EXPLAINING HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Consciousness, Human Action and Social Structure

PAUL F. SECORD

Editor

Contributors

Kurt W. Back

Roy Bhaskar

Kenneth J. Gergen

Mary M. Gergen

Anthony Giddens

D. W. Hamlyn

Rom Harré

Ivan Karp

Martha B. Kendall

Justin Leiber

Peter T. Manicas

John P. Sabini

Paul F. Secord

Maury Silver

Charles W. Smith

Charles Taylor

Stephen Toulmin

EXPLAINING HUMAN BEHAVIOR

EXPLAINING HUMAN BEHAVIOR

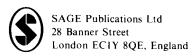## Consciousness, Human Action and Social Structure

PAUL F. SECORD
Editor

For information address:

SECOND PRINTING, 1983

Table of Contents

About the Contributors

KURT W. BACK is James B. Duke Professor of Sociology at Duke University. He has been working on several applications of social psychology such as aging, fertility control, and encounter groups, and is also concerned with the theoretical and methodological bases of the field.

ROY BHASKAR is Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh and currently Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Sussex. His main interests are in the philosophy of science and the human sciences. He is the author of *A Realist Theory of Science* (1975), *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1979), *Dialectic Materialism and Human Emancipation* (1982), and *Philosophical Ideologies* (1982).

KENNETH J. GERGEN is Professor of Psychology at Swarthmore College. He has been primarily concerned with the generation of new forms of study in social psychology. His most recent books are *Toward Transformation in Social Psychology* (1982), *Self Concept* (edited with M. Lynch and A. Norem-Hebeisen) and *Social Psychology* (with M. M. Gergen).

MARY M. GERGEN is a research associate in Psychology at Swarthmore College. Her research has been particularly concerned with foreign relations, social narratives, and explanations in aging. With K. J. Gergen, she has authored a text, *Social Psychology,* and is currently working on a volume, *Historical Social Psychology.*

ANTHONY GIDDENS is a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, England. Among other books, he is the author of *Studies in Social and Political Theory* (1977), *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979), and a *Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (1981). He is an Associate Editor of the *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior.*

D. W. HAMLYN is Professor of Philosophy at Birkbeck College, University of London, and the editor of *Mind*. He is the author of *The Psychology of Perception* (1957), *Sensation and Perception* (1961), *The Theory of Knowledge* (1971), *Experience and the Growth of Understanding* (1978), *Perception, Learning and the Self* (1982), as well as books on Aristotle and Schopenhauer. Philosophy of psychology has been a primary interest of his for many years, along with epistemology and metaphysics and certain aspects of the history of philosophy.

ROM HARRÉ is a Fellow of Linacre College and a member of the Philosophy Faculty at the University of Oxford. His books include *Principles of Scientific Thinking* (1970); (with P. Secord) *The Explanation of Social Behavior* (1972); (with E. Madden) *Causal Powers: A Theory of Natural Necessity* (1975); (with Peter Marsh and Elizabeth Rosser) *Rules of Disorder* (1978); (with Jane Morgan) *Nicknames: Their Origins and Social Consequences* (1979); and *Social Being: A Theory for Social Psychology* (1979).

IVAN KARP is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Indiana University. He is a social anthropologist interested in modes of thought, the interpretation of experience, and has conducted field research in Kenya. He is author of *Fields of Change Among the Iteso of Kenya* (1978) and co-editor of *Explorations in African Systems of Thought* (1980).

MARTHA B. KENDALL is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Indiana University. She is primarily interested in linguistic and semantic anthropological questions as they reflect on social process. Her field work has been in North America and West Africa.

JUSTIN LEIBER is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Houston. His work is with the underlying issues that connect linguistics, cognitive psychology, and primatology. His books include *Noam Chomsky: A Philosophic Overview* (1975), *Structuralism* (1978), and *Beyond Rejection* (1980).

PETER T. MANICAS, Professor of Philosophy at Queens College, City University of New York, has been primarily interested in the foundations of the human sciences and in political and social theory. His articles have appeared in a variety of interdisciplinary and philosophical journals, and

his most recent book is The *Death of the State* (1974). He is an Associate Editor of the *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior.*

JOHN P. SABINI is Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. His major research interests are in the area of moral judgments. With Maury Silver, he is co-author of *Moralities of Everyday Life* (1982).

PAUL F. SECORD is currently Professor of Psychology and Education at the University of Houston. A social psychologist, he has maintained a strong interest in interdisciplinary theory and research throughout his career. In 1970, with Rom Harré, he founded the *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* and has remained its General Editor since that time. He is the author of seven books, including (with Rom Harré) *The Explanation of Social Behavior,* and (with Marcia Guttentag) the forthcoming *Too Many Women: The Sex Ratio Question.* His interests extend beyond psychology to sociology and to the philosophy of mind and of science. He has been a Visiting Professor at Princeton University, Yale University, and Oxford University, and is Past President of the Society for Philosophy and Psychology and of the Division of Personality and Social Psychology of the American Psychological Association. He has also served as Chief Executive Officer of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology.

MAURY SILVER is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at The Johns Hopkins University. His major research interests are in the field of moral judgments. He is co-author (with John Sabini) of *Moralities of Everyday Life* (1982).

CHARLES W. SMITH is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Queens College, C.U.N.Y. His primary interest has been various forms of reasoning and consciousness and their social grounds. He is the author of *A Critique of Sociological Reasoning* (1979) and *The Mind of the Market: A Study of Stock Market Philosophies, their Uses, and their Implications* (1981). He is an Associate Editor of the *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior.*

CHARLES TAYLOR is Professor of Political Science at McGill University. The conceptual foundations of psychology and the social sciences has been one of his primary concerns. His books include *The Explanation of Behavior* (1964) and *Hegel* (1975).

STEPHEN TOULMIN has been a Professor in the Committee for Social Thought at the University of Chicago since 1973. Among his many books are *The Ancestry of Science*, Vols. 1-3 (1962-1965); *Human Understanding* (1972); *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (1973); *Knowing and Acting* (1976); and *An Introduction to Reasoning* (1979).

Preface

This volume is part of a continuing effort by a group of philosophers and behavioral scientists to explore theoretical issues at the interface of philosophy and the behavioral sciences. The volume was planned by the editor in collaboration with several of the scholars regularly participating in this work. For each volume, participants worked for a year or more preparing their contributions, and then, after exchanging papers, convened for a three-day discussion of the ideas therein. The conference for the present volume was held at the University of Houston in December 1979. We are especially grateful for the support of Chancellor Barry Munitz and the Conference Center of the University.

The continuing interdisciplinary collaboration began in the 1960s under the energetic and wise leadership of the late Theodore Mischel. The initial meeting of philosophers and psychologists focused on issues relating to the philosophy of mind and the explanation of human behavior. A conference held in 1967 was followed by the publication in 1969 of the volume, *Human Action.* Subsequent volumes, all edited by Theodore Mischel, but each having a somewhat different topic and set of contributors, were *Cognitive Development and Epistemology* (1971), *Understanding Other Persons* (1974), and *The Self: Psychological and Philosophical Issues* (1977). The last volume was published shortly after Mischel's death in December 1976.

The topic of the present volume departs somewhat from earlier ones, in examining the interface between philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences with a view to conceptualizing adequate explanations of human consciousness and behavior. In addition to the contributors to this volume, Thomas Beidelman of New York University participated in the conference discussions.

Those of us who had the privilege of working with and knowing Ted Mischel greatly lament his untimely death, both in the loss to the world of ideas and in our loss of a warm and enjoyable colleague. This book is dedicated to his memory.

P. F. Secord

Interfacing the Personal and the Social

PAUL F. SECORD

This book addresses what is perhaps the most difficult but also the most important question of the social and behavioral sciences: how we generate explanations of social behavior through articulating a mix of:

1. objective conditions in the physical and social world;
2. actors' conciousness and understanding of themselves in the social world; and
3. background, social context, or social structures which are not part of the actor's consciousness or understandings.

The theme represented by these questions has many roots in the past. It relates the old arguments in social theory between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften,* idealism and materialism, positivism and anti-positivism, naturalism and anti-naturalism, and methodological individualism and holism. During the past few decades, approaches taken by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and others have often emphasized one or more of the thematic perspectives at the expense of others. As a result, their views of human nature and their explanations of social behavior are usually one-sided and make only limited contributions to our understanding. For example, behaviorism in its most extreme form has simply evaded the issue by ruling out the subjective side of the question. Other well-known approaches such as interpretive sociology, humanistic psychology, and symbolic interactionism have emphasized the subjective pole of the question while sacrificing the remaining perspectives. No single book could possibly provide a complete answer to

the many ramifications of this theme, but hopefully partial progress can be accomplished by a varied series of efforts. The original contributions offered here take up some facet of this theme in the attempt to achieve a better articulation of the various approaches.

Among the many questions raised by this core theme are the following:

(1) Are phenomenology, action-theory, notions of rule-governed behavior, ethnomethodology, ethogeny, and dramaturgy (granting differences between these) limited to a "clarification of what is thought about the social world by those living in it" (Giddens, 1976, pp. 17ff, 32)? Do these approaches confuse or assimilate description and "interpretation" with "explanation," assuming that we can get clear on these ideas?

(2) If it be granted that social reality is constituted by the beliefs and acts of participants, and that "understanding" is "the very ontological condition of human life," how does one bring in the "objective conditions"? If we deny that there are any, aren't we into idealism with its problems? Are objective conditions determining conditions in some sense? In what sense? Are they mediated by consciousness? All of them? Do we appeal to Durkheimian "social facts"? To "structures" (whatever *they* are)? What is the role of "cause" in social science? How does it articulate with the various perspectives of our core theme?

(3) Can actors be wrong about their own social reality? Can the ground of action be opaque to the actors? Can it be determined by conditions not mediated by consciousness? How do we negotiate differences in accounts provided by actors? Or differences between accounts and theoretical explanations? What of false consciousness?

(4) What do we mean by the explanation of social behavior? What counts as an explanation? What are we trying to explain? Individual actions? Classes of actions? Forms of life? Institutions? Societies? Are these different *levels* of explanation (e.g., psychological, sociological, biological)? If so, how are they related to each other?

(5) Is social psychology part of psychology, or really part of sociology? That is, if general psychology can be understood as an attempt to detail the "generative mechanisms" of behavior (perception, learning, and the like), perhaps all we need for it is a causal account (à la Australian materialism; Armstrong, 1968). But social psychology seems in stark contrast, in that it is *historical* in being concerned with social acts at specific times and places. And *social* acts have meanings to the actors and involve their understanding.

(6) Is there a useful methodological division of labor between micro- and macro-sociology? What is the flaw, if any, in seeing Goffman- (1974) and Garfinkel- (1967) type inquiries as explanations of interpersonal

behavior? Is it the case that such inquiries are limited or mystifying unless institutions, power differentials, and so forth are part of the study? If so, how do we connect the explication of human action at the interpersonal level with the properties of social institutions and structures?

All of the contributors in this book address themselves directly to one or more of the questions. The following shows how each of the chapters bears upon the central theme, and indicates the tentative lines taken in order to advance our knowledge.

In Chapter 2, Charles Taylor raises one facet of our core theme: the inadequate treatment of consciousness in modern cognitive psychology and the question of its proper role in the explanation of behavior. He first notes that the modern functionalist form of cognitive psychology treats consciousness as marginal—it has only a peripheral role in explaining behavior. Underlying this marginal view is the notion that functions can ultimately be described in physicalist terms, including conscious action. This is not a crude, but a sophisticated reductionism. In this version, computer programs provide an analogue for the functions of behavior: a computer can be said to compute in the same way that humans compute, although the computational process of the human in the analogical sense is at least partially below awareness or outside of consciousness. The reductionism is more sophisticated because it recognizes that radically different forms of hardware could be programmed to represent the same process.

Taylor asks why this functionalist view has such a strong hold on many behavioral scientists. He suggests that the answer is rooted in absolutism—the idea that the world must be grasped entirely apart from observation of it; subject-related properties must be purged; the realm of body must be separate from that of mind. But the Cartesian-empiricist tradition did not achieve this; it retained an interactionism between mind and body—perception and desires entered into explanation. Functionalism rejects any form of interactionism because interactionism would require that nonphysical events trigger physical ones; hence Taylor notes that the choice between seeing consciousness as marginal or adopting an interactionist view of body and mind seems forced only if these two views are the only ones possible. He offers an alternative, called the significance feature, which is not always seen as a view of consciousness, but which actually emphasizes consciousness as a feature of human action. To understand this alternative, one must first see what is inadequate about assuming an essential identity between the functional processes of machines and those of humans.

A machine *does something* when it does what we have designed it to

do. This, Taylor argues, is the flaw in the functionalist view, because in fact the attribution of such action terms to machines is relative to our interests and projects. But there is no answer to the question of what the machine is *really* doing. Clearly, this question is relevant to human action but not to machines. Actions are essentially constituted by their purposes, machines are not. This purposive quality of human action is its "significance feature."

This objection may not be decisive for the computative process—both human and machine—but Taylor considers it decisive in the case of human emotions. For some features of human behavior, such as calculating, the functionalist could still argue that awareness is peripheral and unnecessary; our behavior can be understood without it. But this becomes impossible for human emotions. The case of "shame," for example, seems conclusive. Shame requires a self-feeling, a sense of agency. Humans can feel ashamed of having made a mistake; computers cannot. Shame cannot be regarded as an inessential mental phenomenon; it is too heavily implicated in describing and understanding important human actions; it is inescapably involved in our functioning as human beings. To try to reduce it to physiology, moreover, is futile, because such a reduction would require a fundamentally different logic from that involved in human action.

Taylor concludes, then, that consciousness is at the core of our understanding of human action; it is an achievement of agents with the aid of language, and it is mistaken to view it as a representation of an independent reality. No boundary can be drawn between the mental and the physical, for this would exclude explanations in terms of their most significant feature. This breaks fundamentally with the view dominant today in much philosophy and cognitive psychology.

In Chapter 3, Stephen Toulmin continues the issue of how to understand consciousness and its place in the behavioral and social sciences. Like Taylor, he too rejects a dualistic view of mind and body, a view in which the scientist identifies consciousness with the inner and private, and thus dismisses it as inappropriate for inclusion in any scientific system. But though Toulmin's and Taylor's views are not incompatible, Toulmin's approach and use of argument is different from Taylor's.

Toulmin begins by asking why, for 350 years, the central problems of epistemology and the philosophy of mind have so often been formulated around the mind-body distinction, in terms of a contrast between the inward, private character of experience (consciousness) and the public, interpersonal language of thought. Quite possibly, he suggests, concrete practical terms like "deciding" and "intending," which have functional