

Amitai Etzioni

## Man and Society: The Inauthentic Condition

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AMONG SOCIOLOGISTS and social psychologists the concept of 'basic human needs' is held in low regard. Alex Inkeles, in reviewing the field, has said:

'Man's *'original nature'* is seen largely in neutral terms, as neither good nor bad. It is, rather, a potential for development, and the extent to which the potential is realized depends on the time and society into which a man is born and on his distinctive place in it. If it does not quite treat him as a *'tabula rasa,'* modern sociology nevertheless, regards man as a flexible form which can be given all manner of content.

Socialization, the process of learning one's culture while growing out of infant and childhood dependency, leads to internalization of society's values and goals. People come to want to do what from the point of society they must do. Man is, therefore, seen, in his inner being, as mainly moral, by and large accepting and fulfilling the demands society makes on him.<sup>1</sup>

Albert K. Cohen stated recently:

'... nobody has ever been able to formulate an inventory of original or unsocialized tendencies that has commanded more than scattered and temporary agreement. In the second place, the very meaning of *'original human nature,'* in any other sense than a range of possibilities, each of them dependent upon specific experiences for its development or maturation, has always proved exceedingly elusive and obscure.'<sup>2</sup>

This is not to suggest that these disciplines do not recognize the existence of tensions between social roles (modes of conduct which are socially prescribed and reinforced) and personal needs or preferences. But the discrepancies between a person's inclination and that which is socially expected are accounted for by imperfect socialization, inadequate social control, or conflicting social demands, all *social* factors. True, these sociologists and social psychologists will concede, we do encounter what seems like a conflict between a person's private self and his public self (or between a person and his fellow men), but since the private self is shaped by previous socializations, this conflict really amounts to a clash between the *social* past and the present. One cannot even retreat, grant that private selves are 'socialized' and that all that is 'socialized' is by definition a social product, and suggest that *unsocialized elements in the infant's conduct* are indicative of basic human

1. Alex Inkeles, *What is Sociology?* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 50.

2. Albert K. Cohen, *Deviance and Control* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 60.

needs. This is because sociologists and social psychologists will be quick to point out that unsocialized conduct is animal-like (illustrated by studies of children adopted by a wolf or left in attics) or like a free-floating libido, which has no shape of its own. The *human* element, they stress, is socially provided, and the 'animal' needs — the physiological requirements for nourishment, liquids, and slumber — can be provided for in such a wide variety of socially approved ways that they set only very lax limits on that which is socially feasible. This is where the collective wisdom of mainstreams of modern sociology and much of social psychology stand; the concept of basic human needs cannot be used to account for tensions between specific attributes of private and public selves.

The counter arguments — and we are dealing with debates among schools rather than with findings of 'critical' experiments — advance the proposition that human nature is significantly less malleable than these disciplines tend to assume, that unsocialized beings have *specific* needs. When social arrangements run counter to these needs, human beings can be made to 'adapt' to them, but the fact that adaptations had to be made can be learned from the level of personal 'costs' inflicted, such as mental disorganization and psychosomatic illness. Modern industrial society is often depicted as such a frustrating structure, one which causes various kinds of neurosis, interpersonal violence and craving for charismatic leadership. Excessively 'instrumental' (or 'cold'), it is said to provide only inadequate opportunities for 'expressive' (or 'warm') relations.

A second set of costs is social rather than personal. It manifests itself, we suggest, in that efforts, which must be spent to socialize men into roles or cultures which are unresponsive to basic human needs, are much higher than those needed to socialize men into more responsive ones. The same holds, as we see it, with regard to the costs of social control, i.e., those expenditures required to keep men in frustrating roles and to prevent them from being altered are higher than are those which would be required to keep men in less frustrating roles. It seems more costly, for instance, to educate a man to be a good bureaucrat (e.g., one who disregards family, friendship and political bonds and allows his decisions and acts to be governed by abstract and 'universalistic' criteria) than to be a public servant who follows the opposite rules. That is, we suggest that it is more natural to be 'particularistic.'<sup>3</sup> The same difference is expected to be found between roles which require substantial deferment of gratification, versus those which allow more frequent gratification, even if there is no difference in the sum total of rewards received.

Evidence that some social roles and cultural patterns are less 'natural' as compared to some others may be gleaned from cross-cultural comparative studies which show that certain modes of required conduct generate frustration in a large variety of societies suggesting that such conduct violates a universal set of human needs. The frustration found could not be caused by a specific socialization, cultural pattern or institutional structure of any one society, for these vary greatly among the societies compared. Austerity, for instance, is found objectionable (and generates pressure to overcome it) in as different situations as the U.S.S.R. a decade after

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3. We draw here on the well-known opposition between universalistic and particularistic orientations presented by Talcott Parsons, *The Social Systems* (New York: The Free Press, 1951).

the revolution, contemporary Israeli *kibbutzim*, and Catholic orders a generation after their foundation.

The implications for critical view and social research of these two divergent views of the malleability of human nature are extensive. By the first view, persons who do not accept the social prescriptions are 'deviants.' Even when no moral connotations are attached to the term, attention focuses on the factors which generate the deviancy and the ways these factors can be altered to engender conformity to social prescriptions. In contrast, the second view implies that a society is the 'deviant' if it sets prescriptions which are contrary to human nature. According to this view, it is society that ought to be altered, to make it more responsive to man.

While this debate, as briefly outlined, is often viewed as one between the 'integration' school (of which G. H. Mead and Talcott Parsons are main proponents) and the 'conflict' or alienation school (whose representatives are numerous), scholars of the Marxist branch of the conflict school tend to reject human nature conceptions even more resolutely than those of the 'integration' school. They see the concept of a universal set of basic human needs as a-historical. Conflicts, the Marxist writers stress, are determined by technological and economic relations which have grown apart from other social relations in the process of history. They are not due to personality variables. Actually, the notion of basic human needs and of historical processes can be quite readily reconciled. Human needs, such as a need for regular and frequent affection and recognition, may be universal, while the social conditions, which determine the degree to which these are satisfied, may be historically shaped.

#### FROM ALIENATION TO INAUTHENTICITY

If we ask the extent of responsiveness of society in the present historical stage, and limit our answer to Western societies, a rather central transformation from past stages suggests itself. This is the transformation from scarcity and the alienation generated by instrumentality toward rising inauthenticity of affluence and pseudo-expressive relations. Before this trend can be explored, a note on the place of participation in our conceptual scheme is necessary. Of the many definitions of alienation, the following seems the most essential: a social condition is alienating if it is unresponsive to the basic needs of men in that condition; if it is beyond their understanding and control. The question arises as to how a responsive social structure may be generated. How are the members' needs and preferences to be related to societal forms? The answer seems to us to lie in the members' participation in shaping and re-shaping these forms. Maximal societal responsiveness will be attained under the Utopian condition in which all the members participate in the shaping of all aspects of their societal life. Even this condition would be expected to encounter some alienation (which Marcuse refers to as irreducible),<sup>4</sup> the result of the fact that not all members' needs are mutually complementary, and hence the compromises inevitably worked out leave each less than fully satisfied. Participation, though, provides the most effective way to reach such compromise; any other procedure, e.g., a wise and open-minded monarch, taking his country's needs into account, would be expected to leave a greater residue of alienation than broadly

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4. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

based participation. Under such a system, upward communication of members' needs would be both more accurate and more powerful as compared to any other system. While maximal participation is Utopian, we may compare social systems in terms of the extent to which they are participatory, and expect that those which are relatively more participatory will also be relatively less alienating.

This brings us to the historical stage and situation in which we find ourselves. In contrast to previous ages of scarcity, the contemporary period for industrialized societies has been characterized as one of abundance (at least for the private sector and the 'upper' two-thirds of the members). The lower the level of scarcity, the lower the extent of irreducible alienation in that the more basic needs of members can be satisfied without necessarily depriving anyone.

When a society lives close to the subsistence level, existing allocative patterns often entail the deprivation of the most basic human needs to some categories or groups of members – baby girls or minorities, for instance. Here, reallocation aimed at improving the lot of these members may entail inflicting such deprivation on some other segment of the membership. In the age of affluence, reallocation is aimed at creating a society which satisfies the basic needs of all members and which does not inflict deprivation of basic needs on any member; it can draw on 'slack.' That is, rather than redistribute the burden of social alienation, the total level can be reduced. Moreover, it is not only that material needs can be more widely satisfied, but also that more time and energy can be freed for expressive pursuits. For example, all other things being equal, the mother who need not labor to add to the family's income will find it easier to provide affection for both her husband *and* her children, reducing the rivalry between them for this over-scarce 'commodity.' In *this* period of affluence the role of participation becomes more crucial; if alienation is not reduced here, this can be attributed more to exclusion and unresponsiveness than to objective inability to respond, as compared to *much* less affluent earlier periods or other societies.

The difference between our own earlier societies, it may be argued, is much smaller than we suggest, because scarcity is a state of mind as well as of the economy. For a suburban matron, inability to acquire a new fur, when all her friends acquire one, may be as frustrating as a Burmese village matron's inability to fill her rice bowl with rice or any other food. But, even if there are no 'real' (physiological) differences, and if the status-race has no level of satiation, it still must be noted that the basic reason the suburban matron is caught in a status-race is lack of authentic expressive relations, while the sources of hunger in the Burmese village are at least in part economic and technological. The suburban 'scarcity' can be treated to a large extent by providing for authentic participation; the hunger in Burma can be so treated only to a very limited degree.

The resistance to making affluent societies more responsive, to reallocating and to opening the society to extensive participation, has both 'real' and symbolic sources. In part, this resistance draws on existing privileged power and economic positions, which would be undermined in such a societal change. And, while there is on the one hand a rise in and a spread of societal consciousness and of the capacity to act politically among the deprived collectivities due to mass education and means of communication, there is also in contemporary industrialized society an increasing capacity of those in power to manipulate due to the communication revolution and the growing utility of social science, especially in market and voting research. Aside

from sustaining the existing pattern of privilege and restricted participation, mass manipulation is said to provide for the unloading of the ever-increasing produce the affluent economy manufactures. The ultimate manipulation, some empirical evidence for which is cited below, is found in sustaining the legitimacy of a system that is unresponsive to the basic needs of its members, in that it offers a sense of participation – and, more broadly, of responsiveness – where there is only a pittance.

In pursuing the idea of alienation with the eyes of a sociologist, our attention focuses first on the array of societal institutions. In earlier writings on unresponsiveness, attention would typically focus on work and economic institutions as the source of alienation. But in seeking to understand the affluent age, attention ought to focus on the main source of inauthentic participation, the politics of pluralistic, democratic societies. On the face of it all, authentic democracy is assured by the structure of the government interests and by the values of all members. It is asserted that these can find their way into the political give and take, out of which consensual policies and acceptable structures emerge. These claims tend to minimize or view as temporary the unresponsiveness of this political system to those significant segments of the population which have no effective vote, the role played by the mass media and the elite in producing endorsement of unresponsive policies (policies which are against the interests of the members and which they would reject if they were better informed and less tranquilized), and the fact that the political alternatives offered constitute a narrow range excluding many options – especially for fundamental changes leading to increased responsiveness on the society-wide level. The 1964 choice between the Vietnam policy Senator Goldwater advocated and the rather similar one President Johnson followed up to the election (let alone after it) is a case in point.

Pluralism by itself, without substantial equality in power among the political contenders, does not provide for a responsive political system. Groups of citizens (such as classes or ethnic groups) have a say in accordance with their assets, power, and above all, extent of organization for political action, such as lobbying and campaigning. As these resources are unevenly distributed among groups of citizens, the consensus produced is about as responsive to the needs of the weaker members as an agreement between an international oil company and a street-corner gasoline-pump owner. Pluralism 'works' not mainly via elections, but via private and public interest groups.<sup>5</sup> New administrative policies and major pieces of legislation are 'cleared' with the 'relevant' groups, e.g., labor and management, the church and civic associations. In the process those interests which are not organized (and part of their deprivation is their relative lack of the educational background and experience which organization necessitates) are neglected. Farm hands, excluded from the minimum-wage legislation in the United States, are a typical case in point.

Inauthenticity in other institutional areas is frequently reported. Studies of education show the stress which is placed on a uniform personality format, the 'rounded personality' capable of smooth handling of others. This is a format which firstly, does not provide for expression of the variety of personality needs young men exhibit, and secondly, promotes relations among men which are devoid of deep

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5. Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966).

affection and adequate releases.<sup>6</sup> Studies of suburbia have shown the pseudo-quality of the *Gemeinschaft* generated. Here, it is reported, the instrumental orientation penetrates even the relation between mother and child, the former using the latter to score points in a status-race, disregarding the child's deeper needs (e.g., to get dirty sometimes), and failing to provide authentic, unconditional affection.<sup>7</sup> Studies of 'human relations' training programs for management show programs whose aim is to teach supervisory personnel how to provide their underlings with a sense of participation in the industrial decision-making without real sharing of power or interest in responsiveness,<sup>8</sup> and of labor unions which are so committed to industrial peace and cooperation that they serve much more as a mechanism of downward control ('part of the labor relations department of the plant'), than of upward representation of workers' needs.<sup>9</sup>

Inauthenticity in one area sustains that in others. 'Rounded' education prepares for pseudo-participation in the realm of work (with 'don't rock the boat' as the prime tenet). Consumer races provide an outlet for an avalanche of products which answer no authentic need, but produce the demand to work, even at alienating conditions, in order to obtain them. Inauthentic politics close the circle by not providing an opportunity to mobilize for fundamentally different systems, and the mass-culture provides 'escapes' which drain protest and which in turn serve to conceal the 'flatness'<sup>10</sup> of the mass-society consumption-and-work world.

The total effect is one of a society which is not committing, to which members are not 'cathected,' one which provides no effective channels for expression of frustrations, grievances and needs. Hence, the rise of demonstration democracy, as men take to the streets to express, release or communicate feelings upward; the rise in wild-cat strikes, as labor unions become part of the managerial structure;<sup>11</sup> the rise in *middle-class* dropouts among students; and the rise in the number of demonstrators and the increasingly 'respectable' kinds of social groups which take to the streets (teachers, social workers, and, at least in one case, doctors).<sup>12</sup> More deeply, the high rate of alcoholism, neuroses, divorce, addiction and other such symptoms seem traceable in part to the non-committing social world. The best evidence that lack of involvement is a major factor in causing these personal 'costs' and societal problems is that when social life becomes more committing — as for the members of a social movement — there is a sharp decline in these symptoms.<sup>13</sup> It

6. Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *Coming of Age in America* (New York: Random House, 1965).

7. John R. Seeley, *Crestwood Heights* (New York: Basic Books, 1956).

8. Reinhard Bendix & Lloyd Fisher, 'The Perspectives of Elton Mayo,' in Amitai Etzioni, *Complex Organizations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1961), pp. 113-26.

9. W. F. Whyte et al., *Money and Motivation* (New York: Harper, 1955), pp. 149-65.

10. Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

11. On the nature of wildcat strikes, see A.H. Raskin, 'Why Labor Doesn't Follow Its Leaders,' *The New York Times*, January 8, 1967. For engineers on the picket line, see *American Engineer News*, January 1968, p. 13.

12. Doctors demonstrated in front of the automobile displays at Columbus Circle in New York City to call attention to unsafe cars.

13. A study of narcotics addiction among Negroes in the United States for a decade by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics showed a 15% decline (27,321 as compared to 29,482) from 1955 to 1965; the first factor listed among four was 'growing racial pride among Negroes has accompanied the fight for civil rights.' *The New York Times*, March 6, 1967. See also Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 216. See also p. 101. On similar evidence for Los Angeles, see Edward Druz, *The Big Blue Line* (New York: Coward, McCann,

seems that not only are members of such movements less likely to be alcoholics, have fewer 'breakdowns', and so forth, when compared to other less-involved citizens of similar class, ethnic and educational background, but also that the same persons — for instance Malcolm X — experience a sharp decline in particular symptoms and/or a-social behavior when they are authentically activated.<sup>14</sup> In final analysis, even the members of a social movement are, of course, not free of their society and only a society which would become more active, less inauthentic, could expect to overcome these problems on a broader base.

Shifting from a sociological focus to a psychological one, the difference between alienation and inauthentic involvement seems to lie firstly in the difference between having a clear and external target for aggression, and secondly, keeping aggression at least in part 'bottled up' inside. The 'purely' alienated person — barred from voting, joining a labor union or attending a university — may feel 'shut out,' as if facing a heavy locked door in a passage he seeks to travel. He can, with relative ease, identify an 'enemy' and release part of his frustration by anger and even physical violence against the 'bosses,' 'the establishment,' and so forth. The inauthentically involved person is allowed to vote, to organize, to join; but all of this does not make the system more responsive to his needs. It is like being caught in an invisible nylon net. He is often unable to identify the sources of his frustrations. He frequently has a sense of guilt, because had he not played along, it would have been impossible to sustain the system and he would not have ended up being manipulated. His resentment against being caught is in part a resentment against himself for allowing himself to be taken.

Rejection, which lies at the root of both conditions, is much more impersonal and hence less psychologically damaging in the pure alienating situation as compared to the inauthentic one. Jews, usually excluded during the middle ages from the political and economic power centers of society, could make a comparatively healthy psychological adjustment by focusing their identity on the in-group and limiting their expressive ties to other Jews. But with emancipation, when Jews were allowed, for instance, to study at German universities, they lowered their defenses and moved emotionally closer to the non-Jews. When rejection came here, it was often more damaging to self-identity and emotional security.<sup>15</sup> Similar experiences are now the fate of educated Negroes in the United States. More technically it may

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1967), p. 131. It is said that rates of neurosis were much lower during the London Blitz, and that those mobilized by a social movement had a low criminal record. See also George Rude, *The Crowd in History* (New York: John Wiley, 1964), especially Ch. 13, pp. 195–268. See also Donald D. Reid, 'Precipitating Proximal Factors in the Occurrence of Mental Disorders: Epidemiological Evidence,' *Causes of Mental Disorders: A Review of Epidemiological Knowledge, 1959* (New York: Milbank Memorial Fund, 1961). It is necessary, though, to use as indicators anti-social behavior as defined by a social science model and not by the middle class or the alienating society. Thus, it is not clear at all that the smoking of marijuana (as distinct from heroin or opium) is more anti-social than moderate drinking. Its prevalence in a mobilized group is not a sign that activation does not reduce deviancy. But inter-personal violence, for instance, seems more anti-social, and we would expect a lower rate in active groups, unless this happens to be a pattern the group picks up as its rebelling symbol. The question of an absolute base for the study of deviant behavior will be explored further in a later publication.

14. For a story of a deviant who becomes a political innovator through mobilization, see *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, with the assistance of Alex Haley, Introduction by M. S. Handler, Epilogue by Alex Haley (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

15. Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto* (Chicago: Phoenix Press, University of Chicago 1928).

be said that pure alienation exists when the social distance scale is great and encompasses all the major expressive relations; authentic relations reduce the scale to a minimum; inauthentic ones stand mid-way on the scale and are 'uneven,' allowing for closer relations in some expressive areas, and less in others, a particularly strained imbalance. Much more needs to be found out about the differences in the psychological problems and dynamics of persons who live in these two kinds of social conditions. Are there differences in psychosomatic illness, for instance? Do alienated persons have more speech defects while inauthentic ones have more asthma and ulcers? etc.

We conclude with a brief note on the conditions under which alienation and inauthenticity may be reduced. In part these are 'structural' conditions, as for instance, those under which a more equal distribution of political power among the members of society can be brought about. These, in turn, are a prerequisite of more widely distributed opportunity for participation and thus for a more broadly based responsiveness. Here the central question is: does not the very structure of inequality which generated excluded and underprivileged groups also prevent their effective mobilization for societal change, which such a redistribution of power would constitute? The answer, which cannot be spelled out here, seems to be that while the existing structure does make it more difficult, if only because of differential access to education, for some groups to mobilize themselves, other factors prevent control from being water-tight. The spread of education (which the economy's needs foster) and the unbalanced upward mobility of those groups which did gain admittance (e.g., the Jews in the United States) are among these factors.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, there are psychological factors. The fear to challenge the existing social structure or its rhetoric, for example, has some roots in the reality of experiences in earlier periods or even present ones (e.g., where political activeness on the side of change, as in parts of the American South, causes loss of one's job, land or life); but it may also be grossly magnified because of internal weakness or lack of a tradition of collective action.<sup>17</sup>

Attempts by those who share similar fears, under-privileged statuses and the social sources of alienation to confront their difficulties serve, first, to reduce the inauthenticity by more clearly marking the true opportunities for participation and by pointing out the false ones. They then serve to make the system less alienating by promoting some reallocation of resources and power, which in turn makes society somewhat more participatory and responsive. Whether this leads to a continual reformation of society, until it gradually becomes a highly responsive one or leads to full-fledged confrontation between the rising collectivities and those who see their interest in preserving the status quo, is too early to answer. In either case, should mobilization of the uninvolved lead to a gradual transformation or show-down, inauthenticity — the mark of the affluent society — will be much reduced.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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16. For additional discussion, see Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* (New York: The Free Press, 1968).

17. James Q. Wilson, *Negro Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1960).