Chapter 1

❐

Certain Opening Words

"We just have to take what comes." "Who knows God's will?" "The data are insufficient to solve the problem." "There are many sides to the issue." "Reasonable people do not agree on the facts." "We don't know what the outcome will be." Each of these assertions makes immediate sense to a modern person. As long as we are awake, we need to do something. Occasionally, the audacious uncertainty of what it means to do something breaks through the crust of custom and habit: we need some sense of what the future will be or what our actions will bring in order to go on doing what we are about. Uncertainties are a central component of the modern search for meaning (see Wuthnow 1988).

In the face of the uncertainties projected above, we have countervailing accounts that allow us to act decisively, with a sense that we know what we are doing, even though the *what* has not yet happened. Equally emphatic accounts can be called upon to assert a certain definition of the situation and motivate a course of action. After all, "Fate decrees," "God wills," "Father knows best," "Rationality demands," and "The data dictate"—and I am sure of that. Each account appeals to us when the situation demands.

Analysts attribute the first set of accounts to a world of change, variety, complexity, empiricism, and rationality; that is, to what is generally taken as modern society, charac-

1

terized by heightened uncertainty. We sharpen what we mean by modern through comparisons with other types of society, such as one in which the second set of accounts that pre-empt uncertainty would make sense.

The genre of this book is that of an exploratory essay in the form of a wheel with a central idea from which radiate substantive developments. Interpretive punch is gained from a running, though speculative, thought experiment that implicitly compares contemporary society with other types of societies. Much of the comparison is based on the conventional contrasts that underlay the emergence of sociology: the transition from what we generically think of as traditional society to our present situation that many struggle to christen as modern. A similar running contrast informs this discussion with focus on its implications for making sense out of affective experiences that simultaneously attract and repel from a course of action analogous to contradictory cognitive renditions of that action. If the reader prefers the essay as such, the implicit comparisons generated by the thought experiment can simply be tuned out. Be forewarned, however, that they warrant the line of development in the text, since I am convinced that even an implicit and heuristic sense of historical comparison is better than none at all.

An underlying theme is that the relevance and plausibility of accounts follows from the kind of society in which we live. Without attempting a comparative historical analysis, fairly conventional types of society serve as implicit comparisons to make sense out of the contemporary situation. The types are heuristic only; their purpose is to provide a hypothetical comparative context for the discussion of ambivalence as a modern form of life.

Heuristic Types of Societies

There have been traditional types of societies that were smaller, slower changing, more group conscious, and orally oriented to myth and dicta. These societies had tradi-

tional empowered sources of answers to the issues of self-understanding, social rules, relationship to nature, and paths of proper action. Members of traditional societies can be said to know who they were; how they should relate to others and to the physical world; and what they should do. In other words, there were known legitimate sources of answers to the questions that arise in everyone's narrative of self-understanding, or sense of biography. Centrally organized around a kinship structure of blood or symbolic relationships, short-lived individuals found a world of real meanings that defined them, others, and the environment from birth to an early death, probably in their thirties. Subsistence was the order of the day. Significant changes within an individual's lifetime were likely to be sudden and catastrophic, whether from famine, conquest, or another of the Four Horsemen. Social time moves slowly; recent change bursts on the scene like a stranger from another world. Society's stories were recounted in epics and tragedies telling of an objective world of Fate, Gods and Heros. Epic and dramatic art taught cautionary tales about each person's known and ascribed place in a scheme devised by nature's gods (cf. Baumeister 1986; Bellah,1964; Berger 1967).

A second type pictures a society organized along lines of production hierarchies, from feudal and rural to urban and proletarian. Modern production-oriented societies reach out to imperialist or transnational relationships. Societies produce surpluses of specialized goods to support specialized occupational and social groups arranged in increasingly complex status ladders of privilege, power, and wealth heaped at the top. For those at the bottom of the ladders, life's meanings remain relatively restraining. Legitimation of social arrangements is anchored in traditional religiously based beliefs about how the world worked, and even more powerfully, how it should work. For emerging middle classes, however, internal sources of change such as arts, crafts, and the powerful technological impact of science fueled new ways of thinking and living. With external exploration and imperialist conquest, new production and marketing possibilities ushered in an urban cosmopolitan

world legitimating bourgeois reformulations of traditional ways of life. Inherited objective, collective, and oral meanings were transformed into subjective, individualistic, and discursive counter accounts of how the world works. The novel is crafted to tell the stories of beknighted lives. Individuals, not clans, must find the good life within new forms of social organization that make individual good a supreme cultural value (cf. Weber 1958).

Today's societies present a third type of organization. Modern institutions are structured into bureaucracies peopled by service workers in white shirts or pink blouses. Status and opportunity come from educational entre into preferred professional, executive, and hi-tech careers. High entry-level salaries make increasing consumption of technological gadgetry into the status game par excellence for those with diploma certification. Interlocking media driven by silicon chips and laser beams make expanding computer, video, and telecommunication into a kind of super-organic mind. The environment is transformed into overlapping sets of media images and ever-expanding markets. Without a unified comprehension of events, meanings are overlaid, fragmented, changing, and relativistic. Answers are sought pell-mell. Discarded and primitive inspirations, now vaguely free of content, are revived for psychological closure and therapeutic consolation. Ancient wisdom becomes a series of cliches; that is, sayings used for feeling good rather than thinking clearly or believing firmly (Zidjerveld 1979). Serious searchers after religious truth, for example, are forced to be heretics who must choose among warring creeds, each made implausible by the strength of the others in a pluralistic world (Berger 1980). Multi-media re-presentations of the world are crafted on video or film, with the story line sacrificed for the imagery. Stories, like life, have no dramatic unity with a beginning, middle, and end; they merely start, stop, and re-run.

The mediated "information" society has no unquestioned idea about beginnings and endings, not even concerning human life: witness the abortion bitterness and the pulling-the-plug debates. Framing the debates is the specter

of possible nuclear holocaust or ecological disaster that would end life's stories as we know them. Cosmologists' theories of the "big bang" origins of the world are matched with the mirror imagery of the big bang of nuclear exchange that may slow life-support systems with a big chill freezing mammals in their dens.

Modernity: Pluralism and Multivalence

These types of societal organization are mingled in our lives from lingering enchanted beliefs about magical fulfill-ment to the humming VCR recording simultaneous trans-mission of world events. Persons living in the centers of modern societies have a consciousness shaped by the pres-sures of pluralism. Analysts of different persuasions agree that today's societies are characterized by increasingly for-mal, specialized, and differentiated institutions, the key organizational features of modern life. Consider such indica-tors as: the ubiquity of bureaucracy; the centralization of large-scale government; the spread of legal definitions of actions and relationships; the increase of high technology thinking and instruments; and the growth of world-wide markets based on specialized knowledge and technologies. In a word, the cosmos is transformed from a universe to a multiverse, from isolated states into an international village in which everyone is a possible neighbor or victim of some-one else's conflict. Modernity is characterized by the depth and pervasiveness of the "dilemmatic" attitude; namely, structural contradictions built into societal organization that result in cognitive dilemmas at the common sense and ideological levels (Billig et al. 1988).

Many would so describe today's world. What is rarely seen, however, is the affective or emotional counterpart to the segmented structures of society. Social organization shapes the organization of self understanding *and* self-feel-ing (see Franks and McCarthy 1989). Persons who see the world as a *uni*verse live in plausibility structures that make univalent feelings meaningful (cf. Berger 1967). This is not

to say that such persons live a monotone life. Rather, the point is that such social organization includes affective organization as well, e.g., there would be feeling rules and a mundane theory of emotions that render an emotion real *in situ,* by contrast with modern pluralism. Persons whose world hangs together have a chance to experience feelings that make sense as well. Persons born into a slow-changing traditional society based on clear kinship roles with authoritative cultural rules and shared religious rituals know what to feel; how to define it; how to display it; and to whom.

On the other hand, persons positioned in a *multi*verse of intersecting circles of roles and rituals are faced with the psychic engineering task of arranging feelings into a meaningful whole. If many meanings are plausible, many feelings are meaningful. And the meanings may not be the same that our parents felt. Furthermore, according to the comparative logic of social life, the co-existence of plausible meanings renders each less plausible in some proportion to the plausibility of each. The low plausibility of the flat earth society does little to shake belief in a round earth, whereas the high plausibility of American nationalism threatens belief in the plausibility of world citizenship. The multivalent modern faces a characteristically modern dilemma: the ambiguity of competing meanings and the ambivalence of conflicting feelings.

Institutions that render different worldviews plausible underwrite conflicting emotional experiences. A member of a traditional society would be likely to experience life in the rather univalent emotional tone consistent with the definitions structured into each situation. A person was born into a station in life and progressed through a series of statuses on the way to death at an age which today is tragically young.

A contemporary, however, is likely to find any situation a complex of possible meanings with different plausibilities associated with, not just many, but contradictory emotional meanings. Carriers of modern culture are "multivalent" persons with no certain answers to questions about personal authenticity (cf. Lee 1966; Trilling 1972). Peter Berger finds

modernity in the "transition from fate to choice" felt in a "highly ambivalent" way (1980: 20). Modernity is keyed to an ambivalent struggle between liberation and alienation, between individual freedom and group security, as in the Third World and Eastern Europe celebrating freedom even as traditional statuses and jobs are lost.

Implications for the Individual

To the extent that the human animal is a relatively non-instinctual organism, social structures channel energy, guide action, and constitute meanings. This is the psychological relevance of social institutions; society shapes self. Social scientists speak of the second nature of habit, self-repeating internalized rules and norms, or social personality that makes individuals into enculturated persons (cf. Young 1988). Within larger social arrangements,we speak of the "institutionalization" of the human organism (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

As institutionalized, an individual acquires a pragmatic self that enables it to act meaningfully. A self knows how to perform as a reasonably competent male or female, black or white, rich or poor actor within whatever circumstances of identity are relevant here and now (Weigert et al. 1986). The options are culturally organized into hierarchies, both internal and external, that shape one's biography (Stryker 1980). From an objective perspective, these forces may be real or fictive, determined or voluntary, rational or irrational, but to the individual, they are situational demands within which he or she must act here and now. There is no escaping the need to act or to decide not to act. Society functions within and without as a real force transforming the multivalence of the "pre-social individual" into the mundane valences that make the organism a human person, a competent member of the group. Typically, it appears that competent members knew who they were and what they felt, or they knew how to find out. Emotional lives were channeled within mundane and unquestioned force lines. A normal self was part of a

collective self with no need of emotional police. A modern self, by contrast, is adrift in unchartered seas.

This simplified typology of modern life is the background for the recent sociological psychological analysis of emotions. A central thesis is that society transforms the assumed multivalence of animals born to human parents into predictable and meaningful emotions (e.g., McCarthy 1989). There is no agreement on the mechanism that transforms animal feelings into human emotions. Possible explanations include physiological processes, psychoanalytic dynamics, structured relations, rules of interaction, cultural maps, or abstract cognitive schema. All agree that emotions are problematic in the modern world. These explanations try to fill a gap: how do we understand emotional life in a world in which feelings and sensibility can no longer be taken for granted?

Emotional experience cannot be understood simply as good and evil forces, of God's grace and the Devil's temptations. Nor are emotions morally neutral surges following natural laws of physiology or neurochemistry. Religious transformations and scientific reductions do not offer total explanations of emotions. Emotional life needs to be meaningful, and meanings are socially constructed and interactionally realized. Analysis must include socially available definitions and interpretations of emotional experience.

An axiom of the sociology of knowledge states that new ideas arise to explain previously taken-for-granted experience, and signal the plausibility of an alternative worldview and the relevance of a new interpretive focus. Such a signal was given with the coining and currency of the concept "ambivalence" within the psychoanalytic movement at the dawn of the twentieth century. It found its way also into sociological analysis (see Merton 1976). Psychoanalysis and sociology point to aspects of modernity that need attention. Our concern is with the sociological payoff.

Up to now I have presented general perspectives on social organization and self-understanding. Focus now centers on an emotional issue; namely, making sense out of ambivalence as a characteristic of modern sensibility.

Before facing the task, consider a sociological psychological framework that deepens our understanding of emotions.

Outline of a Sociological Psychology of Emotions

In the last decade, scholars laid the foundations for a sociological psychology of emotions (Denzin 1984; Finkelstein 1980; Franks and McCarthy 1989; Gordon 1981; Harré 1986; Hochschild 1975; 1983; Kemper 1978; Shott 1979). Their work enables us to understand emotions as links between social organization and the way we interpret experience. Specific discussion of ambivalence from a broad social constructionist perspective follows in the next chapter.

As a species of animal, it appears likely that there are universal feeling responses that humans signal through bodily gestures, especially facial expression (Ekman and Friesen 1975). Some feelings seem to be structured into the autonomic nervous system. These feelings are then culturally defined and transformed into socially meaningful emotions. Gestural expression of feelings has been functional in human evolution. Indeed, analogous gestures in other animals are interpretable anthropomorphically from Fido's presumably happily wagging tail to the chimpanzee's presumably happy smile. Humans normally lack tails, but we smile. We presumably know what the smiler means or is feeling—but we are not sure. The smile may mean: a seductive come-on; an embarrassing faux pas; a thinly masked sense of outrage; or a shrug of cosmic irony at human silliness.

Even granting possibly universal emotional gestures, the arena for a sociology of emotions covers the interpretative link between the behavioral display of feelings and what the displayer is experiencing, and that between what the display means to the displayer and to the audiences. If there are no fixed links among feelings, behaviors, and the meanings that self and others attach to them, then we must examine the ways in which those meanings and links are socially constructed. Physiological and neurological components of feelings are real and measurable, but they are

pre-social, as yet without social meaning and thus not yet the subject of a sociological interpretation of emotions.

Social analysis of emotions starts with the "self-feeling" of the person (Denzin 1984). Self-feelings refer to immediate and concrete private experiences each of us has of a flow of affect, mood, or sensibilities. We experience a triple awareness: feelings; self-experiencing the feelings; and our revealing or masking of the feelings. The flow of inner experiences is the bedrock of personal emotions. Self and other interpret the gestural and verbal concomitants of self-feelings within social processes that link self, situation, and the larger socio-political order, just as a child learns to link its wailing with parental responses.

Self-feelings are a phenomenological base for authentic experience of self and meaningful interaction with others. They do not, however, provide the rules for channeling or interpreting action appropriate to the situation (Hochschild 1975). Culture provides rules defining which feelings are typical for a normal person here and now. Routinely competent action results from a complicated confluence of acquired definitions governing self-feelings linked with gestural responses and cultural rules. The person experiences this confluence and routinely labels it so that self can understand the phenomenological flow of feelings and align them with actions that others accept as normal. Failure to interpret the confluence creates personal doubt about one's morality or sanity, and failure to act in accord with public definitions of what one should be feeling can lead to the imposition of a criminal or insane identity.

Anthropologists show how different cultures know the world differently through language reflecting social structure and perceived environments. So too, persons divide up and interpret their feelings according to cultural categories (e.g. White & Kirkpatrick 1985). They learn a "vocabulary of emotions" (Geertz 1959) that supplies the definitions and words for transforming raw bodily feelings into appropriately defined self-feelings, that is, for transforming organic changes into socially meaningful emotions leading to appropriate action.

For our purposes, an emotion is a *socially defined feeling* (Weigert 1983; cf. the "emotionology" of Stearns and Stearns 1986; and the social construction of emotions, e.g., Franks and McCarthy 1989; Harré 1986). As socially defined feelings, emotions are meaningful symbolic transformations of the flow of raw experience. They are personal and social sentient meanings that involve the body as constitutive of the affective meaning (cf. Scheff 1983). By contrast, the voice or gestures that we use to construct and communicate ideas are in principle detachable from the meanings that the symbols carry. The mere body can be considered a neutral medium for the literal semantic meaning of the cognitive symbol qua cognitive, just as the black and white of the printed page are detachable from the meanings of the sentences they carry. Taken by themselves, the black and white marks carry no other meaning than the lexicographical definitions of the words they form. Theirs are the literal meanings found in a dictionary. Even if typed to communicate emotions, printed words do so without feeling.

The embodied person, on the other hand, sentiently constitutes emotions, since self feels or thinks as well as displays or feigns them. The body can be interpreted as communicating feelings through the array of expressions that it "gives off" whenever it gives any expression at all (Goffman 1959). Through unavoidably apparent symbols like voice qualities, facial gestures, mien and gate, stance and distancing, the person necessarily displays emotional meanings, whether or not they are intended or even felt. It is never certain how much of the display is intended, controlled, known to the self, or perceived by the other. The displayer may be feigning, gesturally incompetent, or simply densely unaware—as the other may be as well. These inherent interactional uncertainties add spice to relationships in which emotional communication is central, as in courtship, seduction, spying, or parenting. Modern relationships, presumably premised on accurate understanding of each other's subjectivity amidst increasingly slippery symbols, must be forged on such uncertainties. They become grist for the therapeutic mill.

Assuming that self knows *how* to display emotions competently, there are additional cultural rules governing when the emotions are appropriate and the gestural variations that ought to be displayed. Joy upon meeting a married friend of the opposite sex is displayed appropriately with a rather tight-lipped kiss on the cheek or into the air as cheek touches cheek, but never by an open-mouthed kiss of lips upon lips. Even supposedly irresistible imperatives of physical pain follow cultural rules governing who experiences how much pain, when and how it is displayed, and to whom (Zborowski 1969).

Political rules guide who may express which emotion toward whom (Hochschild,1975). Such rules highlight interactional politics because they follow power and subordination. A secretary, for example, may not without risk display public anger toward the boss, whereas the boss may without risk of ceasing to be boss display anger against the secretary. The same goes for the sergeant toward corporals; parents toward children, and teachers toward pupils (cf. Stearns and Stearns 1986). Yet, in contemporary America there is ambivalence toward anger itself. Carol Tavris states that "ambivalence about anger permeates our society" (1982: 26). American response to the feeling defined as anger has changed historically and currently elicits mixed feelings. Tavris traces a line of thought that posits a traditional attitude based on the belief that we can and typically ought to control anger. The revolution in understanding human nature contained in Darwinian and Freudian views, however, implied that, in the final analysis, we cannot control anger. Finally, there is a modern attitude emerging that, we ought not control it. Anger can be seen as sinful or as self-fulfillment. Mixed feelings in anger-inducing situations echo mixed historical and attitudinal messages. Even anger lingers ambivalently.

In general, positive emotions are displayed up the status ladder, and negative emotions are likely to flow down the ladder. It truly feels tougher at the bottom, and one is not even allowed to display these feelings openly. Personal feelings are socially elicited and defined according to one's

position in the organization of status and power. Being male or female, black or white, doctor or janitor, carries with it different emotional lives that flow from social structures not from genes or hormones. Being shapes feeling as well as having and doing. Social scientists note that females traditionally give support and love while males seek worldly status and recognition. Women pursue occupations involving positive emotional labor while men are allowed to display negative emotions in a wider variety of occupations (cf. Hochschild 1983). These social paths are associated with different emotional lives; we are taught what to feel and how to define and display what we feel. In the process, we construct our feeling selves along certain career and life lines.

Enacting internalized emotional rules, individuals interpret their feelings as socially meaningful; experience them as motives for action; and construct a sense of self as sincere, authentic, or possessed of whatever moral tone is validated here and now (Trilling 1972). Situationally appropriate, aptly displayed feelings reenforce and reproduce the structural arrangements of society. Typically, actors feel internally what the external structure defines as legitimate (see Shott 1979). Cultural values link feelings with a moral universe within which my self makes sense. I feel, therefore I am. I feel righteous, therefore I am righteous. I feel saved, therefore I am saved.

No system works perfectly, however. Indeed, modern society, as we saw above, is characterized by pluralism, ambiguity, and uncertainty. Contradictory rules sometimes cover a single situation. In today's world there are often contradictory expectations attached to a single role, status, or situation that leads to "sociological ambivalence" (Merton 1976; Merton et al. 1983).

Contradictory expectations concern actions and feelings. Contradictory definitions of feelings make it difficult to experience self as a single emotional being. If I do not know what I am feeling, then I do not know who I am nor what to do. My identity is called into question. Why does the radiant bride feel fear and anxiety as well as joy as she walks down the aisle to marry the man she thinks she knows, and whose

"wife" she wants to be? Why does the filial son feel relief and guilt as well as sorrow while he walks behind the coffin of his long-loved mother? In the former situation, there are two feeling rules governing the experience of the bride: rejoice and be wary. In the latter, there is one cultural rule: feel sorrow; but there may be a deeper dynamic that even culture cannot make explicitly legitimate: feel relief that the inevitable death has been survived at least for the time being; not to mention psychoanalytic interpretations about ambivalent Oedipal love toward a mother. No culture seems to have explicitly codified such ambivalence as legitimate or normative, though Susan Cole (1985) speculates that tragic form developed from mourning rituals designed to allay ambivalence toward the dead. Shoring up self's passage through these feeling crises are institutional arrangements that define experience, guide action, and prevent our deserting life at the last minute.

Cultural rules guiding emotional lives are linked with the structure of social relations. How we feel toward others, define and display those feelings, and direct our emotional lives are structured by the relationships of power and status. Power and status are universal components of social interaction and as such they enter into the dynamics of feelings and emotions. A person who experiences too much or too little power or status is likely to define the accompanying feeling in culturally consistent ways. Using too much power leads the user to feel guilt; receiving too much status makes the recipient feel shame. Having too little power, on the other hand, makes the impotent feel anxiety and fear; whereas receiving too little status leads the depreciated to feel depression or low self-esteem (Kemper 1978; and cf. Thomas et al. 1974).

Power and status link situational emotions with more inclusive emotions. Moderns, for example, may experience complexes of vague feelings about self mixed with attachments to ephemeral things and fleeting fads, in other words, materialistic narcissism (Lasch 1979). Other cultural complexes of feelings may be defined as patriotism, if they are experienced during flag waving on the Fourth of July; or

nationalism, if the occasion is a military threat to the Nation; or Divine Presence, if the situation is one of religious ritual, personal tragedy, or millennial exaltation.

Complex emotions totalize the self, that is, they provide a single definition of various feelings that unifies the experiences in terms of a single transcendent symbol or idea. Such cultural emotions are socially constructed unifications of feelings that ground emotional life in meanings beyond the power of the individual as such. The totalized self gains emotional unification to the extent that the definition of the feeling complex is believed and embraced. Such unification and power creates a kind of motivational fusion that generates considerable energy in the service of those parties who carry the unifying symbols. Totalized selves are traditional products of religion's "sacred cosmos" (cf. Berger 1967). New converts dedicate their lives and fortunes to the sect; young recruits march to their deaths in defense of God's Nation; eschatological believers await the end of the world with joyful anticipation (Weigert 1988).

In summary, a sociological approach interprets emotions as socially constructed definitions of feelings that link body and situation in a system of meaning. These meanings are relatively independent of bureaucratic, technological, and formally rational meanings. This independence, or functional autonomy, makes possible an emotional lag that scholars have identified under various rubrics. The point is that emotional meaning is unable to keep pace with other systems of meanings: we are unable to emote appropriately about events generated by technology, biology, or reasons of state. How do you "feel" about terrorism, AIDS, nuclear war, or famine as you sit in your living room watching emaciated children starving or young men dying on evening TV?

Large-scale rationalities like technology, reasons of state, or international markets make some sense out of external forces and public events. Emotional rationality, however, must make sense out of the internal, private experience of those external events. Publically available symbols must be simultaneously meaningful to the inner life of the self if individuals are to feel integrated into the flow of

events. After elections, the winners and hopefully the losers still feel politically integrated. At national holidays and collective rituals, all have a chance to feel integrated. There are likely to be some, however, who reject emotional integration and others whom the power structure excludes. The apathetic and oppressed do not live the public life.

Emotions are constitutive of self in a way that is irreducible to behavioral or cognitive links. Indeed, feelings are deep signs of the way in which the organic self relates to external events (Hochschild 1983). Defining these feelings as socially meaningful emotions symbolically transforms that deep link into objective cultural meanings. Thus, personal inner feelings are engineered into publically available motives and emotional meanings in a naturally occurring world. Self becomes a competent displayer of appropriate self-feelings in that world. Sensibilities do, at times, integrate self and society. Integration is both an analytic and empirical issue. Let us attend first to one analytic aspect and hope that others will see the need for empirical work to follow.

Mixed Emotions, Actions, and Ambiguity: The Temper of Feeling Our Times

Action, unless totally instinctual, robotic, or habitual, requires decisiveness. The actor's plans for the long term; motives influencing the actor in the situation; and objects surrounding the actor must be interpreted and arranged according to lines of relevance for the action at hand (Schutz 1970). Although lines of relevance are typically masked by the unquestioned routines of everyday life, we know that things around us exist as already categorized objects and potential motives. At one routine level of analysis, our circumstances bounce us around like stoppers on a pin-ball machine. Alarm clocks make us go and red lights make us stop. As motives, circumstances spark us into action; otherwise, we merely bob around passively or behave like drones in a hive. The active and passive path

each has its attraction. At times, we dip into passive reverie or plunge into mindless routine. Each can heal us for the moment, and we are emboldened to bear the next decision for acting anew.

We know what it means to be decisive. The actor must know the facts; interpret the causes and consequences likely to surround the facts; and act effectively to bring about the hoped-for results. Within the theater of the mind, or the logical world of mental experiments, the contemplating actor imagines events following the lawful dynamics of those imagined worlds. As ordered, they provide the cognitive basis for action, though the action may or may not be in line with real external forces.

Action halts, however, if the objects are so ambiguous that they cannot be categorized adequately for the actor's purpose. As Alfred Schutz illustrated, if that coiled thing in the corner looks equally like a rope or a snake, we cannot act on it until that ambiguity is settled. If more irrigation is likely both to increase food supplies and to cause serious soil degradation, then we cannot act with certainty. Once we know that the thing in the corner is a rope, then knowledge of ropes, gravity, and trees comes into play as we prepare to loop the rope around the hickory tree high enough to insure that when cut it will fall on the mark. Needless to say, we would have no ambiguity about trying to loop a snake around that hickory tree. Resolving ambiguity is a first step toward decisive action, but not the last.

Ambiguity, in contrast to ambivalence, refers to the cognitive domain; namely, a confusion or contest of ideas (cf. Zielyk 1966). It refers to a situation in which we do not know whether something is this or that, since it appears like each. Donald Levine (1985) has argued that a "flight from ambiguity" is characteristic of a modernity committed to clarity. Nevertheless, ambiguity remains with us. Levine argues that it is desirable for evoking complex meanings and constructing diffuse symbols of social life (1985: 218). Ambivalence, on the other hand, refers to the mixed feelings we have toward an object, such as attraction and repulsion at the same time. Experience commingles elements of cogni-

tive and affective responses toward objects; yet reflection justifies the distinction between knowledge and emotion.

Faced with coiled ambiguity in a corner, we experience attraction and repulsion as we both feel drawn toward it to learn what it is, and feel an urge to flee out of fear of the unknown. This primitive ambivalence is felt in the presence of a "thing" before we have any warrant to be sure of what it is. Once we recognize what the thing is and securely categorize it, our ambivalence fades, at least for the time being. In our newfound sureness, we feel safe in handling the rope, or fearfully relieved as we silently leave the snake to its sleep.

The distinction between cognition and emotion becomes clearer in instances in which there is no ambiguity about the object. We definitely identify the thing as a nuclear bomb. It is a clearly known object. Yet, we may still feel repulsion and attraction toward it, as in Robert Oppenheimer's religious language on witnessing the first nuclear detonation, "I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds" (see Weart 1988: 101). We are fascinated by it even as we fear it. This is what we call object ambivalence: contradictory feelings elicited simultaneously by a single defined object. The object may be a person whose public identity is clear, but whose personal relationship to me is uncertain: I know for sure who she is, and I am both attracted to, and fearful of the thought of being rejected by, that person right now.

The lore of love's problems is filled with feelings of ambivalence. Courtship ambivalence along the thrill lines of first attraction give way to the dimly thrilling ambivalences of married couples. Intimate relations are likely to give rise to ambivalent feelings (Coser 1964). This ambivalence gives truth to the adage about love and hate being close companions. Both may be present in the agonizing lover. As relationships develop, either love or hate may dominate for a time, but ambivalence is not completely rooted out. It is likely to appear in later stages of intimate lives.

Decisiveness demands more than unambiguous objects. Motivation includes knowledge about intended or likely outcomes from the action. Motivated persons may be sure about the object and what they intend to do, but they

may still feel ambivalent about one of the possible outcomes, intended or unintended, but foreseen nevertheless. It is also possible to feel ambivalent toward actions because of what is unknown but feared in free-floating fashion. There are always unforeseen outcomes. This emotional tug-of-war is motivational ambivalence: simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from pursuing a particular line of action.

If motivational ambivalence is strong enough, tension builds as the person is literally drawn toward and driven back from a line of action. "Should I or shouldn't I?" "Whether 'tis better to. . . ." The state of tension is literally an "agonia," that is, a struggle between opposing actions within the will and imagination, a personal agony. The paradigmatic case in the Judeo-Christian traditions may be Jesus' agony in the garden as he wrestled with his decision whether to run away or face the anticipated death that awaited him. "Not my will, but Thine be done."

In the rational milieu of contemporary culture with its emphasis on clear, distinct, planned, and computerized ideas, the agony of motivational ambivalence is interpreted as cognitive breakdown, emotional immaturity, or personal inadequacy. It must be resolved. For a modern, agony is a painful condition to be avoided or resolved. Economic rationality would define it paradoxically as a "negative good," that is, a counter-productive condition that no rational person would choose.

An individualistic consuming culture teaches that persons are to be happy and life is to be pleasurable. Hedonistic economic rationality defines agony as a morally wrong "dis-ease" to be avoided as the body avoids disease. Agony negates the cultural values of optimizing economic or hedonistic rationality. In the modern "battle for human nature," individuals are coded genetically, conditioned behaviorally, and economized rationally, but there is no claim that they agonize morally (cf. Schwartz 1986).

Agony is distinctly anti-modern. Indeed, moderns are, perhaps unwittingly, socialized to transform social agony into personal anxiety. Agony is transmogrified into "my" anxiety. Social contradictions become personal inadequa-

cies (see Wexler 1983). Anxiety, unlike archaic agony, is a recognized mental health problem befalling individuals. As sick individuals, the anxious can seek rational experts such as counselors, clinicians, and other self-help agents who people the therapeutic sector of modern economies.

Decisiveness requires an ethic of responsibility, that is, a moral weighing of the outcomes of action and recognition of the objective basis for ambivalence. Responsibility evaluates action in terms of the moral status of its outcomes. Given the critical state of the world, an ethics of responsibility must start from an informed recognition of the human condition, of self in the midst of circumstances structured into physical and social processes. When we act, we are responsible to both sets of processes and especially to their interaction. The present focus is on humanly constructed social realities and, for simplicity, on the sources of the circumstances. Feelings, like celestial stars, are physical processes, whereas emotions, like Hollywood stars, are totally social constructions. We are interested in Hollywood objects.

Ambivalence as a Distinctively Modern Characteristic

Apparently coined in a 1910 article in German, ambivalence was given conceptual force by Sigmund Freud (see Merton and Barber 1963). He used it to interpret the psychodynamics between son and father within the reconstructed family dramas that served as paradigmatic scenes for the birth of psychoanalysis. Freud interpreted the son as both loving and hating his father; as wanting to be close to him and simultaneously rid of him; both seeking his advice and resenting paternal control. In later writings, Freud widened ambivalence to interpret large-scale cultural phenomena as well as interpersonal dynamics, such as client-therapist relations.

The development of the concept within sociological social psychology will be discussed in the next chapter. For now, I want to suggest that the emergence of ambivalence as