. I have to *make decisions*. Or consider another case: I need a book which I left on the table in another room. When I go to fetch it, I find the room dark. I would naturally switch on the light, but then I notice that someone is lying asleep on the couch. Again, following the habit would not do. If I switch on the light, I might wake the sleeper. Yet if I grope for the book in the dark, I might unwittingly knock a chair or break a vase and again disturb the sleeper. Circumstances are not routine any more, and the habit is suddenly a poor guide. The situation clearly calls for a *choice*, and my decision-making process is again set in motion.

Habitual conduct is a sediment of past learning. At some point in the past, the habit has been acquired. Since then, however, thanks to regular repetition, it has absolved me from the need to think, to calculate and to make decisions; one movement follows another, in a regular and immutable sequence; that is, as long as the circumstances also remain regular. Indeed, so habitualized are my actions that I'd find it difficult, if asked, to describe them. They come into my attention — are noticed by me — only if something goes wrong. Even my seemingly automatic morning routine may grind to a halt and call for my attention if I find myself in an unfamiliar house where bathroom implements are not 'where they should be', that is, where I am used to find them; or if my toothbrush breaks, or the soap has been misplaced. The effectiveness of my habitual behaviour depends, as it were, on the regularity and orderliness of the environment in which my action occurs.

There is another type of conduct in which my thinking plays but a minor role, if any. This is an *affective* action: acting out of strong

emotions — strong enough, in fact, to switch off reasoning, suspend all calculation of the purposes and possible consequences of action. Affective action is compulsive and can hardly be resisted by the actor; it does not listen to argument, is deaf to the voice of reason. It usually follows an outburst of feelings very closely. With the passage of time, the cooling off of passions would have had its effect, and I'd think twice before committing the act. Whatever I do after that will be a calculated (and hence not an affective) act. Being a temperamental person, I may hit or kick a man who has offended me or a person I love and cherish. Or I may give all the money I have to a person in need in an impulse of pity or compassion. However, if I decide to ambush a person I hate in a dark passage in order to avenge the harm for which I blame her or him, this would hardly be an affective act; the premeditation involved would suggest instead that the act was an outcome of a calculated decision. Neither would an act be affective if the help I offered people in need was a deliberate attempt to ingratiate myself in their eyes or in the eyes of God; such an offer would be, rather, a step in a calculated campaign, a means to an end — in this case, the earning of salvation and forgiveness of my sins. An action is truly affective only as long as it stays *unreflective*, spontaneous, unpremeditated, and is perpetrated before any weighing of arguments and measuring of effects has had time to take place.

Habitual and affective actions are often described as *irrational*. What is meant by this name is not that they are foolish, ineffective, wrong or damaging. Indeed, the name does not imply any evaluation of the utility of the act. Most habitualized routines are quite effective and useful. They accomplish something vital to the business of life, and in addition spare us much thinking time and make our conduct less absorbing and the tasks easier to perform. Similarly, hitting an offender may in the end prove more effective than many a calculated, 'cool' method of discouraging his abusive behaviour in the future. Action is irrational not when it lacks utility, but when the consideration of its utility did not precede it — was not a factor in the decision-making. Action is irrational if it has not been an outcome of decision-making. Conversely, the opposite, rational action may happen to be less effective (and so less reasonable) than the irrational one.

The rational action is one in which from among possible ways of

acting the actor consciously selects one which seems to him or her best geared to the end the action is meant to achieve (this is the case of *instrumental rationality*): the means are selected according to what the given ends require. Alternatively, rational action may be *value-rational*: certain means are available to the actor that can be used for different purposes, from which the actor selects the one end he or she considers more valuable than the rest ('dear to one's heart', attractive, desirable, most closely connected to the need most poignantly felt at that moment). What unites both cases — instrumental and value-rational varieties of rationality — is that in both the means are measured against the ends, and their mutual fit, true or supposed, is seen as the ultimate criterion in the choice between the right and wrong decision. The fit may in the end prove to be illusory, the calculation may look wrong in retrospect; the only thing which makes the action rational is that a calculation was made before the action was taken. The essential idea which stands behind all this reciprocal matching, calculating, measuring and finally choosing is that action is rational as long as it is *voluntary* — as long as the actor has had, and exercised, a free choice, rather than being goaded, pulled, pushed or bullied into doing what he or she did by uncontrolled habits or a momentary outburst of passion.

Whenever we choose our actions consciously and after deliberation, we anticipate their probable outcome. This we do, first of all, by taking stock of the situation in which the action is to take place and the effects we expect to attain. More precisely, what we normally take stock of are *resources* and *values*. My resources may consist of money — in the 'liquid' form of banknotes in my pocket or an account in the bank, or in the form of valuable possessions which could be used to obtain credit. My resources also include my skills, which can be applied to create things other people need in exchange for things I demand, my 'social capital' — for instance, my access to people who are in charge of things or services I wish to obtain, and thus relevant to the task ahead. The values I hold and revere enable me to compare accessible ends with each other and determine which one seems to be the best. My resources can be turned to many uses. The alternative uses differ from each other by carrying different degrees of attractiveness and being attractive for different reasons.

They represent different values. Some seem to be more satisfying, or more indispensable, or more praiseworthy. Some may be chosen because they promise to be most useful, as they may open up the possibility of increasing the volume of resources at my disposal and thus enhance my range of freedom in the future. It is ultimately my values which preside over the decision to spend a hundred pounds of extra cash on a new turntable, or on a holiday, or on purchasing sociology books — or to keep them in my building society account. Taking stock of my resources and values shows me the degree of my freedom: what I can do and what in my case is out of the question.

Different people have different degrees of freedom. The fact that they differ in their freedom of choice, in the range of actions they may decide to take, is the essence of *social inequality* (that is, of such differences between people as are social in their origin; of such differences as have been brought into being and maintained by human interactions and which can be distributed differently or even abolished altogether with a change in that interaction). Some people are more free than others: their range of choice is wider, as they have access to more resources, and a wider range of values is within their reach (pursuit of such values is for them realistic and feasible, while remaining no more than an idle, upsetting and in the end frustrating dream for the less fortunate).

The difference in the degree of freedom is often spoken about as the difference in *power*. Power is, indeed, best understood as the ability to act — both in the sense of choosing freely the ends of any action and of commanding the means which make such ends realistic. Power is an enabling capacity. The more power people have, the wider is their range of choice, the larger the amount of decisions they can see as realistic, the broader the scope of outcomes they may realistically pursue while being reasonably certain that they would get what they want. Being less powerful, or powerless, means it is necessary to moderate one's dreams, or to abandon attempts to reach one's aims due to the absence of necessary resources.

To have power is to be able to act more freely; but having no power, or less power than others have, means having one's own freedom of choice limited by the decisions made by others. We say that A has power over B when the resources which A commands

permit A to prompt such conduct of B as is necessary to achieve the ends set by A; when they allow, in other words, A to enlist B's ends as further means to A's ends; or, which means the same, to transform B's values into A's resources. We can guess that were it not for the actual or potential actions of A, B's actions would be different from what they were; as B's ends are someone else's resources and thus used as a means to someone else's ends, B's freedom of choice has been most seriously compromised. B's actions are not *autonomous* any more; they become *heteronomous* instead.

My bosses, for instance, have power over me; they can fire me if I do not conform to the rules they set and do not obey their orders, or can reward or promote me if my performance is exemplary from their point of view. But the rights to hire and fire, to reward or punish, are not among my resources, and so I cannot repay in kind. Moreover, the bosses may play their cards close to their chests. They may keep their intentions *secret* until it is too late for me to resist. They may plan a radical rearrangement of things in the office — new technical equipment, a new division of labour — which would radically worsen my situation and further diminish my freedom to manoeuvre. I cannot respond with the same weapon of secrecy, as there is little I can conspire to do which may have an impact of the same magnitude on the bosses' freedom as their clandestine designs will have on mine. My bosses' secrecy is potentially much more deadly a weapon than anything I may keep under my hat. And so we are sharply unequal in the extent to which we may affect each other's situation. In our reciprocal relation, power is unevenly distributed: this is an *asymmetrical* power relationship. My bosses can choose their actions from a much wider range of alternatives than the scope of my choice. It is because our degrees of freedom are so sharply different that I will probably do exactly what the bosses want, so that they may count on my obedience to their rules; planning their actions, they may therefore count my actions among the resources they have at their disposal. The more my range of choices is limited, the more correctly can they anticipate my conduct. I hold fewer secrets for them, I am less of an unknown quantity in their equation, and hence less a source of uncertainty in their position than they are in mine. My compliance with their ends can

be safely relied upon, much like the capital or machinery they own. To recapitulate: what power amounts to is the ability to deploy other people's actions as the means to one's own end; more generally, it is the ability to reduce the constraint imposed by other people's freedom on one's own choice of ends and the calculation of means. Such a devaluation of other people's freedom, equal to the enhancement of one's own freedom, may be achieved by two methods.

One is *coercion*, which consists of manipulating the situation of action in such a way that the resources of the other person, however large they may seem in other contexts, suddenly become inadequate or ineffective. An entirely new game is created, for which the manipulating side is much better equipped. (Whether the victim of a mugger is a rich banker, a powerful politician or a famous show-business personality, their respective resources, which assure them a large degree of freedom in other contexts, lose their 'enabling' capacity once they are confronted in a dark and deserted street with the point of a knife or sheer muscle power.) A drastic reduction of freedom may also be achieved through enforced re-evaluation of values — or, rather, through reshuffling the choice in such a fashion that the normally highly placed values abruptly lose much of their importance. In a night encounter with the mugger, a wallet full of banknotes and credit cards — usually of supreme value to a greedy person — may suddenly seem insignificant; the choice is now between life and death, not between more and less money. Under an institutionalized coercion, in prison or in a labour camp, the new values — good food, light work, permission of leave or receiving visitors, the avoidance of solitary confinement or high-security jail, or just the benevolence of a prison guard may well dwarf and make eerie or laughable the old, once cherished priorities. In the extreme conditions of concentration camps the value of self-preservation and survival may well overshadow all the prisoner's choices.

The other method is less straightforward (and more costly for the power-holder) than coercion. It consists of enlisting the values of other people as one's own resources: 'making the desires of others work for me'. More specifically, it is manipulating the situation in such a way that other people may attain the values they pursue only if they follow the rules set by the power-holder. Thus the zeal and

efficiency with which the enemies are killed is rewarded by enhancing the social standing of the brave soldier with medals and honourable citations (in the past, it could be rewarded with knighthoods and estates). Formal acknowledgement of skills and knowledge is made dependent upon a student's obedience to college regulations, like regular attendance of classes and the submission of essays on time. Factory workers may secure improved living standards (wage rises) on condition that they work with more dedication and intensity and comply unconditionally with the management orders. In such a way, the values of the subordinates become the resources of their superiors; their dreams and cravings are deployed in the service of ends set by the power-holders. Having no capital of my own, I depend for my living on being employed. Yet being employed means that I must act in accordance with the terms of the job; I suspend my freedom for the duration of my work-time. Having freely chosen the value of a better standard of living — or, for that matter, of simply staying alive — as my own, voluntary commitment, I now find that I have no other way of reaching the value of my choice but to surrender quite a considerable part of my freedom.

Whoever can deploy coercion, or manipulate rewards, may by the same token change my chances of attaining the values I covet. Their decisions affect the volume, or the utility of the resources which I may use in my action. They may also influence the ends of my actions, though only indirectly. I may give up the chase after some values I cherished in the past because I have now found my dream 'unrealistic'. The odds have been too overwhelming, the probability of overcoming them virtually nil; fatigue and disenchantment have taken their toll, and slowly the ends I hoped to achieve (and, indeed, my total life-project) have become sweet dreams of the sort one likes to muse on, but on which does not act. My actions change orientation; they are now directed to more 'realistic' ends, my assessment of the potency of my resources is altered, and from now on I reverse the order of calculation: I measure the ends against the means. The odds are that I'd settle eventually for much less than I dreamt of achieving at the beginning.

Where have my values come from in the first place, however? Why do I put values on some ends, and disregard or downgrade

others? Are these values a matter of my free choice? Can I pick them up and drop them at will? Or are they, much like my resources, affected by actions of other people and by such elements of my situation over which I have but little, if any, control? Consider the following: I intended to go to college straight from school. My friends, however, decided otherwise. Arguing about our respective choices, they convinced me that going on with my education would not make my life much happier; it would be more fun to start enjoying life right away — have some income of my own, rather than condemn myself to three years of self-sacrifice and semi-starvation. After listening to their argument, I changed my mind, and instead of applying for a college place started looking for an instant income. Now I enjoy my regular pay-cheques; it is pleasant to have money in my pocket and use it to shop for things I would like to have. Then the union people suggested that we should strike to force the management to go back on their decision to reorganize the office so that economies can be made by making quite a few employees redundant. My own job and income were secure, prospects of promotion good, after reorganization even better. Moreover, the board has announced that in the event of a strike important orders will be lost and in the end all of us will be fired. I did not like this prospect at all; yet most of my fellow employees put solidarity above the security of their own jobs, dignity above income, and voted for the strike. I did not wish to be a black sheep, and so I joined them — though it is now likely that I'll lose my own job as a result, and with it my freedom to enjoy life as I understand it . . .

As happened in this case, the values people select to orient and guide their actions (that is, to order their ends according to their rising or diminishing importance) change in the course, and under the impact, of social interaction. It is this impact we have in mind whenever we speak of *influence*. Unlike power, influence affects the values directly: it manifests itself by shifting the relative position of various ends in the hierarchy of importance, by making some ends seem more attractive than others, and hence worthy of more effort. Selecting values, putting some ends above the others, means believing that the ends which have been assigned priority are ultimately more satisfying, they bring more pleasure, are more dignified, more morally

elevated, more aesthetically pleasing – on the whole they are more attuned to one's sense of the proper and improper.

Not always are the values consciously chosen. As we saw before, many of our actions are habitual and routine, and do not involve a consideration of means and ends. As long as the actions remain habitual, we seldom pause to ask about the values they serve. Habitual action does not need justification, and we would find it hard to explain why we put them above their alternatives. If really pressed, we would perhaps come up with an answer like 'This is the way things have always been done', or 'This is how it is' – as if the very length of time for which habits have persisted lends them authority of sorts, or as if the fact that many people do it this way is in itself a value which makes the action desirable. Let us remember, however, that these are 'enforced' explanations, prompted by questioning. They were not necessarily present in the mind of the questioned person before the questioning started. As you may recall, the whole point about acting by habit, or a traditional action, is that it does not need justification. The action remains traditional as long as it is not called to *legitimize* itself; traditional action can do without *legitimation*, that is, it does not require reference to values it is supposed to serve. It goes on repeating itself, by and large according to the same pattern, on the strength of the habit alone. Many of our daily activities are traditional (habitual, routine and not reflected upon), even if most of us are most emphatically not traditionalists (that is, were we given the opportunity to think about it and express our considered views, we would deny the authority of the old and the timeless, and disagree with the intrinsic value of stability and lack of change).

The most general values which guide our lives (the values which preside over the selection of the specific ends of our actions) – such as the standards of decency or success, honesty or cleverness, hard work or enjoyment, consistency or flexibility – are established on the whole in our childhood years. More often than not they are sedimented in the subconscious level; they constitute the voice of conscience rather than a set of clearly articulated commandments we can spell out at will or need to spell out for ourselves whenever facing a decision. We hardly ever remember the influences of our

childhood years; it is a measure of the success of such influences that they are forgotten and no longer perceived as outside pressures. We become aware of the outside influence only when it comes to the making of deliberate choices: when the values we obey are challenged, defied and called to legitimize themselves.

The ability of influence other people's values is an attribute of *authority*. Authority is measured by the probability that people will accept given values for the sole reason that someone else – the person or the organization endowed with authority – practises or preaches such values. A person or organization may carry authority for certain people inasmuch as the fact that they vouch for the values in question will be seen by those people as a sufficient reason for acceptance and compliance. The authority a person or an organization wields therefore boils down to the likelihood that other people will follow their example or advice. That obedience may be justified in all sorts of terms, such as wisdom, truthfulness, experience, the moral integrity of the source of guidance which has been followed. In each case, however, what is thus justified is the *trust* of the followers in the basic soundness of the guidance that comes from such a source.

The values we cherish are ultimately a matter of our choice. In the end it is we who bestow authority upon the examples we decide to follow and refuse authority to examples we do not like. Before we decide whom to trust, we may ponder the claims that various competing 'value-leaders', or others on their behalf, make for the worthiness of their example and for their ability to come forward with a good, trustworthy example. To become an authority for us, a person or an organization must produce a *legitimation*, or an argument, which demonstrates why their advice (or their hierarchy of values) ought to be followed in preference to another.

One such legitimation we have already met: let us recall that some values are presented as worthy of esteem because of the *tradition* which stands behind them. They are, so we are told, time-honoured and time-tested. One ought to remain faithful to the past; to the group with which this past has been shared; to the common heritage of which we are jointly the guardians. History, we are told, binds its heirs; what history brought together, no human presumption

should dare to set apart. Old virtues are venerable just because they are old . . .

Thus goes the argument. Often it reverses the truth: rather than values being revered because of their old age, those who seek popular acceptance for the values they preach (sometimes brand new, freshly invented values) bend over backwards to dig out genuine, or putative, historical evidence of their antiquity. The image of the historical past is always selective; in this case it is put together in such a way as to give credence to the venerable age of the values on offer. The deference people feel for the past is enlisted in the service of the current contest of values. Once it has been accepted that certain values were held by our ancestors, they are less vulnerable to contemporary criticism; other values have still to prove themselves, while those of the good old days have already passed the test of time, even if not with flying colours. The traditionalist legitimization becomes particularly attractive in times of rapid change which cannot but generate uneasiness and anxiety. It helps if radical and unprecedented innovations are acclaimed as the restoration of old and tried ways; such representation may sometimes somewhat reduce uncertainty, caused by rapid social change, and seems to offer a relatively safe, less agonizing choice.

The alternative would be to defend new values as a revelation of sorts — as the result of an epoch-making discovery, a particularly profound insight into the truth of the matter, or a strong vision that pierced through the unknown and hence threatening future. This kind of argument is associated with *charismatic* legitimization. Charisma was the quality first noted in the study of the deep and unchallenged influence exerted by the Church upon the faithful. The concept of charisma referred in that case to the conviction of the faithful that the Church is endowed with a privileged access to truth: it has been, as an institution, anointed by God to guide men to a godly life and, ultimately, salvation. Charisma, however, need not be confined to religious beliefs and institutions. We can speak of charisma whenever the acceptance of certain values is motivated by the conviction that the preacher or preachers of such values have superhuman qualities (unusual wisdom, foresight, access to sources of knowledge closed to ordinary men and women) that guarantee the truth of their vision

and the propriety of their choice. The ordinary reason of ordinary people has therefore no means of evaluating what charismatic people aver and thus no right to doubt the power of their perception. The stronger the charisma of the leaders, the more difficult it is to question their commands; the more comforting it is for people to follow their orders when exposed to a situation of acute uncertainty.

With rapid and profound social change fast invalidating customary patterns of acting, the demand for charismatic 'guarantees' of unerring value choices is expanding unabated. Established churches satisfy, however, only a minor part of that demand. There are numerous choice situations generated by new and unprecedented social changes for which churches have not got ready recipes, or have recipes poorly geared to the present conditions. This does not necessarily mean that the divine forms of charismatic authority fall from grace. Updated versions offered by television evangelists, religious gurus and manifold sectarian cults testify, if anything, to the widely and strongly felt need for superhuman solutions to problems which clearly transcend the human capacity of judgement.

With the demand for charismatic solutions to the problems of value growing to unprecedented proportions, some political parties and mass social movements stepped in to provide a substitute service. Among the first, the so-called totalitarian parties (parties claiming the total dedication of their followers in every aspect of their lives), like the fascists or communists, gained particular notoriety for either generating charismatic leaders credited with superhuman foresight and an unimpeachable sense of right and wrong, or turning themselves into collective carriers of charismatic authority. The latter development in particular puts the charismatic influence on an altogether new, more stable basis; the influence of a charismatic organization can in principle (and sometimes in practice) outlive the charismatic leader. More importantly, it can become relatively immune to the eroding impact of past errors for which mere individuals would be blamed, leaving the organization unscathed and its continuous authority assured. Such luxury is not, on the whole, available to loosely organized mass movements (unless, that is, they succeed in establishing a strong, party-like organization capable of self-perpetuation). Usually they share the fate of their leader who is the

proper carrier of charismatic authority: his meteoric rise and his rapid fall once his popularity is undermined by setbacks and unfulfilled promises or overshadowed by more successful (not yet discredited) contenders for public attention.

The centre of charismatic authority, however, now seems to have shifted away from both the religious and the political arena. The advent of mass media – powerful technology capable of making message-senders visible and audible, yet virtually inaccessible, to millions of message-recipients – has played a major role in this shift. The psychological effect of this situation has proved shattering. The sheer mass exposure-cum-inaccessibility of TV personalities, or TV-assisted public personalities, seems to be a source of a powerful, charismatic influence. Much like the charismatic leaders of old, they are credited with a capacity for superior judgement, this time first and foremost in the field of taste – so that they may become the trend-setters of a life-style. The impression of superiority is, one may suppose, the reflection of their exposure and the massiveness of their following. The quantity itself becomes now an authority – the genuine carrier of charismatic aura. The large number of people who look to public personalities for guidance and advice on their own choices reinforces the power of charisma and adds strength to the popular trust in the validity of the source.

Another example of collective charismatic influence is provided by the professions. Their claim to pronounce and adjudicate on human choices is grounded in their expertise: in their privileged access to knowledge otherwise difficult to obtain, and for this reason superior to the untested and often erroneous beliefs of a lay person. The knowledge the professions command is normally beyond the reach and comprehension of those who are called to obey the verdicts based on that knowledge – and so the propriety of the verdicts cannot be checked. Verdicts are accepted because people who obey them assume the impeccability of the adjudicating authority; and the verdicts go on being accepted as long as people who obey them believe, first, in the collective wisdom of the profession as a whole and, secondly, in the profession's ability to monitor its individual members so that each one acts as a competent and reliable spokesman for that wisdom. One is inclined, for instance, to forgo the

pleasure of smoking or drinking once 'the doctors say' that such pleasures are harmful; or one accepts the doctors' opinion on the right body weight even at the cost of depriving oneself of one's favourite food. The charismatic authority of the professions is a special case of a wider phenomenon: our common trust in the unassailable superiority of science as a method of generating valuable and trustworthy knowledge. Whatever the substantive difference between scientific knowledge and religious revelation, the mechanisms of their acceptance by the lay public do not substantively differ. In both cases the ordinary, uninitiated people have no way of testing the truthfulness of information – they can only take it *on trust*, being confident about the wisdom and veracity of persons or organizations (the Church, the University) who collectively purvey the information complete with the guarantee of its quality.

The two legitimations which we have considered so far – the traditionalist and the charismatic – share one feature: they both imply the surrender of one's right to make value choices and ceding it to another, single or collective, actor. The ceding of choice is very often associated with the surrender of responsibility. It is now the other actors (the past generations as we imagine them, or present-day authoritative institutions) which have already made choices for us and thus bear the responsibility for the results – including *moral* responsibility for the consequences of our actions.

Legitimation of the third type, however – the *legal-rational* one – goes further still, as it apparently removes the very problem of value choice and the attendant agony of self-justification. It implies that some organizations, and the persons entitled to speak on their behalf, have the legally guaranteed right to tell us what sort of action ought to be undertaken, while it is our equally lawful duty to obey without further argument. If this is the case, the very question of the wisdom or moral quality of the advice seems to have lost its importance. We do not bear the responsibility (or so we are told) for choosing between competing carriers of charismatic authority. It is now the law and lawful command, and not our decision, which selects for us the authority which determines our action. The legal-rational legitimization separates action from value choice and hence makes it apparently value-free. The executors of a command need

not scrutinize the morality of the action they have been ordered to perform, nor do they need to feel responsible if the action fails the moral test. Self-righteously, they would react with indignation to any reproach on this account: 'I was only carrying out the orders I received from my legal superiors.'

Whatever it gains in enhancing the potency and efficiency of human enterprise, the legal-rational legitimization is pregnant with potentially sinister consequences – and that precisely because of its tendency to absolve the actors from their responsibility for value choice and, in a sense, remove the whole issue of value choice from discussion. The mass murder and genocide of the last war provided the most conspicuous, though by no means unique and exceptional, example of such consequences: the perpetrators of murder refused to accept moral responsibility, pointing instead to the legal determination of their obedience to command; they rejected the charge that their decision to obey was, in fact, a moral choice on their part.

Removing the values which the actions serve from the sight of the actors by the simple expedient of extending the chain of command beyond the vision of the executors renders the action apparently value-free and exempt from moral judgement. The actors are offered, so to speak, escape from the burden of their freedom, which always comes complete with the responsibility for one's actions.

Chapter Seven

Self-preservation and Moral Duty

'I need it. I must have it' – all too often I say these two sentences in one breath, as if the second sentence merely put a greater emphasis on the point made in the first; or as if the second sentence clarified the meaning of the first; or the second sentence drew an obvious practical conclusion from the statement of fact made in the first. It looks like needing something means not having something that should be had: a *deprivation*. And that needing prompts the wish to have what has been missing. 'Having it' is some sort of necessity or compulsion which the need prompts. 'I *must* have it'; 'it' – something I need to possess to be happy, or to escape the present state of need which is, presumably, a state of discomfort and unease and thus restlessness and anxiety. Possessing it is a condition of my self-preservation or even survival. Without it, I cannot remain the sort of person I am. My life would be flawed or even intolerable. In an extreme case, it would not continue at all. Not just my well-being, but my very physical existence would be in danger.

It is the quality of being needed for my survival or self-preservation that makes this something I lack and miss into a *good*. The good is, as it were, the other side of the need. Since I need something, this something is a good; something is a good in so far as I need it. This something could mean many things: commodities one can buy in the shop in exchange for money; silence in the street at night or clean air and uncontaminated water, which cannot be attained but by the concerted effort of many others; the safety of one's home and safe passage through public spaces, which depends on the actions of people with power; love of another person – and the other person's will to understand and to manifest compassion which come with it.

In other words, any 'good', anything that is made an object of our concern because we need it, always brings us into a relation with other people. Our needs cannot be satisfied unless we gain access to the goods in question, either through being allowed to use them, or through owning them. But this always involves other people and their actions. However self-concerned the interest in self-preservation is, it strengthens our ties with other people; it makes us dependent on other people's actions and the motives which guide them.

This truth is not evident at a first glance. On the contrary: on the face of it, **ownership** is widely understood as a thoroughly 'private' thing; a kind of special relation between the person and the object this person owns. The image which most often comes to mind when I say, 'This is mine', or 'This belongs to me', is that of an invisible link extending between me and, say, a pen or a book or a desk which is 'mine'. It seems that the object (the property) is somehow invisibly connected to its owner; it is in such a connection that we suppose the essence of ownership rests. If I am the owner of the piece of paper on which I write these words, it is I and I alone who decide what to do with it. I can use it at will — I can write on it a part of a book, or a letter to a friend, or I can wrap a sandwich in it; what is more, I can destroy it if I wish. (It is true that for some of my possessions I am prohibited from doing so by law: I cannot, for instance, fell an old tree in my garden without permission; neither am I allowed to set my house on fire. But the fact that a special law is needed to forbid me to dispose of certain property in such a way only further underlines the general principle that it is up to *me*, and to me alone, what becomes of the things I own.) What this popular image of ownership overlooks, however, and the popular descriptions of the property relation leave unsaid, is that ownership is also, and more than anything else, a relation of **exclusion**. Think of it: whenever I say, 'This is mine', I mean also, though I do not say it out loud and often do not think of it at all, this is *not* yours. Ownership is never a private quality; it is always a social affair. Ownership conveys a special relation between an object and its owner only because it conveys at the same time a special relation between the owner and other people. Owning a thing means denying others access to it.

All ownership divides and sets apart (that is, it excludes the non-owners from the use of someone else's property). Not in all cases, however, and not all the time does ownership give the owner power over those who have been excluded. Ownership gives power only if the needs of the excluded require the use of the objects owned. Ownership of the tools of work, of raw materials to be processed by human labour, of sites on which such processing can take place, offers such power. (In the example considered before, employees need access to the machine plant controlled by the factory owner to gain their livelihood; they need it for self-preservation, even for their very survival. Without such access, their skills and their time would be useless; they would be unable to use them gainfully, to make a living out of them.) This is not so, however, with the ownership of goods to be consumed by the owner. If I own a car or a video-recorder or a washing machine, this may make my life easier or more enjoyable than it would otherwise be. It may even add to my prestige – to the respect I enjoy among the people whose approval is important to me: I may boast of my new acquisitions, hoping that people whom I like to impress will from now on look up to me. But it does not necessarily give me power over other people. Unless, of course, they wish to use these things for their own comfort or enjoyment, in which case I'll set the conditions of use to which they must conform. Most things we own do not offer power; what they do offer, however, is independence from other people's power (I need no longer observe the conditions other people may set for the use of goods I need). The larger the part of my needs which I can satisfy directly, without asking for the right to use things other people control, the less I must conform to the rules and conditions set by other people. We may say that ownership is an *enabling* faculty. It extends one's autonomy, freedom of action and choice. It makes one independent. It allows one to act on one's own motives and pursue one's own values. The two – ownership and freedom – merge into one thing. Often the task of enlarging the scope of freedom translates into the extension of control over things – of ownership.

Both functions – that of power over others and that of autonomy – are performed by ownership only in so far as it *divides*. Indeed, in all

its versions and under all circumstances ownership means differentiation and exclusion. Underlying all ownership is the principle that the rights of others are limits of my own rights (and vice versa); that the promotion of my own freedom requires that others have their freedom restricted. By this principle, enabling always comes together with some (albeit partial and relative) disabling of someone else. The principle assumes an irreparable conflict of interests between people engrossed in the pursuit of their respective purposes: what one gains, the other loses. The situation is one of the zero-sum game; nothing could be (or so it is assumed) gained by sharing and cooperation. In a situation in which ability to act depends on the exclusive control over resources, to act reasonably means to follow the commandment 'everyone for himself (herself)'. This is how the task of self-preservation appears to us; this is the logic which apparently derives from it and hence ought to be the principle of all sensible action.

Whenever human action conforms to such a principle, interaction takes the form of **competition**. Competitors are moved by the desire to exclude their actual or potential rivals from using resources they control, hope to control or dream of controlling. The goods for which the rivals compete are perceived as *scarce*: it is believed that there is not enough of them to satisfy everybody, and that some rivals must be forced to settle for less than they would wish to possess. It is an essential part of the idea of competition, and the basic assumption of competitive action, that some desires are bound to be frustrated, and hence the relations between the winners and the defeated must be permanently marked with mutual dislike or enmity. For the same reason no competitive gains are considered secure unless actively and vigilantly defended against challenge and contest. Competitive struggle never ends; its results are never final and irreversible. From this, a number of important consequences follow.

First, all competition breeds a tendency to monopoly. The winning side tends to make its gains secure and permanent by denying the losers the right (or at least a realistic prospect) of challenging the gains. The ultimate, though elusive and unattainable, purpose of the competitors is to *abolish* the competition; competitive relations

have an in-built tendency to self-annihilation. If left to themselves, they would eventually lead to a sharp polarization of chances. Resources would cluster and tend to become ever more abundant on one side of the relationship, while becoming increasingly scarce on the other. More often than not, such a polarization of resources would give the winning side the ability to dictate the rules of all further interaction and leave the losers in no position to contest the rules. Gains in such a case would be transformed into a monopoly; monopoly, in its turn, would allow the winning side to dictate the conditions of further competition (for example, to fix the prices of the otherwise unavailable goods), and so attract more gains still and further deepen the gap between the sides.

Secondly, the permanent polarization of chances brought about by the monopoly (that is, by the constraints imposed on competition) tends to lead in the long run to the differential treatment of winners and losers. Sooner or later winners and losers 'solidify' into 'permanent' categories. The winners blame the failure of the losers on the latter's inherent inferiority. The losers are declared responsible for their own misfortune. They are described as inept or wicked, fickle or depraved, improvident or morally contemptible: in short, lacking in the qualities seen as a necessary condition of competitive success, which also happen to be qualities commanding respect. So defined, the losers are denied the legitimacy of their grievances. Since it has been accepted that the misery they suffer has been brought about by their own defects, they have no one but themselves to blame, and no right to claim their share of the cake, particularly the part gained by the successful. The disparagement and vilification of the poor is used as a defence of the advantages enjoyed by the well-off. The poor are defiled as lazy, slovenly and negligent, as *depraved* rather than *deprived*: lacking in character, shirking hard labour and inclined to delinquency and law-breaking. Like everyone else, it is said, they are 'self-made people' — they have chosen their own fate. Their misery has been visited upon them as a consequence of their own character or conduct. The more fortunate do not owe them anything. If it happens that the better-off share part of their possessions with the poor, it is only because of the goodness of those who share, not because of the right of those they share with. Similarly, in the male-

dominated society women are blamed for their oppressed state; their confinement to less prestigious and desirable functions is explained by 'inborn' inferiority: excessive emotionality, lack of competitive spirit and lesser rationality or intelligence.

Defamation of the victims of the competition is one of the most powerful means of silencing the alternative motives of human conduct: moral duty. Moral motives clash with the motives of gain in a number of important respects. Gain-oriented action favours self-concern and ruthlessness in treating potential competitors. Moral action, on the other hand, requires solidarity; disinterested help, willingness to assist the neighbour in need without asking for, or expecting, remuneration. A moral attitude finds its expression in the consideration of the needs of others, and more often than not would result in self-restraint and a voluntary renunciation of personal gain. If in a gain-motivated action my needs (however I may define them) are the sole consideration, in a morally motivated action the needs of others become the basic criterion of choice. In principle, self-interest and moral duty point in opposite directions.

It was first noted by Max Weber that the separation of business from the household is one of the most conspicuous characteristics of modern society. Such a separation is a way of avoiding the clash between the two opposite criteria of action. This effect is achieved through isolating from each other the two contexts in which the gain or the moral duty are, respectively, the dominant considerations. When engaged in a business activity, the person is prised from the network of family bonds; freed, in other words, from the pressures of moral duties. Considerations of gain may therefore be given the sole attention the successful business activity demands. Back in the family, cool calculations of business may be forgotten, and goods shared among family members according to the needs of each member. Ideally, family life (as well as the life of all those communal forms which are or aim to be patterned after the family) ought to be free from the motivations of gain. Equally ideally, business activities should not be affected by the motives prompted by moral feelings. Business and morality do not go well together. Success in business (that is, in an essentially competitive effort) depends on the *rationality* of conduct, and this in turn is equal to the stubborn subordination

of all conduct to considerations of self-interest. Rationality means being guided by the head rather than by the heart. Action is considered rational only in so far as it consists of the application of the most effective and least costly means to the task at hand.

We have noted before that the **organization** (or **bureaucracy**, as it is commonly called) is an attempt to adjust human action to the ideal requirements of rationality. We see again that such an attempt must involve, more than anything else, the silencing of moral considerations (that is, of the concern for others for the others' sakes, a disinterested concern, upheld even if in conflict with the dictate of self-preservation). The task of every member of the organization is reduced to a simple choice of obeying or refusing to obey a command. It is also reduced to a small part of the overall purpose pursued by the organization as a whole, so that the wider consequences of the act are not necessarily visible to the actor. One can do things which have dire consequences one does not see and affect people one does not even know exist – and thus do even the most abominable and abhorrent things without experiencing moral conflict or a guilty conscience (as when one earns one's living, often a very decent living, by working in a weapons factory, or in an enterprise which heavily pollutes the environment or produces potentially addictive and poisonous drugs). Most importantly, the organization puts discipline in place of moral responsibility as the paramount standard of propriety ('I have just been following orders', 'I just tried to do my job well' will be the most popular, and self-evident, excuses). As long as a member of an organization strictly follows the rules and the commands of superiors, he or she is offered freedom from moral doubts. A morally reprehensible action, unthinkable under different conditions, becomes suddenly possible and relatively easy to obtain.

The potency of organizational discipline to silence or suspend moral reservations has been dramatically demonstrated in the notorious experiments of **Stanley Milgram**, in which a number of volunteers were instructed to deliver painful electric shocks to the objects of a fake 'scientific research'. Most volunteers, convinced of the noble scientific purpose of their cruelty (which they, as lay persons, could only admire and not really comprehend or judge) and relying on the admittedly superior judgement of the scientists in

charge of the research project, followed the instructions faithfully – undaunted by the cries of anguish of their victims. What the experiment revealed on a small scale and in laboratory conditions was demonstrated in breath-taking dimensions by the practice of genocide during the Second World War and thereafter. The murder of millions of Jews initiated and supervised by a few thousand top Nazi leaders and officials was a gigantic bureaucratic operation which involved the cooperation of millions of 'ordinary' people – most of them, in all probability, friendly neighbours, loving spouses and caring parents. Such people drove the trains which carried the victims to gas chambers, worked in factories which produced poisonous gas or crematoria appliances, and in myriads of other small ways contributed to the overall task of annihilation. Every person had 'a job to do', a problem to be solved, the job consuming all their energy and physical strength, the problem absorbing all their thoughts. These people could do the things they did only because they were but dimly, if at all, aware of the ultimate consequences of their actions; they never saw them – just as the learned men who designed the clever tools of destruction to be visited upon the peasants of Vietnam did not see their brainchildren in action. The final results could by so remote from the simple tasks they themselves were busy with that the connections could escape their attention or be barred from consciousness.

Even if the functionaries of a complex organization are aware of the ultimate effect of the joint activity of which they are a part, that effect is often too remote to worry them. Remoteness may be a matter of mental rather than geographical distance. Because of the vertical and horizontal division of labour, the actions of any single person are as a rule *mediated* by the actions of many other people. Either one's own job is of no direct consequence, or it is sheltered from the distant targets of action by the multitude of other jobs performed by other people. There seems to be, therefore, no direct causal connection between what one is doing and what happens to the ultimate objects of action. In the end, one's own contribution pales into insignificance, and its influence on the final result seems too small to be seriously considered as a moral problem. 'I myself did not do anything wrong, there is nothing you can reproach me

for' would be a normal excuse. After all, one could have been doing things as innocuous and harmless as drawing blueprints, composing reports, filing documents or switching on and off the machine which mixed two chemical compounds . . . One would not easily recognize the charred bodies in an exotic country as the effects of one's action, as one's own responsibility.

Keeping one's eyes firmly shut on the morally horrifying end-products of ostensibly innocent deeds is further helped by the notorious impersonality of organizational functions. It is an essential feature of any organization that any role can be filled by anybody with proper skills. It can be argued, therefore, that the contribution to the overall task is made by the role itself, rather than by its incumbent. If the current occupant does not perform the role properly, someone else will be put in his or her place and the task will be carried out anyway. The argument can be pushed as far as insisting that the very responsibility for making the overall task feasible rests with the role, and not its performer; and the role ought not to be confused with the personality of the performer. It should be noted that even those among the perpetrators of genocidal actions who stayed too close to the scene of the murder to claim ignorance of the real consequences of their acts could, and did, point out that in the context of bureaucratic command and division of labour moral evaluations were irrelevant. Their own feelings were 'neither here nor there': It did not matter whether they hated their victims or felt sympathy for them. The task demanded their discipline, not their emotions. As in other routinely organized actions, they dealt with appointed targets, not fellow human beings.

Bureaucracy made to service inhuman purposes has demonstrated its ability to silence moral motivations not only in its employees, but also well beyond the boundaries of the bureaucratic organization itself; it did so through appealing to the motive of self-preservation of those whom it intended to destroy as well as of those who unwillingly witnessed the destruction. The bureaucratic management of genocide secured the cooperation of many of its victims and the moral indifference of most of the bystanders. Prospective victims had been transformed into 'psychological captives'; bewitched by the illusory prospects of benign treatment as a reward for compliance,

they often played into the hands of their oppressors and facilitated their own perdition. They hoped against hope that something might still be saved, some dangers averted, if only the oppressors were not unduly aggrieved; that cooperation would be rewarded. In a great number of cases, the phenomenon called anticipatory compliance appeared: the victims went out of their way to please the oppressors by guessing their intention in advance and implementing it with zestful passion. Above all, not until the last moment were they faced with the unavoidability of their ultimate fate. Each successive step on the road to destruction had been presented to them as unpleasant, yet not terminal, and certainly not irreversible; each step confronted them with a clearly defined choice with only one rational solution – invariably the one which brought the final destruction a bit closer. The managers of genocide thus attained their ends with the minimum of disorder and virtually no resistance; very few guards were needed to supervise the long, obedient march to the gas chambers.

As for the bystanders, their compliance, or at least their silence and inactivity, were secured through setting high the price of moral behaviour and of solidarity with the victims. Choosing morally correct behaviour would have meant inviting an awesome punishment, and more often than not putting one's own physical survival at risk. Once the stakes are raised high, the interests of self-preservation push aside moral duties and *moral* compunctions tend to be quelled with *rational* arguments: 'I could not help the victims without jeopardizing my own and my family's lives; I would have saved *one* person at best, yet if I failed, *ten* would die.' Quantitative calculation of survival chances are given priority over the moral quality of action.

These have been extreme illustrations of the ultimate opposition between the motives of self-preservation and those of moral duty; admittedly, they have been drawn from rare and widely condemned situations. In a milder and for that reason less alarming form, however, the opposition leaves its imprint on the everyday human condition. By and large, in any organizational context rationality of action, hailed as the most effective tool of self-preservation, is promoted at the expense of moral obligation. Rational conduct has an apparent advantage over the action guided by moral duty in that it offers an unambiguous recipe for correct choice and appeals

directly to the sense of self-preservation and self-enhancement. It is made still more alluring by its success in satisfying the desire for self-aggrandizement induced by competition. Expressed in the zero-sum competition and armed with reliable weapons of bureaucratic rationality, the motive of self-preservation turns into a formidable, perhaps invincible adversary of moral concerns.

Extinguishing moral obligations is further facilitated by statistical treatment of human objects of action, promoted by all bureaucracy. Seen as figures – pure forms which can be filled with any content – such human objects lose their individuality and are deprived of their separate existence as bearers of human rights and moral obligations. They become instead specimens of a category, fully defined by the attached assembly of organizational rules and criteria. Their personal uniqueness, and thus their unique, individual needs, lose their significance as points of orientation of bureaucratic action. What matters is solely the category to which they have been officially designated. The classification sharpens the focus on selected shared attributes of the individuals in which the organization has expressed its interest; at the same time, it licenses neglect for all the rest of the attributes, that is, for the very individual characteristics which form the individuals as moral subjects, as unique and irreplaceable human beings.

As a matter of fact, bureaucracy is not the only context in which moral motivations of action tend to be declared out of court, silenced or suspended for the duration. A very similar effect of suppressing moral drive happens in a context that in virtually all other respects is diametrically opposed to the cool, calculating rationality of a bureaucratic organization, and that is also virtually free from gain-seeking and greed-arousing competition. One particular context of this kind stands out as a most effective silencer of morality: the crowd.

It has been noted that people who find themselves tightly packed together in a confined space with great numbers of other people whom they do not know – whom they have not met under other circumstances, have not interacted with before, and with whom they are 'united' at present only by a temporary, accidental interest – are prone to behave in a way they would not deem plausible in 'normal' conditions. The wildest of behaviours may suddenly spread through the crowd in a fashion which can only be compared with forest fire.

wind blast or contagion. In an accidental crowd, for instance in a congested market place or in a theatre in the grip of panic, people overwhelmed with the desire for self-preservation may trample over their fellow humans, push others into the fire, just to secure a breathing-space for themselves or to get out of the danger. They may on other occasions attack and kill the ostensible villain pointed out to them and denounced as the source of threat. In a crowd, people are able to commit deeds no single perpetrator would be morally capable of committing left to himself or herself. If the crowd may commit collectively an odious act which every single member abhors, it is because of the *facelessness* of the crowd. In the crowd, individuals lose their individuality and 'dissolve' in the anonymous gathering; they are no longer perceived as moral subjects, as the targets of moral duty (an effect not unlike that of the distancing attained by bureaucratic division of labour). A lynch mob or crowd of team supporters absolve their members from moral responsibility for violent acts visited upon fellow human beings, who are normally protected against violence by the moral constraints of the would-be attackers. In these and similar cases, the suspension of moral obligation is an effect of the anonymity of the crowd and of a virtual absence of any lasting bonds between the participants. The crowd dissolves as quickly as it gathers, and its collective action, however coordinated it may appear, neither follows nor generates interaction of any degree of permanence. It is precisely the momentary and inconsequential character of the crowd action which makes possible the purely *affective* conduct of its individual members. For a fleeting moment, all stops are pulled, all inhibitions removed, all obligations made void, all rules suspended.

The orderly, unemotional conduct in the context of a bureaucratic organization and the riotous eruptions of a crowd's anger or panic seem to be poles apart; and yet their effects on moral drive and inhibitions are remarkably similar. Similar effects have similar causes: **depersonalization**, 'effacing of faces', annihilation of individual autonomy. Bureaucracy – by being constructed of roles instead of persons and by reducing other human beings to the roles or to so many resources or obstacles on the road to goal-attainment or problem-solving – and the unruly, billowing crowd – by being

made of indistinguishable particles rather than individual human beings, by acquiring its character from numbers, rather than individual qualities of its members — are both faceless and anonymous.

For their fellow humans, people remain moral subjects as long as they are acknowledged as *humans*: that is, as beings eligible for the treatment reserved for fellow human beings alone, and proper for every human being (a treatment which assumes that the partners of interaction possess their own unique needs, that these needs are as valid and important as one's own and ought to be paid similar attention and respect). One may even say that the concepts of a 'moral object' and 'human being' have the same referent — their respective scopes overlap. Whenever certain persons or categories of people are denied the right to our moral responsibility, they are treated as 'lesser humans', 'flawed humans', 'not fully human', or downright 'non-human'.

The universe of moral obligations (the collection of people embraced by moral duty) may or may not include all members of the human species. Many 'primitive' tribes gave themselves names which meant, simply, 'human beings'; the human status of other tribes, particularly those with whom no interaction except occasional outbursts of hostility had been established, was not fully recognized. The refusal to accept the humanity of strange tribes and their members lingered on in slave-owning societies, where slaves had been assigned the status of 'talking tools' and considered (at least in principle) solely in the light of their usefulness to the accredited task. The status of limited humanity meant in practice that the essential requirement of moral attitude — respect for another person's needs, which includes first and foremost the recognition of the other person's integrity and the sanctity of his or her life — was not seen as binding in relation to the bearers of such status. It looks as if history consisted of a gradual, yet relentless extension of the idea of humanity — with a pronounced tendency of the universe of obligations to become ever more inclusive and in the end co-terminous with the totality of the human species.

As we have seen, however, this process has not been straightforward. Our century has been notorious for the appearance of highly influential world-views that called for the exclusion of whole categories

of the population — classes, nations, races, religions — from the universe of obligations. The perfection of the bureaucratically organized action, on the other hand, has reached a point where moral inhibitions cannot effectively interfere with considerations of efficiency any more. The combination of both factors — the possibility of suspending moral responsibility offered by bureaucratic technology of management, and the presence of world-views ready and willing to deploy such a possibility — resulted on many occasions in the successful confinement of the universe of obligations, which in its turn opened the way to such diverse consequences as the mass terror practised in communist societies against the members of hostile classes and persons classified as their helpers, persistent discrimination of racial and ethnic minorities in countries otherwise proud of their human-rights record, many overt or surreptitiously practised apartheid systems, and the numerous cases of genocide, moving from the massacre of Armenians in Turkey, through the annihilation of millions of Jews, gypsies and Slavs by Nazi Germany, to the gassing of Kurds or the mass murders of Cambodia. The boundaries of the universe of obligations remain to this day a contentious issue. One may suspect that the development of the bureaucratic technology adept at the task of silencing moral motivation (as much an achievement of modern society as the extension of moral sensitivity to all members of the human species) has made them more contentious than before — in practice, if not in theory.

Inside the universe of obligations, the authority of other people's needs is recognized. It is accepted that the needs of others are legitimate reasons for their demands; if the demands are not met, the failure always calls for explanation and often for some sort of apology. The life of others ought to be preserved, whatever the costs. Everything possible ought to be done to secure their welfare, expand their life chances, open their access to the amenities society has to offer. Their poverty, ill health, dreariness of daily life constitute a challenge and an admonition to all other members of the same universe of obligations. Faced with such a challenge, we feel obliged to excuse ourselves — to supply a convincing explanation why so little has been done to alleviate their lot and why not much more can be done; we also feel obliged to prove that everything that could be

done was done. Not that the explanations provided must of necessity be true. We hear, for instance, that the health service offered to the population at large cannot be improved because 'money cannot be spent until it is earned'. What such an explanation conceals, however, is that the profits made by private medicine used by well-off patients are classified as 'earnings', while the services provided for those who cannot afford private fees are counted among 'expenditures'; such an explanation hides the differential treatment of needs depending on people's ability to pay. The very fact, however, that the explanation is offered at all, and that those who give it feel obliged to provide one, testifies to the recognition that the people whose health needs are neglected remain nevertheless inside the universe of obligations.

The fact that the needs of others remain unsatisfied would not be felt as our failure, and the inner compulsion to explain it would lose much of its urgency, only if the neglected 'others' were evicted altogether from the universe of obligations; or, at least, if it was demonstrated that their presence inside the universe of obligations was doubtful or 'undeserved'. Such a situation is not at all fanciful. It tends to be produced through casting those 'others' in a relatively subhuman situation, and then blaming the misfortune on their inability to act like 'humans do'. From this there is just one step to the decision that the others in question cannot be treated as human beings are, since their failings are beyond cure and nothing can bring them back into the fold of mankind. They will, for instance, for ever remain 'an alien race' that cannot be accommodated in the 'native' moral order, as they themselves would not be able to abide by it.

Self-preservation and moral duty stand in opposition to each other. Neither of them can claim to be 'more natural' than the other, better attuned to the inherent predisposition of human nature. If one gains an upper hand over the other and becomes a dominant motive of human action, the cause of imbalance can usually be traced back to the socially determined context of interaction – to the way the stakes are defined and given prominence. Self-interested and moral motives become prevalent depending on circumstances over which the people who are guided by them have only a limited control. It has been observed, however, that the power of circum-

stances is never absolute, and the choice between the two contradictory motives remains open even under the most extreme conditions. Moral responsibility of the human person, or its renouncement, cannot be explained away in the end by reference to external powers and pressures.