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The problem of objectivity in sociology and its implications for explanation

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ABSTRACT

- 1) If men define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences.
- 2) It is not the consciousness of men which determines their being, but rather their social being that determines their consciousness.

If (1) is true, societies are social products inexplicable except in terms of their definitions. But these vary with time and place. Many men are aware of the possible real consequences of definitions alternative to those prevailing, which hence are associated with potential conflict and necessarily have evaluative aspects. Hence Weber asserts "The concept of culture is a value concept". This implies (i) any social situation which is described has a value to those described and to the describer; (ii) any theory used to compare and explain social situations will also have evaluative implications. Sociology is concerned with investigating prevailing definitions with a view to providing "better" ones.

If (2) is true it contradicts (1), since it implies the superficiality of definitions in social change. But this depends upon the sense of "determines". It cannot mean "directly determines", because action mediates consciousness. "Determines" is thus weakened to mean that men's ideas start from their habitual social practice; hence consciousness must be seen in relation to social being. This still allows the importance of human definitions in their consequences for social reality and in social change. If being determined consciousness directly, change could come only through changes in the physical situation. (2) therefore only implies the existence of continuities between changing definitions.

Hence sociology must always recognize and cannot ultimately objectively transcend the actors' definitions. It can only explain social reality as it currently exists. It cannot predict change except by predicting those fresh definitions which will implement it, and it cannot predict these though it may sometimes be able to indicate their general nature. Sociology is thus partially dissimilar to natural science.

M.J. CLARKE.

The Problem of Objectivity in Sociology
and its Implications for Explanation.

Ph.D. Thesis, 1972.

University of Durham.

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P R E F A C E.

This work has its origins in my experiences of sociology as an undergraduate and my first years as a graduate, when it slowly became clear to me that the dissatisfaction with the monolithic 'scientific' style of the functionalist studies which reached their peak of development in the early 1960's amounted to more than negative criticisms of that kind of sociology. Whilst it was for a time sufficient to point out what was wrong in its practice, it became apparent by degrees that it was really the aspirations of this kind of sociology, not just its practical efforts, that were misguided. This study is accordingly directed towards the construction of an alternative view of the sociological enterprise, defined in terms of the attitude it has towards its object of study. Rather than emphasising those aspects of human action which make it amenable to study as patterned events along the lines of natural science, I have tried to develop a methodology which starts from the principle that actions be assumed to be conscious and that men be credited with minds to make up, only then going on to those situations where this is only partially, or not at all, the case. In my view it is only by taking this position that the distinctive features of action can be taken account of at all satisfactorily.

It is difficult to say how much of the result is my own. In many respects it is an attempt to synthesise the comments and criticisms that have been made from all quarters on sociological methodology in the last ten years. But the attempt outline of a synthesis, and the arguments I use to support it, are chiefly my own. I am by no means the first to attempt this and I certainly shall not be the last. My efforts thus have a provisional nature of which I am very aware. I offer them at this stage not only because in the context of any ongoing discipline, a claim to finality is absurd, but because I have reached a point at which the absurdities deriving from lack of clarity in conception and expression are balanced by the inevitability of increasing complexity, were I to go on and work out in more detail the interrelationships between the various points I make. But I do hope that what I present is internally consistent. It is with the need for sociology to have a consistent and workable methodological foundation that I am most concerned.

I used as my starting point for thinking about this the question of the objectivity of sociology, a matter which is not only intrinsically interesting, but also has a long history as a point of friction between those who would see sociology as a science and those who had doubts about the wisdom of this claim. More importantly it proved valuable as a probe for digging into the subject and clarifying the extent of the differences. Accordingly questions of values and the nature

of objectivity constitute not a single topic but a recurrent theme, which I have tried to explain, in a social scientific methodology.

In this context, some comment on the involvement of my own values and personality in my writing is called for. On a subject of such generality it is more than usually difficult to be precise about the nature of personal commitments - there are no obvious policy recommendations that follow for example. There is little that I can usefully add to what I think will be obvious to the reader: an (at times sceptical) acceptance of what is sometimes known as bourgeois individualism; considerable sympathy with Marxism but an inability to embrace it; a reluctant belief in moral relativism; and a position on the political spectrum which is usually nebulously described as left-liberal. Where personality ends and choice begins in these matters I confess I cannot tell - nor do I think that the answer to this question matters. What does is the extent to which a reasonable discussion of general issues can be attempted.

Many people have helped and thereby influenced me. In reading Jock Young's recent book The Drugtakers¹, I was struck at the extent to which it echoes at the level of particular empirical issues concerned with drug taking, matters that I have tried to deal with at a general level. In some respects it could be read as an extended example of the kind of methodology I propose. Reading the book made me realise how much I owe to participants at several sessions of the National Deviancy

Conference. In particular, I am grateful to Stan Cohen for his detailed comments on Chapter Five and for acting as my supervisor for a short period.

I am also indebted to John Rex for his unstinting support over two years as my supervisor and to Philip Abrams for taking over in the final year. I am grateful too to Gi Baldamus and to Martin Albrow for their sympathetic comments on a draft of my work and to Robert Moore for his comments on the Appendix. But for the kindness of June Wallis in typing the manuscript in draft form I should have been unable to offer it to others for comment without their having to labour with my handwriting. In the final stages the revision of the work was enlivened and sharpened by discussions with Harry Stopes-Roe. The study possibly owes most to the two years spent working on it in the company of Mike Stant, Ian Procter and Paul Corrigan and to intermittent discussions over three years with Peter Lassman. I hope that they found the experience as intellectually stimulating as I did and that they will forgive my inevitable but unintentional borrowing of their ideas. Finally to my wife Liz I owe a great deal for her emotional and at times financial support throughout the time spent on the study, and for her forbearance in not pressing one to explain what I was doing at times when I was less than clear myself.

Birmingham. August, 1972.

Michael Clarke.

C H A P T E R O N E.

INTRODUCTION.

The question of the "objectivity" of the social in contrast to the natural sciences is one with a long and acrimonious history. It has arisen recently in the context of unrest and doubts about the funding and aims of research and it has a central place in the Methodenstreit that has continued among social scientists from the classic years at the turn of the century to present debates between systems and action theorists, and between protagonists of survey and mathematical and participant observational techniques. The question as to whether these are significant differences between the Natur- and the Geisteswissenschaften has always included as one of its central components the issue of the importance of human consciousness. Does this, on the one hand, introduce new complexities, but of a similar order, or on the other require a radical reconceptualisation of social scientific methodology - new notions of truth, objectivity, explanation, verification, discovery and understanding. It is my concern to pursue this question, using the issue of objectivity as a probe.

In drawing contrasts between natural and social science¹ I shall concentrate on what I conceive to be appropriate to the latter, and my remarks about the former will be directed not so

much at the enterprise of natural science itself but at what the dominant neo-positivist school of the philosophy of science conceives it to be, and more frequently, the rather loose interpretation of those philosophers by practising social scientists. What I am interested in then, is very much the nature of social science and the mistakes made about it, some of which have been made on the assumption that it is like a particular theory of the nature of natural science. In this wrangle the question of objectivity has been highly sensitive, and is therefore a promising starting point. On the one hand the protagonists of "natural science" have maintained the objectivity of scientific facts and explanations, however that is defined, against all comers, as a symbol of the scientific respectability of social science; on the other hand those willing to question or reject objectivity have been hard put to cope with the consequent threat of methodological anarchy. Accordingly I will say why traditional actions of objectivity have to be abandoned and go on to say how they can be replaced or are unnecessary. From this starting point I will develop an account of the nature of social science and the kinds of explanation appropriate to it. Thus I shall not remain tied to the objectivity question, but I shall constantly return to it to demonstrate its pervasive importance. The result of my efforts will I hope be to outline a consistent view of social science which does not attempt to incorporate it into natural science and which tries to come to grips with its distinctive subject matter, human action, whilst

retaining the ability to make fairly sure and general statements and to describe and explain social relations on both large and small scales accurately and satisfactorily. When I say "outline" I mean that my aim cannot be completeness. Rather, I hope to indicate first that there is something distinctive about social science, and second to go some way, on some points, towards providing an appropriate methodology. The remarks I make to this end are thus intended to be consistent, but will inevitably have a lot of loose ends.

These loose ends can only be dealt with at much greater length and ultimately only at a philosophical level. Whilst much of what I say touches on philosophical problems, I try to avoid them since they frequently require a book to themselves, and my aims are more various. In the philosophy of mind, in epistemology and in moral philosophy it would be very helpful, I discovered, to have solutions to basic difficulties, and indeed only in the light of such solutions can a final explication be given. But it is possible to go some way towards this, and to clear some of the worst of the present confusion, by talking in terms of sociological theory and methodology, and only at times in terms of philosophy as it is now conventionally practised. It is necessary, however, to devote some space to a discussion of problems in that growing aspect of the philosophy of mind that is concerned with action, for it emerges that the objectivity of any account we are to give of social phenomena is dependent upon an understanding of the distinctive nature

of explanations of action. A concern with the sociological problem of objectivity then, will involve me in a philosophical inquiry, and with the question of the explanation of action.

The various questions and puzzles which I will take up have been posed by writers with a large range of interests and in several disciplines. Their discussions certainly interrelate and to some extent overlap, and I am thus presented with the need to impose some kind of conceptual order in trying to state a thesis which refers to all of them. Given that it is objectivity that I take as my starting point, and to some extent as a recurrent theme, I shall therefore distinguish what I take to be three distinct statements of a problem of objectivity, each of which have a notable intellectual history in their own right, but which in fact are closely linked. I shall then go on in the ensuing chapters to present my views in the framework of this conceptualisation, though often having a closer regard for groups of writers associated with each than would appear from the rather abstracted statement that follows. What will emerge, is that although conceived separately, the various concerns in fact are all linked by a common interest in the distinctiveness of social scientific methodology, an account of which they presuppose. I maintain that despite in many cases the author's protestations to the contrary, these accounts are unlike natural science, and essentially similar.

I. THE LAYMAN'S WORRY.

I give this name to this formulation because it reflects a concern most frequently expressed by outsiders who come into contact with social science, particularly sociology and history. This is usually expressed in such queries as: Is the account biased? Is the author making political assumptions? Is he telling the whole story? This usually elicits the reply that indeed they are not telling the whole truth, they are only talking about what concerns them, and the suggestion that the notion of an 'unbiased' account is incomprehensible. The sociologist retreats into the philosophically based assertion that in order to say anything one has to make assumptions - one has to define a problem in order to investigate it, to pose a question before one can get an answer. Put more abstractly, this becomes an argument for the inevitability and desirability of theory as a basis for research and a scorning of 'facts which speak for themselves' - the question being which facts, and how defined and ordered. The historian can point out that it is unreasonable to expect him to concern himself with events outside his period, and for particular purposes, with events outside the scope of his concern in that period. Thus he does not present a partisan view of e.g. only one side of a political quarrel, but what is said is circumscribed by his interest in that political quarrel.

One then has to go on to elucidate the status of these assumptions or problem definitions. At a simple practical level for the historian or the sociologist they involve the selection and definition of an empirical puzzle. They may also involve more general notions about the nature of man or of society which are both descriptive and evaluative (often in a political sense); an explanation may be premised on the assumption that man is a problem-solver for example, or that he is inherently selfish. In either the case of general notions or particular puzzles, the relative prominence of which depends mainly on the level of generality of the issue of concern, the ultimate moral values of the investigator will also have an influence on what kind of assumptions and definitions are made. The consensus is, however, that within the terms of these premises, an account can be objective by virtue of adherence to the scientific values of e.g. conceptual clarity, honesty, consistency, and an attempt to state verifiable hypotheses, which collectively give science interpersonal replicability, i.e. allow a second investigator to repeat the enquiry at a later date and check validity of the conclusions in relation to the evidence.

It is then pertinent to ask in what sense these premises are necessary, and to question whether research based upon them is left in relativistic isolation, because the premises on which it is based derive from the peculiar interests of the investigator and thus are not comparable to other research based on other

premises. The answer to this is ultimately Yes, but with qualifications. At the simple level of problem formulation, problems change as times do, the historian being particularly aware of this. Not only is one now interested in such a historical phenomenon as the European Economic Community, which did not exist until recently, but the nature of one's interest is inevitably affected by the dominant events of the century, two world wars and a major depression, the Cold War, the end of the British Empire etc. At the level of philosophical anthropology the generalisations, though significant for the conceptualisation of research strategy, are so general as to be unverifiable. They are also fairly numerous, and it would be a worthwhile task to spell out the implications of more than have been so far, so that comparisons can be made and limitations recognised. At the (often overlapping) level of general moral notions, there have been few recent attempts to expound a rationalistic ethics which could claim to provide an objective moral starting point. However, this is not to say that with time and effort some premises do not get discredited as dubious or unhelpful, e.g. evolutionism and the cruder versions of the organismic analogy. Certainly a greater awareness of the importance of the problem leads to concentration on and a clear statement of premises at a general level, and a more explicit working out of their implications. To approach it from a slightly different direction, it does appear that some human problems are more permanent than others, e.g. the problem of

economic production. The prospects for generalisation thus depend, it appears, on agreement as to what are the significant problems on the basis of careful analysis, the elimination of misleading assumptions, and a constant comparison of research results on differing assumptions so that even though these are not commensurable, they may shed light on each other's shortcomings. The consensus-conflict debate in sociology has probably been the most notable recent example of this. Research based on different assumptions and definitions will clearly not be directly comparable and lead to differing conclusions. Relativism will therefore persist as a problem. If the assumptions and definitions are relative pragmatic and close to everyday concerns their evaluative implications will be equally evident. But even if the assumptions are abstract and general, evaluative implications will not dissolve in a rarefied philosophical atmosphere. It may be less obvious in the assumptions but it will be apparent in the conclusions that these assumptions have led - though not by any means completely determined - the argument in a particular direction.

II. CAUSE AND MEANING.

The problem of objectivity re-emerges in another context which has a long and complex philosophical history. Kant attempted to reconcile the idealist with the empiricist accounts of human minds and actions, and Max Weber was much concerned to

follow this through in Sociology, in the attempt to give an account of action which would do justice both to the human consciousness of the actors and to the demands of scientific objectivity. This debate continues today, having recently gone in an empiricist direction in sociology, with a widening desire for precision, large scale studies and mathematisation, in which individual feelings count for little and are relentlessly incorporated into statistics, and the importance of deeds stressed at the expense of thoughts and words. In philosophy though, the importance of the idealist view of the matter has been given new life by the work of Wittgenstein, as this quotation by Quinton concisely shows.

"..... one of the things that was most characteristic of Wittgenstein's account of the mind was his view that human actions, human decisions, human intentions, the whole area of man's life as an agent - his activities and the decisions and intentions that lead up to his activities - weren't capable of being causally explained. The implication of this is that there couldn't be a science of human behaviour, that there could really be no such thing as Psychology or Sociology as these are usually conceived by their practitioners. To put it in more metaphysical language, man isn't a part of nature. It all started, this idea of Wittgenstein's, from a very simple initial point. What, he says, is the difference between my arm going up and my raising my arm? Now somebody might say: my raising my arm is caused by an act of will, whereas my arm just going up may be due to some small muscular seizure somewhere around my shoulder, and the difference between the two events will be a matter of the difference between the causes. Wittgenstein said that there is no act of volition which precedes one's arm going up and turns it into a case of raising one's arm. To say a man raised his arm is to say something very much more complicated than that he raised his arm as a result of an act of will: it's to say something about the sort of thing he would say if you asked him what he was doing and what the circumstances were. Now out of this

apparently small point, a very large scale philosophical division can develop between those who say that man is a part of nature and that what is most important about man as an active being is embodied in the scientific picture of the world, and those who take the opposite view that human actions need to be understood as a kind of thing quite different from natural happenings."

Listener 10.xii.70. p.808.

The question to be considered then, is whether a causal account of actions can be given without violating the essential humanity, and especially the free will and consciousness of the actors; and on the other hand whether an account in terms of the reasons and motives of the actors, while more satisfactory in this respect, is not essentially unverifiable because dependent on what goes on in their heads, and relative because bound to their particular conception of reality. The problem of objectivity raised here is thus slightly different from that concerned in what I called the layman's worry, in being not a specific concern with questions of bias, but a concern about the necessary degree of subjectivity and hence privacy and ephemerality of social knowledge. It rapidly becomes obvious here, as it only did by degrees in the layman's worry, that the difficulties cannot be solved without confronting wider questions about the nature of explanation, given the human consciousness and human actions that constitute the data. The crucial question that arises now is thus the extent which knowledge based on such data can be located like the facts of natural science, which are usually conceived as being "objectively out

there" independent of our thoughts and perceptions in a way that social facts only sometimes are. It now becomes evident that objectivity in this sense is the more radical question in its implications for social scientific methodology, leading to the attempt to construct one distinctively different from natural science. But objectivity in this sense is of course closely linked to it in its evaluative sense in that the consciousness of individuals that constitutes this problem is necessarily evaluative - it involves a selective and constructive perception of and attitude towards the world. In the present case though, the first issue is whether a natural scientific causal methodology can be made to cope with social scientific data. In practice, it emerges that a purely causal account is very rapidly forced back upon the actor's² views, since on a purely external definition of their behaviour, it becomes unintelligible, as they apparently give different responses to the same situation, and the same to different ones. Covertly or overtly the actor's views have to be the starting point, but given this, one then must ask whether an objective account can be given of them on this basis, and thus one must first know what understanding the actor's view and his action amounts to.

That done (I give a summary of what it involves below), one then has to ask if one can go beyond the actor's view in an effort to explain anomalies and shortcomings and to compare it to other interesting cases which appear to be similar. This requires a change of reference point from that of the actor to

that of an observer and, it turns out, a crucial shift in the type of explanation that may be given from motivational (understanding) to causal. With a number of provisos, a quasi-causal account can be given of action, but this involves a relegation of the actor as an agent with a free will and a free ranging imaginative consciousness in favour of a view of him in terms only of the actions he has undertaken, and of typifications of his actions. The account will not lead to causal laws however, because of the ability of actors to respond in a new way to situations that appear on the basis of any account of their past actions to be similar. At a simple level this can be seen in the ability of anyone to falsify any prediction one cares to make about their future actions³. Causal accounts can thus be given retrospectively, but are contingent in holding for the future on the relevant actors continuing to take the same views of the same kind of situations. Just as the sociologist can decide how to define his problem, so can the actor. This does of course raise problems about the relationships between an actor's and an observer's accounts of action, in particular their claims to truth, accuracy and completeness. (See below).

The discussion of causal accounts of actions also raises the question of what has been, often misleadingly, called 'free will'. Basically, the existence of free will is a corollary of consciousness, or more particularly of self-consciousness. It is because the actor can think about the

world and his place in it, because he can remember the past and imagine the future, and because he can in his mind imagine sequences of events in it under differing conditions, because in other words he can plan, that the possibility of changing the world and of recognizing that there are alternatives to be chosen and manipulated first arises. But this capacity also gives rise to the peculiar relation between idea and action: they are conceptually or meaningfully related just because the actor acts out the project in his mind. He does so however, in a world which is not necessarily just or only as he sees it, and in which it may turn out that his project won't work as he thinks. Sociologists are particularly concerned with this latter aspect of his action, and thus though they must understand how and why the actor acts as he does, it is their business to show what in so doing, he also brings about: the unintended consequences of action. This may be at the level of the actor himself - he may have failed to notice something that, given his way of seeing things, he might have; or indeed he may choose to ignore it. Alternatively, he may be contributing to things which can be seen to be taking place given a different frame of reference or context of meaning, especially if this allows for the consequences of his action for others to an extent which he does not. From the point of view of the actor then, he makes his project true in the world, and thus the internal relationship between project and action; whereas from the sociologist's point of view the project is

traced into the hinterland of its origins and the action seen both in the actor's light and in different and often wider contexts. What is to be recognised is that the understanding of the act is done from within the actor's world, but explaining it implies the elaboration and reinterpretation of that act in a different frame of reference which the sociologist chooses, and in this frame of reference the act is an event. This in no way compromises the actor's freedom because he was not at the time interested in the sociologist's viewpoint. In practice of course, the sociologist also being a member of society, the viewpoint he takes will be liable to be one the actor finds indirectly relevant, and so may in the future be recognised and taken into account in action. In this way the sociologist can enlarge his freedom by bringing awareness of unintended consequences. Whether one chooses to call this result causal explanation or not is partly a matter of terminological predilection. Certainly, to do so has a tendency to lead the practitioner into an over-wooden conception of human beings, and to a misleading view of actions as caused by ideas in men's minds. On balance it seems to be best to stick with a different terminology which constantly reminds one of the differences from a genuine causal account.

Objectivity is thus dependent on the relation between the sociologist and those he investigates. Much sociology is in fact simply ethnographic-understanding what is going on. This means that it is limited as it stands to the contexts concerned,

but it is possible to obtain a reasonably objective understanding, subject to the condition that one can never finally be sure about what is going on in another's head. With the techniques of typification and verbal communication one can and indeed does in everyday interaction obtain considerable evidence as to what goes on in society, and with care it is possible to be fairly precise about this. Difficulties arise when one tries to relate and compare what is learned in one sphere 'from the inside', to another. Here one is forced into drawing parallels which cannot do justice to both, in precisely the same way that it is impossible to communicate one's own stream of consciousness to another because he is another and not yourself. Once again, it appears that there is an element of relativism in the account, and in this instance, the results become more simplified as one generalises by the comparison of varied cases.

The attempt at explanation, like that of comparison, implies taking up a stand upon which to explain, rather than dwelling in the actor's world, and here all that applied to the first statement of the problem again applies, except that it is now clear that the question of premises applies both to those that actors have and those that sociologists have. The crucial thing to remember is whether an observer's or an actor's point of view is being maintained.

Because of this it is often been maintained that there is a difference of levels of conceptualisation which distinguishes natural from social science. There is at one level the world,

which actors, including natural scientists, conceptualise, but they also conceptualise about each other's views, and have views about how the society operates. The sociologist comes in and develops theories to explain these at a still higher level. There is thus thought to be at least one extra level in social science, the sociologist's conceptualisation being on a level equivalent to and at times empirically concerned with a theory about what natural scientists do. Analytically this is helpful, but practically it is misleading, since these levels interpenetrate to a considerable extent. I have already suggested that much sociology consists in understanding and thus remains more or less on the actor's level, though one may argue that they are not actually being actors implies a certain distance in their viewpoint, and this is often evident in their work. Even if he is acting as explainer and conceptualising about actors' views, the sociologist is still often liable to draw on theories current in the actors' world in a partial sense: this is almost inevitable if he is studying his own society. The disjunction of levels and the separation of the investigator is thus less radical than appeared. The important matter is whether analytically speaking an actor's or observer's viewpoint is being maintained - if this is not clear, as it often is not, it is also unclear as to whether the account expounds the actors' world or whether it attempts to generalise and explain by making external and perhaps more general assumptions. Not only does this affect the precise amount of relativism involved and the

limits of comparability, it also leads to considerable confusion as to the reliability of the account given, and in particular to a confusion of causal and motivational or reason-based explanations of the action. This question will be returned to below.

III. SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE.

The tradition which has grown out of Marx's theory of false consciousness raises the objectivity problem in a different way by suggesting that all ideas are related to social structure and historical context, thus implying a radical relativism not only of different societies and ages but of the ideas of historians and sociologists also. In the doctrine that all ideas or explanations of them are ideological, the conceptions of the objectivity problem raised before are united from the start: ideas are claimed as context-bound and as evaluative. While it has been ready to analyse others in these terms, the sociology of knowledge has been unwilling to accept the relativistic implications for itself and has deployed various strategies for avoiding the conclusion that its theories too are tied to a particular historico-social context. The most important kind of strategy consists in trying to establish some kind of privileged position on the basis of which an analysis can take place, but so far this has proved unsuccessful.

An alternative is to question the claim that leads to such an uncomfortable conclusion, and careful inquiry reveals that is not plausible to regard man as having no autonomy in the production of ideas and also that it is misleading to suggest that the fact that ideas are involved in a social-historical context implies that they are "merely" the product of it. Here the preceding remarks on causality and understanding are relevant in indicating that the difference between these two kinds of accounts - that ideas are thought up autonomously and so have an independent influence on action, and that ideas are derived from the structure of relations in which men have their social being - involves a shift of gestalt in favour on the one hand of a watertight explanation, and on the other in terms of a conception of the action explained as the result of a free ranging human consciousness. It emerges that the relation between ideas and social context is, in Marxist-Hegelian terms dialectic, or in Weberian ones meaningful, there being an ongoing and ever-changing process of mutual modification between the two. There is an inherent tendency for each to ossify at any given point because of the value invested in particular ideas and institutions and the need for clarity and stability of concepts and social relations if long term projects on the part of individuals in the society are to be a possibility. On the other hand the very inadequacy of conceptions of social reality and of disjunctions in perception and expectation by individuals and groups in different parts of society implies that the

interaction which constitutes the process of society will in a significant sense be ongoing rather than static or rhythmic, leading both to changes in behaviour without corresponding modifications in concepts and to speculative changes in concepts which are ahead of changes in behaviour.

The various attempts to create a platform of objective truth from which the rest of society may be analysed therefore have in practice to attempt to lever themselves out of this subtle, everchanging orderliness, and in practice come to nothing. Accordingly the relativism implied must be accepted, though this will not have quite the despairing quality at first suggested because the relationship of ideas and structure is two sided - men may change their conditions of action by their efforts as well as responding to them as given conditions. It should also be added that the awareness and exploration of this relationship enables the avoidance of some of the cruder forms at least of structural production and distortion of ideas and thus, as was stated earlier in another context, the elimination of some of the less plausible views of man and society, and the explication of some genuinely fundamental problems of the human condition. This kind of relativism certainly cannot be stated in simple class terms.

On the basis of this necessarily condensed general statement, which I hope nonetheless gives an indication that although the three formulations I have singled out are distinct conceptions, they also relate in important ways and deal with the same problems, it is possible to give an overview of the substantive chapters which deal with matters in detail.

Chapter Two will consider Max Weber's contribution to the debate, particularly as represented by his 1904 essay 'Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy' and his introductory Chapter of Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft on sociological methodology, which was written towards the end of his life in 1920. Weber deals with the first two of the problems I have outlined, the layman's worry, which he conceptualises in terms of value-relevance (Wertbeziehung), and the cause-meaning problem, which he tries to solve by claiming that a meaningful understanding (Verstehen) can be causally validated. On the question of value relevance, his clear insight into the relation of political and moral values to dispassionate social inquiry was the source of an exposition of the problem which has remained accepted⁴, with minor elaborations, to this day. As I indicated above, the only reasonable course is to accept the relativism of the evaluative assumptions contained in the definition of the problem, to make these explicit, and to render the account objective by the method of inquiry, i.e. to allow interpersonal replicability.

As regards cause and meaning, his solution is less than adequate, and as I will show in the appendix, does not do justice to his own empirical work. Weber was much involved on both occasions in debates with other social scientists. The 1904 essay reflects his concern with Rickert and the latter's distinction between the historical individualising (idiographic) and the natural generalising sciences (nomothetic). Weber did not accept this distinction, and was thus arguing simultaneously both against it and for his own account of Verstehen followed by a causal verification, as well as giving an answer to the layman's worry. His final version in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft pays much less attention to the latter problem, and it would seem that he was most concerned with the difference in status of the Natur - and the Geisteswissenschaften, one of whose most significant protagonists was Dilthey. It seems likely however, that the most significant figures at the time for Weber were Stammler, a positivist lawyer, and Simmel, with whose writings on social forms Weber had been much impressed. He was very concerned to give an answer to the idealist-empiricist question which would do justice to both sides, and for this purpose a set of concepts or categories or social forms which were in some sense fundamental and necessary to social life would form a useful base. He was however, also still well aware that the concepts he used, despite their generality, had their origins in his own very wide empirical sociological and historical interests.

This path then, was not the one that Weber stressed. In the last analysis he was emphatic that objectivity could not be gained by trying to give privileged status to some position but must consist in the rational and publicly verifiable procedure by which the understanding gained by close familiarity and painstaking elucidation of meaning was checked causally. He thus takes the same epistemological stance in relation to objectivity in the sense of verifiability as he does in relation to it in the sense of value-relevance, but this time he radically confuses the issue by trying to maintain a specious "scientific" respectability, by forcing social actions, the distinctive nature of which he has indicated at length, into a natural scientific verificationist methodology. The exact process by which such a causal check was to be achieved Weber was less than clear about. He appears to have had a firmer grasp on understanding, for which he developed ideal type analysis, than he did of causal explanation and seems to make the mistake of equating meaning and motive, and more importantly of trying to give a causal explanation of motivated action, while not adequately distinguishing the viewpoint of the actor from that of the observer. This has led to accusations that causal verification of a meaningful account is impossible, since the relation between a motive or an intention and an action is conceptual, not contingent. Weber was clearly convinced that something could be, and was being done here, but he was unwilling to accept either consistency in sticking, as did Dilthey, with a meaningful account, or

apparent consistency in claiming that it was only the behaviour, not the actors' views, that mattered, and that this could be causally analysed like any other event. It was thus his insight that there was something very peculiar about action in that it was an event in the world and yet also meaningfully related to its proximate "cause", and his refusal to lean to one side or the other to simplify the dilemma, that led him into difficulty.

It thus begins to look as though there is something fundamentally unacceptable about a "natural scientific" view of social science in terms of which facts are gathered, generalisation made about them, and causal explanations given with the help of laws. The difficulty is first, how much of this is unacceptable, and secondly how much trust one may reasonably put in a form of enquiry based on facts as dubious as the attitudes and ideas of actors rather than just their behaviour in a more limited and observable sense. The procedure I adopt is first to analyse understanding in regard to its possibility and reliability, and secondly to consider what on this basis, can be the nature of social scientific explanation, and what its limitations are. Accordingly in Chapter 3 I investigate the notion of understanding others, which is basic to any social enquiry, and consider if it is possible and if it can be made clear, precise and public. It is taken as self-evident that some degree of understanding may exist between two members of a society, and thus the philosophical problem

of whether knowledge of other minds is possible at all is not pursued directly. Rather I try to explicate what is involved in everyday understanding. I accept that there will be an element that will never be understood: one can never be finally certain that one has interpreted another correctly, and one's understanding will always be limited to those aspects of his consciousness which he can communicate. But there are procedures by which evidence is sought and evaluated, and by a process of typifying the other and his acts, and elaborating this typification, these can be made relatively objective, clear and accurate.

The question of understanding other cultures then arises, and consideration must be given to the limits this puts on comparison and generalisation. Inevitably some simplification occurs in comparison, but it is argued that provided that the investigator is aware that he is simplifying, that is provided he has understood the culture on its own terms first, and also that he is clear as to the purpose of his observation and comparison, there is no reason why this should not take place. Difficulties are posed by the differences between cultures but fundamentally these are like the differences between individuals as far as understanding goes. More serious difficulties arise for comparison, in that differences in culture imply potential differences in conceptions of the whole of social reality, and hence the necessity in adopting a point outside one or both the cultures. The translation involved in this necessarily

does some violence to the understanding gained from inside, and it is important in practice to be aware of the limits set by particular views - the religico-magical and scientific conceptions of reality have been much debated in this respect.

The question of a point of view and the limitations implied by it becomes more important when the notion of a distinctive kind of social scientific explanation is taken up in Chapter 4. Here the debate as to whether explanation in terms of causes is compatible with that in terms of reasons and motives is discussed. I pointed out earlier that if there is any desire to go beyond or to question the framework involved in understanding, a position outside this is implied, which must be clarified. The fundamental difficulties of the two kinds of accounts are the tendency of a causal account to deny the freedom of the actor by suggesting that his acts are inevitable, because caused, and that the relation between reason or motive and action is often construed as internal, whereas that between cause and effect is contingent. The concern about free will is spurious because the different accounts involve a Gestalt or paradigm shift from the point of view of the actor to that of an observer. Whereas for the actor the possibilities of action are seen as open and are only closed by his action, the account by an observer seeks to explain not what might have been but what actually took place, and traces the actual sequence of events - be these desires, decisions, intentions or actions. In a sense the act is seen as an event. A motive-reason

explanation however is always related to the assignation of moral responsibility and stops the explanation not at the end of a causal chain but where the intervention of an agent can be presumed to have been operative.

The second difficulty is resolved by considering the analogy of causal accounts of physical events in terms of which the cause, although claimed to be contingently related to the effect is in practice deduced from a law, once it has been established as an instance of the law - hence the peculiar necessity of causation. I draw attention to the retrospective redescription of actions in order to bring it under some different account and make sense of it. Whereas the relation between cause and event in the physical world is only made logical in retrospect, for action this takes place before the event because of the uniquely human capacity for projecting a future course of events and deciding to intervene in them. This project may of course be inaccurate or be frustrated, so necessitating adjustment at all points from vague initial thoughts about the act through the enactment to retrospective redescription in the light of later events. The way in which actors behave is dependent in large part on their views of the situation, but the accounts they give acquire an at times spurious, but to them essential coherence because of this constant revamping of what is going on, and constant modification of what the actor's intervention amounts to. It is thus not incoherent to see action as a set of events which may be

causally analysed, but it must be remembered that this procedure precludes a consideration of the actor's freedom in a full sense, though it may well contribute to an account of the extent of the constraints on his action.

I then point out that whereas this view indicates that a quasi-causal account of action is possible, it is limited to the past in that the actors have a capacity for reconceptualising the world continually and thus changing the basis of any causal configuration. In order to predict one would thus have to have access to the actor's imagination and knowledge of his future experiences, which as seen in the previous chapter, is a logical impossibility. 'Causal' generalisation will thus only be valid for as long as the actor continues to perceive the world in the same way. From the point of view of the investigator, this constant revision involves a changing viewpoint in the world and thus a changing social world which requires, as stated earlier, a constant rewriting of history in the light both of new developments and of new concerns because of them. As the actor's views change and so his actions, so must the investigator develop his view to take account of the new social phenomena this gives birth to. I conclude that although there are similarities between a motivational or meaningful account of action and a causal one, there are important differences which make it misleading to use causal language. Durkheim's 'suicide' is discussed to illustrate this. Unless the 'causal' view takes proper account of actors responses to situations it

is liable to slide into a projection of the sociologist's own view of what the actions are and why they take place. It emerges that the maintenance of clarity, accuracy and public verifiability must remain a complex matter dependent at least in part on the investigator's correct understanding of the actor before he attempts to explain. Weber's view that causal verification could be used to check such 'interpretive understanding' is accordingly rejected as impossible.

The relativism established in earlier chapters is hence seen to operate at two levels. The context boundedness of understanding clearly implies one kind of relativism, which comparison and explanation attempts to overcome or at least to diminish by pointing out similarities between different cultures and situations and by indicating factors unnoticed within the culture but significant in terms of developmental processes. This leads to the construction of a set of concepts by the investigator that encompasses both the variety of the investigated, though at the expense of detail and faithfulness to the originals, and includes points that are unnoticed by the investigated. These investigator's concepts are themselves however, embedded in particular models of how social relationships operate, which whilst they may be valuable heuristic aids, are not in any but a rudimentary sense testable, and to each of which there is at least one alternative. The sociology of knowledge has made it plain that these models are as rooted in social reality as the views of the actors investigated. We have thus come full

circle to Chapter 2 where Weber emphasised the necessarily evaluative nature of the assumptions and definitions of research, and urged researchers to be explicit in their aims, and to relate them to a search for ever better forms of social organisation. If relativism is thus inescapable, he recommends us to make a virtue of it. The issue which has acquired dominance is thus the significance of individual consciousness as a fundamental component of the data for a discipline that still aspires to be in some sense scientific. The importance of the existence of the consciousness of both investigator and actor and their methodological interrelation is explored in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5 these complexities are explored in the practical attempts of sociologists to give an explanation of action in terms of social structure, and particular attention is given to attacks made on this kind of explanation for reasons basically identical with those outlined in the previous two chapters. "Social structure" is chosen because it is a crucial explanatory concept in social science. It refers to social actions and social relationships seen collectively and macroscopically, and in particular to the fact that for any given individual at any time others' actions constitute for him the conditions of his own action, a social order which lies beyond his ability to change at will, and one which he both understands and identifies with to some degree, but upon which at least in principle, he can make some impact towards large or small scale

change, given time, effort, and insight. The concept of social structure thus focuses the issue at a single point. From a discussion of its practical use in research and some of the history of this use, the arguments of the last chapter can be further illustrated and developed. In particular, it is possible to show how on the one hand an accommodation needs to be made for individual consciousness, and how on the other, if this is allowed to dominate, all generalisation and explanation is impossible except those given by the individual concerned at a particular time. Yet if we curtail the significance of the individual we immediately cease to account for real people and work only with models of people with artificially limited capacities.

The case of the explanation of deviance is discussed, and it is shown that the attempt at a simply causal account tends to leave the actor as nothing more than a cipher, that is to define him in terms of a few acts he has actually done, but that the alternative of allowing the actor to dominate as a fully conscious agent with a very wide range of possibilities for action introduces such complexity that an explanation never gets beyond his immediate situation and his awareness of and response to it. It is also clear that the continuous construction and development of the actor's world in interaction imposes limits upon an explanation in that it is constantly being outdated. On the other hand, concentrated attention on the contingencies of the actor's interaction and his evaluation

and responses to them results in a very circumscribed account which ignores the importance of wider factors. A middle course that preserves some possibility of general structural explanation is therefore necessary, but one which makes a distinction between general descriptions of structure and factors that are likely to be of causal significance, and the actual experience and mediation of these factors for the individual, and which also allows that the fact that he may be said to respond in terms of them does not imply a notion of him as a billiard ball, nor does it imply that it is only in terms of his experience of the structural factors that he responds. This conclusion echoes at a more practical methodological level the general one about the place of causal concepts arrived at in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 6 the third problem formulation posed initially is discussed, the radical relativism implied by the sociology of knowledge. Here the question of the objectivity of social knowledge is united from the start with that of the nature of social scientific explanation in the doctrine of the ideological nature of all social knowledge. The suggestion that ideas are determined by socio-historical context or by social structure is considered in the light of preceding arguments, and the conclusion reached that there is certainly no single one-way causal relation between them, and that an analysis of the interrelation must take into account internal and conceptual relations in action as well as noting the large scale behavioural changes accompanying structural change. I make an attempt to

bring out some of the subtleties of the ongoing relation between ideas and structure to support the view that it is as at least as plausible to regard the one as primary as the other, and that in the last analysis, there are reasons for opting for the primacy of ideas.

I review various attempts to create a privileged position from which to investigate and evaluate society and so avoid relativism. In particular, the theories of Marx, Mannheim and Lukacs are taken up. In all cases the conclusion is that it won't work. Accordingly the relativism implied has to be accepted, but with the qualification that from the earlier discussion of the relation of ideas and structure, its implications are not as dire as was at first claimed. It would appear to be possible, by a process that can only be described as pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps, to enlarge the element of autonomy that ideas have, and at least to be aware of their relation to the existing social order. On this basis it should be possible to have some fruitful argument about the relative validity of some views as against others.

Chapter 7 is concerned with some more recent discussions of the objectivity problems and with the practical implications of what has been said up to this point. The need for a clear statement of value premises and the importance of an investigation of the scope and precise definition of these is emphasised. I also explore the sociologist's moral/political involvement in his work and his society in an everyday practical sense,

with the conclusion that he is inevitably drawn to try to answer questions as to how a society ought to be run, while trying to answer questions as to how it does run, and that as far as possible these should be separately stated and moral arguments waged where they are appropriate. The difficulty of doing this is reflected in the practical interpenetration of the viewpoints of actor and investigator referred to earlier. I then discuss the importance of different conceptualisations of society, social relations and the nature of man and their implications for different theories, stressing that the descriptive aspects of these are in the last resort inseparable from their moral-political evaluative ones. The possibility of a rationalistic ethics as a way out of the relativism that has been demonstrated so far is discussed, but it is concluded that little can be done in this direction and that the relativism has to be accepted. The closeness of the relation between the suggestion that the kinds of answers obtained depend on the kind of questions put, and the suggestion that the concerns of a man derive from his involvement in the process, structure and culture of a society is also argued for.

Finally, the Appendix reconsiders Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis in the light of all that has been said and makes some suggestions as to the reasons for its continuing fascination and methodological importance. I also suggest that in this work, Weber in practice dealt better with the methodological issues raised by him than he does in the works referred to in

Chapter 2 - in fact he ignores^{the} procedure of causal verification which was prompted by the difficulties he had. This appendix provides a final illustration of the contentions made throughout, and makes some comments on the basis of them on a piece of empirical sociology of the first importance.

C H A P T E R T W O.

MAX WEBER: VALUE RELEVANCE.

In this chapter I shall deal principally with what I have called the layman's worry. Weber was concerned with this question and its ramifications throughout his life, but his most important discussion of it is to be found in his essay on 'Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy'¹, written in 1904, when he assumed co-editorship of the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik. Here he points to the fundamental relativism of all the social or cultural sciences, in that all their investigations involve evaluative premises (Wertbeziehung)². My general aim here is thus to show in the light of Weber's and later analyses, why this relativism must be accepted. In later chapters I will show how it re-emerges in response to other sorts of problems and contentions, and how it has been dealt with in these cases. By way of introduction to these problems - what I have called the cause-meaning problem in particular - I will give an outline of Weber's account of understanding and explanation. This is very much less satisfactory than his theory of value-relevance, and its deficiencies serve to indicate some of the difficulties to be resolved, as well as providing some insights which must be included in such a solution.

Weber reacts to the suggestion that social science must be objective and value-free 'like natural science', with an emphatic rejection, which he then goes on to justify at length and with subtlety, finally explaining that the values involved in social scientific enquiry do not preclude objectivity, but are a condition of it. He takes his epistemology explicitly from Kant³, contrasting the scholastic view that concepts and the language in terms of which we talk about reality reproduces that reality more or less faithfully, depending on the accuracy of the account of it, with his own view that language is the means by which we talk about reality, and that while concepts do to a greater or lesser extent reflect reality, they do so only by taking a particular viewpoint. What we can say about the world then, may be assessable in terms of empirical accuracy, but even if accurate, in no way amounts to the truth: it is true from that particular point of view. Thus we may say that language grasps reality and in doing so constructs or gives meaningful order to that which it grasps. What we understand are those aspects of reality with which we are concerned: language is the means by which we focus our attention, and by which we obtain answers to the questions we put, which in turn derive from the peculiar problems of the human condition. It is not that what we assert in linguistic propositions is not true, but that the extent of its truth or falsity is bounded by the terms of reference we give it, and thus that the notion of perfect knowledge - as envisaged for example by the Encyclopaedists - receives a set-back.

There are many overlapping and interrelating possible sets of knowledge. Thus such familiar objects as a table or a cow, which for much of our existence we would assert as being incontrovertibly and necessarily bounded as the concepts 'table' and 'cow' imply, dissolve into insignificance when viewed from another perspective. Every schoolboy learns that the solidity of a table is the consequence of electromagnetic forces and that it is 'really' mostly space, the sub-nuclear particles constituting but a small proportion of its volume. Similarly the artist, and particularly the modern artist (since Impressionism), may see the 'cow' as a patch of colour, a part of a larger configuration which he attempts to depict on canvas and which points to a view of the world and relationships in it that we do not normally consider. We thus come to realise that the concepts 'table' and 'cow', though their empirical referents can be verified, are only particular ways of grasping reality, not necessary ways⁴.

From this position Weber asked: what does this imply for the investigation and analysis of social phenomena? Can they be treated in the same way as natural ones? He saw that the situation was rather more complex, since the subject matter to be dealt with was not a relatively tangible concrete world upon which order might be imposed, but the different views of many individuals of this world, their views of each others' views and the social scientists' views of them all. Social relations exist intangibly in the minds of actors and in their transient

behaviour to each other. But not only are they much less tangible than the physical world, they are also much more variable - people's views of each other and of other people may be only more or less congruent, and they may change. Finally, and most importantly, these differences and changes are rooted in human consciousness, which allows man to reflect upon the world and his place in it, and so to imagine different possible courses of action. Man's consciousness allows him the possibility of choice and of changing his relation to other objects in the world. This he does by conceptualising it in different ways and in working out possibilities and then evaluating them. The social world, as opposed to the physical, is value-laden because the actor's views of reality and their activity on the basis of this are valued. As Weber says: 'The concept of culture is a value-concept. Empirical reality becomes 'culture' to us because and insofar as we relate it to value ideas'. (Methodology, p. 76). Whereas this element of value is relatively obscured in our conceptualisation of physical reality, because there is a measure of agreement about what is interesting and important, since man has a common physical predicament in the physical world, in the world of social relations values are of continuing salience, since within very wide limits, he can alter his social relations at will⁵.

At this point Weber reapplies his epistemological claim with very different results for the social than for the physical world.

"We wish to understand on the one hand the relationships and the cultural significance of individual events in their contemporary manifestations, and on the other the causes of their being so and not otherwise. Now, as soon as we attempt to reflect about the way in which life confronts us in immediate concrete situations, it presents an infinite multiplicity of successively and co-existently emerging and disappearing events, both "within" and "outside" ourselves. The absolute infinitude of this multiplicity is seen to remain undiminished even when our attention is focussed on a single "object", for instance, a concrete act of exchange, as soon as we seriously attempt an exhaustive description of all the individual components of this "individual phenomenon", to say nothing of explaining it causally. All the analysis of infinite reality which the finite human mind can conduct rests on the tacit assumption that only a finite portion of this reality constitutes the object of scientific investigation, and that only it is "important" in the sense of being "worthy of being known".

Methodology, p.72.

Practically, then, the investigator of social reality faces the same problem as that of physical reality: he must impose meaningful conceptual order on it.

At this, we become aware that Weber is avoiding a point that he elsewhere uses to advantage. One of the crucial differences between the social world and the natural world is that the former is the result of the activities of its inhabitants. It already has, at least to a degree, a meaningful order, which may be understood by the investigator. In this case, what can be Weber's justification for referring to it as 'an infinite multiplicity of successively and coexistently emerging and disappearing events'? He is clearly speaking from the point of view of an observer trying to make sense of social activity to which he is not a party, from the position in fact of the

historian. Before rejecting this as merely the consequence of his own practical difficulties, consider the consequence he wants to draw. He is making essentially the same point as Myrdal, on the basis of the same Kantian epistemology, 'Questions are necessarily prior to answers, and no answers are conceivable that are not answers to questions'. This leads Myrdal to contend that 'This is the crux of all science: It always begins a priori but must constantly strive to find an empirical basis for knowledge and thus to become more adequate to the reality under study'⁶. These inevitable assumptions are, in the case of social science, clearly evaluative, for to talk of how society is ordered is only to reflect one of a number of possible views. Unlike the natural world, things could be arranged differently, but to do this would be to go against the wishes of at least some possible members of the society. Now whether one adopts the position of actor or observer on this matter is immaterial so far as Weber's point is concerned: in either case one selects, and one's selection is a matter of what is personally significant. It is not merely the observer who has to conceptualise his subject matter in terms of some conceptual order, the actor too has to do this for his experience, and for both of them the order which is used will derive from their social existence.

This is not to say however, that the distinction between the actor's values and view and the observer's is not worth making. In principle the two are quite separate and the

question of the relation between them is one which every social scientist must confront. Initially he will strive to understand the actor's view and to a degree identify with it. Only on the basis of such an understanding can he step back and compare it with those of other actors and cultures, or put it in a theoretical context of his own making. In doing this he will become aware of the points at which the actor's view and the implications of it are incompatible with his own or with other views, that is in Weber's terms he will become aware of incompatibilities of value assumptions. In the case of many enquiries however, it will be difficult to obtain evidence of enough detail or sophistication to be sure that the general value assumptions attributed to the actor(s) are the correct ones - there may be a number of possibilities. What is likely to happen here is a fusion of the actor's and observer's views, with the observer "filling in the gaps" and so potentially or actually distorting the picture. This is an inherent problem with Weber's ideal types which are designed precisely to state in simple and pure terms the elements involved in a particular configuration. Unless great attention is paid to detail and to the limitations of the evidence available, a fusion of views is liable to be presented as the genuine view of the actor(s). It is not clear whether Weber was aware of this as a distinct difficulty or not. Certainly he makes no mention of the fact that it implies a double value relevance: the evaluative outlook of the actor and the evaluative under-

standing of this by the investigator. The elimination of this second evaluation is a task for understanding, but as soon as the possibilities of comparison, or explanation within a theoretical context of the investigator's making is raised, the difficulties posed by the actor's standpoint have to be resolved either by taking a compatible position or one that includes and transcends it; or if neither of these is possible, accepting the impossibility of comparison or explanation on this basis, except insofar as the two positions shed light on each other. This problem will be taken up again in Chapter 4. For the present the significant matter is that evaluations form the basic premises of either actor's or observer's view.

In not distinguishing the actor's and the observer's views here, Weber therefore also conflates two points which lead to the same result. He clearly makes the practical point that historians do and will continue to interest themselves in particular aspects of social reality and that they discuss it from that point of view. Thus they will tend to pick on those aspects that are significant to them, which they care about. The historian for example selects a particular reign, war, political struggle, social development, and describes it in a way which not only tries to be accurate but which also has a bearing on his own interests and values. This Weber claims, is inevitable and not to be feared; if historians wrote about things no one was interested in with no reference to their own society, they would be meaningless and ignored. Thus he goes

on to argue that even if one could state a number of abstract historical laws,⁷ they would be of little interest to anyone except insofar as they could be filled out in terms of concrete situations, in which case their lawlike character would be compromised by the complexity of the individual situation. 'The significance of a configuration of cultural phenomena and the basis of this significance cannot however be derived and rendered intelligible by a system of analytical laws (Gesetzesbegriffen), however perfect it may be, since the significance of cultural events presupposes a value-orientation towards these events'. (Methodology, p.76). From the point of view of the observer then, though social reality may not be unstructured, it is by no means a neat limited map to be described. Actors involve themselves in all kinds of different activities, the exact nature, and certainly the interrelations between which are often only vaguely understood. The observer selects those with which he is particularly concerned and only looks at others insofar as they turn out to be importantly related to them.

In a more fundamental sense however, the same conclusion may be reached, for as Weber said, the concept of culture is a value concept, and it is in terms of a culture that the actor's existence is framed. Cultural diversity and conflicting ideologies attest the possibility of choice in the way men order their social lives collectively, the way in which they solve the many dilemmas posed by the facts of their human social

existence. If we adopt the viewpoint of an actor, then, or of a group of actors large or small, we are, equally, taking an evaluative standpoint on how society is ordered. We are of course, qua investigators, doing this with a view to understanding these actors, but insofar as we do not question their view but expound it we are adopting their view of society. When we come to compare this with the views of others in the society of different opinions, or with other societies, we see immediately that choice is possible from the variety of social arrangements, in a way that has no counterpart in the physical world. For the distinctive feature of societies is that they are human creations which always can be, and often are, drastically altered over time by their creators, unlike the natural world, which has to be manipulated, and can be manipulated because it remains unchanged in its organisation. Our ability to transform physical reality is always constrained by our understanding of its permanent character, even though this understanding may be achieved and applied through changing conceptual means. In contrast our ability to transform the social world is all but unlimited, questioning at times even the constraints of our physical being. What for example is a man or a woman in social terms? It is clear that these categories, which derive from physical differences, may be accentuated, reversed or ignored with relative impunity.

From this choice then, the value-laden nature of social analysis derives in a basic sense⁸. When we describe an aspect

of social reality, the question must always arise: what implications does that have for what I think and believe, and for the way I run my life? It is always as Weber puts it relevant to some value. Even though we are describing, we are not describing in the way that we describe the physical world. We are constantly driven to compare with ourselves and with others and to evaluate. With the possibility of human choice and evaluation goes that of responsibility, praise, blame and morality. The more we understand of how others run their social lives, the more aware we are of their successes and failures in relation to ourselves. When we compare descriptions of two societies we are thus comparing, essentially, two human social possibilities not just two sets of facts. The facts of their social existence are as they are because, in principle, they have chosen to make the facts so by living in that way. The very differences between the two point to the possibility of their being otherwise.

This is to run ahead of myself though: the full implications of the above will only become apparent in the following chapters and the theme will be returned to specifically in Chapter Seven. The point to be noted at present is the intrusion of values at a fundamental level into any social enquiry. Weber, and other commentators in profusion more recently, have been quick to point out that this is not the end of the matter. A reasonably critical look at any social investigation reveals a host of evaluations and value judgements of different kinds and with

different scope and reference. All attempts to write 'value-free' history or social science have failed, their only success being to obscure the values concerned in turgid and neologistic prose. The writings of the American structural-functionalist school, and in particular of the system theorists, most of them disciples of Parsons, constitute the largest recent body of evidence on this score⁹. A number of questions are thus raised: Is it possible to give an objective account, and in the light of the foregoing, what does 'objective' mean? What can or should be done about the multitude of intruding values?

The answer to the query as to what objectivity consists in can be given readily once the notion of value-freedom has been displaced. Objectivity does not consist in a search for absolute truth - the idea is meaningless - but in the way, the method by which the search is conducted and its results presented. For research to be objective, it must be replicable, that is to say, another researcher could in principle repeat the research, and should if he did so inevitably arrive at the same conclusion. This implies an adherence to the norms of scientific and scholarly procedure, which though certainly not codified are quite clearly practised. Nor is this a feature only of natural science: archaeologists, historians, sociologists and others engage in exactly the same kind of debates in their academic journals as do natural scientists. These normally concern the status of particular pieces of evidence and their critical relation to a theory. Obviously in natural science the

procedures are more exact and the evidence usually experimental, whereas in the social sciences it is less clear, but the same basic questions reappear. What relevances does it have, if any, to the theoretical assertion? If it is relevant, is it conclusive or merely confirmatory? Is it reliable as evidence? What counterevidence is there and what light does this throw on the evidence in question? What implications does it have for rival theories?

It should be clear then, that when I question a particular conception of objectivity and of science, I am not thereby attacking the values of scholarship. If the idea that facts exist in reality like pebbles on a beach and at times (or always) "speak for themselves", or are self-explanatory, has to be rejected in favour of a view that emphasises the investigator's part in the selection and construction of facts, the integrity of the investigator and the public nature of the processes of investigation become more, not less important. Hence objectivity or the ability to avoid distortion in investigation because of emotional involvement with the subject remains a central aspect of scientific discipline. Both the Catholic and the Marxist need objectivity in this sense to prove that their creed really works, rather than that people can be bullied or fooled into supposing that it does. What neither can do without are their distinctive assumptions, which it is the business of social science to bring into clear focus, both in the case of the Marxist and Catholic and in that of his own research. If this

is to come about the social scientist will have to develop a self-critical awareness of a high order entirely compatible with scientific values of objectivity. He will also have to accept criticism from all quarters and evaluate it fairly¹⁰.

A scrutiny of research in any serious subject concerned with empirical truth will reveal the same concern with cogency, clarity and consistency of theory, clearly presented evidence of specified status and sources, empirical accuracy, interpersonal corroboration. But all research must begin by trying to find something out, by asking specific questions and so by making assumptions of an ontological and of an epistemological kind. In order to understand the answers that are obtained one has to have criteria for what constitutes an answer, though these criteria are usually refined in the course of an investigation. Whether these questions and assumptions are regarded as theoretical or pre-theoretical is of little moment. Their peculiarity is that in providing a context for research they are themselves unverifiable. Hence Myrdal's picture of science chasing its own tail and trying to shed light on its own assumptions is apt. There is no direct test, only the indirect indications from the facts that at times lengthy and wide-ranging theoretical explanations can be developed, and that explanations based on different assumptions and in answer to different questions bring to light relevant facts. As Weber remarks, an important component of objectivity is the willingness to recognise facts counter to one's theory, which may arise in the course of a theory developed to answer a particular question, or as a result of research based on quite different assumptions.

Objectivity therefore, does not consist in value-free research, but in adhering to the norms of scientific procedure to allow replicability, and in stating the assumptions of one's theory clearly¹¹. Weber insists in many places in the Methodology, that facts and values can and should be kept separate in this fashion, but by this he means that it is quite impermissible to introduce fresh evaluative notions later in the enquiry. It is this habit, and with it the habit of distorting the evidence to fit such evaluations, that is meant by bias¹². But it should be remembered that the evaluations in the initial assumptions of the enquiry do not disappear once they have been stated, but inform and determine the direction it takes and the kind of concepts it uses. In consequence, the whole enterprise is limited to the terms of its premises - not that this should surprise us - and is therefore incompatible with research conducted on different assumptions.

The nature of the assumptions varies considerably, and in practice premises of different levels of generality may be found in the same piece of research. At the lowest level, it may be highly structured by descriptive and evaluative assumptions, as in a piece of policy research designed to discover for example, how to provide a certain number of trained teachers by a certain date. Clearly very large aspects of the social situation under scrutiny are assumed to be of a certain kind and to operate in certain normatively defined ways. One of the difficulties of policy researchers is that they frequently discover that

institutions do not operate as they are thought to, that social relations are not as they are rosily perceived from afar. At a more general level, the research is structured by notions such as how do we cure the addict, control the delinquent, integrate and assimilate the alien, provide educational opportunities for the disadvantaged. All these questions have figured very prominently in the fields of criminology and deviance, race relations and education research in recent years. Once again they beg a number of general questions and involve making assumptions at a higher level about the nature of the social phenomena they are investigating. A significant proportion of any discussion of research based on low level premises with policy implications is necessarily concerned with the general assumptions implicit in such policy-oriented premises. Thus one might argue that the idea that foreigners should be assimilated implies a consensus view of society, and not a conflict or pluralist one, and then go on to discuss what is involved in these very general notions about the nature of man and of society, about basic dilemmas and problems which must be solved in any social organisation. These are questions of philosophical anthropology, some of which have a long history - for instance, the problem of order, the problem of control¹³, the problem of meaning¹⁴, the problem of economic production¹⁵ are constantly recurring themes in social research, which are constantly shown to have new and important implications.

At this level as at the more specific ones, the descriptive content of what is at issue is inextricably bound up with the evaluative and the moral. On the one hand it is clearly impossible to keep out of a piece of research implications and covert assumptions of a general sort, even if the argument is only that one's use of lower level assumptions rules out certain general assumptions necessary to one view or other, as in the race relations example. On the other hand the argument at the general level is never just in terms of what is, since this is invariably too general to verify, but about what is arguably the empirical case - there is evidence compatible with its being so - and about how man or social life ought to be. Moral and political conclusions of a general but pervasive kind follow from the side one takes - the consensus-conflict discussion of the problem of order is thus roughly divided into right and left political camps according to one's view of the theoretical matter. Unavoidably then, the research is drawn into making assumptions with moral and political implications.

Value relevance does not mean that research is 'biased' or 'distorted', nor that truth and falsity in it are compromised or irrelevant, only that the assumptions which it makes are also value assumptions. The result is thus evaluative not simply in the sense that it happens to support one value position rather than another, but rather that the conclusions necessarily reflect the premises. It is not just that, for example research into crime and delinquency could until quite recently be almost

entirely construed as an attempt to answer the question "Why do people commit crimes?", whereas recently some research has redirected its attention to seek an answer to the question "who decides what is and is not a crime, and who is and is not a criminal, and for what reasons?" It is not just that people do investigate different problems defined in terms of their interests - that there is applied or policy research - but that there is no such thing as pure research in the sense in which this exists in natural science. Not merely some but all concepts and theories bear this character because they are part not only of a conceptualisation of social reality that attempts to describe it adequately, but one that highlights its desirable and undesirable qualities. The social reality with which they deal is itself evaluative - part of a valued way of life - and thus the attitude of the investigator to it constantly raises his evaluation of it as an issue. Does he seek merely to understand and to describe? - then implicitly or explicitly he identifies. Does he point out how its different features interlock to form a stable whole? - then is this not also an apologia? Does he point out shortcomings and contradictions? - then he points the way to change. But in what direction? - the nature of his conceptualisation indicates it. As Peter Berger has often remarked, the training of the social scientist makes him acutely aware of the fragility of social order, because in appreciating that it is so, he also appreciates that it could be otherwise. Whereas it is reasonable in the natural

sciences to consider one's efforts at conceptual and theoretical innovation as attempts to construct a net to catch reality, this can only ever be part of the social scientist's activities. For the plasticity of human relations is such that to describe things in a certain way is inescapably to suggest that they become so.

In the last analysis it is of course impossible to convince ^{some} /one that he does not develop his theories purely on the basis of the facts he discovers and without any evaluative content. One can only point to the evaluative consequences of his criticisms. To argue for example, that a Trades Union employing a restrictive practice which maintains an artificially large labour force is thereby forcing up the price of the product and thereby themselves out of the job, is, on one reading of, it a soberly descriptive account of the situation and its unintended consequences. But if this view is presented to the Union its evaluative implications will be readily seen in their reactions. What to the investigator is a description is to them a threat which they may cope with in a variety of ways. And the difference in values will become apparent in a discussion: the investigator framed his remarks in the context of an assumption that the economic efficiency of the firm was most important, the workers their reply on the assumption that the right to work, and perhaps to work in the traditional way, was most important. If the argument is subject to further escalation the way in which political and economic institutions are ordered and their value priorities may come into question. Of course it is a

fact that if the Union members continue to do as they do in present circumstances, they jeopardise their jobs, but it is only so if the world remains as it is, and it need not - indeed it very probably is not. For the investigator to state trenchantly that 'those are the facts' is to identify himself with it's remaining as it is. It is not a matter then, of there being a relation between the world of facts and what one ought to do in the world; rather such relation arises in social science when one puts a construction on the world and it acquires an order of priorities.

Weber, while recognising this, asserted that the correct procedure was to state these assumptions as clearly as possible and to show how the research conclusions were related to them. Thus one could portray them as answers to questions, as the means necessary for certain specified ends. One affects the disinterestedness of the scientist or administrator and leaves the politician to make his choice and to engage in the evaluative debate. He states his case in some detail.

"Thus the discussion of value-judgements can have only the following functions:

(a) The elaboration and explication of the ultimate, internally "consistent" value-anxious, from which the divergent attitudes are derived. People are often in error, not only about their opponents' evaluations but also about their own. This procedure is essentially an operation which begins with concrete particular evaluations and analyses their meanings and then moves to the more general level of irreducible evaluations. It does not use the techniques of an empirical discipline and it produces no new knowledge of facts. Its "validity" is similar to that of logic.

(b) The deduction of "implications" (for those accepting certain value judgements) which follow from certain irreducible value axioms, when the practical evaluations of factual situations is based on these axioms alone. This deduction depends on the one hand, on logic, and on the other, on empirical observations for the completest possible casuistic analyses of all such empirical situations as are in principle subject to practical evaluation.

(c) The determination of the factual consequences which the realisation of a certain practical evaluation must have: (1) in consequence of being bound to certain indispensable means, (2) in consequence of the inevitability of certain, not directly derived repercussions. These purely empirical observations may lead us to the conclusion that (a) it is absolutely impossible to realise the object of the preference, even in a remotely approximate way, because no means of carrying it out can be discovered; (b) the more or less considerable improbability of its complete or even approximate realisation, either for the same reason or because of the probable appearance of undesired repercussions which might directly or indirectly render the realisation undesirable; (c) the necessity of taking into account such means or such repercussions as the proponent of the practical postulate in question did not consider, so that his evaluation of end, means and repercussions becomes a new problem for him. Finally: (d) the uncovering of new axioms (and the postulates to be drawn from them) which the proponent of a practical postulate did not take into consideration. Since he was unaware of those axioms, he did not formulate an attitude towards them although the execution of his own postulate conflicts with the others either (1) in principle or (2) as a result of the practical consequences, (i.e. actually or logically). In (1) it is a matter in further discussion of problems of type (a); in (2), of type (c). "

Methodology, pp. 20-21.

It was one of Weber's often repeated beliefs that social science would lead to a greater understanding of the at present unnoticed but nonetheless important consequences of actions and decisions, and that this would thereby lead to greater success in achieving just what was wanted and, by increasing man's self knowledge, increase an area of rational choice. Here he

is arguing like an administrator faced with the need for action on a particular matter and having to evaluate the constraints of various other current aims in the light of any proposed course of action. His analysis, though thorough, is deceptively simple because he assumes that the procedures he describes can accurately and exhaustively be undertaken. Whilst this may be so for many administrative decisions, the neat distinction of means and ends and their exhaustive listing and comparison in a clear simple form is not possible in the case of social research unless it is to be tightly bounded by administrative and policy goals. Difficulties arise in that means as well as ends are valued and thus the distinction between the two is blurred; in that evaluation of different ends and the final decision as to what to do is rarely straightforward - people espouse values which directly conflict, and the choice is ultimately a political one, as Weber was quick to point out. Most importantly though, the general evaluative aspects of social research cannot in any way be easily specified and laid out for consideration, and indeed it is one of the major difficulties of Weber's sociology that he did not do this or try to do it. The results of his efforts show that he was in some sense aware of the difficulties, but he failed to articulate the procedures by which he dealt with them, and the unfortunate reader is left to disentangle them for himself.

If one contrasts him with Marx for example, the latter's overt political concern and his deliberate and painstaking

explanation of his basic views in contradistinction to those he wished to reject (the bourgeois notion of Political Economy and other socialist theories) led him to state a relatively clear and coherent philosophical anthropology which detailed his view of the nature of man and of his basic problems. He was then able to show not only how they had been dealt with, but what the consequences of this were and how they might be dealt with in the future, if changes were made. Where dilemmas arise which he cannot cope with, as with the contradiction between his view of man as an agent creating his world, and of that world yet determining man's existence, he is able to go a considerable way in explaining the implications of this difficulty and to suggest his own solution to it. In contrast to Weber, Marx was very concerned to work out a consistent Weltanschauung to deal with all the basic questions and their interrelations, culminating in a vision of man and society which was at once descriptive and evaluative and which enabled him to draw his political conclusions. It is significant that Weber is said to have engaged in a debate with the ghost of Marx, for much of his work can be seen as focussing on aspects of Marx's vision with the fruitful results that we are familiar with. But he counterposed no alternative vision, only a series of alternative concepts, albeit of great importance, deriving from relatively autonomous concerns with the problems of order, control and meaning - the notions of rationalisation, disenchantment, domination and legitimation. Whereas Marx was concerned to

show how all these matters fitted together and that one's view on one has important consequences for one's view on another, Weber treated them relatively discretely, devoting intensive care to each.

In the discussion of 'ultimate value-axioms' then, a philosophical enquiry of considerable depth and sophistication is concerned: the ramifications lead into political theory, into the philosophy of mind and into ethics. This kind of enquiry cannot be represented as straightforwardly as an explication. Certainly, the more basic assumptions implicit in empirical researches can be drawn out where they are not stated, and these kinds of critiques have increasingly been undertaken. But the general problems of social analysis cannot be reduced to formulae, nor can 'implications' be 'deduced' from them. All that can be said in most cases is that certain views are compatible and others incompatible with them, not that the same problems arise in different forms in different places. This being so, it is not legitimate for Weber to contend naively that the evaluative discussions can be left to the politician. The questions which he discusses in a practical form are dealt with in a general form by political and social theory and by philosophy, and these disciplines cannot be regarded as separate from social science. Weber is correct to contend that assumptions must be made as explicit as possible and that the research conducted on the basis of them should try to clarify where philosophical and theoretical discussion ends and empirical

investigation begins, but it must be remembered that an assumption, or a premise, or a basic standpoint informs the whole of that empirical research, though it does not determine it completely. It decides what is relevant, in Weber's own term. To go on to contend then, as Weber persistently does¹⁶, that social science is an empirical discipline which can give no answer to the questions about how we order our lives and arrange our society, but can only say how things are or at best what follows from certain evaluative assumptions, is humbug. That social science is inevitably involved in discussing what might be and should be is by no means to say this is all it is doing. Both parts are necessary for the understanding of the other.

Weber's position is implicitly that *de principiis non est disputandum*: he regards it as enough to expound one's value premises in a piece of research. He sees it as no part of sociology to argue about the merits of these premises and so accepts a radical relativism, at least as far as his academic self is concerned - in politics it is a different matter¹⁷.

But as Myrdal points out in the quotation already cited

'This is the crux of all science: it always begins a priori but must constantly strive to find an empirical basis for knowledge, and thus to become more adequate to the reality under study'.

The argument of the slogan, as Feigl put it, that

'In order to resolve doubt or disagreement we must not, at least in the given context and until further notice, call into question the very means by which doubt and disagreement is to be resolved,'

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only holds given two considerations. First, it holds if we

stick firmly to the same context and the same logical level and do not step back and change the logical level to consider the merits of our assumptions. Myrdal's suggestion involves a constant toing and froing between levels. Secondly, it holds if the assumptions are 'purely evaluative' with no cognitive or assertive aspect, i.e. if they involve only an attitude to reality and not a selective construction of reality. If, as I contend, evaluative and cognitive interpenetrate in practice and are only distinguishable relatively and analytically, there is, as Myrdal's remark as to their 'adequacy' indicates, a great deal of discussion possible about the practical implications of different assumptions¹⁹.

It is thus not enough to say that valuations should be clearly stated and distinguished from empirical investigation. The distinction is to be maintained, but the essence of successful social science lies in the dialogue between the two. In order to have a dialogue one must have two distinguishable parties, but the dialogue consists not in their being two but in the relation and mutual influence of the two. We return to Weber's Kantian epistemology with the realisation that the vision that guides our view of society is constantly modified by what we see through these spectacles, with this theory, on these assumptions. Just as our view of the physical world is selective and constructive so is our view of the social world, but it is also reflective: what we see is not simply a consequence of how we see. This may lead us to ignore things, to conflate

things, to over-emphasise things, but it need not lead to pure illusion or hallucination, unless we allow ad hoc evaluation and falsification of the evidence.

Weber's limitation in this respect emerges when the question is raised of what is to be done about the relativism implied. So far he has claimed that in order to conduct an enquiry one must make assumptions, ask questions, and that these form a framework or give rise to a way of looking at things which is relative and thus evaluative. He emphasises that the assumptions must be brought to light and clearly stated and then claims that within the terms so defined, the enquiry is objective in that it adheres to the norms of scientific procedure, presents evidence, accepts rules of evidence, discusses the sources of the evidence and its relation to explanatory conclusions. All these procedures - the mechanisms by which an empirical explanation is built up - are publicly verifiable. The difficulty that has concerned later commentators however, is that this leaves the entire project in isolation, bound by the nature of its own premises. Other investigations can only be added to it and used to refine and supplement it if they are based on the same premises. Different ones will lead to different conceptions of reality, not just in the sense of different aspects to be considered, but different configurations which are included in the concepts. Thus, if rather misleadingly, we think of a number of elements in reality a n, one view of it may conceptualise them in groups of three, whilst another may take

groups of five and yet another only every sixth one. What is "left out" or "included", what is the "constitution" of a concept, thereby creates a world for the user of the concept a universe of discourse in which he cannot see reality in any other way: he is isolated. This relativism has perturbed subsequent commentators and social scientists to such a degree that rather than accept it they have chosen either to ignore it and behave as though their work did indeed contribute to some unitary social science (or even unitary science), or else to revert to a naively realistic epistemology in terms of which natural and social objects were genuinely reflected in concepts and theory, and the social world was seen as being homogeneously "out there" waiting to be discovered. The active creative element in theory construction and concept formation was denied.

But these difficulties do not end here, even supposing we accept this point. Not only is it argued by Weber that research is limited in the scope of its generalisation by its assumptions, but these assumptions, the values and interests of the enquirer and the social phenomenon of the enquiry, being human constructs, are liable to change. How can one talk of post-war history without referring to the use of the atomic bomb, the cold war, the U.N., the E.E.C., all social ideas with institutional counterparts in social relations that have some similarities to other phenomena in the past, but which also possess a novelty and uniqueness that cannot be assimilated by comparison? There is every reason to suppose that this will continue. The very data

which the social scientist has to deal with changes, the problems presented in social existence change and the social scientist's relation to them also changes. The extent to which the investigator is a product of his time and social position is one that Weber largely ignored, and that I shall leave for consideration in Chapter Six. But this does not alter the incontrovertible evidence that there are constant changes in social ideas and social relations and that these are trivialized if they are reduced to their similarities and made absurd if incorporated in some invisible overarching wheel of History a la Spengler or Toynbee. This fact in itself is enough to upset the social scientists' assumptions: what is true today may not be tomorrow, or next year. And indeed one paradoxical aspect of this is that it may not be, because he shows that it is true today - people may take it into their heads to modify their behaviour on the basis of that knowledge so as to falsify it. Weber proposes the concept of an ideal type, which I shall say more of later, to begin the process of making sense of social phenomena. It is essentially an instrument for setting out those aspects of the phenomena one wants to consider, in, as he puts it, a pure form, uncomplicated by practical entanglements with other phenomena. Weber sees ideal types as a source of hypothesis and theory about reality, not as theory themselves, they being too one-sided and over-simplified. 'The coming of age of science', he says, 'in fact always implies the transcendence of the ideal-type, insofar as it was thought of as

possessing empirical validity or as a class-concept (Gattungsbegriff) ... There are sciences to which eternal youth is granted, and the historical disciplines are among them - all those to which the eternally onward flowing stream of culture perpetually brings new problems.' Methodology, p. 104²⁰.

Not only is Weber claiming relativism therefore, he is claiming that it is constantly updated²¹. We might at this point remember that Weber in 1904 was writing principally as a historian, and that he was mainly concerned with the individual uniqueness of historical phenomena rather than with generalisation. Is there no way of limiting the number of possible value-standpoints for the social scientist who wishes to generalise - and surely even history must make some generalisations? The answer to this is that in principle no, the radical relativism must be accepted. There are as many assumptions upon which to conduct a social inquiry as there are people willing to think them up.²²

The matter is not to be abandoned there, however. There is nothing to prevent comparisons and contrasts being made between different pieces of research, provided their basic incompatibility in terms of reference is recognised. This comparison can be not only in terms of empirical results, but of theoretical premises, and here as I have already suggested there is room for philosophical, political and ethical debate. Two different views may be incompatible but this is not to say they do not shed light on one another - sometimes quite the reverse. Weber points out:

'One of our foremost jurists once explained, in discussing his opposition to the exclusion of socialism from university posts, that he too would not be willing to accept an "anarchist" as a teacher of law since anarchists deny the validity of law in general - and he regarded his argument as conclusive. My own opinion is exactly the opposite. An anarchist can surely be a good legal scholar. And if he is such, then indeed the Archimedean point of his convictions, which is outside the conventions and pre-suppositions which are so self-evident to us, can equip him to perceive problems in the fundamental postulates of legal theory which escape those who take them for granted. Fundamental doubt is the father of knowledge.'

Methodology, p.7.

Similarly the conflict/consensus debate which has been central to sociological theory for so long can be seen as mutually illuminating. Both sides reacted to the other's criticisms as to their inadequacies by modifying and incorporating them. Fundamentally, this makes neither of them any the more satisfactory - they represent different solutions to the problems of order and control - but it does mean that as models they are more sophisticated and that he who has to choose either can make his choice on the basis of a fuller understanding.

Weber argued in an earlier quotation about the function of the discussion of value judgements that the relation of lower level evaluations to ultimate valuations was one major task. Hence one might contend that the effective number of possible value assumptions could be reduced by doing this. Because, as I have already argued practical implications cannot be "deduced" from general value positions however, it is not possible to claim that low level evaluations are insignificant. Several

may be compatible with one more general value position and yet be distinct low level evaluations themselves and so lead to different kinds of research conclusions. At the extreme one has only to consider how concepts like liberty and democracy are capable of different practical usage, or even how 'equality of educational opportunity' may be used to justify a discriminatory and selective system of education. The point remains however, that general problems and their particular solution by individual researchers are of more crucial and pervasive significance for their work than the specific low level evaluation in which they are included, and it is by comparison and criticism of these general problems that theoretical progress is maintained and relations between otherwise isolated pieces of research worked out. This may take a considerable amount of time and much empirical work may be done before the incompatibility of its theoretical assumptions with others is demonstrated. The specific example of recent deviancy theory will be discussed in Chapter 5.

It is very difficult to specify these problems in detail but some of them at least have a considerable intellectual history. The problem of order for example asks how it is that selfish human interests do not give rise to internecine strife - a war of all against all. The problem of meaning wonders how it is that men confer meaning of their social lives. Assumptions may be made about the nature of man: is he basically selfish or does he naturally seek others' love and esteem; does he have

instincts; does he have basic social or biological needs? Is there any necessary significance in sexual differentiation; is man an active creative animal or a passive pragmatic one? To all of these one wants to respond that none represents the truth, yet they all concern fundamental aspects of man's social condition which are relevant to any social enquiry large or small scale, and it is therefore important to discuss what is involved. One's answer depends partly on a full understanding of the issues, but in the last analysis will either be a question of adopting one point of view "for the time being" or more likely, will articulate with one's basic moral-political outlook. The important thing is that this discussion should go on for it is only by means of it, and the application of the results in new research that views can be developed, confirmed and discredited. The answer to the question How shall we order our lives? thus emerges as slowly and as painfully as a social science based upon a limited and consistent set of assumptions does. As Myrdal points out²³, this is likely to be a long time acoming, since people hold to all kinds of disparate and incompatible general values - amply displayed in the paradox of the pacifist who is asked "What would you do if you discovered one of the enemy raping your wife/sister/daughter?". The implications of moral dilemmas such as these must be studied in detail if we are to realise the limitations and the progress to be made in working out a limited and consistent - at least in their application - set of value assumptions and a view of man and of society which

reflects them and allows for a social existence which fulfils them. It will be one of the purposes of this study to show how this general difficulty emerges again and again as questions leading to relativistic conclusions are raised.

I therefore agree with Alan Dawe in deducing the need for moral debate as well as empirical enquiry in social science:

'Research in education is almost entirely geared to the theme that has been central to British sociology since the work of Booth and Rowntree; namely that of working-class deprivation. In fact as far as British sociology is concerned educational deprivation has become the contemporary equivalent of material deprivation..... Clearly, to concentrate on deprivation is an ethical decision. Yet that we should do so is taken to be virtually self-evident. In very much the same way that Weber had in mind, the right to educational equality becomes almost a natural right and is therefore built into the sociology of education unquestioned. Once there it becomes, not the ethical imperative it really is, but an explanatory concept. One result of this concealment of its ethical nature is that it is not defended in the only terms in which it can be defended - the terms of value - because it is not thought out in those terms. It assumes that 'conventional self-evidentness' which leaves those who believe in it, and the sociology which propagates it, wide open to the kind of attack on sociology and its role in what is now being called the 'progressive consensus' that, we are told, is about to be launched. That attack will be mounted, quite openly on the basis of a particular set of values. It cannot be answered by ignoring, if only by default, the issues of value involved. It cannot be answered by research and yet more research. It can only be answered by a conscious defence of an alternative set of values. In the case of education, for example, it needs to be argued that, after all the research has been done, the implementation of comprehensive education is fundamentally a moral decision.'

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But it is misleading to represent the two as entirely separated: they are distinct but not separated. And it is misleading to represent the moral argument, necessary though

it is to raise it and stop covert assumptions in the midst of empiricism, as though it were the manning of the barricades. In straight-forward political action this may be so, but in terms of social science, moral argument is not merely a place for passionate display, but for as much care and cogency and attention to detail as in empirical research. Petty squabbles occur at the level at which men's immediate practical interests are engaged and where the low level of the argument enables fixed entrenched positions to emerge based on spuriously simple differences in ultimate values: this is the stuff of political conflict.

When the discussion takes place at the level of general moral notions and conceptions of social order however, with the particular as example rather than as pressing issue, the possibility of an entrenched position only arises at the expense of the accusation 'ideology', that the other party is determined to disagree on all counts. If one takes Mill or Marx one can clearly see the importance of this recognition of the fundamentally evaluative nature of social life: 'the concept of culture is a value-concept'. At the same time the possibilities inherent in this realism also give rise to one-sidedness, blindness and over-involvement. Both Marx and Mill are criticised for their ideological straightjacketing of the issues. This has led to the development in the academic world of separate disciplines or at least fields of study dealing with scholasticised aspects of the problems. Political theory remains fairly open,

sociology is rapidly being engulfed in the empiricism which has dominated economics and psychology for years, and philosophy is only just showing some signs of recovery from an obsession with, in the words of one of its masters: 'Doing things with words'. I am by no means the first to remark on the perilous state of philosophy and the social sciences; Professor Williams has recently pronounced more sententiously than I.²⁵

'The simple is-ought distinction 'distracts attention from, regards as secondary the enormous number of concepts which we ourselves use and other societies use, and people in the past have always used, which have got an evaluative force of a certain kind - that is their deployment has something to say for or against acting in certain ways... These concepts are not simply choppable up into these, as it were, 'ought' and 'is' bits. Take an everyday concept, the concept of owing somebody something - I mean literal owing, money-owing. You might almost say it's a question of fact - certainly the law regards it as a question of fact - as to whether A owed B some money. Question: how is 'he ought to pay it' related to 'he owes it' in that legal or institutional sense. Again, what about a notion like 'it's his job to'? Or the notion of professional etiquette. Again let's take more exotic examples ... like the oriental conception of face and losing face. This is a notion which obviously has very strong evaluative implications, governs what people do, but is deeply tied up with a network both of institutions and of interpretations of human behaviour.

... Because moral concepts aren't as distinctively moral as all that, but are tied up with sorts of concepts we use to describe human nature, the sorts of human characteristics we find interesting, important, significant, the line between where you've got an evaluative disagreement and a factual disagreement is much less sharp than the other picture suggested; and one of the things about this is that there are presuppositions of using one set of values rather than another, and these can be explored by philosophy. Let me just take one case. Some moral outlooks put an enormous premium on a characteristic called strength of will; and this action is not unconnected, for example, with those genuinely moral questions about

the fanatic - whether he should be admired for doing what he sincerely believes is right. These issues are related, not just to other moral or evaluative questions, but to a whole set of questions - about what the self is, what the will is, what action is - which are to be explored at the philosophical and psychological level, so the first thing I want to say is that we can treat some evaluative disagreements, not at the pure level of adjudicating the evaluative disagreement, but by pursuing those presuppositions which make sense of that set of values - views of human nature, of society, of what human beings are - and some of those may be found to be incoherent at the philosophical level'.

To say that 'this aspect of society is of central importance' or that 'society functions like this' is often helpful and may be true, but only ever within the limits of the terms used. It constitutes a selection of aspects for study, problems to solve and will do greater justice to some interests and values than others. To some extent 'all the world's a stage' and there is a 'territorial imperative', but it is misleading to see social relations only in terms of roles or of overcrowding and to do so has the implication of a reorganisation of social life in terms of a theoretical perspective. As Martins puts it 'Common values and norms hinge on common concepts and categories: there is a social problem of cognitive order as well as a Hobbesian problem of moral order'²⁶. Seeing the world in terms of a set of cognitive categories leads to a limited set of moral choices. Changing the cognitive categories may provide a new order of moral alternatives. The counterpart of Orwell's Newspeak in 1984 which made certain ideas and so certain kinds of action literally unthinkable is the situation

of today's politicians and magistrates who refer to adolescent vandalism or unofficial strikes as 'mindless' or 'anarchic' - literally without order, moral or cognitive. The world view and social experience of those who perpetuate these outrages is in fact so different from those who censure them as to be quite unintelligible, so that the act seen from the vantage point of authority can have no purpose or motive. Similarly those who commit sexual assaults on children often claim a 'mental blackout' in their court defence, because any attempt at explanation is useless to those who judge them, as they do not recognize, nor can they comprehend the desires that motivated them. Better to avow mindlessness and so deny responsibility for one's own acts, than to have one's desires, experiences and motivation distorted and misinterpreted to be intelligible to the court. The question of the limitations imposed on understanding by the cognitive categories employed is not in the last analysis separable from the limitations comprised by moral categories. As Williams indicates above, moral categories, unless they are seen as simply expressions of emotion, contain cognitive aspects. Similarly cognitive categories represent a decision to see certain things in a certain way and so reflect evaluative interests. In the discussion of the 'value premises' and 'theoretical assumptions' upon which sociological research is conducted this overlap should be borne in mind and the argument, as Dawe maintains, waged in whatever form is appropriate: empirical research, conceptual exegesis and moral

debate are all essential to achieve final clarity about what is being said and claimed.

Relativism was the conclusion of Weber's discussion of value-relevance, relativism which stressed the importance of assumptions and definitions and their value implications. It was a conclusion that dealt a blow to the conception of social science along the lines of natural science as independent, cumulative and objective. This view has at last been seriously questioned and shown to be unrealistic for natural science also,²⁷ but there are other important differences between the young and perhaps ever youthful social sciences and the natural sciences. Given that he had accepted a considerable degree of relativism in his subject, and argued that objectivity consisted in the public availability of the results, not the assumptions on which they were based, it is not surprising that Weber should react strongly to a threat to objectivity as he redefined it.

In 1904 he wrote '.... In the social sciences we are concerned with psychological and intellectual (geistige) phenomena of a specifically different type from those which the schemes of the exact natural sciences in general can or seek to solve'. Methodology, p. 74. At the end of his life towards 1920 he wrote 'Sociology ... is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects'. The problem

of the 'geistige' phenomena of sociology and their interpretation prior to causal explanation thus reappears, and as Weber continues, the difficulties become more evident. 'In "action" is included all human behaviour when and insofar as the acting individual attaches subjective meaning to it. Action in this sense may be either overt or purely inward or subjective; it may consist of positive intervention in a situation, or of deliberately refraining from such intervention or passively acquiescing in the situation. Action is social insofar as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course'. Theory of Social and Economic Organisation, p. 88.

Weber is proposing a deliberately non-behaviourist discipline which recognises the necessity to understand what individuals think they are doing, their reasons, intentions, aims and motives and the social worlds they create and inhabit before trying to explain what they do. It gives full recognition to individual consciousness and to culture and social relations as the expression and consequence of man's reflective and imaginative capacities as well as being, for each individual, a world which he experiences as a facticity alien from himself, like the physical world. Weber's view of man is of a creature who confers meaning upon all aspects of reality and upon his own existence in it, who acts in terms of this meaning and this view of reality and thereby contributes to and creates a world

of social relationships and ideas in which to dwell as well as reacting to what already exists as a result of the efforts of those that went before him. His view of society is as a human product which must be understood before it can be explained. He is therefore required to give some account of a method of understanding which will conform to the demand for the accuracy and public verifiability of objectivity, and then to show how action thus understood can be causally explained.

In his earlier essay on value relevance Weber had propounded a similar view of social science which attempted to come to terms with human consciousness as a crucial mediating element in action. He had stressed the importance of actions as taking place in a world construed in a particular way which varied with time, place and individuals. If people tended to see things differently and to act differently at different times and places, this meant that an understanding of their views was an essential starting point for any social science. Objectivity was raised as a problem in one sense by the limitation on comparability between times and places, and the variety of interests, assumptions and definitions with which the researcher, likewise human with his own view of the world, set up his research project. In this direction lay value relevance and relativism. The same emphasis on the significance of consciousness in action however, led to the posing of a question about objectivity in the context of verifiability. Weber had earlier taken it for granted that one would accurately understand other people and other cultures.

But if consciousness was to be the central element in this, and particularly if it was a consciousness separated from one's own by a great cultural gap, how could one be sure as to what one might assert of it? One could not use the procedures of natural scientific verification by experimental testing, at least in any usual sense, since the evidence concerned was not only physical. And if one could not do this how could one lay any claim to certainty and accuracy, how could one say that the facts about which one spoke were indisputable, and in this sense objective? Weber had been careful never to sacrifice objectivity in this sense in his earlier discussion, by claiming that even though research was limited in its scope by its premises, it must be interpersonally replicable, so that a later researcher would inevitably produce the same results if he began with the same assumptions. When the criteria for understanding action as a precondition of providing a more general explanation were raised for examination, it began to look as though there would be some difficulty in getting them to hold up.

It appears that Weber is claiming at this stage that the actor's view of the situation must be understood before his behaviour can be recognised with certainty. An external observer's position leads to mis-interpretation through ego-centrism, with the result that people apparently act differently in situations that are seen as the same by an observer, and the same in situations that are seen as different. Only when

the way the actor identifies situations is recognised will the genuine regularities in his behaviour be comprehended for these derive not only from 'objective' similarities in circumstances, but from rules and meanings which guide the actor's response to them both as regards how he sees them and how he reacts to them.

In fact Weber gives very little account to what he means by understanding (Verstehen) and takes a familiarity with current discussions of the method and the concept for granted as background to his own view. He refers the reader to Jaspers, Rickert and Simmel²⁸ and he might have added, Wilhelm Dilthey whose particular concern it was to make Verstehen the basic method of social science and who was an important protagonist in the contemporary debate on whether such a method was necessary or useful, and whether if it was used, the results would be sufficiently clear and publicly verifiable to allow a subsequent 'respectable' causal analysis, or alternatively could stand on their own as an explanation²⁹.

Weber initially makes a distinction between logical or rational, and emotionally empathic understanding. Thus 'We have a perfectly clear understanding of what it means when someone employs the proposition $2 \times 2 = 4$ or the Pythagorean theorem in reasoning or argument, or when someone correctly carries out a logical train of reasoning according to our accepted modes of thinking. In the same way we also understand what a person is doing when he tries to achieve certain ends

on the basis of the facts of the situation as experience has accustomed us to interpret them. Such an interpretation of this type of rationally purposeful action possesses, for the understanding of the choice of means, the highest degree of verifiable certainty'. We know the state of affairs the actor wants to bring about and the alternatives open to him and so we can see why he did what he did. 'On the other hand, many ultimate ends or values towards which experience shows that human action may be oriented, often cannot be understood completely, though some times we are able to grasp them intellectually. The more radically they differ from our own ultimate values, however, the more difficult it is for us to make them understandable by imaginatively participating in them'. T.S.E.O. p. 91. General value ideas are vague, though they may be important to actors and thus we may have to rely on our identification with the actor and his culture to gain some feeling for the situation, where it cannot be easily spelled out in terms of means and ends. At the same time Weber is quick to reject the dubious intuitive kind of understanding this implies: 'It is a great help to be able to put one's self imaginatively in the place of the actor and thus sympathetically to participate in his experiences, but this is not an essential condition of meaningful interpretation'. p.90.

Weber then goes on to deal with the wider context in which actions take place, for so far we are limited to the actor and his immediate situation. He contrasts observational and explanatory understanding.

'Understanding can be of two kinds: the first is the direct observational understanding of the subjective meaning of a given act as such, including verbal utterances. We thus understand by observation, in this sense, the meaning of the proposition $2 \times 2 = 4$ when we hear or read it. This is a case of the direct rational understanding of ideas. We also understand an outbreak of anger as manifested by facial expressions, exclamations or irrational movements. This is direct observational understanding of irrational emotional reactions. We can understand in a similar observational way, the action of a woodcutter or somebody who reaches for the knob to shut a door or who aims a gun at an animal. This is rational observational understanding of action.

Understanding may, however, be of another sort, namely explanatory understanding. Thus we understand in terms of motive the meaning an actor attaches to the proposition twice two equals four, when he states it or writes it down, in that we understand what makes him do this at precisely this moment and in these circumstances. Understanding in this sense is attained if we know that he is engaged in balancing a ledger or in making a scientific demonstration, or is engaged in some other task of which this particular act would be an appropriate part. This is rational understanding of motivation, which consists in placing the act in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning. Thus we understand the chopping of wood or aiming of a gun in terms of motive in addition to direct observation if we know that the woodchopper is working for a wage or is chopping a supply of firewood for his own use or possibly doing it for recreation. But he might also be 'working off' a fit of rage in an irrational case'.

p.95.

The contrast Weber is drawing here is the extent of our knowledge of the action. By observational understanding we only understand what he is doing, but when we understand motives also, we can see why.

There are a number of difficulties with this account of understanding, not the least being the difficulty for the reader of understanding what Weber is saying. As he admits 'This book,

to be sure, is written in a somewhat difficult style and its argument does not appear everywhere to have been thoroughly thought through', p.88. Ultimately, as will become evident, the only way out is a systematic thinking through of the question, but there are proximate difficulties with the distinction between observational and explanatory understanding. We cannot simply read off the meaning of a piece of behaviour that we see without making assumptions about the cultural context in which it is set and thence the motives involved. So far from being separated, recognition and explanation are closely linked. To identify an act as chopping wood is thus either to say that this is what we the observers call it, or that it is what the actor understands by it. One of Weber's important mistakes noted earlier is to fail to think through the implications of the distinction between the actor's and the observer's view, a distinction which becomes particularly sharp when we take examples from cultures very different from our own. We understand the chopping of wood within a certain cultural context which associates it with the kinds of motives Weber goes on to suggest. And he is surely correct to maintain that the same act defined in terms of public culture may have different specific meanings for the individual, especially in terms of the motives involved. But it is equally possible for the act to take on a quite different meaning in terms of another culture - one might think of the cutting of mistletoe by the Druids, where the possibility of total misinterpretation arises if we locate

a ritual act in a utilitarian cultural context. Weber fails at this point to recognise that the individual lives in a cultural world which is learned and held in common and which he makes use of and modifies in his own action but which provides the basic context of meaning for all his acts. It even supplies in Mills' terms 'vocabularies of motive',³⁰ typical motives associated with typical acts. Weber is able to supply a range of possible motives for chopping wood but the range is in practice not limitless. If actors claim to have motives other than those conventionally understood in the prevailing culture, they tend to be seen as eccentric or insane.

Weber goes on to state the importance of understanding the motive or subjective meaning of the act, without, except implicitly, paying very much attention to the overarching culture and its influence in limiting the actor's aims and informing him as to what things are meaningful and why. His voluntaristic view of the actor leads him to emphasise the variability of subjective meanings of the "same" acts, rather than exploring the limitations imposed upon subjective meaning by the application of common learned cultural meanings to specific practical situations, i.e. suggesting that the actor acts in the appropriate way according to the culture. He is thus presented with a problem, which he never explicitly refers to, as how we know we have understood the actor's motive. His concern appears in the discussion of the status of interpretive understanding (Verstehen) 'Every interpretation attempts to

attain clarity and certainty, but no matter how clear an interpretation as such appears to be from the point of view of meaning, it cannot on this account alone claim to be the causally valid interpretation. On this level it must remain only a peculiarly plausible hypothesis', pp.96-7. He goes on to refer to unconscious and hidden motives, multiple motives, and motives that may be understood as similar to the observer but are differently classified (and thus have a different meaning) to the actor. Because he is allowing for the complexity, privacy and variability in the actor's subjective meanings, because we can never know, in just the way the actor can, what he intended or meant, Weber is left with an insoluble difficulty in establishing the objectivity of this kind of understanding. Aspects of it must remain guesswork and intuition, refined though this may be in cases where there is familiarity with the actor and his culture.

Thus his account of observational and motivational understanding involve a radical confusion. Weber effectively takes an observer's view in claiming to be able to identify acts (though not their motives) just by observing them. While he is correct in asserting that we do claim that people have done things if they have gone through the requisite motions, whether they intended it or not, this is only the case within a common cultural context within which the meanings of situations and behaviour is assumed by all. We can only tell by observation because we understand the common cultural meaning of the symbols.

We read off behaviour as meaningful action just as we read of the meaning of words on a printed page. Weber fails to recognise that although we do not have to understand the individual to understand his acts in this sense, we do have to understand the culture and our point of observation cannot be outside it, and our terms of definition cannot be in some neutral observation language. This problem becomes sharper when he moves to motivational understanding, where on the one hand he says we have to get at the actor's intention and yet on the other defines motive as a complex of meaning adequate to actor or observer as ground for the act. At this point he is simultaneously maintaining that we can only understand by knowing what the actor meant and that it is also possible to understand by imputing a motive by analysing the circumstances. We then go back to observational understanding to enquire what the definition of circumstances is - external 'objective' observers or actor's - and find him unclear. Normally a number of possible motives are associated with an act defined in terms of the common culture - why do you post a letter for example, or go on holiday. Knowledge of these actions and the actor's particular variant of them specifies the meaning of the act and our understanding of it.

This confusion is manifested in its clearest form in his disastrous theory of meaningful and causal adequacy. 'We apply the term adequacy on the level of meaning to the subjective interpretation of a coherent course of conduct when and insofar

as, according to our habitual modes of thought and feeling its component facts taken in their mutual relation are recognised to constitute a "typical" complex of meaning. It is more common to say "correct".' p.99. Here Weber is admitting the importance of general cultural understanding in referring to a 'typical' complex of meaning. This represents the strongest side of his case for claiming that his understanding is verifiably accurate, since there are various means for checking the understanding^{of}/common cultural meanings and in some societies, institutionalised procedures for learning many of them (education). But in a general sense, there is no way of being sure that the motive attributed by the observer is the correct one, and thus of being sure that it brought about the observed action. On the one hand Weber is concerned to maintain the importance of independent ideas leading to individual action, but on the other he has to be able to say which ideas lead to which actions and which come to nothing or are otherwise ineffective. He cannot do this without access to the actor's mind which he can never have. The only way out then is a causal check to see whether the motive does in fact "produce" the results anticipated: 'The interpretation of a sequence of events will on the other hand be called causally adequate insofar as, according to established generalisation from experience, there is a probability that it will always actually occur in the same way'. p.99. This is of course to assume a contingent relation between motive and action rather than a conceptual or meaningful one in

terms of which the actor perceives the situation. If the woodcutter intended to chop some wood for his fire, he will define his action in those terms. To assume a contingent relationship which has to be proved causally is to deny the very point that Weber was trying to make initially, that recognition must be given to actors' ideas and motives in giving an account of their actions, and that it is their view of the world that they act in terms of.

Meaningful adequacy thus represents Weber's final attempt at reconciliation with the view that an understanding of the actors is the only way to understand social interactions. It is linked to the standpoint that looks for an explanation in terms of how the actor experienced the world in the situation leading up to the act. Causal adequacy takes the opposed view that the situation itself conceived in some objective way independently of what the actor sees and acts in terms of, exercises a determining influence which will enable the true causes of the act to be revealed, or as Weber puts it in an attempt to patch the situation up, those motives of the actor which are effective in leading to action. These two kinds of 'adequacy' thus constitute the pasting together of philosophically incompatible positions, one of which regards causal circumstance as irrelevant except insofar as they are perceived and responded to, and the other of which regards the actor's views as irrelevant except insofar as they embody a 'correct' conception of the circumstances which operate causally to determine action.

The paste used to join the two is the notion of motive, conceived ambiguously as something which can either be an actor's idea which leads him to act in a certain way or an imputation by an observer which causes him to do so. It is significant that in our everyday discussion of 'motives' we do not, when we ask why a person acted as he did, usually refer to motives but to reasons, and here we distinguish very clearly an actor's having a reason, that reason being his reason for acting, and there being a reason which we, the others, give for his action, none of these necessarily being identical. For example the reason I have for going on holiday may be to have a rest. I may also have as a reason that I enjoy the sun and the sea but others may impute to me the 'real' reason that I am running away from a failure at work. Motives are best left for detectives in novels to find whence, I suspect, they derived³¹.

Weber's concern with the autonomous individual consciousness thus leads him into insoluble difficulties in giving a scientific account of action because in order to do this he has to deny the importance of the relation between consciousness and action that he began by asserting, and to assume that there is only a constant contingent conjunction between what some people think some of the time and what results in terms of behaviour. In this respect his concern with ideal types as a compromise, and as he saw it, temporary expedient until generalisations of a causal nature could be made, was very much more fruitful. By means of them he attempted to separate out into pure form cultural

configurations or complexes of meaning which were regarded as significant. He regarded them as a source for hypothesis rather than as theoretical generalisations in themselves, and as essentially a tool for simplifying the complexities of the action context so that they might be more readily understood. In his earlier years he concentrated on constructing ideal types to fit individual historical situations, but by the time he came to write of them in The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation, he was more concerned with using them to cover longer periods, as he did in his protestant ethic thesis, and as a source of generalisations. They remain however aids to understanding and only generalise in the sense of imputing the understanding of, and action on the basis of the same complex of meaning to actors over a long period and in apparently different situations. Thus he suggested that elements of the protestant ethic survived, though surrounded by new elements, to become the spirit of capitalism³³.

For the present, the important point to emerge from Weber's account is the confusion of his view of understanding and its breakdown when he moves on to explanation. The following two chapters will try to give a systematic account of both these large notions. The reasons for the collapse of Weber's attempt to make understanding public and methodologically dependable (objective) by means of a causal verification are instructive, in that they lead to the exposure of the radical incompatibility of the methodology implicit in his action of understanding with

that implicit in his action of cause, the one being distinctive to human action, (social scientific), the other appropriate to events (natural scientific). The matter to be considered then is first, whether and in what sense understanding can lead to objective facts, and secondly whether the explanation of them can use any of the methodology appropriate to events. What will emerge is that given the distinctive nature of understanding, explanation too has to be greatly modified to take on distinctive features compatible with the implicit methodology of understanding.

C H A P T E R T H R E E.

UNDERSTANDING.

This chapter begins to try to sort out the muddle that Weber was shown to be in at the end of the last, by considering what it is for two people to understand one another, and what the limits upon such an understanding are. Rather than taking the traditional philosophical approach and asking if such a knowledge of others is possible, I shall start from the common sense assumption that it is, and try to give an outline of the elements involved and their interrelations. - In doing this I shall therefore not deal in a conventional way with the philosophical problem of other minds: I shall start in fact from Wisdom's¹ conclusion at the end of three hundred pages of investigation of the matter, that the problem of other minds is misleadingly conceived and leads constantly into radical scepticism. Rather than worrying about the certainty and perfection of such knowledge, I shall take it as obvious that there is never final certainty nor perfect knowledge of others and turn my attention to the basic reasons for this, which lie in men's social relation to each other in the world.

I will begin by discussing people's understanding of each other within a common context of meaning or culture, and then consider the difficulties involved in understanding another

culture and in comparing cultures. The point that will emerge from the whole and which will become salient in the following chapter is the position of he who would understand in relation to those he tries to understand. Does he do so on their own terms, or in his terms? But there is a great deal else to be said before the significance of this dichotomy can be appreciated.

Understanding Others²

I take it as a fundamental ontological assumption, as I have argued previously, that a real world of phenomena exists independent both of man's existence and of his attention to it. Human beings live in this physical reality and are a part of it, being also physical. Thus they impinge upon and cause changes in it, and it impinges upon them, by their very existence.

As animals, human beings have an awareness of the world, and each has a particular and unique experience of it because of his peculiar position in it in relation to the other objects in it, including his fellow men. One cannot be in more than one place at a time and thus we cannot be in the same place as anyone else, though one can be relatively near or far away. Each individual's experience of reality is thus basically uniquely subjective, whatever attempts may be made at communication and community of experience. This individuality is compounded by differences in each person's make up, physical and psychological, and by the uniqueness of his position in his ongoing relations to other men. No one can have the same set

of relations to other people, though some, for example identical twins, often come quite close to this.

All I have said so far applies as much to rats as to human beings. The distinctive feature of the latter is that they are aware of themselves and of their existential situation, and that they act reflectively on this awareness. This capacity to reflect, project, remember and imagine is usually referred to as human consciousness. What it implies is that, for the most part, human activities in the world are mediated by the view of the world formed by the individual. He does not react to his experience, but relates it to and makes sense of it in terms of a more general picture of reality, and of the aspect of it that he is presently concerned with. We normally refer to this feature of humanity by saying that human beings do not merely behave or react, but act on the basis of a particular view of the situation and an evaluation of it in terms of their aims, beliefs and values.

These notions, to be acceptable, must, within limitations variable from person to person and situation to situation, be in broad accordance with what the individual perceives and experiences of reality. What a person imagines to be the case or remembers to be the case can very often be checked on, either directly by going and looking or indirectly by consulting others, documents, photographs and natural indications like tidemarks or growth rings in a tree. And if he acts upon assumptions about reality that are false, his plans are likely to go awry.

The relation between idea and reality is not however, like that of map to terrain, nor is the process of following out a plan entirely like consulting a map, though of course there are similarities. Maps, we should remember, are made for particular purposes and only show certain kinds of features. Thus a treasure map is important just because it describes not only topography but the location of an object valued by a group of people. Similarly we have maps of where battles were fought and of what routes explorers took, and we might have maps of where spirits dwell and where dogs bury their bones. It depends on what we are interested in. Reality then, for the individual or group, does not consist of a simple set of objects ranged serially and each with a distinctive experiential flavour. The objects exist for us as we see them and we see them because of the way we look. Reality is an infinite possibility for experience. The experiences we have of it only take shape when we impose order on them in terms of some conceptual scheme, that is when we know what kind of things we are looking for and what counts as being one. If we know this, we also know why we are looking for them. Thus there is a close relationship between what we see and what we want to see.

This is not to say though, that we only see what we want to see. I began by asserting that human beings live in the world and are aware of it. Their experiences are experiences of it but they are distinctly theirs. They reflect in two senses. First they only attend to those aspects of reality

that their interest is concerned with. If I am looking for a book on a library shelf I will not attend to the other people in the room, to the construction of the bookcases, nor even to the colour and size of the books, but only to the author, title and classification of the books. I only look at some of the objects in the environment and I only look at some aspects of those objects. This kind of selection however is only selection with a common framework of what the objects in the environment are, that is, within an understanding of the cultural concept of a library, as containing principally books, shelves, people, chairs, tables, and lights within a building. I might be concerned with quite other aspects of this environment. As a heating engineer say, I would be concerned with the temperature, volume of air, its dust content, the relative humidity, not with the books except as objects with a certain capacity for absorbing heat and water, nor with the building except as a box of a given size with certain insulating properties. The way that reality is experienced is thus constructive, in the sense that the terms of the experience, what is attended to, involve a particular way of chopping it up and making sense of it, and impose criteria of relevance upon it. Within these terms however, it is reality that is experienced, and it is often the case that when looking at it in a new way, in different terms, the way we do so is at first inadequate to reality and the result is confusion. Much of our exploration of reality consists in extending concepts and ways of looking to situations and

aspects to which they have not been applied before and seeing what happens. Sometimes the old way works, sometimes it has to be modified or a new one devised. The paradigm of this process is natural science, but it is as much true of our everyday perception of physical reality - problems of perspective etc. - and of our perception of social reality - is Mary getting depressed over examinations like John did or is it something else?

The most important constructive aspect of this process of perception is, as I argued in the last chapter, the involvement of values, aims and purposes in it. One does not just look at certain aspects by chance, one does so for a reason, the reason being concerned with what one wants to do with or in relation to that aspect of reality: one looks at the weather because one wants to go for a picnic. Now is the last analysis, these values and purposes presuppose a correct perception of certain aspects of reality. There would be very little point in thinking about picnics in a climate that was continually cold and wet. Picnics are possible because when it is warm and sunny human beings no longer need the warmth and protection of their houses all the time, nor even of their clothes. Thus the evaluative aspect of perception feeds upon the more purely cognitive and the two are interdependent. Our view of reality is selective, and we devise the terms in which we conceive of it and act in it, but we can never, in doing this, ignore its constraining influence upon us. If we are wrong or too fanciful we shall probably be shown up.

So much seems to be relatively unexceptionable and obvious, but so far I have said nothing about the relationship between man and man in reality, only that between man and reality. The first thing to be said about how we understand each other, and how we can claim to have a common experience of the world in certain respects, is that we do so within a common framework of meanings which is provided for us by the culture into which we are born. In an important sense, this framework structures the way we perceive the world, our experience of it, including our experience of other people and the aims and plans that we have. We participate in elaborating and thinking further what others have thought before us. This cultural context or framework of meanings, because it exists independently of the efforts of any one of us, and because we communicate in terms of it, is often called objective, in contrast to the idiosyncrasy of individual experience which, while it may be in terms of the common culture, is nonetheless a unique determination of those terms for every individual. Even if we do not question the "simple" objective availability of this framework then, we still have to recognise that it is used subjectively, realised in particular projects. My relationship with a bus conductor for example, is in terms of a set of rules and definitions that both of us recognise and understand sufficiently well for me to buy my ticket and travel without fuss, but he and I are still, even in this fleeting contact, aware that this is a particular relationship for us both and that there are other aspects of both

our situations which, though latent, might be brought in as active elements in the interaction. I might be short of change; I might have a large parcel with me, or a small child; I might be a Pakistani, or dress unconventionally. All these are points where the rules governing the situation are more or less adequate to cope in a "normal" mechanical fashion and where each of us is made to realise that two markedly distinct lives are interacting at this point.

Nor is the problem simply a pragmatic one. The bus conductor's ideas about his role and his relationship with passengers is probably fairly clear over an extensive range of contingencies, for example what to do if I have no money, or am drunk, or abusive, or carrying a large parcel. This is partly because he spends a great deal of time at his job and has evolved rules for himself which protect his own interests, and partly because most bus companies make fairly explicit rules as to how their conductors shall behave and what their passengers are permitted. I on the other hand have much vaguer notions of what is proper and reasonable. I may be irritated if he is unwilling to change my pound note or let me on with a large parcel, and justify this in terms of my interests and his bloody-mindedness. Even at this simple level, the rules and definitions are only understood in precisely the same way in certain typical cases. In a double sense then the "objective" rules are subjective: they are realised in particular and subjective situations - they have to be applied; and they are anyhow understood more or less

differently by different individuals. A visitor from Cuba for example would not expect to find a conductor, and would be surprised to be asked to pay.

It was these sorts of reasons that led Wittgenstein to equate the meaning of a word with its use³. Despite the frequent demonstration of the vagueness, ambiguity and 'open texture' of words, there still persists a tendency for them to be regarded as being clear or classifiable with limited denotations and connotations. Practical attempts at classification and delimitation, e.g. Carnap's protocol sentences and Russell's theory of definite descriptions, have had the consequence of ruling out many of our statements as meaningless or 'metaphysical', and have failed even in their own terms. It was Wittgenstein's achievement and preoccupation to show how concepts are imprecise by the criteria of logic and yet usable and flexible. They are so far two basic reasons: (a) Because the empirical world to which they refer is a contingent and not a logical one, where things do not always behave as they 'ought' according to definitions and conceptual schemes. They are all abstractions from and reconstructions of it, made for particular purposes, and they only 'work', as I have already suggested, for a limited range of 'typical' situations. Reality can only be got at by conceptualising it, but any concept sets limits which are arbitrary except to itself. As soon as the limits and the concept are questioned in the recognition that there is more to reality than appears in this particular conceptualisation, reality as it were, hits

back, and at times the concept is modified, at times another is born, but more often than not there is an argument in which eventually both parties agree that "It depends what you mean by a", i.e. what you are interested in.

(b) The other reason for the vagueness of most terms is that they are devised and used in everyday interaction to meet practical not scientific or philosophical standards. They refer to typical expectations about the world which are normally met. We do not worry about lions with stripes and the possibility of their being tigers, because there are no such creatures⁴. The consequence of the limits of the consensual meaning of public terms is that they exist in what Schutz calls a common-sense world and go to build up recipe knowledge of it, formulas enabling us to recognise situations and react appropriately in most situations. If the situation is odd, or if the propriety of the assumptions and the extent of the knowledge involved are systematically questioned - what do you mean? Why? Why? - the self-validating or reflexive nature of them creaks and finally collapses in confusion and irritation. Thus Garfinkel⁵ in a series of ethnomethodological experiments, asked his subjects to make their assumptions explicit, for example by persistently asking why, or by getting them to write down everything that was understood in a brief piece of conversation. It soon emerged that it was quite impossible to say. Either one assumes that what took place was typical and confined entirely to the words used, that is one accepts the terms of the

conversation unhesitatingly, as we do for the most part in everyday interaction; or else one explores the particular context in which it took place and tries to specify the meanings in terms of factors which were unstated and unremarked upon but not, in the strict sense, unnoticed, e.g. the fact that A is a man and B a woman when A says to B 'Do you want a cigarette?'. What is understood by both sides is context dependent, and may not, and in all respects will not be identical. It is this dependence that gives what is understood its reflexive or self-validating quality. Various cues from the context of interaction are noticed by one or both parties and used to licence and confirm a characterisation of the situation as typical in certain respects and therefore of calling for a certain type of interaction with a limited range of possible outcomes. This understanding of and interaction in terms of the situation is reflexive in that once circumstances are accepted as having a certain typical meaning all other features of the situation are included into this meaning as they turn up. This practice enables stable expectations to be maintained and meanings which are general in nature to be applied to particular real situations which will often have features which do not obviously 'fit'. This leads Garfinkel⁶ to assert that the 'recognisable' sense, or fact, or methodic character, or impersonality or objectivity of accounts are not independent of the socially organised occasions of their use. Their rational features consist of what people do with what they 'make of' the accounts in the socially organised

actual occasions of their use. People's accounts are reflectively and essentially tied for their rational features to the socially organised occasions of their use for they are features of the socially organised occasions of their use. They are thus deceptive, perfect and reflexive in that their common-sense existence as definitions of reality - the reality not a view of reality - precludes a questioning of their terms of reference in the typified situation. When such a questioning does occur, it normally does so by attempting to modify the definition in the direction of another typification.

Although the terms in which an interaction is carried out are ostensibly held in common therefore, what is in fact understood may by no means be the same thing. Yet we should not make too much of this, surely, for most interaction runs very smoothly on an assumed common basis and people appear to agree not only in what they mean by 'dog', 'cats' and 'sky', but also by 'marriage', 'voting', and 'the Reformation'. But they do not do this in an isolated context. If I asked someone what 'cat' meant I can think of at least four different answers I might get, depending on who I asked and what they thought I was asking. If it were established that I was a member of the Monday Club or of the Jazz world the answer might be less equivocal, but this would still leave the specification of what this meaning of 'cat' amounted to. The common 'objective' cultural framework acts in these situations not like a statute book - even they need the House of Lords to interpret them for

practical purposes - but as a guide to the specification of the context. It is only when the meaning is classified by reference to other aspects of the context that it can become to any extent clear and agreed upon. And the process does not stop here, but continues with the elaboration and specification of the meanings to the satisfaction of the parties involved.

It appears then, that the objective terms in which people understand the world and each other are only ever realised in subjective particular contexts. The result of this is a constant series of adjustments and confirmations both in expectations of others and of the physical world, and of the terms in which both are understood. That concepts have a history is nothing new, and that important and contentious ones like love, democracy, marriage, law, or God do is notorious. So far from being stable and objective the 'common' culture is no more than one end of a continuum at the other end of which lies the inexpressibly subjective aspects of experience, those aspects of the context which it is impossible to communicate even after years of effort and experience. In between lie various degrees of understanding and various degrees of codification. Situations, people and objects acquire special meaning for each individual, some of which may be held in common and may be explicit to a spouse or close friend. Families have their own way of life which makes the guest feel an outsider. He does not understand the jokes, nor the reasons why household objects are kept where they are, nor why the house is arranged and used as it is.

The process goes further with voluntary associations, some rules being codified often only verbally, and further still with work groups, trades unions and political parties. For most practical purposes the most inclusive context is the language which is objectified and codified in dictionaries and standard texts, but which constantly evolves.

All this leaves the possibility of people understanding each other still obscure. There appears to be no point of insertion from which an understanding can begin, and yet one is confronted with the fact that it nonetheless exists, even if less clearly than has often been supposed. For, to take the sceptical solipsist approach which I have so far avoided, surely each of us experiences the world in his own way. He learns a certain amount about how others classify things and evaluate them and maybe he often thinks he talks about the same things and has the same or at least the same kind of experiences. Certainly he communicates in the same language and can cooperate in common tasks. Nonetheless does he really understand them at all? Can he ever be sure that they mean what he means since, when all is said and done, the only way to be sure, is to get inside their heads and have a look. To take a familiar example, if I say I intend to do something and then fail to do it, despite having a reasonable opportunity, how do you know whether I intended or not?

I think we may allow the sceptic his triumph on this point, for he has already ruined his case in an earlier admission.

The whole of my argument has been concerned to indicate the indissoluble unity of the subjective and the objective aspects of knowledge and experience and to claim that the extent to which either predominates depends on the difficulties of the situation and on the efforts which the parties are prepared to make to ensure that they understand each other. There always remains an ineliminable element of solipsism in our knowledge of others because our experience is not fully expressible in behaviour, and this puts limits on the extent and effectiveness of communication. Lovers, who often try to extend communication beyond its normal limits, are forced to rely on feelings of sympathy - you know what I mean - and references to common experiences - like when we were at It makes no sense to try to extend this solipsism to claim that we never know anything of each other, because we clearly do: we cooperate in common tasks for common purposes and the extent of this cooperation and claimed understanding is sufficient to make nonsense of any claim to the contrary. The fact that for example, the members of a political party have different views both about what should happen and what the party stands for does not prevent consensus existing around certain values and beliefs and on certain issues. Sufficient understanding exists in most areas of life for co-operation to continue despite individual differences and variations: the results of the cooperation validate the understanding. There are thus at least, in Wittgenstein's terms, strong family resemblances, or areas of overlap between the views of different

members of the cooperative group, and often also pieces of core agreement about what issues, facts, beliefs, values, etc. are of importance, and why.

The solipsist is vindicated over other issues, especially those concerning the integrity of an individual. A token of the difficulty of establishing what a person thought at a particular time except on the basis of behaviour lies in the existence of the judicial process, in which juries are required to be sure 'beyond all reasonable doubt' about what happened, including the mental state of the accused. It is impossible to ask them to be sure categorically, because they can only ever have circumstantial evidence in establishing his mental state.

It is therefore overdoing it for Ryle to claim 'In describing the workings of a person's mind we are describing certain phases of his one career; namely, we are describing the ways in which parts of his conduct are managed. The sense in which we 'explain' his action is not that we infer to occult sources, but that we subsume it under hypothetical and semi-hypothetical propositions'. Concept of Mind, p. 49. And later that

'This does not imply the spectator or reader in following what is done or written, is making analogical inferences from internal processes of his own to corresponding internal processes in the author of the action or writings. Nor need he, though he may, imaginatively represent himself in the shoes, in the same situation and skin as the author. He is merely thinking what the author is doing along the same lines as those in which the author is

thinking that he is doing, save that the spectator is finding what the author is inventing. The author is leading and the spectator following but their path is the same.'

p.54.

The lie is given to this line of argument later on:

'The superiority of the speaker's knowledge of what he is doing over that of the listener does not indicate that he has Privileged Access to facts of a type inevitably inaccessible to the listener, but that he is in a very good position to know what the listener is often in a very poor position to know.'

p. 171.

and in the assertion that the question of knowledge of minds, mine or others'

'is simply the methodological question of how we establish and how we apply certain sorts of law-like propositions about the overt and silent behaviour of persons.'

p. 162.

In exorcising the ghost in the machine, the mind is reduced to behaviour.

This is to be unfair to Ryle, and I do not want to disagree with his major arguments. It is my belief also that to see the mind as distinct from, yet of the same class as the body is to erect a misleading dichotomy and to make a category mistake. It will become clear in the next chapter that the recognition of which category one is working in terms of is crucial to a satisfactory explanation of action. I have already asserted the essential unity of the subjective and the objective: this derives like the unity of mind and body from man's existence

in a world of real phenomena. What Ryle tends to give insufficient attention to is the complexity implicit in consciousness, of man's ability to reflect about the world and imagine it both as it is, and how it was, and how it might be, and thus to act in the world both on the basis of perceptual and experiential contact with the world and on the basis of imaginative ideas, which may be more or less congruent with other ideas which are the result of attempts to discover what phenomena are like in themselves, that is to understand in a conceptual scheme that is adequate to as great a range as possible. Men not only see the earth about them, they have visions of heaven and hell, and feelings of love and hatred, and abstract concepts of justice and pity, and social institutions of marriage and government, all of these latter the consequence of reflection and reflection upon reflection and action in terms of reflection, not straightforwardly of a view of phenomena. Camus remarked in L'Etranger that if a man lived for a day in the trunk of a hollow tree with its top open to the sky, he would experience enough to reflect on for a lifetime if he had no further experiences at all. Men are capable of this, and of living in a world of fantasy of their own making.

So when Ryle attacks what he sarcastically calls 'Privileged Access' he is overzealous in his cause. G.J. Warnock puts the case concisely:

'However there are here and there in Ryle's book some traces of a more extreme, and in a way much simpler thesis. This is the thesis that there

really exist only bodies and other physical objects and that there really occur only physical events or processes, and that all statements ostensibly referring to minds are really categorical statements about current bodily behaviour, or more commonly hypothetical statements about predicted bodily behaviour; that hence, there is really no such thing as a private inner life at all, and that in principle everything about every individual would be known by sufficiently protracted observation of his bodily doings. It is true that even this extreme thesis might be presented as factually neutral, as merely an 'analysis' of statements about the mind, but in fact it would be felt, and rightly, that its real character was purely behaviouristic, and that by it many well-known facts must be simply rejected. It cannot, I believe, be wholly an accident that many people have believed that Ryle's book presents this thesis.'

7.

It may be that one's fantasies are based on one's experience: the point is that they are often very unlike any possible experience of the world and they are only available to the individual concerned. This does not mean, as he points out, that they are precise - if we imagine a page of poetry, we cannot read it backwards - and we can make mistakes and have confusions. Although others may lead us to awareness of them, they cannot claim our fantasies were false. What the discussion is about is the description of these ideas. One might think one had imagined what a square circle is like, only to find it inexpressible, but that is not to deny that one thought anything, only to say that it was confused. Our fantasies and our personal reactions and ideas remain obscure and inexpressible because they are a fusion of perceptual memories elaborated by imagination and emotion. What is true in the most obvious way of fantasy is true in a less radical way of memory, and of

perception. We see what we want to see not only by watching our favourite programmes on T.V., but by not noticing the things in them we do not like.

This is by no means to claim that this subjective element of consciousness is the only important component of understanding, but to claim that it is one of three essential components, the other two being the language or public symbolic meanings used and physical phenomena which are conceptualised and referred to. To communicate is to understand the intended use of language to refer to phenomena (or of course, derivatively to other uses of languages and/or other intentions). Powell argues cogently⁸ that we do understand actions independently of our appreciation of the actor's intention, and we are able to do this because of our common language. The courts for example, clearly recognise this in not allowing ignorance of the law, i.e. of the public definition of an act, as entirely exculpatory. It is only exculpatory if the actor is of 'diminished responsibility', i.e. was unable to understand the public meaning of any act at the time, and partially exculpatory, as evidenced in judges' comments and the variety of sentences for the same legal offences, to the extent that the intention with which the offence was committed precludes the view that it was done purely for the advantage accruing to being able to flout the law, the type case being stealing food because one is hungry and has no means of subsistence. Public criteria hold up at times in the face of individual intention. What Powell does not do is to go on

to consider the limits of a language or more properly of a shared cultural context, and how we extend these limits, or how the language is learned. This cannot be done without raising the question of what is intended by a linguistic reference both in its denotation and its connotation. Language viewed in this light is simply a means of maintaining a common consciousness. The questions of how this is maintained, combined and extended are similar to those of how it is applied to particular situations, even though it provides us with a routine account and a basis for everyday interaction. To this extent there is thus something in Weber's distinction between observational and motivational understanding, but the latter can by no means be assimilated to the former.

The fact that every individual has experiences which he creates for himself and which, though related to his experiences of phenomena are better described as about them than of them, implies an element in our knowledge of others that is permanently unverifiable and only partially expressible. Yet it is this same element - what the man sees and believes is there, rather than what is actually there, his 'definition of the situation' - that it is essential to understand if we are to understand his actions. This raises the argument from analogy, which Ryle also fulminates against as mechanistic. We do not make analogies, we know and can see what is going on, he claims, and again one must admit the force of his claim, while qualifying it. It is forceful for two reasons. First, we do indeed see

the world around us, and as a result of our actions in it we constantly confirm that we see it veridically. To suppose that the whole affair is a product of our imagination would make no difference either to our thoughts or our actions. We also have practical ways of checking and making good errors. If we want to jump a stream we look carefully in judging the distance; perhaps we even take a long branch and see if we can touch the other side with it, and then see whether we can jump the length of the branch on dry land. To say that I do not know whether you really perceive what I perceive, and so whether I understand what you say about what you claim to perceive, seems absurd: surely we both know from experience that we agree, and we both know that our bodies have roughly similar physical limits. Of course there will be differences: I may have poor eyesight or hearing; the bird watcher can spot more birds quicker than the layman, though the layman can learn with practice.

The argument against the assumption that we experience the world in a similar way as a necessary condition of knowledge is thus strong because it takes its ground from its opponent: we do indeed assume that we see the world similarly, that we have the same physical makeup and bodily needs, but this is not a bald or a wild assumption, but one that we have very good grounds for believing.

These grounds are strengthened if we consider the way in which the manner of our understanding each other is reflexive

or self-confirming. The contexts in which we interact are, as I pointed out above, not intelligible in terms of their elements alone. The situation only becomes clear when it is established in relation to other elements, all of which singly have a variety of imprecise meanings, but which unite in a recognisably typical situation. To revert to my example of the bus conductor, when I get on a coach, my first query is, does this coach have a conductor, or do I pay the driver, or maybe I should even have bought a ticket at the office beforehand. As the elements of the situation lock into an accustomed pattern, so they take shape, and indeed some that we thought at first important may vanish: of course this is the annual club outing, which is free to all members, so I pay no-one. Now the fact that situations are circular and self validating in this fashion leads to the worry that when we claim to understand what is going on, and what each other understand, we are making a large assumption, because there is no apparent way in which this can be built up - it seems all of a piece. Hence we are led to claim that we assume that others experience the world as we do and have minds as we do. Coupled with the admitted subjectivity of experience this seems persuasive, and it looks as though we might be talking and acting at cross purposes in a more or less serious way.

The reason that we know we are not and the way in which we can be sure of our understanding of each other derives from the way in which the situation is given its apparently impregnable

common-sensicality. In many cases, the situation is of course taken as read by all parties, and features which give it a clear typical definition are immediately recognised. This is particularly true of limited stereotyped repetitive relationships such as that of customer to shop-keeper. Even here however, the regular customer comes to be treated differently from the stranger, and over time factors of age, sex, appearance, social class, consumption patterns, personality etc. come to be explicitly and semi-explicitly recognised by both sides. This does not mean that the relationship is now one of friendship: the words exchanged on each occasion may be few and the length of interaction short. Nonetheless over time each party takes on a fuller identity in the relationship which is recognised by both. This is achieved by a process of negotiation, in which elements that each wants to bring into the situation are carefully brought into view, at first subtly so that they may be abandoned if quite unacceptable, then more explicitly as agreement and understanding is reached. The same kind of process takes place in all social relationships as they accommodate to the peculiarities of the particular situation.

What is going on in this process? Both parties come to the situation with expectations about what it will be like. These are often modified when they see what it is like, and as I suggested, may be further modified if others disagree with their view or wish to introduce other elements. Each person involved draws on his knowledge of a set of supposedly common

cultural meanings, which are at times appealed to in order to justify a view. In practice however, the interpretation and application of these is critical and this depends on each person's individual understanding of and experience with the meanings involved. Each therefore has to negotiate a position that is acceptable or leave the relationship. To some extent this may be a simple matter, if it is a question of establishing a relationship with standardised typical features, though even here individual differences of views will mean that what actually happens is that this situation is agreed to be "accepted" or typical - there are tolerance limits in human relationships as in engineering. Very often however, the relationship is elaborated in a non-standard way and elements not included in the typical form are accepted. If this happens, it frequently becomes, in sociological terms, "institutionalised" into a Mark II version of the typical form. In terms of the shop-keeper-customer example, the advent of supermarkets brought a recognition of the extent to which relationships of more than a purely economic kind were institutionalised and an emphasis in ordinary stores on "personal service".

Once again the unity and interpenetration of subjective and objective is apparent. What can be appealed to as the norm depends upon whether the other is already included with the cultural context where such a norm is established. To say then, that we assume on analogy with ourselves that others have minds is both true and misleading. We assume it because we can see

it happening. It is only on the basis of such an assumption that the negotiation could take place. And once again, if we assume otherwise, the world would be no different except that we should be denying that we do what we do, namely that we see other people as acting not reacting or behaving and that we relate to them as conscious reflective beings not animals or machines.

How then does one individual set about understanding the other in detail? He can not rely more than vaguely upon a common set of meanings and he is forced to realise that the understanding of these varies from person to person, even allowing for the fact that they are teachable and explicable, and that each situation presents peculiar problems of application. All that he can rely on is his experience. He will learn in time to be able to recognise some of the ways in which others differ in their views and definitions and how to cope with this, but his base must always be a typification derived from his own understanding in past situations of how ideas and definitions work in practice. Some of this may be usefully codified transmissible knowledge, but this is only really useful when it can be applied, and ultimately only intelligible insofar as its application is understood. It is not for nothing that the detective or the general ask themselves, 'What would I do in his situation?' They can never become their opponent and understand him that way, so they have to try to acquaint themselves with the features of his situation and to understand also if possible how he sees those features.

The most successful situation in which understanding can occur is in interpersonal interaction. It is there that the negotiations of the definition involved can be most detailed, that the amount and variety of information available is greatest, both in what is deliberately communicated and what is "given off" in involuntary reaction, gesture, grimace etc. Here the parties can build a common context of meaning and explore its definition to the fullest extent, so that the typifications used become highly complex. They can also concentrate their attention in the situation without an overwhelming constant need to recognise their external existence apart from this situation: they can attend to and dwell in it, and it can become to a large degree united in their personal experience of the world. Even here though, while understanding is at its maximum, typifications are still being used, albeit typifications undergoing constant modification as information flows in. The reason that understanding is called typified here even though it may be undergoing constant modification, is that in the first place it is a refinement and development out of cruder understanding in terms of broad and more publicly available classifications of the other person and his ideas and intentions - we understand people better as we 'get to know them' through questioning, observing and interaction; secondly there always remains a minimum of individual experience which cannot be expressed in language or by other means. Although a long term stable relationship between two actors - say

business partners - may enable them to gain a detailed knowledge of each other's character, outlook and typical responses, and also enable the construction of a complex shared world - in this case their business enterprise - they still remain in certain respects distinctly separate persons communicating their intentions in terms of common (between the two of them) meanings. Even where understanding goes beyond words it involves classification, and where words are used, this classification is obvious. Every term implies a universal, a class of actual or possible objects similar to itself, and while the use of many interrelated terms gives a sophisticated result, it is still a classification. The class of objects called John Smith may have only one member, whose characteristics which make him unique are recognised. The reason that he remains a typification is that he has to be defined in terms that are only meaningful and communicable because they can refer to others with similar (or "the same") characteristics. We can never in any ultimate sense know what it is like to be John Smith only what it is like to have qualities like John Smith's.

At a grosser level the classification and typification we use in understanding occur as established patterns for groups of people which are used as paradigms or guides for defining situations and conducting social relationships. As we have seen these tend to get refined and modified in practice. The problem for the outsider is to make sense of these, and in trying to do this it should now be clear that he faces several

difficulties. In the first place the different sets of rules, definitions and meanings probably will not fit neatly and logically together into one system - they contain gaps and contradictions. Secondly, the consensus as to what things count as common rules and what do not, and the understanding of what those that are common mean varies from group to group. Thus there is an imprecise hierarchy in the agreement about what things are rules from the laws on the statute book, through such things as professional ethics, to custom, convention, to local practices and mores, to small group understandings, norms and definitions. In each of these contexts the "established" rules modify or overrule those in others. Not only this, but each individual in each context has a different view of the rules, and only rarely is there a rule book to refer to. Even rule books depend on consensus and consensus depends on a similar reaction to typical situations. Thirdly, because the rules are constantly being applied by new people to new situations they are, even if at one time clear and agreed, constantly modified and elaborated, so that even if existing under the same name they may by no means be the same thing. And of course people neither do what they believe and say they do, nor what they think they ought to do.

The outsider then is in a difficult position. His only solution is to participate in the situations he wants to understand and learn the rules as they operate. This will at least give him an understanding as a participant of an area of society,

which for most outsiders is all that is wanted. The sociologist however, wants to have his cake and eat it. For he wants to make sense of the whole of the society not just a small part of it, and so is frustrated to discover that it does not fit neatly into a system. He can, as participant find out what goes on in a corner, and how the people in this corner see and react to the rest. But their views will be inconsistent with those in other areas of the society. The problem for the sociologist then, is not just to understand what the rules are and how they are operated, but to tell whether actions are done in the light of group or institutional or societal rules and definitions. More often than not they are done in terms of a compromise interpretation of several different definitions and conflicting factors. In making sense of the whole then, he is forced to rely on the rules and definitions the actors use insofar as he can discover them and tell which ones are in use on which occasions, but this will leave him with contradictions and gaps in his overall picture, which can only be overcome by looking at the actions which are done rather than the rules which supposedly govern them. He is thus in the same position as the ordinary member of society, but more ambitious. My ordinary outsider was content to accept the view of the limited group that he lived among, and to accept to their view of the rest of society which had evolved in terms congruent with their own way of doing things. The sociologist however, seeks ideally a similar detailed knowledge of the outlook and actions of all

parts of society and then tries to stand outside them and say how in practice, rather than in the view of any one part, they all fit together (or not, as the case may be, for he will have to account for conflict).

When he does this, he has to make typifications which draw on but do not coincide with any of those he finds in the society, since these will all be more or less limited and particular, and fail to some extent to recognise what is actually happening. His is a work of exegesis and synthesis coupled with detailed empirical examination of what is taking place as well as what people say is happening. What he cannot assume are that the different groups and parts with their different views will fit together easily into a single whole. He is confronted with the fact that the society exists and to that extent is a whole, but he should be ready to recognise that this may be coexistence not agreement, that it may be based on misunderstanding or only limited contact, and that while there may be family resemblances between the views of different groups and members, members of the same family may be actively inconsistent. Stuart Hall points out the difficulties involved in this. Quoting Berger and Luckmann,⁹ he says:

' "Theoretical knowledge is only a small part, and by no means the most important part of what passes for knowledge in a society The primary knowledge about the institutional order is knowledge on the pretheoretical level ... It is the sum total of 'what everybody knows' about a social world, and assemblage of maxims, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths and so forth, the theoretical integration of which requires considerable intellectual fortitude in itself". '

And later (p.20)

'Events are real enough, but they are appropriated in social consciousness only as they are culturally signified and defined. Our analysis must therefore attempt to discover the ideas, values and attitudes which inform those definitions. It must also reveal the categories, conscious-unconscious, into which events are grouped and classified, ranked and ordered, so as to make them meaningful. These frameworks of value and meaning are "inferential normative structures" of social life. They are widely shared, though not by everyone, and are not understood in the same way by groups who have different life-situations and prospects, and who may be the objects rather than the subjects or authors of such "accounts". These maps of meaning give plausibility, order and coherence to discrete events, by placing them within a common world of meanings. Culture is united together by these overlapping, partially shared, incomplete mappings of problematic social reality. Such "structures" tend to define and limit the range of possible new meaning, which can be constructed to explain new and unfamiliar events. In part, such normative structures are historical constructs, already-objectivated and available as informal social knowledge - "what everybody knows" about a social situation. They have been routinised and sedimented over time and are available for the construction of our new definitions and labels only in truncated form. They also exhibit varying degrees of "closure" and of "openness", of coherence or contradictoriness. They are "moving structures" in that they must be continuously revised and amended to "cover" new events. They are never stable.'

Yet it is these same partial incomplete, incoherent, constantly changing and yet persistent meanings that give cognitive and evaluative order to social relations. We should beware then, before imputing too great a degree of system or order to the ideas and to the social relations which they inform and be cautious in the extent of our generalisation of understanding from one situation to another. This also raises questions, if they have not been raised before, of the precision and

verifiable accuracy which any understanding may claim. This I will take up at the end of the next section.

In making his typifications of the actions, relations, institutions and groups, the sociologist has to take a point of view which while recognising the views of those involved, does not coincide with any of them. Prior to this he will of course have had to explore the views of particular actors and groups and to take their view, but if he is to expand his understanding of their situation he has to go beyond its bounds. Once again then, questions of what standpoint is to be taken come in. To some extent it will be constrained by those in the society studied, but it will also depend on the sociologist's sympathies with groups in that society, and with his personal views and values. What he must be absolutely clear about is when he is describing the actions that take place in the actor's terms and when he is doing so in his own terms. Conceptual analysis and exegesis can be helpful in classifying actors' concepts as far as they can be classified, but care must be taken not to make them consistent and exhaustive beyond their real usage. Actors use concepts and definitions loosely and at times contradictorily and in the situations of use difficulties apparent to the persistent analytical outsider may pass unnoticed. Whilst understanding of actors' views is the aim therefore, it cannot be assumed that this will lead directly to the kind of account the sociologist is interested in. In order to achieve this the sociologist has to make statements about the actor's

concepts, their usage and the action in which they are used. He must be aware that the picture he creates in doing this is his picture even though it may be based on an understanding of the actor's views. The difficulties involved in this I leave to the next section.

Understanding Other Societies.

The difficulties involved in understanding are redoubled when more than one society is involved, but the differences are of degree rather than of kind. The range of variations of views and activities between different groups within a modern industrialised society are so great that non-comprehension and problems of understanding between them are by now notorious. It is still assumed that understanding is possible because the groups exist in one nation and speak the same language, even if they use it very differently. The problem is seen rather more clearly however, if we look at the differences between societies with different languages, for here the differences in the concepts used are enshrined in the linguistic differences. A major part of understanding of the ideas and actions of a given group is concerned with specifying their meanings, both in terms of other ideas and in terms of the situations they are related to - spelling out their social action implications. This, as I have already indicated may be very difficult because concepts are variously understood and constantly modified in the course of their application and in some cases may have very

few or only vague action implications. This applies particularly to general evaluative and religious concepts. Much of the sociologist's work will consist, then, in patient ethnography, describing situations in detail to show how concepts are used, in an attempt to become precise. It rapidly becomes clear when discussing a piece of research if this has not been done, since one soon locates situations which the author has not covered, and it is not clear what the reaction was or would be. Basically, the process is the same as that which we use in everyday interaction, except that the typifications used are set out in more detail and more systematically, so that they may be understood by an outsider who has not participated. It is much as if one learnt chess by playing with someone who knew the game and was corrected where one went wrong, and then set out the rules for others to learn. Where the social rules involved have no direct empirical referent like the rules of chess the process is longer and more difficult and the results normally less than perfect.

But while we may come to understand the rules and situations in a single cultural context, this does not enable us to compare between contexts, and to translate, and unless we can do this we can have no basis for generalisation outside any given cultural context and are stranded with two sets of incomparable descriptions. Haas¹⁰ in an illuminating article, reminds us that the meanings of the terms for a translation cannot be constructed as entities to which expressions correspond.

Meaning lies in the use of the expression, the role it plays in reality; it is an organised recollection of many individual uses of the expression in particular contexts. The problem of translation and comparison is thus one of parallel uses and contexts. However, neither can meaning be said to be denotation. Both the term 'Morning Star' and "Etoile du Soir" refer to the planet Venus, but their sense is different, and a translation must do justice to this. We cannot refer to a neutral world of objects to provide a basis for translation, for our only criterion for distinguishing and referring to objects is that names for them already exist in a language, and the need for a name derives from the interest generated in that kind of object within that cultural context. 'How could we know that "what we point at" is neutral between different languages if we can never find it (i.e. identify it) except within (i.e. in terms of) some language or other?' asks Haas, p.98. Though meaning can be abstracted from an expression this does not imply the possibility of its detection or presence apart from the expression, any more than shape or colour can exist apart from objects.

The translator's problem is thus to find expressions that match in the two languages. He has to take full account of context: style, period, tense, person etc. and in doing this he has to fully understand the meanings of both the languages concerned. His aim is as literal a word-for-word translation as possible, but in practice there will often be no exactly

corresponding terms. Also he will have difficulties in translating connotation as well as denotation, particularly the more complex resonances and implications of the expressions used in particular ways in particular contexts. Hence he will probably have to choose his unit for translation at the level of phrases, sentences and paragraphs, and the result is often longer than the original. A creative effort on the part of the translator is essential to obtaining the best rendering possible, and even this cannot be perfect except insofar as the one language and culture is or can be expanded to be broad enough to include the other. The item to be translated has thus to be understood within its own distinctive context before the attempt at translation can be made.

The problem for the sociologist is at once greater and more liberal. He is not required to produce a short elegant result and can devote as much time as he wishes to explaining the differences in meaning of the two cultural expressions and their contexts of use. On the other hand he has to cover a much greater range of expressions than the translator, and is furthermore concerned not only with expressions but with actions. In the process of achieving a comparison or translation of this kind, it is inevitable not only that there will be a loss of meaning on the part of one or both sets of expressions, but also that the translator will himself play a significant role. In early anthropology he did so by being closely identified with European culture and so biasing the result in favour of one party.

This tendency has persisted and will continue to do so, since the sociologist too is a member of a society. More recently however, it has become apparent that sociologists have a special interest in certain aspects of societies which they define as important and in terms of which they consider societies. From such questions as: what is the mode of economic production? what is the form of government? of what significance and form are kinship and marriage relations?, they have begun to build models for the purposes of comparing societies. In a sense, this is a logical way out of the difficulty, but it has the disadvantage that the more of the sociologist there is allowed in, the less there is of the actors, and many models display an alarming tendency to depend more on the latest fad in computer science than on the social reality in question.

We may begin our attempts at coherent translation at various different points. As already suggested above, we may argue that certain institutions, functions, problems, aspects of social relationships etc. are common to all societies. We might for example look at how societies deal with birth, reproduction, death, the provision of food and of shelter, and I have already argued in the previous chapter that a consideration of the positions taken on issues like these is essential to an understanding of a society, and for the sociologist's awareness of his own theory. We may also argue that a start can be made by looking at cases where there is at least an overlap between concept and percept, if not identity of meaning. Both I and

a Hindu refer to the same object when we use the word 'cow', but our respective terms do not have just the same meaning. That might be spelled out by using such a common reference point as a base. Finally, we may argue that there exist naturally and logically criteria of rationality in terms of which we can explicate the social relations of any cultural group.

The difficulty with the two latter bases for comparison, as with the first one, is that what looks like common ground turns out in fact to be the sociologist's perception of common ground. If I claim, for example, that both I and a Hindu may refer to the same physical object, a cow (or perhaps better, a bullock) it is true that so far as one can tell our references overlap and coincide in this animal, and that such a coincidence may provide the basis for beginning to understand one another. Similarly, a visitor to a country who knows neither the language nor the culture will find it possible to communicate by gestures about basic human needs for food and shelter, and may use this as a basis for expanding his understanding to cover the customs surrounding the satisfaction of these needs: he notices what food he is served, by whom, in what manner and how it is eaten. The difficulty however, is not in using these points as the beginnings of a knowledge of the society but of using them as points of comparison between societies. We both see the same bullock, but we do not see it in the same way - our reference is the same but our sense different. A Hindu sees a bullock

as of religious significance, I see it as potential steaks, which is - perhaps literally - unthinkable for the Hindu. Whilst we cannot assume then that we have the same percepts initially, even in the physical shape of what we see, we must assume that we have the same perceptual apparatus that will allow us to coordinate our perceptions in time, and we must assume that this in all cases allows us most of the same perceptual abilities, though probably differentially developed - shape, volume, weight, heat, colour, texture etc. Our starting point in this sense is thus in principle minimal. When the sociologist tries to spell out in his own words the meanings of the habits and social relations he sees and then to compare them with those of another society, he is in danger in doing this of leaving out in his translation the inconvenient difficult bits that do not compare, but which nonetheless constitute an important part of the sense of what is to be translated; and as I have already noted, this sense exists in networks of concepts and meanings, not in single terms and acts. To compare elements or aspects may render the whole comparison meaningless.

The same kind of difficulties appear if we use rationality as a basis for comparison. Jarvie¹¹ has argued at length that rationality is a logical not a culture-bound concept and that any culture and any action in any culture can be analysed rationally and its rational and irrational features displayed. This can be, and if our understanding is to be at all adequate, must be, an essential method. And it is absurd to suppose that all

cultures and all actions are rational: rationality also provides criteria for comparison and evaluation. Thus Jarvie and Agassi suggest two senses of rationality, the strong in which a person acts rationally on the basis of rationally held beliefs, and the weak in which a person acts rationally on the basis of some beliefs. They conclude: "We suggest that primitive people do not sow seeds and then perform an irrational magical ritual, but that they grow crops in a very inefficient way, having no tractors, and not knowing that ritual and no ritual makes no difference. Belief in magic is no better than in leeches or in phlogiston. We must assume that believers in either believe it to be true". But the comparison should not be with leeches and phlogiston but witches and faith healing. Jarvie is quite happy to conclude that rationality is not only developed in its highest possible form in natural science, but that this is the only manifestation of it. Anything else either more or less approximates to this, like primitive people trying to grow crops, or else, like magic, is just irrational. It is surprising that one who has contributed to the long and important discussion of Melanesian cargo cults¹², one of whose central issues was their "irrationality" and hence incomprehensibility to western anthropologists, should take so ethnocentric a view. The issue in this investigation, as in that of magical rituals surrounding agriculture, is why people should persist in activities that blatantly did not bring about the desired ends. In both cases it became apparent that the ends desired were misconstrued by

western outsiders. It was no use pointing out to a Trobriander that the magical rituals were useless because there were no gods or spirits or any occult powers to favour crop growth. The existence of spirits was a fact which did not depend on the issue of crops but was embedded in the culture and verified by a range of cultural practices. This is not something that can be disproved any more than science and philosophy have disproved the existence of God in the western world. All they have been able to do is to show that his existence depends upon the faith of believers, and to counterpose an ideology and way of life deriving from natural science, that is to postulate a view of reality from which God is necessarily excluded.

I have already argued that man's capacity to reflect and have ideas about reality in terms of which he acts in it, leads to him taking a relatively coherent and consistent view, which, once validated by a certain degree of practice, comes to be accepted as common sense reality, and is continued unquestioningly. It becomes impossible to ask questions which genuinely question the whole frame of reference and minor circumstances are explained away by an elaboration of the framework. This feature emerges constantly. Marx termed it an ideology and discussed its operation at a societal level in his critique of the classical view of political economy¹³; Garfinkel discerns it at an interpersonal level, where a questioning of the terms of everyday interaction puts its self-evident common-sensicality in doubt and gives rise to irritation, bewilderment and fear¹⁴; Kuhn¹⁵

discovers it in the practices of natural scientists, who he claims, so far from writing as Jarvie says with ideal radical rationality, constantly questioning everything, on the contrary need to make certain assumptions in order to set themselves problems to answer, and so the puzzles that they deal with are always within the context of a common set of assumptions. True, science does have a radically rational approach, for Kuhn is talking about changes of basic assumptions - scientific revolutions. These however only build up over a very long time as anomalies accumulate, and only occur at all because of the scientific norm of self criticism, and limited elaboration of its theories to explain away anomalies.

It is not so straightforward as Jarvie would like to contend to extend rational analysis to describe and explain and evaluate cultures. If however, we reject Jarvie's approach entirely, as Winch has done in arguing against him, and stress the unity and coherence of a culture, we are stranded in a radical relativism. One can then set about understanding each in its own terms, but never can there be any point of contact. And yet we clearly do make translations and comparisons and there clearly are at least superficial points of similarity which, it might be argued, even if they are derived from one culture, do not, as simple points of comparison, depend on it any more than on the other. To return to the bullock example, the sense which the object has is equally more than that of physical object both for me and for a Hindu. One feels some

sympathy for Jarvie's contention that 'We cannot but attempt to translate alien societies into terms of ours'¹⁶, but one would want some safeguard about the ethnocentricity of such an attempt. And as Apel¹⁷ points out of Winch, the radical relativism implied in the claim that cultures can only be understood in their own terms leads to difficulties. Although Winch can fairly successfully argue that language games (cultural complexes of meaning) are understandable only in themselves, when applied to the language games of concrete history and culture which are rarely as complete and independent "they do not and did not function" because they "outgrew" themselves in the course of history, producing through permanent dialogue, the reflection and critical questioning of their own principles. Although the ideas of a culture are validated in use, they also undergo changes. Their contact with visible reality, and the visible aspects of social relations remind us that there is in this sense ground on which to compare.

The Gordian knot clearly has to be cut if sociology is to be allowed an existence at all. What matters is whether the blow is a clean one or is totally destructive. From what was said earlier about understanding, it is clearly possible to understand in their own terms what is taking place in another society. This is a complex and difficult matter, and as I suggested earlier, an understanding may have to be limited to areas or levels in the society if it is large or culturally varied. It is, however, possible both to understand in the

normal everyday sense of knowing how to react appropriately and in the sociological sense of being able to set out at least many of the relationships between situations, actions and cultural meanings to establish their usage. From the point of view of an outsider this is clearly not an easy process, particularly as the commitment of a sociologist goes beyond ethnographic understanding and aspires to explanation, and that for all that he may live for a time in the society in question, he usually has no intention of settling and being culturally assimilated. Indeed it is just his aim to state in words what this assimilation involves. Ethnocentricity remains a problem then, but by now a fairly well recognised one. Provided that he explains what he thinks he understands as clearly as possible, and particularly that he gives an account of actions, not just idealised culture, it is possible for others to criticise and improve on his work. What is fundamentally important is that he should be as conscious as possible of his relationship to his data and aware of what he is doing in describing what he sees. His initial aim will be a description which does full justice to the culture in question and this will have to be based on a fairly full identification with it. In order to be intelligible to members of his own culture however, it will require some degree of translation, and here the care and detail of the monograph is important. At this stage the sociologist is already in an ambivalent position in relation to the culture under study. He then goes on to pick

on points that seem to him as a sociologist to be important and to reanalyse them in terms of this interest. He must now be aware of the fact that he is no longer talking in terms of the culture studied but about it, and in doing this, and in going on to make comparisons and generalisations he will necessarily omit and crudify aspects of the culture. The only final justification for what he says then, is in terms of his own view of what is important and the fact that he claims to discern aspects common to different cultures. In saying this he must be certain whether he is saying that common problems are dealt with or common actions undertaken on his definition of them, or whether what is held to be common are cultural elements, i.e. the actor's views in the cultures. All too often these two are assumed to overlap when they may not. Thus it is arguable that most societies not only have to deal with the necessity of providing food, but that they have some recognition of this necessity. They might also be said to have to deal with and to recognise reproduction, but this is not to say that they all recognise some concept of marriage; that is a fact to be discovered, and any definition of marriage would have to be exceedingly careful and probably would be very limited. With a matter like religion, where some societies possess none and have no concept of it, it is debateable whether those that do and those that do not have any common recognition of a metaphysical problem of the meaning of life. That too is to be discovered and it would be ethnocentric not only to consider

this a universally recognised problem, but also to consider it universal to religion.

As regards the question of rationality, Lukes¹⁸ has elucidated fairly satisfactorily some of the distinctions that are necessary if rationality is not to be equated with twentieth century Anglo-Saxon philosophy of science. He suggests two sorts of conditions for successful communication, logical conditions, without which we cannot assert anything, and contextual conditions which are specific criteria of meaning and truth (and one might add, ontological criteria) for any particular society. Reality is constructed by different cultures in different ways, but all cultures can be assumed to refer to a common reality of phenomena against which assertion can be checked in some ways. If we reject such rules as the law of non-contradiction, or claim them to be culture-bound, we find ourselves unable to distinguish a statement from its contrary. The rules of logic governing nonsensical statements, self contradiction and methodological inadequacy with reference to the empirical world and also the means-ends relation are necessarily the same for all societies, and in these terms we can criticise people of any culture for illogicality and inconsistency. They are often less illuminating than the contextual criteria however, which specify what is to count as a good reason for holding a belief and in what sense what kinds of things exist. In these terms what is rational for one culture may not be for another, the case of magic and ritual in agriculture being an obvious example. It is not possible to say simply that the end sought is better

crops; the end includes the appeasement of spirits. And one cannot reply that the latter cannot be an end because there are no spirits: there are no spirits because there are none in your culture but there may be in mine.

Lukes goes on in a subsequent paper¹⁹ to argue however, that contextual criteria of truth and validity are positivistic and only intelligible in terms of context independent criteria. He claims that although people may hold beliefs which violate basic logical criteria they are only able to continue doing so in particular cases because they apply the logical criteria in general. If they did not, what they did and said would be unintelligible. An understanding of such deviation is therefore only possible in the context of adherence in general and takes the form of showing how, where and why such deviations take place. Thus Lukes finally contends that truth depends on verification by corresponding with reality, not upon the social uses of concepts and like Jarvie, that science is of superior rationality to prescientific thought, such as that of the Azande. This harder line has many dangers: as Lukes recognises it leads to ethnocentricity, which he hopes to avoid by appealing for criticism of the investigator's beliefs too, and by giving cognitive judgements a provisional rather than absolute status. It also leads to making beliefs out to be more rational and coherent than they are by analysing them as propositions rather than as aspects of social relations. It is a peculiarity of western culture to theorise, and even we

ourselves often fail to make explicit a theory which might be said to be implicit in our practice. While it is the job of social science to make such theories explicit, it is not its job to make them rationalistic and simple when in fact they are complex. A belief may be studied as an attitude and a feeling as well as a proposition and although social science is bound to explicate it in words, these words cannot be a straightforward assertion and always do justice to it. Considered in this light a belief may ramify in several directions and involve a number of 'propositions' in different social spheres. To attempt to reduce all beliefs to empirical propositions and then to verify them is itself to be guilty of ethnocentrism and to fail not only to understand but to want to understand.

Although it is therefore correct to say that there is a sense in which rationality is a precondition of understanding and is necessarily used in it, it is important to be clear about the difference between this and the uses to which rationality is put in different cultures. Rationality is used in a scientific culture in a specialised way to dissect the world into simple hopefully testable statements. That it is not so used in other cultures does not mean that they are in any general sense irrational, but simply that rationality is less normatively prominent. There is thus a problem of scientific ethnocentrism. It is perfectly natural for a scientific analysis to want to ask whether a belief in ritual and magic is e.g. technology, or religion, or merely expressive, and a case might be made out

for saying that it was irrational to conflate these. This does not imply that the culture is "irrational". It is not so if it fulfils two conditions, first that its beliefs are interconnected and that some notion of 'being a reason for' exists to connect them - hence that one can give reasons in terms of the culture for particular beliefs and actions. This notion of what constitutes a reason varies culturally - for those whose culture does not include spirits, spirits cannot feature as a reason for action. Secondly, the culture must in practice rely on basic logic. This is in fact a trivial condition since if it did not it could not make any statements at all. It certainly does not mean either that there is any conscious orientation to it - that the use of logical rationality is a norm - or that logic may not be 'abused' and played upon to make paradoxical and ambiguous statements which juxtapose and artificially connect things which are not 'rationally' connected. We do much the same ourselves, particularly in poetry, which is one reason why poets are always reluctant to state the meaning of their verses - the meanings are several simultaneously. Much the same is true of the way in which ritual and magical beliefs operate in tribal societies. They are true and significant simultaneously in several ways - as technology, as metaphysics, as the expression of personal feelings and as statements about contemporary social relations. It is the sociologist's task to understand and appreciate this, and he can only do it by carefully tracing the connections in various directions.

Only if the belief claims to be supported by something when it is not, that is when it is not substantiated in the way it claims to be does it count as irrational and so incorrigible. A mistake or something very similar to it has to exist.

The case of a belief with no connection with other beliefs is a non-rational one where the conventional way of understanding and accounting for it is no longer available. We are unable to locate it in a wider context and so are forced to use other methods - perhaps further questioning, perhaps an attempt to correlate this phenomenon with other characteristics to try to get a lead. But in the final analysis we can only understand if there is a degree of basic rationality which we can use as a basis for communication in our effort to explore the culture.

The peculiarity of man's relationship to the world and his experience of it in terms of ideas, normally specified as an established culture precludes an easy solution. It is neither true that 'real' phenomena can 'verify' the truth of any assertion so that understanding can be reduced to different varieties in relation to their environment; but neither is it true that the constructed culture in which men live is cut off from reality. We distinguish fantasy from everyday life. Cultures are however necessarily and always limited and 'one-sided' in their relation to phenomena, and they are also consistent and often self confirming in a large degree. To rationally understand and compare different ones is no easy task and what is gained in points of comparison is often lost *pari passu* in the adequacy with which

the meaning is retained. Much sociology is concerned with the manipulation of this compromise.

Such a view raises again the concern that led Weber to his criteria of meaningful and causal adequacy: the need for accuracy and verifiability. From the account that I have given it should be clear that our understanding of human action neither is nor should contrive to be accurate and verifiable in the same way as assertions about the physical world. Because it involves understanding ideas and intention it is inevitably different in its entire approach to such matters. Verifiability for one thing depends upon the assumption of a stable reality because it implies that you will find what I found if I have done my job properly. Social reality is constantly changing in many different degrees and respects. Yet the social scientist like the natural scientist does have the same basic attitudes which conduce to attaining whatever accuracy is possible, that is he is patient, persistent, painstaking, detailed in the analysis of evidence, develops rules for the presentation and discussion of evidence and the development of theory. By these means the social scientist can be fairly precise about what takes place in a social relationship as publicly defined by the relevant culture and can make his own extrapolations and comments on this. He can be less precise about the individual meaning of what happened and here he will have to rely upon cumulative evidence to decide not necessarily whether he was right about what it was, but whether he was right about its longer term implications,

which after all is his main interest. What he must avoid is the belief that he is discovering absolute reality which exists independently of his discovery. He must think always in terms of what might be as well as what is, and this involves a major reorientation from cognition to cognition plus evaluation in his attitude to discovery. He must also be aware that it has for centuries been the preoccupation of some members of society - artists, politicians, the courts, for example - to take an interest in finding out in detail and in general what takes place and why, and not presuppose that by calling himself a scientist he can automatically do disproportionately better. By accumulating and practising techniques - which ultimately are social skills - he may be able to, but these should not give him illusions about the advent of a Newton or an Einstein. He can be sure that certain social events took place by bringing a great many different kinds of evidence to bear. What he has to be wary of is assuming that this gives him the answer to its significance. That is a matter I take up in the next chapter..

It now becomes clearer that Weber's pursuit of verifiability and accuracy in understanding rested in fact on mistaken assumptions as to what this should consist in. He assumed that a claim to have adequately understood an aspect of a culture was to be tested like a scientific hypothesis and that the difficulties with devising an effective test were technical. The fact that they were fundamental pushed him into his attempt at 'causal verification'. What is surprising in view of his

familiarity with the idealist tradition, is that Weber failed to appreciate that the grounds of truth and certainty in regard to understanding are categorically different from those in regard to statements about the physical world. It is for the latter that natural science has developed its sophisticated methodology and techniques of testing. The adequacy of the conceptualisation and the truth of the statement is verified by experiment, to see whether reality corresponds to hypothesis. Whatever objections one may have to the positivist view of science as a complete account of the nature of science, I think it is by now established that the progressive modification and elimination of hypotheses by experimental testing is an important part of its method of proof. This method assumes a correspondance theory of truth whereby the scientist attempts to make a statement about reality which correctly encapsulates it and which he confirms by successful manipulation. Reality is conceived as essentially separate from the knower and the knower's cognitive apparatus; yet of course reality can only be known by means of that apparatus (that is what knowing means). Hence the establishment of knowledge consists in establishing a correspondence between idea and reality, in which increasing precision is the aim.

Such an epistemology is however, only partly relevant to action and understanding. As I have shown, we have to assume that in some very basic and minimal sense our perceptual apparatus is the same and thus that our perceptions of the world can at least overlap. In trying to understand then, we share

the positivistic assumption that for all of us there is a reality 'out there' which is variously conceived of and experienced. But the point in understanding is not reality, but the variety of conceptions of it. So a common unstructured 'objective' reality is only a starting point assumed as common to all men: we all inhabit the same world in that sense. Hence the confusion about the somehow more perfect knowledge of science and its superiority to all other conceptualisations of reality. It is only to reality positivistically conceived to which this applies. Reality in this sense is used only as a starting point and at times as a means of verification in understanding. Understanding proper is concerned with getting inside the variety of conceptualisations, which while they relate at times in a direct and pragmatic fashion to physical reality in such matters as the growing of food and the building of houses, also certain large areas which are independent of physical reality - fantasy, emotion, religion, metaphysics are the most obvious examples, but as I have already pointed out, the essential plasticity of social relations makes them in a significant degree independent of physical constraints. In regard to this a positivistic correspondence theory of truth is simply logically inappropriate and must be replaced by a hermenutic coherence theory. We proceed not by verification against reality but by confirmation through appreciating the connections of a way of seeing the world, a *Weltanschauung*. The method is not experiment but communication and the result is not proof and

disproof in a positivistic sense, but ever greater confirmation as our appreciation of the location of one element in a culture in relation to others expands. Positivistic methods are not in fact exhaustive - a hypothesis is only as good as the next experiment to test it - but it has the appearance of hard certainty in the deliberateness of its logic of procedure. This is not the case in understanding because it is founded not in an attempt to manipulate physical reality but in an attempt to communicate successfully with others. The end result is thus normally conviction that you have fully understood which is confirmed by your ability to communicate and cooperate. Verifiability and accuracy and 'objectivity' are there, but not in the sense that Weber assumed²⁰.

To say that a coherence theory of truth and a methodology of confirmation are appropriate to understanding is not however to say that only they are appropriate, but that they are its central element. I have already allowed that a correspondence view remains relevant insofar as for all their variety culture must relate to physical reality at some points. It is further relevant in as much as actions within a culture although unintelligible except in the terms of the culture are also events in physical reality. What matters when I get married is principally the alteration in social relations and identities, but my physical presence at a ceremony is essential to this taking place, and is a means of verifying that it was done, though of course only in conjunction with a good knowledge

of what is and is not a marriage ceremony (as opposed to an advertising stunt or a joke). Understanding with its peculiar techniques is always a precondition for the use of empiricist correspondence techniques which further back it up. Man is an earthbound creature, but one prone to flights of fancy.

C H A P T E R F O U R .

EXPLANATION

As implied at the end of the last chapter, understanding, although a necessary basis for any sociological account, is in 'scientific' terms limited. It is dependent in the last resort, upon typifications of one kind or another and although some of these in some cultures may be fairly precise and public, many that the sociologist will be interested in are not. Not only is it very difficult to state criteria for the use of some terms, there are typical situations and cultural configurations which may be significant in terms of actors' responses to them, and which yet have no name. In advertisements for example, women are presented to the public with various different images, some of them simple and recognisable - the mother, the hostess - but some of them much less easily describable, though they nonetheless elicit a calculated response. Further, the actor's own view, however much a part of a common culture this may be, eventually becomes problematic for the sociologist when he wants to go outside it by comparing it with another culture or by evaluating it in terms of theoretical considerations. It is at these points that the vagueness of criteria for using actors' terms and descriptions, and the fact that the people often do not do what they say they do, or will do, arises as a difficulty.

As I showed at the end of Chapter Two, this led Weber to formulate the methodological criterion of causal adequacy to supplement and confirm meaningful adequacy. He recognised that a description of the actor's world was essential to understand what was going on, and that the actor's views are in a general sense the frame of reference in terms of which he acts and which enable others to predict his acts. But this frame of reference is rarely extensive or consistent, nor do actors live up to them. The sociologist trying to understand not one but many actors and to relate their various views is faced not only with self-inconsistency but inter-personal and intergroup inconsistencies which he has to account for. Weber's attempt at a causal check was intended to verify which were the behaviourally effective complexes of meaning which invariably led to action. He wrote as though these were more or less conscious motives and as a result, ended in confusion, because he thereby treated as contingently related what is in practice conceptually related¹.

Many philosophers² have noted the modal aspect of action terminology: desires, beliefs, intentions, emotions, decisions etc. These terms can never stand by themselves but always denote a quality of the relation between an actor and an object or state of affairs. One cannot intend, one must intend to do something. Intention thus specifies the situation one has in mind and asserts one's attitude to it. The consequence of this is that their relation to action is always conceptual, rather

than contingent. My wanting an ice cream or a swim is apparently a fact that is logically related to my having the ice cream or the swim. I do not want chocolate, nor will a walk do as a substitute. The source of this conceptual relation between belief, desire, intention, motive, reason and action lies in the actor's capacity for framing a project, reflecting about the world, thinking about what he might do and so deciding what he will do before he does it. When he acts, he puts this project into concrete form and makes it come true, or at least he does so insofar as it is based on a realisable belief about reality. Hence there is a conceptual relation between what is intended and believed and the action because both the intention and belief and the action are described in the same way, in terms of the same concepts. This is further substantiated by considering the answer we give to questions why we act in certain ways. We do not reply with references to causes and general laws but with references to beliefs, reasons and motives which further characterise the action and set it in a wider meaningful context to make it "self-explanatory". To reply in terms of what we were caused to do is to miss the point. It is a rational account that is sought, and conceptual links to demonstrate one's view of the situation, to demonstrate the coherence of the act with its context.

The difficulty with this account, and the difficulty in which Weber became entangled, is that the matter is more than simply verbal. The conceptual relationship between belief,

reason and motive, and behaviour first came to prominence in the context of a debate about a theory of the mind which had dominated Anglo-Saxon philosophy since Descartes who invented it, and Hume, who refined it. According to this view, human beings caused things to happen in the world by acting, and their actions were themselves caused by mental states or acts, or "passions", which were referred to by the words we classify as emotions, motives, beliefs, intentions etc. For some of these, the theory looked quite plausible: fear for example, and ensuing flight from a lion. The advantage of the theory is that it enables reference to be made to mental states on a level with physical ones, and so to talk exclusively about what is going on in the world. In doing so it ignores the conceptual relation between the statements about my wanting an ice cream and my getting one, and talks causally about the mechanics and the events, that lead to my going and getting it. Rather than saying that wanting is always wanting something, it characterises wanting as a mental state of affairs which is causally effective in producing action of a certain sort.

But there are a number of difficulties with a causal theory. A general difficulty is that if my wanting is a psychological state that is the cause of my action, presumably it too is caused, and that cause is also caused. For the determinist this infinite regress is not finally problematic, but its implication is to make nonsense of the traditional notion of free will, in terms of which the account stops with the wanting.

If I am caused to want what I want, and so to do what I do, I can hardly be said to be free. More importantly, if wanting is a psychological state of affairs that is contingently related to action, it becomes an inductive matter that the two are related, and thus one cannot know a priori that they are related: one finds out by experience. Yet surely one knows that one wants an ice cream, one does not just have vague feelings and suddenly finds oneself buying one. The causal theory in effect ignores the very aspects of action which make it distinctive.

MacIntyre puts it as follows:

'If beliefs and actions stand in a causal relationship (as that is understood by Hume) then it is purely contingent which beliefs are related to which actions. If we are looking for the cause of some action in the realm of beliefs, we can have no a priori expectations about where to look. Any belief might be the cause of any action. Suppose we see a man spraying his roses with insecticide and interpret the statement 'He does it because he believes that green-fly are harmful to roses' as an ascription of Humean causality. Our justifications for making the statement can now only be that we have observed uniform correlations between the belief that green-fly are harmful and the action of spraying roses, but we might in establishing this uniformity have found any other to hold. The action of spraying roses might equally well be correlated with the belief that sunspots cause slumps, or with the belief that the Pope is anti-Christ. It just happens to be correlated with the belief that greenfly are harmful to roses.'

3

Neither theory seems very satisfactory. The causal theory treats actors like zombies, the conceptual theory like disembodied spirits. The difficulty occurs both at the level of individual action, as above, and in collective action. On the one hand one has the actors' view of the world and their actions

in it, which are conceptually coherent; on the other there is the fact that people do not do what they say, and nor do we always accept their reasons for what they do. We have to recognise that though ideas guide action in many cases, they do not always do so. Actions are events in the world as well as ideas in the mind, simultaneously. Causal and conceptual relations coexist.

Consider Cohin's⁴ analysis of the genesis of millenarian religious movements in the middle ages. The millenium he defines as a religious belief in the salvation of an elect and the transformation of the earth, or at least their part of it, into an utopia by means of a struggle and a final cataclysm which will involve the reversal of the powers of evil and the substitution of good, beauty and an easeful life in the place of horror and oppression. We may now ask why such movements occur, and what are the conditions necessary for their occurrence. These may be listed as the existence of religious beliefs among the people, and in particular of myths concerning salvation, some sort of natural or social catastrophe (famine, plague, war, depression etc.), the existence also of marginal and dissatisfied educated men in small numbers, who act as leaders and organise the belief system, and of a group of relatively able men to act as disciples, spread the word and mobilise the masses. What we may now try to say is that the existence of this set of conditions is sufficient to cause the emergence of a millenarian movement, the general belief content of which has been previously

described. In this case, however, we totally ignore the personal processes of emotional reaction and interaction by which the movement germinates and develops. Can we say that we give a causal account, when what we do is to look at a series of actual occurrences and at the circumstances which led the actors to act as they did? What we are really asking is "What is it for a millenarian movement to occur?" We cannot describe conditions as though they caused the movement, since this could not happen without the active participation of the actors in developing a collective consciousness. What we have is a set of objective material conditions, but the movement only arises when these are recognised, communicated and related to actors' beliefs and values. This is not a causal process at all but a conscious, moral-evaluative process of developing human action. The relation between events and actions that we are trying to elucidate is not one of contingent causality but an intricate development of conceptual relations in reference to reality. This is not to say that it is not relevant to compare similar movements with similar beliefs and conditions, but beware of treating them as though they were identical causes. Here we have an important shift of perspective from the actor's view point which we are trying to understand to a more generalised observer's view which is trying to give a coherent account of several movements. Here the similarities in the ideas of the actors must be carefully traced. These ideas and beliefs are not just of the causal conditions of action

but the grounds of it. What we are in fact talking about is not the causal effects of conditions upon objects but the response of individuals in interaction to their circumstances, and suggesting that given certain existing beliefs, this will lead them to see their situations and respond to it in a definite way.

The dilemma therefore reappears of whether to describe what people think and do or whether to look for the causes of their actions. On the one hand we have a vocabulary of reasons, desires and motives explaining action; on the other of causes, conditions and effects. The one leads us to an optimistically rational conscious view of action, the other seems to exclude conscious mediation altogether. This led Ryle to argue in the Concept of Mind that this dichotomy was false and based on a category mistake which assumed that minds were different from, though of the same class of objects as events in the physical world, like for example assuming that a university was another building as the colleges, administrative buildings, libraries and so on are. Ryle however, was attacking a particular theory which tried to assimilate the mind to events and causes, that is the causal side of the dilemma. In that this is illegitimate, Ryle is quite correct to point out that talk of minds is of a different logical nature from talk of events. However Ryle saw the dichotomy mind/body as part of this causal theory, since it tended to imply that minds were some kind of ethereal body, having its origins in Descartes' preoccupation with the soul,

which survived the body. In attacking this dichotomy Ryle was led to the view, as I suggested in the last Chapter, that talk of mind was really talk of behaviour, and hence was led to describe human qualities such as vanity, as dispositions to behave in a certain way under certain circumstances, much as glass, being brittle, has a disposition to break if struck sharply. An initial difficulty with this view is that it is very difficult to characterise human qualities as precisely as the qualities of natural objects. Not only are they more complex, they are also vague. We can recognise vanity or kindness, but a precise definition defeats us because they are characterisations of actor's responses to situations. As Danto⁵ points out, they have a creative element which sees and develops opportunities. And the crucial element obscuring their exegesis is that the response is mediated by the actor.

'There is always the possibility that human inventive-ness will contrive a novel instance which society can recognize afterwards as belonging to the class (of events designated in a causal 'law' of behaviour), but which one would not have anticipated, even though in a general way, we might have predicted the general description that this instance falls under. In a comparable way, even knowing that a man has a disposition to do kind things, and knowing that a given occasion is one on which he can be expected to do something kind, it is not always a simple matter to say what precise kind of thing he will do. To be kind is to be creative in benignity, to be considerate, to surprise people by the singular appropriateness of one's gestures.'

This represents an important difference between the term 'disposition' applied to physical objects and to human beings. In the latter case it only refers to law-like behaviour falling

within general evaluative categories subject to constant elaboration in use.

Ryle argues persuasively that the attribution of the term 'vain' depends upon public assessment of a man's behaviour according to common cultural criteria, and it is true that normally this is the case, and that we should be sceptical of someone who said he was not kind or vain when he acted as though he was. But the reason for our scepticism is that we assume him to be aware of and act in terms of the common culture. The truth is that we assume him to have a certain kind of attitude to the situations in which we see him acting and characterise his action. We only withdraw the attribution either in the light of later actions - in which case we may claim that he has changed - or if it becomes clear that for example it was not vanity but lack of self-confidence, or that it was not kindness but self-interest in currying favour. Although subsequent behaviour is often our guide here, it may not be. I may discover his lack of confidence by discussing his state of mind with him afterwards. We would then tend to say that he was not vain but that perhaps he acted "vainly", since that was the social impact of his action.

The point to be made then, is not that there are not public criteria for the attribution of action terms, and that at times we are reluctant to withdraw an attribution simply on the basis of evidence of attitudes, but that attitudes and beliefs are also of importance, and they are of much more obvious importance when we discuss central terms like reason, intention and desire.

In exorcising the ghost in the machine, Ryle is in danger of purging too much. If he disposes of the mental element in the minds he reduces them to a mere difference of category in the vocabularies. The root of the difficulty is that in action mind and body coexist and are united: consciousness is translated into action and action involves events in the world. We not only think about the world, form views of it and take up attitudes to it, we also change it by acting on it. Each view is different to some extent, and so may lead to recognisably different actions, different especially for the actor himself, who knows what kind and character of act they are intended to be.

For the outsider, however, this is, as the last chapter showed, less easy to perceive. It is never possible to know the final nuances of experience that establish the meaning of situation and act for the actor, but one can know about it in a more or less detailed way on the basis of existing and constantly created common understandings. The farther one is removed from the actor, however, the less easy is such an understanding and the more one has to rely on the behaviour one sees rather than the actor one knows. To some degree, and to an extent increasing with lack of familiarity with them, others' actions constitute events about which one generalises, though without necessarily assuming that the acts are not consciously undertaken. In the course of this, the acts are naturally not described in just the way their authors understood them. They are variously redescribed to suit the needs of those who

observe them. What is taking place now is the attribution of different possible ways of thought, of which the given act might have been the outcome.

In doing this, however, we should not be overgenerous to the actor and allow him constant perfect rationality in his appraisal of the world. We are often interested in the mistakes, inconsistencies and unintended consequences in actions. These cannot be subsumed into the logic of the actor's own account, though we all make desperate attempts at rationalisation of our past acts when damning evidence comes to light. When these chinks appear in the logic of the acts as seen by the actor, we begin to recognise the implications of seeing acts as events as well as projects in the minds of actors. We may reasonably claim that conceptual relations may hold between ideas, or descriptions, or statements which may refer to actions or to actors' views, but we cannot claim that such relations hold between events, or between actions insofar as these are events, or between psychological states, and these states and events. The characterisation of an event as an act does not deny its status as event. For the sociologist this is only a starting point. He explores the actor's view of the situation and of his acts, but goes on to set this in a wider context which may partly or wholly redescribe both acts and situation. The sociologist is not only interested in what the actor did, but in what happened whether anyone noticed or not, and in particular in the long term implications of what happened. The question whether the

relations between the events he discusses can be called, on certain descriptions, conceptual or contingent must be initially open, and can only be settled in the light of what is discovered. The description of the world as the actors see it and of acts as they are performed is the starting point in an account of social relations. When we go beyond this point we come to recognise the importance of both the mental and the event aspects of the action. Neither can be ignored. What becomes problematic is the relation of any new description to them.

It seems that actions cannot be construed just as events, for if we do, we thereby ignore their significance to the agents and consideration can only give them an arbitrary meaning. But nor can they be seen as the actor performed them, unless we are willing to stop at a naively experiential account of action. Sociology can only ever have any real value if it can go beyond this point and question the actor's views and look at unintended consequences. In order to try to resolve this question I will consider Durkheim's "Suicide", which has often been taken as an example of a purely causal analysis of social actions and attacked for its failure to explore the actor's points of view⁶. Nonetheless the book has also been accepted as a classic even by many who have doubts about the propriety of causal analysis.

Durkheim was much more aware of the difficulty than has sometimes been allowed. He certainly did have a bias in the direction of causal analysis but he was constantly trying to justify this by pointing to the inadequacy of the actor's view

as a basis for explanation. In the case of suicide he is of course on apparently strong ground, since it presumably requires some emotional intensity to take one's own life, and while there may be reasons for doing so, reasons, we may surmise, are probably not enough. Despair, with its abandonment of reason, is the state of mind conventionally associated with suicide. This large non-rational element supports Durkheim's lack of faith in the actor's views - even supposing they can be obtained, for he is talking of actual suicides, not attempts. These doubts, and the conclusion they force him to are expressed early in the book.

'Our first task then must be to determine the order of facts to be studied under the name of suicides. Accordingly, we must inquire whether, among the different varieties of death, some have common qualities objective enough to be recognisable by all honest observers, specific enough not to be found elsewhere and also sufficiently kin to those commonly called suicides for us to retain the same term without breaking with common usage.

Shall suicide be considered to exist only if the act resulting in death was performed by the victim to achieve this result? Shall only he be thought to truly slay himself who has wished to do so, and suicide be intentional self-homicide? In the first place this would define suicide by a characteristic which, whatever its interest and significance, would at least suffer from not being easily recognizable, since it is not easily observed. How discover the agent's motive and whether he desired death itself when he formed his resolve, or had some other purpose? Intent is too intimate a thing to be more than approximately interpreted by another. It even escapes self-observation. How often we mistake the true reason for our acts! We constantly explain acts due to petty feelings or blind routine by generous passions or lofty considerations.'

Durkheim returns to the problem at the end of the book. How on the one hand to get an adequate precise definition of suicide without including accidents and how on the other to be sure the suicide was meant. For all the scorn he pours on intention he is compelled in the last analysis to admit the actor's view by the back door in the form of - 'We may say then conclusively: the term suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result. An attempt is an act thus defined but falling short of actual death'. p.43. D's italics. Suicide must then be conscious, which introduces the same problem in kind though not in degree of assessing the actor's mental state, as that of assessing motives. This latter Durkheim continues to ridicule:

'The circumstances are almost infinite in number which are supposed to cause suicide because they rather frequently accompany it. One man kills himself in the midst of affluence, another in the lap of poverty; one was unhappy in his home, and another had just ended by divorce a marriage which was making him unhappy. In one case a soldier ends his life after having been punished for an offence he did not commit; in another, a criminal whose crime has remained unpunished kills himself.'

p. 287-8.

All these situations could be a reason and supply a motive for suicide, yet of course they are contradictory and varied and Durkheim is looking for one or a few certain causes. It is interesting to note the form of his argument in the last passage. He suggests that circumstances cannot be causes,

circumstances, that is, defined by an observer. They do not invariably lead to suicide because they have different significance for different people. Here Durkheim is using actor's meanings as a stick to beat causality, defined quite unexceptionably here as the contingent influence of the material environment on behaviour. Yet for most of his book he argues constantly in terms of general social factors which cause suicide and concludes that 'At any given moment the moral constitution of society establishes the contingent of voluntary deaths. There is therefore, for each people a collective force of a definite amount of energy, impelling men to self-destruction.' p. 299. The terminology here is that of Newtonian mechanics and the language purely causal. The individual's view thus really counts for nothing, is a mere gloss which serves to cover the hidden power of wider social factors. Surely Durkheim cannot have it both ways: either suicides are driven to their deaths by some causal factor or they commit suicide because they experience their environment as intolerable. In the one case they are objects, in the other agents. He defined suicide initially as a conscious act, which implies that they are agents. He went on to decry an analysis in terms of motives as impossible and misleading. How then does he explain suicide?

When he begins to come to grips with this, it soon appears that he is hopelessly confused as to which view he is taking. He begins to discuss the causes of suicide and how to reach them and once again dismisses motives, but notice how he does so.

'The legal establishments of fact always accompanying suicide include the motive (family trouble, physical or other pain, remorse, drunkenness, etc.) which seems to have been the determining cause, and in the statistical reports of almost all countries is found a special table containing the results of these inquiries under the title: presumptive motives of suicides.'

p. 148.

It is significant that he continues to use the term 'motive' rather than 'reason', for this can refer either to the circumstances as seen by an observer, or to them as experienced by the actor. Now if we describe them as outsiders, their relation with suicides will be causal and contingent, but it is unlikely to be established with any certainty, since as Durkheim showed, (see above) the 'same' circumstances may or may not result in suicide. Since suicide is a conscious act, we must admit the conscious motivation of the agent. To do this however would give us the reason for the death and would establish a meaningful and conceptual link between the situation and the death by describing how it was experienced as intolerable, with no foreseeable improvement or way out. This description, if given by the actor, would be in particular personal terms and thus constitute the problematic varied motive that Durkheim wants to avoid. What Durkheim claims he is going to do is to look at the circumstances, externally perceived, which are correlated with suicide, and to do this he examines statistics of different sorts to establish a firm relationship. In the last analysis it looks as though he is ditching the actor's view as unreliable and just looking at conditions and events.

'Disregarding the individual as such, his motives and his ideas, we shall seek directly the states of the various social environments (religious confessions, family, political society, occupational groups etc.), in terms of which the variations in suicide occur.'

p. 151.

In building up his analysis of egoistic suicide, the first type, Durkheim initially establishes a difference in rates according to religion. This he proves statistically. Having established it he goes on to explain it as follows.

'We thus reach of first conclusion, that the proclivity of Protestantism for suicide must relate to the spirit of free enquiry that animates this religion. Let us understand this relationship correctly. Free enquiry itself is only the effect of another cause. When it appears, when men, after having long received their ready made faith from tradition, claim the right to shape it for themselves, this is not because of the intrinsic desirability of free enquiry, for the latter involves as much sorrow as happiness. But it is because men henceforth need this liberty. This very need can have only one cause: the overthrow of traditional beliefs. If they still asserted themselves with equal energy, it would never occur to men to criticise them. If they still had the same authority, men would not demand the right to verify this authority. Reflection develops only if its development becomes imperative, that is, if certain ideas and instinctive sentiments which have hitherto adequately guided conduct are found to have lost their efficacy. Then reflection intervenes to fill the gap that has appeared, but which it has not created. Just as reflection disappears to the extent that thought and action take the form of automatic habits, it awakes only when accepted habits become disorganised. It asserts its rights against public opinion only when the latter loses strength, that is, when it is no longer prevalent to the same extent. If these assertions occur not merely occasionally, and as passing crises, but become chronic; if individual consciences keep reaffirming their autonomy, it is because they are constantly subject to conflicting impulses, because a new opinion has not been formed to replace the one no longer existing. If a new system of beliefs were constituted which seemed as indisputable

to everyone as the old, no one would think of discussing it any longer. Its discussion would no longer even be permitted; for ideas shared by an entire society draw from this consensus on authority which makes them sacrosanct and raises them above dispute. For them to have become more tolerant they must first have become the object of less general and complete assent and been weakened by preliminary controversy.

Thus, if it is correct to say that free inquiry once proclaimed, multiplies schisms, it must be added that it presupposes them and derives from them, for it is claimed and instituted as a principle only in order to permit latent or half-declared schisms to develop more freely. So if Protestantism concedes a greater freedom to individual thought than Catholicism, it is because it has fewer common beliefs and practices. Now, a religious society cannot exist without a collective credo and the more extensive the credo the more unified and strong is the society. For it does not unite men by an exchange and reciprocity of services, a temporal bond of union which permits and even presupposes differences, but which a religious society cannot form. It socialises men only by attaching them completely to an identical body of doctrine and socializes them in proportion as this body of doctrine is extensive and firm. The more numerous the manners of action and thought of a religious character are, which are accordingly removed from free inquiry, the more the idea of God presents itself in all details of existence, and makes individual wills converge to one identical goal. Inversely, the greater concessions a confessional group makes to individual judgment, the less it dominates lives, the less its cohesion and vitality. We thus reach the conclusion that the superiority of Protestantism with respect to suicide results from its being a less strongly integrated church than the Catholic church.'

pp. 158-9.

What is the status of this argument? Is Durkheim talking about the causal influence of religion upon suicide or about its meaning to the suicide risk? He still preserves the veneer of causality in his terminology, speaking of 'effect', 'cause' and

'imperative', but in fact he is discussing the consequences of two religions for the quality of social relations he calls social integration. He certainly is not talking about the experiences of any individual, but neither can he properly be said to be discussing causes. His argument is essentially that a religion which dominates all aspects of the life of the faithful through an extensive clergy and elaborate and unquestioned doctrine and mass participation in ritual gives religion a pervasive significance in society and leads to a faith in the stability of the established social relationships and an approval of their nature and permanence. It also leads to the individual to see himself as part of a continuous stable order, not as an isolated atom whose own view of things is all that matters, Durkheim is saying something about aspects or qualities of the individual's experience of many situations and social relations in discussing the general impact of religion, ideology and organisation. This becomes clearer when he sets out his conclusions on egoistic suicide.

'So we reach the general conclusion: suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups of which the individual forms a part.

But society cannot disintegrate without the individual simultaneously detaching himself from social life, without his own goals becoming preponderant over those of the community, in a word without his personality tending to surmount the collective personality. The more weakened the groups to which he belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he depends only on himself and recognises no other rules of conduct than what are founded on his private interests. If we agree to call this state egoism, in which the individual ego asserts itself to excess in the face of the social ego, and at

its expense, we may call egoistic the special type of suicide springing from excessive individualism...

Excessive individualism not only results in favoring the action of suicidogenic causes, but it is itself such a cause. It not only frees man's inclination to do away with himself from a protective obstacle, but creates this inclination out of whole cloth and thus gives birth to a special suicide which bears its mark. This must be clearly understood for this is what constitutes the special character of the type of suicide just distinguished and justifies the name we have given it. What is there then in individualism that explains this result?

It has been sometimes said that because of his psychological constitution, man cannot live without attachment to some object which transcends and survives him, and that the reason for this necessity is a need we must have not to perish entirely. Life is said to be intolerable unless some reason for existing is involved, some purpose justifying life's trials. The individual alone is not a sufficient end for his activity. He is too little. He is not only hemmed in spatially; he is also strictly limited temporally. When, therefore, we have no other object than ourselves we cannot avoid the thought that our efforts will finally end in nothingness, since we ourselves disappear. But annihilation terrifies us. Under these conditions one would lose courage to live, that is, to act and struggle, since nothing will remain of our exertions. The state of egoism, in other words, is supposed to be contradictory to human nature and, consequently, too uncertain to have chances of permanence.'

pp. 209-210.

Here Durkheim clinches his explanation of a set of statistical correlations by interpreting them all as manifestations of the same fundamental problem of the integration of the individual in to society. In this case he claims that the explanation is lack of integration and the lack of self-sufficiency of the individual because of it, and that this is reflected in

the implications of different religions, of domestic situations and of national political situations. He does not therefore say anything about the motives for suicide as any victim conceives it, but that there are elements in each case which, though directly concerned with particular matters of personal circumstances, are also aspects of this continuing struggle of the individual to be free of the constrictions of the social order, but not to be so free as to be isolated. He is not talking about the actors in their own terms, but takes these terms and shows how they are part of a more general problem. He does not just talk of external circumstances, objective conditions, but of how actors experience these conditions and claims that their experience is crucially affected by certain qualities in the social relationships which they have, which lead some of them at certain times to experience the situation as intolerable. He is always of course speaking of rates and of differences in rates. Only later does he come on to try to relate the particular individuals who actually die to the broad social patterns that he outlines here. He is therefore describing social factors which are supra-individual but despite his protestations about social facts as *sui generis*, is very much concerned with how these constitute an element of individual experience. His contribution then, is not only to explain differences in rates between times, nations and groups in a causal sense, but to investigate the quality of the situation as experienced by the individual suicide that led him to feel it

was intolerable. This becomes even more explicit when he goes on to altruistic suicide, which he locates principally in the army in the modern industrial state.

'The first quality of a soldier is a sort of impersonality not to be found anywhere in civilian life to the same degree. He must be trained to set little value upon himself, since he must be prepared to sacrifice himself upon being ordered to do so. Even aside from such exceptional circumstances, in peace time and in the regular exercise of his profession, discipline requires him to obey without question and sometimes even without understanding. For this an intellectual abnegation hardly consistent with individualism is required. He must have but a weak tie binding him to his individuality, to obey external impulsion so docilely. In short, a soldier's principle of action is external to himself; which is the quality of the state of altruism.'

p. 234.

Altruism is the opposite of egoism - the individual is over-integrated into society and thus over ready to kill himself at society's disapproval. He cannot bear loss of face: his self-respect is the respect of others. Durkheim makes it clear that the soldier is trained to deny himself and to put the group first, and it is clear that by this he means not an instrumental cognitive learning but an emotional internalisation which importantly affects the quality of his experience and the significance to him of certain kinds of social relations. The officer suicide before or after court martial will account for this in terms of his inability to live with himself and his brother officers after blemishing the honour of the regiment. Durkheim is able to show that the general meaning of this response

and experience is characteristic of a highly integrated social group of which the army is an example. He deals very much with the meaning of the situation to the actors, not just with the 'conditions', but extrapolates aspects of this meaning and points to their similarity with others.

Durkheim's greatest triumph however, was in his account of anomic suicide, where he seized upon one of the major distinguishing features of the modern industrial state and explored its implications to deal initially with the rash of businessmen who committed suicide after an economic or financial crisis, but also to explain differences in the rates of suicide between rich and poor, and town and country. He is able to use an acute description of the empirical characteristics of industrial society to account for the distinctive nature of the experiences of individuals in such a society and their response to situations and relations in it. The general is used to explain the particular, though not of course to fully explain individual cases.

'For a whole century, economic progress has mainly consisted in freeing industrial relations from all regulation. Until very recently, it was the function of a whole system of moral forces to exert this discipline. First, the influence of religion was felt alike by workers and masters, the poor and the rich. It consoled the former and brought them contentment with their lot by informing them of the providential nature of the social order, that the share of each class was assigned by God himself and by holding out the hope for just compensation in a world to come in return for the inequalities of this world. It governed the latter, recalling that worldly interests are not man's entire lot, that they must be subordinate to other and higher interests, and that they should therefore be pursued without rule or measure. Temporal power, in turn, restrained the

scope of economic functions by its supremacy over them and by the relatively subordinate role it assigned them. Finally, within the business world proper, the occupational groups, by regulating salaries, the price of products and production itself, indirectly fixed the average level of income on which needs are partially based by the very force of circumstances. However, we do not mean to propose this organisation as a model. Clearly it would be inadequate to exist-
ing societies without great changes. What we stress is its existence, the fact of its useful influence, and that nothing today has come to take its place.

Actually, religion has lost most of its power. And government, instead of regulating economic life, has become its tool and servant. The most opposite schools, orthodox economists and extreme socialists, unite to reduce the government to the role of more or less passive intermediary among the various social functions. The former wish to make it simply the guardian of individual contracts, the latter leave it the task of doing the collective bookkeeping, that is of recording the demands of consumers, transmitting them to producers, inventorying the total resource and distributing it according to a fixed formula. But both refuse it any power to subordinate other social aims. On both sides, nations are declared to have a single or chief purpose of achieving industrial prosperity; such is the implication of the dogma of economic materialism, the basis of both apparently opposed systems. And as these theories merely express the state of opinion, industry, instead of being still regarded as a means to an end transcending itself, has become the supreme end of individuals and societies alike. Thereupon the appetites thus excited have become freed of any limiting authority. By sanctifying them, so to speak, this apotheosis of well-being has placed them above all human law. Their restraint seems like a sort of sacrilege. For this reason, even the purely utilitarian regulation of them exercised by the industrial world itself through the medium of occupational groups has been unable to persist. Ultimately, this liberation of desires has been made worse by the very development of industry and the almost infinite extension of the market. So long as the producer could gain his profits only in his immediate neighbourhood,

the restricted amount of possible gain could not much overexcite ambition. Now that he may assume to have almost the entire world as his customer, how could passions accept their former confinement in the face of such limitless prospects?

Such is the course of the excitement predominating in this part of society, and which has thence extended to the other parts. There, the state of crisis and anomy is constant and, so to speak, normal. From top to bottom of the ladder, greed is aroused without knowing where to find ultimate foothold. Nothing can calm it, since its goal is far beyond all it can attain. Reality seems valueless by comparison with the dreams of fevered imaginations; reality is therefore abandoned, but so too is possibility abandoned when it in turn becomes reality. A thirst arises for novelties, unfamiliar pleasures, nameless sensations, all of which lose their savor once known. Henceforth one has no strength to endure the least reverse. The whole fever subsides and the sterility of all the tumult is apparent, and it is seen that all these new sensations in their infinite quantity cannot form a solid foundation of happiness to support one during days of trial. The wise man knowing how to enjoy achieved results without having constantly to replace them with others, finds in them an attachment to life in the hour of difficulty. But the man who has always pinned all his hopes on the future and lived with his eyes fixed upon it, has nothing in the past as a comfort against the present's afflictions, for the past was nothing to him but a series of hastily experienced stages. What blinded him to himself was his expectation always to find further on the happiness he had so far missed. Now he is stopped in his tracks; from now on nothing remains behind or ahead of him to fix his gaze upon. Weariness alone, moreover, is enough to bring disillusionment, for he cannot in the end escape the futility of an endless pursuit.

We may even wonder if this moral state is not principally what makes economic catastrophies of our day so fertile in suicides.'

pp. 254-6.

Durkheim uses this description of the development of industrial materialism as a dominant goal and a principle upon

which society is ordered to account both for business suicides, where the victim's relationships are pervaded by the qualities he describes, and for aspects of other suicides. He extends the concept of anomy to account for domestic suicides also. He speaks to the condition of man in industrial society in the most general terms and yet uses this to account for the most individual of acts. Here there is very much less talk in a way that could be construed as causal. It is a question rather of ideas and values in social relationships and how these affect how men, social relations and situations are perceived and responded to.

Durkheim returns to causal language at the end of his book when he speaks about the role of individual factors in suicide. He is quite unable to do what perhaps he might have done in the first place, namely to work from individual cases up to general social configurations or elements of meaning. His technique from the start has been to look at observed differences in rates and to assume that these were not accidental. He spends some pages early in the book arguing that this cannot be so because the differences are too constant and systematic. He also spends several chapters ruling out external material factors of climate and geography as causes. He tries, as I showed earlier, to account for differences which he proves are social in causal terms, but as became apparent, the explanation of the correlation is not in terms of a causal law, but in terms of the recognition that groups of people experience the social world in similar

ways and so respond to it in similar ways, because they live in societies that are similar in certain respects, respects which Durkheim devotes the bulk of his analysis to describing, both as general social configurations and as elements of individual situations. When he comes to deal explicitly with 'individual factors' rather than 'social currents' then, he is confronted with the contradiction of his causal terminology and his meaningful practice. He has talked as though he was establishing invariant causal laws based on objective facts about the world, but his explanation has been premised upon the assumption the regularities may be accounted for by similar responses to situations perceived in a similar way. And he has been at pains to point out that the reasons for this are cultural, not causal and permanent. To the extent that societies change, the rates and kinds of suicides change, because the experiences of the members of the societies change. Durkheim thus produces only a limited amount of documentary evidence to show that some individuals appear to have recognised the problems and social facts he has been discussing and that this led to their suicide. It would admittedly be, as Durkheim complains, a very difficult and tedious task to collect evidence about the state of mind and perception of their circumstances of many suicides, particularly as, being dead, they cannot be interviewed. Had Durkheim done so however, he would have been increasingly confronted with the non-causal nature of the progression. Durkheim was doing, or thought he was doing, the kind of causal check on

which were the 'ideas' effective in bringing about certain actions that Weber advocated, and he is led into the same dilemma, though he is less aware of it. He uses statistics to furnish him with problems, but the establishing of relationships between them is explained not in terms of a general law and a causal theory about what happens to be the case and holds for all time, but in terms of the actor's ideas and experiences, and a conceptual progression which only holds for as long as the actors continue to experience the world in that way. He is able to postulate a relationship between material conditions and suicidal action only by describing how these conditions are experienced. The relationship is one of meaning, not cause. But because Durkheim clings to the causal ideology we find him at the end of his book referring to the social and individual elements in suicides as external reified entities that somehow compel the unfortunate victims to kill themselves. Conveniently, individual factors, rather than being concerned with the individual experience of the general problems and social factors Durkheim has portrayed, are reduced to a sort of neurosis quotient.

'The role of individual factors in the origin of suicide can now be more precisely put. If, in a given moral environment, for example, in the same religious faith or in the same body of troops or in the same occupation, certain individuals are affected and certain others not, this is undoubtedly, in great part, because the formers' mental constitution as elaborated by nature and events, offers less resistance to the suicidogenetic current. But though these conditions may share in determining the particular persons in whom this current becomes embodied, neither the special qualities nor the intensity of the current depend on these

conditions. A given number of suicides is not found annually in a social group just because it contains a given number of neuropathic persons. Neuropathic conditions only cause the suicides to succumb with greater readiness to the current. Whence comes the great difference between the clinician's point of view and the sociologist's. The former confronts exclusively particular cases, isolated from one another. He establishes, very often, that the victim was either nervous or an alcoholic, and explains the act by one or the other of these psychopathic states. In a sense he is right; for if this person rather than his neighbors committed suicide, it is frequently for this reason. But in a general sense this motive does not cause people to kill themselves, nor, especially, cause a definite number to kill themselves in each society in a definite period of time. The productive cause of the phenomenon naturally escapes the observer of individuals only; for it lies outside individuals.

pp. 323-4. Durkheim's italics.

It does not in fact lie 'outside' the individual. What Durkheim means, though his expression of it is clouded by his adherence to the causal ideology, is that the crucial complexes of meaning though operative in individual suicides, are not easily visible in the analysis of particular cases.

Durkheim thus recognises that the explanation he gives is of rates not cases, and concedes that a full explanation of each case would require much more detailed knowledge. All one can say from what he shows is that the factors he describes were significant in certain cases. One cannot be sure of their significance in situations that were not concerned with suicide - Durkheim explores this avenue in The Division of Labour - nor can one be sure what role they play in relation to other factors. An investigation of the individual cases is necessary however,

not only to refine and modify the generality of Durkheim's account, but to verify in detail that the factors he describes were of significance.

A danger which Durkheim carefully avoids, but which is a besetting problem of social scientific explanation, is that of over-determination. It appears in its most startling form in what might be called the liberal paradox. A man is brought to trial for burglary and in his defence his counsel says that he came from a poor home, had little education, had low paid jobs or was unemployed, had divorced parents and many siblings, that just before the burglary his wife had left him, that he is an alcoholic and generally that he is poor, ignorant and never had a chance. This is calculated to soften the jury to take pity on the man, even though he committed the offence. In its harder form however it postulates causal relationships between the man's background and current circumstances and the burglary, such that he literally never had a chance, being compelled by these causes to act as he did. What this kind of story relies on is a conventional understanding of the significance of the various conditions mentioned and their relationship to a state of mind where, for example, prison was seen as little worse than home, and stealing was not seen as really wrong since society had denied reasonable opportunities for success by effort and merit. Such an account however rarely makes these presumed links explicit, because if it did, evidence would have to be presented that indeed the man did experience the world in this

way, and such evidence is hard to prove. It is the business of sociologists to try to obtain it, for if they do not they are in danger of postulating a series of explanations of his behaviour which can be turned this way and that to account, as Durkheim noted, for quite contradictory actions. Durkheim's solution to the problem was to isolate 'social currents' which constitute elements of suicidal situations. Not only are there limits to such a macro approach in terms of the number of factors which can be used to get at such elements, but we rapidly come to the point of explaining the same phenomenon twice over. Durkheim himself is in danger of overdetermination at least at one point. He explains the Swiss suicide rate by language and religion as egoistic (p. 154) and by language, religion and divorce rate as anomic (p. 260), though of course in both cases he is dealing in differences in rates and never claims that the entire figure is either anomic or egoistic. Over-determination is not of itself objectionable - we are familiar with having many good reasons for a single action, of killing several birds with one stone; it only becomes dubious when the explanations multiply at the expense of methodological adequacy. We must be sure that the explanation we give really was significant to the actors to whom we attribute it. As the previous chapter showed, being sure is sometimes difficult and in the last analysis impossible, but there are many steps we can take to confirm our views. While Durkheim's Suicide represents one group of such techniques, the techniques of case study and

participant observation constitute an important and necessary check on the explanations that arise from them.

This discussion of Suicide is not then to be taken as an attempt to show that Durkheim was methodologically in error, but rather that the language of his methodology is belied by the practical concern of his investigations. I have no wish to come down hard on either side of the cause-reason debate and claim that in human affairs, there are no causes or that, as Durkheim wanted to say, that reasons are insignificant. What an individual cites as a reason is or includes his view of the causal conditions of the situation in which he acts either directly, or by references to other actors' reasons which lead them to act, which for him are relatively objective quasi-causal conditions of his own action. The difficulty for the sociologist in treating the actor's reasons causally is first of all that the actor may be wrong in his belief about the situation. The actor, like the natural scientist, uses a set of concepts to refer to the situation in terms of which one thing follows from another. "A is the cause of B" means that wherever and whenever A occurs, it is followed (or attended) by B. Since a precise repetition of A may not be feasible (or discoverable) a less stringent formulation would use something like a mathematical limit process: The more the actual condition A^1 approximates the conceived (ideal) limit A, the more the actual effect B^1 will approximate the ideal effect B'.⁷ The relation between the observed events A^1 and B^1 is contingent conjunction, but they are classified by

the concepts A and B between which there is claimed to be a causal connection explained in terms of a general law. Insofar as A^1 and B^1 are events classified by the concepts A and B they are thus conceptually related, since the conjunction of these events is seen as an instance of A causing B which in turn is part of a general theory of interrelated concepts. The classification of events as instances of general laws and their articulation with theoretical explanations goes some way to explain the peculiar "necessity" of causal relations: events are not necessarily related but classified according to concepts which are part of a theory in which the concepts are logically linked, and so the events appear to be. Now of course the scientist, and even more likely the actor may be wrong in suggesting a constant conjunction between two events or in classifying the events as he does. - A^1 may not really be an instance of A. The significant thing about the actor however, is that if he believes that it is an instance, he may act as though it were, and it is important to understand this belief, since it may be his reason for acting. Further, because social relations are more malleable than natural events he may by acting make it the case that A^1 is an instance of A and that A causes B - he may by acting in a certain way induce others to respond in accordance with his definition. A straightforward causal analysis which ignores the complexities inherent in the mediation of the actor's ideas in action in favour of 'basic' factors which 'cause' him to act is therefore misleading.

The second difficulty with the causal analysis of action is that as Aron puts it 'Every causal relation, whether accidental or adequate, is partial and analytic; it results from the cutting up of reality into fragments, it does not apply to totalities.'⁸ The concepts in terms which we analyse reality causally thus reflect not only the demands of that reality for a conceptualisation that does it justice and so enables successful action on the basis of it, but also the purposes for which we undertake an analysis. The purposes and scope of the sociologist's analysis are often very different from those of the actor, and hence there is a problem in establishing the relationship between the two. It is this that Durkheim largely ignores, being content to assume a common definition of suicide and rejecting the actor's views of the suicide situations as unimportant compared with the sociologist's. The sociologist's and the actor's views are fused in his account, where social currents in a given society are elements of individual suicide experiences.

Analysis in terms of cause and reason further overlap insofar as actors do frequently act on the basis of stated and otherwise ascertainable reasons, and so reasons and actions appear constantly conjoined. Taken together with the last two paragraphs, it is therefore apparent that although there is a difference in the language of causes and reasons sufficient to result in a gestalt shift in the move from one to the other, and although there are important differences in the way the two

kinds of account operate which cannot be ignored, there are also marked similarities. In everyday interaction for example, we tend to slide from one to the other, not only in our use of such terms as 'cause' and 'motive' to refer both to 'objective' factors 'compelling' action and to reasons for it, but also in our attitude to and understanding of others in action. Those we interact with and comprehend in a common cultural context we credit with reasons, those we observe at a distance 'behaving', without being able to fully understand them, we refer to in terms of the regularity of such behaviour as defined by ourselves: the procedure of the courts in convicting people of crimes and the subsequent compilation of criminal statistics are a continuing exercise of this practice⁹.

It appears then, that causal techniques may yield important results, but that causal language is on the whole inappropriate to the explanation of social action, since it denies its distinctive quality, and operates on a model of the individual as an object propelled by various causal forces and so ignores the mediated response to situations which makes us call behaviour 'action'. The causal model also has the consequence, because it denies this mediation and its significance, of no longer seeing the actors as free agents. Any analysis of behaviour that has taken place will inevitably have a certainty rigidity because, although action, it is also a series of events with a definite character and a definite meaning at the time of enactment to the agent. We do not see the possibilities for the

actor as he did before he acted, we concentrate on what he did. Yet it is the fact that human beings are able to imagine situations and consequences in various different ways, to remember and foresee, that enables them to calculate, to innovate and to construct alternatives among which to choose. This is a fact characteristic of every action situation as it is evaluated. Actions past are memories and conditions for future action. If we adopt a causal view we 'compel' actions present and future to be like those past, whereas their distinguishing feature is their openness and the fact that they are contrasted with the past so that the question may be asked, Do I want to behave in the same way again or can I do better by doing differently? Obviously in many cases the response is automatically the same, and there are enormous areas of regularity in social life which make it socially predictable. There are also rules to be followed which prevent simple calculation and untrammelled innovation. But these very rules are subject to constant re-interpretation as they are re-applied¹⁰.

This ongoing developmental aspect of social relations implies a severe limitation on prediction. Any prediction we may make is based on the discovery that people react to a certain kind of situation in similar ways on different occasions - that it has a constant meaning for them. In everyday life, though not of course in any causal analysis, we may go on to suggest how they will react to other situations, assuming that they do so with the same general frame of reference, that they thus perceive

what we do and that they act rationally¹¹. It is on this kind of basis that economics has made its success. The economic system of an industrial state is a complex but rigid and stable set of cultural meanings, goals and social relations with now a world wide coverage. An understanding of the basic concepts of labour, production, wealth, exchange and consumption in general terms is common to nearly all the members who have been and are increasingly induced to act rationally in simple material, segmented economic relationships. To the extent that they do not act rationally but on some other basis, the economist's predictions become more complex and eventually break down in confusion. On the whole, at least at a macro level, people appear to follow the basic rules. Micro-economics has a much more obviously close relationship with sociology. Such a high predictability in the world of fashion, by contrast, is unthinkable, because fashion changes depend ultimately on a set of designers and a public reaction to their products, only some of which will be accepted and mass produced. The ones that are accepted are the ones that are perceived as appropriately new, i.e. there is a norm of change and innovation. Naturally there are power and economic pressure aspects and propaganda aspects, as the slow advent of the midi and its takeover from the mini shows. In this case retailers and wholesalers were finally pushed into stocking exclusively in midis so that the relevant public had little choice. But this of course is only to say that a different set of values and interests were at work than

those aesthetic ones of fashion. Winch has an apt quotation on this point.

'It may help here to recall Humphrey Lyttleton's rejoinder to someone who asked him where Jazz was going: "If I knew where Jazz was going I'd be there already."

Maurice Cranston makes essentially the same point when he notices that to predict the writing of a piece of poetry or the making of a new invention would involve writing the poem or making the invention oneself. And if one has already done this oneself, then it is impossible to predict that someone else will make up that poem or discover that invention. "He could not predict it because he could not say it was going to happen before it happened." (Freedom, p. 166).

It would be a mistake, though tempting, to regard this as a trivial piece of logic chopping. One appears to be attempting an impossible task of a priori legislation against a purely empirical possibility. What in fact one is showing however, is that the central concepts which belong to our understanding of social life are incompatible with concepts central to the activity of scientific prediction.¹²

By scientific prediction Winch means causal prediction on the basis of an established correlation of facts explained in terms of a general law. Prediction in sociology involves at least: (1) finding what people think now; (2) looking at their situation and the changes occurring in it; (3) finding out when and how these changes are likely to be perceived; (4) extrapolating how people's ideas will change, which involves (a) a

straightforward logical conceptual development of them in a changed context, and (b) possibly the development of fresh concepts. This involves the assessment of (i) the importance of conditions, their perception, and existing ideas to individuals and groups, and (ii) which changes in their ideas will be conscious and rational and which unconscious and perhaps irrational or non-rational, and hence the assessment of the various 'weights' of the ideas in practice. You can try to predict by looking at conditions and assuming that ideas will be constant, but this means failing to predict those events which are responses to changing conditions - wars, political movements etc. It is notable that social science has failed almost totally to predict historical events of this kind. The limitations on prediction in sociology are set by the continued dominance of a set of meanings in the minds of the people we are concerned with. This is not to say of course that we do not respond to situations as we see them or 'as they really are'. The world consists not only of ideas about social relationships which depend on the maintenance of cultural traditions to survive but on ideas about physical reality - that of other human beings and the natural environment which are less heavily dependent on a point of view or a set of ideas. Even here though, people's interests in their physical environment differ. Because we do not live in a world of fantasy and because we are in constant contact with the consequences in material reality of our ideas when put into action, it is natural for us to claim that there

is some objective reality to which we may all respond, though in different ways, and that this may constitute the basis for an analysis, which could then of course be causal, even if at the price of ignoring conscious mediation and only looking at behaviour. We can only claim to go a short distance in this direction however, and it is always a matter for discovery how far situations are seen by different groups in the same way and how far their responses are similar.

Durkheim showed that response to a situation may not be at a highly conscious level. Aspects of the condition of man in the modern industrial state may be significant for suicides without the actor giving them as the reason for his suicide. But Durkheim was not in fact discovering underlying 'natural' or 'causal' permanent features about societies, but underlying socio-cultural configurations in the particular societies he was looking at. When he tried to generalise to all societies not only is he on dangerous ground, but the generalisations themselves are much less rich and more limited. When we predict in sociology, we may therefore be doing three different kinds of things, none of them identical with natural scientific prediction.

- (i) We may conclude that things will continue as they are, that people's ideas will remain the same because the situation is stable or because the ideas are highly valued.

(ii) We may predict developments in various directions, which as Winch points out will be very difficult except in a general sense - we might be able to indicate the next move, given the logic of the present situation, as it is understood by the actors.

(iii) We may predict by persuasion, pointing out the unintended and/or unnoticed aspects of the current situation and suggesting changes in the direction of consistency and conformity with actors more highly valued ends which are at present being compromised.

Even though we may use the techniques of causal analysis then, we should remember that we are only looking at those situations where actions which we observe did result. We must then go on to investigate the importance of the meanings that lead to these actions in other situations where they are relevant but do not lead to action or to the same kind of action. Most importantly, the explanation we give of the observed relationship between two statistics is not a causal one but a meaningful one. We do not explain by reference to some general law but by reference to the perceived features of the situation in which the actors were involved and the course of their response to it. For people are not caused to act by impersonal inevitable forces but led, cajoled, taught, persuaded, forced and so on. In all cases it is not the nature of the situation but the nature of the perception of that situation that is important: the response is not causal but mediated. This mediation may not be directly

in the terms we use - Durkheim's suicides did not claim to be suffering from anomy - but the terms we use must refer not to the situation as we see it or only as we see it and especially not as we claim it 'objectively' to be, but to the situation as the actor sees it. An example of a blatant failure to do this will perhaps make things clearer.

Davenport discusses the fishing practices of a Jamaican village¹³. He discovers that the size of the catches and particularly the patterns of fishing in view of the hazards of tides, currents, winds, rocks and craft coincide with an analysis of the situation in terms of game theory. The fishermen apparently arrange their work to obtain maximum payoff with minimum risks, involving fairly complex calculations. Now we may suppose Jamaicans to be rational enough, and pretty careful where lives and livelihood are concerned, but they clearly had no familiarity with game theory as taught on U.S. campuses. And Davenport gives us no indication as to whether this is more than a coincidence. All he says is, 'If we can assume that human culture, or some of it at least, is a set of patterned solutions which has accreted through trial and error, then such a non-psychological theory of problem solving should have some relevance to the study of culture.' p.3. It may indeed be that this pattern of fishing, now traditionally established, has grown up and been accepted because it gives maximum payoff, but Davenport gives us no evidence whatsoever beyond the behaviour concerned as to whether this is cultural accretion,

coincidence, or calculation. It thus constitutes no explanation, merely an interesting parallel. Only when we know why the Jamaicans fish as they do and how the practice grew up shall we get that. Davenport leaves us with the crude assumption that fundamentally there is only one reality and everyone reacts to it in different ways, but there is only one rational way.

This raises the general question of the relation of the sociologist's views to those of the actors when he gives an explanation. I stressed in the last chapter that the shift from understanding what is going on in actors' terms to explaining it in theoretical terms is an important one, and that understanding is an essential preliminary. It should now be clear that the reason for its importance is that it is constitutive of what is to be explained. The sociologist's view may well want to include features of the world and social life that actors ignore or see differently. What the sociologist has to show is that they still respond to these aspects, which he thinks important, and to show what the consequences of ignoring them are. His viewpoint and his theory may thus initially be markedly different from the actor's, but his explanation lies in relating the two, and this is why it is essential to be sure of their distinctness. He has to show how the actors perceive and respond to the problems that he thinks fundamental, and the extent to which they 'avoid' or confront them. Until he does this he has only a partial explanation and is in danger of suggesting that the actors too are consciously responding to the problems he is

concerned with. For example, we might say that all societies have to produce the means of subsistence and look at the various ways they solve this problem, but this does not imply that they recognise any such problem. Indeed for certain societies it may be very little problem if food is naturally plentiful and the climate benign. What the sociologist is interested in are the consequences of the various kinds of solution to this sort of general problem and this involves relating actual beliefs and practices to the general question in detail. In all cases therefore the sociologist's theoretical position has to be shown to be important and relevant in terms of what the actors think and do. It cannot be argued to be important because that is 'just how things are in the world', not because the world is of no significance in the life of societies, but because human beings have an infinite capacity for ignoring aspects of it, and one never knows which aspect until one goes and finds out. Certainly it is arguable that basic 'human needs' for example, are everywhere significant and no doubt this could form a basis for extensive comparison and generalisation, but there are still human beings occasionally perverse enough to ignore them. As a methodological principle it is always potentially misleading to claim that such or any factors can necessarily be taken as bedrock on which to build. It is always a matter for investigation whether they are significant in the lives of those one is interested in and the crucial matter is in what way they are experienced as significant.

When establishing his account of 'what happened', the sociologist redescribes the acts that he must initially understand. Actors too, and sociologists as actors, constantly indulge in the retrospective redescription of their acts to put them in a better light or to show up unrecognised consequences - to point out that in doing A they also achieve B. These redescriptions are possible because acts, though originating in a project of some sort are events in the world, and as events may be variously perceived and characterised - one's intention in acting may not always be communicated to others. Both actor and sociologist then give the act new meaning, and we may, in doing so take up a different evaluative position in relation to the act and the account of it from that taken by the agent. The sociologist is no different when he does this than the actor himself or his friends. The difference lies in the interests and theoretical background with which the redescription is made and the scope of the explanatory context into which it is thereby put. In either case however, such a redescription has to take account not just of the act as event, but also as publicly defined, and preferably as the agent intended its meaning and understood it. The redescription must thus comprehend the original version within it.

In redescribing it in this way the original point of view from which the act was done is thereby recognised, but it is incorporated into a new and to some extent different and larger view which overcomes the problems of soliptistic relativism

inherent in stopping at the stage of understanding the actor's intention in acting. The actor's particular views and intentions in acting are thus not irrelevant to but included in the explanation. The problem of relativism because of which Weber introduces his criteria of causal and meaningful adequacy, is thus avoided and comparisons are possible. Durkheim for example, was able to show how the same social conditions, that is not only material conditions but perceptions of these material conditions, operated in different industrialised societies and led to certain kinds of action. He could then contrast this set-up with that in pre-industrial societies. He was able to make generalisations not on the basis of permanent causal factors, but on the basis of relatively stable social attitudes to situations, the genesis and likely development of which he was also able to comment on. The explanations he gave were therefore meaningful, that is not actually in terms of anyone's motives and reasons because he was not talking of individual acts, but in the same language, establishing how aspects of the meaning in terms of which situations were experienced at a general level, led to certain kinds of general response to some personal problem situations (suicides). Rather than explaining the relationship between two causal physical factors by reference to a law - which incidentally of course makes their relationship conceptual in the long term if confirmed, factors at first associated with a phenomenon eventually becoming part of its definition - he shows how situations invested with certain meanings lead to a certain

kind of response. To call this link 'conceptual' is to overdo its explicit conscious rationality, but it becomes conceptual rather than the more hazy 'meaningful' as it is brought to full consciousness.

The question of relativism that led me to embark on these last two chapters is therefore at once a permanent problem and one that can be constantly overcome. It is possible for Ryle to claim that 'The sciences grow because the undergraduate can with suitable schooling be trained to start where Euclid, Harvey and Newton left off.'¹⁴ We can assume a constancy about natural phenomena that we cannot about social. In 1963¹⁵ it was possible for a researcher into heroin addiction in Great Britain to claim that it was a problem largely confined to middle class doctors. In 1971 this was blatantly no longer true. This led Weber to claim that there are some sciences to which eternal youth is given, the social sciences being among them¹⁶. Durkheim's method for overcoming this disparity of times and places in regard to 'the facts' was to search for the more durable social characteristics of a society and it was his peculiar genius to lay them bare, and show how they were important and why they were durable. He extrapolated from an understanding of the cultures of the societies he studied, general elements which formed a basis for comparison and generalisation, and showed how they informed particular concrete actions in the society. In doing so he touches on, though not very explicitly in Suicide - his discussion of anomie probably comes closest - problems of the

human condition, of assumptions about the nature of men and of society, which constitute the most general problems of sociological theory and the basic assumptions of any attempt at explanation. In order for these to feature in his account the sociologist must show how they too are incorporated in the same sense into the actor's responses to his environment and thus how these responses can be seen in this light. Once again their implications for concrete actions must be made clear. In this case, the various alternatives being, many of them, now well established as a result of the efforts of political and social philosophers in the past, there appears to be some basis on which to develop theory. As I have already shown in Chapter Two, however, the argument still continues fiercely around which alternatives to opt for, and this argument is at least partially a moral one. The alternatives do not continue to be debated in the light of the same social phenomena, and this may lead to the rise of new choices among the alternatives, new arguments as to their various merits and possibly the development of still other fundamental problems. Relativism thus remains a constant difficulty, though as I said earlier, one that can be dispensed with by settling for one set of assumptions firmly. Practically speaking though, different researches make different choices and the debate continues as does the relative status of the results of their research to each other.

It would appear then, that Weber's attempt at causal analysis and verification was misconceived. The technique may be useful

in detecting regularities in response to situations similarly experienced, but as a philosophy of explanation it will not do. The verification must be of the technique, of whether there really is a similarity of response or a chance incidence and of what this means at an individual and group level. Weber was misled into thinking he could somehow show with greater certainty what were the important factors in social relations by causal analysis. Like Durkheim his practice belied his theory, as the Appendix shows. For what is necessary is not the isolation of causal factors and the attempt to set up general laws but the unravelling of social implications and cultural configurations and the discovery of factors and problems of societal significance at different levels from those of every day common sense behaviour. In most societies, and particularly in the modern industrial state, actors and groups of actors are also from time to time engage in this form of theorising and delving below the surface of social reality, but usually in a speculative way. The sociologist's job is to do this also, and this is why it is important to be clear about what are his views and what the actors. Naturally he will draw on what he has learned in his own society in studying that society and his theories will be the theories of its members to a large degree. However the element of speculation must be reduced and he must concentrate on showing how his theoretical explanations relate to the everyday practice of those he studies. If we are to do justice to the distinctiveness of human action, it seems that

the methodology of social science has to be quite markedly modified from that of natural science, and that in terms of the logical simplicity and neatness, the scope, precision and culmulativity of that are the hallmark of a natural science, social science will remain severely limited or more positively 'eternally youthful'. Part of this youthfulness is its ever changing interests and theories and its involvement in moral and utopian debate. I will return to this latter feature in Chapter Seven. At present I want to take up the implication of what I have said at the level of practical research, and consider the principal explanatory concept in sociology, social structure in the light of this. In doing so I shall echo what I have said already, but some distinct points of interest will also emerge, in particular what to do about the status of the individual in disciplines which if they claim to be science, must surely generalise. Once again the problems of the variability and unpredictability of consciousness arise, and of the relationship of the sociologist to those he investiages, and once again compromises have to be made by a 'natural scientific' view of social science, though in this case the compromising turns out to be by no means all on this side.

C H A P T E R F I V E

WHAT IS SOCIAL STRUCTURE?

The notion of social structure has for a long time been the basic tool of the sociologist in explaining society to itself. It constitutes the sociologist's view of the agglomeration of social relationships which make up the society, and in doing so draws to a greater or lesser degree, according to theoretical predilection, upon the views of these social relations and of the society as a whole which are held by the actors concerned. The precise extent to which it reflects actors' views or sociologists' interests has always been problematic. On the one hand it cannot just reflect actors' views because these are inconsistent between individuals, and especially between groups and social categories; on the other hand it cannot be entirely a sociological construct for if it were it would be impossible for the sociologist to say which social relations he was talking about. Inevitably it consists in fudging the actor's views together to make them consistent, often with the help of general ideas that the sociologist thinks important to societies of any kind, and in so doing, pointing to aspects of social relations which habitually escape the notice of actors, but which nonetheless constitute important social conditions for their actions. The explanatory force of the concept of social structure derives

from its attempt to construct a total picture of the society and in so doing to pick out aspects of social relations which are important but ignored. The sociologist says to the actors then: 'You think you are doing X - that is what you call it. But X, together with Y and Z make up $\mathcal{A}$, and look at the implications of $\mathcal{A}$, not only for X, Y and Z but for the rest of the alphabet'. This explaining of society to itself takes place both in terms of pointing out what is done - what actions constitute $\mathcal{A}$ - and how this is concealed by the concepts beliefs and values that are used as the vocabularies of action - why $\mathcal{A}$ is experienced not as $\mathcal{A}$, but severally as X, Y and Z.

This is only the positive, revelatory side of the sociological art however. Like all arts, it is based upon the presupposition of understanding those upon whom it is practised, and as already noticed, the sociological description which is called social structure is a deviation from this understanding. What is unclear is the adequacy of this deviation, the process by which it is achieved and its exact relation to what actors think is happening in society and to what the sociologists' predilections are. To tackle all the many and complex efforts by sociologists to specify an answer to these questions is of course impossible here. What I hope to do is to look at one particular development in the continuing debate on the nature of social structure, not only to consider this problem in its own right but to illustrate and expand the concerns of the preceding chapters.

The development with which I shall be concerned is the reaction in the 1960's by phenomenologists and symbolic interactions to the functionalism of the 1950's. In particular I shall focus on the field in which the debate has concentrated, that of deviance, and so make no attempt to cover the full literature in the subject. The debate has been sharpest in the discussion of deviance because the very nature of the deviant act raises a problem for the consensus assumptions of functionalism. Parsons, for example, asserts 'There is no such thing as action except as effort to conform to norms'¹. Because of these assumptions and those of equilibrium and system, functionalism postulated a view of social structure as an integrated system of social roles transmitted through socialisation, in terms of which deviation was an anomaly. Merton's attempt to account for deviance within the functionalist model and subsequent subcultural theorists' efforts to deal with the more blatant shortcomings of this, still insisted on the over-socialised view of man, and consequently were able to posit mechanistic systems of action in which social structure determined action in an apparently inevitable and ultimately causal way. The shift from claiming that actions were predictable on the basis of understanding actors' motivation via role structures to claiming that these structures determined their actions was made possible by the blurring of the distinction between the actors' and the sociologists' definition of the roles and their different contributions to the unified concept of social structure.

If the latter was seen as a sociologist's construct based on observed objective regularities it could be argued to be of causal significance rather than a short hand description of habitual definitions of situations and relationships and standardised sources of beliefs and motivations.

The reaction to this view was therefore simultaneous rejection of many of its assumptions. The oversocialised view of man was questioned and the determinism of social structure rejected. The assumptions of system and equilibrium were doubted and raised as empirical problems rather than postulated as theoretical fiat. Attention shifted from the social fabric seen independently of actors to the actor and his existential dilemmas - how far was he free? - to what did he respond? - who constrained him? - Why? In the course of this outburst, questions which had been buried by functionalism were revived as deeply problematic. How far could he claim to understand the actor? How were norms and beliefs applied and effective in real social interaction? What is the relation between the sociologist and the actor? What kind of assumptions does the sociologist have to make when studying social relations and what are their implications?

It is apparent that these are the questions that have concerned me in the preceding chapters. The reason that I want to explore them in the context of this aspect of the debate on social structure is not only by way of illustration of the practical implications of what I have been saying, but also

because the counter-view to functionalism which has emerged has shortcomings which dramatically reflect the difficulties which I have dealt with. This view proposes a concentration upon individuals, their interaction and experience from which little should be abstracted and selected, but nonetheless out of which a more general picture of social relations and ultimately of society should be built. The problem becomes in McHugh's words 'Granted the pre-existence of society as an abstraction. But how does this abstraction enter into the daily lives of individuals whose definitions are continually being made and remade?'² This attitude is in accord with my conclusion in the preceding chapter. But it turns out that if systems theory abstracted so much from man as to leave him soulless, phenomenology includes so much as to make him incomprehensible. In order to make sense of his experience the individual has to abstract, select and conceptualise, and in order to make sense of many individuals, the sociologist has to go a stage further, yet with the certain knowledge that in so doing he is leaving things out that he can never be sure are not important. Once again then the inadequacies of a causal natural scientific approach are exposed and a substitute developed which tries to do more justice to human action on its own terms. In this case however, the relativism inherent in such a move becomes extreme because of the forces on the individual and the single interaction situation, whose particular features are explored adnauseam with the inevitable limitation that either one assumes other people

and situations are the same, which given the detail now at one's disposal is absurd, or else one is stuck in relativistic isolation with an account of a few people and their interaction. A return to notion of social structure which points to similarities and constraints is essential, though this can no longer be of the traditional mechanical kind, whereas in Durkheim's account of it, what the sociologist sees counts for everything, and what the actor thinks for nothing. The nature of this compromise which envisages social structure as the sense the sociologist makes of actors' experience raises once again the relation between the two sets of views, and the limitations entailed by the sociologists' particular purposes. Once again, relativism manoeuvred out of the back door by compromise, instantly reappears at the front. The problem of on what basis the sociologist makes sense of what he finds, what assumptions he makes in constructing his general model and of its relation to what the actors think thus emerges as a crucial dilemma. I have already dealt with this in previous pages; in the course of this chapter I shall say a good deal more about it, albeit not always very directly.

Such is my strategy. My tactic will be to take a series of writers and their works one by one to consider their distinctive contributions. I shall first take three functionalist, Nadel, Merton and Cohen, concentrating on the functionalist account of deviance but including the general view of what social structure consists in. I will try to show what I think its shortcomings were and how they were pernicious. I then turn

to a number of phenomenologists/interactionists, particularly writers on deviance, to see how the attack was launched and sustained but also to point out the limitations for sociology in so opposed a view. Finally I will make some comments as to possible developments.

S.F. Nadel - The Theory of Social Structure.

This is an interesting book, and a good deal more sensitive to the problems involved than the author's concern with mathematical formalisation would imply. It is interesting in view of this, to notice two facts about it. It was published in 1957, the same year as Merton's Social Theory and Social Structure (revd. edn.). Parson's Social System and Towards a General Theory of Action had appeared earlier in the decade, whereas Goffman did not finish his Ph.D. Thesis until 1953, and along with Garfinkel was just beginning to produce significant articles by 1957. The second noteworthy fact is that Nadel was an anthropologist who had spent some years in the field in Africa. As such, he had been trained to notice the detail of real everyday interaction and not to speculate on a grandiose scale. The book thus represents the coming together of the anthropological concern with culture, ideas, and real interpersonal interaction, and the sociological concern with abstract systematisation. Nadel recognises this early in the book in remarking that 'Social structure' is still a problematic term in anthropology but has long been accepted in sociology. Although the book takes the

plunge into abstraction and systematisation, Nadel returns to this concern at the end, as I will point out.

While recognising the variety of formulations of the concept 'social structure', Nadel is evidently concerned to see what can be done with it, and so regards it as fundamentally unproblematic most of the time. He quickly abstracts from the collection of varied notions, the common elements of abstraction, system, stable and defined social relation, and thus the ability to construct a whole independent of the content of the relations, which implies the transposability, i.e. generalisability, of results. He defines society - albeit not really a clear entity - in accordance with this view

'..... Societies are made up of people; societies have boundaries, people either belonging to them or not; and people belong to a society in virtue of rules under which they stand and which impose on them regular determinate ways of acting towards and in regard to one another.'

p.8.

We may note immediately that this is a consensus definition, as may be expected, and also that the rules are seen not only as consensus but simultaneously as constraint in a Durkheimian manner. The notion is the classic functionalist view of society as ordered by a basic consensus which ensures conformity and regular patterns of action.

The social relations of social structure occur according to rules, then, and these describe the relations and the kind of people who may be involved: relationships exist in virtue of roles, p. 11.

'We arrive at the structure of society through abstracting from the concrete population and its behaviour the pattern or network (or 'system') of relations obtaining "between actors in their capacity of playing roles related to one another".'

p. 12 (the quote is from Parson's Essays).

Evidently we need an adequate theory of roles, and in the following chapter Nadel tries to supply it.³

He notes that the concept of role is one borrowed from the real social world and refined by social scientists - it is not an invention. Its crucial function is the separation of the social from the totality of aspects of interaction, since the sociologist must avoid the complexities of personality which clearly affect actual interactions. The concept of role seems to supply him with the very instrument required since it refers only to the public, learned, external aspects and ignores individual idiosyncrasies in performance.

'The concept needed to bridge the gap between society and the individual must therefore refer not to the concrete unique human beings living and acting at any point of time, but to individuals seen as bundles of qualities; the qualities are those demonstrated in and required by the various tasks, relations etc., that is by the given, specified 'constancies of behaviour' in accordance with which individuals must act; while the 'bundle' corresponds to a class or type concept including any and all individuals exhibiting the capacities in question. We can express more sharply the variability of the actor as against the constancy of the contribution expected of him by describing the latter as a part to be played. Which is precisely what the concept of role is designed to do.'

p. 21.

Having isolated the kind of thing we are interested in, the next stage in the analysis is the fitting together of all the

pieces (roles and relations) into an order which we may call social structure, and in the process, pruning off those aspects which are particular to the situation we discover in an effort to expose the skeleton of essentials. This will have the further advantage, besides laying bare the basis of the society, of allowing for the generalisation of the results and by comparison with other societies, the establishment of laws.

'In presenting a social structure without reducing the qualitative character of the component relations we should fail in two respects: not only would it be impossible to combine them satisfactorily in a single order, but it would also be futile to try and transpose that order.'

p. 106.

There are three levels of abstraction: ignore the variety of instances of role behaviour to get at the constant relationships; ignore the individuals performing them to get at the roles themselves; and ignore the qualitative character of rules and relations and concentrate on their systematic nature.

'Our aim in moving to the third level of abstraction is to find criteria whereby we can demonstrate the positional picture presented by a collection of people enacting their various roles related to one another. Obviously, we shall try to make this picture as comprehensive as possible and to get as near as we can to an overall arrangement or order.'

p. 109.

I am tempted to claim at this point that Nadel believes that any degree of abstraction is permissible to demonstrate order, but he remarks that the rigour of the third level of abstraction is decided by expediency - what allows one to transpose but leaves something to be transposed.

In allowing this Nadel reflects his background as an anthropologist: he recognises that the relations we are talking about can in the last analysis only be made sense of in terms of the cultural definitions of them. If we abstract these away we are left with nothing. In the last chapter of the book, the extent to which he baulks at the results of his own enthusiasm becomes more evident.

'But what makes structural analysis really information, it seems to me, is not the final positional picture at all, but the steps that lead to it. Our gain lies in the application of the appropriate analytical methods, not in gathering together, schematically, the results, for it is in the course of this application that we achieve a penetrating insight into the working of society. Every step in the many abstractions and comparisons we have to make reveals crucial interdependences - between individuals and their roles, between roles and the rest of society, and between groups built out of roles. Above all, in progressively discounting the particular features of social situations (which is the essence of abstraction) we prepare the way for the discovery of general characteristics and regularities, and hence of the lawfulness - such lawfulness as obtains - in the realm of social existence.'

p. 154.

'What the students of social structure really do is describe, still in heavily qualitative terms, types of relationships and groups, their interconnections through activities and recruitment, the believed-in values and norms of the people, and the obtaining sanctioning mechanisms; nor do they exclude the psychological concomitants of relationships ('loyalties', 'sentiments' and other motivations). In no sense do these studies bear out the claim of the 'structuralist' school that they follow rigorous procedures and aim at high-level abstractions.'

p. 155.

Nadel has, as it were, approached natural science with a high heart, only to remember as he finally stood in the embrace of the awful machine, that what he had brought with him were human beings, not objects. And he quails. Not only does he recognise that the actors' ideas are essential to talking about the relations in an intelligible way, but also that this has implications for transposibility or lawfulness - 'such lawfulness as obtains'. If the whole encapsulating structure is still dependent on the ideas used to define its parts and their inter-relations, albeit pruned of extraneous elements, how can one generalise except to structures based on the same set of definitions?

If we look back, the ideas that lead up to this withdrawal can be seen to be written in from the very first, in the definition of society in terms of a constraining and all pervasive consensus and the careful separation of the roles as linked sets of scripts from the actors who perform them. It is notable that Nadel has very little to say about power and its influence on the playing of those roles: his assumption is that society operates according to the rules, which, initially prescriptive and moral, come to be seen through abstraction as descriptive and deterministic. By emphasising the systematic aspects and stability of a set of social relations defined as distinct from the individuals who operate them, Nadel progressively falls prey to the scientific ideology which then principally manifested itself in systems theory (it now does so in the mathematisation

of empirical research). Rather than being considered as individuals who act and think the 'actors' become pawns manipulated by the system in which they are entwined.

Dennis Wrong pointed out the origins and shortcomings of the functionalist view of man in a now well-known paper⁴. The solution to the Hobbesian problem of order is seen in terms of consensus which is maintained by the internalisation of norms and/or by a striving for acceptance and status which are normatively defined. He points out that this way of conceiving of the importance of norms makes conflict problematic rather than order since norms become constitutive of, not regulatory of human nature. Because society is defined in terms of normative consensus there is no reason within the model for resistance to norms and prescribed behaviour. These implications of the view of social structure as a normatively defined role structure were never made clear, and Wrong remarks drily

'I do not see how, at the level of theory, sociologists can fail to make assumptions about human nature. If our assumptions are left implicit we will inevitably presuppose a view of man that is tailor-made to our special needs.'

In the case of functionalism these assumptions remained so far implicit that they were further extended and distorted to conform to a particular view of science, and to sociology as a science in these terms. Because as Nadel remarks, the notion of role is common in some sense to both actors and sociologist, the elements that go to make up role structure can be seen not only as determining the motivation and meaning of the actors

concerned but also as objective factors in society exercising a determinate causal objective influence on behaviour. This view becomes the more plausible as the role structure is more abstract and its systemic properties emphasised. The move from the over-socialised concept of man who had no motivation other than what society gave him and thereby had only in a limited sense a mind and will of his own was thus made the more easy, but was only possible because of the dubious nature of the elements of social structure. At one moment they were seen as what was intelligible to the actor, a norm which was a reason for action, and at another as systemic factors which impersonally caused him to act and maintained the equilibrium of society. The shift from actors to sociologists' concepts was crucial in the step to this form of scientism.

In its full-blown form the scientistic ideology consists of three elements.

Determinism: the claim that every event has a cause, i.e. is constantly but contingently related to some other event.

Positivism: the assertion that there are facts which are recognisable, describable and isolable. This is normally necessary in order to specify what the conjoined events are for all instances of the same kind. It is not necessary only if ideas or 'mental events' are construed as causes and accepted as being impossible to pin down completely.

Empiricism: the claim that there are measurable and isolable

external aspects of reality which must be used as the only source of data for the construction of laws. Whether or not the laws purport to be about such external facts, they must in practice be about them, because only these aspects of reality are discretely and objectively discernible. This claim tends to be associated with that of positivism, because of the latter's concern with objective clarity.

Now we know from the names of these elements that they are to be avoided at all costs: however, what they assert, or elements of it, seems to be essential to any systematic or publicly verifiable attempt to explicate a set of phenomena. What seems to be wrong with scientism is partly that it tries to be precise about what is imprecise - human action insofar as the actor attaches meaning to it - and to decry its distinctiveness by implying a mind/body dualism, emphasising the latter at the expense of the former. What is wrong with abstracting the content of social relations in order to arrive at the 'basic laws of structure' is that the relations are dependent upon their definition in terms of the actors' ideas. In order to get laws we have to use an abserver's point of view exclusively, which of course allows us transposability; the difficulty is that, as Nadel recognised, we are left with nothing.

There are also very considerable difficulties in using the scientific paradigm insofar as it leads, because of its external observer's standpoint, to ignoring the significance of the actor's decisions. One is attempting to look only at the actor's

behaviour and to develop a theory to account for this without recognising the force of the fact that he takes decisions to act on the basis of ideas. The actor's point of view cannot be accepted wholeheartedly, because the relationship with his acts then becomes conceptual, and also of course, subject to retrospective rationalisation. His ideas can only be used as a source of concepts in terms of which to try to conduct a causal analysis. The peculiarity of the actor's decision to act for certain reasons and the relation of this to his subsequent action is lost in an attempt to specify sufficient conditions for his action defined in principle in terms which he does not espouse, even though they may be borrowed from him. Crucially, this form of analysis breaks down when the actor has a new idea and acts differently on the basis of it. While it might be able to deal with a fresh idea that was a logical outcome of previous ones, it cannot deal with imaginative innovation in which the actor's view of his situation and thereby his subsequent action, is altered because of an imaginative leap from one conception to a fresh one. The causal account is forced to recognise the importance of the actor's view but only does so in recognising ideas as conditions of action in certain situations, and seeing ideas/^{as} in any case the product of complex experiences. The convinced determinist will no doubt refuse to accept the critical importance of imaginative innovation and claim that it too can in principle be shown to be a causal product. But this implies the extraordinary position that a knowledge of the conditions

which conjoin to result in imaginative innovation would also lead to total knowledge of not only all that is but all that will be known and perhaps all that can be known, since presumably if the conditions can be specified for one occasion they can be specified for many. We are it seems, back to Humphrey Lyttleton who, asked where jazz was going, replied 'If I knew where jazz was going I would be there already'. We have to admit that at times, the actor knows best.

Clearly there are basic problems of the philosophy of mind involved here on which I have commented in earlier chapters. Suffice it to say that I believe that the two points of view - the scientific and the naturalistic - can be seen as paradigms. I have tried to show that Nadel embraced the former, only to realise the immense complexity of his undertaking and also I suspect, the fact that he thereby abandoned the latter, and 'left men out'. But if the scientific paradigm is daunting and impractical, the naturalistic which seeks to describe interaction and social relations on the actor's terms comes up against difficulties just as great as it develops beyond the view of a few actors. For we are faced with the fact that they have different views, especially in a complex society, and that none of them is adequate to explain the wider social situation satisfactorily. At an individual level the same problem recurs when we want to reject an actor's reasons given for an act as rationalisations. At some point in the search for a general description and explanation we are forced to question the actor's

framework and take it as data to be explained and no longer as itself explanatory. Indeed it might be suggested that sociological explanation, as opposed to reportage or ethnography, is only possible insofar as the actor's own accounts are shown to be false or questionable. Explanation thus takes the form either

(i) Statement X is false because other social arrangements are possible - X is ideology.

(ii) Statement X is false because what it implies cannot obtain - X is utopian.

The greatest problem that the naturalistic paradigm has to contend with then, is the articulation of the actor's view which is the starting point, with the observer's which becomes increasingly necessary to make it work as the investigation of its implications proceeds. This is something the scientific paradigm is usually able to avoid because it ignores the importance of the actor's view in explanation and sees it only as data. The situation is further complicated for the naturalist since what at first was an advantage, an explanation and prediction of events using the actor's language of reasons, decisions and action, becomes problematic as these very processes are themselves subject to explanation, usually of a quasi-causal kind. The two fail to articulate because (a) it is unsatisfactory to see 'mental events', that is decisions and intentions, as causes, for many reasons, but most obviously because it involves one in an infinite regress - what caused the intention? and (b) because it is very difficult - indeed impossible - to specify what ideas mean in a social

situation which they are used to define. Garfinkel's experiment⁵ in which he asked subject 'Why?' continually, when they asserted something and ^{he}/pretended to fail to understand, culminating in confusion, and the similar one in which he asked subjects to write out what was "understood" in a dialogue which also became impossible at length, demonstrates clearly that it is impossible to specify ideas completely in terms of reality or of action - the unexpressed elements of understanding in interaction, like the non-contractual elements of contract, are potentially infinite and called upon as the situation demands.

The sociologist would appear to be faced then with an insoluble difficulty. He is unable to use the scientific paradigm without constantly being forced into a reliance on the explanatory power of his subjects because of the complexity of his undertaking. On the other hand the naturalist is equally stymied by the inadequacies of their explanations and the need to expand them further than they seem able to go. It will be remembered that Weber struggled with the same problem without ever arriving at a wholly satisfactory solution. But as I have said earlier, he was probably more confused than was necessary, and in his empirical work laid the foundations of a practical, if not an ideal, way out.⁶ He began, to recapitulate briefly, with social relations and the meanings attached to them, aspects of which are particular to the relation and aspects part of a public culture. This allows one to understand the particular relation but, as Nadel recognised, the specificity of its content prevents

one expanding it to other linked relationships. Weber therefore abstracts in terms of the meaning defining the relationship and seeks common aspects of the meanings of several relationships which are adequate or can be developed to become so, to explain their common adherence. This ultimately enabled him as a result of insight into ideas which were dominant or crucial to sets of social relations, to abstract and define basic sociological concepts for the societies which he studied. Thus his explanatory concepts were always derived from his subject matter not conceived apart from them, though transformed by constant comparison and elaboration and abstraction. Rather than a positivistic he took an idealistic approach and did not claim to have an observer's point of view except insofar as what he said represented an abstraction from the actor's own views. He thus recognised that pressure to generalise existed on two sides: as a sociologist he was after generalisation, and it was apparent that the actor's own views were inadequate if stretched and so generalisation through comparison was essential. In doing this he had to ignore aspects of action and its particular meaning, mostly at Nadel's first and second levels of abstraction. Thus the account does do violence to the integrity of actors as decision makers in reality, substituting an oversimplified situation and reaction to it, but it maintains both the basic elements of human response mediated by decisions, and the core of especially the publicly understood aspects of the meaning of the action and situation. The difference at this point between this approach and the

scientific may of course be limited insofar as the latter as the observer is nonetheless drawing on his knowledge of the society as participant in taking up his position in many cases. The important difference is in the approach to explanation which is implied. Schutz radicalised this view⁷ of the potential for generalisation while maintaining the importance of meaning, in discussing it in terms of the construction of hypothetical actors, homunculi only capable of performing the acts for which they are created, so emphasising that the result must remain possible potential action, not an abstract law which is applied to action and to which it somehow has got to fit.

In saying this about Weber's view of his relation to his subject matter and his extrapolation of explanations out of it rather than constructing them outside of it and applying them to it, I am of course, by no means denying that in approaching his subject matter the investigator has a particular point of view and interests in terms of which he defines what his problem concern is to be. Weber recognised this as inevitable even despite the attempt to frame the explanation in the actor's terms. This initial definition of the problem serves the practical purpose of roughly delineating the enquiry and pointing to the areas of concern. Once again it may well derive from the investigator's involvement as participant in the society in question. The limitations of this definition can be overcome, if at all, only by comparison, which may mean, for example, that of the criminal's view with that of the police or the judiciary or at a

higher level, a conflict view with that of consensus. Comparison is important at both levels; one must compare sets of social relations in order to build up an explanation, and also one must compare one's conceptual framework used to define one's interests with other possibilities. It is because this latter comparison is often more difficult, particularly when the assumptions involved are of a very general kind, that the restriction of the assumptions are important. The problem is thus a variant of the famous chicken and egg conundrum: do you have data before theory or vice-versa? If you assume the former you are forced by its limitations, not to mention your own presuppositions in looking at it, to develop theory. If you assume the reverse, the theory then has to meet the explanation emergent from the data. Weber argued cogently that data was all important to social science because it could be understood and so did not require a pre-existing theory. In practice this understanding is never perfect - aspects of the observer's view linger; and the explanation so gained is limited so that one is forced once again to treat it as data not explanation. The two questions, of theoretical supposition and of how to cope with the limitations inherent in the actor's own situational explanation merge. What is in doubt then is the status of the explanation - is it causal or meaningful? The answer to this question, I have suggested, is not necessarily important provided both that 'meaningful' does not just mean conceptual implication but meaningful implications for action, i.e. refers to the relevance of particular

ideas not to other ideas but to action of certain kinds; and that it does not lead to the explaining away of the actors concerned but keeps them there as decision making beings, albeit with a limited freedom.

I have developed the implications of Nadel's theory at some length in order to avoid giving a fragmented account over the following pages where I discuss a number of authors. I hope that the main lines of my argument about the different schools of thought on explanation will now be evident, so that I can go on to present the accounts of two more of the 'scientific' school and then contrast these with the contributions of the 'naturalists', and conclude with a discussion of the latter's shortcomings. In doing so, I shall expand the relatively tight bounds of the framework in terms of which I have presented either side quite considerably in various directions.

R.K. Merton - 'Social Structure and Anomie'⁸

Merton, riding the crest of the structural-functionalist wave of U.S. post-war sociology was one of those whom Nadel might have referred to as espousing the view that rigorous systematic abstraction was desirable. His argument is spare and schematic, his vision very similar to Nadel's and his logic, once the premises are accepted, utterly compelling. 'Our aim is to discover how some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in non-conforming rather than conforming conduct. If we can locate groups peculiarly

subject to such pressures we should expect to find fairly high rates of deviant behaviour in these groups because they are responding normally to the social situation in which they find themselves' p. 132, Merton's emphasis. One should not be deceived by the human note at the end of the quotation. The response is at best to a stimulus from an abstract pressure exerted in the context of an abstracted system of social relations.

Like Nadel again we have a consensus definition of society, this one even more powerful than Nadel's.

'It is in fact only because behaviour is typically oriented towards the basic values of the society that we may speak of a human aggregate as comprising a society. Unless there is a deposit of values shared by interacting individuals, there exist social relations, if the disorderly interactions may be so called, but no society'.

p. 141.

On this view, it would appear that the silent majority is a functional necessity of society. The clinching element in Merton's argument is to take as one of these values the American Dream, and given the means-ends tool, you have a complete irrefutable explanation of all deviance. There are those possibilities and only those that Merton outlines: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. His admittedly inadequate treatment of the latter gives the lie to his consensus definition of society and he qualifies this by "or social groups" i.e. sub-societies in his view.

The process of deviance production operates as follows:

'Cultural structure may be defined as the organised net of normative values governing behaviour which is common to members of a designated society or group. And by social structure is meant that organised set of social relations in which members of the society or group are variously implicated. Anomie is then conceived as a breakdown in the cultural structure occurring particularly when there is acute disjunction between the cultural norms and goals and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them.'

p. 162.

'When the cultural and the social structure are malintegrated, the first calling for behaviour and attitudes which the second precludes there is a strain towards the breakdown of social norms, toward normlessness.'

p. 163.

Clearly, it is all a matter of disjunctions within the system and has very little to do with actors, except of course that they constitute the evidence for it by their behaviour. Any individual ideas they might have about what is going on are totally irrelevant in the fact of the monolithic determinism of Merton's account. I may be forgiven for thinking that social structure is a myth invented by sociologists to give themselves academic status and explain synoptically the power conflicts and contradictions inherent in existing patterns of social relations and the values and norms used to legitimate them. The lie is given to it when one takes a real situation and looks for the social structure. One is liable to meet a policeman or even an explorer but not an ultimate value. Those entities reside in the courts of appeal and the Houses of Parliament. The notion of structure is inapplicable to interaction, just

because it implies pattern, rigidity, predetermined courses which in practice are a matter of negotiation, however cursory. What began as the recognition of a common store of meanings used to define situations and a recognition of the importance of power differences in social situations has been inflated to the status of single perfect explanans. To use the analogy of 'pressures' and individuals being determined is one thing; to claim that that is all that goes on is quite another.

A.K. Cohen - Delinquent Boys.

It is interesting to look at what happens to Merton when he is operationalised. Cohen's book is a direct outgrowth of Merton's paradigm, but it contains an important change of emphasis even while remaining deterministic in the same way. Initially he is even more 'rigorous' than Merton. 'What we see when we look at the delinquent subculture is that it is non-utilitarian, malicious and negativistic', p. 25, Cohen's emphasis. One has to recognise that it is part of Cohen's ex cathedra style to use the term 'we' for 'I', before realising that one is not in fact bound to say that one necessarily sees this. It is clear that what Cohen sees is going to very much reflect his own view of the world, not that of the delinquents. He opts firmly for the observer's view from the start.

He goes on (pp. 49-50) to make an explicit comparison between natural and social scientific methods and to claim that there are 'facts a theory must fit', i.e. that these facts are

objectively discoverable by external investigation of behaviour not by the consultation of the actors, despite the fact that many of them turn out to be actions. It is therefore not surprising to find him referring deterministically to social structure: 'What is it about the structure of American society that produces in certain sectors of that society a subculture of a certain distinctive content?', p. 109. Not only the behaviour but also the ideas are seen by Cohen as the response to structural pressures. However, he goes on

'We believe that it is necessary, in order to arrive at a satisfactory solution to discover those combinations of personality and situation which yield the problems of adjustment to which the delinquent subculture is an appropriate response, and to show how these personalities and situations are generated by the life conditions in those sectors in which that subculture prevails'.

p. 109.

Cohen's expressly psychological assumption that all action is problem solving and his contrived elaboration of his argument in terms of individuals responding to situations might lead us to believe that he had kicked the determinist habit and that these are real people he is talking about. Certainly the durability of his argument lies in the expanded scope it has, because it includes an account of personal situations and responses, and certainly Cohen is genuinely trying to show how people in distinctive situations have distinctive experiences and problems. But this is misleading. It is interesting that Cohen, who is dealing with real deviance not hypothetical

(?ritualism), should revert to an individualistic discussion, but the individuals are no more than ciphers. What we have is not their reasons for deviating but the reasons. They respond to experiences designed for them by Cohen as a result of his analysis of structure, an analysis which takes a confessedly external point of view. Thus his closing words are 'The validity of our own explanation is contingent upon the accuracy of our description of the delinquent subculture and the validity of any explanation is contingent upon its consistency with the details of the data which it purports to explain'. p. 172. Once again it is assumed that the data is there to be discovered; it is only a question of careful 'analysis'. Cohen has moved almost despite himself to the point of looking at what the actors think rather than only at what they appear to him to be doing, but is prevented from recognising the implications of this by the bent of his previous argument which is set in extreme scientific terms. This is not just to say that if you generalise about people you treat them as determined objects but to go on to say that to maintain reasonable balance you must start with and give due credit to their own views before integrating them and their acts into a generalised structure. Only then do you explain action rather than behaviour seen by the observer.

I have now given three examples of how the scientific paradigm operates and pointed out some of its shortcomings. I will not turn to a series of authors who have tried to explore the alternative view in various directions in a desire to remedy

them. As I will show, they raise important difficulties for themselves in doing so, but they do manage to say what is wrong with scientism in cogent detail. I will take Mead first, both because he has the most elaborate theory and because all the others have to a greater or lesser extent drawn on him.

G.H. Mead - Mind, Self and Society.

It is curious at first glance and significant in the long run that Mead, who, with phenomenological philosophy, has been used as a major theoretical source by the interactionists, should call himself a social behaviourist. He spends a great deal of time attacking Watsonian behaviourism, which he regards as simplistic, but he is adamant about the feasibility of behaviourism as such. The interactionists in fact are interested in him because of his concentration on the individual, but as we shall see, this too leads him into difficulties.

His attempts in the first chapter to define behaviourism in a way that avoids criticism are unsuccessful.

'Social psychology is behaviouristic in the sense of starting off with an observed activity... But it is not behaviouristic in the sense of ignoring the inner experience of the individual... It simply works from the outside to the inside instead of from the inside to the outside.'

pp. 7-8.

Here Mead is attacking the other bogey, introspectionism, but we are still not sure whether or not he is arguing for reducibility to behaviour. He tries to enlighten us:

'Mental behaviour is not reducible to non-mental behaviour. But mental behaviour or phenomena can be explained in terms of non-mental behaviour or phenomena, as arising out of, and as resulting from complications in the latter'.

pp. 10-11.

It is in the process whereby this is achieved that both Mead's strengths and his weaknesses lie.

Mead distinguishes human from animal behaviour, not by reference to consciousness, but indirectly by reference to the ability to use symbols to communicate. It is when this stage in development comes that mind, or reflective awareness emerges. Thus he has relatively observable elements in terms of which to deal with that great obscurity, consciousness.

'That is the general mechanism of what we term "thought", for in order that thought may exist there must be symbols, vocal gestures generally which arouse in the individual himself the response which he is calling out in the other, and such that from the point of view of that response he is able to direct his later conduct. It involves not only communication in the sense in which birds and animals communicate with each other (i.e. by reacting to each other's gestures) but also arousal in the individual himself of the response which he is calling out in the other individual, a taking of the role of the other, a tendency to act as he acts. One participates in the same process the other person is carrying out and controls his action with reference to participation. It is that which constitutes the meaning of an object, namely the common response in one's self as well as in the other person, which becomes in turn a stimulus to oneself.'

pp. 73-4.

This is an excellent exegesis of Parson's double contingency of interaction, expanded slightly to show that that age old problem, mind, is much less truly in our heads than in our interactions.

The individual and the social are not merely joined, they are one and the same. In a literal sense we are other people.

Meaning is likewise no longer a problematic obscurity but an objective reality, accessible but still distinctly human.

'Meaning is a development of something objectively there as a relation between certain phases of the social act: it is not a physical addition to that act and it is not an "idea" as traditionally conceived. A gesture by one organism, the resultant of the social act in which the gesture is an early phase, and the response of the other organism to the gesture are the data in a triple or three-fold relationship of gesture to first organism, of gesture to second organism and of gesture to subsequent phases of the given social act; and this three fold relation constitutes the matrix within which meaning arises or which develops into the field of meaning'.

p. 76.

Mead is prepared to go back into more primitive animal behaviour to show how meaning derives not from the mysteries of the psyche but from concrete interaction. He is however, careful to distinguish this view from crude behaviourism: the view of the actor (or organism) remains entirely necessary to the concept of meaning. Mead's point is that it is not inaccessibly secreted in the individual but only exists in the (observable) relations between them.

'Although external objects are there independent of the experience of the individual, nevertheless they possess certain characteristics by virtue of their relations to his experiencing or his mind, which they would not otherwise possess apart from those relations. These characteristics are their meanings for him or in general, for us. The distinction between physical objects or physical reality and the mental or self-conscious experience of those objects or that reality - the distinction between external and internal experience - lies in the fact that the latter is concerned with or constituted by meanings.'

f.n. p. 131.

So far Mead's efforts have been relatively successful and certainly constructive. We might have qualms about the restrictiveness of his notion of meaning that consists only in what is publicly communicated, as this does not deal with individual idiosyncracies of meaning, which may be important but difficult to communicate. Nor as yet do we have much idea how changes in ideas come about. But it is when Mead turns to the development of the self that problems arise. The self is, as may be expected, entirely social, resulting directly from the responsiveness of one actor to another and particularly from his ability to 'take the role of the other' referred to above, i.e. recognise in himself the response he wants in the other when he calls for it. 'Self consciousness refers to the ability to call out in ourselves a set of definite responses which belong to the others of the group', p. 163. It involves in other words empathy, the explicit recognition of similarities in reaction as the basis of communication. Thus 'no hard and fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others, since our own selves exist and enter as such into our experience only insofar as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our own experience also'. p. 164. It is this notion of a self created in and dependent on interaction that the later interactionists have seized on.

It is at this point that the first major flaw in Mead's argument appears. For he has built up a concept of man so oversocialised as to be incredible. He has emphasised the simil-

arities and interdependence of individuals so much at the expense of their distinctively human attribute - the capacity for initiative, individual innovative action on the basis of a personal view of things - that he is in danger of seeing men as a collection of social robots. He therefore splits the self into two parts, the 'Me' which represents the passive elements entirely derived from interaction and the taking of the role of the other, and the active principle, the 'I' which acts in relation to the elements of the 'We'; thereby providing himself with a voluntaristic *deusex machina* which quite transcends the bounds of his analysis, necessary though it is, and makes nonsense of his behaviourism. He has shorn the psyche of its mystery only to allow it back at the last minute, albeit in a limited form, stripped to its bare essentials. The 'I' Mead admits, responds to the socially given 'Me' and reflects upon it; it gives a sense of freedom and choice and its response is not predictable. If the 'Me' is the conventional self of habit, the 'I' is the response to this and expression of individuality. Society may set the context for individuality, establish a framework of meanings, but it is the uniquely individual self, which reacts to this, which is essential to action and to an adequate account of it.

Mead's attempt to provide a full account of the individual therefore fails, and this failure is reflected in his treatment of the final section of the book where he deals with society. He is clearly unable, having allowed his actors individuality,

to build up the comprehensive theory of the structure of society envisaged earlier in the book, because this could only be done on the basis of the oversocialised concept of man proposed in the 'Me', and then the task would be complex enough. He is reduced to giving examples of the way his theory operates in a wider institutional context. Although he is able to give an informative account of the basis of man in society he finds it far more difficult when trying to build on this basis because he has no conceptual tools with which to do so. His concepts are individual and interactional - meaning, self, social relationship. To go further implies elaboration into further concepts of some sort, which would mean a break with his analysis so far, and the impossibility of incorporating the 'I'. In practice he turns to a drive theory as the basis for social organisation, thereby once again giving a fundamental non-social motivation, but this is developed into an analysis which, where it is coherent, is basically functional.

Mead's final mistake, and one which has been subsequently corrected so I will only mention it here, is a total avoidance of reference to power. The kind of account he gives of society diverts attention from this problem in any case, but as later writers have shown, it is highly relevant to interaction.

The point to be remembered about Mead however, is not his similarity with functionalism in ignoring the problems of power, but his attempt at social analysis based on individual interactions. It became obvious that the stumbling block to any view

larger than the individual was the 'I', those aspects of the individual which could not be represented as the product of societal influence but rather as a response to them. This conflicted with Mead's behaviourism and prevented him from being a reductionist which his analysis of the role would have led him to in spirit if not in name. Symbolic interactionism, with some of those representatives I shall deal with next, drew upon Mead for its theoretical background and in trying to develop a general form of social explanation based upon interpersonal interaction came up against the same difficulties as Mead: the individual cannot be represented as entirely part of society.

Howard S. Becker, et. al.

None of the interactionists actually state very much theory. Their concern is practical - the ones I shall deal with are mainly concerned with deviance - and thus their theory has largely to be inferred from their empirical work. For all of them in the early stages, the innovations were made in reaction to Mertonian functionalist explanations, but this took place not merely in the conventional way of decrying its consensus assumptions, facile generalisations and static analysis but at more a fundamental level also in regard to the kind of explanation that was to be given, and especially the kind of evidence relevant to it.

Thus Erikson⁹ attacks anomie theory, which claims that conflicting or unrealisable demands give rise to deviance, because

it does not distinguish responses which involve the use of social control from those that do not. Becker¹⁰ attacks the conventional functionalist question 'Why do they do it?' because it seeks to locate some predisposing quality in the deviant, whether social or psychological in origin, whereas in fact deviants are made in the process of interaction not before it. The general values basic to Merton's account are ridiculed as incomprehensible and Becker's analysis of moral entrepreneurs shows that values are only effective insofar as support can be mobilised for them, i.e. as they are power-backed. If the moral crusade fails, like the modern temperance or Sabbatarian movements, the value is ineffective. Values are only used by way of justification for actions and never lead to them except when embodied in particular norms.

Lemert puts the same point against Merton cogently but more gently: 'One of the salient difficulties in most discussions of values, and one apparent in Merton's or any purely structural analysis of deviation is the failure to separate out (1) acts of individuals which embody values learned symbolically and transmitted as part of culture during childhood; and (2) acts which are products of contingent valuation. In the first instance actions of individuals are unreflective and carried out without calculation of consequences or consideration of alternatives. Conformity of this kind can be, in Merton's sense, a consequence of structured or patterned relations between values and norms. In the second instance the prelude to action is a conscious

selective process in which the cost of means, rather than a sacred or internalised 'emphasis' play upon a range of alternatives. The two resultants of conformity and deviation may be overtly similar but subjectively quite different.'¹¹ Once the mechanical Mertonian abstraction of man is questioned and real individual action considered, the weakness of its assumptions and the variety of kinds of meanings of human action become evident. When power is included as a factor in all interactions as well as values the outcome is far from mechanical.

The power element is crucial in that while the formal aspects of the norm may be agreed by many, its actual operation in a situation depends on that situation being defined in terms of the norm and the protagonists of enforcement having sufficient power and skill to achieve this. As Erikson puts it, a norm is not a fixed statute but an accretion of precedents which constantly develop it and modify its scope as it is used in a changing variety of situations. Rule application depends on who did it and to whom in what situation. The recognition of the act as deviant, not just its commission, is what is socially significant.

This interest naturally leads to a consideration of values and norms as part of the situation and therefore objects of analysis rather than pre-given entities which 'structure' it. They are used to define situations: the question is which one will be used in which situation and why. The whole structuralist view of values, norms and roles is put in question as attention

focuses on the interaction in progress, whose outcome is seen as problematic because it will be the product not so much of the given facts of structure, but of the negotiations and definitions which take place in the situation. Erikson is therefore concerned with the nature of the screen of selection of deviants, not the reasons for their deviance. He asks not "why do people commit crimes?" but "why are certain acts called crimes?" Why do certain people get sanctioned for their deviance and what happens to them as a result? The answer to all these questions involves a consideration of the power resources (in the widest sense) of those involved and naturally gives rise to Lemert's distinction between primary deviance and secondary deviance, where the actor is reacting not to a continuation of his earlier motives for the first offence, but to the fact that he has been defined or labelled as a deviant by groups in society, as a result of which his situation may have significantly changed, as it does if he has a criminal record.

He sums the point up as follows:

'Social control must be taken as an independent variable rather than as a constant or reciprocal societal reaction to deviance. Thus conceived social control becomes a "cause" rather than an effect of the magnitude and variable forms of deviation.'

12

The slant of the argument then, is away from a general societal explanation of deviance and a substitution of the notion of becoming, of an identity developed and imposed on or accepted by the individual in the course of a series of interactions. Interaction, power, and the actor's views of the situation as

they develop existentially are the focus of attention. This implies attention to people as real individuals, not in terms of social roles, and as reacting with all the subtleties and complexities of which people are capable. What goes on in a relationship is seen as the problem, not as an arena for the operation of structurally established performances. This implies a neglect of general explanations of any sort, and what happens with the interactionists is that assumptions are made as to the basic modus operandi of society, particularly in terms of the institutionalised patterns of power distribution and the major institutions - the educational and political systems for example. Structure is seen only as a set of threads which are grabbed every so often when the wider context appears important. Thus Becker criticises earlier research on deviance for trying to locate its causes, which are seen as operating simultaneously. In fact they operate sequentially and do not 'cause' at all. The relevant contingencies include "both the objective facts of social structure and the changes in the perspectives and desires of the individual".¹³ Becker only discusses structure in a rudimentary fashion. His rejection of causality leads him to look at situations in which people can be seen reflecting and responding as individuals - Mead's 'I' in action - and away from any notion that their actions are caused by social structure, though they may certainly be constrained by it and its human embodiments. The full significance of this change of emphasis will emerge in my summing up of the critiques of structuralism,

but the importance of the difficulty of giving both an account of what actually takes place in interaction, and a general explanation which goes beyond this account should be clear.

A.V. Cicourel - The Social Organisation of Juvenile Justice.

Cicourel's is a painstaking investigation of Erikson's concern, the nature and origin of the screen through which potential deviants are sifted, some being labelled and others ignored. Sociological theories of delinquency, he points out, are usually based on the sociologist's own ideas of lower class delinquency (cf. Cohen), and on the official figures and their correlation with the lower class. He stresses the importance of the delinquent's own uninterpreted view of the situation, and the fact that the statistics are a product not of 'pure' research but of the application of primitive theories of delinquency by the compilers, the agents of social control, not only to explain delinquency but to select the delinquents. The police are caught in the dilemma of demands for due process of legality and for effective control. The combination of discretion over arrest, superior power and credibility in public, and career and professional pressures to make charges and make them stick, result in a desperate need for recipe knowledge of what delinquents look like and why they are delinquent. Thus research results are seized upon that show correlations between broken homes, social disorganisation, anti-authority attitudes and delinquency and a reverse entailment extrapolated and used to select actual or

potential delinquents who conform to these characteristics. Since the same notions are accepted by the judiciary, the descriptions stick and the charges are accepted.

'Through day-to-day encounters with the police juvenile cases are filtered so that some cases assume typical "delinquent" features, that is coming from broken homes, exhibiting "bad attitudes" towards authority etc.'

p. 121.

Cicourel carefully traces the different experiences of lower class male negro delinquents and middle class whites and shows that whereas the former get incarcerated after a series of minor and mostly non-criminal offences because they have no means, cultural or political, to protect themselves, and because they fit the stereotypes used by the social control system, the latter get away with much more, tolerance is displayed by the authorities and in some cases political intervention prevents prosecution. They also avoid criminal treatment because they have few of the requisite social characteristics and the alternative and less punitive sick label is applied. The operation of the official statistics and the processing of delinquents are thus both part of a single process centred in the organisational situation of the social control agency.

'The difficulty with sociological studies of the family, work groups and complex organisations is the presumption of idealised regularity and the search for features to account for variations in the regularities. The contrasting view followed in this book is to view the assembly of a product (e.g. a statistic, a juvenile labelled "delinquent"), recognised by societal members as "routine" and called the "social structures" by sociologists, as being generated by practical decision making.'

p. 232.

'The "Delinquent" is an emergent product, transformed over time according to a sequence of encounters oral and written reports, prospective and retrospective readings of "what happened", and the practical circumstances of "settling" matters in the everyday agency business.'

p. 333¹⁴

Cicourel is making a point both about the need for a less facile approach by sociologists and a greater attention to the actor's experience as he experiences it, and also about the need to recognise the importance of factors that Becker pointed out. But what he does not ever mention is the general problem of why only certain people commit crimes and others do not, whatever their subsequent experience. He attacks the assumption that crime is confined largely to the lower class with great effect, but then fails to go on to give any account of why it is committed. Possibly he may regard the actor's own accounts of why their crimes are committed as quite sufficient and certainly his plea for greater attention to this as a valid piece of the evidence is not idle. The difficulty is that the accounts given are often superficial or non-existent and invariably more limited than the sociologist's consensus. It is when he wants to expand on them and explain why the crimes were committed in wider terms that the difficulty of reconciling this account with the actor's own arises. The psychoanalyst has the same problem in trying to explain his patient's problems to him, but he solves it by getting the patient to accept that the psychoanalytic explanation is the correct one. Up to a point the sociologist may do the

same, and as regards some of the things he can point to, integration may not be difficult, but the more general the explanation and the larger the factors involved, the more the delinquent's own view will seem redundant. Once again the problems of structural and naturalistic explanation arise.

David Matza.

Matza directly confronts the problem that is one of my main concerns, namely that of giving an adequate explanation of action, in his case deviant actions, while still doing justice to the actors. He tries to steer a middle course between what he sees as two poles: the legal view which tends to see crime as a deliberate act, and the deterministic social scientific one which tends to see it as the inevitable outcome of predisposing factors in the actor's character, background, and situation. Matza opts for what he calls soft determinism, in which the criminal's freedom is contrasted with those factors in his life which constrain him, other factors being obstacles but manipulable. The importance of the actor's own attitudes and his reactions to situations as they develop are thus stressed.

In particular Matza attacks the view that subcultures are causal factors in delinquency. This implies a view of the actor equally as naive as Merton's that he is rigidly and permanently socialised into certain values and norms in accordance with which he acts, the norms in the case of the criminal being those of a criminal subculture. 'Delinquency' Matza suggests 'is a status

and delinquents are incumbents who intermittently carry out a role'.¹⁵ The reason for this view is that ^{the} delinquents' situation is always complex with many factors to be reconciled, and in particular the normative demands of conventional society which cannot be ignored.

'My thesis is that the sub-culture is of two minds regarding delinquency, one that allows members to behave illegally and to gain prestige therefrom, the other reveals the impact of conventional precepts'.

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In certain situations the demands of the conventional society may be weakened in their effectiveness. There are many reasons for this, some of which Matza describes. There may, for example, be explicit demands from peers for the delinquent to prove himself and his lack of fear of the law by committing a crime - say driving away a car. Specially important are the circumstances surrounding the crime as seen by the delinquents, since their values only permit of committing offences in extenuating circumstances, though these extend further than those recognised at law. Thus the victim may be seen as too rich to care, mean and exploitative etc. This leads to a view of the crime as a civil tort to be made good by reparation, not as a criminal offense.

The delinquent's treatment at the hands of the police and courts may be seen by him as obscure, arbitrary, unfair, and dictated by personal malice or expediency, and elaborate evidence of this may be available. Police and judicial attitudes are not fully understood and their weaknesses in practice ruthlessly picked on and used as further justification for crimes. He quotes

Becker with approval 'The function of the group or organisation then, is decided in political conflict not given in the nature of the group ... It is likewise true that the question of what rules are to be enforced, what behaviour is regarded as deviant, and which people are labelled as outsiders must be regarded as political.'¹⁷ This political experience of the law has an impact on the delinquent not only in terms of forcing him into a role he may not want, and thereby restricting his freedom, but also of drawing a reaction in terms of the delinquent's attitude to the law which, close to, no longer seems to be the noble moral monolith it did from afar.

This allows the delinquent to drift, as Matza puts it, and no longer be effectively bound by moral demands for conformity, although these are fundamentally agreed on. Once in this position he is more likely to take the decision to commit an offense and motives that would in other circumstances be inadequate are sufficient. In his second book Matza uses the term I have adopted, naturalism, to describe this kind of account, though he tries unsatisfactorily to develop it into a philosophical position of seeing phenomena as they are, not in terms of outside standards. This is impossible except in a limited way by trying to adopt the actor's point of view. But the term itself is not important to his account, which centres upon the individual actor as an individual reacting to his environment and taking various decisions as he thinks appropriate. When all the factors of the situation are said and done and the actor's

own view described one must still as Matza says, be willing, and this is not the same as being pre-ordained or psychologically determined, but neither is it abstractly free. 'Being willing is the human leap that allows an open process to continue'.¹⁸

As the title of the book suggests, this is all part of a concern with existential becoming, the experience by the actor of the situation as it develops, and his part in it. In giving this kind of account Matza is able to throw light upon the processes involved in being and becoming deviant, the development of an identity and the ability to live with it, and what this implies for future action. He works very much from the inside outwards. The question is, once again, how far out he gets. He rarely goes beyond the interpersonal situation, using assumptions and generalised knowledge about the wider society to explain the external factors of the situation. What matters to Matza is the nitty gritty of the interaction, not the relation of aspects of it to wider institutional facts. He shows how the courts, the police and the deviant perceive and are perceived, never asking wider questions about why they should so perceive and act. He contributes a considerable amount to the knowledge of how deviance comes about, but little to how and where it originates. He is able to give an account with real people in it, but he has to stop as soon as the context is widened and they become merely shadows identified by a name tag.

Erving Goffman.

Goffman's work often gives the impression of waspish dilettantism in the multiplicity of examples and concepts he introduces and the bizarre ramifications of interaction he explores, but this is to ignore the important theoretical contribution he makes in taking up one of the basic structural concepts, role, and extending its implications in several directions. He confines himself to primary relations and so does not offer an alternative theory of structure himself, but his sharp insights into everyday social contact expose the naivety of the conventional concept.

In *Fun in Games*¹⁹, for example, he extends the analogy of games to suggest that they are "world-building activities", a means whereby a clear definition of the situation is created, accepted and maintained. Ordinary social contacts may be seen in the same light, with the important rider that external roles, statuses and identities spill over into the situation and have to be managed.

'The process of mutually sustaining a definition of the situation in face-to-face interaction is socially organised through rules of relevance and irrelevance. These rules for the management of engrossment appear to be an insubstantial element in social life, a matter of courtesy, manners and etiquette. But it is to these flimsy rules and not to the constant character of the external world, that we owe our unshaking sense of realities. To be at ease in a situation is to be properly subject to these rules, entranced by the meaning they generate and stabilise; to be ill at ease means that one is ungrasped by the immediate reality and that one loosens the grip that others have of it. To be awkward or unkempt, to talk or move wrongly, is to be a dangerous giant, a destroyer of worlds'.

Now Goffman also says that the way that the situations or encounters are defined does depend on wider 'structural' factors - some options will have more weight than others. The importance of his discussion lies in the fact that he shows the processes by which definitions are decided and sustained to be by no means automatically derivative of the major positions of the participants. What he is claiming in the quotation is that the crucial factor necessary for the situation to be an interaction in a meaningful way is concerned much less with what the actors derive from outside than with how they manage themselves and each other within the encounter. He is pointing the way then, to an analysis of situations in which successful interaction fails, where on the basis of a structural analysis alone there may be no reason to expect this.

Goffman goes on in 'Role Distance'²⁰ to extend this point to suggest that roles are not played simply at all. The only way that real interaction can be managed is by the actors distancing themselves from their identity as role players and using this distance to modify the identity and fit themselves into the current interaction. And part of the reason that makes this distance necessary is the impinging of other roles and identities on the situation - unlike real games, most situations are not definitionally "watertight".

'I have argued that the individual does not embrace the situated role that he finds available to him while holding all his other selves in abeyance. I have argued that a situated activity system provides an arena for conduct and that in this arena the individual constantly twists, turns and squirms, even while still allowing himself to be carried along by the prevailing definition of the situation'.

'He frees himself from one grasp not to be free,
but because there is another hold on him'.

p. 139.

The actor might thus be seen as playing several roles simultaneously and it might be that his subsidiary role is more important in certain respects than his supposedly dominant one - authority roles have a habit of spilling over in this way. Our predictions in terms of a straight-forward role-structural account therefore require careful modification at the interaction level. As Goffman puts it:

'The notion that position is part of a pattern or system must now be reappraised. Some formal organisations, especially ones wholly contained in the physically bounded region of a walled-in establishment, provide a concrete system of activity that can be used as a point of reference. Even here, the system-like properties of the organisation cannot be taken for granted: but when we take a wider unit such as a community or a society, there is no obvious concrete system of activity to point to as the pattern or system in which the position has its place. I suggest that a more atomistic frame of reference must be used ... When we study role we study the situation of someone of a particular analytical category and we usually limit our interest to the situation of this kind of person in a place and time ... But any identification of these encounters as social systems is surely hazardous'.

pp. 94-5.

In other words people are not just role actors - they draw on many roles and bits of roles simultaneously and in rapid sequence and we would do well to remember this. While we would perhaps not insist that there must be a 'concrete system of activity' in quite the same way as in a total institution in order to talk of social systems, Goffman is right to remind us that when we

conveniently talk of vague entities like communities as social systems, we are initially making an assumption which we often do not bother to verify. We say merely that we are looking at its systemic aspects, if questioned, never wondering whether these might not be less important in this case than other aspects. Our assumption may be correct but the questioning of it would indicate the limits of its naivety.

In the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life Goffman dilates on the problems of face-to-face contact and their implications for the operation structural factors in interaction. He specifically excludes a consideration of structure itself, preferring to explore the dramatic analogy implied in the concept of role, an approach which he contrasts with goal attainment (technical), political, structural and cultural approaches to the same subject matter.

'The specific content of any activity presented by the individual participant or the role it plays in the interdependent activities of an on-going social system will not be at issue (in this book); I shall be concerned only with the participants' dramaturgical problems of presenting the activity before others.'

p. 17.

He goes on to point out in intricate and varied detail how 'to be a given kind of person, then, is not to possess the required attributes, but also to sustain the standards of conduct and appearances that one's social grouping attaches thereto'. p. 65. The arts of impression management are not only a problem of ongoing complexity for the actor, but also important to socio-

logists in influencing the outcome. As he says, an important aspect of power for example, is that it shall be recognisable and visible, clothed in the correct and impressive forms of appearance and behaviour; if it is not, its effectiveness is diminished, and may be challenged until it is established through a series of interactions. Clearly this may have an important effect on the outcome of events conceived in structural terms.

Finally, Goffman gives an extended example of one of the sources of situational definitions and personal identity and the problems it presents for situation management, in Stigma. Even here, stigmas can be seen not only as permanent and relatively visible masks of identity-like blindness - but also as roles and statuses that we are all called on to play at some point, when in a less or more important sense we are the odd one out.

'Stigma involves not so much a set of concrete individuals, who can be separated into two piles, the stigmatised and the normal, as a pervasive two-role social process in which every individual participates in both roles at least in some connection and in some phases of life. The normal and the stigmatised are not persons but rather perspectives. These are generated in social situations during mixed contacts by virtue of the unrealised norms that are likely to play upon the encounter. The life long attributes of a particular individual may cause him to be type-cast: he may have to play the stigmatised role in almost all of his social situations, making it natural to refer to him, as I have done, as a stigmatised person whose life situation places him in opposition to normals. However his particular stigmatising attributes do not determine the nature of the two roles, normal and stigmatised, merely the frequency of his playing a particular one of these.'

Here is a situation in which the management of the interaction is always critical to the avoidance of embarrassment^{and}/ confusion, and the obvious characteristics of the stigmatised have to be drawn on and modified in presentation by each side to achieve success, rather than simply constituting a status with an attendant highly scripted role.

It is interesting to note that just four years after the publication of Goffman's most important work on role distance in 1962, there was a functionalist reply in the characteristic form of an attempt at incorporation. Coser²¹ points out that role distance is implicitly recognised in some social roles, in its absence for example in the fanatic, the stuffed shirt, the over-serious and the anxious, and in its over-abundance in the blasé and the cynical. She suggests that so far from being non-normative, its presence is required in a greater degree in high status and authority roles, where uniformity is defined in terms of attitudes rather than specific behaviour, that is where the role is relatively unscripted. The lee-way of role distance is expected to be used to overcome conflicting demands from role partners and resulting ambiguities. Conformity may require the elaboration of a role, and a ritualistic performance come to be seen as deviant because it ignores the difficulties of other members of the role set, who if of lower status are not permitted the same latitude. Thus Coser distinguishes the case in which role distance is used to confirm status as in the operating theatre described by Goffman, where the surgeon made a series

of joking references to the other staff and the patients to preserve integration and a relaxed confident atmosphere, from that in which it is used when the role is being abandoned, as in the blasé attitude of older children riding a merry-go-round in contrast to their more serious and committed juniors. This latter type Coser calls 'true' role-distance.

Although Goffman himself refers to the use of role distance in satisfying other role requirements and thus of dealing with ambivalence, he explicitly questions the simple notion of role structure into which Coser tries to incorporate his concept. If Coser wishes to maintain that the reasons for and terms in which elaboration is carried out are ones which derive from society and are learned in it, Goffman would have no quarrel with her. His notion of the ambiguities of situational definition was considerably less rigid than hers, however. He allows that other roles and statuses spill over and impinge in their perceived demands on the actor's present situation. This may be a relatively direct result of the members of the role set present at a given time, but it may also be concerned with questions of individual aims and identity, where contradictions are perceived between roles, only one of which is socially relevant to the present situation, but both of which are part of the actor's conscious identity. Role distance may be used to reject a role or to maintain conformity to it, and as such it may be normatively required; but it may also be used for individual innovation, for making out, for carving a niche for oneself, for

deviating and succeeding without being called a deviant.

Goffman's concept was wide and admittedly vague as he portrayed it. In trying to incorporate it to functionalism Coser only lights on some of its uses.²² Those which Goffman stresses show how it illustrates the limits of structural explanation by describing individuals awareness of structure - something that is often thought of as the privilege of sociologists - and hence their ability to manipulate it.

He is able to make the concept of role work by (a) taking an actor-centred view of it (b) by limiting its scope to certain kinds of bounded formalised situations - "situated activity systems" and (c) by describing how it operates as a setting for interaction not as a complete prescription. To restrict the role concept in this way allows it to work, but implicitly indicates the difficulties in making it work in the macroscopic context for which it was originally conceived. About this possibility Goffman is sceptical.

Cicourel and Garfinkel.

I deal with these two authors together because they draw on each other heavily for the theoretical basis of their practical methodological critique²³. Garfinkel's views are notoriously complex and obscure, and so to avoid spending an undue number of words expounding him in his own terms, I shall draw extensively on Lassman's concise summary²⁴. The principal difference between Garfinkel and Cicourel is that the latter emphasises the imp-

lications of the questions raised by Garfinkel for the sociological investigator in relation to his data, whereas Garfinkel himself concentrates mainly on the problem of order itself, as I will explain²⁵.

The conventional question of the problem of order can be traced back, so far as sociology is concerned, to Hobbes. He asked essentially a question about political order, and answers have emerged in sociology in terms of political constraints and of the influence of normative rules. The alternative view can be traced to Locke who saw order in terms of mutual meaningful relationships - understanding in interaction - which he thought stable and unlikely to break down. This implies a concern not with the regulative, normative, or legitimate aspects of rule-governed action, but with the function of rules in defining meaningful behaviour and situations, and thence with the problem of sustaining these definitions. Goffman too is concerned with the same kind of question, but he does not make theoretical points about its implications of the same scope as Garfinkel. The answer to the question 'How is meaningful interaction possible?' is made yet more urgent in relation to the question about political order, when we also recognise that people act in terms of contradicting notions of legitimate order on different occasions, and that there are different theories about what "exists" in society both at the general level of world views and the practical level of action²⁶.

Garfinkel, echoing Goffman's concern with the aspects of situation and impression management as world-creative and-sustaining, emphasises the notion of 'trust' between interactors as of central importance to sustaining a 'normal' definition of reality. The influence of Mead too is evident in his description of this as the assumption of reciprocity of perspectives, that I think as you do and believe that you think as I, within certain limits, which is in Mead's terms the taking of the role of the other, the calling out in oneself of the response expected in the other.

The final and problematic element in Garfinkel's theory is that of reflexivity, that is the fact that trust is sustained and a belief in the common-sensical or everyday nature of the interaction situation maintained not simply by reference to constitutive rules defining the situation but by making accounts of reality in process conform to these rules. The peculiarity of reflexivity is its concern with maintaining a definition of the situation, an account of reality, which is tantologous. Thus it consists in the evaluation and specification of aspects of the situation so that they conform with the current definition and confirm its common-sense 'naturalness'. Garfinkel describes the work of a Suicide Prevention Centre which is requested to establish the mode of death of deceased persons in unusual and puzzling circumstances.

'Organisationally, the Suicide Prevention Centre consists of practical procedures for accomplishing rational accountability of suicidal deaths as recognised features of the setting in which that accountability occurs.

In the actual interaction that accomplishment is for members omnipresent and unproblematic and commonplace. For members doing sociology, to make that accomplishment a topic of practical sociological enquiry seems unavoidably to require that they treat the rational properties of practical activities as "Anthropologically strange". By this I mean to call attention to "reflexive" practices such as the following, that by his accounting practices the member makes familiar commonplace activities recognisable as familiar commonplace activities; ... and of proceeding in such a way that at the same time the member "in the midst" of witnessed actual settings recognises that witnessed settings have an accomplished sense, an accomplished facticity, an accomplished objectivity ... For Suicide Prevention Centre staff ... the rational properties of their practical enquiries somehow consist in the concerted work of making evident from fragments, from proverbs, from passing remarks, from rumours, from partial descriptions, from "codified" but essentially vague catalogues of experience and the like, how a person died in society ... Somehow is the problematic crux of the matter.'

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Garfinkel is claiming that this is a problem with which all actors are concerned, though it is only conceived as a problem for those trying to explain the unusual, that is give an account of it which makes it usual. Clearly the same kind of difficulties face the sociologist, and Garfinkel gives an extended account of the problems faced by the questionnaire coder in making sense of his information. Cicourel expands this into a full critique of sociological methodology. Normal situations become problematic for the sociologist however, as soon as he sees them as anthropologically strange, because it is then that he recognises that the actors are taking a great deal for granted and tries to discover how they incorporate and classify new aspects, and how the context develops. Although rules can be

discovered which in some sense define what is going on, they are never exhaustive and concise in their implications. Cicourel takes up this concern with reference to Wittgenstein's contribution to the problem of understanding meaning.

'Language and 'game' have rules but these are not literal rules in the sense of exhausting a set of possibilities or defining a set of possible outcomes. As he (Wittgenstein) states, we get entangled in our own rules. But this means that we have 'rules' not rules, because we want to know how this entanglement and the conditions surrounding such activities are both the sources of data and barriers to precise measurement. The problematic features of everyday life cannot be explained by formal logic, or by any system isomorphic with its axioms. The language one adopts for describing the realities of life always runs the risk of entanglement with what we mean. The logic of everyday activities in which the social object under study is embedded must be related to the logic of the observer's theory such that the two systems are both distinct and yet interrelated. Wittgenstein is telling us that the transformations which relate one system to another and the language which describes each system taken separately and both systems taken together will never be perfect. There can be general congruence but not perfect congruence'.

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And the reason for this is, partly, that the vagueness of the language is compensated for by the ongoing negotiation of the contexts of its use, the continual decisions to bring certain aspects into focus and perceive them in a certain way and so incorporate them into mutual common sense reality. The peculiar problems for the sociologist as explainer or exegete of social reality are obvious. It is immensely difficult to get anywhere near an account which does justice to what is understood between the actors, as Garfinkel's experiment indicates, in which he got subjects to spell out what was understood in a written conversa-

tion, in the course of which they were forced to recognise that this depended extensively on the biographies of the actors and the context of the conversations. This is doubly difficult when one wants to get beyond this to an account in the sociologist's own terms - he has to make sense of how the actors made sense of what they did.

The implications for the conventional concept of social structure are equally problematic. Garfinkel points out that social relations are not an automatic process dependent on a 'structure' of pre-given roles and definitions but the result of the actor's working at a definition of reality which is intelligible and acceptable, which only implies a drawing on given notions, certainly not their determination of reality. It follows from this that notions themselves will become modified by use, and though remaining the same in name, will differ in meaning over time and between groups of users. Lassman states the basic difficulty succinctly:

'Following from the fact that sociologists rarely concern themselves with the properties of daily life, but take for granted the ways in which they identify various activities as evidence of 'structures' or 'systems', they presuppose solutions to or theories of how communication is possible, how 'meanings' are both generated and understood, and how both language and social rules work ... Given an assumption of 'structure' the structuralist can then reconstruct social situations and impute motives to the actor in a post hoc manner that analyses 'action meaning' rather than 'act meaning'. This procedure carefully avoids making problematic the process whereby the actor in routine situations "attaches meaning" to social events. Explanation of action are then argued to be 'reasonable' in terms

of preconceived notions of what constitutes 'structure'. The typical structuralist strategy, in Parsonian theory for example, has been to formulate theories of an underlying pattern or deep level of organisation within the actor's personality conceived as an internalized social order corresponding to a stable set of 'need-descriptions'. There is no adequate conceptual distinction made between the actor's view of the situation and the sociologist's view...

To argue this point is to throw doubt on the adequacy of the criteria that are currently given (if any are given) for deciding between descriptions of social events. The fact that actors whom sociology is trying to describe are themselves making descriptions of their actions should not be regarded as a solution to sociology's problems, but rather as being perhaps, its greatest methodological problem'.

pp. 13-14.

Once again, although from a rather different point of view, there is a serious questioning of the limits of sociological generalisation. Ethnomethodology recommends us to devote considerably more attention to the way in which social situations and communication are sustained, emphasising that this is complex and to a degree at least idiosyncratic to the culture and persons involved. It undermines the generalising impetus of the structural perspective by pointing to the processes whereby definitions which are socially and regularly maintained as the basis of structural accounts, are themselves constituted. The question is raised as to how a structural account can ever get off the ground with the detailed investigation of interpersonal processes.

Social Structure: Problems and Progress.

I began this paper with a discussion of the contrasts between what I called the scientism of the structural and especially the systems view of action, and the naturalistic view which attempts to explain action in terms of the actor's own views. In the course of presenting the work of a range of writers, I have tried to show the shortcomings of the structuralist point of view and the naivety of the concepts it employs, and also how they imply an unrealistically determined concept of the actor.

The clearest and most concise statement of these shortcomings is in Taylor's paper.²⁹

'Firstly we must record how the stress upon the creation of self in social interaction produces an anti-structuralist tendency. If one argues, as symbolic interactionists typically do, that both society and the individual are created in interaction, then the view of society as a pre-existing system of roles to which each new individual merely adapts is seriously modified. Roles become for symbolic interactionists, not simply behavioural straight-jackets which individuals don when they enter particular social environments, but partly idiosyncratic creations which are built up by the efforts of the participants in the situation

What is being argued against here is that view of man which implicitly or explicitly denies the importance of consciousness and meaning by omitting them from consideration - by concentrating upon a specification of antecedent conditions and circumstances which are said to be simply causative or at least positively related to the performance of deviant acts. The argument is against those who postulate motives as entities which somehow pre-date the behaviour - which exist already in the individual and are merely activated by certain

circumstances - in this their attack is not just directed against social factor theorists, ^{but} against system sociologists - against all who they would claim systematically distort the nature of man by ignoring that which guarantees his humanity - namely his ability to confer meaning upon situations in terms of certain conceptions about the world and himself which he consciously entertains.'

pp. 3-4.

The issue which becomes dominant as a result of this critique is that of the place to be given to the individual and his peculiar experiences in the description and explanation of social relation and social relationships. The position which the critique attacks is one which uses sociologist's terms and assumptions in referring to relations and situations and which frequently elaborates a theory which purports to account for actions in a deterministic fashion. The terms of the description look acceptable initially as a version of the actions concerned; it is only when the explanation progresses that an aura of inevitability arises, so that in the end result the actors look like objects propelled by causal forces. An attack on causal explanation and determinism has thus been another part of the critique of structure, but the problem is distinct. For even if one forgoes causes, one is still stuck with the question of the relative emphasis given to a sociologist's terminology as opposed to an actor's one, and to the possibilities for generalisation as opposed to exploration of the individuals' situations³⁰. It is my contention that the critique has led to a fascination with the existential situation of the individual which has been

variously conceptualised by interactionists, phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists. A recognition of the complexities of the individual's situation, and of the fact that all successful interaction (in the sense which implies communication and cooperation or collective and repetitive action) presupposes a solution to the problem of this situation has led to a neglect of the significance of the fact that whatever this solution may be, societies are more than repeated interpersonal interactions - there is a sustained organisation among the interactions which influences the course that any one will take. Perhaps the account is crude and no doubt it is incomplete, but it is the case that the structural variables of age, sex, and social class, for example do allow us to make limited generalisations and do comprise part of the foundations of a general understanding of how societies hang together, and where individual interaction situations are located.

In a characteristic argument, Wilson³¹ maintains that the normative paradigm in sociology (he is probably thinking of Parsons especially) assumes that all behaviour is rule-governed and that explanation is to be deductive, which implies that acts have precise and literal meanings and that rules operate smoothly, but of course acts are partly dependent in their meaning on the situation and have to be interpreted in this limited context. There is no literal meaning, only a constructed one and no deductive explanation or perfect rules which operate smoothly. The argument is logically persuasive but practically

thin, just because the rules operate as persuasively and effectively as they do, to enable us to run our everyday lives and make detailed predictions in them about each other's future behaviour and our reactions to it. The attack on structural explanation that it assumes too much has its force much weakened by the very success of structural explanation: the difficulties raised are not always crucial and the implication that social reality is highly variable and fragile and subject to constant change and development as a consequence of the on-going contingencies of interpersonal interaction, while true in principle, is by no means always significant in practise.

What it does do is to indicate the limitations of the scope of structural explanation and to point out that it makes assumptions which simplify situations and which artificially restrict the possible choices of actors by talking as though they were necessarily limited to what they in fact habitually do. The pay-off of a structural account is its scope. The remaining problems are, as I suggested in the last chapter, the relationship between the sociologically defined features which comprise the explanatory framework and the experiences of the actors involved. Thus in the first place the meaning of social structure has to be spelled out in terms of individual experience, and in the second the sociologists' own contribution to the explanatory framework and its terms has to be explicit, and its relationship to the actors' terms.

It has been apparent then that the alternative theoretical positions, although they have allowed telling criticisms of structuralism, in practice confine themselves overmuch to the actor and his situation. By refusing to abstract and generalise, to create models, and by insisting on having real people to talk about, the critics are faced with the impossibility of transcending the situation and building any coherent explanatory theory. Interactionists and ethnomethodologists both come up against this problem. Let me say in more detail what I mean.

For the interactionists it has the tendency to result in an assumption of constancy about the situations involved, i.e. the presumed similarity of situations because of their characteristics in the situational context, thus ignoring the relevance of the wider context. It may also lead to a neglect of the sources of power, prestige and status, which as the interactionists rightly say, are important and spill over into situations where they may not be strictly part of the definition. To the extent that they concentrate on the niceties and ongoing indeterminacies of the actor's situation therefore, interactionists have neglected wider 'structural' features, using as a reason for doing so (often deliberately), the fact that structure has been the assumed viewpoint in the past and has neglected important aspects of the social process. They have also objected to the over-determined view of man implied in the generalised abstractions that form an essential part of structural explanation. What they have never come to grips with is the possibility of the

continuing relevance of such a wider explanation, which I would have thought is obvious, no matter what its practical shortcomings in the past, and thus they have never confronted the problem of how to account for action both in a general way and without using a model of the actor which denies those very characteristics which make action human problematic and interesting.

Social structure remains problematic for the anti-structuralist in at least two ways. First, even given a risk-taking or drift account of primary deviance, wider factors than the individuals existential situation and the problems and opportunities which arise in it are relevant in explaining why some individuals rather than others commit deviant acts. To fail to do this is to fail to explain them at all, to take the critique of official statistics to the point of suggesting that infractions of the law occur quite randomly, for example. This does not involve a reverision to a consensus view of what the rules are but rather a concern with whose rules are broken by whom and why, as well as the varying consequences of doing so. The precipitate of the critique of official statistics is to ensure that it is made clear, first that we are sure which set of rules we are talking about and for whom they count as rules, and secondly how they are perceived, if they are perceived, by those who break them. But on the basis in the various possibilities resulting from this classification, one still wants to know about the influence of factors beyond the immediate situation of the rule-breaker which have a bearing on how the infractions come

about. The difference which interactionism forces on us when we begin this level of analysis is that it is no longer to be conceived in terms of abstracted pressures which somehow induce the individual to act, but in terms of his sometimes more, but more often less conscious recognition of the importance of wider differences in power and the organised and persistent social relations by which these are maintained, which are one of the sources of his definition of the situation and of his motivation. To criticise structural analysis as crude is one thing, to reject it altogether is another. What is needed is not such a rejection but a more sophisticated analysis to relate social structure to individual action so as to show how it is experienced by individuals, rather than a deterministic view of its operation.

Secondly, as regards secondary deviation where the actor's situation is further complicated by his experience of the sanctioning process consequent upon his earlier perceived infraction, it is clearly important to relate further deviation and the creation of a deviant identity, not just to the fact that he experiences sanctions but to the way in which those who impose those sanctions maintain their power to do so, because of their positions in an organised and permanent system of authority. To claim that such a system is subject to constant modification in its application to situations and through political expediency, is by no means to deny its existence as a relatively permanent system of social relations. Structural analysis is thus relevant to the understanding of the relationship between the deviant and the agencies

of social control. It is also relevant to an understanding of the relative importance of this relationship and the sanctions involved and the continuing deviance. It is after all possible that the deviant acted in the first place for the same reasons as he does after he is labelled as a deviant. The question of the effects of the label is an empirical one and will no doubt vary with different sorts of deviant, different that is not in terms of the legal classification of their infractions, but in terms of their reasons for acting. Only if such a wide structural explanation is explored in detail, that is to say only if the relations not just between policeman and deviant but between the policeman and his seniors, between the police and the judiciary, the judiciary and the legislature, and the legislature and the public, and among all these bodies is explored as it actually operates rather than as we guess that it is supposed to, can there be any full appreciation of why there are deviants. This involves finding out how all the different groups perceived and interact (if at all) with each other, how their power differences are maintained and how these different perceptions and the actions consequent upon them involve misunderstanding, conflict, guilt, rejection, consensus, and hostility.

What may appear as conditions causing behaviour are in fact always circumstances experienced and responded to. Unless this mediation in the response, however inaccurate an understanding it is of the 'objective' situation or of what was intended, and

however irrelevant to the wider (and at times more significant in the long term) situation, unless this is included in the explanation we are constantly deluded, since it is the actor's perceptions, even if these are false, that lead him to act. It is the sociologist's task to unravel these perceptions and their limitations and to relate them to wider aspects of society; only then does he arrive at a full explanation of how the actions come about as they do and have the consequences they do. This involves showing the shortcomings of the actor's view in terms of the consequences of his action but never ignoring it.

To explicitly question and to claim to transcend the actors view however, raises the problem of on what basis one does so. This is a question to which ethnomethodology has addressed itself, though without resolving it (see above). One side of its theory and most of its practice is devoted to a detailed understanding of what goes on in interaction situations, with the recognition that none of the complex processes of inter- and intra- personal meaning and its negotiation can be ignored. Arising out of this is the other concern about the sociologist's relation to those he understands. Ethnomethodology stresses the solipsistic elements of the meaning of ideas and situations to individuals. The sociologist is concerned not only with individuals but with groups and with entire societies, and if he is to give an account in such general terms, reasons with which the actors do not for the most part concern themselves, he must inevitably take a position the terms of which do not coincide

with those of the actors, and will indeed explicitly question them. The consequence of this then, is that he must make explicit in as much detail as possible the relation of his general theoretical view to what the actors do and think, and he must be aware to what extent he is not just describing them but redescribing them. To worry about the sociologist's inability to understand action and simultaneously to explain it is both fruitless and unnecessary: actor and sociologist are not interested in the same thing and do not have the same frame of reference. The sociologist however must be aware of that of the actor and if he is to explain others' actions he must show how his frame of reference relates to theirs. Ideally he should state what his translation rules are, but we are a long way from that.

If anything called a social science of sociology is to remain, social structure it seems, is here to stay, though more aware of its status as an artificial explanatory construct that has to be constantly justified by showing how it is rooted in real social relations. An investigative empirical discipline that aims - albeit while recognising and defining limitations - at generalisation cannot totally incorporate individuals as individuals. It has to make simplifying assumptions. The purpose of what I have said in this chapter has been to establish the nature and extent of this necessity for simplification and so to develop another important aspect of a distinctive social scientific methodology and to indicate the difficulties it raises.

In the following chapter I shall turn to another attempt to provide such a methodology, Marxism, and with it a final formulation of the problem of objectivity. Whilst I shall disagree with some of this alternative, I shall show how much of it may be seen to contribute to the views I have been working with so far.

C H A P T E R S I X.

MARXISM AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE.

It was one conclusion of the last chapter that, in Gouldner's¹ terms the domain assumption of the autonomy of social structure had to be rejected. This assumes that because social structure may be said in one sense to exist independently of individuals and because it exercises constraints on their actions, it is to be considered as immune to human intervention. Gouldner argues against this reified version to contend that whilst social structure does constrain men and does exist independently of individuals it is not independent of but composed of all individuals and is controllable by groups of them. The problem of the explanatory power of the social structure concept and the place of individual consciousness in it is one that has dogged Marxism. On the one hand it has wanted to clarify the unity of the systematic oppressions of certain social structures for some segments of the society, but on the other hand to emphasise the possibility of change by collective decision and action - the organisation of individual wills. In its zeal for showing how far the constraints of structure pervade individual consciousness Marxism has postulated that all ideas are a reflection of social structure and particular of the class nature of that structure. But this of course leads to be paradox that individual initiative to break with the structure and change it becomes impossible.

This chapter will be concerned with attempts to resolve this paradox and hence with the scope and nature of structural explanation once again.

But the matter is not usually expressed, for Marxism, in terms of the nature and scope of structural explanation but as the problem of ideology - the nature and extent of the social determination of ideas. Thus Marxism also raises a problem about the objectivity of sociological enquiry in a new and radical way by suggesting that all ideas are socially determined, and that their significance can only be comprehended when their origins in social relations are made clear. More specifically, the suggestion has been that all ideas are ideological in the sense that they represent the world, especially the social world, in a particular way, with the aim, conscious or not, of furthering certain interests, very often class interests. This general claim was developed into a bold form in Marx's critique of bourgeois political economy, which, he said, so far from being a theory which described how the economy did work, according, as it claimed, to natural laws, was a prescriptive view of how it should work, one of the consequences of this being that such a method of running the economy favoured the interests of the bourgeoisie at the expense of the proletariat. Marx thus shifted attention from the theory and what it claimed to be saying to the consequences in social-economic terms of believing in it, and to the relationship of these consequences to those who propounded the theory. He pointed out that social reality is not

subject to fixed laws as is natural reality, and that how a society is run depends almost entirely upon the choice and imagination of those who have the power to control it. He thus indicated the fundamentally evaluative aspect of any social description, and contended that this should henceforth be made explicit: people should admit that they felt society ought to be run in this way, rather than claiming that it was the only practicable way. The thing to look at when discussing various views of this society then is less what they are, than why they are as they are, and the sociology of knowledge has specifically taken up this question and attempted to lay bare the social roots of ideas and theories.

The reaction of sociology as a discipline however, has been similar to that of the centipede, who when asked which leg came after which, was thrown into confusion and thrashed about helplessly, "considering how to run". As Birnbaum says:

'Discussions of the ideological components of social science seem to have had a shock effect on many of our colleagues. Those who respond to the challenge cannot do so dispassionately; the usually complacent tone of scholarly discourse suddenly disappears - to become strident and discordant. The intellectual and moral tensions implicit in these questions seem to inhibit many others from participating in the discussion. The insistence on sociology's status as a 'science', so common in the literature, sometimes appears to be an article of faith - or a defence mechanism'.

2.

It is not surprising that the newly fledged discipline of sociology should be thrown into consternation by such a suggestion, which effectively put it back among the saloon bar conversations,

political diatribes and shallow journalism whence it came. The factor which confounded the confusion however, was the uncertainty as to the basis of any assertion about social reality. It was not simply that such assertion could not be taken at face value any more, and might reflect the prejudices of those who believed them - that was a familiar problem. The difficulty now was that these prejudices themselves, the sacred beliefs upon which one might, if one was radical, claim to base a view of society, were themselves claimed to be the product of the kind of social relations in which people lived. The claim was that people's ideas were socially determined by general features of the social relationships of the society of their time, a fact of which they were normally unaware, but whose consequence was to bias their thought in a definite direction. Freedom of thought and thereby freedom of action was challenged in a way that made the possibility of deliberately biased thought seem a blessing in retrospect.

A reaction to this state of affairs was inevitable, and when it came the counterattack was as vicious as the attack. It took the form of turning the tables on the opponent and saying: if my ideas are socially determined, so are yours, including the claim that ideas are socially determined. By your own contention, not only can I not make any assertion I can be sure of, but nor can you. This was followed up by the argument, in Bendix's words that "All social theories arise in an historical context and lend themselves to manipulation. That is no argument against any of them."³ The social origins or even 'determination' of

man's thought really have nothing to do with whether what he says is true or false: that depends on an assessment of what he says, not why he says it. To mistake the latter as always relevant to the former is to indulge in political mud-slinging which only confuses, though it may lead to emotional persuasion. In MacIntyre's sober analytical terms, 'The causes which lead a man to hold a set of beliefs are always to be distinguished from the reasons which can be adduced in support of those beliefs.'⁴

MacIntyre is correct in what he says. What is problematic though, is whether, or under what conditions, causes may compromise reasons - whether as Birnbaum suggested they are not reasons but defence mechanisms, rationalisations, or as Marx claimed, false consciousness. Surely one cannot go so far as to claim the idealistic parthenogenesis of ideas without reference to those relatively stable aspects of social relations which have come to be called social structure, for what, after all, are social ideas about: surely they only have meaning in reference to their social context of living relationships?⁵ And did not Marx in fact make out a pretty good case for bourgeois economics being compromised by the inequitable consequences of its application, and the interests that this served?

The counter claim that the social determination of ideas is irrelevant to their validity is the first and crudest variant of a series of responses along the same lines, all of which seek to refute the epistemological force of the sociology of knowledge

and so allow social science to proceed more or less as though nothing had happened. This general strategy is one of three which I shall consider in this chapter. It is normally adopted by anti-Marxists and consists essentially in declaring the unimportance of the fact - if it is a fact - that ideas are socially determined. There are, however, two Marxist variants which I will discuss when I come to Marx and Lukács, namely the suggestion that each historical age has its own truth and its own theories, and the claim that truth is to be discovered not in abstract philosophising but in the detailed application of ideas to reality in praxis. As opposed to the complacency of this first general strategy, the second displays considerable anguish, and whilst accepting that ideas are socially determined, then goes on to try to construct or locate some agreed or objective basis from which to analyse social relations. Those involved in these efforts have all been Marxists, and I discuss the attempts of Marx, Lukács and Mannheim to resolve the problem. The final strategy is to avoid a direct confrontation with the epistemological problem and rather than accepting or rejecting ideas as socially determined, to ask what this means in practice and only then look at the epistemological implications. In this context I discuss the work of Mannheim and of his pupil Stark.

To return to the first strategy in its non- and anti-Marxist variants then, it appears to be overdoing it to claim that the social origins of ideas are just irrelevant to their truth. Nor

will attempts at nice distinctions suffice to deal with the problem, for example De Gré.

'At all stages of gnosiso-sociological research we are concerned only with establishing a relation between ideas and men, and not between statements and reality (material truth), nor between statements and other statements on a strictly logical level (formal truth) ... Any epistemological implications that may be found in these observations may be of concern to the philosopher, but not to the sociologist. The utmost that gnosiso-sociology may contribute to the general theory of knowledge is to demonstrate the sociological limits within which a conceptual position can hope to gain acceptance ... The laity expresses this fact in its adage "A man is a product of his time". '

6.

Despite the evident implications of saying that ideas are produced by social structure, De Gré (and many others) just refuses to go any further and look at the consequences of this for the truth of the ideas. Until we grasp this nettle we can get absolutely nowhere, particularly with certain kinds of research where the truth of the ideas is of central interest - e.g. in student rebellion, race riots and revolutionary warfare and also in some kinds of political crime. I am reminded of Weruher von Braun who in Tom Lehrer's song avowed that he was responsible for making the rockets and sending them up, but not for where they came down.

Not a very much more realistic view is suggested by Gurvitch⁷, but he does make an important point. The sociology of knowledge he contends, can clarify questions for epistemology and vice-versa, but they cannot do each other's jobs. The sociology of knowledge poses the question of the validity of ideas to epistemology

after exposing their roots in social relations. Many epistemological standpoints are possible. But if you try to dissolve one into the other you merely make philosophy into a branch of sociology. You must preserve a radical distinction in terms of the kind of investigation being done to avoid being overwhelmed by relativism. We cannot ignore the question of the extent to which ideas are real and effective determinants of social action and true views of social reality and to what extent epiphenomenal rationalisation, but this is not a matter for empirical investigation, to the extent that we must first know the criteria to be used (which are used) to distinguish rationalisation from true reason.

The first thing that we might admit is that De Gré and Gurvitch are right insofar as the claim that ideas have social origins is in one sense very innocuous, and we should not be blinded by several generations of Marxism and the reactions to it into thinking otherwise. Ideas obviously occur in a social context and they refer more or less explicitly to it. Often, they are thought up in response to identifiable problems arising in it. What we must be clear about is that ideas have their own terms of reference and are often saying very much more limited things than we take them to be. The question of their validity then arises in several ways that we should be careful to distinguish. First, are they self contradictory? The answer here is usually more or less obvious, though in politics it may need quite a lot of unravelling of ideological developments

to show this, because the jargon will be elaborated to obscure it. Secondly, are they just false on their own terms - inadequate when measured against social reality? Here we have to be careful about doing justice to the limits of the frame of reference - and this may not always be clear. Thirdly, are they inconsistent or false in view of another idea complex that is also known to be held by the person or group in question? This is one of the commonest forms of political attack: an attempt to disintegrate the party line. Finally, it may be asked if they are false or inconsistent in the light of views held by others. In this case it is up to the others to use moral suasion to get the holders of the idea to accept the supplementary point of view before they can really begin an attack. A great deal of political invective is wasted by assuming an identity of viewpoints when this does not exist. If any of the first three of these fail, the attacker is left only with the ad hominem mudslinging alternative - the appeal to look at what the man is not what he says or does, at whether what he does will incidentally be of advantage to him or his friends quite apart from the reasons for doing it. This might rather cynically be called pure politics.

The point of these various alternatives is that it is only if one of them holds that a true unmasking can be said to have taken place. It is most effective if one of the first three is used, but the barbs of the ad hominem attack can leave lasting scars if it is launched on a broad enough scale. The sociology

of knowledge approach unearths a great deal of material with which to construct a springboard for such an attack. And the other side of the coin is of course that it increases our understanding of the ideas quite apart from such an attack. The question of the intentions of those holding the ideas are of course irrelevant. Marx did not see the capitalists as necessarily evil men plotting the oppression of the working class, but also as sorcerers' apprentices caught up in a system of their own making, and so caught up that they were quite unable to abandon or change it and so could not, dared not, see its evil side. The explanation presents a challenge to the ideas and their holders however, insofar as it shows that the consequences which they anticipate are not in fact occurring and that the reverse of what they intend is taking place. What the explanation may show is the opposite though - there is just as much likelihood that it may give more reasons for preserving the present way of doing things, perhaps with minor modifications. What it is essential to remember is that the evidence supplied by the sociology of knowledge can only give grounds for suspicion. The evidence must then be turned on the ideas themselves to test this, though there can be no reason for not doing this.

So far it is evident that the first strategy of claiming that it does not matter whether ideas are socially determined is always unsatisfactory it quite fails to meet the criticism. In saying social determination is irrelevant and trying to mark off precisely what it is irrelevant to, this strategy fails to

explain on what basis it undertakes a social analysis, which, whether or not the social determination of such a basis is problematic, is at least a reasonable question. Before going on to the second strategy, which tries to spell out and to justify a number of bases for analysis, it is worth looking at a final variant of the first strategy that explicitly pretends to overcome this problem. Geertz begins his discussion of 'ideology as a cultural system'⁸ by encapsulating the difficulties in the maxim 'I have a social philosophy; you have political opinions; he has an ideology', p. 47. The confusion and difficulty associated with the 'problem of ideology' is displayed in the sloppy thinking which characterises the above maxim. In Geertz' view the way out of Mannheim's paradox, that if all thought is related to social position, where does ideology end and science begin, is via a clear non-evaluative concept of ideology which is theoretically distinct from non-ideology. There has certainly been muddled thinking in the reactions to this paradox: the question is whether such a program as Geertz sets himself is feasible.

The result of his efforts in its final formulation is as follows:

'Science names the structure of situations in such a way that the attitude contained toward them is one of disinterestedness. Its style is restrained, spare, resolutely analytic: by shunning the semantic devices that most effectively formulate moral sentiment it seeks to maximise intellectual clarity. But ideology names the structure of situations in such a way that the attitude contained toward them is one of commitment. Its style is concrete,

vivid, deliberately suggestive: by objectifying moral sentiment through the same devices that science shuns, it seeks to motivate action ... An ideologist is no more a poor social scientist than a social scientist is a poor ideologist.'

p. 71.

The problem of ideology is thus reduced to style - provided one writes in the correct dignified manner and draws no evaluative conclusions it is 'science'.⁹ As for Sutton et al.,¹⁰ whom he quotes at the beginning of his article, ideology is at most a question of bias, oversimplification, emotive language and adaptation to public prejudice. In taking this view Geertz totally ignores the fundamentally problematic nature of ideology, that is the claim that all social science is ideological, even if it is dispassionate in tone, consistent and sophisticated. The problem of ideology points not the matter of bias and oversimplification, but to the fact that all social theories make evaluative assumptions, and that these are explicable in terms of the social experience of those making them.

Significantly, Geertz begins by discussing ideology in general but then moves in his solution to ideological conflict, where political heat and confusion are generated.

'Culture patterns - religious, philosophical, aesthetic, scientific, ideological - are programs; they provide a template or blueprint for the organisation of social and psychological processes, much as genetic systems provide such a template for the organisation of organic processes.'

p. 62.

'It is a loss of orientation that most directly gives rise to ideological activity, an inability, for lack of usable models, to comprehend the universe of civic rights and responsibilities in which one finds oneself located.'

p. 64.

And this of course is just to miss the point: it is not a failure to comprehend, but a rejection of the conventional wisdom as only one way of organising social affairs, and one which has the consequence of benefitting certain interests as against others. The basic point at issue is not when and how ideological conflict arises - this is logically posterior - but what the assumptions of a theoretical standpoint are, and why they are so.

Geertz's implicit response to this is, like that of Bendix quoted above, that it is irrelevant. Provided the form of expression is safeguarded and is open to criticism, the social origins do not matter. Where they do begin to matter however, is that if it can be shown that one particular view derives from, or is compatible with, one set of interests and one kind of social position, even though this in itself does not compromise the validity of the view (except ad hominem), it does raise the possibility of creating a rival view based on an opposed set of interests, which is just what Marx did. The difficulty still remains in that the values and assumptions of the two are incommensurable and cannot be used in direct criticism of each other. They can be used however, to unearth facts which are detrimental to the other side and so can force an elaboration

of the other theory, perhaps to the point of absurdity or even self-contradiction. Something of the kind has taken place between functionalism and its various opponents in sociology - conflict theories, action theories, symbolic interaction theories and behaviourist theories, and among these various kinds of theories. In his emphasis on science and the correctness of the one true way, Geertz is thus quite oblivious to the fact that there is an evaluative and theoretical debate to be waged.

The only sense in which Geertz does recognise this inadequacy is in his discussion of the way in which ideology oversimplifies by refusing to recognise the existence or legitimacy of the other half of such dichotomous choice points as function-dysfunction, boundary maintenance and extension, consensus-conflict integration-autonomy. The anti-ideological view of this kind of recurrent theoretical problem is that both parts must be conceived of as one problem, rather than trying to defend one or the other. The long term result of this catholicism is no theory at all, since theory consists in taking an explicit view of the reality in question and claiming that one's view does better justice to it than others. When taxed with this, the anti-ideologist moves to eclecticism, claiming that different theoretical positions are appropriate for different kinds of phenomenon, e.g. a functionalist model might be appropriate for analysing the family in some societies, and a conflict model for industrial relations or some deviance. This also reduces the prospects for an overall theory to nil. It is only when

the various dichotomies and partial theories are related to the general positions from which they spring that their full significance in terms of the consequences of opting for one or the other in other respects, can be recognised. It may be, as Mills contended¹¹, that people act in terms of vocabularies of motive which pre-justify, and as Geertz suggests, programme their actions, and that they may not always be consistent in their use of the different vocabularies (or ideologies); that is not to imply that sociology should unthinkingly follow suit.

All in all, the first dismissive strategy for dealing with the subversive suggestion of Marxism, is unsatisfactory. It is not possible to legislate either by careful thought or by fiat, to separate off ideology from science, without begging the question. The only realistic path appears to be persistent theoretical development and comparison. But even accepting this vague recommendation does not bring the end of the matter. The next question to arise is that of the merits of the attempts to deal with the problem by accepting that ideas are socially determined, that this does have epistemological implications and that some effort must be made to establish a position which overcomes this. I will examine in turn the efforts of Marx, Lukács and Mannheim to do so.

Marx.

Anyone attempting, as I am, to give a brief exegesis and critique of Marx from a particular point of view on the basis

of a few months reading of a few of his works, some familiarity with his concepts and theories and a smattering of knowledge of the intellectual life and social conditions of his time must needs feel daunted, especially when faced with the scholarship and evident years of devotion that have gone into the production of the better commentaries. Yet it is quite impossible to escape Marx - he asks too many of the basic questions and came very close to providing many of the answers. He must be discussed, but inevitably in doing so I have to rely on some of the more careful and sympathetic secondary sources for the interpretation of crucial points. The great difficulty with him is that his writings, although obviously of lasting importance, were mostly very deliberately directed at a contemporary audience, with the result that a work like the German Ideology is now very obscure to the uninitiated reader except for certain obvious (and often quoted) passages. Because of this preoccupation, very necessary at the time, it often seems now as if Marx took extreme and at times unreasonable positions, and that he contradicts himself in different places. This is quite true, he does, and one is therefore driven either to attack him for this, as for example Plamenatz and Popper do¹², and successfully make an ass of him, or like more sympathetic commentators, discuss what he has said in different places in the light of the current debate and then try to elicit a more balanced, though not meaningless view.

On this count one can I think, be reasonably fair to Marx by making him consistent and without damning him too much, though he is not as I will show, entirely vindicated. From the other major difficulty he escapes less easily. Apart from being a social scientist-cum-philosopher, Marx was a revolutionary politician with all the emotion and rhetoric of his calling. It will become apparent that there is a deliberate and as I have suggested, reasoned tendency for him to conflate the evaluative and moral elements of this side of him with the factual assertions and insights of his intellectual self. This is particularly evident in the implications of what has been called his 'philosophical anthropology' or view of the nature ('essence' as he refers to it in Hegelian terms) of man.

A large part of Marx's intellectual struggle was to free himself from the current German involvement with idealism, then in its most extreme form, on the one hand, and to disentangle himself from the cruder forms of positivist materialism on the other. Like Weber, he never managed to make it satisfactorily, though he produced a notion of truth in praxis which goes some way towards doing so. In fact he was forced, for the sake of scientific clarity and from an abhorrence of idealistic mysticism to lean on the side of materialism. The following quotation from the German Ideology illustrates this wrangle in process.

'In direct contrast to the German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from man as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived,

in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real active men and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also necessarily sublimates of their material life processes, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development, but men develop their material products and their material intercourse alternately along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach the starting point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second method, which informs to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness.

This method of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract) or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists.

Where speculation ends - in real life - there positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity of the practical process of development of men. Empty talk about consciousness ceases and real knowledge has to take its place. When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence. At best its place can only be taken by a summing up of the most general results, abstractions which arise from the observation of the historical development of men. Viewed apart from real history, these abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever.'

Marx¹³ is desperately trying to steer a middle path here between idealism and empiricism, and although he makes many cogent points the overall impression is one of polemic rather than sound argument. If he will have neither the one nor the other, what is his third alternative? In practise a mixture of the two and an insistence on science. As Bottomore points out,¹⁴ and Avineri agrees with him,¹⁵ Marx's epistemology was implicitly that of natural science. He never explicitly discusses it because of his contempt (see above) for philosophy. It emerges in his fundamental belief that social phenomena can be pinned down accurately and laws of their operation discovered. His great difficulty is to reconcile this view with the voluntary action required for revolutionary change, which he sees as at once inevitable and the result of free action by men. As Stark puts it 'Marxism's most excruciating difficulty consists precisely in its enforced attempt to combine an objective determinism with a belief in subjective freedom'.¹⁶ He produces a quotation from The Holy Family in contrast to the one above. 'History does nothing. It is rather man, real living man who does everything... It is not history which uses men as a means to carry out its ends as if it were a separate person, for it is nothing else than man in the pursuit of his ends.' p. 139. Once again there is an attack on idealistic emanationism and once again a stress on real living activity which allows Marx to jump from voluntarism to determinism and back. For on the one hand he wants to say that men's ideas, and thereby their actions, are determined, and

yet simultaneously to say that activity is the determinant and is itself free. But the way he refers to real social relations implies that the ideas which are used to define them by the actors are implicit in them. The necessary assumption that men's activities can be defined separately from their own ideas about them bedevils all of Marx's attempts at a solution. There are three of these: the substructure dichotomy, which is the least satisfactory, the notion of objective interests which is more so, though it too fails; and his philosophical anthropology which works, but at the price of science, because as in the other cases moral precepts are introduced in the guise of fundamental but factual aspects of the human condition. To say that these are three separate ways of achieving the same theoretical end, the establishment of a sure foundation for social knowledge, is of course too arbitrary. All three are interlinked and can only be understood as part of a complete theoretical enterprise, for each are attempts to substantiate a commitment to a materialist standpoint.

In the last analysis, Marx's commitment to materialism is clear: as he puts it he ascends from earth to heaven. As Lichtheim points out¹⁷

' "Materialism" has a double meaning. It may be taken to signify the reality of the external world, but for Engels it also meant something else: the primacy of "matter" as an absolute substance involved in the constitution of the universe. Materialism in this sense is not a theory of knowledge but a methodological doctrine (ontology). It affirms that matter (or nature) is prior to spirit or ideas and that spirit is an emanation

of matter. Such affirmation can be neither proved or disproved. Their acceptance resolves itself into an act of religious (or anti-religious) faith. When Engels declared that he and Marx had adopted "Materialism" as against Hegel's "Idealism", what he meant was not that he and Marx held a theory of knowledge different from Hegel's, but that they regarded "matter" as in some sense more fundamental than "spirit". 18

It was unfortunate for Marxism that Engels survived his coauthor to impress his more rigid views on the subject on to his fellow communists.¹⁹ Marx himself was well aware that talking about materialism in human affairs was by no means as straightforward as for the physical world, since it was not simply a question of the physical activity of men, but also of the meaning it had for them. In order to talk as he did about deterministic relations between material base and ideal superstructure, Marx had to contend that men's ideas were irrelevant when compared to the long term collective consequences of their activity, that they were false consciousness. Although Marx himself, despite his fundamental ontological conviction, was not entirely deterministic, subsequent Marxist theories have emphasised this aspect of his work,²⁰ because it allowed for the claim that Marxism was scientific, being based on a sure material foundation, and historically inevitable, ideas being epiphenomenal of the material base.

The consequence of this is apparent in the following quotation from Lenin:²¹

'It is obvious that Marx's basic idea that the development of the economic formation of society is a process of natural history cuts the ground

from under this childish morality which lays claim to the title of sociology. By what method did Marx arrive at this basic idea? He arrived at it by selecting from all social relations the "production relations" as being the basic and prime relations that determine all other relations ... This idea of materialism in sociology was in itself a piece of genius. Naturally 'for the time being' it was only a hypothesis, but it was the first hypothesis to create the possibility of a strictly scientific approach to historical and social problems. Hitherto, being unable to descend to such simple and primary relations as the relations of production the sociologists proceeded directly to investigate and study the political and legal forms. They stumbled on the fact that these forms arise out of certain ideas held by men in the period in question and there they stopped. It appeared as if social relations were established by man consciously. But this deduction ... was in complete contradiction to all historical observations. Never has it been the case, nor is it the case now, that the members of the society are aware of the sum total of the social relations in which they live as something definite, integral, as something pervaded by some principle. On the contrary, the mass of people adapt themselves to these relations unconsciously, and are unaware of them as specific historical social relations ... Materialism has removed this contradiction by carrying the analysis deeper to the very origin of these social ideas of man; and its conclusion that the course of ideas depends on the course of things is the only deduction compatible with scientific psychology. Moreover this hypothesis was the first to elevate sociology to the level of a science from yet another aspect. Hitherto, sociologists had found difficulty in distinguishing in the complex network of social phenomena which phenomena were important and which unimportant (that is the sort of subjectivism in sociology) and had been unable to discover any objective criterion for such a distinction.

Materialism provided an absolutely objective criterion by singling out the 'relations of production' as the structure of society and by making it possible to apply to these relations that general scientific criterion of repetition whose applicability to sociology the subjectivists denied...'

By taking economic production as his basic problem and claiming that it was basic, i.e. that everything else should be seen in relation to it, Marx solved a number of problems by fiat, though as Lenin points out, Marx spent some time justifying empirically, the claim that economic relations were basic. The ontological belief in materialism thus identified with the economy meant that one could dispose of inconvenient ideas as false consciousness, and thereby of moral beliefs also, since one claimed that the belief in the economy as basic was objective and materialistic, rather than a plausible assumption linked to a moral standpoint, i.e. the belief that production relations should be reformed, and wealth redistributed. Significantly, although Marx's analysis and his method have long been applauded, his predictions failed to come about because they were based on too narrow assumptions - that in the last analysis it was only the economy that mattered - and because of the self-denying features of publicising such a view, which resulted in reformist compromise more often than it did in revolution. Marx's fervent belief in socialist values - in particular in the redistribution of wealth and the end of exploitation - has been partially obscured by his attempt to prove that what he wanted was also historically inevitable.

The clearest statement of the base-superstructure argument is contained in this famous quotation²².

'In the social production of their life men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total

of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society the real foundations on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The model of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness.'

In the Poverty of Philosophy quoted by Plamenatz²³ we find him in a mood of even greater technological determinism:

'The windmill will give you a society with a feudal lord, the steam mill a society with the industrial capitalist.'

Two words are crucial in the first quotation: 'determines' and 'being'. As Plamenatz points out, production is basic in the sense of being a basic need. Marx puts it as follows:

'The first premise of all human existence... (is) that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to make history'.

24.

This premise or need also generates the need for other things, e.g. property rules; but it does not determine what kind of rules nor indeed what kind of means of production. "Production" may range from an ascetic refusal, or mere lack of interest perhaps because of a benign environment and natural abundance to an industrial mass production obsession with material goods. Marx is correct in claiming that some kind of political order is required if production is to be collective, but he has no grounds for assuming that the mode of production determines the nature of the political order rather than vice-versa. What he did have grounds for claiming empirically, and I will come

to this in a minute, was that a given mode of production, the capitalist, had come to dominate the political order of the nineteenth century.

Avineri²⁵ gives Marx a way out in his interpretation, but it is a tautologous one. Marx recognised the existence of a basic substratum of hard fact - men's physical activities - which consciousness conceptualises in many different ways. The world we see is not only conceptually but physically shaped for us by society's previous efforts. Man shapes nature and so his relations with others in constant interaction with both. Marx humanises nature - men's consciousness is their activity in the world, the way they maintain and reproduce themselves in it. Thus social being determines consciousness because it is constitutive of it: consciousness arises out of social interaction. The base-superstructure distinction is not between matter and spirit but between conscious human activity and consciousness which rationalises about it. 'Determination' then, on Avineri's view, refers to the conceptual ordering of the meanings of every day activity into a consistent ideology, an apparently logical rather than causal process and thus not very remarkable. What Avineri may stress was remarkable was the reaction of the ideology back into the everyday productive activities to maintain them well past the time when they could be seen by Marx and others not to be doing the beneficial things Adam Smith claimed. Avineri recognises that 'being' includes the idea component that defines action for the actors as well as the simply physical

aspect defined independently by the investigator. Idea and observable movement are thus indissolubly linked in Marx's terminology, though he talks at times as though there were a causal relationship between them.

Marx's attempted resolution of this dilemma of scientific determinism and free will is indicated by Marcuse. Marx is driven to accept determinism until revolutionary consciousness arises.

'The concept that definitely connects Marx's dialectic with the history of class society is the concept of necessity. The dialectical laws are necessary laws; the various forms of class society necessarily perish from their inner contradictions. The laws of capitalism work with iron necessity towards inevitable results, Marx says. This necessity does not, however, apply to the positive transformation of capitalist society.

----- The transition from capitalism's inevitable death to socialism is necessary, but only in the sense that the full development of the individual is necessary.'

26.

That is to say, it is inevitable that things will get to the point of revolution and when that stage is reached, socialism ought, morally, to follow. 'Marxian theory is then, incompatible with fatalistic determinism ... True, historical materialism involves the deterministic principle that consciousness is conditioned by social existence. We have attempted to show however, that the necessary dependence enunciated by this principle applies to the 'pre-historical' life, namely to the life of class society.' p. 319. Marx and Marcuse are suggesting that up to the point where revolutionary consciousness is aroused men are deluded and

confused and unable to see the factual truth about their own situation and society. They are therefore unfree in the sense of being dependant on falsehoods. They can only grasp freedom through revolution when they are in a position to see it. The relationship of freedom to truth is well shown, but it is surely naive to assume that there is no truth before revolutionary consciousness. People are capable of seeing quite a lot even though they cannot fit their insights into a comprehensive pattern which true consciousness provides²⁷. It is also to conflate moral and factual ideas held by actors as facts to be studied, with an evaluative programme of action, to equate truth with revolutionary consciousness, since this is consciousness with a particular aim in view. The extent to which the inevitability and objectivity of true consciousness and its dependence on material conditions is in fact also concerned with the full realisation of a limited set of values is evident in these remarks by Gramsci on the development of consciousness.

'Objective always means "humanly objective", what may correspond exactly to "historically subjective", in other words objective would mean "universally subjective". Man knows objectively insofar as his knowledge is real for the whole of mankind historically unified in a unitary cultural system: but this process of historical unification takes place with the disappearance of the internal contradictions which tear human society apart, contradictions which are the condition for the formation of groups and the emergence of ideologies which are not concretely universal, but are rendered immediately short-lived by the practical origin of their substance. There is therefore a struggle towards objectivity (towards being free from partial and fallacious ideologies) and this struggle is itself the struggle for the cultural unification of mankind.'

This means that 'objective' is what everyone thinks when they all take the same value standpoint in their view of what is basic and important in society, i.e. a Marxist socialist one that economic relations are basic and that wealth and power should be redistributed. Gramsci is claiming that this ideal is a natural one. It assumes that harmony is a goal (removal of contradictions and conflicting interests) and that this is the principal point of difference of values and interests in society. In fact the distribution of economic goods may not be, or may not continue to be seen as a dominant difficulty and one worth revolting over; other bases of division of interests may exist and cross cut economic ones, e.g. religious, esthetic, sex, age. The Marxist argument is thus very exacting in that it contends that economic differences are and will remain both basic and dominant. Although there are of course interrelations between different kinds of values and interests - for example sexual ideology is at present closely intertwined and partially (though not necessarily) dependent on economic relations and exploitation - it is not plausible to argue in a reductionist manner (even if only 'ultimately') as regards all interests and values other than the economic. How far Marx thought seeing the truth was separable from seeing a socialist alternative is not clear; certainly he did not regard a revolution as necessarily socialist. In fact, the difference in value standpoints is probably crucial to making sense of the insights gained and ordering them into a meaningful whole. Knowledge is always from

a particular point of view. But this is not to deny that a great deal of knowledge can be and has been gained within the broad framework of capitalist society which has allowed it to adjust rather than be transformed. Socialist revolution is a potential watershed between knowledge and ignorance about society but it cannot be presented as the only and necessary one, nor can its association with a particular value alternative be ignored. As Elias²⁹ puts it Marx 'contrasted "Being" and "being conscious", "sein" and "Bewusstsein", in a manner which makes it appear that all forms and levels of men's consciousness stand in contrast to all forms of "social reality" at all times and all ages. One need not look for in order to recognise that this is an ideological overextension ... On closer inspection it is easy to see that men's consciousness not only conceals but also reveals. The picture men have of their social world, of what Marx himself still very much in a philosophical vein "called being", is sometimes a distortion and sometimes a discovery. Marx's theory itself is an example of both rolled into one.'

The notion of base and superstructure is thus rather inadequate in that it is very difficult to define precisely enough without thereby falling foul of the free will problem or begging important questions. But Marx had in fact good reason for his insistence on determinism. Nineteenth century capitalism was not only peculiarly monolithic, it was extraordinarily self-deluded. The blandness with which Disraeli referred to the two societies, was revealed as a far harsher reality by such

investigations as Engels's in Manchester or Mayhew's in London. The organised effort by the ruling class to suppress this from view and the long and careful construction of classical political economy and conservative ideology to obscure it, and where it could not be obscured, call it natural necessity, gave Marx ample reason to call on the working class to recognise the truth, that they had only their chains, intellectual and material, to lose. The positive side of the deterministic view of social ideas which this prompted was Marx's theory of alienation and commodity fetishism, though here again the moral overtones of his philosophical anthropology are evident.

Marx had to show, if his materialism was to be an empirically verified hypothesis as Lenin claimed it was, that everything did boil down to the economic relations of production. His chief means of demonstrating this was his theory of alienation, in the course of which he argued that not only could everything be seen as related to the economic order, but that it was in fact derived from and dependent on it. And to substantiate this he brought a wealth of information - statistics, observations, personal accounts, factory inspectors' reports etc. - to bear in Capital. His most important insight was the reduction of all activities to that of economic exchange value. 'The need for money is the true need produced by the modern economic system, and it is the only need which the latter produces.'³⁰

'The social division of labour, Marx declares... takes place entirely according to the laws of capitalistic commodity production. Under these

laws the commodity seems to determine the nature and end of human activity. In other words the materials that should serve life come to rule over its content and goal and the consciousness of man is completely made victim to the relations of material production.'

31.

Marx is again making two simultaneous points, though: that men are deluded by the system under which they live which feeds them false ideas, and in this situation they should rise up and refuse to allow the system to dominate them, as revolutionary socialists point out the weakness of the received views. 'Far from being a mere economic activity, labor is the "existential activity" of man, his "free conscious activity" - not a means for maintaining life but for developing his "universal nature".'³² A moral exhortation is embodied with the factual claim. Marcuse elaborates:

' "The object which labour produces, its product, is encountered as an alien entity, a force that has become independent of its product. The realisation of labour is its objectification. Under the prevailing economic conditions this realisation appears its opposite, the negation of the laborer. Objectivisation appears a loss of and enslavement by the object and appropriation as alienation and expropriation." '

33.

'The worker alienated from his production is at the same time alienated from himself. His labor becomes no longer his own, and the fact that it becomes the property of another bespeaks an expropriation that touches the very essence of man. Labor in its true form is a medium for man's self-fulfillment, for the full development of his potentialities ... In its current form however it cripples all human faculties ... The worker does not affirm but contradicts his essence.'

34.

' "Labour separated from its object is, in the last analysis, an alienation of man from man; the individuals are isolated from and set against each other (for example, in the job market) they are linked in the commodities they exchange rather than in their persons. Man's alienation from himself is simultaneously an estrangement from his fellow men." '

35.

It was this empirical argument that allowed Marx to argue that revolution was the only way out - people were evidently quite deluded as to the consequences of their actions for society as a whole, and most of those few who were aware sought only to suppress the radical changes that this implied. This made his contention that, in the words of a modern Marxist, 'Values are necessarily linked to beings who have needs, and the nature of these needs determines the character of the values,'³⁶ very plausible in the circumstances and lent weight to the belief that men's ideas, their actual consciousness, gives them very little understanding of how society really operates. But Marx's theory of how the change would finally come was based on an implicit premise that made nonsense of a belief in the total determination of ideas, that is, that the situation would eventually become so exaggerated that people would begin to recognise its real nature, and so take the appropriate action to change it, that is they would respond to their situation rather than as the determinist theory indicated react passively to it. As Lenin later showed, this change of political consciousness, even given revolutionary circumstances is not achieved without the political effort at persuasion and coercion on the part of the

party. People continue to be 'deluded' beyond the point at which things become crystal clear to the ideologist. Partly no doubt this is just confusion, but the Marxist term 'mystification' covers both this and a belief and adherence to values other than those of the socialist revolution. A desire for stability and order, a belief in deference to authority, pacifism, belief in private ownership despite exploitation, all these are political obstacles in the way of the revolution. They are conceived however from the revolutionary standpoint as anomalies which will be swept away by the course of history. In practice the party becomes the instrument of that inevitability.

Hence the following argument, purporting to discriminate right and wrong, true and false, relevant and irrelevant at one stroke on the basis of a materialist analysis is, along with Lenin's similar belief in materialism, highly misleading. It is a deification of the economic relation of production as material and therefore objective and hence as giving rise to objective interests, from which moral conclusions are deduced since ideas are the product of their social context. This is also the only possible standpoint, all others, and that in practice means all other people who hold different values or different hierarchies of values, being seen as trivial and irrelevant.

'In traditional moral discourse the necessities that give rise to OUGHT remain hidden, as a rule, from man. The OUGHT-form itself is largely responsible for this insofar as it represents itself as an a priori position to the realm of

necessity and not as its specific expression. In this necessary misrepresentation of the actual relations, OUGHT displays its character of 'false consciousness'. To get to the actual terms of relations it is always necessary to go beyond the immediacy of the OUGHT-form of discourse towards the comprehension of the underlying objective necessities, however deeply hidden they may be under the intricate layers of normative crust. In the course of much "demystification" it becomes possible to separate the 'genuine OUGHTS' which contain some actual necessity of the development of mankind from the 'reified OUGHTS' which have become independent of man and oppose him in the form of blind unquestionable, a priori prescriptions. (The latter represent the 'direct negation of human essence' according to Marx). Thus the questioning examination of the underlying necessities of OUGHT enables us to draw the necessary line of demarcation between the objective, positive function of moral discourse and its reified myths.'

37.

The 'necessity of the development of mankind' is thus identified with a particular value standpoint, and the moral reduced speciously to the material which in fact turns out to be the economic order as it is defined by Marxists at a particular point in time. The realisation of historical progress which is seen as inevitable at least in the long term is thus in fact the full realisation of this value standpoint, this particular theoretical assumption to which all others are related and subsumed. So far from materialism being a way to give moral judgements a firm foundation it is a mere sleight of hand for elevating a particular one beyond reproach or question.

To derive 'ought' from 'is' in this way involves saying (a) I know what the real basis of society is, (b) hence I can say how it will develop, (c) hence I know what the appropriate

values are for each stage, (d) hence I can distinguish true and false moral consciousness. The fatal step is to assume that even if you are right about (a), you will be about (b), because people might decide they want something quite different. You can only claim they will not if you contend that people are totally determined in their values by the kind of society they live in and that you know the key facts and values of that society. Though this is partly true, people also argue in terms of a range of autonomous and distinct values and about aspects of social relations basic to any society, and may make a variety of consistent choices in their practical lives. You cannot properly claim all of this to be false consciousness without simultaneously claiming your own moral superiority, which it is impossible to demonstrate. All you can do at this point is go in for moral argument and exhortation and apply whatever power you have to compel acceptance. That is practical politics, not social theory.

The action of objective interests is closely intertwined with Marx's philosophical anthropology which attempts to argue about the essence of man is labour and hence that his relations with his fellows in his labour are of cultural importance. Here 'essence' is used somewhat equivocally to mean both 'in fact socially most significant' and 'core of human nature and hence of human needs'. Once again then we discover both factual and moral elements in the same concept which once again leads us back to the economic relations as being of central explanatory significance.

'Revolution is necessary therefore not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.'

38.

Marx's revulsion at the situation he saw made his introduction of a philosophical anthropology with socialist implications all the more cogent. He was well aware when he was discussing it, as above, that it was not entirely the same kind of assertion as the empirical claims he made about the ideological obfuscation of social reality, yet he had a persistent tendency to treat it as though it were fact not morality, since together with his devastating factual analysis it constituted ample grounds for attempting the kind of development he sought. And it should be remembered in this connection that Marx's life was devoted not just to describing reality but to trying to bring about vast social changes, and nearly all his writings are more or less directed to that end. Despite the immense importance of his insight into the nature of alienated labour in the capitalist economy, his somewhat covert introduction of moral dogma as a starting point for his investigations and a spur to action is less directly relevant to us here, and is no way out of the determinism problem. Marx was unwilling to accept that people might not want the changes he envisaged because of a difference in values. That they were content with paternalism meant that they did not understand, they did not see. What he failed to recognise was that what he saw was partly new truths and partly

a socialist vision. He so emphasised^{the}/fact that it was only on the basis of a new moral vision that new facts emerged which discredited the old, and thus that fact and value were largely interdependent, that he failed to appreciate that people might still be unwilling to see his new facts because they could not accept his new values, or that they might recognise, selectively, some of the facts and locate them in another, liberal, framework. For Marx the revolution played the role of a watershed of truth and freedom. He did not always make it clear how this represented a change of values, at least in terms of participation in social relationships, as well as a change in the facts seen, a moral as well as a cognitive awakening whereby man could see the way to developing his full potential. While this moral element is the necessary value assumption for developing new systematic insights it is insufficiently distinguished from factual claims and treated as though it were the only alternative. He dismissed all others current at the time as compromises resulting from delusions fostered by living in society as it was, not as it could, would and should be. Stated this crudely Marx seems to be claiming a monopoly on truth of the most exclusive kind. Quotations can of course be found to defend him; what I am suggesting is that the core of his arguments lead to this conclusion whatever his various statements.

The notion of objective interests, to conclude discussion on this strategy, rests on the widening of the gap between two different uses of the term. We use it in a straightforward

evaluative way when, for example, we ask someone what their interests are, when someone 'declares an interest', or when I say that 'my interest is to achieve X'. Interest here means aim or desire, and it is necessarily true that people know what their own interests are. The fact that people do things is often taken as evidence that they want to do them. In the last analysis it derives from the fact that people want different and often competing or conflicting things. The other use, which Marx relies on and develops, is that in the phrase "it would be in your interest to ...". Here an outsider assumes he knows better than the person himself what the best course of action is. But of course to be able to say this he must know the general aim which the person he advises is trying to attain, and also that the specific aim he advises against is not an end in itself. If this is so, what he is doing is pointing out either a logical inconsistency in the person's deduction of this as a means related to a general end; the fact that from experience he knows it is an inadequate means or that there are better ones; or he may point out consequences of taking this particular line which have not been foreseen by the actor and which conflict with the same or some other general end that he holds. This can be seen to fit very well with the kind of analysis Marx undertook. He argued that the unanticipated consequences of men's activities based on accepted definitions were becoming increasingly far from the anticipated ones, and that people were living in a cloud-cuckoo-land. He was claiming that he knew

better than the classical economists how to achieve the utilitarian virtues. But he went further than this in claiming that the general values themselves were inherent in the system of activities. This, as I have pointed out is true in the sense that the values were used to define the actions but not in the sense in which it was meant, the sense which would make interests 'objective', that by participating in a system one thereby had certain kinds of interests in it. It was of course, reasonable to argue that the values of those participating in the system were inherited, not devised ex nihilo, and that their aims and desires were closely related to their position in the system. What was illegitimate was to claim that all the aims and values were determined by it, and that one set only was really implicit in it, the others being partial views and errors. The second corrective or guiding use of the word interest by another person depends on the tautology that the individual cannot in the last resort be wrong about what he wants: that is an expression of his attitude. Those individuals who despite all the revelations of Marxism, still refused to embrace socialism were (are) not necessarily being inconsistent: they may have a different moral and evaluative view. They may be content with and desire, paternalism, oligarchy, dictatorship or Fascism. Marx's insistence was that people should see in order to be able to choose. But that is not to say they would choose the alternative he wanted: if they were logically compelled to do that, once again his choice would have no meaning.

Marx's attempts to provide a privileged value position on which will enable him to draw evaluative conclusions from his studies of societies therefore fail. He is never able to show that a factual state of affairs inevitably leads to an evaluative conclusion as he would like and invariably has to introduce more or less covert evaluations into his factual analysis. We should recognise then that when we say that Marx's genius was as a political analyst we do not mean by that that he simply described the facts of industrialising societies. He had the insight he did on the basis of a moral vision which was essential for his analysis to penetrate as far as it did. Before entirely dismissing his attempts to justify his analysis as factual or his morality as 'necessary' however, I will consider the fresh attempts made by one of his later followers Lukács, who had the knowledge of what a revolution based on Marx's theory consisted in by the time he wrote.

Lukács

Weber, says Lichtheim,³⁹ drew on Marx, "Mannheim's work was an epilogue to Weber's" and the "important link between them was provided by Georg Lukács". As a committed revolutionary Marxist writing half a century and more after Marx himself, Lukács has inherited more of the narrowness and commitment to established theory of the years since the founding of effective Communist Parties, than the descriptive sensitivity and insight of the founding father. He has changed his views several times during

his life in response to Party pressures - History and Class Consciousness was reviled by Moscow when it appeared in 1923. Since it remains his major theoretical work however, most of his other writing being concerned with the interpretation of art, I will consider it here on its merits as it was written.

Lukács made two attempts to deal with the relativistic problems raised by marxism: that of truth through Praxis, rather than in theory, which is linked with his neo-Hegelian emphasis on the meaning of history as an unfolding totality: and the theoretical elaboration of proletarian consciousness as not only a means to revolution but as a path to truth. He also had quite a lot to say about the relationship between art and history, but since this would involve a discussion of his theory of art, which is complex, and since he is basically limited to the special case of art rather than all social thought, I will not consider his contribution here.

The development of proletarian consciousness, to take the second point first, Lukács takes as at any rate all but inevitable. His Hegelianism emerges as a stress on the forces of history rather than, as in Marcuse, on the individual as a source of ideas. Marx clearly showed how the unintended consequences of people's acts in the capitalist economy were often much more important than the motives when seen collectively. Men reflect on the antecedents of their motives and on their own nature but misunderstand them and hypostasise them as factors outside themselves. Marx called this process reification and tried to

show that it was open to men, if they understood, to take control of these 'forces' in individual and particularly in collective action. For as long as they fail to understand what is going on however, the structure operates through action regardless of individual will. Men act consciously, but it is a false consciousness; their ideas have an effect but historically not the one they appear to. The individual must be seen in a total context to recognise the objective result.

There is, however a basic opposition which becomes increasingly obvious, between the ideology in terms of which actions are undertaken, and the objective consequences for society. In the capitalist economy class conflict slowly rises to the surface through the ideology and makes these contradictions manifest. Unconsciously, a moral battle for consciousness develops into a class struggle. This increases the consciousness of the capitalists too, but this only makes the polarisation more evident and the ideology less and less adequate a mask. True consciousness, the recognition of what has really been going on in society, is inevitable as the contradictions are unveiled, but this can only finally be achieved after a successful revolution. Lukács recognises that so long as the proletariat remains a class, and before it has taken over, and embraced and included the whole of society, it inevitably sees itself onesidedly in contrast to the bourgeoisie, though it is in a better position to see more, since it is by far the larger class and the one that exposes the inadequacies of the existing view of society.

Truth for Lukács is inevitably from a point of view, but this does not imply that it need be one-sided in the sense of reflecting sectarian interests. He is interested in the truth from the point of view of the totality of society as being the most adequate conception. The proletariat, until it takes over and is identified with the society, still represents limited interests, since its main purpose is the elimination of the bourgeoisie. And in addition the proletariat will be involved with ^{and} confused by particular features of the struggle in which they are engaged. True consciousness is thus that which may be imputed on the basis of an analysis of the situation in its crucial, overall, objective features. By looking at the total situation as it develops one can estimate what the correct ideas are in relation to the unfolding totality. It is not clear whether Lukács believes that any knowledge of the post-revolutionary society is possible, but certainly he insists on the temporary nature of classes and of their practical truths, and seems to be claiming that what can be known is the 'correct' consciousness for the proletariat at each stage of its development by having regard to the total situation and ignoring local and accidental problems in the struggle. Thus the

'Twofold dialectical determination of "false consciousness" constitutes an analysis far removed from the naive description of what men in fact thought, felt and wanted at any moment in history and from any given point in the class structure. I do not wish to deny the great importance of this, but it remains after all merely the material of genuine historical analysis. The relation with concrete totality and the dialectical deter-

minants arising from it transcend pure description and yield the category of objective possibility. By relating consciousness to the whole society it becomes possible to infer the thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were able to assess both it and the interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society. That is to say, it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation ... Class consciousness consists in fact of the appropriate and rational reactions "imputed" (zugerechnet) to a particular typical position in the process of production.'

pp. 50-51.

By contrast, as Bottomore points out

'Marx states quite plainly that the working class will, through its own efforts and experiences, attain a fully developed consciousness of its class situation and aims ... What part would be played in this process by intellectuals, by political parties and movements, Marx did not examine, but it seems clear that these would in any case be subordinate to the general development of the working class. At the other extreme Lukács subordinates the working class to the "rational consciousness" expounded by party ideologists, and thus provides an intellectual justification for the unrestrained dictatorship of the party which has characterised all the Soviet-type societies since 1917.'

40.

And not only do we have a defence of the arrogance of the party intellectual, which has at least empirically been found disastrous, but when Lukács refers to the 'category objective possibility' what he means is that relations in capitalist society have reached a certain point at which the lines of battle between bourgeoisie and proletariat can be seen to be drawing up even if there is little open conflict. The intellectual's role is to grasp these objective facts and hammer them

home as a political programme. Yet of course Marx claimed that the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class conflict, thereby indicating the selective and evaluative nature - the specifically political aspect - of his point of view and analysis. Lukács' imputed rational consciousness is thus one in which this one issue, class conflict, is singled out as the only important aspect. This is at least to ignore the other possible bases of cleavage in societies before and after a class revolution, and also to reject as insignificant the various other possible value standpoints which may be held by members and groups in the society. It is, as Bottomore implies, finally to say: I know the way because I hold the right values⁴¹. This is the characteristic stance of the messianic politician and is fine provided he lays no claim to either its objectivity or its inevitability, but recognises that it represents his commitment and point of view, to which he will naturally relate contemporary political developments. This sense of the inevitability of class revolution (or any other kind of historical development) is clear in Merleau-Ponty's critique of Lukács:

'Quand on dit que le marxisme trouve un sens à l'histoire il ne faut donc pas entendre par là une orientation irresistible vers certaines fins, mais l'immanence à l'histoire d'une problème ou d'une interrogation par rapport auxquels ce qui arrive à chaque moment peut être classé, situé, comparé comme progrès ou régression ... bref s'accumule avec les autres résultats du passé pour constituer un seul tout signifiant.'

42.

The difficulty with Hegelian inevitability was, as Marx complained, that it lacked the element of praxis. Ideas do

develop over time but they do so in relation to reality and in the course of their practical application to it undergo modification. The inevitability of historical development relies on having grasped certain ideas which define certain fundamental social relations which it is claimed will persist until transformed in certain directions. But if the history of ideas shows anything, it shows that all ideas may be rejected or changed in any number of ways and that it is not possible to foresee beyond a certain limited period how people are going to react. There are too many imponderables because of the vagaries of human emotion and imagination and of political conflict.

The only meaning in history is the one men give it; there is none there to be discovered. The particular danger of a belief in historical inevitability is that the theoretician will lose sight of his own starting point, forgetting everything is from a particular viewpoint. Marxist theory comes to be seen as an 'objective' science rather than as an amalgam of incisive methodology, some theory and a set of values themselves derived from the very capitalist societies it studies. Lukács clearly falls into this trap.

'The category of mediation is a lever with which to overcome the mere immediacy of the empirical world and as such it is not something (subjective) foisted onto the objects from the outside, it is no value-judgement or "ought" opposed to their "is". It is rather the manifestation of their authentic objective structure.'

Lukács thus seems to be arguing that individuals and groups in societies will remain confused and deluded by their special concerns and social politicians. Only the intellectual can recognise the overall state of affairs for what it is, and respond appropriately. This he could do only in step with the evolution of the total society. Hence the inevitability of the unfolding totality consisted in its arriving at the point at which the society as a whole was ripe for revolution. This could then be perceived by the intellectuals, whose job it was to show that this was so by spreading the message, and by showing that it was the true message by the results it achieved.

Thus truth though visible on the basis of (a) development of the totality of the society to the required point and (b) being an intellectual and therefore able to appreciate the totality and not ^{just} misleading particular situations, is only finally attainable through praxis. Lukács makes the same kind of points as Marx⁴³ about the inadequacy of ideas when put into practice and insists on the collapse of the differences between them. I do not see how this is logically possible, though I have already accepted the reasons for trying to do it. Lukács' special condemnation, like that of Marx, is of course reserved for reflective theorising about the meaning and implication of actions because this gets further away from practical activity. He claims that ideas only separated from action quite late in man's development. What he does not say is that it is just this development that permitted Marx to see

what he did. His demands are realistic insofar as they propose the testing and working through of general and theoretical views - and not of course just science - in practical social reality, a tightening of the circle of action and reflection and greater rigour in thought and flexibility in outlook. But he goes on to argue as though truth were only available in practical action in a way that appears to rule out the intellectual reflection upon the total situation he had earlier emphasised. I fail to see how he could express or conceive, still less act on, a praxis which contained no reflection independent of action. 'Stick to the facts' is a laudable request, but the facts do not speak for themselves - they have to be defined and given the breath of life which is conferred by meaning. Any attempt to take a long term view of action, to plan, inevitably requires standing back and theorising, abstracting and generalising. What Lukács is denying it seems, is the possibility of this. To say that a theory is O.K. provided it is put into practice, is inadequate, for it is quite correct to claim that the process of abstraction is necessarily distorting. The question is whether the purity of praxis is worth the abandonment of theory. Given that his whole book and life were based on a very general theory, I doubt that Lukács or anyone else really wants to accept the implications of truth as only in praxis. If we abandon theory we depend upon the impulse of the moment. I therefore agree with his concern here, though not with his solution, which is logically impossible.

'Only by overcoming the - theoretical - duality of philosophy and special discipline, of methodology and factual knowledge can the way be found by which to annul the duality of thought and existence. Every attempt to overcome the duality dialectically in logic, in a system of thought stripped of every concrete relation to existence, is doomed to failure. (And we may observe that despite many other opposing tendencies in his work, Hegel's philosophy was of this type). For every pure logic is platonic: it is thought released from existence and hence ossified. Only by conceiving of thought as a form of reality, as a factor in the total process can philosophy overcome its own rigidity dialectically and take on the quality of Becoming.'

p. 203.

It is not easy to see how if thought is just part of reality rather than also about it, it is possible to conceive of a totality or anything much else for that matter. Even if we accept that it may be seen as part of reality for certain purposes, we can only say anything by standing outside and reflecting on it and on reality. I doubt that anyone ever pretended that the problems of society were to be solved by pure logic alone. And when he urges us to see the isolated act or fact in relation to a whole, we should remember that it is a whole of human origin, even if concrete and composed of 'factual reality'.

Lukács' attempts to construct a basis on which to describe society without prior assumptions but with dramatically evaluative conclusions therefore fail as much as Marx's. The search for a neutral vantage point has to be abandoned and the fact recognised that one sees different things (or makes different sense

of what one sees) from different positions, and thus that a defense of one's taking of that particular vantage point is a necessary part of a justification of one's account of social relations. The final writer on this problem that I shall consider, resorts to quite a different strategy. Mannheim, rather than assuming the social determination of ideas and then trying to wriggle out of the consequences, spends most of his time examining the nature of this 'determination' with the result that much of the paradoxical edge is taken off the consequences⁴⁴.

Mannheim.

Karl Mannheim spent his early years in Hungary, and so as an intellectual and a Marxist of sorts, he may be expected to have been influenced by History and Class Consciousness which appeared in 1923, as well as by Weber, Marx and Hegel who were his intellectual heritage. Unlike Lukács, he was not a rigorous thinker but he was a very sensitive one. Kettler suggests⁴⁵ that his fundamental insight was that social science in making itself rigorous and a discipline, thereby prevents itself coming to grips with the questions that it began by asking. It tries to pin down human thought and action in a way that is unrealistic, if anything other than crude and probably misleading results are expected. Mannheim, Kettler suggests, tried to be clear about what he was after in using the sociology of knowledge, but this led him to be necessarily imprecise in his analysis - he saw too

much. Certainly he is, as Merton⁴⁶ and others have complained, extremely difficult to pin down, and certainly he offered none but the most perfunctory solutions to the fundamental questions he raised. For instance as Bottomore⁴⁷ says, he does not answer the standard objection to relativism, that it leads to self-contradiction, since if your propositions are only relatively true, so are mine, including this one. Nonetheless, and despite some obvious mistakes, his contribution should in no way be underestimated, especially as a source of insight to the careful reader. The main area in which this is to be found is that of the relation of ideas to social structure and their determination thereby rather than his direct attempt to overcome epistemological problems. He developed his theory over his entire life, and thus there are considerable differences between Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge written between 1923-26, Ideology and Utopia, 1929, and Essays in the Sociology of Culture published in English in 1956. If it is not too misleading a thing to say, his change in attitude might be described by saying that he became less of a Marxist, starting with constant references to Marx and Hegel, and more of a sociologist, ending with references to Parsons. My discussion of him therefore necessarily has a chronological aspect. In his introduction to Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge, Kecskemeti states that Mannheim believed in the objective truth of history and in historicism as a successor to religion. The sociology of knowledge led to relativism but not to scepticism because truth

could be real for each historical period. He later abandoned this firm position but the problem continued to worry him, as I will show. Kecskemeti is also able to ask of him at that time 'Did Mannheim have a rigid "social determinism" in mind? It does not seem so. Unfortunately he never classified the kind of "determinism" he had in mind.' p. 29. Mannheim was clearly thinking in terms of some sort of determinism at this stage, witness p. 144. '... the fact that all thinking of a social group is determined by its existence', but even then he was well aware of the difficulties.

As Stark⁴⁸ points out, he came later to emphasise the non-deterministic aspect of what he called the unity of or immersion of thought in being - "Seinsverbundenheit des Wissens". At this stage he discusses the problem in terms of analysis of types of meaning, of which he describes three

- (a) objective meaning, the public, everyday, immediately recognised meaning of the cultural fact.
 - (b) Expressive meaning - the fact may be a vehicle for the expression of individual feelings and the elucidation of this kind of meaning depends on the persons involved on the occasion concerned and the subjective processes of the user.
 - (c) Documentary meaning puts the fact in a broader context and explores its relations with others. The difficulty of this is that in doing so it may question or reinterpret the other two kinds of meaning. For instance if I give alms to a beggar
- (a) apparently with an expression of compassion (b), a wider

knowledge of my character and e.g. the fact that I know there is someone around whom it is in my interest to impress, may lead one to suspect hypocrisy (c). Mannheim's comments, which are in relation to the interpretation of art, stress the non-controversial possibilities however - "From the point of view of the artist's activity it (documentary meaning) is a wholly unintentional unconscious by-product", p. 55. "Documentary meaning is a matter, not of a temporal process in which certain experiences become actualised, but of the character, the essential nature or 'ethos' of the subject which manifests itself in the artistic creation". p. 55. He does recognise a 'most radical procedure': 'This consists in taking theoretical utterances, aesthetic confessions of faith, which artists make in order to explain their own formal or expressive goals; these can always be exploited for documentary meaning", p. 58. though he then adds 'What we have to ask is not whether the theory is correct ...' He does later make the important point however, that objective and expressive meaning survive in 'bracketed' form in documentary meaning, i.e. it has to include them and is based on them, even if it implicitly rejects their claim to validity.

The difficulty of this earlier part of Mannheim's work, and particularly the essay on the "Interpretation of Weltanschauungen", is that he is still prone to Hegelian flights of fancy and uses the Weltanschauung, which is the distilled essence of cultural objectification, as his tool of analysis.

He does realise however, that this abstraction from reality prevents him from doing what he wants, that is from analysing reality. This leads him to say that although the particular cultural product (he still uses the determinist term) cannot be deduced from a *Weltanschauung*, it can be traced back to its 'global unity', and he draws an interesting contrast between understanding and explanation.

'Interpretation serves for the deeper understanding of meanings; causal explanation shows the conditions for the actualisation or realisation of a given meaning. At any rate there can be no causal genetic explanation of meanings... Meaning in its proper essence can only be understood or interpreted. Understanding is the adequate grasping of an intended meaning or of the validity of a proposition (this then includes the objective as well as the expressive stratum of meaning); interpretation means bringing the abstractively distinguished strata of meaning in correlation with each other, and especially to the documentary stratum.'

p. 81.

He seems well aware here of the inappropriateness of causal terminology for dealing with meanings. He is prepared to talk about the relations of ideas to their social context, but certainly not to claim they are the direct product of it - they have an autonomy and dynamic of their own which renders the overall situation ultimately non-deterministic, though it remains relevant to a full understanding to comprehend the links.

He elaborates this in the final essay, 'The Problem of the Sociology of Knowledge', where he distinguishes denying the truth of an idea from looking at its function, but he does not

then put the crucial question of how the latter is related back to the former. This is done by attacking ideas as empirical contingent claims and showing that they do not have, or do not just have those consequences which their description of reality implies when actually tested against it. One is then testing the extent to which ideas can be put into practice and what happens when they are - are conceptual and meaningful relations reflected in social relations? Only later in his discussion of relativism does he make an indirect attempt to deal with this question.

He does however ask the question whether we consider the ideal as unfolding itself conditioned by material factors or as the product of material factors, and concludes in favour of the former, emphasising that the artist is essential to the meaning of art. Real and ideal meet in the individual who has ideas about his existence - there is no radical duality of mind and matter. It is the mental element that makes economy out of mere hunger drives. Drives cannot explain history unless we assume they change. Each situation presents itself as a range of possibilities not completely determined. The more we know about the general conditions known to the actors, those unknown to them and of the actor's definitions, dispositions and attitudes, the more we will be able to predict. But as the actors probably do not know enough to predict what they will try to do, we will have to know more than they do as well as understanding them. The limits on prediction are thus in

terms of the actor's imagination - can we tell what he will want before he does? At times we clearly do, but we cannot unless we are clever than him at his own job, 'predict' his new ideas which are solutions to problems created by conflicts of meaning, or of meaning and reality. Old conceptions are sublimated and incorporated into new, but this is no additive synthesis: a genuinely new and distinctive position arises. Mannheim says that a change in the function of an idea always involves a change of meaning, but these are not crudely produced. The situation is recognised to have altered in some way and modifications are made to thought which reflect both the perceived change and the already existing set of meanings.

The tension which this approach creates is that on the one hand there is a necessity for giving a sociological and structural explanation of the meanings and social relations we see and have - understanding by itself is inadequate because people's own views are limited and ideas need testing in practice for their social implications. Yet against this, to begin this kind of analysis seems to lead to rejecting the autonomy and validity of all thought - explaining it away. But we cannot even do that, because we are confronted not only with the fact that if men define their situations as real, they have real consequences; but also that innovation has one set of roots in social relations and existing ideas and another in men's imagination. We cannot 'reduce' all ideas to social relations, because we always require some basis, some standpoint upon which to

launch our explanation. As was clear in the analysis of Marx, it is essential that this be clarified in relation to that which we would explain and that its axiomatic status be explicit.

We have to wait until the last part of Ideology and Utopia for any further mention of these questions. Here he modifies his earlier position, in saying that the genesis of a proposition is not always relevant to its truth. He argues that the explanatory function of the sociology of knowledge ranges over factors which increase understanding, give added reasons for the assertion, or question its validity. It is not always possible to make a pervasive separation of the grounds of an assertion and the asserter's personal reasons for doing so, based on his social position. This is true also at the level of basic assumptions and values - the relationship between the grounds of the assertion and the social situation is intimate and intricate. Progress is made by exposing assumptions and their social role and trying to get beyond them by critical comparison and synthesis, that is by the imaginative innovation that all thinkers of a systematic bent have always tried. We are simply made more aware of our own and others' limitations and of the implications of our suggestions.

By the time he wrote Essays in the Sociology of Culture, where he expands these non-deterministic notions, Ernest Mannheim was able to say of him in his introduction, that he distinguished four factors of ideation - situation, individual, imagery and audience - and said that to take anyone as an independent variable

was dogma. Mannheim quickly rejects the 'extreme view' that divorces the idealistic and materialistic views of history and society into a dichotomy as quite unrealistic. Ideas as they exist are articulated in reality. Of the materialist interpretation of history he says

'It may first imply the claim that the functions which meet the basic biological wants of man have a greater urgency and are less amenable to postponement and sublimation than are those which meet so-called secondary needs; secondly, economic activities have a more limited scope of variability than others, and therefore it is the latter which are subject to a 'strain to consistency' with the former. Finally, 'economic activities' have an absolute continuity and in that sense they form the primary basis of social integration. These propositions can be intelligibly discussed without recourse to the unrewarding antinomy of mind and matter.'

p. 35.

i.e. they can be discussed as basic theoretical assumptions.

The sociology of mind as he now calls it

'is not an inquiry into the social causation of intellectual processes but a study of the social character of those expressions whose currency does not reveal or adequately disclose their action context ... The blindness to the action context of ideas gains support from the fact that ideas remain communicable and seemingly understandable long after the social situation which they helped to control or define ended. Actually ideas take on a new meaning when their social function changes and it is this relation of meaning and function which the sociology of mind elaborates.'

p. 44.

His view of this relation is of an over-determination of 'causes' working on many different levels, and here he seems to conflate

reason, motive and cause. But at any rate he seems to want to say that a simple causal sequence view of the relation is inadequate. The language of reasons, motives, consequences and conditions, recognised and unrecognised is probably more appropriate. What is important is that he has now got away from overt determinism and regards it as a red herring. The thing to concentrate on is how ideas operate in actual men's actions rather than worrying about the causal determination of ideologies. Not only does the discussion become much easier it also becomes more realistic and flexible because the terminology is the same as that used with some sophistication, in normal accounts of actions and their consequences.

An example of the kind of investigation Mannheim was referring to is given by his last essay, 'The Democratisation of Culture'. He claims that there are three basic elements to democracy. (1) The essential equality of all human beings, (2) The autonomy of the individual - vital selfhood and self-awareness. (3) The existence of elites chosen by special methods to resolve the problem of order and enable administration. In fact the core of the meaning of democracy is contained in (1). The others follow from it in a quasi-logical way which only becomes obvious when you consider what would happen in a real situation. As with Michel's iron law of oligarchy, all one knows about mankind suggests the relationship, but he is in fact relying on generalisations of an unarticulated kind about 'human nature' to support it. Thus the relations between the

elements may be, and in the case of democracy, have been elaborated into an ideology to spell out the conceptual relationship between e.g. democracy and liberty. This is only finally possible on the basis of assumptions about the nature of man and social relations. Clearly, this process can be developed beyond the level of the 'self evident' to that where the part played by distinctive cultural-social variations is crucial, e.g. Weber's account of the role of the protestant ethic in the development of capitalism. The point to note is that it is the articulation of ideas with social reality that makes the meaningful relationship intelligible. It is not intelligible on the basis of a purely conceptual linguistic or logical account alone. The relations between the ideas are made by the social demands of the situation concerned.

Mannheim goes on in this essay to show how the concepts of democracy have developed and pervaded Western culture at all levels - in epistemology, art, politics, administration, justice. Similar links have been made to show the necessity of democracy and individualism for the development of science, via the role of rationality, which is also central to getting people to conform to a democratic order, and to exercise self-restraint in allowing elected elites to perform their duties. The check lies in the fact that their behaviour must be seen to be rational. From this derives the need for a quasi-rational political ideology for the elites, rational planning etc. instead of a reliance on innate fitness to rule by virtue of

inherited or magical properties. These links are neither straightforwardly logical nor causal. They are simply a demonstration of the relations without which the whole system could not have developed as it did, relations of ideas and of actors and the operation of ideas in social reality.

If we take an example of Stark's,⁴⁹ the looseness of the "determination" of ideas by social relations is made clear. He argues that you could not have had a Beethoven in the eighteenth century at Versailles. 'It was only the cataclysm of the French Revolution which released and unleashed the forces at once destructive and creative, demoniacal and angelic, which inform the music of Ludwig van Beethoven', p. 4. He is clearly arguing for a meaningful relationship between Beethoven's music and the historical social situation in which it emerged. He argues for the importance of certain dominant ideas and feelings - about what was acceptable or even literally thinkable at the time. He does not, as Mannheim does, explicitly use the term 'Geist' to refer to the emotional core of an age, but his use of rhetoric to make his point would support the view that he has a similar idea in mind. He talks in terms of the ideas, tone, assumptions, knowledge and social expectations of high culture, and suggests that they are expressed through individual works of art. A power structure is implicit in the background, but there is no reference to economic class, or political facts other than the French Revolution, which is not referred to except in the most general way as a momentous event and upheaval. He

is not making a strict inductive inference, but a surmise about the reasons for trends in thought to which both the motives and reasons given at the time and the relation of the thought to broad and largely unrecognised factors is relevant. This interpretive understanding can never be strictly predictive, but one does have to show how all the available evidence fits the theory without undue elaboration. On the basis of it one should be able to predict about and fit in other factors discovered later and make links with events and ideas before and after the period of concern. Such a view can never be strictly falsifiable.⁵⁰ What we must be able to say however, is whether something counts as evidence for or against the view, and here of course the action of what is 'undue' elaboration is crucial. One useful way of keeping his feet on the ground is used by Stark in his example: that is, of referring explicitly or implicitly to the view of the people at the time; as soon as our view begins to transcend or contradict theirs we should be cautious, since we are in fact accusing them, who had a great deal more evidence around them than we do, of being unaware of their own situation and its implications as much as we are.

Stark, as may be expected, goes on to reject the causal deterministic view, because he sees that the relationship is much more complex. Ideas progress not only by rational or philosophical argument or scientific experiment but through the medium of social relations and the fortunes of the groups

or individuals who hold them. The logical or factual incompatibility of two different views may emerge first not at an intellectual level, but in social relations themselves, with two groups of people wanting to do different things both for apparently good reasons. This was the basis of Marx's contention about the inevitability of revolution. He could see the rational defects in the ideas which confirmed the way society was run. But he predicted that even if others did not, the conflict would arise in social relations themselves, only later being abstracted to the level of intellectual argument about the basic notions behind the social relations.

Stark opts for what he calls functional interdependence between ideas and structure, though he fails to specify adequately what this means. His major error though, is in persisting, like his predecessors, in maintaining a radical dichotomy between ideas and structure despite his insights into the limitations of this view. His difficulties become apparent when he returns from a lengthy exegesis of different views on this vital relation, to a discussion of the implication of his view for free will.⁵¹ Thought and ideas need a reference to social reality to give them meaning. The dialectic of conceptualising, application in reality and reconceptualisation is limited both by the existence of a set of ideas which are inherited and define the situation, and by the situation itself, which, though susceptible of several or perhaps many interpretations, will exclude others. One is in a circle: one has

a situation one wants to deal with, yet one is limited by the situation itself in doing so. The sociology of knowledge suggests that historical and comparative work enables one to partially get out of one's situation and provide the different viewpoints, and so avoid assuming that how one sees what one sees is all there is to see. The problems of freedom and of truth then become closely allied. One cannot act freely unless one can conceive of alternatives and one cannot conceive of alternatives if one's horizons are sharply limited. But if one can make comparisons and has alternatives then one can evaluate the merits and truth of them one against another in a way that one cannot if there is only one view and set of definitions available. Freedom resides in the ability to reflect on what one does so that even whilst objectively one lives out one set of definitions and values in one's social relationships, one can imagine and believe in another.

The danger in the dichotomy of ideas/structure then, is that despite practical insights into the closeness of their relationship, one may still want to raise queries about which determines which, and as long as the dichotomy is maintained, these questions inevitably arise. Ideas, we say, are modified through being put into practice, take their meaning by being referred to social reality, define social relations and situations. Two things only make us want to see them as separate: our ability to conceptualise and abstract ideas from reality and strip them of their practical content, to analyse

them independently, and, as a result of this ability, our ability to innovate intellectually without immediate practical reference to social reality. As I have already indicated, these possibilities are distinctive of human beings and are what have permitted societies to develop, but it would be wrong to see them as more than a parenthesis in social reality, an artificial and inevitably temporary separation. If we are able to see them in this way and realise that our notion of social structure is an instrumental one, developed at a time when great stress was laid on the need to analyse observable social relations in a verifiable way with clear results, we can begin to see the positivistic implications of the term and the implied dichotomy. If you manufacture the one, you contrast it to the other and questions of which determines which inevitably arise.⁵² 'Structure' is seen as a rigidified scheme rather than actual social relations between men and ideas, as abstracted ghosts rather than notions in men's minds which guide their activities. This formalistic contrast is quite unrealistic in both its elements.

To question the necessity of the ideas/structure dichotomy and to claim that in any case the relation between the two must be seen not as one of causal determination, takes much of the force out of the paradox generated by the hard sociology of knowledge claim. If social structure is conceived not as a reified abstraction but as human action and is looked at in its implications for individual action in particular situations as

well as being an overall model of society, in the manner suggested in the previous chapter, the problems of determinism are less urgent. The problem of relativism remains however, though in less dramatic form. Even if ideas are not causally determined by structure, they and it still vary with time and place and the question remains as to what theoretical and value standpoint to adopt in analysis. But this is a different problem from that posed by deterministic versions of the sociology of knowledge, because it is no longer possible to argue for the superiority of certain viewpoints over others on apparently empirical grounds. The situation is one of the acceptance of the inevitability of relativism and then a discussion of its practical problems rather than vain attempts to transcend it. I have already said something about this in Chapter Two. Mannheim did make two attempts at transcending the problem. His elaborate build-up of intellectuals is an absurd *deus ex machina*, though it does lead to some insights I will mention later.

More extraordinary as an attempt at transcending the problem, and more interesting in the difficulties it raises even if we accept relativism, is his attempt to evaluate the assumptions he knows it is necessary to make for the depth of their cognitive penetration, thus giving a criterion for choosing between them, at least for any given historical period. The idea of 'congruence' or 'fit' is used here and is discussed mainly in Ideology and Utopia in relation to these two concepts and their

more or less inadequate description of reality. Already in his essay on 'Historicism',⁵³ he claims that not only must we all have our own point of view on history and that there must be constant reinterpretation in the light of the changing needs of our situation, but that each point of view has a different cognitive value and so some are 'truer' than others. When he comes to discuss this at greater length in his second work, though, he becomes very confused both about his claim and the difference between ideologies and utopias with which it is clearly bound up. What he wishes to say is that both are inadequate as bases for the description of reality, but that whereas the ideology is backward looking and conservative and thus unable to comprehend the nascent changes in society, utopias are forward looking and expect and even help to bring about such changes.

'A state of mind is utopian when it is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs.

This incongruence is always evident in the fact that such a state of mind, in experience, in thought, and in practice is oriented towards objects which do not exist in the actual situation ... In the course of history man has occupied himself more frequently with objects transcending his scope of existence than with those immanent in his existence, and despite this, actual and concrete forms of social life have been built upon the basis of such "ideological" states of mind which were incongruent with reality. Such an incongruent orientation became utopian only when in addition it tended to burst the bounds of the existing order.'

54.

The difficulty comes when he tries to introduce the notion of partial and total ideology and superimpose it upon this.

Whereas he regards all ideologies and utopias of whatever sort as necessarily limited because they represent a point of view, partial ideologies are actual factual distortions of reality and inconsistent within themselves. Conversely, utopias are also distortions but are truer in the sense that they recognise the failings of the existing order and point to a break with it and the establishment of a new one. Hence they are a source of progress. What he has to do here is to unite the fact that even the best of utopias are still from a point of view with the fact that nonetheless they should be accurate in pointing to failings and more importantly prophetic in being practically realisable in the new order proposed.

'Ideas which later turned out to have been only distorted representations of a past or potential social order were ideological while those which we adequately realised in the preceeding social order were relative utopias.'

p. 184.

His slide from the cognitive to the evaluative is made possible by the fact that although he has partial ideologies which contain factual as well as evaluative claims, and total ones which are sufficiently evaluative to be unchallengable by reference to fact, he has no such counterpart for utopias which are always fact - accurate comments on society's failings and practically realisable suggestions about its development - plus of course basic evaluations. Thus he is able to define ideology as follows

'This conception of ideology maintains that beyond the commonly recognised sources of error we must reckon with the effects of a disturbed mental structure. It takes cognizance of the fact that the "reality" which we fail to comprehend may be a dynamic one; and that in the same historical epoch in the same society there may be several distorted types of inner mental structure, some because they have not yet grown up to the present and others because they are already beyond the present.'

p. 87.

Further, 'All thought labelled "ideological" is regarded as futile when it comes to practice, and the only reliable access to reality is to be sought in practical activity.' p. 64.

The point is that ideologies hide the truth whereas utopias implicitly point it out by suggesting practicable changes which in distinction to ideological ideas will bring workable results if acted on.⁵⁵

This conflation of cognitive effectiveness and descriptive accuracy with basic value assumptions is finally apparent in the following quotation. Mannheim is ready to admit that 'The fact that our thinking is determined by our social position is not necessarily a source of error. On the contrary, it is often a path to political insight'. p. 112. What he is less happy about is admitting that value assumptions he disapproves of are as good as his and also a source of insight. He is quite correct to say they are necessary for us to see anything, what is wrong is the suggestion that some enable us to see more than others.

'The complete elimination of reality-transcending elements from our world would mean the decay of the human will. Herein lies the most essential difference between these two types of reality transcendence: whereas the decline of ideology represents a crisis only for certain strata and the objectification which comes from the unmasking of ideologies always takes the form of self-classification for society as a whole, the complete disappearance of the utopian element from human thought and action would mean that human nature and human development would take on a totally new character ... Man would lose his will to change history and thereby his ability to understand it.'

p. 236.

What is important here is the slide from 'reality-transcending elements' to 'utopias'. Mannheim's conclusion follows from the first, the fact that ideas are essential (or values if you will), but these may be interpreted through both ideologies and utopias, and as he recognises they are both distortions. He makes the latter into unreasonably noble ideas by saying that they not only criticise the status quo rather than supporting it, but make practically workable suggestions for change. Presumably he does this to protect himself from the suggestion that the Third Reich was a utopia in, say, 1924. He is quite unjustified in doing this. Utopias can be just as wrong and misleading as ideologies in theory and practice. And different general values can be successfully imposed in a society: societies may go 'back' to dictatorship as well as 'forward' to democracy. Mannheim is practically correct in pointing out the unmasking function of utopian ideas in relation to unexamined ideologies. The important logical, rather than psychological

point however, is that by comparing and contrasting two points of view we may raise questions about each and so increase the depth of our understanding. What Mannheim is implicitly recognising is that everything would be very much easier if there were a completely rationalistic ethics, and the particular suitability of one moral point of view could be successfully argued for. Unfortunately this appears to be true only within very broad limits. People tend to hold a series of values as absolutes, even if these are not particularly compatible, and it is impossible to get any leverage against them with a moral evaluative argument when the truth is held to be self-evident. And, as Mannheim realises, these values are not without their cognitive content, albeit vague; equality for example makes some reference to the relations between men and can be widely but not limitlessly interpreted in practical terms. Part of his point then, is that if we start with very different or opposing assumptions to those of the people we investigate, we are likely to be limited in the extent we can understand. This appears at an everyday level in middle class conservative complaints that they 'cannot understand the mentality' of student protesters, or in Dean Acheson's avowal that he could never understand why Alger Hiss committed treason.⁵⁶ This is one of the meanings of the sympathy needed to understand alien societies or historically distant ones.

Thus, we are left with a continuing dilemma as regards relativism. We are unable finally to detach ourselves from

our own time and social position and yet we need some sympathy with the basic values and attitudes of the groups we are investigating. Our prospects for the development of a single unified position or even a limited number seem dim. Our hope lies in practical as well as in philosophical and theoretical efforts, in continuing to bring our assumptions to the surface and to stick to them, and by comparison and careful discussion of others to achieve a synthesis of different viewpoints. We must remember that this produces a third viewpoint, but as with Mannheim's documentary method, the old are encapsulated in the new. How far this process can go depends, as I suggested above, on the prospects for a rationalistic rather than a subjectivist ethics, and practically on the degree of value convergence that naturally occurs among investigators. For this latter to go too far however would result in a deadening conventional wisdom and moral complacency. Far better that we should retain different points of view to inspire each other by pointing out what the other ignores. In any case the possibility of transcending the more basic theoretical dilemmas and dichotomies in this kind of dialectical synthesis is slight. Progress may be made in relating lower level evaluative positions to more general areas, so eliminating some possibilities, but the relationship between more general ones must remain, in Hegelian terms, one of anti-thesis. This calls for theoretical open-mindedness on the part of the investigator, a willingness to consider the alternatives when formulating his basic theoretical

assumptions and a continual awareness of the limitations and implications of his taking the position he does. In the sense that they are trained to cultivate and appreciate the importance of open mindedness in this sense, Mannheim's Freihscwebende Intelligenz constitute an important group, but of course for just the opposite reasons to what Mannheim himself contended. Like any other social group, intellectuals have a position in the social structure which gives them a distinctive life-experience as a result of which they are likely to be as one-sided as anyone else. Their only practical virtue is a constant autodidactic effort to overcome the constrictive and blinding limitations of this fact, to be aware that theirs is not the only view of the world. This does not imply an option for mindless or even 'dispassionate' eclecticism, but rather the assertion that a full understanding of what it is to take up one position is only possible if one is aware of its implications for and relation to others. To the problems involved in this and to the development of the other issues raised in this paragraph I address myself in the next chapter. The conclusion of this one must be the reassertion of the necessity of assumptions and of the resulting relativism, and the rejection of materialism as the basis of a social scientific methodology which attempts to avoid this, since in doing so it necessarily eliminates just those interesting and distinctive if intractable features of humanity which I have all along been concerned to preserve and account for in a non-reductionist way.

C H A P T E R S E V E N.

OBJECTIVITY AND EXPLANATION.

In this chapter I will take up some of the loose ends that have been left in previous ones. In particular I will deal with the practical implications of my views on the problem of objectivity and the nature of sociological explanation and indicate some of the limitations these impose on the discipline of Sociology. In the context of recent political events on university campuses, especially in America, fierce debates have taken place about the possibility or desirability of an objective Sociological discipline. I will draw on this material, but I would point out now what will be evident later, that much of it does not bear directly on the questions I am concerned with, for much of it has to do with the relationship between the sociologist as academic and as citizen, whilst I am only concerned with the difficulties for academic research.

It will be remembered that Weber, having accepted the inevitably evaluative nature of the sociologist's assumptions, stresses that they must be made clear: 'It is self-evident that one of the most important tasks of every science of cultural life is to arrive at a rational understanding of these 'ideas' for which men either really or allegedly struggle'.¹ He then maintains objectivity as essential to the method by which research

is conducted and reported: it must be clear and valid and allow of interpersonal replicability, that is be a public statement and not in any way a personal, subjective or esoteric one, although based on a personal viewpoint.

'It has been and remains true that a systematically correct scientific proof in the social sciences, if it is to achieve its purpose, must be acknowledged as correct even by a Chinese - or - more precisely stated - it must constantly strive to attain this goal, which perhaps may not be completely attainable due to faulty data. Furthermore, the successful logical analysis of the content of an ideal and its ultimate axioms and the discovery of the consequences which arise from pursuing it, logically and practically, must also be valid for the Chinese.'

2.

'...The choice of the object of investigation and the extent or depth to which this investigation attempts to penetrate into the infinite causal web, are determined by the evaluative ideas which dominate the investigator and his age. In the method of investigation, the guiding "point of view" is of great importance for the construction of the conceptual scheme which will be used in the investigation. In the mode of their use however, the investigator is obviously bound by the norms of our thought just as much here as elsewhere. For scientific truth is precisely what is valid for all who seek the truth.'

3.

Consequently, the truth which is sought will be truth which it is thought worthwhile to discover and 'An attitude of moral indifference has no connection with scientific "objectivity".'⁴ Failure to recognise the necessity for value assumptions and hiding behind 'science' is thus really a failure to practice science. Mills echoes Weber in words more relevant to our time:

'To say that "the real and final aim of human engineering" or of "social science" is "to predict" is to substitute a technocratic slogan for what ought to be a reasoned moral choice.'

5.

This raises more problems than it solves, however. In the first place, do not moral commitment and value assumptions imply that value-judgements may be drawn from completed research and that the investigator should therefore stand by the moral point that he is committed to publicly? Consequently is it not merely another cop-out to fail to defend this point of view passionately and campaign actively in favour of it, i.e. if it is 'honest' to make explicit value assumptions does not this same honesty require an overtly political stance? But if this is so, how can one hope to do justice to the views of the actors that one is investigating - will the result not be a crude misrepresentation? Or perhaps one should completely identify with the actors in an attempt to render unproblematic the relation between their views and the researchers', the moral choice then being in terms of which groups of actors you study? Finally, what of the relationship between the various viewpoints taken by different investigators - do they remain relativised and isolated or can they be integrated?

On the first question, the admissibility of value-judgements, as opposed to value assumptions, Weber emphasises that the former does not follow from the latter:

'It should be recalled that the expression "relevance to values" refers simply to the philosophical interpretation of that specifically scientific "interest" which determines the selection of a given subject-matter and the problems of an empirical analysis.'

In empirical investigation, no "practical evaluations" are legitimated by this strictly logical fact.'

6.

Weber is clearly very worried about the possibility of the classroom or the lecture hall being turned into a political platform, with the inevitable result that another vital component of objectivity, the ability to recognise and account for facts inconvenient to one's theoretical position is lost. He says elsewhere

'I am ready to prove to you from the works of our historians that whenever the man of science introduces his personal value-judgement a full understanding of the facts ceases ...

To take a practical political stand is one thing, and to analyse political structures and party positions is another.'

7.

Weber's contention appears to be that such value-judgements are often additional or extraneous to the guiding value assumptions, and that in any case although specific evaluations can be shown to derive from and be justified by general ones, they cannot be deduced from them. However, Weber does talk of the clarification of value assumptions in terms of means and ends and envisages a final statement of research results ideally in terms of the implications practically of adopting a value standpoint to a particular real situation. What it seems Weber may claim is that specific value-judgements only follow insofar as (1) the value assumption is accepted - Weber envisages little rational argument about this (see below) and (2) that the situation involved is in fact how it is described in the research. Now

this is arguably never the case for two reasons. First, all research necessarily abstracts and simplifies reality in defining the nature and scope of the problem to be investigated e.g. one looks at the organisation of political parties or religious denominations and not at the same time at the individuals involved as individuals, nor often at the immediate practical concerns of either these individuals or the organisations. Social science is concerned with the generalities of the situation whereas real situations, and this is the second point, are made up of conflicting complexities of demands and possibilities and various levels of evaluation of both ends and means. To make a value-judgement about a particular situation is thus to move from the schematic plane of the investigation to the plane of reality where decisions cannot be so simplified. Research involves limited value assumptions, a simplified and abstracted analysis of the situation in certain of its respects. Value-judgements imply action in the real situation taking all its aspects into account and thus involving both further empirical judgements about aspects of the real situation not included in the research definition, and further value assumptions about the other values and interests involved, and finally an essentially political decision in saying what practical course of action is to be taken, political because in most cases the conflicting views and interests cannot be rationally and systematically reconciled. Against this it can be argued that what this value-judgement will amount to, for any individual making it is a

decision that certain aspects and possibilities are more important than others, a moral decision that one view ought to predominate. Hence the value-judgement is as one-sided and limited as the research. This is misleading insofar as it is only one-sided and limited after taking all sides of the situation into account, or deliberately refusing to in some cases, but at any rate recognising that the decision is one pertaining to all aspects and not deliberately circumscribed beforehand in a manner which from the point of view of practical value-judgements is arbitrary. Value-judgements thus follow from value-assumptions only insofar as either there is a recognition that the situation is simplified, or insofar as there is subsequently a further moral decision that the respects with which the research deals are of overriding importance and thus must be the basis for action.

This position has often been made out as absurd recently, by writers who point out the political consequences of sociological knowledge. Their point is that whether or not the sociologist draws value-judgements from his value-based research, others certainly will and do. His research results will be used to further political ends and he is failing morally if he refuses to recognise this and stand up politically for what he believes in. Nicholaus is one of the more trenchant critics of this sort:

'Sociology has worked to create and increase the inequitable distribution of knowledge, it has worked to make the power structure relatively more powerful and knowledgeable, and thereby to make the subject population relatively more impotent and ignorant

Is it an accident that industrial sociology arose in a context of rising "labour troubles", that political sociology grew when elections grew less predictable, or that the sociology of race relations is now flourishing - to name only a few examples here?

As sociologists you owe your jobs to the union organisers who get beat up, to the voters who got fed up, to the black people who got shot up.'

8.

Now, it looks here as though Nicholaus is echoing Mills' statement that 'Research for bureaucratic ends serves to make authority more effective and more efficient by providing information of use to authoritative planners,'⁹ but this is not really the case. Mills' point is about the necessity to make explicit one's value assumptions and to make the assumptions in the knowledge that research will be used by others for practical purposes. The former is a claim about the nature of sociological enquiry, a methodological point, the latter is a moral point about the sociologist as an individual, and it is to the latter that Nicholaus addresses his remarks. The link between the two is that if moral assumptions mean anything qua morals rather than qua assumptions 'for the sake of argument' or 'for the time being' on which to base an enquiry, if morality is significant to the sociologist who must make the assumptions, then obviously he should consider the moral and political consequences of doing so. If however he is amoral as both Mills and Nicholaus fear many sociologists are, the only point one can press is that they must make whatever assumptions they do have 'for the time being' or to fit in with the prevailing view, explicit. It is only

as individuals that they may be exhorted to consider morally the importance of their work. This argument is of course essentially the same as that of the Nazi doctors in the concentration camps who justified their vile experiments by saying 'We are scientists and our work is scientific.' That was and is true. For sociology however, there is an additional problem in that it may be doubted whether someone with a purely 'scientific' attachment to his assumptions and approach to the people who are his data, can do his job successfully. This leads me to the second problem, that of the desirability of passionate involvement in the people one is investigating.

It has been often said, especially recently, that because sociology involves the attempt to understand social action before anything can be begun by way of explaining it, an identification with the actors concerned and their situation is necessary. Weber's argument for Verstehen¹⁰ has given rise to the method of participant observation, with the problems inherent in the balance of the two aspects of participation as insider, and observer as outsider. The anthropological fieldwork tradition is familiar with this problem and the researcher back from two years or so in the field is systematically 'talked down' by his colleagues as his identification with his fieldwork situation comes out in his reports of what he saw and experienced. In its extreme this identification takes the form of 'going native' and 'forgetting' western society altogether. For sociologists the problem is less extreme, because periods of time in the

field can alternate more frequently and easily with discussion with academic colleagues. The importance of identification, sympathy and involvement is evident in a classic of participant observation like Whyte's Street Corner Society, where the author had to be systematically educated from the initial innocence of his view of the world from middle class white Harvard. Recently the problem has re-emerged in the debate about 'taking sides'.¹¹ When we investigate a deviant group, does the necessary sympathy required to understand the group imply a presenting of the world as that group experiences it, and only thus, so taking sides against those who would control its deviance?

There are two questions here. One is whether or not passionate commitment is necessary or desirable in research as an aid to getting all the facts and understanding fully what is going on. The other is what the relation is between the views of the investigator, and those he investigates: must he suppress his own views for fear of disturbing theirs? And if he does, what does he do about the different or opposed views of other groups - does he merely report and leave it at that? Whyte's study is again illustrative. He could not have achieved the thorough understanding he did unless he had been prepared to participate sympathetically in the life of Cornerville, to learn about that way of life, its values and beliefs, and to suspend his own judgements at least temporarily. He certainly could not have done it just by looking at what people did, failing to make the effort to understand why they did it, what the meaning

of their practices was to them and of what importance they were. By extension it is arguable that commitment to the values of the people investigated increases sensitivity and insight and so leads to fuller understanding. But there are difficulties with this. Whyte remarks that he began as a non-participating observer, became a non-observing participant and only finally approximated to a participant observer. From the research reports of many participant observers it appears that the usual role for the successful researcher is that of group member but with a special status that might be described as trusted and friendly outsider. It is recognised by all that there are certain things he will not want to do and will not be expected to do, but then nor will he have the responsibility of doing or having done them. He will however, join in sufficient activities to count as a group member and perhaps a friend of other members. For the purposes of his induction or socialisation to this point he will have to go through the process of being inundated with the group's culture, of over-conforming while he demonstrates his sympathy and learns the culture and his position. At this time he will be a non-observing participant and his critical faculties will be dulled and his identity outside the group in abeyance. As he becomes more sure of himself and accepted however, he will become a sociologist again and begin to look carefully both at what members say and believe and at what they do, and to compare the two for consistency and unintended consequences. If he does not 're-emerge' in this way he will

become merely a spokesman for the group. If that is what he wants, all well and good, but that is a personal decision and precludes sociology. If on the other hand he is never fully accepted into the group but nonetheless ardently desires to give a 'full and fair' account of it, he is in danger of sentimentalising and romanticising the group, stressing only those aspects which appeal to him as an outsider. He will enjoy the hipness of the addict, the vainglory of the mobster, without appreciating that these are superficial aspects of the life experience of either.

It is possible also that, avoiding either of these difficulties, he may become a genuine participant observer and afterwards, when writing up his research, emphasise the view of the group because he feels that its view has not had a proper public hearing in relation to those of different or opposed groups: the view of the vandal say, in relation to the views of police, magistrates and social workers. This is a legitimate strategy but it is one based not on the demands of research per se, but on the potential audience for the completed research. Weber's view that politics should thus have been kept out of the lecture hall has since been decried as liberalism and moral weakness. That depends on the audience. If the audience is the Police Federation, that is a political fact which should be taken into account when delivering the lecture. From the point of view of sociology as a discipline however, such matters only arise to the extent that the lecturer believes the professional

audience has in the past consistently neglected certain views and that consequently, these need stating loudly and rhetorically to get the point across. S. Lynd puts the matter clearly, drawing on his own experience.

'The tension between the rhetoric of truth-telling and the rhetoric of ethical commitment was exhibited during the recent contretemps between myself and the board of Governors of Chicago State College. Among the professors who formed the ad hoc defense committee there were three positions. One was that a teacher necessarily teaches the whole of what he thinks and therefore should have the right to say anything that he wishes in the classroom.

A second position held that whatever considerations of academic appropriateness might apply to on-campus utterances, off-campus a teacher should be free to advocate like any citizen.

My own attitude was different from both the foregoing. In contrast to the first position, it seemed to me that there was a difference between the low-keyed presentation of intellectual alternatives and the attempt to kindle in an audience an awareness of some indignity. Both seemed to me important things for the man of intellect to do; yet they are different; and my instinct was to accept the proposition that a classroom is a place where one's purpose should not be persuasion, but an opening up of possible new ways of seeing things.'

12.

This does not of course imply that there are no values and no persuasion in the classroom or in research. The point is that those that are there are limited and clearly stated, and the aim of that game is not persuasion at any price but the examination of alternatives and their implications. If rhetoric does enter in, the danger is that specious arguments will be constructed by the introduction of further evaluations and by

carelessness in attention to facts, and that attention to contradictory and supplementary facts will be slight. The ability to engage in dispassionate discussion on subjects which arouse great feeling, and the ability to empathise with people and situations one is unfamiliar with are abilities that it is essential that an academic training should provide. It was in this sense that I believe Mannheim was correct to talk of unattached intellectuals. What it is important to remember though, is that it is only by constant contrivance that they remain detached. As men they are as passionate as others. Passion is thus a two-edged instrument: it is an aid to insight, but it blunts judgement. It has its uses in certain stages of research, and before certain audiences, but for academic progress to be made, something similar to a Wordsworthian 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' is required. If this is not maintained as the core of the academic process the result is not just radicalism - that might be a justification, and in certain circumstances may be necessary politically - but confusion. If academic study means anything, it represents an attempt to clarify matters that are confused no matter how tedious, painful or seemingly irrelevant that process may be.

This does not fully resolve the question of the relation of the sociologists' viewpoint to those of the people he studies however, linked as it is with the question of how he decides upon which viewpoint to adopt in any case. The sociologist's assumptions enter in both in his selection of a particular group of

people to study and in the respects in which he thinks it important to study them - his definition of his research problem in practical and theoretical terms. Very little research is purely ethnographic in the sense of only reporting on the world of the actors. The sociologist's views select and evaluate, partly explicitly in a concluding chapter, partly implicitly in what they leave out in their account of the actors existence. Thus, in Whyte's study, although a considerable insight is evident, certain, sometimes rather embarrassed overtones of W.A.S.P. liberalism appear. Whyte makes very little attempt to locate his study in a theoretical framework and thus does not have to confront the value problem at this level. It is left to Homans in drawing upon Whyte in The Human Group to make one attempt at this. Homans uses Whyte's data as part of the foundations of a behaviourist exchange theory of interaction. Such a theory has its assumptions, though Homans says little of them, and Whyte's study is used as data to articulate them and fill them out with empirical propositions. Homans is not interested in Cornerville, its culture or its values, only in the fact that there were groups in it. Because he ignores the fact that there are at least two previous selections and structurings of the data he uses, Homans is able to tacitly assume that the theoretical position he employs can be reconciled with the views of reality held by Whyte's informants and by Whyte himself. As a behaviourist, Homans' contention is naturally that such matters are irrelevant, since all he is looking at is the behaviour; the fact

is there are groups both there and for example on the Trobriand Islands and the activities of the members of them display certain similarities. Very well, but why? To a limited extent it may be possible to make tentative generalisations about the behaviour of people in groups because of their form or structure, but this will always be limited and itself prone to falsification insofar as what it says or predicts is at odds with the values, purposes and beliefs of the groups. It is no use saying that groups tend to produce leaders, of groups who have a commitment to being leaderless: on the contrary they will 'tend' not to. At some point therefore, the investigator has to confront the view of reality which his research subjects have with the view from which he is conducting the research. This will not be easy, and often the subjects' view will be so unarticulated and limited as to make it impossible to express as a *Weltanschauung*, and consequently compatible by default with various theoretical positions. Nor will theoretical positions necessarily be at all concerned with the same kinds of things that actors are - certain of Homans' characteristics of group structure may be a matter of utter indifference to the people who were used as data both per se and in terms of the consequences of the predictions Homans makes about them. But at certain points, and this is obviously clearer when the question is what the nature of the whole society is like and what is important in it, at certain points conflicts will appear between researchers' view and actors' view. There is no point trying to pretend someone with a

bi-polar view of class has a hierarchical one. At these points the relationship between actors' and sociologists' views and assumptions must be clarified and differences admitted where they exist. And at these and other points the selection made by the sociologist from the world of the actor must be evident, and the world of the actor maintained in view so that the limitation it imposes upon that reality the sociologist studies, namely the actors' social reality, are clear. For if the sociologist is free to draw on the actors' actions and views in substantiating his theory without full regard to the actors' world, he will be enabled to present a picture (or theory) of social action which is in fact a product of a selection derived from his theory and which conveniently ignores all those other aspects of actions that are included in the actors' views but not in the sociologists' theory. Theory may thus be used to generalise and make comparisons provided that due attention is paid to the importance of what is thereby left out.

The inherent difficulty of the relationship between actors' and sociologists' views is but an instance of the more general problem of relativism and its converse, cumulativity. For if there is difficulty in deciding which theoretical viewpoint to adopt, which value assumptions to make, there is thus the probability of research and theories on several incompatible bases and hence the problem of their reconciliation. There have been a variety of responses to this difficulty. Functionalists replied by saying that there was only one possible

theoretical position, their own.¹³ Others have piously awaited the arrival of a theoretical messiah, usually likened to Einstein or Newton, who will resolve all theoretical difficulties. Some Marxists have thought that Hegel was onto something with his development of the dialectic. Myrdal suggests simply adopting the views of those you investigate.¹⁴ Weber's response was to accept relativism as a fact of sociological life and to reject any possibility of justifying value assumptions or conducting much rational argument. '

'The elevation of these ultimate standards, which are manifested in concrete value-judgements, to the level of explicitness is the utmost that the scientific treatment of value-judgements can do without entering into the realm of speculation. As to whether the person expressing these value-judgements should adhere to these ultimate standards is his personal affair; it involves will and conscience, not empirical knowledge ... To judge the validity of such values is a matter of faith.'

15.

This implies a radical subjectivist ethics in which rational debate about values ceases at an early point. This is confirmed and modified later:

'The fate of an epoch which has eaten of the tree of knowledge is that it must know that we cannot learn the meaning of the world from the results of its analysis, be it ever so perfect; it must rather be in a position to create this meaning itself. It must recognise that general views of life and the universe can never be the products of increasing empirical knowledge, and that the highest ideals, which move us most forcefully, are always formed only in the struggle with other ideals which are just as sacred to others as ours are to us.'

16.

The implications of 'creating meaning for oneself' in a 'struggle with others' ideals' indicates that Weber acknowledges that while straightforward discussion and analysis can do no more than set out and juxtapose different views, a consideration of their practical implications helps to resolve conflicts, and that in practice such conflicts are overcome if at all in the political arena. There are elements of persuasion, exhortation and coercion in any moral conflict as well as rational discussion. The danger of Weber's acceptance of relativism is clear if we look at its consequence in this statement by Douglas

'Ours is a pluralistic society in which there are basic disagreements over morality, beliefs and almost anything else. If a sociologist identifies himself with a group or cause as distinct from involving himself temporarily in order to study the group, his understanding of the social world from the standpoint of that group or cause will increase, but his understanding of this highly pluralistic society will not. Rather than encouraging the taking of single standpoints, which lead only to opportunistic truths about our society we must encourage just the opposite, the attempt to understand, analyse and synthesise the multiple social realities, moral and cognitive, of a pluralistic society.'

17.

To which all radicals will yell Fink! Douglas conceptualises the matter badly, by presenting the options of either beginning with a single view or being eclectic. The aim should be to understand the various viewpoints of different societies and groups in society certainly, but not to give up the search for and construction of a single theoretical standpoint in the course of this, by constantly discussing the relation of these different views to each other in reality, and relating them to crucial

theoretical problems. It is not a matter of discovering the views of the juvenile delinquent, the middle class public, the working class public, the police, the courts, the government and the church but of seeing first how all of these groups relate to each other in reality and with what consequences for their views of each other. And the next step is not to take each view separately and try to reconcile it with the view of the next, and so on, but to ask how all of them can be explained as a totality and why they relate as they do to each other. To say that requires theoretical insight and imagination, that is, it requires one to think of all of them in terms that none of them would use of themselves or of each other, but which take account of these terms.

In practice it also requires one to relate the various views to basic assumptions about the nature of man of society, questions with which actors as well as sociologists often have to deal, explicitly or implicitly. It is unlikely, and perhaps as Douglas implies, undesirable that any final answers will emerge, but at least it should be able to be said that the alternatives have been reduced to the smallest possible number by argument and demonstration of their consequences, and at least the choice that is made for a particular theoretical position will be an informed one both in terms of awareness of alternatives and of awareness of its limitations when dealing with actors with whose views it conflicts. For in the last analysis the sociologist must realise that the theory he uses

and discusses is far from being the creation of his own discipline but is the result of generations of intellectual reflection and practical action which was done not just with his aim of understanding and explaining society, but of ordering it, changing it, acting in it and living in it. Theoretical assumptions have about equal parts of moral-evaluative and cognitive aspects. They constitute not only a emotional attitude towards reality but the germ of a practical guide. They are the components of the various answers as to what we shall do and how we shall order our lives. In this very important sense it is clear that sociology is about not only what social reality is but what it might be. And it is in this sense that a single view is unlikely, for that would solve an extraordinary number of problems, some of which at least will exist as permanent dilemmas in any event. The prospects for the end of relativism and the beginning of a cumulative social theory thus seem limited, but that is not to decry the enterprise of seeing this as an ideal.

The beginnings of a way round this difficulty may lie in recent attempts to reappraise the possibilities of a rationalistic ethics. There are several possibilities. It would indeed be convenient if we could establish a single ethical system on grounds sufficiently clear and independent as to compel any rational being to accept them and it. Some moral philosophy seems at times to be trying to argue in this direction, but it is sobering to consider that if this could be done, moral debate of a general kind would end, and it would be a tedious matter

of application to cases. Another possibility is that a morality appropriate to each society in each age might be established. Argument would then revolve around whether or not it had outgrown its usefulness. Another is that for each time and place there might be several moralities competing for acceptance. Something like this appears to obtain in most industrialised societies. At the extreme there might be moral atomism with everyone holding to an individual point of view which it was accepted was right for him because of his particular experiences, but for no-one else. Something like this appears to be developing in industrialised societies in regard to relationships the morality of which involves only limited numbers of others, certain aspects of sexual relationships being the type case. It seems unlikely that this could be extended very far without the anomic disintegration of complex social relationships. The pluralistic situation which now exists is no doubt a reflection of the high degree of differentiation in the structure of an industrialised society, where the kind of social relationships and hence the kind of rules governing them vary widely from one sector to another.

MacIntyre puts some of the issues here subtly

'We are liable to find two kinds of people in our society: those who speak from within one of the surviving moralities, and those who stand outside all of them. Between the adherents of rival moralities, and between the coherents of none there exists no court of appeal, no impersonal neutral standard. For those who speak from within a given morality the connection between fact and valuation is established in virtue of the meanings of the words they use. To those who speak from

without, those who speak from within appear merely to be uttering imperatives which express their own liking and their private choices. The controversy between emotivism and prescriptivism on the one hand and their critics on the other thus expresses the fundamental moral situation of our own society.

All of this does not entail that the traditional moral vocabulary cannot still be used. It does entail that we cannot expect to find in our society a single set of moral concepts, a shared interpretation of the vocabulary. Conceptual conflict is endemic to our situation, because of the depth of our moral conflicts. Each of us therefore has to choose both with whom we wish to be morally bound, and by what ends, rules and virtues we wish to be guided. These two choices are inextricably linked. In choosing to regard this end or that virtue highly, I make certain moral relations with some other people, and other moral relations with others impossible. Speaking from within my own moral vocabulary, I shall find myself bound by the criteria embodied in it. These criteria will be shared by those who speak the same moral language. And I must adopt some moral vocabulary, if I am to have any social relations. For without rules, without the cultivation of virtues, I cannot share ends with anyone else. I am doomed to social solipsism. Yet I must choose for myself with whom I am to be morally bound. I must choose between the alternative forms of social and moral practice. Not that I stand morally naked until I have chosen. For our social past determines that each of us has some vocabulary with which to frame and to make his choice. Nor can I look to human nature as a neutral standard, asking which form of social and moral life will give to it the most adequate expression. For each form of life carries with it its own picture of human nature. The choice of a form of life and the choice of a view of human nature go together.'

18.

A number of points need taking up from this. First in his emphasis on individual choice for morality by individuals who

have withdrawn from the available ones deliberately, MacIntyre implicitly raises a query as to the grounds of such a choice. His own terms seem to indicate that there can be none, but if he took his naturalism a step further he might find it. The mistake is to put it in terms of a choice of a morality rather than the construction of one which is appropriate to the kinds of social relations in which one is involved willy nilly, short of retreating to lead a hermit's existence. This is not to say that the accepted morality in this social context constitutes an alternative, though it will probably be quite closely relevant to that context. 'Choice' is exercised in criticising and developing the ones one inherits, and in applying other moralities to one's situation. The choice is not random in the way MacIntyre here implies but rooted in a critical interest in the relations one has already with others.

Secondly, and related to this, the conception of some members of society as 'outside' existing moralities and some as within them is the root of the notion of random choice between existing moralities. MacIntyre may well be correct to suggest that criticism of moral traditions has reached a point at which the situation is very confused, at which many people are more concerned to avow their rejection of the distinct old ways than to talk about what they now believe. That is not to say either that they do believe nothing, nor that such a purely critical attitude is necessary if what is inherited is rejected as inadequate. The more usual and appropriate response, as I

suggested above, is to attempt to construct new views using bits of the old and with a watchful eye on the application to one's life and social relations.

Finally, MacIntyre's point about human nature and the variety of views of it is true enough, but it does not necessarily have quite the radical relativistic implications that his statements indicate. Norman puts the same point in a more constructive way for sociology.

'Undeniably, the "facts of human existence" are bound to constitute in some sense the "foundations" of any system of ethical concepts; but the mistake is to suppose that they are the foundations in a reductionist sense. The true relation of such facts and ethical concepts might perhaps be indicated by saying that they constitute the "raw material" of ethics, which though common to every system of ethical concepts, may be given a different significance by different systems. The recognition of such facts then, does not require us to abandon the notion of ethical relativism. But it does mean that we can always find some point of contact between the evaluative concepts of another culture and those of our own ... The non-comprehension is not total.'

19.

Though the prospects for the reduction of this relativism seem dim, it appears that we have a certain amount to work on. We may go some way by analysis, argument, comparison and research towards reducing variety and clarifying interrelations, but short of the establishment of some moral and political utopia, we are unlikely to be entirely successful. Indeed success, like heaven would be very boring. It is the constant developments in social relations and in social theories and in moralities

that make them attractive and engaging. The answers which we provide in any of these interrelated spheres are inevitably temporary, if only because the successful solution of one problem entails the creation of subsidiary ones and the raising of formerly lower priorities to more central importance. Man's adaptiveness to his environment is becoming increasingly concerned with the consequences of his own earlier efforts. Pluralism in moralities and pluralism in assumptions about human nature and with them a plurality of theories about social relations will thus survive and antagonism between them continue as the ideal is held out of trying to construct a view appropriate to the age in all respects. Even were this possible it would outdate itself in proportion as it were implemented. The involvement of sociology in this process has been the basis of its past contributions. Despite the appearance of this visionary aspect being lost in a welter of technique and detail in contemporary sociology, it will remain the case that

'Rooted in a limited personal reality, resonating give sentiments but not others and embedded in certain domain assumptions, every social theory facilitates the pursuit of some but not all courses of action, and thus encourages us to change or accept the world as it is, to say yea or nay to it.'

20.

The best we can hope for is a greater understanding of the contribution of these various influences and assumptions and thus a greater understanding of the nature of the social theory.

Clearly this persistent element of relativism in sociological theory and research poses considerable problems for the discipline

as an explanatory science. Of course, in a natural science there are assumptions which have the status of unverifiable and non-falsifiable principles.²¹ The crucial differences in the social sciences however, are first that its principles are nowhere near as clear or as limited, nor are their implications fully understood, and hence neither are the reasons for and consequences of accepting them. Secondly, they not only represent principles for a classification and then explanation of a reality, but also potential guides to action in that reality to order or reorder it. Taxonomic and explanatory principles in natural science do in a sense order natural reality in the sense of saying: see it this way and you can understand how it works. Theoretical assumptions in social science, even where they are clear, which is rarely, are concerned not only with how social reality does work but with how it might work, since it is the constant creation of the members of the society. Thus what appear from one point of view as natural regularities of social behaviour, emerge from another as the consequences, intended or not, of rule-governed action. The corollary of this is that to understand how social reality will change, one has to understand how the rules will change, and so why the actors would want to innovate. Prediction thus depends on either assuming that they will not, that the social system is stable, or that unintended consequences recognised by the sociologist will be in time recognised by the actors and rectificatory action taken, or that the sociologist understands as well or

better than the actors in what ways they are likely to want to innovate. We know from history that societies do not stand still for long, though their stability is a relative matter: certainly we must expect changes from any contemporary society. As regards the second possibility, it only holds if the actors do respond when they become conscious of unintended consequences of their actions as they say and act as though they would respond before becoming aware of these consequences i.e. it is quite possible that their hierarchy of value alternatives will alter when faced with the actual situation. The final possibility of prediction depends on the sociologist claiming to understand the actors view of the world in all its complexity and then to understand the world in which he acts better than the actor; so that he may make guesses about the actor's likely changes in attitude as he confronts new situations. Like the previous possibility this boils down to claiming either that the actor's values are dependent on his physical circumstances (materialism) or that the sociologist knows which values are basic in the sense that they will remain stable whilst others are modified to deal with changed circumstances. Both of these are not only dubious, they are also limited in the sense that what actually happens is not a direct derivative of 'ultimate' factors be they material or moral. As Weber said, value-judgements can be traced back to and justified by general values but cannot be deduced from them. The more general a principle the less direct and explicit a guide it is to practical action.

Insofar as prediction and explanation is attempted it involves the relation of the various actors' views of reality to a sociologists' theory, but when an explanation is given in terms of this theory it must include not just what the actors did according to the definitions of the theory, but also what it meant to the actors. This is necessary simply because the reason for an actors' doing or not doing something may misleadingly be presented as that implied by the theory and as the 'product of circumstances' when the actor may himself have an excellent reason for acting as he did. If the explanation is to be satisfactory then, it must take account of the actor's reasons and show how they relate to the sociologist's theory. This is normally done by trying to understand the actors' idea of reality and then critically evaluating it in terms of its consistency and its consequences when used in action and in terms of a larger view of reality which incorporates it.

By doing this sociology has gained a rightful reputation for being subversive. For to question anyone's established practices and way of life, to question the truths which they take to be self-evident is to raise the possibility that they may not be, and that there may be alternatives which cannot easily be rejected. Sociology is subversive in that it questions all faiths. But it is subversive of right, left and centre. In practice it is probably more dangerous to right than left because conservatism is associated with established

practices which are constitutive of social reality as it now is, rather than with dreams about or even attempts at changing it. The results of the examination may not be altogether subversive however, for whilst it may point to inadequacies and contradictions it may also indicate how these very same contradictions nonetheless knit together into a stable code and system. If sociology can afford to be no respecter of faiths, values and ideologies as they are held and practised by others, that is because it is itself necessarily engaged either in total scepticism and the taking up of one view and one theory after another, or in the search for a successful theory founded upon empirically successful assumptions.²² So long as political and moral alternatives exist in societies, it is likely to continue anxiously criticising and evaluating them whilst searching for a satisfactory answer. Such an answer only has any hope of being approached if the argument and the anguish continue at all levels.

This implies a distinctive view of the logical status of social theories apart from their involvement with various social alternatives and so their evaluative nature. It implies an emphasis upon the function of a theory to illuminate rather than to predict, to provide an explanation which comprehends a wide range of data rather than being precisely testable. Not only is it in any case much more difficult to conclusively establish the empirical validity of social scientific theories as opposed to natural scientific ones, for reasons which I have

explained over the preceding pages, but the contribution of a theory to a world where each person and group already has his own theory of how social relations work and what is important in them must be to provide a new perspective based on a wider range of information. Sociology will never escape from the dilemma, significant but unprovable versus true but trivial, because of the difficulty of obtaining and successfully analysing a sufficient amount of significant and also reliable information about a sufficient number of people in a short enough time. If sociology does not err on the side of significance it will in my view rapidly be reduced to the status of policy research.

A P P E N D I X.

THE METHODOLOGICAL STATUS OF "THE WEBER THESIS".

Intellectual Context.

Weber's essay 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' has been of enduring interest to historians and sociologists ever since its first appearance in 1905. On the whole the interests of the two disciplines have been divided, historians being concerned to revise, annotate, develop or refute Weber's substantive contentions about the historical relations between Protestantism and Capitalism, and sociologists being more interested in the methodological validity of the account. I belong to the latter camp, having no expertise to allow me to question substantive points of history, and furthermore I am particularly interested in Weber's methodology. The Protestant Ethic Thesis presents an excellent opportunity to analyse how Weber operated in practice the methodological position he developed with some care in the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, which I have considered in detail in Chapter One. It will be remembered that two of Weber's concerns were dealt with there: his discussion of value-relevance and objectivity which was considered by him particularly in the Archiv essay of 1904, "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy", and the methodological problems involved in the

explanation of action, in particular his theory of causal and meaningful adequacy. This discussion of the Protestant Ethic Thesis will follow the same pattern: I will look in this section at the social, political and theoretical reasons which led Weber to investigate the religious origins of capitalism, and in the following one I will consider the particular methodological status of the thesis in the essay in question, and some of the reasons for which Weber gave it that status. The aim of the appendix as a whole is to shed further light on the important questions of methodology raised, and in doing so to make a contribution to the still unfinished debate on "The Weber Thesis".

It might seem at first glance that an investigation of the religious origins of capitalism was a candidate for the accolade of a value-free 'purely historical' enquiry. After all, Weber is surely just looking at what happened in his characteristic sober and scholarly way. But this is to be deceived by the size of his undertaking and the contemporary dominance of his concern - capitalism. Weber was concerned with capitalism because it was the central social, political and economic fact of his time. At least to that extent then, his choice of problem was - quite reasonably - time-bound, but further, he was only interested in Western, bourgeois, rational capitalism and was very careful to exclude, when discussing the capitalist spirit, capitalism as it has existed in societies ever since the existence of wealth. What fascinated him was that while there had always been capitalists of a sort, it was only in

Western Europe that it had developed into a system which engulfed the continent and was self-perpetuating. And as soon as this fact was recognised, one was led immediately to consider the peculiar feature of Western, bourgeois capitalism, namely its single-minded, methodical rationality in organising progressively entire societies in every respect for the systematic and endless increase of material goods. The institution produced by this development, and in Weber's view characteristic of modern capitalism and containing all its dangers, is bureaucracy, the super-rational machine-like organisation of human activity which threatened to engulf human individuality, democracy and any other values apart from those subordinate to and expressive of materialism. Mommsen quotes Weber's concern on this issue:

' "How is it, in view of this overwhelming tendency to bureaucratisation, at all possible still to save anything of what is meant by individual freedom of movement" ... The maintenance of a dynamic society in which the individual retains the maximum personal initiative is the central idea determining his attitude towards concrete political and economic problems.'

1.

These fears too were the driving force behind his interest in the origins of this potentially uniquely oppressive system.

Weber states explicitly

'The development of the Spirit of capitalism is best understood as part of the development of rationalism as a whole, and could be deduced from the fundamental position of rationalism on the basic problems of life.'

2.

The Protestant Ethic Thesis is thus clearly seen as an investigation into the historical, and as it turns out non-rational origins

of this rationalism. At other points in his essay too, he displays the same concern at the awful consequences of the marriage of puritanism and economic change in political terms.

'The puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of the monastic cells into everyday life and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force.'

3.

And he looks forward with foreboding to the consequences of this.

'Economic ethics arose against the background of the ascetic ideal, now it has been stripped of its religious impact. It was possible for the working class to accept its lot as long as the promise of eternal happiness could be held out to it. When this consolation fell away it was inevitable that those strains and stresses should appear in economic society which since have grown so rapidly.'

4.

This last comment introduces the third factor influencing Weber's interest in and definition of capitalism as a theoretical problem. I have already indicated that two important factors were the existence and dominance of capitalism in Weber's own time and society, and his own views and value positions in relation to it and what he took to be its implications. The third element was the possibility of a social and political revolt against capitalism and the analysis of capitalism in this light by Marx, whose theoretical and historical writings constituted for Weber a significant proportion of the extant

knowledge of capitalism. Marx was a familiar shadow in the background of Weber's whole opus, and particularly in his concern with capitalism, where he influenced Weber both in a general sense in pointing to the revolutionary consequences of capitalism, which in 1905 must have seemed imminent, and in suggesting that this revolution might lead to socialism and the rejection of materialism as the sole end of human endeavour; and in a specific methodological sense by his emphasis on the economic basis of social change and of the development of capitalism. As is well known, Weber's Protestant Ethic essay was a deliberate attempt to put the opposite view, that economic conditions were themselves influenced by ethical codes of practice and by religion.

Although not very obvious, then, Weber's choice, conceptualisation and analysis of the origins of capitalism as a subject of study were in important respects conditioned by the state of his own society, by his value positions in regard to some of its salient features and by the state of knowledge at the time. As is clear from the quotations already cited, from a glance at the Protestant Ethic itself, or at his other writings, Weber was consistently open in his avowal of the intellectual origins of his interest. This is in accordance with the position he set out in his methodological work, that knowledge is gained as answers to questions put, problems defined with an aim in view, and by this criterion the knowledge is useful, relevant. One should be explicit about this and aware of the limitations it imposes. Weber's later work on the other world religions and

their significance for capitalist development can be seen as an exploration of these limitations.

Having chosen one's problem and given the reasons for one's choice, and made one's theoretical terms of reference clear, however, Weber was adamant that no further evaluations should be admitted. In his own essay there is very little room for rhetoric or extraneous evaluation - it is closely argued and clearly stated. He says at one point: 'The question of the relative value of the cultures which are compared here will not receive a single word.'⁵ He is not quite as faithful as this - there are ironic comments and innuendoes at a number of points about the relative importance of cultures. But the overall effect is of a soberly dependable account, where one may be absorbed with the problems to be dealt with, not concerned to discount prejudice or cut through verbiage. It is a far cry from two at least of his most able commentators, Tawney and Thompson, both of whose work is carried on in a sustained rhetoric. Tawney's liberal socialism comes through, in the long series of appositions he uses to make his points, in a welter of pink adjectives. Thompson's⁶ bitter, almost fanatical hatred of methodism on political and personal grounds not only at times makes it hard to disentangle assertion from invective, but leads to doubts as to whether he is presenting his evidence at all adequately and fully, important though it is. This kind of moralising is sociologically and historically irrelevant, at best obfuscating and at worst seriously misleading, both in

presenting a moral judgement in the place of analysis and in misrepresenting the analysis. It is of course readable, though no more readable, to anyone with an interest and some knowledge of the subject, than Weber's essay. Neither Tawney or Thompson lack scholarship or intellectual imagination but they both do their best to obscure it. Comments such as the following by Tawney are simply, and in his case embarrassingly obviously out of place:

'If it is proper to insist on the prevalence of avarice and greed in high places (in medieval Europe), it is not less important to observe that man called these vices by their right names, and had not learned to persuade themselves that greed was enterprise and avarice economy.'

7.

Unfortunately, if we react to this as its emotional content asks us, by saying 'Aren't those capitalists wicked ideologists,' we shall have missed the historical point he is making, namely that in medieval Europe the church maintained its economic ethics of fair price, no usury etc., for the protection of the many from the hands of the few, even if it did not practice what it preached.

Methodological Status.

In respect of the clarity and honesty of its selection and definition, and the objectivity of its analysis, Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis thus appears to approximate the standards he set himself. The methodological status of the essay itself, to judge from the history of the debate on it, appears on the

other hand uncertain. One of the causes of this lack of clarity is Weber's own self-conscious attempt to put the other side to the Marxist economically biased view of the growth of capitalism. In doing this he unfortunately but inevitably brings in his own methodological preconceptions about the importance of causal 'scientific' analysis, and in the event, fails to do justice to Marx, or at least to Marx at his best. Marx's view of the matter had a good deal of weight to it. Capitalism is a political order dominated by the economy and it was natural to concentrate on the development of the economy in tracing how it achieved this dominance. Nonetheless, even though Marx talked of the economy as the basis, and of the laws of motion of society in relation to this, he was no economic determinist, and the laws were dialectical laws not causal ones. He was quite ready to admit the importance of other factors in the dialectic and he said that in part at least men make their own history and are not the objects of abstract forces. He specified that economic factors could be seen at work all along and would win out in the end, but he did not say when this would be, nor attempt to evaluate the importance of other factors in it. This was the task Weber set himself; what was the importance of religion in providing the economic ethic, the psychological motivation and attitudes to work necessary to capitalist development? Was it possible really to argue, he wondered, that these arose in response to economic changes? The Protestant Ethic was his attempt to say No and to explain why. The difficulty

with the methodological line he took in his explicit statements however, is that even though he accepted - and several times referred to - a complex interaction of factors (a dialectic if you will), such was his concern with correct causal analysis as the only path to scientific respectability that he talked in terms of causally effective ideas. These two aspects are nicely conflated in his famous dictum at the end of the essay; 'It is, of course, not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic one equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and history.'⁸ "Spiritualistic" - geistige - is off-putting: there is no exact English equivalent, but for present purposes the relevant aspect of the meaning is clear: it has to do with ideas as opposed to ^{material} conditions. The problem is, how can one give a causal account of conceptual development, the development of the spirit of capitalism from the Protestant Ethic; surely if a relationship is conceptual it cannot be causal? In order to sort this matter out we have to go back to the beginning of the essay to understand exactly what it is Weber is trying to do.

Weber states very carefully and cogently his position in contra-distinction to Marx, beginning with a definition of capitalism:

'We will define a capitalistic economic action as one which rests on the expectation of profit by the utilisation of opportunities for exchange ... The important fact is always that a calculation of capital in terms of money is made.'

However, he continues

'The central problem for us is not, even from a purely economic point of view, the development of capitalistic activity as such ... It is rather the origin of this sober bourgeois capitalism with its rational organisation of free labour. Or in terms of cultural history, the problem is that of the origin of the Western bourgeois class and of its peculiarities.'

10.

'The answer to this lies in a discussion of the wider question of the specific and peculiar rationalism of Western culture ... Every attempt at explanation must ... above all take account of the economic conditions but at the same time the opposite correlation must not be left out of consideration. For though the development of economic rationality is partly dependent on rational technique and law, it is at the same time determined by the ability and disposition of men to adopt certain types of practical rational conduct. When these types have been obstructed by spiritual obstacles, the development of rational conduct has also met serious inner resistance. The magical and religious forces and the ethical ideas of duty based upon them, have in the past always been among the most important formative influences on conduct ... In this case we are dealing with the connection of the spirit of modern economic life with the rational ethics of ascetic protestantism. Thus we treat here only one side of the causal chain.'

11.

Weber contends then, that unless you argue quite economistically, other ideas are important in the development of capitalism. He might have added, though this is not a point he makes explicitly, that a crucial aspect of the development under consideration is the change from the dominance of a religious view of the world in medieval Europe, to an economic one, from the late eighteenth century and utilitarianism onwards. Evidently religious ideas once had hegemony over economic: how was this reversed? Further

he argues, as I will show below, that rational economic action is not a natural aspect of humanity, it has to be learned. And once again we notice in all this the words "causal chain", when Weber is discussing mostly ideas, and at times actions.

He continues by pointing out the obstacles of traditionalism to rationality in the economic field, giving his famous example of the Silesian mower, who, offered more money per hour, does less work not more, aiming to earn the same amount. 'A man does not "by nature" wish to earn more money, but simply to live as he is accustomed to live, and to earn as much as is necessary for that purpose.'¹² His transposition of this particularism into a general confrontation with Marx comes a few pages later.

'The fact to be explained historically is that in the most highly capitalistic centre of that time, in Florence of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the money and capital market of all the great political powers, this attitude (the capitalist spirit) was considered ethically unjustifiable, or at best to be tolerated. But in the back woods small bourgeois circumstances of Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century, where business threatened for simple lack of money to fall back into barter, where there was hardly a sign of large enterprise, where only the earliest beginnings of banking were to be found, the same thing was considered the essence of moral conduct, even commanded in the name of Duty. To openly hear of a reflection of material conditions in the ideal superstructure would be patent nonsense.'

13.

The point was fairly made: it was and is relevant to consider how people came to accept economic practices which at one time they would clearly have rejected, and what part the dominant religious ideology played in this. It is important to be clear that there is this point to make, for when Weber comes to his

final statement on the matter, things become very confused again. He begins by making a plausible suggestion as to how the two Weltanschauungen, religious and economic, met historically.

'The cultural consequences of the Reformation were to a great extent, perhaps in the particular aspects with which we are dealing predominantly, unforeseen or even unwished for results of the labours of the reformers ...

The following study may thus perhaps in a modest way form a contribution to the understanding of the manner in which ideas became effective forces in history...

We are attempting to clarify the part which religious forces have played in forming the developing web of our specifically worldly modern culture, in the complex interaction of innumerable different historical factors ...

We wish to ascertain whether and to what extent religious forces have taken part in the qualitative formation and quantitative expansion of that (capitalist) spirit over the world. Furthermore, what concrete aspects of our capitalist culture can be traced to them. In view of the tremendous confusion of interdependent influences between the material basis, the forms of social and political organisation and the ideas current in the time of the Reformation, we can only proceed by investigating whether and at what points certain correlations between different forms of religious belief and practical ethics can be worked out. At the same time we shall as far as possible clarify the manner and the general direction in which, by virtue of those relations, the religious movements have influenced the development of the material culture.'

14.

Weber's concern to put a complementary view to Marx's - or perhaps I should say "Marx's" since he nowhere makes explicit references - is evident again in the last sentence and it seems fairly certain that this is the way he conceptualised what he

was at. However, apart from the earlier reference to causes, he also talks here of ideas as "effective historical forces", again with causal implications. Now Marx was concerned with economic, social and political conditions, and particularly with what he called material conditions, that is to say with physical and social facts about societies - for example the distribution of scarce resources and the physical means of production - which could plausibly be claimed to be causal conditions. But Marx did not or did not always, for all his emphasis on science, which in the nineteenth century meant natural science, work in terms of causes, but in terms of conditions as constraints upon action and as conditions for human responses. He was concerned with a political and social analysis which is not very amenable to causal statements, and indeed as I said earlier, he stated his laws as dialectical laws which human ideas and actions played a crucial part in transforming and developing. Weber appears to want to argue that there were spiritual conditions - ideas - to consider as well as material ones and in doing so failed to do justice to Marx, or to his own much more sophisticated view of what is involved in action, and pandered to his belief in the correctness of and necessity for causal analysis in order to be scientific. It is to be remembered that the way he talks of and in practice justifies his discussion of spiritual conditions or ideas as historical forces is in terms of their place as motives for action - that is the point of his very effective argument about

the resistance to new economic practices consequent on traditionalism and hence the importance of the Protestant Ethic in changing this. But of course the relation of motive to action is certainly not causal but at least quasi-conceptual, since any motive must be a motive for a certain kind of act, which it envisages itself. It makes nonsense of motives and of other action terms like purpose and intention to think of them as causes only contingently related to actions: their whole *raison d'être* is that they anticipate actions of a specified kind. Worse than this however, it is doubly inappropriate to what Weber actually did in the Protestant Ethic, for he was not even concerned with the way in which ideas are responded to in various circumstances, that is with the relationship between ideas and conditions mediated by actors. He in fact goes on to give a history of the origin and development of capitalist ethics - a lot of ideas. He continues a few pages after the previous quotation,

'The various different dogmatic roots of ascetic morality did no doubt die out after terrible struggles. But the original connection with those dogmas has left behind important traces in the later undogmatic ethics; moreover only the knowledge of the original body of ideas can help us to understand the connection of that morality with the idea of the after life which absolutely dominated the most spiritual men of that time. Without its power, overshadowing everything else, no moral awakening which seriously influenced practical life came into being in that period ...

We are interested in the influence of those psychological sanctions which originating in religious belief and the practice of religion gave a direction to practical conduct and held the individual to it. Now these sanctions were to a large extent derived from the peculiarities of the religious ideas behind them.'

15.

He goes on to discuss the inner worldly asceticism of Protestantism, the 'unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual' as a result of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, and the crucial emphasis on the calling as the only respectable activity and means of ordering one's life with minimum risk of the single fatal sin that was a sign of lack of grace and election. In support of this he quotes at length the sermons and tracts of the puritans. Weber is thus done with the analysis of action in his earlier argument, that it was relevant to consider ethical attitudes to work, and their religious basis if any. Here he does argue that these attitudes are important, because they lead to significantly different kinds of economic practice. In his argument against economism he seeks only to establish that economic conditions do not fully explain the course of historical development, and proposes changes in attitudes work to complement a purely economic explanation. But he is not concerned to push this point harder to claim to show how ideas became politically effective historical "forces": his intention is rather to show how they exist in changing economic circumstances and how they can be traced back to religious dogma. Such a point as Tawney's that

'it is will, will organised and disciplined and inspired, will quiescent in rapt adoration or straining in violent energy, but always will - which is the essence of puritanism, and for the intensification and organisation of will, every instrument in that tremendous arsenal of religious fervour is mobilised,'

16.

remains largely implicit in its political aspect. Weber stresses Protestantism's systematic asceticism - will in that sense - but does not spell out what the consequences of this will-power were in action, for it is with the ideas that he is primarily concerned with. Thus it is absurd for him to speak of ideas as historical forces, when he is concerned with ideas and not action. It makes a certain sense to talk of ideas as forces when their action consequences are considered, but here too it is misleading insofar as the word "forces" is interpreted as mechanical causality, something which ideas, being abstract entities, could by their nature never be. The ideas were important right enough, but as elements in the responses of individuals and groups to situations and their development as moral or ideological resources, as mediations or as guides to action, not as causes. The references to causes can thus only be construed as a confusion irrelevant to his actual methodological position which was more sophisticated as to the significance of Protestant ideas for historical development, a confusion which was occasioned by the position he took up in his purely theoretical writings where one of his major concerns was to establish sociology as a science, for which purpose he conceived of 'correct' causal analysis as essential. The substance of his historical argument is to show

what these attitudes, ethnics, ideas, were and how they developed from a wholly religious to a wholly economic significance. I must agree with Fischhoff then that

'Weber's thesis must be construed not according to the usual interpretation as an effort to trace the causative influence of the Protestant Ethic upon the emergence of capitalism, but as an exposition of the rich congruency of such diverse aspects of a culture as religion and economy. The essay should be considered as a stimulating project of hermeneutics, a demonstration of interesting correlations (I should say, conceptual links) between diverse cultural factors.'

17.

Weber is explicitly not concerned with the political and social process of how the Protestant Ethic emerged and developed into the spirit of Capitalism, as for example Tawney is. Such a discussion involves considering how the religiously based ethnics were in turn affected by economic conditions, even as they also affected those conditions. This is an important matter, but it was not Weber's concern. What he shows is that such a process took place by tracing the conceptual development and its religious roots. In this kind of account, a causal view is quite out of place. Nor can Weber even argue that it was these ideas that were causal influences in history, given that his major concern was to show what the ideas were, since ideas cannot be the cause of anything, as I show in the early chapters of the thesis. Their relationship to physical events, which are the only things which can be causes, is conceptual.

Weber's inquiry was thus very much in terms of the conceptual transformation of the protestant ethic into the spirit of

capitalism, emphasising that this transformation was always the result of an internal critique, just as Luther's and Calvin's critiques of catholicism had been internal to the religion, theological. The stimulus for such critiques was no doubt external, and this influenced the direction that it would take, but the ethical or theological dogma always exercised a constraint so that what looked like a radical conceptual break much later, only in fact developed by slow transformation as a result of the painful efforts of individual intellectual innovation. As regards the acceptability and appropriateness of what was transformed to time and place Weber was at pains to point this out, but he refrained from arguing that changed social and economic circumstances could be adopted as an explanatory point of view. Despite his closeness to Marx at many points, he was here in contrast to him. The traditional attitudes of the Silesian mower did not change in response to changes in his current situation but in response to his religious and ethical conversion, at least in principle - practice was naturally more complex. This emphasis on ideas rather than conditions leads, as we might expect, to a concern with understanding the culture of the time, rather than an attempt to categorise circumstances, and so leads Weber into the confusion about the causal efficacy of ideas that have been noted. The differences between Weber's attempt to get inside the culture and stress an understanding, in contrast to Marx's assertion of the overriding significance of features obvious to him is well brought out in Giddens acute remarks.

'Marx insists that class relationships form the basic axis upon which ideologies find general acceptance in a society. Thus ideology is, in an important sense "illusory": not in the sense that the content of idea systems is a mere "reflection" and therefore is irrelevant to the activity of the subject, but insofar as ideas which are thought to be of general or universal validity are in fact the expressions of sectional class interests. According to Weber's position however, ideology cannot be adjudged illusory in this sense, because this demands the assumption of a value position which cannot rationally be said to be ethically superior to any other. The conception of charisma, as Weber uses it, connects closely with this. The point about charismatic innovation is that it is "irrational" in relation to the pre-existing social order, since in its pure form, it depends solely on the belief in the extraordinary qualities of a leader ... For Weber adherence to any given set of ideals, whether they are religious, political, economic or whatever, generates interests which can only be defined in terms of the content of those ideals themselves. In Marx's schema, on the other hand, the ascription of rationality to history is possible precisely because of his acceptance of the dichotomy between "sectional" (class) interests and "societal" interests which is progressively resolved in favour of the latter.'

18.

The importance of the notion of innovation through charisma is the room it allows Weber for individual creativity in establishing a new tradition as opposed to using social and economic conditions as the rule explanatory factors. In the case of protestantism the charismatic innovations took place in a curiously rationalistic cultural context, and thus so far from being solely dependent upon the attractive powers of the leaders and irrational in relation to the past, were the result of a long and painstaking critique of the past and grew out of it intellectually. Where Giddens is correct is in implying that

socially these innovations provided the ethical and religious basis for a sharp break which was partly sustained by charisma, partly by changed social conditions and partly by the reinterpretation of dogma involved, where the fundamental legitimacy of the christian tradition was never challenged.

Because of this central concern with a history of the conceptual or ideological development of the Protestant Ethic into the spirit of capitalism, Weber said nothing about the reciprocal influence of political and economic conditions, situations, conflicts and personalities on these ideas. His was a deliberately one sided view. Nor did he emphasise, because of his attempt to complement Marx, the tremendous significance of the change from a society dominated by a religious ideology to one dominated by an economic ideology. He was content to maintain that religious ideas were important without elaborating on the contrast of the reverse hegemony in the past, which would perhaps have looked at the time like overstating his case. Nonetheless this fact was inevitably implicit in his discussion especially of late medieval catholicism and early protestantism. In his discussion of the protestant sect¹⁹ he illustrates how religion is used, in an economic context, as a source of legitimacy and business trust in a community, a protestant sect member being subject to sanctions both social and religious by the congregation, and being compelled thereby to lead a sober way of life. The attitude of the new member concerned was to join in order to gain a business advantage,

rather than, as before, to join for religious reasons and be bothered if and when wealth resulted from his systematic diligence and thrift. In Thompson's analysis of Methodism in the early nineteenth century we see the dominance of economic ideology and the exploitation of religion at its meanest.

'The younger leaders of Methodism were not only guilty of complicity in the fact of child labour by default. They weakened the poor from within by adding to them the active ingredient of submission; and they fostered within the Methodist church those elements most suited to make up the psychic component of the work discipline of which the manufacturers stood most in "need".'

20.

And one might add that such an ethical-religious work discipline was necessary to teach the nascent proletariat being driven off the land at the end of the eighteenth century what kind of life, conditioned by the market and the machine rather than by the seasons and traditional rights and duties, they were to be subjected to and how to make sense of it. But for all that one can make such a Weberian point, Weber himself was never concerned with the enormity of the change from a religious to an economic Weltanschauung which took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He was interested in continuities from the dogmas of Calvin through the ethical handbooks of Baxter and Bunyan to the utilitarian tracts of Franklin and later writers. He spoke of the spirit of capitalism and the unintended consequences of Protestantism, but he looks not at the political aspects of this transformation but at the conceptual continuities. As Thompson illustrates in his work, such continuities are still

very evident in nineteenth century methodism, but it is Thompson's concern to show how religion has changed in status from a basic belief system which orders one's view of social reality, to an ideology which can be manipulated almost at will to justify economic and political expediency. That is not to say it was not so used in Calvin's own Geneva - Tawney gives illustrations that the rot set in early - but the change in its dominance took another century and a half, and required religion to become not only separate from the state but privatised, "a personal matter", and for the collective good to be conceptualised no longer in terms of this now individual ethic, but in terms of empirical economic "necessities".

Weber's Protestant Ethic essay is even more circumscribed than this however; not only is it only concerned with tracing the history of the development of practical ethics, once it has been established that such ethics are empirically, economically and by extension structurally important; not only does it therefore have no concern with the reaction of economic and political pressures upon such an ethic; not only is it only concerned with the early stages of the development of the capitalist spirit and so does not bring out the enormity of the change in ideological hegemony; it is also not historically specific. Weber has many times been unjustly criticised for his conflation of historical changes which took many years and for his lack of historical specificity.²¹ This criticism has come principally from historians, but Weber was no ordinary

historian. His interest in history was always, even in his early, more "historical" years, to look at epochs and cultures rather than events and personalities, to construct types and generalisations rather than detailed, documented pictures. He knew his sources, but he did not write at the historiographic level of sources. In the case of the Protestant Ethic, he was initially concerned to define what he meant by rational, bourgeois capitalism and then to look at its religious origins. He tried to show what the reform of religious dogma and political ethics which took place at the Reformation meant in a general sense for economic behaviour. Thus he was not concerned with detail: he spent no time on the politics of the processes of change - as for example Tawney does - nor does he use his quotations from various divines in other than an illustrative sense as exemplars of their age. The title of his essay, remember, is "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism", neither of the two halves being concerned directly with religious dogma or political or economic events. This approach leads to the conventional criticism of the ideal type method that it is ahistorical, distorting, and very much open to the author's personal preferences, the argument being that unless the types take account of historical changes in detail and unless they are clearly and carefully built up from source material it is difficult to separate the author's persuasive imagination from historical fact.

Weber's retort to this would be that such a work would be stupendous in size and that his aim was to be suggestive and to stimulate interest along new lines. That certainly, he achieved. One suspects that he was only too well aware of the complexities and inevitable inadequacies of any attempt at a "total" account of the interacting development of political economic and religious events, ideas and contributions over so long a period. He is however, compelled to use religious sources in an historically evaluative sense. He discusses the dogmatic innovations of Luther, Calvin, Pietism and Methodism in turn and with some care, with a view to showing what it was of significance that they contributed to practical economic ethics, claiming that Calvin's was the crucial contribution, and trying to spell out clearly why this should be. His argument however, was always in terms of the ideas, of the dogma and of the subsequent practical ethics, and this concentration on ideas and the removal of his main contention - the development of the Protestant Ethic into the Spirit of Capitalism - from both concrete social processes and even religious dogma gives the whole a tautologous air: the conceptual relations between protestant and capitalistic economic ethics became so close as to be "obvious" and seemingly trivial when divorced from the long struggles and political changes which lie behind them.²² It is this also which prevents any clear statement of the change from religious to economic ideological hegemony: Weber was concerned precisely to show the ideological continuities and was not so much concerned with

their political importance in terms of their spread to various classes and social groups.

It has been left to other historians to analyse cases in detail and to point out, for example that Calvinist Scotland failed to show any marked economic development, because political and economic conditions were not right. Weber made the historically sustainable contention that Lutheranism and its dogmatic innovations, and Calvinism and its dogmatic innovations spread at varying rates in varying amounts across Europe and could account in certain obvious cases for economic developments better than anything else, even though other conditions, which he deliberately did not go into, had to be present. Although we now have a fair amount of material dealing in detail with the consequences of religious change in particular cases, it has on the whole been used in a very limited way for (a) case studies of a particular time and place according to the normal habits of historical scholarship and (b) for critiques of Weber's contentions, with the claim: "Look, things aren't so simple." Weber was well aware that they were not - that was why he chose so limited an approach. He chose to present a thesis on a grand scale in order to jolt historians out of their pettifogging concerns. Surely it is now time that some historian - and it must be someone with a knowledge of the history of a nation in depth - to set out the stages of transformation consequent upon the influx of protestant ideas. Tawney made the bravest attempt, but his work is limited by being restricted in the time span it

covers - principally the seventeenth century - and in its lack of specificity about dates. What is needed is a careful tracing of the spread of protestantism, with dates showing what groups were affected at what times and how their influence spread, and regular evaluations of the impact on the nation as a whole, as Tawney does to some extent by using high court decisions and sermons before the Monarch. This would be a work not so much of further basic history, but of organising and setting out clearly the various researches already made.

I have attempted in this appendix to do two things, in practice related: to make some comments by way of clarification on the methodological status of Weber's Protestant Ethic essay, and to show how the same difficulties in explanation that dogged him in his theoretical statements emerge again in his substantive theory. However, what happens is that rather than taking over, they are pushed into the background to appear as a confusing rhetoric of scientism at various points. Of the actual status of what he was doing, Weber seems to have been practically well aware.

N O T E S.

PREFACE.

1. Here as elsewhere I will in the text only identify by name and/or author the work referred to. A full reference will be found in the bibliography.

CHAPTER ONE.

1. In what follows I will use the term 'science' to mean natural science. I shall variously refer to social science and sociology. I do not know how much of what I have to say is confined in its application to sociology. My focus is principally upon sociology, but at those points at which I use the term 'social science' rather than 'sociology', I may be taken to imply that the scope of what I am saying is wider than a single discipline.
2. By the term 'actor', I mean simply one who acts, in the sense of undertaking actions. The term carries no dramaturgical connotation. This view is consistent with, though less explicit than Weber's definitions

of action and social action at the beginning of his
Theory of Social and Economic Organisation (Wirtschaft
 und Gesellschaft)

3. I mean this of course in principle. The actor may well be prevented by some constraint; the point is that he can work out how to do it if he had the resources. It is significant that if his ability to do this is much impaired, we treat him as less than a full human being, as infant, insane or senile.
4. Except of course by those who have chosen to entirely ignore the problem in favour of dogmatic scientific assumptions about objectivity.

CHAPTER TWO.

1. Reprinted in the Methodology of the Social Sciences.
2. This term is normally translated as "value-relevance". Its meaning should become clear in the course of the ensuing account.
3. Methodology, op. cit., p. 106.
4. This argument is both familiar and widely accepted today, and for this reason and the fact that a proper philosophical defence would require a book in itself I do no more than indicate what I mean here. See I. Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, and P.F. Strawson, The Bounds of Sense.
5. Especially if this is read as 'at the collective will of himself and others'.
6. G. Myrdal, An Asian Drama, pp. 24-25.
7. There are reasons why this is unlikely, to say the least, which will become apparent in the following two chapters.
8. My disagreement with Runciman's views on this matter in his A Critique of Max Weber's Philosophy of Social Science both as regards his interpretation of Weber and in his own views should be evident. I shall not discuss Runciman directly. The reasons for my disagreement should be clear from the text.
9. See for example, Mills, The Sociological Imagination, and Gouldner, The Coming Crisis in Western Sociology for critiques.

10.

The argument might thus be extended to claim that the values of science give rise to particular kinds of institutions that permit a high degree of criticism and open-mindedness. As Dahrendorf argues, 'The critical institutions essential to the progress of scientific knowledge are possible only within a political order that permits conflict ... In this sense modern science and liberal political conditions are inseparably related'. (R. Dahrendorf. Essays in the theory of society, p. 246-7). Insofar as any science is a collective enterprise, which is a fact rather than a necessary consequence of its assumptions, freedom of communication is essential within the areas covered by it. It is notable that although natural science has flourished in the U.S.S.R., social science has until very recently been very stunted and restricted. The subject matter of natural science remained open to debate, but not that of social science. But whilst it is true that institutional openness and academic freedom are essential, one should not be led, like Mannheim, into supposing that intellectuals have no political attachments or only liberal ones. Many have firm positions on both right and left, which are usually expressed - though rarely avowed - in their work. And indeed, in a society where nothing was taken for granted and no truths held to be selfevident by anyone,

but all were concerned to debate and question all the time, it is doubtful if there would be any social order for the scientist to look at.

11. This is not to claim that the attempt to state assumptions would in any case be possible or adequate. The reasons they are not usually stated seem to be (1) that it is thought to be 'unscientific' to have any (2) that it requires courage to state one's conviction and (3) because it is in any case very difficult for an author to investigate his own assumption. For all these reasons there will therefore always remain plenty of scope and need for the investigation of others' assumptions and their critical examination. The sociology of sociology is already an expanding enterprise. See Hammond - Sociologists at Work, and at the level with which I am more concerned, Gouldner - The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology.
12. Weber called this value-judgment, as distinct from value-premises, regarding it as always illegitimate for the social scientist, and the province of the politician. Simey, in his Chapter on Weber in Social Science and Social Purpose, appears to regard them as identical, and Weber as therefore contradicting himself. I will take up the question of value-judgments, and Weber's remarks on them, in Chapter Seven; for the present I will confine myself to those general evaluative premises

to which the research enterprise is relative and which define the nature of relevant facts and fields of enquiry.

Although Simey's is one of the few recent discussions of Weber's methodology that I am aware of, it contains so many errors that it would require a considerable diversion to deal with it. In this as in other places, I do not cover directly material that I regard as misleading, as this would result in a much longer, and fragmented argument. Rather, I leave the faults of these works, which are included in the bibliography, to emerge by comparison with my own arguments as stated.

13. See for example, A. Dawe, "The Two Sociologies," but also the whole conflict-systems theory debate.
14. This was one of Weber's central concerns, now taken up by P.L. Berger, and with interesting new implications by H. Garfinkel, see Chapter Five.
15. This was of course Marx's principal concern.
16. See the Methodology essays and "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation", passim.
17. See Chapter Seven.
18. 'De principiis non disputandum ...?', p. 139.
19. The question as to the ultimate relativism of values is taken up in Chapter Six, and that of whose values are to be adopted as value premises in Chapter Seven. For the present, I want only to claim that there are value assumptions, and that discussion of them can be fruitful.

20. If sociology has constantly to be updated and is relative to its time and place, at least to the extent that it deals with phenomena which, though similar to and deriving from those of the past, have new and unique aspects with which sociology must deal, this puts paid to a fully articulated empirical theory of society, because such a theory assumes a constant reality. Hence sociology is in no need of a Newton - unless a Newton for every generation. Work can continue on the comparison of societies, their ideas and social relations, and on theoretical problems and the scope of their relevance to different societies, but the empirical side of this will not be the articulation of theory into empirical propositions, but the constant monitoring of a changing social reality in the light of ever renewed aims, priorities and knowledge. Theory will continue to develop, but relatively abstractly, though it will continue to inform empirical inquiry, as it now does.
21. Similarly in What is History?, E.H. Carr concurs that history must be constantly rewritten as times change, new historical phenomena emerge, and the historian develops new interests and vantage points.
22. The extent to which it depends just on their willingness to think them up, and that to which it is a matter of what they have learned in their own society and its culture is a question I will take up in Chapter Six.

23. In "Ends and Means in Political Economy", Chapter 10 of Value in Social Theory.
24. Alan Dawe, "The Relevance of Values", pp. 58-9, in A. Sahay ed. - Max Weber and Modern Sociology.
25. Listener 4.iii.71. p. 136 ff. See also D. Emmet, Rules, Roles and Relations, I. Murdoch, The sovereignty of Good, and for a different though ultimately related view, P. Winch, The Idea of a Social Science.
26. H. Martins, "The Sociology of Knowledge and the Sociology of Science", p. 80.
27. See T. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions and I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave, Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge.
28. T.S.E.O. pp. 87-8.
29. See Hodges, The Philosophy of W. Dilthey.
30. C.W. Mills, "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive".
31. I am indebted to M. Stant in this discussion. See his untitled paper on the subject, Durham, 1971. Compare also A. MacIntyre, 'A mistake about Causality in Social Science'.
32. See 'Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy', and J. Rex 'Typology and Objectivity in the work of Max Weber', in A. Sahay ed. op.cit.
33. See Appendix.

CHAPTER THREE.

1. J.O. Wisdom, Other Minds.
2. In what follows I shall draw often on the work of Alfred Schutz, particularly his The Phenomenology of the Social World. I will not make explicit references, as those that are familiar with it will realise that I by no means follow him in all matters and have changed many of his ideas that I have borrowed.
3. See especially Philosophical Investigations, and Wisdom - Other Minds, pp. 117-8 and f.n.
4. Or were not until recently: see Sunday Times 25th April, 1971.
5. Studies in Ethnomethodology. See also Chapter Five.
6. Op. cit.
7. English Philosophy since 1900, pp. 100-101, cited by B. Powell, Knowledge of Action, pp. 63-4.
8. Op. cit.
9. The Social Construction of Reality, quoted in S. Hall, 'Deviancy, Politics and the Media', Unpublished B.S.A. Annual Conference, 1971, p. 8.
10. W. Haas, "The Theory of Translation" - Philosophy, 1962.
11. Jarvie and Agassi, "The Problem of Rationality in Magic", Jarvie, "Understanding and Explanation in Sociology and Social Anthropology".
12. See his Revolution in Anthropology. The best account

whole debate is in P.M. Worsley, The Trumpet Shall Sound, MacGibbon and Kee, 2nd Edn. 1968, esp.

Introduction.

13. See Chapter Six.
14. See Chapter Five.
15. See his Structure of Scientific Revolutions, and Lakatos and Musgrave, Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge.
16. "Understanding and Explanation ..." op. cit., p. 231.
17. Apel, Analytic Philosophy of Language and the Geisteswissenschaften, p. 55.
18. 'Sympathy for Alien Concepts',
19. 'On the Social Determination of Truth'.
20. Here, as at other points, I draw indirectly on J. Habermas' Knowledge and Human Interest. Habermas attacks the problem of objectivity consistently at an epistemological level, for example in the following quotation which also indicates the way in which the positivistic epistemology of science can operate ideologically:

On scientific presuppositions, positivism suspends the theory of knowledge in favour of a philosophy of the sciences, because it measures knowledge only in terms of the actual achievements of the sciences. How then, prior to all science, can the doctrine of the elements make statements about the object domain of science as such if we only obtain information about this domain through science. Yet we can reliably distinguish this information from mere speculation, only if we are always in a position, by virtue of

prior knowledge of the object domain, to distinguish science, which copies the facts, from metaphysics. Only via an ontology of the factual does the doctrine of elements lead to a scientific foundation of science that excludes every form of metaphysics as meaningless. This circle is concealed by objectivism, which expresses itself unreflectively, prohibiting the self-reflection of knowledge. In this way a tacit epistemology of commonsense, according to which knowledge replicates reality or copies facts in thoughts, is immunised against possible doubt'.

p. 88.

I am less concerned with this kind of profound epistemological critique than with more practical points of methodology. I am concerned with the social foundations of ethics but not as he is with the social foundations of epistemology.

CHAPTER FOUR.

1. See Chapter Two and Weber Theory of Social and Economic Organisation pp. 98-100, 107-8.
2. See, for example, Anscombe - Intention, Melden - Free Action, Peters - The Concept of Motivation, Kenny - Action, Emotion and Will, McIntyre - "A Mistake about Causality in Social Science", Ryle - The Concept of Mind.
3. A. McIntyre - "A Mistake about Causality in Social Science", p. 50.
4. N. Cohn, The pursuit of the millenium.
5. Analytical philosophy of History, pp. 230-1.
6. See for example, A. McIntyre, "The Idea of a Social Science".
7. H. Feigl, 'Notes on Causality', p. 410.
8. The Logic of Personal Knowledge, p. 103.
9. It was probably this ability to switch from one mode of analysis to the other that led Weber to make his fatal distinction between observational and motivational understanding.
10. The best formulation of the relationship between causation and freedom that I have found is G.H. Von Wright's in Explanation and Understanding, pp. 81-2.

'In as much as it is an empirical fact that a man can do various things when he decides, intends or wants to do them he is, as an agent free. To say that causation presupposes

freedom would be misleading. It would suggest that the way in which the laws of nature operate were somehow dependent on men. This is not the case, but to say that the concept of causation presupposes the concept of freedom seems to me to be right, in the sense that it is only through the idea of doing things that we come to grasp the idea of cause and effect.

The idea that causation can be a "threat" to freedom contains a fair amount of empirical truth, viz the truths to which disabilities and incapacities testify. But metaphysically, it is an illusion. The illusion has been nourished by our tendency to think, in the spirit of Hume, one might say, that man in a state of pure passivity, merely by observing regular sequences, can register causal connections, chains of causally connected events which he then by extrapolation thinks pervade the universe from an infinitely remote past to an infinitely remote future. This outlook fails to notice that causal relations are relative to fragments of the world's history, which have the character of what we have called closed systems. The discovery of causal relations presents two aspects: an active and a passive one. The active component is the putting in motion of systems through producing their initial states. The passive component consists in observing what happens inside the systems - as far as possible without disturbing them. The scientific experiment, one of the most ingenious and consequential devices of the human mind is a systematic combination of these two components.'

11. See Chapter Three.
12. P. Winch, The Idea of a Social Science, pp. 93-4.
13. W. Davenport, "Jamaican fishing - a game theory analysis". Yale Univ. Anthropol. Pubs. 1960.
14. Concept of Mind, p. 293.

15. E.M. Schur, 'Drug Addication under British Policy'
in H.S. Becker (ed) - The Other Side.
16. See Chapter Two.

CHAPTER FIVE.

1. Structure of Social Action, p. 76.
2. P. McHugh - Defining the Situation, pp. 11-12.
3. I am aware that one can abstract aspects of social relations without using the concept of role - one has only to refer to the work of Weber or Simmel to see this. I am here concerned only with the particular way in which Nadel abstracts, which is in terms of a role system.
4. 'The oversocialised concept of man in modern sociology'- A.S.R. Vol. 26.
5. In Studies in Ethnomethodology.
6. See Chapter Two and Appendix.
7. See the Phenomenology of the Social World and Chapter Three.
8. I discuss Merton rather than Parsons and the essay on deviance rather than the rest of his work on social structure because I want to concentrate on the sociological explanation of deviance. Merton's essay was for a long time central to the sociology of deviance and was used as a basis by other functionalists - Cohen is an example. I concentrate on deviance as I said earlier in this chapter, because I think it is here that the debate has taken its clearest form. I should make it clear that both in regard to Merton and the

other authors whose work I take up, I make no attempt at a comprehensive criticism on their own terms, and am not interested in explaining deviance but in elucidating a methodological position. I also deliberately avoid dealing with the authors' revisions and apologies, but stick to the standard texts, since to go into these complexities would cloud the issues I am concerned with. Those interested in the full story should see Merton's apologia in Clinard - Anomie and Deviant Behaviour and Lemert's wide ranging critique. Similarly Cohen's attempt to meet criticism, "The Sociology of the deviant act: anomie theory and beyond", is ignored by me, as are some of the sharp criticism of him in Kitsuse and Dietrick - "Delinquent Boys: A Critique".

9. In H.S. Becker (Ed.) The Other Side.
10. In Outsiders.
11. Human deviance, social problems and social control, p.7.
12. Ibid, p. 18.
13. Outsiders, p. 24.
14. Perhaps one of the most extreme examples of this forcing of facts into a predetermined setting is the media's treatment of the anti-Vietnam war demonstration in London on October, 27th, 1968. See Halloran Elliott and Murdock, Demonstrations and Communication, Penguin 1970.
15. Delinquency and Drift, p. 26.
16. Ibid. p. 40.
17. Outsiders, p. 7.
18. Becoming Deviant, p. 116.
19. Encounters.

20. Also in Encounters.
21. R.L. Coser. 'Role Distance, Sociological Ambivalence and Transitional Status Systems'. A.J.S. 1966-7.
22. Goffman's is the most articulate, and for western sociology one of the most significant attacks on the concept of role as an element in a mechanistic 'social system'. It is interesting to note the recent use of the term 'role' by sociologists from the eastern bloc in a collection of essays edited by Peter Berger - Marxism and Sociology. E. Urbanek discusses roles and Marx's views on them in connection with character masks and emphasises their temporariness, deceitfulness and unreality e.g.

'The Society of finance ... the world of monetary marketing relations, is in Marx's conception a universal confusion and disorder of everything, i.e. a reversed world, a confusion and a mess of all natural and human qualities. It is a world where "individual behaviour returns to its antithesis, to material behaviour". It is the supremacy of social over personal might, the rule of reified relations over the individual, oppression of the individual by accidental character. The process in which private persons appropriate alienated social powers, personify them and play a certain part with the appropriate character masks is lawfully determined by a given social structure, although chance occupies a considerable place in it.'

p. 188.

Here roles are seen as epiphenomena of structure rather than, as in western sociology, constitutive

of it. Urbanek agrees with Goffman however, in believing that the humanity of man is not to be found in his roles but in his attitudes to them and the significance they have for him. Man cannot be 'reduced' to the roles he plays. But for Urbanek this significance is an objective fact ascertainable by reference to structural conditions, whereas for Goffman it is a matter to be discussed with the actor.

23. I gather that there is some dispute as to who draws upon whom.
24. 'Theoretical aspects of Ethnomethodology'.
25. I should make it clear that ethnomethodology regards itself as an intellectual enterprise distinct from sociology, and as such is not concerned with social structure. It is therefore irrelevant to criticise it as not structural in its approach or as ignoring structural features. However, particularly in its early years, ethnomethodology has provided a critique of conventional sociology. It is with this that I am concerned.
26. I do not wish to imply here that a solution to the problem of meaningful order which Garfinkel discusses, implies one to that of political order.
27. Studies in Ethnomethodology, pp. 9-10.
28. Method and Measurement in Sociology, p. 186.

29. L. Taylor - 'The Contribution of the labelling and interactionist school to criminological thought'.
30. An example which amply demonstrates the dangers of pursuing the antistructuralist subjectivist critique too far may be found in Atkinson's Orthodox Consensus and Radical Alternative. The author initially presents the same kind of arguments I have used in this chapter at length and with some cogency, but when faced with providing an alternative that copes with the whole of individual variety and inconsistency and still tries to give a general account of social relations, is unable to provide anything but a painful set of neologisms, culminating in the replacement of the term 'social structure' by 'social kaleidoscopes' to indicate the changing and variable nature of social reality as experienced situationally.
31. In his article 'Normative and Interpretio Paradigms in Sociology' in Douglas ed. Understanding Everyday Life.

CHAPTER SIX.

1. See The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology.
2. 'The Sociological Study of Ideology 1940-60', p. 116.
3. Embattled Reason, p. 115.
4. The Unconscious, p. 5.
5. See T. Parsons - 'The Role of Ideas in Social Action' in Essays in Sociological Theory.
6. 'The Sociology of Knowledge and the Problem of Truth', p. 114-5.
7. 'La Sociologie de la connaissance et Epistemologie'.
8. In Ideology and Discontent ed. D. Apter.
9. It is amusing that so sure is Geertz of the difference between science and ideology that he persists in trying to state it analytically, rather than exploiting the differences by asking whether or not his opponent wishes to regard science as entirely epiphenomenal of social relations - for surely it is part of high culture, practised in privileged settings by bourgeois and revered by them almost as a religion, and at many points related to economic growth. This attack might prompt a response to the effect that social conditions are essential to the establishment of a scientific context of discovery and perhaps to the development of the autonomy of science, but once this stage is reached, it is relatively independent in the validity

of its generalisations from the social conditions in which it is sustained; and that there is a difference between an ideology of science which is a use of science for other purposes, and science itself as a body of knowledge. As I will show later this ad hominem approach provides an important opening, which can be fruitfully explored. Geertz ignores this strategy because of his belief that he can provide cut and dried answers.

10. The American Business Creed.
11. In 'Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive'.
12. Man and Society, The Open Society and its Enemies.
13. I will not refer to Engels as well except when his views are relevantly different from those of Marx.
14. 'Some Reflections on the Sociology of Knowledge'.
15. The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx.
16. The Sociology of Knowledge, p. 146.
17. Lukacs, p. 61.
18. I need hardly point out that if materialism is reduced to an ontological assumption, it can be shown to be no better than its opposite. The only way a preference can be reasonably established between the two is by working out their different implications for theories based upon them. The consequences of materialism, if held consistently, rule out the significant operation of human minds altogether. See the quotation from Marcuse p. 429-30.

19. See for example his Dialectics of Nature and his later Letters.

20. It is interesting to compare the statements of two contemporary East European Marxists to see where the process that Engels and Lenin began has now reached. The following represents the dogmatic view that the general method of Marxism is deduced from general laws.

'1. The law of the relation between the social base and the superstructure. Economic relations in the production and distribution of material goods directly or indirectly determine the creation of spiritual achievements - political, regulatory, ethical, cultural and ideological - in a concrete society, which are mutually in support and interact with economic relations as well as themselves.'

O. Mandic in Marxism and Sociology ed. P. Berger, p. 40.

Here on the other hand is the 'reasonable' view.

'Marxist monism should not be identified with vulgar economism which ... characterises all social change as the passive product of the economic factor. Contrary to mechanic economism, Marxism considers every social phenomena as relatively autonomous as a structure with its own immanent sources of movement, its own inner dialectics, and specific differentiated environment.'

M. Kalab, op. cit., p. 66. It is clear that it is still only economic relations that really count. It will be a measure of the self-awareness of Marxism when a Marxist publishes a study of the development of materialism from Marx's own rejection of Hegel through Engels and Lenin to its most extreme form in Stalin and so to contemporary revisionism.

21. What the 'Friends of the People' are. Selected works, Vol. XI pp. 420-21.
22. Preface to A contribution to a critique of Political Economy p. 182 in Lawrence and Wishart (pubs.) Marx and Engels Selected Works.
23. Man and Society, ch. 5.
24. The German Ideology, p. 39.
25. Op. Cit. Ch. 3.
26. Reason and Revolution, p. 317.
27. Thus one might facetiously suggest that, in the words of a non-Marxist politician, the limits on false consciousness are that you cannot fool all the people all the time.
28. The Modern Prince, pp. 106-7.
29. 'The Sociology of knowledge: New Perspectives.'
30. Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, p. 107.
31. Marcuse, Reason and Revolution, p. 273.
32. Marcuse, Reason and Revolution, p. 275 quoting Marx op. cit. pp. 87-8.
33. Marcuse, op. cit. p. 276 quoting Marx op. cit. p. 83.
34. Marcuse, op. cit. p. 277.
35. Marcuse, op. cit. quoting Marx op. cit. p. 89.
36. I. Meszaros. Marx's Theory of Alienation, p. 192.
37. idem, p. 284.
38. The German Ideology, p. 86.
39. 'The Concept of Ideology', p. 170.

40. Aspects of History and Class Consciousness ed. Meszaros, pp. 53-4.

41. Lukács most explicit recognition of it is as follows

The Marxist method, the dialectical material knowledge of reality can arise only from the point of view of a class, from the point of view of the struggle of the proletariat. To abandon this point of view is to move away from historical materialism, just as to adopt it leads directly into the thick of the struggle of the proletariat.'

p. 21.

What is objectionable is not that Lukács has a point of view, but that he goes on to say that it is 'correct', the only historically rational point of view.

42. Les Aventures de la Dialectique, p. 53. Rough translation:

'When one says that Marxism finds a meaning in history, that should not be taken to imply an irresistible orientation towards certain ends, but rather the immanence of a problem or question in history, in relation to which what happens from moment to moment can be classified, located and compared as progress or reaction ... in short how things cumulate together with the events of the past to constitute a single relevant whole.'

43. Compare the second thesis on Feuerbach.

'The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory, but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.'

The second sentence suggests that Marx was well aware that the realisation of truth in this sense is a purely political question.

44.

I devote no more space to attempts to create a privileged position from which to analyse reality - that this is a fundamentally mis-conceived enterprise should by now be obvious. Lest the reader should imagine that this problem is now a thing of the past however, Gouldner's conclusions in The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology are worth noting, if only for the seeming inevitability with which a Marxist or semi-Marxist mode of analysis leads into paradox of this kind. Gouldner's book consists of a lengthy unmasking of contemporary sociology, using both the respectable techniques of the sociology of knowledge and the less reputable ones of political diatribe, mudslinging and snide remarks. The result is entertaining and impressive. At the end of it all however, Gouldner's conscience pricks him sufficiently to ask whether, as a well-established contemporary sociologist, the same treatment might not be given to himself. His response to this is that it is difficult but he will try, and that, yes, it is possible that he has been led to the views he has on sociology because of his experience and social position. However

'Surely men may be led to truth no less than to falsehood by their socially shaped personal experience in the world. Indeed there is no other way in which they can approach the truth. Surely truth, no less than error, is born of human experience (Note the ad hominem 'surely', again). Whether or not any work presents us with reality or illusion cannot be determined by knowing the life that the thinker has led. In the end this can be appraised only by looking at the work alone and not the life: the work can be judged only in terms appropriate to it, and by seeing how well it bears up under criticism.'

p. 482.

If Gouldner had not spent the preceding 450 pages doing precisely what he contends is inappropriate to himself I would be more disposed to accept his view here. I am prone to scepticism when he concludes:

'Whether or not my theory is the product of my situation it is not merely the product. It is the product of my reflection upon my situation and thus constitutes a development of that situation. The question is, does it work in practice?'

Gouldner is only too pleased to sneer at other peoples' reflections if they are conducted sitting regally in bed every morning. One wonders about the status of Gouldner's own reflections. He offers us no satisfactory criteria for distinguishing their superiority - for distinguishing between ideology and theory. That his theory is 'reflective about' is only significant if one is not willing to treat all aspects of a person's

life and situation, as Gouldner persistently does, as equally relevant to the determination of their ideas about social reality. But whether or not his theory works in practice is a matter of judgment - on what grounds would he reject rather than elaborate it?

This is not to say that I disagree with what Gouldner is saying here - I say the same myself. What I disagree with is his right to say it, because what he has done is to spend the book using a determinist assumption about social ideas and then provided an alternative assumption - the partial independence of men in their thoughts and actions from their social situations - for himself. The materialist determinist assumption is used as a convenient basis for analysis and exposure but it inevitably leads to embarrassment as soon as the query is raised; tu quoque?

45. 'The Sociology of Knowledge and Moral Philosophy'.

46. Social Theory and Social Structure, Ch. 12.

47. 'Some Reflections on the Sociology of Knowledge'.

Many writers make the same point cf. Merton op. cit.

'It appears that in drawing epistemological consequences from the sociology of knowledge, Mannheim has been led into various unresolved antinomies'.

p. 508.

48. 'Towards a Theory of Social Knowledge'.

49. The Sociology of Knowledge, Ch. 1.
50. The relevance of my earlier arguments as to the relative appropriateness of correspondence and coherence theories of truth should be evident here. Stark finds himself unable totally to reject the verificationist position, since ideas are put into practice in social relations and as events are only partially realisable. But the meaning of the ideas and a successful account of their development cannot be based only on the practical problems of their realisation (Weber's notion of which motives are effective in producing successful social actions), but must involve an awareness of their location in a cultural context.
51. The Sociology of Knowledge, Ch. 7.
52. Marcuse puts the problem well in his discussion of the philosophical background of the sociology of knowledge. Reason and Revolution, pp. 334-5.

'It had been the fundamental conviction of idealism that truth is not given to man from some external source but originates in the process of interaction between thought and reality, theory and practice. The function of thought was not merely to collect, comprehend, and order facts, but also to contribute a quality that rendered such activity possible, a quality which was thus a priori to facts. A decisive portion of the human world therefore consisted, the idealists held, of elements that could not be verified by observation. Positivism repudiated this doctrine, slowly replacing the free spontaneity of thought

with predominantly receptive functions. This was not merely a matter of epistemology. The idealistic idea of reason, we recall, had been intrinsically connected with the idea of freedom, and had opposed any notion of a natural necessity ruling over society. Positive philosophy tended instead to equate the study of society with the study of nature, so that natural science, particularly biology, became the archetype of social theory. Social study was to be a science seeking social laws, the validity of which was to be analogous to that of physical laws. Social practice, especially the matter of changing the social system, was herewith throttled by the inexorable. Society was viewed as governed by rational laws that moved with a natural necessity. This position directly contradicted the view held by the dialectical social theory, that society is irrational precisely in that it is governed by natural laws.'

A radical and perhaps unfair contrast but illuminating in showing the intellectual and philosophical roots of the problem.

- 53. In Essays in the sociology of knowledge.
- 54. Ideology and Utopia, p. 173.
- 55. Compare his similar comment in Diagnosis of Our Time, p. 22.

'Whereas the most important values governing a society based upon the rule of custom were blindly accepted, the creation of specifically new values and their acceptance is to a large extent based on a conscious and rational value appreciation'.

Mannheim's point is that the subversiveness of the new ideas makes for greater awareness and understanding - a recognition of the very existence of the 'blindly accepted' ones.

- 56. See 'The Listener', 16.viii.70.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

1. Methodology of the Social Sciences, pp. 53-4.
2. Idem p. 58.
3. Idem p. 84.
4. Idem p. 60.
5. The Sociological Imagination, p. 117.
6. Op. cit., p. 22.
7. "Science as a Vocation" in From Max Weber, pp. 145, 146.
8. Remarks at the A.S.A. Convention 1968.
9. Op. cit., p. 117.
10. At the beginning of The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation.
11. See H.S. Becker, 'Whose side are we on?', and A.W. Gouldner, 'The Sociologist as Partisan'.
12. In Deutsch and Howard, Where it's at, pp. 64-5.
13. See K. Davis, 'The Myth of Functional Analysis as a special Method in Sociology', A.S.R. Vol. 24, 1959.
14. See e.g. An Asian Drama, Prologue and Chapter 1.
15. Methodology of the Social Sciences, pp. 54-5.
16. Idem p. 57.
17. The Relevance of Sociology, p. 231.
18. A Short History of Ethics, pp. 266-8.
19. R. Norman - Reasons for Action, pp. 34-5.
20. A.W. Gouldner - The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, p. 47.

21. Cf. R. Harre - The Principles of Scientific Thinking,
esp. Ch. 8.
22. That is assumptions which can be successfully put
into practice and lead to results in social relations
which actors are pleased with. I do not of course
mean empirically validated and therefore cognitively
"correct", but rather a successful form of politico-
moral practice.

APPENDIX.

1. In D. Wrong ed. Max Weber, p. 187.
2. Protestant Ethic, p. 76.
3. Ibid., p. 181.
4. General Economic History, p. 270.
5. Protestant Ethic, p. 29.
6. The Making of the English working class, ch. 11.
7. Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, p. 72.
8. Protestant Ethic, p. 183.
9. Ibid., pp. 17-18.
10. Ibid., pp. 23-4.
11. Ibid., pp. 26-7.
12. Ibid., p. 60.
13. Ibid., p. 75.
14. Ibid., pp. 91-3.
15. Ibid., pp. 97-8.
16. Op. cit., p. 201.
17. In Green ed. The Weber Thesis and its Critics, pp.113-4.
18. Capitalism and Modern Social Theory, pp. 213-4.
19. "The Protestant Sect and the Spirit of Capitalism"
in Gerth and Mills eds. From Max Weber.
20. Thompson, op. cit., p. 390.
21. See Tawney op. cit. passim and esp. Introduction for
this kind of attack. And see Hansen for a careful
rebuttal of it, "The Protestant Ethic as a General

Precondition for Economic Development".

22. It is relevant at this point to comment on a phrase which often causes confusion in relation to Weber's work, that of 'elective affinity'. This does not actually appear in the Protestant Ethic essay, at any rate in Parsons' translation, but Weber uses it elsewhere in reference to his thesis. Bendix explains as follows,

'The term "elective affinity" was taken from the title of a novel by Goethe. Weber used it frequently to express the dual aspect of ideas, i.e. that they were created or chosen by the individual ("elective") and that they fit in with his material interests ("affinity").

Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait, p. 64 f.n.

Presumably Weber used the term to demonstrate his recognition of but difference from economism. Ideas were not epiphenomenal of the economic base, but neither on the other hand were they "idealistic" - creations of a free imagination. They were responses to situations and conditions and to changes in them, the point being that the response was not entirely predictable in terms of the actor's interest in just that situation or condition: it had to fit in with his values and belief about other aspects of social relations also. Even given this, Weber may have been prepared to claim that the changed idea would not be entirely predictable, since there would be a

number of possible developments. It was part of Weber's position in supporting idealism in the face of materialism that ideas have an important impact on social relations and actions and so on conditions - in terms of material interest the crucial aspect of protestantism was after all that it was irrational, in as much as it led to more work than was necessary, with the surplus being reinvested, not consumed. Weber emphasised the importance of this break with the traditional economic rationality of living at an accustomed level with the minimum of effort. Such a view of human action and its bases does of course constitute one element of the difficulties of a causal explanation of it.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y.

The following is an alphabetical list of works cited in the text and others which were found useful. It makes no pretense to comprehensiveness and inevitably reflects the hazards of bibliographic investigation, the writer's particular interests, and his predilection for certain styles and points of view.

Abbreviations have been used throughout as follows:

A.J.S.	American Journal of Sociology.
A.P.Q.	American Philosophical Quarterly.
A.S.R.	American Sociological Review.
B.A.	British Association (for the Advancement of Science)
B.J.S.	British Journal of Sociology.
C.U.P.	Cambridge University Press.
E.J.S.	European Journal of Sociology.
F.P.	Free Press.
J. of P.	Journal of Philosophy.
N.W.U.P.	North-Western University Press.
N.L.R.	New Left Review.
O.U.P.	Oxford University Press.
P.A.S.	Proceedings of the Aristotolian Society.
P.P.R.	Philosophy and Phenomenological Research.
P.Q.	Philosophical Quarterly.
P.R.	Philosophical Review.

P.S.Q. Political Science Quarterly.
 R.K.P. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
 S.F. Social Forces.
 S.I. Sociological Inquiry.
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