The Bases of Social Behaviour

*An Approach in terms of
Order and Value*

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With foreword by
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To Paddy, Nick and Matt

Foreword

I first met Peter Kelvin in the Fall of 1969 while on a sabbatical visit to University College, London. In the usual exchange between two social psychologists who meet for the first time, I soon learned that Kelvin came to *Social Psychology* late in his career, was more interested in theory than in undertaking empirical research, and that he had just completed the present volume which was about to go into press. I had more than enough to keep me busy during my sabbatical year in London, and therefore I had no real desire to add still another manuscript to my long list of readings planned for that period.

However, the fact that Kelvin was primarily concerned with theory and concept, and that the book had grown out of his desire to provide the newcomer to social psychology with a conceptually coherent or theoretically integrated picture of the field, immediately persuaded me otherwise. I had taught the introductory course in social psychology for many years and used any number of textbooks. I had grown disillusioned with most of them, particularly those that provided a broad survey of the field in which italicized "principles", surrounded by a catalogue of research findings and references, created the aura of a highly developed and verifiable body of knowledge. So, when Kelvin asked me to read the manuscript of his new book, I readily agreed.

When I had read through the first two chapters of Kelvin's book, I wasn't quite sure what my reaction would be. The style was

personal, it tended to be argumentative, and it was highly analytical. But as I read on I became increasingly impressed with the author's detailed and reasoned analysis of the concepts of attitudes, social norms, social roles, power and status, and others. What is most impressive about Kelvin's book is his willingness to be theoretical, to analyse and ask questions about these concepts and indeed to introduce new and provocative interpretations of them. In this respect—not unlike Asch (1952) and Brown (1965)—theoretical analysis and the exploration of ideas take precedence over an encyclopedic presentation of empirical findings.

At the root of Kelvin's analysis of social behaviour and related social processes is a carefully defined theoretical framework based on the interrelationships among the fundamental concepts of *behavior*, *order*, and *value*. In this sense then his book constitutes a coherent and unified approach. Discussions of the social and physical environments in which individuals play roles, express attitudes, achieve status, and exert power, are linked together by the established interrelationships of these three concepts. But Kelvin is by no means wedded to his own conceptions. There is a willingness to expose the limitations of his own definitions and interpretations, and to accept the tentative nature of many of his formulations.

It is not a simple matter to classify Kelvin's volume. Although it grew out of the problems which Kelvin faced in teaching, teaching was the stimulus for, rather than the object of, the book. It was not intended or designed to be a comprehensive introductory textbook, and it therefore lacks many of the characteristics of such introductory texts. It is not all-embracing in the number of problem areas it considers, nor does it present the "body of knowledge" for those areas actually covered; and finally it is not self-consciously geared to "teaching" the student social psychology. From my point of view this is all to the good. Too many of the existing textbooks in social psychology have been designed for "easy learning" of the "facts", to the extent that the student is neither challenged nor is he expected to think seriously on his own. Perhaps Kelvin's book has arrived at just the right moment. Given the new breed of student in the 1960s who seeks not only relevance but the opportunity to think critically on his own—and not merely to absorb facts passively—it may well be that his volume portends the kind of textbook that will be required in the 1970s.

On the other hand even for the student of the 1970s, this book by itself may not be able to meet all the needs of instructors giving the introductory social psychology course. It presents little on methodology; nor does it provide sufficient transitional discussion to establish for the student the relationships between basic concepts in general experimental psychology (e.g. perception, motivation, learning, etc.), and the more complex concepts used by Kelvin to organize and define the field of social psychology. Finally, given the task he set for himself, Kelvin was unable to consider the application of his conceptual schema to such major social problems of relevance to the student as international tensions, poverty, race conflict, and still others.

Yet, with an appropriately selected book of Readings—of which there are more than a few available—Kelvin's volume can serve as the nexus for a comprehensive introductory social psychology course. The book is important not only for the student but for the theoretically oriented social psychologist as well. The penetrating and detailed analysis of social-psychological concepts provides considerable food for thought and more significantly casts a new light on existing formulations. However, it would be a great waste to relegate this book to the shelf of the established theoretician. Given its primary concern with theory, its willingness to examine and modify existing conceptions, and its attempt at a meaningful integration of social behavior in relation to social process, this book clearly belongs in the hands of the introductory social psychology student—if indeed our objective is to have him understand and think critically in social-psychological terms about complex social phenomena.

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Preface

The aim of this book is to provide a coherent account of the basic phenomena and processes of social behaviour and to suggest how they are related to one another. Although it covers a fairly wide area, and grew out of my teaching of *Social Psychology*, it is not intended to be a comprehensive textbook. Instead it offers a conceptual approach which, I hope, may help the reader to gain a general overview and perspective of the subject. Such evidence as I shall cite is used to illustrate problems and argument, not as an end in itself, to inform the reader of all that is known on any given topic.

Since the argument is primary, it is only just to explain why I have made it so. I came to *Social Psychology* relatively late in my academic career and, although I had dabbled in various aspects of the field, I did not recognize its full complexity until I came to teach it. When I did so, I found numerous textbooks which were excellent as surveys of the vast amount of knowledge which was available, but none which, to my mind, provided an adequate link between the various areas in which social psychologists were working. I then asked myself how to teach this subject so that students might gain a coherent picture of it. And thus the task of teaching set me on to an analysis of the problems of the subject. The argument of this book arose out of my attempt to solve these problems. In the course of coping with them, it was often necessary to look closely at concepts whose meaning tends to be taken for granted, or at the definition of

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concepts which others have offered. In the end, however, I hope that I shall have helped to clarify a number of issues; and I also hope that I shall have provided at least one framework, one way of looking at social behaviour, which suggests how its basic phenomena and processes are related to one another.

The fundamental concepts which I shall employ, particularly those of "order", "value" and "behaviour", are defined and discussed in the Introduction. Even here, however, it may be relevant to point out that by "order" I do *not* mean order in its disciplinary sense, as, for instance, enforced by laws and law-enforcing agencies. The term "order" is used as in "order of priorities" and refers, as it were, to an orderly arrangement. The central argument, set out in Chapter 1, then suggests that order in the social environment rests predominantly, though not solely, on judgments of value. The remaining chapters look at the basic processes of social behaviour against the background of that argument.

I find it difficult to define the range of readers to whom this book might be of interest or use. It covers the principal areas and issues which concern social psychologists, and it does so in relatively few pages; and precisely because it is only concerned with the basic processes of social behaviour, it does not, I think, require any previous acquaintance with the field. At the same time, I often found it necessary to examine problems which are usually considered beyond the scope of an "Introductory Course", for instance, problems of conceptual rather than of experimental analysis. I can therefore only hope that the book may be of use to anyone interested in social behaviour, be he student, lecturer or layman.

Among my colleagues, I am particularly indebted to Mr. R. M. Farr, who read and criticized early drafts in great detail, and whose advice and encouragement were invaluable throughout. I would also like to thank Dr. Cecily de Moncheaux and Mr. R. Maliphant whose comments on an early version were of real help when I came to revise it. And I gained enormously from the patient but firm efforts of two ideal "intelligent laymen", my friend Mr. N. B. C. Lucas and my wife, who made me clarify my ideas and express them in a form which is at least fairly readable. The completed manuscript was read by Professor H. Tajfel, Professor T. M. Newcomb and, right at the end, Professor H. Proshansky: their criticisms and suggestions

guided my final revision of the text before publication, and led me to enlarge both the content and the argument in several places: I am sincerely grateful to them.

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A Note on
Further Readings

To bring out the *relationship* between the main processes of social behaviour, the book had to be sufficiently concise for the reader to have a chance to recall at the end what he had read at the beginning. Conciseness, however, could only be attained by limiting the amount of detailed information: for example, while I cite the *results* of many experiments, I only describe the design of a particular experiment when this is directly relevant to the discussion. To compensate, each of the chapters which deals with a specific area of social behaviour (i.e. chapters 2–9) is followed by a list of suggested Further Readings: each of these suggestions is annotated, briefly indicating the content of the article or book and, where relevant, its level of difficulty.

Any list of further readings is, inevitably, only a selection. In making my selection I was, of course, mainly concerned about the content of my suggestions, but I was also concerned about two very practical problems—amount and availability. Firstly, it is very discouraging to be presented with a vast array of material; it can easily look so forbidding that one does not even start, from a sense of hopelessness about ever finishing. With the exception of Chapter 2 which covers many issues, I have therefore kept the lists down to a fairly manageable length; but I have always included one or more articles or reviews which are themselves sources of references for yet further study. Secondly, and based on experience, I have throughout borne in mind the difficulty of obtaining books, as well as their cost. Even

University libraries have limited resources. Most of these suggested readings should be fairly easy to obtain, though there are inevitably some exceptions. The main difficulty is likely to be the availability of journals. This, however, can be partly overcome by books of *Readings*, composed of articles by different authors, some of which may be specially written for that book, but most of which will be reprints, in full or abridged, of articles in journals. Where there is a useful collection of such *Readings* on a particular topic, I have included it among my list for the chapter in question. But there are also books of general *Readings*, covering a variety of topics, and new collections appear quite frequently. The reader who cannot obtain the journals should consult these books: they often include reprints or modified versions of the articles I have suggested. Among such general collections, the following (in order of publication) may be particularly useful.

1. Maccoby, Eleanor E., T. M. Newcomb and E. L. Hartley, Eds. (1958). *Readings in Social Psychology*, 3rd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. (London: Methuen.)
2. Hollander, E. P., and R. G. Hunt, Eds. (1963). *Current Perspectives in Social Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
3. Proshansky, H., and B. Seidenberg, Eds. (1965). *Basic Studies in Social Psychology*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
4. Steiner, I. D., and M. Fishbein, Eds. (1965). *Current Studies in Social Psychology*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
5. Backmann, C. W., and P. F. Secord, Eds. (1966). *Problems in Social Psychology: Selected Readings*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Finally, in addition to the selected Further Readings at the end of chapters, all references made in the text are listed in the Bibliography.

Contents

Introduction

Any attempt to provide a coherent account of social behaviour must consider its basic phenomena and features, and present an argument which suggests how these various features are related to one another. Here we shall only be concerned with the social behaviour of man, and the central argument which I wish to put forward may be summarized thus: man can only cope with his environment if that environment is reasonably orderly and predictable, so that the individual, and the group or society, may know where they stand and what to do; the basic processes of social behaviour may be regarded as different but related ways in which order is created and maintained in the social environment. I shall also argue that this order is ultimately or predominantly based on values, on what is deemed "good" or "bad", as distinct from orders based on physical properties such as, to take a simple example, size or weight. The situation is, of course, more complex than I have here put it; to develop this argument, however, it is essential to examine the concepts of "social behaviour", "order" and "value"; and it will also be necessary to introduce the concept of "the social environment", although its detailed implications will then have to be explored more fully in chapter 1. This introduction therefore deals with these inescapable preliminaries, and it will also look briefly at the main ways in which social phenomena may be studied, and at the nature of the evidence which is available.

Definitions

Social Behaviour

To define "social behaviour" we need to examine what is meant by "behaviour" in general, and to look at the characteristics which are common to the special forms of behaviour which are called "social". The word "behaviour" is familiar enough, and its very familiarity makes it seem deceptively simple. In fact it is a very complicated concept: the most profitable approach is to consider first how it came to be adopted by psychologists, and to recognize that it is used in two somewhat different senses. Historically, then, psychologists came to focus attention on "behaviour" when they began to study lower animals, both in their own right, from an essentially biological standpoint, and to try to elicit general principles of behaviour which might also apply to man. This led to a very strict definition of "behaviour", whereby "behaviour" denoted the *observable* activities of living organisms. All we can know about an animal is what it does; and this is indeed all that we can truly *know* about a human individual—what he thinks or feels, what is "at the back of his mind" can never be more than inference or conjecture. In the case of man, however, we have an additional and very important and special form of behaviour: speech. With speech comes the capacity for very subtle powers of communication, including communication about thoughts and feelings, about things which go on "inside", but which are not themselves open to observation. The capacity for speech, and all that it implies, therefore makes the concept of "behaviour" a much more difficult concept when applied to the activities of man. Let us, for example, consider an individual making a statement. His making that statement is an observable fact about him, it is a form of behaviour. At the very least we could say "X has spoken", and we would indeed have to say this in describing his behaviour at the time he spoke. But clearly we would not normally confine ourselves to noting merely *that* he spoke; we would only restrict ourselves in this way if we could not understand his language or if we failed to hear him distinctly. Normally we would also pay attention to, or "observe", *what* he had said. This is obvious, but now let us examine what it implies. It implies that "behaviour" here includes not only the act of speaking but the

content of what is said. Yet once we accept that the *content* of speech is as much an aspect of behaviour as the act of speaking, the term encompasses not only the facts about an individual which are directly open to observation, but also whatever is referred to or implied by the things he says: and this may include references to, and implications in terms of, thoughts and feelings or other "internal" states and processes which are not, as such, available to observation. In studying human behaviour we therefore have to deal with two types of evidence. There are what might be called the "hard data", behaviour in the strict sense of the word: this consists of the truly public phenomena as these might be noted by a third party, the observable actions of an individual or a group, including the use of words. But there are also "soft data", in the sense that words and other kinds of symbols may stand for things, events or processes which cannot be observed as such. However, in so far as the observer himself knows the meaning of these symbols, their use by those whom he is studying provides him with information: if he knows the meaning of the words when Mr. Jones says "I like apples", he knows not only that Mr. Jones has uttered certain sounds, but also something about Mr. Jones. And it is no use arguing that it would be more reliable to observe whether Mr. Jones in fact eats lots of apples: at the very least Mr. Jones has made the statement—and in any case his doctor may have forbidden him to eat apples, without stopping his liking for them.

There are, of course, difficulties about such "soft data". Words can be misleading, either because the speaker deliberately wishes to deceive or because he is inarticulate; and people's statements may also be misleading in that they may at times unknowingly deceive themselves and thus their listeners. This is a real problem for the study of human behaviour and presents an insoluble dilemma: we can either insist on considering only the "hard data", which would mean ignoring the content of speech when it refers to things which cannot be observed; or we can admit that verbal communication is evidence, though it may not always be wholly reliable. Here one can only make a value judgment, depending on the kind of error one is most willing to accept: for to ignore evidence because it is not consistently trustworthy may lead to mistakes quite as much as accepting evidence which may at times be false. (We do not refuse to accept the