I

Everyone knows what is meant when the word "society" is used, or at least, everyone thinks he knows. One person passes the word on to another like a coin whose value is known and whose content no longer needs to be tested. If one person says "society" and another hears it, they understand each other without difficulty. But do we really understand each other?

Society, as we know, is all of us; it is a lot of people together. But a lot of people together in India and China form a different kind of society than in America or Britain; the society formed by many individual people in Europe in the twelfth century was different from that in the sixteenth or the twentieth century. And although all these societies certainly consisted and consist of nothing other than many individuals, the change from one form of living together to another was clearly unplanned by any of these individuals. At least, it cannot be discovered that any person in the twelfth or even the sixteenth century consciously planned the development of the industrial society of our day. What kind of a formation is it, this "society" that we form together, which has not been intended or planned by any of us, or even all of us together? It only exists because a large number of people exist, it only continues to function because many individual people want and do certain things, yet its structure, its great historical transformations, clearly do not depend on the intentions of particular people.

In considering the answers given to these and suchlike questions today, one finds oneself confronted, in broad terms, by two

large opposed camps. One section of people approaches socio-historical formations as if they had been designed, planned and created, as they now stand before the retrospective observer, by a number of individuals or bodies. Individuals within this general camp may at some level be aware that their kind of answer is not quite adequate. For no matter how they twist their ideas to fit the facts, the conceptual model to which they are tied remains that of the rational and deliberate creation of a work – such as a building or a machine – by individual people. When they have particular social institutions before them, parliaments, police, banks, taxes or whatever they may be, to explain them they look for the people who first created such institutions. If they are dealing with a literary genre, they look for the writer who gave the others a model. When they encounter formations where this kind of explanation is difficult – language or the state, for example – they at least proceed *as if* these social formations could be explained in the same way as the others, the ones deliberately produced by individual people for a specific purpose. They may argue, for example, that the purpose of language is communication between people, or that the purpose of a state is the upholding of order, as if in the course of mankind's history language or the organization of particular associations of people in the form of states had been deliberately created for this specific purpose by individual people as a result of rational thought. And often enough, when confronted by social phenomena that clearly cannot be explained according to this model, for example, the evolution of artistic styles or the civilizing process, their thinking comes to a halt. They stop asking questions.

The opposing camp despises this way of approaching historical and social formations. For them the individual plays no part at all. Their conceptual models are taken primarily from the natural sciences, particularly biology. But here, as so often, the scientific modes of thought easily and imperceptibly merge with religious and metaphysical ones to form a perfect unity. A society is conceived, for example, as a supra-individual organic entity which advances ineluctably towards death through stages of

youth, maturity and age. Spengler's ideas are an example, but related notions are to be found today, independently of Spengler, in the most diverse colours and shades. And even if one is not misled by the experiences of our time into forming a general theory of the necessary rise and decline of societies, if one even anticipates a better future for our society, even opponents within the same camp share an approach which tries to explain socio-historical formations and processes by the influence of anonymous, supra-individual forces. Sometimes, most notably in Hegel, this gives rise to a kind of historical pantheism: a World Spirit or even God Himself, so it seems, becomes embodied in a moving historical world, unlike the static one of Spinoza, and serves as an explanation for its order, its periodicity and its purposefulness. Or this kind of thinker at least imagines particular social formations to be inhabited by a common supra-individual spirit, such as the "spirit" of ancient Greece or of France. Whereas for the people of the opposite persuasion individual actions are at the centre of interest and any phenomena that cannot be explained in the manner of something planned and created by individuals are more or less lost to view, here, in the second camp, it is the very aspects which the other camp finds unmanageable – styles and cultural forms or economic forms and institutions – which are given most attention. And whereas in the former camp it remains obscure how a bridge is to be thrown between individual actions and purposes and such social formations, it is no clearer, in the latter camp, how the forces producing the formations are to be linked to the goals and actions of individual people, whether these forces are seen as anonymously mechanical or as supra-individual forces based on pantheistic models.

But difficulties of this kind are not only encountered in studying historical and social facts in the narrower sense. They are no less intrusive when one is trying to understand human beings and society in terms of psychological functions. In the science which deals with facts of this kind one finds on one hand branches of research which treat the single individual as something that can

be completely isolated, and seeks to elucidate the structure of its psychological functions independently of its relations to all other people. On the other hand one finds trends in social or mass psychology which give no proper place to the psychological functions of the single individual. Sometimes the members of this latter camp, much like their counterparts in the social and historical sciences, ascribe to whole social formations or to a mass of people a soul of their own beyond the individual souls, an *anima collectiva* or a "group mind". And if they do not go so far, they are usually content to treat socio-psychological phenomena as the sum or, what comes to the same thing, the average of the psychological manifestations of many individuals. Society then appears simply as an additive accumulation of many individuals, and the statistical processing of psychological data not just as an essential aid but as the goal of and the strongest evidence in psychological research. And however the various branches of individual and social psychology may proceed in detail, from this general standpoint the relation between the objects of their study remains more or less mysterious. Often enough it appears as if the psychologies of the individual and of society were two completely separable disciplines. And the questions posed by each are usually framed in such a way as to imply from the outset that an unbridgeable gap exists between the individual and society.

Wherever we look we meet the same antinomies. We have a certain traditional idea of what we ourselves are as individuals. And we have a certain notion of what we mean when we say "society". But these two ideas, the consciousness we have of ourselves as society on one hand and as individuals on the other, never really coalesce. No doubt we realize at the same time that in reality such a gulf between individual and society does not exist. No one can be in doubt that individuals form a society or that each society is a society of individuals. But when we try to reconstruct in thought what we experience each day in reality we find, as with a jigsaw puzzle the pieces of which will not form a whole picture, that gaps and fissures are constantly forming in our train of thought.

What we lack – let us freely admit it – are conceptual models and an overall vision by which we can make comprehensible in thought what we experience daily in reality, by which we could understand how a large number of individuals form with each other something that is more and other than a collection of separate individuals – how they form a "society", and how it comes about that this society can change in specific ways, that it has a history which takes a course which has not been intended or planned by any of the individuals making it up.

Aristotle, in trying to master a similar difficulty, once pointed to a simple example, the relation of stones to a house. This does indeed provide us with a simple model which shows how many individual elements together form a unity the structure of which cannot be inferred from its separate elements. For one certainly cannot understand the structure of the whole house by contemplating in isolation each of the stones which form it. Nor can one understand it by thinking of the house as an additive unity, an accumulation of stones; this may not be quite useless to an understanding of the whole house, but it certainly does not take us very far to make a statistical analysis of the characteristics of the individual stones and then work out the average.

The *Gestalt* theory of our day has probed more deeply into such phenomena. It has first taught us that a whole is different to the sum of its parts, that it embodies laws of a special kind which cannot be elucidated by examining its individual elements. The theory has provided the general consciousness of our time with a number of simple models which can help us to think further in this direction, such as the example of the melody, which also consists of nothing other than individual notes yet is other than their sum, or that of the relation of word to sounds, sentence to words, book to sentences. All these examples show the same thing: the combination, the relationships of units of lesser magnitude or, to use a more precise term from set theory, units of a lower power, give rise to a unit of higher power that cannot be understood if its parts are considered in isolation, independently of their relationships.

But if these are the models which are to facilitate our thinking on the relation of individual and society, no wonder our self-image resists them. The stones that are cut and fitted together to form a house are no more than a means; the house is the end. Are we too, as individual human beings, no more than means which live and love, struggle and die, for the sake of the social whole?

This question leads on to a debate the twists and turns of which are all too familiar to us. One of the great controversies of our time is carried on between those who maintain that society in its different manifestations – the division of labour, state organization or whatever it may be – is only a "means", the "end" being the well-being of individual people, and those who assert that the well-being of individuals is less "important", the more important thing, the "end" of individual life, being the maintenance of the social unit of which the individual is a part. Would it not already be to take sides in this debate if one were to start looking for models for understanding the relation of individual and society in the relationships between bricks and house, notes and melody, part and whole?

In social life today we are incessantly confronted by the question how and whether it is possible to create a social order which would allow a better harmonization of the personal needs and inclinations of individuals on one hand and the demands made on each individual by the collaborative work of many, the maintenance and efficiency of the social whole on the other. There is no doubt that this, the development of society in such a way that not merely a few but all of its members have a chance to attain such harmony, is what we would call into being if our wishes had enough power over reality. But if one thinks calmly on the matter it soon emerges that the two things are only possible together: there can only be a communal life freer of disturbance and tension if all the individuals within it enjoy sufficient satisfaction; and there can only be a more satisfied individual existence if the relevant social structure is freer of tension, disturbance and conflict. The difficulty seems to be that in the social orders which present themselves to us, one or the other always has the worst of

it. Between personal needs and inclinations and the demands of social life, in the societies familiar to us, there seems to be always a considerable conflict, an almost unbridgeable gap, for the majority of people involved. And it seems reasonable to suppose that it is here, in these discrepancies in our lives, that the reasons for the corresponding discrepancies in our thought are to be sought. There is clearly a connection between the gaps which open between individual and society, now here, now there, in our thought structures, and the contradictions between social demands and individual needs which are a permanent feature of our lives. The programmes offered to us today for putting an end to these difficulties seem, on close inspection, merely to want to buy one thing at the expense of the other.

The severity of the conflicts which are constantly calling the relation of individual and society into question today confines our thought within certain limits. The agitation and fear which these conflicts stir up in all concerned are seen in the affective charges carried by all words directly or indirectly related to them; they coalesce around such words to form an aura of valuations which obscures rather than illuminates what they are meant to express. Any idea which alludes no matter how remotely to this dispute is unerringly interpreted as taking a position on one side or the other, as either presenting the individual as the "end" and society as the "means", or seeing society as the more "essential", the "highest purpose", and the individual as "less important", a "means". To try to go behind this antithesis or – if only in thought – to break through it, seems meaningless to the participants in the dispute. Here, too, the questions come to a halt at a very specific point: anything which does not serve to justify either society or the individual as the "more important", the "highest purpose", seems irrelevant, not worth the trouble of thinking about. But what if a better understanding of the relation of individual and society could only be attained by breaking through the either/or, melting the frozen antithesis?

By peeling away the layers of disguise concealing the core of the antithesis, we can begin to resolve it. Those who stand

opposed to each other here as enemies both speak as if they had received their knowledge from heaven or from a sphere of reason immune to experience. Whether they say society or the individual is the highest purpose, both parties proceed in thought as if a being outside humanity, or its representative within our thought, "nature" and a God-like "reason" which operates before all experience, had set up this final purpose and this scale of values in this form for all time. If we penetrate the veil of valuations and affects with which the tensions of our time imbue everything connected with the relation of individual to society, a different picture emerges. Considered at a deeper level, both individuals and the society they form together are equally without purpose. Neither exists without the other. First of all, they are simply there, the individual in the society of others, society a society of individuals – as purposeless really as the stars which together form a solar system, or solar systems which form a Milky Way. And this purposeless existence of individuals in society with each other is the material, the basic fabric into which people weave the varying figures of their purposes.

For people set themselves different purposes from one case to another, and there are no other purposes than the ones they set themselves. "Society is the final purpose and the individual only a means", "the individual is the final purpose and the union of individuals into a society only a means to his/her well-being" – both are war-cries which hostile groups shout at each other in the context of their present situation with its transient pressures and interests. Both slogans express something which the two groups believe *ought* to be the case. Only if one goes behind the slogans and overcomes the need to proclaim before everyone what the relation between individual and society ought to be if one were to have one's way, only then does one begin to become aware of the more fundamental question as to what in all the world the relation between individual and society actually *is*. How is it possible – this is now the question – that the simultaneous existence of many people, their living together, their reciprocal actions, the totality of their relations to each other, gives rise to

something that none of the individuals, considered in isolation, has intended or brought about, something of which he is a part, whether he wishes or not, a structure of interdependent individuals, a society? It might be a good thing that here, as in the case of nature, we can only clarify our actions, our goals and ideas of what ought to be, if we better understand what is, the basic laws of this substratum of our purposes, the structure of the larger units we form together. Only then would we be in a position to base the therapy for the ills of our communal life on a secure diagnosis. Until that is the case we behave in all our deliberations on society and its ills much like quacks in the treatment of illnesses: we prescribe a therapy without having being able first to establish a clear diagnosis independent of our own wishes and interests.

There is no doubt that the individual human being is brought up by others who were there before him; no doubt that he grows up and lives as part of an association of people, a social whole – whatever that may be. But that means neither that the individual is less important than society, nor that he is a "means" and society the "end". The relation of part to whole is a certain form of relationship, nothing more, and as such is undoubtedly problematic enough. It can under certain circumstances be linked to the relation of means to end, but is not identical to it; very often one form of relation has not the slightest connection to the other.

But if one starts in this way to penetrate the fog of extraneous valuations surrounding the relation of individual and society, another problem immediately emerges beyond it. The statement "The individual is part of a larger whole that he forms together with others" does not say much; it is really no more than a very banal and self-evident observation. Or, to be more exact, it *would be* a banal observation if so many people did not constantly fail to register this simple state of affairs. A great many of the statements on the relation of individual and society that we come across today boil down to the opposite idea. "In reality", the exponents of this standpoint think and feel, "there is no such thing as a society; in reality there are only individuals." And

those who, in an exact sense of the phrase, fail to see the wood for the trees, might find their thinking somewhat assisted by the allusion to the relation of stones and house, part and whole. The assertion that individuals are more "real" than society is nothing other than an expression of the fact that the people who hold this view believe individuals to be more *important*, and the association they form, the society, less important. The idea that in "reality" there is no such thing as a society, only a lot of individuals, says about as much as the statement that there is in "reality" no such thing as a house, only a lot of individual bricks, a heap of stones.

But in fact allusions to other wholes, to sounds and words, stones and house, are no more than a very rough guide. Strictly speaking, they only show where the problem lies. They provide a starting point from which one can slowly pursue one's ideas, in constant touch with experience. For even if examples like the house may give some help with the first step when thinking about what a "society" is, at the next step the differences only emerge all the more clearly. By a "whole" we generally mean something more or less harmonious. But the social life of human beings is full of contradictions, tensions and explosions. Decline alternates with rise, war with peace, crises with booms. The communal life of human beings certainly is not harmonious. But if not harmonious, at least the word "whole" evokes in us the idea of something complete in itself, a formation with clear contours, a perceptible form and a discernible, more or less visible structure. But societies have no such perceptible form. They do not possess structures that can be seen, heard or touched directly in space. Considered as wholes, they are always more or less incomplete: from wherever they are viewed they remain open in the sphere of time, towards the past and the future. Fathers, the sons of fathers, are followed by sons, mothers by daughters. It is in reality a continuous flow, a faster or slower change of living forms; in it the eye can find a fixed point only with great difficulty.

And even in each present moment, people are in more or less

perceptible motion. What binds the individuals together is not cement. Think only of the bustle in the streets of a large city: most of the people do not know each other. They have hardly anything to do with each other. They push past each other, each pursuing his or her own goals and plans. They come and go as it suits them. Parts of a whole? The word "whole" is certainly out of place, at least if its meaning is determined solely by a vision of static or spatially closed structures, by experiences like those offered by houses, works of art or organisms.

But there is undoubtedly a different side to the picture: at work in this tumult of scurrying people, for all their individual freedom of movement, there is clearly also a hidden order, not directly perceptible to the senses. Each individual person in this turmoil belongs in a particular place. He has a table at which he eats, a bed in which he sleeps; even the hungry and homeless are both products and parts of the hidden order underlying the mêlée. Each of the people who pass has somewhere, at some time, a specific function, property or work, a task of some kind for others, or a lost function, lost possessions and lost work. There are shop assistants and bank clerks, cleaners and society ladies without a profession of their own; there are men who live on interest, policemen, road-sweepers, ruined property speculators, pickpockets and girls with no other function than the pleasure of men; there are paper wholesalers and fitters, directors of a large chemicals concern and the unemployed. As a result of his function each of these people has or had an income, high or low, from which he lives or lived; and as he passes along the street, this function and this income, more openly or more hidden, goes with him. He cannot jump out of it as the humour takes him. He cannot simply switch to another function, even if he wishes to. The paper wholesaler cannot suddenly become a fitter, the unemployed person a factory director. Still less can any of them, even if he wanted to, become a courtier or a knight or a brahmin, except in the wish-fulfilment of a fancy-dress ball. He is obliged to wear a certain form of dress; he is tied to a certain ritual in dealing with others and specific forms of behaviour very different from those

of people in a Chinese village or an urban artisans' community in the early Middle Ages. The invisible order of this form of living together, that cannot be directly perceived, offers the individual a more or less restricted range of possible functions and modes of behaviour. By his birth he is inserted into a functional complex with a quite definite structure; he must conform to it, shape himself in accordance with it and perhaps develop further on its basis. Even his freedom to choose among the pre-existing functions is fairly limited. It depends largely on the point at which he is born and grows up within this human web, the functions and situation of his parents and the schooling he receives accordingly. This too, this past, is also directly present in each of the people scurrying about in the city bustle. It may be that the individual does not know anyone in this bustle; somewhere he has people he knows, trusted friends and enemies, a family, a circle of acquaintances to which he belongs or, should he be now alone, lost or dead acquaintances who live only in his memory.

In a word, each of the people who pass each other as apparently unconnected strangers in the street is tied by invisible chains to other people, whether they are chains of work and property or of instincts and affects. Functions of the most disparate kinds have made him dependent on others and others on him. He lives, and has lived since a child, in a network of dependences, that he cannot change or break simply by turning a magic ring, but only as far as their structure itself allows; he lives in a tissue of mobile relationships, which have by now been precipitated in him as his personal character. And this is where the real problem lies: in each association of human beings this functional context has a very specific structure. It is different in a tribe of cattle-rearing nomads than in a tribe of farmers; it is different in a feudal warrior society than in the industrial society of our day, and over and above this it is different in the different national communities of industrial society itself. However, this basic framework of interdependent functions, the structure and pattern of which gives a society its specific character, is not a creation of particular individuals; for each individual, even the

most powerful, even a tribal chief, an absolutist monarch or a dictator, is a part of it, the representative of a function which is formed and maintained only in relation to other functions, which can only be understood in terms of the specific structure and the specific tensions of this total context.

This network of functions within a human association, this invisible order into which individual purposes are constantly being introduced, does not owe its origin simply to a summation of wills, a common decision by *many* individual people. It was not on the basis of a free decision by many, a *contrat social*, and still less on the basis of referenda or elections, that the complex and highly differentiated functional web of the present has emerged very gradually from the relatively simple early-medieval chains of functions that linked people together as priests, knights and bondsmen, for example, in the West. The people of the West did not come together at some time, as if from a state devoid of relationships, and, by a vote and the will of the majority, decide to distribute functions in accordance with the current scheme, as tradesmen, factory directors, policemen and workers. On the contrary, votes and elections, bloodless trials of strength between different functional groups, have become possible as permanent institutions of social control only in connection with a very specific structure of social functions. Underlying each such additive agreement is a pre-existing *functional* connection between these people which is not only summational. Its structure and tensions are directly or indirectly expressed in the result of the vote. And this functional structure can only be changed or developed within fairly narrow limits by majority decisions, votes and elections. The web of interdependent functions by which people are tied to each other has a weight and laws of its own which leave only a precisely circumscribed scope for bloodless compromises – and every majority decision is in the last analysis such a compromise.

But although this functional context has its own laws on which all the goals of individuals and all decisions counted in voting slips ultimately depend, although its structure is not the creation of

particular individuals or even many individuals, no more is it something existing outside individuals. All these interdependent functions, those of the factory director or the fitter, of a married woman without a profession or of a friend or a father, are all functions which a person has for other people, an individual for other individuals. But each of these functions relates to others; it is dependent on their functions as they are on it. By virtue of this ineradicable interdependence of individual functions the actions of many separate individuals, particularly in a society as complex as our own, must incessantly link together to form long chains of actions if the actions of each individual are to fulfil their purposes. And in this way each individual person is really tied; he is tied by living in permanent functional dependence on other people; he is a link in the chains binding other people, just as all others, directly or indirectly, are links in the chains which bind him. These chains are not visible and tangible in the same way as iron chains. They are more elastic, more variable, more changeable; but they are no less real, and certainly no less strong. And it is this network of the functions which people have for each other, it and nothing else, that we call "society". It represents a special kind of sphere. Its structures are what we call "social structures". And if we talk of "social laws" or "social regularities", we are referring to nothing other than this: the autonomous laws of the relations between individual people.

To close the gulf that seems so often to open in thought between the individual and society is no simple task. It demands a peculiar effort of thought; for the difficulties we have to contend with in all reflections on the relation of individual to society stem – as far as they originate in *ratio* – from specific mental habits which at present are all too firmly rooted in the consciousness of each of us. Generally speaking, it seems at the present stage of thinking to be extraordinarily difficult for the majority of people to conceive that relationships can have a structure and a regularity of their own. Regularity, we are accustomed to think, is something proper to substances, objects or bodies that can be directly

perceived by the senses. The pattern of a relationship, an inner voice tells us, must be explained by the structure and laws of the perceptible objects which are related together in it. It seems self-evident to us that the only fruitful way of understanding composite units is to dissect them. Our thinking should start, so it seems to us, from the smaller units which make up the bigger ones through their relationships to each other. To investigate these as they are "in themselves", independently of all their relations to each other, seems the indispensable first step. The relations between them, and thus the large unit they form together, we involuntarily think of as something added later, a kind of afterthought.

But these mental habits, fruitful as they may be up to a point in dealing with experiences of inanimate substances, constantly give rise to specific anomalies when dealing in thought with the different kind of experiences we have of ourselves, of people and of society. These mental habits constantly force particular groups of people, whose ideas, in conjunction with their specific social experiences, focus above all on the *autonomy* of laws of human relationships, to conceal from themselves the fact that these are, all the same, laws of human *relationships*. Since they can only conceive regularities as the regularities of substances or of substantial forces, they unconsciously attribute to the regularities of human relationships which they observe a substance of their own beyond the individuals. On the basis of these specific social regularities, they can conceive of society only as something supra-individual. They invent as the medium supporting these regularities either a "collective mind" or a "collective organism" or, as the case may be, supra-individual mental and material "forces" by analogy with natural forces and substances. Opposed to them on the other side are groups whose ideas focus above all on the human individuals. They see quite clearly what is concealed to the others: that all that which we call "social structures and laws" is nothing other than the structures and laws of the relations between individual people. But like the first group they are incapable of imagining that relationships can themselves have

structures and regularities of their own; like them they involuntarily think of these structures and regularities not as a peculiarity of relations *between* tangible units but as a peculiarity of such bodily units. But they, in keeping with their different social experiences and interests, believe the tangible substance of social structures and regularities to be located within the individual seen in isolation. If the former group, by virtue of their insight into the autonomous laws of human relations, unconsciously attribute a substance of its own to this regularity, the latter find it inconceivable that relations *between* individuals should have a structure and laws of their own; they involuntarily imagine that the explanation of the structures and laws of the relations between individuals is to be sought in the "nature" or "consciousness" of the individuals, as they are "in themselves" prior to all relationships, and in their own structure and regularities. It is from individuals, as the "atoms" and "smallest particles" of society, so it seems to them, that one's thinking should start, building up a concept of their relations to each other, of society, as something coming later. In a word, they conceive individuals as firm posts between which the line of relationships is strung afterwards. The others, with their eye fixed on the autonomy of human relationships, think of society as something existing before and independently of individuals; the latter group, with their different interests, think of individuals as something existing prior to and independently of society. And for one group as for the other certain areas of facts cannot be dealt with by thought. For one as for the other an unbridgeable mental gulf opens between social and individual phenomena.

The relationship between individuals and society is something unique. It has no analogue in any other sphere of existence. All the same, experience gained in observing the relation of part to whole in other spheres can to a certain extent help us here. It can help to loosen and extend the mental habits that have been referred to. One does not understand a melody by considering each of its notes in isolation, unrelated to the other notes. Its

structure too is nothing other than the structure of the relations *between* different notes. It is similar with a house. What we call its structure is not the structure of the individual stones but of the relations *between* the individual stones of which it is built; it is the complex of functions the stones have in relation to each other within the unity of the house. These functions, and the structure of the house, cannot be explained by thinking about the shape of the individual stones independently of their relations to each other; on the contrary, the shape of the stones can only be explained in terms of their function within the whole functional complex, the structure of the house. One must start by thinking about the structure of the whole in order to understand the form of the individual parts. These and many other phenomena have one thing in common, different as they may be in all other respects: *to understand them it is necessary to give up thinking in terms of single, isolated substances and to start thinking in terms of relationships and functions*. And our thinking is only fully equipped to understand our social experience once we have made this switch.

Let us imagine as a symbol of society a group of dancers performing court dances, such as the *française* or *quadrille*, or a country round dance. The steps and bows, gestures and movements made by the individual dancer are all entirely meshed and synchronized with those of other dancers. If any of the dancing individuals were contemplated in isolation, the functions of his or her movements could not be understood. The way the individual behaves in this situation is determined by the relations of the dancers to each other. It is similar with the behaviour of individuals in general. Whether they meet as friends or enemies, parents or children, man and wife or knight and bondsman, king and subjects, manager and employees, however individuals behave is determined by past or present relations to other people. Even if they withdraw from all other people as hermits, gestures away from others no less than gestures towards them are gestures in relation to others. Of course, an individual can easily leave a

dance if he wishes to, but people do not join up to form a society solely out of a desire for dance and play. What binds them to society is the fundamental disposition of their nature.

Indeed, no other image gives us an adequate impression of the importance which the relations between people have for the make-up of the individual. Nothing except an exploration of the nature and structure of these relations themselves can give an idea of how tightly and to what depth the interdependence of human functions binds the individual. Nothing else, in a word, gives a clearer image of the integration of individuals to form a society. But to gain greater clarity in this direction more than a mere revision of mental habits is needed. What is needed is a fundamental revision of the whole traditional make-up of self-consciousness.[1]

II

Half consciously, half unconsciously, most people carry about with them even today a peculiar myth of creation. They imagine that in the "beginning" a single person first appeared on earth and was then joined afterwards by other people. That is how the Bible describes it. But echoes of this form of consciousness show themselves in various other versions today. The old Adam makes a secularized reappearance in talk about the "primal man" or the "original father". It seems as if grown-up people, in thinking about their origins, involuntarily lose sight of the fact that they themselves and all adults came into the world as little children. Over and over again, in the scientific myths of origin no less than in the religious ones, they feel impelled to imagine: In the beginning was a single human being, who was an adult.

As long as we remain within the realm of experience, however, we are obliged to register that the single human being is engendered by and born of other human beings. Whatever the ances-

tors of humanity may have been, as far as we can see back into the past we see an unbroken chain of parents and children, who in turn become parents. And one cannot understand how and why individual people are bound together in a larger unity by and with each other if one conceals this perception from oneself. Each individual is born into a group of people who were there before him. Not only that: each individual is by nature so constituted that he needs other people who were there before him in order to be able to grow up. One of the basic conditions of human existence is the simultaneous presence of a number of interrelated people. And if, to symbolize one's own self-image, one needs a myth of origin, it seems time to revise the traditional myth: In the beginning, one might say, was not a single person, but several people who lived with each other, who caused each other joy and pain as we do, who came into being through each other and passed away into each other, as we do, a social unit large or small.

But there is no such leap out of nothingness, and no myth of origin is needed to make comprehensible the primal social relatedness of the individual, his natural dependence on a life with other people. The facts directly before us are enough.

At birth individual people may be very different through their natural constitutions. But it is only in society that the small child with its malleable and relatively undifferentiated mental functions is turned into a more complex being. Only in relation to other human beings does the wild, helpless creature which comes into the world become the psychologically developed person with the character of an individual and deserving the name of an adult human being. Cut off from such relations he grows at best into a semi-wild human animal. He may grow up bodily; in his psychological make-up he remains like a small child. Only if he grows up in a group does the small human being learn connected speech. Only in the society of other, older people does he gradually develop a specific kind of far-sightedness and instinct control. And which language he learns, which pattern of instinct control and adult make-up develops in him, depends on the structure of

the group in which he grows up, and finally on his position in this group and the formative process it entails.

Even within the same group the relationships allotted to two people, their individual histories, are never quite the same. Each person advances from a unique position within his network of relationships through a unique history to his death. But the differences between the paths followed by different individuals, between the positions and functions through which they pass in the course of their lives, are fewer in simpler societies than in complex ones. And the degree of individualization of adults in the latter societies is accordingly greater. Paradoxical as it may seem at the present stage in the development of mental habits, the individuality and the social relatedness of a person are not only not antithetical to each other, but the special shaping and differentiation of mental functions that we refer to as "individuality" is only possible for a person who grows up in a group, a society.

Undoubtedly, people also differ in their natural constitutions. But the constitution a person brings with him into the world, and particularly the constitution of his or her psychical functions, is malleable. The new-born child is no more than a preliminary sketch of a person. His adult individuality does not grow necessarily and along a single path from what we perceive as his distinguishing features, his special constitution, as a plant of a particular species grows from its seed: the distinctive constitution of a new-born child allows scope for a great wealth of possible individualities. It shows no more than the limits and the position of the dispersion curve on which the individual form of the adult can lie. How this form actually develops, how the malleable features of the new-born child gradually harden into the adult's sharper contours, never depends solely on his constitution and always on the nature of the relations between him and other people.

These relationships, for example, between father, mother, child and siblings within a family, variable as they may be in

details, are determined in their basic structure by the structure of the society into which the child is born and which existed *before* him. They are different in societies with different structures. For this reason the constitutional peculiarities with which a human being comes into the world have a very different significance for the relationships of the individual in different societies, and in different historical epochs of the same society. Similar natural constitutions in new-born babies lead to a very different development of consciousness and instincts, depending on the pre-existing structure of relationships in which they grow up. Which individuality a human being finally evolves depends not only on his or her natural constitution but on the whole process of individualization. Undoubtedly, the person's distinctive constitution has an ineradicable influence on his or her entire fate. A sensitive child can expect a different fate to a less sensitive one in the same family or society. But this fate, and thus the individual shape which an individual slowly takes on in growing up, is not laid down from the first in the inborn nature of the baby. What comes of its distinctive constitution depends on the structure of the society in which it grows up. Its fate, however it may turn out in detail, is as a whole society-specific. Accordingly, the more sharply delineated figure of the grown-up, the individuality that gradually emerges from the less differentiated form of the small child as it interacts with its fate, is also society-specific. In keeping with the changing structure of western society, a child of the twelfth century develops a different structure of instincts and consciousness from that of a twentieth-century child. It has emerged clearly enough from the study of the civilizing process to what extent the general modelling and thus the individual shaping of an individual person depends on the historical evolution of the social standard, on the structure of human relationships. Advances of individualization, as in the Renaissance, for example, are not the consequence of a sudden mutation within individual people or of the chance conception of a specially high number of gifted people; they are social events, consequences of a breaking

up of old groupings or a change in the social position of the artist-craftsman, for example. In short, the consequences of a specific restructuring of human relationships.

From this side, too, it is easy to lose sight of the fundamental importance of the relations between people for the individual in their midst. And these difficulties too result, at least in part, from the type of thought-models that are used in thinking about these relationships. As so often, these models are derived from the simplest relationships between three-dimensional bodies. The effort of re-orientation needed to break free of these models is certainly no less than that which was necessary when physicists began thinking in terms of the relationships between bodies, rather than starting from individual bodies such as the sun or the moon. The relation between people is often imagined like that between billiards balls: they collide and roll apart. But the interaction between people, the "network phenomena" they produce are essentially different from the purely additive interactions of physical substances.

Think, for example, of a relatively simple form of human relationship, a conversation. One partner speaks, the other replies. The first responds and the second again replies. If one considers not only the individual remark and counter-remark but the course taken by the conversation as a whole, the sequence of interwoven ideas pushing each other along in continuous interdependence, one is dealing with a phenomenon that cannot be adequately represented either by the physical model of the action and reaction of balls, or by the physiological model of the relationship between stimulus and reaction. The ideas of either party may change in the course of the conversation. It may be, for example, that a certain agreement is arrived at by the partners in the course of the conversation. One might convince the other. Then something from one passes into the other. It is assimilated into his or her individual structure of ideas. It changes this structure, and is in its turn modified by being incorporated into a different system. The same applies if opposition arises in the conversation. Then the ideas of one party enter into the inner

dialogue of the other as an adversary, and so drive on his thoughts. The special feature of this kind of process, that we might call a network-figure, is that in its course each of the partners forms ideas that were not there before, or pursues further ideas already present. But the direction and the order followed by this formation and transformation of ideas are not explained solely by the structure of one partner or the other but by the relation between the two. And precisely this fact that people change in relation to each other and through the relationship to each other, that they are continuously shaping and reshaping themselves in relation to each other, is characteristic of the phenomenon of the network in general.

Suppose someone tried to view the sequence of answers given by one of the partners in such a conversation as a separate unity existing with its own order independently of the network-figure of the conversation: that would be much as if one were to consider a person's individuality as something independent of the relations in which he finds himself, the constant weaving of threads through which he has become what he is. That people – unlike billiard balls – evolve and change in and through their relationships to each other may not be quite clear as long as one thinks exclusively of adults, whose characters, whose structures of consciousness and instinct have become more or less fixed. They too are certainly never quite complete and finished. They too can change within their context of relationships, if with some difficulty and usually only in their more conscious self-control. But what we have called a "network" here to denote the whole relationship of individual and society, can never be understood as long as "society" is imagined, as is so often the case, essentially as a society of individuals who were never children and who never die. One can only gain a clear understanding of the relation of individual and society if one includes in it the perpetual growing up of individuals within a society, if one includes the process of individualization in the theory of society. The historicity of each individual, the phenomenon of growing up to adulthood, is the key to an understanding of what "society" is. The sociality

integral to a human being only becomes apparent if one is aware what relations to other people mean for a small child.

The child is not only malleable or adaptable to a far greater degree than adults. It *needs* to be adapted by others, it *needs* society in order to become physically adult. In the child it is not only ideas, not only conscious behaviour that is constantly formed and transformed in and through its relations to others, but its instinctual tendencies, its instinct-controlled behaviour. Of course, the instinct-figures which slowly evolve in the new-born child are never simply a copy of what is done to him by others. They are entirely his. They are *his* response to the way in which his instincts and emotions, which are by nature orientated towards other people, are responded to and satisfied by these others. Only on the basis of this continuous instinctual dialogue with other people do the elementary, unformed impulses of the small child take on a more definite direction, a clearer structure. Only on the basis of such an instinctual dialogue does there develop in the child the complex psychical self-control by which human beings differ from all other creatures: a more or less individual character. In order to become psychically adult, a human individual, the child cannot do without the relation to older and more powerful beings. Without the assimilation of preformed social models, of parts and products of these more powerful beings, without the shaping of his psychical functions which they bring about, the child remains, to repeat the point, little more than an animal. And just because the helpless child needs social modelling in order to become a more individualized and complex being, the individuality of the adult can only be understood in terms of the relationships allotted to him or her by fate, only in connection with the structure of the society in which he or she has grown up. However certain it may be that each person is a complete entity in himself, an individual who controls himself and can be controlled or regulated by no one else if he does not do so himself, it is no less certain that the whole structure of his self-control, both conscious and unconscious, is a network product formed in a continuous interplay of relationships to other people,

and that the individual form of the adult is a society-specific form.

The new-born, the small child – no less than the old man – has a socially appointed place shaped by the specific structure of the particular human network. If his function for his parents is unimportant or, through a shift in the social structure, less important than before, people either have fewer children or, in some cases, kill those already born. There is no zero-point of the social relatedness of the individual, no "beginning" or sharp break when he steps into society as if from outside as a being untouched by the network and then begins to link up with other human beings. On the contrary, just as parents are needed to bring a child into the world, just as the mother feeds the child first with her blood and then with nourishment from her body, the individual always exists, on the most fundamental level, in relation to others, and this relation has a particular structure specific to his society. He takes on his individual stamp from the history of these relationships, these dependences, and so, in a broader context, from the history of the whole human network within which he grows up and lives. This history and this human network are present in him and are represented by him, whether he is actually in relationships to others or on his own, actively working in a big city or shipwrecked on an island a thousand miles from his society. Robinson Crusoe, too, bears the imprint of a particular society, a particular nation and class. Isolated from all relations to them as he is on his island, he behaves, wishes and plans by their standard, and thus exhibits different behaviour, wishes and plans to Friday, no matter how much the two adapt to each other by virtue of their new situation.

III

There is today a widespread modelling of the self-image which induces the individual to feel and think as follows: "I am here, entirely on my own; all the others are out there, outside me; and

each of them goes his way, just like me, with an inner self which is his true self, his pure 'I', and an outward costume, his relations to other people." This attitude towards themselves and others appears to those who have adopted it as entirely natural and obvious. It is neither one nor the other. It is an expression of a peculiar historical moulding of the individual by the network of relations, by a form of communal life with a very specific structure. What speaks through it is the self-consciousness of people who have been compelled to adopt a very high degree of restraint, affect control, renunciation and transformation of instinct, and who are accustomed to relegating a large number of functions, instinct-expressions and wishes to private enclaves of secrecy withdrawn from the view of the "outside world", or even to the cellar of their own psyche, the semi-conscious or unconscious. In a word, this kind of self-consciousness corresponds to the psychological structure that is established at certain stages of a civilizing process.[2] It is characterized by an especially strong differentiation and tension between the social commands and prohibitions inculcated as self-restraint, and the uncontrolled or repressed instincts and inclinations within the human being himself. It is this conflict within the individual, the "privatization" or exclusion of certain spheres of life from social intercourse, their association with socially instilled fear in the form of shame and embarrassment, for example, which causes the individual to feel that "inside" himself he is something that exists quite alone, without relations to other people, and that only becomes related "afterwards" to others "outside". However genuine, however true this idea may be as an expression of the special structure of the consciousness and instincts of individuals at a certain stage of the movement of civilization, it is a very inadequate expression of the true relationship between human beings. The gulf and the intense conflict which the highly individualized people of our stage of civilization feel within themselves are projected by their consciousness into the world. In their theoretical reflection they appear as an existential gulf and an eternal conflict between individual and society.

What is more, the manner in which society brings about the adaptation of the individual to his adult functions very often accentuates the split and tension within his psyche. The more intensive and all-embracing the control of instincts, the more stable the super-ego formation required by the performance of adult functions in a society, the larger, inevitably, grows the distance between the behaviour of children and adults; the more difficult becomes the individual civilizing process and the longer the time needed to prepare children for adult functions. Just because the discrepancy between the attitude of children and that required of an adult is so great, the young person is no longer placed as a child on the lowest rung of the function-career he is destined to climb, as in simpler societies. He does not learn directly through serving an adult master of his future function, like the page of a knight or the apprentice of a guildmaster. He is first removed from the sphere of adults for a long and still growing period. Young people being prepared for a wider and wider range of functions are no longer trained directly but indirectly for adult life, in specialized institutes, schools and universities.

The tasks open to the mass of individuals in a society with so many tensions and such an advanced division of labour as ours require, for as long as work takes up the major part of the day, a fairly narrow specialization. They therefore allow only a rather narrow and one-sided scope for the faculties and inclinations of the individual. Moreover, the prospects of a widening of this scope at a stage of transition from a society with relatively open opportunities to one with relatively closed opportunities, diminish constantly. Between life in the reserves of youth and in the rather restricted and specialized field of adult work there is seldom a true continuity. Very often the transition from one to the other is a sharp break. Often enough the young person is given the widest possible horizon for his knowledge and wishes, a comprehensive view of life while growing up; he exists in a kind of blessed island for youth and dreams, which stands in curious contrast to the life awaiting him as an adult. He is encouraged to

develop diverse faculties for which adult functions in the present structure allow no scope, and diverse inclinations which the adult has to suppress. This reinforces still further the inner tension and split within the individual's psyche that was referred to earlier. Not only the high degree of control and transformation of instinct but the limitations and specialization imposed by adult functions, the intensity of competition and the tensions between various adult groups, all this makes the conditioning of the individual especially difficult. The likelihood that it will be in some way unsuccessful, that the balance between personal inclinations and social tasks will be unattainable for the individual, becomes extremely great.

The advance of the division of functions and of civilization at certain stages is therefore increasingly accompanied by the feeling in individuals that in order to maintain their positions in the human network they must allow their true nature to wither. They feel constantly impelled by the social structure to violate their "inner truth". They feel unable to do what best suits their faculties, or to become what they really wanted to become. The pressure exerted on the individual by the human network, the restrictions its structure imposes on him and the tensions and splits all this produces in him, are so great that a thicket of unrealizable and unresolved inclinations grows up in the individual; these inclinations are seldom revealed to the eyes of others or even to the individual's own consciousness.[3]

A widely held conception of the relation of individual to society vividly expresses this stage of development. In this situation it often seems to the individual that his or her true self, his soul, is locked up in something alien and external called "society" as in a cell. He has the feeling that from the walls of this cell, from "outside", other people, alien powers are exerting their influence on his true self like evil spirits, or sometimes benign ones; they seem to be tossing light or heavy balls on to him, which leave behind in the self deeper or shallower impressions.

This is the vision underlying, for example, the widely disseminated "milieu theory" and appearing to validate the nebulous

concept of the "environment". This is the attitude which is more or less easily discernible in most current reflections on the relation of individual and society. The argument between the different schools of thought really only concerns the question how deep and how essential to the shaping of the individual are the pressures and influences exerted by this "external" society. Some say they are of only slight importance, and that what primarly determines the shape of the individual are the individual's own inner laws, which are independent of his relations to others, his inborn "inner" nature. Others say the importance of this "inner" process is relatively slight and that the crucial shaping influence comes from "outside". Others again favour a kind of compromise; they imagine an interaction between "inside" and "outside", between "psychical" and "social" factors, though they tend to give one or the other greater emphasis.

The conception underlying all these ideas, the antithesis between the "pure self" – the subject of psychology – which enters relationships with other people as if from outside, and a society – the subject of sociology – which stands opposite the individual as something existing outside him, this conception undoubtedly has some value as an expression of a particular historical stage of the human network and the corresponding form of human self-consciousness. But it proves inadequate if the field of enquiry is widened, if the individual does not start directly from himself and his own feelings in reflecting on society, but sees himself and his self-consciousness in the larger context of historical evolution. One might ask how and why the structure of the human network and the structure of the individual both change at the same time in a certain manner, as in the transition from a warrior to a court society, or from this to a middle-class working society, when the wishes of individuals, their instinct and thought structure, even the *type of individualities*, are also changed. One finds then – in adopting a wider, dynamic viewpoint instead of a static one – that the vision of an irreducible wall between one human being and all others, between inner and outer worlds, evaporates to be replaced by a vision of an incessant and irreducible intertwining of

individual beings, in which everything that gives their animal substance the quality of a human being, primarily their psychical self-control, their individual character, takes on its specific shape in and through relationships to others.

Our tools of thinking are not mobile enough adequately to grasp network phenomena, our words not yet supple enough to express this simple state of affairs simply. To get a closer view of this kind of interrelationship one might think of the object from which the concept of the network is derived, a woven net. In such a net there are many individual threads linked together. Yet neither the totality of the net, nor the form taken by each thread in it, can be understood in terms of a single thread alone or even all the threads considered singly; it is understood solely in terms of the way they are linked, their relationship to each other. This linking gives rise to a system of tensions to which each single thread contributes, each in a somewhat different manner according to its place and function in the totality of the net. The form of the individual thread changes if the tension and structure of the whole net change. Yet this net is nothing other than a linking of individual threads; and within the whole each thread still forms a unity in itself; it has a unique position and form within it.

This is no more than an image, rigid and inadequate like all images of this kind. But as a model for thinking about human networks it is sufficient to give a somewhat clearer idea of the manner in which a net of many units gives rise to an order which cannot be studied in the individual units. However, the relations between people can never be expressed in simple spatial forms. And it is a static model. It serves its purpose somewhat better if one imagines the net in constant movement as an incessant weaving and unweaving of connections. The individual actually grows in this way from a network of people existing before him into a network that he helps to form. The individual person is not a beginning and his relations to other people have no beginnings. Just as in a continuous conversation the questions of one evoke the answers of the other and vice versa, and just as a particular part of the conversation does not arise from one or the other

alone but from the relation between the two, from which it is to be understood, so each gesture and act of the infant is neither the product of his "inside" nor of his "environment", nor of an interaction between an "inside" and an "outside" which were originally separate, but a function and precipitate of relations, and can be understood – like the figure of a thread in a net – only from the totality of the network. Likewise the speech of others develops in the growing child something which is entirely his own, entirely *his* language, and at the same time a product of his relations to others, an expression of the human network within which he lives. In the same way, ideas, convictions, affects, needs and character traits are produced in the individual through intercourse with others, things which make up his most personal "self" and in which is expressed, for this very reason, the network of relations from which he has emerged and into which he passes. And in this way this self, this personal "essence", is formed in a continuous interweaving of needs, a constant desire and fulfilment, an alternating taking and giving. It is the order of this incessant interweaving without a beginning that determines the nature and form of the individual human being. Even the nature and form of his solitude, even what he feels to be his "inner life",[4] is stamped by the history of his relationships – by the structure of the human network in which, as one of its nodal points, he develops and lives as an individual.

IV

We normally imagine the human being today as having a number of psychical compartments. We distinguish between "mind" and "soul", "reason" and "feeling", "consciousness" and "instinct" or "ego" and "id". But the sharp differentiation of psychical functions evoked by such words is not, to reiterate the point, something simply given by nature. It only occurs in a human being when he or she grows up as a child in a group, a society of

people. It does not occur, like physical growth, for example, as a result of an inherited natural mechanism, but emerges from the interweaving of the "natures" of many people. And however sharply our concepts may express it, this differentiation only comes into being gradually, even in adults, with the increasing differentiation of the human societies themselves. It is a product of a socio-historical process, of a transformation in the structure of communal life.

Furthermore, the concepts with which we try to express this sharper differentiation of psychological functions in the adults of our society show a marked tendency to conceal the specifically *functional* character of what we call the "psyche" in a particular way. "Reason", "mind", "consciousness" or "ego", no matter how they may differ in detail, no matter how differently they draw the dividing line within the human psyche, all give the impression of substances rather than functions, of something at rest rather than in motion. They seem to refer to something which exists in the same way as the stomach or the skull. In reality they are quite specific functions of the human organism. They are functions which – unlike those of the stomach or the bones, for example – are *directed* constantly towards *other* people and things. They are particular *forms of a person's self-regulation in relation to other people and things.*

The same is true of the instincts and affects. Even in psychoanalytic literature one sometimes finds statements to the effect that the "id" or the instincts are unchanging *if one disregards changes in their direction.* But how is it possible to disregard this directedness in something as fundamentally *directed* at something else as human instincts? What we call "instincts" or the "unconscious" is also a particular form of self-regulation in relation to other people and things, though one which, given the sharp differentiation of psychical functions, no longer directly controls behaviour but does so by various detours.

In a word, within the totality of the human organism there are two different but entirely interdependent areas of functions. There are organs and functions that serve to maintain and con-

stantly reproduce the organism itself, and there are organs and functions which serve the relations of the organism to other parts of the world and its self-regulation in such relations. We usually express the difference between these two areas of functions – in an over-static and substantializing way – by the distinction between "body" and "soul". What we refer to as "soul" or as pertaining to the "psyche" is in reality nothing but *the structure formed by these relation-functions*. The human being is not, as a particular historical form of human self-consciousness makes it appear, simply a closed container with various compartments and organs, a being which in its natural organization has, to begin with, nothing to do with other things and beings, but is organized by nature as a part of a larger world. He or she is, in a sense, a vector, which continuously directs valencies of the most diverse kinds towards other people and things, valencies which are temporarily saturated and ever anew unsaturated. He or she is so made up by nature as to be able, and obliged, to enter into relationships with other people and things. And what distinguishes this natural dependence of human beings on friendly or hostile relations from the corresponding dependence of animals, what actually gives this human self-regulation in relation to others the character of a *psychological* self-regulation – in contradistinction to the so-called instincts of animals – is nothing other than its greater flexibility, its greater capacity to adapt to changing kinds of relation, its special malleability and mobility.

This high degree of malleability and adaptability in human relation-functions is on one hand a precondition for the fact that the structure of relations between people is so much more variable than in the case of animals; in a word, it is the basis of the fundamental historicity of human society. On the other hand it is responsible for the fact that man is to a special degree a social being, dependent on the society of other people. In other animals self-regulation in relation to other creatures and things is restricted in advance by reflex mechanisms to fairly narrow paths. Even in those animals closest to man in the sequence of organisms, a certain relaxation in this respect can be observed, a

somewhat greater adaptability to changing relations, a slight widening of the paths of their self-regulation. But only in man is the loosening and malleability of relation-functions so great that for the individual human being a period of years is needed for the moulding of self-regulation by other people, a social moulding, in order for it to take on a specifically human form. What man lacks in inherited predetermination in his dealings with other beings must be replaced by a social determination, a sociogenic shaping of the psychical functions.

That the form taken by the psychical functions of a person can never be deduced solely from his or her inherited constitution but only from the working up of this constitution in conjunction with other people, from the structure of the society in which the individual grows up, is therefore finally explained by a peculiarity of human nature itself, the fairly high degree of freedom of human self-regulation from the control of inherited reflex mechanisms. The existence of this freedom is well enough known, though we have only a dim understanding of its origins in natural history. Thanks to it the individual's management of relations is capable of, and needs, a far higher degree of social moulding than that of other animals. Thanks to this social moulding the structure of behaviour, the form of self-regulation in relation to others, is more diverse in man than in all the other animals; and thanks to it this self-regulation becomes, in a word, more "individual". From this direction too the discontinuity in thought between society and individual begins to close.

This is also a point from which it is possible easily to demolish the artificial fences we erect today in thought, dividing human beings up into various areas of control: the domains of, for example, the psychologists, the historians, the sociologists. The structures of the human psyche, the structures of human society and the structures of human history are indissolubly complementary, and can only be studied in conjunction with each other. They do not exist and move in reality with the degree of isolation assumed by current research. They form, with other structures, the subject matter of the single human science.

But from this overall viewpoint – sketchy as the view must remain at present – we also gain a deeper understanding of the basic fact of the social existence of man to which we have referred so often: the fact that the network of people has an order and is subject to laws more powerful than and different from what the individuals making up this network themselves plan and want. It is the greater freedom of human relations from the control of inherited automatic mechanisms that really clears the way for the free play of social network mechanisms. It is only through the relative freedom of behaviour from determination by inherited mechanisms, the gradual, uneven transformation of the so-called "instinctive" into the so-called "psychical" self-regulation of the organism in relation to others, that the regularities or laws that come into being through the interweaving and interdependence of individuals take on their full force. Just because humans are less tightly bound to organically prescribed paths than other animals in shaping their relations to each other and the rest of the world, the interweaving of their activities gives rise to laws and structures of a special kind. For just this reason, automatic change mechanisms, historical transformations are set in motion in the network that neither have their origin in the inherited human reflex apparatus nor – taken as a whole, as they actually occur – have been desired or planned by individual people, yet which are anything but chaotic. For just this reason the irrevocable interweaving of the actions, needs, thoughts and impulses of many people give rise to structures and structural transformations in a specific order and direction, that are neither simply "animal" or "natural" nor "spiritual", neither "rational" nor "irrational", but *social*.

And in this peculiarity of the human psyche, its special malleability, its natural dependence on social moulding, lies the reason why one cannot take single individuals as one's starting point in order to understand the structure of their relationships to each other, the structure of society. On the contrary, one must start from the structure of the relations *between* individuals in order to understand the "psyche" of the individual person. If the single

individual entered human society like Adam, as a ready-made grown-up in a strange world, then indeed it would take a miracle or a pre-stabilized harmony to explain why the parts and the whole, the psychological make-up of individuals and the structure of a society at a given time correspond to each other and change with each other. As the relatively undifferentiated relation-control of the new-born child only becomes differentiated and regulated by human means in relation to other humans, what then emerges as the "soul" of the individual adult is not something which is "in itself" alien to society and asocial, but something which is from its very foundation a function of the relation-unit of a higher power that we call "society". The whole manner in which the individual sees and manages himself in his relations to others depends on the structure of the association or associations of which he learns to say "we".

The simplest illustration of this apparently very complex state of affairs repeatedly proves to be the psychological function of speech. By nature each person normally brings with him into the world a speech apparatus that is capable of articulation and that he can himself control. In this respect too the human being is not only capable of being attuned to communicate with others of his kind, but by nature he needs attunement by other people, social attunement, in order to become a human being in the full sense of the word. In man the control of this form of relation by speech and its apparatus is not restricted by natural automatic mechanisms to such a narrow range of expressions as in the other animals. It is far less bound by inheritance. What is fixed by heredity, the range or pitch of voice, for example, merely provides the framework for an infinite variety of possible articulation. One might argue over *how far* these possibilities are *limited* by certain hereditary characteristics, by the history of the ancestral society. Only precise experiments could show, for example, whether the accent of a native of Africa still retained something of the intonation of his ancestors if he were brought up *from the first day of his life* without any further contact with people from his original society, in a society speaking an entirely different

language, and if all his instinctual relationships, the central levers of moulding during early childhood, were relations to people of this other society, and allowed him normal fulfilment. But whether the limits of malleability are somewhat narrower or wider, the fundamental situation remains the same: what decides which language is gradually deposited in the individual's language apparatus is the society in which he or she grows up. And the personal speech habits, the more or less individual style of speaking the individual may have as an adult, is a differentiation within the medium of the language with which he has grown up. It is a function of his individual history within his society and its history. Hereditary features undoubtedly have some influence on the nature of this individual differentiation. But it is an influence of a similar kind to that exerted by the peculiarities of an unhewn stone, for example, its greater or lesser hardness, its type of grain, on the richly articulated sculpture which the sculptor carves from it. And it is not so different with the actual subject matter that language seeks to express, thinking and feeling. It is no different with the whole self-regulation of a person in relation to other beings and things, his "psyche".

Within the division of labour of the sciences, psychology is thus allocated a rather curious task. The individual child, as it is born, is the outcome of a fate which has both a natural and a social dimension, the history of its ancestors which is lost to view in the obscurity of past millennia. The compulsive way in which the organism of the new-born child controls the processes within him, the development and reducing of organs in accordance with a pattern imprinted within him as a legacy of past generations, and the relatively small influence exerted on *this* form of self-regulation by the current social situation – these are the factors which cause us to regard the self-formation of the individual as governed by "natural laws". Even the specific self-regulatory functions with which psychology concerns itself, including the relation-functions, are certainly governed to an extent by natural laws, though to a lesser degree than the self-regulation of the organism in the development of organs. Psychology is concerned

precisely with those functions of self-regulation which are less strictly determined than the others by the ancestral history of a person, and are more determinable by the present structure of his society and his actual fate within it. Because these more malleable control functions are not only able to be moulded by present society but need to be so moulded if they are to evolve into the complex self-control mechanism of an adult person, psychology finds itself confronted by a correspondingly complex task. On one hand it has to investigate the natural structure and laws of all the human self-regulatory functions that are directed towards other beings and things, which play a part in a person's relations to them and, through their natural malleability, form the material to be moulded by these relations. On the other, it has to trace the process whereby these more malleable control functions, in conjunction with a particular social structure and co-existence with other people, are differentiated in such a way as to give rise to a particular individual form. Finally, it has to illuminate the general structure of this process of differentiation and moulding, and to explain in detail how the particular form of behaviour-control that has been consolidated into a "character", an individual psychological make-up within the individual on the basis of a particular set of relations, a specific social moulding, subsequently functions in living together with other people. The first part of these tasks leads directly to an investigation of the physiological and biological regularities of the organism, the other to the investigation of the socio-historical structures and regularities on which the direction and form of individual differentiation depend.[5] In a word, psychology forms the bridge between the natural sciences and the social sciences.

V

Human beings are part of a natural order and of a social order. The preceding reflections have shown how this double character

is possible. The social order, although quite unlike a natural order such as the order of the organs within an individual body, owes its very existence to a peculiarity of human nature. This peculiarity is the special mobility and malleability by which human behaviour-control differs from that of animals. Thanks to these qualities, what is in the animal largely an inherited part of its nature, a fixed pattern of behaviour-control in relation to other beings and things, has to be produced in the individual human being in and through the society of other people. And thanks to these qualities, regularities and automatic processes come into play which we call "social" in contradistinction to organic, natural regularities. The relaxing of the natural reflex-apparatus governing human behaviour is itself the outcome of a long process of natural history. But thanks to it, processes and transformations take place in human communal life that are not pre-programmed in human nature; thanks to it, societies and individual people within them have a history which is not natural history. Within the general coherence of nature they form an autonomous continuum of a special kind.

There are societies – the Australian aborigines, for example – in which the basic structure of the relations between people hardly changes perceptibly over centuries. There are other forms of communal life which contain a peculiar urge to transcend themselves in their mode of communal living without any extra-social causes needing to be involved. They are *directed* towards other forms of interpersonal relationships and institutions, whether or not these forms are actually attained. They are in the narrower sense of the word *historical*.

At the basis of these automatic mechanisms and tendencies of social change are particular forms of human relations, tensions between people of a specific kind and intensity. These tensions begin to be produced, to state the matter very generally, at a particular stage in the division of functions, when certain people or groups acquire a hereditary monopoly of the goods and social values on which other people depend, either for their livelihood or to protect or fulfil their social existence.

Among the goods that can be monopolized in this way, those serving to satisfy elementary needs such as hunger undoubtedly have special importance. But the monopolization of goods of this kind is only *one* kind of monopoly among others. Moreover, it never exists in isolation. Every "economic" monopoly of no matter what kind is directly or indirectly linked to another without which it cannot exist, with a monopoly of physical force and its instruments. This monopoly can take the form, as in feudal times, of an unorganized and decentralized monopoly of arms operated by large numbers of people or, as in the age of absolutism, of a monopoly of physical violence controlled by one individual. What we refer to as the "economic" sphere of interconnections – that sphere which is often regarded today, generalizing from the structure of the first phase of industrialization, as a separate sphere of history and the only driving force in it, the motor that sets all the other spheres in motion as a "superstructure" – itself depends on the monopoly of violence. It only becomes possible with the increasing differentiation of society, the formation of more stable centres of physical violence and internal pacification, allowing the emergence of the economy as a separate sphere within the wide fabric of human actions.

An economic sphere of interconnections does not come into being *solely*, as is sometimes assumed, because human beings have to satisfy their need to eat. Animals, too, are driven by hunger; but they do not engage in *economic* activity. Where they seem to do so it happens, as far as we can see today, on the basis of a more or less automatic, innate or "instinctive" predisposition of their self-regulation paths. Economic networks in the human sense only arise because human self-regulation in relation to other things and beings is *not* automatically restricted to the same degree to relatively narrow channels. One of the preconditions of an economy in the human sense is the peculiarly *psychological* character of human behaviour control. For any form of such economic activity to arise it is essential that super-ego or foresight functions intervene to regulate the elemental instinct functions of the individual, whether they be the desire for food, protection or

whatever else. Only such intervention makes it possible for people to live together in a more or less regulated manner, for them to work together to a common pattern in procuring food, and for their communal life to give rise to various interdependent social functions. In a word, specifically social regularities – and therefore economic ones – only come into being through the peculiarity of human nature which distinguishes humans from all other creatures. For this reason all attempts to explain these social regularities from biological regularities or their patterns, all endeavours to make social science into a kind of biology or a part of the other natural sciences, are futile.

Human beings create a special cosmos of their own within the natural cosmos, and they do so by virtue of a relaxation of automatic natural mechanisms in managing their communal life. They form together a socio-historical continuum into which each individual person grows – as a part – from a particular point. What shapes and binds the individual within this human cosmos, and what gives him the whole scope of his life, is not the reflexes of his animal nature but the ineradicable connection between his desires and behaviour and those of other people, of the living, the dead and even, in a certain sense, the unborn – in a word, his dependence on others and the dependence of others on him, the functions of others for him and his function for others. This dependence is never due *solely* to his instincts on one hand or what is called thought, foresight, ego or super-ego, depending on the viewpoint of the observer, on the other, but is always a functional relationship based on both. In the same way, the specific tensions between different groups which generate an urge towards structural changes within this human continuum, which make it into a *historical* continuum, have two layers. In them, and even in their genesis, though to varying degrees, both short-term emotional and long-term super-ego impulses are always involved. These tensions would never arise without such elemental driving forces as hunger; but nor would they arise without longer-range impulses such as those expressed in the desire for property or for more property, for lasting security or for an elevated social

position with power and superiority over others. Precisely the monopolization of the goods and values that satisfy such manifold instinctual demands, such sublimated forms of desire – that satisfy, in a word, the hunger of the ego and the super-ego – precisely this monopoly, together with the monopoly of that which satisfies basic hunger, is all the more important to the genesis of social tensions the further the differentiation of social functions, and therefore of psychical functions, advances, the more the normal standard of living of a society rises above the satisfaction of the most elementary nutritional and sexual needs.

Of course, the basic situation remains simple enough, no matter how complex the structure of social functions and thus the tensions between various functional groups may become. Even in the simplest societies known to us there is some form of division of functions between people. The further this division has advanced within a society and the more give and take there is between people, the more tightly are they bound together by the fact that one can only sustain his life and his social existence in conjunction with many others. At some stages the instruments of violence available to some may allow them to deny others what they need to secure and fulfil their social existence, or constantly to threaten, subjugate and exploit them; or the goals of some may actually require the social and physical existence of others to be destroyed. This brings into being within the network of interdependent people, function-groups and nations, tensions which may differ widely in nature and strength but which always have a very clear structure that can be precisely described. And it is tensions of this kind that, when they attain a certain strength and structure, generate an urge towards structural changes in society. Thanks to them the forms of relations and institutions within the society do not reproduce themselves in approximately the same form from generation to generation. Thanks to them certain forms of communal life tend constantly to move in a particular direction towards specific transformations without any external driving forces being involved.

Network forces of this kind are at the root, for example, of the

increasing division of functions which is of such decisive importance for the course of western history, leading at one stage to the use of money, at another to the development of machines and thus to the increased productivity of work and to a raising of the living standard of more and more people. We find such automatisms in the manner in which, in the West, free craftsmen emerge to confront the landowning class as the division of functions advances; and in the subsequent emergence, over centuries in which there was a very gradual shift in the balance of forces, of noble and burgher groups, followed by capital-owning and capital-less groups, as the poles of the most powerful tensions – tensions which were certainly never planned or created by individual people. It is network forces of this kind that have in the course of western history changed the form and quality of human behaviour and the whole psychical regulation of behaviour, pushing it in the direction of civilization. We see it in our own time in the rigorous way in which the tensions that emerge in the form of free competition within the human network tend towards a narrowing of the sphere of competition and finally to the formation of centralized monopolies. In this way, through network forces, peaceful periods of history have been produced and are produced no less than turbulent and revolutionary ones, flowering no less than ruin, phases of high art and of pale imitation. All these changes have their origin not in the nature of individual people but in the structure of the communal life of many. History is always the history of a society, but, to be sure, of a society of individuals.

Only from such a general perspective can it be fully understood how changes of this kind – for example, the process of the increasing division of labour or that of civilization – can follow a very definite direction and order over many generations without their actual course being planned or systematically executed by individual people. And only from such a viewpoint can we finally understand how such a change in human beings is possible without some motor of change *outside* human beings. Our thinking today is still extensively governed by ideas of causality which

are inadequate to the process under discussion: we are strongly inclined to explain any change in a particular formation by a cause *outside* that formation. The mystery of the specifically socio-historical transformation only begins to be dispelled if one understands the following: that such changes need be caused neither by changes in nature outside human beings nor by changes in a "spirit" within individuals or nations. No evidence available to us indicates that during the centuries of the advance of western civilization any changes of a similar scale took place in the natural constellation, for example, the climate, or within the organic nature of man himself. The "environment" which changed – to use this often misused expression – was only the environment which people form for each other. During those centuries the sky stayed more or less the same, as did the organic nature of man and the geological structure of the earth. The only thing that changed and moved in a specific direction was the form of communal life, the structure of western society and with it the social influence on the individual and the form of his or her psychical functions.

It might be misleading to say that this continuum of human society is a "perpetual motion machine". Undoubtedly, this continuum constantly draws physical energy from the surrounding world. From the physical standpoint society is only a part of the mightier natural cosmos which as a whole is indeed a perpetual motion machine. But like the Gulf Stream within the ocean, for example, the continuum of interdependent human beings has a movement of its own within this mightier cosmos, a regularity and a tempo of change that are in their turn mightier than the will and plans of a single person within it.

VI

But once one has gained a clearer view of those aspects of social life which stand out more sharply from the historical flow when

seen from above and over long stretches, one must revert to the other perspective, that one has from within the flow. Each of these perspectives, when isolated from the other, has its specific dangers. Each of them – the view of the airman and of the swimmer – shows the picture with a certain foreshortening. Each of them makes us inclined to give a one-sided emphasis. Only the two together give a more balanced picture.

Only by means of a certain detachment, by setting aside immediate wishes and personal sympathies, can one gain an undistorted view of the order of historical change, of the peculiar necessity with which the human network, having reached a certain pitch of tensions, is urged to move beyond itself, whether towards more comprehensive integration or towards relative disintegration, a victory of centrifugal forces. And the insight that one gains through such conscious detachment certainly loses none of its value if one then begins to look again through the eyes of someone who has to take decisions here and now within the historical flow. Only the longer-sighted perspective gives a certain security to the decisions taken under the pressure of short-term impulses. But it in turn needs to be balanced and complemented by that which is perceived better and more easily in the moment of action itself. If what strikes us most of all from the elevated viewpoint is the rigorous way in which the historical flow is constantly urged on in a particular direction, the person engaged in action within the flow is much more aware of how varied – often if not always – are the paths by which structures and tensions of one kind are able to turn themselves into structures of a different kind. To him, history seems like one of those mighty rivers which, although they always follow a particular direction, towards the sea, do not have a fixed, pre-ordained bed before them but a broad terrain within which they have to seek a definite course; within which, in other words, they can still form a bed in a large number of possible ways.

Undoubtedly, we are in general only in a position to gain a clear insight into the automatisms of historical change when we have not only the immediate present before us but the long

history from which our time has emerged. A person who has to act and take decisions within the weft of his time is more likely to perceive another characteristic of the network which is no less important: its extraordinary elasticity. To express what the observer who has attained a certain detachment is struck by in the course of history, one has little choice at the present stage of thought and speech than to borrow words and images from the realm of inanimate nature. This is why terms such as "mechanism" and "automatism" have been used quite often here. But history is not, of course, a system of lifeless mechanical levers and automatisms of iron and steel, but a system of pressures exerted by living people on living people. Only when a special terminology has been developed for this system with its own special laws will it be possible to show with proper clarity how far these social "automatisms" differ from those of the machine shop. And while the observer overflying long stretches of history may notice first how little power individual people have over the main line of historical movement and change, the person acting within the flow may have a better chance to see how much can depend on individual people in individual situations, despite the fixed general direction. Only both observations together – far from contradicting each other – yield, if properly linked, a more revealing, more adequate picture.

One need only consider the effect of the competitive mechanism. If freely competing people or groups find themselves in violent conflict, they work, whether they want to or not, with certainty towards a reduction of the sphere of competition and towards a monopoly situation, no matter how often the process may be temporarily reversed, for example, by alliances of the weaker parties. To this extent the actions of the competitors are no more than levers in a social automatism. But which of the rivals is victorious, which of them is able to seize control of the opportunities of the others and so to administer the law of the competition mechanism, i.e. the decision which matters most to those involved, this decision is far less determined by the overall structure of the society involved than is the social mechanism

itself. The outcome may depend very largely on the instinctual endowments, the personal energy and intelligence of one or more individuals within the rival groups. And the same applies to many other tensions the resolution of which prepares the ground for, or actually brings about, structural changes within a society. The axis along which tensions of a particular kind act, the direction in which they point beyond themselves, and the general structure towards which they are tending, are clearly delineated, whether the direction is towards "downfall", a disintegration of the existing structures and functions, or towards further integration along different axes of tension. But the forms and paths taken by these conflicts and transformations, and the speed with which they occur, are certainly not as strictly pre-ordained as the main line along which the social continuum moves, along which its axes of tension strain beyond themselves.

Every large and complex society has, in fact, both qualities: it is very firm and very elastic. Within it scope for individual decision constantly appears. Opportunities present themselves that can be either seized or missed. Crossroads appear at which people must choose, and on their choices, depending on their social position, may depend either their immediate personal fate or that of a whole family, or, in certain situations, of entire nations or groups within them. It may depend on their choices whether the complete resolution of the present tensions takes place in this generation or only in the next. It may depend on them which of the contending persons or groups within a particular system of tensions becomes the executor of the transformations towards which the tensions are straining, and on which side, in which place, the centres of the new forms of integration, towards which the older ones are moving by virtue of their tensions, will be located. But the opportunities between which a person has to choose in this manner are not themselves created by that person. They are prescribed and limited by the specific structure of his society and the nature of the functions the people exercise within it. And whichever opportunity he seizes, his deed becomes interwoven with those of others; it unleashes further chains of actions, the

direction and provisional outcome of which depend not on him but on the distribution of power and the structure of tensions within this whole mobile human network.

No individual person, no matter how great his stature, how powerful his will, how penetrating his intelligence, can breach the autonomous laws of the human network from which his actions arise and into which they are directed. No personality, however strong, can, as the emperor of a purely agrarian feudal domain – to give an example at random – more than temporarily arrest the centrifugal tendencies the strength of which corresponds to the size of the territory. He cannot turn his society at one stroke into an absolutist or an industrial one. He cannot by an act of will bring about the more complex division of labour, the kind of army, the monetarization and the total transformation of property relations that are needed if lasting central institutions are to evolve. He is tied to the laws of the tensions between bondsmen and feudal lords on one hand and between competing feudal lords and the central ruler on the other.

One comes across very similar compulsions – if we look for related structures in more recent history – in, for example, the development of the United States of America. There, too, a particularly large area of territory was involved. There, too, we find on one hand slowly increasing tendencies towards centralization and on the other especially strong forces opposing greater centralization. As earlier in the immense territory of the medieval German empire, throughout the history of the United States, even though there was a far higher level of division of labour, the tensions between the centrifugal and the centripetal interests were extraordinarily strong. The continual struggles of individual states with the central authorities of the union, the long-successful resistance of the many banks and private monopolies to the stabilization of a central federal bank, the occasional occupation of the central positions by the centrifugal interests themselves, the difficulties in the way of uniform fiscal legislation, the struggle between silver and gold and the countless crises connected with these tensions, all that is sufficiently well known.

Was it a special incompetence which prevented the American statesmen for a long period from establishing publicly controlled central institutions as strong and stable as those in Europe? Anyone who finds himself in the midst of such networks, anyone who studies the history of the United States in detail, knows better. No matter who was raised to the central position in the United States by the various selection mechanisms, that person was irresistibly enmeshed in tensions of a kind and intensity with which European statesmen no longer had to contend, as a result of the longer integration and the relatively small size of the individual European territories.

Of course, the strength of the tensions *within* the territory of the United States was and is amply outweighed by the strength of the tensions *between* the different states of Europe. Whether the different poles of the axes of tension were represented by major figures as in the time of Jefferson and Hamilton, or by people of lesser stature, it was again and again the strength of these tensions within their society that laid down the actions to be taken by the American statesmen. And it was also due to the special strength of centrifugal interests, not to any special incompetence of the leading American statesmen, that the centre of gravity shifted much more slowly than in Europe towards the centripetal interests as the division of functions progressed. No personality, however great, could breach the law of this mighty human network. Within it the individual statesman, depending on his stature, had only a greater or lesser scope for decision.

But even if scope for individual decision emerges here as everywhere within the social network, there is no general formula which indicates how great this individual scope is for all phases of history and all types of societies. Precisely this is characteristic of the place of the individual within his society, that the nature and extent of the scope for decision open to him depend on the structure and the historical constellation of the society in which he lives and acts. In no type of society is there a complete absence of such scope. Even the social function of a slave leaves some room for individual decisions, narrow as it may be. And

conversely, the possibility for a king or general to influence his own fate and that of others through his personal qualities is generally incomparably greater than for the socially weaker individuals of his society. The scope of the decisions taken by the representatives of such leading functions becomes immense in certain historical situations. And for them the form and extent of the individual scope for decision can vary considerably, according to the personal suitability and stature of the function's incumbent. Here the scope for decision is not only greater, it is more elastic; but it is never unlimited. And in the exercise of such leading functions, exactly as in the case of an ordinary slave, the range of the decisions and the extent of their scope are determined by the particular kind of integration which has given rise to these functions and continues for a period to reproduce them. The individual person is always bound to others in a very specific way through interdependence. But in different societies and in different phases and positions within the same society, the individual scope for decision differs in both kind and size. And what we call "power" is really nothing other than a somewhat rigid and undifferentiated expression for the special extent of the individual scope for action associated with certain social positions, an expression for an especially large social opportunity to influence the self-regulation and the fate of other people.

If, for example, the social power of people or groups in the same social area is exceptionally unequal, if socially weak and low-ranking groups without significant opportunities to improve their positions are coupled to others with monopoly control of far greater opportunities of social power, the members of the weak group have exceptionally little scope for individual decision. In this case any outstanding gifts or strongly individualized characteristics among the members of the weak group cannot be developed, or only in directions regarded as asocial from the standpoint of the existing social structure. Thus, for members of socially weak peasant classes living on the verge of hunger, for example, the only way to improve their lot is often to leave their land and take up the life of brigands. The leading position in such groups,

the position of "robber chief", is here the only opportunity for taking a significant personal initiative. Within the framework of the normal social existence of such poor and deprived classes there is minimal scope for personal initiative. And it is quite certain that the social position and the fate of such a group, given the enormous discrepancy in the distribution of the instruments of social power, could be altered solely by the special stature and energy of one of its members who became its leader.

If groups with less divergent or more or less equal power within a society form the main poles of the axes of tension, the situation is different. In that case it may well depend on the determination and stature of a few people whether the centre of gravity shifts decisively to one side or the other at an opportune moment. In such a network constellation the scope for decision open to the persons holding the leading functions can be very large. But whether the individual's scope for decision is larger or smaller, whatever he decides allies him to some and alienates him from others. In large matters as in small he is bound to the distribution of power, the structure of dependence and tensions within his group. The possible courses he decides between are pre-ordained by the structure of his sphere of activity and its mesh. And, depending on his decision, the autonomous weight of this mesh works either for or against him.

We often hear it debated today whether history is made by individual great men or whether all people are interchangeable, a person's individuality counting for nothing in the march of history. But the discussion between these two poles takes place in a vacuum. It lacks the element which provides a basis for all discussion of human beings and their ways: continuous contact with experience. Given a choice of this kind there is no simple "yes" or "no". Even for the people we are accustomed to regarding as the greatest personalities in history, other people and their products, their acts, their ideas and their language were the medium within which they acted and on which they acted. The specific nature of their co-existence with other people allowed their activity, like that of everyone else, a certain scope and

certain limits. A person's influence on others, his importance to them, may be especially large, but the autonomy of the network in which he acts is incomparably more powerful than he. Belief in the unlimited power of individual people over the course of history is wishful thinking.

No less unrealistic, however, is the opposite belief, that all people are of equal importance for the course of history, that people are interchangeable, the individual being no more than the passive vehicle of a social machine. The most elementary observation teaches us that the importance of different individuals for the course of historical events differs, that in certain situations and for the occupants of certain social positions individual character and personal decision can have considerable influence on historical events. Individual scope for decision is always limited, but it is also very variable in nature and extent, depending on the instruments of powers which a person controls. A glance at the nature of human integration is enough to make this variability of individual limits comprehensible. What bends and limits individuals, seen from the other side, is the exact opposite of this limitation: their individual activity, their ability to take decisions in very diverse and individual ways. The individual activity of some is the social limitation of others. And it depends only on the power of the interdependent functions concerned, the degree of reciprocal dependence, who is more able to limit whom by his activity.

We have referred several times to the curious party game that certain groups in western society are apt to indulge in over and over again. There are two opposed parties: one says, "Everything depends on the individual", the other, "Everything depends on society". The first group says: "But it is always particular individuals who decide to do this and not that." The others reply: "But their decisions are socially conditioned." The first group says: "But what you call 'social conditioning' only comes about because others want to do something and do it." The others reply: "But what these others want to do and do is also socially conditioned."

The spell which binds us to think in terms of such alternatives is beginning to break. For indeed, the way in which a person decides and acts has been developed in relationships to other people, in a modifying of his nature by society. But what is shaped in this way is not something merely passive, not a lifeless coin stamped like a thousand identical coins, but the active centre of the individual, the personal direction of his instincts and will; in a word, his real self. What is shaped by society also shapes in its turn: it is the self-regulation of the individual in relation to others which sets limits to their self-regulation. To put it in a nutshell, the individual is both coin and die at the same time. One person may have more of the die-function than another, but he is always a coin as well. Even the weakest member of society has his share in stamping and limiting other members, however small. The party game can only carry on *ad infinitum* because it separates like two *substances* what are in fact two inseparable *functions* of human beings as they live together.

For the two parties have a characteristic idea in common, and this identical basis shows the antagonists to be children of the same time. The whole debate tacitly assumes – as a point of secret collusion, the undiscussed basis of the discussion – that the "social" is what is "the same" or "typical" among a number of people, while what makes a person unique and different from all others – in short, a more or less pronounced individuality – is an extra-social element that is forthwith assigned, for rather obscure reasons, either a biological or a metaphysical origin according to taste. At this point thought and observation come to an end.

We have already stressed that this notion of individuality as the expression of an extra-social, natural core within the individual around which the "typical" or "social" features are accreted like a shell, is itself connected to a specific, historically determined inner life. This notion is connected to the tension between the ego and super-ego functions on one hand and the instinct functions on the other, a tension never entirely lacking in any society but especially strong and pervasive when the civilizing process has reached an advanced stage. This tension, the contradictions between the desires of the individual partly controlled by the

unconscious, and the social demands represented by his superego, is what constantly nourishes the idea of the natural individual core in the shell conditioned by society or milieu. These contradictions make it appear self-evident to the individual that he is something separate "inside" while "society" and other people are "external" and "alien". This specific form of superego, this especially strong and semi-automatic restraint of all drives and affects directed at others, is what has allowed the individual – more and more perceptibly since the Renaissance – to perceive himself as the "subject" and the world as something separated from him by an abyss, the "object". It allows him to see himself as an observer outside the rest of nature, while nature confronts him as "landscape"; to feel himself to be an individual independent of all other people, and other people as an "alien" realm that originally had nothing to do with his "inner" being, an "environment", a "milieu", a "society". Only when the individual stops taking himself as the starting point of his thought, stops viewing the world like someone who looks from the "interior" of his house on to the street "outside", at the houses "opposite", and is able – by a new Copernican revolution of his thought and feeling – to see himself and his shell as part of the street, to see them in relation to the whole mobile human network, only then will his feeling gradually fade that he is something isolated and self-contained "inside" while the others are something separated from him by an abyss, a "landscape", an "environment", a "society".

But this heavy restriction on the emotions does not stand alone. Closely linked to this peculiarity of our inner lives are many others which contribute equally to making contrasting ideas like "inside" and "outside", "innate" and "socially conditioned", appear, with regard to ourselves, as eternal opposites, fundamental items in the arsenal of thought and consciousness. To give just a few examples, there is the special satisfaction associated for the individual, at the present stage of the development of self-consciousness, with the idea that he owes everything he regards as unique and essential in himself, to himself alone, to his

"nature", and to no one else. The idea that "alien" people may play an integral part in the formation of one's own individuality seems today almost like an infringement of one's rights over oneself. Only that part of himself which a person can explain by his "nature" seems entirely his own. In explaining it by his nature, he involuntarily accredits it to himself as a positive achievement; and conversely, he tends to attribute anything in himself which he regards as a positive achievement to his inborn nature. To imagine that his special individuality, his "essence", is not a unique creation of nature, issuing from its womb suddenly and inexplicably as Athene sprang from the head of Zeus, to attribute one's own psychical gifts or even one's problems to something as fortuitous as one's relations to other people, something as transitory as human society, seems to the individual a devaluation which deprives his existence of meaning. The idea that one's individuality has emerged from imperishable nature, like the idea that it was created by God, seems to give a far more secure justification to all that which a person believes unique and essential to himself. It anchors individual qualities in something eternal and regular; it helps the individual to understand the necessity of being what he is. It explains to him with one word – the word "nature" – what is otherwise inexplicable in himself.

In this way, as a result of a peculiar disposition of our feelings and wishes, we constantly lose conscious sight of the fact that the "nature" of the psychical functions of human beings is not quite the same thing as the "nature" of the other functions which enable a body to maintain itself in a particular form. A radical revision of the prevailing consciousness will be needed before the veil of wishes and values which obscures our view in this direction can be lifted. What we call a person's "individuality" is, first of all, a peculiarity of his or her *psychical* functions, a structural quality of his or her self-regulation in relation to other persons and things. "Individuality" is an expression for the special way in which, and the special degree to which, the structural quality of one person's psychical control differs from another's. But this specific difference in people's psychical structures would not be

possible if their self-regulation in relation to other people and things were determined by inherited structures in the same way and to the same degree as the self-regulation of the human organism, for example, in the reproduction of organs and limbs. The "individualization" of people is only possible because the former control is more malleable than the latter. And because of this greater malleability, words such as "nature" or "disposition" and all the related terms have a different meaning when applied to the psychical functions of people than when applied to the functions of organ reproduction or growth. In the latter case, superficially considered, the traditional idea of nature as a realm that does not change, or at least changes at a very slow pace, has some validity. But in the case of psychical functions, in their adaptation and interweaving in social life, we are dealing with natural entities that allow a much faster tempo of change, which embody an order of their own. To explore these functions and the way they are shaped by each other we need to develop special concepts.

At present the traditional terms are all too frequently used, without distinguishing whether they refer to psychical functions or the formation of organs and limbs. Experience with the bodily functions sets the tone. Concepts that have proved more or less fruitful in elucidating them continue to be used without any further basis, and often enough as models for exploring the human psyche. One thinks, feels and to an extent wishes that the individuality of a person, the distinctive structure of his or her self-regulation in relation to other people and things, exists in the same independent way, isolated from all relations, as one feels one's own body to exist in space. From this side too an idea is generated that the individual human being, with all the psychical qualities that distinguish him from other people, represents a self-contained cosmos, a nature apart, which originally had nothing to do with the rest of nature or other human beings. And by using models derived from physical functions in trying to understand psychical ones, we are constantly forced to think in terms of stereotyped opposites such as "inside" and "outside", "indi-

vidual" and "society", "nature" and "milieu". The only choice left open to the individual seems to be whether to concede the decisive role in shaping a human being to one side or the other. The most that can be imagined is a compromise: "A little comes from outside and a little from inside; we only need to know what, and how much."

Psychical functions do not fit into this pattern. The natural dependence of a person on others, the natural orientation of psychical functions to relationships, and their adaptability and mobility within relationships, are phenomena that cannot be grasped by models based on substances or by spatial concepts such as "inside" or "outside". To understand them different conceptual means and a different basic vision are needed.

We have here attempted to take a few steps towards such means. The configuration of a person's psychical self-regulation – for example, his or her mother tongue – is, through that person's having grown up in a particular society, thoroughly "typical", and is *at the same time*, through his or her having grown up as a unique reference-point within the network of a society, thoroughly individual, i.e. it is a unique manifestation of this typical product. Individual animals are also different from each other "by nature", as, certainly, are individual people. But this inherited biological difference is not the same as the difference in the structure of psychical self-regulation in adults that we express by the term "individuality". To repeat the point, a person who grows up outside human society does not attain such "individuality" any more than an animal. Only through a long and difficult shaping of his or her malleable psychical functions in intercourse with other people does a person's behaviour-control attain the unique configuration characteristic of a specific human individuality. It is only through a social moulding process within the framework of particular social characteristics that a person evolves the characteristics and modes of behaviour that distinguish him or her from all the other members of his or her society. *Society not only produces the similar and typical, but also the individual.* The varying degree of individuation among the

members of different groups and strata shows this clearly enough. The more differentiated the functional structure of a society or a class within it, the more sharply the psychical configurations of the individual people who grow up within it diverge. But however different the degree of this individuation may be, there is certainly no such thing as a zero-point of individuation among people who grow up and live within society. To a greater or lesser degree, the people of all the societies known to us are individual and different from each other down to the last detail of their configuration and behaviour, and society-specific, i.e. shaped and bound in the nature of their psychical self-regulation by a particular network of functions, a particular form of communal life which also shapes and binds all its other members. What are often conceptually separated as two different substances or two different strata within the human being, his "individuality" and his "social conditioning", are in fact nothing other than two different functions of people in their relations to each other, one of which cannot exist without the other. They are terms for the specific activity of the individual in relation to his fellows, and for his capacity to be influenced and shaped by their activity; for the dependence of others on him and his dependence on others; expressions for his function as both *die* and *coin*.

VII

If human beings were not by nature so much more malleable and mobile than animals in their behaviour-control, they would neither form an autonomous historical continuum together (a society), nor possess an individuality of their own. Animal societies have no history other than their "natural history"; and the individual animals within such a society do not differ from each other in their behaviour, are not individualizable, to the same extent as individual human beings.

But as human beings are attunable to each other to this extent, and as they also need such adaptation, the network of their

relationships, their society, cannot be understood in terms of single individuals, as if each of them first of all formed a natural, self-contained cosmos. On the contrary, the individual can only be understood in terms of his communal life with others. The structure and configuration of an individual's behaviour-control depend on the structure of the relations between individuals. The root of all misunderstandings on the relation of individual and society lies in the fact that while society, the relations between people, has a structure and regularity of a special kind that cannot be understood in terms of the single individual, it does not possess a body, a "substance" outside individuals.

Such ideas may be easy or difficult to grasp, but the facts they refer to are simple enough: the individual person is only able to say "I" if and because he can at the same time say "we". Even the thought "I am", and still more the thought "I think", presupposes the existence of other people and a communal life with them – in short, a group, a society. Of course, theoretical reflection alone is not enough, and a different structure of individual self-consciousness, a different self-justification of the individual would be needed to explore all the ramifications of this state of affairs. Only by a change in the structure of interpersonal relationships, a different structure of individualities, could a better harmony be established between social pressures and demands on one hand and individual needs, the desire of people for justification, meaning, fulfilment, on the other. Only then could a person's knowledge that everything he is and becomes is so in relation to other people, develop from a theoretical insight into a guideline for action and behaviour. Here it must be enough to create a terminology for the simple state of affairs itself. Society with its regularity is nothing outside individuals; nor is it simply an "object" "opposite" the individual; it is what every individual means when he says "we". But this "we" does not come into being because a large number of individual people who say "I" to themselves subsequently come together and decide to form an association. The interpersonal functions and relations that we express by grammatical particles such as "I", "you", "he",

"she", "we" and "they" are interdependent. None of them has any existence without the others. And the "we" function includes all the others. Measured against what it refers to, everything one can call "I" or even "you" is only a part.

And this fact, that each "I" is irrevocably embedded in a "we", finally makes it clear why the intermeshing of the actions, plans and purposes of many "I"s constantly gives rise to something which has not been planned, intended or created by any individual. As is known, this permanent feature of social life was given its first historical interpretation by Hegel. He explains it as a "ruse of reason". But what is involved is neither a ruse nor a product of reason. The long-term planning of individuals, compared to the multiplicity of individual purposes and wishes within the totality of a human network, and particularly compared to the continuous interweaving of individual actions and purposes over many generations, is always extremely limited. The interplay of the actions, purposes and plans of many people is not itself something intended or planned, and is ultimately immune to planning. The "ruse of reason" is a tentative attempt, still swathed in day-dreaming, to express the fact that the autonomy of what a person calls "we" is more powerful than the plans and purposes of any individual "I". The interweaving of the needs and intentions of many people subjects each individual among them to compulsions that none of them has intended. Over and over again the deeds and works of individual people, woven into the social net, take on an appearance that was not premeditated. Again and again, therefore, people stand before the outcome of their own actions like the apprentice magician before the spirits he has conjured up and which, once at large, are no longer in his power. They look with astonishment at the convolutions and formations of the historical flow which they themselves constitute but do not control.

This is true of the simplest forms of relationship between people. For example, that fact that two different people strive for one and the same social opportunity, whether it be a piece of land

or the same commodity, the same market or the same social position, gives rise to something that neither of them has intended: a competitive relationship with its specific laws, or, as the case may be, a rise or fall in prices. In this way, through the intermeshing of the closely related wishes or plans of many individuals, monopoly mechanisms come into play, advancing into wider and wider areas. Thus, for example, the disorderly monopoly of violence exercised by a whole class of freely competing feudal lords slowly gives rise, in the course of centuries, to a private, hereditary, central monopoly of force, and finally the centre of a state apparatus controllable by wide sections of the population. The same applies to the increasing division of functions. It too, as it now appears retrospectively to the observer – as a continuous change of human relationships in a certain direction over centuries – was certainly not planned or intended by any individual person or by many people together. No doubt, all the particular social instruments and institutions that gradually take on sharper contours, without being planned, in the course of such a process – urban settlements, machines or whatever they may be – are, from a certain time on, gradually incorporated more consciously into the aims and plans of individual people. Moreover, in the course of western history the sector of society open to planning grows larger and larger. But all these instruments and institutions, though built into the short-term purposes of many individual people and groups, tend at the same time, when considered over long stretches of time, always in a single direction that no individual person or group has wished or planned. In the same way, in the course of history, a change in human behaviour in the direction of civilization gradually emerged from the ebb and flow of events. Every small step on this path was determined by the wishes and plans of individual people and groups; but what has grown up on this path up to now, our standard of behaviour and our psychological make-up, was certainly not intended by individual people. And it is in this way that human society moves forward as a whole; in this way the

whole history of mankind has run its course:

> From plans arising, yet unplanned
> By purpose moved, yet purposeless.

Notes

1 It is not entirely easy to explain what social structures and regularities are unless one is able to illustrate them by examples from social life itself, by detailed studies firmly based on experience. Owing to restricted space, that has not been possible here. I can only refer to the various analyses of social processes and regularities to be found in my study *The Civilizing Process* (vol. I, New York, 1978; vol. II, Oxford, 1982). Underlying them, but unstated, are the same ideas which are stated in more general form here.

2 On this and the following ideas cf. *The Civilizing Process*, vol. I, ch. 2, and vol. II, pp. 229ff: "Towards a theory of civilizing processes".

3 R. M. Rilke, from: *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. I, Frankfurt/Main 1962, pp. 316–17:

> I am but one of your most humble monks
> looking from my cell out into life,
> further removed from people than from things
> . . .
>
> Think me not presumptuous if I say:
> No one really lives his life.
> People are accidents, voices, fragments,
> fears, banalities, many petty joys,
> even as children wrapped up in disguise,
> adult as masks; as faces – mute.
>
> I often think: there must be treasuries
> where all these many lives are stored
> like armour or like litters, cradles,
> that never carried someone truly real,
> lives like empty clothes that cannot stand
> alone and, sinking, cling against
> the strong walls made of vaulted stone.

And when at evening I walked
out of my garden, full of weariness,
I know that all the stretching paths
lead to the arsenal of unlived things.
No tree is there, as if the land lay down
and as about a prison hangs the wall,
windowless in its sevenfold ring.
And its gates, with iron clasps
warding off those who seek to pass
and all its bars are made by human hands.

4 The situation we come across here in the relation of individual to society, person to person, has a certain similarity to the one which Goethe so frequently expressed regarding the relation of man to nature. Consider the following two poems (from Goethe, *Selected Poems*, London, 1983):

Epirrhema

You must, when contemplating nature,
Attend to this, in each and every feature:
There's nought outside and nought within
For she is inside out and outside in.
Thus will you grasp, with no delay,
The holy secret, clear as day.
(trans. Christopher Middleton)

True Enough: To the Physicist

"Into the core of Nature" –
O Philistine –
"No earthly mind can enter."
The maxim is fine:
But have the grace
To spare the dissenter,
Me and my kind.
We think: in every place
We're at the centre.
"Happy the mortal creature
To whom she shows no more
Than the outer rind",
For sixty years I've heard your sort announce.

It makes me swear, though quietly;
To myself a thousand times I say:
All things she grants, gladly and lavishly;
Nature has neither core
Nor outer rind,
Being all things at once.
It's yourself you should scrutinise to see
Whether you're centre or periphery.
(trans. Michael Hamburger)

5 Here too lies the key to understanding the relation of civilization to human nature: the civilizing process is made possible by the fact that a person's self-regulation in relation to other beings and things, his or her "psyche", is not restricted by reflexes and innate automatisms to the same extent as, for example, the digestion. It is made possible by the peculiar adaptability and transformability of these self-regulatory functions. It is set in motion and kept in motion by specific changes in human communal life, a transformation of human relations operating in a very definite direction, an autonomous movement of the network of interdependent human individuals.