

People's beliefs are a significant cause of their acts. Action requires belief, because people think, make decisions, etc., based on what they believe to be true, in the face of a confusing, uncertain reality.

Social Order is not some sort of neat, well-integrated system. Rather, it is a "...wobbling, uncertain process that goes careening through history on the wheels of communication."

Society, like nature, is just as disorderly as it is orderly. Symbolic communication is such an essential aspect of human society, that it deserves special attention. It gives rise to social and psychological phenomenon that are not found in other species.

Art is the prime mover of social action. Not art as the fine arts, but art as the creation and communication of meaning, of rhetoric. Rhetorical communication is the art of influencing the thought and deeds of an audience. The creation and communication of rhetoric is the prime mover of social action. Rhetorical thought is the imaginative, cognitive-perceptual-emotional complex of beliefs that impels action. People become committed to action by art, not reason and science. Even science is valued because of the rhetoric associated with it.

Rhetoric is essential for all human action. Logical reasoning, by itself, is not capable of causing action. Rhetoric is variable from culture to culture, from subculture to subculture, and to an extent, from individual to individual. It is integral to human communication, not a secondary aspect of human society, not just a luxury. **Rhetorical art is the essential nature of culture.**

People create and use symbols. To understand people we must understand symbols. An important attribute of symbols is that they can be elaborated endlessly. For example: Sex is not just a physical experience or act. It is also a theatrical setting for expression of good and evil, egotism and altruism, love and hate, convention and deviance, power, dominance, romance, submission, kindness, giving, even a theater of the sacred and the defiling. Sex has a multitude of meanings--it is, in human society, an abstract, culturally defined force in our lives, not just for procreation, not even just a pleasurable instinct. Only symbols can be elaborated in this sense. Physical reality is only what it is, and can be nothing else. But people can elaborate symbols endlessly, making one thing represent any number of other things, represent even imaginary things, not just other real things.

"There is a peculiar kind of anguish in communication."

The Process of Idealization: Human relationships and actions are idealized when they are culturally symbolized. For example, the social role of "father" is conceptualized in terms of a cluster of ideals, called duties, or responsibilities, and other idealized qualities such as love for one's children, faithfulness to one's wife, and so on. Idealizations are, in a sense, our aspirations, the values and norms we attempt to realize. But symbols have a quality of perfection that reality can not match. For example, the concept of a square can never be perfectly realized, only approximated. Similarly, the concept of father can only be approximated, not perfectly realized.

Ideal concepts, by their nature, create in us impossible aspirations. Yet we rarely reject ideals because they can not be realized. Instead, we judge reality negatively, for its failure to live up to the ideal. And we also, from time to time, elaborate, and change the ideal to another ideal, preferring to alter the dream rather than to abandon it. For example, the ideals of the marriage relationship have been elaborated and altered in the 20th century, in an attempt to redefine the dream, hope, and illusion of romantic love. The ideal of romantic love has changed, not been lost, though to an older generation that doesn't resonate with the current, more egalitarian ideal of romance, the new equality between the sexes is seen as unromantic. But the newer generation sees the older generations' romantic ideals as oppressive, a false dream. People modified the dream instead of rejecting it. Dream rejection is a logical alternative, but apparently not a typical alternative to dream failure.

The fact that we cling to ideals means, among other things, that ideals are as much a source of misery as they are a source of fulfillment. The perfection of ideals is an aspect of the nature of symbols, of language itself. Much human suffering stems from a failure to achieve ideals, an aspect of the nature of symbols. Humans suffer, and humans are exalted, by symbols--an experience unknown to other species. Fulfillment and disillusionment are both produced by the relations between symbols and reality.

The Killer of the Dream: We pay a price for protecting our ideals, for clinging to them in the face of a complex, imperfect reality. The price we pay is wrapped up in the sacrificial process of scapegoating that seems to be an inevitable reaction to failure. Someone or something must be blamed for the failure of the real to live up to the ideal. The **drama** of ideals and failure insists on suffering, on paying for failure, to preserve the realm of the ideal. The grander principles of social order and human fulfillment are sacred. Something must happen to preserve the sacred order and meaning of society. Scapegoating is the most prevalent method societies and individuals use in affirming ideals. Duncan calls it the "Drama of the Victim."

The Drama of the Victim: Deviants, of all sorts, are the victims of individual and collective aggression in the dramatic clash between moral order and moral disorder. The drama is ritualized aggression, intense and sustained, institutionalized.

We are all victims of this process, though not always in the same ways. We are victims of our own consciences, and victims of each other's judgments. In either case, the process is symbolic and culturally determined, even when it is internal. When it is internal, we experience guilt, feel bad about ourselves, feel undeserving, and suffer countless, self-inflicted punishments stemming from self-judgment.

The external process is such that deviants are criminalized, victimized by the sacrificial process called, in our society, the criminal justice system. All sacrificial processes require a victim in order to accomplish the ritual, to satisfy the emotional needs the ritual revolves around. The needs, for the most part, are socially induced, though grounded in experience to an extent.

We identify with the suffering victims of crime, even if we don't know them. We disidentify with the perpetrators of crimes, in a fashion similar to how we might respond if we were ourselves the victims of the crimes. We vicariously participate in the collective, aggressive ritual of punishment to complete the process and emerge, once again, in a state of emotional equilibrium. Where there is no personal victim, we are offended because our sacred values have been transgressed, revealing, as Durkheim saw, that the primary victim of crime is those values—i.e., our emotional attachment to ideals. Identifying with the victims of crime merely provides us with a stronger rationalization of our anger. Anger is the product of violation of a moral principle we have internalized. The emotional commitment is a reflection of our submission to authorities, such as parents, during our childhood, when overt force was used to compel our behavior. Our parents punished us, and being victims of their aggression, we now, as the study of child abuse reveals so clearly, desire to inflict similar abuse on others. Aggression begets aggression. When we can not act out our aggressive impulses towards a powerful aggressor we fear, we store it up, and act it out towards some other person, preferably one we believe "deserves" it. Society singles out the deviant as a category of "deserving" victims.

In the family, the same drama is played out between parents and children. The children are the deviants, the parents are the avenging gods. A conflict relationship is played out as a moral drama. The drama, like all good drama, focuses on the tension and struggles between good and evil. Justice requires that good triumph. Justice is the cathartic resolution to conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil, as embodied in the persons of parent and child, or judge, jury, and criminal.

Aggression against one who does us personal harm is a normal, biologically (emotionally) induced response to pain or frustration, irrelevant to concepts of right and wrong, justice or injustice. But the sustained, intense, collective aggression against "wrongdoers" is not just biological or psychological. It is also socio-cultural. The act of communicating and storing aggressive feelings through the use of symbols, triggers and augments our aggression.

There is a chain-like process of

1. idealization,
2. failure
3. attribution of guilt, leading to
4. collective victimization.

This process is uniquely human, maybe unavoidable for us, insofar as we create and live through cultural symbols, which we call morality. This is NOT to say that we can or should refuse to engage in the process. However, we have, all over the world, developed various versions of the concept of MERCY as a means of taming the process, bringing it more under control, perhaps because we not only identify with the victims of deviance, but also because we are all potential victims collective aggression as well. None of us escape. The quest for justice can get out of hand, sweeping countless victims into sacrifice, in a peculiar form of collective behavior that resembles, or can literally become mob violence. So the quest for justice must be contained, else the rage people feel against injustice causes uncontrolled violence. When violence becomes uncontrolled, it no longer functions as a ritual. It becomes a destructive,

catastrophe, as in the "reign of terror" of the French revolution. Any society exists as much in a state of disorder, as in a state of order. Integration of individuals into a collectivity requires shared dreams of order, and shared acts of violence and disorder. Dreams of order and disorder are the province of art. In art, myths are created, elaborated, summarized, and made tangible to our imagination. The artist, in the generic sense of that term, is the agent of society. Art is not just a reflection of society, it is the device through which society is created and sustained. The essence of culture is art, particularly the art of story-telling, and of story representation. Every society instills in its members an obsession with certain specific stories that represent the dramatic tensions between ideals and evils of its culture.

At the level of individuals, people create and sustain symbolic relationships with each other, achieving a sense of certainty and clarity of meaning in action, in the face of confusion and contradiction.

We achieve a sense of meaning through the acceptance of **Transcendent Principles**, valued ideals that are unquestioned, accepted on faith, uncritically. These are beautiful, dream-like, poetic descriptions of ideal conduct and ideal relationships. The models are located in the mythical stories told to us in childhood. Children absorb dreams uncritically, identifying with the ideals and the heroes who embody the ideals. Therefore, social action has an irrational, impulsive, and compulsive quality about it. These qualities revolve around the transcendent principles.

Transcendent principles are created by the use of **A Rhetoric of Opposites** in our myths. The rhetoric of opposites influences us to identify with the purposes of society. The rhetoric of opposites consists of irrational statements which appeal to emotion, not reason. Such ideas as good and evil, beauty and ugliness, power and weakness, freedom and oppression, justice and injustice, love and hate, or democracy and totalitarianism, are rhetorical opposites. Scientific knowledge does not fit this dualistic pattern, so science will always be subordinate to the rhetoric of social action--to religion, in other words, the shared moral values of society. Moreover, the social sciences, while being overtly scientific, are covertly rhetorical, a blend of rational and irrational.

The Self. People struggle to reconcile the contradictory demands social action places on them. We constantly strive to convince ourselves and others of the propriety of our acts. We use rhetoric in our internal conversations with ourselves, and in talking to others, for justification of our highest principles as well as our lowest failings. There is a rhetoric of self-acceptance, and of self-hatred. Both are artful, and irrational.

These are some of the most important aspects of life with each other. Social life is lived as drama, every bit as much a drama as a movie, or television soap opera. The dramatic quality of social life stems from our use of symbols, which though they may have first emerged in an effort to simply communicate experience, now live a life of their own. We not only control our use language, it controls us. We are both creators and created. The grand allegories of religious myth both describe and pre-ordain the tragic structure to human existence. Once imprinted with these patterns, we can not escape their apparent reality.