

FOREWORD

*Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man.*
(ALEXANDER POPE: *An Essay on Man*)

PHILOSOPHISING about man's study of man may take two forms. It may take the form of an *a priori* attempt to answer the question: 'What sort of study is possible, or appropriate, given that human nature is what is to be studied and that man himself is to be making the study?' Or it may take the form of an *a posteriori* examination of the fruits of man's study of man, directed to answering the question: 'What sort of a study is this, and is it the sort the author supposes it to be?'

Both forms of philosophising are represented in this fourth volume of Royal Institute of Philosophy lectures. Roughly half the papers (1 to 7) come in the first category; the other half (8 to 14), in the second. I say 'roughly' because some of the papers fit the classification better than others. One which fits it well is that by Donald MacKay, Granada Research Professor of Communication at the University of Keele. His paper, is in effect, an answer to the question: 'What sort of study is possible, given that man himself is to be making the study?' More precisely, 'Can there be a science of man, if the knowledge science offers must be (a) public knowledge, and (b) expressible in propositions demanding equally unconditional assent by all?'

MacKay's answer to this question is 'No'. He distinguishes between 'the *scientific* doctrine that all human actions fit rigidly into a fully causal explanatory framework, and the *metaphysical* doctrine that all human actions are already determined before they happen'. He is concerned with the second doctrine. If it were true, then a person with complete knowledge of himself, and of the relevant laws of nature, would be able to calculate what his future actions would be. This, says MacKay, is precisely what he cannot do, even in principle. He cannot do it because he cannot, logically cannot, take into account everything about himself that is relevant to what he will do. As MacKay puts it, 'Because no change could take place in

what I believe, without a corresponding change in the "complete specification of myself" that the theory postulates, it follows that even within the most deterministic super-theory, no completely detailed and up-to-date specification exists which has an unconditional claim now on my assent'. In other words, there cannot be such a thing as a person basing a belief on knowledge of state *S* if state *S* has to include a reference to what he believes on the basis of his knowledge of state *S*. It would be like someone trying to pull himself up with his own shoelaces. So if 'an object . . . is something of which there is one and only one objective specification that could logically claim the assent of all', 'in an important sense people cannot be *objects* of scientific scrutiny'. They can be objects to others – providing the others do not communicate their findings to them – but not to themselves, and so not objects, not scientific objects, at all.

Although it is the 'metaphysical' doctrine that MacKay is concerned to refute, he says that he does not hold the 'scientific' doctrine either.

A reason that might be given, though MacKay does not himself give it, for not holding the scientific doctrine is that the sort of 'explanatory framework' into which actions fit is not a causal one, and so not a fully causal one into which they fit rigidly. The concept of an action is not that of an event which ensues on some other event mental or bodily.¹

The significance of this for the study of man is as follows. If when we talk of man we are *not* thinking of man as a biological machine, the motions of the parts of which are to be explained by other motions, then by the study of man we cannot mean such a study as the biologist makes. If by 'man' we mean a being of whom it can be said that he acts in certain ways, then the concepts in terms of which we study him must be those that keep company with the concept of action. What are these concepts?

H. B. Acton, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, in his paper on 'Hegel's Conception of the Study of Human Nature' comments thus on Hegel's reasons for rejecting physiognomy: 'If individuals are best understood in terms of their deeds rather than in terms of their physiological or mental structure, they must be understood in social terms, for their actions, including what they say, relate them to one another.'

What is it to understand individuals, and their deeds, 'in social terms'?

¹ See G. J. Warnock, 'Actions and Events', in D. F. Pears (ed.), *Freedom and the Will* (London, 1963); and G. N. A. Vesey, 'Conditioning and Learning', in R. S. Peters (ed.), *The Concept of Education* (London, 1967).

Albrecht Wellmer, Lecturer in Social Science in Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, in his paper on the logic of explanation in the social sciences, contrasts explanation in terms of a 'social norm' with a 'physical causal' explanation. He takes A. C. Danto's example, of American flags being put out side by side with Monégasque flags in Monaco during the national holidays. The explanation is that the Monégasques have a sovereign who is American, and that the American flags have been put out in her honour. What sort of an explanation is this? Does it consist in bringing the phenomenon to be explained under an empirically established covering law, to the effect that whenever a nation has a sovereign of a different national origin to its own citizens, those citizens, on appropriate occasions, honour that sovereign in some acceptable fashion? Or is the explanation more like that in which when once we are told what rule someone is following, providing the rule makes sense to us, we can interpret the observed facts as an instance of the rule? Wellmer would say the latter. Expressions like 'on appropriate occasions' and 'in some acceptable fashion' give the game away. 'Understanding the explanation means . . . mastering the "language game" of the agent.'

P. L. Gardiner, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, might appear to be making the same point. He distinguishes between the 'positivist', or 'covering law', and the 'anti-positivist' approaches to the problem of elucidating the character of historical knowledge and explanation. About the former, he writes:

One central objection, often propounded in a variety of ways, takes the form of accusing the positivist of representing explanation in history in an 'external' or 'spectatorial' fashion that is altogether inappropriate and of failing to see that to construe such explanation in terms of the subsumption of individual events under general laws is to disregard the special sense (crucial to historical thought) in which we speak of understanding the actions of another person. In a general way, such understanding requires an ability to grasp what is done as endowed with a certain sense or meaning, thereby connecting it with our own experience of what it is to pursue certain purposes or goals, to behave in certain capacities, to observe rules or conventions, to be guided by beliefs or convictions.

But I wonder whether Gardiner's point is in fact the same as Wellmer's. Gardiner talks of 'understanding the actions' and of 'grasping what is done', as though it is a matter of fitting things which already have a status of 'actions' or 'deeds' into a wider

setting of thoughts and purposes. 'We are at the level of understanding that is here in question when we apprehend the things people do as directly manifesting thoughts, motives and emotions which we can imaginatively enter into and share because we are ourselves human beings.' The expression requiring attention is 'the things people do'. The basic or 'categorical' distinction, it seems to me, is (a) that between the motions of people's bodies and what people do, not (b) that between what people do and what their actions may reveal about them to sympathetic observers. The point of calling (a) a 'categorical' distinction can be seen by considering those arguments which pass from a premiss about people's bodies – e.g. that what happens in people's brains cannot meaningfully be said to be free – to a conclusion about people – that people cannot be said to be free. This is something on which MacKay comments in his paper. He says that some people arguing against free will 'successfully prove (*ex hypothesi*) that brains are not free; but they seem unaware that what was at issue was a different question: namely, whether *people* are free; and that freedom is something it would not even make sense to attribute to brains as physical objects'.

Distinction (a), it seems to me, is also the one that matters most when it comes to such questions as 'Is there no essential respect, epistemological or logical, that separates historical work and understanding from the kinds of procedure exemplified in the natural sciences?' To say that, with respect to this question, it is distinction (a) that matters most is not, of course, to deny that there are other distinctions that matter, e.g. those that serve to distinguish history, as dealing with single events in the past, from, say, sociology.

When Gardiner talks of 'apprehending the things people do', and of 'a deterministic view of human behaviour', does he mean by 'the things people do', and by 'human behaviour', *actions*, as distinct from *bodily motions*, or not? One needs to know, if one is to understand his answer to such questions as whether or not 'men, like everything else in the natural order, are subject to empirical modes of investigation', and to Morton White's priceless 'If men are not objects in nature, where are they?'

A term which plays as equivocal a role in philosophising about morality as 'behaviour' plays in philosophising about history is 'need'. It may be said, for example, that the notion of 'human good and harm' can be given content by reference to human needs, or that one institution is better than another in so far as it satisfies human needs better. But is the concept of *human need* the concept of something objective, like the motions of people's bodies, or are needs defined in terms of social institutions or other standards deriving

from a particular culture? If the latter, then justifying an institution by reference to satisfaction of human needs will be circular. This is a point made by Basil Mitchell, Nolloth Professor of Philosophy of Christian Religion at Oxford. Peter Winch, Professor of Philosophy at King's College, London, makes a similar point about the attempt made by Mrs Philippa Foot and others 'to locate the moral in certain alleged features of human nature'. He comments: 'The identification of these human needs – at least in many important cases – may itself be a matter for dispute of a kind which it is hard not to characterise as a moral dispute'.

Winch is concerned with Alasdair MacIntyre's attempt, in *A Short History of Ethics*, to reconcile the 'appeal to human needs in determining what belongs to the moral with a recognition of the extent to which what we are prepared to recognise as being human needs varies *pari passu* with the moral outlook we are prepared to embrace'. He thinks it is an attempt which must fail. He takes MacIntyre to be explaining the existence of a 'specifically moral language over and above the ordinary language of feelings, liking, choice and imperatives' by reference to its existing within the context of such and such social institutions and practices. Different forms of social life 'embody' different moral concepts. But, it may be argued, different social institutions correspond to different conceptions of what human needs are. So we have merely translated the question about different moral codes into one about different conceptions of human needs. Needs are related to ends to be attained. Once one departs from a consideration of what Mitchell calls 'biological needs whose satisfaction is necessary for the survival of the individual and of the race', the question of what human needs, and ends, are becomes one to which the answer depends on what ways of thinking and acting make sense and what do not.

Paul von Buren, in a paper in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures*, vol. 2, *Talk of God*, writes:

What is it to be a man? Or, as it used to be put, what is human nature? Men qualified as Christian today are aware that much can be said to this question by both natural and social sciences that is pragmatically important, which for some purposes provides a helpful leading. In addition, however, sometimes in competition with, at other times complementary to one or another political or social vision of man and human life, there is that way of saying what is the case in human life which is characteristic of Christian faith.

If one can make no sense of religious ways of thinking and acting, then one cannot meaningfully ascribe religious needs to man. I think

this would be an example to illustrate Winch's remark, regarding ways of thinking and acting, that 'what we can ascribe to human nature does not determine what we can and what we cannot make sense of; rather, what we can and what we cannot make sense of determines what we can ascribe to human nature'.

D. D. Raphael, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Reading, in part of his paper 'Philosophy and Sociology', considers 'whether the social sciences can be "value-free"'. He refers to Durkheim's 'precept to keep out concepts that depend on values, purposes, and intentions', and says that Durkheim in his book on *Suicide* avoids making value-judgements in quite a striking way.

Durkheim's procedure is, in fact, to define 'suicide' so that if someone acts in some way that he knows will result in his death, then, regardless of his reason for acting thus, he has committed suicide. On this criterion I suppose the execution of Socrates counts as suicide, since it involves Socrates doing something which he knows will result in his death. Someone who dies for his faith, if he could avoid death by renouncing it, commits suicide. And so on. Reference to people's purposes and intentions is certainly avoided in this way, but at a price. And it isn't even as if sociology thereby becomes like, say, botany. There is still the problem of how the investigator can judge whether or not a man knows what he is doing.¹

If by a 'value-free sociology' Raphael means one in which terms which ordinarily connote a certain motivation are redefined so as to imply nothing about values, purposes, and intentions, then I think he is right to remark on how 'an unthinking insistence on value-free sociology can limit absurdly the scope of an investigation'. I am inclined to go further, and say that if an investigation does not require what Wellmer calls 'mastering the "language-game" of the agent', it is not a sociological one.

The papers I have discussed so far have all been concerned, in one way or another, with the question: 'What sort of study is possible, or appropriate, given that human nature is what is to be studied and that man himself is to be making the study?' I said that some of the papers fit the description better than others. One which fits it only if the question is taken to be a practical one is that by Michael Drake, Dean of the Social Sciences Faculty at the Open University. He is concerned with 'the proper form and content of social science studies', and contrasts the first-year teaching of the social sciences at the University of Kent with that proposed at the Open University.

The other form which philosophising about man's study of man

¹ R. F. Holland, 'Suicide', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures*, vol. 2, *Talk of God*, p. 74.

may take, I said, is that of an *a posteriori* examination of the fruits of man's study of man, directed to answering the question: 'What sort of study is this, and is it the sort the author supposes it to be?'

A paper which fits this description perfectly is that by Frank Cioffi, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Kent. Cioffi's thesis is that some sociology is like literature in calling for contemplation, the 'manipulation of our sentiments towards certain facts', instead of yielding judgements which could be corroborated or overthrown by empirical research. He quotes Santayana. 'We must ask ourselves, says Santayana, whether we are tracing a sequence of events and attempting to infer their probable course, or formulating an interest and defining a policy "which definition is really knowledge of nothing but (our) own hearts".'

Cioffi takes examples to illustrate his thesis from Robert Merton's discussion of Veblen's account of conspicuous consumption, Everett Hughes's *Men and their Work*, David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, and Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and *Stigma*. His comment on how Riesman deals with the topic of autonomy is fairly typical:

Once again the apparent form of his remarks is that of a succession of hypotheses, this time of recipes for facilitating the achievement of autonomy, and once again they illustrate how remote from questions empirical investigation can be called on to decide are the issue they raise.

But this does not mean that the sociologist does not satisfy a real need, for 'it is not the kind of knowledge which results from empirical inquiry that we really need. It is not our state of information which requires altering. What we need is to sort out our thoughts, feelings, reminiscences, sentiments on the topic in question.'

It is interesting to speculate as to what Cioffi would say about the papers by Peter Laslett, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Paul Halmos, Professor of Sociology at the University of Wales.

Laslett is concerned in general with rights and duties as between generations, and in particular with the transfer of guilt. The conclusion to be reached is, for example: 'No living American, or Englishman, no contemporary of ours in the 1970s can be said to have a moral responsibility for the enslavement of Negroes, nor for any act of discrimination against Negroes which took place before the time of their own "generation".' And the argument involves reference to such characteristics of the parent-child relationship as that parents feel themselves to have an obligation to their children, but not vice versa.

I don't think Laslett would be unduly upset if Cioffi were to object that he is not advancing an empirically testable hypothesis; and that the 'psychologistic political theory' – that 'the authority of the older generation is parental authority in the household writ large in society' – to which he refers, has more of political theory in it than it has of psychology.

There might be more real opposition between Cioffi and Halmos, for Halmos's conclusion – that artistic innovation initiates social change – is, on the face of it, a causal hypothesis to which empirical investigation should be directly relevant.

Halmos has six arguments. The first concerns the effect on people of displays of violence, or of sex. Where the result is catharsis or excitement, 'the social influences of the artistic communication containing material of this nature will have been substantial'. I suspect that Cioffi would comment that the emphasis here is neither on artistic *innovation* nor on social *change*. The second argument refers to the fact that 'from the time of Plato's *Republic*, far from doubting the potency of art to affect society, man has always deliberately and consistently behaved as if he had been convinced of the efficacy of art to bring about a change in his life'. The third is connected to the second: leaders of dictatorships nearly all behave as if they believed 'that the creative artist should overthrow them if they allowed him complete freedom of expression'. The fourth refers to the testimony of the artists themselves: 'From Blake to Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth, poets and writers have not been slow to tell us about their moral and intellectual sway over us.' The fifth kind of testimony comes from educators: 'Exposing the young to Shakespeare is fervently believed to accomplish at least minor amendments to their characters.' The sixth is an argument inspired by Georg Simmel, about 'the inner logic of cultural development'. I suspect that about arguments two to six Cioffi would comment that while there is an abundance of appeal to what people believe, there is a significant absence of appeal to empirical evidence to justify their beliefs. I think he might also remark on the absence, in Halmos's paper, of suggestions as to how his hypothesis that artistic innovation initiates social change could be experimentally tested.

The question of the character of debate in sociology is one that is discussed by Basil Mitchell, also, in the third section of his paper on 'Law and the Protection of Institutions'. In the first two sections he considers two justifications for the law being used to protect certain social institutions. One is that if it were not so used the society would disintegrate; the other is that the members of society have a right to preserve unchanged institutions to which they attach value. Mitchell

sees the second justification as being a special case of a more general thesis, that the members of society have a right to protect institutions they regard as *better* than the available alternatives. The problem is: how are disputes about the merits of different institutions to be settled? 'The intuitively attractive answer is that one institution is better than another in so far as it satisfies human needs better or more successfully reconciles conflicting interests.' But this, as we saw earlier, doesn't get us far, since needs are usually defined in terms of social institutions. Those which are not, the biological survival needs, do not provide a basis for comparison. 'The biological adaptability which makes the variety of human cultures possible also makes it difficult or impossible to choose between them on purely biological grounds.' One cannot answer such questions as whether or not grammar schools and secondary modern schools should be replaced by comprehensive schools, whether or not there should be compulsory religious instruction in schools, by reference to basic biological needs. 'They may indeed be answerable by reference to basic *human* needs, but our judgement about these is not independent of our cultural background or philosophy of life.' The same is true when it comes to alternative forms of the institution of marriage. When Dr Alex Comfort predicts what would be likely to happen if standards of sexual behaviour were increasingly relaxed, he is 'relying largely on his own intuitive judgement of human nature'. The situation is complicated still further when it is then asked whether the supposed effects would be desirable or undesirable. It becomes very hard indeed to sort out the empirical and the evaluative elements in the debate.

In the remaining three papers R. S. Peters, Professor of Philosophy of Education at the University of London, David Bell, Senior Lecturer in Logic at the University of Glasgow, and Zeno Vendler, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Calgary, write on topics that are related only marginally, if at all, to the question 'What sort of study is the study of man?' Peters teases out the common notions that underlie the seemingly heterogeneous uses of 'reason', and seeks to show that the 'life of reason' that may be characterised in terms of them is not, as is often thought, inconsistent with a life of passion. The reconciliation is effected by invoking the notion of 'levels of life'.

David Bell argues that 'the idea of authority in political and social philosophy is a special application of a concept of more general relevance', namely the epistemological concept of the dependence of knowledge that one has on trust from another person on that other person's knowing things in a 'primary' way. The view he is opposing

is that which characterises the notion of authority by the concepts of power, imperative control, order and command.

Zeno Vendler advances what he describes as 'a somewhat more explicit reformulation of Wittgenstein's insight'. He means the insight Wittgenstein expressed in the *Blue Book* as follows: 'The sign (the sentence) gets its significance from the language to which it belongs. Roughly: understanding a sentence means understanding a language.' Vendler's reformulation is:

Knowing the meaning of a word is the ability to assign it to a concept, i.e. being aware of the range of minimal propositions in which it can appear. This, in turn, requires the comprehension of speech-acts and mental states appropriate to the propositions in questions.

This leads Vendler to the question: 'How is it possible to learn a language at all?' His answer is that 'the child must learn his native tongue in a way similar to our learning of second languages. He must have, in other words, a native equipment that codes the fundamental structural, semantic and illocutionary features of any possible human language.' Later he says that 'learning a specific language, first, second or third, is learning a code to be able to express one's thoughts and to recover the thoughts expressed by others'.

It is interesting to compare this with what Wittgenstein says in section 50 of Part I of the *Brown Book*.

In view of this mention of Wittgenstein, and of a 'native coding equipment' to explain how we learn our first language, it seems fitting to conclude this foreword by quoting the opening sentence of Frank Cioffi's paper. Its application is certainly not confined to the philosophy of the social sciences.

Wittgenstein has a remark in which he admonishes us to remember that not everything which is expressed in the language of information belongs to the language game of giving information.

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