



THE CONDUCT OF INQUIRY

Methodology for Behavioral Science

BY ABRAHAM KAPLAN

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CHANDLER PUBLISHING COMPANY

124 Spear Street, San Francisco, California 94105

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 64-13470

Printed in the United States of America

THE CONDUCT OF INQUIRY

Methodology for Behavioral Science

Chandler Publications in
ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY
LEONARD BROOM, *Editor*

To

I. J. K.

My Women of Valor

PREFACE

IN THIS BOOK I have emphasized what unites the several behavioral sciences more than what distinguishes them from one another. The special problems of the various disciplines are dealt with only so far as may be helpful in clarifying the general method of inquiry.

With regard to the widely differing and often mutually hostile schools and approaches in behavioral science my position can be regarded, I suppose, as neutralist, and will therefore be condemned, no doubt, by both sides—not rigorous enough for one, and too demanding for the other. My aim has not been compromise, however, nor my ideal a golden mean. What seems to me important is yielding, not to demands externally imposed, but rather to those intrinsic to our own aspirations.

In methodology itself I have a corresponding range of sympathies—with logical construction and linguistic analysis, as well as with the more substantive concerns of the older methodologists, of whom I think more highly than is now fashionable. In particular, those who are acquainted with pragmatism will be aware of how much greater my indebtedness is to Peirce, James, and Dewey than is made explicit by citations. But I have sought the comfort of like-mindedness wherever I could find it, without regard to broader philosophical commitments. References are to whatever editions and printings among those at hand I judged to be most readily accessible to the reader.

The leisure to read and write—and what is more, the stimulus to think about both activities—was afforded me by the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Science at Palo Alto, and by the Center for Advanced

Studies at Wesleyan University, in Middletown, Connecticut; to both I am deeply grateful. I want also to thank Alexander Sesonske and Clyde Coombs for reading portions of the manuscript.

ABRAHAM KAPLAN

Ann Arbor, Michigan
1963

FOREWORD

IN THIS BOOK for the first time a philosopher makes a systematic, rounded, and wide-ranging inquiry into behavioral science. In doing so he has been guided by the experience of sciences with longer histories, but he has been bound neither to their problems nor to their solutions. Instead, he has addressed himself to the methodology of behavioral science in the broad sense of both science and methodology. The tasks, achievements, limitations, and dilemmas of the newer disciplines are the focus of his attention. The work is not a formal exercise in the philosophy of science but rather a critical and constructive assessment of the developing standards and strategies of contemporary social inquiry. Professor Kaplan is familiar with the fields he discusses; he is not a visiting philosopher recounting a sightseeing trip.

Philosophers of science usually choose to write about the most fully developed sciences because the problems are clearer there. But the result is ordinarily of little benefit to the behavioral scientist. His most difficult task is the clarification of method where the precedents and analogies of physical science are inappropriate or obscure. What he needs most is a direct confrontation of methodological problems immediately relevant to his own discipline. He needs to read from the strengths of his own understanding, insights, expertness, and subject matter and not from the insecurity of a limited familiarity with a remote discipline. *The Conduct of Inquiry* goes a long way toward filling those needs because it is appropriate to the present state of the art and to the stages just ahead.

Professor Kaplan draws upon the whole scientific enterprise but always

with a purpose—to guide the behavioral scientist, to post warnings on pitfalls that may lie in his path, to remind him from time to time that he is not a nuclear physicist, to remind him that he is nevertheless a scientist in the somber and in the exciting significance of the term, and to place behavioral science in the context of an ongoing endeavor, particular as well as general.

This most useful philosopher is always lucid but he has not always made things easy. He is a hard taskmaster who holds high aspirations and high standards for behavioral science. He has no philosopher's stone that will turn empirical dross into theoretical gold or even empirical mud into theoretical pots. He does make it easier to distinguish the dross from the gold and the mud from the clay. It is clear that Professor Kaplan thinks behavioral science both feasible and worth the effort—worth his effort as a commentator and worth ours as practitioners.

The book, being an orientation in methodology for behavioral scientists, is indispensable for behavioral scientists and for aspiring ones irrespective of their orthodoxy or heterodoxy, but perhaps it will prove more palatable to the heterodox. It will be durable in its usefulness, and it will be useful to a wide range of readers many of whom will discover unsuspected strengths and weaknesses in their disciplines. The book proves by the fact of its existence that there is a community of scholarship between the humanities and behavioral science and that the validity of one does not depend upon alienation from the other.

There is a consistent emphasis on the common concerns of all the social sciences rather than on their parochial problems and their perhaps temporary points of isolation, an emphasis on major issues rather than side arguments, a concern with problems that are intrinsically important and recurrent rather than with transitory considerations or matters of technique. The author's intellectual tolerance does not extend to fads and fashions whose claims for attention rest on currency alone.

Professor Kaplan departs from the stylistic presumptions that anything interesting must look as if it is being said for the first time, that anything important must be said sententiously, that anything difficult must be made to appear more difficult—and therefore more important—and that anything that bears upon error must begin with a destructive attack on someone—as if human fallibility needed to be proved all over

again. In the pages that follow, the simple is said simply and the difficult is said clearly. A genuine erudition is opened to the student and the advanced scholar. The book fills a gap and does it with admirable clarity and often with engaging wit. It lacks pomposity, pedantry, and pretension, and it is bound to make an impact on the teaching of and, with luck, on research in the behavioral sciences.

LEONARD BROOM

Austin, Texas
1963

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