

2/Man and Society

*Man is the only animal that blushes.
Or needs to.
Mark Twain*

ONE OF THE BASIC FACTS of human existence is the curious intermingling of good and evil in the affairs of men. On some occasions men have displayed the greatest acts of self-sacrifice and heroism. At other times they have engaged in the most appalling acts of cruelty and selfishness. This strange dualism has provided an endless source of material for poets and playwrights since the days of Homer.

Social philosophers and social scientists have found that they, too, must reckon with this aspect of human life, but for them it represents a problem rather than a resource. For how does one explain such varied behavior in a single species, and often in a single individual?

Historically, most efforts to answer this question have led to the conclusion that human behavior springs from two opposing sources, one of good, the other of evil. God is the source of good and the devil the source

of evil. Or, nature is the source of good and society the source of evil. Or, reason is the source of good and the passions the source of evil. In short, the good we observe in men springs from one source, the evil from another.

The classical solution has found favor with both radical and conservative theorists. They differ, however, when they identify the sources. As noted in the last chapter, radicals tend to identify society as the source of evil. Man is basically good, they argue, and the evil we observe in his actions reflects the influence of corrupting institutions. In contrast, conservatives have generally maintained that evil has its origin in the egoistic drives of the individual and that the function of society is to restrain and redirect these harmful tendencies in ways which serve the common good.

Of course, these generalizations oversimplify matters to some degree; the lines are not always drawn so clearly.¹ Nevertheless, this fundamental difference between the conservative and radical views of man and society underlies many of the differences in their theories of distribution. By making this distinction explicit, it becomes easier to identify one of the major sources of controversy between these two intellectual traditions and thus clarify one of the major tasks confronting proponents of the synthetic view.

The chief objective of this chapter is to set forth certain postulates about the nature of man and society which form the foundation for the emerging synthesis. Some are drawn from the conservative tradition, some from the radical, and some from neither. No attempt will be made to give a total view of either man or society. Rather, attention will be concentrated on those aspects of both which are most relevant to the theory of distribution.

The Nature of Man

The starting point in every sociological discussion of the nature of man is the deceptively simple assertion that *man is a social being obliged by nature to live with others as a member of society*. On this proposition at least, radicals and conservatives agree, and this serves as the *first postulate* in our general theory.

To say that man is a social being is not to deny that a few individuals withdraw from society and live as hermits. The human race could not

¹ For example, Marxist theory is a radical theory critical of social institutions only so long as Marxists are out of power. Once they gain power, as in Russia and China, the profoundly conservative elements in this theory come to the fore. The drastic shift in ideological orientation required of Communists in the era following the 1917 Revolution was undoubtedly one reason for the frequent purges of Old Bolsheviks.

survive on this basis, however, since its chief weapon in the struggle for existence has always been culture, and culture is uniquely a social product. Social life is essential not only for the survival of the species but also for the maximum satisfaction of human needs and desires. Through cooperative activity men can satisfy many needs and desires which could never be met otherwise and can satisfy most other needs much more efficiently, i.e., with greater return for less effort or other investment.

To say that man is a social being is also to say that the society into which he is born shapes his character and personality in ways over which he has no control and of which he is often unaware. Peter Berger expressed this well when he wrote:

Society not only controls our movements, but shapes our identity, our thought and our emotions. The structures of society become the structures of our own consciousness. Society does not stop at the surface of our skins. Society penetrates us as much as it envelops us.²

If our first postulate is relatively noncontroversial, the same cannot be said of the second. It takes us directly into the realm of one of the bitterest disputes between radicals and conservatives—the dispute concerning the origin of evil. As noted in the last chapter, the radical view of man and society steadily gained in popularity and intellectual respectability after the English revolution of the seventeenth century. In an era of European growth and expansion, this optimistic view, which postulated society as the source of evil, found increasing acceptance, especially among intellectuals. Since the rise of Nazism and the outbreak of World War II, however, the trend has been halted and, for the first time in roughly three centuries, the pendulum seems to be moving in the opposite direction. On every hand the evidence mounts that the evil in men's actions is rooted more deeply than radical theorists had supposed. Neither the French Revolution nor the Russian produced the utopias that were promised despite revolutionary institutional change. Though the patterns of men's lives have been changed greatly by the social and technological revolutions of modern times, egoism, selfishness, and cruelty continue to loom large.

Paralleling the argument from modern history is that from contemporary psychology, where current theory and research undermine our faith in the natural goodness of man no less than do political events. Recent research reveals the human infant as an extremely self-centered creature, motivated solely by his own needs and desires. If we rid ourselves of the romantic aura which surrounds babies in our society, we discover

² Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1963), p. 121.

that they are totally involved in reducing the various tensions created by their biological nature and the environment. Their early actions are simply trial-and-error probings to discover methods of reducing or relieving these tensions.

In time, of course, the normal child learns to take the wishes of others into account. But this does not mean that he is any less motivated to maximize his own satisfactions. Rather, it means that he has learned that the attainment of his own goals is inextricably linked with the interests of others. For example, a boy who acquires a taste for baseball soon finds that he can satisfy this taste only by cooperating with others who share his enthusiasm. Because he cooperates with them and obeys the rules of the game we should not assume that he is no longer seeking to maximize his own satisfactions. On the contrary, we can be sure he is!

Children's games afford far more insights into the nature of social organization than is usually recognized. In particular, they demonstrate the process by which institutions with their elements of cooperation and morality and their concepts of right and justice can emerge from the actions of an originally unorganized aggregation of individuals each selfishly seeking to maximize his own personal satisfactions. To achieve this maximization individuals are forced to work (and play) together, but they find that this can be rewarding only if the activity takes place within the framework of a system of rules which, above all else, protects the cooperative activity itself. This can only be done if certain basic rights are guaranteed to all of the essential participants; e.g., each boy is guaranteed his turn at bat. This may seem to entail some sacrifice on the part of the stronger or abler participants, but really it does not, since the only alternative is the cessation of the cooperative activity and all its benefits. Thus, for them, as for the other participants, adherence to the rules can be accounted for merely as a form of *enlightened self-interest*.

Many years ago William Graham Sumner coined the phrase "antagonistic cooperation" to call attention to this paradoxical feature of human life.³ As he pointed out, men are "brought into association and held there by compulsion"—the compulsion of self-interest. He declared that "it is quite as wrong to assume mutual good-will as the basis of human cooperation as it would be to suppose its existence between the bee and the

³ See *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn, 1906), p. 32. The quotations which follow are from Sumner and Albert Keller, *The Science of Society* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1927), vol. I, pp. 28-29. For another good discussion of this subject, see Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1926), especially chap. 5. For a good recent discussion of this same essential problem, see Dennis Wrong, "The Oversocialized View of Man," *American Sociological Review*, 26 (1961), pp. 183-193.

clover or the rhinoceros and the tick bird." In his opinion, "most cooperation has in it . . . suppressed antagonisms that are overborne by practical advantage." While he may have overstated the case somewhat, it is especially applicable in the case of those forms of social organization which are so large and complex that they embrace total strangers.

If one is fond of paradox and irony, one might go further and argue that cooperation itself is one of the basic sources of conflict in human life. If man were a solitary species, with each individual living apart from all the rest except for mating, as is the case with certain animals, there would be far less conflict among men. If each produced only for himself and there were no division of labor and exchange of goods, one of the major sources of human strife would be eliminated. By contrast, when men join forces in a cooperative enterprise, whether it be a family or total society, both the opportunity and the motivation for conflict are greatly increased. This is an aspect of the social scene which most conservative theorists have neglected.

We cannot argue, however, that simple self-interest, enlightened or otherwise, is the only motivating force in human affairs. When we take an objective view, we recognize that the problem is more complicated than this. Self-sacrifice is an observable reality no less than self-seeking: parents *do* sacrifice for their children and soldiers for their buddies.

From the moral standpoint, these forms of action are highly commendable. Nevertheless, as some of the more insightful observers of the human scene have pointed out, such actions involve a strong element of self-seeking. Jesus pointed this out to his followers at one point where he said, "If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even tax collectors do that." Many actions appear as sacrifices only when the larger context is ignored. Seen in context, such actions appear as parts of a mutually beneficial system of exchanged favors.

Whatever else is true of this kind of sacrificial action, it is not disinterested. Such actions are seldom taken on behalf of strangers, nor do we expect it. Rather, they presuppose the existence of highly valued and rewarding interpersonal ties between the parties involved. For lack of a better term, we might call this pattern of action "partisan self-sacrifice" and the interests served by it "partisan group interests" to differentiate it from the disinterested pattern of self-sacrifice involved in truly altruistic action.

There is one other aspect of this matter deserving note. Groups which generate sacrificial action by their members in their relations with one another typically foster a very different pattern of action in relations with outsiders. In fact, it sometimes seems that the stronger the sacrificial tend-

encies in *intragroup* relations, the weaker such tendencies in *intergroup* relations. This means that our *judgments about the frequency and importance of sacrificial action in human life are a function of the social level on which we focus*. If we make the family or some other primary group the object of our analysis, we are far more likely to be impressed by the evidences of self-sacrifice than if we examine a large and complex nation. When we view human action in this broader perspective, as we shall in this volume, we soon discover that these groups which generate so much sacrificial action in their internal relations are often capable of the most ruthless pursuit of their partisan group interests when dealing with outsiders, even though the latter are members of the same society.⁴

Closely related to this is the self-sacrificing action of the "true believer," to use Eric Hoffer's apt phrase—the fanatically dedicated member of a social movement which has "found the cure for the ills of mankind" and is prepared to force its adoption on a "stupidly" resisting world. Though the true believer is convinced that he is sacrificing himself for the good of his fellow men, others recognize the important psychic benefits he derives from his participation in such a movement. Self-sacrifice in this case is self-deception; the actions of the true believer seldom serve the needs of others as others see them.

Another questionable form of self-sacrifice is the practice of *noblesse oblige*. The well-to-do in some societies accept certain obligations, such as charity, almsgiving and public service, which yield no obvious returns for themselves. Again, however, the element of self-interest intrudes. For the very wealthy, philanthropy costs relatively little but usually yields substantial dividends. It is one of the few trustworthy routes to honor and prestige, and for those who have everything else, this can be important (see the discussion of the principle of marginal utility on page 36 of this chapter). Also, as the Lynds demonstrated in their famous study of Middletown, philanthropy can be made to pay handsome political and economic dividends.⁵ This is not to say that all charitable actions are prompted by self-interest but only that the element of self-interest is not incompatible with philanthropy. A more serious question which must be directed at charitable action concerns its relative importance in the total economy. Charitable donations usually represent only a small fraction of all expendi-

⁴ For an extreme instance of this, see Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: Free Press, 1958), which provides a vivid description of a southern Italian village in which extremely intense family ties go hand in hand with the most callous disregard for other members of the community.

⁵ Robert Lynd and Helen Lynd, *Middletown in Transition* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1937), chap. 3. A similar pattern can be found in many other parts of the world, as will become evident in later chapters. See especially chaps. 6 and 7.

tures; like icing on a cake, their visibility is no measure of their substance.

Lest it seem that all human action is motivated solely by self-interest, it must be affirmed that some is clearly motivated by a genuine concern for others, with no overtones of self-interest. Clearly there are forces in human experience which are capable of evoking the response of *unselfish or altruistic love*.⁶ However, since in most persons this pattern of response has only a limited development, altruistic action is most likely to occur in the minor events of daily life where little is at stake. Apparently many men develop a genuine desire to be generous and kind in their dealings with others but find it "impossible" to act in this way when much is at stake. Thus altruistic action is concentrated on the level of lesser events and decisions, and is infrequent on the level of major social decisions. In fact, it appears that one can state as a generalization that *the frequency of altruistic action varies inversely with the magnitude of the values involved*.

This is not to say that men are immoral when major values are at stake. Rather, it points to the need to differentiate between two kinds of morality, *pragmatic morality* and *ideal morality*. Pragmatic morality is the basis of all popular moral codes, and is based on the recognition that men need one another, and therefore condemns many kinds of harmful actions, especially those which threaten to undermine the social order. Ideal morality, by contrast, has never been accepted as the basis of any popular moral code, since it not only condemns harmful actions but requires that men love others as they love themselves and without regard to possible rewards.

This does not mean that altruism, or unselfish love, is of little or no importance. It is extremely important from both the psychological and moral standpoints, and human existence would be much poorer and harsher if it were absent. It is not, however, a major determinant of the distribution of power and privilege.

Thus, when one surveys the human scene, one is forced to conclude that *when men are confronted with important decisions where they are obliged to choose between their own, or their group's, interests and the interests of others, they nearly always choose the former*—though often seeking to hide this fact from themselves and others. This is the *second postulate* in our theory. As is evident, it leans far in the direction of the conservative position with its skeptical view of the innate goodness of man.

⁶ Certain religious ideologies, in combination with the personal experience and recognition of undeserved love, seem to be the chief sources of this.

Before leaving this controversial postulate, it may be well to point out that the exchange system and the division of labor in all the more complex societies serve as veils which largely hide this ugly truth. In complex societies men seldom see the consequences of their own economic and political actions. Rather, they observe the workings of the impersonal market system, which favors some and penalizes others. Success or failure thus appears to result from impersonal forces, or forces so complex that the influence of any single individual becomes negligible. This helps to foster the myth that man is by nature good and kind.

The *third postulate* in our theory pertains to the objects of men's strivings. Some, such as the air we breathe, are readily available to all, but most are not. *Most are in short supply*—that is, the demand for them exceeds the available supply.

This is a normal feature of the world of nature. Though we often speak of nature's bounty, the fact remains that all living things have a reproductive capacity which, in view of the limited supply of food and other resources, makes it inevitable that large numbers will die well before the end of their normal life span and most of the others live close to the margin of subsistence.

To some extent man has been able to free himself from these difficulties. Thousands of years ago he learned to increase his food supply and, more recently, he has learned to control reproduction. Yet while man enjoys certain advantages when compared with other living things, he also suffers from certain disadvantages. Unlike the various plants and animals, *man has an insatiable appetite for goods and services*. No matter how much he produces and consumes, he always desires more. This is true chiefly because the goods and services he consumes have a *status value* as well as a utilitarian value. If automobiles were simply a means of transportation, a society able to control its reproduction could eventually satisfy this demand. However, automobiles are also status symbols; hence there is no limit to the demand for their improvement and for the goods and services utilized in their production. The very nature of status striving makes it inevitable that the demand will exceed the supply: those of lower status constantly strive to equal those of higher status and those of higher status always seek to preserve the difference. Given these conditions, satiation is impossible no matter how much man increases production or restricts population increase.

If our first three postulates are correct, that is, if man is a social being, and if most of his important actions are motivated by self-interest or partisan group interest, and if many or most of the objects of his striving are in short supply, then it follows logically that *a struggle for re-*

wards will be present in every human society. This struggle need not always assume violent forms. On the contrary, it can be carried on within the framework of some system of rules. However, the absence of violence does not mean that the struggle is any less real or serious for the parties involved.

Before concluding this portion of our discussion, two further postulates should be entered into the record. The first of these, and fourth in our series, is that *men are unequally endowed by nature with the attributes necessary to carry on these struggles.* Some are born with serious physical handicaps which severely limit their chances. Others are handicapped in less obvious ways, such as by poor physical coordination, mild brain damage, lack of stamina, or even ugliness.

These inequalities in natural endowment are not the primary source of social inequality. But they are important enough to provide some foundation for the ancient conservative thesis that nature is the source of social inequality.

Fifth, and finally, for the present, we postulate that *man tends to be a creature of habit and powerfully influenced by the social counterpart of habit, namely, custom.* William James once called habit "the enormous flywheel of society" and this still seems a fair characterization since habit, like the flywheel, brings the powerful factor of inertia into play in human affairs. The same is true of custom. From the standpoint of the distributive process both habit and custom are tremendously important since they tend to stabilize existing systems of distribution by causing men to accept and take for granted even those distributive arrangements which work to their disadvantage and are not essential. Thus such arrangements prove far more durable and stable than one would expect and persist far longer than a careful analysis of the pattern itself would otherwise indicate.

The Nature of Society

Building on this view of man, it is now possible to turn to the more difficult problem of the nature of human societies. As indicated in the last chapter, here, too, there is a basic conflict between the views of conservatives and radicals and between their intellectual heirs, contemporary functionalists and conflict theorists.

In the conservative tradition human societies have been repeatedly compared to biological organisms. Like organisms, (1) they are systems made up of specialized and interdependent parts, (2) the whole normally outlives the various parts which are continuously being replaced, and (3)

the whole has needs which must be met if it is to survive and thrive, and it is the function of the parts to satisfy these needs through their specialized activities. In short, societies, like organisms, are systems in which the survival and well-being of the whole is achieved through the mutual cooperation of the parts. Through such cooperation the good of the whole is obtained and, as a consequence, the good of all the parts.

It is no coincidence that one of the major statements of modern functionalist theory is entitled *The Social System*.⁷ Functionalist theory is usually *systemic* theory, positing the systemic character of human societies at the outset and then seeking to explain the action of the parts in terms of the needs and requirements of the whole.

Conflict theory, in contrast, is usually *antisystemic* in character. It emphasizes the conflicts and struggles which constantly threaten to destroy the fabric of society. It is much less concerned with the total society and its needs than with the subunits within societies, the classes, parties, factions, and interest groups, which are forever contending for the advantage. As we noted in Chapter 1, radical theorists tend to view human societies as settings within which the conflicts of life are acted out. They are important chiefly because their characteristics, e.g., their level of economic development, affect the outcome of the struggles. The struggles and the struggling factions, not society, are the central object of concern.

Both of these views strike a responsive chord in any open-minded student of society. Both clearly contain an element of truth. Cooperation is certainly a pervasive feature of all human life and so, too, is conflict. Some patterns of human action make sense only when interpreted in the light of the needs of society as a whole, while others make sense only when interpreted in the light of individual needs and desires. To the degree that any theory denies the importance of either the social or the antisocial elements in human societies, it ignores an important aspect of life and becomes an unreliable interpreter of the human scene.

In order to integrate and synthesize the valid insights of both these traditions, it is necessary to reexamine with some care the concept of "systems," which is so important to conservative theorists. This is a concept which social theory cannot ignore; but neither can it be accepted uncritically as is usually done today.

Basically the concept refers to an organization of interdependent parts possessing a unitary character. Sociologists have borrowed it from other disciplines, such as astronomy, physics, and biology, in an endeavor

⁷ Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (New York: The Free Press, 1951).

to combat the extreme individualism and psychological reductionism of so much of popular thought, especially in the United States. As a weapon in this struggle it has been extremely effective; as a tool in social analysis its record is less impressive.

The greatest source of difficulty is that this concept is normally conceived of in *categorical* terms. Either something is a system or it is not. There is no middle ground. If an aggregation of people are interdependent to any appreciable degree, modern functionalists feel justified in analyzing their way of life in systemic terms. Building on this foundation they then proceed to develop their elaborate analyses, which strain to find social utility in every established pattern of action.

This usage ignores two important facts. First, *systems vary greatly in the degree of the interdependence and integration of their parts*. The constituent parts of human societies enjoy a measure of independence and autonomy which far exceeds that of the parts of most biological organisms or mechanical systems. To ignore this is to invite confusion. Second, *there is no such thing as a perfect human social system in which the actions of the parts are completely subordinated to the needs of the whole*. This is a theoretical construct which has no counterpart or even remote approximation in the real world.⁸

These facts have important implications for social theory. In the first place, if there is no such thing as a perfect social system, we should stop spinning theories which postulate their existence and direct our energies toward the building of theories which explicitly assume that all human organizations are *imperfect systems*. Second, social theorists (and researchers too) should stop trying to find *social* utility in all the varied behavior patterns of men; they should recognize that many established patterns of action are thoroughly antisocial and contribute nothing to the general good. Third, we should expect to find *both* cooperation and conflict as continuous and normal features of human life and should stop viewing conflict as a pathological or abnormal condition, as is often done in contemporary functionalist theory. Fourth, we should devote more attention to the causes and consequences of variations in the degree of group integration. Finally, we must learn to think of distributive systems as reflecting *simultaneously* system needs and unit needs, with each often subverting the other.

⁸ Hobbes saw this clearly as his comparison of man with the bees and ants indicates. Of the latter he wrote, "among these creatures the common good differs not from the private; and being by nature inclined to the private, they procure thereby the common benefit. But man, whose joy consists in comparing himself with other men, can relish nothing but what is eminent." Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Liberal Arts, 1958), chap. 17.

Societal Interests and Individual Interests: Their Relationship

This last point deserves special attention since conservative theorists so often deny that there is any basic conflict between the interests of the group and the interests of the individual, asserting that what is good for society is good for the individual, and vice versa. The classic effort in modern times is Adam Smith's famous treatise, *The Wealth of Nations*. The father of modern economics developed a very impressive case for the thesis that, through the alchemy of the market, the single-minded pursuit of self-interest by each of the members of society redounds to the benefit of society as a whole. A century later the Social Darwinians developed a similar thesis. They maintained that as a result of the operation of the laws of natural selection, only the fittest survived, so that once again the pursuit of self-interest redounded to the benefit of society as a whole.

While it is surely true that the destinies of an individual and his society are linked, there is no simple 1-to-1 relationship between them. This can be illustrated in a number of ways. When a society prospers, some of its members may even experience financial disaster. Conversely, when the economy of a society declines, some of its members may benefit greatly, as shown by the stock market crash of 1929.

Logically, it is not possible for the interests of society to be compatible with the interests of all its members if the interests of these members are themselves incompatible to any appreciable degree. Yet, as we have seen, this is precisely the case. Under such conditions, the most that is possible is that the interests of society are consistent with the interests of *some* of its members. As we shall see later, there is good reason to believe that in many societies throughout history the interests of only a small minority of the members were significantly identified with the interests of the total society.

The conflict between societal interests and individual interests can be shown in yet another way. From the standpoint of society as a whole, it is desirable that the key positions be filled by the best qualified men. From the standpoint of the individual motivated by self-interest, it is usually desirable that he fill one of these positions himself. In most instances, the interests of the individual will be subversive of the interests of the society and vice versa.

Conservative theorists have often argued that occupancy of the key positions in a society is evidence of superior ability and therefore that the actions of the occupants benefit all. However, critics reply, "Superior

ability at what? Picking one's parents? Force? Deceit?" Unhappily, these have often been major factors in the acquisition of key positions. The circularity in the logic of the conservative defense is of such a nature as to render it meaningless.

Individual Interests: Their Nature

Up to this point we have frequently referred to societal interests and individual interests, but without ever stating precisely what either is. On first consideration, it may seem that the nature of these interests is so obvious that no discussion is needed. When one reflects on these matters, however, certain difficulties are encountered, especially with respect to the concept of societal interests.

One of the great temptations in this area is to play God and identify these interests with what one feels they ought to be, or what they "really" are. This is, in effect, the practice of the Marxists and other ideologues who know what is good for an individual or a society even better than the persons involved. Such an approach may be fruitful politically, but not scientifically.

If we reject this deductive approach, we are forced back on induction. Two alternatives present themselves: (1) inductions based on *statements* made by the individual or group; (2) inductions based on *inferences from the actions* of the individual or group. Of these two, the latter seems wiser for two reasons. First, both individuals and groups often have reasons for misrepresenting their true interests: dissimulation is often profitable. Second, since the work of Freud, we cannot ignore the role of the subconscious in human behavior. Men's actions are often motivated by desires and goals of which they are only dimly aware. For both reasons it is wiser to base our judgments of the interests which prompt men's actions on what they do rather than on what they say.

The goals or interests of individuals are sufficiently familiar so that an elaborate review of them is unnecessary. However, two complications should be mentioned. First, it is essential to recognize that all men do not share the same goals and even those who do, do not always rank them the same. Three men may value wine, women, and song, but while one values wine most, the second prefers women, and the third song. Such differences are of considerable importance since men are constantly faced with the necessity of choosing among desirable ends.

The economists' concept of "marginal utility" points up the other complication. With respect to many goals, the value varies inversely with the quantity already in hand. Most men are prepared to sacrifice more

for their first pair of shoes than for their second, and more for the second than for their tenth. The same is true of most other goods and services: more value is attached to the first units than to later.

These complications make the task of establishing meaningful propositions about the goals toward which men strive difficult, but not impossible. To begin with, it is clear that the great majority of men have always accorded *survival* the highest priority. Though there have been exceptions, such as religious and political martyrs and heroic warriors, most men have not shared their values. The dominant philosophy has been stated in the simple rhyme:

He who fights and runs away
May live to fight another day.

Death ends all hopes, dreams, and ambitions centered in this world. Even those whose goals are centered in the next world usually cling tenaciously to life in this.

The fact that survival is usually given the highest priority has far-reaching implications for the social life of man. First of all, *it causes might or force to be the most effective deterrent and also the supreme sanction in human affairs*. It is no coincidence that violence is the last court of appeal in human conflicts. As will become evident in later chapters, this is a matter of great importance for our theory of distribution.

Because most men value survival so highly, anything which facilitates survival is also valued highly. Practically, this means that food and other goods and services which provide *sustenance* are highly valued, especially since they are normally in short supply.

After survival, it is more difficult to say which is man's most important goal. Probably the two chief contenders are *health* and *status*, or *prestige*. Little needs to be said concerning health since the value men attach to it is evident in every society. Everywhere men are prepared to pay dearly for the sake of health and freely admit it.

Status, or prestige, is a different matter. Men often deny that they are greatly concerned with it. In our own society, for example, few people will admit to others, or even to themselves, that they value status highly. When we examine their actions, however, the concern for status quickly becomes evident. It influences almost every kind of decision from the choice of a car to the choice of a spouse. Fear of the loss of status, or honor, is one of the few motives that can make men lay down their lives on the field of battle. Robert Lowie, a leading anthropologist of the last generation, was not far wide of the mark when he wrote that primitive man is not a miser, sage, or beast of prey, but rather a peacock. The same

might be said of civilized man. The classic documentation of this can be found in Thorstein Veblen's insightful volume, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

Modern social psychology helps us understand the great importance men attach to prestige or status. Self-respect is a necessary element in every healthy, properly functioning personality. Where self-respect is destroyed, motivation is undermined. Beginning with Charles Horton Cooley, social psychologists have shown that self-respect is in large measure a function of the respect accorded by others. In other words, the image we form of ourselves is largely a reflection of the image others form of us. Hence, our psychological health and well-being are greatly dependent on our status in the groups we value.

This does not mean that emotional health depends on election to high office or anything of the sort. For most persons, the respect of family and associates is sufficient. However, the same psychological process which causes men to need this limited degree of respect also creates a demand for more. The desire for status gives rise to an insatiable appetite. Few men receive so much honor and respect that they will not seek more when the opportunity presents itself. Thus it is that so many decisions in daily life, and especially the more important, reflect the element of status striving.

Creature comfort is another basic goal. However, it does not compare with survival, health, and status. Often it is difficult to distinguish between men's concern for status and for comfort, with the result that we overestimate the value attached to the latter. For example, the purchase of a car commonly reflects a concern for both. Despite much talk about the utilitarian features of automobiles, however, manufacturers have not found an extensive market for a strictly utilitarian vehicle. The same is true of countless other products whose demand is shaped by both status and utility. Robert Lowie's comparison of man to the peacock has more truth in it than we normally admit.

Two other widely shared goals are the desire for *salvation* in the next world and *affection* in this. For the most part, these goals do not generate any serious social struggles. Like the air we breathe, salvation is available to all who seek it, in most of the major faiths. Affection is not so readily available but, since it is something produced and distributed by primary groups, the struggles for it do not normally assume significance at the societal level.

Men's concern with salvation, together with their fear and love of God, do influence our analysis in another way though. Where men recognize the existence of a system of supernatural sanctions, their actions may

be deflected from the course they would follow if this element were not in the picture. How great the deflection is depends both on the nature of the religious system and the seriousness with which it is taken by its adherents. Many religions provide strong supernatural sanction for the existing system of power and privilege, and their chief effect is likely to be a reinforcement of the *status quo*. Certain others, however, notably Judaism and Christianity, provide a basis for an ethical criticism of the existing order and hence sometimes encourage attacks on the *status quo*. Religions which contain a strong ethical component may also function to dull somewhat the sharp cutting edge of self-interest. They may make men of power a bit slower to press their advantage to the point where others are seriously harmed or destroyed. This humanizing role of certain religions can easily be exaggerated, but it can also be overlooked; in the social sciences the latter tendency has been the more common.

All of the goals mentioned thus far are valued in their own right. There are other goals, however, which are sought largely or entirely for their *instrumental* value—that is, because they facilitate the attainment of the goals already mentioned. The classic example is *money*. In and of itself money has little power to satisfy normal human desires, but as a medium of exchange, it can be used to attain creature comforts, improved health, status, and even survival itself. For this reason, money is the object of intense competition in every society where it is found. Because it is a medium of exchange, it can serve equally well men with very different goals. It is as useful to the man who puts status ahead of comfort as to the man who reverses the order. Hence the struggle for money (and also other goals of instrumental value) is at least as intense as the struggle for status, survival, comfort, and other basic goals.

Other forms of wealth occupy a more ambiguous position since they may be sought for their own sake or merely for their instrumental value. It is clear, however, that the intensity of the struggle for wealth is greatly increased because of its instrumental value, which usually increases the number of competitors greatly.

Organizational office and other institutionalized roles with established rights and prerogatives are also widely sought because of their instrumental value. Status and income are attributes of most responsible positions, and in the case of major offices in important organizations, great honor and high income are normally assured. In addition, those in positions of responsibility usually have large numbers of persons prepared to do their bidding, at least within the bounds defined by the authority of their office. Hence, offices, like money, are eagerly sought because they facilitate the attainment of so many goals. By winning high office in the

realm of politics, economics, education, or religion, an individual can satisfy many, if not most, of his desires. In the case of women, the role of *wife* is of crucial importance in most societies since it is the basis for many, if not most, of their rights and privileges. Because the magnitude of these rights is so often dependent on the magnitude of the husband's resources, there is usually an active competition for the role of wife of any man of means or promise.

Education, or training, constitutes another goal men usually seek more for its instrumental than for its intrinsic value. While there have always been some who valued knowledge for its own sake, most men have sought it chiefly because they thought it useful. With the increasing bureaucratization of the world of work, it seems likely that formal education will become even more eagerly sought in the future.

To attain these goals, individuals are obliged to utilize, as best they can, the various resources with which they are endowed by nature and society. These include possessions and such personal attributes as energy, intelligence, beauty, and physical coordination. Each individual uses these in an effort to achieve those things he values most. In the process, his initial resources are used to obtain instrumental rewards such as education, money, and position, and these in turn are used as resources to obtain or preserve the ultimate satisfactions such as status, comfort, health, and life itself.

This "exchange" process constitutes one of the most important aspects of every distributive system and should be a matter of major concern to students of the distributive process and of stratification.⁹ However, unlike the classical economists, we cannot limit our concern to those exchanges which are conducted in accord with the established rules of business practice. We must concern ourselves with both the legal and illegal, the ethical and the unethical, the peaceable and the violent. Were we to limit ourselves to those exchanges which are legal, ethical, and peaceable, we should arrive at a quite misleading answer to the question of who gets what and why. Far too many of the most crucial exchanges—those which establish basic patterns for thousands or millions of subsequent exchanges—fall outside the realm of the legal, the ethical, and the peaceable. In fact, as will become evident in later chapters, the most important exchanges (when judged from the standpoint of their effect on subsequent exchanges) are often the most violent, unethical, and illegal. This is why the classical economists have managed to shed so little light on the ques-

⁹ For two recent and noteworthy contributions in this area, see George C. Homans, *Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), and Peter Blau, *Exchange and Power in Society* (New York: Wiley, 1964).

tion of who gets what and why, despite the fact that they have written voluminously on the subject of distribution. Unhappily, the scope of their inquiry has been much too narrow.

Societal Interests: Their Nature

Societal interests are much more difficult to define than individual interests. This is because human societies are such imperfect systems. Their members frequently work at cross-purposes with one another, and the actions of the whole are often harmful to the parts.

A similar situation exists in the case of individuals, but it is less serious since organisms are more perfect systems. Drug addicts, for example, seek drugs even though rationally they want to stop and even though the continued use of the drug is harmful to their nervous system and other parts of the body. Yet in such instances, we do not hesitate to list drugs as one of the primary goals of the individual.

If the same principle is applied to human societies, we are obliged to define as the goals of a given society *those ends toward which the more or less coordinated efforts of the whole are directed—without regard to the harm they may do to many individual members, even the majority.* This means, in effect, that in those societies controlled by a dominant class which has the power to determine the direction of the coordinated efforts of the society, *the goals of the society are the goals of this class.*

Though this conclusion may be disturbing to those with democratic convictions, it seems the only defensible one. Furthermore, it has the virtue of clarifying certain otherwise perplexing problems. For example, it explains why members of politically dominant classes have always found it so much easier than other members of society to "recognize" the "convergence of the interests of the individual and the interests of society."¹⁰ This approach also helps clarify the relation between societal and individual interests. It makes clear that the interests of the individual and his society are not necessarily the same. Whether they are depends largely on the nature of the society and the individual's position in it.

At the risk of oversimplification, one may say that the coordinated actions of societies are directed largely toward one or the other of two basic goals. First and foremost, they are directed toward *the maintenance of the political status quo within the group.* Since perfect stability or equi-

¹⁰ For example, a recent president of General Motors and Secretary of Defense asserted that "what is good for General Motors is good for the country, and vice versa." Similarly, the United States Chamber of Commerce has long argued that what is good for business is good for the country.

librium is impossible, this goal might better be described as *the minimization of the rate of internal political change*. This manifests itself in various ways, but particularly in the development of the machinery of state and other agencies and instruments of social control, in the great concern for law and order which every society's leaders express, and in the cultivation of political ideologies which justify the *status quo*. It is also seen in the universal concern of societies and their leaders with defense against foreign aggression.

The second basic goal of societies is *the maximization of production and the resources on which production depends*. Sometimes this has been sought by efforts to promote technological advance; more often it has been through war and conquest.

Neither of these two basic goals receives priority in every society. In some, efforts to minimize political change seem to take preference over efforts to maximize production, while in others the reverse is true. In general it appears that *the goal of maximizing production has priority in relatively unstratified societies and that the goal of minimizing political change has priority in societies in which power and privilege are monopolized by a few*. In societies in which neither of these conditions exists, the two goals seem to be given roughly equal priority.

Other goals might be named, but they are little more than variants or extensions of these two. This suggests one final conclusion about societies: *societies, like individuals, are basically self-seeking units*.¹¹ In fact, the history of intersocietal relations suggests that the self-seeking element in societies is, if anything, more pronounced than in individuals.

¹¹ Seen in a broadly comparative perspective, this is an attribute which they share with all forms of life. Much might be gained if more attention than is currently fashionable were paid to the biological bases of human life, and if man and society were viewed as parts, admittedly distinctive, of the world of nature.