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REASONS AS CAUSES OF ACTION

A Non-Humean Account of the Causal Status of Action
Explanations In Terms of Reasons

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INTRODUCTION

The Debate

The broad aim of this thesis is to try and answer the question of why people act as they do - why they act in one way rather than another and what influences them in their decisions to perform certain actions. I want to stress at the outset that in referring to actions I am making a distinction between the activities of agents which are intentional and mere 'behaviour' which can be seen in terms of reflex bodily movements or things that 'just happen' to agents (as in the case of accidents). As a sociologist such an analysis is of vital importance in the explanations we try to formulate concerning not only the actions of individuals, but their relationships with each other and with the society of which they are members. For example, if we take the view that people act as a result of purely 'subjective' motives, desires, reasons, and so on, then our methods of enquiry will concentrate purely on the reasons agents themselves give for their actions. If, on the other hand, we see the explanation of actions lying in the notion of social rules determining the actions of individuals then the 'subjective' reasons of actors have little significance.

It was to an examination of these, seemingly, diametrically opposed views that my attention was first drawn. Should we explain actions in terms of the 'internal' reasons of the agents; should we explain them in terms of socially constructed rules or other forms of societal influences; or should action explanations be seen in terms of both internal reasons and external factors? The other area to be examined is what the status of action explanations should be. That is, can actions be explained in terms of cause and effect or does the fact that people are actors capable of thinking and deliberating, unlike the subjects studied in the natural sciences, render causal analysis in sociology inappropriate? In order to try and answer these questions I shall divide this thesis into four main areas of discussion.

Action as Rule-Governed Behaviour

In the first place, I will question the notion, advocated most strongly by Winch, that actions must be seen as rule-governed. Thus, I shall examine what is involved in the notion of following a rule. In Winch, it is suggested that the actions of individuals should be explained in terms of socially constructed and sanctioned rules. That is, all 'meaningful' behaviour (action) is 'ipso facto' rule-governed and that there

can be no private rules of conduct since these rules are the product of the society of which the individual is a member. There are, as we shall see, a number of problems associated with such a conception of action.

One of the most fundamental implications of such a view, in terms of our interests here, is that people seem to cease to be active agents - they become like 'puppets' who make no subjective decisions concerning their own actions. Whilst Winch argues for an interpretative understanding of the actions of agents and stresses the importance of the subjective motives of these agents, when we examine his claims in more detail we begin to see that this stress on socially constructed rules in fact implies that agents are merely responding to the dictates of the social structure to which they belong. What then, I ask, happens to 'agency'? Are we not back to the positivist idea that people's beliefs, attitudes, desires, motives, and so on, are really determined by social structures over which they have little or no control? This is the type of explanation I want to question, although, as will become clear, I do not want in any way to exclude the influence of social or other external factors on the actions of agents. But, neither do I want to argue that such factors actually determine actions in any

mechanistic way. Instead, I am going to argue that **action explanations should be given in terms of reason which does not necessarily presuppose the notion of rules.** Before considering in more detail the idea of reasons as explanations of action, however, I want to examine to what extent reasons can be seen as 'causes of action'

Reasons as Causes of Action

The essential point I want to make in part two, is that **reasons must be seen as causes of action if reasons are to explain actions at all.** In saying this, however, I am going to argue for a rejection of the Humean notion of causality in explaining natural as well as social phenomena. In Hume, to say that 'A' is caused by 'B' is to say that the temporal succession of 'A' and 'B' is an instance of a generalisation to the effect that events like 'A' are always followed by events like 'B'. Such a conception of causality obviously cannot be applied to human action. It is patently the case that generalisations which connect reasons to actions cannot be made into the kinds of laws advocated by Hume. Nor can we say that the same cause or reason will always result in the same effect or action since agents live in 'open' systems whereas Hume's model only applies to phenomena that exist in 'closed' systems. Thus, it is not

surprising that many objections have been made to seeing reasons as causes if we conceive of causes in a Humean way. However, I shall argue that this conception of causal analysis is not the only one nor, necessarily, one which is always applicable to the functioning of natural mechanisms let alone social phenomena.

As an introduction to this section, I will briefly outline the theoretical arguments concerning the idea that the explanation of action should be in terms of reasons and that reasons should be seen as the product of desires plus beliefs. This conception of reasons is one that is put most forcefully by writers such as Davidson and Hollis. Davidson argues that a reason consists of a pro-attitude towards an action and a belief that the action is of that kind. Hollis, in a similar way, maintains that a reason consists of a desire and a related belief. Both argue that when we examine reasons we should take both pro-attitudes or desires and beliefs into account. This idea is important since, as Hollis argues, beliefs and desires may not always correspond with each other and that the former may, in some cases, serve to modify or go against the latter. In other words, in explaining the action of an individual we must try and discover what his or her internal desires and beliefs are - these, then, constitute the reason the agent had

for acting (or not acting) in a certain way. Here, then, we have an explanation of action whereby agents are seen to make decisions based on their own desires and beliefs. They are not seen to be acting purely on the basis of adherence to socially prescribed rules as Winch argued. It is then possible to analyse what the status of reason-explanations are - if we accept the notion that reasons are seen as the product of desires plus beliefs - that is, can they be seen as causal in a sense different to that argued by Hume.

It is here that I introduce the works of Bhaskar and his conception of causal analysis which he applies both to the natural and the social sciences. Bhaskar maintains that **causal laws are, in fact, tendencies**. They should be seen as the tendencies of things which may be possessed unexercised and exercised unrealised, just as they may be realised unperceived by people. Thus, in this view, in citing a law we are referring to the activity of mechanisms as such and not making a claim about the outcome which will be co-determined by the activity of other mechanisms.

This idea of causes as tendencies can, I will suggest, reconcile the fact that agents act in open systems where there are no constant conjunctions of events with causal explanations

of actions in terms of reasons. What will be argued is that the possession of a reason seen, as Bhaskar suggests, as a more or less long-standing orientation to act in a certain way can be seen as a cause. If we see causes as tendencies then they are clearly distinct from actions because they can be possessed unexercised and will only be exercised under suitable conditions. It seems to me, therefore, that there are two fundamental aspects of the role of reasons as causes of action. Firstly, that agents having certain sets of beliefs and desires will 'tend' to act in certain ways on the basis of these desires and beliefs. Secondly, however, these can only be analysed as 'tendencies' since they are defeasible in special circumstances or under the pressure of countervailing reasons.

This idea of reasons as tendencies, however, raises the fundamental issue I wish to address. That is, whilst the idea that reasons are the product of the desires and beliefs of the agent allows us to let 'agency' back in to action-explanations (and so we avoid the 'oversocialised' view of man as advocated by Winch), have we gone too far in the other direction? Can we really argue that the explanation of all the actions of individuals should be seen in purely 'subjective' terms? Can

we exclude social, cultural or structural factors when explaining action? I am going to argue that this is also a mistake.

Reasons as Explanations of Action - The Three Categories

Whilst I agree that we should explain actions in terms of reasons I do not want to suggest that reasons are only 'internal' to the agents concerned. Rather, that while some reasons may be so, in many cases external factors may serve to modify actions. Thus, I shall consider how 'emergent properties' can condition, help form, or modify the reasons of individual agents. In an attempt to do this, I am going to propose three fundamental categories of reason-formation which, as I shall suggest, are not in any way static or fixed as to their boundaries. Thus, I suggest that reasons can be: (i) **internal** - the agent's own reasons not influenced by any external factors; (ii) **appropriated** - where the agent appropriates reasons from their society or culture and then internalises them and makes them his or her own; and (iii) **external** - reasons which are not the agent's own but which serve to influence his or her actions by acting as constraints on their desired action or as facilitators of that action. It is to be my contention that: (i) is contra-Winch; (ii) is

consonant with Hollis' view; but (iii) is my own contribution which challenges the adequacy of either (i) or (ii) alone, and is held necessary to supplement categories (i) and (ii) which are inadequate without the addition of category (iii). I shall argue that in many cases of explanations of actions in terms of reasons we must take into account both the internal reasons of the agents and the influences of external factors - whether appropriated or constraining/facilitating - on the decisions of agents to act in one way rather than another.

However, in examining the influence of external factors on the reasons of agents - even in the case of category (iii) factors - I do not want to argue that 'subjectivity' is of little or no importance. One fundamental area, in this section, therefore, is the question of whether all reason explanations have to have a 'subjective' aspect. It is to be my contention that the answer to this question is 'yes'. In the first place, even when considering external constraining factors I will argue that it is still the agent's subjective choice of whether or not to abide by the constraints they impose (for example, people can and do break laws). Instead of seeing external factors as determinants of action I want to suggest that we should analyse the effects of these factors in terms of

'opportunity costs' - the price an agent is willing to pay to fulfil their desires and beliefs taking into account the situation in which they find themselves.

Another aspect I will examine is the proposal that we can act in terms of 'unconscious' motives which would imply that the agent is not acting in terms of his or her own reasons but rather as a result of motives or reasons of which they cannot be aware. The question here is, do we have to be aware of the reasons for our actions for them to constitute our reasons for our actions? Here I am going to argue that agents, in general, are aware of their reasons (although this does not always involve full discursive penetration) and that even if the reason the agent gives for his or her action may appear to us to be 'irrational', based on false information, badly thought out, and so on, this does not mean that such a reason is not the agent's own reason. Such reasons, therefore, even if the agent later becomes aware, at some time in the future, through a process of learning, that they were not 'good' reasons should be seen as providing an adequate explanation of the action of that agent, at the particular time in question.

Having outlined how I perceive reasons to be formed in terms of the three categories, the final chapter is concerned with how these can be applied to Bhaskar's notion of reasons as causes.

My contention is that it is possible to account for both tendencies and external factors in the explanation of human action by using these categories and thereby we are able to give all explanations of action in terms of reasons. In other words, tendencies can be explained in terms of category (i) or (ii) reasons with external factors bringing into the explanation category (iii) reasons. The fact that I have emphasised external categories as 'reasons' is that I do not want to perceive them in any 'deterministic' way. Yes, there are external factors that do not involve the agent in any 'subjective' choice of whether or not to act in accordance with them - that is, things that just happen to agents as in the case of accidents or reflex movements. But, I will argue that this is not what we are referring to when talking in terms of meaningful action. In other words, the concept of external category (iii) reasons involves more than just 'behaviour', it involves the agent weighing up costs in the light of the situations in which they find themselves. Reasons, however, should be seen as 'causes' of action if causes are seen as tendencies. An agent may have the tendency to act in a certain way based on his internal beliefs and desires, and yet these tendencies not be manifested in overt action because of 'other' reasons which derive from an external source. In strict parallel, observed regularities in action patterns, especially

of large groups, may be due to the constancy of external factors (to their consistent tendencies) rather than to internal dispositional tendencies of actors (that is, their constant desires and beliefs).

Of fundamental importance in my arguments concerning reason-formation in terms of my three categories is that we are able to conclude that the internalist/externalist debate is somewhat limited in arguing that reasons are only internal or only external to the agent. This is brought out clearly in the last part of the thesis when we consider how other theorists have viewed action-explanations.

Methodological Comparisons

The final section involves an analysis of how various theorists have perceived the relationship between structure and agency and the ways in which this has influenced their approach to the explanation of action. I shall begin with the holist account of Durkheim and argue that his stress on 'social facts' results in him only being able to explain actions in terms of something like category (iii) reasons. We thus lose any notion of the 'subjective' reasons agents have for their actions. In opposition to this, the second chapter deals with

methodological individualism as endorsed in and illustrated here by rational choice theorists. I shall argue that their notion that reasons are the product of desires alone means that **their analysis is limited only to category (i) reasons**; and, further, that these internal reasons are wrongly perceived as not including the beliefs of the agent as well as his or her desires.

The last chapter examines the attempt by Hollis to re-work the idea of rational choice theory in order to introduce some notion of external reasons for actions. Whilst this theory is less extreme than the two arguments previously discussed, it is to be my contention that Hollis' account is also restrictive in the sense (a) **that his conception of external factors only really refers to category (ii) appropriated reasons thus ignoring category (iii) reasons**; and (b) **that in arguing against the idea of reasons as being only explicable in terms of desires, he takes the issue too far and fails to take account of the possibility that reasons for actions may be internal (category (i)) reasons (albeit in a different way from that claimed by rational choice theorists)**.

The fundamental aim of this section, therefore, is to demonstrate that these theorists, by limiting their accounts to only one 'type' of reason, produce a restricted and inadequate

account of action. Further, that by allowing that reasons may be formed on the basis of category (i), (ii), or (iii) factors (or a combination of these categories) we can view the well-worn internalist/externalist debate in a new light. We do not, in other words, need to argue that just because we accept that reasons can be internal to the agent, that we should reject any notion of externality and vice versa. The debate should not be in terms of either one type of reason or another, rather we should be examining what has influenced the formation of reasons agents have for their actions which could involve one, two or all of my three categories.

PART ONE

ACTION AS RULE-GOVERNED BEHAVIOUR

Before commencing with this examination of what Winch means by rule-governed behaviour, I want briefly to outline the reasons why I considered this idea as an important starting point for an analysis of how we can explain actions. Winch, in response to more positivist thinkers such as Durkheim, wanted to argue for a subjective understanding of human action in terms, as he himself stated, of the reasons or motives of the agents in question. Thus, he rejected the idea that social phenomena should be treated in the same way as natural phenomena and the notion that the methodology of the natural sciences could be equally applicable to the social sciences. Of particular importance in this idea of interpretative sociology and a subjective explanation of action was the contention that **social structures should not be seen as determinants of human action** (as writers such as Durkheim seemed to imply).

Yet, when Winch's ideas are examined in more detail it emerges that **in speaking of socially constructed and sanctioned rules, he was, in fact, also emphasising the social at the expense of the subjective reasons of agents.** This raised two fundamental questions. What was it in Winch's analysis that resulted in

this seeming contradiction whereby while stressing that it is important to examine actions in terms of the 'subjective' motives of agents, he then proceeded to produce a rather 'oversocialised' view of man?; and was it possible to incorporate some of the important insights of Winch into a theory of action which avoided seeing action as socially determined while also allowing for the influence of social factors on individual agents? In order to answer these questions we need to examine, in detail, the basic claims made by Winch in order to bring out what, in my view, are the positive aspects of his ideas; and also to assess what the implications are of seeing action in terms of rule-governed behaviour. It would then be possible to explain why I want to argue that reasons involve more than simply the following of rules.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IT IS TO FOLLOW A RULE

Introduction

Winch begins his analysis of the role of sociology by examining the relationship between science and philosophy. He argues that whereas the scientist investigates the nature, causes and effects of particular real things and processes, the philosopher is concerned with the nature of reality as such and in general. The question of 'What is real?', for Winch, involves the problem of man's relation to reality. Thus, we must ask whether the mind of man can ever have contact with reality and, if it can, what difference this will make to his life. Essential to Winch's subsequent arguments here is that this is not an empirical question but a conceptual one. It has to do with the force of the concept of reality and cannot be understood in terms of the preconceptions of experimental science or answered by generalising from particular instances because a particular answer to this question is already implied in the acceptance of these instances as real. (1)

For Winch, the question of whether reality is intelligible involves asking about the relation between thought and reality. In considering the nature of thought, he suggests, we are led

to consider the nature of language - that is, the question of how language is connected with reality, of what it is to say something. (2) Taking an idea from Wittgenstein, Winch concludes that in discussing language we are discussing 'what counts as belonging to the world' and thus the problems of philosophy arise out of language. Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language we use - the concepts we have decide for us the form of experience we have of the world. The world is for us what is presented through these concepts, and while they may change, when they do our concept of the world has also changed. (3)

In view of this, argues Winch, the theoretical issues raised in philosophy should be settled by 'a priori' conceptual analysis rather than by empirical research (which, as we will see later, is an argument that constitutes the basis for his rejection of causal analysis in the realm of actions explanations). In other words, the concepts we have decide for us the experience we have of the world and that the sociologist's understanding involves understanding these concepts rather than seeing what empirical research may show us (indeed, for Winch, this would be concept-mediated anyway - on his view it could not show anything independent of concepts). (4) This, for Winch, is fundamental to how we understand human action.

The Importance of Context in Understanding

The vital philosophical question here, for Winch, is that regarding the nature of intelligibility of reality - what it is to understand something. The notion of intelligibility, argues Winch, is systematically ambiguous. Its sense varies according to the context in which it is being used. Thus, for example, scientists, historians, religious prophets, etc., all try to make the world intelligible but in many ways their objectives are very different. (5) Here then we begin to see Winch's emphasis on the importance of context in understanding action. However, as will be discussed subsequently, there are a number of problems involved here, not least that taken to its logical conclusion it leads to a form of relativism that seems to undermine the role of sociology itself.

To return to Winch, though, and how we can understand social life. People, he suggests, decide how they will behave on the basis of their view of what is the case in the world around them. What then is involved in having such knowledge and what is the general nature of behaviour which is decided in accordance with this knowledge? Understanding, for Winch, depends on our recognition of the 'prima facie' importance of understanding the situation in which one lives one's life. We

must show **why** such an understanding has importance in a person's life by showing what is involved in having it. To answer the question of how understanding is possible it is necessary to show the central role which the concept of understanding plays in the activities of human societies. According to Winch, people's social relations with other people are permeated with their ideas about reality. In fact, social relations are expressions of ideas about reality. We must, therefore, enquire into the nature of man's knowledge of reality and the difference such knowledge can make to human life. (6)

Linguistic Rule-Following

It is at this point that Winch introduces the Wittgensteinian idea of what it is follow a rule. It must be noted that at this stage Winch is talking in terms of linguistic rule-following, but he is later to apply this to the explanation and understanding of human action. Winch begins with, what he terms, an obvious 'prima facie' case of the mind's contact with reality. Suppose, he suggests, I am wondering when Everest was first climbed and explicitly express my thoughts that 'Mount Everest was climbed in 1953'. What is it about the words 'Mount Everest' which makes it possible to say I mean by those

words a certain peak in the Himalayas? A natural answer is that I am able to mean what I do because the word has been defined to me. I have had Everest pointed out to me; I have been told its name is Everest; and in virtue of those actions in the past I am able to mean by those words that peak in the Himalayas. However, a further question has to be asked - what is the connection between those acts of the past and my utterance of the word which gives the utterance the meaning it has? What is it to follow a definition? A superficial answer to this is that the definition lays down the meaning and to use a word in its correct meaning is to use it in the same way as that laid down by the definition. What is it, though, asks Winch, to use a word in the same way as that laid down by the definition? Suppose, for example, that the word 'mountain' rather than 'Everest' was being defined when that peak was pointed out to me. In that case too my grasp of the correct meaning of the word 'mountain' would be manifested in my continuing to use it in the same way as that laid down by the definition, yet the correct use of the word 'mountain' is not the same as the correct use of the word 'Everest'. (7)

It appears, therefore, argues Winch, that the word 'same' is an example of systematic ambiguity - we cannot know whether two things are the same or not unless we know the context in which

the question arises. There is, in fact, no absolute, unchanging sense to the words 'the same'. It is only in terms of a given rule that we can attach a specific sense to the words 'the same'. In this way, asking what it is for a word to have a meaning leads on to the question of what it is for someone to follow a rule. On the face of it, someone could be said to be following a rule if he always acts in the same way on the same kind of occasion. This, though, does not advance matters since it is only in terms of a given rule that the words 'the same' have sense. In what circumstances, therefore, for Winch, does it make sense to say that someone is following a rule?

Suppose, he suggests, that the word 'Everest' has been defined to me and I settle its future use by deciding that I will use this word only to refer to this mountain. This is perfectly intelligible, but, argues Winch, it is presupposing that whose very possibility we are investigating. It does not matter how emphatically I point out this mountain and utter the words 'this mountain', my decision still has to be applied in the future. It is, then, what is involved in this application which is in question. What is the difference between someone who is really applying a rule and someone who is not? (8)

Winch answers this question by arguing that in following a rule we must take account not only of the actions of the person involved but also the reactions of other people to what they do. Thus, it is only in a situation in which it makes sense to suppose that somebody else could in principle discover the rule being followed that a person can be said to be following a rule at all. (9) For instance, given a certain form of training everybody does, as a matter of course, continue to use the words 'Everest' and 'mountain' in the same way as would everybody else. It is this that makes it possible for us to attach a sense to the expression 'the same' in a given context. (10) But, Winch argues, it is important to note that going on in one way rather than another as a matter of course must not be just a peculiarity of the person whose behaviour claims to be a case of rule-following. His behaviour belongs to that category only if it is possible for someone else to grasp what he is doing by being brought to the pitch of himself going on in that way as a matter of course. (11)

The Impossibility, in Winch, of a Private Rule of Conduct

Here, then, we come to the argument that it is not possible to have a private rule of conduct. Is what we call 'obeying a rule', asks Wittgenstein, something that it would be possible

for only one man to do, and to do only once in his life? He replies that it is not possible that there should have only been one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule. To obey a rule is a custom but it is also a practice and thus to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. For Wittgenstein, it is not possible (and here, as will be shown, I disagree) to obey a rule 'privately' otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same as obeying it. (12)

The notion of following a rule, therefore, in Winchian terms, is logically inseparable from the notion of making a mistake. If it is possible to say that someone is following a rule, that means we can ask whether he is doing what he does correctly or not. There is no sense, Winch argues, in describing his behaviour without doing this since everything he does is as good as anything else he might do, whereas the point of the concept of rule is that it should enable us to evaluate what is being done. A mistake, in fact, is a contravention of what is established as correct and it must be recognisable as such a contravention. (13) This idea of the impossibility of private rules of language, for Winch, is also true of actions - that is the rules which govern our actions must be publicly accessible and involve the notion of making a mistake.

The Possibility of Private Rules of Conduct

To take, first, the idea that rules involve the notion of making a mistake - MacIntyre asks 'What is the wrong way of going for a walk?' and 'if there is no wrong way, is my action in any sense rule-governed?'. To ask these questions, he claims, is to begin to bring out the differences between those activities which form part of a coherent mode of behaviour and those which do not. It is to begin to see that although many actions must be rule-governed in the sense that the concept of some particular kind of action may involve reference to a rule, the concept of action as such does not involve such a reference. (14) MacIntyre's point here is very important to my subsequent arguments. It is to be my contention that the explanation of human action should be seen in terms of the reasons the agent has for that action. The possession of a reason though does not require adherence to rules - it may do - but people do not have to be obeying a rule to have a reason for an action and for that action to be intentional. In other words, reasons are more than rule-following, as I hope to demonstrate in Part Three.

Ryan, though, suggests that MacIntyre is overweighting Winch's case. The point Winch is making, he argues, is that there is always some correct and recognised description of his action

that both the agent and his fellows can accept, such that it makes it possible to say or deny that that was what he did.

(15) Winch is claiming, in fact, that establishing a standard is not an activity which it makes sense to ascribe to any individual in complete isolation from other individuals since it is contact with others which alone makes possible the external check on one's actions; and this is inseparable from an established standard. It is, of course possible, concedes Winch, for an individual to adhere to a private rule of conduct, but it must in principle be possible for other people to grasp that rule and judge whether it is being correctly followed. Also, it makes no sense to suppose anyone capable of establishing a purely personal standard of behaviour if he never had experience of human society with its socially established rules. (16)

This, it seems to me, is speculative and by no means a self-evident proposition. For example, would it not be conceivable that a desert islander could create private rules in terms of which he relates to 'nature' such as 'do not go near this wild animal' or 'do not walk on thin ice'. Such rules could be based on his own observation or experience of what properties 'wild animals' or 'thin ice' have. It is not necessary for other people to understand these rules for them to be rules of

conduct for the desert islander. Indeed, they are probably essential rules of action for that individual if he is to survive. It thus seems that Winch should not dismiss the idea of a private rule of conduct (or, as I shall later term them, internal reasons for action) as easily as he does. Many rules may be socially constructed but others may be privately constructed and be still as efficacious in producing certain forms of action and have just as much explanatory power.

Strawson makes a similar point arguing that it is perfectly conceivable that we can imagine a desert islander who has never been brought up in human society devising a language for his own use. Also, we can imagine an observer who sees a correlation between the use of the words and sentences of this language and the speaker's actions and environment. This observer is thus able to form hypotheses about the meanings (the regular use) of the words of this subject's language and, in time, come to be able to speak it. While, at this stage, the practice of each serves as a check of the practice of the other, this does not mean that before the use of the language becomes a shared form of life the words of the language had no meaning or use. (17)

Strawson, for Winch, is begging the question by using in his description terms like 'language', 'use', 'words', 'meanings', and so on; the applicability of which is exactly what is in question. To say, he argues, that the observer may form hypotheses about the meanings of the words in his subject's language is senseless unless we can speak of what his subject is doing in terms of the concepts of meaning, language, use, etc. From the fact that we can observe him going through certain sounds which, were they performed in the context of a human society it would be legitimate to describe in those terms, it by no means follows that his activities are legitimately so describable. Further, the fact that the observer might correlate his subject's practices with his own does not, for Winch, establish Strawson's case since it is not these practices, considered on their own, which justify the application of categories like language and meaning, but the social context in which these practices are performed. It is, he argues, precisely the nature of the connection between the initial definition and the subsequent use of the sound that is in question. (18) Yet, as has been argued, the origins of rule formation may depend upon a natural context and be independent of a social one.

Even if, however, we accept that all rules are socially constructed (which I do not), another problem that faces Winch is where these rules came from originally. Could it not be, as Strawson implies, that there were once private rules which gradually became shared? Ayer, in fact, argues that some human being must have been the first to use a symbol. (19) Ayer, Winch argues, implies that socially established rules cannot have been presupposed by this use and so established rules cannot be a necessary prerequisite to the use of symbols in general. Winch maintains, however, that it does not follow from the fact that there was a transition from a state of affairs where there was no language to one in which there was, that there must have been some individual who was the first to use language. The supposition that language was invented by some individual, for Winch, is nonsensical (although he does not explain why). (20) It is more likely, Winch argues, that we can imagine practices growing up amongst early men none of which could count as the invention of language; and yet once these practices had reached a certain degree of sophistication one can say that there was a language. (21) This, it seems to me, is avoiding the whole issue of where these early practices came from. Winch has not answered the fundamental question of the origins of rules. He takes as his starting point socially

created rules but is unable or unwilling to discuss how they first arose and how they became socially accepted as rules of conduct.

Summary

In sum, therefore, Winch is arguing that a major property of language-using, and of the behaviour which accompanies it, is that these are performances that can be done correctly and incorrectly; and the assessment of this requires that there should be a set of socially maintained rules which embody the criteria of correct and incorrect performance. These rules, suggests Ryan, will include the criteria for the correct and incorrect application of a word, as well as the rules of a different scope concerned with the appropriate and inappropriate occasions for its use. (22)

As has been discussed, however, there are a number of problems associated with this view. Firstly, that it is by no means clear whether we can dismiss the idea of private rules of language or conduct as easily as Winch, nor can he satisfactorily answer the question of where these socially accessible rules originated from. Moreover, and this is vital to my fundamental criticism of Winch, I would dispute the idea

that adherence to rules is fundamental to all action explanations. We should explain actions in terms of reasons, and the notion of reasons involves more than the simple following of rules. In the second place, bound up with the notion of rule-governed behaviour is the idea of 'ways of life' and the importance of context. This has fundamental implications for sociology and the study of action so it is to this I will turn in the next chapter.

NOTES TO PART ONE, CHAPTER ONE

- (1) Winch, P.: *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, 1958, pp. 8 & 9.
- (2) Ibid. pp. 11 & 12.
- (3) Ibid. pp. 15 & 16.
- (4) Ibid. pp. 16 & 17.
- (5) Ibid. pp. 19 - 21.
- (6) Ibid. pp. 21 - 24.
- (7) Ibid. pp. 24 - 27.
- (8) Ibid. pp. 27 - 29.
- (9) Ibid. p. 30.
- (10) Ibid. p. 31.
- (11) Ibid. p. 31.
- (12) Wittgenstein, L.: *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953 (1958 Edition) pp. 80 & 81.
- (13) Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) p. 32.
- (14) MacIntyre, A.: "The Idea of a Social Science", 1967 in Wilson, B.R.: *Rationality*, 1970, p. 119.
- (15) Ryan, A.: *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1970, p. 159.
- (16) Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) pp. 32 - 37.
- (17) Strawson, P.F.: *Critical Notice on Mind*, Vol. LXIII, No. 249, cited in Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) p. 34.
- (18) Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) pp. 34 & 35.
- (19) Ayer, A.J.: "Can There Be a Private Language", *Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society*, Vol. XXVIII, cited in Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) p. 37.
- (20) Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) p. 37.
- (21) Ibid. p. 37.
- (22) Ryan, A., 1970 (op. cit.) p. 131.

CHAPTER TWO

THE 'WAYS OF LIFE' ARGUMENT

Introduction

As previously outlined, Winch's idea of following a rule turns on whether it makes sense to distinguish between a right and a wrong way of doing things in connection with what an agent does. Winch, in arguing against Oakeshott's contention that most human behaviour can be adequately described in terms of the notion of habit or custom (1), maintains that learning to do something is not just copying what someone else does. It may start in that way, but a teacher's estimate of a pupil's prowess will lie in the latter's ability to do things which he would precisely not simply have followed. The pupil has to acquire not merely the habit of following his teacher's example, but also the realisation that some ways of following that example are permissible and others are not. He has to learn not only to do things in the same way as his teacher, but also what counts as the same way. Learning, in fact, often involves doing something different from what one is originally shown, but in relation to the rule that is being followed. This counts as 'going on in the same way' as one was shown. (2)

There may be a sense, Winch admits, in which to acquire a habit is to acquire a propensity to go on doing the same kind of things; and there is a sense in which this is true of following a rule; but these senses are different. For example, in the case of an animal forming a habit there can be no question of 'the reflective application of a criterion'. Even when, for instance, a dog always responds in the same way - performing tricks to a command - what counts as 'always doing the same kind of thing' when the word of command is uttered is decided by the owner rather than by the dog. It is only in relation to the owner's purposes that the statement that the dog 'always does the same kind of thing' has any sense. In contrast, the human being has to understand what is meant by 'doing the same kind of thing on the same kind of occasion' before he can be said to have acquired a rule; and this is also involved in the activities that can be described as 'habit'. It is, Winch maintains, only because human actions exemplify rules that we can speak of past experiences as relevant to our current behaviour. (3)

The dog performing a trick in response to a command, Winch argues, has no conception of what it would be to respond differently because it has no conception of what it is doing at all - it just responds to the appropriate stimuli. An honest

man may refrain from stealing money, though he could easily do so and needs it badly. The thought of acting otherwise need never occur to him, but, nevertheless, he has the alternative of acting differently because he understands the situation he is in and the nature of what he is or is not doing. Understanding something, for Winch, involves understanding the contradictory too, and that is why conduct which is the product of understanding, and only that, is conduct to which there is an alternative. (4)

Rules as Specific to 'Ways of Life' - A Contextual Approach

In Winch, however, understanding action not only involves the idea that meaningful behaviour involves a choice between alternatives, but also the idea of rule-following specific to certain 'ways of life'. Thus he argues that learning what a motive (or reason) is "belongs to learning the standards governing life in the society in which one lives and that again belongs to the process of learning to live as a social being".

(5) Ideas, for Winch, cannot be torn out of their context. The relation between ideas and context is an internal one. The idea gets its sense from the role it plays in the system and it is nonsensical to take several systems of ideas, find an element in each which can be expressed in the same verbal form,

and then claim to have discovered an idea which is common to all systems. (6) What Winch is claiming, therefore, is that there can be no non-contextual ideas.

This view is clearly expressed in the article "Understanding a Primitive Society" where Winch takes issue with Evans-Pritchard's discussion of the Zande belief in magic. (7) Evans-Pritchard, suggests Winch, although emphasising that a member of a scientific culture has a different conception of reality from that of the Zande believer in magic, wants to go beyond merely registering this fact and making the difference explicit. He wants to say that the scientific conception agrees with what reality is actually like, whereas the magical conception does not. (8)

While, argues Winch, the idea that men's ideas and beliefs must be checkable by reference to something independent - some reality - is important, great care is needed in fixing the precise role that this conception of the independently real does play in men's thoughts. In the first place, we should notice that the check of the independently real is not peculiar to science. God's reality, for example, is certainly independent of what any man may care to think, but what that amounts to, ontologically, can be seen from the religious

tradition in which the concept of God is used, and this use is very unlike the use of scientific concepts. Within the religious use of language, therefore, the conception of God's reality has its place. This does not mean, though that it is at the mercy of what anyone cares to say; if this were so God would have no reality. In the second place, Winch claims that reality is not what gives language its sense. What is real and unreal shows itself in the sense that language has. Further, both the distinction between the real and the unreal, and the concept of agreement with reality, themselves belong to our language. They are not concepts of the language like any other since they occupy a commanding and even limiting position here; nevertheless, we could not distinguish the real from the unreal without understanding the way this distinction operates in the language. If, then, we wish to understand the significance of these concepts, we must examine the use they actually do have in the language. (9)

From these arguments, suggests Winch, one question that can be raised is: is it in fact the case that primitive systems of magic constitute a coherent universe of discourse like science, in terms of which an intelligible conception of reality and clear ways of deciding what beliefs are and are not in agreement with reality can be discerned? An affirmative answer

to this, Winch argues, does not commit him to accepting as rational all beliefs conducted in magical concepts or all the procedures practised in the name of such beliefs. This is no more necessary than is the proposition that all procedures 'justified' in the name of science are immune from rational criticism. It is important to distinguish a system of magical beliefs and practices like that of the Azande, which is one of the principal foundations of their whole social life, and magical beliefs that might be held and magical rites that might be practised by persons belonging to our own culture. Concepts of witchcraft in our own society, for Winch, at least since the advent of Christianity, have been parasitic on and a perversion of other orthodox concepts both religious and scientific, and have been rejected as irrational in the system of beliefs on which these practices are thus parasitic. Hence, when we speak of such practices as 'superstitious', 'illusory' or 'irrational' we have the weight of our culture behind us because these beliefs and practices belong to and derive such sense as they have from that same culture. The sense is thus only apparent in terms which are culturally relevant. If, though, we wish to understand Zande magic we must seek a foothold elsewhere. (10)

The crux of Winch's argument is that the concepts used by primitive people can only be interpreted in the context of the way of life of those peoples. Winch, to demonstrate this, considers the criticism made of him by MacIntyre. MacIntyre, argues Winch, claims correctly that description is important for the concept of human action and that these descriptions do not exist in isolation but occur as constituents of beliefs, speculations and projects which are continually criticised, modified, rejected or improved, so the stock of descriptions changes. The changes in human actions are thus intimately linked to rational criticism which requires the notion of choice between alternatives. To explain, which is a matter of making clear what the agent's criterion was and why he made use of this criterion rather than another; and to explain why the use of this criterion appears rational to those who invoke it. Hence, in explaining the rules and conventions to which action, in a given social order, conform, we cannot omit reference to the rationality or otherwise of those rules and conventions. Furthermore, argues MacIntyre, the beginning of an explanation of why certain criteria are taken to be rational in some societies is that they are rational, and since this has to enter into our explanation we cannot explain social behaviour independently of our own norms of rationality. (11)

What is important here, argues Winch, is to be clear about whose concept of rationality is being alluded to. It seems, he suggests, that it must be that which is current in the society in which the criterion is invoked. Something can appear rational to someone only in terms of his understanding of what is and what is not rational. If our concept of rationality is different from his, then it makes no sense to say that anything either does or does not appear rational to him in our sense. MacIntyre, however, seems to be suggesting that the explanation of why, in society 'S', certain actions are taken to be rational, has got to be an explanation for us; so it must be in terms of concepts intelligible to us. If, then, in the explanation, we say that these criteria are rational, we must be using the word 'rational' in our sense. (12)

The explanation, suggests Winch, would then run: members of society 'S' have seen to be the case something that we know to be the case. If 'what is seen to be the case' is common to us and to them, it must be referred to under the same concept for each of us. But, argues Winch, this explanation is not open to us since we start from the position that standards of rationality in different societies do not always coincide. From the possibility, therefore, that the standards of rationality current in 'S' are different from our own, we

cannot assume that it will make sense to speak of members of 'S' as discovering something we have also discovered since such discovery presupposes initial conceptual agreement. Rationality, for Winch, is a concept necessary to the existence of any language, it is not just a concept in a language. Where there is a language it must make a difference what is said and this is only possible where the saying of one thing rules out, on the pain of failing to communicate, the saying of something else. MacIntyre, Winch states, is right to say that we have already invoked our concept of rationality in saying of a collection of people that they constitute a society with a language, but this is to say nothing about what constitutes rational behaviour in that society. This would require more particular knowledge about the norms they appeal to in living their lives. It is not a matter of invoking our notion of rationality, rather it is a matter of invoking our notion of rationality in speaking of their behaviour in terms of 'conforming to norms'; but how precisely this notion is to be applied to them will depend on our reading of their conformity to norms - that is, what actually counts for them as conformity and what does not. (13)

Again Winch is emphasising the importance of context when trying to understand and explain ideas and actions. However, the question must be asked as to how he could explain that some ideas have been 'lifted' from their context of origin and transported to other contexts. For example, the introduction of industrial techniques from one culture to another; or the influence on the social lives of many non-Christian societies that missionary activities have had. Is, then, Winch rather overstating his case when he argues that all ideas and actions must be explained in terms of the context in which they arise or take place?

The Justifications for a Contextual Approach

There are, suggests Gellner, various motives and/or justifications for a contextual approach. One of these is simply that it contains a good deal of validity since one does, indeed, get a better appreciation of a doctrine by seeing its setting and use. There are, however, other motives. There is the laudable desire to be tolerant, understanding and liberal - to refrain from an uncomprehending and presumptuous superiority in one's attitude to other societies. (14) Indeed, Winch, himself, states that we do not initially have a category that looks at all like the Zande category of magic. Since it is we

who want to understand the Zande category, it appears, he argues, that the onus is on us to extend our understanding so as to make room for the Zande category, rather than to insist on seeing it in terms of our own distinction between science and non-science. Certainly, Winch argues, the sort of understanding we seek requires that we see the Zande category in relation to our own categories, but this neither means that it is right to evaluate magic in terms of the criteria belonging to those other categories, nor does it give any clue to which of our existing categories of thought will provide the best point of reference from which we can understand the point of Zande practices. (15)

Let us pause here for the moment. Winch seems, here, to be undermining his own position regarding understanding only being possible within ways of life, not between them. If, as he suggests, we are able to extend our understanding to make room for the Zande category then this implies that we are able to, as Hollis suggests subsequently, build conceptual bridges between elements of the system so that we can understand the Zande category; and, moreover, that these 'bridges' go in both directions. In other words, there is a possibility, even in Winch, that we can understand other cultures without having to become 'part of that culture' - to go native. Thus it seems

that Winch has, in fact, contradicted himself in yet another argument by suggesting that such understanding is possible, whilst also implying that while 'we' are able to do this, the Zande are not. This is a very strange conclusion for him to draw!

The Problems of Contextual Charity

This aside (as we will be considering it more detail later), such a contextualist approach must be treated with caution. As Gellner suggests, it may be that the sympathetic, positive interpretation of indigenous assertions is not the result of a sophisticated appreciation of context, but the other way around: that the manner in which the context itself is invoked, the amount and kind of context and the way the context itself is interpreted, depend on prior tacit determination concerning the kind of interpretation one wishes to find. (16)

What Gellner is arguing is that contextual charity, as advocated by Winch, may be too charitable. (17) Gellner claims that when it is argued, in a sense rightly, that the interpretation of people's assertions must be made in the light of what they do and the social setting they do it in, this requirement is profoundly ambiguous. Two quite different

things may be intended. Assume, he suggests, that in the language of a given society there is a word 'boble' which is applied to characterise people under either of the following conditions: (a) a person who antecedently displays certain characteristics in his conduct, say, courage, is called 'boble'; and (b) any person holding a certain social position is also described as 'boble'. One is tempted, he argues, to say that 'bobility' (a) is a descriptive term whose operational definition consists of tests for the possession of certain attributes, whereas (b) is simply an ascription depending on the will or whim of those in authority or on the social situation but not dependent on the characteristics of the person in question. The society, however, does not distinguish between the two concepts. It only uses one word 'boble' and its theories about 'bobility' only knows bobility, one and indivisible. As a first and simplified approximation, Gellner suggests, the logic of bobility is not an unrecognisable model, perhaps, of some familiar concepts in our own language. (18)

What, however, asks Gellner, is the observer to say about bobility-like semi-operational concepts? Bobility is a conceptual device by which the privileged class of the society acquires some of the prestige of certain virtues respected in that society without needing to practise it thanks to the

meaning of the word. It is, at the same time, a manner of reinforcing the appeal of those virtues by associating them with prestige and power. However, all this needs to be said, and to say it is to bring out the internal logical coherence of the concept. The over-charitable observer determined to defend the concept he is investigating from the charge of logical incoherence, though, is bound to misdescribe the social situation. To make sense of the concept is to make nonsense of the society. Thus, the uncharitable may be 'contextualist' in a second, deeper and better sense. Excessive indulgence in contextual charity, argues Gellner, blinds us to what is best and what is worst in the life of societies. It blinds us to the possibility that social change may occur through the replacement of an inconsistent doctrine or ethic by a better one, or through a more consistent application of either (or the possibility, for instance, of social control through the employment of absurd, ambiguous, inconsistent or unintelligible doctrines). (19)

Ideological Explanations

A similar point is raised by Mackie under the rubric of 'ideological explanation'. He defines 'ideology' as a system of constructs, beliefs and values which is characteristic of

some social class (or other social group or a society as a whole), and in terms of which the members of that group see and understand their position in relation to their social environment and the world as a whole and explain, evaluate and justify their actions especially the activities and policies characteristic of their group. At least some of the beliefs and concepts in the system, he argues, are false, distorted or slanted, and at least some of the activities sustained and guided by that ideology have a real function differing from that which, in the ideology, they are seen as having. (20)

The point this illustrates, suggests Mackie, is the ironic resonance to Winch's insistence that ideas cannot be torn out of their context since the idea gets its sense from the role it plays in the system. This position, he argues, appears plausible only so long as we forget that concepts can play different roles in systems, and that there are different sorts of systems of categories. A given idea can be situated in more than one context. Thus, even if we set aside the question of the truth or falsity, say, of Azande witchcraft beliefs in order to ask merely how they are related to other elements of Azande life, we will be drawn back to the matter of truth in order to answer this question. Zande witchcraft can be considered as ideology, under Mackie's definition, and this

indicates the need for some explanation of the maintenance of false beliefs which must play a role in social life different from the one they are thought to play by people who believe them to be true. (21)

A full explanation and description, in this view, must take account of both how their actions appear to the agents and what is not apparent to them. This, I would argue, is a very important point and essential to my subsequent assessment of reasons as explanations of actions. What I am going to suggest is that although action explanations should be seen in terms of the agents' reasons for their actions, I also argue that in some cases these reasons may have been appropriated from the culture in which the agent lives and then internalised. It may be that the agents may not fully appreciate the function of these ideological tenets, a fact that may only be apparent to an observer who exists outside the situation in question.

For Mackie, the shallowness of Winch's theory derives in part from his simple identification of concepts and action. In Winch actions embody concepts. The context from which ideas cannot be torn is a system of ideas. Understanding a society is nothing more than grasping the meaning of ideas in their systematic interconnection. But, argues Mattick, institutions

and beliefs are not always correctly understood by the natives whose property they are. An unbeliever's account of magical properties will be quite different from a believer's. Witchcraft, he argues either works or does not. The persistence of belief in methods that do not work calls for some explanation, even though we normally cannot expect those for whom these methods embody basic traditions to heed that call. (22) In other words, when explaining the actions of individuals we should not only examine what their reasons are but how they are formed and this involves an assessment of the cultural or societal system in which they live and the ideas they have internalised which they may not fully appreciate or understand.

A further important point, for Mattick, is that social intercourse is richer than language. It comprises a vast range of objects and practices which may lie outside the field of verbal representation or even contradict it. Even in those areas of social action, he argues, which are organised through language, if we identify the meaning of a word or idea with the social behaviour in which it plays a role, it may easily turn out that the meanings in this sense will differ from the meanings elicitable from the natives. How then do we describe the social intercourse in which a concept has its place? If,

Mattick argues, we do it in the language of the natives we have learned nothing; if we do it in our own theoretical language we will describe social action differently from a native and perhaps in a way that the native will not recognise. Winch's view assumes a double coherence of world views; both internal coherence and coherence in relation to action. But, Mattick argues, the criteria implicit in the practice of a society are not necessarily coherent. (23)

Gellner, for Mattick, has brought out a basic flaw in Winch's identification of social concepts and social action - his neglect of the fact that concepts generally contain justifications of practices, and hence that one misrepresents them grossly if one treats them simply as these practices, and their context, in another guise. Thus, Gellner argues that nothing is more false than the claim that, for a given assertion, its use is its meaning. On the contrary, its use may depend on its lack of meaning, its ambiguity, its possession of wholly different and incompatible meanings in quite different contexts, and on the fact it emits the impression of possessing a consistent meaning throughout - on retaining, for example, the aura of justification valid only in one context when used in quite another. (24)

The Problem of Relativism

Another outcome of the 'ways of life' argument specifically relates to the problems of relativism and the implications this has for sociology. While, argues Mattick, it is only 'polite' to extend our understanding so as to make room for the Zande category, it is difficult to see how categories can be expanded in this way if Winch's conception of a culture is correct. Either we are dealing with two systems each with its own criteria of rationality and truth of which the elements are meaningless when dissociated from the whole; or else, as has already been suggested, it is possible to build conceptual bridges between elements of the systems for us to understand a Zande category. Such bridges, if they are possible, however, go in both directions. If we can stretch our categories to meet a Zande concept, the latter has 'ipso facto' been brought into congruence with our ways of thought. (25)

Thus, as Gellner argues, it is not tenable to claim that indigenous societies always live in a conceptual dimension of their own in which our categorial boundaries do not apply. On the contrary, we can sometimes only make sense of the society in question by seeing how the manipulation of concepts and the violation of categorial boundaries helps it work. The

doctrines advocated by Winch which identify meaning with use, therefore, as well as failing to account for the forces of ideology also cannot account for social change. It precludes us from making sense of social changes which arise, at least in part, from the fact that people sometimes notice the incoherence of doctrines and concepts and proceed to reform the institutions which justify them. (26)

MacIntyre also argues that the weakness of Winch's position is clear when we consider the conceptual self-sufficiency claimed for 'ways of living' and 'modes of social life'. The examples given in Winch are 'religion' and 'science', but, argues MacIntyre, at any given date in any given society the criteria in current use by religious believers and by scientists will differ from what they are at other times and places (indeed, religious believers and scientists may differ between themselves). **Criteria have a history** and this emerges strikingly if we ask how we are to think of magic in Winch's terms. Is magic a 'mode of social life', or a 'primitive religion', or, perhaps, a 'primitive society'? For we do want, MacIntyre claims, to reject magic as illogical because it fails to come up to our standards of rationality. A belief in magic may not be falsifiable, but does it stand in need of rational criticism and, if so, by what standards? MacIntyre suggests

that one could only hold a belief in magic rationally in the absence of any practice of science and technology in which criteria of effectiveness and ineffectiveness, etc. have been built up. To say this, however, is to recognise the appropriateness of scientific criteria of judgement from our standpoint. A belief in magic is not intended either as a piece of science, or non-science. The people do not possess these categories. It is only in the light of later and more sophisticated understanding that their beliefs and concepts can be classified and evaluated at all. This suggests to MacIntyre that beliefs and concepts are not merely to be evaluated by the criteria implicit in the practice of those who hold and use them; a conviction, he suggests, that is reinforced by other considerations. As Gellner argued, the criteria implicit in the practice of a society or mode of social life are not necessarily coherent; their application to problems set within that social mode does not always yield one clear and unambiguous answer. When this is the case people start questioning their own criteria. They try to criticise the standards of intelligibility and rationality which they have hitherto held. On Winch's view it is difficult to see what this could mean, which returns us to the point that criteria and concepts have a history. It is not just activities which have a history while the criteria which govern actions are timeless. (27)

MacIntyre's ultimate quarrel with Winch, and one with which I completely concur, is the suggestion that agreement in following a rule is sufficient to guarantee it making sense. There are cases where we cannot rest content, he argues, with describing the user's criteria for an expression, but we can criticise what he does. Indeed, unless we could do this we could not separate the case where there are no problems of meaning, the case where there is now no clear sense to an expression but where once there may well have been, and the case where there appears never to have been a clear and coherent sense available. Sometimes to understand a concept, for MacIntyre, involves not sharing it. In the case of 'taboo', for example, we can only grasp what it is for something to be taboo if we extend our insight beyond the rules which govern the use of the expression to the point and purpose which these rules once had but no longer have in a different social context. We can only understand what it is to use an incoherent concept such as 'a soul in a stick' if we understand what has to be absent from the criterion or practice and of speech for this incoherence not to appear to the user of the concept. In other words, we are beginning to notice requirements for the elucidation of concepts which are necessarily absent from Winch's account. We have not only to give the rules for the use of relevant expressions, but to show what the point could be of following such rules. (28)

MacIntyre does appreciate, however, that the fact that we cannot approach alien concepts except in terms of our own criteria could lead to distortion. In this way he argues that all interpretation has to begin with detecting the standards of intelligibility established in a society. But, he argues, as a matter of fact, no-one can avoid using clues drawn from their own society and these will often be helpful. Thus, while we must begin with the society's implicit form of self-description, it does not follow that the descriptions used or the standards of intelligibility detected will always be coherent; and, if they are not, a key task will be to show how this incoherence does not appear as such to the members of the society or else does do so and is somehow made tolerable. In detecting incoherence of this kind we have already invoked our standards. Since, however, we cannot avoid doing this it is better to do it self-consciously otherwise we shall project on our own studies an image of our own social life. If, suggests MacIntyre, we are sufficiently sensitive, we make it possible for us to escape, partially, from our own cultural limitations for we shall have to ask not just how we see the other society, but how they do or would see us. Perhaps, then, what hitherto looked intelligible will then appear opaque and question-begging. (29)

To sum up, therefore, Winch's thinking, according to Gellner, seems to be dominated by an image of small, highly bounded groups. His 'way of life' argument would only make sense in a world populated by a set of small tribes, discontinuous enough to have little to do with each other and of roughly equal cognitive power. (30) What, suggests Ryan, Winch seems to ignore is that **ways of life are not clearly defined**. They overlap and compete, share assumptions and serve different purposes. It is plain, he argues, that societies have radically revised their intellectual assumptions as the result of just this kind of overlap and competition. (31)

Even within cultures we can find many ways of life. As Benton suggests, each participant or class of participants may conceive relationships differently and may even have competing conceptualisations of the whole social order. (32) For example, if we take an instance of the relationship between an employer and an employee, we may find that although they stand in a relationship to one another, the ideas which the one 'expresses' in his relationship will not be the same as the ideas which the other expresses. They will differ in their relationship, and, even more seriously for Winch, one of the 'partners' in the relationship may not conceive of it in terms

of rights and obligations at all but in terms of 'power' and 'necessity' of what he or she is 'forced to do' in order to live or can 'get away with'. (33)

The Winchian could respond to this by arguing that such competing conceptualisations are 'parasitic' on a deeper, primary fund of concepts which constitutes the 'core' of the culture. Benton, though, asks that if this is the case is it possible to speak of a single culture or way of life at all? Mutual intelligibility can be established by reference back to areas of culture which are held in common, but the existence of this 'common core' has to be demonstrated (remembering that such a 'core' in many cases does not exist). Its existence is an empirical matter, which cannot be legislated upon 'in principle', yet it apparently defies any empirical method of ascertaining its existence or non-existence.

The Winchian, though, could simply concede the co-presence, in a single society, of incompatible conceptualisations of the social relations and practices constituting that society; but, Benton maintains, this would mean that these incompatible conceptualisations will be mutually unintelligible. Thus, if there are conceded to be even partial sets of incompatible conceptualisations of a single system of social relations (say,

that system which relates employer to employee) it follows that one or both of the sets of concepts must be rejected if we are to conceptualise the unity of the system of social relationships (or Winch would have to fall back on two different 'ways of life' and then have the problem of how they manage to interact). A corollary of this is that the concepts 'culture' (symbolic universe) and 'society' (way of life) are not equivalent in meanings.

The second implication of this is that even an adequate account of participants' understanding would have to make reference to the way in which social actors individually and collectively 'negotiate' interactions in which incompatible conceptualisations are involved. Sometimes, of course, these interactions are best described as conflicts in which each side exercises power to attain its objectives, but, argues Benton, there are also procedures which involve the articulation of conceptualisations and the search for the presuppositions of existing practices in such a way that dialogue between competing conceptual systems may be constructed. These procedures are given more explicit formulation and may even be systemised in intellectual disciplines; but this aspect of 'interpretative' understanding and the implications of it are unrecognised by Winch. (34)

Trigg also makes the point that Winch's emphasis on agreements in judgements would mean that basic disagreements are an indication of clashes between societies. The scientist, he argues, will belong to one society with one set of assumptions; and the believer in oracles to another. The Christian has one society, the atheist another. However, Trigg argues, many societies overlap. Some scientists will be Christians and others atheists. Every time a new basic disagreement appears, we can go on multiplying societies and it is difficult to know where to stop once this process is started. Every issue on which different groups cannot reach agreement seems to raise the question of whether we are encountering a fresh form of life. **If we accept that apparently insoluble disagreement is a criterion of different ways of life, we shall eventually arrive at the situation where ways of life contain only one person.** Thus, argues Trigg, to avoid starting on this 'slippery slope' we have to accept that one society can comprise individuals who disagree with others in the same society. The definition of a society, then, will not involve the condition that there will be agreement on basic issues. Some sharing of concepts will not imply unanimity. In this case judgements about what is true will be separated from the social background against which they are made, and personal understanding of social institutions cannot be identified with the way they work.

People, he suggests, (and this is vital to my arguments in the part three concerning 'external' reasons for actions) may even follow rules that they disagree with. (35)

The Importance of Individual Understanding

Once, argues Trigg, it is accepted that communities, institutions and social practices do not provide the sole context of social explanation, we see that individual understanding is also important. Winch, he maintains, wanted to combine 'Verstehen' with a Wittgensteinian view of concepts. The 'internal' perspective turns out, though, to be irreducibly social, rooted in modes of social life. It appears that this does not so much involve the situation from the point-of-view of the individual as participating in society, rather the emphasis has swung from the individual to society. Yet, all Winch said about the need for aesthetic sense seemed to demand not participation in social practices but the kind of empathy which a more individualistic theory would demand. Once, in Winch, the emphasis drifts away from individuals to society, the possibility of 'Verstehen' seems to be removed. Shared public concepts may need public criteria for their application, but we should not, argues Trigg, ignore the reality and importance of private mental events. (36) In other words, as I

shall argue, we do not need to reject internal reasons for actions just because we allow that some actions result as a consequence of factors that exist outside the individual (more of this later).

Summary

The above discussion concerning the problems of contextual analyses and the apparently rigid boundaries around ways of life raises the fundamental problem of relativism. Is there any way, however, of overcoming this problem? Can we ever understand the actions of people who live in a society or culture different to our own? Indeed, can we understand anyone who has beliefs and attitudes different from our own? It is to this that the next chapter addresses itself.

I want to emphasise, before doing this, the essential point Trigg has drawn out in his criticism of the 'way of life' argument. That is, that Winch's insistence on socially formed and enforced rules specific to a way of life does not only mean that we cannot ever, as sociologists, really understand or explain the actions of people who live in societies different to our own, but also that we cannot account for the actions of any individuals in terms of the reasons that agent has for his

or her own actions. The agent, in Winch, is acting in accordance with rules. These rules are given to the agent by the society in which the agent lives and the agent is incapable of constructing his own rules of conduct. Not only do I object to the idea that we cannot have private rules of conduct (as previously outlined) but I also take issue with the whole idea that reasons for actions can only be seen in terms of rules. The formation of reasons, I will suggest, involves much more than just adhering to socially prescribed rules. Such rules may exist, but it is the agent's own choice whether to abide by rules (if they exist) and reasons, as such, are in many cases not formed solely as a result of an acceptance of socially given rules.

NOTES TO PART ONE, CHAPTER TWO

- (1) Oakeshott, M.: "The Tower of Babel" cited in Winch, P.: *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, 1958, pp. 58 & 59.
- (2) Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) pp. 58 & 59.
- (3) Ibid. pp. 59 - 62.
- (4) Ibid. pp. 63 - 65.
- (5) Ibid. pp. 82 & 83.
- (6) Ibid. pp. 106 & 107.
- (7) Winch, P.: "Understanding a Primitive Society", 1964 in Wilson, B.R.: *Rationality*, 1970, pp. 78 - 111.
- (8) Evans-Pritchard, E.E.: "Levy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality", *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, University of Egypt*, 1934 cited in Winch, P., 1964 (op. cit.) p. 81.
- (9) Winch, P., 1964 (op. cit.) pp. 81 & 82.
- (10) Ibid. pp. 84 & 85.
- (11) MacIntyre, A.: "Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing" and "A Mistake about Causality in Social Science", 1962 cited in Winch, P., 1964 (op. cit.) p. 95.
- (12) Winch, P., 1964 (op. cit.) p. 97.
- (13) Ibid. pp. 97 - 100.
- (14) Gellner, E.: "Concepts and Society", 1962 in Wilson, B.R. 1970 (op. cit.) p. 30.
- (15) Winch, P., 1964 (op. cit.) p. 102.
- (16) Gellner, E., 1962 (op. cit.) pp. 30 - 34.
- (17) Ibid. p. 36.
- (18) Ibid. pp. 41 & 42.
- (19) Ibid. pp. 41 - 43.
- (20) Mackie, J.L.: "Ideological Explanation" cited in Mattick, P.: *Social Knowledge*, 1986, pp. 60 & 61.
- (21) Mattick, P., 1986 (op. cit.) pp. 59 - 61.
- (22) Ibid. pp. 64 - 66.
- (23) Ibid. pp. 66 & 67.
- (24) Gellner, E., 1962 (op. cit.) cited in Mattick, P., 1986 (op. cit.) p. 67.
- (25) Mattick, P., 1986 (op. cit.) p. 46.
- (26) Gellner, E., 1962 (op. cit.) p. 48.
- (27) MacIntyre, A., 1962 (op. cit.) pp. 68 & 69.
- (28) Ibid. pp. 68 & 69.
- (29) Ibid. pp. 70 - 72.
- (30) Gellner, E.: *The New Jerusalem*, cited in Bloor, D.: *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge*, 1983, pp. 179 & 180.
- (31) Ryan, A.: *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1970, p. 162.
- (32) Benton, T.: *Philosophical Foundations of the Three Sociologies*, 1977 pp. 123 & 124.
- (33) Ibid. pp. 14 & 15.
- (34) Ibid. 123 - 125.
- (35) Trigg, R.: *Understanding Social Science*, 1985, pp. 65 & 66.
- (36) Ibid. pp. 68 & 69.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POSSIBILITY OF TRANSLATION

Introduction

As we have seen, Winch's theory concerning the idea that actions should be explained in terms of rule-following, and, specifically, that these rules are socially constructed and specific to certain forms of society has raised a number of problems. Not least of these, and one that has fundamental implications for sociology, is that, if we take this view, we can never really understand the actions of agents who live in societies or cultures different to our own. Indeed, if we adopt the Winchian view and take it to its logical conclusion we could be in the situation such that we could never explain the action of any individual who did not hold the same beliefs as ours. This, it seems to me, is an untenable position to arrive at. Thus, in this chapter, we are going to examine whether it is possible to translate concepts from one culture to another so that such an understanding is possible.

Lukes - The Idea of Universal Criteria of Rationality

For Lukes, beliefs are not only to be evaluated by the criteria that are to be discovered in the context in which they are held; they must also be evaluated by criteria of rationality

that simply are criteria of rationality - universal criteria. Let us assume, he suggests, we are discussing the beliefs of a society 'S'. One can draw a distinction between two sets of questions. First, what for 'S' are the criteria of rationality in general?; and, secondly, what are the appropriate criteria to apply to a given class of beliefs within that society? (1)

In so far, argues Lukes, that Winch seems to be saying that the answer to the first question is culture-dependent, he must be wrong, or, at least, we could never know if he were right. Indeed, we cannot even conceive what it could be for him to be right. In the first place, the existence of a common reality is a necessary precondition for our understanding of 'S's language. This does not mean we and the members of 'S' must agree about all 'the facts' as any given true statement in 'S's language may be untranslatable into ours and vice versa. What must be the case is that 'S' must have our distinction between truth and falsity if we are to understand its language since, if, 'per impossible', it did not we would be unable even to agree about what counts as the successful identification of public objects. Moreover, any culture, scientific or not, which engages in successful prediction must presuppose a given reality. Prediction would be absurd unless there were events to predict, and both primitive and modern man predict in

roughly the same ways and, also, they can learn each other's languages. Thus, concludes Lukes, they assume an independent reality which they share. (2)

In the second place, Lukes argues, 'S's language must have operable logical rules, and not all these can be pure matters of convention. Thus, Lukes asks whether Winch's statement that the logical relations between propositions depend on social relations between men, is implying that the concept of negation and the laws of identity and non-contradiction need not operate in 'S's language? If so, then it must be mistaken since if the members of 'S' do not possess even these, how could we ever understand their thought, inferences and arguments? Could they ever be credited with the possibility of inferring, arguing or even thinking? It follows, argues Lukes, that if 'S' has a language, it must, minimally, possess criteria of truth (as correspondence to reality) and logic which we share with it and which simply are criteria of rationality. The only alternative conclusion is that 'S's thought and language operate according to quite different criteria and that it is literally unintelligible to us. If the members of 'S' did not have our criteria of truth and logic, we would have no grounds for attributing to them a language, thought or system of beliefs, and would be unable to make any statement about these. (3)

The Necessity of Context-Dependent Criteria of Rationality

Lukes does go on to say, though, that there are criteria which it is appropriate to apply to a given class of beliefs within 'S'. The context, he argues, may provide criteria which specify which beliefs may acceptably go together. There are, therefore, contextually-provided criteria of truth. Such criteria may apply to beliefs which do not satisfy rational criteria in so far as they are **in principle** neither directly verifiable nor directly falsifiable by empirical means. There are also contextually-provided criteria of **meaning** which make particular beliefs **appropriate** to particular circumstances. Moreover, there are contextually-provided criteria which specify the best way to arrive at and hold beliefs. In general, Lukes argues, there are contextually-provided criteria for deciding what counts as a 'good reason' for holding a belief. For any class of beliefs in a society, therefore, there may be criteria provided by context according to which they are 'consistent' or 'inconsistent', 'true' or 'false', 'meaningful' or 'nonsensical', 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' in the circumstances, soundly or unsoundly reached, properly or improperly held, and, in general, based on good or bad reasons. Likewise, the context may provide criteria against which the agent's reason for acting or even the ends of his action, may be judged adequate or inadequate. (4)

In summary, therefore, all beliefs, according to Lukes, are to be evaluated by both universal and context-dependent criteria of rationality. Sometimes universal rational truth criteria will not take the analysis very far and not reveal anything positive about relations between beliefs that are to be explicated in terms of 'provide a reason for'. Sometimes universal criteria of rationality appear less important than 'what the situation demands'. In these cases, context-dependent criteria are illuminating, but they do not make universal criteria dispensable. They could not specify the ultimate constraints to which thought is subject, that is they are fundamental and universal in the sense that any society which possesses a language must apply them in general, although particular beliefs may violate them. It is only by the application of universal criteria that it is possible to see how beliefs which fail to satisfy them can come to be rationally criticised or fail to be. On the other hand, though, Lukes suggests that it is usually only by the application of contextually-relevant criteria that the point and significance that beliefs have for those who hold them can be grasped. (5)

Where is Context Relevant?

Lukes' suggestion that beliefs must be evaluated in terms of universal and context-dependent criteria of rationality seems, however, to be somewhat unclear about the actual circumstances in which each should be applied. He seems to be suggesting that where beliefs do not seem to correspond to universal criteria, they may be understandable in terms of context-dependent criteria. But does this mean that they are or are not rational? In other words, can beliefs be rational in their context while not universally rational and, if so, in what circumstances can we, as observers, call them rational? This, then, appears to leave us with a similar problem to that suggested by Gellner in his discussion of contextual charity. In this he concludes that while contextual interpretation is in some respects inevitable, it is at the same time dangerous and liable to disastrous abuse. It is probably impossible, he argues, to draw up general rules for delimiting the legitimate and illegitimate uses of it and the best safeguard may be to admit of the possibility that the interpreted statement may contain absurdity. (6)

The question is, therefore, whether there is any solution to this rather unsatisfactory state of affairs whereby there seem to be no guidelines as to how far context can be used to

justify beliefs that appear to us not to be rational. Hollis suggests that Lukes' universally rational criteria are not so much universally rational as necessary, and that his context-dependent criteria are not so much context-dependent as optional (since context-dependent criteria that just happen to apply in all societies should be universal without ceasing to be context-dependent).

Rationality Cannot Be Relative

Hollis maintains that **if anthropology (and sociology) are to be possible, the natives must share our concepts of truth, coherence and rational interdependence of beliefs** otherwise we are confronted with vicious circles. In other words, Western rational thought is not just one species of rational thought, nor rational thought just one species of thought. If we supposed it was, and so had to discover empirically which societies espoused which brand of rationality, we would destroy our test for the identification of native beliefs. In this sense, universal criteria of rationality are necessary, but anthropologists often come across beliefs that seem false, incoherent and unconnected. These beliefs are rendered harmonious by appealing to theoretical options - ambiguity, metaphor and local variations in context-dependent rational

criteria. They are options in the sense that the interpretations to be placed upon utterances are partly a function of the anthropologist's own view of the possible uses of language and the possible connections among beliefs. (7)

If, Hollis argues, Winch's interpretative charity means merely making the native society as rational as possible then there is no objection. If, however, it means making the notions of reality and rationality relative to the native conceptual scheme in the belief that we should not claim the monopoly of these notions, then it would seem that anthropology (and sociology) is, in consequence, impossible. Without assumptions about reality and rationality we cannot translate anything and no translation could show the assumption to be wrong. (8)

Incommensurability of Languages - The Outcome of Relativism

Cultural relativism in this form, for Mattick, is, therefore, leading to what we may call incommensurability of languages: the view that there is simply no way in which an assertion, for example in Zande about the reality of witches, can be compared, with respect to truth value, with an assertion in English about the reality of witches. It is not so much that the Azande have

different explanations to ours for some class of phenomenon, but that they try to explain a class of phenomenon that we do not recognise to exist. (9)

As Trigg suggests, it is significant that Winch specifically refers to science as a 'mode of life' in contrast to religion which he considers to be another and different mode; and that each has criteria of intelligibility peculiar to itself. This raises an important problem. A clear corollary of this view is that **the rules of a particular practice determine what is to count as real.** The reality of each is an internal matter for the mode of life concerned. There is, in fact, no neutral language in which the respective claims of each can be discussed and neither can either ever contradict the other. Yet, he argues, this means that reality is not what belief systems are about, but what is expressed in them. There is no one reality against which all putative knowledge can be measured, even if only in principle; there are as many realities as there are different institutions of belief. The conclusion can easily be drawn, therefore, that **'reality' is given sense only be the rules of particular social institutions.** Such a view denies traditional definitions of knowledge which, Trigg maintains, insist that knowledge must involve true belief and reflect reality. Thus, far from

looking at the content of knowledge and trying to assess worth through reasons, exponents of this view will refuse to abstract what is known from its social setting. Any remaining contrast between knowledge and belief, therefore, would have to be what is socially accepted and what is individually held. The sociologist will wish to investigate the 'agreement in judgement' which is held to constitute social practice. Individual deviations from this would not then affect the general social setting. The social sources of authority and the institutional basis for what is counted knowledge are the focus of concern. Implicit in this is the assumption that social rules and public decisions are not the product of individual decisions; the judgements of the individuals gain their sense from a public framework and thus reality is the product of social agreement. (10)

Viewing a body of beliefs as a social practice, argues Trigg, may be illuminating since it enables us to see social influences which we may have previously ignored, but we have not then given an adequate explanation of the belief, as this concentrates on the fact of rather than the content of the belief. (11) The idea that all standards are embedded in particular social backgrounds, he suggests, and that 'objective' claims only have validity against a particular

social background is self-defeating. It destroys itself because it can no longer claim the kind of truth it needs if others are to take notice of it and it undermines the possibility of comparing different societies since there would be nothing in common to facilitate comparison. (12) It is this 'incommensurability' that Hollis wants to overcome, and in doing so he goes some way to solving the problem of how far an analysis of context is useful in assessing the rationality of alien practices and beliefs.

Is Translation Possible?

Hollis claims that to understand native utterances the anthropologist must relate them to one another and to the world. To translate them, he needs to relate some of them to the world since in relating an utterance to others he does not learn what it means unless he already knows what the others mean. Thus, he argues, the anthropologist needs a class of utterances whose situation of use he can specify, and these, apparently, can be specified either as he perceives them or as the natives perceive them, and these two specifications might well be different. If, though, Hollis contends, he has to allow for this possibility he cannot begin since his only access to native perceptions and specifications is by

translating what they say about what they perceive. He would, therefore, have to translate before discovering what the natives perceive and to know what they perceive before translating. Having posed this problem, Hollis proceeds to try and overcome it by arguing that the class of utterances which form the bridgehead for the anthropologist's advance must be one for which his specifications and his informants coincide. His line of attack, then, is that a native sentence can be correctly translated by any, say, English, sentence which can be used in the same way in the same situation. Although sentences which are related like this need not be semantically equivalent, there is not more direct attack on meaning available to us. (13)

In taking this line, however, Hollis argues that two crucial assumptions must be made: that the natives perceive more or less what we perceive, and that they say about it more or less what we would say. Some overlap in concepts and percepts, therefore, is a necessary condition of successful translation. The 'sine qua non' is a bridgehead of true assertions about a shared reality, but it is clear that societies differ about what is real and rational so the philosopher's problem is to see where the necessary limits on these divergences lie. On the one hand, there must be some test of success in

identifying, for example, 'supernatural beliefs', otherwise any account would be as good as any other. On the other hand, any test proposed looks parochial in that it forces other cultures to subscribe to a Western, twentieth century view of what is true. So, asks Hollis, can we find a test which is innocent of this parochialism? (14)

Hollis rejects the idea that we can test such beliefs for correspondence with reality since unless we believe in it we can only report that it does not. Nor is it helpful to say that the natives take the belief to be empirically true since we do not know yet what the belief is. Equally, we cannot invoke a wider reality to give the beliefs something to correspond to since we can only get at it through the beliefs. There is more point, argues Hollis, in testing the belief for coherence, but there are the problems that more than one set of beliefs about the supernatural, for example, may be coherent or that the belief system may contain incoherences. Incoherence may appear to be a reason for rejecting a belief, but it can always be removed by showing why the natives do not perceive it. A more promising requirement, he suggests, is that the everyday meanings of native words used in utterances expressing beliefs should have been firmly established, but this is, at best, inconclusive since words can have more than one meaning.

The anthropologist can invoke the notions of ambiguity and metaphor when he does not wish to be bound by the everyday meanings of native terms. Since, therefore, one way of putting the question at issue is to ask when an utterance may be given a special metaphysical interpretation we cannot, concludes Hollis, rest content that the words always carry the sense they were allocated at the bridgehead. (15)

Rational Interconnection of Beliefs - The Bridgehead

Thus far, therefore, we do not seem to have progressed very far in solving the problem of contextual versus universal criteria of rationality nor with the problem of translation. Hollis, however, puts forward the proposition that it is possible to find internal relations among the beliefs that make their identification plausible. Hollis rejects both deductive and inductive relations as a way of achieving this, and argues that we should, instead, test alleged native beliefs for rational interconnection. Each new identification of a native belief has to be plausible given what is already established. In other words, to justify an identification we must show that a native who believed what we already know he believes would have a good reason to believe what we now claim he believes. There is, however, a problem here since what counts as a good reason

appears to be a social matter and so has to be discovered by empirical investigation - we should have to know what the natives believed in order to find out what is a good reason for what; and we should have to know what the native criteria for rational belief were before we could find out what they believe. We can, however, avoid this circle, according to Hollis, if we distinguish between the definition of a concept and examples of its application. It would be fatal, he argues, to allow that anthropologist and native might have different concepts of what is meant by saying that one belief gives a good reason for holding another; but if we add to the necessary conditions for the possibility of anthropology a shared concept of rational belief, then we are free to admit that some societies find rational beliefs which others find to be irrational. (16)

In Hollis' account, therefore, the anthropologist emerges as part chronicler, collecting observed facts of native behaviour; part philosopher, setting 'a priori' limits to the possible interpretation of the facts; and part social theorist, deciding which of the interpretations consistent with the facts is empirically correct. We cannot, argues Hollis, understand the irrational and to suppose that we can is to run into vicious circles, but we can understand the rational in more than one

way. (17) Hollis, therefore, according to Archer, is advocating a rationalistic approach to translation which depends upon the establishment of a bridgehead between two languages; that is, a set of utterances definitive of the standard meaning of words. The investigator has to assume that he and the native share the same perceptions and make the same empirical judgements in simple situations and these serve to anchor communication and to get translation going by allowing the researcher to identify standard meanings for everyday native terms. (18)

The Necessity of the Possibility of Translation

Relativists, however, Archer argues, would deny these assumptions. Barnes and Bloor, for example, argue that learning, even the most elementary of terms, is a slow process that involves the acquisition from the culture of specific conventions - they are culturally influenced. There are, they argue, no privileged occasions for the use of the term, no simple perceptual situations which provide the researcher with 'standard meanings' uncomplicated by cultural variables. In short, there is no bridgehead and, therefore, perfect translation cannot exist; there can only be translation acceptable for practical purposes. This, though, is no problem

for the relativist who claims that he can do without translation altogether. It is necessary for the rationalist because without it beliefs could not be ascribed to other people of other places and times which would mean nothing could be said about the formal logical relations of beliefs; yet relativists also want to assert things about alien beliefs - very different things like their relationship to local conditions and conventions - but still assertions. So, asks Archer, why is translation not necessary to them? Their answer involves circumventing translation and making a direct assault on alien language and culture. As a strategy it could be called 'becoming as a child' or 'going native'. Archer, however, argues that, in the first place, such a strategy cannot be a complete alternative to translation for it can only be attempted with other living people. It deals only with the contemporary, with inserting oneself into some current alien context in order to assert its difference. It cannot thus dispose of the necessity of translation when attempting to ascribe beliefs to the majority of cultural agents - for these are the dead. (19)

More fundamentally, for Archer, the relativist strategy cannot remove the necessity of translation. As Hollis argued, it is, where alien beliefs are concerned, the most direct attack on

meaning available. (20) Barnes and Bloor, however, argue that translation is not the most direct attack on meaning since it was not available, nor did it play a part in, the first attack any of us have on meaning when we acquire language. Firstly, they argue that language acquisition is not a translation process and nothing that is absent here can be a necessary ingredient in subsequent learning. Thus to understand an alien culture we can proceed in the way the native speakers do and any difficulties in achieving this will be pragmatic rather than 'a priori'. Problems arise, however, for Archer, because this statement about acquiring a second language obfuscates the undoubted truth that the presence of a first language is an ingredient in subsequent language learning. This leads to difficulties, which are 'a prioristic' and not just pragmatic. As language speakers, we simply are unable to become as pre-linguistic children. Since all knowledge is conceptually formed and, therefore, linguistically enshrined, then acquisition of a second language will be inescapably filtered through the first. It is not possible to 'go native' and it follows, 'a priori' there is no alinguistic 'entrée' accessible to existing language speakers. Secondly, Archer argues that even if we suspend these points, there could be no 'return of the native'. Without the possibility of translation there is no way that the investigator of alien beliefs who had gone

through the business of 'becoming as a child' could then report back what the natives did believe. In other words, not only is there no 'entree', there would be no exit. (21)

A description of the role of anthropology, therefore, would be reduced to saying that 'if you want to understand 'X', then go and live with them for five years and then we will talk about 'X' in 'X's language, replete with its conventions, reasons and truths - that is, we will then talk together as natives'. It would, suggests Archer, remain impossible to ascribe beliefs to the natives and communicate these to others. Even more worrying is that if one tries to imagine this capacity to move from one linguistic skin to another, stating and believing one thing in one language and something incompatible in another, then if translation is, indeed, an impossibility, one could not know that one was doing this oneself. In short nothing comparative can either be privately known or publicly communicated about alien beliefs. (22)

We thus come full circle back to the necessity of translation. If we cannot ascribe beliefs, Archer claims, the end result is that sociology has no role to play in explaining actions. Radical relativism, she argues, sought to undermine ethnocentric sociology, but taken to its logical conclusion it

undermines the discipline altogether. Unless we accept as our basic axiom that, as Hollis suggested, if the natives reason logically at all they reason as we do, we effectively abolish the human subject. (23) Translation, therefore, is essential. Trigg, too, suggests that when people enter an alien culture they must assume that they and the natives see the world in the same way. Even if they cannot translate from the native culture to their own, they must assume that they are able, in some pre-linguistic manner, to grasp what the natives are talking about. Thus, while conceptual relativists may try to undermine all possibility of translation, they are still forced to rely on the fact that they and the natives share common human reactions to a common objective world, otherwise teaching and learning would be impossible. (24)

Trigg is arguing, therefore, that this means that translation is possible after all since different languages must refer to the same world. The relativist may wish to deny any basic similarity with the members of another society whose culture may have conditioned them to see things differently, to act differently and divide up the world differently. People in a culture would be similar enough to communicate but there would be a great divergence between cultures. This may be the case, admits Trigg, but such differences would not only undermine the

possibility of translation, but would prohibit participation by anyone in a society which is not their own. Thus, if relativists are correct we are locked into the culture into which we are born. If it is possible to leave one society to join another, then membership of a society is not the most important fact about people. Their conceptual schemes are not totally conditioned by a society, but depend, at least in part, on their membership of the human race; on the same objective world in which they find themselves. (25)

Summary

Here then we have an analysis of views that differ in many respects from that of Winch and his idea of 'ways of life'. What the above arguments suggest is that while different societies may have different sets of beliefs, norms, values, and so on, this does not mean that members of other societies with different sets of beliefs can never understand the beliefs and subsequent actions of the individuals of the first society. Relativists suggest that the only way we can ever comprehend the actions of peoples of a different culture is 'by going native', but as Archer points out this is unrealistic since we can never totally suspend our assumptions and beliefs which we derive from our own social structure; and, even if we could, we

could never then give any explanations other than in terms of the criteria that belonged to that society which would, again, make understanding and explanation impossible.

Hollis' answer to the problem of translation, it seems to me, has much to recommend it. That is, that even though the members of different societies may have different beliefs and values, it is inconceivable that different societies have different concepts of what is meant by saying that one belief gives a good reason for holding another. In this idea Hollis is arguing that we should test alleged native beliefs for rational interconnection - that is, to show that a native who believed what we already know he believes would have a good reason to believe what we now claim he believes. In this way, while we may not be able to understand what we conceive of as irrational beliefs we can understand the rational in more than one way (or rather, we can understand the process of good reasoning which underpins the beliefs). But we do have shared concepts of rationality in the way outlined by Hollis so translation is possible. Rationality, in other words, should not be seen as relative to different cultures as Winch implied.

NOTES TO PART ONE, CHAPTER THREE

- (1) Lukes, S.: "Some Problems about Rationality", 1967 in Wilson, B.R.: Rationality, 1970, p. 208.
- (2) Ibid. pp. 208 & 209.
- (3) Ibid. pp. 209 & 210.
- (4) Ibid. pp. 211 & 212.
- (5) Ibid. pp. 212 & 213.
- (6) Gellner, E.: "Concepts and Society", 1962 in Wilson, B.R. 1970 (op. cit.) p. 48.
- (7) Hollis, M.: "The Limits of Irrationality", 1967 in Wilson, B.R., 1970 (op. cit.) pp. 218 & 219.
- (8) Ibid. p. 235.
- (9) Mattick, P.: Social Knowledge, 1986, p. 42.
- (10) Trigg, R.: Understanding Social Science, 1985, pp. 31 & 32.
- (11) Ibid. p. 35.
- (12) Ibid. p. 41.
- (13) Hollis, M., 1967 (op. cit.) p. 214.
- (14) Ibid. pp. 215 & 216.
- (15) Ibid. pp. 216 & 217.
- (16) Ibid. p. 218.
- (17) Ibid. p. 220.
- (18) Archer, M.S.: "Resisting the Revival of Relativism", International Sociology, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1987, p. 244.
- (19) Ibid. p. 244.
- (20) Ibid. p. 247.
- (21) Ibid. p. 247.
- (22) Ibid. p. 248.
- (23) Ibid. pp. 248 & 249.
- (24) Trigg, R., 1985 (op. cit.) p. 77.
- (25) Ibid. pp. 77 & 78.

SUMMARY TO PART ONE

As we have seen human action, for Winch, is best understood in terms of rule-following. Specifically, Winch maintains that we need to understand the rules followed by different people and cultures in order to explain their actions. Central to this idea of rules is the notion that they are socially constructed and reinforced so that the notion of obeying a rule presupposes the notion of making a mistake. People can only be said to be following a rule if it is possible for other people to understand the rule being followed and to assess if it is being followed correctly. I have indicated, however, that there are a number of problems associated with this view that cast doubts on the suggestion that action-explanations should be in terms of rules. Why then, it can be asked, have I devoted so much attention to the ideas of Winch?

What Happened to the Subjective Understanding of Action?

The answer to the above question lies in the fact that while Winch stresses the importance of a 'subjective' understanding of action, his insistence on rule-following resulted in the subjective being virtually ignored when explaining the actions of individual agents. Winch, in fact, stated that we should explain action in terms of the subjective meaning agents attach to their actions - that is, their motives or reasons. Yet when

we look at his theory in detail we find that agents really act in accordance with the dictates of rules; and, moreover, that these rules are socially and not individually constructed. This seeming contradiction led me to question what it was about Winch's theory of action that led him to this rather unsatisfactory conclusion. It seemed to me that the answer lay in the way in which Winch analysed how reasons for action are actually formed.

In Winch, reasons are formed on the basis of an uncritical acceptance by individual agents of the norms, values, beliefs, and so on, which are given to those individuals by the collectivity. Thus the reasons why an agent acts in one way rather than another are socially prescribed and reinforced by the society in which that agent resides. But, can we really say that agents are so 'puppet-like' that they are incapable of forming their own reasons for their own actions? Yes, I would admit that in many cases agents are influenced in their actions by external factors that are not of their own making. However, I would not agree that agents are so uncritical in their acceptance of the rules, of whatever kind, that exist in the society or culture of which they are a member. Rather, I would argue that agents are capable of assessing the situation in which they find themselves, counting the costs that would have

to be paid as a result of their actions and making decisions in terms of these costs. Moreover, I would also argue that we should not see reasons for actions only in terms of the acceptance of rules whether individually or socially constructed. In other words, reasons are more than rule-following. In order to demonstrate how this conclusion was arrived at, I shall briefly examine the fundamental problems I see as existing in the idea of rule-following.

Reasons Are More Than Rule-Following

One of these problems is clearly indicated in MacIntyre's question 'What is the wrong way of going for a walk?'. While it is clear that some actions, like 'writing a letter' or 'reading a book', are wrongly described as 'going for a walk', this does not mean that there is one correct way of going for a walk that is prescribed by a set of rules which were socially constructed and sanctioned. Some actions may, indeed, be governed by rules - for example, those actions of players in a game of cards - but this is not to say that the concept of meaningful or intentional action itself involves the application of rules. People do not have to obey rules, even in a game of cards (they may cheat), for their action to be intentional. People may be more or less committed to following

rules and there may be other facts which help condition whether or not they do so (they may need to win some money or gain prestige by winning).

I would argue then that Winch's insistence that actions can only be explained in terms of following socially constructed rules produces an oversocialised view of man. It allows no room for the agent to make decisions about his or her own actions. People, I want to suggest, act for 'reasons' not because they are unquestioningly following the rules of the society to which they belong.

What I am suggesting, therefore, is that when explaining actions we should firstly examine the agent's own reasons for his or her action. It could be that the agent is acting in accordance with socially prescribed rules, but this should not be assumed at the outset. Actions, in fact, as the example of the 'cheating' card player illustrates, may be explained in terms of the reasons why an agent chooses to disobey or ignore rules. How though could Winch explain this scenario? He may argue that this agent is acting in terms of a different set of rules, but it would be very difficult to show where rules for cheating, for example, came from and how they could all be

socially constructed, especially since some forms of cheating must be private to be effective. Rather than explaining the actions of this agent in terms of rules, then, I would argue that we should begin by analysing for what reason the agent felt it necessary to cheat - his reason for his action. It may be the case that his action is as a result of the objective situation in which he finds himself (for example, he may need to pay off a debt), but it is still the agent's own decision to act in this way faced with this structural situation (not everyone who owes money will resolve his problem by cheating at cards). In short, I want to maintain that **reasons are more than rule-following.**

How Can Winch Account for Ideology and Social Change?

Another aspect of the idea of rule-following which leads me to want to find a more adequate explanation of action also relates to the idea that learning why people act as they do involves learning the standards governing life in the society in which they live. Ideas, for Winch, cannot be torn out of their context since the relation between ideas and context is an internal one. For example, Winch would contend that the concepts employed by primitive people can only be interpreted in the context of the way of life of those people. Here, then,

we have the problem of cultural relativism which, taken to its logical conclusion, means that we can never understand the actions of people who live in a culture different to our own. This has already been discussed in some detail, but for the purposes of my own arguments I would like to concentrate on the failure of relativism to account for ideology and social change since this has a direct bearing on the role of 'emergent properties' or 'external reasons' to be discussed subsequently.

To begin with 'ideology'. Whilst I would agree that it is important when we are examining other cultures that we appreciate that their 'ways of life', beliefs and attitudes may be different from ours and that this should be taken into account in our explanations, I would argue, with Gellner, that excessive indulgence in contextual charity blinds us to what is best and what is worst in the life of societies. For example, it may prevent us from seeing the possibility of social control through the use by elite groups of ideology. It is important to recognise, I believe, that institutions and beliefs, in any society, may not be fully or correctly understood by the members of that society and may play a different role, say, of the maintenance of the power of an elite group, than the role perceived by other members of that society. Such a role, if it exists, needs to be recognised, understood and explained if we

are to have any knowledge of that societal form; yet this is not possible if we take the Winchian contextualist approach. If we follow Winch, then the explanation of a belief or institution lies in the meaning it has for the members of that society to which it belongs, and only that meaning. Now, I am not denying that the meaning beliefs, and so on, have for the agents is important in action explanations. But, if it is the case that members of a society do not fully understand the role of that belief, as, say, a method of social control, then we are missing a fundamental aspect of the explanation of that belief. As I will argue later, an observer may be in a better position to see the picture more clearly than those involved in the situation in question but this is not to negate the importance of the agent's subjective understanding and responses to this situation when explaining his or her subsequent actions.

The fundamental point I am making here is that Winch could not bring into any explanation of action the existence of ideological tenets that have been appropriated and internalised by agents and which, therefore, should feature in any explanation of their actions. He is, in fact, arguing that observers should never even try to analyse whether the function of the 'rules' an agent is supposedly following is correctly

understood by that agent nor even whether there are any apparent inconsistencies or incoherences in the doctrines that are being advocated. This, it seems to me, leaves us with a rather limited or partial account of the actions of these individuals. It is true that Winch is correct to argue that explanations of actions should involve examining the individual's reason for that action, but this does not mean that the explanation should end here. Rather, the explanation should be in terms of how this reason was formed and this necessarily involves an assessment of the role or function of any ideas or ideologies that may have served to influence the agent in his or her action.

To return, however, to relativism. This position also seems to preclude any possibility of social change. Why is it that societies do not remain static unless changes arise, at least in part, from the fact that people can become aware of incoherences in beliefs and institutions or the falsity of the doctrines advocated, and proceed to reform or destroy the institutions that serve to justify them? How, in Winch, would people come to notice these inconsistencies if they rigidly accepted and obeyed social rules and had no contact with or understanding of (which involves the possibility of translation) other ways of life with different beliefs and

doctrines. In fact, Winch's 'ways of life' argument only works in a world populated by sets of small tribes with rigid boundaries and no contact with one another. Yet, I would contend that in most cases 'ways of life' do overlap and compete; and people often revise their beliefs and assumptions as a result of this. People, in other words, are capable of learning and may change their beliefs as a result of new ideas or additional information - but how could this happen if we accept the idea of socially constructed rules and 'ways of life'?

Thus I would agree with Hollis and Archer that we are able to assess and understand the concepts or ideas that exist in other societies. This is by no means an argument for whether we should judge these as somehow right or wrong, rational or irrational. Certain beliefs and ideas may appear to us to be irrational and we may be able to demonstrate for what reasons they are so, but this is not the function of the observer who is trying to explain why people act in one way rather than another. What is important is that we assess to what extent these doctrines or beliefs influence the actions of the members of that society, but not only in terms of how the agents perceive them since this would only give a partial account. We

also need to understand the role and function of these ideas in order to explain fully the extent and influence they have on individual actions.

Reasons Rather Than Rules as Explanations of Actions

All these problems associated with rule-following, I would argue, point to the need to seek for a more adequate explanation of human action. I want to stress, however, that I agree with Winch to the extent that he argues that we should begin any explanation of human action with the subjective meaning the actor attaches to his or her action - his or her reason. It is then the case that I do not totally reject all that Winch argued for in "The Idea of a Social Science...". Where the fundamental problem with Winch lies, in my view, is that reasons, for Winch, are not seen as, possibly, the product of the agent without the influence of external factors, nor really internal to the extent that they are influenced by social, cultural or structural factors and then appropriated, critically, by the agent. Rather they are seen as being formed by the social structure in which the agent lives. This has resulted in the unsatisfactory state of affairs where the agent, far from being the prime mover in action-explanations, is seen as simply a 'puppet' of society acting in terms of the dictates of the social structure.

My analysis of Winch, therefore, led me to the conclusion that while reasons should indeed be the starting point of any explanation of action, these reasons entail more than just the acceptance of socially prescribed rules. The question remained, therefore, as to how reasons are formed. Are reasons wholly 'subjective'? Can we also see reasons as external as well as internal to the agents? Is the formation of reasons the result of an interaction between a number of factors and not simply a product of the individual or the social structure? It is to answering these questions that the rest of this thesis is devoted.

PART TWO

REASONS AS CAUSES OF ACTIONS

The first chapter of this section involves a brief examination of how we can see reasons as explanations of action. This involves an examination of the works of Davidson and Hollis who argue that reasons must be seen as the product of pro-attitudes or desires plus beliefs. Of fundamental importance here is the idea, put forward most strongly by Hollis, that **both desires and beliefs must be included in action explanations in terms of reasons**, particularly because a belief can modify or change a desire.

This leads us on to the questions of why Winch, although he accepts the basic argument that 'reasons' provide the explanation of action, rejects any notion of causality when explaining actions. This, I am going to suggest, rests on his **restriction of cause and effect to the Humean notion of causation which argues that the same cause always results in the same effect**, which clearly cannot be applied to the actions of human agents. Within this area of discussion, I will also examine Davidson's arguments concerning how reasons can be causes. Whilst I agree with Davidson to the extent that central to the relationship between reasons and action is the idea that **the agent performed the action because he had the**

reason, and his idea that reasons, as beliefs and desires, are not identical with actions as Winch claimed; I would also argue that Davidson is mistaken to try and re-work the Humean idea of cause and effect in his attempt to explain actions causally.

In this way, in the third chapter, I am going to examine Bhaskar's interpretation of causation and its application to both the natural and social sciences. In this he argues that intentional human action is caused, it is always caused by reasons, and it is only because it is caused by reasons that it can be conceived of as intentional. Bhaskar's fundamental claim is that we should see causes (both natural and social) as the tendency of things to happen given certain circumstances, but that other factors may intervene to alter the resulting action. In other words, causal laws are tendencies.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The following discussion will outline two fundamental issues involved in the analysis of reasons as explanations of action. That is, firstly, that the theorists considered seem to agree that the explanation of actions should be in terms of reasons; not, as positivists argue, in terms of social facts of one kind or another. There is, therefore, no real disagreement on where the focus of our understanding of action should lie. Where the disagreement arises concerns the question of from what source these reasons are derived and thus what the status of explanations in terms of reasons is - can they, in other words, be seen in terms of 'cause and effect?

Reasons as Rules - An Externalist Account

Winch's analysis of reasons begins, correctly, by examining what is meant by human action as opposed to the behaviour of inanimate or non-human subjects. Thus, he uses the definition of action provided by Weber who argues that we are concerned with human behaviour if and in so far as the agent or agents associate a subjective sense with it. The sense of which Weber

speaks is something which is 'subjectively' intended and the notion of meaningful behaviour is closely associated with notions like motives and reasons. Motive means, in fact, a meaningful configuration of circumstances which, to the agent or observer, appears as a meaningful 'reason' for the behaviour in question. (1)

Winch does not take issue with this definition of human action, indeed, he endorses the idea of acting for a reason when explaining the behaviour of human beings. However, the main crux of Winch's argument, as we have seen, is that the analysis of meaningful behaviour must give central role to the notion of rules: "that all behaviour which is meaningful (therefore all specifically human behaviour) is 'ipso facto' rule-governed". (2)

In other words, even when we are talking in terms of reasons we must see these as somehow formed in terms of socially prescribed and sanctioned rules. The fundamental problem, therefore, with the Winchian view of action-explanations is that the subjective nature of reasons seems to be ignored. While Winch stated that he was concerned with the subjective in the explanation of social life, the argument that actions should be explained in terms of rule-following, and the

contention that these rules are socially not individually or privately constructed, is difficult to reconcile with his original claims. This problem stems from a rather limited view of how reasons for actions are formed. Can we really argue that the reasons the agent has for his or her action can only be seen as a product of socially constructed rules? **Reasons**, I would maintain, **involve more than rule-following**. Winch may be correct to talk in terms of reasons when explaining actions, but he is mistaken to restrict the concept of reason to an uncritical acceptance of socially prescribed rules on the part of the agent.

Reasons as Pro-attitudes Plus Beliefs - An Internalist Account

Davidson would argue, in opposition to Winch, that **reasons are individually and not socially constructed**. He begins his analysis by asking what the relationship is between a reason and an action when the reason explains the action by giving the agent's reason for doing what he did? Such explanations, he argues, can be called 'rationalisations', and a reason can be seen to rationalise the action. For Davidson, a reason can only rationalise an action if it leads us to see something the agent saw, or thought he saw, in his action. We cannot explain why someone did what they did simply by saying that the action

'appealed' to them, we must indicate what it was about the action that appealed. A person, in fact, can be characterised as performing an action for a reason: firstly, if he has a pro-attitude towards action of a certain kind; and, secondly, believes his action is of that kind. (3) In short, Davidson suggests that "'R' is a primary reason why an agent performed the action 'A' under the description 'd' only if 'R' constitutes a pro-attitude of the agent towards actions with a certain property and a belief of the agent that 'A' under the description 'd' has that property." (4)

To illustrate this point Davidson asks, for example, how my wanting to turn on a light be (part of) a primary reason for my turning on the light. It is easy, he suggests, to be misled by the verbal parallel between 'I turned on the light' and 'I wanted to turn on the light' since the second has the same event as the first as its object. Davidson maintains, however, that the event of turning on the light cannot be referred to in the same way by both sentences since the existence of the event is required by the truth of 'I turned on the light' but not by the truth of 'I wanted to turn on the light'. If the reference was the same in both cases, the second sentence would entail the first. But, in fact, the sentences are logically independent. Moreover, Davidson suggests, the event whose

occurrence makes 'I turned on the light' true cannot be called the object of 'I wanted to turn on the light'. If I turned on the light then I must have done it at a precise moment and in a particular way - every detail is fixed. However, we cannot demand that my want be directed at an action performed at any one moment or done in some unique way, since any one of a large number of actions would satisfy the want and can be considered equally eligible as its object. For example, 'I want that gold watch in the window' is not a primary reason, and only explains why I went into the shop because it suggests a primary reason such as 'I wanted to buy the watch'. Essentially, Davidson is arguing that because 'I wanted to turn on the light' and 'I turned on the light' are logically independent, the first can be used to give a reason why the second is true. (5)

This, as will be shown, represents the important difference between Winch and Davidson, and is one reason why Davidson sees action-explanations in terms of cause and effect - a notion Winch totally rejects. What, though, is it about this account which leads me to argue that Davidson is stressing the internal aspect of reason-formation at the expense of more external factors? To answer this I will examine Hollis' contention that we must explain reasons by **both desires and beliefs**.

Reasons as Desires Plus Beliefs

Hollis, in a similar way to Davidson, also argues that actions result from reasons and that reasons can be seen in terms of desires (which are similar to pro-attitudes) and beliefs. (6) But, in a very fundamental way, their accounts differ. While Davidson does argue that a primary reason consists of both a belief and a pro-attitude, he suggests that it generally serves no practical purpose to mention both. If, for example, he argues, you tell me you are 'easing the jib because you think that will stop the main from backing', I do not need to be told that you want to stop the main from backing. Similarly, many explanations of action in terms of reasons that are not primary do not require mention of the primary reason and, thus, if I say 'I am pulling weeds because I want a beautiful lawn', it is fatuous to add 'and so I see something desirable in any action that does, or has a good chance of, making the lawn beautiful'. Why, asks Davidson, insist that there is any step, logical or psychological, in the transfer of desire to an end that is not an action to the action one conceives as means? It serves the argument as well that the desired end explains the action only if what are believed by the agent to be means are desired. (7)

There is, however, Hollis argues, an essential reason **why** such a step must be included in the action explanation - that is, that a belief can regulate a desire by sanctioning it or proscribing it. He maintains that most desires are premised on beliefs of many kinds and would change if the beliefs changed. For example, a desire to visit a zoo might not survive if a person discovered the zoo was closed or that the animals were cruelly treated. Thus, whenever it makes sense to ask why the agent prefers 'x' to 'y' and to expect a reason, the preference is not exactly given. One needs to know how an agent would respond to a change in his situation or in his beliefs about the situation. Not to consider the effect on his current preferences would be a mistake. In addition, it is also a mistake to fail to notice that the results of an action are prone to affect the desires that prompted it. For example, it is possible that clever advertising can persuade people to buy things which then leads to fresh wants (or to acquire the wants the advertiser has fooled them into supposing they had already). (8)

In this way, Hollis is rejecting the Humean notion that only desire can move an agent (an argument we return to subsequently). There is, he argues, no obvious reason for regarding desire rather than belief as the determining

component of action. Both the desire and the belief are necessary to account for action and both must be included in an action-explanation. Action, in Hollis' view, results from desire plus belief in such a way that belief can be a motive to the will. Rational agents, he argues, act from objectively good reasons whose merits are conceptually independent of their current desires. The key question, for Hollis, is whether the rationality of action is always relative to the current desires of the agent as Hume argued? This involves asking what form a reason for an action must take if it is to move a man? The Humean view is that reasons for actions must be 'internal' to the desires of the agent whose reasons they are. Hollis, however, claims that man may 'sit in judgement' on his present desires and, when reason demands, decide to act against the balance of his 'internal' reasons. In other words, 'external reasons' can be effective. (9)

The Importance of External Reasons

While, as will be discussed in part four, I have some problems with Hollis' account of action, suffice it to say that the essential point I want to make here is that reasons may not only be 'internal' to the agent, but may derive from external sources. Trigg also raises this point, arguing that it is

impossible that we should only be concerned with individual motives since this leaves out of account the sheer complexity of society. Individualist accounts, he argues, are atomistic. The meaning of actions becomes the meaning given separately to them by individuals acting in isolation from each other. Each separate social happening can then be understood even when it is wrenched from its social setting which, for Trigg, is an impossible task for anyone to take to extremes since human beings are born into societies and made by them as well as making them. (10)

Thus, Davidson and Hollis both argue that beliefs are essential to the explanation of human action. Desires, alone, cannot explain actions although they are an important element in the formation of reasons. Moreover, both agree that desires are not fixed - they can change as a result of a change in beliefs. Thus, Trigg argues that if we explain actions in terms of atomic individuals with fixed desires, then features of society are explained in terms of the desires and are not allowed to explain them. This, then, leaves no room for a sociological understanding of the way desires can be created by society or for the possibility that beliefs can modify desires. Refusing to accept that human reason has any control over desires strikes at the root of all freedom. It merely locates the

causes of our behaviour in whatever produces our desires. If our wants are fixed and unalterable we seem then to be mere puppets acting according to the dictates of something beyond our control. (11) On the contrary, in Hollis' words "the rational man is master of his passions and so his own free sovereign artificer". (12)

Summary

What the above arguments demonstrate is that, in my view, Winch is correct in his claim that meaningful behaviour is associated with acting for a reason and involves examining the agent's own reasons for doing what he or she did. Where he is mistaken is in proceeding to claim that meaningful behaviour must be seen as rule-governed, and that these rules are socially constructed and specific to 'ways of life'. There appears, therefore, to be a contradiction in Winch whereby, on the one hand, he stresses the importance of the subjective and the need for interpretative understanding of action; yet, on the other hand, his insistence about rule-following seems to emphasise the social over the subjective elements of explanation.

The idea of reasons - as desires plus beliefs - as explanations of actions, therefore, has clear advantages over the idea of rule-governed behaviour, especially as it allows 'agency' back

into the notion of intentional action. However, as we have seen, there are various perceptions of how reasons are formed. On the one side, those in the Humean tradition and to some extent Davidson, see reasons as 'internal' to the agent - as purely subjective. This I will argue is not the whole picture either. On the other side, we have the suggestion made by Hollis that reasons cannot be seen as internal to the agent since they are influenced by factors that exist outside the agent's subjective desires.

Here then we extend the idea of reason formation to include 'external' factors as influences on how reasons are constructed. This, though, should not be seen in terms of socially constructed rules which are uncritically accepted by agents. As I am going to argue, while agents may be influenced by external factors they still retain the choice of whether or not they act in terms of them. Such 'external reasons' for actions, therefore, should be seen as influences on action rather than 'rules' of conduct. Moreover, it is to be my contention that by accepting the idea that reasons may be 'external' we should not exclude the possibility that actions may result from internal reasons - either reasons that are purely internal to the agent or reasons that have been

appropriated from outside factors and then internalised. All these issues will be raised in part three. For the purpose of this section, however, I want to discuss how these different views on how reasons are formed are reflected in the various authors' ideas of the possibility of a causal account of human action. In particular, I am going to argue that just because we accept the idea that actions should be explained in terms of reasons this does not mean that reasons should not be seen as causes of action.

NOTES TO PART TWO, CHAPTER ONE

- (1) Weber, M.: "Wirtschaft and Gesellschaft", cited in Winch, P.: The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy, 1958, p. 45.
- (2) Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) pp. 51 & 52.
- (3) Davidson, D.: "Actions, Reasons and Causes", 1963 in Brodbeck, M. (Ed.): Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 1968, pp. 44 & 45.
- (4) Ibid. p. 47.
- (5) Ibid. p. 47.
- (6) Hollis, M.: The Cunning of Reason, 1987, p. 16.
- (7) Davidson, D., 1963 (op. cit.) pp. 47 & 48.
- (8) Hollis, M., 1987 (op. cit.) p. 64.
- (9) Ibid. pp. 68 - 75.
- (10) Trigg, R.: Understanding Social Science, 1985, p. 53.
- (11) Ibid. pp. 129 - 134.
- (12) Hollis, M., 1987 (op. cit.) p. ?

CHAPTER TWO

CAUSES AND EFFECTS - THE PROBLEMS OF THE HUMEAN ACCOUNT

Introduction

In order to address the issue of whether actions can be explained causally, I shall return, for the moment, to the first fundamental statement made by Winch - that is, that the question of what is real involves the problems of man's relation to reality which is a conceptual not an empirical question. It is for this reason, he argues, that it cannot be understood in terms of the preconceptions of the natural sciences, nor can it be answered by generalising from particular instances. (1)

This idea is extended to the notion of the relationship between reasons and actions - that is, that the connection between them is an 'internal' one whereas that between cause and effect is 'external'. It is this argument and, as I will suggest, Winch's rather restricted account of causal explanations to that advocated by Hume, which leads him to the conclusion that the same methodology cannot be applied to the social sciences as can be applied to the natural sciences, especially explanations in terms of cause and effect. What I want to

argue, here, however, is that both these contentions are questionable and lead to a misconception of the relationship between reasons and actions and the status of the explanations that can be given in terms of reasons.

The Humean Notion of Causation

Winch accepts, in his discussion of J.S. Mill's argument that the methods of investigation of the philosophy of the social sciences should be seen as the same as those of science in general (2), that scientific investigation is based on Hume's notion of causation. That is, to say that 'A' is the cause of 'B' is not to assert the existence of any intelligible (or mysterious) nexus between 'A' and 'B', but to say that the temporal succession of 'A' and 'B' is an instance of a generalisation to the effect that events like 'A' are always found in our experience to be followed by events like 'B'. (3) Winch, however, with some justification, rejects the idea that explanations of social life can be seen as the same as those employed in the natural sciences (if we perceive science in a Humean way). He wants to demonstrate, and this is crucial to his whole theoretical position, that "the notion of human

society involves a scheme of concepts which is logically incompatible with the kinds of explanations offered in the natural sciences". (4)

Can Reasons Be Causes?

Winch argues that since human agents do not simply behave but act in accordance with reasons or motives and attach meanings to their actions, then the explanations of the natural sciences dealing, as they do, with simple behaviour of inanimate objects, cannot apply to the explanation of human actions. But, it must be asked, is this necessarily the case?

Trigg, for example, up to this point, seems to agree that 'reasons' must be included in the explanation of actions. Human actions, he argues, are endowed with meaning and it may appear that they cannot be properly understood unless their meaning is grasped. Human behaviour, viewed as a mere succession of bodily movements, and human actions performed with definite motives and intentions, are not the same. The bodily movements involved in signing a cheque, for example, can never by themselves explain what is occurring. We would have, in addition, to understand the agent's reasons for transferring the money - to buy a house, give a present, pay a bribe, or

perform countless other actions. But, asks Trigg, if the goal of social science is to discover 'meanings' should the conclusion be drawn that it is not concerned with causal explanation? (5)

Davidson would say that this conclusion need not be drawn. He claims that, in the light of a primary reason, an action is revealed as coherent with certain traits of the agent, and the agent is shown in his role of 'Rational Animal'. There is, he maintains, a certain irreducible sense in which every rationalisation justifies - that is, that from the agent's point-of-view, there was, when he acted, something to be said for the action. (6) For Davidson it is pro-attitudes plus beliefs which give the primary reason for an action and he further states that the primary reason for an action is its cause. (7)

Here, therefore, it seems that we have some agreement that reasons can explain actions, but two opposing views on what type of explanation this is. On the one hand, Davidson is saying that reasons can be seen as causes of actions, but, on the other hand, Winch denies this claiming that meaning is not open to causal analysis. How, then, does Davidson perceive reasons to be causal explanations?

Davidson - Reasons as Mental Events

One argument for claiming that actions cannot be explained causally is that both causes and effects must be seen as events, but primary reasons consist of attitudes and beliefs which are states or dispositions and not events. They cannot, then, be seen as causes. Davidson, however, does not agree with this conclusion. One reply to this, he suggests, is that states, dispositions and conditions are frequently named as causes of events - for example, 'the bridge collapsed because of a structural defect'. But, he argues, this does not answer the problem that mention of a causal condition for an event only gives a cause on the assumption that there was a preceding event. However, Davidson argues that while states and dispositions may not be events, the 'onslaught' of a state or disposition is, and, thus, in many cases events are very closely related with primary reasons. Those, then, who have claimed that there are no mental events to qualify as causes have missed the obvious because they insist that a mental event must be observed or noticed (rather than observing or noticing) or that it be like 'a stab', 'a qualm', 'a mysterious prod' or an act of the will.

Some writers, Davidson argues, challenge those who want to explain actions causally to identify an event which is common and peculiar in all cases. Davidson maintains, however, that there is, at least, a **mental event** which can be identified. For example, if we consider the case where a man driving an automobile raises his arm in order to signal. At some moment the driver noticed, or thought he noticed, his turn coming up and that is when he signalled. The signalling driver, he argues, can answer the question 'why did you raise your arm when you did?', and from that answer we learn the event that caused the action (not that his turn coming up 'caused' the driver to raise his arm in some mechanical fashion; for example, he might start to do it on his way home and then decide to go in a different direction). It may be the case that the actor cannot always answer such a question; sometimes the answer will mention a mental event which does not give a reason, and there may be causes of intentional action where we cannot explain why we acted as we did. In such cases, though, explanation in terms of primary reasons parallels the explanation of the collapse of the bridge from a structural defect; we are ignorant of the event or sequence of events that caused the collapse, but we are sure that there was such an event or sequence of events. Davidson does concede, though, that it is not possible to find an event that is common and

peculiar in all cases where a man intentionally raises his arm. (9) But, as we shall see, he does not perceive 'generality' as a precondition of causal analysis even in the Humean sense of cause.

Davidson's ideas have some support from Goldman. It is important to notice, argues Goldman, that from the point-of-view of the agent, practical reasoning does not appear as a causal process. When an agent is trying to decide what actions to perform, he is trying to select the 'best' course of action. A decision of this sort usually requires attention to the probable consequences of alternative acts, and sometimes requires attention to moral principles and so forth. Considerations such as these seem very far from any question concerning the causation of his action. Thus, Goldman argues, 'What will be the consequence of my doing 'A'?' is very different from 'What will be the cause of my doing 'A'?'. Nevertheless, although the agent, when deliberating, does not normally worry about the causes of his actions, the process of weighing alternatives, or noticing their probable consequences, etc. - this process itself constitutes a causal process culminating in his actions. In other words, although the agent's reasoning does not focus on its own causal efficacy, it has efficacy 'vis a vis' his action. (10)

In this way, doubts are thrown on the claim that motives or reasons cannot be seen as events, although Davidson and Goldman concede that these are mental events associated with the 'onslaught' of reasons or motives.

Social Action and Generalisations

Winch, however, insists that the fact that we cannot 'generalise' in social science precludes causal analysis in the realm of action explanations. Suppose, he suggests, that 'N', a university lecturer, states that he is going to cancel a lecture because he intends to travel to London. Here we have a statement of intention for which a reason is given. 'N' does not infer his intention of cancelling his lecture from his desire to go to London. He does not offer his reason as evidence for the soundness of his prediction about his future behaviour. Rather, he is justifying his intention. His statement is not of the form: 'such and such causal factors are present, therefore, this will result'; nor yet of the form: 'I have such and such a disposition which will result in my doing this'; it is of the form: 'in view of such and such considerations this will be a reasonable thing to do'. (11)

Winch, therefore, is arguing that causal accounts involve making generalisations, which is not possible when we examine social action. Ryan, however, questions whether, in fact, we do not make generalisations about human action in the course of our everyday lives. There is a plausible argument, he suggests, that everyday life already involves an immense knowledge, unorganised though it may be, of the regularities implied in human behaviour - in fact, social life would be quite impossible if we could not expect that people would behave in a (more or less) regular manner. Such generalisations may be approximate and subject to exceptions, but as much could be said about many of the generalisations found in the natural sciences. (12)

Yet, Ryan agrees with Winch that explanations of human action appeal not to causes, but reasons. He states that an important difference between reason and cause is that reasons can be assessed as good or bad, proper and improper, whereas cause either is or is not the cause of whatever we are explaining. A second important difference is that a person who makes a decision is not engaged in causal enquiry into his own motives. A man making a decision may well enquire into the causal factors which led him to assess things as he did, but, Ryan argues, causal enquiries are not basic to our making decisions (note, however, Goldman's answer to a similar point). (13)

The question remains, however, whether the apparent regularities we observe in human behaviour can be accounted for causally. Perhaps, suggests Ryan, social behaviour, as Winch argued, should be understood as rule-following rather than causally regular. Winch is claiming, in fact, that the connections that hold between actions are conceptual and that the terminology which we employ in talking about actions is indispensable to our identity of actions as actions - rather than mere bodily happenings or physiological events. Human actions, in this view, are meaningful and **meaning is not a category open to causal analysis**. Thus, so long as meaningful actions form the subject matter of social enquiry, the most important category for our understanding will not be that of cause and effect but that of rule-guidedness. (14)

What Winch is saying is that we cannot causally explain meaning. It could be argued, for example, that much political behaviour is linguistic - people listen to arguments and produce counter-arguments, they look at accounts of current events and talk to friends, relations and candidates. Thus, it could be said that all these things are causal influences on the way people behave in political matters, but, nonetheless, this does not mean that the **meaning** of what they hear and read can be causally explained. Indeed, to try and do so, argues

Ryan, is to 'put the cart before the horse' since the causal relationship is parasitic on the meaning of the words heard or read. We cannot explain the meaning of the words in terms of causation because it appears that social causation rests upon prior identification of conceptual connections. What Winch insists on, therefore, is that **we cannot analyse meaning in causal terms but only in terms of rules which are necessarily social.** (15)

The Weberian Notion of Cause

While Ryan argues that Winch is right in the assumption that we should not causally analyse meaning, he maintains that there is nothing wrong with backing up our accounts of the meaning of actions with causal analysis. In the first place, he argues, it is true that if people endow their actions with a certain significance, and thus follow certain social rules, they will display regularities in their activities so that the absence of these regularities would mean that our account of the significance of their actions would be wrong. In the second place, it is also true that people will only endow their lives with certain significance under particular circumstances. If we claim that people do things which have a certain significance for them, we can also claim that there are causes

and effects of their behaving in this manner. Not only can we analyse the internal logic of a way of life, we can ask what the origin and result of its existence are; and thus restore causality to a central place in the social sciences. Why, asks Ryan, should we restrict ourselves? Winch's argument seems to distort the perception we have of the great variety of questions we can ask within the social sciences. (16)

It is clear that Ryan's account is influenced by the works of Weber and his ideas of the possibility of causation in the social sciences. Weber, while recognising that causal laws, like those of the physical sciences (assuming, again, the Humean notion of cause), were not possible in sociology since the same conditions never recur and the same causal sequences are never repeated, did argue that a different kind of causal analysis is possible. This is achieved by hypothetical analysis based on the conviction that it will be sufficient if we can locate the factor which, when removed, would make the decisive difference in a given sequence of events. The presence of this factor may then be accepted as an adequate explanation of the event. Thus, a cause is adequate if, without it, the desired end would not have been achieved or the event being explained would not have occurred. There can, for Weber, be no one universally valid system of general theory in

the social sciences, only 'adequate cause'. In sociology, therefore, it is only possible to determine, with some show of plausibility, causes adequate to account for the events and consequences of human action. (17)

Weber, like Winch, argues that a person's action is to be explained in terms of the consequences he intended it to have - his motive or purpose. Thus, he argues that "a motive is a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself or to the observer an adequate ground for the conduct in question". We apply the term 'adequacy at the level of meaning' "to the subjective interpretation of a coherent course of conduct when, and in so far as, according to our habitual modes of thought and feeling, its component parts taken in their mutual relation are recognised to constitute a 'typical' complex of meaning". (18)

The concept of 'Verstehen' or interpretative understanding, for Weber, refers primarily to the spontaneous and immediate recognition of acts and their meanings in everyday life. Actions, he argues, can only be related to one another and to their overall context in terms of logical or conceptual connections. Thus far, therefore, Weber's account is very similar to that of Winch. However, he goes on to say that all

action takes place in a context which is structural and which we also need to understand. Action must be put into context both historically and contemporarily, in order to understand people's motives. Therefore, both a subjective understanding of meanings and an understanding of structural conditions are necessary. Thus, Weber argues: "Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet, very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest." (19)

Having established the 'subjectively intended meaning', therefore, or, rather, having posited a plausible hypothesis about that meaning, Weber wanted to add a further level of explanation in terms of adequate cause. For Weber, an understanding of action not only involves it having 'adequacy at the level of meaning' but also it should be 'causally adequate'. He argued that causally adequate interpretations concern the statistical probability that, according to verified generalisations from experience, there would be a correct or erroneous solution of the same problem. Causal explanations, then, depend upon being able to determine that there is a probability that a given observable event will be followed or accompanied by another event. (20)

Rules Revisited

Winch, however, would deny that we can speak of action in terms of any kind of generalisations and it is this that precludes any type of causal analysis. It could be argued, admits Winch, that just because explanations appeal not to causal generalisations about the individual's reaction to his environment but to our knowledge of institutions and ways of life which give actions their meanings, this does not mean that the understanding of social institutions should not be a matter of grasping empirical generalisations. An institution, after all, is a certain kind of uniformity and a uniformity can only be grasped in a generalisation. However, Winch argues, while a regularity or uniformity may be a constant recurrence of the same kind of event on the same kind of occasion and hence statements of uniformity presuppose judgements of identity, these criteria of identity are necessarily relative to some rule - with the corollary that two events which count as qualitatively similar from the point-of-view of one rule will count as different from the point-of-view of another. Thus to investigate the type of regularity studied in a given type of enquiry is to examine the nature of the rule according to which judgements of identity are made in that enquiry. Such judgements are intelligible only relative to a given mode of human behaviour governed by its own rules. In a physical

science, the relevant rules are those governing the procedures of the investigators in the science in question. Therefore, someone with no understanding of the problems and procedures of physics would gain nothing from being present at a complicated experiment. (21)

These rules, argues Winch, rest on the social context of common activity, so to understand the activities of the scientist we must take account, firstly, of his relation to the phenomena he investigates; and, secondly, his relation to his fellow scientists. These two relations belong to different types. The phenomena being investigated present themselves to the scientist as an object of study - he observes them and notices certain facts about them. This presupposes, however, that he already has a mode of communication in the use of which rules are already being observed, since to notice something is to identify relevant characteristic which means the noticer must have some concept of such characteristics. This is only possible if he is able to use some symbol according to a rule which makes it refer back to those characteristics. Thus, we come to a scientist's relation to his fellow scientists, in which context alone he can be said to be following such a rule. Hence, his relationship with his fellows is not simply a relation of observation. It cannot consist in the fact that he

has noticed how his fellows behave and decided to take that as a norm for his own behaviour, since this would presuppose that we could give some account of the notion of 'noticing how his fellows behave' **apart from** the relation between the scientist and his fellows which we are trying to specify. In the course of his investigation, Winch maintains, the scientist applies and develops the concepts germane to his peculiar field of enquiry, and this application and modification are influenced both by the phenomena to which they are applied and also by the fellow workers **in participation with** whom they are applied. The two kinds of influence are different because, whereas it is on the basis of his observation of the phenomena that he develops the concepts as he does, he is only able to do this in virtue of his participation in an established form of activity with his fellow scientists in which they have all learned in similar ways and are therefore capable of communicating with each other. (22)

In sociology, however, Winch argues, the matter is complicated. While in the case of the natural sciences there is only one set of rules - those governing the scientist's investigation itself, **what the sociologist is studying**, as well as his study of it, is a human activity carried out according to rules. It is these rules rather than those governing the investigation

which specify what is to count as 'doing the same kind of thing' in relation to that kind of activity. For instance, (and here we return again to the idea of 'ways of life') the sociologist of religion will have to judge according to the criteria taken not from sociology but from religion itself. If, though, the judgements of identity of the sociologist of religion rest on criteria taken from religion, then his relationship to the performers of the religious activity cannot be just that of observer to observed. It must, rather, be analogous to the participation of the natural scientist to his fellow scientists in the activity of scientific investigation. Thus, even if it is legitimate to speak of one's understanding of social life in terms of a knowledge of regularities, the nature of this knowledge must be very different from that of physical regularities. For example, a historian of art must have some aesthetic sense if he is to understand the problems confronting the artists; and without this he will have left out of his account precisely what would have made it a history of art, as opposed to a rather puzzling external account of certain motions which certain people have been perceived to go through. Winch does emphasise that this does not mean that we should stop there. Rather, that any more reflective understanding must presuppose, if it is to count as genuine understanding, the participant's unreflective understanding.

The reflective student of society may find it necessary to use concepts which are not taken from the forms of activity being investigated and which are taken from the context of his own investigation, but these technical concepts of his will imply a previous understanding of these and other concepts which belong to the activities which are under investigation. (23)

Whilst I would agree that a sociologist's subjects of study are different from those of the natural scientist, I do not agree that this means that the sociologist has to 'become as a native' in order to understand the actions of the people he or she is studying. I would suggest that it is perfectly conceivable that an atheist sociologist could understand the actions of religious converts, for example, in terms of their reasons for their actions. He or she would not have to become a convert in order to discover these reasons. I feel, therefore, that Winch is wrong to discount the possibility of causal accounts of action as a result of this type of argument. Where Winch is more justified in rejecting causality is in the situation where we are using the Humean account of cause and effect.

Davidson's Re-working of Hume's Causality

The crux of the Winchian argument is that reasons as explanations of actions cannot be seen in terms of the Humean idea of cause and effect whereby a cause must be defined as an object followed by another where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second. (24) Winch, and I agree, argues that if Hume is correct in his notion of causality (and this is the point at issue), then the idea of cause and effect cannot apply to the relationship between reasons and actions.

Davidson does not disagree that laws are not included in rationalisations. Generalisations, he argues, connecting reasons and actions are not - and cannot be sharpened into - the kind of law on the basis of which accurate predictions can be reliably made. In fact, what emerges, in the 'ex post facto' atmosphere of explanation and justification, as the reason frequently was, to the agent at the time of action, one consideration among many - a reason.

The crucial point is (and here I am in total agreement) that any theory for predicting action must find a way of evaluating the relative forces of various desires and beliefs, it cannot

take as its starting point the refinement of what is to be expected from a single desire. It would appear, therefore, that if the above interpretation of Hume is correct, it is difficult to see how reasons can be the causes of actions. Davidson states, however, that ignorance of competent predictive laws does not inhibit valid causal explanations since, if it did, few causal explanations could be made. Thus, he argues, I am certain the window broke because it was struck by a rock, but I am not in command of laws on the basis of which I can predict what blow will break the window. A generalisation like 'windows are fragile, fragile things tend to break when struck hard enough, other conditions being right', is not a predictive law, it is a generalisation like our generalisations about behaviour and serves a different purpose. In fact, Davidson suggests, it provides evidence for the existence of a causal law covering the case in hand which, in Davidson's interpretation, is what Hume was arguing for. Hume, he suggests, could be saying that the idea 'A' caused 'B' entails that there is a causal law instantiated by some true description of 'A' and 'B'. This allows that single causal statements entail laws and that explanations involve laws, but also allows that no particular law is entailed by a singular causal claim, and, therefore, a singular causal claim can be

defended without defending any law. This version of Hume's claim, for Davidson, can be made to fit in with most causal explanations, and it suits rationalisations equally well. (25)

Mischel too argues that, in general, one could say that a good explanation in terms of reason is one which the explanandum can be used to 'justify' the explanans. That is, 'R' is a good explanation of why 'A' chose to 'x'. In sum, Mischel argues, we can give responsible explanations of intentional actions in terms of the agent's reasons without using laws or theories about human behaviour in our explanations since, when we explain in this way, there is never any problem about when explanans and explanandum are connected. In fact, the only problem is that of discovering what the agent's reasons were. Discovering this is an empirical process which may involve inference based on laws and dispositions, but explaining the action by showing that the agent decided that this was the right, appropriate, thing to do for such and such a reason is a rational process which requires no empirical laws nor any theories of behaviour. (26)

Likewise, Davidson maintains that the most primitive explanation of an event gives its cause; more elaborate explanations may tell us more of the story or defend the

singular causal claim, by producing a relevant law or by giving reasons for believing such exists. But, it is an error to think no explanations have been given until a law has been produced. (27) Davidson, however, claims that by his interpretation of Hume, he can still apply Hume's model to the explanation of action.

A Rejection of the Humean Account of Causation

Where, it seems to me, Davidson goes wrong is in trying to re-work the Humean notion of causation to 'fit in' with his account of explaining actions in terms of reasons. Thus I agree with Hollis who denies that it is possible to explain actions under the Humean 'covering law' model. He argues that rational actions do not have causal explanations in the sense where it is explanatory to subsume a case under a generalisation for similar cases with similar initial conditions, or in the sense which appeals to a natural law to account for particular instances. The chess player, for example, who plays 'Q-K5 ch.' for the excellent reason that it gives him a smothered mate in five moves is doing what any good player would do in that position, but he does not do it because others would do it. There is no natural law of chess about the occurrence of smothered mates. Other good players would do the

same simply because they would have the same good reason for doing it. The particular explains the general and not the other way around. Hollis maintains that this contrasts with a natural science where there are still presumed to be laws of nature of an explanatory kind. There may well be some in the social world too, especially where social life is influenced by our biology or use of natural objects. AIDS, for example, is unmistakably a social fact, and the biological laws of its transmission and of the mutations of the virus affect people's behaviour. However, Hollis denies that social patterns are part of an explanatory causal order in the Humean sense. Whether they turn out to be depends on their not being traceable to individual reasons and their collective consequences. AIDS affects people; what people know (or believe) about AIDS affects its spread. (28)

The fundamental point being raised here is that Hume's model of cause and effect, however, it is interpreted, cannot be applied to the relationship between reasons and actions, and, indeed, to many other relationships. Trigg, in fact, denies that even if generalisations can be made in terms of natural phenomena, they need have the status of general causal laws. It may well be true, he suggests, that the barometer falls when it gets windier, but it would not be right to say that the wind

makes the barometer fall. The wind and the barometer each have the same underlying causes. In other cases there is no genuine connection at all. The difficulty of sifting out 'real' empirical regularities from the coincidences arises because empiricists wish to stop at the level of observation. Their ideal of explanation is the association of different experiences on different occasions, but why should these be associated? Even appeal to counterfactuals so as to discover genuine causal connections merely pushes the question back a stage. What makes a connection a genuine causal one? Following Hume, he maintains, many philosophers deny the existence of 'hidden powers' and 'necessary connections' arguing that it is impossible to experience the way two events are causally related, as one can merely observe that one typically follows the other. Anything more, Trigg suggests, requires a theory which may need to posit unobservable entities as the source of the relevant causal power which seems, to the empiricist content to be successful in predicting observations, irredeemably metaphysical. But, argues Trigg, this is done at a cost. Explanation merely becomes a summary of actual and possible observations and the reasons why events are limited as they are can never be given. However, Trigg maintains that instead of facts being discovered in the world, our descriptions are governed as much by our interests and purposes

as by what is there. Human knowledge is not just a passive reflection of reality, but is itself partly constituted by human interests. (29)

Here then the question is raised as to whether the Humean notion of causality is not only inappropriate to the study of social action, but also whether it is mistaken in accounting for the causal sequences that occur in the natural sciences. In other words, the Humean conception of cause and effect is not the only one, nor indeed the correct one, to be applied in the natural sciences. Thus, it is no surprise that there are problems in trying to explain the social world in these terms. It could be that an alternative perspective on causal analysis in the natural sciences would be more relevant to the explanation of action when applied to human agents.

Davidson, though, tries to retain the Humean notion of causality, especially his model of 'causal laws'. But, I would suggest that in doing this he is restricting his analysis in a similar way to Winch. In particular, I find the argument that one case is often enough to prove a 'law' in the Humean sense rather difficult to sustain.

No doubt, Davidson concedes, our knowledge of our own intentions in acting will show many of the oddities peculiar to first-person knowledge of our own pains, beliefs, desires, and so forth; the only question is whether these oddities prove that reasons do not cause the actions that they rationalised. Davidson admits that a person may be mistaken about his reasons, and the fact that the person may be wrong shows that, in general, it does not make sense to ask him how he knows what his reasons were, or ask him for his evidence, since he usually has no evidence or makes no observations so his knowledge of his own reasons for his action is not generally inductive. However, he asks, does this show that the knowledge is not causal? Causal laws, Davidson maintains, differ from true but non-lawlike generalisations in that their instances confirm them. Induction is, therefore, a good way to learn the truth of a law, but it is not the only way. In any case, in order to know that a singular causal statement is true, it is not necessary to know that some law covering the event in hand exists, and it is not the case that induction alone yields this knowledge. Indeed, argues Davidson, Hume himself admitted that one case is often enough to persuade us that a law exists, and this amounts to saying that we are persuaded, without direct inductive evidence, that a causal relationship exists. (30)

While, as I have suggested, I have problems with Davidson's attempt to reconcile Hume's causal analysis with the idea of reasons for action (especially that we can see Humean causal laws as covering only one event), Davidson does go on to posit a very important argument about reasons as causes in response to Melden's claim that explanation by reason is redescription of the action and therefore cannot be causal.

Reasons as Redescriptions

Melden claimed that what makes the raising of an arm an act of signalling is that it is done against a background of an understanding of the conventions of signalling. It is 'conditions' or 'circumstances' that constitutes or defines the bodily movement as the action that it is, and these are structured by 'social and moral institutions'. If, argues Melden, our mental states do not progressively reveal themselves, but are progressively 'constituted and defined' by ever broader social contexts, then, as the context changes so will their essential meaning. These issues involve not the inner nature of the actors since these have no determinate form other than that which is socially imputed. (31) Thus, suggests Bloor, Melden argues that the causal idiom of the sciences is wholly irrelevant to the understanding we seek in our everyday

description of behaviour. Such a view reflects Melden's (and Winch's) tendency to over-simplify the character of causal thinking in science. Motives, for Melden, explain by giving a fuller characterisation of an action whereas a causal explanation is not concerned with the identity or character of the effect. (32)

The suggestion here is that reason-giving explanations have a special function which excludes causal analysis. The way in which citing reasons functions to explain is that the reasons justify the action or show that it is the appropriate thing to do in the circumstances. Such explanations, it is claimed, reveal that, at least from the agent's point-of-view, what he does or intends to do is rational. Discourse about reasons, therefore, belongs to the language of evaluation rather than the language of objective, value-free description of natural events. However, as Caré and Landesman argue, even given that the premise of the argument is correct (that the function of reason is to provide a rationale for actions), the conclusion that reasons cannot thus be causes does not follow. Although being a cause may not be sufficient for something to be a reason, the opposite is not true. Its being a cause does not prevent it from being a reason: "Just as the same thing may be both blue and good, perhaps the same conditions may be both a reason and a cause". (33)

This is the very point, and one which is essential to my subsequent arguments, that Davidson wants to make. The idea that justification only means that the agent has certain beliefs and attitudes in the light of which action is reasonable, leaves out, he argues, the essential factor that a person can have a reason for an action, perform the action, and yet this reason not be the reason why he did it. Thus, central to the relationship between a reason and an action it explains is the idea that the agent performed the action because he had the reason. (34)

Davidson concedes that whilst it is true that when we explain an action in terms of the reason given for that action, we are redescribing the action, and it is also true that redescribing the action gives that action a place in a pattern and, in this way, the action is explained; it does not mean that reasons are not causes of actions. In the first place, we should not infer from the fact that giving reasons redescribes actions and from the fact that causes are separate from effects, that therefore reasons are not causes. Reasons, being beliefs and attitudes, are certainly not identical with actions. Moreover, events are often redescribed in terms of their causes. In the second place, it is mistaken to believe that because placing an action in a larger pattern explains it, we consequently understand the

sort of explanation involved. Talk of patterns and contexts, he argues, does not answer the question of how reasons explain actions since the relevant pattern of context contains both reasons and actions. (35)

For Davidson, one way we can **explain** an event is by placing it in the context of its cause. Cause and effect, he argues, form the sort of pattern that explains the effect in the sense of 'explain' that we understand as well as any. Davidson illustrates this using the aforementioned example taken from Melden. A man driving an automobile raises his arm in order to signal. His intention to signal explains his action, raising his arm, by redescribing it as signalling. If, argues Davidson, the pattern that explains the action is the familiar one of an action done for a reason, then it does explain the action, but only because it assumes the relation of action to meaning is a causal one. (36) The interpretation of this pattern, however, given by Melden, is as follows: the man is driving, he is approaching a turn, he knows he ought to signal, knows how to signal by raising his arm, and now, in this context, he raises his arm and perhaps if all this happens, he does signal; then the explanation would be that if, under these conditions, a man raises his arm, then he signals. (37)

Reasons Must Be Causes To Have Explanatory Power

The problem here, for Davidson, is that this explanation does not answer the question of why he raised his arm. He had a reason to raise his arm, but this has not been shown as the reason why he did it. If the description 'signalling' explains his action by giving his reason, then the signalling must be intentional, but on this latter account it may not be. If, therefore, as Melden claims, causal explanations are wholly irrelevant to understanding human action then, Davidson concludes, we are "without an analysis of the 'because' in 'He did it because; where we go on to name a reason". (38) Davidson's claim can, therefore, be summed up as follows: "In order to turn the first 'and' to 'because' in 'He exercised and he wanted to reduce and thought exercise would do it', we must, as the basic move, augment ..." the idea that reasons explain actions with the idea that a "primary reason for an action is its cause". (39)

Winch, however, would object that this kind of explanation cannot be causal because the relationship between reason and action is internal and each cannot be identified as separate from the other. Consider, Winch asks, the case of an act of command and an act of obedience. In describing the man's act

in terms of obedience to a command, one is committing oneself to saying that a command has been issued just as if I hear a sound and recognise it as a clap of thunder. I commit myself to believe in, for example, the occurrence of electrical changes in the atmosphere or even calling what I heard 'thunder'. However, an event's character as an act of obedience is intrinsic to it in a way which is not true of an event's character as a clap of thunder; and this is generally true of human acts as opposed to natural events. In the latter case, although human beings can only think in terms of the concepts they have of them, the events themselves have an existence independent of those concepts. It does not make sense, though, to suppose that human beings might have been issuing commands and obeying them before they came to form the concepts of command and obedience since their performance of such acts is itself the chief manifestation of their possession of these concepts. (40)

Social relations, argues Winch, exist only in and through the ideas which are current in society, or, alternatively, social relations fall into the same logical category as do relations between ideas. It follows, therefore, that social relations must be an unsuitable subject for generalisations and theories of a scientific kind. Explanation is not then the application

of generalisations and theories to particular instances (as Davidson suggested), it is the tracing of internal relations. It is like applying one's knowledge of a language in order to understand a conversation rather than like applying one's knowledge of the laws of mechanics to understand the workings of a watch. (41)

Here, therefore, we come to the basic argument Winch puts forward as an objection to the idea of reasons as causes of action. That is, that reasons and actions are internally related and so cannot be identified separately as causes and effects. It is, for me, Davidson's answer to this claim which is most persuasive in arguing that reasons may be causes of action in the sense that the reason provides the because in the statement 'He acted because' when a reason is cited. As MacIntyre argues, although nothing could count as a reason unless it stood in an internal relationship to an action, the agent's possessing of a reason may be a state of affairs identifiable independently of the event which is the agent's performance of the action, and, thus, it does seem as if the possession of a reason by an agent is an item of a suitable type to figure as a cause or an effect. In the light of this, he claims, we are entitled to treat with scepticism Winch's claim that understanding in terms of rule-following and causal explanations have mutually exclusive subject matters. (42)

It is in the idea that reasons and actions are separate events that we need to reintroduce the argument put forward by Hollis that beliefs and desires do not necessarily correspond. Caré and Landesman, for example, argue that the way in which desires are often said to be logically connected to behaviour is that the form of the words used to describe the desire (for example, 'wanting to eat') is also used to describe the ensuing action ('eating'). But, they maintain, it is evident that this sort of connection may hold and yet the desire and action still be logically independent. It is surely possible for a person to want to eat and yet not eat, or for a person to eat and yet not want to. (43) Similarly, Hamlyn suggests that 'I may have the desire to go for a walk, and believe that this is the right thing to do, therefore, I go for a walk'. However, it is also possible that 'I want, and even intend, to go for a walk, but believe I should work instead, thus, in this case, I do not take the walk'. This is not because I no longer have the desire but because my belief that I should work has overcome my desire for a walk. This argument was precisely the same as that in Davidson's discussion of primary reasons, and which he now reiterates. To describe an event in terms of its cause, he argues, is not to identify the event with its cause, nor does explanation by description exclude causal explanation. (44)

As Hamlyn argues, it by no means follows that where two concepts are internally related, the things to which the two concepts may be applied cannot be contingently related. Thus, although the intention to write a letter can be described only as that intention, whatever goes on in the mind when the person has that intention might be represented as the cause of writing the letter. When a man forms an intention to write a letter, he may, though he need not, express the intention to himself saying 'I will write a letter'. There is nothing to show that it is inadmissible to argue that his saying these words to himself caused him to write the letter. It may be admitted that if we interpret the man's saying these words to himself as the formation of an intention, then the intention itself, 'qua' intention, can be defined only in terms of its object. But, what goes on in the man's mind is separately describable in terms of what he says to himself, and it seems quite permissible to say that the forming of the intention (rather than the actual intention itself) is the cause of the letter writing. (45) This idea of Hamlyn's corresponds well to Davidson's idea of the 'onslaught' of a state or disposition as being a mental event. However, I feel that Hamlyn's phrase 'the forming of the intention' is more accurate than Davidson's word 'onslaught' since this seems to imply what he was, in fact, refuting - that mental events are like 'a stab' or a

'mysterious prod'. The idea of forming an intention allows for the possibility that an agent's desires need not necessarily be current desires which just happen. Indeed, for Hollis, the idea that desires must be current is false. People, he argues, are often moved by last week's desires or by tomorrow's. They are moved by the past, present and future desires of other people and by hypothetical desires of their own. (46)

Reasons are More Than Rules

The argument that reasons and actions are logically separate and that the reason may then be seen as the cause of the action introduces the fundamental issues raised in the next section. As MacIntyre suggests, clearly, if the citing of reasons by an agent, with the concomitant appeal to rules, is not necessarily the citing of those reasons which are causally effective, a distinction may be made between: those rules which agents, in a given society, sincerely profess to follow and to which their actions may in fact conform but which do not direct their actions; and those which, whether they profess to follow them or not, do in fact guide their actions by providing them with reasons and motives for acting in one way rather than another. The making of this distinction is essential to the notions of ideology and false consciousness, but to allow that these

notions could have application is to find oneself at odds with Winch's arguments at yet another point. It seems clear, argues MacIntyre, that the concept of ideology can find application in a society where the concept is not available to the members of the society, and this concept implies that criteria beyond those available in the society may be invoked to judge its rationality (or, indeed, give a fuller explanation of the actions of the members of that society). As such, though, it would fall under Winch's bar as a concept unsuitable for social science. (47)

Winch, according to MacIntyre, is perfectly correct in arguing that unless we begin by a characterisation of a society in its own terms we shall be unable to identify the matter which requires attention. Description in terms of the agent's concepts and beliefs must, he argues, precede description in terms of our concepts and beliefs. However, the fact that explanations in terms of reasons ought not to be excluded by any initial decision of the social scientist does not mean that explanation is incompatible with causal explanation. Compare, he suggests, two situations: one in which managers minimise shop-floor trade union activity in a factory by concentrating opportunities of extra over-time and of earning bonuses in those parts of the factory where such activity shows signs of

flourishing; and, then, one in which managers similarly minimise trade union activity by a process of continual transfers between one part of the factory and another or between different factories. In both cases, it may be possible to explain the low level of trade union activity causally by reference to the managers' policies, but in the former case the reasons which the workers have for pursuing over-time and bonuses can find a place in the explanation without it losing its causal character; and, in both cases, a necessary condition of the managers being causally effective may well be that the workers are ignorant of the policy behind the actions. The causal character of the explanation can be brought out, argues MacIntyre, by considering how generalisations might be formulated in which certain behaviour of the managers can supply either the necessary or sufficient condition, or both, for the behaviour of the workers. In such a formulation, however, one important fact will emerge, namely, that true causal explanations cannot be formulated unless intentions, motives and reasons are taken into account. A true explanation in terms of reasons must entail some account of the causal background, but it is also true that a causal account of action will require a corresponding account of the intentions, motives and reasons involved. (48) MacIntyre is thus arguing that just because we understand actions in terms of reasons, this does not exclude causal analysis of those actions. However, he does

seem to be suggesting that explanation in terms of reasons and causal explanations are somehow different in form. As I will argue, though, I would contend that the reasons themselves must be seen as the causes of the actions of agents if we perceive causes in a different way to that advocated by Hume.

Summary

One of the fundamental questions that emerges from this analysis is whether the Humean notion of causality is appropriate to either (a) the natural sciences or (b) the social sciences? For Winch, the former is true whereas the latter is not. But why is this the case? I have argued that while Winch is justified in rejecting the Humean notion of cause (as the idea that similar causes always result in similar effects) when applied to the relationship between reasons and actions; this does not mean that we should reject causal analysis altogether. One of the problems with Winch, therefore, is his limited notion of cause. That is, that he perceives the possibility of 'cause and effect' only in terms of a Humean concept of what it is like in the natural sciences. Thus, it can be argued that Winch only considered one particular kind of causal analysis and failed to consider not only that 'cause and effect' relationships may take different

forms in the natural sciences, but also that explanations in terms of reasons could also be causal but not in the sense outlined by Hume.

The reasons for Winch's refusal to accept any idea that actions can be explained 'causally' are not, however, restricted to this aspect of his arguments. They also lie in his contention that the relationship between reason and action is an internal one - that reasons and actions cannot be perceived of as separate events. This too would preclude any notion of cause and effect, however it is perceived. Yet, I would argue, with Davidson, that this is not the case. The reason we have for our action and our action are not the same.

However, I would also argue that Davidson's reply to Winch is not completely satisfactory either since it also depends on a Humean notion of cause and tries to reconcile such a view with the idea of reasons as causes of action. Many of the points made by Davidson are valid, particularly that reasons must be seen as separate from actions as are causes separate from effects, but I am not convinced that his interpretation of Hume was completely satisfactory nor that he was able to bring about such a reconciliation.

The natural follow-on to this analysis of the Winch versus Davidson debate, therefore, is to try and formulate some explanation which would incorporate the valid points made by both in an attempt to try and establish how reasons can be seen as causes of actions. Here then I would look at the causal account put forward by Bhaskar which differs fundamentally from Hume and which, I shall argue, applies just as well to the social sciences as it does to the natural sciences.

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- (2) Mill, J.S.: *A System of Logic*, cited in Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) pp. 66 & 67.
- (3) Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) p. 67.
- (4) Ibid. p. 72.
- (5) Trigg, R.: *Understanding Social Science*, 1985, pp. 44 & 45.
- (6) Davidson, D.: "Actions, Reasons and Causes", 1963 in Brodbeck, M. (Ed.): *Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1968, p. 49.
- (7) Ibid. p. 46.
- (8) Ibid. p. 52.
- (9) Ibid. pp. 52 & 53.
- (10) Goldman, A.I.: *A Theory of Human Action*, 1970, p. 80.
- (11) Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) p. 81.
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- (14) Ibid. pp. 128 - 131.
- (15) Ibid. pp. 132 - 135.
- (16) Ibid. pp. 165 & 166.
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- (18) Weber, M.: *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation* 1947, pp. 89 & 90.
- (19) Quoted in Gerth, H.H. and Wright-Mills, C.: *From Max Weber*, 1970, p. 280.
- (20) Lewis, J., 1975 (op. cit.) p.
- (21) Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) pp. 83 & 84.
- (22) Ibid. pp. 84 - 86.
- (23) Ibid. p. 89.
- (24) Hume, D.: *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principle of Morals*, reprinted by the Open University Press, 1975, pp. 74 - 77.
- (25) Davidson, D., 1963 (op. cit.) pp. 55 & 56.
- (26) Mischel, T.: "Psychology and Explanation of Human Behaviour", 1963 cited in Caré, N.S. and Landesman, C.: *Readings in the Theory of Action*, 1968, pp. 225 - 227.
- (27) Davidson, D., 1963 (op. cit.) p. 56.
- (28) Hollis, M.: *The Cunning of Reason*, 1987, pp. 190 & 191.
- (29) Trigg, R., 1985 (op. cit.) pp. 7 - 9.
- (30) Davidson, D., 1963 (op. cit.) p. 56.
- (31) Melden, A.I.: *Free Action*, 1967 cited in Bloor, D.: *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge*, 1983, p. 73.
- (32) Bloor, D., 1983 (op. cit.) p. 75.
- (33) Caré, N.S. and Landesman, C., 1968 (op. cit.) p. xxix.
- (34) Davidson, D., 1963 (op. cit.) p. 50.
- (35) Ibid. pp. 50 & 51.
- (36) Ibid. p. 51.

- (37) Melden, A.I., 1967 (op. cit.) cited in Davidson, D., 1963 (op. cit.) p. 51.
- (38) Davidson, D., 1963 (op. cit.) p. 51.
- (39) Ibid. p. 52.
- (40) Winch, P., 1958 (op. cit.) pp. 124 & 125.
- (41) Ibid. pp. 132 - 135.
- (42) MacIntyre, A.: "The Idea of a Social Science" 1967 in Wilson, B.R.: Rationality, 1970, pp. 117 & 118.
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- (45) Hamlyn, D.W.: "Causality and Human Behaviour", 1964 in Caré, N.S. and Landesman, C., 1968 (op. cit.) p. 58.
- (46) Hollis, M., 1987 (op. cit.) p. 66.
- (47) MacIntyre, A., 1967 (op. cit.) p. 118.
- (48) Ibid. pp. 123 & 124.

CHAPTER THREE

CAUSES AS TENDENCIES - AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE HUMEAN ACCOUNT

Introduction

As the arguments in the previous chapter indicate, in terms of the Winchian notion of cause which follows that of Hume, the same cause will always result in the same effect. This, obviously, is not the case when we are talking about human action. So, if we see cause and effect in a Humean way, Winch may be right, to some extent, to claim that action cannot be explained causally. However, I want to argue that certain aspects of the Humean notion of cause not only do not apply to human actions but also do not apply in many of the causal relationships found in the natural sciences. In other words, it is not surprising that some aspects of human action fail to correspond to Humean causality since this, itself, is suspect.

It is, therefore, the case that the generalisations which connect reasons to actions cannot be made into the kinds of laws advocated by Hume on the basis of which accurate predictions can be made. As Hollis argued, rational actions do not have causal explanations in the sense where it is explanatory to subsume a case under generalisations for similar cases with similar initial conditions or in the sense which

appeals to a natural law to account for particular instances. Winch, therefore, may be correct to argue that actions are not caused in the sense meant by Hume. However, his anti-causal stance depends on an acceptance of this empiricist theory of causality which, I want to argue, is not the only acceptable theory of causality in the natural sciences, let alone the social sciences. I shall now, therefore, examine the alternative view put forward by Bhaskar.

The Problems With The Positivist View of Science

Bhaskar maintains that both positivists and relativists are united in their acceptance of a positivist account of the natural sciences. In contrast, Bhaskar wants to argue for a qualified anti-positivist naturalism based on a realist view of science which maintains that science employs a causal criterion for ascribing reality and that causal laws are, in fact, tendencies. Under this, he argues, the methods of both the natural and social sciences can fall. Bhaskar is not going to deny the differences that exist in their subject matter and the relationship in which their sciences stand to them. Indeed, he maintains that ontological, epistemological and relational considerations all serve to qualify the form of naturalism.

But, it is in virtue of these differences that social science is possible. It is the nature of the object that determines the forms of its possible science. (1)

Bhaskar proceeds to outline his proposals by asking how a philosophy of science is possible. He maintains that if the general form of the philosophical investigation is into the necessary conditions for social activities as conceptualised in experience, then two things must be recognised. Firstly, that the activity and its conceptualisation may be historically transient - it may depend on the powers people possess as material things rather than just as thinkers; and, secondly, that its analysis may establish transcendental realist rather than idealist conclusions. In this way, both the premises and conclusions of philosophical arguments remain central facts, the former being necessarily social and hence historically transient. It is, argues Bhaskar, only in this sense that philosophy can establish synthetic 'a priori' truths. Philosophy, then, operates by the use of pure reason on the basis of prior conceptualisations of historical practice. (2)

On this conception, philosophy is distinguished by the kinds of considerations and arguments it employs. It does not consider a world apart from the various sciences, it considers just that

world, but from the standpoint of what can be established about it by 'a priori' argument, where it takes as its premises generally recognised activities as conceptualised in experience. It does not compete with science because its task is to show what must be the case for scientific activity to be possible and, in doing so, it analyses notions that denote only on the condition that they are used under some particular description in science. One difference, then, between transcendental realism and idealism, for Bhaskar, is that in the former what is presupposed in any given scientific activity is a possible object of scientific explanation so that what is clearly demonstrated or established is also scientifically comprehensible. Philosophy, though, does not constitute an autonomous order of being and, as such, is itself susceptible to scientific or sociological explanation. (3)

One implication of this is that it suggests that there is no connection between what lies beyond sense experience and some special sphere of philosophy. Once a non-reductionist account of science is accepted then some 'transcendental entities' (such as magnetic fields) may be regarded as objects of scientific investigation. But, Bhaskar argues, their 'transcendence' is a contingent fact and philosophy speaks with no special authority about it. Moreover, by making the

possibility of philosophical discourse contingent upon the activity of particular social practices, it provides a way of reconciling transcendental and sociological analyses of social activities such as science and philosophy. Another implication is that this conception situates the possibility of clearly established enquiries into non-scientific, even non-cognitive, human activities where these are conceptualised in the experience of the agents concerned. This is so because the possibility is bound to arise of posing the transcendental question in the form 'what must be the case for 'X' to be possible?' for social practices other than science, and the answer will consist in a statement of necessary conditions for the particular activity (which I would argue are the reasons for the action). However, Bhaskar argues, such conditions are both real and subject to historical transformation so that the resultant hermeneutics becomes contingently critical. (4)

In Bhaskar's conception of the philosophy of science, one assumes, at the outset, the intelligibility of science, and one asks what the world must be like for these activities to be possible. Traditionally, as we have seen, epistemology has been dominated by the dispute between experience and reason, but, for Bhaskar, both must play a part (as argued in Part Two in terms of internal and external reasons). The problem is, he

suggests, that neither have been sufficiently differentiated to yield the premises needed to produce a real definition of science. Bhaskar thus attempts their substitution by the more specific concepts of 'experimental activity' and 'scientific development'. (5) In addition, he argues, the orthodox tradition (as I have suggested) uncritically accepts the doctrine of causal laws and has interpreted these, following Hume, as empirical regularities which reduces them to sequences of events, and events to experiences. Anything more is then supposed to be contributed by 'mind'. Bhaskar claims that his analysis of experimental activity and applied activity will show that causal laws cannot be explicated as sequences of events, and considerations of the possibility of scientific change will show that events cannot be explicated in terms of experience. (6)

Causality in the Natural Sciences - An Alternative View

Here, then, we arrive at the possibility of a causal analysis which is not based on the Humean model. At this stage we will consider this in terms of the natural sciences, but we will proceed to analyse its applicability to the realm of the social sciences.

Bhaskar begins by examining experiment and application - what he terms the intransitive dimension. For Bhaskar, in an experiment, scientists produce a pattern of events. But what is so special about these is that they enable them to identify the mode of operation of natural structures, mechanisms and processes which they do not produce. What distinguishes the phenomena the scientists **actually** produce from the totality of the phenomena he or she **could** produce is that, when the experiment is successful, it is an index of what he or she does **not** produce. A **'real** distinction between the objects of experimental investigation, such as causal laws, and patterns of events is thus a condition of the intelligibility of experimental activity. This, for Bhaskar, demonstrates (and this is an important point) that the Humean model depends on the misidentification of causal laws with their empirical grounds. As human activity is, in general, necessary for constant conjunctions, if one identifies causal laws with them then one is committed to the absurdity that human beings cause and even change the laws of nature in experimental activity. The objects of experimental activity are thus not events and their conjunctions, but structures, generative mechanisms, and the like, which are normally out of phase with the patterns of events which actually occur. (7)

Causes as Tendencies

As Bhaskar points out, though, we must also apply our knowledge in systems that may be characterised as open - where no constant conjunctions of events obtain. If this activity is to be intelligible then "causal laws must be analysed as the tendencies of things, which may be possessed unexercised and exercised unrealised, just as they may of course be realised unperceived (or undetected) by people". (8) Thus in citing a law, we are referring to the activity of mechanisms as such and not making a claim about the outcome which will be co-determined by the activity of other mechanisms. This, it seems to me, is rather like Davidson's suggestion, although I still believe that it was not an accurate interpretation of Hume, that in a single case we can see that a particular cause resulted in a particular effect, but if other factors intervene the result may not be the same. We must, Bhaskar claims, make the ontological distinction between causal laws and patterns of events and, if we do so, this allows us to sustain the universality of the former in the face of the variability of the latter. It follows from the fact that causal laws must be analysed as tendencies, that deducibility despite empirical variance, depending upon the availability of constant conjunctions of events, can neither be necessary nor sufficient for a natural scientific explanation. There is an ontological

gap between causal laws and their empirical grounds which has previously been ignored. In this way, just as a rule can be broken without being changed, so a natural mechanism may continue to endure, and the law it grounds be both applicable and unfalsified, though its effect be unrealised (presumably because other factors have intervened to alter the outcome). If, argues Bhaskar, the objects of our knowledge exist and act independently of the knowledge of which they are the objects, it is equally the case that such knowledge, as we actually possess, always consists in historically specific social forms. Thus, changing knowledge of unchanging objects is possible. (9)

This idea of scientific discontinuity and change, however, is difficult to reconcile with the idea that science involves a cumulative growth in our knowledge of nature. Bhaskar's analysis of experimental activity suggests that the objects of investigation are irreducible to patterns of events and active independently of their identification by people. How, then, can science come to possess knowledge of them? Here, Bhaskar turns to his ideas on discovery and development - the transitive dimension. He maintains that it is a condition of the intelligibility of scientific discovery that, in the intransitive dimension, what is discovered exists independently of its discovery; and that, in the transitive dimension, it is

not known prior to its discovery. If one is to avoid the absurdity of the production of such knowledge 'out of nothing' it must depend upon the employment of antecedently existing cognitive materials. In this way, science must be seen as a social process whose aim is the production of the knowledge of the mechanisms of the production of phenomena in nature. This involves the building of a model, utilising such cognitive materials and operating under the control of something like a logic of analogy or metaphor, of a mechanism which if it were to exist and act in the postulated way, would account for the phenomena in question (rather like showing 'why things are so and not otherwise'). The reality of the postulated explanation must then be subject to empirical scrutiny, and once this is done the explanation must then, in principle, itself be explained. (10)

In science, therefore, there is a three-phase schema of development in which, in a continuing dialectic, science identifies a phenomenon, constructs explanations for it, and empirically tests these explanations leading to the identification of the generative mechanisms at work which now become the phenomena to be explained, and so on. In this process, Bhaskar argues, science must construct and test its explanations with the cognitive resources and physical tools at

its disposal which are, themselves, in the process, transformed, modified and refined. In this dialectic, science employs two criteria for the ascription of reality to a posited object. Firstly, a perception criterion; and, secondly, a causal criterion which turns on the capacity of the entity, whose existence is in doubt, to bring about changes in material things. On this criterion, to be is not to be perceived but just to be able to do. Both parties to the naturalist dispute, for Bhaskar, have assumed that the social must be either merely empirically real or transcendently ideal. This has produced either a conceptually impoverished and deconceptualising empiricism or a hermeneutics drained of causal import and impervious to empirical controls. In contrast, this transcendental realist view of science argues for the movement, at any one level, from the knowledge of manifest phenomena to knowledge of the structures that generate them. (11)

Bhaskar suggests that his conception of science sees it, in a similar way to positivism, as unified in its essential method and, in a similar way to the hermeneutic tradition, as essentially differentiated in (or specific to) its object. To posit an essential unity of scientific method, argues Bhaskar, is to posit an account which conceives the sciences as unified in the form that scientific knowledge takes, the reasoning by

which it is produced and the concepts in terms of which its production can be most adequately theorised or reconstructed. The transcendental analysis of science reveals that its essence consists in the movement of manifest phenomena to the structures that generate them. It shows: (i) that experimental and practical activity entails an analysis of causal laws as expressing the tendencies of things not conjunctions of events; (ii) that scientific discovery and development entails that scientific inferences must be analogical and retroductive not simply inductive and/or deductive; and (iii) that the process of knowledge-production necessitates a conceptual system based on the notion of powers. From this perspective, therefore, things are viewed as individuals possessing powers (as agents as well as patients); and actions are the realisation of their potentialities. Historical things are structured and differentiated ensembles of tendencies, liabilities and powers, and historical events and their transformations. (12)

Basic Conclusions of Bhaskar's Concept of Science

These, then, are the basic conclusions drawn out of Bhaskar's analysis of the ontology and epistemology of the natural sciences. The fundamental issue raised, for our present purposes is the idea of causes as tendencies. The question remains, however, as to how far this conception of causality

can be applied to the area of social action. In the light of this new conception of cause and effect, can reasons be causes? Bhaskar's answer to this question is in the affirmative.

What Bhaskar is going to claim is that **intentional human action is caused; that it is always caused by reasons; and that it is only because it is caused by reasons that it is properly characterised as intentional.** Bhaskar does, however, want to stress that the agent, and others, may or may not be aware (or I would prefer to say **fully aware**) of the reasons that caused the action. He suggests that any explanation of the reasons that form the immediate explanations of human actions may have recourse to both psychological mechanisms unavailable to consciousness (a point I do not agree with, although, again, an agent may not be fully aware of these influences); and to non-psychological - say, sociological - ones (like ideological external factors). Moreover, he claims that the mechanisms delineated as 'psychological' may be radically non-homogenous and affected by the aspects of non-psychological mechanisms. Nevertheless, **reasons, for Bhaskar, are and must be seen as causes of actions.** (13) Let us then examine how Bhaskar reaches this conclusion.

A Generative Conception of Cause in the Social Sciences

Bhaskar, like Davidson, argues that when a reason is cited in explanation of a human action any of a whole variety of mental items may be invoked. However, in any such explanation both cognitive and conative considerations are involved in that if a cognitive item, such as a belief, is mentioned, a conative one, such as a desire, is presupposed. Here, then, we have agreement as to what a reason actually consists of, but the question still remains as to what the causal status of reasons is?

For Bhaskar, when something is cited as a cause it is typically viewed as that factor which, in the circumstances, so tipped the balance of events as to produce the known outcome - a non-Humean generative concept of cause. Bhaskar, though, not only wants to show that reason-explanations function in a causal way, but that reasons are analogous to the causal structures of nature and that empirical knowledge of them is possible. (14)

In order to do this he, as did Davidson, begins with an analysis of the objections raised to seeing reasons as causes of actions. Although, as we shall see, he considers these objections in a somewhat different light since he, unlike Davidson, rejects the Humean notion of cause as the only one applicable to even the natural sciences.

Objections to the Causal Analysis of Action

The first objection considered is the teleological argument that turns on the alleged logical difference between reason-explanations and causal ones. This contrasts (i) 'X' occurs for the sake of 'Y' and (ii) 'X' causes 'Y'. It contends, firstly, that in (i) the focus of interest is 'X' but in (ii) it is 'Y'. This, for Bhaskar, is arbitrary as will be shown subsequently. Secondly, this argument states that 'X' is consistent with the non-occurrence of 'Y' in (i) but not in (ii). This case, in Bhaskar's view, also fails because ordinary causal explanations, as well as teleological ones, are defeasible in open systems. The third case is that a change in 'Y' in (i) will bring about a change in 'X' whereas in (ii) it will not. Bhaskar argues, however, that a change in 'Y' will only bring about a change in 'X' if the desired end-state is represented by a place in a series temporally prior to 'X', say 'W', in which case the first statement also fails. Thus, he states, teleological explanations are a species of causal explanation where the cause is, as in the case of reasons, some antecedent state of mind. (15)

The second line of argument against the idea of reasons as causes of action is the one that attempts to show that human actions cannot have any cause of a mentalistic kind (the type of argument put forward by Melden and dismissed by Davidson). Bhaskar responds, in a similar way to Davidson, by saying that to have a reason for an action I do not have to have a reason for that reason. Moreover, possession of a reason should not be construed as an action, rather as a disposition to act; and the possession of a reason for an action can itself be sufficient for that action when appropriate circumstances materialise. (16)

An even more damaging idea to threaten the status of reasons as causes, for Bhaskar, is the behaviourist argument which ^{state} cites either that the category of reasons is altogether otiose or that reasons are not mental causes but redescription of overt behaviour. Bhaskar responds to this by arguing that even if it were the case that the only grounds for ascribing reasons were overt behavioural ones it would not follow that reasons were not mental or could not be efficient causes of behaviour. To suppose the former is to confuse what a claim is about with our grounds for making it; and to suppose the latter is to commit the fallacy of holding that the only real causes are ultimate ones which makes all causal claims unverifiable. Bhaskar, in

fact, claims that appeals to ordinary usage are at best indecisive, and behaviour, no less than speech, has first to be interpreted in terms of a language in order to give grounds for a causal claim. However, as such interpretation is, or depends upon, a mental act or process, a behaviourist analysis of behaviourist practice is impossible. (17)

The fourth argument against the idea of reasons as causes is that provided by the advocates of the hermeneutical tradition with their stress on 'Verstehen'. This, I feel, is not so easy to dismiss, particularly if the Humean notion of cause is accepted (not that I think it should be). Indeed, Bhaskar, himself, admits that inasmuch as the ontological claim is made that the social world is constituted as meaningful, prior to the application of scientific theory to it, then a clear difference between it and the natural world must be accepted.

However, he goes on to say that inasmuch as the epistemological claim is made that the natural world cannot be made intelligible in a scientific redescription and explanation of it, then it must be rejected. Moreover, the significance of the difference between the human and the natural worlds must be carefully considered. Bhaskar, like Davidson, claims that the meaning of an action - its correct identification as an act of

a particular type in a particular language and culture - is always and in principle independent of the intentions with which it is, on some particular occasion and by some particular agent, performed. The immediate 'explananda' of reason-explanations are intentional acts and it is a necessary condition for an act to be intentional that the agent believes it to possess some quality that is desired or wanted (in other words, reasons consist of desires plus beliefs and must include both to be reasons for an action). Thus, argues Bhaskar, that which we want to discover in what a reason explanation allows us to immediately explain is not its correct social meaning (socially constructed rules), but the trait or quality that the agent believes his or her action to possess - the actor's meaning. The explanation then proceeds by reconstructing the set of beliefs that led the agent to want to perform the action manifesting that quality (to discover how these reasons were formed). Therefore, even though the reason for the behaviour is itself a belief, which differentiates it from physical causes which are not beliefs, this does not suffice to show that such reasons cannot be causes. (18)

The strongest anti-causal claim, for Bhaskar, (although it was easily dismissed by Davidson), is the argument that reasons are not logically distinct from the actions they explain so they

cannot be causes which are logically distinct from their effects. However, Bhaskar maintains that it is quite improper to talk of events, as distinct from their descriptions, being logically connected or not. Logic, in fact, connects statements not events and actions, which are connected, when they are, by relations of natural necessity. The fact that it is sometimes sufficient to an explanation that we identify or redescribe a human action in terms of its cause in no way differentiates human action from other natural events which are often also so redescribed in terms of their cause. Moreover, their identification in such a way that the description of the cause logically entails the description of the effect is exactly paralleled by the class of physical action statements (such as 'he drank the coffee') that underlie our ordinary attributions of causality. The fundamental point, however, and one which we have already discussed, is that actions can normally be redescribed independently of their reasons. (19)

Bhaskar goes on to say that the fact that the notion of wanting, desiring or intending to do 'X' logically presupposes the notion of doing 'X' (that intentionality presupposes agency), is exactly paralleled by the fact that the notion of cause logically presupposes that of effect ('X' cannot just be

a cause, it has to be a cause of something). Thus, if we say that there is an intentional connection between 'wanting to do 'X'' and 'doing 'X'', we must also say that there is an intentional connection between 'causing 'X'' and 'X'. Once set in motion a cause tends to issue in an effect that bears its trace, and a reason in an action that the agent believes will fulfil or satisfy it. This, argues Bhaskar, is a necessary or conceptual truth but it is contingent and up to science to discover, in any particular case, what the generative causes or reasons are. So where the logical connection theorist posits a radical dichotomy, there are instead exact parallels. (20)

Another argument against reasons as causes typically runs that to cite a reason is to talk at a different logical level from that at which one talks of causes of natural events. This, for Bhaskar, is an argument compatible with the idea that all events are governed by a closed determinate system of (Humean) 'laws' - empirical invariances. It is argued, in the first place, that criteria for identity are different in the case of human actions and bodily movements. In response to this, Bhaskar maintains that because, in general, open systems are characterised by both a plurality and multiplicity of causes, the fact that the same bodily movements may be used to perform different actions and that the same action may be performed by

different bodily movements is no surprise. It is a Humean myth, he declares, to suppose that for any given event there is a unique set of antecedent or concomitant conditions under which it is constantly conjoined, so one has no grounds for saying that there is not a real difference between a human action and a mere bodily movement because in the former case (but not in the latter) a determinate set of reasons figures amongst its causes. (21)

The other argument put forward to support this thesis is that the contexts in which reasons and causes are cited are logically discrepant. This turns on the fact that reasons are typically offered in justificatory contexts. Now it would seem to be a necessary condition, argues Bhaskar, for any justification 'R' of an action 'A_t' that 'R' was the reason why the agent performed 'A' at 't', and it is difficult to see how this claim can be explained without making use of the notion of 'R' causing it. However, Bhaskar concedes that there is an important consideration on the nature of reasons behind this argument - that is that, in contradistinction to other causes, we appraise reasons 'qua' beliefs for consistency, truth, coherence, etc., and we appraise them from a certain standpoint necessitated by the irreducibility of intentionality, that of their suitability for believing (accepting) and acting upon.

Such appraisals of beliefs, he argues, are necessitated by the conditions that 'what I am to do' can never be reduced to, or discovered by scrutiny of, the antecedents of 'what I will do' since 'what I will do' will happen not in spite of but because of any decision I take and the beliefs and purposes I have. The picture of the agent's situation is not that of two series of events: (S1) in which it is determined what is going to happen; and (S2) in which the agent has plans, beliefs, desires and intentions and generally cogitates his or her life. There is only one event, ontologically speaking, and it is continuous with (S2). It is wrong, Bhaskar maintains, to suppose that what is going to happen in the future is (epistemologically) determined before it is (ontologically) caused. This is because when it is caused, it will be caused by the action of bodies, preformed, complex and structured, possessing powers irreducible to their exercise, endowed with various degrees of self-regulation (and transformation) in thoroughgoing interaction with one another and subject of a flow of contingencies that can never be predicted with certainty. As for human agents, Bhaskar maintains that it is contingent that they exist and have the powers that they do, but given that they do they cannot help but co-determine the future. (22)

The third supporting argument for this thesis is that there are fundamental differences in the conceptual structures of paradigms of the two modes of explanation. Compare, Bhaskar suggests, the paradigm (a) 'I raised my arm' with (b) 'My arm went up'. In the future tense, (a) expresses an intention and (b) a prediction. The answer to the question 'why?' in (a) will be a story about reasons, purposes and the like; in (b) one about reflexes, nerves and muscles over which the agent has no special authority. These differences are then taken to show that we are dealing with a difference in category or level of discourse. While, though, Bhaskar argues, they do show that in our conceptual system we differentiate actions from mere movements, and reasons from physical causes; they do not show how, or on what criteria, such a differentiation is made, or, indeed, how it could be made unless actions were regarded as a class of bodily movements with reasons as their causes. (23)

Reasons and Natural Laws

The problem, then, with the above thesis, according to Bhaskar, is that reasons are seen as not affecting the sequence of physical events that actually occur. They 'hover above' and unconnected to whatever it is that actually happens, playing no real generative role in the life of agents. This means,

firstly, that in any given context where it is deemed that reason-explanations are appropriate, there can be no grounds - independent of subjective preference or its socialised form, custom, or convention - for preferring one reason-explanation to another. Thus, the agent's authority and responsibility collapses. Secondly, the question must be asked - in virtue of what are reason-explanations deemed appropriate at all if they do not co-determine the states of the world? Given this, Bhaskar argues, there is as much sense in trying to discover the agent's reasons for his or her heartbeat as for his or her voting behaviour; the bodily movements are as little and as much determined by reasons in both sets of cases - not at all.

In this way, our habits of investigation, ascription and persuasion appear as wishful illusions; and, if apparently motivated behaviour or its consequences are regarded as undesirable, the only way to alter them is by operating on the purely physical causes of the bodily movements involved. Denied ontological purchase on the phenomenal world of bodily movements and physical happenings, therefore, it seems that both the status of reason-explanations and the particular reasons adduced in explanation must appear as arbitrary and the practice they depend upon as illusory. Indeed, Bhaskar argues that the very distinction between (a) 'things that we do' and

(b) 'things that happen to us' becomes impossible to sustain because it is only if we are the cause of some but not other bodily movements that such a contrast can be made and that we can properly be said to act at all. (24)

In contrast, Bhaskar maintains that the transcendental realist can sustain such a contrast whereby in the (a) case but not the (b) case, the agent's reasons are a necessary condition for the bodily movements that occurred. In this way, reasons are invoked in the former but not in the latter case and the source of the agent's authority is explained. Bhaskar stresses that this granting of causal status to reasons necessitates no exemption to natural laws. Let us, though, pause here for a moment and consider this point. What does Bhaskar mean by a 'law'. I would suggest that his argument could go like this: 'if an agent had not set her alarm clock she would not have woken up'. She would have slept on (one presumes) without this intentional action. No **exemption** also means that having done so she may well have been very tired. In fact, Bhaskar argues that intentional action may best be regarded as setting initial and boundary conditions for the operation of physical laws; and reasons for the operation of neurophysical ones. Contrary to the myth, he suggests, laws are typically universal in that they apply to all members of a kind without (and this is

important) being deterministic in the sense of completely determining the behaviour of the members of that kind (our agent may have intentionally set her alarm because she was tired and wanted to wake up at a certain time, but then ignores the alarm when it goes off because she feels that her need for sleep is more important than her getting up at a certain time). In other words, we should see causal laws as the tendency of things to happen given certain circumstances but that other factors may intervene to alter the resulting action. Further, that this applies both to the natural and the social sciences. This, and the previous arguments considered, also serves to negate the final anti-causal argument which asserts that laws are involved in causal but not reason-explanations since reasons but not causes are dispositions or states rather than events. (25)

Summary

Having thus dismissed these objections to the idea of reasons as causes of actions, Bhaskar concludes not only that reasons can be causes of actions but they must be so if: firstly, they are to discharge their explanatory function; secondly, if thought is to be possible; and, thirdly, if the concept of agency is to be saved. Thus, in a similar way to Davidson,

Bhaskar argues that a person may possess a reason 'R' for doing 'A', do 'A', and yet 'R' not be the reason why the agent did it. It is, he argues, only if 'X' does 'A' because of 'R' that we are justified in citing 'R' as the reason for 'At'. Further, there would be no way of explicating the 'because' except in terms of cause since unless the reason was a necessary condition for the physical movements that occurred 'CP' then both the decision to invoke a reason-explanation and the particular reason-explanation given must be totally arbitrary. In this way, if and whenever they explain, reasons must be interpreted as causes on pain of ceasing to explain at all. (26)

NOTES TO PART TWO, CHAPTER THREE

- (1) Bhaskar, R.: The Possibility of Naturalism, 1979 (1989 Edition) pp. 2 & 3.
- (2) Ibid. pp. 4 & 5.
- (3) Ibid. pp. 6 & 7.
- (4) Ibid. pp. 7 & 8.
- (5) Ibid. p. 8.
- (6) Ibid. p. 15.
- (7) Ibid. p. 9.
- (8) Ibid. p. 9.
- (9) Ibid. pp. 9 - 11.
- (10) Ibid. pp. 11 & 12.
- (11) Ibid. pp. 13 & 14.
- (12) Ibid. pp. 18 & 19.
- (13) Ibid. pp. 80 & 81.
- (14) Ibid. p. 83.
- (15) Ibid. pp. 83 & 84.
- (16) Ibid. p. 84.
- (17) Ibid. pp. 84 & 85.
- (18) Ibid. p. 85.
- (19) Ibid. pp. 85 & 86.
- (20) Ibid. p. 86.
- (21) Ibid. pp. 86 & 87.
- (22) Ibid. pp. 86 - 88.
- (23) Ibid. pp. 86 & 88.
- (24) Ibid. pp. 88 & 89.
- (25) Ibid. p. 90.
- (26) Ibid. p. 90.

SUMMARY TO PART TWO

Introduction

The aim of this section has been to analyse, firstly, the ways in which 'reasons' can be seen to explain the actions of human agents; and secondly what the status of reason-explanations is - that is, can reasons be seen as 'causes' of action. It has been my contention that whilst all the writers considered seem to be in agreement concerning the idea that reasons do provide the explanation of actions, there is no consensus of agreement on how reasons are formed and, therefore, whether or not the relationship between reasons and actions should be seen in terms of cause and effect.

Reasons are More than Rules

I have suggested that Winch is correct to argue that meaningful action is associated with acting for a reason, but that his stress on rule-governed behaviour led him to the unsatisfactory conclusion that reasons involve nothing more than the following of rules which have to be socially constructed and sanctioned. This resulted in the agent appearing rather 'puppet-like', unable to form reasons as the result of his or her 'internal' desires and beliefs.

In contrast to this, Davidson and Hollis both maintain that reasons could only be understood as the product of desires plus related beliefs. Of considerable importance here, for the subsequent analysis of reasons as causes of action, is the idea, advocated strongly by Hollis, that both desires and beliefs must be included in any explanation of action since a belief can modify or change the desires of an agent. However, even though I accept many of the arguments put forward by Davidson, it seems to me that he also restricts his account of reasons by implying that they are purely 'internal' to the agent. Having stated that reasons are the product of pro-attitudes (or desires) and beliefs he seems to leave out of his account the possibility that our beliefs need not be the same as our desires, and thus that 'external' factors may be involved in the formation of reasons.

The crux of my argument here, and one which is considered in much more detail in the next section, is that reasons may be purely internal to the agent, but they may also be formed on the basis of the influence of factors that exist outside the agent's own internal desires (a possibility particularly excluded in the Humean account of reasons). However, I do not want to suggest that when we talk in terms of external influences on action we are referring to anything like 'rules'

which agents uncritically accept. External reasons may modify actions, but it is the agent's choice whether to be influenced by them so that no form of determinism is involved in this conception of externality.

The Humean Account of Causality

The second important issue raised, is whether, by accepting that reasons provide the best explanations of action, this means that reasons cannot be seen as causes of action. I have argued that Winch's rejection of the idea of a causal explanation of action not only reflects his insistence that the relationship between reason and action is 'internal' and thus not open to causal analysis, but also results from his restriction of the notion of cause to that advocated by Hume. Such a conception of cause would entail us arguing that the same reason would always result in the same action, which is obviously not the case when explaining the actions of human beings. Winch, then, is right to reject this notion of cause in the social sciences. But, is it the case that we can only perceive 'cause and effect' in this way?

The answer given to us by Davidson is 'no'. Davidson makes the totally valid claim that reasons must be seen as separate from the actions which occur as a result of the agent holding those reasons and that Winch is therefore 'wrong' to exclude causality on the basis of an argument which maintains that the relationship between the two is one of internality not contingency. Where, though, in my opinion, Davidson is wrong is that he too limits his account of cause and effect to that of Hume and thereby tries, not very successfully, to re-work the Humean notion to correspond with his ideas concerning reasons and actions.

The problems associated with these two accounts of the status of reason explanations led me to question whether, in fact, we should only perceive causal analysis in this rather limited way. As Bhaskar argued, **both positivists and relativists share a positivistic account of the natural sciences.** But, he maintains, there is an alternative view of science - and the causal explanations that are involved in the natural sciences - which can be applied equally well to the explanation of action in the social sciences.

Reasons as Tendencies

This alternative view argues that, while science employs a causal criterion for ascribing reality, the causal laws produced are in fact tendencies. Seeing causes as tendencies is important when we are trying to explain actions. **The crux of the matter is that action occurs in open systems where there are no constant conjunctions of events.** This would preclude the possibility of any causal account within the remit of Humean causality. **If, however, we see causes as tendencies of things, then the fact that we are referring to open systems does not prevent us using causal criteria to explain events.** In citing a causal law in Bhaskar's sense, with reference to actions, we are discussing the activities of mechanisms as such. We are not making a claim about the outcome of the activity since **this may be co-determined by other mechanisms.**

Science, in the sense described by Bhaskar, is seen as a social process. Its aim is the production of the knowledge of the mechanisms of the production of natural phenomena. In order to gain this knowledge it is necessary to build a model of the mechanism in question which, if it existed and acted in the way it was posited to act, could account for the phenomena in question. Having done this then the explanation itself must be

tested and then explained. Throughout this process two criteria are employed; that of perception, and a causal criterion which involves the capacity of the entity whose existence is in question to bring about changes in material things. (1)

This knowledge of structures applies also to social life. Many of the criteria of a causal account of action have seen the social in terms of the category of 'behaviour'. If, though, we adopt Bhaskar's view of the social we do not see the distinct subject matter of sociology as behaviour. Instead, we examine the structures that combine together in social life. It is this stress on the examination of structures that leads us away from examining reasons in a purely 'internal' sense and raises the possibility of the influence of 'emergent properties' or 'external factors' on the actions of individual agents.

The issues raised in Bhaskar's account of the social sciences are, as we shall see, considered in detail in the next section. Suffice it to say, however, for our present purposes, that his idea that causes must be seen as tendencies of things provides us with a causal analysis that can be applied to the social as well as the natural sciences. For Bhaskar, then, the law-like statements of the social sciences designate historically

restricted tendencies operating at a single level in the social structure. Because of this, and because they always operate in open systems, they designate tendencies which may never be manifested but which are essential to the understanding and changing of different forms of social life just because they are productive of them. Society, then, is not a mass of separable events, nor, as Winch suggested, is it constituted wholly by the concepts we attach to our physiological states. Rather, it is a causally efficacious whole which cannot be read straight off a given world nor reconstructed from subjective experience. It is in this respect, however, that sociology is on a par with the natural sciences. (2)

The point I want to stress is that **intentional action is always caused by reasons if we accept the definition of causes as tendencies**. I would maintain, in fact, that if reasons do not cause actions then how can these actions be said to be 'intentional' and how can we explain the relationship between reason and action if we cannot do it causally? This is not to deny that Winch is correct to argue that reference to beliefs and other concepts is necessary for an adequate explanation of action. What I am arguing is that this may not be enough since **action also has a material and ideational aspect which cannot**

be reduced to the internal states of the individual agent. In other words, the agents' own reasons for their actions are causally efficacious in producing that action.

The Natural and the Social Sciences

Where does this leave us in terms of the similarities and differences between the natural and the social sciences? I would contend, with Bhaskar, that because social subjects are thinking, conscious agents able to make their own decisions - unlike the subjects of the natural sciences - the predicates that appear in social explanations will be different as will the procedures used to establish them. Thus, while positivists are correct to say that causal laws do exist in social life, they are wrong to see these causes in terms of empirical regularities, as did Hume, since we are dealing here with open systems in which such regularities cannot be found. This, though, if we accept that causal laws in the natural sciences must be seen as tendencies, does not make social laws very different from natural ones. (3)

Perhaps the main difference between the natural and the social sciences, as Bhaskar suggests, is that the latter are part of their own field of enquiry and are conditioned by developments

NOTES TO PART TWO, SUMMARY

- (1) Bhaskar, R.: The Possibility of Naturalism, 1979 (1989 Edition), pp. 97 & 98.
- (2) Ibid. p. 54.
- (3) Ibid. pp. 20 & 21.
- (4) Ibid. p. 47.
- (5) Ibid. p. 39.

PART THREE

REASONS AS EXPLANATIONS OF ACTIONS - A CAUSAL ACCOUNT

The primary purpose of this section is to put forward my theories concerning how actions can be explained in terms of reasons. To this end, I will suggest that while I accept the idea that reasons can be seen as the product of desires (or pro-attitudes) plus beliefs, the tendency has been, within this debate, to argue that reasons are **either external to the agent or are purely subjective**. It is this suggestion, **itself**, which I challenge and will argue that on such a basis explanations of action become inadequate and restrictive.

Thus, in chapters one and two, I want to suggest an alternative view of how reasons are formed. What I am going to argue is that **we should not restrict our ideas of reasons to the debate between 'subjective' versus 'objective' reasons**. Rather that we should take account of the possibility that the formation of reasons may be (a) 'purely' internal to the agent; (b) internal in the sense that they are appropriated from external sources and then internalised; or (c) influential on actions as a result of external constraining or facilitating factors which are processed by the agent (so being external without being deterministic). Later on it will be argued, in more detail,

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that; (d) reasons can be a combination of some or all of these factors, when the time dimension is introduced and taken into serious consideration.

It is in these chapters, therefore, that I bring into the explanation of action the idea of my three categories of reason-formation. In doing this I hope to demonstrate that we can allow for the effect of external factors on individual actions without producing the type of explanation which produces an 'oversocialised' view of actors. Moreover, we can allow the agent back into the explanation, but avoid the pitfalls of totally individualistic accounts which, in contrast to the first scenario, allow insufficient place for societal or cultural factors.

The final chapter is concerned with how my assessment of how reasons are formed can be allied with Bhaskar's contention that reasons can be seen as 'causes' of action, if causes are seen as tendencies. Here, I will suggest that seeing reasons as causes must be done in terms of my three categories. That is, that tendencies can be seen in terms of category (i) or (ii) reasons, and that the existence of external factors brings into play category (iii) reasons (as reasons for actions or for taking alternative forms of action and not as determinants of action).

CHAPTER ONE

HOW REASONS ARE FORMED - THREE CATEGORIES OF REASONS

Introduction

One of the fundamental issues raised in the previous section is that concerning the need to include both desires and beliefs in action explanations. Whilst I agree that reasons must be seen as desires plus beliefs, it is important to recognise that our desires may not be the same as our beliefs. Indeed, a belief can and often does regulate our desires by sanctioning or proscribing them. For example, a hungry man may have the desire to steal food to satisfy his hunger, but his belief that stealing is a crime or a sin may prevent his performing the action of stealing. Conversely, if he believes that his stealing the food is the only way he can survive, which he sees as a justification of his act of stealing, then his belief in this will sanction his desire and he will steal the food.

What this illustrates is that we must understand both the beliefs and desires of an agent in order to understand his or her action or non-action. This reflects the aforementioned idea that man may 'sit in judgement' on his present desires. Moreover, it can also be true that desires and beliefs may change or be modified as a result of previous actions or

societal pressures. There may be reasons 'external' to the agent's own desires and beliefs why a person may or may not perform an action which would fulfil his wants - such as fear of breaking the law or religious sanctions or cultural and ideational pressures not to or to do something - and these may prove stronger than either his or her desire or belief. Reasons, I am arguing, therefore, need not only be internal to the agent. Here, then, I could be seen as departing, to some extent, from the contention that it is only desires and beliefs that produce actions. I am, in fact, introducing a third dimension to how reasons are formed in terms of external factors. I want to stress, however, that these external reasons **work on** the desires and beliefs of the agent; they are not external in the sense that the agent has 'no choice' whether or not to be influenced by these reasons (a point I shall return to subsequently).

For the present, however, I want to suggest that the immediate explanation of an action lies in discovering the desires and beliefs of the agent in question. In contrast to the Winchian idea of rules, reason-explanations allow us to explain not the **correct** social meaning of an action but the quality that the agent believes his action to possess. We must, then, examine and evaluate the beliefs and desires which led the agent to

perform the action which displayed that quality. This, though, does not exclude 'external' factors since desires, for example, can be created by society (as the force of advertising demonstrates) and beliefs and desires can be modified by the presence of 'emergent factors'.

There are a number of issues raised here which require some unpacking. I have, up to now, been making a contrast between 'internal' and 'external' reasons and between the 'subjective' and 'objective' aspects of reason-forming. In both cases this type of dualism appears too simplistic and no consideration has been given to how they combine together in everyday human action. Let us then consider how we can analyse the interaction between internal and external factors in the formation of reasons.

The Three Fundamental Categories of Reason Formation

It seems to me that the most useful starting point for addressing the question of how internal and external factors can be seen to be involved in the formation of reasons is to divide reasons (for analytical purposes) into three main types:-

(i) **Internal reasons which are the product of the individual and which arise out of the individual without the influence of any external factors;**

(ii) **Internal reasons which are appropriated from outside - from structural or cultural sources;**

(iii) **External reasons which are not appropriated and internalised but which influence actions in two ways - by operating negatively in limiting alternative courses of action or by restricting knowledge of such alternatives; or by operating positively in providing the conditions under which people can fulfil their desires without encountering problems.**

Internal (Category (i)) Reasons

The form of reasons I am referring to in (i) can be usefully described as the agent's own (in the sense of being internally generated) desires and beliefs. Thus, I may have the desire to read a particular novel and a belief that this will give me pleasure - a belief based on having, say, read previous books by the same author pleurably (as opposed to a belief based on 'publicity' which could be seen as a socially constructed belief and not then my reason - that is, it is not internally

generated). I then read that book and my action in doing this can be explained in terms of reasons that arose out of my own wants and beliefs. There are, in fact, no external factors involved.

It could be argued, however, that there is an external factor involved here in that my reading of another book by the same author depends on the availability of other books by that author. As I will suggest, though, **availability of external factors is somewhat different from being influenced by external factors.** Thus, while the availability of the book is an external factor which allows me to read that book, it is my decision whether or not I actually do read that book; and this is based on my pleasure - which constitutes my reason for reading the book - in having read a book, previously, by the same author. Moreover, I would suggest that my contention works equally well with one book, and thus I am immune from the above criticism. That is, having read chapter one of a particular novel, I then read on and complete the book because that chapter and the subsequent chapters gave me pleasure. My pleasure in reading each chapter was my reason for continuing to read the book. Thus, even though the book had to exist for me to read it, there were no external factors that influenced

my decision to do so, or to continue doing so. This, as will be seen, is very different from the type of reason I am referring to when talking of category (ii) reasons.

Appropriated (Category (ii)) Reasons

It may be the case that the reasons we have to act in certain ways may still be our own reasons, but we have appropriated them from our culture or from structural conditions and have then internalised them and, in Hollis' words, 'made them our own'. For example, the reason an agent may give for visiting an elderly neighbour on a regular basis and for doing her shopping is her desire to help that neighbour and a belief that the neighbour needs help. Yet, it may also be the case that the culture in which the agent lives is one which encourages or even obligates (by making people feel guilty or by rewards for such services) that people care for the elderly; and this is an ethic that the agent has been raised in and has internalised. In this situation, in contrast to the first, there are external factors involved, but the reasons are still the agent's own because although she has been encouraged to internalise them she still retains the freedom not to perform that action (not everyone in that 'caring society' will visit their elderly neighbour).

Moreover, as I shall argue later, the agent need not be completely aware of the fact that she has internalised this cultural ethic from outside for it still to be a factor in her reason-formation. But this does not mean that the reason she gives is not her reason for the action. In other words, as agents we do not need fully to appreciate the influence of structural or cultural factors on our decisions to act in certain ways for them to be influences. Indeed, it is often the case that we simply do not recognise from where we appropriated these reasons. This, though, does not mean that the reasons we give for our actions are not our own - they are because we have internalised them.

This idea, it seems to me, can again be illustrated by the notion of ideology. It has been argued, for example, that in Britain today there exists an ideology of self-help and non-intervention by the state. One outward manifestation of this is the stress on community care especially for elderly people, the mentally ill and the chronically sick. Now, while the reasons given for this may be couched in terms of the benefits of non-institutionalised care for these people, it has been suggested that this stress on self-help and care in the community is really advocated and encouraged by a government wishing to reduce the costs of state health care provided by

the National Health Service (hence the closure of mental hospitals and state-run homes for the elderly). If this is the case, then the ideology of a 'caring society' may really be disguising a more financial motive for encouraging lay people to care for their elderly, mentally ill or chronically sick relations and friends.

Let us then assume that the agent who is caring for her elderly neighbour is unaware of this underlying reason for the ideology of a 'caring society'. Does this then mean that her reasons for providing this care are not her own reasons? I would wish to deny this. It may be true that the agent does not fully appreciate the financial reasons for advocating community care, but she has internalised the ethic involved in this ideological stance and made it her own. Thus, it does form her reason for her action. However, it is also the case that an observer may be able to discover the underlying financial motive for this ideology and so give a fuller explanation of the conditions that have influenced the beliefs and desires of the agent which led her to act in the way in question. In other words, the explanation of the actions of this individual need not finish with the motives, desires and beliefs of the agent. These are important, but the 'external' influences on these desires and

beliefs must also be taken into account particularly if the agent is not fully aware of the way in which they affect her actions.

Indeed, the effect of these 'external' factors could be demonstrated, in a hypothetical situation, where these influences were withdrawn. Thus, say the society in which the agent lived was radically altered - it became a socialist state in which all 'caring' became the responsibility of state agencies. I stress that this is an 'ideal' which would probably not occur in reality since even in socialist states today, the state does not have the resources or even perhaps the desire to undertake all caring functions. Nevertheless, say this was the case, is it not conceivable that the desires and beliefs of the agent may change - albeit over a period of time? If there are no external influences for the agent to appropriate, that is, no ideology of self-help and community care, then the agent may lose that desire to help her elderly neighbour and her belief that this neighbour actually needs help. I emphasise the point that she may change her desires and beliefs - this should not be seen as a necessary outcome of this change. It could be that once these external influences have been 'internalised' by the agent, then, even if these were then to be withdrawn, she may have made these reasons so much

her own that they still influence her actions. In fact, what were once category (ii) reasons may appear more like category (i) reasons even though they were originally appropriated from an external source (a point to which I will return).

Whilst appreciating that this is a purely hypothetical case, it does seem to me that if the ideological stance of a society changes or the moral attitudes towards certain groups or types of behaviour change that we may also change our attitudes, desires and beliefs. Perhaps, the changes in how societies view alcoholics or drug-users - that is that they are not deviants but people who need help - is a case in point. Not everyone will cease to treat these people as some kind of 'criminal' but many will alter the way in which they view individuals who have these problems and their actions towards them will also change. This response to 'external' factors, however, that is that they are appropriated and internalised, is very different from that found in category (iii).

External (Category (iii)) Reasons - Constraining Factors

The reasons for acting here are not our reasons for acting, but can still be seen as 'reasons' - or perhaps 'causes' - of our acting in one way rather than another. As previously stated,

within this category there are negative reasons which act either to limit what we can do or restrict our knowledge of alternatives. The most obvious example of the former are legal restrictions, but, religious doctrines or moral pressures can also serve as constraints on our actions.

In terms of religious doctrines, for example, it may be the case that a couple, one of whom is divorced, desire a Church wedding and sincerely believe in the importance of a religious ceremony to bind their union. However, when they approach the minister in charge he refuses them this course of action based on his doctrinal belief that marriage is for life and that the divorced person is still, in the eyes of God, married. This is not a legal restriction since there is nothing in the law that prevents divorced people re-marrying in Church, but it still serves to restrict the action desired by this couple. In this case, then, the category (iii) constraint operates both as a reason and as a cause. This couple obviously cannot have a Church wedding and they know the reason why. I want to stress, however, that not all category (iii) reasons may be like this. As I will argue, actors may experience constraints to their actions - know that there are certain things that they are prevented from doing - but they may not, because of restricted knowledge, know the reasons why they cannot act in this particular way.

The idea of moral sanctions is more complex, though nevertheless as powerful. In talking of moral sanctions providing external negative reasons for actions, I am referring to something similar to Dahrendorf's idea of homo sociologicus. Dahrendorf suggests that for every position a person can occupy, 'society' has defined certain personal qualities and modes of behaviour as acceptable. The incumbent of this position must decide whether or not to behave as society demands. If he yields to society then he may lose some of his independence but he gains society's approval. If he does not act in accordance with society's wishes he may preserve his independence but only at the cost of incurring certain sanctions which arise from 'society'. In other words, one of the external influences on our actions is provided by society itself and the positions we occupy within that society. As Dahrendorf argues, every position carries with it certain expected modes of behaviour - to every social position there is a social role. By assuming a social position, the individual becomes a character in the drama written by society - with every position he assumes, society hands him a role to play. Social roles, in fact, represent society's demands on the incumbents of social positions. They are bundles of expectations directed at social actors. (1)

This is different from the reasons provided in category (ii) since in Dahrendorf's idea of social roles we are referring to expected behaviour over which we have no control. Our concerns, he argues, are with the individual as confronted with demands generated outside himself. Thus, social roles are seen as quasi-objective complexes of prescriptions for behaviour which are in principle independent of the individual. Their content is defined and redefined not by the individual but by society, and the behaviour expectations associated with roles are binding on the individual in the sense that he cannot ignore or reject them without harm to himself. (2)

Perhaps, however, Dahrendorf is rather overstating the case when he argues that we have no control over these 'external' reasons. Even though the expected behaviour that corresponds with social roles is not generated by the individual but by the society in which the individual lives, this does not mean that the individual is forced to abide by these norms and values. We should not, in my view, see 'external reasons' as somehow determining actions or else we lose the element of 'choice' that my emphasis on the importance of agency demands. Thus, we do have some control in the sense that we are free not to conform to the type of behaviour that is expected of us by society. However, external reasons can act as constraints in

the sense that if we wish to fulfil a role that is desired by us then we must conform to the expected behaviour that goes with this role. In other words, if we choose to ignore the norms and values of the society in which we live we can expect some form of sanctions against us or the creation of a situation in which we are prevented from fulfilling some social role we desire.

For example, the expectations of a society may be that neighbours in a community are considerate about noise levels especially after a certain time of night. That is, in our roles as 'good neighbours' we are expected not to play loud music until the early hours of the morning however much we may desire this and believe that it is a reasonable thing to do. This expectation, then, is external to the individual, and it is binding in the sense that if we do play our loud music we can expect sanctions - say, that we may be ostracised by the rest of the community and perceived as not fulfilling our role as 'good neighbours'.

It could be argued, however, that this is more like a category (ii) reason than category (iii) since our reason for not playing loud music is that, on balance of reasons, we put 'avoiding ostracism' ahead of 'our rights to be a disturbance'.

After all, people can and do play loud music despite the risk of ostracism if they do so - the idea of 'the crime is worth the punishment'. On the other hand, the agent may be aware that this action may prevent them from fulfilling a role they desire - say, being popular, or it may result in more physical sanctions such as being put out of their Halls of Residence. They know this, so they knowingly avoid creating this situation. Again, the example of ostracism could be perceived as a reason appropriated from outside but internalised. In response to this, however, I would argue, firstly, that ostracism is only the first of the risks taken by these agents. Being ostracised may prevent them from carrying out other roles they desire - such as becoming a local councillor or obtaining a job in the community in which they live - and this, then, is a practical constraining force on the individual not to perform the action which would result in ostracism. As previously argued, though, the agent has a choice of whether his or her desire to play loud music is more powerful than his desire to become a councillor. That is true. But it is also true that we have the choice of whether or not to break the law. We know that if we do we face fine or imprisonment, but people still break the law.

The two cases are similar and I would argue that legal restrictions are a constraining force in the sense of category (iii) reasons because even though we are aware of them and abide by them we need not necessarily have internalised them and made them our own. We do not have to agree with a law that prevents us from performing certain actions, but it may still serve, in most cases, to do so. Thus I would suggest that category (iii) reasons differ from those in category (ii) in a fundamental way. The reasons we have appropriated from outside and made our own are those which we basically agree with. We appreciate the 'rightness' of the law or the moral pressure and we internalise it and make it part of our own belief system. If, on the other hand, we do not agree with the law or moral dictate it may still constrain or modify our action because of the sanctions that will ensue if we flout it, but we have not internalised it in the sense of making it our own. We are influenced by it as an external factor but far from becoming part of our own reasons for acting, it actively prevents us from acting in a way we desire and believe to be acceptable.

Thus, the person who does not play loud music at night because he believes that this is the wrong thing to do may have appropriated this ideal from the community in which he lives, but he has internalised this belief - it has become his own

category (ii) reason. Alternatively, the person who does not play loud music because he fears the sanctions that will be forthcoming if he does - not because he feels it is wrong - has not internalised the belief. Rather, he experiences it as a constraint upon his desired action over which he has little control if he is to avoid the penalties that will ensue if he fulfils his own desires and beliefs - category (iii).

In this way, as Dahrendorf suggests, an individual's relationship to his social role is neither purely accidental nor alterable by his own free decision. It is a matter of necessity and constraint. Society then is not merely a fact, but a vexacious fact and one that we cannot ignore or flout without punishment. Social roles, therefore, are a constraining force on the individual, whether he experiences them as an obstacle to his private desires or a support that gives him security or positive advantages to his desired action. The constraining force, which we are considering here, of role expectations is due to the availability of sanctions - measures which society can enforce conformity with its prescriptions. The individual who does not play his role is punished, the man who does may be rewarded or, at least, not punished. (3)

Negative reasons or constraints to actions, though, may also be seen in terms of more structural factors - such as, for example, financial restrictions. Thus, we may have the desire to send our children to private school because we believe that this would provide them with a better education, but the cost of doing this is prohibitive so that form of action is prevented by the external constraints, say, of low wages, unemployment, and so on. This, then, is different from the case of the couple who desired a Church wedding since although we may know that we cannot afford private education we need not always know exactly why. That is, we may not be fully aware of all the social factors involved in determining, say, wage differentials but we are aware of the situation in which we find ourselves and we experience this as a constraint on our desired action. I am not suggesting, however, that we cannot change the situation that we find ourselves in. We may not be able to do so, but, in some cases, we may find this possible - perhaps a change in our occupation or our priorities over spending, will enable us to afford this private education. Thus, these external factors, at present, may confront us as constraints but I want to avoid the determinism of saying that they need always do so. Other factors may intervene to remove this obstacle to our desired action: yet often its very circumvention influences our action.

Another type of external negative constraint is **restricted knowledge** which is, perhaps, best demonstrated in the case of censorship whereby those in power, for instance, prevent others from possessing certain information which may enable them to see alternatives to the way the society in which they live is organised. Alternatively, it may involve a 'cultural situation' whereby the people of a certain form of society do not possess knowledge, say, of certain 'scientific' discoveries which would aid them to increase their crop yields - they do not have this knowledge so have no alternatives to their methods of farming. As Brodemeier stated, "**ignorance of alternatives and of the popularity of alternatives prevents practice of alternatives**". (4)

External Category (iii)) Reasons - Facilitating Factors

It is, however, true that external factors do not only influence our actions by providing negative sanctions. **Emergent properties can also facilitate rather than constrain actions.** As Dahrendorf suggests, there are positive as well as negative sanctions: society may bestow decorations as well as impose prison sentences, acknowledge prestige as well as expose unacceptable behaviour. (5) Thus, as social actors we may find that our desires and beliefs, and our subsequent actions, are

supported by the society in which we live. For example, a person may have the desire to improve their standard of education by, say, attending university. If this is a goal that is supported by the rest of society then that individual may find practical inducements available to achieve this - such as the provision of higher education facilities, financial support, etc.; and more psychological encouragement in the form added status given to people who achieve a certain standard of education. In this case, society is providing positive sanctions to the individual's own desires and beliefs by providing a situation in which this desire to improve educational standards is largely problem-free.

Facilitating factors, however, may also be seen in terms of the position or status of an individual in the society in which they live. Thus, say the person who wishes to improve their standard of education comes from the type of background in which they have knowledge of the provisions available, have no need of paid employment because of their financial status, come from an area where the availability of higher education (and, perhaps, child-care facilities) is good, and so on. In this case the position in which they find themselves is relatively problem-free in terms of attending university and so, by virtue of their social position, they are able, without encountering

negative constraints, to fulfil their desires and beliefs. In contrast, another person, in the same society, may come from the type of background where the knowledge of these opportunities is not available (nor, indeed, are the facilities). They too may have the same desires and beliefs but their situation is not problem-free. There are no facilitating factors to encourage the course of action they desire. This does not mean that they will not go on and attend university or college, just that 'external' or 'emergent' properties do not provide the facilitating factors we are discussing here.

Again I wish to stress that the agents need not know **why** a situation is problem free/ridden for it still to influence their actions. The point is that they **do** know that it **is** and this affects their reasons (that is, it forms one of them) for their action or non-action. Moreover, it is clear that the emergent factors affecting these actions are something over which the agent, at present, has little or no control. They are purely 'objective' and serve to influence the actions of the agents by imposing constraints on or facilitating certain forms of action. The reasons here, then, are not the agent's own reasons - they are reasons but they exist outside the agent. Whilst these 'emergent properties' are important in

many action-explanations, they are not the only ways in which emergence affects the ways in which actors behave. We thus return to category (ii) whereby our actions are influenced by outside factors but where the reasons we give for our action constitute our **own** reasons for acting as we do.

Emergent Factors Modify Actions

The crux of my argument is, in fact, found in my contention that beliefs and desires can be modified by the presence of 'emergent properties'. This is very different from the case where external factors prevent certain actions by imposing sanctions on them. In this case, the emphasis is on the agent's own reasons for their actions, but where these reasons are somehow altered or changed by the exigencies of external factors. To illustrate this I shall use the example of health-care.

Let us, for instance, take the case where an agent begins to display symptoms which seem to indicate some form of disease. There are a number of options open to this agent in the light of this. He may, for instance, decide to ignore the symptoms hoping that they will just disappear; he may decide to 'wait and see' how the condition develops; or he may take the

decision to visit the doctor. If this agent decides not to visit the doctor this may also be for a variety of reasons. It could be that in the society in which he lives there are no health-care facilities - no doctors - available. In this case his not visiting the doctor can only be explained in terms of category (iii) reasons. There are 'external factors' over which the agent has no control. His action (or non-action) has nothing to do with the desires or beliefs of the agent.

Alternatively, if the agent lives in a society in which there are health-care facilities he may also decide not to visit the doctor but for other reasons which are his own. He may, for example, have a distrust of doctors, based on past experiences of his own or others, and prefer to ignore the symptoms or treat himself. In this case, his decision is a product of his own reasons but these reasons have been influenced by previous experiences which were not of his own making. Similarly, his decision not to seek professional advice may be influenced by more structural factors, such as difficulty in travelling to a surgery, the waiting time when he gets there, fear of having time off work, etc. In all these cases, the decision taken has been affected by external factors, but it is still the agent's decision because he has the choice of whether or not these external factors will deter him from fulfilling his desire, if he has it, to visit the doctor.

Even having made this decision, however, the agent's subsequent actions may be modified by changing conditions. For example, the symptoms may become worse, overcoming his distrust of doctors; he may discover a means by which travelling to the surgery becomes easier; the doctor may institute an appointments system, and so on. In the light of these changing external conditions then the agent may make a new decision to visit the doctor. Again, it is the agent's own choice but one based on or modified by external factors.

Summary

What I am arguing, therefore, is that both 'objective' and 'subjective' factors play a part in this type of decision-making. This, though, brings us to the question raised earlier as to whether there has to be a subjective aspect to reason-explanations. I have suggested that we can see reason-formation in terms of three categories internal, appropriated and external reasons. It has been my contention that reasons should be seen in terms of the desires and beliefs of the agent, but that these two elements may not always correspond. That is, that the beliefs of the agent can modify his or her desires and that both may be influenced by external factors that exist outside the agent.

However, I do not want to imply that there are no subjective factors involved in any of the three categories of reason-formation. The first case (category (i) reasons) obviously involves 'subjectivity' and the second (category (ii)) also can be seen to do so as the agent internalises reasons he or she accepts as somehow 'right'. But the case of category (iii) external reasons is somewhat different. As I have argued, though, even in the case of external constraining factors the agent does have a 'choice' of whether or not to abide by these constraints and this can be seen as the 'subjective' or internal aspect of this type of reason-formation. The question here is: does the agent have to be aware of the reasons for his action for them to be reasons or can something constitute a reason (that is, someone's reason) without any awareness of it? It is to this question that the next chapter addresses itself.

NOTES TO PART THREE, CHAPTER ONE

- (1) Dahrendorf, R.: Essays in the Theory of Society, 1969, pp. 31 - 37.
- (2) Ibid. p. 37.
- (3) Ibid. p. 38.
- (4) Brodemeier, H.C.: "The Functional Analysis of Interpretation" in Demerath, N.J. and Peterson, R.A.: System, Change and Conflict, 1967, p. 368.
- (5) Dahrendorf, R., 1969 (op. cit.) p. 39.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INTERNAL/EXTERNAL ASPECT OF REASON FORMATION

Introduction

The thrust of my argument in this chapter, as a starting point, is that agents do have to have some awareness of their reasons (in some way which need not entail full discursive penetration) for these reasons to be their reasons for acting as opposed to a reason which while being a reason not to act is not the agent's reason for acting. Whilst I agree that agents may not be fully aware of all the factors involved in their decisions to act in one way rather than another, I still want to suggest that agents do not act for reasons of which they are totally unaware.

The second contention, discussed here, is that while I have divided reason-formation into three categories, I do not consider that these are in any way rigid or unchanging. The categories I have outlined are intended for analytical purposes only and are not intended to imply that reasons are only formed on the basis of one 'type' or another. On the contrary, my aim is to remove the seeming 'fallacy' that we have to explain actions in terms of reasons in either one way or another. We can see reason formation as the result of a number of factors,

all of which are needed to be included in our explanation; or we can see reasons as originating within one category and evolving into another category, especially as a result of the agent undergoing some sort of 'learning process'. In other words, I want to get away from the restrictions of the internalist/externalist debate whereby we cannot see reasons as the result of both subjective and objective factors - or, indeed, one or the other with the possibility that both could be included. This is, as I shall argue, exactly what we should be trying to discover.

The Problems of the Idea of Unconscious Motives

Let us begin with the first issue. There are those who would argue that the agent need not be aware of his or her motives for these to be their reasons for acting. Freud and his supporters, for example, maintain that many actions can be explained in terms of 'unconscious motives' of which the agents are unaware. The argument is that even when an agent seemingly deliberates and decides to do something for a reason of which he thinks he is fully aware, his choice is really determined not by the reason he gives to himself but by unconscious forces of which he is not even aware still less in control of. To take an extreme example. The neurotic handwasher claims and believes that his hands are dirty and so he decides to wash

them for that reason. When he is told that they are not, he says that they still feel dirty. He thinks that he decides to wash them, but the psychoanalyst would say that his free rational decision is an illusion. His conduct is determined by unconscious motives and his alleged reasons are rationalisations. For Freud, according to Nowell-Smith, this is not only true of the actions of neurotics. In fact, many of our actions are due to unconscious motives - even the most carefully planned actions. What Freud argues is that the 'reasons' an agent gives to himself do not really affect his decisions. His conscious mind and will are puppets activated by wires pulled by his subconscious. (1)

Now, even if this were the case, the question could be asked as to whether the reasons the agents give for their actions cannot still be seen as reasons for that action, even if the psychoanalyst claims that they are not the real reasons? Take the case of the neurotic handwasher. It seems to me that we could still be perfectly justified in saying that the action of the neurotic can be explained in terms of the reason that he believes his hands are dirty even though we believe they are not. The fact that he does believe this constitutes the reason, his reason, for the action of washing his hands. As Nowell-Smith contends, the psychological causes of my believing

something (if they exist) are irrelevant to the question of whether I have good reasons for believing it. The man who accepts the well-paid job may have good reasons even though his action could be explained in terms of unconscious causes.

There is a problem here, however, of whether the neurotic handwasher, for example, really has a good reason for washing his hands. It can be argued that the fact that his hands are not dirty means that his reason is not a good one since the belief his reason is based on is false. The point I am making, though, is that regardless of whether or not the belief he has can be seen as 'rational' or somehow correct, it is still his belief and we can explain his action, initially, in terms of it. Whether the belief is right or wrong, rational or irrational, the action of the individual is based upon the belief and the related desire so that the action is explicable in terms of the belief. Indeed, the agent's hands still feel dirty - which is a good enough reason for him - although the explanation of the action may be supplemented by the observer in terms of the medical condition that accounts for the agent having that belief.

In this way, therefore, even if unconscious motives do exist, this is not to say that the reasons an agent gives for his actions should be discounted. However, I want to go a stage

further than this and question the whole concept of unconscious motives, specifically that we can have motives of which we are unaware. Psychoanalysts suggest that the beliefs and desires we recognise in ourselves and think are determinant of our actions are really only a substitute or mask for our true motivations which lie deep in our unconscious; and that because of early experience, indoctrination and our built-up interests we have powerful incentives for suppressing the very awareness of these motivations and for resisting any exploration that might lead us to our own enlightenment. In response to this I would like to ask the psychoanalysts how they are able to discover these if we have no awareness of them at all. It seems to me that unless we have some knowledge ourselves of these motives no-one could ever find out what they were. It is more likely, as MacIver suggests, that we can have motives of which we are only fitfully or dimly aware and do not realise their full significance, but that a dim light is still a light. There is some awareness, and to suggest that we are unconscious of a motive when we do not know its consequences and the function which it serves is to employ a mode of speech that plays havoc with any distinction between the conscious and the unconscious. (2)

Before continuing with this argument, however, I think a slight digression is in order concerning the point MacIver made about not knowing the consequences of our motives and the subsequent actions that arise from them. In fact, it is probably the case that we can never know fully all the consequences of our actions, but this is not to say that we do not know what the initial motives for these actions were. Rather, it is to say that the consequences of the actions that result may be very different from that which we intended. For example, say our patient displaying symptoms decides to visit the doctor for the reason that he believes that early treatment will result in his quick return to good health. One of the motives for this decision is that he feels that his work is suffering because of these symptoms. However, as a result of consulting the doctor and taking his advise and treatment the patient has to take a number of days off work. During this time a contract for which he has been working is clinched by his rival for promotion and he thus loses that promotion because of his action. In this case, then, the consequences of the action of this agent could not be appreciated by that agent, but this does not mean that he did not reason in terms of a good motive of which he was fully aware. In other words, we can never know all the consequences of our actions but this does not negate our understanding of the reasons we initially gave for our action.

To return, however, to the Freudian argument that we do not know the reasons for our actions. I feel that there is no justification for saying that we are unaware of these reasons even though they may not be fully appreciated by us. This is the important point. I do not wish to deny that we may not know the complete reason why we act as we do (as the force of ideology illustrates) but I do not accept the idea that the reasons we give for our actions are in truth only masks for the real reasons for that action which arise out of the unconscious mind. What I do suggest is that, in some cases, the agent does not fully recognise the 'external conditions' that influence their reasons. For example, the old age pensioner who cuts back on the amount of heating he uses is aware of the rising costs of electricity and gas. The cost of heating is then the reason - his reason - why he uses less heating. However, he need not be aware of the structural conditions, say, of inflation, which is the cause of this and which constitutes the structural conditions for the situation in which the pensioner finds himself. This may only be apparent to an outsider who has access to this information and who can then provide a more detailed explanation of the actions of the pensioner.

The Subjective/Objective Interaction

The crux of my argument is that 'emergent properties' can serve to modify our actions by limiting or restricting what we can do or by providing the conditions which encourage certain courses of action. However, this, which I am calling the external or objective aspect of reason-explanations, is not the only way in which emergence affects our reason-formation. I also want to maintain that the individual is capable of internalising some, if not all, of these external factors. By this process of internalisation he makes these reasons his own and makes decisions subjectively in terms of them. As MacIver argues, motivations, subjective urges of all kinds, are the expressions of felt needs. But needs vary with external conditions, are responsive to them, in large measure depend on them. We thus need to conjoin motives with the relevant situations if we are concerned to discover their causal role. (3) How, though, do we conjoin these internal and external aspects? What is the bridge between the two?

The problem is that, up to now, we have been discussing internal and external reasons as two separate entities. We need to know how they interact and affect each other in the course of everyday action. In doing this, however, I want to

avoid the individualism of Davidson whereby reasons are purely subjective and the other extreme whereby reasons are seen to be given us entirely from the societal structure in which we live.

Opportunity Costs

Perhaps the most useful way of seeing this is in terms of 'opportunity costs'. A person, for example, may have the desire to go on to higher education and believes that this is the best course of action to take for their future happiness and security. However, before taking the decision to go to university, the person has to weigh up the costs of this action, say, in terms of deferring the earning of a salary, having to move away from home, and so on. If, in one case, the costs appear relatively low - there is parental encouragement and financial support - then, based on these structural and cultural factors and the agent's own desires and beliefs, the person will probably undertake that course of action. On the other hand, there could be the case where a person, while still having the same beliefs and desires, comes from a poor household where an extra income is needed and where there is no parental encouragement. In this situation, the costs of going on to higher education may be too high and the decision is taken not to pursue this action. In both cases, the reasons

for going or not going to university are the agent's own reasons. But, the decision has been modified or influenced by factors that exist outside the individual - by structural or cultural factors which serve to enable or prevent the course of action desired.

It could still be argued, however, that the influence of external factors, in this example, seem to carry greater weight on the decision taken than the internal desires and beliefs. This, though, is not the case. People will and do vary in the way that they weigh up costs - otherwise how could we explain the fact that people from poor backgrounds with little encouragement do attend universities? It is the subjective choice of each individual as to how high a cost they are willing to pay. Moreover, it is an ongoing process whereby the costs may rise and fall and new decisions taken in the light of this over a period of time. Thus, a person may take the decision that despite the financial problems, etc., the costs of attending university are not too high to pay. After a while, however, the conditions may change - a family member may fall ill and need help. The opportunity costs then rise again and the individual subsequently takes the decision to leave and find work or care for their sick relative. The point is that the reason to do this is the agent's own reason but the

decision is taken in the light of the structural or cultural condition in which the agent finds him/herself which is not of the agent's own making nor even over which the agent has any control.

Unacknowledged Conditions of Action: Is There Subjectivity Here?

In this case, however, the actors do know something about the emergent properties which influence their actions. In other words, there is still a subjective aspect to the decision taken. It could be argued, though, that there are situations where emergent properties exist, which condition actions, but of which the agent is unaware - that is, unacknowledged conditions of action. This is particularly true where 'facilitating factors' are concerned. Could it not be the case that if the actor is in a problem-free situation then he or she can take the bonuses of that situation without being aware that they are bonuses? If this is so then can we argue that these 'emergent properties' constitute part of their reason for acting? Is there, in this case, a subjective element?

For example, say our patient displaying symptoms of disease, comes from a particularly wealthy background. He is financially able to afford private medical care when convenient

to himself. He is aware, because he has always been able to avail himself of these facilities, where such medical services are available. This, then, is an emergent factor which will influence his action to seek medical advice. But, because he is in a situation into which he was born and which he has never considered any alternative to, he is unaware that this is a facilitating factor which is influencing his decision. Thus, can we not argue that, in this case, there is no 'subjective' awareness of the motives for his action of seeking medical advice?

In response to this, however, I would argue that a course of action being problem-free is a reason in itself since it sets no costs on carrying out the agent's desire, say, to seek medical advice. In other words, the fact that the course of action is problem-free constitutes a belief that 'x' - the agent's desire for medical help - is possible. It is, therefore, this belief in the availability of the means to fulfil his desire which forms the subjective element in this explanation of the action of this patient. Thus, even if the agent is unaware of the bonuses of his objective position, because they can and do facilitate his desired action, they do constitute part of the agent's own reason for acting as he does. Moreover, even if the agent is not immediately aware of

the facilitating factors which condition his action, this is not to say that this will always be the case. He may, in time, perhaps by comparing his situation with that of others, begin to comprehend the advantages that he has and become aware of the factors that facilitate his desires. Thus, just because an agent may not be immediately aware of all the reasons for his actions, this is not to say that he will never be so. Awareness of reasons need not be instant, it may be that our comprehension of all the reasons why we act as we do is something that evolves over time and requires some kind of learning process.

The suggestion, however, that facilitating factors do have a subjective element seems to indicate that they are an example of category (ii) rather than (iii) reasons. Yet, I have argued that facilitating factors can be an example of external reasons rather than appropriated ones - as factors outside the individual over which he or she has little control. I still believe this to be the case in the sense that the situation in which the agent finds him/herself is one that he or she was born into - he or she did not, as an individual, create it nor does he or she necessarily appreciate the bonuses of that situation. It is, in this conception of externality, an external factor that conditions the agent's actions. There is

an internal factor involved simply because the agent experiences no problems in executing his/her desired action, but it is difficult to argue that he or she is acting as a result of factors that have been internalised (the bonuses of the situation) especially if the actor remains unaware of them.

This is not to say, though, that the agent will never do this. In fact, our patient, over a period of time and as a result of some kind of learning process, may come to appreciate the bonuses of his situation and why he has these bonuses. For example, he may be exposed, in his work or in his relationships with others, to the experiences of different people in less privileged positions; or he may come across material concerning inequalities in health care. In either case this could lead him to become aware that his status and financial position has given him benefits over others in terms of health care and even his whole quality of life. He thus becomes aware not only of the situation he is in, but what the bonuses are and why he has them. In this case, then, he may well internalise these factors so that they now form part of his category (ii) reason for acting because he is aware of them. He may not internalise these factors - that is, he may reject them once he has this awareness, but if he does not then it seems reasonable to assume that he perceives of these bonuses as 'right' and makes them part of his own value system.

Reason-Formation Categories Are Not Rigid or Static

This idea of the possibility that the reason-formation category can be seen to change in this way - as a result of the agent becoming aware of the bonuses of his or her situation and internalising them - does raise the question of whether we should view the categories, previously outlined, in such a way that implies that they are rigid in their boundaries and somehow static and unchanging. This is not the conclusion I wish to draw. The categories, in some cases, are not clear-cut and there are areas where they may seem to merge into one another. Nor are they unchanging - a reason may, initially fall into one category but because people are thinking, learning agents their reasons may also change in form. Let us then examine in what circumstances this could occur.

Firstly, I want to consider whether there are any situations where internal reasons can become appropriated or even external reasons. Remember that the definition of internal reasons given before is that they are the product of the individual and one derived from no external source. It is precisely because they are totally subjective - there are no external factors involved - that they are internal reasons. If, then, for any case, we can locate any external factor, these internal reasons

cease to be such. They become either category (ii) or (iii) reasons. It is difficult, then, to envisage how an internal reason can become an appropriated or external reason if it was initially a definite example of category (i).

One way that internal reasons may be seen to become appropriated is if they are shared - but even in this case they can only be category (ii) reasons for 'other people' not for the individual who initially formed the reason. For example, say our individual who formed the desire to read a novel (based on a belief that this will give pleasure having previously read books by the same author) recommends it to other people. If, then, the other people read the novel they will have appropriated the desire and belief from an external source. The point is, though, the reason for reading the novel is only category (ii) for the 'others' - the reason why the original individual read it remains 'internal' to that person.

Perhaps, however, we could argue that there can be a shift from category (i) to (ii) through a process of learning in the sense that the agent becomes aware of the effects of his or her action on the rest of society and the reactions of that society back on the individual. In other words, when we are examining category (i) reasons we should not only look at the origins of

the action that results, we should also ask the question of whether, regardless of the initial reason for the action, the social structure supports or rejects that action based on the individual's reason. Thus, if on the one hand, the agent's action is seen as acceptable or desirable then that agent will receive positive feedback from the society or culture in which he or she lives and this will reinforce the desires and beliefs that formed the original reason for the action. This is, then, at this next stage, an external input into the agent continuing to have that reason. On the other hand, if the agent receives negative feedback from the social structure this may (though not necessarily) lead him or her to revise their desires and beliefs and reject the reason he or she originally had for the action in question. What I am arguing, then, is that the formation of a reason is not static - it is an ongoing process which can result, because we interact with other people and take account of other ideas, in a revision of our initial reason for acting.

It is still the case, however, that, in terms of the definition of internal reasons given, the agent is no longer acting purely in terms of subjective desires and beliefs - the category of reason has changed even though the reason itself may not have done. What, though, can we say concerning the possibility of

trying to envisage a situation where appropriated or external reasons can become internal reasons? Problems again occur because internal reasons should be seen as those that have no external factors influencing them. Thus, once we have appropriated a reason, even though we then internalise it, it cannot be said to have had no external input.

The situation, however, may not be as clear-cut as this implies. If we are discussing how types of reason-formation can change then perhaps we are justified in arguing that, despite previous external influence, in the situation where this external influence is removed and yet the agent retains the internalised reason for acting, there is a change to a form of category (i) reason. Let us take the example in which the ideology of self-help and community care is replaced by that of state responsibility for care due to a change in the organisation of society. In this case I suggested that even though the external influence of one ideological stance is removed and replaced by another, the agent may have so internalised the former ideology, and made it her own, that she retains the belief that it is her responsibility to care for her neighbour despite new external influences on her reason-formation. Thus, despite the fact that the external factor - the ideology - no longer exists, the reason previously

internalised is influencing how that agent acts even in the face of the influence of new external factors which may actively discourage such actions. The question is, has her reason for continuing her action become a category (i) reason?

I would argue that the answer to this is yes. In referring to category (i) reasons as internal to the agent - as 'personal' reasons - I am not suggesting that they have to be entirely 'original'. For example, if an agent continued to be or actually became a Christian in Eastern Europe ten years ago then he or she was not appropriating these beliefs from current category (ii) approved beliefs (in fact, he or she would be accumulating (category (iii)) sanctions from the Party in power). But neither was he or she 'inventing' Christianity. Similarly, as a lone novel reader I have not invented the novel - it had to exist for me to read it, but it is as a result of my pleasure - which is my reason - that I continue to read that novel. This is not to say that no reason can ever be personal and original. Rather, that in many cases the personal element often consists in 'raiding' the cultural system for items that are not socially advocated. It is this that distinguishes category (i) reasons from those of category (ii). There is, in fact, a distinction between external availability and external influence (as I stated at the outset) when we are discussing

reason-formation. In the case of category (ii) reasons - as the example of ideology illustrated - the agent has appropriated and internalised current socially accepted external reasons and made them her own. She has accepted them as somehow 'right' and made them part of her own belief system. On the other hand, the agent who became a Christian in Eastern Europe has not appropriated and internalised the ideology of the society or culture in which he or she lives. This agent, in fact, has not been influenced by this ideology at all but has taken the personal decision to act in accordance with beliefs that are totally opposed to this ideology. It is the agent's own personal choice to select the particular beliefs advocated by Christianity - a set of beliefs available to the agent but not advocated by the society in which the agent lives. It forms then the internal reason of the agent even though the agent has not 'invented' those beliefs themselves. This is very different from category (ii) reasons where the agent appropriates beliefs from the society and culture of which they are a member and then internalises them and makes them their own.

What of the possibility of changing categories of reason-formation between (ii) and (iii)? It is important to be clear here about the basic difference between appropriated reasons

and external reasons which constrain actions. I have argued that the reasons we appropriate from outside and internalise are those which we believe to be 'right'. They are, for us, values and norms which seem to us rational and accord with the way of life we desire. External reasons, on the other hand, in the case of negative reasons, usually act as constraints on our desired actions. We do not agree with them or want to incorporate them into our value system, but we have to accept them as conditioning our actions if we are to avoid the sanctions which would be forthcoming if we did not act in accordance with them. Is it then, given this difference, possible for appropriated reasons to become external, constraining reasons, or vice versa? It is here, I suggest, that the effects of the learning process - of new experiences, added knowledge, and so on - come into play.

Let us, for instance, return to the case of the agent who cares for her elderly neighbour living in a society where community care is advocated. I have argued previously that in this situation the agent has internalised this ethic and made it her own. Thus, her reason for performing her role is that she believes that this is the right thing to do and her desire is to help. Her reason, therefore, is a category (ii) reason. However, there may be a change in her own experiences. She may

have added pressures on her time, she may find the neighbour is abusing her help, and so on. She may even begin to question, in the light of views that it should be the state's responsibility to care for the elderly and sick, whether her role is really allowing the state to shirk its responsibilities and is thus contrary to the real needs of this neighbour. Whatever the case, she begins to reject the ethic she has internalised. In this case, even though the agent still continues to visit the neighbour, it is for a different reason. In fact, rather than feeling that this is the right thing to do, she feels obligated to help for fear of censorship if she does not continue to do so - or through a feeling of 'guilt' as the state does not fulfil the role itself. In either case, she no longer desires the role; she does not believe that she should have to continue her caring, but because she fears sanctions if she does not do so she continues in her action. Her reasons, now, though, are category (iii) rather than (ii). She no longer sees this ideology as 'right' rather as a constraint on alternative courses of action.

In a similar way, the motorist who has all his motoring life abided by the law in relation to speed restrictions has done so because he accepts the reasons why these laws exist - that is, for the safety of himself and others. He does not see it as a

constraint on his action because he has never desired to act otherwise. However, at some stage the need for him to arrive at his destination as soon as possible arises - his wife needs to get to the hospital, he is late for an important appointment, and so forth. In this case, perhaps, his not breaking the speed limit is not because he accepts the logic of the law but because he fears being stopped by the police for breaking the law. The law, in this instance, does constrain the action he desires. Thus, even though he has, in most circumstances, internalised the reason for the law, in this situation his reason for abiding by that law may not be as a result of this (category (ii)). Rather, it is as a result of the constraint imposed on him by an external factor (category (iii)).

The other side of the coin is where external reasons become appropriated ones. This is probably the most likely scenario of all. For example, our couple who desire marriage in Church and believe that this is the right thing to do, see the refusal of the minister as a constraint on their desired action. They do not agree with the dogma he advocates, but they have no option to the external force applied (category (iii)). However, perhaps due to the persuasive power of the minister or some kind of religious experience, they come to agree with the

religious doctrine of the minister. They may still want to marry in Church but they now begin to believe that this is the wrong thing to do. Their new beliefs, in this situation, overcome their desire for a Church wedding. Now their reason for not getting married in Church is very different from previously. It is no longer because they have no option, but because they have internalised the dogma involved and made it their own (category (ii)).

Or, let us take the case of the person who wishes to play loud music but who is prevented by the moral sanction of ostracism. It could be that at some stage this person, themselves, is disturbed, say, at a time when sleep is essential, by a noisy neighbour. Due to this experience, the agent now becomes aware of why this sanction exists - he internalises it and makes it his own. Again his reason for not playing the music has changed. A category (iii) reason - an external constraint forced on but not accepted by the agent - now becomes a category (ii) reason because the agent has internalised it.

This can also occur in the case of legal restrictions. A visitor to Britain, who is a heavy smoker, finds that he is prevented from smoking on the underground. He does refrain from smoking because he knows that if he does he will be

prevented from travelling this way. However, when he discovers why this restriction is enforced, the danger of fires which had previously taken a number of lives, he can appreciate why this law is enforced - he internalises the reasons - and his subsequent reasons for not smoking may be as a result of this rather than because he fears sanctions. Thus, as a consequence of new information the reasons the agent has for his action (or non-action) has changed from category (iii) to (ii).

Summary - A Reformulation of the Categories of Reason-Formation

The implications of the foregoing arguments, as I see them, are twofold. Firstly, that the three categories previously outlined are too rigid in form. I would suggest, therefore, that, at the very least, we could revise the categories as follows:-

(i)(a) **Internal reasons** which are the product of the individual and which arise out of the individual without the influence of any external factor at any time - 'original' reasons;

(i)(b) **Internal reasons** which are the product of the individual in the sense that they are not appropriated and internalised by the agent from current external factors present in the culture or society in which the agent lives;

(ii) **Internal reasons** which are, and remain, appropriated from outside - from structural or cultural sources;

(iii)(a) **External reasons** which are not appropriated and internalised but which influence actions by operating negatively in limiting alternative courses of action or by restricting knowledge of such alternatives;

(iii)(b) **External reasons** which, where they are not recognised by the agent, are not appropriated and internalised but which influence actions by operating positively in providing the conditions under which people can fulfil their desires without encountering problems.

In the second place, it seems clear that a person's reason for an action may originate within one category but change to another. In other words, a person's outward action may remain the same, but because of changing experiences, new knowledge or even different cultural or structural conditions, their reasons for this action may alter.

NOTES TO PART THREE, CHAPTER TWO

- (1) Nowell-Smith, P.H.: "Psychoanalysis and Moral Language" in Brodbeck, M.: Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 1968, pp. 712 & 713.
- (2) MacIver, R.M.: Social Causation, pp. 208 - 216.
- (3) Ibid. p. 223.

CHAPTER THREE

REASONS AS TENDENCIES

Introduction

In this chapter I want to combine the ideas of reasons as explanations of action and reasons as causes of action. Specifically, to argue that seeing reasons as tendencies and thus causes of action must be done in terms of the three categories of reason-formation previously outlined - that is, category (i) internal reasons, category (ii) appropriated reasons and category (iii) external reasons.

Let us then begin with Bhaskar's contention, which is essential to the proposition that reasons as tendencies are causes of action, that the possession of a reason conceived as a more or less long-standing disposition or orientation to act in a certain way can be a cause; and that if we conceive of reasons in this way then they are clearly distinct from actions because they can be possessed even when unexercised and will only be exercised under suitable conditions. (1) Here, then, we have two fundamental aspects of the role of reasons as causes of action. Firstly, that agents having certain sets of beliefs and desires will tend to act in one way rather than another on

the basis of the possession of these beliefs and desires. But, secondly, that these can only be analysed as tendencies since, like any tendencies manifest in open systems, they are defeasible in special circumstances or under the pressure of counterveiling reasons. (2)

My contention is to be that it is possible to deal with both the tendencies and the counterveiling reasons through using the three categories of reason-formation already considered and thus allow us to give the explanation of all actions in terms of reasons. In short, I am arguing that tendencies can be explained in terms of category (i) or (ii) reasons but if we perceive reasons as involving not only desires but also beliefs, then given the presence of external category (iii) factors, the agent may act against their desires in the light of the situation in which they find themselves. What I am suggesting is that an agent may have a 'tendency' to act in one way rather than another based on their own desires and beliefs (whether of a category (i) or (ii) type), but external or emergent facts (category (iii)) may intervene to modify or prevent the action that may have occurred on the basis of these reasons.

It is important to note here the emphasis I place on category (iii) factors being reasons since I want to avoid the idea that external factors - that is, socially formed external factors -

are somehow determinants of action existing apart from the agent and over which he or she has no control. This is not to deny that some external factors may be determinants of action in the sense that they constitute 'things that just happen' to agents. Here we must bring in Weber's distinction between 'action' and 'behaviour'. In his concept of action Weber includes 'all human behaviour when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it'. (3) By contrast, falling off a bike, being hit by a car, accidents caused by natural disasters, reflex actions, and so on, do not involve the individual agent in attaching meaning to them. They are not under the control of the agent - they are physical happenings which may be of interest to the natural scientist and be explicable in terms of physical laws but are not reasons in the sense of the category (iii) reasons we are discussing here. In other words, there is a fundamental difference between 'action' which results from the reasoning process of the agent and 'behaviour' which results from a physical source and is in no way under the control or influence of the agent.

Thus, when I refer to external factors, I am talking in terms of 'action' rather than 'behaviour'. That is, to something that is brought about by the agent in response to the influence of external factors rather than something that 'just happens'

to agents over which they have no control. My argument is that whilst it is true that in any explanation of action we need to be able to account not only for tendencies to act in certain ways in terms of the beliefs and desires of the agent but also to explain how the same tendencies may produce different actions under different circumstances as a result of external factors, these factors often functioning as further reasons of the agent to act in one way rather than another. We must then explain all actions (as opposed to types of behaviour) in terms of reasons which are causally efficacious. Even if the beliefs and desires of the agent have been modified by external factors or if the desired action of the agent has been constrained by these factors, we should not perceive them as some 'hydraulic force' which determines how an agent behaves. Rather, they constitute other reasons. They can explain why an agent acts differently to the way he or she may tend to act - based on his or her desires and beliefs - under particular circumstances, but they are processed by the agent and thus form part of the agent's reason for acting.

External Factors

The essential point I am making is that a person may possess a reason to act in a particular way but not act in that way because of their reaction and responses to external factors.

For example, a person with a certain set of beliefs, say, in the rights of trade-unions, will tend to act in a certain manner based on the possession of these beliefs in terms of how trade-unions understand and perceive their role. In this way, we can explain the action of the trade-unionist in striking when his wage levels are reduced in terms of his tendency to act in this way - based on his own desires and beliefs - given these circumstances. His action can be explained, therefore, in terms of his internal reasons. It is probably true that these will be category (ii) reasons. That, due to the influence of family attitudes, the culture in which he has been raised or the experiences he has had in the work place, he has internalised the basic tenets of trade-unionist values and ideologies and made them his own. They have become **his** reasons for acting in a particular way when he is placed in a particular position. His reason for striking is **his** desire to maintain his wage levels and **his** belief that striking is legitimate and will be effective in achieving this goal.

However, it is important to remember that actions do take place in open systems. Thus, such an orientation to act in this way can only be seen as a **tendency** to act thus. It may be that in certain circumstances and under the pressure of countervailing **external reasons** he may not act in this way. For example,

whilst the trade-unionist may still have the same beliefs and desires, he may also be aware that if he and his colleagues do strike there is a strong possibility that the company he works for will have to close and that he would lose his job. In the light of this he may then decide not to strike. His action in not striking then would be explained in terms of other counterveiling reasons which have intervened to lead him to act contrary to his internal reasons.

As previously argued, the presence of external factors - especially constraining category (iii) factors - may serve to influence the actor not to act in the way he desires or would tend to act in the light of internal reasons. However, these external factors do not determine this since the actor has the choice of whether or not to be constrained by the pressure of open system factors. We thus return to the concept of 'opportunity costs'. Our trade-unionist, for instance, may decide that his belief in the rights of trade-unionists outweighs the risk of losing his job. The cost of losing his job is not too high a one to pay to maintain the right to strike for adequate wage levels. He thus takes the decision to act according to his own beliefs and desires even in the light of other reasons which could serve to constrain him from such action. On the other hand, another trade-unionist may weigh up

the costs differently. This individual may take the decision that under the pressure, say, of a large mortgage, the need to provide for a young family, the high rate of unemployment in the area, and so on, the cost of losing his job is too high and thus will not strike. This does not mean that his tendency to act in this way no longer exists. Rather, that in the light of other external reasons he acts, in this case, against his own desires and beliefs. Moreover, this does not mean that under the pressure of new conditions his decision may not change. It could be that the financial problems associated with accepting lower wages, or the social pressures of becoming a 'blackleg' leads him to make a new choice to strike because there are yet further reasons for him to take into account.

I want take the opportunity here of stressing that the 'weighing up of costs' is not just a matter of objectively assessing, in some mathematical way, the positive and negative aspects of acting in a certain manner. It can also take place in the context of more emotional factors taking into account, say, the views of 'loved ones' or 'loyalty to workmates' and so on. Thus, the trade-unionist may have to take account of a number of variables to arrive at his decision of whether or not to strike - he has, perhaps, his own principles concerning the rights of trade-unions, his duty to provide for his family and

the emotional pressures from that family, and also his loyalty towards those he works with or towards the company who has employed him for a number of years; as well as the more objective considerations concerning the chances of him being able to obtain another job and the financial problems of paying his mortgage. All these factors, then, will come into play in taking the decision on how he should act when faced with this situation.

What the above argument indicates, therefore, is that whatever the agent decides to do, **the explanation of the action (or non-action) of the individual lies in the reasons** the agent had to act (or not to act) in one way rather than another. The fact that an external constraining factor or a number of factors may intervene to influence the agent to act contrary to his internal desires and beliefs (category (ii) reasons) - to his tendencies - does not mean that the action cannot be explained in terms of reasons. The category (iii) external reasons as processed through the agent provide the reasons why the trade-unionist did not strike (if he did not); and because the agent had a choice whether or not he was influenced by this factor (or these factors) it still forms part of the agent's reason for acting. **Open system factors may be external to the agent** in the sense that they are not created by him or her and do not

form part of his or her own belief system in that they are not appropriated and internalised by the agent as are category (ii) reasons, but they are reasons because they are processed by the agent and decisions are made by him or her, subjectively, in terms of the weighing up of the costs associated with them.

The Importance of the Subjective Factor - The Agents' Reasons

I would also argue that unless we see external factors as reasons we could not explain why different agents act in different ways when faced with the same situation. It is the agent's subjective choice of how he or she reacts to the pressures of external reasons and it is this choice which makes open system factors a part of a reasoning process carried out by the agent. In other words, reasons, however formed, must be the causes of action. People do not just, uncritically or in a mechanistic way, accept the dictates of external forces. They are capable of second-order monitoring, evaluation, reflection - the weighing up of the costs involved - and make conscious decisions on how they will act in the face of external constraints. If this were not the case then we would all act in the same way in similar situations which we certainly do not. However, because actions normally take place in open systems, reasons, that is category (i) or (ii) reasons, must be

seen as causes only if causes are defined as tendencies rather than determinants of actions precisely because external reasons can and do intervene to modify the actions of some individuals. This, though, according to Bhaskar, does not mean that reasons, seen as tendencies, do not have a degree of manifest generality and are thus incapable of being subject to independent controls. (4) The question is, how we can discover what these tendencies are. How can we know if a person has an orientation to act in one way rather than another if, in certain situations, they act contrary to their internal reasons?

It seems to me that we can only do this by discovering, via the agent, what his or her category (i) or (ii) reasons are. What his or her beliefs and desires actually consist in and how they influence their subsequent actions. Thus, presumably, it is possible to establish, independently by dialogue, if a person is, say, a socialist in orientation. Even if the agent is not explicit in saying 'I am a socialist' we can, by assessing his attitudes, beliefs, political preferences, ideological standpoint, and so on, through discussion, discover that he tends to act according to and react to situations in terms of socialist beliefs and doctrines. This, I would argue, is a far more satisfactory way of establishing tendencies to act in one

way rather than another than simply observing the outward manifestation of reasons - that is, the actual actions of the individuals. This is precisely because we cannot ignore the fact that people live in open systems and may act in terms of other reasons (category (iii)) whilst still possessing internal (category (ii)) reasons which, under different circumstances, would lead them to act in a very different way.

For example, say we were trying to explain the actions of the non-striking trade-unionist. If we based our explanation on the overt action of not striking we may conclude that this individual was either against the action of striking or believed that it would not be effective in achieving his aims. This, however, as we have already illustrated, may not be the case. If, on the other hand, we go to the agent himself to discover his reasons for not striking we would, in many cases, obtain a far more accurate explanation of his action. Thus we would discover that under most circumstances he would strike because he believes in the legitimacy and efficacy of strike action, but in this particular case, having weighed up the opportunity costs involved, he has made the decision that maintaining his job is more important - perhaps for financial reasons or through pressures from his family - than the principles he believes in. This is then the reason he has

decided not to strike. He may still hold the category (ii) reason - he may still have an orientation to act in a certain way - but in the light of further external reasons, in this case, he has made the conscious decision to act against his desire to strike. His tendency to act in a particular way still exists, in general, because he will usually act in that way in most circumstances. It is only in the light of these particular conditions, when the external opportunity costs suddenly arise, that he does not do so. This, however, should not be seen in any deterministic way. The agent is still acting in terms of a belief that is his, namely, that this is not the appropriate time for him to strike in the light of the particular conditions in which he finds himself. This is still a belief albeit one that is different from his belief in the legitimacy of strike action. If this were not the case, if he did not subjectively reflect on the external conditions that exist, then these factors would indeed become determinants of not influences on his action - which is precisely the idea we want to avoid.

Similarly, say we were evaluating the political tendencies of an agent and noted that this individual had paid for private health care for his child. If we merely based our assessment of his political beliefs on this action we may well conclude

that he was more 'conservative' than 'socialist' in his orientation. However, if we discussed his action with him we may discover that his child was suffering considerable pain due to a condition which could be easily treated but for which there was a long waiting list in the National Health Service. In this situation, then, he decides that the category (iii) opportunity cost of allowing his child to suffer was too high to pay. His emotional attachment to his child and his duty as a parent outweighs his socialist principles concerning the unfairness of a two-tiered system of health care. In all other respects his tendency to act will be based on socialist ideals and doctrines, but external reasons have intervened to lead him to take the decision to act against his internal desires and beliefs. Yet, had we not discovered, through dialogue, the reason why the agent had acted thus in this situation we may have placed a false interpretation on his actions. We would not know what his political beliefs were nor that he was acting contrary to them nor the reasons why he did so in this case.

Reasons as tendencies, therefore, do have a degree of manifest generality to the extent that given a certain set of desires and beliefs an agent will tend to act in a certain way. Moreover, these are subject to independent controls in the sense that we are able to establish, by dialogue, in an

independent way, that someone is, say, a socialist in orientation even if under certain circumstances he has not acted in a very socialist way. Thus, our explanation of the non-striking trade-unionist or our socialist who pays for private medical care must begin with understanding the desires and beliefs of the agent - his desires and beliefs as perceived by him - in order to understand his tendencies to act in certain ways. If, then, he does not act in accordance with his desires and beliefs - his category (i) or (ii) reasons - we can then discover why this is so in terms of other category (iii) reasons that have intervened. In other words, we then seek further reasons - and they are reasons for not determinants of - his action. Even though the external factors involved are not of the agent's own making this does not mean that they do not form part of his reasoning process. The fact that the socialist pays for private health care to prevent his child suffering is his reason for his action because he has weighed up the costs of acting otherwise and found them too high. It is because the agent has a choice of whether or not to be constrained or influenced by external reasons that they cease to be determinants of action - the trade-unionist may still strike despite the hardship it would cause, the socialist may still refuse his child private medical care despite the pain this will cause the child. Rather, these external factors must

be seen as reasons why an agent acts which, though different in kind from internal or appropriated reasons, are still causally efficacious in producing that action.

One of the fundamental points I am making, then, is that in explaining actions it is important to discover, initially, the internal desires and beliefs of the agent which will tend to lead him or her to act in one way rather than another. This, though, can only be achieved via the agent because the overt action of the individual may be co-determined by other factors which serve to modify the action which would have occurred had the circumstances been different - had external reasons not intervened. If we based our explanation on the interpretation of the action itself then we are in danger of misinterpreting not only the beliefs and desires of the agent - his or her tendencies to act - but also we may fail to discover what external reasons intervened which resulted in the agent acting in a way which does not correspond to these internal reasons. We would interpret the action - on its face-value - without discovering why - for what reason - that particular action occurred.

What Are 'Real Reasons'?

It has been argued, though, that there are problems in basing our explanations on the reasons given by the agents themselves. Bhaskar, for example, suggests that it is possible that an agent may incorrectly describe some state of consciousness. In fact, he maintains that this is a condition of the possibility of any discursive thought since it must be possible to be in doubt, to conjecture, hypothesise or learn about states of mind of oneself or others. It must be possible to do so not only for rational argument about those states but also for the acquisition and development of a mentalistic vocabulary and hence any science or culture. Thus, the logical possibility of error about or misdescription of one's own states of awareness, and so one's reasons, is a condition of any reflective intelligence. In other words, reasons and consciousness of reasons must remain distinct. (5)

Whilst I would agree that it is possible that we may act for reasons which appear to others not to be rational or based on false beliefs, this is not to say that the reasons we give for our actions are not real reasons for us at the time of the action. For example, the reason the neurotic handwasher has for washing his hands is that they feel dirty. They may not be

so, but that does not alter the fact that to him they are and so this explains his action of continually washing his hands. Even if an agent (presumably to himself) 'incorrectly describes some state of consciousness' this does not mean that, at the time the action takes place, this did not constitute his reason for his action.

Before continuing with this argument, though, I want to stress that my interest, for the purposes of this thesis, lies in discovering the reasons an agent has for his or her actions based on the desires and beliefs of the agent and the influence of external reasons on his or her subsequent actions. I do not propose to try and discover **why** agents come to hold certain beliefs and have certain desires in the sense of why the neurotic handwasher becomes one or why the socialist decides to appropriate and internalise social principles and beliefs and make them his own. Whilst this is no doubt of importance in the explanation of action, I am limiting myself to the explanation of action in terms of reasons the agent actually possesses at the time of the action and which are causally efficacious in producing that action.

To return to the idea that we can be mistaken about our reasons. I would also concede that it is possible that, in the light of new information, discussion and negotiation with

others, and the realisation of the consequences of our actions, and so on, we may come to realise or appreciate that the reason we had for our action at 't1' is based on false beliefs or faulty information. This, though, is not to say that the reason we gave for our action at 't1' is not the real reason for that action at 't1'. The idea, however, that reasons may be formulated in terms of false beliefs, irrational desires, and the like, and the fact that we as agents may come to realise this at 't2', is very different from the idea that we know we are mistaken about those reasons at the time of the action. Here then we come to the distinction that is often made between **real** reasons and **good** reasons for actions. Is it conceivable, in fact, that we can have a **real** reason for an action which is not, at the same time, a **good** reason?

Whilst I agree that it is possible that we can have a reason - a **real** reason - for acting which would appear to others not to be a **good** reason, it does not make sense to argue that an agent would say 'This is my **real** reason for acting but it is not a **good** reason for me'. In other words, a **real** reason for an action at 't1' must appear to the agent as a **good** reason for that action at 't1' otherwise we could not explain why the agent actually acted in terms of that reason. He or she would, in fact, have had no reason for the action in question unless

he or she perceived that reason as a good one. It seems senseless to say that we would ever act for a reason which was not, for us at the time, a good reason. However much we may think and even say to the neurotic handwasher that his hands are clean, he still has a real and good reason for washing his hands because - at the time of the action - they still feel dirty to him.

In this way, I would want to ask Bhaskar what he actually means by being in error about one's state of mind and thus one's reasons. If he is referring to something like the concepts of ideology or false consciousness then is he arguing that if an agent appropriates ideological tenets from outside which are based on faulty or inadequate information, internalises them and makes them his or her own - they form his or her reasons for his or her action - then these reasons are not good reasons to this agent? This is a scenario which I would wish to dispute. Moreover, even if we could say that they were not good reasons does this make them any less efficacious in producing the subsequent actions of that agent?

The fundamental point I want to make here is that a reason based on faulty or inadequate information can still be a 'good' reason to the agent at 't1' and is capable of explaining the

action that results. However, I am not suggesting that it must be seen as a 'good' reason, in general, or that the agent at 't2' will not come to realise that this is the case in the light of new information being made available to that agent. We can, therefore, argue that 'X' thinks 'Y' is a real and good reason for the action 'A' and because of this the action 'A' that results can be explained in terms of that reason even if the reason was not, in fact, a good one in general. It may be that 'Z', another agent, disagrees that this is a good reason and is able to show 'X' why this is so. If this were not the case then, indeed, all reasoned debate would disappear. In other words, however strongly I hold that my reasons were good ones, I remain open to the reasoning of others who may be able to demonstrate to me that they were ill-founded, badly thought out, ill-informed, and so on; and as a result of this I may then come, at 't2', to appreciate that they were not good or good enough reasons for my subsequent actions. This possibility of a revision of our reasons is essential if we are to avoid the type of relativism whereby it becomes the case that 'Y' is a good reason for me and something else is a good reason for 'Z' and each is as good a reason as the other despite evidence to the contrary. The agent thinking a reason is good may explain his action at 't1', but it does not necessarily mean that the reason was actually a good one if it

were based on faulty information, nor does it mean that the agent is not capable of realising this through a process of learning or through acquiring new information.

What I am arguing then is that whilst it may be true that the reason the agents have internalised may be based on false, incomplete or misleading information, this does not mean that they think it is not a good reason, at that time, for them to act as they do. At that stage, these reasons appear to the agents as both real and good reasons. This is not to say, however, that at a given moment the agents may not become aware of the inconsistencies or falsity, say, of the ideology which they have internalised. Thus, it is possible that through a process of learning - through reflection, discussion, the assimilation of new information, and so on - a real reason which appeared to the agent at 't1' as a good reason may come to appear at 't2' not to be a good reason for any subsequent action at 't3'. For while it makes no sense to say that an agent's real reason for an action is not for the agent a good reason, it does make sense for an agent to say 'This was my real reason for acting (at 't1') and I thought it good, but now (at 't2') I realise that it is not a good reason and so it will no longer prompt my action (at 't3').

For example, say a group of people or an individual always votes for the party of an elite group in that society. This could be for a number of reasons. It may be that they lack information concerning the possibility of alternatives to the pervading political structure through some form of censorship, or it could be that they have appropriated and internalised the ideology of that elite group and made it their own (category (ii)), or it is possible that they know that if they do not vote in this way they are likely to face some form of punishment (category (iii)). At some stage, however, these people may come to have access to new information - they become aware of alternatives, or the elite group may lose some of its power and thus the constraining factor loses some of its force (like in the current case of the former Soviet Union), or in some other way the people involved become conscious of the inconsistencies or unfairness of the social structure which has emerged as a result of the political system which currently exists. For whatever reason, having gone through this learning process, these agents may then decide not to vote for that party in the future. Does this then mean that the reason they had for voting for that elite group when they did vote for them was not a good reason at that time?

The answer to this, I would argue, is no. Just because the reason we gave for our action at 't1' may, at 't2', emerge as based on false or incomplete premises and is thus no longer a good reason, this does not mean that, at the time of our action, it was not a good reason in terms of the criteria which were available to us when the action took place. Say, for instance, we are trying to plan a route on the London underground having never used this form of transportation before. From reading the map of the system we decide that the Victoria line provides the quickest route from point 'a' to point 'b'. Our reason, then, for travelling on the Victoria line is that it seems to be the most efficient way of reaching our destination - it is a good reason for this action. However, having once travelled this way we discover that it is the line most used by commuters and thus the train is very overcrowded making the journey very uncomfortable. In the light of this we then decide that the opportunity cost of discomfort is too high a one to pay. Our need for comfort outweighs our need to reach our destination as quickly as possible. We then decide to take a longer route which is less crowded. The good reason we had for travelling on the Victoria line at 't1' now, at 't2', because of our experiences in having travelled this way, is no longer a good reason or good enough

reason for our continuing in this action. What was a good reason no longer appears as a good enough reason for us to repeat that action.

What I am suggesting, therefore, is that even though agents may come to appreciate that a reason they had for a previous action is not a good reason for subsequent actions, this does not mean that at 't1' it was not a good reason for the agent in the light of the information available at the time. It was the reason the agent had for the action that ensued and it was causally efficacious in producing that action. However, because people are capable of learning - of evaluating new information and gaining experiences, and because people act in open systems where external factors may intervene to modify their actions, our reasons may change. What once may have been good reasons for certain forms of action may cease to be so as a result of these factors but, at the time of the action, it was a good reason and one which explains the action in question. Thus, even though an agent may act for a reason which in the light of new information or new experiences emerges as not a good reason for subsequent actions, this does not mean that the agent was mistaken about his or her reason for acting. Rather, it means that the reason was formed on the

basis of false beliefs, irrational desires (as in the case of the neurotic handwasher), faulty information, and so on, which the agent is capable of recognising at 't2'.

Reasons as Rationalisations

There is, though, another objection raised to the idea that the explanation of actions should be given in terms of the reasons the agent gives for his or her action. This is that reasons may merely be rationalisations. The argument runs that the reasons given by agents may not be the **real** reasons but ones which appear to the agents as the most socially or psychologically acceptable in the situations in which the agents find themselves. I would argue, though, that such rationalisations themselves have explanatory power and constitute part of the reasoning process undertaken by agents. We must ask ourselves why - for what reasons - agents need to rationalise their actions. In what situations do agents feel that they have to undertake such a process. The answer, it seems to me, lies in the presence of category (iii) external pressures and constraints. In other words, **rationalisations can be seen as responses to category (iii) reasons.** My argument here is that when an agent says 'X' was not my real reason, she or he is actually saying 'were circumstances

(category (iii) reasons) different I would have acted otherwise'. This, it seems to me, can account for much of the 'mental anguish' that occurs over 'what to do for the best' in a given situation and the reflective experience we have all had of distinguishing what we would 'ideally' like to do and what we actually do do when faced with a set of conditions. The essential point is that the action that is performed - even though it may be seen in terms of a rationalisation - can be explained by reference to our not being willing to pay high opportunity costs. In other words, it can be explained in terms of category (iii) reasons. Thus, say our group of people who have always voted for the elite party do so because they know that if they do not they will be punished in some way. Their reason for voting in this way may be a rationalisation - they may 'ideally' want to vote for a different party - but their action in voting the way that they do can be explained in terms of a high (category (iii)) opportunity cost which they will not pay.

There are two points to be stressed here. In the first place, even though external factors have intervened to lead the agents to act in this way this does not mean that such factors do not provide reasons for this action. They are, in fact, as previously discussed, category (iii) reasons. In the second place, the agent is still active in making the decision to act

in one way rather than another. The point is that it is not that the agents cannot pay these costs, rather that they make the decision not to do so. Indeed, the fact that in any dictatorship we can find dissident groups illustrates that some are willing to pay the costs sooner or later. It is true that high costs may produce regularities in a system - say, Fascist compliance - but they do not determine the actions of individuals - as the plot against Hitler, for example, demonstrates.

Thus, even if agents rationalise their actions as a result of social, political, or other pressures this must be seen as forming part of their reasoning process. Their reason for acting in accordance with the constraints imposed on them is that they are not willing to pay the costs that will ensue if they act against these constraints. They have the choice of whether their actions will be influenced by category (iii) open system factors and it is because they have such a choice that we can argue that such factors are not determinants of action but are further reasons for the agent to act in one way rather than another.

It could be argued, however, that the above assertion presupposes that the agent is aware that he or she is rationalising his or her action. That is, it assumes that the

agent is able to say to himself or herself and to an observer that had the circumstances been different I would not have acted in this way. What, though, of the possibility that the agent is not aware that he or she is rationalising what she does? For example, it could be that 'X' before her marriage to 'Y' believed that married women had as much right to a career as married men. However, 'Y' holds completely opposite views to this believing that the role of a wife is to stay at home and care for her husband and children. In order to 'keep the peace' 'X' takes the decision to abandon her career and concede to her husband's wishes. Here, then, we have the situation in which 'X' makes a decision that the opportunity cost of marital disharmony is too high to pay. At this stage, she is well aware that she is making a conscious decision in deciding on this course of action, but it may be that after forty years of marriage she comes so to internalise the beliefs and desires of her husband that she has made them her own. She is thus no longer aware that had the circumstances been different she would have acted otherwise. She now, in fact, believes herself that married women should be housewives rather than career women.

There are, it seems to me, a number of points to be made here. In the first place, I would contend that even though the agent may no longer be aware that she is rationalising her actions,

this does not mean that her action at 't1' cannot be explained in terms of category (iii) opportunity costs. It was, initially, still the agent's decision as to whether the cost of displeasing her husband was too high to pay. In the second place, the fact that she has internalised the desires and beliefs of her husband and made them her own does not mean that her action can no longer be explained in terms of reasons. Rather, it means that her reasons for acting as she does at 't2' (after being married for forty years) have changed from category (iii) to category (ii) - the explanation of her action is still given in terms of reasons even though the category of reasons which provides the explanation has changed.

There is, though, a problem to be faced, and this can be seen in terms of methodological difficulties in knowing whether an agent is rationalising an action if the agent is no longer conscious herself that she is doing so. I would concede that in some cases we may never be able to discover if an action is a rationalisation. But in many cases we may be able to do so through, say, discussion with the agent. For instance, it may be that we can discover, through asking the agent what her views on married women having a career were before she was married, that she did believe that women had this right and that it was because her husband held such contrary views that

she did not work. In other words, although the agent may have internalised the belief that the place of married women is in the home, it is still possible that we can trace the origins of this belief back to external category (iii) reasons, and that the agent herself may become aware of this through the process of discussion.

The third point I wish to make is that even though the methodological problems of discovering if an agent is rationalising an action do indeed exist - we, as observers, can never be entirely confident that the agent is telling or is able to tell us the whole story - this does not undermine the contention that rationalisations themselves, when we can discover them, do have explanatory power and are able to explain actions in terms of reasons. In a substantial number of cases we are able to elicit from the agents themselves that had the circumstances been different they would have acted otherwise even if this may not be apparent to the agents without some reflection on their part. We may not be able to establish this in all cases, but the number of situations where we are able to do so, it seems to me, is sufficient to justify such an approach.

The Problem of Self-Deception

Critics of the idea that we can discover reasons for actions via the agents themselves, however could come back and say 'what about self-deception?' Do all agents correctly know why they do what they do? In response to this I would, firstly, question the whole idea of self-deception. Is it really possible that we are able to deceive ourselves (even though we may be able to deceive others) without some awareness that we are doing so - without some idea of the real reasons why we are acting as we do? Perhaps an example of this could run as follows. Say 'X' decides to take on some voluntary work caring for the mentally handicapped initially for purely altruistic reasons. In doing this work, though, she receives from those around her considerable praise and commendation for this action. It could be, then, that her continuing in this action is for the reason that she is enjoying this praise and added status in her community rather than for the altruistic reason she initially had, yet she still tells herself that her reason for caring for the mentally handicapped is that it helps them, not that it gives her considerable rewards. In this then an example of self-deception?

My first response to this is that I find it very difficult to imagine that 'X' has no awareness of her reasons for continuing in her action. In other words, I would doubt that she is able

totally to deceive herself of her real reasons for her action even though she may not be totally honest with others about her true motives. The idea of self-deception, it seems to me, has much in common with that of unconscious motives. Agents may not be fully aware of all the reasons for their actions, but there is some awareness there which the agent can come to appreciate through some form of analysis concerning their reasons for their actions - a point I will return to. Again, I would argue that the problem of discovering the real reason for the agent's action is a methodological one. It does not alter the fact that the agent is still acting for a reason which is the agent's own reason albeit one which is influenced by the external factor of the responses of others to her action. The reason for the action, in this case, may have changed but this does not make it any less efficacious in explaining the continued action.

Again, though, critics could argue that agents, while not being internally dishonest, may be incapable of knowing or articulating their reasons since they are merely acting from habit. There are, I would suggest, two possible responses to this. It could be argued that habitual behaviour is simply behaviour rather than action done for reasons. Thus it could be said that if we perform certain actions over and over again

without conscious decisions concerning those actions then we are not really acting at all we are just behaving without attaching a subjective meaning to what we are doing. In other words, we could bring in here the Weberian distinction between 'action' and 'behaviour' and dismiss habitual action as an example of the latter and so not relevant to a discussion concerning action.

However, it seems to me that this is 'ducking the issue' to some extent. I would want to suggest that while it is true that having formed a habit we may not consciously reason each time we act in terms of it, this does not mean that we did not have a real and good reason, at 't1', for forming that habit. I am not referring here to habits such as smoking cigarettes or taking drugs since these are physical addictions to certain substances which fall within the remit of the physical sciences (although the reason for becoming addicted in the first place may, indeed, have a social context). What I am referring to here is something like the agent who always cleans her house in the same order or the agent who always cleans his teeth before he does anything else in the morning, and so on. These may be seen as actions which the agents perform without consciously being aware of the reasons why they do so, but I would suggest that, in most cases, if the agents actively analyse their

habits they could see the reasons why they originally acted in this way and why they continue to do so. The person who always cleans his teeth prior to any other activity could probably explain why - say, because he is a smoker and wants to eliminate the foul taste in his mouth on rising - even though he may not consciously think of this each time he does so. The person who always cleans her house in the same order may be able to explain this in terms of the efficiency of doing it that way or because they dislike certain chores and want to get them out of the way first, and so on. In other words, I am arguing that even in the case of habitual behaviour it is possible to explain the actions of agents in terms of reasons in the sense that the agent had a reason which led him or her to form the habit in the first place. Further, that agents, if they are asked about their habits, will often be able to appreciate and articulate what these reasons were. Moreover, I would argue that if we dismiss habits as merely examples of unconscious behaviour we could not explain why people are capable of breaking habits. If we cannot appreciate the reasons we have for forming habits in the first place, how can we ever take the decision to act differently or even have the desire to do so.

Summary

The crux of the above arguments, therefore, is that we are able to explain all actions in terms of reasons and that agents are active in this process of reason-formation. This is the case even when we are considering emergent factors (remembering the distinction between action and behaviour) which are not of the agents own making since such external factors must also be seen as reasons - category (iii) reasons - which are processed by the agent and so are not determinants of actions. It may be that the agents may not be fully aware of all the external factors that may constrain their actions, but they are aware of the situation in which they find themselves and to which they are responding and thus this information too is available to the observer via the agents themselves. In this way it is possible to explain actions in terms of the reasons the agent has, as perceived by the agent, whether we are talking in terms of internal, appropriated or external reasons.

The other fundamental point is that reasons - if seen in terms of tendencies - are causes of actions. Thus, I agree with Bhaskar that a real reason 'R' may be defined as a reason possessed by some agent 'X' at 't' which was causally efficacious in producing 'X's behaviour at 't'. If this is so then the criterion for distinguishing intentional action from mere bodily movement is that in the former case a real reason

'R' is a condition for the bodily movement 'M' at 't' in the sense that but for the possession and exercise of 'R' at 't', 'M' would not have occurred at 't'. If, Bhaskar stresses, the concept of human agency is to be sustained it must be true that we are responsible for some but not other of our bodily movements; and unless our responsibility is causal, agency follows in the wake of reason-explanations and intentionality is a 'fairy tale'. (6)

Thus, Bhaskar maintains that it is analytic to the concept of action that the agent could have acted otherwise, but an agent is only free to the extent that she or he is capable of realising his or her real interests which means knowing, acting on and bringing about a state of affairs satisfying them (which I would argue involves them having some awareness of their own desires and beliefs). Bhaskar goes on to say, though, that all actions are not free in this sense. It is necessary, he argues, for the concept of action that the world is open, in the sense that the agent's activity makes a difference to the state of affairs that would normally otherwise have prevailed (and also, as I have indicated, that the actions of agents may be modified by factors that exist outside the agents themselves). As the world is open and agency is real, Bhaskar continues, and as society is only materially present in

intentional human action, it follows that social phenomena could only ever manifest themselves in open systems. It follows from this that any possible social laws, therefore, must be analysed as tendencies. (7)

Finally, I want to agree with Bhaskar that Winch's argument for the conceptual nature of social reality is unsound and that his anti-naturalist stance is based on an untenable theory of science. Bhaskar, rightly, wants to retain the idea that the subject-matter of social science is concept-dependent, but he does not want to be committed to the position that it is exhausted by such conceptualisations or that such conceptualisations are incorrigible. Moreover, he wants to show that any adequate account of social science must accept that social causation depends upon the identification by the agents concerned of conceptual connections so that our knowledge of social causation depends on our identification of these connections. In other words, that social science depends on 'Verstehen' (that is, the interpretative understanding of the meanings actors attach to their actions - their reasons for their actions), but that 'Verstehen' does not exhaust social science (since, in all open systems, external factors may intervene to influence the desires and beliefs of individual agents). (8)

NOTES TO PART THREE, CHAPTER THREE

- (1) Bhaskar, R.: The Possibility of Naturalism, 1979 (1989 Edition), p. 93.
- (2) Ibid. p. 93.
- (3) Weber, M.: Theory of Social and Economic Organisation.
- (4) Bhaskar, R., 1979 (op. cit.) p. 93.
- (5) Ibid. pp. 91 & 92.
- (6) Ibid. pp. 92 & 93.
- (7) Ibid. p. 114.
- (8) Ibid. pp. 135 & 136.

SUMMARY TO PART THREE

Introduction

I began this section by arguing that reasons for actions can be both 'internal' and 'external' to the agent and that the distinction between the two is not so clear cut as former debates have implied. Indeed, that, in many cases, both subjective and objective reasons are involved in action-explanations. Whilst I concede that it is possible to envisage an action which results purely from an internal reason or an external cause, I would suggest that, with the majority of actions, both types of reason exist. Thus, I am suggesting that, when we act, we are often (not always) influenced in that action by external factors or emergent properties that exist outside our subjective being. I am not advocating, however, that these external factors ever determine our actions. Rather, that they condition or modify the subjective beliefs and desires of individual agents.

I would maintain, therefore, that when we are examining actions in terms of reasons we should, firstly, try and discover the agents' own reasons for acting as they do since it is for these reasons that the subsequent action occurs. However, our explanation should not end here. We must also try and discover

if the desires and beliefs of the agent have been influenced by external factors and, if so, what these external factors are (category (ii) reasons). Or, if the action of the agent has been the result of external factors which have constrained or facilitated the desired action of an agent (category (iii) reasons).

The Influence of External Factors

As I have argued, the influence of external factors on agents differs according to the type or category of reason involved. In terms, then, of category (ii) reasons, the agents have appropriated the reasons from cultural or structural conditions and then internalised them. However, it is the agents' own choice whether they accept the norms and values, forms of behaviour, and so on, which are associated with these reasons and then make them part of their own belief systems. Thus, it seems to me, that in trying to explain the actions of individuals we should first take account of the agents' own desires and beliefs - of the agents' own reasons for acting as subjectively perceived by the agents themselves. But I do not think that this provides the whole of the explanation.

As agents, we need not have full awareness of all the structural or cultural factors that may serve to influence our internal desires and beliefs - as the force of ideology demonstrates. Thus, even though the reasons - desires and beliefs - of an agent may give part of the explanation of their action (it may form all the explanation but we do not know this), it may be the case that an 'observer', with access to other information, can give a fuller explanation in terms of the external factors which the agent has internalised. We cannot expect agents to be 'perfect sociologists' with a complete understanding of all the factors which may serve to influence their reasons for acting. Some aspects of the information may only be available to, or indeed sought for by, someone outside the situation in question.

Methodological Implications - Begin With the Agent's Reasons

I want to stress, however, that we certainly should not ignore the internal reasons of the agents. They, after all, have chosen to internalise these external reasons and make them their own. It is their reasons that direct their actions, even though they may not fully appreciate all the factors that have served to influence how these reasons were formed.

Say, for example, we are studying a group of first-year nurses in order to try and explain why they decided to take up nursing as a profession. Our initial enquiry should consist in asking these individuals, themselves, why they think they decided to become nurses - **their reasons for their action.** From this we may obtain a number of reasons. They might, for example, say it is because they enjoy 'caring for people', or they may see nursing as a 'worthwhile' career which fulfils their desire to be a valued member of society as well as their desire to be in a professional occupation, and so on. **Each reason given, then, is the reason why that individual chose to become a nurse.** However, further enquiry into the structural and cultural backgrounds of these nurses could reveal further information on **why they came to have these desires and beliefs.**

It could be the case, for example, that a nurse has been raised in a 'caring' environment - caring is a value that she has internalised and made her own; she may be a member of a form of society that gives considerable prestige to the role of nursing which is something that individual desires; she may never have considered any alternative to nursing because most of her family are involved in medicine of some form or another, and so on. In all these cases the nurse may not be fully aware of these influences on her decision to become a nurse, but they

still are influences and should be included in the explanation of her action. The 'observer', therefore, in trying to explain the actions of these nurses should look beyond the immediate explanations given by the individuals. He or she should enquire into the cultural and structural conditions which these people have experienced and assess to what extent 'external factors' have influenced the desires and beliefs which form the reasons why these people decided on this course of action.

Methodological Implications - Also Examine External Factors

What, though, of category (iii) reasons? These, in a different way from category (ii), do constitute reasons for acting. They are different because they do not constitute the agent's own reasons - they are external to the agent. Thus, in the case of negative external reasons, the agents find themselves constrained in their choice of action by factors not of their own making. Factors which they have not internalised and made their own. In action-explanations, therefore, we must also examine whether such external factors have influenced the action of the individual in question. Say, for example, one of our group of nurses really wanted to be a doctor. However, because of the financial problems involved in the length of training a doctor requires - that is, the external structural

conditions - she is unable to undertake this training. In this case, then, this particular individual is prevented from fulfilling her own desires by factors over which she has little control.

The situation is not as clear-cut in the case of moral, or, indeed, legal external constraints. Here the agents are constrained only if they want to avoid the sanctions that will be imposed if they ignore moral or legal pressures to behave in one way rather than another. It could be argued, then, that, as in the other case, the agent must be aware what these external factors are. We can obtain this information from the agents themselves. What, therefore, can the 'observers' learn that the agents cannot tell them? The answer to this, I would maintain, is that while agents may know that there are certain things that they cannot do (if they are to avoid sanctions) they may not have access to the knowledge of why they cannot act in this way - indeed, they may not even question why they cannot. In the case of censorship, as an extreme example, the members of a particular society may be faced with a number of regulations which they must abide by to avoid punishment, but they are prevented from knowing the reasons why these regulations exist - perhaps they are denied this knowledge to maintain the control of an elite group. Only an 'outsider' may

be able to obtain access to this information. At a more cultural level, a teenager may know that his parents will not allow him to go camping in Europe with his friends. He knows that he is prevented from this action if he wants to avoid punishment from his parents, but he may not be aware of the reasons behind this prohibition. He, as yet, is not aware of the dangers that may be involved in such a course of action.

What I am suggesting, therefore, is that, at a particular point in time, an agent may not be fully aware of all the factors that serve to influence their actions. If, then, the 'observer' relied exclusively on the information received from the agent then he or she may only be able to formulate a partial explanation. He or she may not include all the factors involved in the formation of the reason for an action or non-action.

The 'Subjective' Element in External Reasons

It could seem, though, that if we explain actions in terms of these negative external reasons, we are ignoring any 'subjective' elements in our explanations. Are we saying, in a rather Durkheimian way, that these 'external factors' determine

the actions of the agents in question - that the full explanation of the action is provided by the presence of these external constraining factors?

If this were so then human agents become like 'puppets' - a conclusion I certainly do not want to come to, even in the case of external constraining factors. What must be remembered is that agents still have the choice of whether to obey a law, conform to a moral sanction, obey their parents, and so forth. External reasons are only constraining to the extent that the agents are aware that if they do not conform to whatever restrictions are imposed on them they can expect sanctions. It is the agents' own subjective decision as to whether they do conform. They decide 'if the crime is worth the punishment' based on their own weighing up of the costs involved if they do 'commit the crime'. Thus, our teenager may decide that his desire to go camping outweighs his desire to please his parents. He is willing to risk the sanctions that will be forthcoming if he disobeys his parents.

If, then, people do submit to a constraint, it is important to discover why they do so. It may be that they come to internalise the ethic, value or reason involved and come to make it their own (category (ii)). Thus, the teenager may,

after his parents have explained the dangers involved in his planned trip, come to appreciate their reasons and accept these as valid and for his own safety. Alternatively, it may be that while agents disagree with the constraint, they feel that the sanctions involved if they flout it would prevent them from achieving something else they desire even more. For example, the teenager may not agree that his parents' reasons for preventing him camping are justified, but he knows that the promised motorbike that was forthcoming would not be so if he disobeyed his parents. His desire for the motorbike outweighs his desire for the holiday. He submits to the constraint but he has not internalised the reasons that lie behind the constraint. Therefore, even if we, as sociologists, can locate an 'external factor' which seems to explain the action or non-action of an individual, this cannot be seen as the whole explanation. **Human actors are agents - they make subjective choices (albeit influenced by external factors) and we must discover why they make these choices.**

External factors, however, are not only constraining, they can also be facilitating. The 'observer' must, therefore, also ask **'do agents act in one way rather than another because the culture or society in which they live supports and reinforces their desires and beliefs; or provides structural conditions**

that make their desired action problem-free?'. It is in the case of facilitating factors that we are most likely to find that the agents, at least initially, will not be aware of how these factors influence their actions. The person who wished to become a doctor, for example, can explain her action in doing so in terms of her own desires and beliefs. She may not appreciate, though, that her action is only possible because, say, she had financial backing, parental encouragement, the necessary educational qualifications, and so forth. This may be because they have never compared their situation with that of others who do not have these advantages. At this stage, then, the agents may not comprehend that the situation in which they find themselves provides these bonuses and that the presence of these forms part of the reason why they have chosen this form of action. An 'observer', on the other hand, may be able to perceive these bonuses and thus give a fuller explanation of the action not only in terms of the 'internal' desires and beliefs of the agent but also in terms of the 'external' factors which support these desires and beliefs.

As the preceding arguments illustrate, these external factors, both constraining and facilitating, are different from external factors that have been internalised

because they exist outside the individual and do not constitute part of the agent's own reasons. I am not denying the role of the 'subjective' in category (iii) reasons, but it seems to me that the interaction of internal/external reasons is more marked in the case of category (ii) reasons. This is because emergent factors have been internalised and it is through this process of internalisation that agents make these reasons their own and make decisions, subjectively, in terms of them. In other words, the presence of external factors, here, serves to modify the desires and beliefs of individuals.

Agents' Awareness of the Reasons for Their Actions

I would argue, further, that a necessary condition for this process of internalisation is that the agent has some awareness of what these external reasons are. The agents may not have the 'whole picture' - as the case of ideology illustrates - but they are aware of the essential values, norms, expectations, and so on, which are associated with these external factors and they accept them as somehow 'right' and desirable. The agent, therefore, has some knowledge of the external factors, but if we restrict our explanation to the agent's knowledge we may miss other important aspects of relevance to the effects of external factors on individual action and the responses of

individuals to these external factors. Thus, we need to examine reasons in terms of both the subjective knowledge of the agent and the more objective information available which, perhaps, only the 'observer' can discover.

Agents Have Choices

One danger, though, with the view that external factors modify individual actions is that too much emphasis may be placed on 'externality' and not enough on 'subjectivity'. I do not want to suggest that, given the same structural or cultural conditions, all agents will react and act in the same way - they certainly do not. Even in the case of category (iii) reasons, it is the agents' individual choice of whether or not to conform to constraints or take advantage of facilitating factors (once they become aware of them). The criminal or the disobedient teenager has obviously made the subjective decision not to be constrained by external factors. The private patient, once he realises that he is 'advantaged' compared to other people, may reject this form of medical care and turn to the National Health Service.

My point is that when we are trying to explain the actions of individuals we should not restrict the information we can elucidate to the purely subjective or the purely objective. We

must examine the agents' own reasons for their actions but also try and discover all the factors involved in the formation of these reasons. Individual agents are not and cannot be always fully aware of all the factors that form their reasons for acting. The reasons they give are their reasons and they explain why they act as they do. However, agents are also social beings influenced by the society and culture into which they are born. Thus, the reasons they have, in many cases, will be conditioned and modified by factors that exist outside them. Such factors, I am arguing, must also form part of the explanation for their individual actions. On the other hand, I do not want to give 'external factors' - societal or cultural - a force which they do not have. As the discussion on 'opportunity costs' suggests, one agent faced with structural conditions that hinder a certain course of action may decide that the costs of performing that action are too high and thus he or she will not perform that action. Another agent, though, faced with the same conditions, weighs up the costs differently and makes the decision that his or her desired action is worth the costs he or she has to pay. In other words, people will vary in the way they perceive and react to external factors. In most cases we are influenced by factors outside ourselves, but we are by no means all influenced in the same way. Thus, sociologists cannot obtain a full explanation of an action

simply by observing the external factors that seem to affect that action, they must also observe the way the agents perceive these factors, react to them and make decisions in terms of them. Both internal and external reasons for an action, therefore, must be included in action-explanations.

Reasons For Actions May Change

One final point that must be made is that, although I have placed the different aspects of reason-formation into three main categories, I do not wish to suggest that these are in any way static nor that any particular action can be explained in terms of only one of these categories. For example, even if an individual acts from purely 'internal' reasons at one point in time, his or her desires and beliefs which formed that reason may be reinforced or modified in some way by the way in which the society or culture of which they are a member reacts to this action. Such a reaction may have no effect, but in many cases it will, even by simply reinforcing the desires and beliefs of the agent, or, more significantly, by modifying these in the face of new information being made available to the agent. Alternatively, an agent who may have acted or not acted because of an external constraint may eventually come to

accept this constraint as somehow right and justified. The agent then internalises this external reason and it becomes part of his own system of beliefs and desires.

Reason-formation, then, is not static - it cannot be so as agents are continually undergoing a learning process. They are gaining new knowledge, obtaining more information, as a result of their interaction with other people and other ideas, and this may lead to a revision not only of the way they act but of the reasons they have for an action which, in its outward appearance, remains the same. Thus, the teenager having experienced the sanctions involved when he disobeys his parents, may take the decision that in the future he will not perform actions that are contrary to their wishes - he revises the way in which he is going to act. Alternatively, the teenager who did not disobey his parents may have done so purely because he feared the sanctions, but after gaining new knowledge, through explanation or experience, he becomes aware of why this restriction is imposed and he internalises the reason. His action or non-action remains the same but his reasons have changed. What were once category (iii) reasons are now category (ii) reasons.

Agents May Act For More Than One Reason

Moreover, people often act for more than one reason. The nurse who initially wanted to become a doctor may have taken the decision to become a nurse for a number of reasons. For example, it could have involved a category (iii) reason in that structural constraints prevented her from becoming a doctor, but also a category (ii) reason in that she has internalised the cultural value of the importance of 'caring' for the sick and elderly. She thus decides to fulfil her desire to enter a caring profession and her belief in the importance of this by becoming a nurse instead of a doctor. Thus, I wish to emphasise that the categories I have formulated do not have rigid boundaries. Reasons may change from one category to another over time and an action may be carried out for more than one category of reasons.

Towards A Causal Account of Action

As I have previously argued, reasons may be 'purely internal' to the agent or may be internal in the sense that they have been appropriated and have become part of the agent's own belief system. Indeed, it would be unacceptable to say otherwise if we are to allow for the agency of human beings.

It is these reasons, then, that constitute the agent's tendency to act in one way rather than another. However, I do not consider that the attempt to discover the reasons given by the agents themselves for their actions always tells us the whole story. While such an attempt should be the starting point of any explanation of action since it is these reasons that prompt the particular action in question, it is also the case that some of the beliefs and desires an agent has do not arise from within the agent but from an external source. The question needed to be asked, therefore, as to what the effect of these reasons can be and where they actually derive from.

It was in trying to answer these questions that I began to move away from Davidson's individualist analysis of reasons and towards the possibility of an external source of reasons - that is, society, which while being composed of individuals cannot be reduced to them. As Bhaskar argued, while a society would not exist without human activity, the agents themselves did not create it, they can only reproduce it or transform it. At this stage, though, it would be perfectly justified to ask the question 'Where does this society come from if it is not created by people?' Indeed, when considering the claims made by Bhaskar this is one question for which he seems to provide no satisfactory answer.

Emergent Properties

I agree that we are born into a social structure that already exists so, in this sense, we as individuals do not create it. But, the society into which we are born must have been created by 'other people' - it did not just occur. Thus, to say that society is irreducible to people, should not be to say that people did not create it. We want to avoid the impression that 'society' is just there. Rather, we should see it as something that people did create, albeit people who no longer participate in it. But, I agree with Bhaskar that, once created society takes on certain 'emergent properties' that condition or influence the actions of the agents born into it. In this way, and only in this way, can society be seen to provide the material and ideational causes of action.

There is still the danger, however, of seeing society as an 'all powerful force' over which the agents have no control. This is not the case. As Bhaskar has suggested, society is both the material and ideational cause of action and the reproduced outcome of human agency. Emergence, though, is a reality and thus it is important to distinguish between people and society and recognise that the properties possessed by people may be different from those possessed by social

structures. People, then, in their everyday lives, often unconsciously reproduce and produce social structures (such as a certain legal system) which take on properties of their own which serve to condition the actions of the people who produced and reproduced them (by sanctioning or proscribing their actions). But, people are also able to transform these structures, even though this may not be possible immediately⁷ and may take a period of time.

A Causal Account of Action

The point of stressing the idea of 'external factors' is twofold. In the first place, the idea of causes as tendencies corresponds well to my contention that people may have a 'tendency' to act in a certain way, based on their 'internal' beliefs and desires, but that the situations in which they find themselves - as a result of external conditions, may serve to modify or change their actions. In other words, agents may have reasons (whether category (i) or (ii)) which provide the tendencies of the agent to act in one way rather than another. But, actions occur in open systems where other (external category (iii)) factors may intervene to modify the actions of individual agents by providing them with **other reasons** for not acting in accordance with their original desires and beliefs -

even for acting contrary to the way they would have acted had these factors not been present. Thus, in the second place, when explaining actions we must not end our account with the subjective reasons of the actor. We must also examine whether these reasons have been formed or modified as a result of the influence of external factors which exist outside the agent.

To reiterate the point, when an agent honestly cites a reason for his or her action, then this is the agent's own reason and must form part of the explanation of the action. The reason the agent gives, therefore, is the cause of the action of that agent. But the sociologist must recognise that these reasons may be formed on the basis of the influence of external factors of which the agent may not be fully aware but which the observer can detect; and also, that the agents may not be acting in accordance with their own desires and beliefs because their action is being constrained or facilitated in some way by emergent factors not of their own making. This, however, does not deny a causal status to the explanation of action in terms of reasons since these external factors provide other reasons why an actor performed an action because he or she had a reason.

PART FOUR

METHODOLOGICAL COMPARISONS

The aim of this section is to demonstrate and vindicate, via comparison with other approaches to the explanation of action, the arguments I have outlined previously. That is, that it is not only desirable but necessary to include in our explanations of action not just one category of reason-formation but all three categories, in conjunction. It is only by taking into account category (i) internal reasons, category (ii) appropriated reasons, and category (iii) external reasons that we can really gain explanatory purchase on the reasoning of people in society - of our very social selves as self and socially reflective (in both senses of the term).

To this end I propose to examine three theories which seem to me to restrict themselves to only one of my three categories of reasons in order to show what the implications of such partial accounts are, why they provide an inadequate account of the actions of human agents, and how they can be marshalled as systematic illustrations of what is generically wrong with all that theorising which does not employ the three categories when dealing with agent's reasons for action. For this analysis,

therefore, I have chosen the 'holist' ideas found in some of Durkheim's work, at one extreme; the methodological individualism of rational choice theorists, at the other extreme; and, finally the less extreme but still limited account provided by Hollis.

It is to be my contention in chapter one that Durkheim considers only the force of external society factors - a rather deterministic form of category (iii) reasons - rather than examining either individual reasons for action (category (i)) or even reasons which have been appropriated because they are seen as somehow 'right' by the agents - category (ii)). Chapter two argues that rational choice theorists restrict their analysis of reasons, through seeing them as the product of desires alone, to internal (category (i)) reasons. In this I will include the very persuasive criticisms made of such accounts by Hollis. However, in the final chapter, I will suggest that Hollis' re-working of rational choice theory is also restricted in that he really only talks in terms of category (ii) reasons. In fact, when we examine Hollis in detail we find that his external reasons turn out, in truth, to be appropriated reasons; and in his justifiable criticisms of methodological individualism he mistakenly excludes the importance of category (i) reasons.

The purpose behind examining these particular theories, in this order, is not only to point to the restrictive nature of such accounts; I also want to argue that the inclusion of three categories of reasons places a new light on the old internalist/externalist debate (clearly outlined by Hollis) which involves rejecting one type of reason just because we accept the existence of another. This, it seems to me, is mistaken and places severe limits on the explanation of action which can be formulated within social science.

CHAPTER ONE

DURKHEIM AND 'HOLISM' - THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Introduction

In order to illustrate the restrictive nature of the account of action provided by 'holists' I will examine the methods advocated by Durkheim in his study of religion which exemplifies, for me, an extreme form of explanation in terms of a form of category (iii) external factors. I am not suggesting that Durkheim, throughout his substantive works, displays such blatant holism, but that, in this case, we find a form of 'emergence' that leaves little room for the 'subjective' interpretation and processing of external factors by agents. Nor, I shall argue, does it allow for the possibility that agents may act in terms of 'internal' reasons either of a category (ii) or category (i) type.

Durkheim, as we shall see, wanted to establish sociology as a 'science'. To this end he wanted to establish generalisations about the role of religion and its place in the social structure in a similar way in which general laws are formulated in terms of natural phenomena. Such generalisations, for Durkheim, could be applied universally whatever form or type of

religion was being analysed. It is to be my contention that no such sweeping generalisations can be made. Not only do religions reflect the type of society in which they are found, but religions can be seen to have different meanings for different agents. What I am going to question is the way in which Durkheim disregards the agents' own reasons for believing via an ontological judgement that they are wrong. Durkheim, in fact, legislates both on God and on agents' reasons for acting. But, what right has he to do this? Can sociology make such claims and if not how should we try and understand the beliefs and subsequent actions of agents who hold religious views? In order to address these questions let us first examine Durkheim's methods and the way in which these reflect his views on the relationship between structure and agency.

Durkheim's Definition of Religious Phenomena

Durkheim's starting point was to produce a scientific definition of religion which would cut through previous definitions put forward by other theorists from allied disciplines. Durkheim stated that any definition would be one that would adequately embrace all religions from the most primitive to the most recent, from the most 'materialistic' to the most 'spiritual'. Most importantly, he wanted to eliminate

all subjective ideas. (1) Durkheim's first definition of religion can be found in "On the Definition of Religious Phenomena' (L'Annee Sociologique, 1899) in which he argued that the general distinguishing criterion of religion was in terms of the **obligatory** character of the beliefs lying behind the practices. There was, in fact, a pressure exercised by a society on its members to prevent them from deviating from the common faith. In short, religious phenomena consist of obligatory beliefs united with definite practices which relate to the objects given in the beliefs. (2)

Religion, in Durkheim's view, differed from law and morality because the latter cases represent obligatory practices without obligatory beliefs, whereas in the former case both the beliefs and the practices are obligatory. He further maintained that all that is obligatory is social in origin and thus conformity to religious rules involved the individual's deference to the moral power of society. (3)

There are, it seems to me, a number of problems involved here. In the first place, I would question the idea of using a definition of a phenomenon as the starting point of any analysis. Durkheim, by doing this, is 'putting the cart before the horse' by delimiting what he expects to find the role of

religion to be before actually examining the phenomenon of religion itself. Surely, the way we should proceed is to try and discover what religion means to the agents who hold religious beliefs by examining why - the agents' reasons why - they hold such beliefs (whilst remembering that we should not succumb to a 'use' theory of meaning or to assuming that all there is to religion is what actors can articulate or that their beliefs are 'complete' articulations as they may not be fully conversant with the scriptures or myths they advocate - a point to which I shall return). My point is that we should begin with the agents' reasons, we can then go on to try and elucidate to what extent their reasons for holding these beliefs are conditioned by other factors - such as the influences of the culture or society in which the agents reside. In other words, we should begin by asking for what reasons agents hold religious beliefs and how this affects their subsequent actions. We can then go on to analyse to what extent they have appropriated these reasons from societal or cultural factors - we should not limit our account to category (iii) external factors. In particular, we should not restrict accounts of action to a form of category (iii) external factors whereby the agents do not seem to 'weigh up costs' in the light of the situations in which they find themselves. In other words, there is nothing in the notion of external 'reasons'

that leads us to exclude the agent, but the agent does seem to 'disappear' in the Durkheimian notion of 'social facts'. Holism, thereby, is not only restricted in accounting for action in terms only of category (iii) factors, it is also limited in the form these factors take.

In the second place, we can question Durkheim's definition itself. Presumably, when he speaks of law and morality having obligatory practices without obligatory beliefs he is referring to something like category (iii) external constraints. That is, that agents do not need to perceive the constraints imposed by moral or legal rules as somehow 'right' for them to act as guides to their actions (if they want to avoid sanctions). However, the idea of obligatory beliefs seems to be a rather doubtful concept. Whilst agents, who are raised in a strong religious community, may act in accordance with the rules laid down by that community this is not to say that they actually believe in the concepts or ideas of that community. They may do so - they may have appropriated these beliefs from the community and made them their own, but judging whether this is so from their outward actions may be misleading. If the agents wish to live in harmony with others in a community then he or she may act in accordance with religious rules and practices of that community. But the only way we could know whether they

actually believe in the religious ideals advocated is via the agents themselves. The beliefs they have are internal to the agents. They may have appropriated their beliefs from outside, but they are not obliged to do so. It is their choice based on their own desires, needs, wants, and so on. No community can ever force people to believe in anything even though their actions may be conditioned by the social structure in which they live - whether in the form of category (ii) reasons which have been appropriated because they are perceived as somehow 'right' or category (iii) external constraints which influence actions by placing 'costs' on those who elect not to act in accordance with them. The point is that we cannot explain the effects of social structure on action in terms only of category (iii) reasons, the agents may be acting in terms of appropriated reasons and it is whether this is the case that we need to discover. We can, in other words, include the influence of external factors - in the form of category (ii) reasons - and still allow a place in the explanation for the human agent.

I am not saying, however, that the social structure (in the form of category (iii) reasons) does not, in some cases, have a considerable influence on the beliefs of the agents in certain forms of society. For example, extreme censorship can heavily condition what people come to believe largely because they have

no knowledge of alternatives to that belief system. In this case then we can give to the social structure a great deal of force in conditioning or modifying the beliefs and actions of agents. But such cases are extreme, and even in societies where censorship is found not all the agents will unquestioningly adopt these beliefs - otherwise how could we explain the presence of dissidents. We cannot, as Durkheim seems to do, presuppose the extent of social pressure on beliefs, this is precisely what we should be trying to discover. What I arguing, therefore, is that adherence to religious creeds and the practices associated with them may be as the result of category (iii) reasons - the actions of the agents may be explained in terms of external constraints.

Alternatively, such actions may be the result of category (ii) reasons whereby the agent has appropriated these beliefs and perceives them as somehow 'right' and so he or she acts in accordance with them. They may, indeed, be category (i) reasons - an individual's internal belief in the existence of a god or gods based, perhaps, on some kind of revelation. What I am arguing, therefore, is that we need to examine the possibility that any one of three categories (or a combination of categories) may explain the actions of individuals and not restrict our account to only one type of reason.

Durkheim further maintained that the determining cause of religious phenomena lay in the 'nature' of the societies to which they relate, and that if they have evolved in the course of history it is because social organisations have themselves been transformed. (4) Again, the content of religious beliefs is seen as determined by society. But how then do we explain the fact that not only in the same society can we find a plurality of different beliefs but also there are members of that same society who hold no religious beliefs at all. Moreover, what evidence does Durkheim have that the transformation of religious beliefs is as a result of the transformation of societies and not the other way around - as Weber suggested in his analysis of the protestant ethic?

I would thus contend that Durkheim is mistaken to begin his analysis of religious phenomena by an examination of the type of society in which they are found. Rather, we should begin by analysing the reasons why agents appropriated certain beliefs (if they did so), how these beliefs affect their actions, and whether the holding of such beliefs can be seen to act back on and influence the type of society in which such beliefs are held. I am not denying that societal factors can modify the actions of individuals either as external constraints (category (iii) reasons) or by providing beliefs that the agents

appropriate (category (ii) reasons), but I object to the idea that societies **determine** what agents believe and the view that this is a one-way process.

In this way, I feel that Durkheim, by **starting** with a definition of religion, was really outlining what he wanted to conclude rather than providing an 'objective' analysis of the function of religion. Surely we need to begin by studying the content of religious beliefs as perceived by individuals before we can understand the function of religious phenomena to the actors involved, and the consequences of religious beliefs being held for society - a two-way process.

Durkheim's Use of the Crucial Experiment

Another aspect of Durkheim's methodological approach which must be questioned is the idea of the crucial experiment. Durkheim, in order to arrive at a stage where the explanation of religious phenomena could be applied universally, claimed that it was necessary to examine carefully a particular society. In other words, to undertake one well-conducted experiment from which laws could be formulated as in the natural sciences. Thus Durkheim claimed that since all religions can be compared to each other, and since all are species of the same class, there

are necessarily many elements which are common to all. We do not mean, he argues, to speak simply of the outward and visible characteristics which they all have equally, and which make it possible to give them a provisional definition from the very outset since the discovery of these is relatively easy as the observation which it demands does not go beneath the surface of things. But these external resemblances suppose others which are profound. (5)

Let us pause here for a moment. Such a statement can be questioned, firstly, at the level of meanings. For example, a complete 'fake religion' may look the same as other religions, such as the Protestant Church, from outside observation, but the actual content of the religious beliefs is not based on a genuine belief on the part of the leaders of the religious cult in a god or gods, but is a way, perhaps, of making money out of those who have faith in the 'false prophets'. In other words, the outward appearance of the religion may correspond to the appearance of other religions, but this is not to say that the meaning of the religion to the advocates of that religion is the same. The Protestant minister believes in the god he is worshipping, but the false prophet knows that his religion is false. Yet we could never know this if we presuppose that the similar external aspects of religious practices means that the

content of the religious beliefs are also similar. We need to understand what the religion 'means' to those who are involved in that religious activity.

Durkheim, however insisted that at the foundation of all systems of beliefs and of all the cults there ought necessarily to be a certain number of fundamental representations or conceptions and of ritual attitudes which, in spite of the diversity of forms which they have taken, have the same structures everywhere. These, he maintains, are the permanent elements which constitute that which is permanent and human in religion - they form all the objective contents of the idea which is expressed when one speaks of religion in general. How, he asks, is it possible to find, underneath the disputes of theology, the variations of ritual, the multiplicity of groups and the diversity of individuals, the fundamental states characteristic of religious mentality in general? (6)

Durkheim's response was to examine a particular type of society - that of totemism - which he saw as a real social institution with distinctive characteristics. It was, moreover, the most primitive and simple religion which it is possible to find, found in its purest form among societies as close as possible to the origins of evolution with the most rudimentary

techniques and the most primitive and simple organisation known - namely organisation on a clan basis. (7) In focussing on totemism, conceived in this way, Durkheim, argues Lukes, was making the assumption that all the essential elements of religious thought and life ought to be found, at least in germ, in the most primitive religion. In making this assumption, though, he was influenced by an analogy taken from the natural sciences. Durkheim, in fact, argued that while an extended verification may add to the authority of a theory, it is equally true that when a law has been proved by one well-done experiment, this proof is valid universally. (8)

I would argue, however, that such a methodological approach has many problems. Again, Durkheim is assuming, at the outset, that all religious beliefs have the same objective significance and meet the same needs for all agents despite the variations found within each type of religion and despite the different ways in which agents react to and act in accordance with religious tenets. This is his starting point which, again, reflects the fact that he restricts his analysis only to a restricted form of category (iii) reasons. But I would argue that he could not know this without an analysis of what individual actors perceive these beliefs to be and what function they, the actors, see their beliefs as having for

them. In other words, we should begin with the reasons agents themselves have for holding these beliefs and try and discover how the holding of such beliefs influences the actions of agents in their everyday life - and this we can only do by not limiting our account to only one category of reason - if we did so there would be nothing to discover. Not only can we not assume (a) that all religions are based on the same kinds of beliefs and originate from the same source, but (b) we cannot know that such beliefs, in any one religion, are perceived in the same way by all those who hold them, nor (c) that the holding of such beliefs will influence the actions of agents in the same way. For example, two agents may believe in the religious tenet that 'thou shalt not kill', yet one may interpret this that killing under any circumstances is a sin and thus be against the idea of capital punishment; while the other believes that if someone commits a murder then he has sinned against God and so must atone with his life ('an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth').

Moreover, even if we accept Durkheim's 'scientific' approach it must be stressed that no scientist would claim that just one experiment proves a law. Rather, scientific certainty is derived from repeating similar experiments which provide similar results and so 'demonstrate' the law. I would object,

however, to the idea that any such law could ever be said to exist in social science - that is laws based on a positivist account of science. We cannot say, as I have already indicated, that all religions are the same. Religions vary a great deal both in their practices and in their beliefs. What can be explained from one religion also varies since certain facets of religion are absent in one religion but present in another. As Pickering suggests, Durkheim's intention was to choose a group in which religion was all-pervasive - where its influence was at a maximum; and at the same time to avoid societies where religion or world-views co-exist as a pluralism. (9) In fact, he selected a system that could be seen as 'closed' as possible, yet most religions work in open systems thus severely limiting the applicability of Durkheim's explanation. Indeed, it can be argued that totemism itself works in an open system since closure is never hermetically sealed. In other words, Durkheim's crucial experiment cannot be applied universally. And even within the particular religion he was studying, he is applying his presupposition that religious phenomena can be explained in terms of social factors, rather than trying to discover the 'meaning' that this religion had for those who held the particular beliefs in question.

As I have suggested previously, therefore, a more adequate theory of religious phenomena would be forthcoming if we began with an examination of the reasons agents have for believing in gods, totems and the like, taking account of all three categories of reason-formation rather than just category (iii) factors. In doing this we do not exclude an examination of the societal factors at work in the formation of these beliefs, but neither do we exclude the agent from the account.

Neither does it mean that we cannot give a causal status to the role of religion if causes are seen as tendencies to act in a certain way. Thus we may discover that agents, given a certain set of beliefs, may tend to act in particular ways as a result of these beliefs (noting that in this explanation we do not need to judge the beliefs as right or wrong, false or based on inadequate information - what we need to understand is what the beliefs are, where they came from and how they influence the actions of those who hold them). Moreover, because agents live in open systems and are capable of weighing up costs and evaluating the situations in which they find themselves, we cannot assume that they will always act according to these beliefs. In other words, by accepting the idea of causes as tendencies rather than seeing causes in the positivistic way advocated by Durkheim, we can discover certain patterns of

behaviour associated with certain religious beliefs, but we cannot say that all the actors who have these beliefs will act in the same way when faced with the same situation, as other factors may intervene to influence the action of the agent in question. For example, a Christian Scientist may believe that it is wrong to accept the blood of another human being in the form of a transfusion, but when faced with the situation that his wife or child will die unless blood is given may give his permission for the transfusion to go ahead despite the fact that his belief that this is a sin still exists. The emotional cost of refusing such a course of action is too high a one to pay so he goes against his beliefs in this situation. Another agent, though, may take a different course and deny the transfusion because his belief that this is against the teaching of his religion is stronger than his desire to save the life of his wife and child or because he believes that it is in the hands of God whether they survive or die.

Society as a God

To return to Durkheim. In a typically Durkheimian way, he strongly criticised the definitions of religion which were associated with the theories of animism and naturism. He also rejected a definition which was based on beliefs and practices centred on

a god or gods or some conception of the supernatural. To accept these definitions would be to admit to the existence of a god or some other that is not society - to admit to something Durkheim rejected as actually existing. What right, though, did Durkheim have to do this? Is it really up to sociology to deny the existence of a god and posit some alternative explanation to account for why people believe in the existence of such a phenomenon? I would suggest that, when trying to explain religious phenomena, instead of trying to posit an all-embracing theory of the origins and functions of all religions, it would be more profitable to focus our interest not on whether the belief the individual or group of actors has is empirically 'real' (that is, somehow able to be proved by empirical means) but how the agent or group came to hold such beliefs and how these condition their actions in their everyday life. By concentrating entirely on the idea that when individuals worship totems, animals, plants or gods they are really worshipping society, Durkheim excludes a very important aspect of any analysis of religion. That is, how the holding of such beliefs affects the actions of the agents involved. We, as sociologists, may not share the beliefs of the religious group we are studying, but this does not prevent us from analysing, via the agents themselves, how the holding of these beliefs serves to provide reasons for the actions of those that hold them.

What Happens to Agency?

Why, though does Durkheim seem to ignore the individual actor in his analysis of religion? To answer this we must examine the principles he set out in "The Rules of Sociological Method". Namely, that sociology in general has as its subject matter social facts - ways of acting, thinking and feeling which are external to the individual, which control or constrain him, and which cannot be explained in terms of psychology (in other words, external category (iii)) constraining factors with no reference to either category (i) or (ii) reasons). Religious facts, for Durkheim, were also social facts and thus they were to be explained and understood in terms of the type of society in which they were found.

In line with his definition of a social fact, Durkheim, as we have seen, initially held that a key characteristic of religion was that of constraint - its power or ability to produce some social effect. Thus the transgression of ritual regulations brings with it censure and feelings of guilt. Religious prescriptions, therefore, and with them religious behaviour patterns, carry with them a sense of obligation. We have already examined this idea in some detail, but I wish to emphasise that, for Durkheim, what is obligatory must come from

a higher power, from an authority which is 'ipso facto' a power more exalted than the individual. Since Durkheim rejected the idea that such a power comes from 'God' and the idea that individuals can act in accordance with their own beliefs and desires, then the answer must lie in society.

Can we, however, accept the idea that religious phenomena can only be explained in terms of something like category (iii) external constraints? Are individuals really so 'puppet-like' that their only reasons for acting in accordance with religious tenets is because they are 'obliged' to do so? I would want to reject this scenario, arguing, instead, that while agents may be constrained by the religious doctrines that exist in the society or community of which they are members, they may also act in accordance with these doctrines because they believe them to be right (category (ii) reasons). Moreover, there is no reason to exclude the possibility that the agent may hold beliefs that are not the product of some societal influence (as in the case of revelation) and thus act as a result of category (i) reasons. It is, I would argue, not up to sociology to decide that people's beliefs are somehow false or misconceived (accepting that in some cases this may be discovered to be the case where false religions are concerned), nor is it up to sociology to legislate, in advance, on the subject's reasons

for holding these beliefs. It is up to sociology to discover why, for what reason, agents do obey religious sanctions, if they do - to discover, in short, the reasons they have for acting in one way rather than another.

It is true that Durkheim, in "The Elementary Forms" changes his definition of religion arguing that a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relevant to sacred things - that is, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them. Thus, he comes to reject the notion of constraint or obligation as the criteria of religious phenomena. However, we can see that the concept of a moral community can be seen to imply some form of obligation in the sense of category (iii) reasons which constrain the actions of the individuals who reside in that community. What is significant in this new definition of religious phenomena, though, is the idea of the sacred.

Pickering suggests that Durkheim views man as 'homo-duplex'. He has two irreducible components - the social and the individual. There is in man two 'consciences', one common to and derived from the group, the other unique to the individual. What man absorbs from the social is sacred; what is individual

is profane. Sacred things are thus those whose 'representations' society itself has fashioned; profane things are those which each of us constructs from our sense data of experience. (10)

Durkheim argues that, associated with each sacred item or class of items there is a 'representation' - an idea or ideal that is supported collectively. Thus, sacredness has at its basis a mental concept which is not dependent on the natural or utilitarian properties of the thing, idea or person which is held to be sacred. This means that the key lies in the ideas and values which are at the basis of society and which are collectively expressed by its 'representations'. In "The Elementary Forms" Durkheim spoke of the sacred character of something being superimposed on it - stamped on it. But, argues Pickering, who does the stamping? There can, in Durkheim, be only one answer - 'society'. The original cause can never be discovered. All we can say is that it happened within the context of a society and with its approval and acceptance. Here then we clearly see Durkheim's ontological judgement - that it has to be society which explains religious phenomena because it is society which determines what is sacred.

Let us examine these claims in more detail. In the first place, I would question the idea that it is society alone that ascribes sacredness to certain people or things. Sociology, I would argue, cannot and should not exclude the possibility that the original cause of sacredness could be God. What I am suggesting is that even though the original cause of sacredness could be a power that exists outside the individual, this does not mean that this power is necessarily social - it could be a supernatural power (we cannot, within the realm of sociology, know this). But, the only way we can come to an understanding of such beliefs is through discovering the reasons given by agents as to why they believe in the sacredness of that person or thing.

It is also the case that to follow Durkheim means accepting the eternality of both the concept of the sacred and the existence of a meaningful content. But we can question the claim that the sacred exists in every society, whether or not the members of that society accept the concept and irrespective of the presence of sacred things within their society. To Durkheim the answer is yes. Every society is based on collective 'representations', and the sacred is not just a collective 'representation', it is the symbol of the collective entity. Thus when man is worshipping God, he is worshipping the

collective entity - that is society. (11) I would suggest, though, that it is very difficult to explain why something becomes sacred or remains sacred unless a number of people in a society believed that it was so. The idea that 'society' stamps on something the label of sacred, it seems to me, presupposes an agreement between individuals that it is, in fact, sacred. This belief cannot be imposed on individuals - it emanates from them even though, once it exists, it may be seen as an emergent factor which influences the actions of the agents in the society in which these beliefs can be found (remembering that it is the agent's choice whether or not it does so).

For Durkheim, however, the sacred is irreducible. It cannot be explained by reference to anything else (it is a category (iii) fact). The point is that the sacred, in Durkheim's view, cannot be broken down into its constituent parts - it cannot be explained at another level. The sacred is a social fact and that is all that needs to be said. But this does not really explain why individuals come to hold something as sacred. The sacred is imposed on the individual from outside.

I have already argued that I cannot see how we can understand the sacred unless we examine the reasons individuals have for holding something sacred. Thus, I agree, to some extent, with Parsons who argues that the sacred is located according to the declaration of the individual, the actor; though I would stress that this does not necessarily mean that it is dependant on nothing but this declaration otherwise I would be making the ontological judgement I accuse Durkheim of making that we should reject the idea of the existence of God altogether - I would be replacing 'society' with the 'individual'. What I am saying is that any kinds of beliefs need holders to proclaim them and it is via these holders of a belief that we can try to understand them. Thus I would also concur with Good who stresses the emotional and personal content of religious beliefs. Pickering suggests that the danger, for Durkheim, of using the actor's frame of reference is that such a subjective approach makes it difficult to differentiate the sacred from the profane (presumably because people would differ over which was which). (12)

But, I would ask, why should we need to differentiate in such a way? The problem here, it seems to me, is in terms of the bipartite division between the sacred and the profane. Lukes suggests that this dichotomy derives from and is explained by

the basic dichotomy Durkheim sees between the individual and society. (13) In Durkheim's view society is not a mere sum of individuals; rather the system formed by their association represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics. It is, then, in the nature of this entity, not in that of its component units, that we must seek the immediate and determining cause of the facts appearing there. But, as Lukes argues, this sharp bifurcation into two levels of facts - social versus individual - was conceptually confused and led him to overstate his case. In fact, he need only to have claimed that social facts cannot be explained wholly in terms of individual facts. In other words, it would have been sufficient to have claimed that no social phenomenon, indeed few human activities, can either be identified or satisfactorily explained, without reference, explicit or implicit, to social facts. (14) This may be the case, but I would also maintain that there are reasons for action which fall into the category of internal reasons and, also, that external factors may be appropriated and then internalised making them very different from the category (iii) reasons that Durkheim restricts himself to.

Here then we come to the fundamental differences between my theoretical approach and Durkheim's which underlies our different methodological approaches. In the first place, I do

not accept the claim that all religious beliefs (or any other beliefs) have to be social in origin in the sense that they are the product of the culture or society in which the agent actually resides. As I argued previously, when I refer to internal (category (i)) reasons I am not suggesting that the reasons the agent has have to be entirely 'original' still to be personal reasons. Thus, an agent's belief in the tenets of Christianity can be said to be personal rather than social if, as in the example previously cited, he or she remained or actually became a Christian in Eastern Europe ten years ago. Yes, he or she is not 'inventing' Christianity, but neither are they appropriating their beliefs from current approved beliefs in the society in which he or she was a member. How, though, would Durkheim explain such a case. He would probably argue that it was a result of inadequate socialisation, but is this really an adequate answer? I would suggest that the only way we could explain the actions of this individual is by trying to discover, from the agent, what it was about Christian beliefs that led him or her to want to appropriate them and live their life in accordance with the doctrines associated with them.

However, although I would argue that there are beliefs of this kind which are best analysed and explained on an individual level, I agree that in many cases the beliefs of an individual

can be seen as influenced or modified by the society of which the person in question is a member - that is category (ii) reasons. This is not to say, though, that such beliefs are determined by that social structure. The agent has to appropriate these beliefs because they see something positive in holding them - the agent has a choice of whether or not he or she agrees that the beliefs are somehow 'right'. It may be that lack of knowledge of alternatives may be a reason why an agent holds certain beliefs (a category (iii) reason) but we cannot assume this at the outset. The point is that it is up to the sociologist to try and discover what reasons an agent has for believing in certain religious doctrines and that this must begin with the agents themselves not with examining the type of structure of the society of which they are members.

Summary

In this way, I would suggest that Durkheim, whilst being correct in emphasising the influence of societal or cultural factors, is wrong to try and explain religious activities and beliefs only in terms of external factors. Rather, I would advocate a method of investigation which begins with the individual actor while taking into account the force of external factors on the formation of the reasons of these individuals.

I would argue, in fact, that if we begin with an understanding of the agents' reasons for beliefs and then analyse how these beliefs are formed we can gain far more explanatory purchase on action than Durkheim's rather restricted account provides. In the first place, **Durkheim cannot explain religious beliefs of a category (i) kind at all.** In Durkheim all beliefs stem from the social structure, but this cannot explain the plurality of beliefs found in many societies which depend on the meaning of these beliefs to the individuals who adhere to them. Nor can it explain situations where individuals adhere to beliefs that are not currently held in the society to which that individual belongs. Nor, indeed, can it explain how new religions are formed which may be the result of an individual revelation which may then come to be shared.

In the second place, **I would claim that my category (ii) reasons can explain how beliefs that exist in a society can come to be appropriated in a far less deterministic way than can Durkheim.** In my conception of appropriated reasons there is no need to talk in terms of 'obligation' whereby the agent has no place in deciding what they are to believe in. In this, we are accepting that external factors do have an influence on the beliefs of agents, but rather than being forced to accept the beliefs the agents make conscious decisions to accept (or

reject) them on the basis of whether they conceive of the tenets of the belief as somehow 'right'. They have a 'meaning' for the agents concerned and thus they internalise them and make them their own. In this way I am able to allow for the influence of society on individual beliefs without excluding the agent from the account.

Finally, I can explain religious beliefs as category (iii) beliefs - which they may be in cases, for example, where extreme censorship prevents agents being aware of alternative beliefs and so they have very little choice in what they believe - without committing myself to the Durkheimian stance that all religious believers are category (iii) believers or that category (iii) reasons are not 'subjectively' processed by the agents concerned.

The point I am making, therefore, is that we should not assume, as Durkheim does, what in fact we are trying to explain. Instead of stating, at the outset, that all beliefs can be explained in terms of category (iii) reasons, we should begin by trying to elucidate the agents' reasons for believing what they actually believe and then make an assessment of how these reasons are formed - which may be in terms of category (i), (ii) or (iii) reasons.

NOTES TO PART FOUR, CHAPTER ONE

- (1) Durkheim, E.: *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 1915, Introduction; and Pickering, W.S.F.: *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion*, 1984, p. 164.
- (2) Durkheim, E.: "L'Année Sociologique", 1899 cited in Lukes, S: *Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work*, 1975, p. 164.
- (3) Durkheim, E., 1915 (op. cit.) note (i), page 23; and Lukes, S., 1975, (op. cit.) pp. 241-242.
- (4) Durkheim, E., 1915 (op. cit.); also cited in Lukes, S., 1975 (op. cit.) p. 241.
- (5) Durkheim, E., 1915 (op. cit.) pp. 4 & 5.
- (6) Ibid. p. 5.
- (7) Ibid. pp. 95 & 96.
- (8) Pickering, W.S.F.: *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion*, 1984 p. 108
- (9) Durkheim, E., 1915 (op. cit.) p. 225. See also Pickering, W.S.F., 1984 (op. cit.) pp. 119 & 120.
- (10) Pickering, W.S.F., 1984 (op. cit.) pp. 131 & 132.
- (11) Ibid. pp. 153 & 154.
- (12) Lukes, S. 1975 (op. cit.) p. 25.
- (13) Ibid. pp. 19 & 20.

CHAPTER TWO

RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY - METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALISM

Introduction

In this chapter I am going to analyse the arguments put forward by rational choice theorists as an example of methodological individualism. Here we will see the suggestion that the explanation of human action should be purely in terms of the internal reasons of the agent - that is category (i) reasons. There is, in these accounts, no consideration of external factors at all either in terms of appropriated (category (ii)) reasons or constraining/facilitating category (iii) reasons. As in the previous chapter, my aim is to demonstrate how perceiving reasons in terms of only one 'type' (in this case, category (i) reasons) severely limits or restricts the possible explanations of action that can be given. Indeed, I will argue that many of our actions cannot be explained by methodological individualists because these actions are influenced or modified by factors that exist outside us and are either internalised or act as restraints on, or facilitators of, our actions. Such reasons, of necessity, because of the claims of rational choice theorists, cannot ever be included in action explanations.

To this end this chapter will be concerned with 'traditional' views on what rational choice theory entails and the perfectly valid criticisms of this theory outlined by Hollis in The Cunning of Reason. I shall argue that the idea that it is desires alone that move us to action not only dismisses two fundamental categories of reasons as explanations, but also provides a restrictive and misconceived notion of what internal reasons actually are. What I am going to contend is that category (i) reasons are not only to be seen in terms of desires, but should also involve the beliefs of the agent, as has been discussed previously.

This chapter also provides the second element of the debate between externalists, such as Durkheim, and internalists, such as those we will be considering shortly. As will be discussed in chapter three, it is my view that such a debate takes on a different dimension if we refrain from taking either internal or external reasons as the explanation of action, and consider the possibility that both objective and subjective elements may be involved. Moreover, I am going to suggest that internal reasons may be seen in more than one way (that is, as purely 'internal' in the sense that they are not appropriated from external factors, or as reasons that have been internalised and

then form part of the agents' own belief systems); and that external reasons are by no means as 'deterministic' as positivists would seem to imply.

Only Desires Can Move an Agent!

Rational choice can be defined as choice which is instrumental in securing the agent's goals. According to the traditional view of rational-choice theory these goals need to be internal to the agent and they need to be fixed, since otherwise expected utilities cannot be calculated. Thus, Hollis argues, they take the form of given preferences. In the simplest case they can be seen as 'tastes'. Since, then, it is obvious how tastes or sentiments can move us to action, should we then conclude that only desires can move an agent to action? (1) Hollis' answer to this (and it is one with which I completely concur) is no. But let us first examine, in more detail, what 'rational choice' theory, in this form, is suggesting.

The fully rational agent of the ideal-type case has complete and consistent preferences, whose domain is the consequences of his feasible actions. He knows his preferences and enough about likelihoods and costs so that he can assign expected utilities to his options. He thus makes, what Hollis calls, a

maximising choice in the sense that he always avoids the inferior options. He is a **bargain hunter** who never gets less than he could or pays more than he must. (2)

The Limits of Choice for the Rational Man

Does, though, rational choice theory allow for as much choice as it implies? Flam, for example, argues that although, in the model, rational man is posited as a free man and a free decision-maker, this freedom is in fact constrained because he is obliged or compelled to follow certain rules in making his choices. In the first place, he is constrained by his own cost-conscious calculating rationality - the fact that he holds the criteria of cost and benefit and **has** to compare marginal utilities attached to each good in order to maximise his overall utility as sovereign guidelines for choosing among different options and in rank-ordering his preferences. In the second place, he is constrained by the pursuit of internal consistency of choice. He has, to be rational, not to have contradictory desires or beliefs. He is to be exacting and careful in his comparisons, exercising the utmost effort to comply with the rule of consistency. Finally, as Hollis too points out, rational man is selfish. Thus, the final constraint on his action is exercised by his unrelenting

pursuit of self-interest which informs all his choices. In sum, then, rational man is desirous, calculating, consistent and selfish; and the three criteria of rationality - calculus, consistency, selfishness - organised his desires. (3) Let us examine, therefore, the latter of these points - that is, that rational man is selfish.

The Selfish Rational Man

A current trend, Hollis argues, is to argue that to call an agent rational is to say merely that he reasons correctly in identifying the actions likeliest to satisfy his preferences (this, as I shall argue subsequently presupposes two assumptions that can be questioned - that is, that the agent has complete and consistent preferences and that he knows exactly what these preferences are). One version of this idea is the 'theory of egoism', a crude form of which identifies costs and benefits as costs to the agent and benefits to the agent. This theory then goes on to argue that no agent will be moved to action unless his benefits outweigh his costs. He can thus be kind to animals and helpful to old ladies, provided that what moves him is the satisfaction which he expects from the result. Here then we have the type Hollis calls 'Solitary'. But is this really an adequate conception of what

human agents are like? For instance, it is a slight nuisance for 'Solitary' to remove his own litter after his picnic on the beach, but the total utility of a clean beach to all users is greater than the utility of a beach spoilt by 'Solitary's' litter. Plainly, argues Hollis, beaches are sometimes left clean, so it looks as if there must be people about who do not reason like 'Solitary'. That also might explain why people save water in droughts and keep the social world moving in apparent defiance of their dominant choices. (4). In other words, it is a mistake to view agents as always acting in order to satisfy their dominant desires, without taking account, for example, of the desires and preferences of other people. Human agents are not purely 'egoistic'.

An alternative idea, for Hollis, involves the notion of 'altruism'. Thus, Hollis suggests that we can call an agent 'altruistic' if he sets the costs to himself against the benefits to all. This gives us a second homunculus - Poor - as a claim about motivation. 'Solitary' fits in with Hobbes' version of the social contract and 'Poor' to Hume's. In Hobbes human nature starts as strictly self-regarding whereas Hume credits us with enough natural sympathy to one another to keep the social world moving. (5) Writers such as Blau argue, however, that beneath this seeming selflessness an underlying

egoism can be discovered. A basic reward people seek in their associations is social approval. (6) Hollis argues, though, that even given that people commonly do what brings them social approval, it does not follow that they are doing it for the sake of approval (in other words, social approval can be an unintended consequence of their action). The other argument is that 'Poor' and 'Solitary' are both moved to seek whatever rewards are important to them. (7)

Both views, however, as Hollis will argue, are too simplistic and are based on the mistaken idea that only desires can move a man. The theory of rational choice, in fact, depends on four contentions. Firstly, the idea of 'given preferences' which regards rational choice as the use of instrumental reason in the service of the passions. Secondly, the idea that the rational agent's desires must be **current**. Thirdly, the idea that preferences are homogenous. A preference order has to be complete and consistent and must be an order of preferences. Finally, the idea that preferences are **determining**. An agent's choice is determined by his order of preferences. Here the information or belief component of the decision is thought of as universal - standard equipment - and the desire component is what varies between individuals. (8)

The Problems of Complete Information and Consistency

Flam, rightly, points to the fact that the rational actor model has problems in assuming that all actors have complete information concerning their choices and are fully consistent in their desires. This, as we shall see, rests on the assumption that it is desires which alone moves a man or woman to action without taking account of the possibility that beliefs can and do modify our desires. In other words, a fundamental flaw in the rational choice argument is the failure to consider the possibility that agents can appropriate beliefs from external sources which serve to influence their desires or even lead them to act against their desires - (category (ii) reasons. Even within the rational actor model these problems have been perceived. For example, Simon's model of bounded rationality rejects the assumptions of complete information, certainty and perfect calculability. In fact Simon's man is defined as limited in his capacity to handle either complexity or uncertainty. Yet, as Flam argues, he still remains rational even in this model - (sub)goal-oriented, cost-conscious, calculating and (under)informed - although his capacities have been considerably reduced. (9)

If, Flam argues, Simon removes the assumption of complete information, Schelling and Elster considerably weaken that of consistency. They argue that individuals have cognitive coordination problems and experience some motivational conflict and that they are engaged in a constant battle to remain rational and to maintain self-control. In other words, human reason and/or human will often cave in under the weight of contradictory desires, momentary impulses or norms. Both Schelling and Elster do try to improve the concept of rationality by evoking the image of multiple selves - individual and organisational - but both stay with the model.

(10) The question is, therefore, why do these theorists, having appreciated the problems with the model insist on retaining it, albeit in a modified form. It is to be my contention in chapter three that this is also a problem with Hollis' account. It seems to me that if we replace the rational actor model with the idea that the explanation of action should be in terms of reasons, then we can overcome the problems of incomplete information and the fact that people often have contradictory desires or beliefs without making the actor 'irrational' in the choices that he or she makes given the situations in which he or she finds themselves. Moreover, we are able to account for both individual and organisational factors in our explanations of the reasons for actions.

Voluntary Collective Behaviour

It is the notion of 'irrational' behaviour which is considered by Flam in her final criticism of rational choice theory - that is, that the model cannot adequately address the explanation of voluntary collective behaviour or the voluntary creation of public goods. Here she considers Olson's theory which relies on the rational man model and makes a strong argument for why neither cooperation nor public goods should exist in the absence of selective incentives and/or coercion. Olson argues that the rational man model implies 'rational' free-riding when it is applied to collective action. Each rational actor is a potential free-rider who is concerned about not wasting his contribution so that he always calculates whether his individual contribution is likely to be futile. The reason why collective action does sometimes come about is that the association between calculus, sense of futility and free-riding can and is at times broken. For example, either the presence of selective incentives or a measure of coercion can persuade the individual on rational grounds that his cooperative efforts would not be futile and thus motivate him to contribute to collective action. In Olson's view, however, when this sort of 'rational' calculation is not made at all, that is, when individuals are 'irrational' there is no reason to apply the

rational man model. It is not useful when ideological inspiration and altruism counter the sense of futility or when self-disciplined commitment and heightened emotional resources accomplish the same task. In other words, not only coercion and selective incentives can solve the free-rider problem and motivate participation on 'rational' grounds. Ideological inspiration, altruism, commitment and heightened emotional resources accomplish the same task. The implication, though, of Olson's account, as Flam argues, is that both normative and emotional resources belong to the residual category of 'irrational' action. (11)

Yet why see normative and emotional resources as 'irrational'? This is the problem of defining 'rational' in the limited sense as outlined in the rational actor model. If, instead we talk in terms of reasons for actions - based on the idea that reasons are the product of desires and beliefs - and taking into account that reasons are not only formed on the basis of internal desires (category (i)) but also take account of external factors which can include the appropriation of reasons from the social or cultural sphere (category (ii)), or, indeed, external constraining or facilitating factors (category (iii)), then we can have an actor taking rational decisions in terms of

the situations in which he or she is living. That is, making decisions in terms of 'opportunity costs' each will have to pay.

Desires Alone Cannot Move an Agent

This brings us back to one of the basic problems with the theory of rational choice - that desires alone move an agent to action. As Hollis argues, when one thinks about preferences which are very unlike tastes (for instance principles) or which change as a result of choices made, the presumption that desire, rather than belief, as the only motor of action is questionable. (12) The traditional idea of rational action suggests that there cannot be action unless motivated by desire and done in order to satisfy that desire. Such a theory of rational choice involves interpreting all sorts of actions as a contest between different desires. However, as Hollis maintains, most desires are premised on beliefs of many kinds and would change if the beliefs changed. Thus, we should not only speak of 'current preferences', we also need to know how an agent would respond to a change in this situation or in his beliefs about that situation. (13) This is something I have stressed before. It involves the idea, for example, that a starving man may have the desire to steal food, but if he

believes that this is wrong he may not steal that food. In short, we need an analysis of the effects of external factors on the formation of reasons in terms of either category (ii) or category (iii) reasons.

Hollis is thus arguing, correctly, that agents are wrongly perceived as throughputs. There is, in fact, no obvious reason for regarding desire, rather than belief, as the determining component. A belief would not move an agent unless he had the desire, but a desire would not move an agent unless he had the belief. (14) Rational choice theory, therefore, as it stands needs to include some committal thesis about what moves rational agents to action. Old contentions about selfishness and self-interest cannot be replaced with a bland silence. Yet motivation is not self-evidently a matter of desire. It is thus time to challenge the approach shared by Hobbes and Hume. (15). In this way we come to Hollis' arguments against the idea of a purely 'internalist' approach to action explanations.

Hollis argues that rational choice theory need not be committed to the presumption that only desire can move an agent. He wants to argue that it is possible to construe the proposition that action results from desire plus belief in such a way that

belief can be a motive to the will. Rational agents, in fact, act from objectively good reasons whose merits are conceptually independent of their current desires. (16)

Internal versus External Reasons

Neo-Humeans argue that reasons for actions must be internal to the desires of the agent whose reasons they are. Neo-Kantians argue that external reasons can be effective. This, for Hollis, is the basic difference between the two views of how we explain actions. The internalist way of answering the question 'how are we to construe sentences of the form 'A' has a reason to 'q' is to say that 'A' has some motive which will be furthered by his 'q'ing. This, for Hollis, implies the thought that reason is and can only be the slave of the passions. Williams, in Moral Luck, 1981, wants to rework this individualistic account whilst still advocating the principle that men act in terms of their desires. Williams states that a "subjective motivational set" (as he re-names 'the passions') need not be static. A man can acquire new motivations through new information or further deliberation provided that he already has a motivation to deliberate from. Furthermore, motivation can be conceived as the same thing as 'desire'. A motivational set can contain such things as dispositions of

evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties and various projects embodying commitments of agents. Reasons for actions, therefore, must depend on an existing desire. (17) Let us then look at these claims in more detail.

Hollis' account of the internalist view, that is that the reason 'A' performs an action is that he has a motive which will be furthered by that action, does not, it seems to me, imply that the motive in question has to be a desire. It may be that internalists claim that motives and desires are the same thing, but there is nothing in this particular statement that presupposes the idea that motives or reasons are only to be analysed in terms of desires; they may also include beliefs of one kind or another, albeit beliefs that are internal to the agent and not affected by outside factors.

I would maintain that Williams' stress on the possibility of an individual acquiring new motivations indicates that an agent, in his view, is capable of 'learning' (and therefore not be restricted to his or her present desires), so long as the things learned stem from and batten on to present desires. For example, having tasted spaghetti bolognese, then, on the basis of this taste, I may come to discover that other pasta dishes are just as desirable. But does this exclude the possibility

that 'learning' may involve factors other than the present 'desires' of the agent? Is it not possible that as the result of a recommendation from a friend, having never tasted pasta before, we try and enjoy a pasta dish? Where in this case is our 'subjective motivational set'? Surely, the reasons we have for our action derive from an 'external source'. We should not assume, from the outset, therefore, that all new motivations come from 'internal desires', we must take into account the possibility that these may be the product of an external source. Yes, it may be the case that we 'learn' as a result of our 'internal' reasons, but this is not to exclude the possibility that 'external' factors may come to influence our decisions.

It could be argued, also, that a change in desires could be explained, without using the notion of external reasons, via the idea of developmental biology. For example, children can be seen to have desires for the 'thrills and spills' of fairground rides, whereas many pensioners have a greater desire for stairlifts, and so on. In other words, our desires may alter not from factors that exist outside the agent but from factors which are 'innate' because they are a function of biological changes. I would argue, nevertheless, that this does not affect my basic argument as these biologically

anchored desires are limited in scope when we come to explain how desires may change. What I am saying is that while we do not need to assume an external element in changing desires and beliefs, this is not to negate the possibility that this may be the case. Why assume that just because we accept that there may be an 'internal' aspect to reason-formation, do we need to reject the idea that there may also be external influences as well?

In other words, I am questioning Hollis' interpretation of Williams to the extent that he is claiming that Williams is focussing entirely on the 'current desires' of the agent. If, though, as Hollis maintains, Williams is stressing that only desires can move an agent, then I would argue that Williams is restricting his analysis of how agents can acquire new desires or change these desires by not taking into account the effects of outside factors on the possibility that a change in our beliefs can result in a change in our desires.

This, though, is somewhat different from the Kantian claim that beliefs can lead us to act against our current desires. As Hollis asks, 'then what about duty, that stern voice that can cut across our desires?'. For example, might not a man from a military family have a duty, and hence a reason, to become a

soldier, even though he has not the slightest wish or feeling of prior commitment to deliberate from? If so, duty would be an external reason. But, he argues, internalists could say 'how then could this external reason come to motivate him?' The obvious link would be his coming to believe the truth of the external reason statement. But since he could come to believe it only by deliberating from an existing motivation, the link consists in the emergence of an internal reason. Thus, according to Hollis, Williams is arguing that 'external reason statements', when definitely isolated as such, are false, incoherent and really something else misleadingly expressed. (18)

Whilst I would agree with the Kantian notion that man may 'sit in judgement' on his present desires and when reason demands decide to act against the balance of his 'internal reasons', I would also argue that the type of 'external reason' (the idea of duty) that Hollis is giving must be seen to contain an internal aspect in that the agent conceives of duty as an adequate reason for acting - he sees it as somehow 'correct' and this belief is internalised by the agent and forms part of his belief system. Indeed, Hollis argues that his retort to the claim made by the Humean that the Kantian cannot do without a 'psychological link' between reason and action is that in

recognising a reason as good, a rational man makes it his own.

(19) This, I would suggest, is an internal reason in the sense that the agent has 'made it his own'. I am not arguing against the idea that beliefs can lead agents to act against their current desires and therefore that rational choice theorists are wrong to dismiss the effect of external factors on the reasons agents have for their actions. Rather I am suggesting that we should not dismiss the 'internal' aspect of reason-formation in arguing that the beliefs and desires of the agent can be influenced by 'external' reasons. Surely, the very fact of recognising that a reason is good and thus making that reason the agent's own, the reason becomes the agent's reason for acting and is 'internal' in a sense somewhat different from that advocated by Hume. The point that I am making here is that, in the first place, beliefs may come from outside, and yet be internalised; but that this does not mean, as Williams implies, that these are only those that gel with an 'existing subjective motivational set'. We must not deny the agent 'the strong voice of reason' which allows the agent to 'weigh up the costs' of acting in one way rather than another based on the situation in which he or she finds themselves based on a 'reasoning processes' which is far more than 'the slave of the passions'. This is important and an issue that

we will return to in the next chapter since it provides a new dimension to the well-worn debate that has existed between internalists and externalists.

Summary

What I am suggesting, therefore, is that we need to understand the idea of 'internal reasons' in more than one way. Reasons may be purely internal to the agent, but this does not necessarily imply that they are internal only to his current desires. Reasons may also be internal in the sense that they have been appropriated from external sources and then internalised. This conception of internal reasons, I would argue, is not considered, at all, by rational choice theorists who seem to advocate that reasons for action can only be perceived in terms of category (i) reasons. There is no consideration that such reasons may have an external source in the sense of category (ii) reasons, nor is there any conception that agents may act in terms of reasons which they have not internalised, but which serve to modify their desired action especially as a result of category (iii) constraints.

The account given, therefore, by rational choice theorists is restricted in a double sense. Not only do they fail to consider that the idea of 'internal' reasons involves much more

than just the current desires of the agent and that internal reasons may be appropriated from outside and then internalised. They also ignore a very important aspect of reason formation in the effect of external reasons which are not the agent's own, but which can influence actions in a very real sense in terms of opportunity costs which agents may or may not pay. However, as I am now going to argue, I also feel that Hollis fails to appreciate the distinction between reasons that are internalised and purely internal reasons and also the type of external reasons subsumed under my category (iii) reasons.

NOTES TO PART FOUR, CHAPTER TWO

- (1) Hollis, M.: *The Cunning of Reason*, 1987, p. 23.
- (2) *Ibid.* p. 27.
- (3) Flam, H.: "Emotional Man: The Emotional Man and the Problem of Collective Action" in *International Sociology* Vol. 5, No. 1, March 1990, pp. 39 & 40.
- (4) Hollis, M., 1987 (*op. cit.*) pp. 60 & 61.
- (5) *Ibid.* p. 63.
- (6) Cited in Hollis, M., 1987 (*op. cit.*) p. 62.
- (7) Hollis, M., 1987 (*op. cit.*) p. 62.
- (8) *Ibid.* pp. 65 - 67.
- (9) Flam, H., 1990 (*op. cit.*) p. 40.
- (10) *Ibid.* p. 40.
- (11) *Ibid.* p. 41.
- (12) Hollis, M., 1987 (*op. cit.*) p. 27.
- (13) *Ibid.* pp. 63 & 64.
- (14) *Ibid.* p. 68.
- (15) *Ibid.* p. 72.
- (16) *Ibid.* p. 74.
- (17) *Ibid.* pp. 74 - 76.
- (18) *Ibid.* pp. 76 & 77.
- (19) *Ibid.* p. 75.

CHAPTER THREE

HOLLIS AND RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

Introduction

Let us then examine whether the model advocated by Hollis can provide a more adequate account of action in terms of the acceptance of the effects on action of 'external' reasons. As suggested previously, it is to be my contention that while many aspects of Hollis' account have advantages over the explanations of action provided by 'holists' and 'individualists', it too contains some problems which, it seems to me, can be overcome if we examine reasons in terms of my three categories.

There are, in fact, two fundamental limitations of the explanation of action given by Hollis. In the first place, his idea of external reasons is somewhat limited and really refers only to category (ii) reasons. In the second place, and related to this, Hollis, in his justifiable criticism that individualists should not restrict their analysis of reasons to desires alone, also misunderstands what is involved in internal reasons and thus fails to consider the importance of category (i) reasons. In this way, we can argue, as in the other cases

considered, that Hollis too provides a restricted account of action in that he only takes into account appropriated reasons of the category (ii) type.

The aim of this chapter, however, is not merely to point to the problems of Hollis' theory. I also want to suggest that by not restricting our accounts of action to only one category of reason, but employing all three of my categories, we can make some inroads into trying to resolve the internalist/externalist debate. That is, by accepting that reasons may be internal, appropriated or external (indeed, often a combination of two or all of these categories) we can avoid the situation whereby we have to say either external reasons or internal reasons explain actions. Instead, we can allow for the possibility that both may be involved and argue that the real issue is in discovering just which category or categories do explain the action of a particular agent or agents.

The Sub-Kantian Model

The simplest version of Hollis' model is: 'A' has a reason to 'q' if 'A's interests would be furthered by 'q'ing. He argues that by appealing to interests rather than desires this allows for the monitoring of desires which the internalist cannot. It

claims, therefore, that 'A' has interests which are conceptually independent of his desires. External reasons can move a rational man. (1) Whilst I agree, wholeheartedly, with the arguments that interests must be seen as independent of desires and that external reasons can move an agent to action, I cannot see how reference to 'interests' rather than 'motives' (as used in Hollis' account of the individualist approach) takes us any further on. Surely, 'interests' could as easily be interpreted as internal to the agent as are 'motives'. What exactly does he mean by interests? For what reason should we regard 'interests' as external, specifically as we shall see as related to roles, rather than internal to the agent?

Hollis' example of the pension fund may provide the answer. In this he is arguing that a person may provide for his retirement by taking out a pension fund at twenty-five even though he could use the premium money for his more pressing needs. This, he argues, provides a puzzle for the sub-Humean about delayed gratification. It arises, he argues, because a rational agent will provide for some desires which he foresees but does not yet have, but a sub-Humean agent is only moved by present desires. (2) Whilst, again, I agree that agents are not always moved to action by their 'present' desires, I would contend that this example of delayed gratification does not necessarily

provide an external reason apart from the agent's own beliefs and desires. It is more likely that this is an example of a category (ii) appropriated internal reason whereby the agent has internalised the belief, as advocated in the advertisement: that it is wise to provide for your future needs by joining a pension scheme. But, and this is important, it is still the agent's choice whether to do so and this is the 'internal' aspect of his reason-formation. It seems to me, therefore, both the sub-Humean account and the sub-Kantian account of internal and external reasons are somewhat limited. Reasons are perceived as either 'internal' in the sense that they are the result of the present desires of the agent or 'external' in the sense that they are premised on the beliefs of the agent which act against the present desires of the agent. I would maintain, though, that reasons can be seen as both internal to the agent whilst also being formed on the basis of external factors in that the agent has internalised his beliefs from outside and then made them his or her own. We do not, in other words, need to make such a stark distinction between 'subjective' factors on the one hand and 'objective' factors on the other - both should be considered if we are to avoid the situation where either the agent acts only in terms of desires or in terms of factors which exist outside him or her and where no real element of 'choice' (which is the agent's own) is involved.

Whilst, then, I am convinced that Hollis does not perceive 'external' reasons as reasons that simply constrain individuals to act in one way rather than another, I would contend that what he is arguing for are not 'external' reasons at all. They are in fact 'appropriated internal reasons'. I will now elaborate on this.

The Importance of Beliefs

Hollis maintains that if an actor is to be able to act rationally - or indeed at all - against the balance of his internal reasons (presumably he means here desires), he will have to be able to be moved by a belief. The obstacle to this, for Williams, is that belief alone cannot move to action, nor can a belief be rational unless acquired by deliberation which works from a previous motivation. Williams, argues Hollis, means us to assent to his argument, having found it rationally persuasive. His message is that his case supplies good reason for any and every rational man to assent, whatever his previous motivational set. But, if the case supplies good reason for everyone, then either everyone already has suitable internal motivations or the good reason is external. Yet, he argues, since the desire in question would be a desire to assent to the conclusion of a sound argument with true premises, it is simply

a special case of the 'desire' to do the rational thing which Humeans distrust. Besides, Hollis argues that he doubts if everyone has the internal motivation required. There are plenty of bigots who have invested too much in their prejudices to be willingly moved by rational arguments. Since Williams thinks that they have no less reason to grant his case than do open-minded persons, he sounds like the pedlar of an external reason. (3) Let us pause here for a moment. If Hollis is correct and Williams is arguing that everyone would accept a rational argument despite their own beliefs or prejudices, then Hollis is correct to argue that there is no real 'internal' aspect to reason-formation in Williams view. But is Hollis not admitting, when he states that prejudice (or any other belief) can lead an agent to reject a rational argument, that beliefs are not only 'external' to the agent - rather, that they may be internalised by the agent?

Perhaps, Hollis argues, the sub-Humean should acknowledge a possible desire to do the rational thing. There could be room for one in a motivational set which already can contain such things as dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reactions, personal loyalties and various projects embodying commitments of the agent. But, we must ask how such things get into a motivational set. Williams speaks as if they were

either innate or caught like measles. That is all very well, if we are content to think of agents as the intelligent instruments of their own passions. But it will not do once the agent has been ascribed a self-direction which distances him from his passions. The natural model of action is, then, according to Hollis **rational deliberation** where agents arrive at beliefs neither by whim nor by inner impulse nor through socialisation but by recognising the merit of good reasons. **Rational assent occurs because the rational person, in recognising a good reason, makes the reason his own. (4)**

Hollis' Restricted Account of External Reasons

There are a number of issues here. In the first place, I would argue that the reasons an agent has for his actions can be 'purely internal' to the agent (in that they are not appropriated from outside factors). These are my category (i) reasons. Whilst I would agree that in many cases reasons are appropriated from outside, I would not, as Hollis seems to do, discount these internal reasons as a source of action. In the second place, Hollis is restricting his model of action to appropriated reasons rather than allowing that reasons not only may be internal, but may be external (category (iii)) reasons whereby the agent may act in terms of a constraining reason not

because he considers these reasons as 'good' in the sense that he sees them as somehow 'correct' but because he or she fears sanctions, or is not willing to pay the price, if they act against these reasons. It seems to me that Hollis, when he states that an agent in recognising that there is a good reason for him to 'q' the rational man acquires a good reason to 'q', is not asking anything about the source of 'good reasons', he is assuming that if the agent acts in terms of a reason then that reason has been internalised. But this may not be the case. In short, I would maintain that Hollis is restricting the idea of good reasons to category (ii) reasons and is thus failing to account for what I perceive to be the possible effects of real 'external' reasons which are not necessarily internalised by the agent, but which certainly can modify his or her actions if the agent chooses to avoid the sanctions that may be incurred if these reasons are ignored, or, indeed, to collect the bonuses even if these go against any particular current desire.

Perhaps, though, I am being rather unfair to Hollis. Indeed, he states that the rational reconstruction of action often fails to explain why actors act when they do. Hence the timing of action seems to depend on the state of motivation rather than on the recognition of good reasons. But, he argues, the

rational man is always busy, and his good reason to 'q' becomes sufficient to move him only if he has no better reason not to 'q'. Thus the removal of a reason against can trigger a reason for. (5) **Could we not then perceive these reasons as external constraining or facilitating factors rather than internalised appropriated reasons? Do not these reasons need to be included in Hollis' model of action?**

On first reading it appeared that Hollis was considering such external reasons when he argued that if we were confined to a language of internal reasons, we would have to describe people who succeeded in enacting their reflectively consistent preferences as free agents. Happy slaves, well adjusted to an enduring system of slavery, could not be suffering from false consciousness. They get what they want and they want what they get. Yet that ignores a major dimension of power, the manipulation of wants. I do not wish to imply, he argues, that wants thus instilled are necessarily 'false' or that such power has to be malign, but I do insist that enduring contentment is not a sufficient test of liberty and hence that there is a further question about reasons for wants, requiring a language of external reasons. (6) Hollis, therefore, is giving some consideration here to the idea of 'power' which is external to the agent, but again this is restricted to 'the manipulation of

wants' which implies the idea of internalised ideology rather than external constraints - that is, that the 'wants' are internalised by the agent and form part of his reasons for acting.

Hollis does, though, go on to talk in terms of social facts which he defines as features of social life which have meaning for the actors and are external to each of them. (7) There is, he argues, an idea of structures that make them systematic and external whilst also making it plain that structures can enable as well as constrain. However, he then goes on to say that he will discuss structures as systems of rules which are similar to rules of a game. Thus he proposes to use a Wittgensteinian notion of rules which is, he maintains, a nice way of capturing the sense in which social facts are external to each actor without being external to all. (8) As I am going to argue, though, there is nothing in the idea of social facts or 'emergent properties' that necessitates reference only to rules especially rules of a game.

The Notion of Rules

Hollis refers to two types of rules in his analysis. Regulative rules, he argues, are typically those which let the players of a game play it better or more effectively. They are

practical in character, arrived at by experience. They govern means rather than ends. The test is whether they direct people to one way of arriving at an outcome for an activity rather than another, as opposed to determining whether the activity is being engaged in at all. For instance, the rules of the road in Britain direct motorists to drive on the left. They carry no implication that cars cannot be driven on the right or that persons who drive on the right are not motorists. Motorists who disobey this rule may end up in court, but they do not cease to be motorists. Constitutive rules are best typified by those rules of a game which declare what the purpose of the game is and what counts as playing it. For example, the rules of chess specify the legal moves of the pieces and the conditions for check-mate. Many activities, Hollis argues, can be identified only by way of citing the rules by those engaged in them because the actors take part in a capacity conferred by the rules and their actions have no purpose which can be specified outside these rules (the Winchian idea of rules endowed with all the problems of this idea previously outlined). Hollis, though, does say that we cannot explain social life by arguing that all action instances an institution and all institutions are ultimately self-contained. However, he argues, that one need not be committed to explaining all actions through their internal relations to institutions before

agreeing that constitutive rules are important. Nor need one suppose that they are always distinct from regulative rules. It is enough to say that people often act in an institutional capacity which defines their options. Forms of life are crucial for identifying many social actions, whatever one goes on to say about explaining them. (9)

Let us look at these ideas more closely. It seems to me that whether we are talking in terms of regulative or constitutive rules, the agents appear to be directed in their actions by the presence of these rules without there being any 'choice' made by the agent as to whether or not they abide by the rules in question. I have already stated my criticisms of Winchian type constitutive rules, but I do not think that Hollis' reference to regulative rules allows the agents much more freedom in deciding how they should act. Whilst I agree that some actions may be modified by the presence of rules - the motorist who disobeys the rules of the road may expect punishment so he chooses to obey these rules to avoid punishment - but this does not mean that all motorists are going to obey the rules just because they are there. It is up to the agent to weigh up the costs of disobeying rules and decide his or her action in terms of these costs. Moreover, I cannot accept that all action

takes place in terms of specific rules. I will repeat, 'what are the rules of taking a walk, reading a book, watching the television, and so on?'. What, more importantly since we are talking about institutions, were the rules for, as examples, founding and developing an educational system, developing Trades Unions, etc., which could not be rule-governed (when talking in terms of regulative and especially constitutive rules) since as emergent entities, rules applicable to them would only be actually involved after they had been formed. That is, both these examples are not rule-governed in their primary objectives. Obviously some rules like legal and financial ones are involved, but this is secondary to their objectives.

Another problem with the idea of rules is that it is hard to account for social change. Hollis, indeed, admits to this problem. He argues, that if we think of context as a game (or set of games) in which the actors are players, we get a fresh idea of what options are feasible. The actors are now choosing from among the moves open to a player of the game in progress. The constitutive rules of the game enter into the description of the possible moves. The regulative rules govern what is acceptable as a way of playing and hence what each player can expect of others. The rules together account for the player's

knowledge of how to go on (note how Winchian this sounds). This yields an inbuilt explanation of historical continuity. For example, developing societies cannot make instant leaps forward while commercially rational actions are not proper moves in traditional games of honour. The rules of the traditional games have to change first. Rules need not, argues Hollis, be thought of as self-contained (although it is hard to see how 'rules' cannot be so -they either are rules or are not rules). It may partly explain continuity, he argues, to point out that people accept the new only when they have made sense of it in terms of the old. But it is also a fair point that continuity suits those with power. Since power depends as much on acceptance as on a big stick, it is often redistributed by changes in the game. What is crucial is that **this all makes change a puzzle for a theory which defines context in terms of the prevailing rules.** (10)

Hollis tries to overcome this problem by the notion of unintended consequences. Changes in technology, for example, he argues, can have unintended effects on rules. Changes in rules can bring about further changes in rules. There is no reason why the system, once disturbed, should tend to its previous equilibrium, if the changes are large enough to make the previous game futile or, indeed, unplayable. (11) But, I

would ask, where are the actors in this scenario? Who brings about the changes and why - for what reasons - not those embodied in rules without this concept becoming vacuous. Hollis argues that the feed-back is controlled by the actors themselves. They give direction. But how can they if they are simply abiding by rules? Hollis maintains that the sense of game he is referring to is not that of game-theory. In this no serious attempt is made to capture the expressive aspects of social life or the internal meaning and value attaching to many practices. Nor is there much scope for the actor's critical monitoring of their performances especially from a moral point-of-view. For these dimensions to emerge we need a conception of role-playing. (12)

Whilst I agree that game-theory thus far described does seem to exclude the internal reasons for acting of the agents themselves, I am doubtful that Hollis' version of the idea of the rules of a game can rectify this situation. It seems to me that any notion of pre-scripted rules as the foundation of action-explanations will result in the agent appearing as a 'puppet' unable to make choices concerning his or her action. Why, though, does Hollis use the idea of rules in the first place? The answer to this seems to lie in his conception of agents as following the norms contained in the roles they

undertake as social actors. It is the case, as we shall see, that Hollis' conception of role-playing, especially his idea of 'personification' tries to get away from the 'puppet' mindlessly reading the small print of the rules. But, although Hollis is able to let the actor back into the picture in his notion of roles, I am going to suggest that by confining all interests to roles (and their accompanying rule-set), there are no other interests which can provide any leverage to action by supplying reasons for it. Particularly, Hollis cannot explain why it is rational for agents to adopt a role and how a role array comes about and changes. Let us then examine what is entailed in the notion of role-playing and the problems associated with it.

Role-Playing

Hollis argues that it makes good sense to speak of a system of rules as external to each actor and yet internal to them all. (But is this implying that all rules are accepted and internalised by all actors - a point to which I shall return[?]) X
 Rules, he argues, evolve in a way influenced by the actors' shared experiences and thus we get a promising idea of historical location (ways of life?). The actors become flesh and blood followers of rules with a knowledge of how to go on.

Even so, it remains unclear how the actors relate to the rules. Since the image is no longer one of causal forces there is not, according to Hollis, a danger of turning agents into puppets (I would dispute this in the sense previously outlined although Hollis' conception of roles is more promising). Instead, the suggestion is that they are players of roles governed by normative expectations. (Note here that I have stressed the word 'governed'. Does not this imply a form of determinism?) Hollis admits that **an actor who is not the creature of hidden forces may yet be the creature of rules.** That, he argues, would be too high a price to pay for expectations which make social life determinate. (13) How then does he want to avoid 'paying this price'.

It is here that Hollis introduces the Bureaucratic Politics model of decision making. It matters very much, he argues, whether the units of a Bureaucratic Politics model are bureaucracies (agencies) or bureaucrats (agents). The starkest contrast to a rational-actor model would make them bureaucracies with the human agents cast as mere puppets or mouthpieces of the agencies. This he rejects. As soon as we ask how the dynamics work, Hollis claims, we find that we need human agents to work through. Let us then regard bureaucratic agents as rule-followers subject to sets of rules which

differentiate between bureaucracies (ways of life again?). In other words, let us resume the idea that systems are construed in terms of rules rather than in terms of functions. Think of each policy maker at the crucial moment of a collective decision-making as having an institutionalised position which accounts for his presence. Think of each position as laying normative expectations on whoever occupies it, thus giving him rules to follow, tasks to perform and demands to fulfil. Think of each actor as obedient to the demands of his position. In brief, think of the actors as role-players and of role as the normative expectations attaching to official positions. (14)

Let us pause for a moment. Are we to assume from this that we should see all human actions as similar in type to the actions of bureaucrats in an institutionalised system? This, it seems to me, is a rather worrying conclusion to draw. Do we really go on in our everyday lives undertaking tasks that have been assigned to us and conforming to the rules that define these tasks? Moreover, is it really the case, even in bureaucracies, that people always obey the rules? I will examine this latter point first.

Hollis, indeed, argues that if rules are supposed to be complete lists of duties, then it is simply false that they are performed in full and simply feeble to say that they usually

are. But, he maintains, the model becomes plausible as soon as it is granted that roles are not fully scripted in advance of every situation. There are some definitive do's and don'ts but agents are also able to use their judgement. (15) Roles, for Hollis, are treated as sets of normative expectations attached to social positions. Normative expectations, he argues, need not be explicit, still less created by law, and they imply nothing about ethics, but they sanction social rules, prove their existence and are a source of reasons for action. Hollis admits that 'normative expectations' sound forbiddingly external and he wishes to avoid the idea of making roles into a system over and against individuals. (16) To do this he allows the agent judgement in the performance of their roles. This is a very promising picture of the agent as a role-player who has some say in how he or she plays a role whilst also being constrained to some extent by the situation in which they find themselves. Let us then expand on what, in Hollis' view, is actually involved in the idea of role-playing.

Hollis maintains that a dramaturgical analogy can shed light on what is involved in playing a role. By one account of the theatre, he argues, a stage is a place where individuals step out of their private lives and into character parts. They pretend to be the 'dramatis personae' for the performance and

act as the play requires. The text is already scripted; the players don masks for the duration of the play and when the curtain falls return to their off-stage lives. This, Hollis suggests, at first sight, is a reassuring account to apply to social life if one is recommending individualism. It distinguishes sharply between public and private being and postulates a self behind the mask. There exists role-distance and leaves it open to any actor who is morally offended by the action of the play to 'throw off the mask' and go home. Taken literally, though, the text has nothing to do with individual choices. While the individual is totally distinct from the role he is totally unimportant. The script is everything. Then, asks Hollis, how about making the analogy one with an incompletely scripted play and where the actors supply the endings themselves - a compromise between a character provided as far as the script goes and an individual fleshing out the rest of it for whatever private purposes of his own. But, for Hollis, this makes no sense at all. In so far as the private purposes obtrude, they spoil the play and, in so far as they remain concealed they do not matter. If norms and choices are related as public discipline to private motive, then the discipline is what counts. Thus when the model is applied to the individual in the play of his own life he is again abolished. (17)

Hollis, argues, though that the analogy need not be taken this way. Before considering this, though, I would suggest that perhaps such an analogy in itself is not really appropriate to an analysis of human action. Such an analogy already presupposes that actors adopt 'roles' and act in accordance with 'rules' that are set out in scripts. But is this really true of agents in their everyday lives, dealing with new situations and making decisions in terms of the circumstances in which they find themselves?

As will be argued subsequently, these circumstances may not be associated with roles but with structural and material conditions - for example, the situation of the 'underprivileged'. These agents are not in a 'role' but their situation as such presents them with 'interests' on the basis of which they make decisions. Nevertheless, Hollis' account of roles does try to bring back to the notion of role-playing the acting agent who is not playing a prescribed part in a play (even though his idea that all interests are role-related raises problems as indicated above). Hollis argues that in his account of the theatre, actors are thought of not as impersonating characters but personifying them. One actor's portrayal of Hamlet uses the same lines as another's but is different. Great actors become the masks which they have

donned. Their performances are open-ended despite the complete script. Role-distance, he argues, conjures up images of alienation, disenchantment and frustration. But in this account we can think of it as detached judgement within the play. Detachment can be not the cool use of the stage for some private purpose but the monitoring of one's own endeavours to bring the character to life. (18) This, for Hollis, puts the actor on the stage and gives him work to do.

The question pointed up by drama, according to Hollis, is whether roles create agents or agents create roles. For Autonomous Man, the notion of roles offers an 'explanans'. Agents create their roles or at least influence them. Such a claim, however, should be worded cagily if we are to avoid ghostly individualism. Hollis claims that he makes no individualist assumptions about the identity of the agents who are to create their roles. Provided a man can make his roles essential to being who he is and do so without losing his autonomy, we may yet have the best of an old argument. At any rate, he argues, Autonomous Man has a clear interest in the notion of role which is both a source of reason for action and a vehicle giving him control of his own social life. Autonomous Man must keep space for the self. An action 'A', argues Hollis, can be seen to have a normative explanation in

so far as: (i) the agent occupied a position with a role 'R' requiring 'A'; (ii) the agent knew that 'R' required 'A'; (iii) the agent did 'A' because of (i) and (ii). But, the third clause is obscure and is doing too much work. We can read it as asserting that (i) and (ii) caused him to do 'A' in that he was so well socialised that he always acted on a normative syllogism with true premises. Alternatively, we can treat (i) and (ii) as reasons for doing 'A' which apply to this particular agent and (iii) as asserting that these reasons were his reasons. A single role array, argues Hollis, rarely requires a unique course of action, and, even when it does, there is often more than one way of discharging the duty. We can thus re-write the normative scheme as follows: (i) the agent occupied positions with roles 'R1'..... 'Rj', requiring 'A'; (ii) the agent knew that 'R1'..... 'Rj' required 'A'; (iii) conditions (i) and (ii) were the agent's reasons for doing 'A'. (19)

Here then we have a model of the actor which avoids the dual problems of oversocialisation and over-individuation. As Archer states such an account eschews two notions, that of an actor undertaking a prescribed part (too much of society; too little of self), or one who merely dons and doffs masks behind which his private business can be conducted (too much self; too

little of the social). In Hollis' concept, the social actor becomes such by choosing to identify him or herself with a particular role and actively to personify it in a particularistic way. The actor's real interests come with the role she or he has chosen to personify. (20) In other words, as agents we are able to choose the roles we take in our everyday life, but within the roles there are certain do's and don'ts which come along with these roles - which define these roles as the roles they are. However, within the constraints of these the actor has a certain amount of lee-way in how he or she personifies that role (as the actor has in personifying Hamlet). For example, a university lecturer chooses to adopt the role of a lecturer for his or her own reasons (perhaps they have had contact with other lecturers and like the sound of what they have been told about that particular career - a point I will return to). But, within this role they have to abide by certain norms attached to that role - if they are to avoid sanctions - as laid down in their contract (for example, turning up regularly to give lectures unless they have a legitimate excuse, marking essays promptly, and so on). This, though, does not exhaust their role as a lecturer. They have the freedom to interpret what they perceive the role to be within the aforementioned constraints. They may decide that they will teach on a very formal basis or in the informal

setting of a seminar. They may decide to restrict their interest in their students to purely academic matters or they may take a personal interest in all their students' activities. Thus, to this extent the agent has a certain amount of choice within the role he or she has chosen to adopt.

It must be noted, however, and it seems that Hollis does not really raise this point, that roles will vary as to the degree of 'elasticity' within them. The university lecturer has far more scope in how he or she interprets his or her role than, say, the policeman who has to abide by more restrictive rules in order to carry out his or her job effectively. The fundamental problem, though, with Hollis' account of role-playing is his failure to account for why agents choose a role in the first place. Indeed, Hollis himself argues that the actor 'qua atomic social individual' has no reason to adopt one identity rather than another. He cannot have a reason because he has no prior interests upon which reasons can work because in Hollis interests are embedded in roles. For Hollis, real interests are acquired within a social contract. The initial choice of position is non-rational in prospect. A man can have good reason to be glad today that he got married yesterday without thereby having to have had a good reason yesterday to be glad at his impending change of state. (21) As a

consequence of this position, as Archer argues, the initial choice of a position is 'contractarian' - a contract which it is non-rational to enter into but which can be rational in retrospect or rationally corrected. In this way, the explanation of why actors choose the roles they play either cannot be given or is reduced to depth psychology. (22)

This is certainly a situation I would wish to avoid. What we must remember, in the first place, is that agents are born into social situations which are not of their own making and which serve to influence (but not determine) the range of roles available to them. For example, someone who has never had the opportunity to go on to higher education, for whatever reason, is unlikely to be able to 'choose' the role of university lecturer. I am not arguing that these category (iii) constraints or enablements determine the options open to agents but they are influential to the extent that they decide how high the opportunity costs of attaining a particular role are. It is this idea of differential costs which can be seen to provide 'good reasons' for why agents adopt certain roles and not others. We have then a rational actor with rational interests in accepting a social role. We can locate 'reasons' for why actors choose the roles they do in terms of the existence of category (iii) factors. Moreover, as I argued

previously, we can identify interests in adopting a role in terms of category (ii) appropriated reasons whereby, for example, we can explain why one agent chose to be a policeman and another to be a fireman in terms of the fact, perhaps, that the first agent had been in contact with a policeman and liked what he heard about that career whereas the second agent had not, but had been in contact with a fireman and liked what he had heard about that career.

The problem with Hollis' account of role-playing is that he locates all interests within roles. He does not allow that some interests pertain to social actors outside the roles they adopt. It is also the case that the account of role-playing given by Hollis means, as Archer claims, that actors are condemned to a 'normative conventionalism' which severely limits their innovations as 'artificers'. Thus she suggests that we need to link the pre-grouping aspect of social agency to its promotive re-grouping aspect since it is the latter which gives us purchase on how new positions or roles are constructed out of something other than role-clash and how the action involved is not restricted by rule-governed normative conventions. What we need to do is to stress that as social agents, groups and collectivities of people confront problems which are interest-related but not role-related (we can share

an interest in a clean environment without this entailing the adoption of a role: we do not need to be a member of the Green Party to want to live in a town where there is no pollution); and also to appreciate that as social agents they engage in promotive activities, when tackling these problems, which are too innovative to be construed as 'games' since they follow no regulative rules and embody no constitutive rules. For example, Archer argues that the 'underprivileged' confront plenty of daily exigencies, given their poor life chances, and thus have the best of reasons for struggling towards collective organisation (unionisation, franchise and civil rights movements, and so on), just as the 'privileged' find good reasons in protecting their vested interests to try to contain or repress the former. In the struggle between them (and the privileged and non-privileged are not playing the 'Us and Them' game), the extant role array undergoes considerable transformation. New positions get defined under the prompting of promotive interest groups, though they will bear the marks of compromise and concession in the course of interaction against opposition. Equally, the defence of vested interests may prompt role changes precisely in order to defend interests themselves (Kings will accept any form of constitutionalism in order to remain King - but it is a very different position embedded in a much modified role array). (23)

What Archer is saying, therefore, is that the re-grouping of social agents provides the mechanism which generates new role-rule sets as some of its unintended consequences, 'thus providing an account of their development in terms of non-rule governed action'. This is not open to social actors if they are perceived as incumbents of roles hedged by normative conventions. In this way, we can, on the one hand, remove the illusion of contractual freedom to become any social self we choose to personify (because of the presence of wider interests), but we also gain (thanks to the re-grouping of agents) a collective capacity to refashion social positions which allows us to make society as well as ourselves. (24)

The crux of the argument I am making here is as follows. The idea of actors as role-players who have shared interests within that role, and the idea that these shared interests serve to influence how they act once they have taken on a role has much explanatory power. After all, I claimed that the actor who adopted the role of 'good neighbour' was influenced in his action not to play loud music for the reason that it was in the interests of all concerned not to cause a disturbance after a certain time of night and this was accepted by that agent. I also accept, indeed endorse, the notion that within roles agents are able, within the constraints of accepted do's and

don'ts, to use individual judgement in how they interpret these roles. Where I think Hollis is mistaken is to restrict the idea of 'interests' to those within roles. In doing this he cannot explain why - for what reasons - agents choose roles in the first place. If they have no interests other than those within the role then they cannot have reasons for adopting one role rather than another. Moreover, if we reject the idea of 'wider interests' other than those within roles we are left with a very static picture of social life. Roles could not change as a result of the unintended consequences of the pursuit of these other interests which, it seems to me, is an unacceptable conclusion to draw.

Having considered the positive and negative aspects of Hollis' idea of role-playing, I would also suggest that there are problems involved in his conception of what is involved in 'reasons for action'. This stems from his distinction between 'legitimizing' and 'real' reasons.

The Problem of Legitimizing Reasons

Hollis claims that in discovering the reasons why an agent acts as he does there is no guarantee that the reasons given are the agent's underlying reasons. The reasons, he argues, which make

the utterance appropriate in its context are legitimating reasons. He argues that one might fancy that legitimating reasons are unimportant to explanation unless they coincide with the actor's motives in putting them forward (surely the actor has to have a motive in putting them forward). As Skinner argues, though, the legitimating language enables and constrains the power of the actors to effect their motives. For example, if your motives in playing chess are to humiliate me, you will get nowhere unless you play better moves than I by the public legitimating test of what makes a good move. Once the terms of the game are set, the players may not challenge them nor the public values enshrined in them. Hollis argues that everyday actors in everyday lives commonly conduct second discourses distinguishable from their official ones. The official one continues to matter because it enables and constrains the others. The others matter because they account for how the actors pick their way through the indeterminate permission of the official discourse. We, thus, need to understand both the legitimating and the real reasons. (25)

Hollis sets out this idea in the following table:-

| | <u>Action's Meaning</u> | <u>Actor's Meaning</u> |
|-------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| What? | conventions | intentions |
| Why? | legitimating reasons | real reasons |

Hollis states that the epistemological problems of knowing that an interpretation is correct on all four counts are formidable since answers to the two 'What?' questions often need justifying by reference to the two 'Why?' questions. With the action's meaning in partial variation with the actor's meaning we shall have to strengthen the rationality assumption required for 'desire plus belief equals action'. (26) Hollis argues that we have here a hermeneutic circle which comes into view when we note that the context of action is a conjecture, which we erect with explanatory intent. We need conventions to identify the intentions and vice versa (does he mean here that we need to identify the external factors that can influence 'subjective' reasons and we need to understand the agent's reasons in being influenced by these external factors?). We need both to get at the reasons and vice versa. Actions, argues Hollis, have meanings taken from a stock created by actors who use it. However, he states, the circle is not fatal in practice because one can work piece-meal by alternating between context and actor using conjectures about one to test hypotheses about the other. But this is possible only by relying on strong rationality assumptions to the effect that actors are moved by good reasons for their desires, their beliefs and hence their actions. (27)

Again, then, we come to what Hollis means by 'good' reasons. Why, he asks, assume that all agents are rational when we know that they are not? There is some case for a flat denial of this difficulty. This might be done by playing up the subjective element until **all agents always do what seems to them to be best at the time and there is nothing more to be said.** (28) Indeed, I can see no reason for Hollis to object to this idea. I would maintain that the reason the agent has for his action, at the time, is a good reason even though it may be premised on false or inadequate information. This is not to say that the agent is incapable, at a later date and in the light of new information, of realising that his reason was not a good one, but, at the time in question, it was a good reason for the agent in question. However, Hollis maintains, that rationality involves more than subjective consistency (presumably because he tends to underplay the role of 'subjectivity' in his analysis of action). Another suggestion, he maintains, seems to be to play up the degree to which all action conforms to rules (or what the agent takes the rules to be) and is always rational in this sense. But, Hollis argues that he hopes to have given ample reason for refusing to let the rules absorb the agent (although I would dispute whether he has done this, and if he has why talk in terms of rules at all). There is then a genuine puzzle here. Action cannot be

non-rational since we cannot ascribe intention to behaviour without reproducing at least some reason on the actor's part (I would agree with this). Action cannot be very irrational because we need warrant for believing that the reasons we ascribe were the agent's own or at least likelier to have been his own than other possible reasons. But actions need not always be completely rational. The more rational the action is the easier it is to understand and explain so it pays to give the actors the benefit of the doubt. (29)

Reasons Rather Than Rules

Whilst I would agree that we should treat the actions of agents as rational in the sense that they are acting for reasons which appear to them to be good reasons at the time of the action, I would maintain that this does not mean that we cannot take as rational the agent's own reason for the action even if it is premised on false or incomplete information. What we need to understand is the reason the agent had for his or her action and the situations which helped form this reason. If we begin our explanation in terms of the actor's reasons we can overcome Hollis' problem, as he states it, of where we cannot understand social action. Hollis maintains that there is still work to be done at the causal level for the parts of social life which

understanding cannot reach. The first case of this kind, for Hollis, is when an actor's own reasons derive from irrational beliefs and desires. This gives us a causal question about the source of these beliefs and desires. Irrational, here, does not mean 'false'. One can hold a false belief for a good reason and a true belief for a bad reason. (30) It is not clear here what Hollis means by an 'irrational' belief or desire. Presumably he means something like the neurotic handwasher. If he does, then I cannot see that the actions of the handwasher are beyond understanding. The beliefs he holds may not appear rational to us, but this does not mean that we cannot explain or understand his actions in terms of 'reasons' since the reason the agent has for washing his hands are that they appear dirty to him and this accounts for his action.

Hollis also argues that more goes on in social life than the actors singly or plurally realise. This then is another area where understanding is difficult. I have already stressed, however, that although actors may not fully understand all of the factors that make up their reasons, they do have some awareness of the reasons for their own actions. I would agree, though, that explanations of social action should not end with the actor's reasons - further questions need to be answered. Thus, as Hollis argues, even when an action is done for a good

reason which the actor recognised and we therefore know why it was done, there are questions to be asked. For instance, much of the history of technology is a success story of rational solutions to engineering problems. But that does not prevent interesting questions about the conditions for technological advances. 'Verstehen' then opens the enquiry because that is how we set the questions, but it does not provide all the answers to all of them. (31)

Summary

To sum up Hollis' account. He maintains that the opening step of explanation is to identify the act by the agent's intentions in its context or conventions. Perception under an action-description may suffice if the enquirer already knows the conventions, but shades in to more nuanced interpretation if intention or context is opaque. The next step is to recover the agent's reasons and judge his judgements to see what is thereby accounted for and what needs further explanation. The enquirer, Hollis argues, must pass judgement since the merit of the actor's reasons affects the residue for further explanation. A rational role-player allocates resources efficiently but by a test of efficiency which relates to the norms governing his role. His role leaves him latitude to

judge what is appropriate. He could not carry it out at all were he unable to take settled custom for granted. Such customs include his own proven habits and other people's stable practices. (32) Whilst I would agree with Hollis that we must take account of the agent's reasons for his or her actions, I would argue that the discovery of these reasons should be the first step in the explanation. It is only after discovering these reasons that we should look at the context in which these reasons are formed to arrive at a fuller picture of why the agent had these reasons. Moreover, why should we have to pass judgement on these reasons? If the agent is acting for a reason which he or she feels is a good reason at the time of the action then this is the explanation of that action whether or not we believe that action was or was not based on rational criteria.

One fundamental problem, it seems to me, with Hollis' view of rational action is the fact that in talking in terms of norms he takes the retrograde step of referring to rules. This then raises all the problems that we encountered with Winch and seems to leave the agent as a 'puppet' who acts entirely in terms of socially constructed and sanctioned rules.

The account of role-playing, however, given by Hollis has much explanatory power and he is able to bring the actor back into the picture by arguing that agents are free to subjectively interpret what their roles are within the constraints of specific do's and don'ts that are entailed in that role. Where Hollis is mistaken, it seems to me, is in arguing that 'interests' are only found within roles. This gives us no explanation of why agents choose to adopt the roles that they do in the first place and it also results in a rather static conception of roles whereby no account could be given of why they can and do change as a consequence of wider interests. This, it seems to me, is rather a strange conclusion for Hollis to draw given the statements he made in the last chapter of Models of Man. In this he stresses the importance of context which he argues enables and constrains the individual actor - setting him problems. Hollis, in fact, argues that for a single actor institutions are usually given, being stores of power and stocks of reasons for action. He can count on being helped or hindered depending on what he decides to do, and this fact is a reason which influences his decision. He goes on to say that institutions are more than the results, foreseen and unforeseen, of individual negotiations. **A theory of emergence is needed.**

However, having stated this, Hollis in The Cunning of Reason seems to fail to consider category (iii) factors at all. Where, I would argue, in the idea of role-related interests, is an acceptance of the effects of emergent properties which exist outside the negotiation of individuals in the creation of roles? Where, in other words, are the wider interests that can serve to modify or constrain the roles the actor can undertake? If, though, we dispense with many of the claims made by methodological individualism and accept emergence, we can explain how interests are distributed and allocated not on the basis of 'chance' but in relation to a range of external category (iii) reasons which have nothing to do with roles. This, then, enables us to overcome the problem faced by Hollis in his being unable to account for why - for what reasons - agents adopt one role rather than another.

What I want to emphasise is that Hollis, by trading only in category (ii) reasons, produces a rather limited account of action-explanation in terms of reasons. This is particularly apparent in his analysis of roles and seems rather at odds with his contention that emergent properties exist and serve to influence actions. If, though, we accept that factors exist outside the individual and that agents take these into account in deciding to act in one way rather than another, accepting

that the agent subjectively weighs up the costs involved in being influenced by these factors, we are able to include in our account the possibility of category (iii) emergent or external reasons modifying actions without resorting to any kind of determinism.

Finally, I feel that Hollis is mistaken to reject the idea of internal (category (i)) reasons as possible explanations of action. Whilst I agree that methodological individualists are wrong to argue that all action should be explained in terms of 'current desires', this need not mean that we should not allow for the possibility that agents act for reasons which are not appropriated from the beliefs, values, ideas, and so on, which are current in the society of which they are members. It seems to me that the neo-Humean/neo-Kantian debate needs to be reconsidered in the light of the idea that reasons for actions may be formed on the basis of my three categories. Why make the debate in terms of internal versus external reasons (remembering, in fact, that the external reasons advocated by Hollis are really appropriated reasons)? Why reject one type of reason and only accept the other? This should not be a 'battle' of an 'either/or' type. What we should be examining is the factors that may explain why agents act as they do which could be internal, appropriated or external (or a combination

of two or all of them). We do not, in other words, need to reject one 'type' of reason just because we accept that other 'types' may also be included in the explanation of action.

NOTES TO PART FOUR, CHAPTER THREE

- (1) Hollis, M: *The Cunning of Reason*, 1987, p. 78.
- (2) *Ibid.* pp. 81 - 86.
- (3) *Ibid.* p. 88.
- (4) *Ibid.* p. 89.
- (5) *Ibid.* p. 89.
- (6) *Ibid.* p. 92.
- (7) *Ibid.* p. 130.
- (8) *Ibid.* pp. 136 & 137.
- (9) *Ibid.* pp. 137 & 138.
- (10) *Ibid.* pp. 140 & 141.
- (11) *Ibid.* p. 142.
- (12) *Ibid.* p. 142.
- (13) *Ibid.* p. 145.
- (14) *Ibid.* p. 152.
- (15) *Ibid.* p. 152.
- (16) Hollis, M.: *Models of Man: Philosophical Thoughts on Social Action*, 1977, pp. 70 & 71.
- (17) Hollis, M., 1987 (*op. cit.*) pp. 154 - 156.
- (18) *Ibid.* p. 155.
- (19) Hollis, M., 1977 (*op. cit.*) pp. 73 - 78.
- (20) Archer, M.: "*The Morphogenesis of Social Agency*", 1988, pp. 35 & 35.
- (21) Hollis, M., 1977 (*op. cit.*) p. 105.
- (22) Archer, M., 1988 (*op. cit.*) p. 35.
- (23) *Ibid.* pp. 37 & 38.
- (24) *Ibid.* pp. 38 & 39.
- (25) Hollis, M., 1987 (*op. cit.*) pp. 182 & 183.
- (26) *Ibid.* p. 184.
- (27) *Ibid.* pp. 184 & 185.
- (28) *Ibid.* p. 186.
- (29) *Ibid.* pp. 186 - 188.
- (30) *Ibid.* p. 189.
- (31) *Ibid.* pp. 189 & 190.
- (32) *Ibid.* p. 192.

SUMMARY TO PART FOUR

The fundamental aim of examining various methodological approaches to the analysis of human action was to try and demonstrate how explaining action in terms of more than one 'type' of reason provides a more adequate account of why agents act as they do. Thus, I have argued that within action explanations we should allow for the possibility that reasons may be internal (category (i)), appropriated (category (ii)) or external (category (iii)), or a combination of any of these. What I have suggested is that the theories studied in this section restrict their analyses to only one of these categories and thus are unable to account, in many cases, for the multiplicity of factors that can be seen to influence action. Indeed, I would maintain that they cannot explain some actions at all. Let us then reiterate where, in my opinion, the aforementioned writers have excluded important factors which can serve to explain actions. This I shall do in terms of the three categories of reason formation. Moreover, I also want to stress that by appreciating that reasons are not only 'purely' internal or external, but can be appropriated; and by showing (a) that external reasons are not as deterministic as positivists seem to imply and (b) that internal reasons do not need to be perceived as the product of desires alone, we can overcome the either/or situation which has characterised the internalist/externalist debate.

Internal (Category (i)) Reasons

One of the basic problems with the holist argument, as exemplified by Durkheim, was that he failed to take account at all of the possibility that individuals may have reasons for their actions which are not the product of social forces at all. In excluding the idea of internal reasons for action, therefore, Durkheim was unable to explain such concepts as 'revelation' or to understand why, for example, some agents adopt religious beliefs which are not propounded in the society of which they are members. Why, in other words, do these agents come to hold these beliefs, and act in accordance with them, if the only explanation of religion lies in the influence, indeed determination, of societal forces? If, though, we accept the idea that agents may act in terms of reasons that are 'internal' to them (remembering that these beliefs need not be 'original' to be internal) then these 'gaps' in explanation can be closed.

In complete contrast to Durkheim, however, methodological individualists want to restrict all action explanations to category (i) reasons - indeed, to the 'current desires' of the agents in question. Again, this is problematic since it is not plausible to account for all reasons for action in terms of

desires, since beliefs can and do modify or change our desires. Thus, I agree with Hollis to the extent that we must take account of the effect of external factors on the formation of reasons.

Where I think Hollis is mistaken, is to totally reject the idea that internal reasons can be posited as one possible explanation of action. It is my contention that Hollis, in his perfectly correct criticism of methodological individualism, 'falls into the trap' created by the internalist versus externalist argument that if you accept one category of reasons you have to reject the other type. There is nothing in the acceptance of external reasons that precludes the possibility that the actor may have been acting on the basis of internal reasons. Nor, incidentally, is there, in the idea of internal reasons, any necessity to restrict these to 'current desires'. Reasons, whether internal or external, are premised on desires and beliefs - the beliefs too, though, can be internal to the agent.

Appropriated (Category (ii)) Reasons

While I am not denying that Durkheim appeared to be referring to something like appropriated reasons for action when he talked of agents internalising beliefs that derived from their

culture or society, it his idea of obligation that removes any notion of a subjective aspect to this type of reason formation. Durkheim seems to be implying that agents internalise beliefs because they are 'obliged' by the society of which they are members to do so. Such reasons, therefore, emerge not as category (ii) but as types of category (iii) reasons, and a rather 'strange' type of category (iii) reason at that since in my perception of external reasons no process of internalisation occurs. I would maintain, in contrast to Durkheim, that appropriated reasons are internalised because the agent perceives them to be somehow 'right' and they function to meet some desires or wants that the agent may have. We cannot, it seems to me, ever argue that society can force someone to believe in anything - the agent must find (or be induced to find in cases of extreme ideological manipulation) something positive in the belief in order to internalise it and act in accordance with it.

Methodological individualists of the rational actor model do not seem to allow for the fact that the desires of an agent can be modified or changed by external factors at all, albeit factors that have been internalised from outside factors. Desires, in this view are everything and beliefs (which may be appropriated) play no part in the explanation. Yet, there is nothing in the idea of category (ii) reasons which prevents the

agent from playing a very active role in deciding what or what not to believe in; in formulating their own reasons for their own actions. The agent has good reasons for internalising these beliefs which are not enforced on him or her, but which can be explained not only in terms of the current desires of the agent, but in terms of the beliefs, values and ideas that the agent has appropriated from an outside source.

It is in the idea of appropriated reasons that Hollis, in my view, puts forward a most convincing argument, especially in his idea of role-related action. Here we see the agent being influenced by factors that are external to him or her, but still having considerable lee-way in decisions concerning how that role is to be performed. External factors, then, are not determining the actions of the agent, but they are influencing how an agent acts in accordance with the role. Agents, in other words, internalise the beliefs, values, ideas, and so on that come with the role because they perceive them as 'right' and necessary if they are to carry out that role. What is missing, however, is any consideration, as I will argue subsequently, of the presence of category (iii) reasons which could explain why roles are adopted in the first place and why they can change.

External (Category (iii)) Reasons

As I have already indicated, Durkheim appears to only consider external reasons in his analysis of action. While I totally agree that the actions of agents may be influenced by external constraints or enablements which exist outside them and which they may not perceive as somehow 'right' and they thus do not incorporate them into their belief-systems, this does not mean that such reasons determine the actions of these individuals as Durkheim implies. It is up to the agent, based on his or her weighing up of the 'opportunity costs' involved whether to be constrained (or enabled) by these external reasons. There is, in other words, no need to exclude the agent even if we are talking in terms of category (iii) reasons. Thus, in Durkheim, category (iii) external factors lose all their subjective content, and we could even argue that, through this determinism, they cease to be the reasons of the agent at all - they are merely structural constraints.

The rational choice explanation of action, as we have seen, does not take account of external reasons at all. This, therefore, excludes any analysis of reasons, other than the agents' internal reasons, from action explanations which is not only restrictive but mistaken. Again, we have the problem that

is associated with the internalist/externalist debate that if you can show that some actions result from reasons that are of one type, you necessarily have to reject reasons of other types. This, I would argue, is a false conclusion to draw and a limitation that can be overcome by assessing actions in terms of my three categories.

Hollis, while arguing for the presence of external reasons also fails to consider category (iii) type external reasons at all. In his arguments, in 'The Cunning of Reason' he only refers to category (ii) internalised reasons. It is for this reason that he is unable to account for why agents adopt roles in the first place. He does not seem to appreciate the importance of constraints and enablements, derived from external reasons, which can serve to limit or provide for the range of choices available to the actor in taking on one role rather than another. Whilst I appreciate that Hollis wants to avoid the idea that the agent does not play an active role in deciding how he or she will act, there is nothing in the idea of category (iii) reasons which negates the idea of agency. We do not need to have the agent 'internalising' an external factor to restore the notion of decision-making to the explanation of action in terms of the weighing up of the costs involved.

Subjective and Objective Reasons for Action

It is my contention, therefore, that we should not restrict our analysis of human action to any one type of reason. We should not assume, from the outset, that agents only act according to one category of reason-formation. If we do this, then we will only obtain a partial (or, indeed a mistaken) account of why agents act as they do. Rather than talking only in terms of category (iii) reasons as does Durkheim; or in terms of category (ii) reasons as Hollis seems to do; or even just in terms of category (i) reasons as in the case of rational choice theorists: we should approach the methodology of the social sciences from another perspective. We should begin with the agents own reasons for their actions, but investigate how these reasons are formed on the basis of the three categories I have outlined above. We must not, in other words, presume from the outset (that is, how reasons are formed and how they affect actions) what we are in fact trying to explain.

CONCLUSION

EXPLANATION OR UNDERSTANDING - THE SECOND DICHOTOMY

Introduction

Throughout this thesis I have emphasised what I perceive to be a false dichotomy between internal and external reasons. However, the debate surrounding this issue has revealed another dichotomy that can be questioned, namely, that between explanation and understanding. More precisely, that we have in social theory two traditions which depend on two very different methodologies; prediction and explanation, on one side, versus understanding, on the other. In a rather simplified form this can be re-phrased as the opposition between positivism and hermeneutics as illustrated in the diagram below:-

Positivism

Prediction



Explanation

Hermeneutics

Interpretation of

reasons



Understanding

While I would not disagree that there is a divide between positivism and the type of social theory I am advocating - that is, a theory based on the need to account for action in terms

of the agents' reasons; I am going to suggest that the divide is not between (i) prediction and explanation, on the one hand, and (ii) understanding on the other. Rather it is between (i) prediction and (ii) explanation and understanding. Why, I am going to ask, do we have to exclude the possibility of being able to 'explain' actions if we advocate a methodological approach which begins with an analysis of 'understanding' the reasons the agents have for their actions. Explanation and understanding, I am going to suggest, are not mutually exclusive.

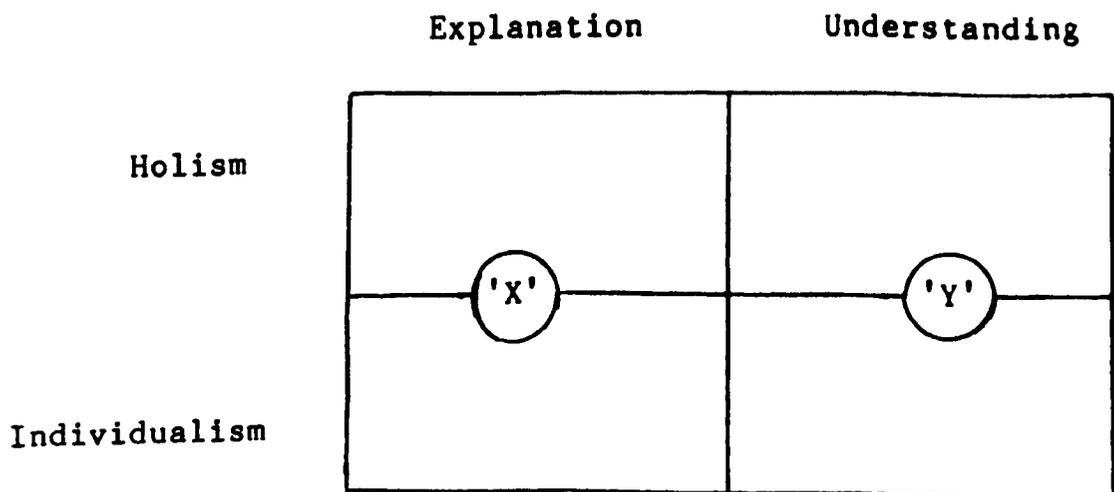
The Dichotomy 'Writ Large'

The title of the book, by Hollis and Smith, Explaining and Understanding International Relations perhaps, more accurately, should be 'Explaining or Understanding', since in it they claim that the social sciences thrive on two intellectual traditions. One story is an 'outsider's' told in the manner of the natural scientist seeking to explain the workings of nature and treating the human realm as part of nature. The other is an insider's, told as to make us understand what the events mean, in a sense distinct from any meaning found in unearthing the laws of nature. What, you may ask, is wrong with this? After all, I too have made the

distinction between positivism and interpretative sociology. Their mistake, it seems to me, is to claim that 'explaining' is the key term in one approach, 'understanding' in the other. (1)

While neither of these two authors advocate extreme individualism or extreme holism, they do argue that: (i) the 'insider' approach is concerned with establishing what the unfolding events mean to the principal actors concerned by reporting their statements, analysing their actions and re-creating their thoughts so as to convey the reasons which account for why each step was taken rather than any other; while (ii) the 'outsider' approach is modelled on the methods of the natural sciences and is usually described as a search for causes. (2)

The diagram below clearly illustrates their argument:-



In this the holism/individualism range is represented on the vertical axis and the explanation/understanding contrast on the horizontal axis, with the actors in their social capacities located on the dividing line, where we can say structure meets action. (3)

The crucial contrast between 'X' and 'Y', according to Hollis and Smith, lies in the stuff of their social worlds. For 'X' the social world is an environment, independent and to some extent predictable. For 'Y' it is a construction consisting of rules and meanings. The contrast brings with it different theories of social action and how to study it. There are, in fact, two stories to tell - one seeks to explain, the other to understand. While, they argue, it is appealing to believe that bits of the two stories can be added together, they maintain that there are always two stories to be told and combinations do not solve the problem. (4)

There are two fundamental arguments I want to put forward, in response to these claims. Firstly, that while there may be two stories to be told, one positivistic and one hermeneutic; Hollis and Smith are mistaken about the 'plots' of the two stories. Instead of seeing the first as concerned with 'explanation' it should be perceived as involving 'prediction', while the second story is about both understanding and

explanation. Secondly, I would dispute the idea that we are unable to both understand reasons for action and explain action within a single methodological approach.

The Positivist Story

One problem with many accounts of action couched in positivistic terms is the acceptance, as I have previously argued, of a Humean account of causality. That is to say that 'A' is the cause of 'B' is to say that the temporal succession of 'A' and 'B' is an instance of a generalisation to the effect that events like 'A' are always followed by events like 'B'. If, then, we maintain that the relationship between reason and action is causal in this sense, then we are claiming that human action is 'predictable' in the same way as behaviour of phenomena in the natural world.

It is this idea of the possibility of prediction in the social sciences which, it seems to me, provides the plot of one 'story' of social action. As we have seen, however, it is one that is rejected, rightly, by many social theorists. As writers such as Davidson and Hollis suggest, generalisations connecting reasons to actions cannot be made into the type of laws upon which accurate predictions about human action can be

made. People do not always act the same way given the same situation. This, however, does not mean that causality needs to be excluded from the social sciences as Winch argued. Rather, as Bhaskar maintained, we should see causes as 'tendencies' both in the natural and the social sciences. In this it is claimed that the possession of a reason, conceived as a more or less long-standing disposition or orientation to act in a certain way, can be a cause; and that if we conceive of reasons in this way they are clearly distinct from actions because they can be possessed even when unexercised and will only be exercised under specific conditions.

In this view, therefore, we cannot predict action in any positivistic way since reasons can only be analysed as 'tendencies' and like all tendencies, they are defeasible in special circumstances or under the pressure of countervailing reasons. However, we can explain actions in terms of reasons without needing reference to predictive laws. In other words, we do not need the positivist story which tells us that we need to be able to predict in order to explain. The 'explanation' of the action is provided by the 'reasons' the agent had for his or her action. We can explain by providing the 'because' in 'he or she acted thus because they had this or that reason(s)'.

The Hermeneutic Story

The other story, according to Hollis and Smith involves 'understanding'. The methodological claim here is that in any analysis of action we need to discover the agents' reasons or motives for acting in one way rather than another. The problem with this 'story' in its extreme form (that is, the type of methodological individualism advocated, for example, by rational choice theorists) is that it takes no account of the influence of 'external factors' on the formation of reasons. It goes to the opposite extreme of Durkheim's holistic approach which relies exclusively on the determining nature of 'social facts', by rejecting altogether what I term category (iii) external reasons. As I have previously argued, however, there is nothing in the idea that we should begin our analysis of action by discovering the agents' reasons that implies that we should restrict our account to the 'internal' reasons of the agent. All this has been covered in some detail. The point is, that 'understanding' does not only involve understanding the agents' internal beliefs and desires, it also entails an understanding of the external conditions in which the agents find themselves. Understanding the agents desires or beliefs may not always explain their actions. A person may possess a

reason to act based on their internal desires and beliefs but not act that way because of their reaction and responses to external factors.

What I also want to emphasise here is the inadequacy of 'understanding' without 'explanation'. Again, we return to the idea of reasons as causes. As Bhaskar points out, if we do not see reasons as causes then reasons are seen as not affecting the sequence of events that actually occur. They 'hover above' and unconnected to whatever it is that actually happens. There is, in other words, little sense in trying to understand reasons unless they also explain the action. The very distinction between 'things that we do' and 'things that just happen to us' becomes impossible to sustain because it is only if we are the 'cause' of some but not other bodily movements that such a contrast can be made and that we can properly be said to act at all. What is the point, in other words, of 'understanding' the agents' reasons (however they are formed) unless we accept that these reasons provide the 'explanation' for these agents' action. The second story, therefore, is not about 'understanding' alone. It is about 'understanding' the reasons agents have for their actions and about 'explaining' these actions in terms of these reasons.

The Explanation/Understanding Debate

Hollis and Smith conclude their book by entering into a debate concerning the relative merits of methods that proceed on the basis of 'understanding' or on the basis of 'explaining'. (5) What becomes clear in this is their determination to draw a sharp distinction between the two. This is very apparent in Smith's contention that although he believes in the existence of structures as providing the best explanation of social life, this does not mean that he is committed to seeing them as fully 'determining' or as 'timeless'. So far so good. But he goes on to say that, at the end of the day, he and Hollis have two very different views of social action. Smith maintains that his fits broadly within the 'Explaining' mode, Hollis' within the 'Understanding' mode. These different views, he argues, entail fundamentally different distinct (and mutually exclusive) views of the individual and of the social world. (6) The question is whether this is really a conclusion we need to draw?

I have already argued that the contrast between explanation and understanding illustrated by the vertical axis on Smith and Hollis' diagram is misconceived. What I also want to maintain is that the horizontal axis showing the holism/individualism

range is far too extreme. If, however, we add a third dimension - that of methodological collectivism, then we can avoid the problems associated with the type of two-dimensional model that Smith and Hollis seem to be advocating.

As I have tried to argue throughout this thesis, we do not need to perceive the understanding and explanation of action in terms of either the constraining or facilitating aspect of social structures or the internal reasons agents have for their actions. The type of collectivism I am advocating allows for both aspects and does not see them as 'polarities' - as two different 'kinds' of explanation. Rather, it maintains that 'emergent factors' exist and do influence actions in the sense that they may place obstacles in the way of the agent to perform an action which is desired by that agent or by providing the agent with no obstacles to their desired action. This, though, does not imply any form of holism whereby the agent is 'determined' by social factors. The agent faces these external factors as 'real', as having an existence which is outside his or her internal beliefs and desires, but the agent still has a 'choice' whether or not to be influenced by these factors.

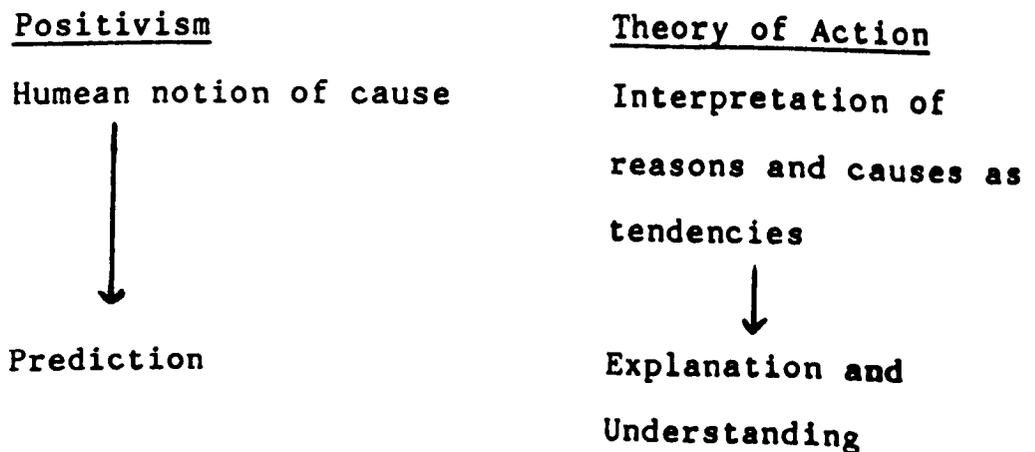
Let us take the analogy used by Smith and Hollis. Hollis claims that enablements and constraints are initially like a hand of cards one is dealt. But in social life not all the enablements or constraints are fully specified in advance of play. How the game turns out depends on how well one plays the hand. Smith responds to this by saying that the analogy can be taken two ways. Hollis' conception, he argues, means that the way one plays the hand determines, in part, the outcome. However, Smith wants to maintain that his reading is simply that an awful lot of people get dealt very poor cards, hands so bad that no matter what their skill they cannot do much to improve their lot. Talking about 'skill', he maintains, places responsibility on individuals for changing their lot, whereas in reality they cannot do so. (7)

These two views, for Smith, are radically different and illustrate two opposing views of the relationship between the agent and the social structure. However, I would contend that the basic argument behind both interpretations is the same. That is, that agents are born into particular social situations which provide the objective conditions that help 'form' their reasons for their actions; but, also, that agents are capable of making 'subjective' decisions in the light of the situations in which they find themselves on the basis of the 'weighing up

of the costs' involved. If we accept that agents make decisions in terms of the 'opportunity costs' they may have to pay in order to act or not act in certain ways; and, taking Smith's point, that for some the costs may be higher than for others; this allows us to accept both the influence of external conditions on agents' actions and the agents' participation in the 'game' (Hollis' words, not mine) that they are playing.

This places a new light on Smith's next comment. He concedes that there is a tempting compromise for both of them to accept that individuals have some room for manoeuvre but are also constrained, and that they differ 'only' about the degree of latitude individuals have. That is, that individuals are subject to external influences but can still use skill and judgement to make actual choices. Smith insists, however, that such a combination of views is not possible since one sees 'Understanding' as the key to analysis, while the other sees no need to resort to 'Understanding' as a necessary constituent of analysis, preferring instead the analysis of 'Explaining'. The implication of this is that, in all discussions of social life, there are always and inevitably two stories to be told - one that concentrates on 'Understanding' the other that concentrates on 'Explaining'. (8) Also, presumably, one that is primarily individualistic and one that is more holist in orientation.

I hope, however, to have demonstrated, firstly: (i) that explanation and understanding are not mutually exclusive elements in the analysis of social action, but necessary components of it; and (ii) that while there may be two stories to be told the dichotomy is not between explanation or understanding, but between prediction or explanation and understanding. The diagram outlined earlier, therefore, should be revised as illustrated below.



In the second place, I hope to have shown that the other dichotomy between externalist and internalist accounts of action is also inadequate. That the 'compromise' Smith refers to (that is, that agents are subject to external influences, but are still able to use their own skill and judgement in making choices) is not a compromise at all. Rather, it is a

realistic assessment of what actually occurs in the world. We do not, in other words, need to place the actors in their social capacities on some indeterminate dividing line between 'holism' and 'individualism' (9), rather we can accept that 'reasons for actions' may be formed on the basis of both the internal desires and beliefs of the agent and the influence of external factors on how these reasons are formed.

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

- (1) Hollis, M. and Smith, S: **Explaining and Understanding International Relations**, 1990, p. 1.
- (2) Ibid. pp. 3 & 4.
- (3) Ibid. pp. 4 & 5.
- (4) Ibid. pp. 6 & 7.
- (5) Ibid. chapter 9.
- (6) Ibid. p. 210.
- (7) Ibid. pp. 209 & 210.
- (8) Ibid. pp. 210 & 211.
- (9) Ibid. p. 5.

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