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The Noise of Solemn Assemblies
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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 extra-organismic 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.
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 unstable together posit the fundamental problem of man’s world-building activity. Its far-reaching implications will occupy us in considerable detail a little later 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 mo-
ment 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 en-
tities 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 sub-
stance. 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 en-
terprise 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 hu-
manizing, 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 prod-
ucts, 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 in-
tended 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 lan-
guage 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 insti-
tutions, which come to confront him as powerfully controlling
and even menacing constellations of the external world. The re-
lationship 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
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Systematic Elements

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. Uncle, 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 opacity (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

religion and world-construction

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 meaning 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
Systematic Elements

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 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 anomie 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 meaningfulness. 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
Systematic Elements

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 meaningfulness, 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
Religion and World-Construction

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-
Systematic Elements

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.
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 cognitions 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 assertions about kinship, such as, “You X’s brother and she is your sister,” are legitimating in even more fundamental sense. To put it a little crude, legitimization begins with statements as to “what’s what.” Only on this cognitive basis is it possible for the normative propositions to be meaningful. Finally, it would be a serious mistake to identify legitimization with theoretical ideation (2). “Ideas, to be sure, can be important for purposes of legitimatio. However, what passes for “knowledge” in a society is by no means identical with the body of “ideas” existing in the society. There are always some people with an interest in “ideas,” but they have never yet constituted more than rather small minority. If legitimation always had to consist of theoretically coherent propositions, it would support the social order only for that minority of intellectuals that have such theoretical interests—obviously not a very practical program. Most legitimation, consequently, is pretheoretical in character.

It will be clear from the above that, in one sense, a socially objectivated “knowledge” is legitimating. The nomos of a society first of all legitimates itself by simply being there. Institutions structure human activity. As the meanings of the institutions are nominally integrated, the institutions are ipso facto legitimated, to the point where the institutionalize actions appear “self-evident” to their performers. This level of legitimation is already implied in speaking of the objectivity of social order. In other words, the socially constructed world legitimates itself by virtue of its objective facticity. However, additional legitimations are invariably necessary in any society. This necessity is grounded in the problems of socialization and social control. If the nomos of a society is to be transmitted from one generation to another, so that the next generation will also come to “inhabit” the same social world, there will have to be legitimating formulas to answer questions that, inevitably, will arise in the minds of the next generation. Children want to know “why.” Their teachers must supply convincing answers. Furthermore, as we have seen, socialization is never completed. Not only children but adults as well, “forget” the legitimating answers. They must ever again be “reminded.” In other words, the legitimation formulas must be repeated. Clearly, such repetition will be especially important on those occasions of collective or individual crisis when the danger of “forgetting” is most acute. Any exercise of social control also demands legitimation over and above the self-legitimating facticity of the institutional arrangements—precisely because this facticity is put in question by the resisters who are to be controlled. The sharper the resistance, and the sharper the means employed to overcome it, the more important will it be to have additional legitimations. Such legitimations serve both to explain why the resistance cannot be tolerated and to justify the means by which it is to be quelled. One may say, then, that the facticity of the social world or of any part of it suffices for self-legitimation as long as there is no challenge. When a challenge appears, in whatever form, the facticity can no longer be taken for granted. The validity of the social order must then be explicated, both for the sake of the challengers and of those meeting the challenge. The children must be convinced, but so must be their teachers. The wrongdoers must be convincingly condemned, but this condemnation must also serve to justify their judges. The seriousness of the challenge will determine the degree of elaborateness of the answering legitimations.

Legitimation occurs, therefore, on a variety of levels. One may first distinguish between the level of self-legitimating facticity and that of, so to speak, secondary legitimations made necessary by challenges to facticity. One may further distinguish between different levels of the latter type of legitimations. On the pretheoretical level there are to be found simple traditional affirmations of which the paradigm is “This is how things are done.” There follows an incipiently theoretical level (hardly to be included, though, in the category of “ideas”) on which legitimation takes the form of proverbs, moral maxims and traditional wisdom. This type of legitimat-
ing lore may be further developed and transmitted in the form of myths, legends, or folk tales. Only then may one come upon explicitly theoretical legitimations, by which specific sectors of the social order are explained and justified by means of specialized bodies of “knowledge.” Finally, there are the highly theoretical constructions by which the nomos of a society is legitimated in toto and in which all less-than-total legitimations are theoretically integrated in an all-embracing Weltanschauung. This last level may be described by saying that here the nomos of a society attains theoretical self-consciousness.

There is both an objective and a subjective aspect to legitimation. The legitimations exist as objectively valid and available definitions of reality. They are part of the objectivated “knowledge” of society. If they are to be effective in supporting the social order, however, they will have to be internalized and serve to define subjective reality as well. In other words, effective legitimation implies the establishment of symmetry between objective and subjective definitions of reality. The reality of the world as socially defined must be maintained externally, in the conversation of men with each other, as well as internally, in the way by which the individual apprehends the world within his own consciousness. The essential purpose of all forms of legitimation may thus be described as reality-maintenance, both on the objective and the subjective levels.

It will readily be seen that the area of legitimation is far broader than that of religion, as these two terms have been defined here. Yet there exists an important relationship between the two. It can be described simply by saying that religion has been the historically most widespread and effective instrumentality of legitimation. All legitimation maintains socially defined reality. Religion legitimates so effectively because it relates the precarious reality constructions of empirical societies with ultimate reality. The tenuous realities of the social world are grounded in the sacred realissimum, which by definition is beyond the contingencies of human meanings and human activity.

The efficacy of religious legitimation can be brought home by asking an, as it were, recipe question on the construction of worlds. If one imagines oneself as a fully aware founder of a society, a kind of combination of Moses and Machiavelli, one could ask oneself the following question: How can the future continuation of the institutional order, now established ex nihilo, be best ensured? There is an obvious answer to the question in terms of power. But let it be assumed that all the means of power have been effectively employed—all opponents have been destroyed, all means of coercion are in one’s own hands, reasonably safe provisions have been made for the transmission of power to one’s designated successors. There still remains the problem of legitimation, all the more urgent because of the novelty and thus highly conscious precariousness of the new order. The problem would best be solved by applying the following recipe: Let the institutional order be so interpreted as to hide, as much as possible, its constructed character. Let that which has been stamped out of the ground ex nihilo appear as the manifestation of something that has been existent from the beginning of time, or at least from the beginning of this group. Let the people forget that this order was established by men and continues to be dependent upon the consent of men. Let them believe that, in acting out the institutional programs that have been imposed upon them, they are but realizing the deepest aspirations of their own being and putting themselves in harmony with the fundamental order of the universe. In sum: Set up religious legitimations. There are, of course, wide historical variations in the manner in which this has been done. In one way or another, the basic recipe was followed throughout most of human history. And, actually, the example of Moses-Machiavelli figuring the whole thing out with cool deliberation may not be as fanciful as all that. There have been very cool minds indeed in the history of religion.

Religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by locating them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference. The historical constructions of human activity are viewed
from a vantage point that, in its own self-definition, transcends both history and man. This can be done in different ways. Probably the most ancient form of this legitimation is the conception of the institutional order as directly reflecting or manifesting the divine structure of the cosmos, that is, the conception of the relationship between society and cosmos as one between microcosm and macrocosm (3). Everything "here below" has its analogue "up above." By participating in the institutional order men, ipso facto, participate in the divine cosmos. The kinship structure, for example, extends beyond the human realm, with all being (including the being of the gods) conceived of in the structures of kinship as given in the society (4). Thus there may be not only a totemic "sociology" but a totemic "cosmology" as well. The social institutions of kinship then merely reflect the great "family" of all being, in which the gods participate on a higher level. Human sexuality reflects divine creativity. Every human family reflects the structure of the cosmos, not only in the sense of representing but of embodying it. Or, for another crucial case, the political structure simply extends into the human sphere the power of the divine cosmos. The political authority is conceived of as the agent of the gods, or ideally even as a divine incarnation. Human power, government, and punishment thus become sacramental phenomena, that is, channels by which divine forces are made to impinge upon the lives of men. The ruler speaks for the gods, or is a god, and to obey him is to be in a right relationship with the world of the gods.

The microcosm/macrocosm scheme of legitimating the social order, while typical of primitive and archaic societies, has been transformed in the major civilizations (5). Such transformations are probably inevitable with a certain development of human thought beyond a strictly mythological worldview, that is, a worldview in which sacred forces are continuously permeating human experience. In the civilizations of eastern Asia the mythological legitimations were transformed into highly abstract philosophical and theological categories, though the essential features of the microcosm/macrocosm scheme remained intact (6). In China, for instance, even the very rational, virtually secularizing, demythologization of the concept of tao (the "right order" or "right way" of things) permitted the continuing conception of the institutional structure as reflective of cosmic order. In India, on the other hand, the notion of dharma (social duty, particularly caste duty) as relating the individual to the universal order of the universe survived most of the radical reinterpretations of the latter's meaning. In Israel the scheme was broken through by the faith in a radically transcendent God of history, and in Greece by the positing of the human soul as the ground for the rational ordering of the world (7). The latter two transformations had profound consequences for religious legitimation, in the Israelite case leading to the interpretation of institutions in terms of revealed divine imperatives, in the Greek case to interpretations based on rationally conceived assumptions about the nature of man. Both the Israelite and the Greek transformations carried within them the seeds of a secularized view of the social order. The resulting historical developments need not concern us at the moment, nor the fact that large masses of people continue to conceive of society in essentially archaic terms down to our own time and regardless of the transformations in the "official" definitions of reality. What is important to stress is that, even where the microcosm/macrocosm scheme was broken through, religion continued for many centuries to be the central legitimating agency. Israel legitimated its institutions in terms of the divinely revealed law throughout its existence as an autonomous society (8). The Greek city, and its subsidiary institutions, continued to be legitimated in religious terms, and these legitimations could even be expanded to apply to the Roman empire in a later era (9).

To repeat, the historically crucial part of religion in the process of legitimation is explicable in terms of the unique capacity of religion to "locate" human phenomena within a cosmic frame of reference. All legitimation serves to maintain reality—reality, that is, as defined in a particular human collectivity. Religious legitimation purports to relate the hu-
manly defined reality to ultimate, universal and sacred reality. The inherently precarious and transitory constructions of human activity are thus given the semblance of ultimate security and permanence. Put differently, the humanly constructed nomoi are given a cosmic status.

This cosmization, of course, refers not only to the over-all nomic structures, but to specific institutions and roles within a given society. The cosmic status assigned to these is objectivated, that is, it becomes part of the objectively available reality of the institutions and roles in question. For example, the institution of divine kingship, and the several roles representing it, is apprehended as a decisive link between the world of men and the world of the gods. The religious legitimation of power involved in this institution does not appear as an \textit{ex post facto} justification of a few theoreticians, it is objectively present as the institution is encountered by the man in the street in the course of his everyday life. Insofar as the man in the street is adequately socialized into the reality of his society, he cannot conceive of the king \textit{except as} the bearer of a role that represents the fundamental order of the universe—and, indeed, the same assumption may be made for the king himself. In this manner, the cosmic status of the institution is “experienced” whenever men come into contact with it in the ordinary course of events (10).

The “gains” of this kind of legitimation are readily evident, whether one looks at it from the viewpoint of institutional objectivity or from that of individual subjective consciousness. All institutions possess the character of objectivity and their legitimations, whatever content these may have, must continuously undergird this objectivity. The religious legitimations, however, ground the socially defined reality of the institutions in the ultimate reality of the universe, in reality “as such.” The institutions are thus given a semblance of inevitability, firmness and durability that is analogous to these qualities as ascribed to the gods themselves. Empirically, institutions are always changing as the exigencies of human activity upon which they are based change. Institutions are always threatened not only by the ravages of time, but by those of conflict and discrepancies between the groups whose activities they are intended to regulate. In terms of the cosmic legitimations, on the other hand, the institutions are magically lifted above these human, historical contingencies. They become inevitable, because they are taken for granted not only by men but by the gods. Their empirical tenuousness is transformed into an overpowering stability as they are understood as but manifestations of the underlying structure of the universe. They transcend the death of individuals and the decay of entire collectivities, because they are now grounded in a sacred time within which merely human history is but an episode. In a sense, then, they become immortal.

Looked at from the viewpoint of individual subjective consciousness, the cosmization of the institutions permits the individual to have an ultimate sense of rightness, both cognitively and normatively, in the roles he is expected to have. The individual can identify himself with a role only insofar as others have identified him with it. When roles, and the institutions to which they belong, are endowed with cosmic significance, the individual’s self-identification with them attains a further dimension. For now it is not only human others who recognize him in the manner appropriate to the role, but those suprahuman others with which the cosmic legitimations populate the universe. His self-identification with the role becomes correspondingly deeper and more stable. He is what society has identified him as by virtue of a cosmic truth, as it were, and his social being becomes rooted in the sacred reality of the universe. Once more, the transcendence of erosive time is of paramount importance here. An Arabic proverb puts it succinctly: “Men forget, God remembers.” What men forget, among other things, is their reciprocal identifications in the game of playing society. Social identities and their corresponding roles are assigned to the individual by others, but others are also quite liable to change or withdraw the assignments. They “forget” who the individual was and, because of the inherent dialectic of recognition and self-recognition, thus powerfully
threaten his own recollections of identity. If he can assume that, at any rate, God remembers, his tenuous self-identifications are given a foundation seemingly secure from the shifting reactions of other men. God then becomes the most reliable and ultimately significant other (11).

Where the microcosm/macrocosm understanding of the relationship between society and cosmos prevails, the parallelism between the two spheres typically extends to specific roles. These are then understood as mimetic reiterations of the cosmic realities for which they are supposed to stand. All social roles are representations of larger complexes of objectivated meanings (12). For example, the role of father represents a wide variety of meanings ascribed to the institution of the family and, more generally, to the institutionalization of sexuality and interpersonal relationships. When this role is legitimated in mimetic terms—the father reiterating “here below” the actions of creation, sovereignty, or love that have their sacred prototypes “up above”—then its representative character becomes vastly enhanced. Representation of human meanings becomes mimesis of divine mysteries. Sexual intercourse mimes the creation of the universe. Paternal authority mimes the authority of the gods, paternal solicitude the solicitude of the gods. Like the institutions, then, roles become endowed with a quality of immortality. Also, their objectivity, over and beyond the foibles of the individuals who are their “temporal” bearers, becomes immensely strengthened. The role of fatherhood confronts the individual as a divinely given facticity, ultimately untouchable not only by his own conceivable transgressions against it but also by all the conceivable vicissitudes of history. The point need hardly be belabored that legitimation of this kind carries with it extremely powerful and built-in sanctions against individual deviance from the prescribed role performances.

But even where religious legitimation falls short of cosmization and does not permit the transformation of human acts into mimetic representations, it still permits the individual to play his roles with a greater assurance that they are more than ephemeral human productions. At any rate those roles that have been specially circumscribed with religious mandates and sanctions will “gain” in this way. Even in our own society, for example, where sexuality, the family, and marriage are hardly legitimated in mimetic terms, the roles pertaining to these institutional spheres are effectively maintained by religious legitimations. The contingent formations of a particular historical society, the particular institutions produced out of the polymorphic and pliant material of human sexuality, are legitimated in terms of divine commandment, “natural law,” and sacrament. Even today, then, the role of fatherhood not only has a certain quality of impersonality (that is, detachability from the particular person who performs it—a quality attaching to all social roles), but in its religious legitimation this becomes a quality of suprapersonality by virtue of its relationship to the heavenly father who instituted on earth the order to which the role belongs.

Just as religious legitimation interprets the order of society in terms of an all-embracing, sacred order of the universe, so it relates the disorder that is the antithesis of all socially constructed nomoi to that yawning abyss of chaos that is the oldest antagonist of the sacred. To go against the order of society is always to risk plunging into anomy. To go against the order of society as religiously legitimated, however, is to make a compact with the primeval forces of darkness. To deny reality as it has been socially defined is to risk falling into irreality, because it is well-nigh impossible in the long run to keep up alone and without social support one’s own counterdefinitions of the world. When the socially defined reality has come to be identified with the ultimate reality of the universe, then its denial takes on the quality of evil as well as madness. The denier then risks moving into what may be called a negative reality—if one wishes, the reality of the devil. This is well expressed in those archaic mythologies that confront the divine order of the world (such as tao in China, rta in India, md’at in Egypt) with an under-world or anti-world that has a reality of its own—negative, chaotic, ultimately destructive of all who inhabit it, the realm of demonic monstrosities. As particular religious traditions move away
from mythology, this imagery will, of course, change. This happened, for instance, in the highly sophisticated ways in which later Hindu thought developed the original dichotomy of rta and an-rta. But the fundamental confrontation between light and darkness, nomic security and anomic abandonment, remains operative. Thus the violation of one's dharma is not just a moral offense against society, but an outrage against the ultimate order that embraces both gods and men and, indeed, all beings.

Men forget. They must, therefore, be reminded over and over again. Indeed, it may be argued that one of the oldest and most important prerequisites for the establishment of culture is the institution of such “reminders,” the terrible-ness of which for many centuries is perfectly logical in view of the “forgetfulness” that they were designed to combat (13). Religious ritual has been a crucial instrument of this process of “reminding.” Again and again it “makes present” to those who participate in it the fundamental reality-definitions and their appropriate legitimations. The farther back one goes historically, the more does one find religious ideation (typically in mythological form) embedded in ritual activity—to use more modern terms, theology embedded in worship. A good case can be made that the oldest religious expressions were always ritual in character (14). The “action” of a ritual (the Greeks called this its ergon or “work”—from which, incidentally, our word “orgy” is derived) typically consists of two parts—the things that have to be done (dromena) and the things that have to be said (legoumena). The performances of the ritual are closely linked to the reiteration of the sacred formulas that “make present” once more the names and deeds of the gods. Another way of putting this is to say that religious ideation is grounded in religious activity, relating to it in a dialectical manner analogous to the dialectic between human activity and its products discussed earlier in a broader context. Both religious acts and religious legitimations, ritual and mythology, dromena and legoumena, together serve to “recall” the traditional meanings embodied in the culture and its major institutions. They restore ever again the continuity between the present moment and the societal tradition, placing the experiences of the individual and the various groups of the society in the context of a history (fictitious or not) that transcends them all. It has been rightly said that society, in its essence, is a memory (15). It may be added that, through most of human history, this memory has been a religious one.

The dialecticity between religious activity and religious ideation points to another important fact—the rootedness of religion in the practical concerns of everyday life (16). The religious legitimations, or at least most of them, make little sense if one conceives of them as productions of theoreticians that are then applied ex post facto to particular complexes of activity. The need for legitimation arises in the course of activity. Typically, this is in the consciousness of the actors before that of the theoreticians. And, of course, while all members of a society are actors within it, only very few are theoreticians (mystagogues, theologians, and the like). The degree of theoretical elaboration of the religious legitimations will vary with a large number of historical factors, but it would lead to grave misunderstanding if only the more sophisticated legitimations were taken into consideration. To put it simply, most men in history have felt the need for religious legitimation—only very few have been interested in the development of religious “ideas.”

This does not mean, however, that where there exists more complex religious ideation it is to be understood as nothing but a “reflection” (that is, a dependent variable) of the everyday, practical interests from which it derives. The term “dialectic” is useful precisely in avoiding this misinterpretation. Religious legitimations arise from human activity, but once crystallized into complexes of meaning that become part of a religious tradition they can attain a measure of autonomy as against this activity. Indeed, they may then act back upon actions in everyday life, transforming the latter, sometimes radically. It is probable that this autonomy from practical concerns increases with the degree of theoretical sophistication. For example, the thought of a tribal shaman is likely to
be more directly linked to the practical concerns of society than the thought of a professor of systematic theology. In any case, one cannot properly assume a priori that to understand the social roots of a particular religious idea is ipso facto to understand its later meaning or to be able to predict its later social consequences. "Intellectuals" (religious or otherwise) sometimes spin out very strange ideas—and very strange ideas sometimes have important historical effects.

Religion thus serves to maintain the reality of that socially constructed world within which men exist in their everyday lives. Its legitimating power, however, has another important dimension—the integration into a comprehensive nomos of precisely those marginal situations in which the reality of everyday life is put in question (17). It would be erroneous to think of these situations as being rare. On the contrary, every individual passes through such a situation every twenty hours or so—in the experience of sleep and, very importantly, in the transition stages between sleep and wakefulness. In the world of dreams the reality of everyday life is definitely left behind. In the transition stages of falling asleep and waking up again the contours of everyday reality are, at the least, less firm than in the state of fully awake consciousness. The reality of everyday life, therefore, is continuously surrounded by a penumbra of vastly different realities. These, to be sure, are segregated in consciousness as having a special cognitive status (in the consciousness of modern man, a lesser one) and thus generally prevented from massively threatening the primary reality of fully awake existence. Even then, however, the "dikes" of everyday reality are not always impermeable to the invasion of those other realities that insinuate themselves into consciousness during sleep. There are always the "nightmares" that continue to haunt in the daytime—specifically, with the "nightmarish" thought that daytime reality may not be what it purports to be, that behind it lurks a totally different reality that may have as much validity, that indeed world and self may ultimately be something quite different from what they are defined to be by the society in which one lives one's daytime existence. Throughout the greater part of human history these other realities of the nightside of consciousness were taken quite seriously as realities, albeit of a different kind. Religion served to integrate these realities with the reality of everyday life, sometimes (in contrast to our modern approach) by ascribing to them a higher cognitive status. Dreams and nocturnal visions were related to everyday life in a variety of ways—as warnings, prophecies, or decisive encounters with the sacred, having specific consequences for everyday conduct in society. Within a modern ("scientific") frame of reference, of course, religion is less capable of performing this integration. Other legitimating conceptualizations, such as those of modern psychology, have taken the place of religion. All the same, where religion continues to be meaningful as an interpretation of existence, its definitions of reality must somehow be able to account for the fact that there are different spheres of reality in the ongoing experience of everyone (18).

Marginal situations are characterized by the experience of "ecstasy" (in the literal sense of ek-stasis—standing, or stepping, outside reality as commonly defined). The world of dreams is ecstatic with regard to the world of everyday life, and the latter can only retain its primary status in consciousness if some way is found of legitimating the ecstasies within a frame of reference that includes both reality spheres. Other bodily states also produce ecstasies of a similar kind, particularly those arising from disease and acute emotional disturbance. The confrontation with death (be it through actually witnessing the death of others or anticipating one's own death in the imagination) constitutes what is probably the most important marginal situation (19). Death radically challenges all socially objectivated definitions of reality—of the world, of others, and of self. Death radically puts in question the taken-for-granted, "business-as-usual" attitude in which one exists in everyday life. Here, everything in the daytime world of existence in society is massively threatened with "irreality"—that is, everything in that world becomes dubious, eventually unreal, other than one had used to think. Insofar as the knowledge of death cannot be avoided in any society, legiti-
mations of the reality of the social world in the face of death are decisive requirements in any society. The importance of religion in such legitimations is obvious.

Religion, then, maintains the socially defined reality by legitimating marginal situations in terms of an all-encompassing sacred reality. This permits the individual who goes through these situations to continue to exist in the world of his society—not "as if nothing had happened," which is psychologically difficult in the more extreme marginal situations, but in the "knowledge" that even these events or experiences have a place within a universe that makes sense. It is thus even possible to have "a good death," that is, to die while retaining to the end a meaningful relationship with the nomos of one's society—subjectively meaningful to oneself and objectively meaningful in the minds of others.

While the ecstasy of marginal situations is a phenomenon of individual experience, entire societies or social groups may, in times of crisis, undergo such a situation collectively. In other words, there are events affecting entire societies or social groups that provide massive threats to the reality previously taken for granted. Such situations may occur as the result of natural catastrophe, war, or social upheaval. At such times religious legitimations almost invariably come to the front.

Furthermore, whenever a society must motivate its members to kill or to risk their lives, thus consenting to being placed in extreme marginal situations, religious legitimations become important. Thus the "official" exercise of violence, be it in war or in the administration of capital punishment, is almost invariably accompanied by religious symbolizations. In these cases religious legitimation has the already discussed "gain" of allowing the individual to differentiate between his "real self" (which is afraid or has scruples) and his self qua role-carrier (warrior, hangman, and what not, in which roles he may act the hero, the merciless avenger, and so on). Killing under the auspices of the legitimate authorities has, for this reason, been accompanied from ancient times to today by religious paraphernalia and ritualism. Men go to war and men are put to death amid prayers, blessings, and incantations. The ecstasies of fear and violence are, by these means, kept within the bounds of "sanity," that is, of the reality of the social world.

To return once more to the dialectic between religious activity and religious ideation, there is a further aspect of this that is extremely important for the reality-maintaining task of religion. This aspect refers to the social-structural prerequisites of any religious (or, for that matter, any other) reality-maintaining process. This may be formulated as follows: Worlds are socially constructed and socially maintained. Their continuing reality, both objective (as common, taken-for-granted facticity) and subjective (as facticity imposing itself on individual consciousness), depends upon specific social processes, namely those processes that ongoingly reconstruct and maintain the particular worlds in question. Conversely, the interruption of these social processes threatens the (objective and subjective) reality of the worlds in question. Thus each world requires a social "base" for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings. This "base" may be called its plausibility structure (20).

This prerequisite applies both to legitimations and to the worlds or nomoi that are legitimated. And, of course, it applies regardless of the fact whether these are religious in quality or not. In the context of the present argument, however, it will be useful to concentrate on examples of religiously legitimated worlds. Thus, for example, the religious world of pre-Columbian Peru was objectively and subjectively real as long as its plausibility structure, namely, pre-Columbian Inca society, remained intact. Objectively, the religious world of pre-Columbian Peru was objectively and subjectively real as long as its plausibility structure, namely, pre-Columbian Inca society, remained intact. Objectively, the religious legitimations were ongoingly confirmed in the collective activity taking place within the framework of this world. Subjectively, they were real to the individual whose life was embedded in the same collective activity (leaving aside here the question of the "unadjusted" Peruvian). Conversely, when the conquering Spaniards destroyed this plausibility structure, the reality of the world based on it began to disintegrate with terrifying rapidity. Whatever may have been his own intentions, when Pizarro killed Atahualpa, he began the de-
struction of a world of which the Inca was not only the representative but the essential mainstay. By his act, he shattered a world, redefined reality, and consequently redefined the existence of those who had been "inhabitants" of this world. What previously had been existence in the nomos of the Inca world, now became, first, unspeakable anomy, then a more or less nomized existence on the fringes of the Spaniards' world—that other world, alien and vastly powerful, which imposed itself as reality-defining facticity upon the numbed consciousness of the conquered. Much of the history of Peru, and of Latin America generally, since then has been concerned with the consequences of this world-shattering catastrophe.

These considerations have far-reaching implications for both the sociology and the psychology of religion. There have been religious traditions that have strongly emphasized the necessity of the religious community—such as the Christian koinonia, the Muslim 'umma, the Buddhist sangha. These traditions pose particular sociological and psychological problems, and it would be mistaken to reduce them all to abstract common denominators. Nevertheless, it can be said that all religious traditions, irrespective of their several "ecclesiologies" or lack of same, require specific communities for their continuing plausibility. In this sense, the maxim extra ecclesiam nulla salus has general empirical applicability, provided one understands salus in a theologically rather unpalatable sense—to wit, as continuing plausibility. The reality of the Christian world depends upon the presence of social structures within which this reality is taken for granted and within which successive generations of individuals are socialized in such a way that this world will be real to them. When this plausibility structure loses its intactness or continuity, the Christian world begins to totter and its reality ceases to impose itself as self-evident truth. This is the case with the individual—the Crusader, say, who has been captured and is forced to live in a Muslim ambience. It is also the case with large collectivities—as the entire history of Western Christendom since the Middle Ages demonstrates with impressive clarity. In this respect, despite the historical peculiarities of the Christian community, the Christian is subject to the same social-psychological dialectic as the Muslim, the Buddhist, or the Peruvian Indian. A failure to understand this is likely to produce blindness with respect to very important historical developments in all these traditions.

The prerequisite of plausibility structures pertains to entire religious worlds as well as to the legitimations designed to maintain these, but a further differentiation may be made. The firmer the plausibility structure is, the firmer will be the world that is "based" upon it. In the limiting case (an empirically unavailable one) this will mean that the world, as it were, posits itself and requires no further legitimation beyond its sheer presence. This is a most unlikely case, if only because the socialization of every new generation into the world in question will require legitimation of some sort—children will ask "why." An empirically more relevant corollary follows, though: The less firm the plausibility structure becomes, the more acute will be the need for world-maintaining legitimations. Typically, therefore, the development of complex legitimations takes place in situations in which plausibility structures are threatened in one way or another. For example, the mutual threat of Christendom and Islam in the Middle Ages required the theoreticians of both socio-religious worlds to produce legitimations that vindicated one's own world against the opposing one (and which, typically, also included an "explanation" of the other world in terms of one's own). This example is particularly instructive because the antagonistic theoreticians employed an essentially similar intellectual apparatus for their contradictory purposes (21).

It must be stressed very strongly that what is being said here does not imply a sociologically deterministic theory of religion. It is not implied that any particular religious system is nothing but the effect or "reflection" of social processes. Rather, the point is that the same human activity that produces society also produces religion, with the relation between the two products always being a dialectical one. Thus it is just as possible that, in a particular historical development,
A social process is the effect of religious ideation, while in another development the reverse may be the case. The implication of the rootage of religion in human activity is not that religion is always a dependent variable in the history of a society, but rather that it derives its objective and subjective reality from human beings, who produce and reproduce it in their ongoing lives. This, however, poses a problem of "social engineering" for anyone who wishes to maintain the reality of a particular religious system, for to maintain his religion he must maintain (or, if necessary, fabricate) an appropriate plausibility structure. The practical difficulties involved in this will, of course, vary historically.

A theoretically important variation is between situations in which an entire society serves as the plausibility structure for a religious world and situations in which only a subsociety serves as such (22). In other words, the "social-engineering" problem differs as between religious monopolies and religious groups seeking to maintain themselves in a situation of pluralistic competition. It is not difficult to see that the problem of world-maintenance is less difficult of solution in the former instance. When an entire society serves as the plausibility structure for a religiously legitimated world, all the important social processes within it serve to confirm and reconfirm the reality of this world. This is so even when the world in question is threatened from the outside, as was the case in the Christian-Muslim confrontation during the Middle Ages. The "social-engineering" problem in such a situation, apart from providing the necessary institutional context for socialization and resocialization under "correct" auspices (given, in the two instances, in the religious monopolies in education, scholarship, and law), involves the protection of the territorial limits of each plausibility structure (the military frontier between the two worlds being a cognitive frontier as well), their extension if feasible (through Crusades and Holy Wars) and the upkeep of effective controls over dangerous or potentially dangerous deviants within the respective territories. The last can be achieved in different ways, the typical ones being physical destruction of deviant individuals or groups (the favored Christian way, as in the liquidation of individual heretics by the Inquisition and that of heretical subcommunities along the lines of the Crusade against the Albigensians), and physical segregation of these individuals or groups in such a way that they are kept from significant contact with the "inhabitants" of the "correct" world (the favored Muslim way, as expressed in the Quranic provisions for non-Muslim "peoples of the book" and the millet system that grew out of these, though Christendom used a similar method in dealing with the Jews in its midst). As long as the particular religious system can maintain its monopoly on a society-wide basis, that is, as long as it can continue to utilize the entire society as its plausibility structure, these ways of solving the problem have a high chance of success.

The situation, of course, changes drastically when different religious systems, and their respective institutional "carriers," are in pluralistic competition with each other. For a while, the old methods of extermination (as in the wars of religion in post-Reformation Europe) and segregation (as in the "territorial formula" of the Peace of Westphalia that ended the most violent of these wars) may be tried. But it may become quite difficult to either kill off or quarantine the deviant worlds. The problem of "social engineering" is then transformed into one of constructing and maintaining subsocieties that may serve as plausibility structures for the demonopolized religious systems. This problem will be taken up again in greater detail in a later part of this book. Suffice it to say at this point that such subsocietal plausibility structures typically have a "sectarian" character, which in itself creates practical as well as theoretical difficulties for the religious groups in question, especially those that retain the institutional and intellectual habits deriving from the happy days when they were monopolies.

For the individual, existing in a particular religious world implies existing in the particular social context within which that world can retain its plausibility. Where the nomos of individual life is more or less co-extensive with that religious world, separation from the latter implies the threat of anomy.
Thus travel in areas where there were no Jewish communities was not only ritually impossible but inherently anomic (that is, threatening an anomic disintegration of the only conceivable “correct” way of living) for the traditional Jew, as travel outside India was for the traditional Hindu. Such journeys into darkness were to be shunned not only because the company of pork-eaters or cow-defilers caused ritual impurity but, more importantly, because their company threatened the “purity” of the Jewish or Hindu world—that is, its subjective reality or plausibility. Thus the agonizing question of the Babylonian exiles, “How can one worship Yahweh in an alien land?,” has a decisive cognitive dimension, which indeed has been the decisive question for diaspora Judaism ever since. Since every religious world is “based” on a plausibility structure that is itself the product of human activity, every religious world is inherently precarious in its reality. In other words, “conversion” (that is, individual “transference” into another world) is always possible in principle. This possibility increases with the degree of instability or discontinuity of the plausibility structure in question. Thus the Jew whose social ambience was limited by the confines of the ghetto was much less conversion-prone than the Jew existing in the “open societies” of modern Western countries (conversion here referring to “emigration” from traditional Judaism to any one of the various worlds “available” in such societies, not necessarily to conversion to Christianity). Both the theoretical measures of conversion-prevention (“apologetics” in all its forms) and their practical correlates (various procedures of “maintenance engineering”—development of subsocietal institutions of “defense,” education, and sociability, voluntary restrictions on social contacts that are dangerous to reality-maintenance, voluntary group endogamy, and so on) increase in complexity in such situations. Conversely, the individual who wishes to convert, and (more importantly) to “stay converted,” must engineer his social life in accordance with this purpose. Thus he must dissociate himself from those individuals or groups that constituted the plausibility structure of his past religious reality, and associate himself all the more intensively and (if possible) exclusively with those who serve to maintain his new one. Put succinctly, migration between religious worlds implies migration between their respective plausibility structures (23). This fact is as relevant for those who wish to foster such migrations as for those wishing to prevent them. In other words, the same social-psychological problem is involved in evangelism and in the “care of souls.”

The sociology of religion has been able to show in numerous instances the intimate relationship between religion and social solidarity. It is well at this point of the argument to recall the definition of religion used a little earlier—the establishment, through human activity, of an all-embracing sacred order, that is, of a sacred cosmos that will be capable of maintaining itself in the ever-present face of chaos. Every human society, however legitimated, must maintain its solidarity in the face of chaos. Religiously legitimated solidarity brings this fundamental sociological fact into sharper focus. The world of sacred order, by virtue of being an ongoing human production, is ongoingly confronted with the disordering forces of human existence in time. The precariousness of every such world is revealed each time men forget or doubt the reality-defining affirmations, each time they dream reality-denying dreams of “madness,” and most importantly, each time they consciously encounter death. Every human society is, in the last resort, men banded together in the face of death. The power of religion depends, in the last resort, upon the credibility of the banners it puts in the hands of men as they stand before death, or more accurately, as they walk, inevitably, toward it.