

THE CLOSED COMMUNITY AND ITS FRIENDS

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The concept of the open society and the ways in which it differs from those forms of society which are not "open" present a problem which is fundamental to any typology of social systems. The concept has also been used by philosophers to examine the nature of political and moral ideas (1). The distinction is obvious to anyone who has spent a few days on the one hand in a Southern European village off the tourists' circuit, and on the other (to take the two extremes furnished by Western Civilization) in that vast suburbs sine urbs which stretches inland from Santa Monica in Southern California. But to make a distinction one must use criteria, and what criteria should one use for this one?

The Open Society is an area of social activity

- (a) which is placed in an urban, or semi-urban, or "exurban" environment, shall we say?
- (b) Where neighbors do not (expressing the criterion in degrees) borrow from each other, speak to each other, know each other's name, know each other by sight.
- (c) Where entertainment is a commodity, not an activity.
- (d) Where purchases can be made, and a lot of other things done also, anonymously.
- (e) Where parents hand over to others the education of their children and in their old age are cared for by others.
- (f) Where an individual is free to choose the occupation, the friends, the kind of life he wishes. It is this consideration which appears to recommend the open society to the philosophers mentioned above.

On the other hand one might define the closed society as that in which:

- (g) people greet each other when they pass even if they are not acquainted.
- (h) Where everyone knows everyone whom everyone else knows.
- (i) Where services are performed and even commodities sometimes ceded upon a tacit understanding of reciprocity.
- (j) Where the individual's role is dictated by the social system.
- (k) Where gossip is more powerful than the law.

These random specifications are all in some way true, though none of them entirely. They are descriptive of certain characteristics found in types of society which we recognize to be either open or closed. In order to put them into logical relation to one another we require a different kind of criterion, an analytical concept which can explain why some societies are open and some closed and why they should possess the characteristics observed. We need to reduce, if you will, a collection of empirical observations to the form of a logical proposition. The concept which has been much used in this connection is Community, and this essay is therefore in the first place a sheaf of notes for the definition of Community.

In common usage the word conveys the idea of things held in common by a defined group of people, and by extension, that group of people themselves. It is generally meant to indicate a local group (2); indeed the expressions "closed" or "open" purvey the notion of territorial exclusiveness or the contrary.

Robert Redfield examines this same concept of the closed society in his magisterial essay, The Little Community, and lays it down as a premise that the little community is "a human whole." He does not analyze this idea but rather presents it "to the view of common sense" as one of the "integral entities," one of the "prevailing and conspicuous forms in which humanity obviously comes to our notice" (3). He puts forward four qualities by which the little community can be recognized: Distinctiveness, Smallness, Homogeneity, and Self-sufficiency (4). Distinctiveness is apparent to the outside observer and is expressed in the group consciousness of the community. Homogeneity extends in time so that it is also equivalent to stability. The quality of self-sufficiency "provides for all or most of the activities and needs of the people in it." These qualities are present in different degrees in different little communities. Redfield illustrates his contention from a wide range of societies, but he is not concerned to discuss the theoretical relation of the different criteria to one another. The closed community remains for him essentially a descriptive category.

Another writer who has paid much attention to the notion of community is R. M. MacIver (5):

"It is the term we apply to a pioneer settlement, a village, a city, a tribe, a nation. Wherever the members of any group, small or large, live together in such a way that they share, not this or that particular interest, but the basic conditions of a common life, we call that group a community. . . . A community then is an area of social living marked by some degree of social coherence. The bases of community are locality and community sentiment." The latter is defined as having three elements: "We-feeling," "Role-feeling" and "Dependency-feeling," MacIver later discusses the "solidarity" which is founded upon these sentiments and which is essential to the existence of a community.

Certain difficulties arise in using this definition. It assumes that members of large groups like the city or the nation share the basic conditions of common life. It also assumes that the community of the nation and the community of the village are bound together by solidarity of the same kind, by the same kind of feelings. I do not think that this is so, nor does Redfield who discusses the little community in relation to larger integral entities in a chapter entitled "A community within communities": "We seem to need a recognition of a series or range of kinds of communities according to their degree of independence from city, manor, national state, or other center of a different or more developed mode of living" (6).

This recognition complicates the problem of definition for it implies that, if we are to use the word analytically, it must be broken up into a number of variants which, while containing an essential common element, nevertheless include significant and regular differences. Here we are concerned only with that variant which Redfield calls "the little community."

The essential element of this concept was elaborated by Ferdinand Tönnies under the term Gemeinschaft, generally translated as "community." Tönnies, precisely because his sociology arose from a psychological basis (a rather quaint psychology of "wills"), made no attempt to analyze social relations systematically (7), but tried rather to understand the nature of their content. Contrasting the community-type of social relation with its opposite, which he described as Gesellschaft or "society," he observed that different categories of people tend to enjoy more of one type of social relation than the other. Thus women, children and the plebs tend to have "communal" relations while men, older people and the educated, particularly those engaged in commerce or science, have "societal" relations. These people are the wielders of authority while the natural goodness of the former fits them for submission to authority. For Tönnies, social life is a battle between the forces of the head and those of the heart, between the warm-blooded organ and the cold-blooded mechanism. The law and specialized economic systems typify "societal" relations, since they are intellectual, heartless and impersonal. The intellectual function of abstraction is associated with them (8). Family life and personal relations typify community because they depend upon instinct and feeling rather than calculated purpose. It is not surprising then that Tönnies regards the village community as the heart of Gemeinschaft. Full of vivid and significant observations as the illustration of his theory is, the concept itself is not easy to handle because the many terms of its definition lead to ambiguities. Every social institution seems to have an aspect of Gemeinschaft and also an aspect of Gesellschaft, and such propositions which one might deduce from the theory cannot be verified by reference to any field of data within the social sphere but only to the elusive concepts of "natural" or "rational will." Does the family really stand for concord? Are women and peasants lacking in calculation and greed for money? Intellectuals in valor and passion? The anthropologist asks

himself and possibly also his wife. But if these propositions are not true then how can the connections of Tönnies be demonstrated?

Yet we cannot complain if Tönnies' work does not help us to establish a typology of social systems; he does not employ the notion of social system at all but remains content to expose the characteristics of social relations treated by themselves. Indeed, it is possible to take a number of his observations and give them an explanation which has nothing to do with natural will but derives from the concept of social structure. Thus, for example, in examining the social structure of a closed community in Andalusia (9) I found the characteristics of women, of plebs, of people in authority, of the educated, and of the State to be such as Tönnies describes, but I showed them to be so, not by nature, but on account of their relations to one another and of the values which govern those relations. For me, the concept of Gemeinschaft expressed the essence of the spirit of the community, but the township of Alcalá was a closed community because all its members lived in more or less permanent contact with and knowledge of one another and gave particular value to this fact.

The idea that a community is limited in size, if it is to retain the nature of a closed community, by the necessity that its members should be personally acquainted is general within the Mediterranean and also ancient. Many writers on Spain have commented on it and the word personalismo has been used by some in order to express it, at least as far as the insistence on the importance of personal acquaintanceship goes. Similar values are found both in Italy and in Greece. Moreover this argument, that is, that the members of a community must know each other personally if it is to retain the characteristics of a community, was used by Aristotle in the Politics to limit the size of the ideal polis, for he maintained that, "as it belongs to the [governors] to direct the inferior magistrates and to act as judges, it follows that they can neither determine causes with justice, nor issue their orders with propriety without they know the characters of their fellow-citizens. . . ." (10). In fact as Aristotle viewed it, justice, so far from being bound to abstract principles by rules of evidence, required a network of local gossip in order to function properly. It is worth noting that the opposition which Tönnies and many other writers have visualized between the Community and the State was not evident to the Greek philosophers; for them the polis was and ought to be both. It is also perhaps significant that Aristotle should devote so much space (in the Ethics) to the discussion of friendship, that pillar of Tönnies' Gemeinschaft.

Finally the idea of personal acquaintanceship as a necessity to the closed community can be seen as logical in that human relations must, in a community, be conducted by people who know one another and who react to one another as total personalities (as Aristotle's ideal judges viewed their litigants), not as abstractions. This circumstance gives the closed community many of its characteristics: the many-sidedness of relations; its preference for private sanctions rather than legal

ones, and the power of private sanctions; the lack of a single simple purpose in social actions and the consequent illogicality of its economic values. (Even where money is required it never fulfills more than a part of the supposed equivalence in any given transaction, the other part being fulfilled by the non-economic aspect of the relationship of those concerned. Thus in an Andalusian town some articles and services cost the rich twice as much as the poor, and others cost the poor twice as much as the rich.)

On the other hand, the open society presupposes not only a lack of personal knowledge among its members but also a large and powerful state since, where the sanctions of private contact and public opinion are no longer effective, the state must take over the functions which were otherwise performed on a local and informal, not upon an abstract and impersonal level.

Nevertheless, the criterion of smallness is not in itself adequate, even if one qualifies it with the stipulation that it consists of a group who all have habitual personal contacts with each other. In many closed rural communities there live families of superior social standing who are in habitual personal contact but are very far from "sharing the basic conditions of common life." In others are to be found collections of outcasts, the sedentary gypsies of Andalusia who are outcasts in some ways and in others not, or formerly those untouchables of the Pyrenees, the agotes and the cagots (11). Caste cuts across the little communities of India, and in Mediaeval Europe before the building of the cities status cut across the local community. We may well jettison the criterion of the "sharing of the basic conditions of common life," in the sense of living on terms of equality, but even so it is clear that one can find examples of people who live cheek by jowl and yet are not related by that kind of sociation which is meant by community.

Must we allow MacIver's criteria of feelings, feelings of attachment, identification of solidarity? Leaving aprioristic considerations on one side, feelings are a most unsatisfactory form of data for the anthropologist, or rather they are not data at all but only what is inferred from data: from the assertion of their existence, often false as anyone who has worked in an Hispanic area can testify, or alternatively from the behavior which, to the observer, implies their existence. Secondly, if they are to be introduced into a definition of community they must be assumed to be, if not as constant as the community, at least habitual and unequivocal. The concept of ambivalence, introduced by the psychologists, makes it very difficult to know whether a feeling is what it appears to be or whether it is really a cloak to hide its opposite. In any case, which feelings are to be regarded as significant? The café-keeper of Santa Monica proudly asserts his "we-feeling" with the film stars of Hollywood; the widow who keeps a grocery store in an isolated village of the Auvergne gives vent to uncontrollable hostility toward her rival at the other end of the street, then goes on to discuss the solidarity of the small shop-keepers of France: "Nous, les petits

commerçants . . . ". How then can one recognize the presence of that solidarity which is, we are told, an essential characteristic of the closed community?

The word "solidarity" presents difficulties. In current usage it means "sticking together." For MacIver it is a feeling which causes members of a group to stick together. It was used by Durckheim (12) in the classical French sense of mutual dependency, a meaning closer to its legal sense than in English, and he divided it into ties based upon similarity, "la solidarité mécanique," and ties based upon cooperation, "la solidarité organique." (The words mechanical and organic are used in almost diametrically the opposite sense to that which, six years earlier, Tönnies had given them.) Durckheim was only concerned with instances where it could be safely assumed that similarity or cooperation did in themselves constitute ties, for he was writing about the effects of the specialization of function in society. Yet, though usages differ in detail they are all in a sense attempts to answer the question: what keeps a group of people together?

I believe that the studies of segmentary political systems in primitive society enable us to see with more clarity what is the sociological nature of solidarity. It is not a quality which a group possesses through the characteristics of its individual members, by means of which they might be classified, but one which it possesses only in a dynamic social situation, in response to a specific stimulus. It might be expressed as a logical connection, in "pure sociology," by pointing out that two persons (or social elements) while they are alone or conceptually alone cannot possess it. They can only acquire it, i.e., form a group, in relation to a third element which is excluded. The segmentary system is constructed upon this truth. Each segment at whatever level in the system it may occur, possesses solidarity only in relation to other segments at the same level, so that it is possible to break down the concept of solidarity into two elements:

- (a) Identification of members of the internal group through a common allegiance.
- (b) Differentiation from non-members in response to an external stimulus.

The feelings between individuals, hostile or solidary, at any given moment will depend upon their relation to the other elements involved and upon the categories which are relevant to the situation. There is however one important observation to be made and that is that whereas in primitive society the categories upon which grouping is based appear to be in the main categories determined by nature, i.e., sex, kinship, descent, age and so forth, in the open society they are mainly dependent upon the will or the wealth of the individual. In those communities within communities which are represented by the small towns of Southern Europe place of birth provides the category which is the basis of much solidarity. The local group is in every sense a corporate group. Nevertheless it is not the only

group which is liable to show solidarity when the occasion demands. The conflicts of the wider society find their reflection in the local community where, needless to say, they tend to take on a quite different significance in accordance with local interests and the local balance of power. It seems to me therefore that the solidarity which the closed community exhibits is not a necessary nor even a useful term of its definition but only a characteristic which, given its structure, it manifests under certain circumstances. It possesses solidarity in Southern Europe in relation to other similar local communities but it is interesting to observe that this is not the case, in general, with Northern Europe. The reason is not far to seek. In Latin countries the local group includes both the town where the people live and the territory where they work which is administered by the town and regarded as belonging to it, as part of it. In England, on the other hand, the country is not part of the town at all but rather is juxtaposed to it within the local structure, hence the distinction between Borough and Rural District in English administrative law, between rural and urban interests in English political history, the concept of the middle class (the word "bourgeoisie" is meaningless in its literal sense in Southern Europe), the absence of what Redfield calls "nucleation" (13) and consequently the absence of the possibility of exhibiting solidarity as an exclusive local community.

It seems to me that a better criterion to adopt is cultural homogeneity and within that I include common values. For common values are necessary to any form of collaboration and where relationships are many-sided it follows that the whole value system must be shared. However this does not imply equality (MacIver stresses the egalitarian nature of community relations) but only common acceptance of the inequalities which exist. Within a homogeneous culture, the inequalities of status did not prevent the local community of the Middle Ages from being a closed community, while today equality in relation to the law does not suffice to bring the weekending businessman into the closed community of the English village even though he may run a farm there (for income-tax purposes), and his wife may give a Christmas party for the school children. He belongs to another world and he speaks, culturally, another language. For the same reason the Andalusian gypsy is differentiated from the community in which he lives for he is known to have his own customs (and literally his own language) and he is known not to accept the sanctions of the community's opinion. "We Castilians" or "We Christians" people say in order to distinguish themselves from those who are gypsies.

To sum up, the closed community can be defined as the group having two necessary conditions:

- (1) Members who have habitual personal contact and this implies living in the same place.
- (2) Homogeneity of culture and values. It follows that people who have habitual personal contact must either conform to the customs of the majority or must mark themselves out from the community by not

conforming so that this is a point which quickly becomes evident to an observer. Putting it more succinctly, close habitual contact imposes the alternatives of conformity or differentiation.

Given these two, the other characteristics of community which have been discussed can be seen to derive from them: the solidarity, the feelings, the egalitarian tendencies, the distinctiveness, the conscious mutual dependency and, within a subsistence economy, the self-sufficiency. Outside a subsistence economy one can observe other closed groups who are not self-sufficient but who possess more or less the two terms of our definition and most of the characteristics; communities of fishermen, railwaymen or thieves.

I have discussed the closed community so far as an abstract concept, referring to examples only in order to make my meaning clear. But there is, as Redfield points out, a progression of communities which are more or less closed according to their size and the amount of contact which they have with the outside world. Moreover this progression has been frequently illustrated as a progression in time, leading historically from the closed to the less closed, from the smaller to the larger. Bertrand Russell comments of Aristotle's ideal polis which was both State and Community, that it was already obsolete in the writer's lifetime because the polis was required by Aristotle's specification to be large enough to defend itself against invasion, and this it could not do against Macedonia (14). The present age sees a similar progression developing all over the world. Societies which were formerly autonomous cease to be so. Communities which were isolated become incorporated within larger communities. The closed communities of Southern Europe are rapidly changing. The small towns of the Sierra de Cádiz, though they are still well defined corporate groups, no longer exhibit hostility towards one another as they once did (15). This is general not only throughout Spain but also in France. About one hundred years ago the small towns of Vayrac and Bétaille in the valley of the Dordogne fought each other with such violence that the military were called out to intervene, yet today that hostility has almost vanished. They are no longer corporate groups in any sense other than in municipal administration. The environment is changing and the closed community is opening up.

I propose therefore to take a brief look at these changes in order to see how they affect the terms of my definition. They seem to be technological, economic and political. Explicitly, they are changes in the means and cost of transport and communication, resulting in more effective communication, more knowledge of the outside world and more knowledge, or the possibility of more knowledge of the local community by the outside world; change in the methods of production, greater specialization and increase in the size of the productive unit. In a word, powered transport in the place of animal and the factory in place of the craftsman, and accompanying these changes goes the change in the rural community from subsistence farming to money

crops. Simultaneously with the development of industrial cities which is implied in this, goes the development of the State, in terms of the numbers of its employees and the functions which it fulfills; also the degree to which, thanks to improved communications it is able to centralize its activities.

These changes result in: (a) a widened and less well defined group of persons in habitual personal contact. Members of the community travel more and maintain relations far outside both for business and also for holidays. On the other hand an increased number of people come into the community. The artisan in the small community is replaced by the specialist in the larger town serving a whole number of small communities. With this go changes in demographic structure, very noticeable in many areas. While the larger agglomerations have increased in size the smaller ones have been depopulated, to the point that in several areas of southern France they have been abandoned altogether.

(b) The historical depth of the transformation of the culture of the local community from a homogeneous whole to a mixture of elements, culturally distinct, can be seen most clearly where the indigenous language is not that of the state, and this is the case in the southern half of France. There was never, it should be pointed out, an inherent reason for regarding the Langue d'Oc as inferior to the Langue d'Oïl, for the former was the language of the great literary renaissance of the twelfth century. (The troubadours came mostly from the part of France upon which these observations are based.) But France was governed from the North and in French so that the use of the language serves as a measure of the penetration of the State and the culture of the governing elements into the local community. At one time only government and the law were conducted in French and only persons of standing knew it. Today only agriculture is conducted in patois and only those who have to deal with peasants know it. Only the old-fashioned peasants speak it to their children. Those who speak it feel inferior for doing so. Unaware of the nobility of their linguistic heritage they explain that they speak badly because they are rough. The significant groupings all spread across the frontiers of the Communes, dividing them into factions which are no longer, like the factions of a segmentary system, in rivalry for the attainment of accepted goals, but rather are split by the diversity of their values and their culture; Church faction against laïques, traditionalists against modernists, patois-speakers against non-patois-speakers, that is to say farmers against non-farmers, young against old. The social structure has changed and the closed community is coming to an end and with it the distinctiveness of its culture. The national culture takes its place.

These changes, roughly outlined as they have been, appear to be going on all over Europe whether the peasants have a patois or not, for a common language disguises but does not obliterate profound differences between peasant and urban culture.

It is not for the anthropologist to give vent to his own prejudices, applauding the increase in freedom for the individual, now liberated from the closed community and the dead hand of the past, nor yet to deplore the loss of tradition and the cultural uniformity which, once he is free to choose, he chooses, but to study while there yet remain some to be studied, the closed communities of Europe where lie embedded still the values which gave birth to Western Civilization.

NOTES

- (1) Notably K. Popper: *The Open Society and its Enemies*, London, 1945. Also Henri Bergson: *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. London, 1935.
- (2) viz: Ogburn and Nimkoff: *A Handbook of Sociology*, London, 1947, p. 269.
- (3) Robert Redfield: *The Little Community*, Chicago, 1955, p. 1.
- (4) Redfield: *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- (5) The quotations are all from: R. M. MacIver and Charles H. Page: *Society*, London, 1949, which has been preferred to an earlier edition of the work and also to an earlier work by MacIver, entitled *Community*.
- (6) Redfield, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
- (7) F. Tönnies: *Fundamental Concepts of Sociology*, New York, 1940. Cf. "Sociology is the study of man, not of his bodily nor of his physical, but of his social nature."
- (8) cf. J. Leif: *La Sociologie de Tönnies*, Paris, 1946, p. 67. "Les rapports sociétaires ne concernent que les choses et les biens considérés d'après leur valeur abstraite et générale: l'argent. . . . Abstraction et rationalisation constitue bien, en effet l'essence meme de la société."
- (9) J. A. Pitt-Rivers: *The People of the Sierra*, London, 1954.
- (10) Aristotle: *Politics*, London, Everyman Library, 1912, p. 210.
- (11) viz: Francisque Michel: *Histoire des Races Maudites de la France et de l'Espagne*, Paris, 1847.
- (12) Emile Durkheim: *De la Division du Travail Social*, Paris, 1902.
- (13) Redfield, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
- (14) Bertrand Russell: *A History of Western Philosophy*, New York, 1945, p. 215.
- (15) Pitt-Rivers, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

