

The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies by Georg Simmel

Georg Simmel, "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies," *American Journal of Sociology* (AJS) 11 (Trans. Albion W. Small; 1906): 441-498. See www.PreciousHeart.net/fm/Simmel.pdf.

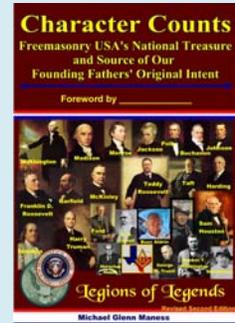
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All relationships of people to each other rest, as a matter of course, upon the precondition that they know something about each other. The merchant knows that his correspondent wants to buy at the lowest price and to sell at the highest price. The teacher knows that he may credit to the pupil a certain quality and quantity of information. Within each social stratum the individual knows approximately what measure of culture he has to presuppose in each other individual. In all relationships of a personally differentiated sort there develop, as we may affirm with obvious reservations, intensity and shading in the degree in which each unit reveals himself to the other through word and deed. How much error and sheer prejudice may lurk in all this knowing is immaterial. Just as our apprehension of external nature, along with its elusions and its inaccuracies, still attains that degree of truth which is essential for the life and progress of our species, so each knows the other with whom he has to do, in a rough and ready way, to the degree necessary 'in order that the needed kinds of intercourse may proceed. That we shall know with whom we have to do, is the first precondition of having anything to do with another. The customary reciprocal presenta-

(442) -tion, in the case of any somewhat protracted conversation, or in the case of contact upon the same social plane, although at first sight an empty form, is an excellent symbol of that reciprocal apprehension which is the presumption of every social relationship. The fact is variously concealed from consciousness, because, in the case of a very large number of relationships, only the quite typical tendencies and qualities need to be reciprocally recognized. Their necessity is usually observed only when they happen to be wanted. It would be a profitable scientific labor to investigate the sort and degree of reciprocal apprehension which is needed for the various relationships between human beings. It would be worth while to know how the general psychological presumptions with which each approaches each are interwoven with the special experiences with reference to the individual who is in juxtaposition with us; how in many ranges of association the reciprocal apprehension does or does not need to be equal, or may or may not be permitted to be equal; how conventional relationships are determined in their development only through that reciprocal or unilateral knowledge developing with reference to the other party. The investigation should finally proceed in the opposite

Simmel's article is a positive contribution to Freemasonry and perhaps the first sociology of secrecy.

See Michael G. Maness' [*Character Counts—Freemasonry USA's National Treasure and Source of Our Founding Fathers' Original Intent*](#) (AuthorHouse, 2006, 2nd Rev. Ed., 2009) for a complete refutation of the critics and the fuller nature of secrecy in Freemasonry.



One point not truly needing clarification is how Freemasonry is a society with secrets and not at all a secret society. One seminal point made clear in Simmel is about the absolute necessity of secrets in advanced societies.

direction; that is, it should inquire how our objectively psychological picture of others is influenced by the real relationships of practice and of sentiment between us. This latter problem by no means has reference to falsification. On the contrary, in a quite legitimate fashion, the theoretical conception of a given individual varies with the standpoint from which it is formed, which standpoint is given by the total relationship of the knower to the known. Since one never can absolutely know another, as this would mean knowledge of every particular thought and feeling; since we must rather form a conception of a personal unity out of the fragments of another person in which alone he is accessible to us, the unity so formed necessarily depends upon that portion of the Other which our standpoint toward him permits us to see. These differences, however, by no means spring merely from differences in the quantity of the apprehension. No psychological knowledge is a mere mechanical echo of its object. It is

(443) rather, like knowledge of external nature, dependent upon the forms that the knowing mind brings to it, and in which it takes up the data. When we are concerned with apprehension of individual by individual, these forms are individually differentiated in a very high degree. They do not arrive at the scientific generality and supersubjective conclusiveness which are attainable in our knowledge of external nature, and of the typically individual psychic processes. If A has a different conception of M from that of B, this does not necessarily mean incompleteness or deception. On the contrary, the personality of A and the total circumstances of his relation to M being what they are, his picture of M is for him true, while for B a picture differing somewhat in its content may likewise be true. It is by no means correct to say that, over and above these two pictures, there is the objectively correct apprehension of M, by which the two are to be corrected according to the measure of their agreement with it. Rather is the ideal truth which, to be sure, the actual picture of M in the conception of A approaches only asymptotically, that is as ideal, something different from that of B. It contains, as integrating organizing precondition, the psychical peculiarity of A and the special relationship into which A and M are brought, by virtue of their characteristics and their fortunes. Every relationship between persons causes a picture of each to take form in the mind of the other, and this picture evidently is in reciprocal relationship with that personal relationship. While this latter constitutes the presupposition, on the basis of which the conceptions each of the other take shape so and so, and with reference to which these conceptions possess actual truth for the given case, on the other hand the actual reciprocity of the individuals is based upon the picture which they derive of each other. Here we have one of the deep circuits of the intellectual life, inasmuch as one element presupposes a second, but the second presupposes the first. While this is a fallacy within narrow ranges, and thus makes the whole involved intellectual process unreliable, in more general and fundamental application it is the unavoidable expression of the unity in which these two elements coalesce, and which cannot be expressed in our forms of thought except as a building

(444) of the first upon the second, and at the same time of the second upon the first. Accordingly, our situations develop themselves upon the basis of a reciprocal knowledge of each other, and this knowledge upon the basis of actual situations, both inextricably interwoven, and, through their alternations within the reciprocal sociological process, designating the latter as one of the points at which reality and idea make their mysterious unity empirically perceptible.

In the presence of the total reality upon which our conduct is founded, our knowledge is characterized by peculiar limitations and aberrations. We cannot say in principle that "error is life and knowledge is death," because a being involved in persistent errors would continually act wide of the purpose, and would thus inevitably perish. At the same time, in view of our accidental and defective adaptations to our life-conditions, there is no doubt that we cherish not only so much truth, but also so much nescience, and attain to so much error as is useful for our practical purposes. We may call to mind in this connection the vast sums of human knowledge that modify human life. which, however, are overlooked or disregarded if the total cultural situation does not make these modifications possible and useful. At the other extreme, we may refer to the *Levensluge* of the individual, so often in need of illusion as to his powers and even as to his feelings, of superstition with reference to God as well as men, in order to sustain himself in his being and in his potentialities. In this psycho-biological respect error is co-ordinated with truth. The utilities of the external, as of the subjective, life provide that we get from the one as well as from the other precisely that which constitutes the basis of the conduct which is essential for us. Of course, this proposition holds only in the large, and with a wide latitude for variations and defective adaptations.

But there is within the sphere of objective knowledge, where there is room for truth and illusion. a definite cement in which both truth and illusion may take on a character nowhere else observed. The subjective, internal facts of the person with whom we are in contact present this area of knowledge. Our fellowman either may voluntarily reveal to us the truth about himself,

(445) or by dissimulation he may deceive us as to the truth. No other object of knowledge can thus of its own initiative, either enlighten us with reference to itself or conceal itself, as a human being can. No other knowable object modifies its conduct from consideration of its being understood or misunderstood. This modification does not, of course, take place throughout the whole range of human relations. In many ways our fellow-man is also in principle only like a fragment of nature, which our apprehension, so to speak, holds fast in its grasp. In many respects, however, the situation is different, and our fellow-man of his own motion gives forth truth or error with reference to himself. Every lie, whatever its content, is in its essential nature a promotion of error with reference to the mendacious subject; for the lie consists in the fact that the liar conceals from the person to whom the idea is conveyed the true conception which he possesses. The specific nature of the lie is not exhausted in the fact that the person to whom the lie is told

has a false conception of the fact. This is a detail in common with simple error. The additional trait is that the person deceived is held in misconception about the true intention of the person who tells the lie. Veracity and mendacity are thus of the most far-reaching significance for the relations of persons with each other. Sociological structures are most characteristically differentiated by the measure of mendacity that is operative in them. To begin with, in very simple relationships a lie is much more harmless for the persistence of the group than in complex associations. Primitive man, living in communities of restricted extent, providing for his needs by his own production or by direct co-operation, limiting his spiritual interests to personal experience or to simple tradition, surveys and controls the material of his existence more easily and completely than the man of higher culture. In the latter case life rests upon a thousand presuppositions which the individual can never trace back to their origins, and verify; but which he must accept upon faith and belief. In a much wider degree than people are accustomed to realize, modern civilized life—from the economic system which is constantly becoming more and more a credit-economy,

(446) to the pursuit of science, in which the majority of investigators must use countless results obtained by others, and not directly subject to verification—depends upon faith in the honor of others. We rest our most serious decisions upon a complicated system of conceptions, the majority of which presuppose confidence that we have not been deceived. Hence prevarication in modern circumstances becomes something much more devastating, something placing the foundations of life much more in jeopardy, than was earlier the case. If lying appeared today among us as a sin as permissible as among the Greek divinities, the Hebrew patriarchs, or the South Sea Islanders; if the extreme severity of the moral law did not veto it, the progressive upbuilding of modern life would be simply impossible, since modern life is, in a much wider than the economic sense, a “credit-economy.” This relationship of the times recurs in the case of differences of other dimensions. The farther third persons are located from the center of our personality, the easier can we adjust ourselves practically, but also subjectively, to their lack of integrity. On the other hand, if the few persons in our immediate environment lie to us, life becomes intolerable. This banality must, nevertheless, be brought out to view, because it shows that the ratios of truthfulness and mendacity, which are reconcilable with the continuance of situations, form a scale that registers the ratios of the intensity of these relationships.

In addition to this relative sociological permissibility of lying in primitive conditions, we must observe a positive utility of the same. In cases where the first organization, stratification, and centralization of the group are in question, the process is accomplished by means of subjection of the weaker to the physically and mentally superior. The lie that succeeds—that is, which is not seen through—is without doubt a means of bringing mental superiority to expression, and of enabling it to guide and subordinate less crafty minds. It is a spiritual fist-law, equally brutal, but occasionally quite as much in place, as

the physical species; for instance, as a selective agency for the breeding of intelligence; as a means of enabling a certain few, for whom others must labor, to secure leisure for production of the higher

(447) cultural good; or in order to furnish a means of leadership for the group forces. The more these purposes are accomplished by means which have fewer disagreeable consequences, the less is lying necessary, and the more room is made for consciousness of its ethical unworthiness. This process is by no means completed. The small trader still thinks that he cannot dispense with a certain amount of mendacious recommendations of his wares, and he acts accordingly without compunctions of conscience. Wholesale and retail trade on a large scale have passed this stadium, and they are accordingly able to act in accordance with complete integrity in marketing their goods. So soon as the methods of doing business among small traders, and those of the middle class, have reached a similar degree of perfection, the exaggerations and actual falsifications, in advertising and recommending goods, which are today in general not resented in those kinds of business, will fall under the same ethical condemnation which is now passed in the business circles just referred to. Commerce built upon integrity will be in general the more advantageous within a group, in the degree in which the welfare of the many rather than that of the few sets the group standard. For those who are deceived – that is, those placed at a disadvantage by the lie – will always be in the majority as compared with the liar who gets his advantage from the lie. Consequently that enlightenment which aims at elimination of the element of deception from social life is always of a democratic character.

Human intercourse rests normally upon the condition that the mode of thought among the persons associated has certain common characteristics; in other words, that objective spiritual contents constitute the common material, which is developed in its individual phases in the course of social contacts. The type and the most essential vehicle of this community of spiritual content is common language. If we look a little closer, however, the common basis here referred to consists by no means exclusively of that which all equally know, or, in a particular case, of that which the one accepts as the spiritual content of the other; but this factor is shot through by another, viz., knowledge which the one associate possesses, while the other does not. If there were

(448) such a thing as complete reciprocal transparency, the relationships of human beings to each other would be modified in a quite unimaginable fashion. The dualism of human nature, by reason of which every manifestation of it has its sources in numerous origins that may be far distant from each other, and every quantity is estimated at the same time as great or small, according as it is contemplated in connection with littleness or greatness, makes it necessary to think of sociological relationships in general dualistically; that is, concord, harmony, mutuality, which count as the socializing forces proper, must be interrupted by distance, competition, repulsion, in order to produce the

actual configuration of society. The strenuous organizing forms which appear to be the real constructors of society, or to construct society as such, must be continually disturbed, unbalanced, and detached by individualistic and irregular forces, in order that their reaction and development may gain vitality by alternate concession and resistance. Relationships of an intimate character, the formal vehicle of which is psycho-physical proximity, lose the charm, and even the content, of their intimacy, unless the proximity includes, at the same time and alternately, distance and intermission. Finally—and this is the matter with which we are now concerned—the reciprocal knowledge, which is the positive condition of social relationships, is not the sole condition. On the contrary, such as those relationships are, they actually presuppose also a certain nescience, a ratio, that is immeasurably variable to be sure, of reciprocal concealment. The lie is only a very rude form, in the last analysis often quite self-contradictory, in which this necessity comes to the surface. However frequently lying breaks up a social situation, yet, so long as it existed, a lie may have been an integrating element of its constitution. We must take care not to be misled, by the ethically negative value of lying, into error about the direct positive sociological significance of untruthfulness, as it appears in shaping certain concrete situations. Moreover, lying in connection with the elementary sociological fact here in question—viz., the limitation of the knowledge of one associate by another—is only one of the possible means, the positive and aggressive technique, so to speak, the purpose of which in general

(449) is obtained through sheer secrecy and concealment. The following discussion has to do with these more general and negative forms. Before we come to the question of secrecy as consciously willed concealment, we should notice in what various degrees different circumstances involve disregard of reciprocal knowledge by the members of associations. Among those combinations which involve some degree of direct reciprocity on the part of their members, those which are organized for a special purpose are first in eliminating this element of reciprocal knowledge. Among these purposeful organizations, which in principle still involve direct reciprocity, the extreme in the present particular is represented by those in which utterly objective performances of the members are in view. This situation is best typified by the cases in which the contribution of so much cash represents the participation of the individuals in the activities of the group. In such instances reciprocity, coherence, and common pursuit of the purpose by no means rest upon psychological knowledge of the one member by the others. As member of the group the individual is exclusively the agent of a definite performance; and whatever individual motive may impel him to this activity, or whatever may be the total characteristics of his conduct as a whole, is in this connection a matter of complete indifference. The organization for a special purpose (*Zweckverband*) is the peculiarly discreet sociological formation; its members are in psychological respects anonymous; and, in order to form the combination, they need to know of each other only that they form it. Modern culture is constantly growing more objective. Its tissues grow more and more out of impersonal

energies, and absorb less and less the subjective entirety of the individual. In this respect the hand laborer and the factory laborer furnish the antithesis which illustrates the difference between past and present social structure. This objective character impresses itself also upon sociological structure, so that combinations into which formerly the entire and individual person entered, and which consequently demanded reciprocal knowledge beyond the immediate content of the relationship, are now founded exclusively on this content in its pure objectivity.

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By virtue of the situation just noticed, that antecedent or consequent form of knowledge with reference to an individual—viz., confidence in him, evidently one of the most important synthetic forces within society—gains a peculiar evolution. Confidence, as the hypothesis of future conduct, which is sure enough to become the basis of practical action, is, as hypothesis, a mediate condition between knowing and not knowing another person. The possession of full knowledge does away with the need of trusting, while complete absence of knowledge makes trust evidently impossible.[2] Whatever quantities of knowing and not knowing must commingle, in order to make possible the detailed practical decision based upon confidence, will be determined by the historic epoch, the ranges of interests, and the individuals. The objectification of culture referred to above has sharply differentiated the amounts of knowing and not knowing essential as the condition of confidence. The modern merchant who enters into a transaction with another, the scholar who undertakes an investigation with another, the leader of a political party who makes an agreement with the leader of another party with reference to an election, or the handling of a proposed bill—all these,

(451) with exceptions and modifications that need not be further indicated, know, with reference to their associates, precisely what it is necessary to know for the purposes of the relationship in question. The traditions and institutions, the force of public opinion, and the circumscription of the situation, which unavoidably prejudice the individual, are so fixed and reliable that one only needs to know certain externalities with reference to the other in order to have the confidence necessary for the associated action. The basis of personal qualities, from which in principle a modification of attitude within the relationship could spring, is eliminated from consideration. The motivation and the regulation of this conduct has become so much a matter of an impersonal program that it is no longer influenced by that basis, and confidence no longer depends upon knowledge of that individual element. In more primitive, less differentiated relationships, knowledge of one's associates was much more necessary in personal respects, and much less in respect to their purely objective reliability. Both factors belong together. In order that, in case of lack in the latter respect, the necessary confidence may be produced, there is need of a much higher degree of knowledge of the former sort.

That purely general objective knowledge of a person, beyond which everything that is strictly individual in his personality may remain a secret to his associates, must be considerably reinforced in the knowledge of the latter, whenever the organization for a specific purpose to which they belong possesses an essential significance for the total existence of its members. The merchant who sells grain or oil to another needs to know only whether the latter is good for the price. The moment, however, that he associates another with himself as a partner, he must not merely know his standing as to financial assets, and certain quite general qualities of his make-up, but he must see through him very thoroughly as a personality; he must know his moral standards, his degree of companionability, his daring or prudent temperament; and upon reciprocal knowledge of that sort must depend not merely the formation of the relationship, but its entire continuance, the daily associated actions, the division of functions between the partners,

(452) etc. The secret of personality is in such a case sociologically more restricted. On account of the extent to which the common interest is dependent upon the personal quality of the associates. no extensive self-existence is in these circumstances permitted to the personality of the individual.

Beyond the organizations for distinct purposes, but in like manner beyond the relationships rooted in the total personality, stands the relationship, highly significant sociologically, which is called, in the higher strata of culture, "acquaintance." That persons are "acquainted" with each other signifies in this sense by no means that they know each other reciprocally; that is, that they have insight into that which is peculiarly personal in the individuality. It means only that each has, so to speak, taken notice of the existence of the other. As a rule, the notion of acquaintanceship in this sense is associated only with mere mentioning of the name, the "presentation." Knowledge of the *that*, not of the *what*, of the personality distinguishes the "acquaintanceship." In the very assertion that one is acquainted with a given person, or even well acquainted with him, one indicates very distinctly the absence of really intimate relationships. In such case one knows of the other only his external characteristics. These may be only those that are on exhibit in social functions, or they may be merely those that the other chooses to exhibit to us. The grade of acquaintanceship denoted by the phrase "well acquainted with another" refers at the same time not to the essential characteristics of the other, not to that which is most important in his inmost nature, but only to that which is characteristic in the aspect presented to the world. On that account, acquaintanceship in this polite sense is the peculiar seat of "discretion." This attitude consists—by no means merely in respect for the secret of the other—that is. for his direct volition to conceal from us this or that. It consists rather in restraining ourselves from acquaintance with all of those facts in the conditions of another which he does not positively reveal. In this instance the particulars in question are not in principle distinctly defined as forbidden territory. The reference is rather to that quite general reserve due to the total personality of another, and

(453) to a special form of the typical antithesis of the imperatives ; viz. what is not forbidden is permitted, and, what is not permitted is forbidden. Accordingly, the relationships of men are differentiated by the question of knowledge with reference to each other what is not concealed may be known, and what is not revealed may yet not be known. The last determination corresponds to the otherwise effective consciousness that an ideal sphere surrounds every human being, different in various directions and toward different persons; a sphere varying in extent. into which one may not venture to penetrate without disturbing the personal value of the individual. Honor locates such an area. Language indicates very nicely an invasion of this sort by such phrases as “coming too near” (*zu nahe treten*). The radius of that sphere, so to speak, marks the distance which a stranger may not cross without infringing upon another’s honor. Another sphere of like form corresponds to that which we designate as the “significance” (*Bedeutung*) of another personality. Towards the “significant” man there exists an inner compulsion to keep one’s distance. Even in somewhat intimate relationships with him this constraint does not disappear without some special occasion; and it is absent only in the case of those who are unable to appreciate the “significance.” Accordingly, that zone of separation does not exist for the valet, because for him there is no “hero.” This, however, is the fault, not of the hero, but of the valet. Furthermore, all intrusiveness is bound up with evident lack of sensitiveness for the scale of significance among people. Whoever is intrusive toward a significant personality does not, as it might superficially appear, rate that person high or too high; but on the contrary, he gives evidence of lacking capacity for appropriate respect. As the painter often emphasizes the significance of one figure in a picture that includes many persons, by grouping the rest at a considerable distance from the important figure, so there is a sociological parallel in the significance of distance, which holds another outside of a definite sphere filled by the personality with its power, its will, and its greatness. A similar circuit, although quite different in value, surrounds the man in the setting of his affairs and

(454) his qualities. To penetrate this circuit by curiosity is a violation of his personality. As material property is at the same time an extension of the ego-property is precisely that which obeys the will of the possessor, as, in merely graduated difference, the body is our first “property” (*Besitz*)- and as on that account every invasion of this possession is resented as a violation of the personality; so there is a spiritual private property, to invade which signifies violation of the ego at its center. Discretion is nothing other than the sense of justice with respect to the sphere of the intimate contents of life. Of course, this sense is various in its extension in connection with different personalities, just as the sense of honor and of personal property has a quite different radius with reference to the persons in one’s immediate circle from that which it has toward strangers and indifferent persons. In the case of the above-mentioned social relationships in the narrower sense, as most simply expressed in the term “acquaintanceship,” we have to do immediately with a quite typical boundary, beyond which perhaps no guarded secrets lie: with reference to

which, however, the outside party, in the observance of conventional discretion, does not obtrude by questions or otherwise.

The question where this boundary lies is, even in principle, by no means easy to answer. It leads rather into the finest meshes of social forms. The right of that spiritual private property just referred to can no more be affirmed in the absolute sense than that of material property. We know that in higher societies the latter, with reference to the three essential sides, creation, security, and productiveness, never rests merely upon the personal agency of the individual. It depends also upon the conditions and powers of the social environment; and consequently its limitations, whether through the prohibitions that affect the mode of acquiring property, or through taxation, are from the beginning the right of the whole. This right, however, has a still deeper basis than the principle of service and counter-service between society and the individual. That basis is the much more elementary one, that the part must subject itself to so much limitation of its self-sufficiency as is demanded by the existence and purposes of the whole. The same principle applies to the

(455) subjective sphere of personality. In the interest of association, and of social coherence, each must know certain things with reference to the other; and this other has not the right to resist this knowledge from the moral standpoint, and to demand the discretion of the other; that is, the undisturbed possession of his being and consciousness, in cases in which discretion would prejudice social interests. The business man who enters into a contractual obligation with another, covering a long future; the master who engages a servant; and, on the other hand, this latter, before he agrees to the servile relationship; the superintendent who is responsible for the promotion of a subordinate; the head of a household who admits a new personality into her social circle—all these must have the right to trace out or to combine everything with reference to the past or the present of the other parties in question, with reference to their temperament, and their moral make-up, that would have any relation to the conclusion or the rejection of the proposed relationship. These are quite rough cases in which the beauty of discretion—that is, of refraining from knowledge of everything which the other party does not voluntarily reveal to us—must yield to the demands of practical necessity. But in finer and less simple form, in fragmentary passages of association and in unuttered revelations, all commerce of men with each other rests upon the condition that each knows something more of the other than the latter voluntarily reveals to him; and in many respects this is of a sort the knowledge of which, if possible, would have been prevented by the party so revealed. While this, judged as an individual affair, may count as indiscretion, although in the social sense it is necessary as a condition for the existing closeness and vitality of the interchange, yet the legal boundary of this invasion upon the spiritual private property of another is extremely difficult to draw. In general, men credit themselves with the right to know everything which, without application of external illegal means, through purely psychological observation and reflection, it is possible to

ascertain. In point of fact, however, indiscretion exercised in this way may be quite as violent, and morally quite as unjustifiable, as listening at keyholes and prying into the letters of

(456) strangers. To anyone with fine psychological perceptions, men betray themselves and their inmost thoughts and characteristics in countless fashions, not only in spite of efforts not to do so, but often for the very reason that they anxiously attempt to guard themselves. The greedy spying upon every unguarded word; the boring persistence of inquiry as to the meaning of every slight action, or tone of voice; what may be inferred from such and such expressions; what the blush at the mention of a given name may betray—all this does not overstep the boundary of external discretion; it is entirely the labor of one's own mind, and therefore apparently within the unquestionable rights of the agent. This is all the more the case, since such misuse of psychological superiority often occurs as a purely involuntary procedure. Very often it is impossible for us to restrain our interpretation of another, our theory of his subjective characteristics and intentions. However positively an honorable person may forbid himself to practice such cogitation with reference to the unrevealed traits of another, and such exploiting of his lack of foresight and defenselessness, a knowing process often goes on with reference to another so automatically, its result often presents itself so suddenly and unavoidably, that the best intention can do nothing to prevent it. Where the unquestionably forbidden may thus be so unavoidable, the division line between the permitted and the non-permitted is the more indefinite. To what extent discretion must restrain itself from mental handling "of all that which is its own," to what extent the interests of intercourse, the reciprocal interdependence of the members of the same group, limits this duty of discretion—this is a question for the answer to which neither moral tact, nor survey of the objective relationships and their demands, can alone be sufficient, since both factors must rather always work together. The nicety and complexity of this question throw it back in a much higher degree upon the responsibility of the individual for decision, without final recourse to any authoritative general norm, than is the case in connection with a question of private property in the material sense.

In contrast with this preliminary form, or this attachment of secrecy, in which not the attitude of the person keeping the secret,

(457) but that of a third party, is in question, in which, in view of the mixture of reciprocal knowledge or lack of knowledge, the emphasis is on the amount of the former rather than on that of the latter—in contrast with this, we come to an entirely new variation; that is, in those relationships which do not, like those already referred to, center around definitely circumscribed interests; but in relationships which, at least in their essential idea, rest upon the whole extension of the personalities concerned. The principal types in this category are friendship and marriage. The ideal of friendship that has come down from antique tradition, and singularly enough has been developed

directly in the romantic sense, aims at absolute spiritual confidence, with the attachment that material possession also shall be a resource common to the friends. This entrance of the entire undivided ego into the relationship may be the more plausible in friendship than in love, for the reason that, in the case of friendship, the one-sided concentration upon a single element is lacking, which is present in the other case on account of the sensuous factor in love. To be sure, through the circumstance that in the totality of possible grounds of attachment one assumes the headship, a certain organization of the relationship occurs, as is the case in a group with recognized leadership. A single strong factor of coherence often blazes out the path along which the others, otherwise likely to have remained latent, follow; and undeniably in the case of most men, sexual love opens the doors of the total personality widest; indeed, in the case of not a few, sexuality is the sole form in which they can give their whole ego; just as, in the case of the artist, the form of his art, whatever it may be, furnishes the only possibility of presenting his entire nature. This is to be observed with special frequency among women—to be sure, the same thing is to be asserted in the case of the quite different “Christian love”—namely, that they not only, because they love, devote their life and fortune without reserve; but that this at the same time is chemically dissolved in love, and only and entirely in its coloring, form, and temperature flows over upon the other. On the other hand, however, where the feeling of love is not expansive enough,

(458) where the other contents of the soul are not flexible enough, it may take place, as I indicated, that the predominance of the erotic nexus may suppress not only the practically moral, but also the spiritual, contacts that are outside of the erotic group. Consequently friendship, in which this intensity, but also this inequality of devotion, is lacking, may more easily attach the whole person to the whole person, may more easily break up the reserves of the soul, not indeed by so impulsive a process, but throughout a wider area and during a longer succession. This complete intimacy of confidence probably becomes, with the changing differentiation of men, more and more difficult. Perhaps the modern man has too much to conceal to make a friendship in the ancient sense possible; perhaps personalities also, except in very early years, are too peculiarly individualized for the complete reciprocity of understanding, to which always so much divination and productive phantasy are essential. It appears that, for this reason, the modern type of feeling inclines more to differentiated friendships; that is, to those which have their territory only upon one side of the personality at a time, and in which the rest of the personality plays no part. Thus a quite special type of friendship emerges. For our problem, namely, the degree of intrusion or of reserve within the friendly relationship, this type is of the highest significance. These differentiated friendships, which bind us to one man from the side of sympathy, to another from the side of intellectual community, to a third on account of religious impulses, to a fourth because of common experiences, present, in connection with the problem of discretion, or self-revelation and self-concealment, a quite peculiar synthesis. They demand that the friends reciprocally refrain

from obtruding themselves into the range of interests and feelings not included in the special relationship in each case. Failure to observe this condition would seriously disturb reciprocal understanding. But the relationship thus bounded and circumscribed by discretion nevertheless has its sources at the center of the whole personality, in spite of the fact that it expresses itself only in a single segment of its periphery. It leads ideally toward the same depths of sentiment, and to the

(459) same capacity to sacrifice, which undifferentiated epochs and persons associate only with a community of the total circumference of life, with no question about reserves and discretions.

Much more difficult is measurement of self-revelation and reserve, with their correlates intrusiveness and discretion, in the case of marriage. In this relationship these forms are among the universal problems of the highest importance for the sociology of intimate associations. We are confronted with the questions, whether the maximum of reciprocity is attained in a relationship in which the personalities entirely resign to each other their separate existence, or quite the contrary, through a certain reserve—whether they do not in a certain qualitative way belong to each other more if they belong to each other less quantitatively. These questions of ratio can of course, at the outset, be answered only with the further question: How is the boundary to be drawn, within the whole area of a person's potential communicability, at which ultimately the reserve and the respect of another are to begin? The advantage of modern marriage—which, to be sure, makes both questions answerable only one case at a time—is that this boundary is not from the start determined, as was the case in earlier civilizations. In these other civilizations marriage is, in principle, as a rule, not an erotic phenomenon, but merely a social-economic institution. The satisfaction of the instincts of love is only accidentally connected with it. With certain exceptions, the marriage is not on grounds of individual attraction, but rather of family policy, labor relationships, or desire for descendants. The Greeks, for example, carried this institution to the most extreme differentiation. Thus Demosthenes said: “We have *hetaerae* for our pleasure, concubines for our daily needs, but wives to give us lawful children and to care for the interior of the house.” The same tendency to exclude from the community of marriage, *a priori*, certain defined life-contents, and by means of super-individual provisions, appears in the variations in the forms of marriage to be found in one and the same people, with possibility of choice in advance on the part of those contracting marriages. These forms are differentiated in various ways with reference to the economic, religious, legal,

(460) and other interests connected with the family. We might cite many nature-peoples, the Indians, the Romans, etc. No one will, of course, fail to observe that, also within modern life, marriage is, probably in the majority of cases, contracted from conventional or material motives; nevertheless, entirely apart from the frequency of its realization, the sociological idea of modern marriage is the community of all life-contents, in so far as

they immediately, and through their effects, determine the value and the destiny of the personalities. Moreover, the prejudice of this ideal demand is by no means ineffective. It has often enough given place and stimulus for developing an originally very incomplete reciprocation into an increasingly comprehensive attachment. But, while the very indeterminateness of this process is the vehicle of the happiness and the essential vitality of the relationship, its reversal usually brings severe disappointments. If, for example, absolute unity is from the beginning anticipated, if demand and satisfaction recognize no sort of reserve, not even that which for all fine and deep natures must always remain in the hidden recesses of the soul, although they may think they open themselves entirely to each other—in such cases the reaction and disillusionment must come sooner or later.

In marriage, as in free relationships of analogous types, the temptation is very natural to open oneself to the other at the outset without limit; to abandon the last reserve of the soul equally with those of the body, and thus to lose oneself completely in another. This, however, usually threatens the future of the relationship. Only those people can without danger give themselves entirely to each other who *cannot* possibly give themselves entirely, because the wealth of their soul rests in constant progressive development, which follows every devotion immediately with the growth of new treasures. Complete devotion is safe only in the case of those people who have an inexhaustible fund of latent spiritual riches, and therefore can no more alienate them in a single confidence than a tree can give up the fruits *of* next year by letting go what it produces at the present moment. The case is quite different, however, with those people who, so to speak, draw from their capital all their betrayals of feeling and

(461) the revelations of their inner life; in whose case there is no further source from which to derive those elements which should not be revealed, and which are not to be disjoined from the essential ego. In such cases it is highly probable that the parties to the confidence will one day face each other empty-handed; that the Dionysian free-heartedness may leave behind a poverty which —unjustly, but not on that account with less bitterness—may so react as even to charge the enjoyed devotion with deception. We are so constituted that we not merely, as was remarked, need a certain proportion of truth and error as the basis of our life, but also a similar mixture of definiteness and indefiniteness in the picture of our life-elements. That which we can see through plainly to its last ground shows us therewith the limit of its attraction, and forbids our phantasy to do its utmost in adding to the reality. For this loss no literal reality can compensate us, because the action of the imagination of which we are deprived is self-activity, which cannot permanently be displaced in value by any receptivity and enjoyment. Our friend should not only give us a cumulative gift, but also the possibility of conferring gifts upon him, with hopes and idealizations, with concealed beauties and charms unknown even to himself. The manner, however, in which we dispose of all this, produced by ourselves, but for his sake, is the vague horizon of his personality, the intermediate zone in which faith takes the place of knowledge. It must be observed that we have here to do by no

means with mere illusions, or with optimistic or infatuated self-deception. The fact is rather that, if the utmost attractiveness of another person is to be preserved for us, it must be presented to us in part in the form of vagueness or impenetrability. This is the only substitute which the great majority of people can offer for that attractive value which the small minority possess through the inexhaustibility of their inner life and growth. The mere fact of absolute understanding, of having accomplished psychological exhaustion of the contents of relationship with another, produces a feeling of insipidity, even if there is no reaction from previous exaltation; it cripples the vitality of the relationship, and gives to its continuance an appearance of utter futility. This is the danger of

(462) that unbroken, and in a more than external sense shameless, dedication to which the unrestricted possibilities of intimate relationships seduce, which indeed is easily regarded as a species of obligation in those relationships. Because of this absence of reciprocal discretion, on the side of receiving as well as of giving, many marriages are failures. That is, they degenerate into vulgar habit, utterly bereft of charm, into a matter-of-course which retains no room for surprises. The fruitful depth of relationships which, behind every latest revelation, implies the still unrevealed, which also stimulates anew every day to gain what is already possessed, is merely the reward of that tenderness and self-control which, even in the closest relationship, comprehending the whole person, still respect the inner private property, which hold the right of questioning to be limited by a right of secrecy.

All these combinations are characterized sociologically by the fact that the secret of the one party is to a certain extent recognized by the other, and the intentionally or unintentionally concealed is intentionally or unintentionally respected. The intention of the concealment assumes, however, a quite different intensity so soon as it is confronted by a purpose of discovery. Thereupon follows that purposeful concealment, that aggressive defense, so to speak, against the other party, which we call secrecy in the most real sense. Secrecy in this sense— i. e., which is effective through negative or positive means of concealment is one of the greatest accomplishments of humanity. In contrast with the juvenile condition in which every mental picture is at once revealed, every undertaking is open to everyone's view, secrecy procures enormous extension of life, because with publicity many sorts of purposes could never arrive at realization. Secrecy secures, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside of the obvious world, and the latter is most strenuously affected by the former. Every relationship between two individuals or two groups will be characterized by the ratio of secrecy that is involved in it. Even when one of the parties does not notice the secret factor, yet the attitude of the concealer, and consequently the whole relationship, will be modified by it. The historical development of society is in many respects characterized

(463) by the fact that what was formerly public passes under the protection of secrecy, and that, on the contrary, what was formerly secret ceases to require such protection and

proclaims itself. This is analogous with that other evolution of mind in which movements at first executed consciously become unconsciously mechanical, and, on the other hand, what was unconscious and instinctive rises into the light of consciousness. How this development is distributed over the various formations of private and public life, how the evolution proceeds toward better-adapted conditions, because, on the one hand, secrecy that is awkward and undifferentiated is often far too widely extended, while, on the other hand, in many respects the usefulness of secrecy is discovered very late; how the quantum of secrecy has variously modified consequences in accordance with the importance or indifference of its content—all this, merely in its form as questions, throws a flow of light upon the significance of secrecy for the structure of human reciprocities. In this connection we must not allow ourselves to be deceived by the manifold ethical negativeness of secrecy. Secrecy is a universal sociological form, which, as such, has nothing to do with the moral valuations of its contents. On the one hand, secrecy may embrace the highest values: the refined shame of the lofty spirit, which covers up precisely its best, that it may not seem to seek its reward in praise or wage; for after such payment one retains the reward, but no longer the real value itself. On the other hand, secrecy is not in immediate interdependence with evil, but evil with secrecy. For obvious reasons, the immoral hides itself, even when its content encounters no social penalty, as, for example, many sexual faults. The essentially isolating effect of immorality as such, entirely apart from all primary social repulsion, is actual and important. Secrecy is, among other things, also the sociological expression of moral badness, although the classical aphorism. “No one is so bad that he also wants to seem bad,” takes issue with the facts. Obstinacy and cynicism may often enough stand in the way of disguising the badness. They may even exploit it for magnifying the personality in the judgment of

(464) others, to the degree that sometimes immoralities which do not exist are seized upon as material for self-advertising.

The application of secrecy as a sociological technique, as a form of commerce without which, in view of our social environment, certain purposes could not be attained, is evident without further discussion. Not so evident are the charms and the values which it possesses over and above its significance as a means, the peculiar attraction of the relation which is mysterious in form, regardless of its accidental content. In the first place, the strongly accentuated exclusion of all not within the circle of secrecy results in a correspondingly accentuated feeling of personal possession. For many natures possession acquires its proper significance, not from the mere fact of having, but besides that there must be the consciousness that others must forego the possession. Evidently this fact has its roots in our stimulability by contrast. Moreover, since exclusion of others from a possession may occur especially in the case of high values, the reverse is psychologically very natural, viz., that what is withheld from the many appears to have a special value. Accordingly, subjective possessions of the most various sorts acquire a decisive accentuation of value through the form of secrecy, in which the substantial significance

of the facts concealed often enough falls into a significance entirely subordinate to the fact that others are excluded from knowing them. Among children a pride and self-glory often bases itself on the fact that the one can say to the others: “ I know something that you don’t know.” This is carried to such a degree that it becomes a formal means of swaggering on the one hand, and of de-classing on the other. This occurs even when it is a pure fiction, and no secret exists. From the narrowest to the widest relationships, there are exhibitions of this jealousy about knowing something that is concealed from others. The sittings of the English Parliament were long secret, and even in the reign of George III reports of them in the press were liable to criminal penalties as violations of parliamentary privilege. Secrecy gives the person enshrouded by it an exceptional position; it works as a stimulus of purely social derivation, which is in principle quite independent of its casual content, but is naturally heightened in the degree in

(465) which the exclusively possessed secret is significant and comprehensive. There is also in this connection an inverse phenomenon, analogous with the one just mentioned. Every superior personality, and every superior performance, has, for the average of mankind, something mysterious. To be sure, all human being and doing spring from inexplicable forces. Nevertheless, within levels of similarity in quality and value, this fact does not make the one person a problem to another, especially because in respect to this equality a certain immediate understanding exists which is not a special function of the intellect. If there is essential inequality, this understanding cannot be reached, and in the form of specific divergence the general mysteriousness will be effective —somewhat as one who always lives in the same locality may never encounter the problem of the influence of the environment, which influence, however, may obtrude itself upon him so soon as he changes his environment, and the contrast in the reaction of feeling upon the life-conditions calls his attention to this causal factor in the situation. Out of this secrecy, which throws a shadow over all that is deep and significant, grows the logically fallacious, but typical, error, that everything secret is something essential and significant. The natural impulse to idealization, and the natural timidity of men, operate to one and the same end in the presence of secrecy; viz., to heighten it by phantasy, and to distinguish it by a degree of attention that published reality could not command.

Singularly enough, these attractions of secrecy enter into combination with those of its logical opposite; viz., treason or betrayal of secrets, which are evidently no less sociological in their nature. Secrecy involves a tension which, at the moment of revelation, finds its release. This constitutes the climax in the development of the secret; in it the whole charm of secrecy concentrates and rises to its highest pitch — just as the moment of the disappearance of an object brings out the feeling of its value in the most intense degree. The sense of Power connected with possession of money is most completely and greedily concentrated for the soul of the spendthrift at the moment at which this power slips from his hands. Secrecy also is sustained by the conscious-

(466) -ness that it might *be* exploited, and therefore confers power to modify fortunes, to produce surprises, joys, and calamities, even if the latter be only misfortunes to ourselves. Hence the possibility and the temptation of treachery plays around the secret, and the external danger of being discovered is interwoven with the internal danger of self-discovery, which has the fascination of the brink of a precipice. Secrecy sets barriers between men, but at the same time offers the seductive temptation to break through the barriers by gossip or confession. This temptation accompanies the psychical life of the secret like an overtone. Hence the sociological significance of the secret, its practical measure, and the mode of its workings must be found in the capacity or the inclination of the initiated to keep the secret to himself, or in his resistance or weakness relative to the temptation to betrayal. From the play of these two interests, in concealment and in revelation, spring shadings and fortunes of human reciprocities throughout their whole range. If, according to our previous analysis, every human relationship has, as one of its traits, the degree of secrecy within or around it, it follows that the further development of the relationship in this respect depends on the combining proportions of the retentive and the communicative energies—the former sustained by the practical interest and the formal attractiveness of secrecy as such, the latter by inability to endure longer the tension of reticence, and by the superiority which is latent, so to speak, in secrecy, but which is actualized for the feelings only at the moment of revelation, and often also, on the other hand, by the joy of confession, which may contain that sense of power in negative and perverted form, as self-abasement and contrition.

All these factors, which determine the sociological role of secrecy, are of individualistic nature, but the ratio in which the qualities and the complications of personalities form secrets. depends at the same time upon the social structure upon which its life rests. I., this connection the decisive element is that the secret is an individualizing factor of the first rank, and that in the typical double role; i. e., social relationships characterized by a large treasure of personal differentiation permit and promote secrecy in a high degree, while, conversely, secrecy serves and

(467) intensifies such differentiation. In a small and restricted circuit, construction and preservation of secrets are technically difficult from the fact that each is too close to the circumstances of each, and that the frequency and intimacy of contacts carry with them too great temptation to disclose what might otherwise be hidden. But in this case there is no need of secrecy in a high degree, because this social formation usually tends to level its members, and every peculiarity of being, acting, or possessing the persistence of which requires secrecy is abhorrent to it. That all this changes to its opposite in case of large widening of the circle is a matter-of-course. In this connection, as in so many other particulars, the facts of monetary relationships reveal most distinctly the specific traits of the large circle. Since transfers of economic values have occurred principally by means of money, an otherwise unattainable secrecy is possible in such transactions. Three peculiarities of the money form of values are here important : first, its compressibility,

by virtue of which it is possible to make a man rich by slipping into his hand a check without attracting attention; second, its abstractness and absence of qualitative character, in consequence of which numberless sorts of acquisitions and transfers of possessions may be covered up and guarded from publicity in a fashion impossible so long as values could be possessed only as extended, tangible objects; third, its long-distance effectiveness, by virtue of which we may invest it in the most widely removed and constantly changing values, and thus withdraw it utterly from the view of our nearest neighbors. These facilities of dissimulation which inhere in the degree of extension in the use of money, and which disclose their dangers particularly in dealings with foreign money, have called forth, as protective provisions, publicity of the financial operations of corporations. This points to a closer definition of the formula of evolution discussed above; viz., that throughout the form of secrecy there occurs a permanent in- and out-flow of content, in which what is originally open becomes secret, and what was originally concealed throws off its mystery. Thus we might arrive at the paradoxical idea that, under otherwise like circumstances, human associations require a definite ratio of secrecy which merely changes its

(468) objects; letting go of one, it seizes another, and in the course of this exchange it keeps its quantum unvaried. We may even fill out this general scheme somewhat more exactly. It appears that with increasing telic characteristics of culture the affairs of people at large become more and more public, those of individuals more and more secret. In less developed conditions, as observed above, the circumstances of individual persons cannot protect themselves in the same degree from reciprocal prying and interfering as within modern types of life, particularly those that have developed in large cities, where we find a quite new degree of reserve and discretion. On the other hand, the public functionaries in undeveloped states envelop themselves in a mystical authority, while in maturer and wider relations, through extension of the range of their prerogatives, through the objectivity of their technique, through the distance that separates them from most of the individuals, a security and a dignity accrue to them which are compatible with publicity of their behavior. That earlier secrecy of public functions, however, betrayed its essential contradictoriness in begetting at once the counter-movements of treachery, on the one hand, and of espionage, on the other. As late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, governments most anxiously covered up the amounts of public debts, the conditions of taxation, and the size of their armies. In consequence of this, ambassadors often had nothing better to do than to act as informers, to get possession of the contents of letters, and to prevail upon persons who were acquainted with valuable facts, even down to servants, to tattle their secrets.[3] In the nineteenth century, however, publicity takes possession of national affairs to such an extent that the governments themselves publish the official data without concealing, which no government would earlier

(469) have thought possible. Accordingly, politics, administration, justice, have lost their secrecy and inaccessibility in precisely the degree in which the individual has gained possibility of more complete privacy, since modern life has elaborated a technique for isolation of the affairs of individuals, within the crowded conditions of great cities, possible in former times only by means of spatial separation.

To what extent this development is to be regarded as advantageous depends upon social standards of value. Democracies are bound to regard publicity as the condition desirable in itself. This follows from the fundamental idea that each should be informed about all the relationships and occurrences with which he is concerned, since this is a condition of his doing his part with reference to them, and every community of knowledge contains also the psychological stimulation to community of action. It is immaterial whether this conclusion is entirely binding. If an objective controlling structure has been built up, beyond the individual interests, but nevertheless to their advantage, such a structure may very well, by virtue of its formal independence, have a rightful claim to carry on a certain amount of secret functioning without prejudice to its public character, so far as real consideration of the interests of all is concerned. A logical connection, therefore, which would necessitate the judgment of superior worth in favor of the condition of publicity, does not exist. On the other hand, the universal scheme of cultural differentiation puts in an appearance here: that which pertains to the public becomes more public, that which belongs to the individual becomes more private. Moreover, this historical development brings out the deeper real significance: that which in its nature is public, which in its content concerns all, becomes also externally, in its sociological form, more and more public; while that which in its inmost nature refers to the self alone—that is, the centripetal affairs of the individual—must also gain in sociological position a more and more private character, a more decisive possibility of remaining secret.

While secrecy, therefore, is a sociological ordination which characterizes the reciprocal relation of group elements, or rather

(470) in connection with other forms of reaction constitutes this total relation, it may further, with the formation of “secret societies,” extend itself over the group as a whole. So long as the being, doing, and having of an individual persist as a secret, his general sociological significance is isolation, antithesis, egoistic individualization. In this case the sociological meaning of the secrecy is external; as relationship of him who has the secret to him who does not have it. So soon, however, as a group as such seizes upon secrecy as its form of existence, the sociological meaning of the secrecy becomes internal. It now determines the reciprocal relations of those who possess the secret in common. Since, however, that relation of exclusion toward the uninitiated exists here also with its special gradations, the sociology of secret societies presents the complicated problem of ascertaining the immanent forms of a group which are determined by attitudes of secrecy on the part of the same toward other elements. I do not preface this part of the discussion

with a systematic classification of secret societies, which would have only an external historical interest. The essential categories will appear at once.

The first internal relation that is essential to a secret society is the reciprocal *confidence* of its members. This element is needed in a peculiar degree, because the purpose of maintaining the secrecy is, first of all, protection. Most radical of all the protective provisions is certainly that of invisibility. At this point the secret society is distinguished in principle from the individual who seeks the protection of secrecy. This can be realized only with respect to specific designs or conditions; as a whole, the individual may hide himself temporarily, he may absent himself from a given portion of space; but, disregarding wholly abstruse combinations, his existence cannot be a secret. In the case of a societary unity, on the contrary, this is entirely possible. Its elements may live in the most frequent commerce, but that they compose a society—a conspiracy, or a band of criminals, a religious conventicle, or an association for sexual extravagances—may remain essentially and permanently a secret. This type, in which not the individuals but their combination is concealed, is sharply distinguished from the others, in which the social formation is

(471) unequivocally known, but the membership, or the purpose, or the special conditions of the combination are secrets; as, for instance, many secret bodies among the nature peoples, or the Freemasons. The form of secrecy obviously does not afford to the latter types the same unlimited protection as to the former, since what is known about them always affords a point of attack for further intrusion. On the other hand, these *relatively* secret societies always have the advantage of a certain variability. Because they are from the start arranged on the basis of a certain degree of publicity, it is easier for them to accommodate themselves to further betrayals than for those that are as societies entirely unavowed. The first discovery very often destroys the latter, because their secret is apt to face the alternative, whole or not at all. It is the weakness of secret societies that secrets do not remain permanently guarded. Hence we say with truth: “A secret that two know is no longer a secret.” Consequently, the protection that such societies afford is in its nature, to be sure, absolute, but it is only temporary, and, for contents of positive social value, their commitment to the care of secret societies is in fact a transitional condition, which they no longer need after they have developed a certain degree of strength. Secrecy is finally analogous only with the protection which one secures by evading interruptions. It consequently serves only provisionally, until strength may be developed to cope with interruptions. Under these circumstances the secret society is the appropriate social form for contents which are at an immature stage of development, and thus in a condition peculiarly liable to injury from opposing interests. Youthful knowledge, religion, morality, party, is often weak and in need of defense. Hence each may find a recourse in concealment. Hence also there is a predestination of secret societies for periods in which new life-contents come into existence in spite of the opposition of the powers that be. The eighteenth century affords abundant illustrations.

For instance, to cite only one example, the elements of the liberal party were present in Germany at that time. Their emergence in a permanent political structure was postponed by the power of the civic conditions. Accordingly, the secret association was the

(472) form in which the germs could be protected and cultivated, as in the case of the orders of the *Illuminati*. The same sort of protection which secrecy affords to ascending movements is also secured from it during their decline. Refuge in secrecy is a ready resort in the case of social endeavors and forces that are likely to be displaced by innovation. Secrecy is thus, so to speak, a transition stadium between being and not-being. As the suppression of the German communal associations began to occur, at the close of the Middle Ages, through the increasing power of the central governments, a wide-reaching secret life developed within these organizations. It was characterized by hidden assemblies and conferences, by secret enforcement of law, and by violence—somewhat as animals seek the protection of concealment when near death. This double function of secrecy as a form of protection, to afford an intermediate station equally for progressing and for decaying powers, is perhaps most obvious in the case of religious movements. So long as the Christian communities were persecuted by the state, they were often obliged to withdraw their meetings, their worship, their whole existence, from public view. So soon, however, as Christianity had become the state religion, nothing was left for the adherents of persecuted, dying paganism than the same hiding of its cultus which it had previously forced upon the new faith. As a general proposition, the secret society emerges everywhere as correlate of despotism and of police control. It acts as protection alike of defense and of offense against the violent pressure of central powers. This is true, not alone in political relations, but in the same way within the church, the school, and the family.

Corresponding with this protective character of the secret society, as an external quality, is, as already observed, the inner quality of reciprocal confidence between the members. This is, moreover, a quite specific type of confidence, viz., in the ability to preserve silence. Social unities may rest, so far as their content is concerned, upon many sorts of presumption about grounds of confidence. They may trust, for example, to the motive of business interest, or to religious conviction, to courage, or to love, to the high moral tone, or—in the case of criminal combinations—

(473) to the radical break with moral imperatives. When the society becomes secret, however, there is added to the confidence determined by the peculiar purposes of the society the further formal confidence in ability to keep still—evidently a faith in the personality, which has, sociologically, a more abstract character than any other, because every possible common interest may be subsumed under it. More than that, exceptions excluded, no kind of confidence requires so unbroken subjective renewal; for when the uncertainty in question is faith in attachment or energy, in morality or intelligence, in sense of honor or tact, facts are much more likely to be observable which will objectively

establish the degree of confidence, since they will reduce the probability of deception to a minimum. The probability of betrayal, however, is subject to the imprudence of a moment, the weakness or the agitation of a mood, the perhaps unconscious shading of an accentuation. The keeping of the secret is something so unstable, the temptations to betrayal are so manifold, in many cases such a continuous path leads from secretiveness to indiscretion, that unlimited faith in the former contains an incomparable preponderance of the subjective factor. For this reason those secret societies whose rudimentary forms begin with the secret shared by two, and whose enormous extension through all times and places has not even yet been appreciated, even quantitatively—such societies have exerted a highly efficient disciplinary influence upon moral accountability among men. For there resides in confidence of men toward each other as high moral value as in the companion fact that this confidence is justified. Perhaps the former phenomenon is freer and more creditable, since a confidence reposed in us amounts almost to a constraining prejudice, and to disappoint it requires badness of a positive type. On the contrary, we “give” our faith in another. It cannot be delivered on demand, in the same degree in which it can be realized when spontaneously offered.

Meanwhile the secret societies naturally seek means psychologically to promote that secretiveness which cannot be directly forced. The oath, and threats of penalties, are here in the foreground and need no discussion. More interesting is the fre-

(474) -quently encountered technique for teaching novices the art of silence. In view of the above-suggested difficulties of guarding the tongue absolutely, in view especially of the tell-tale connection which exists on primitive social planes between thought and expression—among children and many nature peoples thinking and speaking are almost one—there is need at the outset of learning silence once for all, before silence about any particular matter can be expected. Accordingly, we hear of a secret order in the Molucca Islands in which not merely silence about his experiences during initiation is enjoined upon the candidate, but for weeks he is not permitted to exchange a word on any subject with anybody, even in his own family. In this case we certainly have the operation not only of the educational factor of entire silence, but it corresponds with the psychical undifferentiation of this cultural level, to forbid speech in general in a period in which some particular silence must be insured. This is somewhat analogous with the fact that immature peoples easily employ the death penalty, where later for partial sins a partial punishment would be inflicted, or with the fact that similar peoples are often moved to offer a quite disproportionate fraction of their possessions for something that momentarily strikes their fancy. It is the specific “incapacity” (*Ungeschicklichkeit*) which advertises itself in all this; for its essence consists in its incompetence to undertake the particular sort of inhibition appropriate to endeavors after a strictly defined end. The unskilled person moves his whole arm where for his purpose it would be enough to move only two fingers, the whole body when a precisely differentiated movement of the arm would be indicated. In like manner, in the particular types of cases which we are

considering, the preponderance of psychological commerce, which can be a matter of logical and actual thought-exchange only upon a higher cultural level, both enormously increases the danger of volubility, and, on the other hand, leads far beyond prohibition of the specific act which would embarrass its purposes, and puts a ban on the whole function of which such act would be an incident. When, on the other hand, the secret society of the Pythagoreans prescribed silence for the novice during a number

(475) of years, it is probable that the aim went beyond mere pedagogical discipline of the members in the art of silence, not, however, with special reference to the clumsiness just alluded to, but rather with the aim of extending the differentiated purpose in its own peculiar direction; that is, the aim was not only to secure silence about specific things, but through this particular discipline the adept should acquire power to control himself in general. The society aimed at severe self-discipline and schematic purity of life, and whoever succeeded in keeping silence for years was supposed to be armed against seductions in other directions.

Another means of placing reticence upon an objective basis was employed by the Gallic druids. The content of their secrets was deposited chiefly in spiritual songs, which every druid had to commit to memory. This was so arranged, however—especially by prohibition of putting the songs in writing—that an inordinate period was necessary for the purpose, in some cases twenty years. Through this long duration of pupilage, before anything considerable could be acquired which could possibly be betrayed, there grew up a gradual habit of reticence. The undisciplined mind was not suddenly assailed by the temptation to divulge what it knew. There was opportunity for gradual adaptation to the duty of reticence. The other regulation, that the songs should not be written down, had much more thoroughgoing sociological structural relations. It was more than a protective provision against revelation of the secrets. The necessity of depending upon tradition from person to person, and the fact that the spring of knowledge flowed only from within the society, not from an objective piece of literature—this attached the individual member with unique intimacy to the community. It gave him the feeling that if he were detached from this substance, he would lose his own, and would never recover it elsewhere. We have perhaps not yet sufficiently observed to what extent, in a more advanced cultural stage, the objectifications of intellectual labors affect the capacity of the individual to assert independence. So long as direct tradition, individual instruction, and more than all the setting up of norms by personal authorities, still determine the spiritual life of the individual, he is

(476) solidly merged in the environing, living group. This group alone gives him the possibility of a fulfilled and spiritual existence. The direction of those connective tissues through which the contents of his life come to him, run perceptibly at every moment only between his social milieu and himself. So soon, however, as the labor of the group has capitalized its output in the form of literature, in visible works, and in permanent

examples, the former immediate flow of vital fluid between the actual group and the individual member is interrupted. The life-process of the latter no longer binds him continuously and without competition to the former. Instead of that, he can now sustain himself from objective sources, not dependent upon the actual presence of former authoritative persons. There is relatively little efficacy in the fact that this now accumulated stock has come from the processes of the social mind. In the first place, it is often the labor of far remote generations quite unconnected with the individual's feeling of present values, which is crystallized in that supply. But, more than that, it is before all else the form of the objectivity of this supply, its detachment from the subjective personality, by virtue of which there is opened to the individual a super-social natural source, and his mental content becomes much more notably dependent, in kind and degree, upon his powers of appropriation than upon the conventionally furnished ideas. The peculiar intimacy of association within the secret society, of which more must be said later, and which gets its place among the categories of the feelings from the traits of the specific "confidence" (*Vertrauen*) characteristic of the order, in consequence of what has been said very naturally avoids committing the contents of its mysteries to writing, when tradition of spiritual contents is the minor aim of the association.

In connection with these questions about the technique of secrecy, it is not to be forgotten that concealment is by no means the only means under whose protection promotion of the material interests of the community is attempted. The facts are in many ways the reverse. The structure of the group is often with the direct view to assurance of keeping certain subjects from general

(477) knowledge. This is the case with those peculiar types of secret society whose substance is in esoteric doctrine, a theoretical, mystical, religious gnosis. In this case secrecy is the sociological end-unto-itself. The issue turns upon a body of doctrine to be kept from publicity. The initiated constitute a community for the purpose of mutual guarantee of secrecy. If these initiates were merely a total of personalities not interdependent, the secret would soon be lost. Socialization affords to each of these individuals a psychological recourse for strengthening him against temptations to divulge the secret. While secrecy, as I have shown, works toward isolation and individualization, socialization is a counteractive factor. If this is in general the sociological significance of the secret society, its most clear emergence is in the case of those orders characterized above, in which secrecy is not a mere sociological technique, but socialization is a technique for better protection of the secrecy, in the same way that the oath and total silence, that threats and progressive initiation of the novices, serve the same purpose. All species of socialization shuffle the individualizing and the socializing needs back and forth within their forms, and even within their contents, as though promotion of a stable combining proportion were satisfied by introduction of quantities always qualitatively changing. Thus the secret society counterbalances the separatistic factor which is peculiar to every secret by the very fact that it is *society*.

Secrecy and individualistic separateness are so decidedly correlatives that with reference to secrecy socialization may play two quite antithetical roles. It can, in the first place, as just pointed out, be directly sought, to the end that during the subsequent continuance of the secrecy its isolating tendency may be in part counteracted, that *within* the secret order the impulse toward community may be satisfied, while it is vetoed with reference to the rest of the world. On the other hand, however, secrecy in principle loses relative significance in cases where the particularization is in principle rejected. Freemasonry, for example, insists that it purposes to become the most universal society, "the union of unions," the only one that repudiates every particularistic character and aims to appropriate as its material exclusively that

(478) which is common to all good men. Hand in hand with this increasingly definite tendency there grows up indifference toward the element of secrecy on the part of the lodges, its restriction to the merely formal externalities. That secrecy is now promoted by socialization, and now abolished by it, is thus by no means a contradiction. These are merely diverse forms in which its connection with individualization expresses itself—somewhat as the interdependence of weakness and fear shows itself both in the fact that the weak seek social attachments in order to protect themselves, and in the fact that they avoid social relations when they encounter greater dangers within them than in isolation.

The above-mentioned gradual initiation of the members belongs, moreover, to a very far-reaching and widely ramifying division of sociological forms, within which secret societies are marked in a special way. It is the principle of the hierarchy, of graded articulation, of the elements of a society. The refinement and the systematization with which secret societies particularly work out their division of labor and the grading of their members, go along with another trait to be discussed presently; that is, with their energetic *consciousness* of their life. This life substitutes for the organically more instinctive forces an incessantly regulating will; for growth from within, constructive purposefulness. This rationalistic factor in their upbuilding cannot express itself more distinctly than in their carefully considered and clear-cut architecture. I cite as example the structure of the Czechic secret order, *Omladina*, which was organized on the model of a group of the *Carbonari*, and became known in consequence of a judicial process in 1893. The leaders of the *Omladina* are divided into "thumbs" and "fingers." In secret session a "thumb" is chosen by the members. He selects four "fingers." The latter then choose another "thumb," and this second "thumb" presents himself to the first "thumb." The second "thumb" proceeds to choose four more "fingers"; these, another "thumb;" and so the articulation continues. The first "thumb" knows all the other "thumbs," but the remaining "thumbs" do not know each other. Of the "fingers" only those four know each other who are subordinate to one and the same "thumb." All transactions

(479) of the *Omladina* are conducted by the first "thumb," the "dictator." He informs the other "thumbs" of all proposed undertakings. The "thumbs" then issue orders to their

respective subordinates, the “fingers.” The latter in turn instruct the members of the *Omladina* assigned to each. The circumstance that the secret society must be built up from its base by calculation and conscious volition evidently affords free play for the peculiar passion which is the natural accompaniment of such arbitrary processes of construction, such foreordaining programs. All schematology—of science, of conduct, of society—contains a reserved power of compulsion. It subjects a material which is outside of thought to a form which thought has cast. If this is true of all attempts to organize groups according to *a priori* principles, it is true in the highest degree of the secret society, which does not grow, which is built by design, which has to reckon with a smaller quantum of ready-made building material than any despotic or socialistic scheme. Joined to the interest in making plans, and the constructive impulse, which are in themselves compelling forces, we have in the organization of a society in accordance with a preconceived outline, with fixed positions and ranks, the special stimulus of exercising a decisive influence over a future and ideally submissive circle of human beings. This impulse is decisively separated sometimes from every sort of utility, and revels in utterly fantastic construction of hierarchies. Thus, for example, in the “high degrees” of degenerate Freemasonry. For purposes of illustration I call attention to merely a few details from the “Order of the African Master-Builders.” It came into existence in Germany and France after the middle of the eighteenth century, and although it was constructed according to the principles of the Masonic order, it aimed to destroy Freemasonry. The government of the very small society was administered by fifteen officials: summus regis, summi locum tenentes, prior, sub-prior, magister, etc. The degrees of the order were seven: the Scottish Apprentices, the Scottish Brothers, the Scottish Masters, the Scottish Knights, the Eques Regii, the Eques de Secta Consueta, the Eques Silentii Regii; etc., etc.

Parallel with the development of the hierarchy, and with

(480) similar limitations, we observe within secret societies the structure of the ritual. Here also their peculiar emancipation from the prejudices of historical organizations permits them to build upon a self-laid basis extreme freedom and opulence of form. There is perhaps no external tendency which so decisively and with such characteristic differences divides the secret from the open society, as the valuation of usages, formulas, rites, and the peculiar preponderance and antithetic relation of all these to the body of purposes which the society represents. The latter are often guarded with less care than the secret of the ritual. Progressive Freemasonry emphasizes expressly that it is not a secret combination; that it has no occasion to conceal the roll of its members, its purposes, or its acts; the oath of silence refers exclusively to the forms of the Masonic rites. Thus the student order of the *Amicisten*, at the end of the eighteenth century, has this characteristic provision in sec. i of its statutes

The most sacred duty of each member is to preserve the profoundest silence with reference to such things as concern the well-being of the order. Among these belong:

symbols of the order and signs of recognition, names of fraternity brothers, ceremonies, etc.

Later in the same statute the purpose and character of the order are disclosed and precisely specified! In a book of quite limited size which describes the constitution and character of the *Carbonari*, the account of the ceremonial forms and usages, at the reception of new members and at meetings, covers seventy-five pages! Further examples are needless. The role of the ritual in secret societies is sufficiently well known, from the religio-mystical orders of antiquity, on the one hand, to the *Rosekretzer* of the eighteenth century, and the most notorious criminal bands. The sociological motivations of this connection are approximately the following.

That which is striking about the treatment of the ritual in secret societies is not merely the precision with which it is observed, but first of all the anxiety with which it is guarded as a secret—as though the unveiling of it were precisely as fatal as betrayal of the purposes and actions of the society, or even the existence of the society altogether. The utility of this is probably

(481) in the fact that, through this absorption of a whole complex of external forms into the secret, the whole range of action and interest occupied by the secret society becomes a well-rounded unity. The secret society must seek to create among the categories peculiar to itself, a species of life-totality. Around the nucleus of purposes which the society strongly emphasizes, it therefore builds a structure of formulas, like a body around a soul, and places both alike under the protection of secrecy, because only so can a harmonious whole come into being, in which one part supports the other. That in this scheme secrecy of the external is strongly accentuated, is necessary, because secrecy is not so much a matter of course with reference to these superficialities, and not so directly demanded as in the case of the real interests of the society. This is not greatly different from the situation in military organizations and religious communities. The reason why, in both, schematism, the body of forms, the fixation of behavior, occupies so large space, is that, as a general proposition, both the military and the religious career demand the whole man; that is, each of them projects the whole life upon a special plane; each composes a variety of energies and interests, from a particular point of view, into a correlated unity. The secret society usually tries to do the same. One of its essential characteristics is that, even when it takes hold of individuals only by means of partial interests, when the society in its substance is a purely utilitarian combination, yet it claims the whole man in a Higher degree, it combines the personalities more in their whole compass with each other, and commits them more to reciprocal obligations, than the same common purpose would within an open society. Since the symbolism of the ritual stimulates a wide range of vaguely bounded feelings, touching interests far in excess of those that are definitely apprehended, the secret society weaves these latter interests into an aggregate demand upon the individual. Through the ritual form the specific purpose of the secret society is expanded into a comprehensive unity and totality,

both sociological and subjective. Moreover, through such formalism, just as through the hierarchical structure above discussed, the secret society constitutes itself a sort of counterpart of the official

(482) world with which it places itself in antithesis. Here we have a case of the universally emerging sociological norm; viz., structures, which place themselves in opposition to and detachment from larger structures in which they are actually contained, nevertheless repeat in themselves the forms of the greater structures. Only a structure that in some way can count as a whole is in a situation to hold its elements firmly together. It borrows the sort of organic completeness, by virtue of which its members are actually the channels of a unifying life-stream, from that greater whole to which its individual members were already adapted, and to which it can most easily offer a parallel by means of this very imitation.

The same relation affords finally the following motive for the sociology of the ritual in secret societies. Every such society contains a measure of freedom, which is not really provided for in the structure of the surrounding society. Whether the secret society, like the *Vehme*, complements the inadequate judicature of the political area; or whether, as in the case of conspiracies or criminal bands, it is an uprising against the law of that area; or whether, as in the case of the “mysteries,” they hold themselves outside of the commands and prohibitions of the greater area—in either case the apartness (*Heraussonderung*) which characterizes the secret society has the tone of a freedom. In exercise of this freedom a territory is occupied to which the norms of the surrounding society do not apply.

The nature of the secret society as such is autonomy. It is, however, of a sort which approaches anarchy. Withdrawal from the bonds of unity which procure general coherence very easily has as consequences for the secret society a condition of being without roots, an absence of firm touch with life (*Lebensgefühl*), and of restraining reservations. The fixedness and detail of the ritual serve in part to counterbalance this deficit. Here also is manifest how much men heed a settled proportion between, freedom and law; and, furthermore, in case the relative quantities of the two are not prescribed for him from a single source, how he attempts to reinforce the given quantum of the one by a quantum of the other derived from any source whatsoever, until such settled proportion is reached.

(483) With the ritual the secret society voluntarily imposes upon itself a formal constraint, which is demanded as a complement by its material detachment and self-sufficiency. It is characteristic that, among the Freemasons, it is precisely the Americans—who enjoy the largest political freedom—of whom the severest unity in manner of work, the greatest uniformity of the ritual of all lodges, are demanded; while in Germany—where the otherwise sufficient quantum of bondage leaves little room for a counterdemand in the direction of restrictions upon freedom—more freedom is exercised

in the manner in which each individual lodge carries on its work. The often essentially meaningless, schematic constraint of the ritual of the secret society is therefore by no means a contradiction of its freedom bordering on anarchy, its detachment from the norms of the circle which contains it. Just as widespread existence of secret societies is, as a rule, a proof of public unfreedom, of a policy of police regulation, of police oppression; so, conversely, ritual regulation of these societies from within proves a freedom and enfranchisement in principle for which the equilibrium of human nature produces the constraint as a counter-influence.

These last considerations have already led to the methodological principle with reference to which I shall analyze the still outstanding traits of secret societies. The problem is, in a word, to what extent these traits prove to be in essence quantitative modifications of the typical traits of socialization in general. In order to establish this manner of representing secret societies, we must again review their status in the whole complex of sociological forms.

The secret element in societies is a primary sociological fact, a definite mode and shading of association, a formal relationship of quality in immediate or mediate reciprocity with other factors which determine the habit of the group-elements or of the group. The secret society, on the other hand, is a secondary structure; i.e., it arises always only within an already complete society. Otherwise expressed, the secret society is itself characterized by its secret, just as other societies, and even itself, are characterized by their superiority and subordination, or by their offensive pur-

(484) -poses, or by their initiative character. That they can build themselves up with such characteristics is possible, however, only under the presupposition of an already existing society. The secret society sets itself as a special society in antithesis with the wider association included within the greater society. This antithesis, whatever its purpose, is at all events intended in the spirit of exclusion. Even the secret society which proposes only to render the whole community a definite service in a completely unselfish spirit, and to dissolve itself after performing the service, obviously regards its temporary detachment from that totality as the unavoidable technique for its purpose. Accordingly, none of the narrower groups which are circumscribed by larger groups are compelled by their sociological constellation to insist so strongly as the secret society upon their formal self-sufficiency. Their secret encircles them like a boundary, beyond which there is nothing but the materially, or at least formally, antithetic, which therefore shuts up the society within itself as a complete unity. In the groupings of every other sort, the *content* of the group-life, the actions of the members in the sphere of rights and duties, may so fill up their consciousness that within it the formal fact of socialization under normal conditions plays scarcely any role. The secret society, on the other hand, can on no account permit the definite and emphatic consciousness of its members that they constitute a society to escape from their minds. The always perceptible and always to-be-guarded pathos of the

secret lends to the form of union which depends upon the secret, as contrasted with the content, a predominant significance, as compared with other unions.

In the secret society there is complete absence of organic growth, of the character of instinct in accumulation, of all unforced matter of course with respect to belonging together and forming a unity. No matter how irrational, mystical, impressionistic (*gefühlsmässig*) their contents, the way in which they are constructed is always conscious and intentional. Throughout their derivation and life *consciousness of being a society* is permanently accentuated. The secret society is, on that account, the antithesis of all genetic (*triebhaft*) societies, in which the unifica-

(485) -tion is more or less only the expression of the natural growing together of elements whose life has common roots. Its sociopsychological form is invariably that of the teleological combination (*Zweckverband*). This constellation makes it easy to understand that the specifications of form in the construction of secret societies attain to peculiar definiteness' and that their essential sociological traits develop as mere quantitative heightenings of quite general types of relationship.

One of these latter has already been indicated; viz., the characterization and the coherence of the society through closure toward the social environment. To this end the often complicated signs of recognition contribute. Through these the individual offers credentials of membership in the society. Indeed, in the times previous to the general use of writing, such signs were more imperative for this use than later. At present their other sociological uses overtop that of mere identification. So long as there was lack of documentary credentials, an order whose subdivisions were in different localities utterly lacked means of excluding the unauthorized, of securing to rightful claimants only the enjoyment of its benefits or knowledge of its affairs, unless these signs were employed. These were disclosed only to the worthy, who were pledged to keep them secret. and who could use them for purposes of legitimation as members of the order wherever it existed. This purpose of drawing lines of separation very definitely characterizes the development manifested by certain secret orders among the nature peoples, especially in Africa and among the Indians. These orders are composed of men alone, and pursue essentially the purpose of magnifying their separation from the women. The members appear in disguises, when they come upon the stage of action as members, and it is customary to forbid women, on pain of severe penalties, to approach them. Still, women have occasionally succeeded in penetrating their veil of secrecy sufficiently to discover that the horrible figures are not ghosts, but their own husband. When this occurred, the orders have often lost their whole significance, and have fallen to the level of a harmless masquerade. The undifferentiated sensuous conceptions of nature people cannot

(486) form a more complete notion of the separateness which orders of this sort wish to emphasize, than in the concealment, by disguise or otherwise, of those who have the desire and the right thus to abstract themselves. That is the rudest and externally most

radical mode of concealment; viz., covering up not merely the special act of the person, but at once the whole person obscures himself; the order does not do anything that is secret, but the totality of persons comprising it makes itself into a secret. This form of the secret society corresponds completely with the primitive intellectual plane in which the whole agent throws himself entire into each specific activity; that is, in which the activity is not yet sufficiently objectified to give it a character which less than the whole man can share. Hence it is equally explicable that so soon as the disguise-secret is broken through, the whole separation becomes ineffective, and the order, with its devices and its manifestations, loses at once its inner meaning.

In the case in question the separation has the force of an expression of value. There is separation from others because there is unwillingness to give oneself a character common with that of others, because there is desire to signalize one's own superiority as compared with these others. Everywhere this motive leads to the formation of groups which are obviously in sharp contrast with those formed in pursuit of material (*sachlich*) purposes. As a consequence of the fact that those who want to distinguish themselves enter into combination, there results an aristocracy which strengthens and, so to speak, expands the self-consciousness of the individuals through the weight of their sum. That exclusiveness and formation of groups are thus bound together by the aristocracy-building motive gives to the former in many cases from the outset the stamp of the "special" in the sense of value. We may observe, even in school classes, how small, closely attached groups of comrades, through the mere formal fact that they form a special group, come to consider themselves an elite, compared with the rest who are unorganized: while the latter, by their enmity and jealousy, involuntarily recognize that higher value. In these cases secrecy and pretense of secrecy (*Geheimnistnerei*) are means of building higher the wall

(487) of separation, and therein a reinforcement of the aristocratic nature of the group.

This significance of secret associations, as intensification of sociological exclusiveness in general, appears in a very striking way in political aristocracies. Among the requisites of aristocratic control secrecy has always had a place. It makes use of the psychological fact that the unknown as such appears terrible, powerful, and threatening. In the first place, it employs this fact in seeking to conceal the numerical insignificance of the governing class. In Sparta the number of warriors was kept so far as possible a secret, and in Venice the same purpose was in view in the ordinance prescribing simple black costumes for all the *nobili*. Conspicuous costumes should not be permitted to make evident to the people the petty number of the rulers. In that particular case the policy was carried to complete concealment of the inner circle of the highest rulers. The names of the three state inquisitors were known only to the Council of Ten who chose them. In some of the Swiss aristocracies one of the most important magistracies was frankly called "the secret officials" (*die Heimlichen*), and in Freiburg the aristocratic families were known as *die heimlichen Geschlechter*. On the other hand, the democratic principle is bound up with the principle of publicity, and, to the same end, the tendency toward general and

fundamental laws. The latter relate to an unlimited number of subjects, and are thus in their nature public. Conversely, the employment of secrecy within the aristocratic regime is only the extreme exaggeration of that social exclusion and exemption for the sake of which aristocracies are wont to oppose general, fundamentally sanctioned laws.

In case the notion of the aristocratic passes over from the politics of a group to the disposition (*Gesinnung*) of an individual, the relationship of separation and secrecy attains to a plane that is, to outward appearance, completely changed. Perfect distinction (*Vornehmheit*) in both moral and mental respects, despises all concealment, because its inner security makes it indifferent to what others know or do not know about us, whether their estimate of us is true or false, high or low. From the standpoint of such superiority, secrecy is a concession to outsiders, a

(488) dependence of behavior upon consideration of them. Hence the “mask “ which so many regard as sign and proof of their aristocratic soul, of disregard of the crowd, is direct proof of the significance that the crowd has for such people. The mask of those whose distinction is real is that the many can at best not understand them, that they do not see them, so to speak. even when they show themselves without disguise.

The bar against all external to the circle, which, as universal sociological form-fact, makes use of secrecy as a progressive technique, gains a peculiar coloring through the multiplicity of degrees, through which initiation into the last mysteries of secret societies is wont to occur, and which threw light above upon another sociological trait of secret societies. As a rule, a solemn pledge is demanded of the novice that he will hold secret everything which he is about to experience, before even the first stages of acceptance into the society occur. Therewith is the absolute and formal separation which secrecy can effect, put into force. Yet, since under these conditions the essential content or purpose of the order is only gradually accessible to the neophyte —whether the purpose is the complete purification and salvation of the soul through the consecration of the mysteries, or whether it is the absolute abolition of all moral restraint, as with the Assassins and other criminal societies—the separation in material respects is otherwise ordered; i. e., it is made more continuous and more relative. When this method is employed, the initiate is in a condition nearer to that of the outsider. He needs to be tested and educated up to the point of grasping the whole or the center of the association. Thereby, however, a protection is obviously afforded to the latter, an isolation of it from the external world, which goes beyond the protection gained from the entrance oath. Care is taken—as was incidentally shown by the example of the druids—that the still untried shall also have very little to betray if he would, inasmuch as, within the secret principle which surrounds the society as a whole, graduated secrecy produces at the same time an elastic zone of defense for that which is inmost and essential. The antithesis of the exotic and the esoteric members, as we have it in the case of the

(489) Pythagoreans, is the most striking form of this protective arrangement. The circle of the only partially initiated constitutes to a certain extent a buffer area against the totally uninitiated. As it is everywhere the double function of the “mean” to bind and to separate—or, rather, as it plays only *one* role, which we, however, according to our apperceptive categories, and according to the angle of our vision, designate as uniting and separating—so in this connection the unity of activities which externally clash with each other appears in the clearest light. Precisely because the lower grades of the society constitute a mediating transition to the actual center of the secret, they bring about the gradual compression of the sphere of repulsion around the same, which affords more secure protection to it than the abruptness of a radical standing wholly without or wholly within could secure.

Sociological self-sufficiency presents itself in practical effect as group-egoism. The group pursues its purposes with the same disregard of the purposes of the structure external to itself, which in the case of the individual is called egoism. For the consciousness of the individual this attitude very likely gets a moral justification from the fact that the group-purposes in and of themselves have a super-individual, objective character; that it is often ‘impossible to name any individual who would directly profit from the operation of the group egoism; that conformity to this group program often demands unselfishness and sacrifice from its promoters. The point at issue here, however, is not the ethical valuation, but the detachment of the group from its environments, which the group egoism effects or indicates. In the case of a small group, which wants to maintain and develop itself within a larger circle, there will be certain limits to this policy, so long as it has to be pursued before all eyes. No matter how bitterly a public society may antagonize other societies of a larger organization, or the whole constitution of the same, it must always assert that realization of its ultimate purposes would redound to the advantage of the whole, and the necessity of ‘, this ostensible assertion will at all events place some restraint upon the actual egoism of its action. In the case of secret

(490) societies this necessity is absent, and at least the possibility is given of a hostility toward other societies, or toward the whole of society, which the open society cannot admit, and consequently cannot exercise without restrictions. In no way is the detachment of the secret society from its social environment so decisively symbolized, and also promoted, as by the dropping of every hypocrisy or actual condescension which is indispensable in co-ordinating the open society with the teleology of the environing whole.

In spite of the actual quantitative delimitation of every real society, there is still a considerable number the inner tendency of which is: Whoever is not excluded is included. Within certain political, religious, and class peripheries, everyone is reckoned as of the association who satisfies certain conditions, mostly involuntary, and given along with his existence. Whoever, for example, is born within the territory of a state, unless peculiar circumstances make him an exception, is a member of the highly complex civic

society. The member of a given social class is, as a matter of course, included in the conventions and forms of attachment pertaining to the same, if he does not voluntarily or involuntarily make himself an outsider. The extreme is offered by the claim of a church that it really comprehends the totality of the human race, so that only historical accidents, sinful obduracy, or a special divine purpose excludes any persons from the religious community which ideally anticipates even those not in fact within the pale. Here is, accordingly, a parting of two ways, which evidently signify a differentiation in principle of the sociological meaning of societies in general, however they may be confused, and their definiteness toned down in practice. In contrast with the fundamental principle: Whoso is not expressly excluded is included, stands the other: Whoever is not expressly included is excluded. The latter type is presented in the most decisive purity by the secret societies. The unlimited character of their separation, conscious at every step of their development, has, both as cause and as effect, the rule that whoever is not expressly adopted is thereby expressly excluded. The Masonic fraternity could not better support its recently much emphasized assertion that it is

(491) not properly a secret order, than through its simultaneously published ideal of including all men, and thus of representing humanity as a whole.

Corresponding with intensification of separateness from the outer world, there is here, as elsewhere, a similar access of coherence within, since these are only the two sides or forms of manifestation of one and the same sociological attitude. A purpose which stimulates formation of a secret union among men as a rule peremptorily excludes such a preponderating portion of the general social environment from participation that the possible and actual participants acquire a scarcity value. These must be handled carefully, because, *ceteris paribus*, it is much more difficult to replace them than is the case in an ordinary society. More than that, every quarrel within the secret society brings with it the danger of betrayal, to avoid which in this case the motive of self-preservation in the individual is likely to co-operate with the motive of the self-preservation of the whole. Finally, with the defection of the secret societies from the enviroing social syntheses, many occasions of conflict disappear. Among all the limitations of the individual, those that come from association in secret societies always occupy an exceptional status, in contrast with which the open limitations, domestic and civic, religious and economic, those of class and of friendship, however manifold their content, still have a quite different measure and manner of efficiency. It requires the comparison with secret societies to make clear that the demands of open societies, lying so to speak in one plane, run across each other. As they carry on at the same time an open competitive struggle over the strength and the interest of the individual, within a single one of these spheres, the individuals come into sharp collision, because each of them is at the same time solicited by the interests of other spheres. In secret societies, in view of their sociological isolation, such collisions are very much restricted. The purposes and programs of secret societies require that competitive interests from that plane of the open society should be

left outside the door. Since the secret society occupies a plane of its own—few individuals belonging to more than one secret society—it exercises a kind of absolute

(492) sovereignty over its members. This control prevents conflicts among them which easily arise in the open type of co-ordination. The “King’s peace” (*Burgfriede*) which should prevail within every society is promoted in a formally unsurpassed manner within secret societies through their peculiar and exceptional limitations. It appears, indeed, that, entirely apart from this more realistic ground, the mere form of secrecy as such holds the associates safer than they would otherwise be from disturbing influences, and thereby make concord more feasible. An English statesman has attempted to discover the source of the strength of the English cabinet in the secrecy which surrounds it. Everyone who has been active in public life knows that a small collection of people may be brought to agreement much more easily if their transactions are secret.

Corresponding with the peculiar degree of cohesion within secret societies is the definiteness of their centralization. They furnish examples of an unlimited and blind obedience to leaders, such as occurs elsewhere of course; but it is the more remarkable here, in view of the frequent anarchical and negative character toward all other law. The more criminal the purposes of a secret society, the more unlimited is likely to be the power of the leaders, and the more cruel its exercise. The Assassins in Arabia; the *Chauffeurs*, a predatory society with various branches that ravaged in France, particularly in the eighteenth century; the *Gardunas* in Spain, a criminal society that, from the seventeenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, had relations with the Inquisition—all these, the nature of which was lawlessness and rebellion, were under one commander, whom they sometimes set over themselves, and whom they obeyed without criticism or limitation. To this result not merely the correlation of demand from freedom and for union contributes, as we have observed it in case of the severity of the ritual, and in the present instance it binds together the extremes of the two tendencies. The excess of freedom, which such societies possessed with reference to all otherwise valid norms, had to be offset, for the sake of the equilibrium of interests, by a, similar excess of submissiveness and resigning of the individual will. More essential, however,

(493) was probably the necessity of centralization, which is the condition of existence for the secret society, and especially when, like the criminal band, it lives off the surrounding society, when it mingles with this society in many radiations and actions, and when it is seriously threatened with treachery and diversion of interests the moment the most invariable attachment to one center ceases to prevail. It is consequently typical that the secret society is exposed to peculiar dangers, especially when, for any reasons whatever, it does not develop a powerfully unifying authority. The Waldenses were in nature not a secret society. They became a secret society in the thirteenth century only, in consequence of the external pressure, which made it necessary to keep themselves from view. It became impossible, for that reason, to hold regular assemblages, and this in turn

caused loss of unity in doctrine. There arose a number of branches, with isolated life and development, frequently in a hostile attitude toward each other. They went into decline because they lacked the necessary and reinforcing attribute of the secret society, viz., constantly efficient centralization. The fact that the dynamic significance of Freemasonry is obviously not quite in proportion with its extension and its resources is probably to be accounted for by the extensive autonomy of its parts, which have neither a unified organization nor a central administration. Since their common life extends only to fundamental principles and signs of recognition, these come to be virtually only norms of equality and of contact between man and man, but not of that centralization which holds together the forces of the elements, and is the correlate of the apartness of the secret society.

It is nothing but an exaggeration of this formal motive when, as is often the case, secret societies are led by unknown chiefs. It is not desirable that the lower grades should know whom they are obeying. This occurs primarily, to be sure, for the sake of guarding the secret, and with this in view the device *is* carried to the point of constructing such a secret society as that of the Welfic Knights in Italy. The order operated at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the interest of Italian liberation and

(494) unification. At each of its seats it had a supreme council of six persons, who were not mutually acquainted, but dealt with each other only through a mediator who was known as "The Visible." This, however, is by no means the only utility of the secret headship. It means rather the most extreme and abstract sublimation of centralized coherence. The tension between adherent and leader reaches the highest degree when the latter withdraws from the range of vision. There remains the naked, merciless fact, so to speak, modified by no personal coloring, of obedience pure and simple, from which the superordinated subject has disappeared. If even obedience to an impersonal authority, to a mere magistracy, to the representative of an objective law, has the character of unbending severity, this obedience mounts still higher, to the level of an uncanny absoluteness, so soon as the commanding personality remains in principle hidden. For if, along with the visibility of the 'ruler, and acquaintance with him, it must be admitted that individual suggestion, the force of the personality, also vanish from the commanding relationship; yet at the same time there also disappear from the relationship the limitations, i. e., the merely relative, the "human," so to speak, which are attributes of the single person who can be encountered in actual experience. In this case obedience must be stimulated by the feeling of being subject to an intangible power, not strictly defined, so far as its boundaries are concerned; a power nowhere to be seen, but for that reason everywhere to be expected. The sociologically universal coherence of a group through the unity of the commanding authority is, in the case of the secret society with unknown headship, shifted into a focus imaginarius, and it attains therewith its most distinct and intense form.

The sociological character of the individual elements of the secret society, corresponding with this centralized subordination, is their individualization. In case the

society does not have promotion of the interests of its individual members as its immediate purpose, and, so to speak, does not go outside of itself, but rather uses its members as means to externally located ends and activities—in such case the secret society in turn manifests a heightened degree of self-abnegation, of leveling of individuality, which is

(495) already an incident of the social state in general, and with which the secret society outweighs the above-emphasized individualizing and differentiating character of the secrecy. This begins with the secret orders of the nature peoples, whose appearance and activities are almost always in connection with use of disguises, so that an expert immediately infers that wherever we find the use of disguises (*Masken*) among nature peoples, they at least indicate a probability of the existence of secret orders. It is, to be sure, a part of the essence of the secret order that its members conceal themselves, as such. Yet, inasmuch as the given man stands forth and conducts himself quite unequivocally as a member of the secret order, and merely does not disclose which otherwise known individuality is identical with this member, the disappearance of the personality, as such, behind his role in the secret society is most strongly emphasized. In the Irish conspiracy which was organized in America in the seventies under the name Clan-nagael, the individual members were not designated by their names, but only by numbers. This, of course, was with a view to the practical purpose of secrecy. Nevertheless, it shows to what extent secrecy suppresses individuality. Among persons who figure only as numbers, who perhaps—as occurs at least in analogous cases—are scarcely known to the other members by their personal names, leadership will proceed with much less consideration, with much more indifference to individual wishes and capacities, than if the union includes each of its members as a personal being. Not less effective in this respect are the extensive role and the severity of the ritual. All of this always signifies that the object mold has become master over the personal in membership and in activity. The hierarchical order admits the individual merely as agent of a definite role; it likewise holds in readiness for each participant a conventional garb, in which his personal contour disappears. It is merely another name for this effacement of the differentiated personality, when secret societies cultivate a high degree of relative equality among the members. This is so far from being in contradiction of the despotic character of their constitutions that in all sorts of other groupings despotism finds its correlate in the leveling of the ruled. Within the secret

(496) society there often exists between the members a fraternal equality which is in sharp and purposeful contrast with their differences in all the other situations of their lives. Typical cases in point appear, on the one hand, in secret societies of a religio-ethical character, which strongly accentuate the element of brotherhood; on the other hand, in societies of an illegal nature. Bismarck speaks in his memoirs of a widely ramified pederastic organization in Berlin, which came under his observation as a young

judicial officer; and he emphasizes “the equalizing effect of co-operative practice of the forbidden vice through all social strata.” This depersonalizing, in which the secret society carries to an excessive degree a typical relationship between individual and society, appears finally as the characteristic *irresponsibility*. In this connection, too, physical disguise (*Maske*) is the primitive phenomenon. Most of the African secret orders are alike in representing themselves by a man disguised as a forest spirit. He commits at will upon whomsoever he encounters any sort of violence, even to robbery and murder. No responsibility attaches to him for his outrages, and evidently this is due solely to the disguise. That is the somewhat unmanageable form under which such societies’ cause the personality of their adherents to disappear, and without which the latter would undoubtedly be overtaken by revenge and punishment. Nevertheless, responsibility is quite as immediately joined with the ego-philosophically, too, the whole responsibility problem is merely a detail of the problem of the ego—in the fact that removing the marks of identity of the person has, for the naive understanding in question, the effect of abolishing responsibility. Political finesse makes no less use of this correlation. In the American House of Representatives the real conclusions are reached in the standing committees, and they are almost always ratified by the House. The transactions of these committees, however, are secret, and the most important portion of legislative activity is thus concealed from public view. This being the case, the political responsibility of the representatives seems to be largely wiped out, since no one can be made responsible for proceedings that cannot be observed. Since the shares of the individual persons in the transactions remain

(497) hidden, the acts of committees and of the House seem to be those of a super-individual authority. The irresponsibility is here also the consequence or the symbol of the same intensified sociological de-individualization which goes with the secrecy of group-action. In all directorates, faculties, committees, boards of trustees, etc., whose transactions are secret, the same thing holds. The individual disappears as a person in the anonymous member of the ring, so to speak, and with him the responsibility, which has no hold upon him in his intangible special character.

Finally, this one-sided intensification of universal sociological traits is corroborated by the danger with which the great surrounding circle rightly or wrongly believes itself to be threatened from the secret society. Wherever there is an attempt to realize strong centralization, especially of a political type, special organizations of the elements are abhorred, purely as such, entirely apart from their content and purposes. As mere unities, so to speak, they engage in competition with the central principle. The central power wants to reserve to itself the prerogative of binding the elements together in a form of common unity. The jealous zeal of the central power against every special society (*Sonderbund*) runs through all political history. A characteristic type is presented by the Swiss convention of 1481, according to which no separate alliances were to be formed between any of the ten confederated states. Another is presented by the persecution of the

associations of apprentices by the despotism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A third appears in the tendency to disfranchise local political bodies, so often manifested by the modern state. This danger from the special organization for the surrounding whole appears at a high potency in the case of the secret society. Men seldom have a calm and rational attitude toward strangers or persons only partially known. The folly which treats the unknown as the non-existent, and the anxious imaginativeness which inflates the unknown at once into gigantic dangers and horrors, are wont to take turns in guiding human actions. Accordingly, the secret society seems to be dangerous simply because it is secret. Since it cannot be surely known that any special organization whatever may not some day turn its legally

(498) accumulated powers to some undesired end, and since on that account there is suspicion in principle on the part of central powers toward organizations of subjects, it follows that, in the case of organizations which are secret in principle, the suspicion that their secrecy conceals dangers is all the more natural. The societies of Orangemen, which were organized at the beginning of the nineteenth century in England for the suppression of Catholicism, avoided all public discussion, and operated only in secret, through personal bonds and correspondence. But this very secrecy gave them the appearance of a public danger. The suspicion arose “that men who shrank from appealing to public opinion meditated a resort to force.” Thus the secret society, purely on the ground of its secrecy, appears dangerously related to conspiracy against existing powers. To what extent this is a heightening of the universal political seriousness of special organizations, appears very plainly in such an occurrence as the following: The oldest Germanic guilds afforded to their members an effective legal protection, and thus to that extent were substitutes for the state. On the one hand, the Danish kings regarded them as supports of public order, and they consequently favored them. On the contrary, however, they appeared, for the same reason, to be direct competitors with the state. For that reason the Frankish capitularies condemned them, and the condemnation even took the form of branding them as *conspiracies*. The secret association is in such bad repute as enemy of central powers that, conversely, every politically disapproved association must be accused of such hostility!

Notes:

1. Translated by Albion W. Small.
2. There is, to be sure, still another type of confidence, which our present discussion has nothing to do with, since it is a type that falls outside the bounds either of knowing or not knowing. It is the type which we call faith of one person in another. It belongs in the category of religious faith. Just as no one has ever believed in the existence of God on grounds of proof, but these proofs are rather subsequent justifications or intellectual reflections of a quite immediate attitude of the affections ; so we have faith in another person, although this faith may not be able to justify itself by proofs of the worthiness of the person, and it may even exist in spite of proofs of his unworthiness. This confidence, this subjective attitude of unreservedness toward a person, is not brought into existence by experiences or by hypotheses, but it is a primary attitude of the soul with respect to another. This

condition of faith, in a perfectly pure form, detached from every sort of empirical consideration, probably occurs only within the sphere of religion. In order that it may be exercised toward men it probably always needs a stimulus or a sanction from the knowledge or the inference above referred to. On the other hand, it is probable that in those social forms of confidence, however exact vi intellectually sanctioned they may seem to be, an element of that sentimental and even mystical “ faith “ of man toward man is hidden. Perhaps the type of attitude here indicated is a fundamental category of human conduct, resting back upon the metaphysical meaning of our relationship, and realized only empirically, accidentally, and partially through the special conscious grounds of confidence.

3. This counter-movement occurs also in the reverse direction. It has been observed, in connection with the history of the English court, that the actual court cabals, the secret whisperings, the organized intrigues, do not spring up under despotism, but only after the king has constitutional advisers, when the government is to that extent a system open to view. After that time—and this applies especially since Edward II — the king begins to form an unofficial, and at the same time subterranean, circle of advisers, in contrast with the ministers somehow forced upon him. This body brings into existence, within itself, and through endeavors to join it, a chain of concealments and conspiracies.