APPENDIX 2

A Note on the Concepts " Social Structure " and " Anomie "

One could point to many instances in which " anomie " is treated as a problem while its opposite, the state of " well integrated " people or whatever one may call it, is made to appear as relatively " unproblematical ", as " normal " and sometimes, by implication, as a phenomenon which need not be studied.

It may be enough to choose as an example some of the concluding remarks of Merton's well-known essay " Social Structure and Anomie "[1] :

> " In so far as one of the most general functions of social structure is to provide a basis for predictability and regularity of social behaviour, it becomes increasingly limited in effectiveness as these elements of the social structure become dissociated. At the extreme, predictability is minimised and what may be properly called anomie or cultural chaos supervenes."

At the end of his essay Merton presents " social structure " and " anomie " as antithetic phenomena ; they are made to appear as opposite poles of a continuum : where " anomie " prevails, there is no, or little, " social structure " ; its place is taken by cultural (or perhaps social) chaos ; " predictability and regularity of social behaviour " are at a discount.

This concept of anomie, as one can see, is different from that of Durkheim. If its use in Durkheim's study of suicide means anything, it means that " anomie " is a specific type of social structure, not its opposite pole in a continuum of social phenomena.

Durkheim argued that when the particular type of social structure prevails to which he referred as anomie suicide rates are likely to be high. Contrary to Merton's idea that " anomie " diminishes predictability of social behaviour, Durkheim's theory implied that a better understanding of " anomie " as a

[1] Merton, R. K., *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, Ill.), 1963, p. 159.

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type of social structure might make it possible both to explain high suicide rates and to predict that, given anomic conditions, suicide rates are likely to be high.

Merton's idea of a polarity between " social structure " and " anomie " is based on a misunderstanding which is fairly widespread. " Social structure " is identified with a type of social order of which the observer approves, with a " good order ". Hence " anomie " regarded as undesirable and incompatible with a " good order ", also appears as incompatible with " social structure ". A " good order " is seen as an order in which social behaviour is well regulated. The identification of social structure with a " good social order ", therefore, leads to the assumption that sociological regularities of social behaviour diminish when " social structure " in the sense of a " good " and " well regulated " order gives way to the " bad order " of anomie. The semantic difficulties which arise if one equates the sociological concept of " social order " with what one regards in everyday life as a " good social order " and the sociological concept of " regularities of social behaviour " with the evaluating concept of a " well regulated behaviour " show themselves in such considerations clearly enough. Here as elsewhere the intrusion into one's sociological diagnosis of evaluations extraneous to the problem under consideration—of heteronomous evaluations—is at the root of the difficulties. Evaluations such as " good " and " bad " invading a sociological analysis give the impression of sharp moral dichotomies where factual enquiries reveal in the first place simply differences in social structure. In this respect Durkheim's approach can serve as a corrective. He was able to show that social behaviour which is " not well regulated " has its distinct sociological regularities. It is easy to evaluate high suicide rates as " bad ". It is much more difficult to explain why certain societies have higher suicide rates than others. If that is regarded as the primary sociological task—if one tries to correlate, as Durkheim did, different suicide rates with different social structures one soon becomes aware that the issues are more complex than simple value polarities such as " good " and " bad " suggest. A steady rise in suicide rates, for example, which one may judge to be " bad " may be connected with

changes in social structure, such as increasing industrialisation, which one would find more difficult to evaluate as equally " bad ". Thus the concept of " social structure " can be used, and has been used among others by Merton himself, in a sense which is less disturbed by alien evaluations than that in which it has been used by Merton in the sentences that have been quoted. It can be used with reference to more closely as well as to more loosely integrated groups. There is no harm in speaking of the former as " well integrated " (which suggests approval) and of the latter as " badly integrated " or " dissociated " (which suggests disapproval) as long as the differences of structure and the reasons for these differences firmly remain in the centre of one's attention.

Both, forms of close integration and forms of loose integration, raise problems that require investigation. The comparison between " village " and Estate in Winston Parva showed that clearly enough. All sections of Winston Parva, including the unruly minority of the Estate, were " structured " sections. As such they all showed a degree of regularity and predictability of social behaviour.

At the beginning of his essay Merton himself uses the term " social structure " in a more sociological sense. There he represents " social structure " as a condition for deviant and, at least by implication, for conforming behaviour [1] :

" Our primary aim, " he wrote, " is to discover how some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in non-conforming rather than conforming conduct."

And he adds in the light of this sentence very appropriately :

" Our perspective is sociological."

The perspective ceases to be sociological if the term " social structure " is approximated only to " nomic " conditions and behaviour and if " anomie " is identified with " structureless " chaos. Sociology can come into its own as a scientific discipline only if it is understood that there is no chaos in any absolute sense. No grouping of humans, however disorderly and chaotic

[1] Ibid., p. 132.

in the eyes of those who form it, or in the eyes of observers, is without structure. But perhaps this is not the place to enlarge on this point.

Merton uses the term " social structure " in two different and not wholly compatible ways—once as a possible condition of deviant behaviour and of anomie and once as one pole of a continuum whose opposite pole is "anomie". In terms of one's immediate evaluations as involved participants, structures which encourage a more " orderly " and others which encourage a more " disorderly " behaviour may be experienced as independent and incompatible opposites. In terms of a sociological enquiry both can be approached as structures on the same level ; in many cases one can show them as interdependent. Again, the study of Winston Parva illustrates the point. The primary task was simply to enquire how the community and its various sections functioned, why they functioned in this particular way and, among others, why tensions arose and persisted within the community. When that had been done it appeared no longer as easy as it may have seemed before, to pass judgement on the various sections of Winston Parva in terms of a black and white design—in the simple terms " good " and " bad ". The Estate showed to a fairly high degree the condition to which one refers as " anomie ". The " village " might serve as an example of a " well integrated " community. Compared with the vivid and complex picture which can emerge from an empirical enquiry, the tendency to argue in general terms as if close integration of a group were a purely positive quality and loose integration a purely negative quality appears as a dry oversimplification. Close integration, as the example of the " village " indicated, is often bound up with specific forms of coercion. It may be bound up with specific forms of oppression. There can be too much social cohesion as well as too little, and too much as well as too little pressure for conformity. More empirical investigations alone can help us to understand what actually happens in communities to which we apply terms such as " close integration ", and what in such cases " too much " and " too little " actually mean. At present one is apt to believe that value judgements used in such cases are wholly independent of the advances in

knowledge. One often argues as if people acquired the values for which they stand from nowhere. They appear to be *a priori*, namely prior to all experiences. Without suggesting that they can be simply derived from empirical enquiries, one can certainly say that they are not independent of them. Men's sense of values changes with the changing conditions of their lives, and, as part of these conditions, with the advances in human knowledge.

The point is not without relevance in this context. The axiomatic evaluation of close integration as unconditionally " good " could be rectified with the help of a factual enquiry. That is one of many examples one could give of the way in which evaluations which at one stage are widely accepted as self-evident can be affected by advances in knowledge. It will require many more comparative empirical investigations of communities with varying degrees of cohesion and of the effects on the people who live there before one can with reasonable certainty define and evaluate some of them as better than others. At present, human organisations are still so imperfectly designed and our ignorance about them is so great that forms of malfunctioning and the suffering which results from it are ubiquitous and are widely accepted as normal and unavoidable. Although general and abstract value judgements of which the present form of moral judgements are an example may satisfy one's conscience, they are of little help as guides to actions with a long-term perspective. One can only hope to act more adequately with the help of a much improved factual knowledge about society. Without such knowledge it is not only difficult to say which actions, in the long run, are likely to be " good " and which will turn out to be " bad," one may also in order to remedy what one evaluates as " bad " take steps which make it even worse.

N.E.