



CHAPTER IV

NOTES ON SOME METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

A number of methodological problems are either explicitly raised, or are implicitly present, in the theory or theories of human nature espoused by our social psychologists, and in the critiques directed by them against the S-R and Freudian theories of man. They are problems of varying degrees of difficulty and complexity. All of them would require extensive discussion, perhaps running into volumes. Some of them have received such extensive treatment in philosophical literature, especially in the literature of the philosophy and methodology of the social sciences. It appeared desirable at least to note some of these problems, to refer briefly to the views presented on them in some of the literature, and to attempt some comments of my own, before undertaking to sketch the image of man that emerges out of the writings of our group of social psychologists, and then to examine its value assumptions and its significance for normative ethics and social and political theory, which will be done in Chapters VI to X.

A. The Idiographic vs. the Nomothetic Approach to the Study of Man

The writers whose work we are examining in the present inquiry are known as social psychologists, and their



writings belong to a loosely demarcated sector of the empirical science of psychology. "What is the proper subject matter of this science?" is a perfectly proper methodological question to ask about psychology as about any other empirical science. Gordon W. Allport asks this question about the science of psychology in a special way, and thereby raises the old philosophical problem as to whether scientific knowledge is knowledge of particulars or of universals. It is Allport's oft-repeated complaint that psychology has given its attention only to universals, has neglected to study the individual, and has therefore been guilty of a serious failure in the fulfillment of its scientific task. Allport's complaint and prescription may be looked at in the following two brief quotations, before we examine more systematically his theory of the "idiographic" vs. the "nomothetic" study of man:

. . . as long as psychology deals only with universals and not with particulars, it won't deal with much-- least of all human personality.¹

. . . psychology will become more scientific, i. e., better able to make predictions, when it has learned to evaluate single trends in all their intrinsic complexity, when it has learned how to tell what will happen to this child's I.Q. if we change his environment in a certain way.²

¹Allport, Personality and Social Encounter, p. 146.

²Gordon W. Allport, "The Psychologist's Frame of Reference," Psychological Bulletin, XXXVII (1940), 17.



Borrowing a pair of terms from Windelband,³ Allport calls the study of broad, general, universal laws, and the methods employed in this kind of study, nomothetic, from the Greek word νόμος--nomos, meaning law,⁴ and the study of individuals and the methods employed by this kind of study, idiographic, from the Greek word ἴδιος --idios, meaning one's own, private.⁵ Allport sees contemporary psychology caught in "the dilemma" between "science and uniqueness," and states the "quandary which confronts us" as follows:

The individual, whatever else he may be, is an internally consistent and unique organization of bodily and mental processes. But since he is unique, science finds him an embarrassment. Science, it is said, deals only with broad, preferably universal, laws. Thus science is a nomothetic discipline. Individuality cannot be studied by science, but only by history, art, or biography whose methods are not nomothetic (seeking universal laws), but idiographic. Even the medieval scholastics perceived the issue, and declared scientia non est individuorum.⁶

³Gordon W. Allport, The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1942), p. 53. Also, Pattern and Growth in Personality, op. cit., p. 9, n. 9.

⁴Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, Greek-English Lexicon (New York: Harper & Bros., 1875), p. 982: "νόμος, . . . strictly any thing assigned, distributed, apportioned, that which one has in use or possession: hence, -- I. a usage, custom, and all that becomes law thereby, a law, ordinance, Lat. institutum. . . . At Athens νόμος was the name given esp. to Solon's laws . . ."

⁵Ibid., p. 665: "ἴδιος, . . . own, one's own, private . . ."

⁶Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, pp. 8-9.



Let us develop further Allport's formulation of the idiographic horn of the dilemma posed by him. Allport quotes from Kluckhohn and Murray⁷ the observation that

"Every man is in certain respects

- a. like all other men,
- b. like some other men,
- c. like no other man."⁸

It is with the respects in which every man is "like no other man" that this horn of Allport's dilemma is concerned.

"Individuality," he insists, "is a prime characteristic of human nature."⁹ Moreover, Allport reminds us,

The application of knowledge is always to the single case. . . . With all its weaknesses the case study remains the preferred tool of all clinicians psychiatrists, personnel officers, and consulting psychologists. They find that the single case cannot be reduced to a colligation of scores. Here, then, we encounter a pragmatic reason why idiographic procedures must be admitted to psychological science: practitioners demand them.¹⁰

Allport would thus appear to be asking for what might be called a science of individuals, of single cases, of unique

⁷ Clyde Kluckhohn, Henry A. Murray, and David M. Schneider (eds.), Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture (New York: Knopf, 1959), p. 53.

⁸ Quoted by Allport in Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 13.

⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰ Allport, The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science, op. cit., p. 58.



beings, of insightful understandings of each individual personality. He points out that the case worker takes an idiographic approach in his work with his client, and that no nomothetist can be helped by the general laws of psychology to know what his wife would like for a gift. "He can make this prediction correctly only by knowing his wife's particular pattern of interest and affection."¹¹

In espousing this position Allport seems to be going back, at least so far as knowledge of man is concerned, to Duns Scotus' doctrine of haecceitas--thisness. Duns Scotus was arguing that, since the human intellect discovers that things are distinct, then there must be some inherent, fundamental characteristics that differentiate each of them. Individual things are therefore always distinguished from each other in essence as well as in existence. Scotus therefore "expressed a theory of knowledge which emphasizes the status of the distinctions which the intellect discovers."¹²

For Scotus, the principle of individuation is in the form, not merely in the matter; the essence of each individual contains the principle of contraction and limitation which restrains the universality of the species: the ultimate reality of the thing which is contracts the specific form. This is the doctrine of hecceity, according to which the characteristics of individuation are not to be found in the quantity or

¹¹Ibid., p. 59.

¹²Richard McKeon (ed. & trans.), Selections from Medieval Philosophers, Vol. II (New York: Scribners, 1930), p. 305.



in any other attribute of body . . . but in a formal distinction derived from the thing. . . . Duns Scotus . . . considered that which is as particular, and as known in each case by the hecceity peculiar to the particular thing.¹³

Another commentator, Anne Freemantle, asserts that Duns Scotus "denied the distinction between essence and existence, because neither accounted for the individuality of real things."¹⁴ She then quotes from D. J. B. Hawkins' A Sketch of Medieval Philosophy on the concept of haecceitas, and appends her own comments:

'Hence, beyond all that in reality corresponds to universals . . . [Scotus] claims that things exhibit a principle of individuality, a thisness, which is not reducible to any other factor. The singular adds an entity over and above the entity of the universal . . . ' We cannot understand anything until we have understood its thisness, and the difference between thisness and thatness. . . . In fact, for Duns Scotus, the individual is the only existing thing, and it is not the being of being but the being of the individual which is investigated by philosophy.¹⁵

A useful brief statement of the Scotist point is given by George Boas:

. . . by the 16th century more philosophers follow the lead of Duns Scotus who asserted that every individual had what he called thisness (haecceitas)

¹³Ibid., pp. 305-306.

¹⁴ Anne Freemantle, The Age of Belief: The Medieval Philosophers (New York: Mentor Books, 1955), p. 183.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 183-84.



and that this individuality could never be completely resolved into a class concept.¹⁶

If this is what Allport means, namely that (with reference to human beings) every individual has a thisness which cannot be resolved into a class concept and that the study of man ought to concentrate on the study of these unique and irreducible individualities--and, as I shall argue below, it is not at all clear that this is what he means--then he has support from various quarters in current and recent thought. He finds strongest support in Existentialist thought. He points out that "at bottom the existentialist approach to man is urgently idiographic."¹⁷ He sounds like an existentialist when he delivers himself of such pronouncements as the following:

. . . the outstanding characteristic of man is his individuality. He is a unique creation of the forces of nature.¹⁸

Every person deviates in thousands of ways from the hypothetical average man. But his individuality is not the sum of these separate deviations.¹⁹

¹⁶George Boas, Dominant Themes in Modern Philosophy: A History (New York: Ronald Press, 1957), p. 286.

¹⁷Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 557.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 7.



Existence ultimately resides nowhere except in the individual's point of view.²⁰

But the existentialists go much further than this. They deny the very possibility of science and of systematic thought in general. They appear to say that the only significant kind of knowledge is the intuitive, insightful apprehension of the individual in his bare individuality, in his utter uniqueness. All other knowledge-claims distort and tend to destroy both the knower and the known. Allport himself points out that for the existentialists,

To force existence into a theoretical system is to destroy it. . . . Another's existence cannot be pinned down or communicated by devices; an extrascientific grasp is the best we can hope for.²¹

These comments occur in a footnote, and are occasioned by Allport's reference to a sentence by Soren Kirkegaard, which is quoted by Jean Wahl. Kirkegaard said:

One might say that I am the moment of individuality, but I refuse to be a paragraph in a system.²²

But Allport's ascription to the existentialists of the view that "an extrascientific grasp is the best we can

²⁰Ibid., p. 557.

²¹Ibid., n. 6.

²²Jean Wahl, A Short History of Existentialism, trans. Forrest Williams and Stanley Maron (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 4. Quoted in Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 557, n. 6 (Allport's footnote gives the wrong page number in the reference to Wahl's book, and the quote from Kirkegaard contains a minor inaccuracy).



hope for" is misleading, and suggests that there is in fact a considerable gap between Allport's views and existentialism, in spite of his emphasis on idiographic knowledge and methods. The existentialist would insist that, for authentic knowledge, a direct, intuitive, "extrascientific grasp" of the other person's concrete uniqueness and individuality is what we should hope for and strive for, and that scientific knowledge of generalizations, abstractions, laws, etc., is only a barrier to authentic knowledge. But Allport's emphasis on idiographic knowledge has not led him to any rejection of science. At most it has resulted in some confusion on his part about the differences between these two kinds of knowledge and the relationships between them, as I shall try to show. Allport does show some awareness of the distance between his and the existentialists' views. He points out that the existentialist approach to man

as yet . . . offers no special methods for representing the unique structure of persons. . . . the movement has not yet evolved genuinely novel methods for the representation of individuality.²³

However, in a footnote, Allport acknowledges, with a kind of embarrassed self-consciousness, that the existentialists may find his desire for such "methods of representation" quite uncongenial:

²³Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 557.



Existentialist writers may dispute this implied criticism. They may say that it is not the purpose of existential analysis to become objective and scientific. To force existence into a system is to destroy it.²⁴

For, unlike Allport even when he urges the pursuit of idiographic knowledge, the rejection of scientific knowledge on the part of most existentialists is categorical. This may be seen in all its forcefulness in the epistemology of Martin Buber's distinction between the I-Thou and the I-It relationship. Maurice S. Friedman's exposition of Buber's theory of knowledge helps throw into bold relief the existentialist rejection of science, and its advocacy of the intimate I-Thou bond with the concrete particular, as the only real knowledge:

The real opposition for Buber is not between philosophy and religion, as it at first appears to be, but between that philosophy which sees the absolute in universals and hence removes reality into the systematic and the abstract, and that which means the bond of the absolute with the particular and hence points man back to the reality of the lived concrete--to the immediacy of real meeting with the beings over against one.²⁵

. . . the philosophical anthropologist . . . must discover the essence of man not as a scientific observer, removed as far as possible from the object that he observes, but as a participant who only afterwards gains the distance from the subject matter which will enable him to formulate the insights he has attained.

²⁴ Ibid., n. 6.

²⁵ Maurice S. Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 161.



. . . science investigate man not as a whole but in selective aspects. . . . Scientific method is man's most highly perfected development of the I-IT, or subject-object, way of knowing. . . . Just for these reasons scientific method is not qualified to discover the essence of man. It can compare men with each other and man with animals. . . . This scale . . . can be of aid . . . but not in discovering the uniqueness of man as man.

It is, in fact, only the knowing of the I-Thou relation which makes possible the conception of the wholeness of man. Only I-Thou sees this wholeness as the whole person in unreserved relation with what is over against him rather than as a sum of parts²⁶

Allport does not reject the generalized knowledge which comes to us from science and scientific method, though others, not only existentialists, who are allied with Allport in the emphasis on idiographic knowledge, seem to be on the threshold of such rejection. Adlerian adherents of the school of "Individual Psychology" seem to be implying such a rejection in statements such as the following:

Adler's 'Individual Psychology would be the idiographic science par excellence.'

. . . Adler was not satisfied with probabilities; he wanted a psychological theory which would be adequate for each individual case, the exceptions as well as the rule. What he aimed at was a truly idiographic psychology²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 172-73.

²⁷ H. L. Ansbacher, "Causality and Indeterminism According to Alfred Adler, and Some Current American Personality Theories," Essays in Individual Psychology, ed. Kurt A. Adler and Danica Deutsch (New York: Grove Press, 1959), pp. 34, 29.



And Maslow, in his cavalier, swashbuckling manner, announces that

American psychologists have listened to Allport's call for an idiographic psychology but have not done much about it. Not even the clinical psychologists have. We now have an added push from the phenomenologists and existentialists in this direction, one that will be very hard to resist, indeed, I think, theoretically impossible to resist. If the study of the uniqueness of the individual does not fit into what we know of science, then so much the worse for the conception of science. It, too, will have to endure re-creation.²⁸

A clear warning against this extreme idiographic anti-scientism which, paradoxically, some psychologists and other social scientists have wished to insinuate into the social sciences, comes from the pen of Alfred Schutz, a keen student of the methodology of the social sciences:

It has been maintained that the social sciences are idiographic, characterized by individualizing conceptualization and seeking singular assertory propositions. . . . Some proponents of the [above view] . . . were inclined to identify the methodological situation in one particular social science with the method of the social sciences in general. Because history has to deal with unique and non-recurrent events, it was contended that all social sciences are restricted to singular assertory propositions.²⁹

We can say, by analogy, that because psychotherapy, case work, guidance, etc., have to deal with unique and (in many respects) non-recurrent individual persons, the

²⁸ Abraham H. Maslow, "Existential Psychology: What's In It For Us," Existential Psychology, ed. Rollo May (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 56.

²⁹ Alfred Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences," Philosophy and the Social Sciences: A Reader, ed. Maurice Natanson (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 232.



idiographic anti-scientists contend, and sometimes Allport appears to contend, that psychology must work toward singular assertory propositions. That the history of the individual case is of crucial importance for the work of the psychotherapist, case worker, or guidance counsellor, is of course axiomatic. In psychoanalysis in particular, the unique history of the patient is of the greatest importance. This is shown by Hans Meyerhoff in an interesting paper in which he charts the large areas of overlapping between the disciplines of psychoanalysis and history, and in which he makes the keen observation that ". . . psychoanalysis 'works' only insofar as we reconstruct the history of the individual case."³⁰

Thus, for certain purposes, the direct, idiographic knowledge of the unique, non-recurrent individual person, the person's case history, or the I-Thou insight and einführung that take place between close friends, lovers, husband and wife, therapist and patient, are irreplaceable. Moreover, though the existentialists are profoundly wrong in assuming or implying that this kind of idiographic, I-Thou knowledge of individual persons is all the knowledge we need, and that it can somehow constitute a knowledge of man, it also seems clear that the generalized, nomothetic knowledge of man through the science of psychology can never reach or

³⁰ Hans Meyerhoff, "On Psychoanalysis As History," Psychoanalysis and the Psychoanalytic Review, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer, 1962), p. 12.



exhaust the rich uniqueness and individuality of the person. The existentialists are profoundly right in insisting that a kind of knowledge other than the generalizations of the science of psychology is needed for the "knowledge from within" of the unique individual person. However, by the same token, one has to remind Allport that this knowledge of the full uniqueness of the individual person "from within" is by definition uncodifiable into a science of psychology. This has to be said, because Allport appears to be confused about the distinction between idiographic and nomothetic knowledge, and, in the final analysis, his point is unclear.

As was pointed out earlier, Allport neither denies nor objects to "the proposition that psychology seeks general laws."³¹ His insistence that psychology must deal with individuals is based, as was pointed out earlier, on two considerations, one substantive, the other methodological. The substantive point is his belief in "the real possibility that no two lives are alike in their motivational processes."³² His methodological point is that even abstract, general, nomothetic science can never escape the individual, since its findings must be applied to the individual object:

³¹ Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 572.

³² Allport, The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science, p. 57.



The application of knowledge is always to the single case. We apply the science of engineering only in building particular conduits or bridges. In the human realm we have to particularize our nomothetic knowledge before it is of any value. . . .³³

No general principles can ever be applied except to concrete and particular objects. The individual case stands at the gateway and terminus of generalized knowledge.³⁴

So far, nothing in these passages suggests any departure from the assumptions and procedures of the sciences generally, including the physical sciences. Allport appears to believe that he is pointing to psychology's need for a departure from the nomothetic procedures of science, when he draws our attention to the fact that

general laws of human behavior known to us are altered and sometimes negated by the idiographic knowledge available to us concerning the personality we are studying.³⁵

But this is also true of the application of the science of engineering to bridge building. If, upon idiographic examination, a fault is discovered in a beam of structural steel, or some other significant deviation from the general character of the other beams, it is discarded. Or if, as happened several years ago, a wind of unusually great force blows down a great suspension bridge because of the bridge's

³³Ibid., p. 58.

³⁴Ibid., p. 150.

³⁵Ibid., p. 58.



"rigidity," the idiographic knowledge about this bridge leads to the altering of the general laws of bridge building so that future bridges are built with less "rigidity" and more "elasticity." Similarly, automobiles designed in accordance with nomothetic principles show defects when individual cars are driven by their buyers, and their design has to be changed in conformity with revised nomothetic principles of automotive design. New, nomothetically designed airplanes are produced, crashes of individual planes occur, and a revised design is substituted in accordance with revised nomothetic principles of aerodynamics. This, therefore, can not be Allport's point.

What Allport seems to getting at is something different, and is a point about psychology. Each individual human being is unique. The individual person is "a system of patterned uniqueness."³⁶ But it is also a fact, says Allport, that "science likes universals and not particulars."³⁷ This, for Allport, seems to present a problem. Let us see the problem as stated in Allport's own words:

. . . personality itself is a universal phenomenon though it is found only in individual forms. Since it is a universal phenomenon science must study it; but it cannot study it correctly unless it looks into the individuality of patterning! Such is the dilemma.³⁸

³⁶Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 9.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.



It is the responsibility of psychology, according to Allport, to investigate "how uniqueness comes about," to study "those processes that bring about uniqueness."³⁹

Accordingly,

The reason conventional science is baffled is that it cannot see how the internal organization of the particular can fit into its nomothetic search for general laws.⁴⁰

But the investigation of the processes that bring about uniqueness, the quest for "the laws that tell us how uniqueness occurs," is ultimately a nomothetic enterprise, the successful pursuit of which will give us abstract, general knowledge about how these individual systems of patterned uniqueness come about, rather than knowledge of the idiographic kind (though of course much idiographic investigation has to take place in order to lead to the nomothetic goal of formulating the laws of how uniqueness comes about, but this is true in varying degrees of all empirical investigations). The nomothetic character of this part of Allport's quest is betrayed in his own words, when he says that he has shown "that a general law may be a law that tells us how uniqueness comes about,"⁴¹ or that he has "drawn special attention to those laws and principles

³⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Allport, Personality, op. cit., p. 558.



that tell how uniqueness comes about."⁴²

What remains out of Allport's advocacy of the use of idiographic methods in the study of man, are two other contentions:

(a) that "the personal patterns of individuality are unique,"⁴³ i. e., that each individual person is unique; and

(b) that "the behavior of every individual is lawful in its own right,"⁴⁴ that ". . . each personality is a law unto itself. . . . The course of each life is a lawful event, even though it is unlike all others of its class. Lawfulness does not depend upon frequency nor upon uniformity, but upon necessity. There is a necessary patterning in each life . . ."⁴⁵

Now, before getting on with the main argument of this section, one feels constrained to digress, and inquire what Allport means by the claim that the behavior of every individual is lawful in its own right, that each personality is a law unto itself, that the course of each life is a lawful event, that this lawfulness depends upon necessity,

⁴²Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 572.

⁴³Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Allport, Personality, loc. cit.



and that there is a necessary patterning in each life.

There is no trouble with the obvious meanings of this claim, which Allport makes clear, namely,

- (a) that there is a consistency, a predictability, even a necessity in the behavior patterns of each individual,
- (b) that the better you know an individual person, i. e., the more you have studied or experienced the person, the more accurately you will be able to predict that person's behavior. _

However, the less obvious problem, namely, what are the causal explanations of this consistency and lawfulness, Allport does not probe. He disposes of this problem by brief, almost casual, and dogmatic references to some concepts out of the writings of Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza, and Leibnitz.

When a body of phenomena is said to display lawful behavior, it is natural to seek explanations for this, to ask what the causes are for this lawful behavior. To the question as to what the causes are for the lawfulness of the behavior of each person, Allport would of course reject the Behaviorist answer that would attempt to give explanations in terms of physiological causation such as drives and tensions, and of the "law of effect" that refers



to reward-and-punishment conditioning. He would also reject the Freudian answer that would explain the lawfulness of each person's behavior in terms of such psychological causation as early childhood experiences, the oedipal phase, toilet training, etc.

What Allport seems to be suggesting is the rather vague theory that there is a kind of immanent purposive force within each person which explains the person's lawful, consistent behavior. He invokes Aristotle's doctrines of orexis (ὀρεξις) and entelechy (ἐντελέχεια), Aquinas' doctrine of intention, Spinoza's concept of conatus, and Leibnitz's notion of the intellect as the source of its own ideas, and, according to Allport, of the person as the source of his own acts. This seems to be a kind of doctrine of immanence with respect to the behavior of the discrete individual which would make of each person a causa sui. Such a doctrine is at least dubious, and would require considerable critical scrutiny.

To return now to the main argument, it is difficult to understand how the two contentions mentioned above, namely, that each person is unique, and that his behavior is lawful, require additional idiographic knowledge of individuals. These contentions are themselves generalizations, general laws, and therefore by definition nomothetic in character. Either these two generalizations have been reasonably well established on the basis of empirical evidence,



in which case no additional idiographic evidence is needed for their support (except in the sense that the evidence for empirical generalizations of this type is never complete, and the generalization or law or theory always retains the character of a "conjecture"⁴⁶). Or, if the generalizations have not been established well enough, then additional idiographic evidence for their support has to be sought; but the objective of such a quest would be a nomothetic one, the establishment of a general law, and would not differ essentially from the procedures of other scientific investigations. On the other hand, if the therapist, or case worker, or personnel director needs for his special purposes genuinely idiographic knowledge about this or that person, the acquisition of this knowledge would not require extensive idiographic studies of other individuals. Allport himself understands this, as we can see in his assertion that

We do not need to understand every life in order to discover the lawful regularities in one life. If you have an intimate friend, you may know very well why he behaves as he does . . . because you know the lawful regularities in his life.⁴⁷

Let us, however, examine Allport's emphasis and the emphasis of others on the need for "an idiographic psychology"

⁴⁶See Karl R. Popper, Conjectures and Refutations (New York: Basic Books, 1962), pp. 33-66.

⁴⁷Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 10.



by making the extreme assumption that, pursuant to this goal, every human being on earth were to be subjected to the suggested idiographic analysis, what kind of knowledge would this hypothetical undertaking yield, and to what uses could it be put? What, as a result of this undertaking, would the science of psychology have that it now does not have? What would the results of this undertaking contribute toward the three contentions stressed by Allport, namely, that the personal patterns of individuality are unique; that the behavior of every individual is lawful in its own right; and that psychology must discover the laws of how uniqueness comes about?

First we must note that since, ex hypothesi, every human being on earth would be studied, we would have an instance of what the logic textbooks call "perfect induction," or "complete induction." It would then seem that, if the idiographic studies gave proper attention to properly selected variables, the consolidated results should give us complete and certain knowledge of the laws of how uniqueness comes about. However, as pointed out above, this would be essentially nomothetic knowledge, knowledge of general, abstract laws of certain aspects of human nature abstracted from the totality of each of the individual human beings. Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that, for the discovery of the laws of how uniqueness comes about, a study of all members of the class of human beings is needed, and



that reasonably well-established laws could not be arrived at on the basis of studies of a sample of the class. Indeed, if only "perfect induction" could give us these laws, then all future generations of human beings would have to continue being subjected to the idiographic studies advocated by Allport, and psychology would finally achieve a full knowledge of these laws of how uniqueness comes about only in the ultimate moment of collective self-contemplation immediately before the cataclysm that destroys the entire human race. This seems to me not too unfair a reductio ad absurdum of the "call for an idiographic psychology."

As to Allport's contentions that each individual is in some respects unique and that each person is a lawful system, either these have already been established as sound empirical generalizations, or as in the case of other scientific disciplines, psychology must continue its investigations by studying individual human beings (idiographic, if you will) to see whether the two nomothetic contentions under discussion are supported by the evidence. Here again, it would hardly require idiographic studies of all human beings in order to establish satisfactorily these two generalizations. At most, what it would require is more careful or thoroughgoing study of individuals in order to have a more solid foundation of evidence for the nomothetic generalizations. This does not add up to an "idiographic psychology."

It would seem, however, that the knowledge obtained



from such idiographic studies of all human beings would have two kinds of uses. First, it would be useful to therapists, case workers, guidance counsellors, or personnel directors in helping them to a more thorough understanding, and to more accurate predictions of the behavior, of those in the total population who are their patients or clients. In other words, it would be useful to have this idiographic knowledge about those individuals about whom it is important to have individual knowledge for such specific purposes. This seems hardly more than a tautology, and one is therefore tempted to ask what need there is for universal idiographic studies of individuals other than the patients and clients concerned, and, by the same token, to ask what need there is for an "idiographic psychology." What is needed is careful idiographic study of each individual who, for one reason or another is in need of the attention of the type of practitioner mentioned above, so that the practitioner will know as much as possible about the laws of his patient's or client's inner personality system. If Allport means that there ought to be more of this done, and that it ought to be done better than it is being done now, then his admonition is probably right, but, from the point of view of the systematic psychological study of human nature, trivial.

The other use to which idiographic studies of all human beings could be put is in the prediction of the



behavior of human beings generally. We can predict the behavior of an intimate friend more accurately than can be done by another person who does not have our idiographic knowledge of our friend. So with each person of whom we possess idiographic knowledge. Accordingly, where the prediction of individual persons' behavior is important, idiographic knowledge of these persons is important. Allport complains that science is greatly disadvantaged in the prediction of the behavior of individuals, "because the best source of that prediction is the past behavior of the individual."⁴⁸ His complaint about science continues this theme:

Where this [scientific] reasoning seriously trips is in the prediction applied to the single case, instead of to a population of cases. A fatal non-sequitur occurs in the reasoning that if 80% of the delinquents from broken homes are recidivists, then this delinquent from a broken home has an 80% chance of becoming a recidivist. The truth of the matter seems to be that this delinquent has either 100% certainty of becoming a repeater or 100% certainty of going straight. If all the causes in his case were known, we could predict for him perfectly (barring environmental accident). His chances are determined by the pattern of his life and not by the frequencies found in a population at large.⁴⁹

Here Allport is once more saying that if you wish to know about the probable behavior of an individual, you will be better off if you have as much knowledge as possible

⁴⁸ Allport, The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science, p. 155.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 156-57.



about this individual's personality system, than if you have only statistical generalizations about a class of persons to which he belongs. This is probably right, and it means that if you wish to make predictions about recidivism in the case of 1,000 specific delinquents, your predictions will be better if you have idiographic knowledge of each one of them. But you will then in fact be making 1,000 disparate predictions, and idiographic studies of other individual human beings, whether of all of them or only of a sample of them, will be irrelevant to these 1,000 predictions. Again we end up with the trivial conclusion that it is useful to have idiographic knowledge about those individuals about whom it is important to have individual knowledge for specific reasons or purposes. And again, this does not add up to an idiographic psychology.

To sum up then, in the study of the nature of man we may acquire knowledge of individuals in their unique and irreducible individuality, and we may acquire general knowledge of aspects of human beings, traits, or propensities, which are abstracted from the concrete individuals. This is true about all other empirical sciences. However, in the case of human beings, the knowledge of the individual is of especial importance, because the behavior, the future, the fate or destiny of certain individuals is of importance to us. Therefore, the idiographic knowledge of the individual person is of crucial importance in the work of therapists,



case workers, guidance counsellors, etc., because it is with the individual that these practitioners deal. Knowledge of the uniqueness of the unique individual in the sense of einfühlung, of the I-Thou relationship between persons, is of transcendent importance in interpersonal relations, but it is the kind of knowledge that one can only experience directly and ineffably; one can hardly talk about it. At best one can try to describe it elliptically, metaphorically. It is not systematically codifiable.

But the study of the nature of man requires the acquisition of general, abstract knowledge of human behavior; general laws about the psychological constitution of human beings, and about probable human actions under certain conditions. This is the kind of knowledge Allport calls nomothetic, and without which a science of psychology, and more generally, a science of man, would be an impossibility. While Allport is probably right when he says that "psychological causation is always personal and never actuarial,"⁵⁰ it is through the study of many instances and many kinds of personal causation, and through codifying them into nomothetic generalizations, that our knowledge of man will increase and deepen. Indeed, just as new idiographic knowledge of individuals may serve as a

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 157.



point of departure for extending and enriching our knowledge of laws of human nature, so does nomothetic knowledge of general laws of human behavior make possible deeper idiographic insights into individuals by making it more possible to understand the respects in which the individual under study is "like (some or all) other people," and the respects in which he is "like no other men."

Ernest Nagel, approaching this issue in connection with his examination of problems in the logic of historical inquiry, concludes that science is not purely nomothetic and that history is not a purely idiographic discipline. "It would be a gross error," Nagel tells us, "to conclude that singular statements play no role in the theoretical sciences or that historical inquiry makes no use of universal ones."⁵¹ As to the natural sciences, Nagel reminds us that even they

can assert their general statements as empirically warranted only on the basis of concrete factual evidence, and therefore only by making use of singular statements. Moreover, many . . . laws of 'pure' science have a generality that is at least geographically restricted. . . . Furthermore, some branches of natural science . . . are primarily concerned with spatiotemporal distributions and the development of specific individual systems, and are therefore engaged in establishing statements singular in form.⁵²

On the other hand, so far as history is concerned,

⁵¹Ernest Nagel, The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), p. 548.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 548-49.



. . . the historian's characterizations of individual things assume that there are various kinds of occurrences, and in consequence that there are more or less determinate empirical regularities which are associated with each kind and which differentiate one kind from other kinds.⁵³

Returning to psychology now, the interplay of singular statements and universal statements in the systematic discourse about human nature and conduct is really quite familiar. But what may be worth recalling here, in connection with Allport's call for an idiographic psychology, is the extent to which even therapists depend upon nomothetic generalizations to help them better to understand idiographically their patients or clients. Kenny's observation is helpful here, when he says that "Being told that a man acted out of vanity helps us to understand his action . . . because we say to ourselves: 'Yes, of course, men often act like that.'"⁵⁴ On the other hand, the therapist is helped in making predictions about individuals, i. e., idiographic predictions, by means of the nomothetic knowledge he has of regularities and generalizations concerning the class of similar cases. Jacob A. Arlow's clinical illustration is instructive in this connection:

During an initial interview I asked a patient how long he had been married. He answered, 'Sixteen months, three weeks.' The overly exact quality of this

⁵³ Ibid., p. 549.

⁵⁴ Anthony Kenny, Action, Emotion, and Will, op. cit., p. 95; cf. supra, p. 57.



response aroused in me the suspicion that I was dealing with a person whose character structure was colored by obsessional thinking and compulsive traits. To confirm my suspicion I asked further, 'How long did you know your wife before you married her?' He answered, 'Two years, three months.' At this point, inwardly, I made a further set of predictions concerning this individual's mental traits. I guessed that he would be especially concerned with money, that he would have a passion for accumulating it, keeping meticulous records of his financial transactions, and that he would be most reluctant to spend it. A further set of predictions concerned his relationship to cleanliness. I could guess that he would be excessively neat regarding his person and his clothes, tidy in his surroundings, orderly in his manner, and vigorously punctual regarding appointments and the fulfillment of financial obligations. Questioning confirmed each of these predictions in minute detail. But even further predictions can be made on the basis of the minimum hints given by this patient. In the course of detailed psychoanalytic investigation it could be predicted that a specific type of childhood experience regarding bowel training and interest in excrement would emerge. Such predictions in psychoanalysis. . . . are predictions that have been validated regularly, hundreds of times in psychoanalytic investigations. Thus, we can see how a pathognomonic detail may enable the trained and experienced psychoanalyst not only to predict a whole set of correlative conditions but to hypothesize correctly concerning the genesis and development of certain mental characteristics.⁵⁵

It is considerations such as these that lead the psychologist Melvin H. Marx to conclude that the nomothetic-idiographic issue is a "pseudo issue." He points out that while the nomothetic-idiographic distinction appeals to "practically-oriented clinicians because "predictions about specific individuals, as such, are essential for the clinical

⁵⁵Jacob A. Arlow, "Psychoanalysis as Scientific Method," Psychoanalysis, Scientific Method and Philosophy, ed. Sidney Hook, op. cit., pp. 206-207.



practitioner," it is also true that evaluation of a clinician is dependent "not upon his ability to predict satisfactorily in any one case but rather upon his continuing efforts in a number of cases." He thus concludes that

Failure to make a clear distinction between the scientific objective of generalized understanding from this sort of 'group' prediction and the practical clinical objective of particularized understanding from individual prediction has resulted in the acceptance and perpetuation of this pseudo issue.⁵⁶

This point of view is reflected in some sentences by Gardner Murphy, and by Clyde Cluckhohn and Henry A. Murray, which provide a fitting close for this part of our discussion:

It is hard to see what serious purpose could be served by attempting a catalogue of all the individual differences in all the traits known to psychology--a manual of human diversities. . . . Personality traits, in inventories or elsewhere, presuppose a working conception as to what traits are, and, a fortiori, a working conception as to what a personality is. . . . Methods which, like the case study, or biography, or psychoanalysis, seek to understand the organized totality of a person are presumably richer in their perception of their problem when they are fortified by a broad and clear conception of the laws governing such totalities.⁵⁷

. . . there is uniqueness in each inheritance and uniqueness in each environment. . . . In personal relations, in psychotherapy, and in the arts, this

⁵⁶ Melvin H. Marx, "Confusion in Attitudes Toward Clinical Theory," Theories in Contemporary Psychology, ed. Melvin H. Marx, op. cit., p. 313.

⁵⁷ Gardner Murphy, Personality: A Biosocial Approach to Origins and Structure (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947), pp. 1-2.



uniqueness of personality usually is, and should be, accented. But for general scientific purposes the observation of uniformities, uniformities of elements and uniformities of patterns, is of first importance. This is so because without the discovery of uniformities there can be no concepts, no classifications, no formulations, no principles, no laws; and without these no science can exist.⁵⁸

B. Some Issues of Psychologism vs. Sociologism

Some of the issues of what is known as "psychologism" vs. the position known as "sociologism" are raised by S. E. Asch in connection with his defense of the thesis that, since man is a social being, the systematic study of the psychological nature of man requires "a social psychology to understand the social actions of men."⁵⁹ Asch's view finds opposition from two schools of thought which, in addition to opposing Asch's thesis, are also diametrically opposed to each other. On the one hand there are the psychologists who have been traditionally concerned only with the psychology of the individual, his personal tendencies and capacities. When these psychologists have reason to give attention to historical processes, we observe "the irresistible tendency to 'read them off' from the principles of a narrow individual psychology."⁶⁰ They

⁵⁸ Clyde Kluckhohn, Henry A. Murray, and David M. Schneider (ed.), Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

⁵⁹ Asch, Social Psychology, p. 31. (Emphasis mine)

⁶⁰ Ibid.



therefore, as Asch explains, proceed to derive the facts of war from individual aggressiveness, of the institution of private property from alleged individual acquisitiveness, etc.

But on the other hand, the proposal for a "social psychology" also finds opposition among some social theorists "with a sense of the historic sweep of events." These social theorists are struck by the power of social forces over individuals and by the "apparently impersonal march of history," and they therefore conclude that there are large scale social phenomena, forces, or directions in history and society which function independently "of the consciousness or desires" of the individuals moved by them, and "in comparison with which psychological factors are puny and impotent."⁶¹ Asch presents his own more systematic and formal statement of the two positions as follows:

One claims that the study of individuals outside the social setting is sufficient to establish the basic principles of social behavior and the properties of institutions. The other, which has its roots in sociological thought, asserts that a knowledge of social forms and institutions alone is relevant to the understanding and prediction of social events, and that a knowledge of psychological processes has no explanatory or predictive value at the social level.⁶²

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., p. 32.



The debate between psychologism and sociologism is also reflected in Freud's criticism of Communist theory with its faith that if the social institution of private property were abolished social conflict would be eliminated,⁶³ and in Fromm's criticism of Freud because of "the 'psychologistic' approach which characterizes Freud's thinking."⁶⁴ Freud's criticism says, inter alia, that Communist theory is wrong in supposing that the social force of an institution such as private property is the determining factor in directing and controlling aspects of human behavior, and is mistaken in ignoring such psychological factors as the sexual instinct in the determination of individual actions and patterns of culture.⁶⁵ Freud was thus attacking an element of sociologism in Communist theory.

On the other hand, Fromm attacks Freud's "psychologistic" approach on the ground of its alleged contention that

cultural phenomena are rooted in psychological factors that result from instinctual drives which in themselves are influenced by society only through some measure of suppression.⁶⁶

⁶³ See supra, p. 216.

⁶⁴ Fromm, Escape from Freedom, pp. 295ff.

⁶⁵ Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, pp. 87-89.

⁶⁶ Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 295.



I have argued above that this narrow interpretation of Freudian doctrine is mistaken; it neglects or ignores Freud's depiction of the dynamic interplay between the individual and the situational social forces with which he interacts. Fromm himself adopts a modified sociology which, while it acknowledges that "psychological forces are effective," nonetheless contends that these psychological forces are themselves the result of the molding forces of society. Fromm states his view as follows:

. . . we have assumed that ideologies and culture in general are rooted in the social character; that the social character itself is molded by the mode of existence of a given society; and that in their turn the dominant character traits become productive forces shaping the social process. . . .
.....
man reacts to changing external situations by changes in himself, and . . . these psychological factors in their turn help in molding the economic and social forces. . . . In spite of this interdependence of economic, psychological, and ideological forces, each of them has also a certain independence.⁶⁷

Of the two positions, the one which stresses the study of individuals as the source for our understanding of social processes and institutions, is often called "psychologism," and the position which claims that the understanding of large scale social phenomena and historical processes is independent of any knowledge of the psychological constitution of the individual participants, is known as "sociologism." The theories referred to by these

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 296-298.

terms are of concern not only to the field of psychology, but to sociology, political science, and other social sciences as well. The clash between these two positions is therefore reflected in some of the literature of these other disciplines. A brief sampling of how the term "psychologism" is defined by some contemporary writers in these fields, and an indication of the context in which the position of psychologism is discussed in each case, may help sharpen our focus on the issues.

C. Wright Mills, the sociologist, criticizes a contemporary trend in sociological thought and research, which he dubs "abstracted empiricism," for its fragmented, small-scale, trivial research projects, based on the tabulations of questionnaires and interviews administered to samples of individuals, for emphasizing and cultivating "method for its own sake,"⁶⁸ for pursuing a "systematically a-historical and non-comparative approach,"⁶⁹ and for coming up with "microscopic findings"⁷⁰ and thus producing studies which "probably cannot be 'added up' to more significant results."⁷¹ In most of these studies, not only

⁶⁸C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination (New York: Grove Press, 1951), p. 24.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 68.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 67.



is the fundamental source of information a sample of individuals, but the questions asked are in terms of the psychological reactions of individuals. Accordingly, Mills contends, these studies require the assumption "that the institutional structure of society, in so far as it is to be studied in this way, can be understood in terms of such data about individuals."⁷² Mills feels that a "rather convincing case might be made" for the view that these studies "are very often examples of what is known as psychologism."⁷³ The definition of this term given by Mills is as follows:

'Psychologism' refers to the attempt to explain social phenomena in terms of facts and theories about the make-up of individuals. Historically, as a doctrine, it rests upon an explicit metaphysical denial of the reality of social structure. . . . psychologism rests upon the idea that if we study a series of individuals and their milieux, the results of our studies in some way can be added up to knowledge of social structure.⁷⁴

A political scientist, Kenneth M. Waltz, in a book entitled Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis, develops a powerful argument for the autonomy of political analysis, and therefore an autonomous political science. Waltz argues that, without political analysis of the internal

⁷²Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁷³Ibid., p. 67.

⁷⁴Ibid., n. 12.



structure of states, and especially of the international environment and of the various patterns of political relationships among states, there can be no understanding of war and peace. Psychological data about individuals as well as sociological information about social structures and institutions will not explain the occurrence or non-occurrence of war. It is in this context that Waltz defines and rejects the doctrine of psychologism, adding to it also a rejection of sociologism as of equally little help in understanding international relations and the problems of war and peace:

To attempt to explain social forms on the basis of psychological data is to commit the error of psychologism: the analysis of individual behavior used uncritically to explain group phenomena.⁷⁵

The attempt to explain everything by psychology meant, in the end, that psychology succeeded in explaining nothing. And adding sociology to the analysis simply substitutes the error of sociologism for the error of psychologism.⁷⁶

A philosopher, Karl R. Popper, in a book which he describes as "a critical introduction to the philosophy of politics and of history,"⁷⁷ rejects certain aspects of

⁷⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 28.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

⁷⁷ Karl R. Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. v.



psychologism and their implications, but considers other aspects of the theory to be correct. He defines psychologism as follows:

. . . the plausible doctrine that all laws of social life must be ultimately reducible to the psychological laws of 'human nature,'⁷⁸

. . . the main thesis of psychologism [is] the doctrine that, society being the product of interacting minds, social laws must ultimately be reducible to psychological laws, since the events of social life, including its conventions, must be the outcome of motives springing from the minds of individual men.⁷⁹

Popper then proposes that a distinction be made between psychologism as defined above, and a broader doctrine, which he refers to as "methodological individualism." He agrees with the doctrine of psychologism in so far as it insists that macroscopic group phenomena and processes, the functioning of social institutions, etc., must be understood in terms of the decisions and actions of individuals: this is methodological individualism. What he disagrees with is the narrower doctrine that social phenomena are reducible to psychological laws. Let us look at this distinction in Popper's own words:

The mistake of psychologism is its prejudice that . . . methodological individualism in the field of social science implies the program of reducing all social phenomena and all social regularities to psychological phenomena and psychological laws.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 282.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 283.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 291.



On the other hand Popper admonishes us that

we must not overlook the great merits which psychologism has acquired by advocating a methodological individualism and by opposing a methodological collectivism; for it lends support to the important doctrine that all social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc., of human individuals, and that we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called 'collectives,' (states, nations, races, etc.).⁸¹

To help explain this distinction, Popper points out that there are notions and concepts used in the social sciences which, though they appear to be psychological, are not purely psychological, but have connotations which are "social" in character, and must be understood in terms of the subject matter of the particular group science under discussion. In this connection Popper quotes a contemporary psychologist, D. Katz, as follows:

In philosophy there has been for some time a tendency to make psychology 'the' fundamental basis of all the other sciences. . . . This tendency is usually called psychologism. . . . But even such sciences, which, like sociology and economics, are more closely related to psychology, have a neutral nucleus which is not psychological. . . .⁸²

Popper, in turn, in his eagerness that his arguments against psychologism "should not be misunderstood," explains as

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² D. Katz, "Psychological Needs," Human Affairs, ed. Cattell, Cohen, and Travers (1937), p. 36. Quoted by Popper, Ibid., pp. 666-67, n. 19.



follows, and reflects here the point he had quoted from Katz:

[My arguments against psychologism] are not, of course, intended to show that psychological studies and discoveries are of little importance to the social scientist. They mean, rather, that psychology--the psychology of the individual--is one of the social sciences, even though it is not the basis of all social science. Nobody would deny the importance for political science of psychological facts such as the craving for power, and the various neurotic phenomena connected with it. But 'craving for power' is undoubtedly a social notion as well as a psychological one . . . the first appearance in childhood of this craving [is studied] in the setting of a certain social institution, for example, that of our modern family.⁸³

Strictly speaking, therefore, there seem to be three positions represented in the literature: (a) Sociologism (also called "sociological holism," "metaphysical holism," "methodological holism," or "organicism"); (b) Psychologism; (c) Methodological Individualism. The distinction between (b) and (c), is narrow and not always clear. Whereas Psychologism, i. e. (b), refers to the doctrine that social or group or macro-phenomena can be and must be understood completely in terms of the psychological attributes of individuals, Methodological Individualism, i. e. (c), appears to be advocating a somewhat broader view, namely that social phenomena are completely explainable in terms of, or that statements about them are completely

⁸³ Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, p. 290.



reducible to statements about, individual behavior and the situations in which the individual behavior occurs.

There appears to be a tacit assumption here that some behavior of individuals is not a matter of pure individual psychology, but is social in character as well. There sometimes seems to be some confusion between these two views. One writer, a vocal and enterprising apostle of Methodological Individualism, seems to have shifted his position from espousing (b), i. e., what we have called "psychologism" to (c). In 1952 J. W. N. Watkins stated that Methodological Individualism (c) required the scientist to "continue searching for explanations of a social phenomenon until he has reduced it to psychological terms."⁸⁴ On the other hand, in 1957 Watkins stated that

the ultimate constituents of the social world are individual people who act more or less appropriately in the light of their dispositions and understanding of their situation. Every complex social situation, institution or event is the result of a particular configuration of individuals, their dispositions, situations, beliefs, and physical resources and environment. . . . we shall not have arrived at rock-bottom explanations of . . . large-scale phenomena until we have deduced an account of them from statements about the dispositions, beliefs, resources and inter-relations of individuals.⁸⁵

⁸⁴J. W. N. Watkins, "Ideal Types and Historical Explanation," British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, III (1952), p. 29. (Emphasis mine) This version differs from the later version of the same paper, reprinted in Feigl and Brodbeck, Readings in the Philosophy of Science, op. cit., pp. 723-43 (cf. supra, p. 178). The quoted statement above does not appear in the later, revised version.

⁸⁵J. W. N. Watkins, "Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences," British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, VIII (1957), p. 106. (Emphasis mine)



It is to be noted that in his later (1957) statement of the position of Methodological Individualism, Watkins no longer requires that the reduction of social phenomena be limited to psychological terms exclusively. Some of the terms to which he now thinks large-scale social phenomena should be reduced are not terms of individual psychology. Thus, in the above statement, "situations" do not refer to individual psychological data; "physical resources and environment" do not refer to psychological data at all; and "inter-relations of individuals" do not denote psychological properties of individuals.

It will also be useful to quote here Watkins' definition of Holism, to help us with the discussion that will follow:

. . . methodological individualism is contrasted with sociological holism or organicism. On this latter view, social systems constitute 'wholes' at least in the sense that some of their large-scale behavior is governed by macro-laws which are essentially sociological in the sense that they are sui generis and not to be explained as mere regularities or tendencies resulting from the behavior of interacting individuals. On the contrary, the behavior of individuals should (according to sociological holism) be explained at least partly in terms of such laws (perhaps in conjunction with an account, first of individuals' roles within institutions, and secondly of the functions of institutions within the whole social system).⁸⁶

Now, it is Watkins' view that these two alternative positions are the only positions possible, i. e., that they are

⁸⁶ Ibid.



mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive:

If methodological individualism means that human beings are supposed to be the only moving agents in history, and if sociological holism means that some superhuman agents or factors are supposed to be at work in history, then these two alternatives are exhaustive.⁸⁷

However, the position of methodological individualism has recently been subjected to incisive critical analysis, notably by May Brodbeck and Ernest Nagel. These analyses lead to doubts about the claim that the two positions, sociological holism and methodological individualism, as defined, really exhaust the alternatives. They also lead to the conclusion that under the term methodological individualism there are comprehended two separate doctrines that must be distinguished from each other, (I shall refer to them later as MI₁ and MI₂) and that one of them is probably right and the other probably wrong. We therefore end up with four positions:

- (a) Sociological Holism;
- (b) Psychologism;
- (c) Methodological Individualism₁; and
- (d) Methodological Individualism₂.

Let us now examine each of these positions briefly, restating each position in relation to the terminology commonly employed in the various branches of social inquiry.

⁸⁷Ibid.



a) Sociological Holism

It is customary to distinguish between two classes of terms: (1) terms referring to individual persons or to their properties or attributes; (2) terms referring to groups of persons, the properties of such groups, or the groups' institutional forms within which group activity manifests itself. The former class includes such terms as "leader," "employee," "respondent," "absentee," "lazy," "bigoted," "determined," "pious," "avaricious," "thoughtful," "considerate," etc. The latter class contains such group terms as "cold war," "inflation," "group cohesiveness," "corporation," "mob hysteria," "the Church," "the Reformation," "the French Enlightenment," "capitalism," "staff morale," etc. Nagel calls those in the first class "individual terms," and those in the second class "collective terms."⁸⁸ What is the status of such group concepts or collective terms?

There would appear to be two questions here:

(1) What do such collective terms denote? What are their extensions? Are there such entities as "mob hysteria" or "the Church" apart from or over and above the individual persons involved and their interrelationships? Or, are such collective terms definable by means of individual terms?

⁸⁸Ernest Nagel, The Structure of Science, op. cit., p. 536.



(2) Since there can be no doubt that there are social phenomena and group characteristics, and these are referred to in discourse by means of collective terms, how do you explain these group phenomena, or how do you define such group attributes or characteristics? Are these group attributes definable in terms of individuals, their purposes, and their behavior, or are there "any such attributes which are undefined or undefinable," in other words, are there "attributes of groups not definable in terms of either the behavior of the individuals composing the group or the relations between these individuals or both?"⁸⁹

However, May Brodbeck believes that these two questions really resolve themselves into a single question. Her reasoning is that if, for example, the efficiency of a group is not in effect the sum total of the behaviors of its individual members, then there must be some other entity which exhibits this efficiency, namely, the group itself. Accordingly, such a "superentity" will have characteristics of its own, and there is really only one question, namely, "whether or not there are such undefinable descriptive

⁸⁹ May Brodbeck, "Methodological Individualism: Definition and Reduction," Philosophy of Science, XXV (January, 1958), 2.



properties of groups." Whereas the property of "cohesiveness" of a group, Dr. Brodbeck explains, may be defined in terms of the number of the group's members who display certain attitudes to other members, in proportion to "the total number of votes for people within and without the group," the question is whether the phenomenon of "'crowd hysteria' [can] be similarly defined in terms of individual behaviors or whether it is an undefinable quality of the crowd itself?"⁹⁰ Methodological individualism, Dr. Brodbeck reminds us, denies the existence of such undefinable group properties or such "superentities," whereas metaphysical holism (Dr. Brodbeck's term) holds the contradictory position, namely, "its proponents generally maintain that there are so-called wholes, group entities which have undefinable properties of their own."⁹¹ Since this position holds that the property of the "whole" is "emergent" from the properties of the individuals that compose it, this thesis, according to Dr. Brodbeck, is also called "emergentism."⁹²

That holistic hypostatizations have been carried to intellectually irresponsible extremes, and have been used by political regimes as rationalizations to justify social

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.



and political oppressions, is a matter of common knowledge.⁹³ In the various fields of social life and social inquiry these "wholes" are often endowed with a power and will of their own, and are substituted, as ostensibly dynamic and explanatory forces directing the actions of individuals, for a realistic inquiry into and explanation of the complexities of human interrelationships and human action. Political theories of "general will," "Blut und Rasse," "the dictatorship of the proletariat"; psychological and sociological theories of "group mind," and "group psyche"; pseudo-legal theories or discourse about "the corporation," or "the company" as if these were independent existents apart from the individuals who make them up, and as if they had wills, powers of decision, personalities, apart from those individuals; historical "forces" and social "movements" that have an autonomous power independent of the individuals involved, and direct the actions of these helpless individuals; these are examples of holistic hypostatizations which have served as sterile and sometimes fatal substitutes for real understanding.

A word has to be said here about the sociologism or holism of Durkheim and other sociologists of his school. Durkheim argued that there are social phenomena that cannot

⁹³ See Brodbeck, ibid., pp. 3-4, and Nagel, op. cit., pp. 536-37.



be explained by and cannot be reduced to information about individual persons. In his classic study of suicide Durkheim was quite dogmatic on this point:

The conclusion . . . is that the social suicide-rate can be explained only sociologically. There is . . . for each people a collective force of a definite amount of energy, impelling men to self-destruction. The victim's acts which at first seem to express only his personal temperament are really the supplement and prolongation of a social condition which they express externally. . . . It is not a mere metaphor to say of each human society that it has a greater or lesser aptitude for suicide; the expression is based on the nature of things. Each social group really has a collective inclination for the act, quite its own, and the source of all individual inclination, rather than their result.⁹⁴

. . . the basic proposition that social facts are objective, a proposition . . . which we consider the fundamental principle of the sociological method
collective tendencies and thoughts are of a different nature from individual tendencies and thoughts . . . the former have characteristics which the latter lack.⁹⁵

In Durkheim's view,

. . . the psychological factor is too general to predetermine the course of social phenomena. Since it does not call for one social form rather than another, it cannot explain any of them . . .⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Emile Durkheim, Suicide: A Study in Sociology, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1951), p. 299. (Emphasis mine)

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 310. (Emphasis mine)

⁹⁶ Emile Durkheim, The Rules of Sociological Method, trans. Sarah Soloway and John Mueller, ed. George E. G. Catlin (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), p. 108.



Thus, in his study of Suicide, Durkheim announced that he would disregard the individual and concentrate on social groups and social environments:

We shall try to determine the productive causes of suicide directly, without concerning ourselves with the forms they can assume in particular individuals. Disregarding the individual as such, his motives and his ideas, we shall seek directly the states of the various social environments (religious confessions, family, political society, occupational groups, etc.), in terms of which the variations of suicide occur.⁹⁷

And later in his book Durkheim remarked how "wholly different" were the results obtained "when we forgot the individual and sought the causes of the suicidal aptitude in the nature of the societies themselves."⁹⁸

However, this kind of sociology overstates its case. Even in Durkheim himself, as the Sociologist, Alex Inkeles, points out, "of course, the individual and his psychology crept back into sociological explanation."⁹⁹ For example, after discovering the inverse correlation between states of social integration and incidence of suicide, Durkheim still had to answer such questions as "why and how such states of the social environment produce the

⁹⁷ Durkheim, Suicide, p. 151.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 299.

⁹⁹ Alex Inkeles, "Psychoanalysis and Sociology," Psychoanalysis, Scientific Method, and Philosophy, ed. Sidney Hook, op. cit., p. 118.



differential suicide rates,"¹⁰⁰ and why there are exceptions to the general explanation, i. e., why some members of groups or societies with a high state of social integration still do commit suicide, and why the vast numbers in poorly integrated societies do not commit suicide. Such questions obviously cannot be answered without reference to the individual person "who intervened between the 'suicidogenic' currents that Durkheim located in societies, and the suicide rates that the currents produced."¹⁰¹ In general, as Alex Inkeles says elsewhere,

. . . adequate sociological analysis of many problems is either impossible or severely limited unless we make explicit use of psychological theory and data in conjunction with sociological theory and data. Indeed, I would assert that very little sociological analysis is ever done without using at least an implicit psychological theory.¹⁰²

It is quite clear that a pure and unadulterated holism or sociologism can not be maintained, and cannot be a frame of reference within which a program of obtaining new knowledge about man and society could be pursued. This is so quite apart from the fact that holism clashes with the philosophical presuppositions of empiricism, which

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Alex Inkeles, "Personality and Social Structure," Sociology Today: Problems and Prospects, ed. Robert K. Merton, Leonard Broom, Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 250.



holds

that all terms must ultimately refer to what is observable, directly or indirectly, and that what we observe are people and their characteristics not supraindividual groups and their characteristics. . . . [and that] the behavior of groups can be defined in terms of behavior in groups.¹⁰³

Fruitful sociological analysis never in fact proceeds within a pure and exclusively holistic framework. The fullness of analysis must carry with it a consideration of the individuals in society, their purposes, behavior and interactions. Durkheim apparently came to recognize this toward the end of his career. In a paper entitled "The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions," which he published three years before his death, Durkheim developed the theory that "one of the most characteristic peculiarities of our nature. . . . is the constitutional duality of human nature," the duality being that of "the body and the soul."¹⁰⁴ The body "is regarded as profane," whereas the soul "has everywhere been considered something sacred."¹⁰⁵ Corresponding to the body and the soul within man are "two states of consciousness that differ from each

¹⁰³ Brodbeck, "Methodological Individualism," op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Emile Durkheim, "Le Dualisme de la Nature Humaine et ses Conditions Sociales," Scientia, XV (1914), 206-221. Reprinted as "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions," Emile Durkheim 1858-1917, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1960), pp. 325-40; p. 325.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 334.



other in origin and nature," one class merely expresses our organism, the other class comes to us from society.¹⁰⁶

"It is evident," says Durkheim, "that passions and egotistic tendencies derive from our individual constitutions, while our rational activity . . . is dependent on social causes."¹⁰⁷ While Durkheim did not, in this paper, abandon the thesis that "society has its own nature," and that society's nature has requirements and interests that are "quite different from those of our nature as individuals,"¹⁰⁸ there is here a new and different emphasis on the importance for sociology of the constitution of the individual person and his psychological character.

Thus, near the beginning of his essay we find what is, from the pen of Durkheim, the startling statement that sociological investigation must be concerned also with the individual person:

Although sociology is defined as the science of societies, it cannot, in reality, deal with the human groups that are the immediate object of its investigation without eventually touching on the individual who is the basic element of which these groups are composed.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 336.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 338. (Emphasis mine)

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 325.



And in this paper even Durkheim sees that the study of man requires an interplay between sociology and psychology:

. . . it is impossible to attempt to explain the whole without explaining the part--without explaining, at least, the part as a result of the whole. . . . To look for the causes and conditions upon which civilization depends is, therefore, to seek out also the causes and conditions of what is most specifically human in man. And sociology, which draws on psychology and could not do without it, brings to it, in a just return, a contribution that equals and surpasses in importance the services it receives from it.¹¹⁰

b) Psychologism

The purist, naive version of sociologism or holism thus cannot serve as a basis on which to build our knowledge of human society, since information concerning individual human beings, their characteristics, purposes, and behavior is either built into social theories in the form of tacit assumptions, or must be sought if these theories are to be relevant. However, neither can a pure, naive psychologism be usefully maintained, and the distinction between psychologism and the position of methodological individualism is misleading and spurious. A pure psychologism would maintain, as pointed out above, that individual psychology is the fundamental science of man to which all the other social sciences must be reduced, or from which all the other social sciences could be derived.

¹¹⁰ ibid.



But this would be simply impossible. For, how one would make the deductive transition from general psychological laws of individual behavior exclusively to a systematic understanding of political, economic, religious, or other social and institutional phenomena, or from microscopic concepts about individual persons in isolation, to macroscopic concepts of groups of persons in patterned interrelationships, is most obscure.

In fact, however, the problem never arises in this form. Man is a social being. Any meaningful talk about individual human actions has built into it social categories and concepts; and any meaningful discourse about social, macro-events has built into it categories and assumptions about individual human nature. As Peters points out, man is a rule-following animal.¹¹¹ His actions conform to social standards and conventions. Man's behavior in accordance with rules is therefore explainable by reference to the rules of the particular area of social life into which the action naturally falls, e. g., economics, politics, etiquette, athletic contests, worship service, etc. Generally, we would ask for psychological explanations only in those cases in which the behavior of the individual deviated from the rule-following paradigm,¹¹² e. g., if a

¹¹¹Peters, The Concept of Motivation, pp. 5ff.

¹¹²Cf. Gilbert Pyle, The Concept of Mind, op. cit., pp. 326ff.



man came to a church service dressed in a bathing suit and carrying an inflated rubber tire. However, the reason we do not seek psychological explanations for rule-following behavior, and find the sociological, economic, political, or institutional explanations satisfactory, is that we tacitly assume human nature to be thus and so, and the rule-following behavior is thus self-explanatory. We begin raising psychological questions when the person's behavior deviates from our assumptions concerning human nature.

These considerations would tend to support the idea that individual psychology is not the fundamental empirical science of man at the basis of all other social sciences, but rather is one of the social sciences. Formulations about individual behavior in connection with explanation of social facts always have implicated within them some social concepts. Methodological Individualism, as was pointed out earlier, and we shall return to this, insists that these social concepts must be and are definable in terms of actions and purposes of individuals. But these terms need not be and cannot always be narrowly psychological in the sense of having a place in a formal science of psychology. This kind of narrow psychologism, as I said above, is misleading. However, strictly speaking, the distinction between psychologism and Methodological Individualism is spurious either because it cannot actually and consistently be adhered to in the process of explanation



of group phenomena, or because what is really meant by psychologism is that all concepts employed in the description and analysis of individual behavior are psychological; and if this is what is meant, then the distinction vanishes. 113

This point is made clearly and sharply by Dr. Brodbeck. The individual behaviors or attributes with which group terms have to be definitionally connected, Dr. Brodbeck says,

need not necessarily be 'psychological' in the sense that they are technical concepts within the science of psychology. Characteristics occurring in the definitions of macroscopic concepts, such as choosing friends, communicating, buying or selling, need not be, though of course they may be accounted for by an existing psychological theory. It is therefore misleading to say that because group concepts must be defined in terms of individuals they are 'really' psychological. Only if 'psychological' is broadly defined to include all human behavior is this the case. In this sense 'selling short on the stock market' is psychological. But then the term is so broad as to be virtually useless. Only if this behavior can be explained within the context of a theory in psychology is it significantly called psychological rather than, say, economic. 114

113 Nagel does not seem to draw the distinction between psychologism and methodological individualism, but treats them as a single thesis:

"Methodological individualism thus subscribes to what is often advanced as a factual thesis (although it is perhaps best regarded as a program of research) concerning the reducibility of all statements about social phenomena to a special class of ('psychological') statements about individual human conduct." Ernest Nagel, The Structure of Science, pp. 541-42.

114 Brodbeck, "Methodological Individualism," p. 16.



c) Methodological Individualism

The observation made above that statements or formulations of individual behavior, if they are to constitute satisfactory and sufficient explanations of social phenomena, always must involve some social concepts, lead one to doubt Watkins' contention that methodological individualism and sociological holism are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive positions. Nagel makes that point as follows:

. . . no set of premises about the conduct of individual human beings might suffice for deducing some given statement about the actions of a group of men, and . . . at least one assumption of the latter kind might be required in any set of premises from which the given statement is deducible.¹¹⁵

These doubts are strengthened if we try to pursue further the distinction between "individual terms" and "collective terms," and ask whether these two classes of terms are collectively exhaustive, or whether there may be borderline cases of terms which cannot be assigned categorically to one or the other of these two classes on the basis of some clear principle of classification. If there are such borderline terms, then what happens to the thesis of methodological individualism that all collective terms are in principle definable by means of individual terms? Nagel

¹¹⁵ Nagel, The Structure of Science, pp. 542-43.



points out that there are such borderline terms.¹¹⁶ He uses as illustrations the terms "law-abiding" and "warlike." "Law-abiding" may be the name of an attribute of an individual person, who conforms to the norms of conduct prescribed by a community. When used in this sense, it functions as an "individual term." But "law-abiding" may also be used as a "collective term," to designate the quality of the prevailing behavior of the population of a city, a town, or a community. It makes perfectly good sense to speak of a "law-abiding" community. There is no difficulty in understanding this locution as referring to the aggregate making up the community without the need to translate it into statements about individuals. Similarly, "warlike" is a "collective term," in that we often speak of a warlike nation, and know that we are talking about the nation as a group; we also might mean to refer by this term to various organized group and institutional activities within that nation (militaristic organizations, large military establishment, large armaments industry, pugnacious attitudes in the pronouncements and negotiations in the field of foreign affairs). But one can also claim that the nation is "warlike" in the sense that its citizens are warlike, though the translation into exclusively individual terms is rather difficult.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 538.



Such borderline terms and the difficulties in clearly determining their status suggest that there may be a third, common ground position between the two positions which Watkins claims are exclusive alternatives. This and other difficulties, which will be discussed presently, in connection with the requirement of MI that collective terms must be reducible to or definable by means of individual terms, suggest further that perhaps there are confusions in the doctrine of MI that require some distinctions and refinements to clarify its meaning.

The fact is, as both May Brodbeck and Ernest Nagel point out, that there are or that there do occur group characteristics, and that groups and group activities can be observed. A parade, the seventh inning stretch at a baseball game, a congregation singing, kneeling or rising at a religious service, a mob looting, an audience applauding a virtuoso's performance, a convention approving a motion unanimously by voice vote, these are a few examples of observable groups and of observable group action. Some groups are wealthy, some are poor, some are boisterous, some are attentive, some are well-disciplined, etc., etc. These are examples of group characteristics. There is no essential difference between saying the above and saying that one has observed a forest, and that the forest is dense. The "wholes" or groups and group activities are observable, and that groups may be described, i. e., have



characteristics, does not contradict the doctrine of MI. What MI insists on is that all groups are explainable or definable without residue in terms of the individuals that compose them, and that all group characteristics are definable in terms of information about individuals, though the characteristics or properties of a group may be different from the characteristics of the group's members. May Brodbeck illustrates this by pointing out that, e. g., the property of "homogeneity" may characterize a group but is inapplicable to individuals, though homogeneity is definable in terms of statistical information about the individual members of the group.¹¹⁷ The crucial question is, as Dr. Brodbeck makes clear, whether there are any undefinable group characteristics. She calls this the problem of "descriptive emergence," in the sense that, if there are any undefinable group properties, it would mean that out of the fact of the aggregation of individuals into a group some new property, a describable property, has emerged, which cannot be accounted for in terms of information about the group's members, and this would contradict the thesis of MI.

At this point both Brodbeck and Nagel call attention to the fact that there are many terms signifying or implying group properties, "holistic terms" is another name for them,

¹¹⁷Brodbeck, "Methodological Individualism," p. 4.

which occur frequently in the various social sciences, but which it is extremely difficult to define in terms of information referring to individuals, even information of the statistical kind. Dr. Brodbeck uses such illustrations as the following: from economics, such terms as "boom," "slump," "depression," meaningful terms which we cannot define precisely, not because of unavailability of facts, but because of "the fringe of vagueness surrounding the application of the terms";¹¹⁸ and from other fields, such institutional terms as "The Reformation," "the Church," "capitalism," "mercantilism," "cold war," "army morale," etc.¹¹⁹ While in principle these "openended" terms must, according to MI, be definable in terms of information about individuals, in practice they often cannot be so defined. However, this inability to define them does not make these terms so ambiguous as to deprive them of their meaning and great usefulness in their respective social sciences. And so long as the principle of MI is kept in mind, that it would be desirable if these terms could be so defined, and so long too, as this prevents any flirtations with any theories of supraindividual group-minds or other non-observable, hypostatized group entities, these openended,

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 6.



imprecisely defined group terms will continue to be meaningful and useful in social analysis.¹²⁰

But, aside from such admonition and such a resolve to adhere to this procedural principle of MI, what happens to the thesis of MI in the light of the fact that there are undefined (and perhaps undefinable) holistic terms in the social sciences, and that consequently we cannot achieve "the elimination of collective terms from [many] statements in favor of individual terms exclusively?"¹²¹ This problem is attacked in what seems to me pretty much the same way by both May Brodbeck (in a much more thoroughgoing, systematic manner) and by Ernest Nagel (in a relatively brief statement)¹²² by applying Aristotle's old distinction between τὰ ὄντα (ta onta)--"the things which actually exist," and τὰ λεγόμενα (to legomenon)--"that which is said," or between "what is," and "what is said"; between the ontic and the epistemic; or to use more contemporary terms, between the existential and the cognitive. They both point out that the theory of MI contains two theses which must be kept distinct from each other, one thesis concerns "what is," and this we shall call MI₁, and the other thesis concerns "what is

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Nagel, The Structure of Science, p. 542.

¹²² Nagel makes no reference to Brodbeck's paper, but the publication of Brodbeck's paper antedated the publication of Nagel's book by three years.



said," and this thesis we shall call MI_2 . MI_1 has to do with "things and events," whereas MI_2 has to do with "laws and theories" (Brodbeck, p. 6). In Nagel's terminology, MI_1 is an "ontological thesis" concerning "the ultimate constituents of the social world," whereas MI_2 is "the reductive thesis" with reference to "statements about social phenomena" (Nagel, p. 542).

The thesis of MI_1 "denies that supraindividual [i. e. undefinable] group properties can be meaningfully attributed to things or events" and is thus "a denial of descriptive emergence" (Brodbeck, p. 6); this is "the ontological thesis that the ultimate constituents of the social world are individual people" (Nagel, p. 542). On the other hand, the theory of MI has also been propounded "in the context of laws and theories," and it is the thesis of MI_2 that is advanced in this context and "is a matter of explanation rather than of description." MI_2 denies "explanatory emergence," i. e., it denies that "the laws of group behavior [may be] emergent with respect to laws about individuals" (Brodbeck, p. 6), and insists that "the laws of the group sciences are in principle reducible to those about individuals" (Brodbeck, p. 20). MI_2 is "the reductive thesis that statements about social phenomena are deducible from psychological statements about human individuals" (Nagel, p. 542).

Now, what Brodbeck and Nagel agree on is that the espousal of MI_1 does not logically entail the espousal of



MI₂. Nagel's statement of this differentiation between commitments to the two positions is brief and dogmatic. He points out that many students who subscribe to methodological individualism do so in the mistaken belief that "to reject a hypostatic interpretation of collective terms and to deny that 'superhuman agents' are causally operative in human affairs"--this is the thesis of MI₁--"is logically equivalent to the reductive thesis"--i. e., the thesis of MI₂. However, Nagel states categorically,

a commitment to the ontological thesis [i. e., MI₁] does not logically require a commitment to the reductive one [i. e., MI₂]. (Nagel, p. 542)

May Brodbeck develops the differentiation between MI₁ and MI₂ systematically and at some length, and I shall not try to summarize her argument here. However, I do want to note one or two salient points in her argument which are particularly germane to the present inquiry. She distinguishes between, on the one hand, properties or characteristics of groups and of individuals (this concerns ta onta, i. e., what is, existential matters), and on the other hand laws of behavior, laws of individual behavior and laws of group behavior (this concerns to legomenon, i. e., what is said, explanatory matters). She agrees with MI₁ in denying that, over and above individuals and their properties, there exist or there occur irreducible, supraindividual group properties and hence in denying that there exist or occur supraindividual group entities, which



have an independent existence and are not explainable in terms of the properties of or information about the individual members of the group. This is a metaphysical assumption or claim about an aspect of the nature of reality, and, to repeat, since this concerns describing (or claiming to describe) aspects of reality, or what occurs or exists and what does not occur or exist, Dr. Brodbeck refers to this view as the denial of descriptive emergency (Brodbeck, pp. 4, 19-20).

On the other hand, in the context of explanation (i. e., to legomenon--what is said) of human behavior, she disagrees with the thesis of MI_2 which denies "that in principle laws about groups are not derivable from laws about individuals" (Brodbeck, p. 20). In other words, she believes that there are no logical grounds for denying that there may be macroscopic group behavior laws which are not reducible to or derivable from laws of individual behavior.¹²³ She argues that, for the derivation of laws of group behavior from laws of individual behavior, two kinds of the latter laws are needed to provide the sufficient conditions for the deduction to be made:

- (a) "elementary laws telling how an individual acts in the presence of one or two others," and

¹²³Maurice Mandelbaum obviously misunderstood Dr. Brodbeck's views when he said that "she rejects the view that there are irreducible societal laws." (Maurice Mandelbaum, "Societal Laws," British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, VIII (1957-58), 211-224. Quote is from p. 211, n. 1.



- (b) "composition laws stating what happens, under certain conditions, as the number of people he is with increases. The latter, of course, state how he behaves in a group." (Brodbeck, p. 18)

From these two types of law taken in conjunction with each other, "we can predict the behavior of the group, that is, we may derive laws of group behavior" (ibid.). (Dr. Brodbeck illustrates this with reference to group behavior under conditions of stratification.)

Composition laws with reference to a person's behavior in a group are "empirical generalizations, [and] they may fail at some point" (Brodbeck, p. 19), e. g., they may work for groups below a certain size but not for larger groups, or vice versa, or, "it might be that even though group behavior is itself lawful there is no composition rule from which it can be predicted" (ibid.). If the composition rule breaks down, then we have an instance of what Dr. Brodbeck calls "explanatory emergence" (to be carefully distinguished from descriptive emergence). In other words, in such situations we would have

laws of group behavior, which, even though their terms are defined as they should be [i. e., by reference to individual behavior or characteristics], are still not derivable from the laws, including whatever composition laws there are, about individual behavior" (Brodbeck, pp. 20-21, second emphasis mine).

Accordingly, so far as explanation is concerned, that is, so



far as formulating explanatory macroscopic laws of group behavior is concerned (i. e., so far as what can be said about group behavior is concerned), there are no logical grounds for denying says Dr. Brodbeck, that there may be group laws which can not be reduced to or derived from laws of individual behavior, even though their terms conform to the requirements of MI.

This conclusion contradicts MI_2 , or at least means that there are no logical grounds for accepting MI_2 . However, as Dr. Brodbeck shows, the espousal of MI_1 does not logically entail the espousal of MI_2 . Though there is often confusion, and the term MI is often taken to refer to both the doctrine that "there are no undefinable group concepts" (i. e., that no supraindividual entities exist), and to the doctrine that "the laws of the group sciences are in principle reducible to those about individuals" (i. e., that there are no irreducible social laws), the two positions are not identical. They are disparate, and

the empiricist commitment to definitional methodological individualism [MI_1] does not logically imply a commitment to explanatory methodological individualism [MI_2], that is, to reduction (Brodbeck, p. 20).

It thus seems clear, as a result of this review of some of the issues, that there is no incompatibility between the position that the nature of individual human beings and laws of individual human behavior must be studied (since it is individual human beings who make up society), and the



possibility of autonomous, or, as I prefer, quasi-autonomous group science which will include irreducible laws of institutional and other group behavior. It is of the first importance to keep in mind always the admonition of MI₁ that groups are made up of individuals, their characteristics, and the interrelationships among them, and of nothing else, i. e., that no mysterious, supra-individual entities come into being as a result of individual persons coming together into a group or institution. But knowledge of man and society can not be advanced on the basis of a purist individualism, and therefore MI₂ must be rejected. Man, as Asch insists, individual man, is also social. And the summary of this section may perhaps take the form of another admonition, namely, that in the study of man and society, two errors must be avoided:

- (a) The error that knowledge of the nature of individual human beings alone is logically sufficient for the explanation of social behavior and its laws; or that the facts and laws of social behavior can be reduced without residue to the laws of individual human nature and behavior. (In addition to information about individual human nature, knowledge of the social situation is indispensable.)



(b) The error that social facts and laws alone, without information about individual human nature or individual psychology, can explain sufficiently all of human behavior; i. e., the error of assuming that all human behavior is socially determined.

C. Is the Concept of Human Nature Necessary?

In considering this question we must distinguish between logical necessity, psychological necessity, and instrumental necessity, because packed into it are three separate and distinct questions:

1. Is the concept of human nature logically necessary for the understanding of man and society; in other words, is the concept of human nature such that without it our understanding of man and society would be impossible or seriously defective?
2. Is the concept of human nature psychologically necessary in psychological theories and the various social sciences, i. e., will this concept be inevitably present in all such theories? In other words, even if it were concluded that the concept of human nature is not logically necessary for this branch of knowledge, is it nevertheless a psychological



fact that this concept inevitably appears, and will always appear in these disciplines as an assumption, either tacit or overt?

3. Is the concept of human nature instrumentally necessary for realistic and effective social planning, i. e., for developing a good social order? In other words, is it necessary to have a theory of human nature in order to determine what would be a good social order, or would a given social order work?

The answer to the first of these three questions is contained implicitly, and to some extent explicitly, in the section immediately preceding this one (Psychologism vs. Sociologism), and is in the affirmative. The answer to the second question is contained in the testimony of our group of social psychologists, as sketched in the second section of our Introductory chapter (supra, pp. 9-15), as well as in the discussions of the S-R and Freudian theories and of Sociologism vs. Psychologism, and to this question also the answer is in the affirmative. The answer to the third question can not be a simple yes or no, was alluded to briefly in the Introductory chapter (supra, p. 7), and will be developed systematically in Chapters VI and X below. The present section will therefore be limited to a discussion of the logical necessity of the concept of human nature.



1. Logical Necessity.--Methodological holists, like Durkheim in sociology and Kenneth Waltz in political science, as pointed out in the last section, seem to be saying that a knowledge of human nature, of man's psychological structure, of his propensities, capacities, motivations, is not necessary for, indeed is irrelevant to an understanding of social behavior, or to the development of a science of society. They claim that knowledge of human nature alone gives us very little, if anything, by way of explanatory or predictive power. And in fact it is often the case that sociological, or economic, or political analysis and explanations of social phenomena and group behavior appear to be complete, satisfactory, sufficient, and to leave nothing to be desired, so that reference to human nature seems unnecessary and irrelevant.

However, it is never irrelevant. They appear irrelevant because certain basic assumptions concerning human nature, i. e., concerning the psychological constitution of men, have been tacitly taken for granted and built into the "holistic" explanation as suppressed assumptions. The holistic, or group-science explanations which are successful possess explanatory and predictive power because they also include assumptions about human nature which are not stated explicitly. Without these tacit assumptions the explanations would not have the explanatory and predictive power. In other words, many



successful holistic or group-science explanations of social phenomena or social behavior are in fact enthymematic arguments in which one or more of the premises are not stated explicitly, but are tacitly assumed. The methodological holists are right when they maintain that a knowledge of human nature alone has little predictive or explanatory power; but they are in error when they pretend to throw out information or assumptions about the basic constitution of man as unnecessary or irrelevant for satisfactory and sufficient explanations. The information about human nature which appears to have been thrown out through the front door stays on, unobserved, where its presence is of the greatest consequence, namely, in the kitchen, where explanatory and predictive recipes are cooked up and applied, and it manages somehow to sneak into these recipes as an unacknowledged ingredient. The salient fact is that knowledge of social, institutional, group forces alone also has little explanatory or predictive power. It is the combined knowledge of social forces and of human nature that can provide sufficient explanations and predictions of social behavior.

The contention that a conception of human nature is logically necessary in explanations of social phenomena if these explanations are to be satisfactory and sufficient, and that successful sociological or holistic explanations have tacit assumptions concerning human nature built into



them, sometimes meets with a sarcastic counter-argument that deserves a brief comment. The counter-argument runs somewhat as follows: "You are saying nothing more than that if men were different kinds of beings, they would act differently. Having said this, have you said anything significant, or have you simply stated a sterile tautology which tells us nothing about why knowledge of human nature is necessary for the explanation of specific social phenomena?" Waltz's formulation of this counter-argument is instructive:

Wars would not exist were human nature not what it is, but neither would Sunday Schools and brotherhoods, philanthropic organizations and criminal gangs. Since everything is related to human nature, to explain anything one must consider more than human nature. The events to be explained are so many and so varied that human nature cannot be the single determinant.¹²⁴

Now, Waltz is of course right in insisting that a knowledge of human nature alone can not explain social phenomena, and that human nature cannot be the single determinant. We have said this above, and we shall return to it again shortly. However, merely to say that knowledge of human nature alone does not contain much explanatory power and leave it at that, and to say nothing further explicitly about the role of human nature as one of the determining factors in conjunction with social factors

¹²⁴Waltz, Man, the State, and War, pp. 80-81.



(and this is precisely what holistic thinkers typically fail to do) is to reason enthymematically. And it is a commonplace of elementary logic that an enthymeme cannot be evaluated so long as it retains its enthymematic form. The absence of the missing or suppressed premise or premises makes it impossible to check on the argument's logical validity or to pass judgment as to the truth or falsity of the absent premises. It is always important to exhibit and make explicit our concealed assumptions and premises, and to subject them to scrutiny. And thus, to say that if man were a different kind of being he would act differently is perhaps not altogether the barren tautology that it is made out to be. It makes perfectly good sense to ask, "Since man is not different from what he is, then what is he? How differently would he act if he were different in such and such a way? Being what he is, how would he act under such and such conditions, and how would he act under conditions different in one or another respects?"

The crucial question is precisely the last one: "How would a man act under one set of conditions, and how would he act under another set of conditions which differ from the first in some determinate respects?", "How would a man act in one situational context, and how would he act in a situational context that varies from the first in some determinate ways?" Without knowing what kind of being man is, or without tacitly assuming such knowledge, in addition



to having knowledge of social laws, it is difficult to see how one could answer the question whether the same man would behave the same way, in a different way, or in what way he would behave, if the situational context within which he acted and the interactions within it were to be changed. It is the full meaning of this kind of question that holistic thinkers fail to probe.

Let us probe this question further by using some additional material out of Kenneth Waltz's book. Waltz discusses Hans Morgenthau's views on competition for scarce goods, and then suggests an explanation of his own:

Morgenthau recognizes that given competition for scarce goods with no one to serve as arbiter a struggle for power will ensue among the competitors, and that consequently the struggle for power can be explained without reference to the evil born in men. The struggle for power arises simply because people want things, not because there is some evil in their desires.¹²⁵

First, let us note that, contrary to his holistic protestations, Waltz does appear to accept (though he discloses his assumption) and use an alleged psychological trait of human nature to help explain a social phenomenon, namely, that "men want things." This assumption is of course different from the assumption of "evil born in man." The former is much more specific, and helps much more than the latter in the explanation of the struggle for power in the competition

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 34. (Emphasis mine)



for scarce goods. (Whether or not ethical properties like "good" or "evil" can properly be attributed to psychological propensities will be discussed below in Chapter IX.) But that "men want things" is a statement attributing to human beings a certain psychological propensity; it is information about human nature. Waltz's correct point that the generalization about human beings that they want things is more helpful toward explaining the social phenomena under discussion than the generalization that evil is born in men, is itself evidence that some information (or assumptions) about human nature does help in the explanation of social phenomena; some information about human nature helps more and some helps less, but this is a matter of differences in the degree of explanatory power.

In fact, the concept or variable of men wanting things as a propensity of human nature is the kind of variable of normative human behavior that can make for progress in the science of man. It lends itself to, indeed, it demands further investigation, with varying degrees of specificity in the questions that it engenders, such questions as, "Do men want things insatiably, or are there limits--points of satiety?" "Do men want all things with the same intensity. or are there stronger wants and weaker wants?" "Under what conditions do men want more of certain things and less of others?" "Are there 'permanent,' generic kinds of wants of things with the possibility of satisfying each kind of want



by means of various things (depending upon the cultural patterns), or are all the wants themselves floating or changing wants?" In other words, "Do men always want things, material goods, as status symbols, for 'conspicuous consumption' or 'conspicuous waste,' irrespective of what the object is that happens to be the status symbol (big houses today, expensive cars tomorrow), or are there times when people may not want status symbols at all, or, in the alternative, are there certain categories of things that people want irrespective of whether these particular things function as status symbols?" "What is the nature of the wanting of things in response to contemporary mass advertising techniques, are these wants related to a wish for self-esteem, for the esteem of others, or to sheer imitativeness?" These and similar questions about how the fact that men want things, or that man is a "thing-wanting creature," manifests itself and functions at various times and in varying conditions, are basic to an understanding of man and society. How such understanding would be possible without the interplay of knowledge about human nature and knowledge of social forces, is difficult to understand.

One of the problems that seems to bother many holistic thinkers is the alleged utilization of the idea of a "fixed human nature," of "fixed psychological elements," to explain the many differences one finds in human behavior and in the



multiple, kaleidoscopically broad spectrum of social phenomena. Waltz even maintains that the assumption of a fixed human nature tends to draw attention away from human nature:

The assumption of a fixed human nature, in terms of which all else must be understood, itself helps to shift attention away from human nature--because human nature, by the terms of the assumption, cannot be changed, whereas social-political institutions can be.¹²⁶

Asch, in his discussion of Durkheim, says that Durkheim takes the position that

since the members of different societies are fundamentally alike in their biological equipment and in their individual capacities and tendencies, the latter are irrelevant to a science of society or to an account of social behavior. The principle he invokes is that what is alike in all men can not be used to explain the differences among them.¹²⁷

Harry Alpert, in a brief paper entitled, "Emile Durkheim: Enemy of Fixed Psychological Elements," deplores the use of information about human nature for the explanation of social phenomena on both logical and sociological grounds:

Logically, it involves the fallacy of explaining a variable by a constant.¹²⁸

Now, there is confusion here with respect to the

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 41. (Emphasis mine)

¹²⁷ Asch, Social Psychology, p. 16. (Emphasis mine)

¹²⁸ Harry Alpert, "Emile Durkheim: Enemy of Fixed Psychological Elements," The American Journal of Sociology (Durkheim-Simmel Commemorative Issue), LXII, No. 6 (May, 1958), 662-64, quote is from page 663. (Emphasis mine)



concept "fixed human nature," or of human nature as a "constant." There is an ascription here to the anti-holists of a bizarre theory of man as somehow completely ossified and impervious to the conditions and situations in which he finds himself and to the interactions within them, and responding to all conditions and situations in exactly and invariably the same way. Now, this is nothing less than puzzling nonsense. Of course such a concept of human nature could never help to explain anything, and no one in his right senses would advocate such a concept. What we are talking about is a concept of man as a stable, determinate entity, which responds in a great variety of different behavioral ways to the great variety of different conditions and situations, and that the behaviors are the products of the interactions between the person and the conditions or situations within which he is acting. There is nothing novel or unusual about this. This is true about physical objects as well. A bar of iron will behave in one way if it is immersed for a period of time in a receptacle filled with water, and quite differently if it's immersed for the same period in a container filled with nitric acid. And it is precisely because iron is a stable, determinate entity (ignoring here philosophical problems connected with subatomic physics), that it behaves differently in different situations. Similarly with men, as situations and conditions in which they find themselves vary, so their



behaviors vary. (This will be discussed again, more systematically, in the next section of the present chapter.) The notion that anyone suggests that men respond in a rigidly identical way to all situations is, if I may borrow C. I. Lewis' famous sentence, "one of the strangest aberrations ever to visit the mind of man." Using information about human nature to help explain social phenomena is not at all a case of explaining a variable by a constant.

It is because man is what he is that he responds and behaves differently in different situations, and if we knew more about human nature, about what man is, we would be able to develop better explanations and predictions of human behavior within institutional or group settings. To argue thus in support of the logical necessity of knowledge of human nature in no way entails the rejection of the "autonomy" of group science and the emergence of irreducible group laws to help explain group behavior. Such group laws together with and in constant interplay with laws about the nature of man are the potential source of understanding of man and society. In the light of this discussion we can see more easily the justification for that part of the holistic position in sociology, economics, political science, etc., which insists that you cannot understand social, economic, or political behavior without sociological, economic, and political analysis respectively. If what their argument intends to say is that such group analysis in



terms of group laws in their respective fields is logically necessary, then they are of course right. The trouble is that they so often claim that group analysis alone is also logically sufficient, and this is the error I have been trying to point out, and to argue that knowledge of the psychological nature of man is also logically necessary, and that only the two kinds of knowledge in conjunction with each other can provide the sufficient conditions for explanation and prediction of social phenomena and behavior.

The reasons for the importance of group analysis in terms of the findings of the particular social disciplines should be quite obvious: these social disciplines often spell out in detail and with the required degree of specificity certain special features of the conditions or the situation within which the particular behavior under investigation is taking place. And it should be clear that determinate human beings, because they are what they are, behave differently--the differences in the behavior being at least theoretically predictable--in different situations. A man--a "wanter of things"^k--behaves in one way when what is involved is making a choice between two jobs he had been offered, and the same man behaves in quite another way when the situation involves his deciding whom to vote for in a national election.

Waltz is right when he says that



. . . sociologists have, in approaching the problem of war and peace, often erred in omitting all reference to the political framework within which individual and social actions occur. The conclusion is obvious: to understand war and peace political analysis must be used to supplement and order the findings of psychology and sociology.¹²⁹

Political analysis is required, because the political context possesses certain features that make the situation to be studied, and hence man's response to it, different from the situation and from his response in, e. g., a religious context.

One final comment in connection with the logical necessity for a concept of human nature in connection with the explanation of man and society. A concept of the nature of man is relevant and logically necessary at least in that it constitutes an hypothesis which negatively defines, no matter how crudely, what man is not, and therefore rules out as bizarre or irrelevant certain kinds of explanations. Certainly such negative definition is logically implicit in all research and theorizing about man and society. One kind of theory of man rules out astrology or phrenology as a source of explanation of human events. It gives point to Cassius' lines:

The fault, Dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.
(Julius Caesar, Act I, Scene 2)

Another kind of theory of human nature rejects as irrelevant

¹²⁹Waltz, Man, the State, and War, p. 81.



social-environmental conditioning as explanatory of delinquent or criminal behavior, etc., etc.

It is therefore of considerable importance to heed the admonition of Asch, Popper, and others that it is both pointless and misleading to talk or speculate about human nature, or man, in some hypothetical primitive, pre-social state, as if it were the nature of that kind of being that is under discussion. The point is that man is a social being. To try somehow to define the nature of man outside society, in complete, bare isolation from other humans (it is difficult to understand how that could be done, except as an act of the imagination), would in fact be equivalent to trying to define the nature of another being. Then to try to make inferences from the definition of such an imaginary, isolated being, to man in society, is surely an exercise in futility.

Explanation and prediction of human behavior require a knowledge both of man's psychological propensities, traits, and motivations, and the social situations and conditions of his existence. Man, having created social, political, and economic institutions, will, within the conditions of these institutions, behave thus and so. It would be strange to try to explain man's behavior within political institutions as if he were living outside such institutions, i. e., totally without using political concepts. But it would be equally strange to try to explain this behavior as if it were



some creature other than man whose behavior we were trying to explain; i. e. as if we were dealing with a creature that did not "want things," or did not, under certain conditions (e. g., the condition of being a competitor for scarce goods) want power. Human nature alone is not the single determinant. It is one of the determinants, but a logically necessary one, without which explanation and prediction with respect to man and society would be impossible.

D. Can Human Nature Be Changed?

In a recent paper, Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn defined for her readers "a limited number of basic human problems for which all peoples at all times and places must find some solution."¹³⁰ She concluded that such "common human--universal--problems" are five in number, the first one being:

- (1) What are the innate predispositions of man? In other words, what is the definition that a people will give of basic human nature?¹³¹

With respect to the question of what innate human nature is, she points out that

¹³⁰Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn, "Dominant and Variant Value Orientations," Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture, ed. Clyde Kluckhohn, Henry A. Murray, and David M. Schneider, op. cit., p. 346. A briefer version of the first part of this paper also appeared in Roy H. Grinker, ed., Toward a Unified Theory of Human Behavior (New York: Basic Books, 1956), pp. 83-87.

¹³¹Ibid.



there are three logical divisions of evil, neither good nor evil (or mixed), and good. And such, in fact, seem to be the distinctions which have been made by societies.¹³²

She then proceeds to show that the range within this problem contains six positions, as follows: human nature can be regarded as

1. Fundamentally evil and unalterable (immutable).
2. Evil but perfectible (mutable).
3. Neither good nor evil (a mixture of good and evil) that is invariant (immutable).
4. Neither good nor evil (a mixture of good and evil) but subject to influence (mutable).
5. Good and unalterable (immutable).
6. Good and mutable (corruptible).¹³³

There has been a general impression in the literature of the social sciences that the polarization of views between those who believe in the plasticity, mutability, changeability of man, and those who adhere to the invariance, unalterability, immutability of man, is paralleled in the polarization between those who view man as essentially good

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid. (I have combined here the texts from the volume edited by Kluckhohn, Murray and Schneider, with the text as it appears in the volume edited by Grinker, p. 85.



and those who view him as essentially evil. In general it has been assumed that those who adhere to the doctrine of man's unchangeability also hold the doctrine that man is evil; and those who espouse the doctrine of the plasticity of man also believe in the essential goodness of man. This is reflected in Karen Horney's generalization that

Those people who are convinced that human nature cannot change usually have not only a static but a pessimistic view of man. In simple terms, their conviction is that man has always been and will always be greedy, envious, cruel, vindictive, and destructive . . .¹³⁴

In other words, the assumption has been that, of the six positions outlined in Florence Kluckhohn's schema, the normal and prevalent positions are the ones numbered (1) and (3). There has also been a companion assumption, a kind of corollary to the first, namely, that [irrespective of what the judgment may be on positions (2), (3), and (4)] no one or almost no one in the social sciences identifies himself with position (5), i. e., the position that man is both unalterable and good. It is generally looked upon as almost a contradiction in terms.

It is therefore quite significant that the social psychologists whose work we are examining do not conform to this assumption. They all affirm that man is essentially

¹³⁴Karen Horney, "Human Nature Can Change: A Symposium," in The Nature of Man in Theological and Psychological Perspective, ed. Simon Doniger, op. cit., p. 181.



good." At the same time they all affirm, more or less vigorously, that man is a determinate, stable being, characterized by a certain degree of invariance, continuity, and stability, and that the doctrine of the plasticity, changeability, or malleability of man is an erroneous one. I shall illustrate this briefly by one or two quotes from each of our social psychologists. Thus Maslow points out that many recent investigations

support a certain scepticism with regard to the current stress by psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists on the plasticity, flexibility, and adaptability of the human being. . . . Human beings seem to be far more autonomous and self-governed than modern psychological theory allows for.¹³⁵

And in his later book he proclaims the existence of an inner human nature that is stable and "unchanging":

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.

It is possible to study this nature scientifically and to discover what it is like--(not invent-discover).

.
This inner nature is not strong and overpowering and unmistakable like the instincts of animals. It is weak and delicate and subtle and easily overcome by habit, cultural pressure, and wrong attitudes toward it.

Even though weak, it rarely disappears in the normal person--perhaps not even in the sick person. Even though denied, it persists underground forever pressing for actualization.¹³⁶

¹³⁵Maslow, Motivation and Personality, p. 123.

¹³⁶Maslow, Toward A Psychology of Being, pp. 3-4.



Erich Fromm predicates the idea of a science of man on the existence of a determinate, species-wide human nature:

The concept of a science of man rests upon the premise that its object, man, exists and that there is a human nature characteristic of the human species.¹³⁷

While he says that human nature "is not fixed," i. e., that men do not respond with rigidly identical behavior under varying conditions, he at the same time attacks "the theory of the infinite malleability of human nature" as leading to an "untenable position," and to "conclusions which are as unsatisfactory as the concept of a fixed and unchangeable human nature."¹³⁸ He then contrasts the absurd implications of the malleability theory with an appropriate approach to the study of man:

If we assumed that there is no human nature . . . the only possible psychology would be a radical behaviorism content with describing an infinite number of behavior patterns. . . . If, however, psychology and anthropology are to make valid propositions about the laws governing human behavior, they must start out with the premise that something, say X, is reacting to environmental influences in ascertainable ways that follow from its properties.¹³⁹

Man is not a blank sheet of paper on which culture can write its text; he is an entity charged with energy and structured in specific ways, which,

¹³⁷Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 20.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 21.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 22.



while adapting itself, reacts in specific and ascertainable ways to external conditions.¹⁴⁰

In a more recent book Fromm maintained that

The species 'man' can be defined not only in anatomical and physiological terms; its members share basic psychic qualities, the laws which govern their mental and emotional functioning, and the aims for a satisfactory solution of the problem of human existence.¹⁴¹

Carl Rogers rejects the theory of the malleability of man, and affirms the proposition that man has determinate, species-wide characteristics:

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 . . .¹⁴²

I find that man, like the lion, has a nature . . .¹⁴³

Asch points out that

the interrelated activities of man exhibit regularities that can be the object of fruitful investigation. . . . we are asserting that the starting point of all inquiries about social processes as in definite assumptions about the goals and capacities of individuals. . . . at the basis of all social disciplines there must be a comprehensive conception of human nature. . . .¹⁴⁴

Allport approaches the fact of continuity and stability

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴¹Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 12.

¹⁴²Carl R. Rogers, "The Nature of Man," The Nature of Man in Theological and Psychological Perspective, p. 91.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁴⁴Asch, Social Psychology, p. 5.



in man through an "essentialist" definition of personality:

For the purpose of the present volume we require a definition of personality that is 'essentialist.' We shall treat personality as a unit 'out there,' possessing internal structure in its own right. . . . 'Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behavior and thought.'¹⁴⁵

When he undertakes a discussion of what the units are for the analysis of the structure of human personality, the "building blocks that comprise the edifice of a given personality," Allport introduces the subject with this broad statement on the relative stability of the structures making up human nature:

Man's nature, like all of nature, seems to be composed of relatively stable structures. The success of psychological science, therefore, as of any science, depends in large part upon its ability to identify the major structures, sub-structures, and microstructures (elements) of which its assigned portion of the cosmos is composed.¹⁴⁶

Gardner Murphy's views on the subject of the stability vs. plasticity of human nature are something of a puzzle because of what appears to be an almost complete about face from his earlier position to his more recent theories. In his book Personality, Murphy emphasized stability and continuity in human personality. A few sentences from his chapter on "Continuity" will illustrate this:

¹⁴⁵Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 28.

¹⁴⁶Allport, Personality and Social Encounter, p. 111.



Despite all vicissitudes of life there is continuity. . . . the individual cast of personality, something that enters into and persists through every situational adjustment.¹⁴⁷

We start then with the assumption that there are personality constants. These traits may be approximately fixed for life.¹⁴⁸

In spite of all this [various changes], we cling to the evidence that there is a good deal of continuity both in the sense of stability and in the sense of consistent direction in the growth process.¹⁴⁹

By virtue of all the factors suggested thus far, the inner dynamics become more and more stable. The self, the symbolic system, and the value system, each related to the other, take on a degree of fixity --or even rigidity--which will resist environmental pressure, or, to speak more accurately, will require each environmental pressure to operate on the individual in a more or less prearranged way.¹⁵⁰

In the long run, stability and rather narrowly restricted change are the rule; and complexity of organization, though a mark of fragility, may also mean that the whole is less changeable than the parts.¹⁵¹

However, in his later book, Human Potentialities, Murphy develops a rather speculative and euphoric evolutionary theory, in which man is seen as being transformed and transforming himself through three "human natures," the last one being a more or less utopian stage. We shall have occasion to return to this a little later in connection

¹⁴⁷Gardner Murphy, Personality, p. 714.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 715.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 728.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 730.

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 732.



with the discussion of the concept of "evolution."

We should not move ahead to the next step in our discussion of the problem of permanence and change in human nature, without adding to the inventory of the views of our social psychologists the obvious reminder that Freud's theory of man emphasized stability and permanence, and that on this problem there is a good deal of agreement between Freud and the social psychologists under discussion. Before moving on to an examination of the meaning of the problem of permanence vs. plasticity in human nature, we should also recall that the views of our group of social psychologists and of Freud are distinctly in the minority among contemporary psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists. For example, the several varieties of Behaviorism and S-R psychology, the "functionalist" school of sociology and anthropology, and orthodox Marxism aggressively champion the doctrine of the plasticity and malleability of man.

If we are to analyze the meaning of the question "Can human nature be changed?", it is important to dispose of a minor linguistic point. What should be talked about in connection with this question is man, and the nature of man. Too often, however, as a result of the unfortunate linguistic form of the locution "human nature," the discussion turns out to be about something called "human nature," and many absurdities result. The hypostatization of the idea of human nature has led some writers to ascribe certain attributes (adjectival in form), for example "teachability,"



to something called "human nature" because the locution is substantival in form. Thus the sociologist, Cooley, said about human nature that "it is a nature whose primary trait is teachability,"¹⁵² instead of saying that a primary trait of man is his teachability. And Ellsworth Faris gave one of his books the title The Nature of Human Nature, thus predicating an attribute of another attribute (or aggregate of attributes), instead of calling his book The Nature of Man.

Manifestly, then, when we ask the question "Can human nature be changed?", we do not mean to be talking about something called "human nature," but rather about man, and man's attributes, propensities, traits, motivations, or behavior. The real question before us, therefore, is "Can man be changed?", and this is to be kept in mind, though we shall continue to use the locution "human nature." We shall be talking about the universal "man," referring to the aggregate of all human beings, but we shall also be referring to individual persons, members of the species to which the universal term, "man," refers. More troublesome than the word "man," or the term "human nature" in the question "Can human nature be changed?" or "Can man be changed?", is the old word "change." The old problem about what it means to say that something changes or is changed

¹⁵²Charles Horton Cooley, Human Nature and the Social Order (New York: Scribners, 1902), p. 34.



immediately raises its haunting head.

In the interest of avoiding the many intricacies of the metaphysical and epistemological problem of "permanence and chance" and keeping our eye on the problem at hand, it may be helpful to suggest that the question "Can man, or the nature of man, be changed?", is the same kind of question as the question "Can the nature of wood be changed?", or "Can the nature of oxygen be changed?", "Can the nature of chlorine be changed?", "Can the nature of dogs be changed?", "Can the nature of paramecia be changed?", etc. This kind of question of course has implicit behind it an anterior question. When we ask "Can the nature of wood be changed?", it is presupposed that we have at least some answer to the "What is wood?", or "What is the nature of wood?". Similarly, anterior to the question "Can man be changed?" is the question "What is man?", or "What is the nature of man?". In the context of empirical inquiry the answer to this kind of question would have to take the form of placing the subject matter under discussion into certain classifications, and of detailing some of its attributes, or properties, or traits, or behavior.

If this is accomplished at all satisfactorily, say with reference to wood, or oxygen, then the empirical question "Can wood or the nature of wood be changed?", or "Can oxygen or the nature of oxygen be changed?" seems to rule out quite naturally two kinds of answer. First to be



ruled out would be the answer which, stemming from a radical, extreme Heracliteanism would say: "Of course wood or the nature of wood can be changed, because all there is, is change and flux!" This would be an obvious petitio principii. If there were only change there would be no philosophical problem of "permanence and change." The problem has arisen out of our experience of both permanence and change, and what has been sought is an explanation of the relationships between them. When we ask about anything whether it can be changed, implicit in the question is the epistemological and metaphysical assumption that the question is about something, whether the "something" is a substance possessing certain attributes, or is only, as Bertrand Russell once said, a collection of qualities or attributes;¹⁵³ and that if the "something" can indeed be changed in some sense, it will be a something which is in some sense permanent that will be undergoing or that will have undergone the change. Or, to put it in the words of F. H. Bradley, "The thing, to be at all, must be the same after a change, and the change must, to some extent, be predicated of the thing."¹⁵⁴

In a framework of empirical inquiry, therefore, anything--wood, oxygen, man--which is to be studied, investi-

¹⁵³Bertrand Russell, An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth (New York: Norton, 1940), pp. 120-22.

¹⁵⁴F. H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1893; ninth impression, 1930), p. 62.



gated, talked about, must in some sense be assumed to have a determinate character, that is, it must in a fundamental sense continue to be the same; and the question whether it can be changed resolves itself to a question as to the sense in which, the ways in which, the conditions under which, and the extent to which the thing or the subject matter under investigation which remains the same, also undergoes change. Paul Tillich emphasized this point in his contribution to a symposium on the subject "Human Nature Can Change":

. . . human nature could not change if there were not something changeable in it. This is easy to understand: absolute change is an impossible notion, because without a subject of which we can say that it changes we neither could notice nor measure change. In our case this 'it' which changes is man. We do not ask has man replaced another being or will he be replaced by another being, but must ask: can this nature change, which we call human, and which remains human nature before and after the change? Our question can now be formulated in a precise way: Which are the changeable and which are the unchangeable elements in that which makes man, man?¹⁵⁵

The second kind of answer that is ruled out is the one that would use the word "change" in a sense equivalent to, or approximating, destruction. A thing can be "changed" by being destroyed. Wood can be put to the fire, burned,

¹⁵⁵Paul Tillich, "Human Nature Can Change: A Symposium," The Nature of Man in Theological and Psychological Perspective, ed. Simon Doniger, p. 178.



and "changed" into something which is not wood. Minute particles of certain chemical elements may be subjected to bombardment by subatomic charges or particles, their atomic structure destroyed by the bombardment, and as a consequence particles of a different chemical element made to appear in the experimental chamber. A human being could conceivably be subjected to such extreme physical mutilations and tortures, or mental tortures, that, while a living organism could still persevere in existence, we would no longer classify that organism as a man.¹⁵⁶ A person might, at a certain very young age, be placed in solitary confinement, in a dark, cramped cell, with enough food to keep him alive handed to him through some opening, and deprived of any other contact with other humans or with the outside world.¹⁵⁷ Whether the organism, after 20 or 25 years of such confinement, assuming it survived, could still be classified as human, may be considered at least questionable. A sculptor might carve a figure of a man throwing a football, but the original "inspiration" might leave him before the final touches are completed, and he

¹⁵⁶Analogous problems of classification and definition are discussed by John Locke when he takes up the problem of "monster births" or "monsters" in connection with his doctrine of essences, and his distinction between "real" and "nominal" essences. See John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Chapter III, Par. 14-17, and Book IV, Chapter IV, Par. 16.

¹⁵⁷Jakob Wasserman described this kind of situation in his novel Caspar Hauser.



might proceed to "change" the statue into a smaller female dancing figure. The proposition that things can be changed in this "destructive" sense of change, is of course true, but is irrelevant to our inquiry. The question under discussion is obviously not directed toward this kind of change.

The only remaining meaningful sense in which we can talk about anything undergoing change is the one which refers to a "something" stable, of determinate character, which continues being "the same," and which changes in the sense of behaving differently under different conditions. Oxygen, in its free form as part of the earth's atmosphere, behaves in certain determinate ways. When, in the process of combustion, Oxygen has combined with Carbon in certain proportions to form Carbon-dioxide, it behaves in a different way in its new role as one of the chemical elements in the Carbon-dioxide. On the other hand, Oxygen may combine chemically with Hydrogen to form water. As an element in water Oxygen will behave in still another way. Has the "nature" of the Oxygen changed in these three different situations? We may perhaps even have, theoretically, the very same identical bit of the gas at one time as a part of a given quantity of Carbon-dioxide, at another time, liberated through photo-synthesis by some plant, as free Oxygen in the atmosphere, and at still another time as part of a given quantity of water. In such a hypothetical series of changes it would be the same Oxygen, retaining its



"nature," but behaving differently in different situations. Indeed, it is by virtue of its having remained the same, of its having retained its "nature," that the Oxygen's behavior was what it was within each of the three different sets of conditions. Only Oxygen, its "nature" being what it is, behaves in these particular ways, or exhibits these particular "changes," under these particular conditions. Moreover, it is by virtue of its being what it is that its behavior, the changes it will exhibit, under given conditions, are predictable. A young, active, frisky dog, subjected to certain types of treatment in a laboratory over a period of time, will become listless, phlegmatic, in a state near prostration. The nature of the dog has remained the same, and it is by virtue of its having remained the same that the dog's behavior is different under the changed conditions, and that such behavior is predictable.

In short, significant discussion about change, and fruitful investigation of the kinds of change, ranges of change, and conditions of change of things or aggregates of things which form the subject matter of any empirical science, are predicated upon the continuity and stability of the subject matter being investigated scientifically. The absence of such continuity and stability would make impossible any systematic or scientific investigation of the subject matter, and discourse about it unintelligible. May Brodbeck's description of a "system" of subject matter being



subjected to scientific study is helpful in this connection:

A system consists roughly of any group of objects or patterns of behavior remaining constant in time. The planets, identifiable by their masses, the market with its stable procedures for buying and selling, rats in a cage, people in a community identifiable, say, by occupation and income, all constitute systems. Just as velocity and position, changing in time, are states of a mechanical system, so consumer preferences or political opinions may be the changing states of human systems.¹⁵⁸

Thus, what has been said here about any body of subject matter under scientific investigation is true, mutatis mutandis, about man and the sciences of man. Both our ordinary, everyday, common sense behavior toward other human beings, and the activities of social scientists in studying and investigating human behavior, are predicated upon the continuity and stability of man, and on the predictability (at least to some extent), by virtue of this stability, of wide variations in men's behavior, under varying conditions.

This methodological discussion compels us to reject, at least on methodological grounds, Wilhelm Dilthey's, Jose Ortega y Gasset's, and Ernst Cassirer's essentially Heraclitean view of man and of human history and culture, which is expressed in Cassirer's words:

We cannot define man by any inherent principle which constitutes his inherent essence--nor can we define him by any inborn faculty or instinct that may be ascertained by empirical observation. Man's outstanding characteristic, his distinguishing mark, is not

¹⁵⁸May Brodbeck, "Methodological Individualism," op. cit., p. 10.



his metaphysical or physical nature--but his work. It is this work, it is the system of human activities, which defines and determines the circle of 'humanity.'¹⁵⁹

or in Ortega y Gasset's words:

Man has no nature; he has history. . . . Man is historical in the sense that he has no actual or immutable constitution but assumes most varied and diverse forms.¹⁶⁰

More to the point are (if we discount his extreme and one-sided psychologism) the view of David Bidney, the philosophical anthropologist, when he says that

. . . we must postulate human agents with determinate psycho-biological powers and impulses. . . . Man does have a substantial nature which may be investigated by the methods of natural science as well as a cultural history which may be studied by the methods of the social sciences and humanities. . . . If there were nothing relatively permanent or fixed, if there were no human nature or essence, there could be no science of man but only a sequence of descriptions for each period in history.¹⁶¹

and the admonition of Eduardo Nicol, whom Bidney quotes, that

. . . we have to investigate what the being who changes is. It is not enough to say that man changes, that man is historical; it is not sufficient to say that man is. We must begin to explain how he is in change; we must explain what constitutes the internal law of his change and how the organic structure of his being operates in history.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 68.

¹⁶⁰Quoted by David Bidney, "On the Philosophical Anthropology of Ernst Cassirer and Its Relation to the History of Anthropological Thought," The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (Evanston, Ill.: The Library of Living Philosophers, 1949), p. 491.

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 495.

¹⁶²Quoted by Bidney, ibid.



In other words, the very fact of history and of culture, of social and institutional change, the very attempt to predict that such and such institutional changes will affect man's behavior in such and such a fashion, must be predicated on the assumption of man as stable and permanent, behaving in varying and changing ways in response to varying and changing conditions; this variable behavior under varying conditions being impossible without the assumption of man as a stable and constant being.

At this point in our discussion it may contribute to further clarification if we take cognizance of the critique by the philosopher, R. G. Collingwood, in his book The Idea of History, of what he calls the 18th century "conception of human nature as something solid, permanent, and uniform."¹⁶³

¹⁶³R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Galaxy Book edition; New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 83. Collingwood's paragraph in which this quote occurs deals specifically with Hume's view that the science of man is the ultimate foundation for all the other sciences; and on the subject of the permanence and uniformity of human nature Collingwood must have had in mind such passages from Hume as the following:

. . . there is great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and . . . human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations. The same motives always produce the same actions. . . . Ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit; these passions mixed in various degrees, and distributed through society, have been, from the beginning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and enterprises which have ever been observed among mankind. . . . Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature . . .

David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (Chicago: Open Court, 1930), Section VIII, Part I, pp. 85-86.



Collingwood maintains that "philosophically, this conception was self-contradictory." For, his argument runs, if the sciences of man produce a greater understanding of our own understanding, then this results in the improvement of-- hence change in--our understanding. "The historical development of the science of human nature entails an historical development in human nature itself," says Collingwood. Moreover, assuming human nature to be constant," Collingwood maintains that this assumption "fatally distorted" the 18th century philosophers' conception of history in two ways:

- (1) It made it impossible for them "to arrive at the conception of a history of human nature itself; for such a conception implies that human nature is not a constant but a variable."
- (2) It made them "look forward to a Utopia in which all the problems of human life should have been solved. For if human nature itself undergoes no change when we come to understand it better, every new discovery we make about it will solve the problems which now perplex us because of our ignorance, and no new problems will be created. . . . human life will consequently



become better and better, happier and
happier."¹⁶⁴

We find here a polarization which is frequently found in the literature. For Collingwood, as for many others, the views on this problem become dichotomized into two mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive positions: either man is totally static, absolutely and rigidly unmodifiable, or man is characterized by complete plasticity or fluidity. The self-contradiction alleged by Collingwood would be present only in the case of a conception of man as completely static, either displaying no differences in behavior under different conditions, or subsisting statically in a completely static universe devoid of change. But reflection on the problem leads neither to this rigidly static conception, nor to one of extreme Heraclitean fluidity, but rather to a conception of man as possessing a stable, basic structure, by virtue of which his behavior varies in (to some degree) predictable ways under varying conditions. Man's improved knowledge of himself through the investigations pursued by the "sciences of man" is thus among the natural and expected variations in human behavior, related on the one hand to the altered conditions introduced by any specific advance in the social sciences, and on the other hand, to the capacities for self-knowledge present in his basic stable constitution. There is no reason to suppose, on the

¹⁶⁴ Collingwood, The Idea of History, pp. 83-85.



one hand, that man's behavior will not respond in an appropriately modified way to advances in his own self-knowledge, or, on the other hand, that man's increasing self-knowledge entails some kind of ultimate self-transcendence by man, which would carry him beyond the limits placed upon his variability by his inherent, stable constitution.

We have no reason to assume that man's knowledge of himself will reach perfection, i. e., that it will become complete and exhaustive, any more than to assume that man's knowledge of the physical universe which is his home will ever be complete and exhaustive. This is one of the limitations of man in his finitude. With a recognition of this and other limitations which are part of the nature of man, and of a range within whose limits man responds in different ways to different situations, what Collingwood called "a genuine history of man . . . a history of how man came to be what he is,"¹⁶⁵ is not at all ruled out. Collingwood interpreted the claim that man is a stable, determinate being to imply a claim that man's self-knowledge is now complete; this is part of the error of assuming that the doctrine of man's stability implies a rigidly fixed, non-historical, completely static image of man. But the view of the relationship between stability

¹⁶⁵Ibid., p. 85.



and change within man, which we have been developing here, implies a conception of history which would relate social and cultural change, as well as change in man's self-knowledge, to the nature of man and his limitations, and show how, under various changed conditions man's nature has manifested itself.

This, I believe, is what Werner Stark means when he says:

. . . a last limitation would remain for the cultural sciences. So long as history continues, their material can never be complete. History is the self-revelation of man, and the longer it lasts, the more facets of his essence does he reveal.¹⁶⁶

In other words, the fact that man has an "essence," a determinate nature, does not mean either that he has full knowledge of his own nature now, or that he will attain full and complete knowledge of it at some future time. Part of the process of history is the process of man's unfolding knowledge of himself, as it is also of his

¹⁶⁶Werner Stark, The Sociology of Knowledge: An Essay in Aid of a Deeper Understanding of the History of Ideas (International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 209. In this connection Stark quotes a passage from Hume's essay "Of Civil Liberty" which raises doubts about Collingwood's ascription to Hume of a rigidly static view of man. In that essay Hume said:

The world is still too young to fix many general truths in politics. We have not as yet had experience of three thousand years; so that . . . we want sufficient materials upon which we can reason. It is not fully known, what degree of refinement, either in virtue or in vice, human nature is susceptible of; nor what may be expected of mankind from any great revolution in their education, customs, or principles.



unfolding knowledge of the universe. Man's increasing knowledge of his own essence does not imply any change in his essence. Neither does man's advancing knowledge of himself imply a utopian view of the future, in which "all the problems of human life should have been solved." Since we cannot suppose that our knowledge of physical nature will ever be exhaustive, we cannot suppose it ever to result in a utopian elimination of earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, accidents, explosions, fires, power failures, etc., etc. And since we cannot suppose man's self-knowledge ever to be more than partial, increasing self-knowledge will, at most, make more understandable some of the human problems that will continue to arise, or it may help devise ways of anticipating, predicting, and possibly preventing the occurrence of some of the eruptions in the social, economic, and political realms. But the possible occurrence of such eruptions will continue to be an ever lurking danger in view of man's being what he is. "Our knowledge, however greatly we may extend it, will forever remain fragmentary. This is part and parcel of our fate."¹⁶⁷

One of the difficulties, evident in Collingwood and in other writers, is the failure to distinguish between that which John Dewey called the "unchangeable in the structure of human nature" and what Dewey refers to as "the manifesta-

¹⁶⁷Stark, Ibid., p. 210.



tion of these needs"; and the false inference that because man has a stable, unchangeable structure it must follow that the manifestations of this structure are also unalterable. Dewey, who certainly did not lack in vigor in emphasizing the variable and changeable aspects of man and his behavior, both in his book Human Nature and Conduct, and again in an essay "Does Human Nature Change?", also emphasizes that there is a sense in which it is correct to say that human nature does not change:

. . . we have first to recognize the sense in which human nature does not change. . . . there are some tendencies so integral a part of human nature that the latter would not be human nature if they changed. . . . human nature has its own constitution. Where we are likely to go wrong, after the fact is recognized that there is something unchangeable in the structure of human nature, is the inference we draw from it. We suppose that the manifestation of these needs is also unalterable.¹⁶⁸

However, with this false conditional as a premise, many go wrong in reasoning in the reverse direction. They conclude that the concept of man's stability and unalterability must be rejected on the basis of this premise in conjunction with the empirical observation that the manifestations of the nature of man are in fact variable. The implicit logical structure of this reasoning is that of a simple Modus Tollens argument form, as follows:

If man's basic structure is unalterable then its manifestations are also unalterable.

¹⁶⁸John Dewey, "Does Human Nature Change?", Problems of Men (New York: Philosophical Library, 1938), pp. 184-185.



But these manifestations of man's structure are in fact variable or alterable.

Therefore: Man's basic structure is not unalterable.

The argument is formally valid. What is wrong is that its first premise is, as Dewey pointed out, a false proposition.

To recapitulate, then. Man is a determinate, stable being with a determinate structure or nature, and his behavior is to some extent predictable and subject to discoverable laws. But this conception is not of a rigidly static being, the assumptions of many writers such as Collingwood and Kardiner¹⁶⁹ to the contrary notwithstanding. Man's behavior is variable and differs under differing conditions. How man's behavior will vary under varying conditions is, within certain limits of probability, theoretically an answerable question, and the laws which would summarize the orderliness and predictability of these variations in behavior are, theoretically, discoverable laws. Social scientists study this variable behavior and expect to advance our knowledge and understanding of it, on the basis of an assumption, tacit or explicit, that they are studying a stable entity, man, which, by virtue of its stability and determinateness, and only by virtue of it, is susceptible to this kind of scientific investigation. Our social psychologists affirm this assumption of stability in man,

¹⁶⁹See supra, p. 9 and n. 11.



the subject of their investigation, and, whatever other shortcomings they may display, in this respect they are on the side of responsible scientific method. That this is a sine qua non for the scientific study of man is reflected in philosopher Abraham Kaplan's evaluative comment on Freud, who, as we pointed out earlier, conformed to this requirement. Freud, Kaplan tells us,

posits a human nature sufficiently stable and invariant to make possible scientific generalization beyond individual case histories. Some such posit is presupposed in every study of man, and indeed in every science for its subject matter.¹⁷⁰

E. "Real Definition" vs. "Nominal Definition" of Human Nature

The doctrine which insists on the concept of human nature as stable, determinate, permanent, i. e., as a pattern of attributes, or qualities, or propensities, or as some pattern of relationships, which persists and remains the same while its manifestations vary in varying situations, entails the requirement to provide a definition of human nature. What kind of definition would that be? What kind of definition of human nature is explicitly propounded or implicitly assumed by the social psychologists under examination? In this attempt to describe and classify the definition of human nature, I shall limit myself to the distinction in traditional logic between "nominal" and "real"

¹⁷⁰Abraham Kaplan, "Freud and Modern Philosophy," Freud and the 20th Century, ed. Benjamin Nelson (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 222.



definition.

A "nominal" definition is a convention employed to introduce a new term, a new symbol, or alternative notation, as a substitute for another term, or phrase, or expression.

A sampling of characterizations of nominal definition may be helpful:

A verbal or nominal definition is a declaration of intention to use a certain word or phrase as a substitute for another word or phrase. The original word or phrase is the definiens; the substituted one, the definiendum.¹⁷¹

A nominal definition . . . is an agreement or resolution concerning the use of verbal symbols. A new symbol . . . is to be used for an already known group of words or symbols. . . . The definiendum is thus to have no meaning other than the definiens.¹⁷²

A nominal definition may be characterized as a stipulation to the effect that a specified expression, the definiendum, is to be synonymous with a certain other expression, the definiens, whose meaning is already determined.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹Ralph M. Eaton, General Logic: An Introductory Survey (New York: Scribner, 1931), p. 295.

¹⁷²Morris R. Cohen and Ernest Nagel, An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934), p. 228.

¹⁷³Carl G. Hempel, Fundamentals of Concept Formation in Empirical Science, p. 2. In recent logic textbooks a further distinction is often made between "stipulative" and "lexical" (sometimes called "dictionary" or "reported") definitions. A stipulative definition stipulates that a term or an expression, the definiendum, will be used so that its meaning will be identical with that of another expression, namely, the meaning of the definiens. This is the same as what is called nominal definition in the quotations above. On the other hand, a lexical definition reports on the meaning a word has in common usage or the meaning it is assigned in the dictionary. It is quite clear that lexical definitions are also nominal definitions, although there is some



Now, it is quite clear that the definition of human nature that is assumed, propounded, or sought, is not a nominal definition. What is intended is neither a verbal definition which stipulates that the term "human nature" is to be synonymous with such and such an expression, so that the definiendum is to be identical in meaning with the definiens, and is to be substitutable for it in all contexts, nor a lexical definition which reports what meaning the "term human" nature is given in common usage or in the dictionary. What is intended is some kind of "real" definition, which refers to man and to man's nature. We shall presently review some meanings of real definition, in order to determine which is applicable to the definition of human nature. At this point it is important to recall the admonition given in the section immediately preceding this one, namely, the admonition against any hypostatization of

confusion in the terminology on this subject. Some writers identify lexical definitions as nominal, e. g. Romane Clark and Paul Welsh, Introduction to Logic (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1962), p. 175. Others call lexical definitions "real," but they use the word "real" in another sense, namely, to convey the idea that these are definitions which refer to actual or real common usage or dictionary meaning. Cf. Irving M. Copl, Introduction to Logic (Second Edition; New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 102-103, who says: "Whether a definition is stipulative or lexical has nothing to do with the question of whether the definiendum names any 'real' or 'existent' thing." Rescher calls lexical definitions "real" definitions, but in the special sense just mentioned. Cf. Nicholas Rescher, Introduction to Logic (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), p. 34. Max Black, after giving an illustration of what we have called a lexical definition, explains as follows: "This . . . definition purports to be true, for it is not a proposal or resolution, but a report about the usage of the definiendum. We shall call the latter



the concept of human nature. Just as "human nature" must not be taken as the proper name of a concrete entity, so also there is no need to suppose that there is any abstract entity of which it is the name or to which it refers. The term "human nature" has meaning, and we may say with Quine: "Meaning . . . is not to be identified with naming," and "the cleavage between meaning and reference is [to be] properly heeded."¹⁷⁴

"Human nature" is another way of saying "the nature of man." Strictly speaking therefore, we are really trying to determine what kind of real definition is intended of the concept "man." "Man" is a general term, a universal. However, we need not here become entangled in the old philosophical controversy between realists, nominalists, and conceptualists as to the status of universals, since the possibility of real definition does not depend upon there being any abstract entities of which general terms are the names. It is only necessary to suppose that "human nature"

type of definition REPORTED definitions, of which 'customary' or 'dictionary' definitions will be a special case. . . . Dictionaries are collections of reported definitions." See Max Black, Critical Thinking: An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method (Second edition: New York: Prentice-Hall, 1955), pp. 208-209.

¹⁷⁴Willard Van Orman Quine, From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 21 and 130, also p. 9. Cf. also Russell's theory of descriptions, particularly in "On Denoting," Mind, XIV (1905), 479-493; reprinted in Bertrand Russell, Logic and Knowledge: Essays 1901-1950, ed. Robert Charles Marsh (New York: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 41-56. And also Bertrand Russell, Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919), Chapter 16, pp. 167-180.



and the definiens of the definition of 'human nature' apply to each individual human being, i. e., to the extension of the term or to any member of the extension of the term "human nature." Adopting the terminology used by Quine (and others), we may say that a general term "is true of an entity, or of each of many, or of none. The class of all entities of which a general term is true is called the extension of the term."¹⁷⁵ The class of all entities of which the definiens of "human nature" must be true will thus be the class of individual persons. If this is achieved, no relevant additional question arises as to whether the term "human nature" in any way refers to any abstract meaning or intention. ¹⁷⁶

Before examining what a real definition is, it is proper to point out here the differences in approach to this problem between, e. g., Fromm and Allport. Fromm explains that "human nature" is a theoretical construction which is inferred from observed data of human behavior:

Human nature can never be observed as such, but only in its specific manifestations in specific situations. It is a theoretical construction which can be inferred from empirical study of the behavior of man. In this respect, the science of man in constructing a 'model of human nature' is no different from other sciences which operate with concepts of entities based on or controlled by inferences from observed data and not directly observable themselves.¹⁷⁷

In this statement Fromm, as we shall see below, comes fairly

¹⁷⁵Quine, From a Logical Point of View, p. 21.

¹⁷⁶ibid.

¹⁷⁷Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 24.



close to describing some of the requirements of a real definition of human nature. On the other hand, Allport, in discussing the related subject of giving a definition of "personality," ends up in a confused combination of essentialism and hypostatization. Allport says that "psychologically considered, personality is what a man really is,"¹⁷⁸ so that it is quite clear that in talking about personality, Allport is really talking about human nature. Personality, Allport insists, is real and not merely a construct:

Personality is something and does something. It is not synonymous with behavior and activity; least of all is it merely the impression that this activity makes on others. It is what lies behind specific acts and within the individual.¹⁷⁹

For the purpose of the present volume we require a definition of personality that is 'essentialist.' We shall treat personality as a unit 'out there,' possessing internal structure in its own right.¹⁸⁰

Turning now to the matter of real definition, which is what Allport seems to be reaching for, it is true that the traditional conception of this kind of definition tended to be "essentialist." In the first place, real definitions were not supposed to give verbal equivalents of other words, or of symbolic expressions, but rather to say something about the basic natures of things. Real definitions, according to Alonzo Church, are

¹⁷⁸Allport, Personality, p. 48.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 28.



. . . those in which the definiens embodies the 'essential nature' (essentia, οὐσία) of the definiendum Ockham makes the distinction . . . on the basis that real definitions state the whole nature of a thing and nominal definitions state the meaning of a word or phrase.¹⁸¹

And Hempel begins his discussion of real definition by saying that

. . . according to traditional logic [a 'real' definition] is not a stipulation determining the meaning of some expression but a statement of the 'essential nature' or the 'essential attributes' of some entity.¹⁸²

However, Hempel's analysis shows that real definitions are not limited only to this essentialist kind:

It is often possible to reinterpret the quest for real definition in a manner which requires no reference to 'essential natures' or 'essential attributes,' namely, as a search either for an empirical explanation of some phenomenon or for a meaning analysis.¹⁸³

In other words, a real definition might be "an analysis of an idea," which a nominal definition never is;¹⁸⁴ e. g., Euthyphro's analysis of "piety" as "that which is dear to the Gods," in Plato's dialogue by that name.¹⁸⁵ In such a definition the definiens and the definiendum both refer

¹⁸¹Alonzo Church, "Definition," in The Dictionary of Philosophy, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1942), pp. 74-75.

¹⁸²Hempel, Fundamentals of Concept Formation, p. 6.

¹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁸⁴Eaton, General Logic, p. 300.

¹⁸⁵Cohen and Nagel, An Introduction to Logic, p. 230.