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THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE:  
A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE  
IN THE WRITINGS OF G. W. ALLPORT, S. E. ASCH, ERICH FROMM,  
A. H. MASLOW, AND C. R. ROGERS

By  
Isaac Franck

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of the University of Maryland in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree  
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1966

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### APPROVAL SHEET

Title of Thesis: THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE: A PHILOSOPHICAL  
ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE IN  
THE WRITINGS OF G. W. ALLPORT, S. E. ASCH,  
ERICH FROMM, A. H. MASLOW, AND C. R. ROGERS

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## PREFACE

A word of explanation appears necessary in connection with my use of the terms "social psychology" and "social psychologists" with reference to the writings and the writers under discussion in this dissertation. Surely these men and their work are less than fully typical of the mainstream of what today goes under the name "social psychology," with its preoccupation with problems of communication, interaction, socialization, social norms and roles, reference groups, attitudes, propaganda, etc. None the less, the work of these men does fit into what appears to me is the essence of social psychology, namely, the study of human behavior in its social context, in the interhuman situation. And since I needed some shorthand term by which to refer to the group under discussion and to those aspects of their work which are more or less generic to all of them, the terms "social psychology" and "social psychologists" seemed not too improper a rubric to adopt for this purpose.

Several persons gave invaluable help in connection with the preparation of this thesis, and I wish to express to them my warm gratitude. Above all I am grateful to Professor W. E. Schlaretzki, who read critically the first draft of each chapter as it came out of my typewriter, corrected errors, pointed out deficiencies, suggested



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improvements, gave me encouragement, and showed great patience and never-failing graciousness. The thesis is much improved because of his help, though I am sure that there are still numerous points on which he disagrees with my views.

Professor May Brodbeck, of the University of Minnesota, very kindly read the long chapter on Freud, as well as two sections of the chapter on methodological problems. She pointed out one downright mistake, and made two or three important substantive suggestions which resulted in clarification and improved organization of the material.

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My wife, in addition to her infinite patience, constant encouragement, and judiciously frequent prodding, read the successive drafts of the chapters was intolerant of obscurities, made me chop up many long and involved sentences into shorter ones, and suggested many stylistic improvements. In addition, she did the proof reading of the final typing of the text, and assembled and organized the Bibliography.

My typist, Mrs. Irma Einheber, showed not only great skill and competence, but also meticulous attention to detail, admirable perseverance, and incredible stamina in working under pressure.



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It should be noted that all emphases shown in quotations are the emphases of the authors of these quotations, unless otherwise indicated by the parenthetical phrase "(emphasis mine)."

Isaac Franck



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### I

The sector of contemporary social psychology which is represented by the writers whose work forms the subject of the present inquiry is a psychology of revolt, and much of its rebellious energy is directed against the alleged domination of the field by two schools, the Behaviorist and the Freudian. Abraham H. Maslow writes about "the two comprehensive theories . . . most influencing psychology until recently . . . the Freudian and the experimentalist-positivistic-behavioristic."<sup>1</sup> Solomon E. Asch declares that "Today the guiding ideas of social psychology stem principally from two movements--behaviorism and psychoanalysis."<sup>2</sup> The errors attributed to these two older psychologies are many and varied. However, the principal charge is that Behaviorism and Freudianism, though they are distinguished from other, more limited psychologies by having offered "two comprehensive theories of human nature,"<sup>3</sup> their theories of human nature are

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<sup>1</sup>Abraham H. Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1952), p. vi.

<sup>2</sup>Solomon E. Asch, Social Psychology (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1952), p. ix.

<sup>3</sup>Maslow, op. cit., p. vi.



inadequate, and on many matters largely mistaken. Asch, discussing Freudianism and Behaviorism, says that

In tracing the effects of these doctrines I have come to the conclusion that in spite of the importance of their contributions they have not supplied an adequate foundation for a social psychology, and that their accounts of human motives and intelligence must be re-evaluated.<sup>4</sup>

And according to Maslow,

The various behaviorisms do not generate any such definition [of man, and the differences between man and any other species, between man and objects, and between man and robots], at least none that can be taken seriously. (What would an S-R man be like?) Freud's picture of man was clearly unsuitable, leaving out as it did his aspirations, his realizable hopes, his Godlike qualities.<sup>5</sup>

It therefore should have occasioned no surprise when Maslow, in a recent book, announced a coalition of the rebels into a new force:

these various groups [of rebels against Freudianism and Behaviorism] have been coalescing into a third, increasingly comprehensive theory of human nature, into what might be called a 'Third Force.'<sup>6</sup>

In the inquiry which follows I have undertaken a philosophical examination of what several of the social psychologists in this "Third Force" group, as well as two or three others, say or assume about the nature of man. This inquiry concentrates principally on the work of Gordon W. Allport, Solomon E. Asch, Erich Fromm, Abraham H. Maslow, and Carl R. Rogers. I also make use, as ancillary material,

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<sup>4</sup>Asch, op. cit., p. ix.

<sup>5</sup>Abraham H. Maslow, "Existential Psychology: What's in It for Us," Existential Psychology, ed. Pollo May (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 56.

<sup>6</sup>Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, loc. cit.



of the writings of some Gestalt psychologists, notably Kurt Goldstein and Wolfgang Köhler, of Gardner Murphy and Henry A. Murray, and of some of the so-called existentialist psychologists.

This is not an empirical inquiry into the nature of man. Rather, it is a philosophical inquiry into the presence or absence of an explicit or implicit conception of human nature, that is assumed or employed by these social psychologists, and that may serve to guide or determine their investigations and researches. It is an inquiry into the findings or conclusions this group may reach concerning the nature of man; into the methodological character of the concept of human nature present or assumed in their writings; and into the relationship of this concept to the ethical or socio-political commitments of this group of social psychologists.

That the "nature of man" has always been a subject of major philosophical interest and importance, is a truism. Man's curiosity about the world, and his search for knowledge, have always included the search for self-knowledge, for the knowledge and understanding of man. In addition to seeking this as knowledge for its own sake, it has almost always been assumed that knowledge of the nature of man is needed for, indeed, is a necessary condition for, probing the most important problems of ethics, morality, and interhuman relations, and for establishing the foundations of a just social and political order.



. . . there must be acknowledged to be an infrangible bond between what man values or feels obligated to do and what is characteristic of his psychological nature.

The extent to which this assumption is justified or unjustified, and the nature of this "infrangible bond," are subjects clamoring for investigation.

Theories of human nature have appeared, explicitly or implicitly, in the writings of the great philosophers, and of the great social and political theorists, from Plato through Marx, and down to our own day. But on the whole these have been speculative theories of the nature of man, with little grounding in systematic empirical study of human behavior. In contradistinction to these, much of contemporary social psychology, including that written by the psychologists included in our inquiry, has claimed, or at least has aspired, to be empiricist and even experimentalist. It is therefore of philosophical interest to take a good look at a group of contemporary social psychologists, and to subject their assumptions, their concepts, and their conclusions with respect to the nature of man to philosophical analysis and criticism.

This inquiry will include an examination and evaluation of the critique directed by these social psychologists against the Behaviorist and Freudian conceptions of human

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<sup>7</sup>Maurice Mandelbaum, The Phenomenology of Moral Experience (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1955), p. 306.



nature. It will attempt to show that, whereas their rejection of the Behaviorist, Stimulus-Response conception of human nature appears to be well-grounded, their attack on Freudianism is not. However, I will also attempt to show, in its proper place, that the renewed emphasis by the social psychologists under discussion on some of the "optimistic" ingredients in human nature contributes a needed corrective to some of the exaggerations of Freudianism and its many misinterpreters.

In connection with the analysis and evaluation of the concept of human nature explicitly present or implicit in the writings of our group of social psychologists, I shall attempt to examine briefly and comment on several methodological problems, such as (a) Allport's advocacy of the idiographic as against the nomothetic study of man; (b) Some of the issues between psychology and sociology; (c) Is the concept of human nature necessary in the social sciences? (d) Can human nature be changed? (e) Is the definition of human nature sought by this group of social psychologists a "real definition" or a "nominal definition?" (f) What kind of units are being employed in the effort to define human nature? After an inventory of the units or elements stressed by our social psychologists as constitutive of human nature, an attempt will be made to distill the image of man that may be attributed to them. I shall then try to show that their criticism and misinterpretations of Freud are part and parcel



of the one-sided, distorted, utopian image of human nature held by the social psychologists under discussion.

In analyzing these distortions of the image of man, it is my hope to show that they are a product of the confusion on the part of the social psychologists under discussion, between their roles as descriptive social psychologists, and another role they enact, namely, that of disguised moralists who espouse certain ethical and social goals. It is my contention that, in spite of their claims to being empirical scientists, they single out for attention and special emphasis certain aspects of human nature because of their own ethical commitments. Starting from certain preconceptions of what are good, or right, or beneficent psychological motivations, needs, traits, dispositions, or propensities, our social psychologists concentrate their research and writing on them, and advance the descriptive claim that these propensities are constitutive of human nature. Then, committing a glaringly obvious petitio principii, they proceed to suggest or imply that some of these propensities may serve as ethical norms or guides for conduct, or that ethical norms and guides for conduct may be deduced from them. Their enterprise is thus to a substantial extent normative rather than descriptive. Much of their quest is for what man ought to be rather than for what man is.

Their procedure thus raises the old philosophical problem as to whether normative, ethical prescriptions can



be deduced from descriptions of human nature or its constituents. Their procedure also raises another problem, namely, whether their assumption is correct that the existence in human nature of the propensities which they consider good or beneficent is a necessary condition for a free, democratic, and humane social order. I shall try to argue on the side of those philosophers who maintain that from descriptions of human nature it is impossible to deduce moral prescriptions as to ends or goals of human action. However, I shall argue that it may be possible to deduce from the facts of human nature prescriptions as to what means may be effectively employed to fulfill ethical ends that had been independently chosen. I shall further try to show that the attempts of some of our social psychologists to deduce ethical norms as to ends or goals, from man's psychological propensities, are self-refuting. In conclusion, I shall try to show that the units or propensities in terms of which human nature is analyzed are in themselves ethically neutral; and also that the presence in human nature of propensities which are generally regarded as good or beneficent, is not a necessary conditions without which a democratic social order would not be possible.



## II

The terms "human nature," or "the nature of man," or simply the universal, general term "man" occur frequently in the recent and contemporary literature of social psychology. However, even a most cursory perusal of this literature is enough to throw into bold relief some of the confusions and conflicts surrounding this term and this concept. At one extreme of the spectrum there are those who reject the concept out of hand, as unscientific. Examples of this rejection are the following:

The term 'human nature' is a dangerous one to use scientifically because it is a popular term and, as such, may mean all things to all men.

Most generalizations about our psychological human nature run into contradictory instances. . . . The term human nature is forceful. . . . It will not be easy to arrive at technical definitions that are independent of popular definitions when the term is as persuasive as human nature.

The term 'human nature' is herewith being abandoned . . . in favor of the less confusing and less contradiction-encrusted term 'personality norms.' . . . In recent years the term 'human nature' has lost its implication of universality and has become redefined to mean the typical personality attributes of the members of a particular group . . .

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<sup>8</sup> H. Newcomb, Social Psychology (New York: The Dryden Press, 1950), p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Brown, Words and Things (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 361-63.

<sup>10</sup> Richard T. LaPiere and Paul R. Farnsworth, Social Psychology (3rd ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949), p. 221 and footnote.





. . . we do away permanently with a uniform and constant 'human nature' which can be counted on to behave in a uniform manner under all conditions.<sup>11</sup> This assumption has been in use for a long time.

Some of the confusions and contradictions scattered along the broad spectrum of views on the concept of human nature are summarized with disconcerting effectiveness by Solomon E. Asch:

. . . it is not surprising to find schematic and contradictory views thronging this no-man's land of science. Human nature is unchangeable; there is no human nature; it is an X that changes with historical conditions. Society enslaves men; in it alone they can find freedom. Groups are fictions and only individuals are real; groups have a reality higher than that of individuals. Society is created by sympathy and cooperation; at the root of society are destructive impulses. Men are conformists, infiltrated by the Trojan horse of social influences; they are rebels against society.<sup>12</sup>

At the other extreme of the spectrum, away from those who reject the concept altogether, we find, among others, the group of social psychologists who are the subjects of the present inquiry. The concept of human nature is, in the writings of our social psychologists, of the greatest importance. They assert one or both of the following two propositions:

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<sup>11</sup> Abraham Kardiner, The Psychological Frontiers of Society (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), p. 415. Later in this inquiry the question will be discussed whether the notion of a human nature which would "behave in a uniform manner under all conditions" makes any kind of sense, and whether any psychologist ever propounded such a notion.

<sup>12</sup> Asch, Social Psychology, p. viii.



- (1). The search for the psychological nature of man, the formulation of a psychological theory of human nature, is the principal task of social psychology.
- (2) Some theory of human nature, some assumptions concerning the psychological nature of man, are implicit in every system of social psychology.

If we return to Asch, we find him affirming these two propositions interrelatedly:

If we scrutinize closely the several social disciplines we shall find that they in fact make assumptions, either tacit or explicit, about the psychological structure of man . . . the starting point of all inquiries about social processes is in definite assumptions about the goals and capacities of individuals. At the center of society is man himself . . . at the basis of all social disciplines there must be a comprehensive conception of human nature. . . . The central task of human psychology is to formulate a theory of man based on the direct observation and study of human action and experience in relation to the physical and social milieu. It is the goal of psychology to furnish a comprehensive doctrine of man, one that will provide a tested foundation for the social sciences . . . psychology takes as its aim the formation of a theory of man based on systematic observation and, <sup>13</sup>where possible, the method of experimentation.

Allport's concern with the nature of man as a key concept in social psychology produces substantially the same two propositions as those asserted by Asch:

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<sup>13</sup>ibid., pp. 4-5.



All books on the psychology of personality are at the same time books on the philosophy of the person. It could not be otherwise. A writer who decides that one theory of learning, or of motivation, is better than another is thereby endorsing one view of the nature of man at the expense of other views. In most psychological texts, however, the philosophy is hidden . . . the present volume . . . invites the reader to note the philosophical consequences of endorsing one psychological interpretation rather than another.

Or again,

Theories of learning (like much else in psychology) rest on the investigator's conception of the nature of man. In other words, every learning theorist is a philosopher, though he may not know it. To put the matter more concretely, psychologists who investigate (and theorize about) learning start with some preconceived view of the nature of human motivation.

Having asserted the second of the two propositions formulated above, namely, that assumptions concerning the psychological nature of man are present in all psychological theories, Allport proceeds to deplore the fact that "present-day psychology has no consistent theory of the nature of man," and four pages later sets forth his view that "the most crucial issue in all psychological theory" is "the question concerning the nature of man."<sup>14</sup>

In an earlier book too, Allport had affirmed the same two propositions, as follows:

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<sup>14</sup> Gordon W. Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1961), p. xi, and pp. 84, 245, 249.



Psychologists gravitate toward one or another philosophical assumption regarding the nature of man, often without being fully aware that they do so.

The goal of psychology is to reduce discord among our philosophies of man, and to establish a scale of probable truth, so that we may feel increasingly certain that one interpretation is truer than another.<sup>15</sup>

Erich Fromm in his first book described the task of psychology as follows:

Human nature, though being the product of historical evolution, has certain inherent mechanisms and laws, to discover which is the task of psychology.<sup>16</sup>

Fromm reiterates the same proposition in his two subsequent major books, except that in the later books it is no longer only the science of psychology, but rather "the science of man" that has it as its task to formulate a description or definition of human nature:

The subject of the science of man is human nature. But this science does not start out with a full and adequate picture of what human nature is; a satisfactory definition of its subject matter is its aim, not its premise. Its method is to observe the reactions of man to various individual and social conditions and from observation of these reactions to make inferences about man's nature.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Gordon W. Allport, Becoming (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), pp. 7 and 17.

<sup>16</sup>Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941), p. 15.

<sup>17</sup>Erich Fromm, Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1947), p. 23



It is true that our knowledge of man is still so incomplete that we cannot yet give a satisfactory definition of man in a psychological sense. It is the task of the 'science of man' to arrive eventually at a correct description<sup>18</sup> of what deserves to be called human nature.

In the case of Maslow, we find his preoccupation with the concept of human nature reflected in his assertion of both of the propositions referred to above:

I am afraid that a number of psychologists are . . . working with erroneous preconceptions and unconscious assumptions about human nature . . . which, because they are implicit and unconscious, can maintain and perpetuate themselves beyond the reach of testing for a considerable time to come. Meanwhile they are projected by the psychologist upon his 'data.'

First of all and most important of all is the strong belief that man has an essential nature of his own, some skeleton of psychological structure that may be treated and discussed analogously with his physical structure . . .

We have, each of us, an essential biologically based inner nature, which is to some degree 'natural,' intrinsic, given, and, in a certain limited sense, unchangeable, or, at least, unchanging.

Each person's inner nature is in part unique to himself and in part species-wide.

<sup>18</sup> Erich Fromm, The Sane Society (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1955), p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, Motivation and Personality (New York: Harper & Bros, 1954), p. 353.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 340.



It is possible to study this inner nature scientifically and to discover what it is like-- (not invent--discover).<sup>21</sup>

It is thus clear that Asch, Allport, Fromm, and Maslow ascribe great importance to the concept of human nature, and assign to it a major role in psychological theory. Carl Rogers and Gardner Murphy are similarly at that end of the spectrum of psychological theories where there is pronounced preoccupation with the concept of human nature. In an essay entitled "The Nature of Man" Rogers declares:

I do not discover man to be, in his basic nature, completely without a nature, a tabula rasa on which anything can be written, nor malleable putty which can be shaped into any form. . . . In my experience I have discovered man to have characteristics which seem inherent in his species . . .<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, in this same paper, as well as in others, Rogers severely criticizes both the Freudian and the Stimulus-Response theories of human nature.

From a somewhat different perspective, Gardner Murphy, in a somewhat rhapsodic and highly speculative attempt to foresee man's future evolution, plots his predictions in terms of "Three Kinds of Human Nature" that have appeared in the course of man's history, and concludes

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<sup>21</sup> Maslow, Toward A Psychology of Being, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Carl R. Rogers, "The Nature of Man," The Nature of Man in Theological and Psychological Perspective, ed. Simon Doniger (New York: Harper & Bros, 1962), p. 91.



with an adumbration of "The Human Natures of the Future."

He characterizes his book as :

an effort to describe the sources available within human nature for the outgrowing of human nature, the constitution of new varieties of human thought, value, and aspiration.<sup>23</sup>

But he acknowledges regretfully that

We do not know what human nature is. We have a limited glimpse only of certain historical and social expressions of it, and a few techniques for learning more about it.<sup>24</sup>

Out of these extensive quotations we may thus extract the following three observations:

(1) The social psychologists under discussion all agree in assigning to social psychology the task of formulating a psychological theory of human nature.

(2) Allport, Asch, and Maslow explicitly contend, and Fromm and Rogers clearly imply, that some assumptions concerning the psychological nature of man, some theory of human nature, underlie every social-psychological theory.

(3) All but Murphy are, as pointed out above, explicitly and severely critical of the conceptions of human nature present in the recent Behaviorist, Stimulus-Response, Experimental psychologies, and in Freudian psychology. It would therefore seem to me that it will be most instructive if we begin to work our way toward an understanding of the

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<sup>23</sup> Gardner Murphy, Human Potentialities (New York: Basic Books, 1958), p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-12.



theory of human nature espoused by our group of social psychologists by means, at first, of a presentation and analysis of some of the major thrusts in their attack against the Behaviorist and Freudian theories of man. Accordingly, I shall attempt to deal in the next chapter with their critique of the Behaviorist, Stimulus-Response, Experimentalist theory of human nature, and devote the following chapter to a discussion and analysis of their attack on the Freudian conception of man.





## CHAPTER II

### CRITIQUE OF THE BEHAVIORIST, STIMULUS-RESPONSE THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE

The social psychologists under discussion do not, on the whole, attempt to draw any distinctions between Behaviorist psychology, Stimulus-Response psychology, and so-called Experimental psychology. Rather, they tend to lump them together and treat them as a single "school," or as representative of a comprehensive, generic psychological theory. They use the above-mentioned three names interchangeably, as well as two or three others, such as associationism, environmentalism, elementarism, etc. For the purposes of the present inquiry there is no reason for not following Allport and the others in speaking of this group of psychological theories as if they constituted a single comprehensive theory. For the sake of brevity I shall adopt Allport's convention of using the abbreviation S-R as an umbrella symbol for the Behaviorist, Stimulus-Response, and so-called experimental psychologies.

The gravamen of the critique directed by our social psychologists against the S-R theory of human nature is that it "depict(s) man as a reactive robot."<sup>1</sup> More specifically

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<sup>1</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, pp. xi-xii.



the attack may be said to concentrate chiefly on three aspects of the S-R theory:

- a) Theory of Learning
- b) Theory of Motivation
- c) Over-all, or Ultimate Explanation of Human Behavior

a) Critique of S-R Theory of Learning

S-R psychology assumes man to be a largely empty, quasi-mechanical organism, "pushed and pulled by external forces,"<sup>2</sup> and by a few physiological needs, such as the needs for food, water and sex, which are referred to as primary needs or drives. All human action is acquired or learned. The paradigm of learning is represented as "a process of trial and error guided by the operation of reward and punishment."<sup>3</sup> From birth, the human organism makes all kinds of responses to internal stimuli from the primary drives, and to external stimuli. Some of these response-actions of the organism are "rewarded," i. e., some response-actions bring satisfaction of one or more of the primary drives. As an action is repeated and the reward that follows it is likewise repeated, it is "stamped in," it is learned, as an action that will lead to a reward. Similarly, if a response-action is followed

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 92.



by pain, or by deprivation of the satisfaction of one or more primary drives, then this too, with repetition, is stamped in, and avoidance of this specific action is learned. This is Thorndike's well-known Law of Effect, more recently called The Principle of Reinforcement,<sup>4</sup> which states that a stimulus-response sequence (an S-R connection) is automatically strengthened if followed by a reward.

According to the S-R image of man, the above model serves to explain all human learning, and indeed all human actions, including social actions. For, our social responses and actions are nothing but indirect ways of securing for the individual person more primary drive gratifications, and avoidance of physiological pain. This is the reason they have been learned. To quote Asch, the S-R theorists conclude

that social motives, such as cooperation, submission, and dominance, are reactions that derive their potency from the fact that they are instrumental to primary need gratification; they are techniques to secure for the individual 'more food, drink, sex; less pain and the like.' Consequently they describe mutual help, cooperation, and self-assertion as techniques for securing more adequate biological satisfaction, and submission as a technique for avoiding physical pain and injury.<sup>5</sup>

This process is sometimes called "secondary reinforcement." According to Thorndike, the process is sufficient for the

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<sup>4</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 95 and passim.

<sup>5</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, pp. 13, 95.



explanation of the entire broad range of human actions. He states this categorically and succinctly:

They [repetition and reward] are the only forces I shall use to account for anything in man's work.<sup>6</sup>

Like all theories of learning, this one too, Allport reminds us, "is tied to our view of the nature of man. Specifically, if we think of man as a thing, pushed and pulled by external forces . . . we seek for quasi-mechanical principles of learning."<sup>7</sup> These quasi-mechanical theories, Allport reminds us, "try to empty the organism of inner teleological forces (much as . . . attitudes, intentions, purposes)."<sup>8</sup>

This "empty organism" assumption in S-R psychology, with its model taken in part from the study of animal behavior, implies that the human organism has no conative, cognitive, creative energies of its own. It is virtually empty except for a few primary physiological drives, and its behavior is purely reactive, purely a series of responses or reactions to the pushes of external stimuli or of the internal stimuli of hunger, thirst, sex needs, etc. Erich Fromm, directing his attack against a variety of theories, but "also against those theories that are more or less

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<sup>6</sup>E. L. Thorndike, The Psychology of Wants, Interests and Attitudes (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1935), p. 24. (Quoted by Asch, ibid., p. 94.)

<sup>7</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 108.

<sup>8</sup>ibid., p. 86.



tinged with behavioristic psychology," makes the same point in his assertion that "common to all these theories is the assumption that human nature has no dynamism of its own."<sup>9</sup>

Allport pursues this line of attack more persistently, in relation to his theory of personality. In an extended, quasi-technical footnote he points out that

The weakness of the S-R formula is that it fails to allow for the enormously intricate internal organization that occurs when the stimulus is perceived, thought about, channeled into one rather than another pathway, receiving the imprint of personality along the way, before finally issuing into action.

When, Allport continues, instead of S-R, an S-O-R formula is proposed, O standing for "internal organization" and suggesting the existence of "determining tendencies" within the organism, the S-R "methodologists" reply, according to Allport, that, since we cannot know precisely what O is, it would be better to refer to it merely as an "intervening variable." However, Allport says, if pressed as to the kind of intervening variable is implied here, even the strictest S-R methodologist will

admit that he has in mind such possible 'constructs' as drives, habits, attitudes, traits. The few extremists who try to approach psychology on the strict S-R basis ('empty organism') generally work with pigeons or rats . . . <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 345, n. 12.



The S-R view of man as a purely reactive being, Allport points out, is woven into the very fabric of the vocabulary of recent psychology. He notes that a large number of key terms in psychological literature begin with the prefix re, e. g., receptor, reaction, response, reflex, repression, repetition, reward, reinforcement, regression. Allport suggests that these terms connote "a passivity of human nature (which receives and reacts to outside pressures), and a retracing or reinstatement of past conditions."<sup>11</sup> Such terms, Allport claims, "are far more common--perhaps a hundred times more common--than terms with pro prefixes" in the lexicon of psychology. Terms which begin with pro, such as proactive, programming, propriate, proceeding, promise, production, proficiency, suggest "futurity, intention, forward thrust" according to Allport. Thus, he concludes, while human lives are oriented to the future, to intention, to planning, and while each of us feels that he is "spontaneously active," many psychologists tell us "that we are only reactive."<sup>12</sup>

Here some of the preconceptions concerning the nature of man, held by Allport and the other social psychologists under discussion, become manifest. A human being is

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 206, 550, and Allport, Personality and Social Encounter (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), pp. 40-41.



not an empty organism. He does display purpose, intention, striving. What he learns and does cannot, most often, be explained by the mechanical Law of Effect, but only by these other ingredients in his psychological constitution. Man's playful, exploratory, risk-taking activities in situations in which these activities are a departure from well-established, previously "successful" responses, simply do not fit into the reward-punishment paradigm. Allport's illustration of the chess player who generally wins when he uses the king's pawn opening, but nevertheless takes the risks of trying new and novel gambits, can be multiplied many times.

Moreover, this quasi-mechanical, reward-punishment theory of learning completely ignores man's cognitive or intellectual functions. It tries to explain learning in terms of the formation of an alleged bond between "two happenings that have initially nothing to do with each other and are joined arbitrarily,"<sup>13</sup> only through the relation of succession in time:

All that we know is of the form: when a happens b will follow. From the standpoint of the organism the sequence of events is regular and blind; the why and wherefore of the particular sequence is entirely hidden.<sup>14</sup>

According to the Law of Effect, any mode of action arises and is strengthened automatically in the nervous

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<sup>13</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 96.



system, without any recourse to cognition, understanding, insight, or perception of relations.<sup>15</sup> These quasi-mechanical principles

overlook such factors as a person's deliberate intent to learn, his effort, his striving, and his ability to perceive the fitness or appropriateness of an act for his purposes. There are no planning and no guiding self-image to steer and intensify the learning. Such factors are not allowed for, and yet they are of prime importance in the learning process.<sup>16</sup>

Much of the critique of the image of man in S-R learning theory, as well as S-R theory of motivation (as we shall see below), is packed into the reiterated observation by our social psychologists that S-R psychology, in its approach to the study of man, uses the study of infra-human organisms, the study of animals, as its basic model. Since presumably animal learning conforms to the Law of Effect, reward-punishment paradigm, S-R psychology simply assumed that human behavior can be explained by the same model. To quote Allport,

This view says that every basic feature of human nature can be studied without essential loss among lower species. Since man is an animal, why not take animals that are simpler--the rat for instance--as a prototype of the more complicated animal? Species equivalence is widely accepted in contemporary psychology . . .<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Allport, Growth and Pattern in Personality, pp. 96-97.

<sup>17</sup> Allport, Becoming, p. 10.





Asch in turn points out that the S-R formulation of the learning process

was based primarily on the interpretation of the problem-solving activities of infrahuman organisms but was given a general application and extended to the human level.<sup>18</sup>

The result of this use of animal behavior as a model for the study of man was, according to Asch

a dehumanization of the concept of man, which dominates much of current thought and from which psychology has by no means recovered. . . . The effort . . . directed to forming a psychology based primarily on the study of lower organisms, the principles of which were generalized to the human level . . . was marked by a radical omission or devaluation of specifically human characteristics.<sup>19</sup>

While Maslow often emphasizes man's continuity with the animal world, he also warns against overstressing this continuity "without at the same time stressing the profound differences between the human species and all others."<sup>20</sup>

As to the use of animal behavior as a model for the study of man, Maslow makes the wry point that when it was first shown that a rat was able to learn a maze almost as well as a human being, "the maze should have been dropped once and for all as an instrument for the study of learning."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>20</sup>Maslow, Motivation and Personality, p. 139.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 372.



Using a maze, says Maslow, is like measuring the height of people "who are bent over in a room with a low ceiling. . . . All that a maze does is measure a low ceiling and not the height to which learning and thinking may go."<sup>22</sup>

It should always be kept in mind that the use of animals guarantees in advance the neglect of just those capacities which are uniquely human, for example, martyrdom, self-sacrifice, shame, love, humor, art, beauty, conscience, guilt, patriotism, ideals, the production of poetry or philosophy or music or science.<sup>23</sup>

Asch, commenting on the practice of studying human nature on the basis of experiments with animals, makes the telling point that many S-R psychologists "today have a point of departure which follows the curious doctrine that man is directly descended from the white rat."<sup>24</sup> And another psychologist, Sigmund Koch, formulates this same critique of S-R psychology succinctly as follows:

For the possibility must be faced that the putting of questions in the strategy and logic of general behavior analysis to rats can settle few such questions except for rats.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 373.

<sup>24</sup> Solomon E. Asch, "A Perspective on Social Psychology," Psychology: A Study of a Science, ed. Sigmund Koch (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), III, 368.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted by R. S. Peters, The Concept of Motivation (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960, Second Impression), p. 27.



Asch pursues further the implications of this S-R image of man derived from the study of infrahuman behavior by pointing out its impact on social theory. The very method implicit in the use of animal behavior as the model for studying man represented, according to Asch, "an attempt to proceed directly from biology to a social psychology and a theory of society."<sup>26</sup> The logic of this methodology leads to the same type of reductionism in social theory that we noted earlier in the S-R explanation of individual human behavior. All interhuman relationships, the dynamics of groups and societies, indeed, all of history, are reduced to and explained as nothing more than complicated methods for individuals to satisfy their primary, biological needs for food, water, sex, etc. The complexities of social life contain nothing new or different from the primary biological drives and their fulfillment. The apparent pursuit of other ends or purposes within social life is only a kind of charade which disguises the real character of this social behavior, namely, its being the indirect pursuit of the primary biological goals. Social life can be exhaustively explained, without remainder, in terms of the animal model of the pursuit of food, water, sexual gratification, and the avoidance of physical pain. Here is Asch's statement of the results of proceeding "directly from biology . . . to a theory of society":

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<sup>26</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 11.



We find here . . . the bold claim that the fact of society, the course of history, the growth of thought have introduced no new ends, that for all of man's achievements his ends remain the same as those of infra-human organisms. He differs from these only in the possession of a superstructure, of an elaborate set of tools, material and psychological. Human activities are either consummations of primary needs or means to their consummation. If we find in society what appear to be other needs or ends, say for companionship or knowledge, we must trace them to their instrumental value for primary needs. There can be nothing new in the way of purpose and aspiration. The crux of the doctrine is to deny this possibility; there can be only more circuitous ways of satisfying primary needs.<sup>27</sup>

The social actions of men, all their social concerns and values, are therefore, in the S-R explanation, purely instrumental. A corollary that follows from this doctrine, as Asch makes clear, is that "men utilize each other as they utilize other objects." "People are simply sources of stimulation that make possible or hinder the gratification of primary needs."<sup>28</sup> This is an illustration of what Asch calls "elementarism" in psychology. It is the assumption of elementarism that "to understand a complicated event it is necessary to break it up into its irreducible elements," and that "a sequence of experiences is the sum of its elementary components."<sup>29</sup> Individual human behavior is the sum total of a person's pursuits of individual

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 49.



primary drives. Social actions and events are the sum total of the pursuits of the satisfaction of primary needs by all the individuals composing the society. As is to be expected, the assumptions built into this starting point determine the nature of the results, and a major result of the elementarism in S-R psychological theory is, as Asch points out, to reduce social to pre-social facts:

One principal consequence of elementarism is to reduce facts of a social content to the level of facts that are pre-social, and to deal with human actions in terms used to describe and explain pre-human action.<sup>30</sup>

But from pre-social facts one cannot arrive at an understanding of human nature. The only fruitful way to study human beings, is to study them in the only setting in which they can be observed, namely, the social setting. What is required is a "strict investigation of man as a social being." Its aim should be "to establish a psychology of social life." And it is clear, according to Asch, that "the psychological study of social facts is the study of individuals in society."<sup>31</sup> But elementaristic S-R psychology is not concerned with interpersonal or person-group relationships. It is guided by the elementaristic assumption that "the basic data of psychology are those that concern the most elementary phenomena," and that the laws or

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. vii, viii, ix.

principles that may be discovered about these elementary phenomena in the behavior of individuals, apply also, by extrapolation, to the more complex and more extended phenomena of social relations. In other words, there is a belief here "that all principles of psychological functioning will be discovered in the nonsocial setting."<sup>32</sup>

For Asch this is of course a grievous error. "No psychology," he insists, "can be complete that fails to look at man directly as a social being."<sup>33</sup> If social psychology is to "contribute to a theory of psychological functions," as Asch wishes it to do, then it can not accomplish this by studying only the behavior of individuals in isolation from others. Social psychology, which for Asch is "part and parcel of the enterprise of general psychology," demands that basic psychological issues be looked at independently and critically "in the light of social behavior and experience."<sup>34</sup> In the study of man and of his psychological functions,

It would be most unusual if we had discovered the key to the central properties of men without having to go to the trouble of studying them in the only setting in which they can be observed . . . it requires also the direct investigation of happenings between persons.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Asch, "A Perspective on Social Psychology," 364-65.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



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Asch's insistence that the study of human nature requires the investigation of "happenings between persons" arose not only out of his dissatisfaction with the assumptions and the empirical results of the elementaristic S-R school of psychology. It arose also out of his own Gestalt point of view which emphasizes that actions and experiences always take place in relations of interdependence. Therefore, to understand human actions, we must not look at discrete, isolated facts. We must instead look at the total Gestalt, the total configuration of which the action is a part, the total situation. We must look

at the facts as they interpenetrate, as they complete each other, or as they clash and move away from each other. We must see . . . what principle governs the whole. To understand a person we must see him in his setting, in the context of his situation and the problems he is facing. . . . Most social acts have to be understood in their setting, and lose meaning if isolated.<sup>36</sup>

Asch's insistence that the study of human nature must begin with the concept of man as "social man," and that social psychology can make its unique contribution to general psychology and to the knowledge of man by using this concept of social man as a basic philosophical assumption and by studying human behavior in its social contexts, finds an interesting parallel in some of the theoretical speculations of what is known as "philosophical anthropology," particularly as represented by Martin Buber

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<sup>36</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, pp. 60-61.



and his I - Thou philosophy, with its emphasis on the "dialogical" relations. Starting from an altogether different set of interests, and disparaging science and scientific method as unqualified to discover the essence of man because "science investigates man not as a whole but in selective aspects and as part of the natural world,"<sup>37</sup> Buber defines "philosophical anthropology" as the study of "man in his wholeness."<sup>38</sup> For Buber this means that "the central subject of [the philosophical science of man] is neither the individual nor the collective but man with man."<sup>39</sup> Man's full essence can be known only in the "man with man" relation, because only within this relation is man's essence ontologically present. It is interesting, in spite of their important differences, to observe the similarities in language between Asch, when he emphasizes "investigation of happenings between persons,"<sup>40</sup> and Buber, when he prescribes the study of "man with man," in the following lengthy passage:

That essence of man which is special to him can be directly known only in a living relation. The gorilla, too, is an individual, a termitary, too,

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<sup>37</sup> Maurice S. Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 173.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Buber, Between Man and Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 123.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>40</sup> Supra, p. 30.





is a collective, but I and Thou exist only in our world, because man exists, and the I, moreover, exists only through the relation to the Thou. The philosophical science of man, which includes anthropology and sociology, must take as its starting point the consideration of this subject, 'man with man.' If you consider the individual by himself, then you see of man just as much as you see of the moon; only man with man provides a full image. . . . Consider man with man, and you see human life, dynamic, twofold, the giver and the receiver, he who does and he who endures, the attacking force and the defending force, the nature which investigates and the nature which supplies information, the request begged and granted--and always both together, completing one another in mutual contribution, together showing forth man. . . . We may come nearer the answer to the question what man is when we come to see him as the eternal meeting of the One with the Other.<sup>41</sup>

The image of man that emerges out of S-R learning theory, namely, that the human organism is virtually empty except for its few primary drives, and that it acts on the basis of reward and punishment; that its learning results only from its pursuit of primary satisfactions and avoidance of pain, via the mechanism of the Law of Effect; that, in society, the human organism uses other humans for the achievement of its own primary satisfactions which are

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<sup>41</sup>Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 205. Buber, in his historical review of "The Progress of the Question" (the question being "What Is Man?"), *Ibid.*, pp. 118-156, furnishes the interesting information that it was in Ludwig Feuerbach's *Philosophie der Zukunft* (1843) that he first found the full formulation of the principle that the study of man must not be of "man as an individual, but man with man--the connection of I and Thou." He quotes Feuerbach as follows:

The individual man for himself does not have man's being in himself, either as a moral being or as a thinking being. Man's being is contained only in community, in the unity of man with man--a unity which rests, however, only on the reality of the difference between I and Thou." *Ibid.*, pp. 147-48.



often elaborately disguised by a facade of secondary satisfactions; that the human organism has no other interests except the attainment of primary satisfactions for itself; that the behavior of the human organism is to be studied only by elementaristic methods, through the behavior of infra-human organisms, and in isolation from other human beings; this image of man is rejected by the social psychologists under study. Indeed, in their view, the elementaristic method of inquiry is so intimately related to the initial assumptions of S-R psychology, that inevitably its search turns out to be concentrated exclusively on those ingredients in human behavior that appear to give support to the image of man that is entailed in these initial assumptions. Thus, this image of man and the methodology employed in its service are doomed to a systematic incapacity to perceive and study the essential nature of man as a social being who is always inextricably implicated in a multiplicity of relationships with other human beings.

b) Critique of S-R Theory of Motivation

I now turn from the critique directed by our group of social psychologists against some aspects and implications of S-R learning theory, to their strictures against the S-R theory of motivation.



Any discussion of motivation is made extremely difficult by the "terrible logical muddle"<sup>42</sup> in which this concept is entangled. I shall try to disentangle some of this muddle as I go along, hopefully in sufficient measure to achieve clarity of discussion in this portion of our inquiry.

Generally speaking, the theory of motivation is concerned with the "explanation" of human behavior, with determining why human beings behave as they do. This is a rather large order. A somewhat narrower statement of what the theory of motivation is concerned with, is that used by two authors of a recent book to describe the contents of their chapter on Motivation:

This chapter deals with the objects and nature of human striving: the things man needs, wants, or fears, and how he seeks to attain or avoid them . . .<sup>43</sup>

Definitions of "motivation" found in two recent books may be helpful as a beginning for our discussion:

Motivation: The general term that we will use to refer to all those inner striving conditions variously described as wishes, desires, needs, drives, and the like. . . . Formally . . . a motive is an inner state that energizes, activates, or moves (hence 'motivation'), and that directs or channels behavior toward goals. In short, a motive

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<sup>42</sup>Peters, The Concept of Motivation, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup>Bernard Berelson and Gary A. Steiner, Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1954), p. 239.



results in and hence can be inferred from purposive, means-ends behavior . . . .<sup>44</sup>

Another definition reads as follows:

. . . there is general agreement that a motive is an internal factor that arouses, directs, and integrates a person's behavior. It is not observed directly but inferred from his behavior or simply assumed to exist in order to explain his behavior. . . . A motive is usually broken down into two components. First, the term drive refers to the internal process that goads a person into action. Drive may be influenced by external environment--by the temperature for example--but the drive itself is internal. Second, a motive is terminated by reaching a goal or obtaining a reward. The goal or reward is assumed to have some reducing or satiating effect on the internal goad, so that after reaching a goal or being rewarded sufficiently, the motive no longer directs behavior for some period of time.<sup>45</sup>

These definitions are broader than the S-R definition of motivation. However, the basic ingredients of the latter may be discerned in the quoted definitions. What is fundamental in the S-R concept of motivation is the assumption that the activating force behind human behavior is the process of reducing or eliminating tension. The organism experiences a state of tension, of excitation, in connection with its primary drives, or with learned or conditioned drives. All behavior tends toward ridding the organism of this tension or "exciting state" and the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 239-40.

<sup>45</sup> Edward J. Murray, Motivation and Emotion (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall (Foundations of Modern Psychology Series), 1964), pp. 7-8.



discomfort allegedly associated with it, and thus returning the organism to a state of rest, of satisfaction, of equilibrium. Certain objects outside the organism, and certain activities, will satisfy the drive, and in doing this they will reduce or terminate the state of tension or excitation, as water and the act of drinking will terminate the tension-state we call being thirsty. The organism is impelled by the small number of primary drives, by the many conditioned drives that are acquired through environmental instigation and conditioning, by the objects that will satisfy the drives, and by the tensions they induce, to seek the satisfaction of the drives and thereby to eliminate these tensions. This, it is the claim of S-R psychology, explains all of human behavior.

A well-known social psychologist in the S-R tradition, though not exclusively so in areas of psychological research other than motivation, gives the following as his definition of the term "motive":

Motive, like the non-technical terms 'want' and 'desire,' is a word which points both inward and outward. Such terms refer both to an inner state of dissatisfaction (or unrest, or tension, or disequilibrium) and to something in the environment (like food, mother's presence, or the solution of a puzzle) which serves to remove the state of dissatisfaction.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Theodore H. Newcomb, Social Psychology (New York: The Dryden Press, 1950), p. 80.



In addition, S-R theory of motivation, with its all-out emphasis on the organism's pressure for tension-reduction and the goad within it to seek a state of equilibrium or quiescence, has claimed to find support in a concept taken over from the field of physiology, namely, the concept of homeostasis. This concept was formulated most clearly and most elegantly by the physiologist Walter B. Cannon.<sup>47</sup> Essentially, the phenomenon called homeostasis is the body's automatic mechanism which maintains constant conditions, or "steady states," in the organism, of such factors as temperature, acidity-alkalinity balance, salt content, sugar content, protein content, calcium content, water content of the blood, etc., in the presence of conditions or forces which could be expected to constitute a danger to the survival of the organism. Thus, using temperature as an illustration, there is a safe range within which the temperature of the human organism may fluctuate without the danger of damage to it. However, when the temperature in the organism's environment is so high as to constitute a possible danger, as directly under the sun in very hot climates, or within close proximity of open furnaces in metal foundries, the mechanisms in the bodies of persons exposed to the excessive heat call forth a variety of physiological reactions that

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<sup>47</sup>Walter B. Cannon, The Wisdom of the Body (New York: Norton, 1932).



contribute to the reduction of body temperature, and consequently to the maintenance of the "steady state" in the body's temperature. Thus, under conditions of excessive external heat, the body begins to perspire, greater amounts of blood are sent to the skin, and breathing tends to be faster and deeper than it usually is. The evaporation of the sweat causes loss of heat at the body's surface; the larger quantities of blood in the skin are cooled by the cooling effect of the evaporation of the sweat: and the faster and deeper breathing with its accelerated circulation of air in the respiratory passages, also contributes to the loss of heat.

These balancing, homeostatic physiological processes, "involving, as they may, the brain and nerves, the heart, lungs, kidneys, and spleen, all working cooperatively,"<sup>48</sup> are indeed remarkable in their protection of the body by maintaining physiological equilibrium, or restoring physiological equilibrium when external or internal conditions disturb it. However, S-R psychologists have tried to convert the concept of homeostasis into an all-embracing law of human motivation and a theory of human nature. They assimilate conditions of the organism which are deviations from the "steady state," into the concept of "tension,"

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<sup>48</sup>Walter B. Cannon, *op. cit.* Cannon, "Homeostasis," in *Studies in Explanation: A Reader in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Russell Kahl (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 187-197 (quote on p. 189).



and conclude that all human behavior can be explained in terms of the drive toward equilibrium, balance, rest, or the homeostatic state. A succinct statement of this theory is given by Allport as follows:

Motivation is regarded as a state of tenseness that leads us to seek equilibrium, rest, adjustment, satisfaction, or homeostasis.<sup>49</sup>

The image of man that emerges out of this use of the concept of homeostasis is thus essentially, in spite of its greater teleological emphasis, the S-R image again, of man as an equilibrium-seeking animal.<sup>50</sup>

The S-R tension-reduction theory of human motivation, and the theory of human nature entailed by it, are also sharply rejected by the social psychologists under discussion in our inquiry. I shall review some of their strictures against this theory before attempting to draw several distinctions between some meanings of the concept of motivation, and thus perhaps clarify the different kinds of questions about human behavior the various meanings of "motivation" are supposed to be capable of answering.

A general and somewhat undifferentiated rejection is that by Carl Rogers, as he speaks of "the good life" which people wish and try to achieve. This goal of the good life, says Rogers,

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<sup>49</sup>Allport, Becoming, p. 48.

<sup>50</sup>See Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, pp. 88-89, 249-250, 568-69; also Allport, Personality and Social Encounter, pp. 43-44; Allport, Becoming, p. 48.





is not any fixed state. . . . To use psychological terms, it is not a state of drive-reduction or tension-reduction or homeostasis. . . . Social scientists have frequently spoken of the reduction of tension, or the achievement of homeostasis or equilibrium, as if these states constituted the goal of the process of living . . . my experience supports none of these definitions.<sup>51</sup>

In the psychological realm, any simple S-R type of explanation of behavior seems almost impossible.<sup>52</sup>

Allport's critique of the tension-reduction and homeostatic theories of human motivation is much more elaborate and systematic. It takes the form of two principal arguments with respect to the image of man depicted by these two related theories of motivation:

- (1) Man is depicted here as an empty, passive, purely reactive being, "capable only of receiving impressions from, and responding to, external goods," the resultant reactive response "persisting only until the instigator is removed and the tension, created by the drive, lessened."<sup>53</sup> The fact, however, is that man is a striving being, with interests, intensions, expectations, plans, long-range goals, future-directedness,

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<sup>51</sup> Carl R. Rogers, "The Meaning of the Good Life," Reconstruction in Religion: A Symposium, ed. Alfred E. Kuenzli (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 175-76.

<sup>52</sup> Carl R. Rogers, Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1951), p. 487.

<sup>53</sup> Allport, Becoming, pp. 48-49.

exploratory curiosity, etc., motivations which simply cannot be explained in terms of pressure toward tension-reduction.

- (2) The image of man that emerges is of a being motivated only by the quest for quiescence, adjustment, rest, satisfaction, equilibrium, or homeostasis, and by the pressure to rid itself of the discomforts and disturbances of tension. While this is partially correct about some physiological processes and primary needs like the need for food, water and sex, it is often simply not true even about these, and it is certainly not true about much of human behavior, both in children and adults. It is simply not true that human beings always want to reduce or get rid of tensions. Indeed, much of human striving, planning, curiosity, and future-oriented behavior, is characterized by resistance to quiescence and equilibrium, and by the maintenance rather than reduction of tension.

In connection with the first of these two arguments, Allport avers that among man's "central psychological characteristics" is his "search for answers to the 'tragic trio' of problems: suffering, guilt, death," and also "his effort to relate himself to his fellow men and to the



universe at large. . . . As a consequence of this quest"

Allport continues,

which is the very essence of human nature--we note that man's conduct is to a large degree proactive, intentional, and unique to himself.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, on the basis of the evidence assembled by him,

Allport contends that

it is clear that many authors reject the 'reactive' view of man. Man has energies that reach way beyond the need to react . . . he has an expanding image of himself (a conception of what he would like to be), and the pursuit of this goal directs much, if not most, of his conduct.<sup>55</sup>

Opponents of the S-R views on motivation, Allport points out,

say that they account for only a small part of the desires, aspirations, hopes, yearnings of the human person. They say it is impossible to reduce elaborate adult motives to a drive basis. Drives exist, yes, and for the most part they tend to push the organism to seek relief from tension. But they are only the primitive, and animallike, part of human motivation.<sup>56</sup>

Maslow, in turn, warns against "the choice of hunger as a paradigm for all other motivation states," as being "both theoretically and practically unwise and unsound."<sup>57</sup> To use hunger as the paradigm would be to ignore so many fundamental differences between the large number of other

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<sup>54</sup> Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 252.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>57</sup> Maslow, Motivation and Personality, p. 64.



motivations, and the physiological drives. We must not be misled, Maslow admonishes, by the model of research on animal behavior:

Academic psychologists have relied largely on animal experimentation in working in the field of motivation. It is a truism to say that a white rat is not a human being, but unfortunately it is necessary to say it again, since too often the results of animal experiments are considered the basic data on which we must base our theorizing of human nature.<sup>58</sup>

Maslow appends an important and instructive footnote at this point which exhibits tellingly the effects upon S-R psychology of its being slavishly tied to the model of experimentation on animal behavior:

For instance P. T. Young arbitrarily excluded the concept of purpose or goal from motivation theory because we cannot ask a rat for his purpose: Is it necessary to point out that we can ask a human being for his purpose? Instead of rejecting purpose or goal as a concept because we cannot ask the rat about it, it would seem much more sensible to reject the rat because we cannot ask him about his purpose.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to these general and theoretical considerations, there is much specific, empirical evidence that human beings, children as well as adults, and even animals, often engage in non-tension-reduction activities, such as play or exploration, while ignoring the pressure of tension-producing drives and doing nothing to satisfy them. Asch points this out in the following passage:

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., n. 2.



The child who exerts himself to explore, to construct and take apart, may forget to eat, resist the fatigue that is creeping up on him, overlook his pains, brave the punishment of the parent--in short, he can ignore to a degree those very needs that are regarded in certain quarters as the source of his interests. He seeks work and activity; he triumphs in overcoming difficulties. He does not seek the easiest tasks; nor will he be satisfied if he receives the final product ready-made, without the effort. What is so clearly evident in the child is often equally true of the adult when he is engaged in work and play. To expose oneself to hardship, to forego immediate satisfactions, to make sacrifices--these are not characteristics alien to human action.<sup>60</sup>

Such actions are obviously at complete variance with the tension-reduction theory of human motivations. Manifestly, pressure toward tension-reduction cannot account for or explain much of human behavior. There is an ironic and yet fatal suggestion that Allport attributes to some psychologists who do not accept the simple formula of pressure toward tension-reduction as the essence of human motivation. These psychologists, Allport reports, "point out that the quickest way to reduce tensions is to commit suicide."<sup>61</sup> The fact, however, is that most people prefer to stay alive, and try to stay alive, and in doing this they only prolong and even increase their "excited states" and tensions. Indeed, Allport reminds us, "To live at all is to have tension."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 23.

<sup>61</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 88.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.



This leads us to the second argument, i. e., the argument against the conception of man as an equilibrium-seeking or homeostasis-seeking being. The sharpest criticism of this view of man comes from Allport. He speaks derisively of the "many psychologists [who] see nothing in human personality beyond this basic law," meaning the physiological law of maintaining or restoring of "steady states" in the organism, and he points out that Walter B. Cannon, who formulated the law of homeostasis, "did not regard it as accounting for all human conduct." Allport quotes Cannon's statement that

With essential needs answered through homeostasis, the priceless unessentials could be freely sought.

He argues that man wants much more than biological balance and drive satisfaction, and that what Cannon calls the "priceless unessentials" of life "are the most conspicuous feature of human personality . . ."<sup>63</sup>

But his most powerful argument against the homeostatic theory of human nature is his flat denial that human beings find all tension intolerable and seek to reduce or eliminate it. Using the same illustration that Asch used concerning "a child who reaches out to the world in wonder and interest" by exploring, learning new skills, asking to be told new stories, Allport makes the point that, in doing this, the child is actually seeking tensions and relishing

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

them. Far from finding tension intolerable, most healthy human beings find a joy and exhilaration in tensions of various kinds, and actually seek them. "The healthy child and adult" he points out, "are continually building up tensions in the form of new interests, and are going way beyond the basic safety level of homeostasis."<sup>64</sup> On several occasions Allport uses the explorer Raold Amundsen as an illustration of man as tension-seeker rather than equilibrium-seeker. Amundsen pursued and satisfied his life-long passion--exploring the polar regions--against seemingly insurmountable obstacles. No doubt the temptation to reduce or eliminate the frequent physiological tensions "continually engendered by fatigue, hunger, ridicule, and danger" confronted him throughout his career as an explorer. But because he had other purposes, Amundsen withstood these temptations, and in fact sought the tensions that came with being a polar explore.<sup>65</sup> Amundsen's kind of striving is not at all unique, says Allport. It is an example of what he calls "propriate striving," and its "characteristic feature . . . is its resistance to equilibrium: tension is maintained rather than reduced."<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, Allport concludes that

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-90.

<sup>65</sup> Allport, Becoming, pp. 49, 67; Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 90.

<sup>66</sup> Allport, Becoming, p. 49. (Emphasis mine)



Man . . . is not a homeostatic creature. He does not seek equilibrium within himself and with the environment. His restlessness is systemic, and too deeply-rooted to be drugged by temporary satisfactions. . . . There is something bloodless about homeostasis; it favors laziness and belies our specifically human capacity to outstrip ourselves.<sup>67</sup>

Now, these criticisms, in addition to exhibiting some of the conflicting assumptions concerning human nature in S-R psychology on the one hand, and in the writings of our "third force" group of social psychologists on the other, also direct our attention to some of the conceptual confusions that cluster around the concept of motivation. In fact, within these criticisms one can discern a dim awareness on the part of our social psychologists of some of the confusions surrounding the concept of motivation, as well as feeble attempts to unravel them. As pointed out earlier, theories of motivation are concerned with the explanation of human behavior, with determining why human beings behave as they do.<sup>68</sup> But in order to be enabled to try to explain a person's actions, it is necessary that (a) the right questions be asked, and that (b) the answers that are offered to any question be answers that are appropriate to that question, rather than answers that address themselves to a question or questions other than the

<sup>67</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 558.

<sup>68</sup>Supra, p. 35.





question that had been asked. In their criticisms of the S-R theory of motivation, our social psychologists seem to be in part trying to say (or this is what it seems to me they ought to be trying to say), that the S-R theory of motivation is not asking the right questions as to explanations of a person's actions, and that some of the answers it offers, not only are empirically wrong, but set out to answer questions other than the questions under consideration. The result is a confusion of concepts, or, as Gilbert Ryle would say, the result is a "category-mistake."<sup>69</sup>

When we seek for the motive or motives of a person's action, we are seeking for an explanation of the person's action. Essentially, we appear to be asking the question: "Why did Mr. X do this?" However, this is a simplification. S-R psychology errs when it assumes that there is a single, all embracing explanation of human actions. There are several different kinds of questions packed into the question: "Why did X do this?", and when these questions are unpacked it becomes clear that each kind of question requires a different kind of answer, and, if available, each type of answer would furnish a different kind of explanation. R. S. Peters distinguishes four kinds of questions that may

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<sup>69</sup>Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1949), pp. 16-18.



be intended when we seek for an explanation of a person's action, or ask "Why did he do this?":

- (1) What was his reason for doing this?
- (2) What was the reason for his doing this?
- (3) What made him do this?
- (4) Why do people do anything, or why do people act in the various ways in which they do?<sup>70</sup>

It should be carefully noted that questions (1) and (2), which will be discussed here first, are different from questions (3) and (4).

(1) These first two questions ask for reasons that would explain the person's action. Reasons that are considered satisfactory answers to these questions, because they satisfactorily explain the action, are typically in terms of the actor's purposes, wishes, plans, goals, hopes, aspirations. Such answers are satisfactory explanations because most human action is typically goal-directed.

Peters makes this point in the following passage:

The paradigm case of human action is when something is done in order to bring about an end. So the usual way of explaining an action is to describe it as an action of a certain sort by indicating the end which Jones had in mind. We therefore ask the 'why'

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<sup>70</sup> Peters, The Concept of Motivation, pp. 3-26. In the discussion that follows I rely heavily on Peters and on two other monographs in the series entitled Studies in Philosophical Psychology, published in England recently. They are: Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), and Anthony Kenny, Action, Emotion and Will (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).



question in a more specific form. We ask what was his reason for doing that or what was the point of it, what end he had in mind.<sup>71</sup>

Accordingly, explanations of a person's action by giving his reasons within a means-to-end framework are generally satisfactory, provided, as Peters emphasizes, the explained behavior does not depart from certain generally accepted norms as to what are proper or effective or sensible means for attaining the goal given in the explanation. Thus, if I had been seen walking to and entering a restaurant and were subsequently asked why I had done that, an answer such as "I went there to have lunch," or "I went there because I wanted to eat" would be a satisfactory explanation. However, if I had been seen running fast to the restaurant and entering it, and subsequently were to be asked why I had run to the restaurant, an answer like "Because I wanted to eat," or "Because I wanted to have lunch," would be strange, and would not make a good explanation, because running to a restaurant is not generally considered a proper means for getting to a restaurant to have lunch. If, on the other hand, I were to reply that on my way out to lunch I was detained by a friend, and suddenly remembered that I had an important appointment after lunch, and that I could get a fast bite and get to my important appointment on time

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<sup>71</sup>Peters, The Concept of Motivation, p. 4.

only if I ran to the restaurant, this would be a satisfactory explanation, because my action had two goals, to eat something, and to avoid being late for my appointment; and running is a generally accepted method of saving time in getting from one place to another over a short distance. This is what Peters means when he says that "Man is a rule-following animal." Man's actions, he explains, are not only goal-directed,

they also conform to social standards and conventions, and unlike a calculating machine he acts because of his knowledge of rules and objectives.<sup>72</sup>

(2) However, explanations that take the form of giving the actor's own reason for his action in terms of the end or goal toward which it is directed, are often quite unsatisfactory. People often invent reasons for their actions, or they may delude themselves into believing that the reasons they give for doing certain things are the real reasons. We find nothing extraordinary about being told that though Mr. X gave such and such as his reason for doing something, the reason for his doing it was rather thus and so. Accordingly, a person may give "fear of being late for an appointment" as his reason for running to the restaurant, whereas the reason for his running may not really have been that at all (since he could have saved time by grabbing a bite in the drugstore next door), but rather his desire not

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.



to miss seeing a pretty girl who generally eats there at a certain hour. However, his reason and the reason, as Peters makes clear, often coincide. His fear of missing an important appointment may in fact have been the reason for his running to the restaurant. Peters further points out that in the case of his reason for an action, the actor is always aware or conscious of his goal, whereas the reason for a person's action does not entail that he is conscious of the action's goal. In other words, in case of the reason, the actor may be unaware of the goal of seeing the pretty girl as the goal of his running. This in turn means that whereas in the case of his reason the explanation is always in purposive, goal-directed terms, in the case of the reason the explanation may be either in purposive, goal-directed terms, or it may be in terms of some causal factor over which he had no control, as for example, that he ran because he had a momentary hallucination that a dangerous enemy was pursuing him. The point here is that such causal explanations "can count as the reason why a person does something."<sup>73</sup> However, such causal explanations are only one kind of answer to the question as to the reason for a person's action, and we shall return to these shortly.

To summarize then, explanations of human action require, a great deal of the time, the giving of reasons for

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 9.



the action in terms of purposes to be achieved, of ends or goals to be attained. This is always true of his reason explanations, and it is generally true--though not always--of the reason explanations. Motives, therefore, are, to quote Peters, "a particular class of reasons,"<sup>74</sup> "motives . . . are reasons of the directed sort."<sup>75</sup> It would appear that Max Weber meant to say something quite similar when he defined motive as follows:

'Motive' means a meaningful configuration of circumstances which to the agent or observer, appears as a meaningful 'reason' (Grund) of the behavior in question.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, when we give a motive explanation, we generally refer to a "directive disposition like hunger, greed, or ambition."<sup>77</sup>

At this point some additional refinements or distinctions must be made, since not all dispositions are of the directed sort. Traits, for example, are non-directional dispositions, and traits do explain certain aspects of human action. But unlike motives, traits do not point to any

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-28. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>76</sup>Max Weber, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Chapter I, quoted in Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science, p. 45. The widely used Henderson-Parsons translation is a little different. It reads: "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." Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 98-99.

<sup>77</sup>Peters, The Concept of Motivation, pp. 31-32.



definite goals or purposes in the actions to be explained, and they therefore do not constitute sufficient explanations of purposive behavior. Peters' illustrations are helpful here:

. . . we ascribe to people traits of character like honesty, punctuality, considerateness, and meanness. Such terms do not, like ambition, or hunger, or sexual desire, indicate the sorts of goals that a man tends to pursue; rather they indicate the type of regulation that he imposes on his conduct whatever his goals may be. A man who is ruthless, selfish, punctual, considerate, persistent, and honest, does not have any particular goals; rather he pursues whatever goals he has in particular sorts of ways. <sup>78</sup>

Much the same distinction was made by N. S. Sutherland, in "Motives as Explanations."<sup>79</sup> However, Sutherland warns that the distinction between "words which describe character traits" and "motive words" is sometimes difficult to draw:

Words like 'intelligence,' 'stupidity,' 'vivacity,' 'sarcasm,' 'scepticism,' 'bravery,' 'conceit,' 'timidity,' have very little connection with the ends a man pursues; words like 'patriotism,' 'vindictiveness,' 'greediness,' 'avarice,' are intimately connected with ends; and words like 'vanity,' 'cowardice,' 'generosity,' are somewhere in between in so far as the ends of a man's actions are relevant to considering whether or not these words can be truthfully applied to him. (p. 151)

Anthony Kenny, dissatisfied with "a vagueness in the concept" of motive,<sup>80</sup> draws a distinction between motive and

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>79</sup>Mind: A Quarterly Journal of Psychology and Philosophy, LXVIII, No. 270 (April, 1959), 145-59, especially 149-51.

<sup>80</sup>Kenny, Action, Emotion and Will, p. 85.



intention, and joins the two in a related pattern of explanation of human actions. Using the example of the man who goes to the fire to get warm, he observes that if the man is asked why he went to the fire, his answer might take one of two forms: he might say that he did it because he was cold, or he might reply that he did it in order to get warm. Both appear to be sufficient explanations.

In the first case, the reason given is backward-looking; in the second case it has the form of the report of an intention.<sup>81</sup>

This illustration exhibits the relationship between motive and intention, according to Kenny:

The important distinction is that between backward-looking and forward-looking reasons for action. Reports of intentions give forward-looking reasons for action; reports of motives may either exhibit the action as falling under some specific scheme of this general pattern; or they may merely give a backward-looking reason.<sup>82</sup>

Kenny points out that "the great majority of descriptions of human actions carry with them built-in presumptions . . . about forward- and backward-looking reasons."<sup>83</sup> This is the reason why the way an action is described often leaves very little to be explained by reference to either motives or intentions. When we see, or are given a description of a man washing, it will generally not

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., pp. 91-92.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 94.





be necessary to explain that he is acting this way because he wishes to get clean, or because he is dirty. The purposive, directed, means-to-end paradigm of human action is the standard explanatory scheme through which we proceed to try to understand a man's behavior. And since this purposive, goal-directed pattern is so universal, we often find explanations to be sufficient if they do nothing more than point out that the person's action is similar to the way other people frequently act. Here is Kenny's statement of this point:

At one level of explanation an action . . . is explained if it is shown as exemplifying some familiar pattern. So, in this sense, we understand a man's action once we see that he is acting in a way in which men often act, to bring about a state of affairs of a kind which men commonly like, or to put an end to a state of affairs of a kind which they commonly dislike. This, I think, is the truth behind Ryle's idea that an explanation in terms of motives stated a 'law-like generalization.' Being told that a man acted out of vanity helps us to understand his action not because (as Ryle thought) we say to ourselves 'Yes, of course, he often acts like that,' but because we say to ourselves "yes, of course, men often act like that."<sup>84</sup>

It is thus quite clear that one type of explanation of human actions, a type of explanation that is applicable to a great part of human behavior, must take the form of answers to "What was his reason for his doing this?" and "What was the reason for his doing this?" types of question. Answers to these questions, to be satisfactory, must conform to the purposive, goal-directed, means-to-end paradigm. This

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 95.



analysis of the meaning of motivation and motive-explanations also makes it quite clear that human actions that are explainable by recourse to purposive, goal-directed reasons, can not be adequately explained by reference to drive-reduction, tension-reduction, or homeostasis. Whatever it is that these latter concepts may or may not tell us about the functioning of the human organism, manifestly they do not provide the kinds of explanation of human actions that we have just discussed, and that we normally look for a great deal of the time. Certainly, therefore, tension-reduction and homeostasis do not explain all of human behavior, as is claimed by some S-R motivation theorists, and to parade these concepts in the guise of universal explanations, only introduces logical confusions into this area of scientific inquiry. Human behavior is such that for much of it only those explanations are logically sufficient which take the form of giving reasons for the behavior, reasons "of a directed sort," which conform to the purposive, means-to-end, goal-directed model.

(3) The third kind of question that is often intended when we ask for an explanation of a person's behavior, is the question "What made him do this?" From the very nature of the question it should be quite clear that it concerns behavior which appears to deviate from the purposive, goal-seeking model in which rule-following is an essential ingredient. For this kind of behavior, explanations in terms of causes rather than motives are quite appropriate.

Often the explanation for this type of behavior is sought by asking the question thus: "What drove him to do this?", or "What ever possessed him to do this?" Examples of the kind of behavior about which we ask the "What made him do it?" type of question, would be the following: compulsive acts, obsessive acts, perversions, hallucinations, dreams, sudden failure to remember a well-known name when making an introduction, or sudden insulting conduct on the part of a customarily gracious person (we might try to explain this by saying that the person was under the influence of alcohol, or drugs, or post-hypnotic suggestion). N. S. Sutherland gives five additional examples of such behavior:

1. Reflex acts, e. g., the jerk of the leg when the patellar tendon is tapped, or blinking when something is waved close to one's eyes.
2. Acts done purely out of habit.
3. Something done merely for the sake of doing it, such as suddenly starting to run while you are taking a walk through a meadow with your favorite girl.
4. Actions which are the expression of a mood or an emotion, such as yawning or beginning to hum a melody.



5. Unintentional acts, by accident or by mistake, such as giving the wrong change by mistake, or getting the order of two digits in a telephone number reversed.<sup>85</sup>

All of the actions used above as illustrations have at least two things in common: first, they apparently are not done to achieve some further end or goal; second, in all of these cases it is apparently correct to say that "the man suffers something rather than does something."<sup>86</sup> In other words, in none of these cases is the person acting out of conscious intention, purpose, wish, design, etc. In all of them the person is passive rather than active, and what he does or refrains from doing results not from his own conscious determination or control, but rather from forces outside his control. Strictly speaking these are not actions but rather (if we attend to the Latin derivation of these terms) passions.<sup>87</sup> Such "happenings" (inasmuch as they are cases of something happening to a person, rather than cases of a person's "acting"), in contrast to the normal,

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<sup>85</sup> Sutherland, "Motives as Explanation," op. cit., pp. 145-147.

<sup>86</sup> Peters, The Concept of Motivation, p. 10. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>87</sup> See Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary: "PASSION -- 3. State or capacity of being affected by external agents or forces." (1959 Edition, p. 614).



rule-following, purposive actions, may be explainable in terms of causes. Sometimes such causal explanations may succeed in specifying the sufficient conditions for the happening, at other times only a necessary condition.

Causal explanations may be of various kinds. If Jones suddenly jumped in the middle of the road as he walked across it to the library, either the explanation that he had a sudden cramp, or that a car backfired loudly near him, would be deemed an appropriate as well as sufficient explanation, by virtue of our assumption that this was a case of something happening to Jones rather than a case of his acting. If, upon meeting a friend whom we had not seen for several years, and whom we knew to be alert, orderly, coherent, and articulate in thought and speech, we now find him, to our surprise, rambling, incoherent, and muddled in speech, we would consider it a sufficient explanation if we were told that he had suffered a brain lesion. This explanation would be deemed sufficient because it would indicate to us the absence of a condition which we consider necessary for clarity of thought and speech, and the absence of this necessary condition would thus sufficiently explain to us the absence of clear thought and speech.

Thus, in any theory of human nature and human behavior, recognition would have to be included of the kind of explanation this type of behavior is susceptible to. If the



behavior is a case of the person "suffering something" rather than "acting," then, as Peters says,

the stimulus-response sort of model would perhaps be appropriate and the causal type of explanation in terms of internal or external stimulation might be sufficient . . .<sup>88</sup>

Peters further maintains that, while there are conflicting views as to whether Freud's explanation of human behavior in terms of unconscious processes is of the causal or of the purposive, rule-following type, what Freud did do is explain in terms of causes, through unconscious processes only those cases of behavior where the purposive, rule-following model breaks down and is inappropriate. Freud, he insists, "did not think--and often explicitly denied--that this sort of explanation [i. e., of the causal type, in terms of unconscious processes] can be appropriately given for everything--for cases where a man acts as well as for cases where something happens to a man."<sup>89</sup>

Causal explanations of human behavior are thus different from explanations which take the form of giving reasons of a directed sort. That this is so should occasion no surprise, since these are two different kinds of explanation of two different kinds of behavior. Explanations in terms of reasons concern human actions, i. e., purposive,

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<sup>88</sup>Peters, The Concept of Motivation, p. 15.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 11. Freudian doctrine will be discussed in Chapter III, infra, pp. 84ff.

goal-directed, rule-following actions. In contradistinction to these, causal explanations concern behavior which is puzzling; behavior which does not conform to our customary image of man as a purposive, goal-seeking, rule-following creature; behavior of which we would be prompted to say that the person "had no good reason for doing this," or that "there was no point to it." It therefore follows, R. S. Peters maintains, that all-inclusive theories of human behavior are inappropriate: they are ineluctably plagued by logical confusions and category-mistakes. It also follows, mutatis mutandis, that the undertaking of S-R psychology to give causal explanations for purposive, rule-following human actions is doomed to failure, because these are logically inappropriate as sufficient explanations. To recognize any actions as purposive and rule following, is to deny that causal explanations would be sufficient explanations; and to explain any example of behavior in terms of causal concepts is a way of denying that the explicandum is a human action. Another and additionally clarified logical underpinning is therefore provided by this analysis for the rejection by our group of social psychologists of this aspect of the S-R theory of motivation.

(4) However, there is another and extremely important sense in which causal explanations for all human behavior are proposed by the S-R theory of motivation, and



which is a corollary of its theory of human nature. This is implicit in some of the S-R definitions of motive quoted earlier.<sup>90</sup> In fact, though they sometimes do not appear to realize it, this version of the proposal on the part of S-R psychologists, which will be discussed below, namely, to give causal explanations for human behavior, is less a proposal to answer the question as to why this person or that person acted thus-and-so, and more in the nature of an attempt to answer another question, namely, the question "Why do people ever act in the many ways in which they do?", or "Why do people ever have and act upon desires, wishes, intentions, purposes, goals, aspirations, plans, etc.?" This, of course, is related to the fourth of the group of four questions that Peters sifted out of the quest for explanations of human behavior.<sup>91</sup> This, to put it in another way, is no longer a question about what motivates men for their actions. Rather, it is, as Peters suggests, a question "at a different level." Questions about what motivates a person to do this or that are "lower order questions." There are "higher order questions," questions which seek "an explanation of motives," or which signify an attempt "to explain the directedness and persistence of behavior."<sup>92</sup> There is often confusion about these different

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<sup>90</sup>See supra, pp. 34-37.

<sup>91</sup>See supra, pp. 49-50.

<sup>92</sup>Peters, The Concept of Motivation, pp. 20-21 and



level questions, questions at one level being mistaken for questions at another level, with disastrous consequences. Answers to the higher order questions are simply inappropriate as answers to the lower order questions. The proper answer to the question "Why did John make love to his secretary?" will not be furnished by the answer to the question "Why do men make love to women?"

c) Over-all or Ultimate Explanation of Human Behavior

Examination of questions of this fourth type, namely, "Why do men make love?", "Why do men eat?", etc., brings us to our social psychologists' third line of attack upon the S-R theory of human nature,<sup>93</sup> namely, the programme of S-R psychology to furnish an over-all or ultimate explanation of human behavior. In reply to this kind of question, S-R psychology does try to offer answers that fit into a paradigm of causal explanations, and that are conceived as part of an over-all theory or ultimate explanation of human behavior. These explanations take on two related forms:

- (1) Explanations in terms of tension-reduction and the quest for homeostatic states.
- (2) Explanations in terms of bodily, physiological, or neural movements.

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<sup>93</sup>See supra, pp. 17-18.



We have already examined above (pp. 36-48) explanations of human actions in terms of tension-reduction and homeostatic theory. We found that these explanations were not sufficient or adequate for purposive, goal-directed, rule-following human actions. Using a somewhat different approach, we shall now try to see whether and in what sense the mechanical tension-reduction or homeostatic types of explanation, and explanation in terms of physiological or neural movements do in fact constitute ultimate or over-all explanations of human nature and human behavior.

Attempts to explain all human behavior in terms of tension-reduction and homeostasis sometimes wear a spurious appearance of plausibility because of a misleading logical confusion. As Peters points out, these are instances of a familiar class of explanations which he calls "explanations in terms of end-states."<sup>94</sup> There is serious question about the extent to which this explanatory model really explains or is really vacuous most of the time. However, what interests us here is the confusion between the concept of "end-state" and the concept of "end," "goal," or "purpose." The mechanical idea that the body tends toward the attainment of the physiological state of non-tension or of homeostatic equilibrium superficially resembles discourse about human goals or purposes, and thus

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 20.



acquire the spurious plausibility of seeming to fit into the theory of man as a purposive, goal-seeking, rule-following being. This seems to be the unconscious homage mechanistic S-R psychology must pay to our natural and intuitive acceptance of the non-mechanistic, purposive, goal-seeking theory of human nature.

However, though the terminology may mislead us into thinking so, non-tension or homeostatic states are not goals or purposes. A man's goal in wooing a woman and making love to her is not to achieve a tensionless state; neither is a man's goal in going for a cold bottle of beer after strenuous physical exertion on a hot summer day, or in seeking out a quiet, secluded spot for his vacation, or in joining a contemplative monastic order, the goal of achieving a condition of homeostasis. Moreover, as pointed out above (pp. 36-48 passim), there are many goal-directed human actions which are not followed by tensionless or homeostatic states. It must therefore be asserted again, together with the group of social psychologists in our inquiry, that tension-reduction and homeostasis simply do not explain all behavior, certainly not goal-directed actions of human beings.

On the other hand, tension-reduction or homeostatic explanations do seem to provide satisfactory answers, in causal, mechanistic terms, to questions about the body. Significantly, such questions are about passions rather



than about actions; they are questions about some things that are happening to the body, rather than about a person's actions which involve bodily activity. Tension-reduction and homeostatic theory will furnish reasonable answers to questions about the profuse sweating of a man sitting out under the hot sun, in the bleachers, at a ball game; they will furnish no satisfactory answers to questions as to why he went to the ball game. They will give relevant answers to questions about the contractions of a man's stomach and the hunger pangs he is experiencing; but they will provide no sufficient answers to questions as to why the man went into a restaurant (since he may have chosen to skip that meal, to go to another restaurant, to have a milk shake at the drug store, or to drop in to a noontime birthday party at a friend's office and partake of refreshments there; in any event, to paraphrase Peters, a man does not go into a restaurant for lunch in order to reduce a tension). Tension-reduction or homeostatic explanations may answer satisfactorily questions about a man's nocturnal emission of semen during sleep; they will give no satisfactory answers to questions as to why and how the man had sexual intercourse with his wife (since he may have chosen not to have sexual intercourse, or he may have chosen to engage in sexual relations in spite of feeling tired and disinclined, but in response to his wife's desire). So much then for the limited explanatory power of homeostatic and tension-reduction theory with reference to the behavior of human beings, who



are possessed of bodies, and are characterized by actions that conform largely to the purposive, goal-directed, rule-following paradigm.

The other form of the answer by S-R psychologists to the higher order, over-all questions through which they seek to explain human behavior, is also a causal answer, which postulates physiological states and movements, neural states, or brain conditions as the causes of human behavior. These S-R psychologists, often without realizing it (as pointed out earlier), instead of trying to explain people's actions by discovering what their motives or reasons are, are rather trying to explain why people have motives, or why people behave in a goal-directed, purposive way. They try to do this by reference to "phase sequences in the brain," or to physiological or neural movements. Some "drive" theories exemplify this approach, and, as pointed out by Peters, for many S-R psychologists the terms "drive" and motive have become almost synonymous.<sup>95</sup> Drives (and motives) are defined by these psychologists in terms of conditions of the brain, and the assumption is made that, if we learned to understand brain conditions, neural impulses, and physiological states, we would be able to understand and to predict all human behavior, including purposive, goal-directed actions. C. L. Hull, in his "Principles of Behavior" which represents an extreme example of this

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., pp. 40-41.



position, tried to construct a deductive system of this kind, in which all human behavior would be deduced from brain states. Peters' introduction to Hull's words, and his quote from Hull on this subject, are as follows:

Hull (1943) boldly proclaimed his programme of starting from 'colorless movements and mere receptor impulses as such' and eventually explaining everything in terms of such concepts-- 'familial behavior, individual adaptive efficiency (intelligence), the formal educative processes, psychogenic disorders, social control and delinquency, character and personality, culture and acculturation, magic and religious practices, custom law and jurisprudence, politics and government and many other specialized fields of behavior.'<sup>96</sup>

D. O. Hebb, in The Organization of Behavior, also claims that the ultimate explanation of human behavior is in brain states:

The term motivation then refers (1) to the existence of an organized phase sequence, (2) to its direction and content, and (3) to its persistence in a given direction, or stability of content.<sup>97</sup>

Thus, if we could read the organized phase sequence in the brain, as well as its direction or content, we would be able to predict and explain a person's behavior. This "programme" for a mechanistic theory of brain-states by which to explain all human behavior is also reflected in E. G. Boring's manifesto-like pronouncement:

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>97</sup>Quoted by Peters, ibid., p. 42.



I believe that robotic thinking helps precision of psychological thought, and will continue to help it until psychophysiology is so far advanced that an image is nothing other than a neural event, and object constancy is obviously just something that happens in the brain. That time is still a long way off, and in the interval I choose to sit cozily with my robot, squeezing his hand and feeling a thrill--a scientist's thrill--when he squeezes mine back again.<sup>98</sup>

Asch calls attention to the tendency in S-R psychology to downgrade the role of thinking and understanding, and "to reduce them to a complication of mechanical processes lacking insight."<sup>99</sup> Some S-R psychologies, he points out,

hold that the units of behavior are specific anatomical-physiological paths of excitation and that action is a sum of elementary units or reflex-arcs . . .<sup>100</sup>

But what Asch and our other social psychologists fail to point out in their critique of this phase of S-R psychology is that, no matter how specific would be the "anatomical-physiological paths of excitation" or "organized phase sequences" in the brain that would ex hypothesi, according to this theory, become known to us, they could not provide for us explanations or predictions of purposive human actions. To say this does not require one to deny that corresponding to all human actions, intentions, wishes,

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<sup>98</sup>E. G. Boring, "Mind and Mechanism," American Journal of Psychology, No. 54 (1946), 173-92. Quoted by Allport in Personality and Social Encounter, p. 67.

<sup>99</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 77.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 76.



purposes, there may be, indeed there no doubt are, brain conditions or neural paths of excitation. But that there are these correspondences does not entail that sufficient explanations and satisfactory predictions of goal-directed actions can be made from knowledge of the brain states or neural excitations in question. It only entails, as is pointed out by Peters, that we would know and be enabled to state some of the necessary conditions of purposive behavior, in the absence of which the purposive behavior could not take place. The claim that knowledge of brain states or neural movements that correspond to a purposive action will also furnish a sufficient explanation of this purposive action, is a category-mistake.

We are calling attention here to the distinction between two different types of entity: physiological states or processes and human purposes or goals. For the consummation of any purposive action (Peters uses the example of signing a contract) no specific neural or muscular movements must occur. Any of a variety of combinations of numerous physiological states or movements, within a certain broad range of movements, may result in the consummation of the purposive action: the contract may be signed while standing, sitting, or lying down; in pen, pencil, crayon, or pigment; on paper or parchment; while chewing gum or a chocolate mint, or with nothing in one's mouth; while listening to a symphony, to the loud noise of an airplane overhead, to street cries, or in a quiet,





sound-proofed room, etc., etc. And conversely, any given physiological state or set of movements may correspond to more than one purpose or intention or goal of the particular action. Let me illustrate this latter point.

Let us assume that physiological research has reached the stage of development at which it is possible to observe and identify the brain states or neural and chemical changes that are the necessary conditions, and therefore the necessary accompaniment, of any given human action. Having reached this stage of knowledge, let us suppose that we are able to observe the brain states or neural processes that accompany a specific action of a person, without being able to observe the action itself. We would of course be able to talk about, to describe, these brain states and neural processes. But in describing these neuro-chemical processes would we be giving an account of the human action that is taking place? Indeed, would our ability to describe the neuro-chemical states and processes enable us to say anything at all significant about the corresponding human action?

Let us now look at this question through the medium of an example. Suppose we have a desk cluttered with magazines, papers, letters, envelopes, etc. Suppose further that a woman stands at this desk, picks up some of the objects lying on the desk, glances at them quickly, and, before replacing them, applies a dust cloth to the exposed surface of the desk. Suppose she repeats this several times

until she has attended to the entire surface of desk. Now suppose another woman at this same desk, going through the identical motions of picking up the papers, glancing at them, applying the dust cloth to the desk's surface, and replacing the papers. If we could observe the chemic-neural processes of these two persons accompanying the actions described above, would we, from inspection of the two sets of chemic-neural processes alone ever be enabled to tell that one of these two women was dusting the desk as part of her housecleaning duties, whereas the other woman was looking for a letter that had been misplaced, and, in passing, was giving the desk a dusting? Manifestly we could not. Chemical and neural processes tell us nothing about human intentions, goals, purposes. Accordingly, even if we were able to observe the physiological processes that correspond to and are among the necessary conditions of given actions, we would not be able to derive from them sufficient explanations of these human actions.

It is important to note here, as a final observation, that S-R psychology fails to understand, and that R. S. Peters fails to point out throughout his extensive discussion, that "higher order" causal explanations of human behavior are not always or necessarily only physiological or neuro-chemical explanations. When we go beyond purposive explanations of human actions, i. e., beyond explanations of actions by or in terms of purposes; and when we resolve to look further and seek explanations of purposes, i. e.,



of why people have the purposes that we say they have in certain of their actions, for example, if we ask "Why does this young man, or why do many young men, have it as a purpose of certain acts they indulge in, to hurt their fathers actually or symbolically?"; our answer will offer an explanation of these purposes in causal terms, i. e., it will try to explain these purposes by telling us what caused them, but this may still be a psychological and not a muscular, physiological, or neuro-chemical explanation. In other words, the causes suggested may be psychological causes. The fact is that both S-R psychology and Peters make the assumption that all causal explanation of human actions and human purposes is physiological explanation. This is an error. One of Freud's significant contributions was his showing that explanations of the purposiveness or directedness of certain behaviors or psychological events, may be explanations which are both causal and psychological. To this we shall return in our next chapter.

So much then for the programme of some S-R psychologists which has it as its goal to explain why people are motivated, or why human actions are purposive or directed, in terms of antecedent or corresponding physiological or chemico-neural states or processes. It is a logical error to believe that this could be done, since a knowledge or description of chemical, or neuro-chemical, or physiological, or muscular states or movements can tell us nothing about



intentions or purposes. This is the implicit logical structure of one aspect of the critique mounted against S-R psychology by our group of social psychologists, whose conception of man is essentially of a purposive goal-directed being whose actions are sufficiently explainable in terms of intentions, hopes, wishes, and reasons.

It should be noted that Maslow doesn't quite see the category-confusion of which the S-R psychologists are victims, and he falls into it himself. At one point he voices the same vain hopes that are embraced by mechanistic S-R psychology, namely, that when "objective correlates or indicators of subjective states" are discovered we shall have achieved an explanation of human motivation. Maslow expresses this confused and vain hope thus:

The original criterion of motivation and the one that is still used by all human beings except behavioral psychologists is the subjective one. I am motivated when I feel desire or want or yearning or wish or lack. No objectively observable state has yet been found that correlates decently with these subjective reports, i. e., no good behavioral definition of motivation has yet been found. Now of course we ought to keep on seeking for objective correlates or indicators of subjective states. On the day when we discover such a public and external indicator of pleasure or of anxiety or of desire, psychology will have jumped forward by a century. But until we find it . . . there is no reason in the world why we should refrain from [asking the human being for subjective reports] until we have a better source of data.<sup>101</sup>

What Maslow fails to see is that objective (meaning physiological) correlates will tell us nothing about a

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<sup>101</sup> Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 20.



mother's anxiety over her child's illness, her pleasure at the sight of the child in her new party dress, or her desire to have the child near her after a prolonged separation.

Solomon E. Asch is the only one in our group of social psychologists who shows a degree of awareness of this category-confusion in mechanistic S-R psychology, but only in relation to human action in a social situation. When individual purposive action is the subject of his discussion, Asch is still captive of the same confusion. This may be seen in his dubious statement that, with the terms stimulus and response "used in a neuro-muscular sense" we may be able to formulate acceptably not only the fact that an organism is moving in a certain direction, but "even that it is moving in a given direction in order to reach a goal."<sup>102</sup> In the light of the above analysis it appears that it would not be possible to deduce that the organism is moving "in order to reach a goal" from the description of the neuro-muscular facts of the organism's motion. That the organism's motion is directed toward a goal would not be a deduction from the neuro-muscular states or processes. Rather, it would be an ex post facto purposive interpretation by a purposively oriented human observer only after the completion of the organism's movements.

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<sup>102</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 149. (Emphasis mine)



However, in relation to human action in a social context, Asch does perceive the S-R psychologists' category-confusion, and directs our attention to it. He points out that there is "a sheer (and unacknowledged) gap" between the sense in which the terms stimulus and response are initially used in S-R psychology, and the meaning which is projected upon them when they are used to refer to social situations. The confusion of these two senses covers up the failure of S-R psychology to provide sufficient explanations of social interaction, and creates an illusion that it is giving satisfactory explanations:

The terms of social interaction are, as a rule, actions, purposes, emotions, ideas. When we say that a man plays or deliberates we are not referring simply to physical stimuli; one cannot define the category 'play' in terms of a particular set of physical energies. It would seem therefore to be the task of the theory to indicate either how the physical stimuli and responses become psychological structures or how they simulate psychological structures. Instead it starts with stimuli apparently defined in physical terms and silently alters their meaning until 'stimuli' are purposes, thoughts, and emotions. It does not adhere to the physical definition, but reverts to the common sense meaning of psychological events. . . . the present-day application of stimulus-response conceptions to social facts is a program rather than the consequence of concrete investigation.<sup>103</sup>

This category-confusion is evident also when we inspect closely the Behaviorist's "scientific" refusal to accept as data any "subjective," conscious elements in human

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<sup>103</sup>ibid.



action, and his systematic insistence on counting as scientific data only "objective" observations of large-scale, "molar" (as distinguished from "molecular") bodily movements of individuals or groups of individuals. For here again, if his discourse is to sound sensible, the behaviorist is forced to be inconsistent in his description of human action and introduce purposive, goal-directed, psychological terms. Thus, even the Behaviorist, observing a certain interaction between two persons, would be obliged to report that one of the persons "helped" the other person who had tripped and fallen. The concept of "help" is a purposive, psychological concept, and could not be derived from a consistent Behaviorist's descriptions of the bodily movements in this encounter which would have to read something like: "approached the other person, bent toward him, extended his hands, grasped the other person's hands, flexed certain muscles, began straightening himself up, etc., etc." As Asch says, after quoting R. R. Sears' description of what transpires between a mother and a young child who wants to be kissed good-night by her:

This sentence is surely not an unadulterated description of geometrical displacements; it does not supply the kinematics of affection, or even of slipping, lifting, or leaning.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Asch, "Perspective on Social Psychology," in Koch, Psychology: A Study of a Science, p. 376.



Clearly then, a description of the bodily movements of a person or of a group of people, does not constitute an adequate description, much less an adequate explanation, of human action. Why then does the Behaviorist believe and claim that he does understand human actions on the basis of observing bodily movements alone, or that sufficient research and investigation will lead to such understanding on the basis of the study of bodily movements alone? It would seem that this is a result of his bringing to his descriptions previously known, non-mechanical and non-physiological categories of the purposive, goal-directed sort, such as "helping" and "wanting to be kissed good-night" in the examples just given, and smuggling them surreptitiously into his discourse. Without attention to what Asch calls "the phenomenal facts" of our experience, namely, the purposes, values, meanings, intentions, which are of the essence of human nature, discourse about human action would be meaningless and sterile. From observing only the movements and gestures of a group of people moving their bodies around rhythmically in a given area, it would be impossible to tell whether we are seeing an art dance, a popular jazz dance, a calisthenics group, a religious rite, or part of a sexual orgy. That we do understand such happenings and are able to discourse about them meaningfully is a consequence of the fact that we know or assume some knowledge of the purposes, meanings, values, or intentions of the people, a knowledge which does not





come to us and is not deducible from the bodily movements as such.

The category-confusion we have been discussing is also evident in some of the discourse of S-R and Behaviorist psychologists who study animal behavior. They not only try to apply such mechanical-physiological categories as "drive" and "stimulus," that are employed in their study of rats, to the reactions of human beings. As Peters points out, their discourse about animals often sounds more meaningful than critical scrutiny would show, because here too they surreptitiously smuggle purposive, goal-directed, rule-following categories that are applicable only to human beings, into their descriptions and explanations of the behavior of rats under experimental conditions.<sup>105</sup> Thus we often read about the rat's "searching" for something, "wanting" something, "reaching its goal." But to write this way about rats implies that the rat, like a human being, knows the meaning of wanting, searching, or pursuing a goal, and knows also what it is searching for, what it wants, or what its goal is. To be consistent, S-R psychologists would have to stipulate for such terms meanings fundamentally different from the lexical meaning they have in discourse about human actions. They often do not make this distinction. Hence the terminology becomes thoroughly

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<sup>105</sup>Peters, The Concept of Motivation, pp. 97-98.



confused, and barren so far as yielding any knowledge is concerned about human nature and action, or about animal behavior."

The barrenness that results from the category-confusion is exhibited in this remarkable passage by a well-known Behaviorist, E. C. Tolman, as quoted by Peters:

Let me close now with a final confession of faith. I believe everything important in psychology (except perhaps such matters as the building up of a super-ego, that is, everything save such matters as involve society and words,) can be investigated in essence through the continued experimental and theoretical analysis of the determiners of rat behavior at a choice point in a maze.<sup>106</sup>

Peters counters this by the wry question as to what there is of importance in human behavior which does not involve society and words. The image of man in the writings of our group of social psychologists is of a being social in nature, using words and symbols, and communicating through words and symbols the purposive, goal-directed, valuing, normative, intentional, rule-following nature of most of his actions, and of his interactions with his social and physical environment. From this perspective they have mounted an attack against the S-R Behaviorist theory of human nature, an attack which is powerful, though sometimes deficient in logical and philosophical insight, and which, in the

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<sup>106</sup>E. C. Tolman, "The Determiners of Behavior at a Choice Point," Psychological Review, XLV (1938), 1-41. Quoted by Peters, The Concept of Motivation, p. 96. (Emphasis supplied by Peters.)



aggregate, establishes the failure of S-R, Behaviorist  
psychology to provide logically and empirically sufficient  
descriptions and explanations of vast areas of uniquely  
human action.