Illusions of freedom: a comment on Barth's individuals

One of the main lines of criticism of 'structural-functionalist' anthropology, typified in many minds by African Political Systems (1940), has been that 'society' cannot be adequately described in terms of norms, institutions, customs, values, for these things do not explain themselves. They exist because people have set them up, and continue to uphold them, for very good reasons of their own; and the same people may change their minds at any time. Social processes and the ebb and flow of politics must be examined in any society, stable or changing, before its formal organisation or cultural values can be understood. The individual in a society, on the whole neglected in structural-functional descriptions, is thrust into new prominence: he is represented as a free agent, exercising discrimination over values and choice over political allegiance, and making economic and social decisions and innovations. This general position derives its immediate inspiration from Weber rather than from Durkheim; and one of its most forceful, prolific and consistent exponents is Fredrik Barth, at the moment Professor of Social Anthropology in the University of Bergen, Norway.[1]

One of Professor Barth's best-known formulations of the analytic principle of individual free choice is found in the opening pages of his monograph Political Leadership among Swat Pathans. It is enunciated in this context with specific reference to political organisation, and reads in part as follows:

> In many anthropological accounts of tribal peoples, one has the impression that political allegiance is not a matter of individual choice. Each individual is born into a particular structural position, and will accordingly give his political allegiance to a particular group or office-holder. In Swat, persons find their place in the political order through a series of choices, many of which are temporary or revocable.
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> This freedom of choice radically alters the way in which political institutions function. In systems where no choice is offered, self-interest and group advantage tend to coincide, since it is only through his own group that any individual can protect or improve his position. Where, on the other hand, group commitments may be assumed and shed at will, self-interest may dictate action which does not bring advantage to the group; and individuals are able to plan and make choices in terms of private advantage and a personal political career. In this the political life of Swat resembles that of Western societies. (1959a,pp. 1-2).

This concept of freedom of choice does not oppose it to an external, imperative structure of institutions and rules. For the institutions and rules of society are themselves seen as the outcome of the aggregate of individual choices; and there is assumed to be an on-going, two-way process whereby behavioural choice is influenced by formal organisation and yet at the same time modifies it. For the political organisation of Swat:

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1. Professor Barth was kind enough to invite me to the Institute of Social Anthropology in Bergen, where I spent some seven months during 1971-72. I owe my interest in the kind of question discussed in this essay to the lively discussions and seminars I attended there, and to the challenge represented by the body of work being produced by members of the Bergen Institute.

> The political system of Swat thus does not define a set of formal structural positions - it emerges as a result of individual choices. But these choices represent the attempts of individuals to solve their own problems; and as some of these problems spring from features of the formal organization, the form of the political system may, through this method of analysis, be seen in part to reflect such features. (ibid., p. 4)

A major theme running through Barth's work, including work on topics which are not strictly 'political', and made explicit in his programmatic statements, is that of the individual as free agent. He is assumed to be unbound by custom or moral dictate, and unfettered by social compulsion. The society and culture around him is represented as an environment, upon which he can act, though within certain constraints. His inner will, his autonomous power of making decisions and acting upon them, is seen as the seed of dynamic processes in society, and movements of historical change. Relations between people are seen as the coming together of two separate persons; and social institutions and cultural values are seen as emerging from the network of relations, encounters and transactions between people. Such interaction gives substance to the idea of 'values', for insofar as they are enacted in such a social world, they may be observed and investigated empirically. Assumptions can be made about the motivations of people in one society, rather than another; and contrasting social forms can be seen in the light of such a relativity of values. The freedom of individuals to choose does not therefore lead to complete anarchy, for particular incentives, or values, and constraints, govern the choice of people in a particular society, and lead to statistical regularities of decision. The empirical order found in societies, that order which is the object of the social anthropologist's enquiries, is the result of the aggregate pattern of individual behaviour. To examine the reasons why particular decisions are made by individuals, exercising their freedom to choose within the limits of their environment, the social situation as they see it and their 'values', is to approach an explanation of the form of society as a whole. Specification of the crucial reasons why decisions are made provides a formula which can be said to generate the relevant social forms. Barth's method and its justification are lucidly presented in his 1966 paper on Models of Social Organization, which I do not need to summarise. But I want to take a second look at the concept of the free agent upon which so much of his analysis rests, and the view of society which treats individual decision as the prime motive force.[1]

The puzzle is this: that although Barth starts with the idea of the free individual, the extension of the argument and its application to specific material so qualify the original concept that it is scarcely recognisable. In the ordinary language sense of freedom, choice and so forth, the person with whom we started out has lost much of what he had, for the sociologist is hinting at possibilities of behavioural determinants and predictions, given at least the intelligence and rationality of a population. The argument in the passages already quoted from Political Leadership... slips from the idea of free choice to that of self-interest; and then self-interest is said to 'dictate' action of a certain kind. How can 'free choice' be equated thus with the 'dictation' of action? On the first page of Barth's 1966 article, he writes of there being 'no absolute compulsion or mechanical necessity', of 'determining factors',

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1. Extended critiques of this kind of sociology, with specific reference to Barth's work, may be found for example in Dumont (1970) and Asad (1972).

and the difficulty in predicting behaviour. But ought these considerations to have any place in a sociology based on the idea of freedom?

> The most simple and general model available to us is one of an aggregate of people exercising choice while influenced by certain constraints and incentives. In such situation, statistical regularities are produced, yet there is no absolute compulsion or mechanical necessity connecting the determining factors with the resultant patterns; the connection depends on human dispositions to evaluate and anticipate. Nor can the behaviour of any one particular person be firmly predicted - such human conditions as inattentiveness, stupidity or contrariness will, for the anthropologist's purposes, be unpredictably distributed in the population (1966, p. 1).

The implication appears to be that if dispositions are known, and if stupidity, inattentiveness and so forth are eliminated, behaviour will be predictable. The idea of individual freedom, in itself, does not appear to interfere with the possibility of prediction.

I believe there is a real paradox here, and that it is rooted in the difficulty of combining the idea of personal freedom, essentially a moral notion, with a science of behaviour. Freedom and choice are not used by Barth in the way they are used in the language of political thought; his concept of free choice is a sociological idea, bearing little relation to the conditions or notions of personal freedom that might actually prevail in a society.

Before considering some of the details of the way in which this paradox reveals itself in Barth's writings, it is helpful to recall that the dilemma is not new. It is a problem deeply embedded in the tradition of utilitarian thought, and one over which there has been argument since the time of Jeremy Bentham (1740-1832) to the present. The relevance of the utilitarian tradition to the growth of social anthropology is not always realised, and its founders are absent from the pantheon of anthropological ancestors. But the principles of rational utility, in its twin guise as an assumed motive for individual action and as a standard for the judgment and justification of rules and institutions, has had a persistent influence in social anthropology, either as the vehicle for theory and substantive work, or as a ghost to be laid. Much writing in our subject has been shaped by the need to answer the utilitarian position. But the argument goes on and the ghost refuses to be laid. There is an internal consistency, a circularity, about the defences of utilitarian ethics and social science which make their case difficult to answer piecemeal.

Classical utilitarian thought rests on a few main assumptions. The first is that of psychological hedonism: that is that men are governed, in Bentham's terms, by the two forces of pain and pleasure (extensively defined), and they will naturally choose to seek pleasure while avoiding pain. Further, our system of ethics must be based on these facts, for we are obliged to define as good actions those which produce happiness, and as evil actions those which produce misery. Moreover, it must be right to seek the maximum happiness for as many as possible, not just oneself; social morality requires that a person should seek the general happiness. A rational person can see that the happiness of individuals is connected to the general state of happiness; and a scientific study of society can thus point the way to morally good legislation, which aims to secure those conditions in which the general happiness can flourish. There is no real opposition between self-interest and social duty, even though the less enlightened may perceive such a conflict; for in the ideal society they coincide, where each person devotes himself to the general good. With

the spread of understanding and education, men will increasingly realise this truth, and meanwhile ought to work towards it.

John Stuart Mill, brought up in the tradition of Bentham, was critical of its cruder formulations and qualified what he named 'utilitarianism' with great sensitivity and humanity, though claiming to remain within the essential principles of Bentham's scheme. Mill saw clearly that there could be no reconciliation of idealist moral philosophy as represented by a man like Coleridge, and the radical utilitarian view; but that they were complementary, and as such, necessary to each other.

'For, among the truths long recognised by Continental philosophers, but which very few Englishmen have yet arrived at, one is, the importance, in the present imperfect state of mental and social science, of antagonist modes of thought: which, it will one day be felt, are as necessary to one another in speculation, as mutually checking powers are in a political constitution.' (Coleridge, in Leavis, 1950, p. 104).

In his Introduction to Mills' essays on Bentham and Coleridge, Leavis presents them as key documents for any study of the nineteenth century, as guides to the two opposite poles of thought by which the significance of other writings can be charted. Leavis goes even further, to suggest of Bentham and Coleridge that 'even if they had had no great influence they would still have been the classical examples, they are of two great opposing types of mind...' (loc. cit., p. 7). It is scarcely astonishing, therefore, that the utilitarian mode of thought persists in philosophy and sociology today; Mill himself wrote, 'In all ages of philosophy one of its schools has been utilitarian' (loc. cit., p. 54). The dilemmas of utilitarian ethics are still discussed; and are closely paralleled by some of the dilemmas of what we could call utilitarian sociology. For just as the ethical scheme rests on the identification of the individual and the social good, so the corresponding sociological scheme rests on the identification of the formal 'values' and structure of society with the motivations and acts of those individuals who compose it. The principle of the reducibility of collective phenomena to the subjectivity of individuals is common to Bentham and Mill on the one hand, particularly in their ethical arguments, and to Barth and other modern 'action-theorists' on the other, where social-scientific arguments predominate. In both cases, for example, the question of the relative freedom of the individual is problematic, for it is difficult to reconcile the idea of personal liberty either with a complete scheme of utilitarian ethics, or with the explanatory ambitions of behavioural science. Bentham's view is of man as a somewhat passive creature and the problem did not appear to worry him unduly; but Mill championed the cause of the private freedom of the individual, especially in his classic essay On Liberty. He argued with passion that a utilitarian view did not reduce the individuality or worth of a person, and explored the territory for private freedom which should be preserved within a scheme of general utility. The problem itself he recognised clearly, and dealt with it mainly in the context of practical politics. But it has a general character, and arises from a real dilemma in all but the most extreme forms of utilitarian theory.

Some answer must be given to the question: what can be the significance of an individual person in a view of life, or an analytical scheme, which merges him into the fabric of his society and morality, so that his standing is that of a part within a wider whole? He contributes to the general social sum, and partakes in its aggregate results; but what is he in himself? The problem bothers modern critics no less than it bothered Mill. In a recent essay, Bernard Williams takes issue with the utilitarian position

partly on these grounds. He shows that the integrity of the individual is seriously undermined by the utilitarian view, itself defended not long ago by J. C. C. Smart. Among other points, Williams shows that an impersonal calculation of general happiness disposes of the idea that one has perhaps more responsibility for one's actions than for someone else's; and also of the deeper commitments of a person, to which he will stick even though he may acknowledge that by giving way to projects of others he will cause a greater general happiness. To reconcile the two interests, which is the ideal ethical system of the utilitarians, is to jeopardize the very identity of the person:

> To take the extreme sort of case, how can a man, as a utilitarian agent, come to regard as one satisfaction among others, and a dispensable one, a project or attitude round which he has built his life, just because someone else's projects have so structured the causal scene that that is how the utilitarian sum comes out?...
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> It is absurd to demand of such a man, when the sum comes in from the utility network which the projects of others have in part determined, that he should just step aside from his own project and decision and acknowledge the decision which utilitarian decision requires. It is to alienate him in a real sense from his actions and the source of his action in his own convictions. It is to make him into a channel between the input of everyone's projects, including his own, and an output of optimific decision; but this is to neglect the extent to which <u>his</u> actions and <u>his</u> decisions have to be seen as the actions and decisions which flow from the projects and attitudes with which he is most closely identified. It is thus, in the most literal sense, an attack on his integrity' (Williams, in Smart and Williams, 1973, pp. 116-117).

I quote this passage from Williams' argument, because it seems to me that like Mill's attempts to define and clarify the question of political liberty, it illuminates the nature of the corresponding problem in utilitarian sociology.

Barth faces the same difficulty in his presentation of the identity and freedom of the person in his analyses. The more strictly he adheres to the requirements of a utilitarian style of sociological analysis, the more precarious becomes the standing of the free agent; and the more concessions are made to the integrity and independence of this agent, the less distinctive and consistent the analysis. This theme can be developed in three main areas of Barth's work: his elaboration of the notions of status, role, etc. as abstractions from the empirical individual; his exploration of the rational motivation of action, especially in relation to entrepreneurs; and his analysis of the sources of an individual's 'values'.

Barth's use of status and role is a development from Radcliffe-Brown and Nadel. He sees 'status' as a cultural category (such as priest, doctor, etc.) and 'role' as the behaviour associated with a given status. Statuses often form series, and Barth uses 'status set' to mean a linked series such as doctor-nurse-patient. A person may occupy more than one status (wife, nurse, etc.) and each is then termed a part-status. This terminology forms the basis of his well-known article on stratification in north-west Pakistan, where he argues that the system is so similar to Hindu India that the term 'caste' can be used. The common principle of stratification in the Muslim Swat valley and Hindu India is that within each of a series of ranked groups, everyone holds a closely similar series

of part-statuses, highly compatible one with another.

> The simultaneous comprehensiveness and clear definition of units which characterizes caste systems results from the summation of many part-statuses into standardized clusters, or social persons, each identified with a particular caste position. Thus, in a Hindu caste system, there is a diversity of economic and ritual statuses, but these are interconnected so that all Priests are sacred and all Leatherworkers are untouchable.
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> A sociological analysis of such a system naturally concentrates on the principles governing the summation of statuses, and the consequent structural features of the clusters of connected statuses or caste positions... The caste system defines clusters of such statuses, and one particular cluster is imposed on all individual members of each particular caste.
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> The coherence of the system depends upon the compatibility of such associated statuses... Each caste position must be such that the requirements implied by its component statuses may be simultaneously satisfied; and the alignment of each individual in terms of his different statuses should also be consistent and not fraught with interminable dilemmas.' (1960, pp. 113-114)

Barth suggests that societies of the caste type lie in an intermediate position between homogenous societies, and 'complex systems in which different statuses can be freely combined... This type of system is found associated with the use of a monetary medium which facilitates the division of labour' (ibid. p. 145). In a recent article which I had the privilege of reading before publication, Barth develops this typology and its implications, recommending with great lucidity an emphasis upon the 'system-oriented, rather than ego-oriented' application of such concepts as status, and the use of the behavioural vocabulary of Erving Goffman. The concept of the person as a whole and independent agent becomes subordinate to the system:

> ...We can visualize any society of which we are members as follows. Each of us is a compound person, the encumbent of many statuses. When we come into each other's presence we do so in a physical environment - one which we perceive selectively and classify culturally as a potential scene for certain, and only certain, kinds of activities. We add to these constraints, or modify them, by communicating with each other as to who we are and what we intend to do, and thereby we arrive at an agreed definition of the situation, which implies which status out of our total repertoire we shall regard as relevant, and what use we shall put it to... Behind this creation of organized encounters, we can identify the interests and goals that set social life in motion: we can recognize social statuses as <u>assets</u>, and situations as occasions for realizing them by enactment...
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> I thus see encounters, structured by such agreements, as the stuff of society... (n.d., pp. 5-6)

The mode of arrangements and combination of statuses in person provides a framework for a fourfold typology, with western society at one extreme, as in the earlier typology. The nature of Barth's sociological definition of what freedom consists in becomes explicit; for it consists in the kind of manipulation of statuses and switching of roles which is possible in western society (or supposedly so); whereas in the smaller scale society there is scarcely any option. An interesting corollary seems to be that it is not the whole person at all who is considered as a free agent; it is some inner kernel, underneath the apparel of status and role. In western industrial society, wide networks of interaction can be set

up on minimal status information;

> The realization of this potential is further enhanced by the remarkable freedom of each individual person to accumulate information and act upon it by diversifying social relations and involving himself in deeper commitments with a particular alter based on this information... (ibid., p. 22).

However this kind of freedom is impossible in other social systems:

> ... The very concept of 'status' in these different social systems refers to rather different kinds of things. In the simpler societies status refers to a sum of multiplex capacities vis-a-vis alters with comprehensive previous information about a person. In involute systems it refers to a - perhaps compromising - component of a stereotyped cluster of capacities. In modern contract society it may refer merely to the ability to demonstrate vis-a-vis strangers the command of a very limited and specific asset. In other words it varies between being a total social identity, a compelling straight-jacket, and an incidental option. The difference may be highlighted by the realization that a concept like that of role distance, based on the distinction between subjective self and objective status (cf. Goffman...) which seems very useful and fundamental to an understanding of status in our society, becomes totally inapplicable in a social system of elementary type, based on only a very few status sets (ibid., pp. 24-25).

This passage is very helpful for perceiving what Barth has in mind: the inner, subjective self which 'utilizes' various attributes such as status, and because of this can be said to operate with a certain 'freedom', exists in itself merely as a consequence of a certain configuration of the 'outer' society. In other configurations, where total identity is obligatory, the existence of a subjective self cannot be distinguished, and there is therefore no freedom for it to manipulate the 'objective' aspects of the self. What has happened to the free agent from whose independent action and decision the form of society flows? He has given way to a compound person, whose composition is consequent upon the form of the external society; and whose subjective self and freedom is defined in such narrow sociological terms, that it does not exist at all in large parts of the world though it is important in 'western industrial' society. The premise that 'status' is a categorical attribute relevant for behaviour in personal interaction perhaps necessarily leads to this kind of conclusion, in studies which take as their object of investigation that kind of behaviour, in the aggregate. The general approach is worked out in Barth's Introduction to Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, where ethnicity is treated as a status in this sense, though it is recognised that in some circumstances it may indicate a primary identity, or "imperative status" (1969, Introduction).

The 'compound' person also appears in Barth's various discussions and applications of role-theory. The main point of present interest is that a person may play two or more different roles, which are incompatible, and therefore when they clash in certain social situations, his behaviour has to be modified. He may have to choose behaviour appropriate to one role and suppress the other role; or the dilemma may be insoluble since neither role is dominant, and he may avoid the situation altogether, by absenting himself or severely modifying his behaviour. This is the topic treated in Barth's Role Dilemmas..., where the case examined is that of the conflict between the kind of behaviour expected in the Middle East between a man and his son, and between husband and wife; the latter is suppressed,

for example, when a man's father comes to visit him and his wife. Because it takes priority, the father-son relation can be described as dominant. It is of fundamental importance, and must not be compromised; other relationships, and role-play appropriate to them, must take a subordinate place. The solution to a conflict of roles of this kind may be more extreme; the Swat Pathan bridegroom even avoids his own wedding, which Barth suggests arises from the profound role dilemma he experiences in a situation where otherwise he would have to acknowledge and play out publicly his role as son, and as husband.

The concept of individual freedom seems to recede further from view in this analysis of behaviour as a negative reaction to situations where the categorical obligations of the various roles one is supposed to play become confused. The person appears a somewhat passive creature, permeated by the external encounters and situations in which he finds himself. He copes with a dilemma by suppression or avoidance; he seems to have little 'choice' in this field. His freedom seems limited not because of any external framework of rules, but because of his uncontrollable internal reaction to the stimuli of spontaneous encounters. However, as Barth has accepted the concept of 'imperative' statuses, and therefore implied a heirarchy of statuses, it is of great interest that he accepts also a heirarchy of social or kinship relations, in the sense that some are of primary importance and others are worn more lightly. For by attaching such weight to certain aspects of organisation and giving them a deeper significance, his arguments surely appeal to something other than a principle of utility in behaviour. Mill's heirarchy of 'pleasures', some higher and some lower, was constructed to give some real form to a social morality and real standards to the individual in the face of the shifting and infinitely reducible morality of the extreme utilitarian scheme; and Williams' argument that there must be 'deeper' commitments which block the utilitarian calculation of individual interests is also recalled by Barth's acceptance of a hierarchy of statuses and roles from the individual's viewpoint.

Barth's summary of the argument on role dilemmas reads in part as follows:

> I believe that the empirical substance of Hsu's thesis of dominance in some kinship systems is valid and can be demonstrated. But I think that the pattern he has observed does not need to be cast in the descriptive and analytical mold that he has chosen. For the kind of data I have at my disposal, an explanatory model based on role theory appears to be both adequate and economical. It starts with the view that the distribution of rights on different statuses is never entirely integrated and harmonious. Where status sets and relevant social situations are clearly differentiated, this disharmony matters little to the actors, who can then pursue discrepant roles and project variant social personalities in different social situations. Routinized social life will in part be shaped by these considerations. Persons will seek the situations where successful role play can be consummated and avoid the situations where serious dilemmas keep arising - to the extent of grooms in Swat avoiding their own weddings. In general, difficulties can be resolved by avoiding simultaneous encounters with the parties to whom one has discrepant relations - by patterns such as the seclusion of women, for example... (1971, p. 94).

Barth goes too far in suggesting that seclusion of women is actually 'explained' by role theory, and the desire by men to avoid embarrassment

through the confusion of their public and private roles. His 'explanation' in terms of the dominant character of relations between man and man in the public sphere cannot stand on its own; appeal must surely be made to some external structure of an economic, political or ideological kind to justify the classification of some roles as dominant and others as recessive. It is difficult to see how behavioural interaction, in itself, could produce such categorical distinctions.

Barth's acceptance of 'dominant' relations represents something of a concession to the idea of there being permanent and stable features of society, as does his concept of the imperative quality of some statuses. But these are points at which his arguments resist the full implications of the utilitarian position he has taken up. Apart from these concessions (and I point out another below), the person dissolves into the ever-changing patterns of encounter and behavioural modification. Underneath the bundle of items of social personality and role requirements, there is an individual will; but its integrity and autonomy has been sadly eroded. There remains the inner being which utilizes the social statuses and other assets it controls, and provides the motivation of the person. The inner being, almost by definition, is itself impermeable to experience; for the social aspects of a person are those which can be assumed, discarded, projected, modified or suppressed at will, as an actor dons or doffs his clothes, and his stage character. The inner person is asocial in itself; it is motivated by the rational aim of maximising whatever values and satisfactions are offered in the culture in which it grew up; there is a predictability about its motivation which seems of a mechanical kind, although ironically Barth's work is devoted to the criticism of the mechanical quality of some structural-functional explanation.

The second set of questions which relate to the problem of choice in Barth's social anthropology concern the external activities of persons rather than their inner nature. The essence of freedom and choice, it is suggested, lies in the careers of innovators and entrepreneurs. They are not different in kind from the rest of the people, who also exercise choice, but merely in degree; they are more devoted to maximizing one kind of value (profit) and make more rational and extensive calculations. Their activity can lead to major changes in society, as they initiate new kinds of transaction, organization, and even value. But, as the analysis proceeds, the entrepreneur looks less and less a creative and original person; both within himself and in relation to the opportunities around him, he appears increasingly as a creature of his situation, his behaviour as more predictable, and his decisions as more pre-structured. Barth makes it clear in his theoretical analysis of 1963 that the entrepreneur must not be thought of in a naive sense to begin with:

> It is essential to realize that "the entrepreneur" is not a <u>person</u> in any strict sociological sense (Radcliffe-Brown 1940) though inevitably the word will be used, also in the present essays, in a way that may foster this impression. Nor does it seem appropriate to treat entrepreneurship as a status or even a role, implying as it would a discreteness and routinization which may be lacking in the materials we wish to analyse. Rather, its strict use should be for an <u>aspect of a role</u>: it relates to actions and activities, and not rights and duties, furthermore it characterizes a certain quality or orientation in this activity which may be present to greater or less extent in the different institutionalized roles found in the community. To the extent that persons take the initiative, and in the pursuit of profit in some discernible form manipulate other persons and resources, they are acting as entrepreneurs. It is with the factors encouraging and channeling, or inhibiting such activity, that we shall be concerned. (1963, p. 6.)

Insofar as these factors which encourage or inhibit entrepreneurs are the object of study, rather than the exercise of choice and originality by the entrepreneur himself, the free individual fades from the centre of the picture. The controlling factors obviously include environmental conditions in the ordinary sense; but also social conditions, which are represented as being in the nature of an environment to the individual. Because of this metaphor, it is possible to chart the opportunities for an entrepreneur inherent in a given social milieu.

> The central theme to which we have chosen to address ourselves is the entrepreneurial career as a process, as a chain of transactions between the entrepreneur and his environment; and so we need to describe the social aspects of that environment in terms which emphasize the reciprocity of those transactions. In other words, we need to see the rest of the community as composed of actors who also make choices and pursue strategies... (ibid., p. 7)

Through the network of social transactions linking people, which are the substance of society, the entrepreneur finds his way and perceives how new links can be made. His actions are usually represented as a bringing together of previously separate people, previously incommensurable values or spheres of exchange, and integrating society further as a consequence. A given economic structure presents certain clear possibilities for such entreprenuerial activity, and to that extent the activity is predictable. Barth's analysis of the economy of the mountain Fur, of the Sudan, analyses its structure from this point of view. What is perhaps not predictable is the reaction of the Fur people to non-Fur entrepreneurs who make enormous profits on selling tomatoes by exploiting the traditional reciprocal labour system (see 1967, esp. pp. 171-2). However the language used by Barth in his theoretical analysis of entrepreneurs is closely linked to the language of the natural sciences, with all the suggestions of natural process and predictability that they evoke:

> The point at which an entrepreneur seeks to exploit the environment may be described as his <u>niche</u>: the position which he occupies in relation to resources, competitors, and clients. I have in mind a structural analysis of the environment like that made by an animal ecologist or human geographer: resources in the form of codfish on a bank provide a niche for cod-fishermen, while their activity in delivering to a port again provides resources in unprocessed and untransmitted catch, which may be exploited by actors in a niche as fish-buyers... (1963, p. 9).

> The purely economic enterprise can be used as a model for other kinds of social activity, and in particular politics, viewed as a competitive game. Barth states clearly in his analysis of entrepreneurial activity that it is based on a view of social life of which the 'logically most stringent expression is the Theory of Games'.

He has demonstrated elsewhere the application of formal game theory to Swat politics (1959b). The game metaphor, which I shall not discuss as such, fits in well with the range of metaphors used by Barth - actors, role-playing, impression management, and so forth. When these terms are used in a technical sense, they lead to real difficulties, as I am trying to show with respect to the concept of the individual; when their normal language use is recalled, the sense that all social life is unreal, artificial and optional, is unavoidable. The puzzle remains as to what would be left if all the layers of artifice and induced behaviour were dissolved; would the naked individual underneath have some social being,

some irreducible social identity, which would give him a 'real' place in society which itself formed the basis of his individuality? Or must the basis of individuality remain a particular layered assortment of ascribed statuses, aspects of roles, incurred and consequential obligations, and managed impressions? Is the residue, which resists social explanation, merely a bundle of raw psychological motivations, of instinct and animal need? If this were the case, how would it be possible to speak of individual freedom and choice? The dilemma closely parallels, to my mind, the problem of Bernard Williams, in locating the sources of the integrity of an individual person in a utilitarian scheme of ethics. Can a sociological scheme treat only of the external aspects of people, the bargains, inputs and outputs between them, while leaving untouched the inner motivations and self-consciousness of individuals? If that inner being is defined as asocial, then by definition it is left out of the picture, and one cannot speak of freedom; if on the other hand the inner being of a person is itself social in nature, then one can speak of the question of his freedom, for the idea of freedom is a social concept and applicable only in a social context. It is bound to lead to difficulties if one speaks of freedom in the context of 'scientific' behaviour study, where the opinions, personality and activity of individuals are treated as so much external paraphernalia, subject to manipulation by some inner psychological automaton.

Barth's treatment of the place of 'values' in culture follows clearly and consistently the principles he has laid down elsewhere for the study of social organization, and I believe some of the same difficulties recur. The most concise expression of his approach to this question is contained in the second part of his 1966 paper on Models of Social Organization. 'Values' are an integral part of society; but they are not given in any final sense. They are subject to modification through social experience, and in particular to the patterns of interaction in a given society. For the only values relevant to a study of society are those which find material expression through acts. Actions are performed in the light of specific values, which may be modified by patterns of interaction, and form basis contrasts between different societies. A value does not exist in a vacuum; it grows from, and is subject to, the experience of encounter and communication with others. The predominant metaphor for a value is that of price. As with prices, a scheme of values may be modified by actual transactions. The process of social interaction Barth considers to be the basis for the reaching of any agreed values in a population, and the achievement of consistency and integration in culture. Barth does admit that there are 'some such processes' as 'contemplation or introspection through which disparate values are compared in the direction of consistency'; but 'they are only to a slight degree available for observation by a social anthropologist; nor do they seem to explain the patent inconsistencies in various respects which characterize the views or values of many people' (1966, pp. 12-13). Here is the recurrent image of the person who contains some inner inconsistency, which Barth views as divisive to his personality; the person himself is unable to overcome the contradiction and become a source of wholeness in human experience. The contradiction is imprinted on him by the form of 'interaction' in a society; and only the revision of this form of interaction through time, in the direction of greater consistency, can be a source of such wholeness. 'As a process generating consistency in values, social transactions would seem to be more effective and compelling than any contemplative need for logical or conceptual consistency in the minds of primitive philosophers' (ibid., p. 14). The values of an individual are therefore partial, meaningful only as part of the wider society. The metaphor of the social organism, which Barth has so firmly rejected elsewhere, is uncomfortably close. In the process of value adjustment to shared standards, there does not seem to be much

ground for the individual person to stand on. He seems to have no real boundaries, to be totally permeable to circumstantial experience, and subject to such flexible revision of his principles and standards of evaluation that he could scarcely remain 'the same person' throughout his life. His personality seems no more than the sum of its parts than the wider society is more than the sum of its parts. This dissolution of the person, consequent upon a certain style of analysis, is realised by Barth; and as he made use of the concepts of imperative status and dominant roles, he admits the idea that there are relatively stable values, from which a person does not easily shift. 'I feel it is necessary to distinguish a person's continually shifting profile or preferences and appetites from a profile of stable judgments of value to which people also seem to subscribe. These more stable values, by which different situations and longer-range strategies may be compared, are more basic to an explanation of social form.' (ibid., p. 13) Does not this concession to relatively stable values, which cannot so easily be represented as the outcome of interaction, come remarkably close to Mill's hierarchy of motivations, and Williams' insistence on 'deeper commitments'? The maintenance of such distinctions, in the end, leads to the abandonment of the principle of utility, for it demands an appeal to other standards of relevance. To save the individual person, a difference in kind is admitted between 'more stable' and 'shifting' values; but the analysis ought then to take into account other dimensions of society besides the 'interactional'. In a consistently utilitarian world, even the entrepreneur has no real freedom and no real choice; for being ultimately rational, he can calculate the outcome of various possible actions precisely, and compare their potential profit; the decision is made for him by the configurations of the world around him. Real choice is faced where one thing is not reducible to another; and all humane writers in the utilitarian tradition make concessions of some kind towards the preservation of real choice and the integrity of persons.

The alternative to such concessions is fully faced by B. F. Skinner, in behavioural psychology, and spelled out in the harsh message of his recent book, Beyond Freedom and Dignity.

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