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NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

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NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

The following discussion was recorded on 18 March 1958 as part of the series 'The Fifty-One Society'. It was transmitted on the BBC Home Service on 26 March 1958. The presenter was Niel Pearson and the producer Kenneth Brown. It is sometimes referred to in the BBC Archives as 'The Social Inequality of Nations' or 'Stereotypes'. This transcript, made by Henry Hardy from the recording, has been only lightly edited, to achieve basic readability. The spellings of the names of some of the participants may be incorrect.

NIEL PEARSON ... in the University of Oxford. His subject is 'National Superiority and Inferiority', and he is a person whom it's a delight to listen to upon any subject. Sir Isaiah.

ISAIAH BERLIN Thank you very much. I ought really to apologise to you, Mr Chairman and everyone. I've got no thesis to offer – it's a sociological or psychological kind of set of remarks which I wish to deliver. I am not a sociologist or a psychologist. I speak in extreme ignorance and want to offer this only as a sort of collection of impressions which I've formed on a topic which interests me. And that is about the fact that various countries or nations appear to have a kind of collective class-consciousness, if you like, which is not unlike that of individuals. We are a very class-conscious country and everyone knows what that means. People in this country, on the whole, tend to think of themselves as belonging to this or that class, and this modifies their political and their social behaviour. One knows what that means by contrast with a country like, say, the United States, which has, of course, deep social divisions but where one knows that very few people, for example, think of themselves as belonging to the lower classes or the working classes. Whatever they may in fact belong to, they don't think of themselves as that, and therefore any appeal to them, as, for example, members of the working class, or as the poor against the rich, falls flat, because whatever the reality may be, this isn't their image of themselves, and obviously, however images are born in people's breasts, once they are born, they have a very profound effect on the people's behaviour.

What I should like to propound is the view that this is also true of nations as well as individuals; that, for example, all countries have a certain image of themselves. They usually think very well of themselves; almost all countries think that they are simple, honest,

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

decent, rather puzzled human beings in danger of being misled by a lot of cunning, sophisticated, wicked foreigners. This is an image which the Americans have of themselves, it's an image which the French have of themselves, even, vis-à-vis the English, it's a vision which the English have of themselves vis-à-vis the French, it's the image the Russians in the nineteenth century had of themselves vis-à-vis Europeans. It's an image with which people start, and this kind of image tends to be to some extent modified by the opinion of them which other people hold. For example, in the eighteenth century the Germans, having been defeated by the French, were much despised, and began to despise themselves. In the nineteenth century the Russians were much despised for their barbarism and began to have acute fits of enormous national self-pity, which were of course, in due course, followed by extreme fits of national exasperated pride. You start by accepting other people's opinion of yourself, and then some people will always try to make out that the thing which other people think ill in you is in fact an enormous virtue in you – I mean, other people think it's bad of you to be barbarous, ill-educated and savage, whereas you say, well, at any rate we are not smooth, polite, sophisticated, stuffy, formalistic: at least we have some kind of passionate and spontaneous attitude to the world which our detractors have not. And so the image people have of themselves is formed partly by what they think of themselves, partly by a kind of refracted version of what other people think of them.

These images tend to change with extreme abruptness. If you think, for example, of the French and the Germans as they were thought of, say, in about 1845 or 1855, and again, say, in 1875: if you take the earlier date, the French were thought of as a very gallant, swashbuckling nation of soldiers with enormous twirling mustachios, gallant with ladies, very immoral, full of imagination, with civilised values, dashing, dangerous and on top of the world. Whereas the Germans were thought of as a pedantic, rather boring nation, comical, full of professors who were occupied with all kinds of unimportant and pedantic and tedious subjects, laughing-stocks on the whole, and no danger to anybody. Then if you look at exactly this picture in 1880 you get the Germans, suddenly, as a kind of marching army of Prussians, extremely rigid, extremely well-disciplined, very terrifying, whereas the French have become a collection of very defenceless, rather neurotic persons, repositories

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

of an ancient and important culture who must on all accounts be protected against barbarous onslaughts from without.

And the same thing happens to other people. It's happened to all kinds of other nations. It's happened to the Russians, for example, who from having had a sort of mystical Slav soul in the late nineteenth century have suddenly turned into a kind of – Martians, almost, in some people's imaginations now; very very quickly, too. This has happened to the Turks: if you think of what the Turks were like in 1910 and what the Turks are thought of as now, you will find the image is totally different.

Well, this business about how nations think of themselves and how others think of them also has a certain relevance to how they react to others, obviously, and if they find themselves in the inferior portion of this apparently widely accepted social scale of precedence – I don't know what else to call it – they tend to react accordingly. I remember very well when I was in America in 1940 I had dealings with various groups of immigrants, and I talked to an immigrant, I think an Italian immigrant, about somebody else, who was in fact a Swede, and he was talking about immigrants, and I said something about my Swedish friend, and he seemed to look up to him rather, and I said, 'Isn't he an immigrant too?', and he said, 'Ah yes, he is an immigrant, but he comes from one of those classy countries.' And I suddenly realised there was a deep image in my Italian's mind, certainly, between classy and non-classy countries from which you might come. And there was a terrific difference of status, even though you might be a poor immigrant in both cases. Classy countries, roughly, were, I suppose, the British Isles, not Ireland – Northern Ireland, perhaps, Southern Ireland certainly not – Scandinavia, Holland, Germany. Everything else was non-classy, at least less classy, in graduated stages. Certainly central Europe was not classy, certainly Italy was not, and once you got to countries East and South of that they became totally classless, so that they were in no class at all. And this is the kind of thing – I mean, this is of course how the Americans, and indeed the Canadians, too, organise their quota system, to some extent, a little bit in accordance with this. And I have a feeling that this is a thing which is very deep in people's imagination, and affects them at least as much as, for example, economic considerations, or political ambitions, or other factors which are regarded as frightfully important in determining national conduct;

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

and that, for example, the Benidorm Conference of the Afro-Asian nations is to some extent created by the common sense of, I suppose one ought to call it, social inferiority versus the West, which isn't entirely to do with just imperialism or being done in at some earlier stage of their life, it's something to do with their general social status, so that even Americans, who imagine that when they come and explain that they have never been imperialistic, they've never oppressed these nations, that they don't come to exploit, they merely come to help, which they say with the greatest possible sincerity and goodwill – find to their own surprise that they are treated exactly as if they had been these wicked imperialistic Englishmen, because it's not a matter of careful memories of past history or of expediency, it's a matter of their accent, their looks, the kind of looks on their faces, the colour of their hair, the colour of their eyes, the way they get up and sit down – it's some sort of complex of qualities towards which these people react exactly as class-conscious persons react to other class-conscious persons in their own society. And this curious fact, that there should be this class-consciousness among nations, seems to me important, because obviously what nations want is equality of status, and I think this desire for equality of status, which is the same, I suppose, as nationalism, at some stage, which can of course take very aggressive and ugly forms, is it seems to me a very very deep thing in them and isn't cured by a lot of persons coming to them with, for example, offers of help, or offers of aid, because if it's awful to be bullied, if it's awful to be treated as Indians, say, were treated in E. M. Forster's *Passage to India*, in this sort of obviously cold-hearted and snubbing way in which the Englishmen of that novel, or the majority of them, treat the Indians, it's also awful to have people who say 'We have come to help you' in a kind of Boy Scout spirit, an extreme benevolent patronage, in which people come – because you must be very, very pathetic, and very, very degraded, or hardly conscious of your status at all, if that helps you. In the end you may accept the help, but you dislike the helper, and therefore it seems to me that there is a Scylla and a Charybdis. There is a Scylla of not bullying people, or not sitting on them, or not governing them, or not being nasty to them, and there is also a Charybdis of not being over-nice to them, not coming to them with an open heart and seeking somehow to be a sort of missionary among them. I think the old

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

missionaries were all right because they didn't think about themselves at all, they thought that there was a certain truth which they wanted to inculcate, and they had no sense of inferiority or superiority to the people they were preaching to, but when people with economic help or political help, or all kinds of benevolent persons from the West, come among, let us say, Arabs or the Negroes of Africa, or whatever it may be, there is a kind of natural desire, there is a kind of attitude on their part of wishing to bring them up to their own status in some way, no doubt for these people's good, and this ultimately produces resentment. It ultimately produces, possibly at first gratitude, but later extremely wounded feelings, and therefore it seems to me that this is a factor which perhaps hasn't been sufficiently noticed in the dealings between nations.

ERIC JAMES Aren't we dealing here simply with the tendency of any group of people to encourage their own loyalty by forming an image, both of their enemies and of themselves? I mean, nationalism is, as Sir Isaiah says, of course, moderately recent, but before that you've had regional affiliations, even villages. The men from the next village are like this. You get it in England today, of course: the Northerner has this picture of the effete Southerner and the Southerner has the picture of the Northerner more or less covered with hair, and so on, you see, and any community, it seems to me – it merely is, surely, that the nation for certain purposes is the unit, and it naturally forms this image of itself or of its opponents. I mean, where do we go from here, as it were? That's really what I ...

BERLIN What's also quite interesting, I think, is that this image is formed not only by people of themselves, in terms of their own images, but to some extent under the influence of the opinion of them held by others. This happens on a national scale.

JAMES Oh, I think that's quite true: it's certainly true of Northerners.

BERLIN Well, it's true of the Russians in the nineteenth century, who spent their time in writing novels about the appalling

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

condition they were in, and apologising to the West or else being aggressively non-apologetic.

JAMES It's not a phenomenon of nationalism, is it, at all? It's a phenomenon of any group of human beings. I don't know what Max Gluckman ...

BERLIN Oh yes, I think that it is ...

PEARSON Just one thing: I don't think this evening it's necessary to go anywhere. Otherwise – you asked where we were going – you don't want to go anywhere ...

BERLIN Not a bit, not a bit. (*laughter*)

PEARSON That was a question not expecting an answer, actually. (*talking together*)

MAX GLUCKMAN Sir Eric has appealed to me. Isn't it that problems of relations between groups are always very complex and in order to handle them groups tend to simplify them, and they simplify them by forming a stereotype of the other group to which they react?

But I think I'd like to complicate the problem by suggesting that they form a series of stereotypes, some of which contradict one another, so that while we may think of the French as effete, neurotic and civilised – I don't know why Sir Isaiah thinks that 'civilised' must necessarily imply being effete and neurotic at the same time (BERLIN Oh, I don't, I don't, I don't – just de facto so) – we may also at the same time think of them as gallant, brave, courageous soldiers, and the stereotype that comes to play at any one moment depends upon the reality of our actual relations with them at any one moment, so that the picture which we've held of the Russians, say, during the last twenty years could change rapidly according with the actually existing realities of our present political relations with them. Similarly, our picture of the Americans might change from moment to moment: we might at one moment regard them as powerful, skilled people, coming to our aid, and the next moment as bombastic people who were boastful of their triumphs, which we have won, in Burma, judging by their films, and so on.

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

So I think there are a whole series of stereotypes, which simplify the reaction in any specific political situation, and those that come into play at any one moment are determined by the realities of the political situation, which are realities with which the nation has to deal.

Now we can't handle political situations if we think of the other group with which we are involved in terms of all the complexities of differentiated personal relations, and we oversimplify every situation, except for a few of us. And those few of us are not good citizens, because we realise that not all Germans are bad, not all Americans are bad, not all Russians are bad. There may be something to be said for Russia; there may be something to be said for America; there may be even something to be said for South Africans.

DENNIS CHAPMAN Mr Chairman, I wonder if I could just ask Max Gluckman a question. He said they come into play. I mean, is this a sort of spontaneous activity, self-generated, or what did he mean – these selective stereotypes?

GLUCKMAN I think the situation itself actually – if we move into a new relationship with a particular country, as we have with Germany, it produces the picture of the angels of Munich, which we in Manchester are so conscious of at the moment, and the picture of our relations with the Germans, which existed for nine years, may go out of play. Well, if we were to go to war with Germany again, the angels of Munich might be very quickly forgotten.

PEARSON Dennis Chapman, does that satisfy you as an explanation?

CHAPMAN Well, I just wondered whether or not things like the Ministry of Information that I once worked for, or the Foreign Office hand-outs, or something in the Establishment didn't in fact play a part in, for example, changing our image of the gallant, heroic defender of Stalingrad.

GLUCKMAN Very little. You remember Francis Cornford's definition of propaganda, as that branch of the art of lying which

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

consists in not deceiving your enemies and quite deceiving your friends.

VICTOR WISEMAN Chairman, I am not so sure about this. You see, one goes back to the few years before 1914 when all the hate-complex was being developed about Germany, and we were given a picture of Germany which would justify the fact that ultimately we were obviously going to war with her. Now I think it was one of the owners of the popular press who said, 'The people like a good hate, and we are going to give 'em one', and they gave them one in the form of Germany. And it seems to me that Dennis Chapman is on to something here, when he implies that the stereotype that we see of other nations is to a large extent artificial, and may be induced by those who, for various reasons of their own, want us to see the other nations in the form of this stereotype; and equally it seems to me that we're asked to see ourselves in the form of a particular stereotype, when it suits all the organs of publicity and propaganda to do so. On this point, for instance, I'd very much like to hear Sir Isaiah on this popular conception that we ought to be thinking in terms of a new Elizabethan Age, you see, as though there's something in common between Elizabethan England as it was three hundred years ago and what we are today. I mean, who produces this stereotype, why do we accept it?

PEARSON Have you any views about the new Elizabethan Age?

BERLIN I've got no views about the new Elizabethan Age (PEARSON Good!), but just in connection with that I don't think these induced sentiments are necessarily produced for sinister reasons or for pure reasons of, say, political expediency. Sometimes they are. But you see, for example, the American image of China is quite an interesting case in point. This is largely produced by Chinese missionaries, who are good people, fond of the Chinese, who certainly bred in the Americans – certainly when I first went there in 1940–41 – a sort of picture of a nation entirely touched with grace, almost a community of saints. And then of course the disappointment when they went Communist was the most violent upheaval in the American consciousness. That I don't think was induced by anybody for any particular ...

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

WISEMAN Well, surely the stereotype that the American has of the Communist government in China now has some connection with the China lobby?

BERLIN Some connection, certainly, but I think that the China lobby would have had nothing to build on if there hadn't been an appalling sense of let-down from the Americans, which was a natural development.

GLUCKMAN A great sense of disappointment. The Chinese, who had always been their allies, were now their enemies.

BERLIN Oh, and wonderful people, and unrequited love is the most horrid of sentiments.

PETER HILTON Mr Chairman, your remark to Sir Eric James when he put his rhetorical question, 'Where do we go from here?', shows that you, like I, are lulled into this cosy Oxford Senior Common Room atmosphere which Sir Isaiah Berlin has so skilfully engendered for us, that here we are calmly and with all the time in world, knowing the future is on our side, discussing this question; and I want to play an uncharacteristic role of throwing a few spanners in the works. At least I want my remarks to have the function and the quality that if they're not true, they will be false, and that I won't be simply sort of reminiscing about my experiences of some nation or another; I won't be tempted to describe what I discovered in Switzerland for example, about what the Swiss think of themselves.

CHAPMAN Why not? You raise our expectations.

HILTON Well, you know the answer, don't you, Dennis? I want to say first of all that I disagree hotly with Sir Isaiah when he says that nations want equality of status. This seems to me to be absolute nonsense. Surely it's only the nations that regard themselves as inferior who want equality of status, and they want this only as a stepping-stone to superiority; and isn't it a fact about the relationships between nations today that they're all seeking

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

superiority to each other, and isn't this an extremely unstable situation?

I also want to ask three questions, which I suppose you could regard as rhetorical, but I hope you won't. First of all, is it not perhaps the case that what one nation thinks of another is very largely a product of that other nation's economic prosperity? If you take Sir Isaiah's example of the Italian and the Swede, isn't it probably, to some extent, due to the fact of Swedish prosperity that the Italian takes this view? And as to what a nation thinks of itself, to how great an extent is this conditioned, firstly by a conviction that the nation has a monopoly of culture, and secondly by the conviction that the members of that nation are able rather effectively to control their sexual appetites? Because it has appeared to me, in my own unprofessional study of this question, that the attitude which we take towards the Italians and the Spanish and the Mediterranean peoples is very largely due to the fact that we don't show our emotions very much and we like to think we don't have the sort of fierce emotions which these rather primitive people do have. I would rather like to have Sir Isaiah and members' views on this question of whether the factors which I've brought forward are considerable or not.

PEARSON Well, that was a jolly good effort at being red-brick. Thank you very much. (*laughter*)

HILTON I come from the same university as Sir Isaiah.

PEARSON Oh, we know that, we know that!

BERLIN I don't believe that all nations who seek equality seek superiority. Some do, some don't. I think you go perhaps a little too far. I don't know that the poor Latvians, the poor Estonians, when they became independent States, sought superiority to anybody terribly.

HILTON If I may just intermit: if all want equality and some want superiority, mustn't this be an unstable situation?

BERLIN Ah, but I wouldn't be denying that our situation is unstable, whatever happens. I'm not at all suggesting that the

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

search for equality leads to stable situations or even that it's possible. All I was wanting to do was to constate that this is in fact what people want, very very badly indeed. And to give them quite different things, such as economic prosperity or other blessings, won't satisfy them, and this is a kind of root, that's all I really wanted to say, not that it's a thing which is likely to make for peace, necessarily. Then I quite agree with you, I think, about the last point, about the fact that repressed and continent nations despise unrepressed and incontinent ones, but this is returned with enormous (*laughter and inaudible talk*) ... I mean, think of what the view is of the English on the part of, let us say, Frenchmen, who are liable to a greater degree of self-expression. The contempt for the sort of cold, boring and inward-looking Englishman is at least as great as our extreme shock at these violent public exhibitions on the part of the ill-educated persons of the South.

PEARSON And much better expressed.

BERLIN And a great deal more articulate, yes.

RON LLOYD I think, Mr Chairman, it's fascinating to try to find out just what are the sorts of pressures that produce these stereotypes, and stereotypes not only between one country and another but within a society, the way in which we have them as far as social and class distinctions are concerned and as regards religion as well. I can remember a schoolmistress not very long ago who always divided the entire population of the British Isles into whether they were Bushey or Vere de Vere. I heard the other day of a staunch Ulster Protestant who was told by his doctor that he had only six months to live, and three months afterwards he suddenly joined the Roman Catholic Church, and when his friends protested and asked him why he'd done it, 'Well,' he said, 'I think it's a lot better that one of them should die than one of us.' (*laughter*) I think that if you carry this a little further and you turn to source-books like, for example, Drummond and the Sapper books – and John Buchan runs him a pretty close second – you find a wonderfully rich mine of stereotypes. Now, I'm just waiting for some Freudian here to jump into the fray.

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

MAX NEWMAN I can't understand why in discussions of this kind one must assume that there really are no differences between peoples. All this talk we hear about stereotypes – I suggest that one of the simple explanations of why people think that nations are different is that they are different. It was only a few weeks ago since I heard people talking at the lunch table in the University, and they were saying: 'How do you think this idea arises that Manchester is wet?' (*laughter*) Is it really necessary that we should go on talking about these stereotypes as if there were no differences between nations? When one comes to races – the word 'race' has not been mentioned, only 'nations', but I suppose we are talking about differences between races – and if people have different-coloured skins, why shouldn't they behave in different ways and have different capabilities? I suggest this with great trepidation – that Sir Isaiah, even, seemed to suggest that these differences were pure matters of fashion, that they changed, they came and went, and that really there was very little difference. Perhaps he would tell us?

PEARSON Will you [*inaudible*] ...

BERLIN [*inaudible*] ... I agreed with the greater part of these very unpopular and provocative remarks, with which I think I'm in agreement. I think I wanted to agree with Mr Gluckman to the effect that stereotypes are not avoidable: we can't in fact think about foreign nations in all the rich variety of all the characteristics which we may have observed. Consequently we are bound to some extent to think of them in fairly stylised ways. That, I think, is unavoidable. But I don't see why it should be assumed that these stereotypes are necessarily always falsifying and libellous. They are sometimes highly complimentary, and sometimes the more we learn, the more the stereotype gets wedged in us, both hostile and friendly.

GLUCKMAN They may or may not [*inaudible*] ...

BERLIN They may or may not, exactly, but I don't know why – the assumption, I think, was a little bit that stereotypes are things to be avoided, and what we must do is to study all these types, so to speak, in their full, rich, concrete variety. Well, that's a very

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

desirable ideal, but it obviously can't be achieved, and therefore all we can do, I think, is to see to it that our stereotypes correspond at least roughly; but I entirely agree with the last speaker to the effect that there are differences, that there's something a little, I think, suspicious about us that we don't want to face the fact that there are different aptitudes connected with different races or different nations, and that perhaps, if this was faced a little more resolutely, we should be nearer the truth, and that the notion that everybody is frightfully similar, that all differences are superficial, is something to do with the desire to escape from some set of disagreeable facts or other, I don't quite know what, something like that. I don't see why it shouldn't be the case that we are all very different, and very nice too.

PEARSON Now, we've got – wait a minute, we've got a quadrilateral here, all wanting to come in. Cordelia James, you seem to be the most urgent, and you're also a lady, so come in first.

CORDELIA JAMES Thank you, Mr Chairman. I should have thought the whole jam that we're in at the moment is just because we have accepted the Western white stereotype for about the last two thousand years, based partly on, of course, the traditions of Christianity, partly on the traditions of Greece and Rome, and we've accepted that – it's been exemplified in Greece and Rome, then in England, and now perhaps in the United States, and I think that another cycle is possibly now beginning. I'd like to ask Sir Isaiah who the top people are now. Are they the United States or are they the Russians?

PEARSON The Fellows of All Souls.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE That's a stereotype, too.

WILLIAM GREER As we draw towards a conclusion, as I suppose we must, I should like to feel that we have got some little practical conclusion as a result of our discussion, and one seemed to peep out at the end of Sir Isaiah's opening remarks, and that was on this question of how, assuming that there are these pictures in people's minds – how we can do anything to solve that modern

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

problem, which is an immense problem, touched upon by Mr Kennan in his famous Reith Lecture: How can you help another nation in such a way that you will not either trample upon them, or pauperise them and antagonise them? You mention, Sir Isaiah, that that didn't happen in the missionary enterprise. That was true, I think, in the earlier days: today it's a very real problem in the missionary enterprise throughout the world, in the Christian Churches, and I would very much value your remarks on how – what the answer is there. What can be done? Is there any practical thing that can be done to ease this problem, such as, for instance, canalising all assistance and aid not direct but through the United Nations, or in some other way? Because it's one of the main problems we're facing today, it seems, in the world.

PEARSON Would you like to answer that?

BERLIN I've no concrete suggestions to make, I'm not very competent, but I should have thought that this is the kind of problem which has to be solved in practice, there's no general rule that can be given. One has to do exactly what one does in the case of helping individuals, I think. How do people manage to help individuals without antagonising them? By the use of what kind of tact? By knowing what not to say. In some sort of way, by exercising judgement, by having some kind of insight into the kind of people they are, and if they are benevolent fools, they do of course blunder and do create the most terrible problems for the best possible motives in the world, and that's what I think has happened particularly in the case, I think, of America, but to some extent in the case of our aid too. If you say 'What are we to do with people who need aid, but who perhaps resent patronage?', well, I think each case has to be treated on its merits, we have to weigh their needs. We want – we ought to seek to do what they want rather than what we think is good for them, but sometimes what they want is, we think, very bad for us. In which case I don't think we are obliged to do everything and martyrise ourselves in the process; but of course we must balance different claims – our own utility, their needs, other people's opinions of them, their opinion of us. How can this be done except by choosing the, I don't know, nicest, best, wisest ...

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

JOHN COHEN Mr Chairman, I think we ought to clear up this – the confusion between differences between stereotypes, which is a purely subjective conception, and so-called real differences. A previous speaker I think identified these two, which are quite different things. I won't say anything more about that.

The danger of overlooking the subjective stereotype which Sir Isaiah spoke about was illustrated a little while ago when the Schumann plan was being discussed, when the German newspapers represented Michel, the German national character, as marrying Marianne. That symbolised their acceptance of the Schumann plan. But the French regarded this as a suggestion of adultery on the part of Marianne and an imputation of lack of virility on the part of the French. But quite apart from these images that nations have of themselves on the basis of which they behave and treat other peoples, there are other national characteristics which can be demonstrated, in fact are much more demonstrable than so-called racial or ethnic characters, which are in fact environmentally determined, and these national characteristics in behaviour can also be politically important. For example, when the Americans were dissatisfied with a Korean decision, which was – it seemed to be because they never like vague outcomes. They like everything to be clear-cut, and this can be shown in every walk of American life, not only in the military situation; but that again is a long story and you have to show how this develops in upbringing through different stages. I mean, there's one stage in a child's life, for example, when he thinks – when the English child, for example, thinks that the French is a foreigner, even when he's in Paris, and that an Englishman is an Englishman – he's never a foreigner, wherever he is. The American wouldn't come in at the customs barriers at Dover where it said 'Foreigners'; he said, 'I'm not a foreigner, I'm an American.'

And the other point I would like to make in reference to the speaker's last remarks, and the Bishop's question, is that we can help others by asking them to help us. We seem to have a conviction that we can only teach, that we've got nothing to learn. If we went to these peoples and asked them to help and advise us – What can we learn from you? – but we seem to think, and I think the Americans in particular, that if you haven't got any dollars, you haven't got any ideas, you haven't got anything. And we

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

also seem to share this dangerous delusion that we've only got things to give, nothing to receive, nothing to learn.

LEWIS RUDD I've come across some quite extraordinary reactions to these sorts of things in other countries recently. A fortnight ago I was in Greece, and speaking to a working-class organisation and discussing Cyprus. They said to me: Well, of course, we know the TUC attitude to this matter, and the Labour Party's attitude towards it, but what are the British going to do? – giving me the impression at least that they subdivided, and that the Greek workers at least think of the British as the exploiters, from history, as the imperialists, conquering half the world and so on, and they think of the working-class people as being something completely different. They don't stereotype working-class people, and the stereotypes of history, and the stereotypes in all lands, are not working-class people at all, and the stereotype of the Greek people, for instance, has been acquired over the last hundred years by the visitors to the Acropolis, to the Agora, and so on. Now I think this is acquired through history on the one hand, ignorance on the other, and not being able to visit each other, and I've discovered, without doubt at all, that if people can meet each other more often, if there can be greater travel, if workers particularly, and others, can meet each other abroad in each other's country, then within the next ten years these stereotypes which are so marked in all countries of the world will very soon disappear. And I would say to Dr Greer that one way to help to eradicate these stereotypes is greater travel, greater meetings of peoples of the world. This more than anything else, in my judgement, will help to eradicate these false impressions of the stereotypes that we hear so much about.

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE I quite agree with Professor Newman that there are real differences between nations; only you've got to be careful that you really know what they are. I belong to a people that two hundred years ago were regarded by the English much as the Bantu were regarded by Afrikaner South Africans today.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE And very rightly. (*laughter*) And still are.

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

MACINTYRE We've come on wonderfully in the last two hundred years. One of the differences, and the big ones ...

PEARSON What nation are you referring to?

MACINTYRE Gaelic Scot. One of the differences between peoples is the differences in their relationship to their stereotype, the fact – at two extremes – that you can be related to the stereotype in a harmful way. On the one hand, in these islands we've got the English, who are so closely identified with their stereotype that they don't usually realise they have one in a serious way. It's only when you hear the English talking about what the British say, and what the British believe, when they mean – in the South of England they mean what they say and believe in Surrey, in the North they mean anything South of Berwick-on-Tweed. But the confines of the English within their picture of themselves, their complete unselfconsciousness of it, the way in which they go round telling people how glad they are they don't belong to a nationalistic culture – this is one extreme, and the other extreme the Irish, who have a picture of the nation which is completely detached from reality altogether – something that some of the best younger people in Ireland have identified themselves with from time to time in the IRA, and that leads into frustration and murder and complete uselessness. Now I would like to just suggest, mainly for Sir Isaiah's criticism, that the best relationship a nation can have to its stereotype is one which is not too serious, in which it's got an image of itself, so that it's able to think about itself in a fairly simple way, but one in which at the same time the image isn't really a burden you carry or something that you have to worry about, but something that's of real use to you. I'm not sure that I can think of a nation which has ever managed to stand in this ideal relationship, but it seems to be something that people approximate to more or less.

SIDNEY RAYBOULD I just wanted to say a word, Mr Chairman, about the, I think, very important question that the Bishop of Manchester raised and that John Cohen commented on. During a stay in West Africa, both in Ghana and in Nigeria, some years ago, I was very much struck by the importance of this point, and it seemed to me that if the initiative is left with them in asking for

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

help, and if help is given on the sort of terms which they suggest, there is a chance of help being given without the consequences in the shape of resentment. I found that both in Ghana and in Nigeria they wanted to feel that they could look anywhere they pleased for help, that they weren't always going to have to ask Britain for help, that they could ask Germans and Americans, and even Russians, for help. We know there are political difficulties, but we're talking about the psychological aspect of that.

LINDSEY PLATT You'll be relieved to hear, Mr Chairman, that I'm not going to use the word 'stereotype'. I want to go back to what Sir Isaiah said at the beginning. I am still puzzled, I don't know what problem he has posed, and if he retorts 'It wasn't a problem, it's a subject', then I don't really understand the subject. What he said at the beginning seemed to me to be full of errors. He started by contrasting national consciousness with class-consciousness: he said an appeal falls flat if directed to a class, for example the working class. I can say only that, if he really thinks that, he's never lived amongst the working class, and if any government or group today had the nerve to appeal to what used to be called the upper classes, and Sir Isaiah thinks it wouldn't resound silently in their hearts, then I wonder about the class structure of All Souls. But let me go back to one example that he mentioned: the French and the Germans in 1845, 1875, the French at the earlier date swashbuckling, mustachio-twirling and so forth, the Germans a collection of ineffectual and laughable professors, and the roles reversed after the Franco-Prussian war — the Germans militant, the French neurotic. That is a perfectly true picture. Nations change, national characteristics change, and when people look at nations and say, this nation strikes me as being so-and-so, people are usually right. A man doesn't change his character in the course of his life, he has only one life. Nations have many lives, many generations; a son differs from his father, grandson from the grandfather, and these changes take place in the course of a generation, and you can see this from the attitude we now have, quite rightly, to the French and the Germans since the war, the attitude we had towards them before the war. I don't see where the mystery is.

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

PEARSON Well, I think this is where we ask Sir Isaiah to come back again for as short or as long a time as he likes and to say whatever comes into his head, whether in reply to you or not.

BERLIN I'll be very brief, I can see that there's very little time. I'll try to reply to my critics as quickly as I can. First, Mr MacIntosh [sc. MacIntyre], who wanted to know about what kind of relation we ought to have to our stereotypes, to use that fatal word again. I agree with him, I think there is something dangerous about people who die for their stereotype, as the Irish are apt to, or as the Poles used to be, where there is a burning image of some sort which corresponds to something in their hearts, but certainly isn't a description of their habits in any way, and to which people become martyrs in the most violent, romantic spirit, which earns a great deal of praise, leads to a great deal of art and poetry, and breeds an enormous amount of suffering and misery in the process. And he says: Well, what nation is on the right sort of terms with its own image? I don't know, I suppose the smaller Scandinavian nations, I have to say rather tamely. I think the Danes are in a very easy, comfortable relation to their stereotype: very few Danes feel an impulse to do superhuman acts in the name of the ideal image of Denmark, nobody – non-Messianic images, I think, is what's on the whole desirable – and I should have thought that these nations are rightly regarded as civilised partly in direct proportion to the extent to which there isn't a sort of lunatic romanticism which impels them forward, however splendid the artistic results.

In answer to Mr Platt, I think the nations don't change with quite the rapidity which he assumes. He wants to know what problem I am posing. The problem I am posing is this: I think there are differences, and I think that we think of people in different terms, perhaps sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly. But I think that when we produce form orders in our heads, as we do, and when we give different nations different types of status in our minds, this tends to influence these nations' images of themselves, and quite apart from the other factors which make them unhappy, this itself creates a climate of public opinion which makes them unhappy too. I mean, as I say, the Russians in the nineteenth century, for example, made themselves miserable without very much necessity in certain respects, because they felt too much contempt was being poured upon them in the West –

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

too much contempt which in fact was undeserved. But nevertheless they accepted other people's judgement of them, and this whole problem of the dependence of human beings upon the judgements of them often expressed by people wholly ignorant of them is something which it is very difficult to cure – I'm not even sure whether foreign travel, a greater degree of knowledge, will cure it, because sometimes the better we know people the more we like them, sometimes the better we know people the more we dislike them; I think it cuts both ways. I think it doesn't do to be entirely smug on that subject. As for the question of class-consciousness, I do think there is a vast difference between political parties in Europe, which certainly appeal to economic classes, and political parties in, say, America, which don't appeal to classes as such – they may in fact be classes – but it's a very powerful factor in American society that they won't recognise this fact, and this itself plays a part in American politics, and a very significant part. Again, whether it's a good thing to be deceived in this way or a bad thing I'm not going to pronounce about, but I think it is a very profound chasm – it is a great chasm between those who feel it and those who don't.

In conclusion, if I'm asked what thesis I wanted to produce or whether there was some particular proposition which I want to defend, I don't really think there is, I think it is simply that there is a great desire for equality, inequality is partly the result of people's opinion, and some of the world's ills come from partly accurate and partly inaccurate images of other people which I don't think can in fact be eliminated, and which in fact, I think, is simply a neglected factor in international relations. That's all I really wanted to say. I didn't really want either to condemn it, to praise it, or to say anything else about it except to constate it.

PEARSON When we were about a quarter way through this discussion we came to the conclusion we probably didn't want to go anywhere much. I have a curious feeling that although we weren't deliberately trying to go anywhere we may perhaps have arrived somewhere, and for wherever we have arrived I would thank you, Sir Isaiah, and also thank you for listening to us.

BERLIN I was delighted to listen to you, far more than to listen to myself. (*laughter and applause*)

NATIONAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

PEARSON Well, it goes both ways. Thank you very much.

ANNOUNCER You've been listening to Sir Isaiah Berlin addressing the Fifty-One Society on the subject of 'National Superiority and Inferiority'. Niel Pearson was in the chair, and the other members and guests who took part in the discussion were Sir Eric James, Professor H[erman] M[ax] Gluckman, Dennis Chapman, Victor Wiseman, Peter Hilton, Ronald Lloyd, Professor M[ax(well)] H[erman] A[lexander] Newman, Lady [Cordelia] James, The Bishop of Manchester [William Derrick Lindsay Greer], Professor J[ohn] Cohen, Lewis Rudd, Alasdair MacIntyre, Professor S[idney] G[riffith] Raybould and Lindsey Platt. This was a recorded and shortened version of the original proceedings.

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