

THE
Lonely Crowd

A Study of the
Changing American Character

By

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IN COLLABORATION WITH

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Some Types of Character and Society

. . . nor can the learned reader be ignorant, that in human nature, though here collected under one general name, is such prodigious variety, that a cook will sooner have gone through all the several species of animal and vegetable food in the world, than an author will be able to exhaust so extensive a subject.

Fielding, *Tom Jones*

SOcial CHARACTER is the product of social forms; in that sense, man is made by his society. Yet we know that social forms change; sometimes men change them; and character changes with them. What part does character play, then, in the initiation of change?

Let us take political apathy as an illustration. The complexity of society, its segmentation, the difficulty of comprehending it, the consistent failure to have it act the way people say they would like it to act—all these factors induce political apathy. At the same time general political apathy is itself one of the main factors “causing” the apparent inelasticity of society.

The relations between political apathy and social change are actually more complicated even than this, once unconscious interconnections are recognized. For example, uncertainty as to social position, combined with the possibility or hope of rapid social advance, leads parents in certain middle social strata to largely unconscious changes in their child-rearing practices. The child is no longer trained to an unquestioned ideal as perhaps his parents were; he is trained to do the “best possible” in any situation. The decline of specifically defined goals and clear purposes, for this and other reasons, can easily

have the effect of making the person more vulnerable to apathy. This in turn may lead him to interpret the world in such a way as to justify his apathy and to mold it into a political style. He says, "No one can do anything in politics anyway," when the point is, "I cannot imagine myself doing anything, in politics or elsewhere."

The complexity of such interconnections is so great that we must recognize very clearly the limitations of historical analysis pursued according to *any* method we now have; the *Kulturkampf* aroused by Max Weber's magnificent essay on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* indicates both the controversiality and the possible fruitfulness of pursuing a typological method to see where it leads. Hence the place given to character in this book is heuristic; it is an effort to find something out, not a conviction as to *the* road for overcoming the elusiveness of history.

Let us begin by defining character structure as the more or less permanent, socially and historically conditioned organization of an individual's drives and satisfactions. The term as thus defined is less inclusive than "personality," the word which in current usage denotes the total self, with its inherited temperament and talents, its biological as well as psychological components, its evanescent as well as more or less permanent attributes.¹ My reason for selecting from this complex the abstraction called "character" is that in this book I propose to deal with those components of personality that also play the principal role in the maintenance of social forms—those that are learned in the lifelong process of socialization.

As soon as we begin to speak of character as related to social forms we make, in effect, a still further selection from the matrix of personality. For we begin to isolate for inspection those components of character that are shared among significant social groups. And to speak of character in these terms is to speak of character as "social character." This notion of social character, the character that is clearly generalized in a society, permits us to speak elliptically but meaningfully of the character of classes, groups, regions, and nations.

The assumption that a social character exists has always been a

1. See Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself* (New York, Rinehart, 1947), pp. 50-61; see also, Gardner Murphy, *Personality: A Biosocial Approach to Origins and Structure* (New York, Harper, 1947), pp. 1-11; *Culture and Personality*, ed. S. Stansfeld Sargent and Marian W. Smith (Viking Fund, 1949).

more or less invisible premise in ordinary parlance; and it is becoming a more or less visible premise in the language of the social sciences. Its importance as a premise in the social sciences stands in direct proportion to the uncertainty that the social sciences feel about the nonsocial, or less obviously social, aspects of personality that are rooted in temperament. Under "temperament" we may lump together the constitutional or physiological determinants of behavior—such matters as hormones, metabolism, blood pressure as well as "temperament" in the sense of cheerfulness, dourness, peppiness, etc. We know little about the causes or consequences of differences of temperament in individuals and groups; and hence they are excluded from the scope of this study, although this is not intended to deny their importance.

Why should there be a social character? Psychoanalysts have given an answer explaining it on the basis of the society's needs. Thus Erik H. Erikson writes, speaking of child socialization in preliterate groups: ". . . systems of child training . . . represent unconscious attempts at creating out of human raw material that configuration of attitudes which is (or once was) the optimum under the tribe's particular natural conditions and economic-historic necessities."²

Likewise, Erich Fromm declares:

In order that any society may function well, its members must acquire the kind of character which makes them *want* to act in the way they *have* to act as members of the society or of a special class within it. They have to *desire* what objectively is *necessary* for them to do. *Outer force* is replaced by *inner compulsion*, and by the particular kind of human energy which is channeled into character traits.³

By implication these writers are saying that if human beings lived at random—in an inconceivable pure contingency—their drives could not be harnessed to perform the culturally required tasks.

The individual undoubtedly gets some benefit out of living in the more or less confining strait jacket of the social character which is imposed on him. It is one of the ambiguities of human existence, as it is of art, that personal life flourishes within the forms provided for it

2. "Observations on the Yurok: Childhood and World Image," *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology*, XXXV (1943), iv.

3. "Individual and Social Origins of Neurosis," *American Sociological Review*, IX (1944), 380; reprinted in *Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture*, ed. Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry Murray (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), pp. 407, 409-410.

by tradition and necessity. Character structure, like social structure, serves not only to limit choice but also to channel action by foreclosing some of the otherwise limitless behavior choices of human beings. We are familiar enough with the compulsive person, who feels he must decide, without the aid of habitual conformity, which shoe to put on first, whether to take the local or the express, whether to order eggs boiled or scrambled. Since life is too short for such overworked elaboration of choice, the social character permits it to be lived in some sort of working harness.

The danger is not of having too much leeway but of having too little. This is the constriction of choice range against which Freud eloquently warned mankind—character and culture can overreach themselves and thus swallow up all of life in enterprises whose only virtue is that they are shared.

I. CHARACTER AND SOCIETY

Since this study assumes that character is socially conditioned, it also takes for granted that there is some observable relation between a particular society and the kind of social character it produces. What is the best way to define this relation? Since the social function of character is to insure or permit conformity, it appears that the various types of social character can be defined most appropriately in terms of the modes of conformity that are developed in them. Finally, any prevalent mode of conformity may itself be used as an index to characterize a whole society.

Having said this, we must not overestimate the role of character in the social process. It is not a sufficient explanation, for instance, to say, as some students have said, that the German army held together because "the Germans" had an authoritarian character, since armies of very diverse character type do in fact hold together under given conditions of battle and supply. Nor will it do to assume, as American aptitude-testers sometimes do, that certain jobs can be successfully handled only by a narrowly limited range of character types: that we need "extrovert" or "oral" salesmen and administrators, and "introvert" or "anal" chemists and accountants. Our conventions on this score may make an introvert administrator feel inadequate because he does not fit the stereotype that patterns the narrow judgment passed on him by others and, through their eyes, by himself.

Actually, people of radically different types can adapt themselves to perform, adequately enough, a wide variety of complex tasks. Or, to put the same thing in another way, social institutions can harness a gamut of different motivations, springing from different character types, to perform very much the same kinds of socially demanded jobs. And yet, of course, this is not to say that character is merely a shadowy factor in history, like some Hegelian spirit. Character will affect the style and psychic costs of job performances that, in economic or political analysis, look almost identical.

Thus we are forced to take account of the possibility that people may be compelled to behave in one way although their character structure presses them to behave in the opposite way. Society may change more rapidly than character, or vice versa. Indeed, this disparity between socially required behavior and characterologically compatible behavior is one of the great levers of change. Fortunately we know of no society like the one glumly envisaged by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, where the social character types have been completely content in their social roles and where consequently, barring accident, no social change exists. Thus while we shall be talking hereafter of social character types we must try to remember that these types are constructions and that the richness of human potentiality, human discontent, and human variety cannot be imprisoned within a typology.

As there are numberless ways of classifying people, none of them definitive, none of them more than approximations, none of them useful for more than a limited range of analytic purposes, so there exists in the social science literature an enormous number of different ways of classifying societies. I myself have chosen to emphasize some possible relationships between the population growth of a society and the historical sequence of character types. For I think it fruitful in developing a historical characterology to explore the correlations between the conformity demands put on people in a society and the broadest of the social indexes that connect men with their environment—the demographic indexes. A useful key to those indexes is the theory developed by modern students of population who see all societies as located in and moving along a *curve of population growth and distribution*.

Actually there is no single curve of population, but a variety. We are interested here in a particular kind of S-shaped curve that appears in the history of the long-industrialized countries, as well as in the

projected populations of certain other countries as they are expected to take shape in the future. The S-shaped curve begins at a point where the number of births and deaths are fairly equal (both birth rates and death rates being high) and moves through a period of rapid population increase to a new plateau where births and deaths are again equal (both rates being low).

As Malthus gloomily observed one hundred and fifty years ago, populations are capable of growing at a geometric rate. A slight rate of increase of births over deaths per annum means that in fifteen or twenty years there will be more women of childbearing age who are able in turn to swell the birth rate in comparison with the death rate. In a short time, moreover, such a development can change the age composition of a society—just as in the postwar years in America some of the consequences of an upward spurt in births are visible.

Societies at an early place on the S-curve are heavily weighted toward the younger age groups, which means that birth rates and death rates are high: the turnover of generations is rapid. Societies at a late place on the curve are weighted toward the middle-aged groups, which ordinarily means that birth rates and death rates are low. These vital statistics (we are ignoring the many technical indeterminates that haunt work with population figures) are in their turn dependent on many subtle social and psychological factors: attitudes toward sanitation and toward children, cultural beliefs about the standard of living appropriate to different classes, food and sex taboos—these merely begin the list.

Population theorists⁴ distinguish three phases on the population S-curve. Societies of high birth rate and equally high death rate are said to be in the phase of "high growth potential": their population would increase with great rapidity if the death rate were lowered by, say, a sudden advance in hygiene. Societies which have passed into the phase of decreased death rate are said to be in the phase of "transitional growth." Finally, societies which have passed through both these earlier phases and are beginning to move toward a net decrease in population are said to be in the phase of "incipient population decline." (It should be noted that all references to the population phase of a society are to averages which do not take account of the very different rates that may characterize classes or ethnic groups within the society—our treatment is highly generalized.)

4. We have relied here chiefly on the terminology and theory of Frank W. Notestein.

It would be very surprising if variations in the basic conditions of reproduction, livelihood, and survival chances, that is, in the supply of and demand for human beings, failed to influence character. My thesis is, in fact, that each of these three different phases on the population curve appears to be occupied by a society that enforces conformity and molds social character in a definably different way.

The society of high growth potential develops in its typical members a social character whose conformity is insured by their tendency to follow tradition: these I shall term *tradition-directed* people and the society in which they live *a society dependent on tradition-direction*.

The society of transitional population growth develops in its typical members a social character whose conformity is insured by their tendency to acquire early in life an internalized set of goals. These I shall term *inner-directed* people and the society in which they live *a society dependent on inner-direction*.

Finally, the society of incipient population decline develops in its typical members a social character whose conformity is insured by their tendency to be sensitized to the expectations and preferences of others. These I shall term *other-directed* people and the society in which they live *one dependent on other-direction*.

Let me point out, however, before embarking on a description of these three "ideal types" of character and society, that I am not concerned here with making a detailed demographic analysis such as would be necessary before one could prove that a link exists between population phase and character type. Rather, the theory of the curve of population provides me with a kind of shorthand for referring to the myriad institutional elements that are also—though usually more heatedly—symbolized by such words as "industrialism," "folk society," "monopoly capitalism," "urbanization," "rationalization," and so on. Hence when I speak here of transitional growth or incipient decline of population in conjunction with shifts in character and conformity, these phrases should not be taken as magical and comprehensive explanations.⁵

I am sure that change in the population age distribution, even with all it implies in change of the spacing of people, the size of markets, the role of children, the society's feeling of vitality or senescence, and

5. See the incisive discussion of the psychological appeal and social menace of deterministic theories of history by Jerome Frank, *Fate and Freedom* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1945). I am indebted to Judge Frank for a number of helpful suggestions.

many other intangibles, cannot determine character all by itself. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. What matters, too, is the *rate* of change, the size of the country or other unit of organization, the distribution of the change among social classes, a group's reaction to its density, the persistence of traditions because (as in the case of Japan) they can be made compatible with industrialization.

HIGH GROWTH POTENTIAL: TRADITION-DIRECTED TYPES

It has already been stated that a society characterized by high birth rates and high death rates is in the stage of high growth potential. The mortality rates are so high that any decline in them permits a very rapid expansion of the population. This is the situation of more than half the world's population: in India, Egypt, and China (which have already grown immensely in recent generations), for most pre-literate peoples in Central Africa, parts of Central and South America, in fact in most areas of the world relatively untouched by industrialization. Here death rates are so high that if birth rates were not also high the populations would die out.

Regions where the population is in this stage of growth may be sparsely populated, as in the areas occupied by many primitive tribes and as in parts of Central and South America. They may be densely populated, as in India, China, and Egypt. In either case, the society achieves a Malthusian bargain with the limited food supply by killing off, in one way or another, some of the potential surplus of births over deaths—the enormous trap which, in Malthus' view, nature sets for man and which can be peaceably escaped only by prudent cultivation of the soil and prudent uncultivation of the species through the delay of marriage. Without the prevention of childbirth by means of marriage postponement or other contraceptive measures, the population must be limited by taking the life of living beings. And so other societies have "invented" cannibalism, induced abortion, organized wars, made human sacrifice, and practiced infanticide (especially female) as means of avoiding periodic famine and epidemics.

Though this settling of accounts with the contradictory impulses of hunger and sex is accompanied often enough by upheaval and distress, these societies in the stage of high growth potential tend to be stable at least in the sense that their social practices, including the "crimes" that keep population down, are institutionalized and patterned. Generation after generation people are born, are weeded out,

and die to make room for others. The net rate of natural increase fluctuates only within narrow limits, as is true also of societies in the stage of incipient decline. But unlike the latter, the average life expectancy in the former is characteristically low: the population is heavily weighted on the side of the young, and generation replaces generation far more rapidly and less "efficiently" than in those industrialized societies of incipient population decline.

In viewing such a society we inevitably associate the relative stability of the man-land ratio, whether high or low, with the tenacity of custom and social structure. However, we must not equate stability of social structure over historical time with psychic stability in the life span of an individual: the latter may subjectively experience much violence and disorganization. In the last analysis, however, he learns to deal with life by adaptation, not by innovation. With certain exceptions conformity is largely given in the "self-evident" social situation. Of course nothing in human life is ever really self-evident; where it so appears it is because perceptions have been narrowed by cultural conditioning. As the precarious relation to the food supply is built into the going culture, it helps create a pattern of conventional conformity which is reflected in many, if not in all, societies in the stage of high growth potential. This is what we mean when we speak of tradition-direction.

A definition of tradition-direction. Since the type of social order we have been discussing is relatively unchanging, the conformity of the individual tends to be dictated to a very large degree by power relations among the various age and sex groups, the clans, castes, professions, and so forth—relations which have endured for centuries and are modified but slightly, if at all, by successive generations. The culture controls behavior minutely, and, while the rules are not so complicated that the young cannot learn them during the period of intensive socialization, careful and rigid etiquette governs the fundamentally influential sphere of kin relationships. Moreover, the culture, in addition to its economic tasks, or as part of them, provides ritual, routine, and religion to occupy and to orient everyone. Little energy is directed toward finding new solutions of the age-old problems, let us say, of agricultural technique or "medicine," the problems to which people are acculturated.

It is not to be thought, however, that in these societies, where the

activity of the individual member is determined by characterologically grounded obedience to traditions, the individual may not be highly prized and, in many instances, encouraged to develop his capabilities, his initiative, and even, within very narrow time limits, his aspirations. Indeed, the individual in some primitive societies is far more appreciated and respected than in some sectors of modern society. For the individual in a society dependent on tradition-direction has a well-defined functional relationship to other members of the group. If he is not killed off, he "belongs"—he is not "surplus," as the modern unemployed are surplus, nor is he expendable as the unskilled are expendable in modern society. But by very virtue of his "belonging," life goals that are *his* in terms of conscious choice appear to shape his destiny only to a very limited extent, just as only to a limited extent is there any concept of progress for the group.

In societies in which tradition-direction is the dominant mode of insuring conformity, relative stability is preserved in part by the infrequent but highly important process of fitting such deviants as there are into institutionalized roles. In such societies a person who might have become at a later historical stage an innovator or rebel, whose belonging, as such, is marginal and problematic, is drawn instead into roles like those of the shaman or sorcerer. That is, he is drawn into roles that make a socially acceptable contribution, while at the same time they provide the individual with a more or less approved niche. The medieval monastic orders may have served in a similar way to absorb many characterological mutations.

In some of these societies certain individuals are encouraged toward a degree of individuality from childhood, especially if they belong to families of high status. But, since the range of choice, even for high-status people, is minimal, the apparent social need for an individuated type of character is also minimal. It is probably accurate to say that character structure in these societies is very largely "adjusted," in the sense that for most people it appears to be in tune with social institutions. Even the few misfits "fit" to a degree; and only very rarely is one driven out of his social world.

This does not mean, of course, that the people are happy; the society to whose traditions they are adjusted may be a miserable one, ridden with anxiety, sadism, and disease. The point is rather that change, while never completely absent in human affairs, is slowed down as the movement of molecules is slowed down at low temperature; and the

social character comes as close as it ever does to looking like the matrix of the social forms themselves.

In western history the Middle Ages can be considered a period in which the majority were tradition-directed. But the term tradition-directed refers to a common element, not only among the people of precapitalist Europe but also among such enormously different types of people as Hindus and Hopi Indians, Zulus and Chinese, North African Arabs and Balinese. There is comfort in relying on the many writers who have found a similiar unity amid diversity, a unity they express in such terms as "folk society" (as against "civilization"), a "status society" (as against a "contract society"), "*Gemeinschaft*" (as against "*Gesellschaft*"), and so on. Different as the societies envisaged by these terms are, the folk, status, and *Gemeinschaft* societies resemble each other in their relative slowness of change, their dependence on family and kin organization, and—in comparison with later epochs—their tight web of values. And, as is now well recognized by students, the high birth rate of these societies in the stage of high growth potential is not merely the result of a lack of contraceptive knowledge or techniques. A whole way of life—an outlook on chance, on children, on the place of women, on sexuality, on the very meaning of existence—lies between the societies in which human fertility is allowed to take its course and toll and those which prefer to pay other kinds of toll to cut down on fertility by calculation, and, conceivably, as Freud and other observers have suggested, by a decline in sexual energy itself.

TRANSITIONAL GROWTH: INNER-DIRECTED TYPES

The emergence of transitional growth. Except for the west, we know very little about the cumulation of small changes that can eventuate in a breakup of the tradition-directed type of society, leading it to realize its potential for high population growth. As for the west, however, much has been learned about the slow decay of feudalism and the subsequent rise of a type of society in which inner-direction is the dominant mode of insuring conformity. Such a society is likely to be found in the phase of transitional growth of population.

Many writers are apt to view the situation of the tradition-directed peasant as idyllic and to exaggerate by comparison the anomie, the rootlessness, the trapped malaise, of the modern city dweller. There is more than a hint of this in the work of many contemporary social

scientists. On the other hand, critical historians, pushing the Renaissance ever back into the Middle Ages, seem sometimes to deny that any decisive change occurred. On the whole, it makes sense to suppose that the greatest social and characterological shift of recent centuries did indeed come when men were driven out of the primary ties that bound them to the western medieval version of tradition-directed society. All later shifts, including the shift from inner-direction to other-direction, seem unimportant by comparison, although of course this latter shift is still under way and we cannot tell what it will look like when complete.

A change in the relatively stable ratio of births to deaths, which characterizes the period of high growth potential, is both the cause and consequence of other profound social changes. In most of the cases known to us a decline takes place in mortality prior to a decline in fertility; hence there is some period in which the population expands rapidly. The drop in death rate occurs as the result of many interacting factors, among them sanitation, improved communications (which permit government to operate over a wider area and also permit easier transport of food to areas of shortage from areas of surplus), the decline, forced or otherwise, of infanticide, cannibalism, and other inbred kinds of violence. Because of improved methods of agriculture the land is able to support more people, and these in turn produce still more people.

As a result population begins increasing nearly in geometric ratio, as it did in Europe between 1650 and 1900 and as it has in recent years been doing in countries like India. Notestein's phrase "transitional growth," is a mild way of putting it. The "transition" is likely to be violent, disrupting the stabilized paths of existence in societies in which tradition-direction has been the principal mode of insuring conformity. The imbalance of births and deaths puts pressure on the society's customary ways. A new slate of character structures is called for or finds its opportunity in coping with the rapid changes—and the need for still more changes—in the social organization.

A definition of inner-direction. In western history the society that emerged with the Renaissance and Reformation and that is only now vanishing serves to illustrate the type of society in which inner-direction is the principal mode of securing conformity. Such a society is

characterized by increased personal mobility, by a rapid accumulation of capital (teamed with devastating technological shifts), and by an almost constant *expansion*: intensive expansion in the production of goods and people, and extensive expansion in exploration, colonization, and imperialism. The greater choices this society gives—and the greater initiatives it demands in order to cope with its novel problems—are handled by character types who can manage to live socially without strict and self-evident tradition-direction. These are the inner-directed types.

The concept of inner-direction is intended to cover a very wide range of types. Thus, while it is essential for the study of certain problems to differentiate between Protestant and Catholic countries and their character types, between the effects of the Reformation and the effects of the Renaissance, between the puritan ethic of the European and American north and west and the somewhat more hedonistic ethic of the European east and south, while all these are valid and, for certain purposes, important distinctions, the concentration of this study on the development of modes of conformity permits their neglect. It allows the grouping together of these otherwise distinct developments because they have one thing in common: *the source of direction for the individual is "inner" in the sense that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals.*

We can see what this means when we realize that, in societies in which tradition-direction is the dominant mode of insuring conformity, attention is focused on securing external *behavioral* conformity. While behavior is minutely prescribed, individuality of character need not be highly developed to meet prescriptions that are objectified in ritual and etiquette—though to be sure, a social character *capable* of such behavioral attention and obedience is requisite. By contrast, societies in which inner-direction becomes important, though they also are concerned with behavioral conformity, cannot be satisfied with behavioral conformity alone. Too many novel situations are presented, situations which a code cannot encompass in advance. Consequently the problem of personal choice, solved in the earlier period of high growth potential by channeling choice through rigid social organization, in the period of transitional growth is solved by channeling choice through a rigid though highly individualized character.

This rigidity is a complex matter. While any society dependent on inner-direction seems to present people with a wide choice of aims—such as money, possessions, power, knowledge, fame, goodness—these aims are ideologically interrelated, and the selection made by any one individual remains relatively unalterable throughout his life. Moreover, the means to those ends, though not fitted into as tight a social frame of reference as in the society dependent on tradition-direction, are nevertheless limited by the new voluntary associations—for instance, the Quakers, the Masons, the Mechanics' Associations—to which people tie themselves. Indeed, the term "tradition-direction" could be misleading if the reader were to conclude that the force of tradition has no weight for the inner-directed character. On the contrary, he is very considerably bound by traditions: they limit his ends and inhibit his choice of means. The point is rather that a splintering of tradition takes place, connected in part with the increasing division of labor and stratification of society. Even if the individual's choice of tradition is largely determined for him by his family, as it is in most cases, he cannot help becoming aware of the existence of competing traditions—hence of tradition as such. As a result he possesses a somewhat greater degree of flexibility in adapting himself to ever changing requirements and in return requires more from his environment.

As the situational controls of the primary group are loosened—the group that both socializes the young and controls the adult in the earlier era—a new psychological mechanism appropriate to the more open society is "invented": it is a psychological gyroscope.⁶ This instrument, once it is set by the parents and other authorities, keeps the inner-directed person, as we shall see, "on course" even when tradition, as responded to by his character, no longer dictates his moves. The inner-directed person becomes capable of maintaining a delicate balance between the demands upon him of his life goal and the buffets of his external environment.

This metaphor of the gyroscope, like any other, must not be taken literally. It would be a mistake to see the inner-directed man as incapable of learning from experience or as insensitive to public opinion in matters of external conformity. He can receive and utilize certain signals from outside, provided that they can be reconciled

6. Since writing the above I have discovered Gardner Murphy's use of the same metaphor in his volume *Personality*.

with the limited maneuverability that his gyroscope permits him. His pilot is not quite automatic.

Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages* gives a picture of the anguish and turmoil, the conflict of values, out of which the new forms slowly emerged. As early as the late Middle Ages people were forced to live under new conditions of awareness. As their self-consciousness and their individuality developed, they had to make themselves at home in the world in novel ways. They still have to.

INCIPIENT DECLINE OF POPULATION: OTHER-DIRECTED TYPES

The emergence of the next phase: incipient decline. The problem facing the societies in the stage of transitional growth is that of reaching a point at which resources become plentiful enough or are utilized effectively enough to permit a rapid accumulation of capital. This rapid accumulation has to be achieved even while the social product is being drawn on at an accelerated rate to satisfy the consumer demands that go with the way of life that has already been adopted. For most countries, unless capital and techniques can be imported from other countries in still later phases of the population curve, every effort to increase national resources at a rapid rate must actually be at the expense of current standards of living. We have seen this occur in the U.S.S.R., now in the stage of transitional growth. Only a fantastically large increase in productive capacity will, without a prolonged period of misery, permit an increase in the supply of food and other commodities sufficient to stimulate migration from country to city and at the same time to accommodate the change from large-family to small-family ideational patterns. For Europe this transition was long-drawn-out and painful; and this may be one reason that countries such as France, despite their demographic transformation into the third stage of incipient decline, still retain modes of conformity appropriate to an economy in the second stage or even earlier. For America, Canada, and Australia—at once beneficiaries of European technique and native resources—the transition was rapid and relatively easy.

As has been said, the tradition-directed character hardly thinks of himself as an individual. Still less does it occur to him that he might shape his own destiny in terms of personal, lifelong goals or that the destiny of his children might be separate from that of the family group. He is not sufficiently separated psychologically from himself

(or, therefore, sufficiently close to himself), his family, or group to think in these terms. In the phase of transitional growth, however, people of inner-directed character do gain a feeling of control over their own lives and see their children also as individuals with careers to make. At the same time, with the shift out of agriculture and, later, with the banning of child labor in factories (a humanitarian measure both needed and possible because of the altered social relations introduced by industrialization), children no longer become an unequivocal economic asset. And with the growth of habits of scientific thought, religious and magical views of human fertility—views that in an earlier phase of the population curve made sense for the culture if it was to reproduce itself—give way to "rational," individualistic attitudes. Indeed, just as the rapid accumulation of productive capital requires that people be imbued with the "Protestant ethic" (as Max Weber characterized one manifestation of what is here termed inner-direction), so also the decreased number of progeny requires a profound change in values—a change so deep that, in all probability, it has to be rooted in character structure.

As the birth rate begins to follow the death rate downward, societies move toward the epoch of incipient decline of population—the prelude to the time when the birth rate will plunge below the already lowered death rate, so that total population will decline.

This problem of incipient population decline has been much discussed in the western countries, notably in France, Britain, and the Scandinavian countries, where the population is nearing stability or hovering on the verge of actual decrease. Production here has at last outrun even greatly expanded consumption, and the standard of living, which Malthus already realized was a cultural and psychological index, has completed its work by subtle psychological pressures on fertility—though not every social class shares equally in these developments. Fewer and fewer people work on the land or in the extractive industries or even in manufacturing. Hours are short. People may have material abundance and leisure besides. They pay for these changes however—here, as always, the solution of old problems gives rise to new ones—by finding themselves in a centralized and bureaucratized society and a world shrunken and agitated by the contact—accelerated by industrialization—of races, nations, and cultures.

The hard enduringness and enterprise of the inner-directed types are somewhat less necessary under these new conditions. Increasingly,

other people are the problem, not the material environment. And as people mix more widely and become more sensitive to each other, the surviving traditions from the stage of high growth potential—much disrupted, in any case, during the violent spurt of industrialization—become still further attenuated. Gyroscopic control is no longer sufficiently flexible, and a new psychological mechanism is called for.

Furthermore, the "scarcity psychology" of many inner-directed people, which was socially adaptive during the period of heavy capital accumulation that accompanied transitional growth of population, needs to give way to an "abundance psychology" capable of "wasteful" luxury consumption of leisure and of the surplus product. Unless people want to destroy the surplus product in war, which still does require heavy capital equipment, they must learn to enjoy and engage in those services that are expensive in terms of man power but not of capital—poetry and philosophy, for instance.⁷ Indeed, in the period of incipient decline, nonproductive consumers, both the increasing number of old people and the diminishing number of as yet untrained young, form a high proportion of the population, and these need both the economic opportunity to be prodigal and the character structure to allow it.

Has this need for still another slate of character types actually been acknowledged to any degree? My observations lead me to believe that in America it has.

A definition of other-direction. The type of character I shall describe as other-directed seems to be emerging in very recent years in the upper middle class of our larger cities: more prominent in New York than in Boston, in Los Angeles than in Spokane, in Cincinnati than in Chillicothe. Yet in some respects this type is strikingly similar to *the American*, whom Tocqueville and other curious and astonished visitors from Europe, even before the Revolution, thought to be a new kind of man. Indeed, travelers' reports on America impress us with their unanimity. The American is said to be shallower, freer with his money, friendlier, more uncertain of himself and his values, more demanding of approval than the European. It all adds up to a pattern which, without stretching matters too far, resembles the kind of character that a number of social scientists have seen as developing in

7. These examples are given by Allan G. B. Fisher, *The Clash of Progress and Security* (London, Macmillan, 1935).

contemporary, highly industrialized, and bureaucratic America: Fromm's "marketer," Mills's "fixer," Arnold Green's "middle class male child."⁸

This raises several questions which, as I said earlier, I have not been able to answer. It is my impression that the middle-class American of today is decisively different from those Americans of Tocqueville's writings who strike us as so contemporary, and much of this book will be devoted to discussing these differences.⁹ It is also my impression that the conditions I believe to be responsible for other-direction are affecting increasing numbers of people in the metropolitan centers of the advanced industrial countries. However, the available comparative studies of European "national character," broken down by social class, are not yet sufficiently inclusive to permit comparison. Given impetus by the late Ruth Benedict, Gorer, Kardiner, Kluckhohn, Margaret Mead, and others, such studies are now under way. Meanwhile, my analysis of the other-directed character is at once an analysis of the American and of contemporary man. Much of the time I find it hard or impossible to say where one ends and the other begins. Tentatively, I am inclined to think that the other-directed type does find itself most at home in America, due to certain constant elements in American society, such as its recruitment from Europe and its lack of any seriously feudal past. As against this, I am also inclined to put more weight on capitalism, industrialism, and urbanization—these being international tendencies—than on any character-forming peculiarities of the American scene.

Bearing these qualifications in mind, it seems appropriate to treat

8. See Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*; C. Wright Mills, "The Competitive Personality," *Partisan Review*, XIII (1946), 433; Arnold Green, "The Middle Class Male Child and Neurosis," *American Sociological Review*, XI (1946), 31. See also the work of Jurgen Ruesch, Martin B. Loeb, and co-workers on the "infantile personality."

9. I have tried to discover, by reading the eyewitness social observers of the early nineteenth century in America, whether Tocqueville "saw" America or "foresaw" it, to what extent he was influenced—as visiting firemen of today also are—by American snobs who take their image of Europe as the norm in describing their own countrymen. And to what extent, in establishing America's polarity from Europe, he tendentially noticed those things that were different rather than those that were the same. From conversations with Phillips Bradley and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and from G. W. Pierson, *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1938) I get the impression that all these qualifications must be put on Tocqueville's picture of America in the 1830's. On the general problem of whether there is an American character, and if so what are its sources, and how such questions might be investigated, I have profited from the work of Oscar Handlin and from suggestions made by him. Thomas and Znaniecki's *Polish Peasant* may be thought of as a pioneer effort, unfortunately too little followed up, to attack the problem in terms of the experience of a particular ethnic group.

contemporary metropolitan America as our illustration of a society—so far, perhaps, the only illustration—in which other-direction is the dominant mode of insuring conformity. It would be premature, however, to say that it is already the dominant mode in America as a whole. But since the other-directed types are to be found among the young, in the larger cities, and among the upper income groups, we may assume that, unless present trends are reversed, the hegemony of other-direction lies not far off.

If we wanted to cast our social character types into social class molds, we could say that inner-direction is the typical character of the "old" middle class—the banker, the tradesman, the small entrepreneur, the technically oriented engineer, etc.—while other-direction is becoming the typical character of the "new" middle class—the bureaucrat, the salaried employee in business, etc. Many of the economic factors associated with the recent growth of the "new" middle class are well known. They have been discussed by James Burnham, Colin Clark, Peter Drucker, and others. There is a decline in the numbers and in the proportion of the working population engaged in production and extraction—agriculture, heavy industry, heavy transport—and an increase in the numbers and the proportion engaged in white-collar work and the service trades.

Furthermore, societies in the phase of incipient decline (societies, that is, in which we expect other-directed types to come to the fore) are not only highly urbanized but have a high level of capital equipment and technological skill built up during the period of transitional growth. People who are literate, educated, and provided with the necessities of life by machine industry and agriculture, turn increasingly to the "tertiary" economic realm. The service industries prosper among the people as a whole and no longer only in court circles. Education, leisure, services, these go together with an increased consumption of words and images from the mass media of communications in societies that have moved into the incipient decline stage via the route of industrialization. Hence, while societies in the phase of transitional growth begin the process of distributing words from urban centers, the flow becomes a torrent in the societies of incipient population decline. This process, while modulated by profound national and class differences, connected with differences in literacy and loquacity, takes place everywhere in the industrialized lands. Increasingly, relations with the outer world and with oneself are mediated

by the flow of mass communication. For the other-directed types political events are likewise experienced through a screen of words by which the events are habitually atomized and personalized—or pseudopersonalized. For the inner-directed person who remains still extant in this period the tendency is rather to systematize and moralize this flow of words.

These developments lead, for large numbers of people, to changes in paths to success and to the requirement of more "socialized" behavior both for success and for marital and personal adaptation. Connected with such changes are changes in the family and in child-rearing practices. In the smaller families of urban life, and with the spread of "permissive" child care to ever wider strata of the population, there is a relaxation of older patterns of discipline. Under these newer patterns the peer-group (the age- and class-graded group in a child's school and neighborhood) becomes much more important to the child, while the parents make him feel guilty not so much about violation of inner standards as about failure to be popular or otherwise to manage his relations with these other children. Moreover, the pressures of the school and the peer-group are reinforced and continued—in a manner whose inner paradoxes I shall discuss later—by the mass media: movies, radio, comics, and popular culture media generally. Under these conditions types of character emerge that we shall here term other-directed. To them much of the discussion in the ensuing chapters is devoted. *What is common to all other-directeds is that their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual—either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted, through friends and through the mass media. This source is of course "internalized" in the sense that dependence on it for guidance in life is implanted early. The goals toward which the other-directed person strives shift with that guidance: it is only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals from others that remain unaltered throughout life.* This mode of keeping in touch with others permits a close behavioral conformity, not through drill in behavior itself, as in the tradition-directed character, but rather through an exceptional sensitivity to the actions and wishes of others.

Of course, it matters very much who these "others" are: whether they are the individual's immediate circle or a "higher" circle or the

anonymous voices of the mass media; whether the individual fears the hostility of chance acquaintances or only of those who "count." But his need for approval and direction from others—and contemporary others rather than ancestors—goes beyond the reasons that lead most people in any era to care very much what others think of them. While all people want and need to be liked by some of the people some of the time, it is only the modern other-directed types who make this their chief source of direction and chief area of sensitivity.¹⁰

It is perhaps the insatiable force of this psychological need for approval that differentiates people of the metropolitan, American upper middle class, whom we regard as other-directed, from very similar types that have appeared in capital cities and among other classes in previous historical periods, whether in Imperial Canton, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, or in ancient Athens, Alexandria, or Rome. In all these groups fashion not only ruled as a substitute for morals and customs, but it was a rapidly changing fashion that held sway. It could do so because, although the mass media were in their infancy, the group corresponding to the American upper middle class was comparably small and the elite structure was extremely reverberant. It can be argued, for example, that a copy of *The Spectator* covered its potential readership about as thoroughly in the late eighteenth century as *The New Yorker* covers its readership today. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English and French writing as well as in Tolstoy we find portraits of the sort of people who operated in the upper reaches of bureaucracy and had to be prepared for rapid changes of signals. Stepan Arkadyevitch Oblonsky in *Anna Karenina* is one of the more likeable and less opportunistic examples, especially striking because of the way Tolstoy contrasts him with Levin, a moralizing, inner-directed person. At any dinner party Stepan manifests exceptional social skills; his political skills as described in the following quotation are also highly social:

Stepan Arkadyevitch took in and read a liberal newspaper, not an extreme one, but one advocating the views held by the majority. And in spite of the fact that science, art, and politics had no special interest for him, he firmly held those views on all subjects which were held by the majority and by his

10. This picture of the other-directed person has been stimulated by, and developed from, Erich Fromm's discussion of the "marketing orientation" in *Man for Himself*, pp. 67-82. I have also drawn on my portrait of "The Cash Customer," *Common Sense*, XI (1942), 183.

paper, and he only changed them when the majority changed them—or, more strictly speaking, he did not change them, but they imperceptively changed of themselves within him.

Stepan Arkadyevitch had not chosen his political opinions or his views; these political opinions and views had come to him of themselves, just as he did not choose the shapes of his hats or coats, but simply took those that were being worn. And for him, living in a certain society—owing to the need, ordinarily developed at years of discretion, for some degree of mental activity—to have views was just as indispensable as to have a hat. If there was a reason for his preferring liberal to conservative views, which were held also by many of his circle, it arose not from his considering liberalism more rational, but from its being in closer accord with his manner of life . . . And so liberalism had become a habit of Stepan Arkadyevitch's, and he liked his newspaper, as he did his cigar after dinner, for the slight fog it diffused in his brain.

It would, of course, be better if there were space for more than one such description to reinforce my point that Stepan, while his good-natured gregariousness makes him seem like a modern middle-class American, is not fully other-directed. This gregariousness alone, without a certain sensitivity to others as individuals and as a source of direction, is not the identifying trait. Just so, we must differentiate the nineteenth-century American, gregarious and subservient to public opinion though he was found to be by Tocqueville, Bryce, and others, from the other-directed American as he emerges today, an American who in his character is more capable of and more interested in maintaining responsive contact with others both at work and at play. This point needs to be emphasized, since the distinction is easily misunderstood. The inner-directed person, though he often sought and sometimes achieved a relative independence of public opinion and of what the neighbors thought of him, was in most cases very much concerned with his good repute and, at least in America, with "keeping up with the Joneses." These conformities, however, were primarily external, typified in such details as clothes, curtains, and bank credit. For, indeed, the conformities were to a standard, evidence of which was provided by the "best people" in one's milieu. In contrast with this pattern, the other-directed person, though he has his eye very much on the Joneses, aims to keep up with them not so much in external details as in the quality of his inner experience. That is, his great sensitivity keeps him in touch with others on many

more levels than the externals of appearance and propriety. Nor does any ideal of independence or of reliance on God alone modify his desire to look to the others—and the “good guys” as well as the best people—for guidance in what experiences to seek and in how to interpret them.

The three types compared. While for analytic purposes it is sound to visualize all these differences sharply, it would be a mistake to expect to find such a sharp separation in the world of living people. In one respect all human behavior is inner-directed, in the sense that it is motivated, and all human behavior is other-directed, in the sense that it results from the process of socialization by others. And, of course, neither the tradition-directed nor the inner-directed person is immune to the impact of the opinions and directions of others. Nevertheless, one way to see the structural differences between the three types is to see the differences—again, as a matter of degree only—in the emotional sanction, control, or “tuning” in each type.

The tradition-directed person feels the impact of his culture as a unit, but it is nevertheless mediated through the specific, small number of individuals with whom he is in daily contact. These expect of him not so much that he be a certain type of person but that he behave in the approved way. Consequently the sanction for behavior tends to be the fear of being *shamed*.

The inner-directed person has early incorporated a psychic gyroscope which is set going by his parents and can receive signals later on from other authorities who resemble his parents. He goes through life less independent than he seems, obeying this internal piloting. Getting off course, whether in response to inner impulses or to the fluctuating voices of contemporaries, may lead to the feeling of *guilt*.

Since the direction to be taken in life has been learned in the privacy of the home from a small number of guides and since principles, rather than details of behavior, are internalized, the inner-directed person is capable of great stability. Especially so when it turns out that his fellows have gyroscopes too, spinning at the same speed and set in the same direction. But many inner-directed individuals can remain stable even when the reinforcement of social approval is not available—as in the upright life of the stock Englishman in the tropics.

Contrasted with such a type as this, the other-directed person learns

to respond to signals from a far wider circle than is constituted by his parents. The family is no longer a closely knit unit to which he belongs but merely part of a wider social environment to which he early becomes attentive. In these respects the other-directed person resembles the tradition-directed person: both live in a group milieu and lack the inner-directed person's capacity to go it alone. The nature of this group milieu, however, differs radically in the two cases. The other-directed person is cosmopolitan. For him the border between the familiar and the strange—a border clearly marked in the societies depending on tradition-direction—has broken down. As the family continuously absorbs the strange and so reshapes itself, so the strange becomes familiar. While the inner-directed person could be "at home abroad" by virtue of his relative insensitivity to others, the other-directed person is, in a sense, at home everywhere and nowhere, capable of a superficial intimacy with and response to everyone.

The tradition-directed person takes his signals from others, but they come in a cultural monotone; he needs no complex receiving equipment to pick them up. The other-directed person must be able to receive signals from far and near; the sources are many, the changes rapid. What can be internalized, then, is not a code of behavior but the elaborate equipment needed to attend to such messages and occasionally to participate in their circulation. As against guilt-and-shame controls, though of course these survive, one prime psychological lever of the other-directed person is a diffuse *anxiety*. This control equipment, instead of being like a gyroscope, is like a radar.¹¹

A caveat. Population analysis is, I believe, a useful approach to the study of society and character, for it enables us to isolate certain important questions. But I should like to anticipate the entirely reasonable criticism that an inference drawn from only one observation—in this case, from the suggested correlation between character type and population phase in modern western history—is unwarranted. Unless we are to stop with mere description of a way of life—a description bound to be somewhat biased by our very closeness to this way of life—we must further test our concepts in the laboratory of history. With this in mind, studies have been initiated with the view of determining insofar as possible whether the hypothetical correlation is to be rejected or accepted on the basis of information available for other

11. The "radar" metaphor was suggested by Karl Wittfogel.