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THE SACRED CANOPY

Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion

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1. *Religion and World-Construction*

Every human society is an enterprise of world-building. Religion occupies a distinctive place in this enterprise. Our main purpose here is to make some general statements about the relationship between human religion and human world-building. Before this can be done intelligibly, however, the above statement about the world-building efficacy of society must be explicated. For this explication it will be important to understand society in dialectic terms (1).

Society is a dialectic phenomenon in that it is a human product, and nothing but a human product, that yet continuously acts back upon its producer. Society is a product of man. It has no other being except that which is bestowed upon it by human activity and consciousness. There can be no social reality apart from man. Yet it may also be stated that man is a product of society. Every individual biography is an episode within the history of society, which both precedes and survives it. Society was there before the individual was born and it will be there after he has died. What is more, it is within society, and as a result of social processes, that the individual becomes a person, that he attains and holds onto an identity, and that he carries out the various projects that constitute his life. Man cannot exist apart from society. The two statements, that society is the product of man and that man is the product of society, are not contradictory. They rather reflect the inherently dialectic character of the societal phenomenon. Only if this character is recognized will society be understood in terms that are adequate to its empirical reality (2).

The fundamental dialectic process of society consists of three moments, or steps. These are externalization, objectivation, and

internalization. Only if these three moments are understood together can an empirically adequate view of society be maintained. Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men. Objectivation is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness. It is through externalization that society is a human product. It is through objectivation that society becomes a reality *sui generis*. It is through internalization that man is a product of society (3).

Externalization is an anthropological necessity. Man, as we know him empirically, cannot be conceived of apart from the continuous outpouring of himself into the world in which he finds himself. Human being cannot be understood as somehow resting within itself, in some closed sphere of interiority, and *then* setting out to express itself in the surrounding world. Human being is externalizing in its essence and from the beginning (4). This anthropological root fact is very probably grounded in the biological constitution of man (5). *Homo sapiens* occupies a peculiar position in the animal kingdom. This peculiarity manifests itself in man's relationship both to his own body and to the world. Unlike the other higher mammals, who are born with an essentially completed organism, man is curiously "unfinished" at birth (6). Essential steps in the process of "finishing" man's development, which have already taken place in the foetal period for the other higher mammals, occur in the first year after birth in the case of man. That is, the biological process of "becoming man" occurs at a time when the human infant is in interaction with an extraorganismic environment, which includes both the physical and the human world of the infant. There is thus a biological foundation to the process of "becoming man" in the sense of developing personality and appropriating culture. The latter developments

are not somehow superimposed as alien mutations upon the biological development of man, but they are grounded in it.

The "unfinished" character of the human organism at birth is closely related to the relatively unspecialized character of its instinctual structure. The non-human animal enters the world with highly specialized and firmly directed drives. As a result, it lives in a world that is more or less completely determined by its instinctual structure. This world is closed in terms of its possibilities, programmed, as it were, by the animal's own constitution. Consequently, each animal lives in an environment that is specific to its particular species. There is a mouse-world, a dog-world, a horse-world, and so forth. By contrast, man's instinctual structure at birth is both underspecialized and undirected toward a species-specific environment. There is no man-world in the above sense. Man's world is imperfectly programmed by his own constitution. It is an open world. That is, it is a world that must be fashioned by man's own activity. Compared with the other higher mammals, man thus has a double relationship to the world. Like the other mammals, man is *in* a world that antedates his appearance. But unlike the other mammals, this world is not simply given, prefabricated for him. Man must *make* a world for himself. The world-building activity of man, therefore, is not a biologically extraneous phenomenon, but the direct consequence of man's biological constitution.

The condition of the human organism in the world is thus characterized by a built-in instability. Man does not have a given relationship to the world. He must ongoingly establish a relationship with it. The same instability marks man's relationship to his own body (7). In a curious way, man is "out of balance" with himself. He cannot rest within himself, but must continuously come to terms with himself by expressing himself in activity. Human existence is an ongoing "balancing act" between man and his body, man and his world. One may put this differently by saying that man is constantly in the process of "catching up with himself." It is in this process that man produces a world. Only

in such a world produced by himself can he locate himself and realize his life. But the same process that builds his world also "finishes" his own being. In other words, man not only produces a world, but he also produces himself. More precisely, he produces himself in a world.

In the process of world-building, man, by his own activity, specializes his drives and provides stability for himself. Biologically deprived of a man-world, he constructs a human world. This world, of course, is culture. Its fundamental purpose is to provide the firm structures for human life that are lacking biologically. It follows that these humanly produced structures can never have the stability that marks the structures of the animal world. Culture, although it becomes for man a "second nature," remains something quite different from nature precisely because it is the product of man's own activity. Culture must be continuously produced and reproduced by man. Its structures are, therefore, inherently precarious and predestined to change. The cultural imperative of stability and the inherent character of culture as *un*stable together posit the fundamental problem of man's world-building activity. Its far-reaching implications will occupy us in considerable detail a little further on. For the moment, suffice it to say that, while it is necessary that worlds be built, it is quite difficult to keep them going.

Culture consists of the totality of man's products (8). Some of these are material, others are not. Man produces tools of every conceivable kind, by means of which he modifies his physical environment and bends nature to his will. Man also produces language and, on its foundation and by means of it, a towering edifice of symbols that permeate every aspect of his life. There is good reason for thinking that the production of non-material culture has always gone hand in hand with man's activity of physically modifying his environment (9). Be this as it may, society is, of course, nothing but part and parcel of non-material culture. Society is that aspect of the latter that structures man's ongoing relations with his fellowmen (10). As but an element of culture, society fully shares in the latter's character as a human product. Society is constituted and maintained by acting human beings. It has no being, no reality, apart from this activity. Its patterns, always relative in time and space, are not given in nature, nor can they be deduced in any specific manner from the "nature of man." If one wants to use such a term as designating more than certain biological constants, one can only say that it is the "nature of man" to produce a world. What appears at any particular historical moment as "human nature" is itself a product of man's world-building activity (11).

However, while society appears as but an aspect of culture, it occupies a privileged position among man's cultural formations. This is due to yet another basic anthropological fact, namely the essential sociality of man (12). *Homo sapiens* is the social animal. This means very much more than the surface fact that man always lives in collectivities and, indeed, loses his humanity when he is thrust into isolation from other men. Much more importantly, the world-building activity of man is always and inevitably a collective enterprise. While it may be possible, perhaps for heuristic purposes, to analyze man's relationship to his world in purely individual terms, the empirical reality of human world-building is always a social one. Men *together* shape tools, invent languages, adhere to values, devise institutions, and so on. Not only is the individual's participation in a culture contingent upon a social process (namely, the process called socialization), but his continuing cultural existence depends upon the maintenance of specific social arrangements. Society, therefore, is not only an outcome of culture, but a necessary condition of the latter. Society structures, distributes, and co-ordinates the world-building activities of men. And only in society can the products of those activities persist over time.

The understanding of society as rooted in man's externalization, that is, as a product of human activity, is particularly important in view of the fact that society appears to common sense as something quite different, as independent of human activity and as

sharing in the inert givenness of nature. We shall turn in a moment to the process of objectivation that makes this appearance possible. Suffice it to say here that one of the most important gains of a sociological perspective is its reiterated reduction of the hypostatized entities that make up society in the imagination of the man in the street to the human activity of which these entities are products and without which they have no status in reality. The "stuff" out of which society and all its formations are made is human meanings externalized in human activity. The great societal hypostases (such as "the family," "the economy," "the state," and so forth) are over again reduced by sociological analysis to the human activity that is their only underlying substance. For this reason it is very unhelpful if the sociologist, except for heuristic purposes, deals with such social phenomena as if they were, in actual fact, hypostases independent of the human enterprise that originally produced them and keeps on producing them. There is nothing wrong, in itself, with the sociologist's speaking of institutions, structures, functions, patterns, and so on. The harm comes only when he thinks of these, like the man in the street, as entities existing in and of themselves, detached from human activity and production. One of the merits of the concept of externalization, as applied to society, is the prevention of this sort of static, hypostatizing thinking. Another way of putting this is to say that sociological understanding ought always to be humanizing, that is, ought to refer back the imposing configurations of social structure to the living human beings who have created them (13).

Society, then, is a product of man, rooted in the phenomenon of externalization, which in turn is grounded in the very biological constitution of man. As soon as one speaks of externalized products, however, one is implying that the latter attain a degree of distinctiveness as against their producer. This transformation of man's products into a world that not only derives from man, but that comes to confront him as a facticity outside of himself, is intended in the concept of objectivation. The humanly produced

world becomes something "out there." It consists of objects, both material and non-material, that are capable of resisting the desires of their producer. Once produced, this world cannot simply be wished away. Although all culture originates and is rooted in the subjective consciousness of human beings, once formed it cannot be reabsorbed into consciousness at will. It stands outside the subjectivity of the individual as, indeed, a world. In other words, the humanly produced world attains the character of objective reality.

This acquired objectivity of man's cultural products pertains both to the material and the non-material ones. It can readily be understood in the case of the former. Man manufactures a tool and by that action enriches the totality of physical objects present in the world. Once produced, the tool has a being of its own that cannot be readily changed by those who employ it. Indeed, the tool (say, an agricultural implement) may even enforce the logic of its being upon its users, sometimes in a way that may not be particularly agreeable to them. For instance, a plow, though obviously a human product, is an external object not only in the sense that its users may fall over it and hurt themselves as a result, just as they may by falling over a rock or a stump or any other natural object. More interestingly, the plow may compel its users to arrange their agricultural activity, and perhaps also other aspects of their lives, in a way that conforms to *its* own logic and that may have been neither intended nor foreseen by those who originally devised it. The same objectivity, however, characterizes the non-material elements of culture as well. Man invents a language and then finds that both his speaking and his thinking are dominated by its grammar. Man produces values and discovers that he feels guilt when he contravenes them. Man concocts institutions, which come to confront him as powerfully controlling and even menacing constellations of the external world. The relationship between man and culture is thus aptly illustrated by the tale of the sorcerer's apprentice. The mighty buckets, magically called out of nothingness by human *fiat*, are set in motion. From

that point on they go about drawing water in accordance with an inherent logic of their own being that, at the very least, is less than completely controlled by their creator. It is possible, as happens in that story, that man may find an additional magic that will bring back under his control the vast forces he has unleashed upon reality. This power, though, is not identical with the one that first set these forces in motion. And, of course, it can also happen that man drowns in the floods that he himself has produced.

If culture is credited with the status of objectivity, there is a double meaning to this appellation. Culture is objective in that it confronts man as an assemblage of objects in the real world existing outside his own consciousness. Culture is *there*. But culture is also objective in that it may be experienced and apprehended, as it were, in company. Culture is *there for everybody*. This means that the objects of culture (again, both the material and non-material ones) may be shared with others. This distinguishes them sharply from any constructions of the subjective consciousness of the solitary individual. This is obvious when one compares a tool that belongs to the technology of a particular culture with some utensil, however interesting, that forms part of a dream. The objectivity of culture as shared facticity, though, is even more important to understand with reference to its non-material constituents. The individual may dream up any number of, say, institutional arrangements that might well be more interesting, perhaps even more functional, than the institutions actually recognized in his culture. As long as these sociological dreams, so to speak, are confined to the individual's own consciousness and are not recognized by others as at least empirical possibilities, they will exist only as shadowlike phantasmata. By contrast, the institutions of the individual's society, however much he may dislike them, will be *real*. In other words, the cultural world is not only collectively produced, but it remains real by virtue of collective recognition. To be in culture means to share in a particular world of objectivities with others (14).

The same conditions, of course, apply to that segment of cultures we call society. It is not enough, therefore, to say that society is rooted in human activity. One must also say that society is *objectivated* human activity, that is, society is a product of human activity that has attained the status of objective reality. The social formations are experienced by man as elements of an objective world. Society confronts man as external, subjectively opaque and coercive facticity (15). Indeed, society is commonly apprehended by man as virtually equivalent to the physical universe in its objective presence—a "second nature," indeed. Society is experienced as given "out there," extraneous to subjective consciousness and not controllable by the latter. The representations of solitary fantasy offer relatively little resistance to the individual's volition. The representations of society are immensely more resistant. The individual can dream of different societies and imagine himself in various contexts. Unless he exists in solipsistic madness, he will know the difference between these fantasies and the *reality* of his actual life in society, which prescribes a commonly recognized context for him and imposes it upon him regardless of his wishes. Since society is encountered by the individual as a reality external to himself, it may often happen that its workings remain opaque to his understanding. He cannot discover the meaning of a social phenomenon by introspection. He must, for this purpose, go outside himself and engage in the basically same kind of empirical inquiry that is necessary if he is to understand anything located outside his own mind. Above all, society manifests itself by its coercive power. The final test of its objective reality is its capacity to impose itself upon the reluctance of individuals. Society directs, sanctions, controls, and punishes individual conduct. In its most powerful apotheoses (not a loosely chosen term, as we shall see later), society may even destroy the individual.

The coercive objectivity of society can, of course, be seen most readily in its procedures of social control, that is, in those

procedures that are specifically designed to "bring back into line" recalcitrant individuals or groups. Political and legal institutions may serve as obvious illustrations of this. It is important to understand, however, that the same coercive objectivity characterizes society *as a whole* and is present in *all* social institutions, including those institutions that were founded on consensus. This (most emphatically) does *not* mean that all societies are variations of tyranny. It *does* mean that no human construction can be accurately called a social phenomenon unless it has achieved that measure of objectivity that compels the individual to recognize it as real. In other words, the fundamental coerciveness of society lies not in its machineries of social control, but in its power to constitute and to impose itself as reality. The paradigmatic case of this is language. Hardly anyone, however far removed from sociological thinking, is likely to deny that language is a human product. Any particular language is the result of a long history of human inventiveness, imagination and even caprice. While man's vocal organs impose certain physiological limitations on his linguistic fancy, there are no laws of nature that can be called upon to explain the development of, say, the English language. Nor does the latter have any status in the nature of things other than its status as a human production. The English language originated in specific human events, was developed throughout its history by human activity, and it exists only insofar and as long as human beings continue to use and understand it. Nevertheless, the English language presents itself to the individual as an objective reality, which he must recognize as such or suffer the consequences. Its rules are objectively given. They must be learned by the individual, whether as his first or as a foreign language, and he cannot change them at will. There are objective standards for correct and incorrect English, and although there may be differences of opinion about minor details, the existence of such standards is a precondition for the use of the language in the first place. There are, of course, penalties for offending

against these standards, from failing in school to social embarrassment in later life, but the objective reality of the English language is not primarily constituted by these penalties. Rather, the English language is real objectively by virtue of the simple fact that it is *there*, a ready-made and collectively recognized universe of discourse within which individuals may understand each other and themselves (16).

Society, as objective reality, provides a world for man to inhabit. This world encompasses the biography of the individual, which unfolds as a series of events *within* that world. Indeed, the individual's own biography is objectively real only insofar as it may be comprehended within the significant structures of the social world. To be sure, the individual may have any number of highly subjective self-interpretations, which will strike others as bizarre or as downright incomprehensible. Whatever these self-interpretations may be, there will remain the objective interpretation of the individual's biography that locates the latter in a collectively recognized frame of reference. The objective facts of this biography may be minimally ascertained by consulting the relevant personal documents. Name, legal descent, citizenship, civil status, occupation—these are but some of the "official" interpretations of individual existence, objectively valid not only by force of law but by the fundamental reality-bestowing potency of society. What is more, the individual himself, unless again he encloses himself in a solipsistic world of withdrawal from the common reality, will seek to validate his self-interpretations by comparing them with the objectively available coordinates of his biography. In other words, the individual's own life appears as objectively real, to himself as well as to others, only as it is located within a social world that itself has the character of objective reality (17).

The objectivity of society extends to all its constituent elements. Institutions, roles, and identities exist as objectively real phenomena in the social world, though they and this world are at the same time nothing but human productions. For example,

the family as the institutionalization of human sexuality in a particular society is experienced and apprehended as an objective reality. The institution is *there*, external and coercive, imposing its predefined patterns upon the individual in this particular area of his life. The same objectivity belongs to the roles that the individual is expected to play in the institutional context in question, even if it should happen that he does not particularly enjoy the performance. The roles of, for instance, husband, father or uncle are objectively defined and available as models for individual conduct. By playing these roles, the individual comes to represent the institutional objectivities in a way that is apprehended, by himself and by others, as detached from the "mere" accidents of his individual existence (18). He can "put on" the role, as a cultural object, in a manner analogous to the "putting on" of a physical object of clothing or adornment. He can further retain a consciousness of himself as distinct from the role, which then relates to what he apprehends as his "real self" as mask to actor. Thus he can even say that he does not like to perform this or that detail of the role, but must do so against his will—because the objective description of the role so dictates. Furthermore, society not only contains an objectively available assemblage of institutions and roles, but a repertoire of identities endowed with the same status of objective reality. Society assigns to the individual not only a set of roles but a designated identity. In other words, the individual is not only expected to perform as husband, father, or uncle, but to *be* a husband, a father, or an uncle—and, even more basically, to *be* a man, in terms of whatever "being" this implies in the society in question. Thus, in the final resort, the objectivation of human activity means that man becomes capable of objectivating a part of himself within his own consciousness, confronting himself within himself in figures that are generally available as objective elements of the social world. For example, the individual *qua* "real self" can carry on an internal conversation with himself *qua* archbishop. Actually,

it is only by means of such internal dialogue with the objectivations of oneself that socialization is possible in the first place (19).

The world of social objectivations, produced by externalizing consciousness, confronts consciousness as an external facticity. It is apprehended as such. This apprehension, however, cannot as yet be described as internalization, any more than can the apprehension of the world of nature. Internalization is rather the reabsorption into consciousness of the objectivated world in such a way that the structures of this world come to determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself. That is, society now functions as the formative agency for individual consciousness. Insofar as internalization has taken place, the individual now apprehends various elements of the objectivated world as phenomena internal to his consciousness at the same time as he apprehends them as phenomena of external reality.

Every society that continues in time faces the problem of transmitting its objectivated meanings from one generation to the next. This problem is attacked by means of the processes of socialization, that is, the processes by which a new generation is taught to live in accordance with the institutional programs of the society. Socialization can, of course, be described psychologically as a learning process. The new generation is initiated into the meanings of the culture, learns to participate in its established tasks and to accept the roles as well as the identities that make up its social structure. Socialization, however, has a crucial dimension that is not adequately grasped by speaking of a learning process. The individual not only learns the objectivated meanings but identifies with and is shaped by them. He draws them into himself and makes them *his* meanings. He becomes not only one who possesses these meanings, but one who represents and expresses them.

The success of socialization depends upon the establishment of symmetry between the objective world of society and the subjective world of the individual. If one imagines a totally socialized individual, each meaning objectively available in the

internalization. Only if these three moments are understood together can an empirically adequate view of society be maintained. Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men. Objectivation is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness. It is through externalization that society is a human product. It is through objectivation that society becomes a reality *sui generis*. It is through internalization that man is a product of society (3).

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has established unclehood as a centrally significant institution (not ours, to be sure, but most matrilineal societies), he will conceive of his whole biography (past, present, *and* future) in terms of his career *as* an uncle. Indeed, he may even sacrifice himself for his nephews and derive consolation from the thought that his own life will continue in them. The socially objectivated world is still apprehended as external facticity. Uncles, sisters, nephews exist in objective reality, comparable in facticity to the species of animals or rocks. But this objective world is also apprehended now as subjective meaningfulness. Its initial opaqueness (say, to the child, who must learn the lore of unclehood) has been converted to an internal translucency. The individual may now look within himself and, in the depths of his subjective being, may "discover himself" as an uncle. At this point, always assuming a degree of successful socialization, introspection becomes a viable method for the discovery of institutional meanings (21).

The process of internalization must always be understood as but one moment of the larger dialectic process that also includes the moments of externalization and objectivation. If this is not done there emerges a picture of mechanistic determinism, in which the individual is produced by society as cause produces effect in nature. Such a picture distorts the societal phenomenon. Not only is internalization part of the latter's larger dialectic, but the socialization of the individual also occurs in a dialectic manner (22). The individual is not molded as a passive, inert thing. Rather, he is formed in the course of a protracted conversation (a dialectic, in the literal sense of the word) in which he is a *participant*. That is, the social world (with its appropriate institutions, roles, and identities) is not passively absorbed by the individual, but actively *appropriated* by him. Furthermore, once the individual is formed as a person, with an objectively and subjectively recognizable identity, he must continue to participate in the conversation that sustains him as a person in his ongoing biography. That is, the individual continues to be a

co-producer of the social world, and thus of himself. No matter how small his power to change the social definitions of reality may be, he must at least continue to assent to those that form him as a person. Even if he should deny this co-production (say, as a positivistic sociologist or psychologist), he remains a co-producer of his world all the same—and, indeed, his denial of this enters into the dialectic as a formative factor both of his world and of himself. The relationship of the individual to language may, once more, be taken as paradigmatic of the dialectic of socialization. Language confronts the individual as an objective facticity. He subjectively appropriates it by engaging in linguistic interaction with others. In the course of this interaction, however, he inevitably modifies the language, even if (say, as a formalistic grammarian) he should deny the validity of these modifications. Furthermore, his continuing participation in the language is part of the human activity that is the only ontological base for the language in question. The language exists because he, along with others, continues to employ it. In other words, both with regard to language and to the socially objectivated world as a whole, it may be said that the individual keeps "talking back" to the world that formed him and thereby continues to maintain the latter as reality.

It may now be understandable if the proposition is made that the socially constructed world is, above all, an ordering of experience. A meaningful order, or nomos, is imposed upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals (23). To say that society is a world-building enterprise is to say that it is ordering, or nomizing, activity. The presupposition for this is given, as has been indicated before, in the biological constitution of *homo sapiens*. Man, biologically denied the ordering mechanisms with which the other animals are endowed, is compelled to impose his own order upon experience. Man's sociality presupposes the collective character of this ordering activity. The ordering of experience is endemic to any kind of social interaction. Every social action implies that individual meaning is

directed toward others and ongoing social interaction implies that the several meanings of the actors are integrated into an order of common meaning (24). It would be wrong to assume that this nomizing consequence of social interaction must, from the beginning, produce a nomos that embraces *all* the discrete experiences and meanings of the participant individuals. If one can imagine a society in its first origins (something, of course, that is empirically unavailable), one may assume that the range of the common nomos expands as social interaction comes to include ever broader areas of common meaning. It makes no sense to imagine that this nomos will ever include the totality of individual meanings. Just as there can be no totally socialized individual, so there will always be individual meanings that remain outside of or marginal to the common nomos. Indeed, as will be seen a little later, the marginal experiences of the individual are of considerable importance for an understanding of social existence. All the same, there is an inherent logic that impels every nomos to expand into wider areas of meaning. If the ordering activity of society never attains to totality, it may yet be described as totalizing (25).

The social world constitutes a nomos both objectively and subjectively. The objective nomos is given in the process of objectivation as such. The fact of language, even if taken by itself, can readily be seen as the imposition of order upon experience. Language nomizes by imposing differentiation and structure upon the ongoing flux of experience. As an item of experience is named, it is *ipso facto*, taken out of this flux and given stability *as* the entity so named. Language further provides a fundamental order of relationships by the addition of syntax and grammar to vocabulary. It is impossible to use language without participating in its order. Every empirical language may be said to constitute a nomos in the making, or, with equal validity, as the historical consequence of the nomizing activity of generations of men. The original nomizing act is to say that an item is *this*, and thus *not that*. As this original incorporation

of the item into an order that includes other items is followed by sharper linguistic designations (the item is male and not female, singular and not plural, a noun and not a verb, and so forth), the nomizing act intends a comprehensive order of *all* items that may be linguistically objectivated, that is, intends a totalizing nomos.

On the foundation of language, and by means of it, is built up the cognitive and normative edifice that passes for "knowledge" in a society. In what it "knows," every society imposes a common order of interpretation upon experience that becomes "objective knowledge" by means of the process of objectivation discussed before. Only a relatively small part of this edifice is constituted by theories of one kind or another, though theoretical "knowledge" is particularly important because it usually contains the body of "official" interpretations of reality. Most socially objectivated "knowledge" is pretheoretical. It consists of interpretative schemas, moral maxims and collections of traditional wisdom that the man in the street frequently shares with the theoreticians. Societies vary in the degree of differentiation in their bodies of "knowledge." Whatever these variations, every society provides for its members an objectively available body of "knowledge." To participate in the society is to share its "knowledge," that is, to co-inhabit its nomos.

The objective nomos is internalized in the course of socialization. It is thus appropriated by the individual to become his own subjective ordering of experience. It is by virtue of this appropriation that the individual can come to "make sense" of his own biography. The discrepant elements of his past life are ordered in terms of what he "knows objectively" about his own and others' condition. His ongoing experience is integrated into the same order, though the latter may have to be modified to allow for this integration. The future attains a meaningful shape by virtue of the same order being projected into it. In other words, to live in the social world is to live an ordered and meaningful life. Society is the guardian of order and meaning not only ob-

jectively, in its institutional structures, but subjectively as well, in its structuring of individual consciousness.

It is for this reason that radical separation from the social world, or anomy, constitutes such a powerful threat to the individual (26). It is not only that the individual loses emotionally satisfying ties in such cases. He loses his orientation in experience. In extreme cases, he loses his sense of reality and identity. He becomes anomic in the sense of becoming worldless. Just as an individual's nomos is constructed and sustained in conversation with significant others, so is the individual plunged toward anomy when such conversation is radically interrupted. The circumstances of such nomic disruption may, of course, vary. They might involve large collective forces, such as the loss of status of the entire social group to which the individual belongs. They might be more narrowly biographical, such as the loss of significant others by death, divorce, or physical separation. It is thus possible to speak of collective as well as of individual states of anomy. In both cases, the fundamental order in terms of which the individual can "make sense" of his life and recognize his own identity will be in process of disintegration. Not only will the individual then begin to lose his moral bearings, with disastrous psychological consequences, but he will become uncertain about his cognitive bearings as well. The world begins to shake in the very instant that its sustaining conversation begins to falter.

The socially established nomos may thus be understood, perhaps in its most important aspect, as a shield against terror. Put differently, the most important function of society is nomization. The anthropological presupposition for this is a human craving for meaning that appears to have the force of instinct. Men are congenitally compelled to impose a meaningful order upon reality. This order, however, presupposes the social enterprise of ordering world-construction. To be separated from society exposes the individual to a multiplicity of dangers with which he is unable to cope by himself, in the extreme case to

the danger of imminent extinction. Separation from society also inflicts unbearable psychological tensions upon the individual, tensions that are grounded in the root anthropological fact of sociality. The ultimate danger of such separation, however, is the danger of meaninglessness. This danger is the nightmare *par excellence*, in which the individual is submerged in a world of disorder, senselessness and madness. Reality and identity are malignantly transformed into meaningless figures of horror. To be in society is to be "sane" precisely in the sense of being shielded from the ultimate "insanity" of such anomic terror. Anomy is unbearable to the point where the individual may seek death in preference to it. Conversely, existence within a nomic world may be sought at the cost of all sorts of sacrifice and suffering—and even at the cost of life itself, if the individual believes that this ultimate sacrifice has nomic significance (27).

The sheltering quality of social order becomes especially evident if one looks at the marginal situations in the life of the individual, that is, at situations in which he is driven close to or beyond the boundaries of the order that determines his routine, everyday existence (28). Such marginal situations commonly occur in dreams and fantasy. They may appear on the horizon of consciousness as haunting suspicions that the world may have another aspect than its "normal" one, that is, that the previously accepted definitions of reality may be fragile or even fraudulent (29). Such suspicions extend to the identity of both self and others, positing the possibility of shattering metamorphoses. When these suspicions invade the central areas of consciousness they take on, of course, the constellations that modern psychiatry would call neurotic or psychotic. Whatever the epistemological status of these constellations (usually decided upon much too sanguinely by psychiatry, precisely because it is firmly rooted in the everyday, "official," social definitions of reality), their profound terror for the individual lies in the threat they constitute to his previously operative nomos. The marginal situation *par excellence*, however, is death (30). Witnessing the death of

others (notably, of course, of significant others) and anticipating his own death, the individual is strongly propelled to question the *ad hoc* cognitive and normative operating procedures of his "normal" life in society. Death presents society with a formidable problem not only because of its obvious threat to the continuity of human relationships, but because it threatens the basic assumptions of order on which society rests.

In other words, the marginal situations of human existence reveal the innate precariousness of all social worlds. Every socially defined reality remains threatened by lurking "irrealities." Every socially constructed nomos must face the constant possibility of its collapse into anomy. Seen in the perspective of society, every nomos is an area of meaning carved out of a vast mass of meaninglessness, a small clearing of lucidity in a formless, dark, always ominous jungle. Seen in the perspective of the individual, every nomos represents the bright "dayside" of life, tenuously held onto against the sinister shadows of the "night." In both perspectives, every nomos is an edifice erected in the face of the potent and alien forces of chaos. This chaos must be kept at bay at all cost. To ensure this, every society develops procedures that assist its members to remain "reality-oriented" (that is, to remain within the reality as "officially" defined) and to "return to reality" (that is, to return from the marginal spheres of "irreality" to the socially established nomos). These procedures will have to be looked at more closely a little later. For the moment, suffice it to say that the individual is provided by society with various methods to stave off the nightmare world of anomy and to stay within the safe boundaries of the established nomos.

The social world intends, as far as possible, to be taken for granted (31). Socialization achieves success to the degree that this taken-for-granted quality is internalized. It is not enough that the individual look upon the key meanings of the social order as useful, desirable, or right. It is much better (better, that is, in terms of social stability) if he looks upon them as inevitable, as part and parcel of the universal "nature of things." If that can be

achieved, the individual who strays seriously from the socially defined programs can be considered not only a fool or a knave, but a madman. Subjectively, then, serious deviance provokes not only moral guilt but the terror of madness. For example, the sexual program of a society is taken for granted not simply as a utilitarian or morally correct arrangement, but as an inevitable expression of "human nature." The so-called "homosexual panic" may serve as an excellent illustration of the terror unleashed by the denial of the program. This is not to deny that this terror is also fed by practical apprehensions and qualms of conscience, but its fundamental motorics is the terror of being thrust into an outer darkness that separates one from the "normal" order of men. In other words, institutional programs are endowed with an ontological status to the point where to deny them is to deny being itself—the being of the universal order of things and, consequently, one's own being in this order.

Whenever the socially established nomos attains the quality of being taken for granted, there occurs a merging of its meanings with what are considered to be the fundamental meanings inherent in the universe. Nomos and cosmos appear to be co-extensive. In archaic societies, nomos appears as a microcosmic reflection, the world of men as expressing meanings inherent in the universe as such. In contemporary society, this archaic cosmization of the social world is likely to take the form of "scientific" propositions about the nature of men rather than the nature of the universe (32). Whatever the historical variations, the tendency is for the meanings of the humanly constructed order to be projected into the universe as such (33). It may readily be seen how this projection tends to stabilize the tenuous nomic constructions, though the mode of this stabilization will have to be investigated further. In any case, when the nomos is taken for granted as appertaining to the "nature of things," understood cosmologically or anthropologically, it is endowed with a stability deriving from more powerful sources than the

historical efforts of human beings. It is at this point that religion enters significantly into our argument.

Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established (34). Put differently, religion is cosmization in a sacred mode. By sacred is meant here a quality of mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience (35). This quality may be attributed to natural or artificial objects, to animals, or to men, or to the objectivations of human culture. There are sacred rocks, sacred tools, sacred cows. The chieftain may be sacred, as may be a particular custom or institution. Space and time may be assigned the same quality, as in sacred localities and sacred seasons. The quality may finally be embodied in sacred beings, from highly localized spirits to the great cosmic divinities. The latter, in turn, may be transformed into ultimate forces or principles ruling the cosmos, no longer conceived of in personal terms but still endowed with the status of sacredness. The historical manifestations of the sacred vary widely, though there are certain uniformities to be observed cross-culturally (no matter here whether these are to be interpreted as resulting from cultural diffusion or from an inner logic of man's religious imagination). The sacred is apprehended as "sticking out" from the normal routines of everyday life, as something extraordinary and potentially dangerous, though its dangers can be domesticated and its potency harnessed to the needs of everyday life. Although the sacred is apprehended as other than man, yet it refers to man, relating to him in a way in which other non-human phenomena (specifically, the phenomena of non-sacred nature) do not. The cosmos posited by religion thus both transcends and includes man. The sacred cosmos is confronted by man as an immensely powerful reality other than himself. Yet this reality addresses itself to him and locates his life in an ultimately meaningful order.

On one level, the antonym to the sacred is the profane, to be defined simply as the absence of sacred status. All phenomena

are profane that do not "stick out" as sacred. The routines of everyday life are profane unless, so to speak, proven otherwise, in which latter case they are conceived of as being infused in one way or another with sacred power (as in sacred work, for instance). Even in such cases, however, the sacred quality attributed to the ordinary events of life *itself* retains its extraordinary character, a character that is typically reaffirmed through a variety of rituals and the loss of which is tantamount to secularization, that is, to a conception of the events in question as *nothing but* profane. The dichotomization of reality into sacred and profane spheres, however related, is intrinsic to the religious enterprise. As such, it is obviously important for any analysis of the religious phenomenon.

On a deeper level, however, the sacred has another opposed category, that of chaos (36). The sacred cosmos emerges out of chaos and continues to confront the latter as its terrible contrary. This opposition of cosmos and chaos is frequently expressed in a variety of cosmogonic myths. The sacred cosmos, which transcends and includes man in its ordering of reality, thus provides man's ultimate shield against the terror of anomy. To be in a "right" relationship with the sacred cosmos is to be protected against the nightmare threats of chaos. To fall out of such a "right" relationship is to be abandoned on the edge of the abyss of meaninglessness. It is not irrelevant to observe here that the English "chaos" derives from a Greek word meaning "yawning" and "religion" from a Latin one meaning "to be careful." To be sure, what the religious man is "careful" about is above all the dangerous power inherent in the manifestations of the sacred themselves. But behind this danger is the other, much more horrible one, namely that one may lose all connection with the sacred and be swallowed up by chaos. All the nomic constructions, as we have seen, are designed to keep this terror at bay. In the sacred cosmos, however, these constructions achieve their ultimate culmination—literally, their apotheosis.

Human existence is essentially and inevitably externalizing ac-

tivity. In the course of externalization men pour out meaning into reality. Every human society is an edifice of externalized and objectivated meanings, always intending a meaningful totality. Every society is engaged in the never completed enterprise of building a humanly meaningful world. Cosmization implies the identification of this humanly meaningful world with the world as such, the former now being grounded in the latter, reflecting it or being derived from it in its fundamental structures. Such a cosmos, as the ultimate ground and validation of human nomoi, need not necessarily be sacred. Particularly in modern times there have been thoroughly secular attempts at cosmization, among which modern science is by far the most important. It is safe to say, however, that originally *all* cosmization had a sacred character. This remained true through most of human history, and not only through the millennia of human existence on earth preceding what we now call civilization. Viewed historically, most of man's worlds have been sacred worlds. Indeed, it appears likely that only by way of the sacred was it possible for man to conceive of a cosmos in the first place (37).

It can thus be said that religion has played a strategic part in the human enterprise of world-building. Religion implies the farthest reach of man's self-externalization, of his infusion of reality with his own meanings. Religion implies that human order is projected into the totality of being. Put differently, religion is the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant.

2. *Religion and World-Maintenance*

All socially constructed worlds are inherently precarious. Supported by human activity, they are constantly threatened by the human facts of self-interest and stupidity. The institutional programs are sabotaged by individuals with conflicting interests. Frequently individuals simply forget them or are incapable of learning them in the first place. The fundamental processes of socialization and social control, to the extent that they are successful, serve to mitigate these threats. Socialization seeks to ensure a continuing consensus concerning the most important features of the social world. Social control seeks to contain individual or group resistances within tolerable limits. There is yet another centrally important process that serves to support the swaying edifice of social order. This is the process of legitimation (1).

By legitimation is meant socially objectivated "knowledge" that serves to explain and justify the social order. Put differently, legitimations are answers to any questions about the "why" of institutional arrangements. A number of points should be noted about this definition. Legitimations belong to the domain of social objectivations, that is, to what passes for "knowledge" in a given collectivity. This implies that they have a status of objectivity quite different from merely individual cogitations about the "why" and "wherefore" of social events. Legitimations, furthermore, can be both cognitive and normative in character. They do not only tell people what *ought to be*. Often they merely propose what *is*. For instance, the morals of kinship, expressed in a statement such as, "You ought not to sleep with X, your sister," are obviously legitimating. But cognitive as-