PLURALISM AND PROFESSIONALISM: A CRITIQUE OF CULTURAL PLURALISM WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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MUCH of the current-day literature about Jewish life advances the concept of cultural pluralism as the ideal and preferred mode of adaptation of Jews to American society. In scanning these writings one detects a certain casualness with which the phrase is turned. It seems to have become a cliché and a ready panacea for an infinitely complex problem. In view of the relevance of the matter not only for the Jewish group but also for intergroup relations, it might be useful at this time to take a fresh and broad look at the concept of pluralism.

Varying Conceptions of Cultural Pluralism

There is little uniformity among authorities regarding the meaning and implications of cultural pluralism. Sociologists Arnold and Caroline Rose [1] suggest that advocacy of cultural pluralism arose originally out of the concern of philosophers—among them, John Dewey—about a "dead level of civilization" which they saw evolving. Accordingly, cultural pluralism represented an antidote to the tendency of pouring every individual into a superficially identical mold. A later version of cultural pluralism, the Roses have said, was based on the view that sub-cultures should be encouraged to survive and not become obliterated in the Americanization process.

In the most general formulation, proponents of cultural pluralism would hold that each ethnic group within a nation or society should have its own distinctive cultural form, which would be different from all others and somewhat apart from them. At the same time there would be a core of commonality which would bind the various groups together through shared customs and goals. The question then arises—how much segregation and how much integration? Horace Kallen likens pluralism to the harmonious concordance of an orchestra wherein, "each cultural group may be the natural instrument, its temper and culture may be its theme and melody, and the harmony and discords and dissonances of them all may make up the symphony of civilization." [2] For Kallen there is no particular problem in this. Differences may be stretched and accentuated; they would be accommodated with an overall aura of unity. (One wonders if Kallen has ever witnessed a symphony orchestra during rehearsal.)

Others, however, have anticipated difficulty, or at least have expressed qual-

[1] Arnold and Caroline Rose, America Divided: Minority Group Relations in The United States, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1948.

[2] Horace M. Kallen, "The World Crisis and Welfare Board Tasks," *The Jewish Center*, Vol. XVIII, No. 16 (1941).

ifications regarding pluralism. For them it does not appear predestined or automatic that harmony and balance will emerge from a mosaic of difference. MacIver, for example, states that pluralism must be built on a basis stronger than "live and let live." He sees that as a precondition of intergroup harmony under cultural pluralism, "there must be *community,* before differences can be welcomed, or even admitted at all. Community does not consist of a set of distinct enclaves, self-contained, self-fulfilling. If that is what the ambiguous expression 'cultural pluralism' means then it must be rejected."[3]

To the Roses, pluralism as currently applied in practice, is associated with groups who accept and even demand segregation as a necessary condition for cultural development. Such segregation is not induced from the outside, but is "imposed by the minority group itself on all its members." This is done, according to the Roses, to preserve the "mystic superiority" of the group by high-pressuring and intimidating members of the minority group into conformity with the established approach. Accordingly, "cultural pluralism must be charged with racism and a totalitarian spirit."[4]

Janowsky denies the validity of cultural pluralism as applied to the American scene, but on other grounds. He feels that American society provides for all ethnic sub-groups such a powerful central cultural core that this becomes their predominant and overriding symbol and guide to behavior. The subgroups are left with a narrow range within which to develop unique cultural forms and traditions, and these are supplementary to the more broadly shared American way of life. Thus, according to Janowsky, "cultural pluralism in the United States really means *cultural supplementation.*"[5]

Still another conception of cutural pluralism in the literature is that of scholars like M. R. Davie, who see pluralism as an interim step in the process of achieving a homogeneous, national, integrated society.[6] Various ethnic groups are thus expected to contribute fully their values and customs to the ultimate and higher society which is to evolve and which is to be a composite of all. At the same time, during the period when separate sub-cultures still exist, cultural pluralism provides a framework for maintaining good intergroup relationships and encouraging communication. Davie frames the "interim" point of view as follows:

> There appears to be an irresistible pressure toward assimilation, which may eventually result in complete cultural integration. Cultural pluralism then will have disappeared, but it will have served the useful purpose of contributing to the final cultural pattern.[7]

Models of Pluralism

Professor Janowsky has said that "there are several varieties of cultural pluralism, and there are states in which the entire idea is frowned upon."[8] Strictly speaking, however, what he refers to as "varieties" are really a number of operational models of pluralism. These become evident upon examination of those nations which are customarily singled out as examples of the plural

[3] *Report of The Jewish Community Relations Agencies,* National Community Relations Advisory Council, New York, 1951, p. 41.

[4] Rose, *op. cit.,* p. 174.

[5] Oscar Janowsky, *The JWB Survey,* The Dial Press, New York, 1948, p. 271.

[6] For the conceptions and models of cultural pluralism which follow the authors have drawn heavily upon a former teacher of one of us, Brewton Berry, and his writings, particularly his *Race Relations: The Interaction of Ethnic and Racial Groups, infra.*

[7] M. R. Davie in F. J. Brown and J. S. Roucek, eds., *One America,* Prentice Hall, New York, 1945, p. 564.

[8] Janowsky, *op. cit.,* p. 270.

system. The following models may be distinguished:

1. In the first model, two or more peoples live within one nation *as distinct political entities,* with separate languages and customs, though federated together through a national state. This is the most highly developed or one might say most pronounced model of pluralism. It is the form that exists, for example, in the Soviet Union. It calls for separate governmental agencies, schools, theatres, court systems, newspapers, welfare institutions, social and sports associations, etc. In a country with the diverse sociological make-up of the Soviet Union—185 different ethnic groups and 147 languages—this may have been a format arrived at as the only practical way of binding together peoples who are vastly different and who might otherwise succumb to irresistible sociological centrifugal forces. At any rate, probably the outstanding proponent of this model of pluralism was Joseph Stalin, and his writings constitute the most elaborate theoretical exposition of the concept.[9]

2. The second model is similar to the first, with the exception that the element of political sovereignty is not as clear or as highly emphasized. Separate cultural forms exist, and different languages receive official sanction and equal status, but the cultural sub-groups do not conform as closely to the idea of a full political entity. Switzerland is perhaps the outstanding example of this arrangement. There is no overall Swiss language—rather the four cultural subgroups inhabiting the country speak German, French, Italian or Romansh—the last being a recognized although not an official language. There are regional differences in dress, dialect, behavior and thought. All federal documents and pronouncements are issued in the three official languages, each of them being equally authoritative. People tend to identify as much with their specific canton or local unit government as they do with a single national image. The cantons retain a measure of local autonomy approximating but exceeding that held by the individual states in America.

Switzerland has managed extremely well over the years in holding together the people of her greatly disparate cultural units. This nation is most frequently cited as the outstanding example of cultural pluralism.

3. In a third model occasionally referred to in the literature, there are two or more official languages and cultural traditions, but separate governmental expression is altogether lacking. South Africa with its English and Dutch speaking populations is probably the chief example of this model. The apartheid policy for black Africans is no doubt outside the cultural pluralism frame of reference.

4. Still another model is represented by a group that maintains a somewhat separate cultural tradition and distinct language or dialect, but the language is not recognized officially; neither is the separate political existence recognized. The Welsh in Great Britain are sometimes pointed out as fitting this model.

These then illustrate the patterns of cultural pluralism described in the literature.

Critique of Pluralism as a Design for Social Living in the United States

In its theoretical expression cultural pluralism is a particularly appealing ideal, especially when artfully set forth by scholars like Horace Kallen. However, it is subject to the following criticisms when recommended as a way of life in modern society:

[9] Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and The National Question,* Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow, 1950.

Divisive

Cultural pluralism contains within it seeds of divisiveness and disunity. It cannot be assumed that emphasis on cultural differences will somehow promote unity. Once the forces of difference are released they may go their independent and powerful ways. Even such a staunch advocate of cultural pluralism as Steward G. Cole warns that "National cultural unity must not be jeopardized by an exaggerated development of the forces of cultural diversity."[10] Berry expresses a similar reservation:

> Any society, if it is to survive, must have a considerable agreement among its members as to basic ideals, goals, values, mores, folkways, and beliefs. An aggregation of individuals, or of groups, each speaking its own language, worshiping its own gods, practicing its own sex mores, following its own peculiar customs with respect to food, dress, recreation, and government would not be a society at all. Ethnic groups which differ radically in their fundamental value systems could hardly become accommodated on a plane of equality and tolerance.[11]

The hazards of fifth columns and other devices which divide and conquer are too familiar to require explication. Essentially, they rely on the exploitation of exaggerated sub-group loyalties at the expense of other sub-groups and the culture as a whole.

Inconsistent with U. S. Cultural Tradition

Cultural pluralism is not consistent with the national tradition of the United States. There, rather, some variation or other of the "melting pot" ideology, the ideology of a common American culture, has held sway over the years. In America, similarities among groups and a national image are emphasized and differences are played down; the popular conception is of groups reaching a mutuality of thought and action. Janowsky acknowledges this sociological fact when he asserts that "The United States is not culturally plural in any such sense, but is rather a *culturally uniform state in the making*. . . . The English language and American history and culture are obligatory for all Americans irrespective of religious affiliation, ethnic origin, or cultural antecedents."[12] On the basis of their empirical investigations Warner and Srole conclude that American society "performs the transmutation of diverse ethnic elements into elements almost homogeneous with its own."[13]

This is not to say that the United States represents a one-dimensional culture. As Roucek points out, the present-day American culture has resulted from the interaction of the multiplicity of groups comprising the American society. He states that "the original Anglo-American culture has been modified by the continued impact of the cultures of the minority groups, conditioned, in turn, by the geographical and sociological factors in America and by the distance of this country from the original habitat of the immigrants."[14]

Rabbi Robert Gordis takes a strong stand against cultural pluralism as a mode of adaptation for American Jews. He asserts that "At best, cultural pluralism is useful in making the process of assimilation more gradual and in thus reducing the tension between the immigrant and the native generation. It does not constitute a permanent ideal for

[10] Steward G. Cole in Brown and Roucek, *op. cit.*, p. 564.

[11] Brewton Berry, *Race Relations: The Interaction of Ethnic and Racial Groups*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1951, p. 332.

[12] Janowsky, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

[13] W. L. Warner and L. Srole, *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1946, p. 155.

[14] J. S. Roucek, "Group Discrimination and Culture Clash" in Robert M. MacIver, ed., *Civilization and Group Relations*, Institute for Religious Studies, New York, 1945, p. 68.

American democracy, for whether we lament it or applaud it, the basic drive in American society is toward uniformity in language, in culture and in mores.'' [15]

It must be remembered that the particular cultural ideology and *de facto* patterning of intergroup relations in a nation derives from its peculiar past. Kurt Mayer,[16] in surveying the cultural patterns in Switzerland, points out that the nation originated historically from the desire of a group of essentially dissimilar peoples to preserve a measure of security and self-determination by means of a system of mutual defense alliances. Switzerland had the misfortune to be located in one of the most accessible and strategic thoroughfares in Europe, hence was vulnerable to the ambitions of warriors from Caesar and Hannibal to Napoleon. As a means of protection, the heterogeneous, relatively isolated, and weak groupings residing in the region joined forces. Mayer predicts that the Swiss system will persevere because of a ''fortunate balancing of demographic factors'' including geography, population distribution, language and religious variables. Thus, cultural pluralism in Switzerland arose and persists on account of the unique set of social and physical phenomena which exist and co-exist in the nation. The applicability of cultural pluralism is situational; it cannot be artificially induced in contravention of existing social forces. Therefore, America may well be one of those states in which, in Janowsky's metaphor, the entire concept of pluralism may be frowned upon.

Separative

A group which adopts a pluralistic pattern for itself severs itself from other groups which may be operating under different premises. Cultural pluralism requires a common understanding and set of ground rules regarding mutual statuses and relationships. Carried out by one group without the readiness or concurrence of others, the outcome could be merely insulation and segregation of that group, as well as suspicion and hostility on the part of the other groups.

Nevertheless, one often finds agencies under minority auspices in policy and program operating as though cultural pluralism is a successful *fait accompli.* They sometimes seem impervious to the realities of American life and to the effect of ingroup behavior on outgroup mentality. Many decent, ''tolerant'' outgroup members perceive this behavior as the erection by the minority group of a social barrier which is difficult to comprehend and impossible to penetrate. This applies particularly to the Jewish group. As MacIver points out, inherent in anti-Semitism is the notion of Jewish aloofness, smug self-segregation, intractability. ''Jewish'' cultural pluralism has the effect of reinforcing this stereotype. Says MacIver:

> Unlike, for example, the ''distance'' between the White and the Negro, it is assumed to be created not by the Gentile but by the Jew himself, owing to his imputed apartness and ''secretiveness'' and to his stubborn maintenance of a different code and different manner of life. . . . Consequently, there is the feeling that the Jew does not ''belong'' with the majority group. He is particularly the outsider. He ''doesn't play the rules of the game.'' [17]

MacIver adds that pluralistic assertions that America is a ''multi-national'' union or ''culturally federated,'' are

[15] Robert Gordis, *Judaism for the Modern Age,* Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, New York, 1955, p. 79.

[16] Kurt Mayer, ''Cultural Pluralism and Linguistic Equilibrium in Switzerland,'' *American Sociological Review,* Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1951), pp. 157–63.

[17] *Report on the Jewish Community Relations Agencies, op. cit.,* p. 31.

misleading unless carefully qualified. "They might suggest that the Jewish people are an enclave in the larger community, that they are a community by themselves. *No other group openly makes such a claim.*" (Emphasis supplied.) [18]

It is hardly being proposed that a platform of minority action should be guided by the perception of other groups, however warped. Still, as MacIver insists with regard to Jewish culture and life, its distinctiveness is sometimes so emphasized as "to set it in a kind of insulation, as something apart, something walled around, that has to be defended from enemies on all sides. This may not be the intention of certain representatives of the matter but it is often the impression they convey. It is implicit in the attitudes of some Jewish subgroups and sometimes is inculcated in the education of the young." He goes on to suggest that "The proper claim for religious and cultural liberty should be stated in a better way, lest it strengthen the prejudice which regards the Jewish people as intransigent and unwilling to be full citizens of the larger society." [19]

The task for the minority group is not to adapt itself to the variable biases of other groups, but to clarify for itself as well as to others wherein its aims are in its own best interest and wherein they are not inconsistent with those of other groups and the society as a whole.

Impractical

Practical considerations are introduced in the application of a concept of cultural pluralism to the American scene. In order to function optimally under such a mode of operation, if it is to be constructive, an individual must be prepared to take part with equal vigor in the activities of his specific cultural group and of the larger group. Time pressures and limitations of physical and psychic energy, however, operate in such a way as to preclude the participation by all but the most extraordinary in a constantly proliferating volume of organizations and events in our highly gregarious society. For example, teenage members of sectarian centers or youth organizations are occupied with school work and activities, part-time jobs, household responsibilities, dates, etc. Consequently, the center or organization in many cases becomes their primary if not their exclusive leisure-time affiliation, particularly if broader affiliations are not externally stimulated. In addition, financial requirements make it difficult to join both sectarian and community-wide recreational-educational institutions. This would tend to militate against the realization of the value and organizing principle generally associated with cultural pluralism when described as a social goal—namely, intergroup harmony.

Here again MacIver offers pertinent commentary. He warns against a needlessly and meaninglessly separatist organizational pattern such as a Brooklyn Jewish Dentists' Association or a Manhattan Italian Psychological Society. Psychology or dentistry has little inherent relevance as a separate profession to the ethnic group. Such ethnic associations, indiscriminately organized in various fields of professional interest, could serve to splinter our society as well as hopelessly to segment the minority group member psychologically. It could also be disastrous from the intergroup relations standpoint. When an ethnic group sets up a network of associations of its own:

> it encourages the members of other groups to think of it as withdrawn and lacking in community sentiment. It tends to make these others, the large majority, think of them as an alien element. It precludes the members of the separately organized group from con-

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[19] *Ibid.* p. 36.

tacts with those who share the same common interests as their own. A Jewish acquaintance of the writer's remarked that he spends so much time in this organizational activity that he has very little to spare for any non-Jewish relationships.[20]

There has been enough research to suggest that this effect may be caused by factors quite apart from time or energy. However, the consideration is relevant if only as a consequential factor in relation to other social problems which also deserve attention.

Geographically Elusive

Cultural pluralism necessarily affects groups which are both spacially and culturally defined. In the Soviet Union, for example, each nationality group inhabits a specific territorial region. Members of the Swiss subcultural groups live in a limited area in close proximity to one another. The Jewish group in the United States, on the other hand, is widely interspersed within the total population, has no territorial unity and seeks none. When one begins to function along culturally segmented lines amidst neighbors who are guided by a different frame of reference, tension and confusion may result. True, there can be mutual enrichment. The question is what are the risks and what are the probabilities of avoiding them in such a social structure and such a social system as are found in the United States?

Inimical to Interests of the Minority Group

Another argument sometimes raised against cultural pluralism suggests that, as a social goal, it is inimical to the minority group. Rabbi Gordis, for example, takes this position. His view is that dwelling on ethnic and nationality considerations weakens the major foundation of the Jewish group which, according to Gordis, lies in the religious sphere. Gordis holds that pluralism may serve to reduce the psychological trauma facing newly arrived immigrants and help them to make a less catastrophic transition into American life, but these are "inadequate for preserving Jewish life; they cannot suffice for Jewish survival."[21] "The only enduring type of pluralism which the structure of American life envisages," he declares, "is, as has been shown, in the field of religion."[22]

MacIver, for different reasons, sees pluralism as potentially detrimental to the Jewish group. He expresses the concern that if American Jews are presented with multiple group aspirations, they may be faced with embitterment, frustration and perhaps even psychic damage. Protective isolation is no solution, for "if Jewish life is insulated it is also narrowed, so that it looks out with anxious, mistrustful eyes on the wider human scene."[23]

Thus, from MacIver's point of view, pluralism may bear harmful psychological fruits for the Jewish individual. From Gordis' point of view, it may prove to be of dubious value in the enhancement of the Jewish people as a religio-social group.

Logically Inconsistent

The final criticism of pluralism to be considered pertains to its logic. Proponents of pluralism tend to assume that cultural sub-groups are or are likely to be cohesive in their beliefs and actions, that they share a consensus of opinion regarding the desirability of coalescing as a group and a readiness to experience this coalescence in a pluralist framework. American Jewry, for one, does not adhere to these assumptions. As Janowsky succinctly puts it, "The expressions of Jewish living are no less

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[21] Gordis, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

[23] *Report on the Jewish Community Relations Agencies, op. cit.*, p. 41.

plural than those of American living."[24] Jews do not constitute a monolithic ideological entity in the United States. There are profound differences in beliefs, in attitudes, in theology, in interests, in objectives among Jewish sub-groups. One cannot posit a single Jewish way of life, contrary to the propaganda of professional anti-Semites and the teachings of Jewish educators. Jewish life is probably more accurately characterized by variability than by sameness.

While calling for cultural diversity on the national or societal scale, pluralism presupposes cultural uniformity on the sub-cultural level. Are both parts of the scheme correlative? Does pluralism contain with it a built-in mechanism to bring about these somewhat dissimilar ends simultaneously? The Roses frame this dilemma of pluralism as follows:

> It is true, of course, that some minority group members have a greater interest in the cultural past of their group, and have acquired more skills for developing that culture than have most members of the minority group. But other minority group members have not. There thus seems to be an inconsistency in the cultural pluralist's argument that all members of minority groups should develop that group's past culture, and yet that that development be free and voluntary.[25]

The Problem for Social Work Practice

While the foregoing criticisms of cultural pluralism need not be taken as gospel, it would be irresponsible for the social agency—even the sectarian agency—not to take into account the effects which are deemed possible. Moreover, social work philosophy requires the establishment of some boundaries to the nature of social agency intervention. The following approach seems indicated.

Whatever the social agency does, it is obliged to respect variability and voluntarism in human relations. The social adaptations which are possible among groups are multitudinous. No one mode of relationship is sacrosanct—including cultural pluralism. Human relations should be approached with an open mind, a willingness to experiment and a desire to match theory with observable reality. Cultural pluralism, while it represents a theoretically useful construct, at the same time presents knotty difficulties of conception and implementation. As Berry indicates, "Pluralism is a delicate form of accommodation, difficult to achieve, applicable only in rare circumstances, and demanding a high degree of mutual tolerance and sympathy."[26]

From a social work standpoint it might be well to approach this question from the perspective of the individual minority group member. He is in the position of a marginal man, "poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds, reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds."[27] In resolving his problem of multiple group identifications it would seem advantageous for the individual to strike some kind of viable balance between exclusive or total psychological investment in either the minority ingroup or the outgroup comprising the wider American society. His manner of adjustment to minority group-majority group identification will depend in part on his conception of the rightful place and role of minority groups in American life. Here again a balance needs to be struck between retention of as much as possible of the distinctive personality and vitality of the minority group and the maximal interaction among all groups in a shared culture. Determining a proper stance regarding this complex social-psychological constellation

[24] Janowsky, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

[25] Rose *op. cit.*, p. 173.

[26] Berry, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

[27] Robert E. Park in Everett V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1937, p. XVIII.

of factors can be a painfully trying and soul-searching venture for the minority group member. It must be as much at least for the social agency practitioner.

It falls to the social worker in the course of his professional responsibilities to make a contribution here. And it would be plausible for him to do so by keeping foremost in his mind that his main job is to help the member-client to arrive at a solution which is most beneficial to himself as a person, one which is consistent with his outlook and goals in life, and one consistent with the welfare of his group and society. Thus the social worker approaches the task with an appreciation of the need for individualization and a respect for self-determination. One individual may need to be helped to reinforce his desire to deepen his ingroup affiliation, to gain knowledge or understanding regarding the group and its rightful place in history and in society. The worker may try to enhance his feeling of belonging and his pride in more profoundly sensing that belonging. Another individual may need support in breaking away from strong traditional ingroup ties which for him serve to constrict or retard his personal development. In all cases, the worker would influence the individual to see his ingroup in a constructive light. For this, the social worker will require some knowledge and conviction about the group's culture and traditions; not merely to preach a sermon about it but to represent it accurately, soundly and adequately.

But the individual would be given the opportunity to decide for himself how he wants to relate to the group, which (many or few) cultural symbols, values and folkways he wishes to select out as having meaning to him as a person.

This approach is consistent with the concept of "critical acculturation," which has been appraised in the following manner:

> Those who accept it do not believe in the complete acceptance or adoption of any culture. All cultures, dominant or subordinate, majority or minority, are viewed critically. Critical discernment and intelligence are exercised in the selection of cultural patterns, institutions, trends and ideas. The individual selects what he thinks is best in the extant cultures and rejects the bad or evil.[28]

From the Standpoint of the Minority Group Agency

This may appear to be excessively nonspecific for a practical approach in social work practice, but to be more specific is to deny the individuality of agency members and clients. At the same time, it affords space for free movement to the sectarian agency which is not entirely neutral—nor should it be—with respect to the survival of the group and the culture which it represents. However, since it *is* a social agency and not simply an indoctrinating one, it necessarily assumes the obligations implicit in social work principles.

This need not dilute an agency's efforts on behalf of the group which supports and maintains the agency. If anything, it may very well help individuals to cope with their own conflicts and irresolutions satisfactorily enough to make their identification with their group more substantial, deeper and more enduring, and this need not be at the expense of other groups or their interrelationship. At the same time, professionals must face up to the fact that there is risk to the ingroup in all this, that the approach does not materially alter the centrifugal acculturational forces at work in American society. It is incumbent upon professionals, however, to look social reality in the eye and make the most favorable accommodation possible with it. The alternative is group survival in the context of autocracy, coercion, ghettoization and intergroup hostility.

[28] Rubin Gotesky in Feliks Gross and Basil J. Vlavianos, eds., *Struggle for Tomorrow*, Arts Incorporated, New York, 1954, p. 217.