

THE HUMAN CONDITION

BY SILENT PERCEPTION

SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

As a global society we are confronted with the threat posed by nuclear armament; the fact of endless wars; poverty, starvation and over-population in various parts of the world; the suffering of animals in the contemporary means of meat production; an escalating superficiality that inflames consumerism and inspires an increasingly materialistic mindset; the theatricality of politics; the morbid state of mainstream media; cataclysmic deforestation; colossal extinction; negligent pollution of the land, sea and sky; the transition of wealth from the docile many to the rapacious few; incessant corruption in almost every organisation and, if one is sensitive enough to see it, the serious matter of the mental degeneration of man hidden under the bonnet of psychiatric and neurological advance.

All of these catastrophes are the result of a combination of human action and inaction.

This is society.

As individuals, we experience moments of elation: the smile when we see an old friend, the laughter when we hear a witty joke, the comfort when another demonstrates they really care about us, the excitement of anticipating a long-awaited event and the sense of serenity and beauty we are struck with when seeing the stillness of a lake and the outline of marvellous mountains against the majesty of the night sky.

As individuals, we also routinely suffer. There is the resentment we feel towards the monotonous, repetitious trap of financial obligation and the proportion of our lives it consumes; the dismay of holding unfulfilled desires; the absurdity of popular culture; the fatigue of daily responsibilities; the feeling that there are simply not enough hours in the day; the abandonment of the notion of becoming the happy and healthy person we once were because life's pressures seem to refuse us that freedom and relegate our lives to the moment-to-moment struggle of trying to hold ourselves together; the desire to participate in a group activity to feel connected to something; the urge to express ourselves; the longing for deep human relationship and sex that often culminates in the acquisition of a partner whereby, through continual compromise, we enter a state of confusion such that the creation of an 'us' feels like it requires the partial or complete loss of 'me'; the pressure to exhibit pretentious concern for others in order to maintain relations with those

at the office, in one's family or social network; the arresting embarrassment of saying something or acting in a way deemed socially inappropriate; the shy, awkward and nonchalant attitudes we embody when in the presence of someone we find attractive; the desperation we feel when we lose, or imagine losing, someone on whom we depend; the anger, hatred and necessity for revenge that arises when we consider someone to have wronged us; the use of occupation to escape boredom; the habitual, envious comparison between ourselves and others; the insatiable drive to have more, be more or be 'someone' that originates from a dissatisfaction with what or how we are; the inadequacy we feel when we acknowledge that we parrot the assertions of others because we have never discovered anything original in ourselves, and that lost feeling when loneliness arises and we confront the fact that, in the absence of distraction, we are empty, guilty, petty and shoddy human beings—an experience so powerful that it provokes a fear in us of being alone, quiet and unoccupied.

All this is what we are.

This is the individual.

People speak as if society were something outside of them, but this strikes me as not entirely true.

What is the relation of the individual to society?

'Society' can refer to separate categories: British society and French society, Catholic society and Protestant society, horticultural society and agricultural society and so on, but, irrespective of these distinctions, there is one global society. There is no true independent nation, religion or profession; society is an amalgam of all these disparate categories. As such, the use of the word 'society' is meant in the context of the whole of humanity. Society is mankind.

Society is composed of individuals. You are an individual, and you form part of society. Society is not something outside of you or within you; rather, it is a term that represents humanity as a collective. That term is not exclusive, so while it may be wrong to say, 'you are the whole of society', it is not wrong to say, 'you are society'. You are society just like your neighbour is society, irrespective of whether that neighbour lives next door to you or on the other side of the planet.

We are accustomed to thinking of society as something outside of us because we have the notion that society is broader than the single individual.

This notion of 'broader' causes us to develop a sense of separation between ourselves and society; a disassociation is formed between oneself and society. Disassociation is of crucial importance because association and responsibility have a direct relationship.

That which one is associated to, one feels responsible for.

That which one is not associated to, one does not feel responsible for.

An individual cannot act responsibly towards something he considers himself to be separate from. When one considers oneself to be separate, one will not act, and the consequences of inaction can be as severe as the consequences of wrong action, e.g.:

Not responding to a humanitarian crisis with aid can cause as many casualties as responding to a brutal regime with aggression.

The problems of society and the individual mentioned above demand a deep feeling of responsibility, so we must explore why we consider society to be separate from us.

We hold to an axiom that society is broader than the individual, but why do we say society is broader than a single individual?

Is it because we think of society as a quantitative measure? i.e.:

An individual is one person, while society is a collection of seven billion people.

When we consider society from a quantitative perspective, society is clearly *bigger* than an individual. However, instead of considering an individual as a quantity, consider an individual as a quality because the quality of the individual is what determines how the individual thinks and behaves.

On the surface, individuals demonstrate varying thoughts and behaviours, but those surface appearances are underpinned by the same fundamental psychological structures. E.g.:

One believes in Christianity; another believes in Judaism.

The fundamental quality underpinning these individuals is belief.

One loves Tanya; another loves Frank.

The fundamental quality underpinning these individuals is attachment.

One drinks alcohol; another smokes.

The fundamental quality underpinning these individuals is escapism.

Each individual's thoughts and behaviours are underpinned by the drives of fear, pleasure, and pain. Whether you take one individual or seven billion individuals, action is determined by the same fundamental psychological structure; therefore, society as a quality is one.

Society is a single fundamental psychological structure in action.

Society is not something broader or lesser than the individual; there is an identical relation between the individual and the society.

You are society, and society is you.

There are seven billion individuals sharing the same planet and the same psychology. That is to say, there are seven billion individuals just like you.

'Society' is a concept, not a material entity. The implication of comprehending society as nothing more than an ideological construct is that one sees that there are only individuals and what they experience. That means:

You are an individual, and the reality of your daily existence is your relation to the **world**, your relation to **people** and your relation to **yourself**; there is nothing else. This is true for every individual on the planet.

The basis of our existence is our relationship to the world, to people and to ourselves. Relationship is the common ground on which we all stand, the ground of humanity.

When we hear a criticism of society's effect on the ozone layer, deforestation or something else, it is a criticism of human relationship. Fundamentally, the troubles of society are caused by disorder in relationship. That means all society's troubles, except for natural disasters, are the result of disorder in the individual's relation to the world, to people, or to himself.

There is only the individual.