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# THE FACTOR "CULTURE" IN THE GLOBAL SOCIAL SYSTEM

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Among the numerous patterns of consciousness which play a role in human existence, the one that we designate as "culture" is complex and difficult to define.

If we would distinguish social patterns into those which originate in a social event of great significance and those which develop gradually, "culture" would belong to the second category. It is the response of a given social group to the social and natural environment, but a response which has grown gradually and which consists of an intricate pattern in which beliefs, customs, art, symbolism and behavioral attitudes are mixed in such a way that the pattern can be distinguished from other social groups.

If we speak, for instance, about French culture, we imply by this term that the French pattern of consciousness is a highly complex one which has developed over many centuries, has a strong linguistic identity, as well as involving a specific mental pattern that is applied to situations as they arise.

The title of a book "In France the Clocks Tick Differently" illustrates what is meant. Indeed, the clocks tick differently because the French mind processes live differently than the German or the Chinese mind.

Interpreting "culture" in this way also implies that the naked structures of power and domination may exist in a culture-pattern but be imbedded in a way of life in which continuity and identity play a significant role. In other words, a volitional pattern aimed at political

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or economic power is not a culture-pattern although it could be asserted that naked power-patterns do not exist in reality but some of our social patterns come at times pretty close to them.

In this connection, it is important to stress the role of identity in a culture-pattern.

If we consider an individual as "cultured", we mean that he has made a great effort to develop his identity by striving for as complete an awareness as possible. The cultured person is deemed to have a philosophy, to be a discriminating reader, a connoisseur of the arts, and a master of meaningful living, also in his relations with other people.

If we say that the merchants of Amsterdam of the 17th century were cultured people, this is exactly what we have in mind. It seems that culture would need a rather ample material basis but although this plays a role in many cases, we talk also about "proletarian culture", meaning that the striving for identity is far more essential than the material basis.

It is important to point out that this identity, this awareness of one's place in life, requires the possibility to reflect, to ponder, to meditate. A person who is always in a hurry, rushing from one meeting to another, is not likely to be a cultured person because he cannot gain this awareness to a sufficient degree.

The individual who has a single, dominant motivation, be it money, power, fame, etc., does not fall under this definition of culture because the cultured individual has a structured and more complex motivation. He weighs the impact of his action upon others within the framework of general social values, not purely in terms of his own advantage or disadvantage.

If we speak about a social system, we would say that the one-channel system, the system with one dominant motivation, is not a culture-system. The culture-system is multi-channeled: it has a philosophy, a style of life, an identity to which it wants to remain loyal, even under adverse conditions, perhaps even in matters of life and death.

Culture does not only mean identity: it means awareness of this identity. It is not the identity attributed by others but the identity of the self.

In this essay, it is not the intention to deal with the individual as such but with social systems that attribute to themselves a cultural identity, although not in all cases is the claim identical

with the reality so that some objective measures must be used which enable us to distinguish between identity and pseudo-identity.

There is pseudo-identity if the identity is used for ulterior motives of power or again in status. If a nation, for instance, describes itself as "democratic" purely as a stratagem in international power-politics, and without much concern about the reality of its claim, we can speak about "pseudo-identity". The same holds often true for such generalised concepts as progressive, civilised, etc. These are frequently status-attributes without real value in regard to the identity of the social system in question.

The pseudo-identity resembles the situation in regard to advertising: we do not readily regard the advertised attributes of a product to be the real ones. On the contrary, we begin by supposing that advertising is largely fictitious.

If we define "culture" as the awareness of the specific identity of a social system, we may have gained a useful starting point. This identity can be that of a nation-state, of an ethnic group, of a religious or ideological group, of a linguistic group, etc., but it cannot be the attribute of the global system as such.

The global system as such is not a culture-system because it is not a social system which has grown into an identity of its own. It is more the projection of a social system, an expectation for the future than a reality in terms of the present situation.

In the global system, however, it is of the greatest significance if the actors of the system are culture — or power - systems.

There is a very basic conflict between culture and power although the distinction is a subtle and complex one. In a culture-system power can be one of the components but in a power-system in pure form there is no cultural component.

This seems to be a contradiction of history as, for instance, England and France, undoubtedly culture-systems, have played a significant role in power politics. However, their social systems grew gradually and led to political and economic power in the total structure of their culture-systems. Power can be the natural concomitant of a culture-system without being its overriding or single motivation.

In every social system we can distinguish individuals or groups in terms of their "weight" or influence. We cannot separate the role of the individual or the group from the "capa-

bility" which may express itself in ideological, religious, cultural, political or economic patterns. What factor plays the largest role can be determined by the action-pattern of the system rather than by its self-image which, often, is more a projection of wishes than a realistic self-analysis.

As a matter of fact, it is never the latter as we construct our image-of-self largely as a mechanism, aimed at enhancing or maintaining social status.

The image-of-self is the magnified projection of actual or desired status. This is all the more true in complex social systems in which the distance between image and reality becomes much larger than in simpler social situations. In a dynamic system, the dynamism is a factor which increases the gap between image and reality since focal dynamism has to operate with projected situations rather than with existing ones.

This leads to the conclusion that the more complex and the more dynamic a social system becomes, the larger the gap between image-of-self and reality. In terms of a culture-system this means that excessive dynamism and great complexity cannot be attributes of a culture-system which distinguishes itself by the continuity of its identity and its philosophic awareness of the values of its system. It cannot leave too much to projected situations unless they can be visualised as fitting into the value system rather than upsetting or even destroying it.

Modern terminology like "accelerated social change", "future-shock", "developed" and "underdeveloped" do not fit into a culture-system of which the values are more circumspect and more structural so that they cannot be sloganized so easily.

Europe of the Eighteenth and the beginning of the Nineteenth century did not sloganize its culture-patterns but kept them within the realm of the responsible dialogue. It was only the advent of the industrial mass-civilisation which initiated operating with slogans and generalised images.

It seems obvious that a mass-society cannot become a culture-system. Its philosophic assumptions are different: culture is based upon the assumption of individuality within the limits of a given structure; mass-society denies the structure of the individual and of society and operates with the mechanical image of equal interacting units although this is a contradiction

in terms because as soon as units interact, they are part of a system and the term "system" implies structure.

Thus, a culture-system is based upon the assumption of structural pluralism as the condition which is innate in human nature. It is a logical consequence of this interpretation of the term "culture" that it requires the awareness of the actor in the system of the system as a whole as well as of his individual role. This process of gaining awareness in a culture-system can never be a linear process but only a structural one as the system itself is structured.

It is true that rationalism put an often one-sided stress on the intellect as a tool to develop society but "ratio" in the deeper sense implied philosophic awareness rather than the attempt to arrive at political or legal controls. The latter are a late and linear offshoot of rationalism which is only aimed at control over nature and society, without awareness of structural limitations.

If it is admitted that the concept "culture-system" implies pluralism within states as well as within the international system, it becomes possible to outline its implications in a more satisfactory manner.

To many, pluralism may seem like a sort of half-way station between chaos and order but this opinion sees "order" as something imposed from without rather than an inbuilt factor in human nature.

Yet, it would be hard to assume that Man could exist without this inbuilt natural order. Under primitive conditions as well as under highly complex ones, all systems of ordering society or knowledge emanate from Man's consciousness, and they reflect the order of this consciousness which, fortunately for us, also seems to exist in nature, although in differing structural forms.

If we interpret all forms of social order as emanations of the order of human consciousness, it is exactly this consciousness which holds the key to the question to what extent cultural pluralism is constructive or not.

In Man's structure we find in the first place the emotional basis which is generally linked to the small group in which he lives, his daily task, and his immediate surroundings. It gives Man his most basic pattern of consciousness. Rationally, however, he has to adjust to more

complex situations which require knowledge, social control, etc. They imply a more complex and more rational awareness but less deeply rooted than the first pattern, and, finally, only constructive insofar as it corresponds to the basic motivation and identity of the individual.

Social systems force the individual into a division of social labor which can function as long as it operates in terms of the responses of the individual. This social role can imply self-sacrifice to the group but it has to appear meaningful to the individual as a part of the order which he conceives rather than upon a force which he feels as coming from the outside.

Finally, then, there are the more general patterns of awareness in which Man expresses this concept or feeling of an inbuilt order which manifests itself differently in different periods and in numerous forms and terminologies. Even if we use a standardised terminology, the weight of a term is determined by its place within the structure of our thoughts or words and by the intensity which our emotions lend to it. In this sense, all our expressions in words, sound, color are individualised expressions within a certain structure.

Returning, however, to pluralism and its implications, it is obvious that pluralism must be linked to those values which are felt as being most essential.

It links itself to the group which is "real" in terms of our feelings, our thoughts, our language, our habits and customs. The culture-system is in a sense an existential system, structured by those factors which appear as essential in our consciousness. A culture-system is not a planned system but a system in which social growth and social awareness take precedence over volitional controls although this obviously depends upon the given situation.

As the culture-system tends towards what is "real" in our consciousness, it leads to social systems that are limited in size because they are based upon similarity of identity. It is the small or medium nation which is at the basis of a pluralistic system although a certain sense of limitation is also conceivable in larger nations, but it becomes more difficult in terms of the existential limit of Man's consciousness.

The stress upon culture as identity also implies that the links to Man's emotional motivation have to be maintained. Whatever is excessive, falls outside the horizon of the culture-system

because it implies a sense of measure, a feeling for moderation. The Greeks had this great awareness of measure and of the destructiveness of excesses or extremes.

A culture-system cannot strive for power in the abstract sense because its world consists of those with whom it has a link in terms of understanding and affinity. This means that a pluralistically structured world would tend to be regional rather than global, although global in its most general awareness.

Within the regions we see the differentiation of nations and sub-national systems, striving more for functional links than for political ones which tend to become depersonalised if they become too general. Nevertheless, every social system is in reality a compromise between centralising and decentralising tendencies.

Consciously, the culture-system stresses pluralism and decentralisation but it obviously refers to situations which also make their own demands.

Social goals and values arise out of situations which they in turn begin to influence. As the situations undergo change and unfold themselves in a certain sequence, there is a tendency in human nature to overestimate change and to move in the direction of linear thinking, for such thinking seems to offer "solutions". Thus, linear and structural thinking alternate as they both mean mental attitudes which either overestimate or underestimate the innate flow of events which follows a natural rhythm.

As we have now for several centuries and in an increasing manner worshipped dynamism and linear thinking, the tide has turned towards collectivist social systems and the vision of more stable social systems, more recently prompted by the ecological crisis in the individualistic industrial nations.

While a culture-system is in a sense a collectivistic system, its values are subject to a dialogue which adjust them to the flow of events. This is implicit in the concept of the culture-system as its values have to be continuously adjusted to reality by a constructive dialogue.

The result of this is that the problem of centralisation and decentralisation is relative in a culture-system. There is no direct preference as such because the values of the system determine where centralisation or decentralisation is the most proper technique. "Centralisation" is, however, not a value of the system as such as it

is in a power-system because the assumption of uniformity is one of the bases of a power-system. Awareness of global society as a structural system of which the parts are interrelated makes excessive power-motivation negative in terms of the system but the remedy is not necessarily centralised control. On the contrary, the culture-system is the system which knows its own limits in terms of the total structure and strives for a fair place under the sun, rather than a dominant one. The principle of self-limitation can be carried far as in some religious groups but for national systems and economic groups structural thinking means a very far-reaching change in the systems themselves. They have been conditioned for linear and expansionistic thinking, and the idea of limitation is incomprehensible to them.

The transition from linear to structural thinking means, however, the transition towards a more complex goal system, and this is exactly what the culture-system can achieve.

It is by its very essence a multi-goal system which derives its goals from its history, its situation, its structure, its traditions, and its resulting awareness of its place in the world. In this sense, the culture-system may mean the transition that is needed because its concept of order comes from within. This concept can be found nowhere else and certainly not in those forms of power which defeat themselves because they are in conflict with the inner order of world society as it presents itself quite clearly before our eyes. It is the reality of a structured existential social system, ecologically determined.

We always live and act and think somewhere in space and time and out of these given situations our social systems arise, not man-built but as constructs of nature. As the global system is one of growing populations upon the same planet "Earth", we can only visualize a compact, carefully managed social system in which other values than political or material dominance will have to furnish the guiding principles.

The reality of the situation is clearly visible but to gain awareness of it in its full complexity and differentiation is the first step towards a stable and acceptable world system. It cannot be man-made on short notice but it may grow out of a better understanding of human nature as it functions in reality.

And this is the eternal task of what we generally call "culture": the awareness of self in relation to others.

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