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INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS

Essays and Readings on Human Interaction

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FLEISHMAN *Studies in Personnel and Industrial Psychology*

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BENNIS, SCHEIN, BERLEW, & STEELE *Interpersonal Dynamics: Essays and Readings on Human Interaction*

FOREWORD

I

As a graduate student many years ago, I remember musing over a comment by Gordon Allport that God had not seen fit to organize natural phenomena so that they would conform to man's neat and logical ordering of the scientific disciplines. Recently C. P. Snow has given other connotations to this point in his discussion of the "two worlds."

Perhaps nowhere is the abyss between formal logic and reality more evident than in man's attempts to order knowledge about his own behavior. There are today twenty-four divisions within the American Psychological Association, and these are presumably logically separable from each other as well as from the subdivisions of sociology, anthropology, political science, and psychiatry. In turn, none of these gives more than a nod of recognition to the insights of the playwright, the novelist, the poet, or the historian.

In the resultant confusion of tongues, it is refreshing to come upon a sophisticated attempt to bring systematic order to an important set of behavioral phenomena without regard for disciplinary jurisdiction. When my colleagues told me so in their Preface, I realized with a start that studies of these phenomena, although they form the very core of human existence, are scattered all over the map of the behavioral sciences and the humanities. The field of interpersonal relations is not even formally recognized as a scientific discipline in its own right!

Several things become apparent as a result of this endeavor. First, and most important, there is much useful knowledge scattered all through the behavioral science literature about the many different varieties of interpersonal relationships. The fact that it is so scattered has prevented us from discovering how much, in a sense, we know already.

It is unlikely to occur to us until such a systematic analysis is undertaken that there are *common* causal relationships affecting the behavior of lovers, friends, nurses and patients, prisoners and wardens, confidence men and their victims, teachers and students, consultants and clients, and mutual enemies. Since a sociologist interested in criminology has studied one of these relationships, and an

educational psychologist has studied another, a psychoanalyst another, and an organization theorist another, and so on *ad infinitum*, the possibility of perceiving them as belonging to a *common* behavioral category is almost precluded.

A second "discovery" follows on the heels of the first: many of the profound insights of the novelist and the poet are remarkably consistent with the knowledge we have gained from systematic research. It would of course be surprising if this were not so, but it is only rarely that an attempt is made like the present one to bridge the "two worlds." Thus the careful, critical observations of behavior reflected in the work of a first class novelist are seen to be significantly related to the observation reflected in the report of a scientific research study. The methods are indeed different, but the slow process of accumulating useful knowledge about man's behavior is well served by both. It is time we gave more than lip service to this fact. The editors of this volume are to be commended for transcending (some will say violating) the existing norms concerning the distinctions between science and the humanities, too many of which are motivated merely by the desire to maintain status differences.

Third, the task undertaken here brings into focus some of the glaring gaps in our knowledge about these ubiquitous phenomena. The theoretical formulations presented in the essays by the editors are—as they are careful to point out—only first rough approximations. When one considers the different orientations of those who have studied bits and pieces of interpersonal relationships, it is a genuine *tour de force* to produce even a tentative theoretical framework which ties the pieces together. Once this is done, the gaps and inconsistencies in the data become apparent. A careful perusal of these pages will suggest dozens of significant research studies—studies which need not stand alone, but which can contribute to the reformulation or the strengthening of this theory.

Any knowledgable critic could "nit-pick" many details of the theory as it stands, but the breadth and depth of the formulation challenges him instead to undertake another task, namely to offer a better general theory. That challenge makes this an exciting book.

II

Since World War II and the Bomb, it has become increasingly difficult for the scientist in any field to disclaim responsibility for

the uses to which knowledge is put. My colleagues have faced this issue squarely: ". . . we desire not only greater scientific attention to this field, but we *care* about improving the quality and nature of interpersonal relationships." They place themselves in the functional tradition by defining a good relationship in terms of the achievement of its primary goal, but they do not stop there. Their analysis of the "social conditions" and the "personal competencies" which appear to be essential to the achievement of the primary goals of interpersonal relationships is, for me at least, a noteworthy attempt to lay bare the assumptions and values underlying a given scientific endeavor.

Men everywhere are beginning to look toward the behavioral sciences as a source of help in creating a better world. We who identify ourselves with these sciences do mankind a disservice unless we make transparently clear a fundamental "law" of human behavior: intellectual knowledge and emotional values and needs are inextricably interwoven in all but the most trivial human acts.

Scientific endeavor is not trivial; every step of the process from the initial choice of a "field" through the design of the research to the interpretation of results is profoundly influenced by personal and cultural values. The scientist can and must take precautions to minimize the effects of these subjective factors. Perhaps the most important precaution of all—at the same time the most difficult and the least recognized—is to perceive and understand and make explicit the values underlying his own work. (Fish discover water last!) Part V of this volume provides a model which deserves emulation.

The important point about such a model, by the way, is not whether the reader agrees with it, but whether he is explicit about why and how he disagrees. It is this dialogue—carried on in the public domain—which will ultimately make possible the use of scientific knowledge about human behavior to improve the welfare of all men. If the dialogue is continuous and public, the power yielded by scientific knowledge cannot for long be used by man to exploit his fellows. If it is not, fears like those expressed by Loren Baritz in his *The Servants of Power* will turn out to be well-founded.

The furtherance of this dialogue is a second challenge which makes this an exciting book.

DOUGLAS MCGREGOR

PREFACE

We can divide the problems Man faces into two classes, the *noninteractional* or man-in-relation-to nature, and the *interactional* or man-in-relation-to man. This latter class involves *human* interactions which make it necessary to take into account the activities, thoughts, and feelings of the other. We have made stunning progress with respect to the noninteractional class of problems, partly because they are "stable" problems. That is, they seem to "sit still" for the engineers or scientists who adapt or create an innovation, instrument, or idea which makes a "scientific breakthrough."

When it comes to the second class of problems, the human problems, we have been notoriously incompetent. One would think, judging from the report of history, that we simply cannot progress; that unlike knowledge about physical phenomena, human knowledge is not cumulative, that parents cannot teach their children nor learn from their own parents. On the very day we are writing this preface, railroads threaten a national strike, war simmers in Vietnam, and racial tensions imperil the schools. Last year's newspapers would have carried almost identical news, with other place-names.

The trouble is that these national and international conflagrations have their counterparts at every level of human intercourse: in small groups, in marriages, in friendships, among lovers and siblings, between teachers and students, between worker and boss. Unless the protagonists are famous, the tensions go unnoticed, to be registered indirectly and anonymously in divorce rates, homicides, and gang wars or often in the more pedestrian way civilized people live with their human problems: poison pen letters, petty jealousies, unproductive relationships, prejudices, practical "jokes," destructive fantasies, unstable careers, ulcerative colitis, "frayed nerves," tranquilizers, and sleeping pills.

As human beings, we harbor moral outrage at these corrosive and destructive events. As social scientists, we consider it almost obligatory to explore and illuminate these problems. The unusual challenge lies in the fact that we do not practice as much as we know, and do not know as much as we could.

We cannot induce better practice through a book, but we can

hope to enhance our understanding of those relationships that occur between small numbers of people, usually only two. We believe that this understanding is crucial, not only to improve the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships, but also to make this area more central to the sciences of man. To rephrase Pope, the proper study of man is *man-in-relation-to man.*

Two related forces went into the creation of this book. One is an intellectual and academic concern with the loosely defined field of interpersonal relations. We hope to make it more central to the discipline of social psychology, to fill an important gap that exists between the study of groups and the study of personality. At the very least we think we have succeded in sharpening up the boundaries of the territory.

Second, we *care* about improving our interpersonal relationships. "Life Is with People," reads the felicitous title of a book, and if our vision of the world is at all accurate we foresee greater and greater reliance on our fellow men, more and more interdependencies, and hence, a more vital need to understand those enormously complex human events we call *interpersonal dynamics.*

We have edited this book with an eye to the teacher and student of interpersonal relations as well as to the intelligent laymen. In fact, the more of the latter who come into contact with these pages, the better. For we have tried to select articles and to write our original essays in good, clear English which can be understood by an interested reader.

For the scholar and student we can foresee this book's utility in a number of ways. It might be used for courses in personality or interpersonal theory, for courses in social psychology, as a text or ancilliary text. Finally, courses in the broad area of human relations might find it a useful supplementary reading.

Let us say a final word or two in the way of acknowledgements. First, to the Sloan School of Management of M.I.T. both for providing a climate where colleagues can work profitably together, and for the fine administrative support Dean Howard Johnson has provided. Professor D. V. Brown who administered the Ford Foundation Organizational Theory Grant which made this book possible obviously deserves our full gratitude. Mary Beth Ketcham, who acted as secretary, administrator, editorial assistant and all around "Pooh-bah" gets our admiring appreciation. And to those others who helped out in one way or another, who have tried to make

working on this book a pleasure rather than a chore, and who have made useful suggestions about its contents, we can scarcely show our full gratitude. These include: Clurie Bennis, Sylvan Bennis, Diane Berlew, Mary Schein, Peter Gil, Matt Miles, and John Thomas.

Cambridge, Mass.
March, 1964

W. G. B.
E. H. S.
D. E. B.
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INTRODUCTION

Well, what are you? What is it about you that you have always known as yourself? What are you conscious of in yourself: your kidneys, your liver, your blood vessels? No. However far back you go in your memory it is always some external manifestation of yourself where you come across your identity: in the work of your hands, in your family, in other people. And now, listen carefully. You in others—this is what you are, this is what your consciousness has breathed, and lived on, and enjoyed throughout your life, your soul, your immortality—your life in others.

—BORIS PASTERNAK, *Dr. Zhivago*

This is our hope; to deepen and broaden the understanding of "our life in others." We think it is of crucial importance, not only for its scientific yield, but for its potential to man's welfare. How we have attempted to realize our aim through this book is the purpose of this introductory essay.

PURPOSES OF THIS BOOK

Our main goal is to sketch out the conceptual territory and boundaries of the field of interpersonal relations more clearly, coherently, and integratively than has been done before. Our aim is to suggest a "focus of convenience" for the field.

If we are at least partly successful, then we believe that the study of interpersonal dynamics can play a major role in the behavioral sciences, rather than its present peripheral one. In other words, we hope that this volume will fill the gap which we see existing between the Cartwright and Zander[1] book of readings, *Group Dynamics*, and the Maccoby[2] *et al. Readings in Social Psychology*. We want to bring the scientific study of interpersonal relations most particularly into the heart of social psychology, making it a truly *social* psychology.

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[1]D. Cartwright and A. Zander (eds.), *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory* (2nd ed.; Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson & Co., 1960).

[2]E. E. Maccoby, T. M. Newcomb, and E. L. Hartley (eds.), *Readings in Social Psychology* (3rd ed.; New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1958).

Our second, less pivotal aim is pragmatic. This means that we desire not only greater scientific attention to this field, but we *care* about improving the quality and nature of interpersonal relationships. Undoubtedly, it is our passionate concern for *improvement* that fuels our intellectual energies. This passion is based upon more than the moral and ideological premises presented in Part V of this volume. It is also founded on the conviction that the quality of our interpersonal relations can affect not only important arenas of social conflict (such as racial and religious tensions, international conflicts, social disorganization, etc.) but also the quality of our productive and creative efforts.

Before going on to explain the organization of this book, let us take a detailed look at the academic status of the field of interpersonal dynamics.

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE FIELD AND OUR APPROACH TO IT

It might be useful to begin with a few words about the current academic state of interpersonal dynamics—as a field. As we do this we will be irresistibly drawn to our own views and biases. So what follows is the combination of description and viewpoint which determines our approach and orientation to the field of interpersonal dynamics.

It is a strange field: loosely organized, interdisciplinary and interstitial, i.e., tangent to or on the frontier of the behavioral sciences; it is a field without fixed boundaries or stable definitions. An analogy may help to bring it into better focus. We can compare it to a "foreign" territory, claimed by all because of its strategic importance, explored by only a few adventurers, and understood fully by none. It is not a "no-man's" land, however. It is everyman's land. And this means that long before the social scientist invaded this domain, the poets, troubadors, essayists, lyricists, and novelists were tilling its rich soil. In fact, the "humanists" have long claimed this territory for their own and have looked askance at the social scientist: referring to him as a poacher or *arriviste,* as a Point IV technocrat or as a dilettante, depending upon their mood and style.

The social scientist who does forage around in these uncharted lands not only receives abuse at the hands of the humanists, but also from his colleagues. Quite often, they will attack him harshly for losing his "scientific" bent; others, more subtly, say that he is "too dense" or that he creates a private language, bordering on

neologisms. Even if his work is recognized, he is considered, at best, a soldier of fortune who should return to the fold, at worst, a fugitive.

Our analogy helps to bring into focus a number of points we can make about the current status of research and theory in the field of interpersonal dynamics:

1. There is as yet no single, comprehensive theory of interpersonal relations. Sociology, social psychology, and psychiatry have offered important insights to the understanding of its phenomena, but the area has resisted successful theoretical comprehension. "What single general proposition about human behavior have we established?" asked George Homans in 1950. His answer, alas, holds too much truth today: "And we shall find ourselves waiting for an answer."[3]

2. Because it is a new field as far as the social sciences are concerned and because of its complexity and subtlety, it tends to be treated in a discursive, exploratory, essayistic way, rather than a terse, positivistic, experimental way. We'll say more about this later on, but for the record, the periodical we relied on most heavily for our readings was *Psychiatry*, with its longish, anecdotal essays, rather than on the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, with its rigorous experimental emphasis.

3. The third thing we can say about the field, implied in our analogy, is that despite its relevance to the behavioral sciences, it has been treated only tangentially in those fields. In social psychology, for example, we would expect it to play a fundamental role. This does not seem to be the case.[4] Social psychologists have been more interested in the group or in the individual than in interpersonal relationships. The field of psychiatry also has not yielded the expected results with respect to interpersonal theory. It has been dominated by a neuro-biophysiological philosophy of man, a reliance on the instincts and a silence regarding man's interactional behavior.[5] Anthropology and sociology fare no better, though a branch of sociology, known as the "symbolic interaction" school, has made crucial contributions to interpersonal theory. More about that later on. In summary, *the scientific study of interpersonal relations lags woefully behind other areas of social research.*

[3]G. Homans, *The Human Group* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Inc., 1950), p. 115.

[4]F. Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), p. 3.

[5]H. Guntrip, *Personality Structure and Human Interaction* (New York: International Universities Press, 1961), p. 17.