

9. Embedded Persons

Overview: Starting with immediate caregivers and siblings, our natal families, we are strongly shaped by the groups around us – both the groups that we belong to, and 'foreign' groups which try to influence us as non-members within their reach. We can think of such influence as 'context pressure,' exerting causal power which may be very strong without becoming fully determinant. Context pressures (from groups that we belong to, and from other groups as well) commonly have us doing things that no individual would or could do otherwise. On the other hand, as individuals we remain autonomous agents in that our choices and actions are finally our own. Moreover, the context that shapes us is a dynamic one, that we ourselves have a hand in shaping. The upshot is to see ourselves as living in a kind of dialogue with the society around us, with specific groups (e.g. family, work groups, nations) as our interlocutors. Within such dialogues we form identities and live them, and we defend them as best we can.

What renders man an imaginative and moral being is that in society he gives new aims to his life which could not have existed in solitude: the aims of friendship, religion, science and art.
- George Santayana

Throughout this book, we have embraced a view of the human being as a social *specialist*, prepared by evolution not just for group living but for the uptake and reliance on collective mindset and for contributions to this mindset as occasion offers. At the same time, we value our individualities and insist upon them, and we compete for recognition, status and advantage against our peers. Our sociality comes packaged with a lively attention to self-interest. We do not automatically sacrifice ourselves for the group's advantage, though we may do so on occasion. We know full well how to take a profit at the expense of a neighbor. We can and do sometimes withdraw from our groups to think, scheme, meditate or pray by ourselves.

In this book, we have discussed our human groups and societies as self-organizing systems, emergent from our individual activities and interactions through 'loops of social participation,' as discussed in Section 1.1.3. Groups shape their human members' personal mindsets and identities, even as they are themselves no more than outcomes of their members' activities and thoughts.

Collective minds provide the contexts in which our personal minds develop and operate.

So we have to ask, what does it mean to be a creature of this kind: not just a [locus of rational self-interest](#), but an *embedded* social product? When we learn to see ourselves in this fashion – likened to disparate nuts and berries in an ambient cake that is mixed and baked and eaten by our own activities – what follows?

A first point is that individual [selfhood](#) and [personhood](#) are almost meaningless without their social context. Robinson Crusoe on his desert island almost ceases to be an English gentleman and becomes a lone survivor. The immigrant¹ becomes a new person, in effect; and if he cannot make the change, his children will. New Age types in the sixties talked about the Self as an '[inner committee](#)' comprised of different 'voices' for different occasions. More formally, psychologists speak of the [hypostatic model](#) to convey the transformations of personality under different internal and external conditions. Lina Wertmüller displays such transformation to comic advantage in a film called [Swept Away](#),² which shows what happens when a rich bitch and a deckhand on her yacht get stranded together on an island where he becomes a domineering male, feeding and bedding his submissive woman.

A second point is that as social beings, embedded as we are in our social contexts, we seek for recognition and meaning (as well as livelihood and whatever material payoffs), not only from significant other individuals but from significant groups as well. The ambient group is an interlocutor with other groups, but with its own members as well. What might such groups say to us, and we to them?

A third point, as we saw in the last chapter, is that the ambient group has interests and intentions of its own, and may not be a safe or friendly place. An individual's relationship with their group is ambivalently politicous at best, and may be toxic or lethal. This is the case for infants born to unloving or dysfunctional parents, and was the case for millions of adult Europeans in the 20th century period of global war. Given this unpleasant possibility, we come to a question which was, in fact, among my motives for this book: How to survive and thrive in a toxic family, or nation, or society? How to at least stay sane, when the world around you is mad?

It is with these three points that this chapter is concerned. But first a few words about the notion of context itself, and about the causal pressures that a context can exert on its component parts:

Human children learn very early that they can cause things to happen. They can cry and summon a caregiver. They can suck to get pleasure and milk.

1 Like my father, transplanted as a young man from his native soil: the city of Kiev, before the Russian Revolution to New York City in the United States.

2 Available on YouTube [here](#), as I am writing this.

They can push and pull and drop things, and make them move in some desired way, and often gain the attention of others by doing so. In general, unless they are constantly stymied and frustrated, they soon develop their own sense of *agency* – limited, to be sure, but amply competent within some familiar and personal sphere.

This mode of causal agency can be extended almost indefinitely, and in every direction – as children actually do while growing up into adults. With the skills that they practice and develop, they can do some very bad things and some good ones. They can do all the things that humans do.

But there is another type of causality that children intuit may dimly but take years to partially comprehend – if they ever do: the causality of context, and of reciprocal feedback between a whole and its parts.

Think of what happens in a functioning family that does *not* happen in a dysfunctional one. A child does something cute or clever or annoying or dangerous, and other persons respond to this in characteristic and fairly reliable ways. In due course, the child learns to anticipate a collective, net response, not just from individuals, but from the whole family. If this net response is pleasurable, then the child learns to do more of it, and we speak of 'positive reinforcement.' If the net response is disagreeable or actually painful in some way, we speak of 'negative reinforcement.' Either way, the child learns that his or her participation in a social system elicits a reliable net response from that system as a whole, altering the context for everyone's subsequent choices and actions in ways that can be anticipated – even reliably manipulated – to some extent.

The crucial point here is kids *cannot* determine how other family members – and thus, the system as a whole – will respond to their initiatives. They have no direct causal power over their family's mood and behaviour. But they do have some influence which may be considerable or very limited – and this they learn to use as best they can. Learning from experience what their families are like, the child develops a contextual engagement and participation in its affairs. From this awareness, they learn to present themselves and manage their social participation in some more-or-less acceptable, but also self-serving way. They “go along to get along,” as the saying goes.

One corollary of this 'contextual engagement' is that when we think about our futures – about where we want to be next week or next year – we must accept that these outcomes are only partially dependent on choices that we as individuals can make. They depend as much or more on what the world at large and other people do. We do a few small things ourselves. We can influence other people and the attitudes, moods and knowledge through which they make their choices. But we cannot actually control what others will do, or what will happen as a result.

What I am calling 'contextual engagement' is similar to William Gibson's concept of '[situated cognition](#)' which holds that perception and action are inseparable, and that knowledge is inseparable from context and required performance. "Ask not what is inside the head," as this idea has been expressed. "Ask what the head is inside of." But where situated cognition is a theoretical approach in the psychology of cognition, contextual engagement is an ethical principle about 'the good life' and how to have one. Though some people have stronger influence than others, no one can actually determine what other people will do. All they can be sure of is that some of their choices will somehow respond to and reflect their own. This principle is reflected in various folkloric injunctions which seem based on some grasp of its dynamic: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." "No man is an island." "Honesty is the best policy." "What goes around, comes around." "Think global, act local," and "It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest." All these sayings show some awareness that our own lives are inextricably entangled with the lives and choices of others.

The central concept of this chapter is an idea of *Context* – a dynamic, ecological environment which makes claims upon us, and in which we autonomously participate. This Context is singular and all-encompassing (and deserves its capital letter for that reason). It is even personal, in the limited sense that your Context is different from mine or that of anyone else. It even has properties of collective desire, belief and intention, as when we speak of "the national interest, "public opinion," or "government policy." But it is otherwise quite unlike the all-knowing, benevolent God that religious persons imagine. The Context cannot know any more than the common knowledge, belief and mood of human society as a whole. It is quite indifferent to what befalls us, and utterly amoral by human standards. It does nothing at all by itself save what we humans do in response to its promptings. And yet the idea of Context does have religious overtones. Only those deficient in imagination can think of the Context with no sense of awe or gratitude, simply for the fact that they are alive . . . for the fact that it includes them. Only fools and mentally-ill persons treat their contexts without a healthy respect.

The idea of 'contextual engagement' describes much more than the reciprocal shaping of human groups by their members, and of these members by their group. It includes, for example, the flocking behaviour of birds and fish and sheep; the spontaneously coordinated social behaviour of ants and bees, and the tacit communication and collaboration of all the intertangled vegetation in a rain forest. It describes how 50 billion neurons in a brain can coordinate the activities of a whole organism to stay alive and perform the most complicated actions in a smooth, coordinated way. It describes how a single fertilized ovum, adequately protected and supplied with nourishment

develops into an adult of its species. As a general principle of ontology, it describes physical systems as well.

It's not just that a whole is something more than the sum of its parts. It's that the whole exerts strong influence – a context pressure – on what its parts can do or become – on what they must *be* – in order to belong as parts of that particular whole. Without this notion of contextual engagement between parts and whole, our idea of cause-and-effect, does not avail beyond the simplest systems and relationships.

9.1 The Social Context

As discussed above, in Section 2.3, we need our personal *identities* to mediate between the Self and other persons, and to adapt and manage the self for appropriate participation in its various groups. The clear implication is that identity must be multi-faceted, presenting a different face in each different context. Potentially, this *multiplicity of faces* can lead to problems.

9.1.1 A Face to Meet the Faces

Embedded in our groups, managed by them as we are, our response to this condition is something more than passive adaptation. What we find, in general, is that most people, most of the time, take up, display and re-enact the traits or beliefs approved and rewarded by their groups, while a few '[black sheep](#)' strongly react against these traits and beliefs. Other adaptive strategies are also possible. We need to consider what these responses are. We also want to say what little we can about how the individual chooses one such strategy rather than another.

Beyond a first basic choice – whether to conform to or resist a given suggestion from one's group – there are subtleties for either of these options. Conformity may be grudging or whole-hearted or even super-charged, as when the individual 'bends over backwards,' goes far out of their way, to demonstrate their sincerity and loyalty. Another possibility is the minimalist, token conformity which puts on a show of obedience but actually complies as little as possible.

Conformity to the demands of one group may conflict with the demands of another – as when the gifted girl plays down her smarts and talents so as not to intimidate potential boyfriends; as when the gifted black student drops out of school and joins a gang for fear of being labeled an '[Uncle Tom](#).' Or worse – having to think of himself as one.

Along similar lines, some cultures encourage their children to 'improve themselves.' Others speak of the young person who does so as getting above

himself/herself, or as as 'getting too big for their boots' (or breaches). Over the years, I have had several friends who went to university and wound up in excellent professional jobs, but paid an emotional price from rejection by their families and their recurring feelings of guilt. Unlike the British who once made careers in 'the colonies' and then retired home to Britain, I have known several Japanese families who were posted abroad, in Canada or the US, who found that they (and later, their Japanese-speaking children) could not go back to Japan because they no longer 'fit in' – no longer had a place in its society. Second- and even third generation children of immigrant families from other cultures may be torn between the values and customs of their new society, and the traditional ones left behind. Muslim families today have special difficulties in this respect, but they are by no means the only ones. In New York and Montreal, I have known Chinese and orthodox Jewish families with the same problem. It's hard to think of a people or culture that does *not* have its [diaspora](#) today.

On the other side of this coin, there are different subtleties. You can decide to resist your group's demand or suggestion, but again, there are various ways of doing so.

A first approach is like the minimalist compliance, already mentioned. You can pretend to go along with the group, doing as little as you can get away with. The difference lies in the level of risk accepted: if you are willing to risk severe penalties and loss of membership you will behave rather differently than if you intend to stay in the group while contributing as little as possible. A second approach would be generalized emmigration. You can leave this group and join another, or try to go it alone. The third approach, evasion, takes minimalism to an extreme. You can do nothing at all for the group, not even pretend to go along while avoiding getting got. The smuggler, dope peddler and spy would be examples – persons who pretend to be members in good standing, while engaging in criminal activities. Finally, there is defiance, possibly with active rebellion. You can refuse to obey the group and take the consequences, as [Jan Hus](#) did. Or you could mount an effective revolt as Luther and Calvin did. Circumstances will often make the difference here, as they did with Hus who was both unlucky and a hundred years ahead of his time. Luther, in 1517, launched the Reformation. Hus, in 1415, was burned at the stake.

So, how do we choose our strategies of compliance or non-conformity? A short answer might be that we have only statistical ways of predicting such choices in advance, and are likely to be surprised frequently by the choices of an individual. Nor are techniques of personnel management more than moderately successful, whether with school children, corporate employees or in the military. A more comprehensive answer might be that when we think

about the sources of some individual's adhesion to and investment in a given group, three points stand out:

First, obviously and trivially, adhesion and conformity will depend on the distribution of opportunity and risk for the individual in their particular situation. Other things being equal, we would expect the individual to feel involved with the group, and more inclined to accept and internalize its customs and its values, when there are higher rewards for doing so, and higher costs for not doing so. In whatever group, we must expect members to remain autonomous individuals, calculating their self-interest and making choices accordingly.

Second, we must expect that group solidarity and peer pressure will be significant factors. By definition, in a group with high solidarity, members will be inclined to act on behalf of the group and in accord with the group's directives, whether tacit or explicit. At the same time, members will be more inclined to sanction any deviant activity comes to their attention.

But finally, identity and its entanglements may be the key factor.³ We surely create ourselves and our identities through the choices we make, but we also make the choices we do from whom we believe we are, and what we want others to believe about us. We form and maintain identities with regard to, and in support of our entanglements with significant others: a parent, a role model, a charismatic leader – a loved one of any kind. The identities formed in childhood are especially durable and influential. As [St. Francis Xavier](#) said, on the design of a durably Catholic education, "Give me the children until they are seven and anyone may have them afterward."

People change over time; we can and do contradict ourselves. We even betray ourselves on occasion. What we call '[identity](#)' is the source and basis of such coherence as our lives can claim. This is a sub-structure of mindset: an understanding that we have of ourselves, of what we hope to become, of how we wish to be seen by others. We are not born with an identity. Rather, we develop and maintain one, with changes and updates as required, over the course of a lifetime. We defend our identities against unwanted change – especially against change suggested by intrusive others.

In this way, we tend to resist new ideas, even when they are (and can be shown to be) distinctly superior to the old familiar ones. This resistance is especially strong, when an idea touches closely on identity – so that the persons who accept and hold it are compelled to revise their sense of who they are – the persons they understand themselves to be. (Thus, the concept of [natural selection](#), and the close kinship between humans and great apes is still bitterly resisted by many people, more than 150 years, and several technological revolutions after Darwin's great book [On the Origin of Species](#). The neurological basis of mind and identity – "[the mind made flesh](#)" as

³ See sections 2.3 and 2.2.2

Humphrey called it – is an intellectual scandal scratching at the edges of our collective mindset, whose full impact has still to be felt.

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9.1.2 *Social Navigation*

Our concept now is of the person as a multi-faceted identity 'navigating' (so to speak) in the currents and contexts of their life. What can we say about this process?

The features of human sociality has already been discussed at some length in Chapter 2 – notably, the four modes of social relationship in Section 2.2.4. The treatment of [groupthink](#) in section 4.2.2 is also relevant. Here I just want to mention two further points which have not yet been covered.

First, is the concept of [integrity](#), and the gray area between social adaptability and sheer [hypocrisy](#). On one hand, we have a concept of the [rigid personality](#) who finds it difficult to change plans in a changing situation – to go along to get along, without insisting too hard on being him-or herself. On the other, we have a concept of the hypocrite who just tells people what they want to hear, and presents a tailored face for different situations. Is there a happy medium here, of flexible, adaptable integrity? I think there is, but one's success in finding it may be a matter of opinion.

The example that comes to mind is one [Simon Aley](#)n, Vicar of St Michael's Church at Bray in Berkshire, who is said to have held his position between 1540 and 1588, throughout the religious conflicts in England in the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth, making himself successively Catholic, Protestant, Catholic again, and then Protestant again, to keep his position. I had to look up his name and story, but the satirical song that he inspired is still being sung. I learned it as a boy, and you can [find it here](#). Each verse recounts one phase in his religious adaptations, but the recurring chorus tells you who he is:

"And this is law, I will maintain, until my dying day, sir,

That whatsoever king may reign, still I'll be the Vicar of Bray, sir."

It is easy enough to see this priest as a consummate hypocrite and time-server, but few if any are inclined to do so. It seems more just to see him as an amiable, reasonable man who felt that he could be of more use to his parish and himself by continuing in his office than by getting himself martyred. I leave my readers to find the moral that pleases them.

A second, related point is the way that human social interests can be divided broadly into the three motivations of fear and fun and comfort. This generalization holds for individuals, and it extends to groups as well. We do things:

- to avoid unpleasant (or downright painful) consequences; or
- because we believe they will make (or keep) us comfortable; or
- with some expectation that they will be fun, i.e. pleasurablely stimulating.

Responding to contingencies, and to the activities of others, our 'social navigation,' then, whatever course it finds, is broadly seen to steer between these three motives. Of special interest for our discussion is the fact that these motives apply to groups as well as to individual persons and that they are closely inter-related. It is not intuitively obvious that the voyages of Columbus or the invasion of the Aztec Empire (Mexico) by Cortés and his men must be grouped under the heading of 'fun,' while the Great Wall of China was a matter of fear and comfort. Sex and riding the roller coaster are fun. Sitting in a Lazy Boy with a blanket, your favorite drink and a book is comfortable. The shriek of your building's smoke alarm system is neither fun nor comfortable, merely unpleasant. But each of these feelings is self-limiting: The excess of comfort becomes boring, which is not comfortable. An excess of fun (which relieves boredom) is uncomfortable and may be dangerous – therefore no longer fun. On the other hand, a certain amount of discomfort, even fear and pain, can be stimulating, and therefore fun. There can be no enduring contentment in this life, because no satisfaction lasts. Just a few hours after your last meal, you are hungry all over again.

As social actors, embedded in our various groups, people are constantly operating with and against each other in this triangle of competing motives, and within their over-arching dilemma of adaptation against integrity and authenticity. We are driven by personal desires and values, but these in turn are shaped social relationships in a social context. And these in their turn, exist within the context and constraint of minding groups with their collective mindsets, their collective needs and values, and their collective purposes and projects.

9.1.3 When Do Collective Intentions Matter?

We don't think about large questions like the collective intentions of society while driving on busy streets, changing the baby, or coping with any of life's ordinary challenges and tasks. In fact, it's dangerous to do so. When a rude driver cuts you off, you jab your brake pedal and try not to get rear-ended. You don't reflect on the social meaning of the local driving habits. Everyone knows the jokes about stumbling on the sidewalk while looking up at the sky. Really, then, given our vulnerability to the local and im-mediate, what point is there to this long discussion of group minds?

There are times, however, when such reflection is appropriate – times, even, when reading the political barometer can save your life.

For this part of our discussion, the distinction between climate and weather provides a useful metaphor. Weather is the temperature on the thermometer outside your window, the wind now blowing at you, the rain now soaking your jacket. Climate is an average of weather over years and centuries, and also the context in which weather occurs. Weather is what you dress for and take shelter from today. Climate is what you think about in choosing a crop to plant, or in designing a house. In our dealings with other people, climate is the history, context and frequent mood of a group, considered as an ongoing system of relationships. Its 'weather' is the current mindset – the state of things at the moment. While one can distract from the other, and it is difficult to think of both at the same time, there is no question that both are important, and that appropriate attention must be paid to both.

On a larger scale, there have been numerous historical situations when reading the political climate could be a matter of life and death. As a Jew, the example of the [Holocaust](#) comes most readily to my mind, but there have been many other genocides and 'crimes against humanity' that achieved comparable atrocity. I will spare the reader a list; but see the Wikipedia article "[Genocides in history](#)" to feel ashamed, as I sometimes do, of being human. There have been far too many of these campaigns of mass murder, sometimes by act of government, sometimes from the spontaneous hatred and fear between one group and another. In at least some of these cases, it was possible to get out while there was still time, or to take other measures of self-defense. But doing so, of course, depended on accurate reading of the climate and its trends, beyond one's state a given moment.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, and passed their [Nuremberg Laws](#) in 1935, it should have been a warning. Jewish families who got out of Europe in the early Nazi period mostly saved their lives and survived the war. When the lethal political weather came – with [Kristallnacht](#), in November, 1938 – it was already too late. In the next years, most of the Jews in Europe perished.

It is worth emphasis here that knowing what a group intends is not the same as predicting what it will do, still less what the results will be. Groups too are open to surprises. Sometimes sheer chance, or the choices and actions of individuals or sub-groups make a huge difference in the outcome. There was no way that anyone in 1933, after Hitler came to power, could know for sure what would be happening by Kristallnacht in 1938 – or by January, 1942 when the [Wansee conference](#) made the extermination policy official, and enlisted the cooperation of all the relevant agencies of Nazi government. But the general intention of Hitler's Germany might have been clear in 1933 to anyone who had read [his book](#); its readers could then anticipate, if not predict, what was about to happen.

9.1.4 *The Widening Gyre*

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

- *The Second Coming*, William Butler Yeats

My friend John McKeefery, reading and commenting on this book in manuscript, points at what must be the most urgent question about collective mindsets, and tells me that I should address it more explicitly than I have so far done: "Why do some societies, peoples and individuals get over their grievances while others seem unable to do so?" He calls this nurturing of grievances "a form of Irish dementia," and adds that the Irish seem now to be getting over it, while the US and much of the rest of the world is catching it.

We get some kind of answer to my friend's question when we think of individual persons as autonomous beings who may be strongly influenced by the collective mindsets of groups and societies which they themselves comprise and maintain. Sometimes this collective mind encourages civility and mutual respect. Sometimes it works to retain and amplify existing disagreements and divergences of interest. What makes the difference is the direction of a feedback loop (what Yeats called a 'gyre') which may work either to attenuate or to conserve and amplify the signal it is receiving. If the feedback loop is negative – in this case, a signal of divergence of interest, or of a grievance – it will dwindle and be eventually extinguished and forgotten. If the loop is positive, that signal will grow until some tipping point is reached: perhaps a fight, or an end to the relationship. Either way, the centre is not holding. But we have not said, and it is generally impossible to say, exactly how the gyre's 'gain' – the sign and amplitude of its feedback – is set or altered.

In a social system of any size, this gain is the outcome of a suggestive ecology – a network of memes and reciprocal influences too complex for causal analysis. Due to chance and butterfly effects, we cannot tell how this system's gain is going to drift over time. But what we can theorize is that the gain of a social feedback loop (or 'gyre') usually changes either very slowly, or under the stimulus of a large and sudden shock. If the system isn't close to a tipping point, its sign is unlikely to change soon unless something drastic happens (like an economic depression, or an enemy attack or invasion) to flip it from positive to negative, or the other way. When the system *is* near a tipping point, even a relatively small shock may push it into a new state. Or this may happen spontaneously, from no apparent cause at all. Thus, as we

saw in Chapter 6, the assassination of that Austrian archduke was enough to flip Europe, within a month, from peace to total war.

But why had the Serbs been nurturing their grievance, apparently since their defeat in the [Battle of Kosovo](#), fought more than 500 years before, and not even with the Austrians but with the Ottoman Turks? Why had this collective memory been enough to prompt Gavrilo Princip and his collaborators to their deed of futile terrorism – which, in the end was all it was? Why could they not just let their historical memory fade – which would have been so much better for everyone?

We can answer that it was a case of fragile identity, and speculate that something similar is at work in most such instances of cherished grievance. What made the difference was that Princip saw himself, was seen at the time by his fellow Serbs, [and is still seen](#), as a great national hero and not as a sickly, humiliated, nineteen-year-old boy (more like what he really was). Young Gavrilo was already ill with the skeletal tuberculosis [of which he died](#) in prison a few years later. He wanted his life to have some meaning. On his own terms, he succeeded.

This case can be generalized to a principle which does not always hold, but will often do so, A young person (probably male, because men are much more prone than women to this sort of thing) needs some orientation for his life: wants it to have some value and some meaning. Embedded as he is in a given milieu – a group mind with its own strong values, beliefs and wishes – he willingly, ardently, accepts these for himself and decides to build his life (and possibly death) around them. Another boy or girl might find a different purpose and meaning because its suggestions felt stronger for some reason. But when some collective hate or fear or grievance is strongly in the air, it will predictably find takers – at least a few persons who will use it to meet their own needs *by letting it use them* for its own.

The group will nurture such feelings, rather than let them fade away, because they serve systemic functions of group identity and solidarity. As a minding entity in its own right, it will tell stories (not always true ones); it will sing songs; it will erect statues; it will keep the grievance alive in its collective memory because that meme keeps the group together and defines it to itself – and because the few or many persons who are possessed by it become the group's much needed heroes and champions.

Conquered or enslaved peoples, and persecuted minorities too, resort to this tactic often as a defense against assimilation. Muslims are using it a lot these days. Israelis and Jews (my own people) are using it more now – in a vicious circle – as they feel anti-Semitism on the rise again. The Irish may be using it less now, as my friend suggests, because Ireland is doing rather well today, because the Irish identity is easily maintained without it, because the differences between Catholics and Protestants, between Celts and Anglo-

Saxons, matters much less than it used to, and because a self-reinforcing sense of grievance would be self-defeating – as much for the group as for its individual members.

Of course, all this is no more than speculation. But it is subject to the abductive testing of Section 7.1.1, and stands up pretty well so far as I can see.

9.2 Thymos: The Need for Recognition

Greek thinkers conceived the human soul as divided into three parts:

- [*Logos*](#), meaning reason, discourse, and language;
- [*Eros*](#), meaning not just sexual love, but desire in all its forms; and
- [*Thymos*](#), a word translated usually as spirit, or spiritedness, which really has no English equivalent.⁴ It connoted too a person's need for recognition, and it is this secondary meaning that we need.

It is difficult to write about things of the spirit without implying some belief in supernatural entities, but I intend nothing of the sort. We all know what is meant by a spirited horse, or a spirited musical performance. When a Japanese school teacher wants to say “Pay attention!” the phrase she uses means “Place your spirit (*ki*)!” In English, we speak of doing something “half-heartedly,” or “with all one’s heart.” I doubt there is or could be a human culture for which this distinction was meaningless – between the “listless” or “apathetic” and the *spirited*.

I take *spirit* to mean that faculty, possessed by each of us, to focus attention, energy and behavior upon some matter of interest. A person's sphere of interest may be vast or very narrow and self-centered. The logic of [attention](#), this selective directedness of our spirits, is surely one of the deepest questions of psychology.

Thymos, now, as we will use the word, is an involvement of one's spirit with that of others (as in those situations of joint attention, discussed in Section 2.1.2). As well, it is the need for attention and recognition *from* others which binds us into relationships and groups. We all have this *thymos* in some fashion and to some degree. There are some – [Donald Trump](#) is a notable example as I am writing this, just before the US presidential election of 2016 – who prefer negative attention, even rage or contempt to no attention at all. In these people, the thymotic drive seems swollen out of all proportion, to the point of pathology. There are others who seem to fear attention *per se*, even positive attention – who seem to hide or camouflage themselves for self-protection. We don't know much for sure about the thymotic drive. In this sense of 'need for recognition,' psychologists have not given it the study it

⁴ See also Paul Lee's [TED^x talk on thymos](#).

deserves. For that reason, this section must consist largely of question marks and speculation.

Thymos is crucial for us here because of its connection with group embeddedness and participation. Along with the material payoffs – a paycheck, for example – that we gain from our participation in groups, the recognition that groups provide is a reward all by itself, and one of the prime reasons why we form them, join them, and compete for status in them. Thymos is connected too with the need for 'meaning,' that Viktor Frankl wrote about, as recognition from others is one of the prime things that make our lives feel 'meaningful.' Even writers who work alone, essentially talking to themselves or to their word processors, imagine future recognition from their future readers. Even the hermit imagines recognition from God, if not from living persons who will admire their piety and self-denial. The general point is that we join and participate in groups partly for all kinds of material rewards but also for thymotic rewards. We crave the recognition and the sense of meaning that group membership can give. And we allow ourselves to be controlled by our groups, often pushing their values to an extreme, from the thymotic urge work a little harder, push the bar a little higher, just for the recognition and status of having done so. This is why we hold Olympic games, and why athletes train to break records. This is why some religious people compete at lengthy prayer and painful mortification, seeking to prove themselves "holier than thou." For one individual case, thymotic drive must have been a powerful motive for [Benedict Arnold](#), both at the battle of Saratoga, in his treason afterwards, and in fact, throughout his career. More on his story in the next section.

Understanding 'thymos,' then, as a fundamental principle of human existence and sociality, I want to suggest how little we know (so far as I have been able to determine) about its workings.

1) To begin with, we know almost nothing about its physiological basis. Thymos has traditionally been linked with breathing, with the heart and with the so-called [thymus gland](#) (which actually was named for it). Though positioned near the heart and between the lungs, in the region where certain emotions are felt, its known function has to do with the production of T-cells for the [adaptive immune system](#). We really don't know how, or even if, the thymus has any role at all in the making of thymotic personality – the individual in search of recognition and highly tolerant of stress and risk.

2) The thymotic drive must be closely linked with the concept of identity – as an interfacing structure between self and society, and thus "a face to meet the faces that you meet." It may be linked with the role of [sexual selection](#) in evolution. It must be part of the reason why we are sometimes ['our own worst enemies](#),' when we put ourselves under spotlights or take on extra burdens that we could easily have avoided.

3) Where thymotic personalities seem to live for recognition, it sometimes seems to take a negative form where it is linked with shame, self-effacement and excessive modesty. [Emily Dickinson](#), with her famous '[I'm nobody](#)' poem, is an outstanding example. One thinks as well of the Japanese [ninja warriors](#), famous for their invisibility, and of Muslim women, wearing the burqa or [niqaab](#), who make themselves conspicuous through a fetish of modesty.

The connection between thymos and [shame](#) is of the greatest interest here. Silvan Tomkins defined [shame affect](#) as a turning away from temptation. It is a crucial aspect of human sociality, evolved for the control of impulses toward activities pleasurable in themselves which would provoke dangerous opposition from others. But if shame has a physiological basis in this way, what about pride, its opposite? Thymos too may be an affect – a physiological basis of emotion – that Tomkins failed to notice. What exactly is thymos as a component of human sociality? Is it an instinct, an affect, a drive, or what? And what exactly do these mentalistic terms mean, in physiological language?

4) Finally, I suspect (but this is no more than a conjecture) that thymotic needs and feelings are implicated in many cases of depression and suicide, especially in the current epidemic of suicide in the US military and its veterans. Here you have persons trained as warriors – trained to thymotic feelings and behaviors, that is to say – but at the same time, reduced to interchangeable and expendable cogs in a militarized bureaucratic machine. There is an obvious contradiction here, but not one that soldiers or their psychiatrists will be especially keen to recognize. And if they did recognize the contradiction there might not be very much they could do to eliminate it, or even ameliorate it much.

In conclusion here, let me just say that as individual persons, we are embedded in our groups – even extrusions of them – in more ways than we know. From the outset, they stamp us with a language and a culture, they draw us into their games, and thereby teach us a set of values. They supply our vital needs and our desires to some extent, and hold our attentions with their demands and threats, as well as with their thrills and pleasures. In turn, we look to them for recognition and a sense of meaning, and for what Goldstein and Maslow called 'self-actualization' – the drive to realize one's potential. We are not their creatures and still less, their marionettes. From the outset we bring ourselves up, more than our parents raise us. But we could not do so, would not even survive, without their help: without the nourishment and protection (such as it is) that the whole society gives us. If its gifts are less than ideal, they are still much more than have been for others. And still, the danger to individual lives from the toxic choices of this society is very real. We must defend our lives and families if we can, or strive megalothymically to change society itself.

9.3 Choosing to Belong

Groucho Marx famously quipped that he wouldn't want to belong to any club that would have him for a member. That would indeed be a serious problem, and you have to wonder how such a man could tolerate himself.

My own problem – most people's, I think – is to find a club where the feeling of attraction is mutual: where you want to belong, and where the club wants you. Just as attraction between two people may or may not be reciprocated, so attraction to an existing group may not be mutual. Some groups welcome everyone, while others are highly selective and/or biased against certain classes of applicant. Some groups use violence or the threat of it to hold their members, and attempt to kill anyone who tries to leave. Sometimes an individual can get a reluctant group to accept them, by sheer persistence or resort to law.

In what follows, I want to consider just the straightforward case of belonging that is voluntary in both directions. You have freely joined a group, but are free to leave at any time. The group has freely accepted you as a member, but could change its mind, or expel you for cause – that is to say, for violating its norms or rules, and/or your own specific role. There is thus a voluntary relationship between the member and the group. So long as this is so, we find the relational situation discussed in Section above in Section 2.2.1, where your behavior toward the group, and its toward you are shaped and guided by the understandings negotiated between you.

These understandings may be set down explicitly in a written contract, or may be a matter of long-standing custom or habit. They may have been negotiated definitively beforehand or continually re-negotiated from time-to-time or on the fly. What is of interest here is that the pure game-theoretic case of methodological individualism (MI) does not apply. Your values and desires – and thus, to some extent, your very identity – are partly a function of your belonging and participation in this group.

As discussed early on,⁵ human identities are anchored not just by the genome, physiology and temperament of our physical bodies, but by our relationships with other people and our participation in certain groups – beginning with our natal families, of course. Over a lifetime they get shaped by all that we experience, but partly by our memberships and affiliations in our various groups. Inevitably, most of us define their own identities by such memberships and affiliations, and we all do this to some extent. But some of us 'fall between the cracks' so to speak, and end up with multiple identities and thus ambiguous ones.

A group typically plays a specific game (or games) with nature and with other groups; and the moods of these games vary. Some are largely

⁵ In Section 2.3.2 to be exact.

cooperative, but others are mostly adversarial and hostile. But all such relationships are politicious as we have seen,⁶ with some mixed bag of common and conflicting interests. Belonging to a group, we are drawn willy-nilly into the games it plays and into its relationships with nature and with other groups. We learn to see things as our group sees them, and to feel about them as it does. As we belong to more than one group, playing more than one game, ambivalence and dissidence are possible – with all the risks and potential penalties these may incur. And with a corresponding potential for creativity and constructive criticism. There is a fascinating book – [*Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides and Survivors*](#), by a linguist and historian named Frances Karttunen – which recounts sixteen such lives, of persons thoroughly socialized for two different cultures, and thus at home in neither.

What we understand, then, is that human autonomy is real but limited – not only physically, but culturally as well. In some very real sense, we do not just belong, but find ourselves *lived by* the groups that we belong to and the games we play. We are shaped by our group and their games, and once we're in, we're in.

The broad conclusion is that group membership is a politicious relationship, with existential payoffs and opportunity costs for the individual – and also for the group, to some extent, though more for small groups than for large ones. The group needs members who will contribute and can be used. For the individual, the big pay-off is to find what [Carlos Castaneda's teacher](#) called "[a path with a heart](#)": participation in a group that stimulates and nourishes – a game you can play joyfully and with devotion.

9.4 The Social Experience

Further to Chapter 2's discussion of our unsocial sociability: While it is true that our identities are what make us the people that we are, they are not essential traits that we were born with. The genome and its anatomical and temperamental expression are biological givens, but all the social features of identity come later and are subject to change. Sometimes they do change, and very drastically. What calls for explanation, then, is how stable most identities become once they have been built.

Identity is a solution to the problematic of one's life, but it is not intrinsically a stable solution. Lovers break up and move on to other relationships. People change jobs and whole careers. True believers have conversion experiences and change their convictions and loyalties. We are always being pulled and bent (for better and for worse) by our encounters with groups and other persons, and with life itself; and for that reason, biology aside, our identities would be quite unstable if they were not so strongly anchored and defended. They are anchored by our living arrangements and

⁶ In Section 2.2.5.

our social commitments. They are defended by such cognitive mechanisms as [denial](#), [repression](#) and [cognitive dissonance](#). And these defenses sometimes fail. We succumb to impulse, temptation and self-serving suggestions from the advertising industry. We are frustrated in our plans and projects by circumstance, and by the opposition of others. We get bored when things go too easily, and go looking for some excitement in our lives.

However, though our identities are constantly being threatened in such ways, they can usually protect themselves with a kind of '[sour grapes](#)' defense which does not deserve the bad name that Aesop gave it: This defense is, in fact, a formula for contentment and relative stability: If we cannot always have what we want, we can learn to want what we have – and to not want what is out of reach.

We are shaped by our social worlds, but then tugged away from whatever personal balance we have found as we encounter other persons who are similarly pulled and jostled by us. And although identities are sometimes perturbed and altered, they can usually restore themselves in most respects, though in others, there is a permanent change. Anyone who has been married and then divorced knows the 're-centering effect' of this separation – the re-emergence of individual tastes and habits, after a period of merger and compromise with the significant other. At the same time, if the relationship was at all significant, this re-centering is not complete. Memories remain, experience is expanded; identity is shifted.

From any individual's perspective, the whole of social experience can be seen in these terms: We orbit around in whatever identity we have established for ourselves, but we are perturbed in doing so by situations that arise. Sometimes, we are perturbed so much that our identities must change quite radically – reform themselves around some new [attractor](#)⁷ in a way that may be shocking or really threatening to other people.

Seeking an example of the endless dance of an identity in its society, I have chosen [Benedict Arnold](#), hero and traitor of the American revolution, because his story is fascinating for its own sake, and because its facts are well-established and readily available. His life displays the interplay between identity, collective mind, and circumstance remarkably well. We will see how Arnold's identity – both in his lifetime and as he is remembered today – was shaped by suggestive influence from various groups, including some of which he was not even a member.

Arnold was a very able man, and he was a man on the make. He was born in 1741, in Norwich, Connecticut, to a father of the same name who was a prosperous and prominent merchant at the time. His great-grandfather, also of that name had been an early governor of Rhode Island colony. On his mother's side, he was a descendant of one [John Lothrop](#), ancestor to at least six future

⁷ See Section B.1 on temporal patterns (in Appendix B).

presidents, and many other distinguished Americans. We understand, therefore, that he was born to honor and wealth, into a family that must have been held in the highest esteem by Connecticut society. From this family and the Connecticut society of his time, he drew an expectation and inner need for status and high living that was to drive his career throughout.

At puberty, however, young Benedict's expectations were shattered. Several of his siblings died of Yellow Fever and his father became an alcoholic and went broke. Through his mother's family connections, he entered into an apprenticeship with two of her cousins, Joshua and Daniel Lathrop who ran a successful apothecary and did a general merchandise business. When war broke out with the French in 1755, when he was 14, he tried to enlist in the provincial militia but could not get his mother's permission. Two years later he did enlist, marching off with his company toward Lake George and Albany; but his service on this occasion lasted only 13 days. The French took [Fort William Henry](#), their Indian allies massacred and scalped its defenders, and Arnold's column turned around and went home, back to his apprenticeship.

His mother died in 1759, and his father died two years later. In 1762, with money borrowed from his Lathrop relatives, Arnold set up as an apothecary and bookseller in New Haven. His business prospered, and in 1763, he repaid his debt to the Lathrops. In 1764, having learned to sail on previous trading voyages with his father, with a partner he bought three ships and established a lucrative trade to the West Indies – bringing his sister Hannah into the business to manage it while he was away. On one of his voyages he fought a duel, and wounded his opponent. We have the picture of a versatile, adventurous and fearless man primed for success and wealth, if not for greatness, so long as his luck held.

At this point, history began to overtake him. Relations between the British and their colonies [deteriorated swiftly](#): When the French and Indian War ended, in 1763, there was no thought of separation. Only 12 years later, in 1775, the American revolution got started; and next year, the [Declaration of Independence](#) was signed in a remarkably swift breakdown of collective identity.

The British, having incurred huge expenses defending their colonists against the French and Indians, felt that the latter should help defray those costs. Unfortunately, the new taxes that they saw fit to levy were almost designed to turn their erstwhile friends and cousins into enemies. The Stamp Act of 1765, imposing tax on all printed materials, annoyed especially the merchants and the lawyers – two groups who were well-positioned to resist and rally support. Also, in 1763, the British government had issued an edict forbidding settlement west of the Alleghenies, which angered both speculators, prospective settlers.

Another grievance, especially with those colonial lawyers, was the British Parliament's insistence on its right to impose taxes on the colonies without colonial representation in that body. "*No taxation without representation*" made a great slogan, and fine trigger for the revolution that followed. Barbara Tuchman tells the story very well in her book (chiefly about the Viet Nam war) called *The March of Folly* – reviewing four cases in which the political thought process conspicuously failed.

As a merchant operating trading vessels between Boston and the West Indies, Arnold was much affected by these developments. By 1754, he was active in the opposition underground. Soon he joined (and may have helped to organize) a local chapter of the [Sons of Liberty](#), a secret society engaged in propaganda and violent protest against the repressive British legislation, which made a practice [applying tar and feathers](#) to unpopular British officials, and which 'gave' the famous [Boston Tea Party](#). He also joined the Connecticut militia, and was elected to the rank of captain in this one month before the [outbreak of war](#) at Lexington and Concord in April, 1775.

Thus, when the revolution broke out, Arnold was already a soldier, with a taste for the military life. Swept along by the logic of events, he was soon to show outstanding talent also; and he quickly gained a reputation for physical courage, leadership skills and strategic genius – leading a (failed) invasion of Quebec,⁸ actions like the [capture of Fort Ticonderoga](#) in 1775, the [naval Battle of Valcour Island](#) on Lake Champlain in 1776 (which delayed the British invasion from Canada by a full year), the [Battle of Ridgefield](#), Connecticut (after which he was promoted to major general), operations in relief of [Fort Stanwix](#), and brilliant participation and generalship in the [battles at Saratoga](#) in 1777, where he suffered a severe leg wound that left him unable to ride a horse for several years.

With all his gifts, however, and with this now enormous reputation, Arnold also had some fatal flaws. He was contentious, proud and jealous of his standing. He could not take even friendly criticism, and saw conspiracies (often quite rightly) from every direction. He was no kind of politician; he made enemies unnecessarily, and he held grudges for years. These traits led him into endless conflicts, both with fellow generals in the Army and with the Continental Congress, causing him several times to be passed over for promotion.

Washington who knew Arnold's qualities and valued them, tried to soothe Arnold's resentment, but the latter by this point was bitter and dis-illusioned with the cause of independence and with the new nation's capabilities for self-government. He also disliked the French who had just come into the war on the American side. When Arnold sought to resign his commission and go

⁸ Not so much a land grab as an attempt to expand the revolution, and to protect the 13 seaboard colonies from invasion on their northern flank.

home, Washington appointed him to the military command of Philadelphia, a key city on the American seaboard, and a hotbed of Loyalist sympathy. This was to prove a disastrous decision, even a tragic one, as it led directly to Arnold's treason.

Up to this point, Philadelphia had been held by the British. It had been the comfortable headquarters of General Howe during the terrible winter of 1777 while Washington's little army was starving and freezing at Valley Forge. But 1778 marked a turning point in the war. After Saratoga, the French recognized American independence and signed a formal Franco-American Alliance under which they contributed money and supplies to the American cause and launched a naval campaign (which was eventually to win the war) against their old enemy, Great Britain. In response, the British had to revise their strategy. Facing the French naval threat, Howe abandoned Philadelphia to reinforce New York. But even before the British withdrew from Philadelphia in June, Arnold had begun planning to exploit his command there for personal gain.

At that time, a degree of corruption was standard practice, more or less, especially given that the Congress was slow about paying its officers and troops. Arnold, in particular, had neglected his business and spent quite a lot of money out of his own pocket to buy supplies for his men. When he was brought up on charges by powerful local enemies, he felt hard done by. In May of 1779 he wrote to Washington, "Having become a cripple in the service of my country, I little expected to meet [such] ungrateful returns." In the court martial that followed, he was acquitted of all but two minor charges.

But already in 1778, there had been signs that Arnold was angry and unhappy, and pessimistic about the country's future. In November of that year, he wrote a letter to General Nathaniel Greene lamenting the "deplorable" and "horrid" situation of the country at that moment, citing the depreciating currency, disaffection of the army, and internal fighting in Congress, and predicting "impending ruin" if things did not soon change. Also, hostile as he was to the French and to Catholicism, he must have been less than overjoyed that they were entering the war on the American side.

In Philadelphia, Arnold lived extravagantly, was a prominent figure on its social scene, and associated freely with some known Tories (as Loyalist sympathizers were called). In that summer of 1778, he met [Peggy Shippen](#), the fourth daughter of Judge Edward Shippen who had attempted to stay neutral but had done business with the British while they occupied the city, and had opposed the new [Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776](#), which sought to reduce the hold on government by powerful families (like the Shippens). A widower already for several years, Arnold courted the lovely 18-year-old Peggy and, in April 1779, they were married. But Peggy had also been courted by the British Major [John André](#) during their occupation of Philadelphia.

Major André was an adjudant on the staff of Sir Henry Clinton, General Howe's successor and the new British Commander in Chief; he had been placed in charge of military intelligence. Through Peggy and some other persons, he opened a negotiation with Arnold who was living extravagantly in Philadelphia, in need of money, and already seeking to defect. In this little circle, the West Point conspiracy developed. We don't know whose idea it was, but absent this opportunity, Arnold might never have become a traitor. Also, in the summer of 1780 when Arnold made his final choice to defect, it was anything but clear that the war for independence would eventually be won. Indeed, it seemed likely that the cause would fail. The British surrender a year later at Yorktown was largely due to support from the French and even the Spanish and Dutch, whose effectiveness Arnold could not have foreseen.

At that time, [West Point](#) was a key fort controlling passage up the Hudson River. Its surrender to the British would have been of great military value to them, and a great loss to the Americans. By the end of June, 1780, after the Philadelphia scandal, Arnold had persuaded [Washington, long a friend and supporter of his](#), to put him in command of that fort; promptly arranging through Major André to turn it over to the British for £20,000 and a commission as Brigadier General in the British Army. We can skip [the details](#) of how this plot failed. John André was captured with incriminating documents and hanged as a spy. [Arnold escaped](#), took up his British commission, and spent the rest of the war fighting for them first in Virginia and then in Connecticut. After the British surrender at Yorktown, in 1781, Arnold and his family boarded ship and moved to England. Between that time and his death twenty years later, he lobbied for a succession of major assignments and was denied each time – chronically disliked and chronically short of money. In 1785, [he came to Canada](#) for a few years, speculating in land and again establishing a trading business with the West Indies. But again he made enemies. There was a nasty lawsuit; there is even a story, probably fiction,⁹ that a mob in St John, New Brunswick burned him in effigy with a sign 'Traitor!' around the dummy's neck. Arnold and his family returned to London in 1791, where he died ten years later and Peggy a few years after that.

Human social experience has often been seen as tragedy – a drama of greatness undermined by a [tragic flaw](#). This surely applies to Benedict Arnold, though in his case there was not one flaw but several. This must be so for all of us, though rarely for such big stakes. It's really too bad that he guessed wrong about the revolution's outcome.

Except by historians, Arnold is mostly remembered as an egregious traitor, though his generalship at Saratoga is remembered with a monument to his

⁹ See *Benedict Arnold: A Traitor In Our Midst* by Barry K. Wilson (2001) pp. 208-214, which offers a Canadian perspective on Arnold's career.

shattered leg (the so-called [Boot Monument](#)) which does not mention his name. And there is also a story that during his campaign in Virginia, he once asked a prisoner-of-war what would be done with him if he were captured. To which the reply came, "They would cut off the leg that was wounded at Saratoga and bury it with the honors of war. The rest of you they would hang on a gibbet."

* * * * *

We can see Arnold as a self-interested agent; we can see him as a creature of the context in which he lived; or we can see him (as this book suggests) as an interlocutor with various groups and individuals. What is at stake in this choice of perspective? Just how are these three paradigms different?

To see him just as an agent leaves unexplained how he became the man he was. It pins all the responsibility on him and allows us to blame him as an evil person. It makes us see our social existence as a game awarding different pay-offs to its various players as a function of the choices that *all of them* make.

To see him entirely as a creature of his world and context absolves him too completely, and leaves unasked why other persons in similar circumstances have chosen very differently. It dissolves all notions of moral responsibility and turns the perp into a victim.

But finally, to see Arnold as an intentional, minding system formed by a history of engagement and dialogue with other such systems (collective minds and individual ones) affords an altogether more nuanced view with many additional questions and some answers. First, this intentionalist paradigm¹⁰ opens the question of Arnold's complicity in his own life-world. He did not, after all, just take it as he found it – merely responding to his circumstances. Within the overall drift of history, and after age 13 (when he was apprenticed with the Lathrops), he largely made the context of his life, as we have seen. He could have wasted the opportunity, and not laid the foundation of any career. He could have remained in New Haven as a prosperous apothecary and bookseller. In the event, with the purchase of his first ships, he put himself on a much larger stage, with a large stake in colonial politics.

Next, our mentalist approach opens a speculation, which cuts beneath the facts of Arnold's history, on the *meanings* of the choices he made and were made by others. This man became first a wealthy merchant, then a brilliant soldier, then a traitor, and then a land speculator and businessman again. After the British surrender at Yorktown, he moved to London, England, then to New Brunswick, Canada, then back to London again. We can ask why he undertook these changes, and why Peggy Shippen stayed with him. Conversely we can ask what Arnold's personality and behavior meant to the

¹⁰ See our introduction to the paradigm of group intentionalism in Section 1.4.1.

groups and individuals connected with him: e.g. to other business firms and persons, to various military units and their officers; to the soldiers who served under him; to the Continental Congress; to Generals Gates and Schuyler at Saratoga; to George Washington with his staff; and to Sir Henry Clinton with his. All of these had occasion to wonder what Benedict Arnold was up to, what he was likely to do next, and how to deal with him. Of course, these are questions that historians ask anyway, but with less theoretical justification for doing so. Asking them more technically and with greater confidence, may lead these scholars to deeper analyses where the intentions of groups are concerned.

Finally, our approach takes note that Arnold's life still has significance for us – and not just as a fascinating biography, but as a commentary and a warning. His story resonates with that of [Alcibiades](#) and [Belisarius](#) in ancient times and that of [Douglas MacArthur](#) more recently. (Not to say that Belisarius and MacArthur were traitors. They were not.) But their stories, Arnold's most strikingly, warn us about the potential for trouble between such [megalothymic](#) military leaders and the civilian polity and its ruler. In a truly civilized world, a career and life like Arnold's would scarcely have been possible, nor could so many other lives have fallen under his shadow. In a truly civilized world, the problem of self-defense by peaceful persons against such [megalothymic](#) ones would be foreseen and solved.¹¹ One sad fact is that unless such people can be tamed and harnessed by the social order, great men and women will sometimes be a menace to those around them.

11 As Bernard Shaw pointed out in his play, [The Millionairess](#), made into [a film](#) with Peter Sellers and Sophia Loren.