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## What Would An Adequate Philosophy of Social Science Look Like?\*‡

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### I

During the last twenty years an enormous literature has grown up around the question, what is the nature of social science? Two positions have dominated these discussions, the 'naturalist' view which holds that social science involves no essential differences from the natural sciences, and the 'humanist' view which holds that social life cannot adequately be studied 'scientifically'. Whole models of social science have been propounded that argue for one position and view the other as an incompatible alternative.<sup>1</sup> Given such a vigorous tradition of discourse, it may seem odd that anyone would now ask the question, what would an adequate philosophy of social science look like? Unfortunately, however, neither naturalism nor humanism is capable of answering the three questions which the idea of a science of behaviour raises. These questions are: first, what is the *relationship between interpretation and explanation in social science?*; second, what is the *nature of social scientific theory?*; and third, what is *the role of critique?*

In this essay we will show why these three questions must be answered by any compelling account of social science, and why humanism and naturalism are unable to answer them. The first question will be taken up in section II, the second in section III, and the third in section IV. By showing that the dualism which dominates current philosophical thinking makes it impossible to answer these questions adequately, we will point to the need for a new synthesis in the philosophy of social science, one that transcends the antimony of humanism and naturalism.

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1 See Maurice Roche, *Phenomenology, Language and the Social Sciences*, London 1973, and G. H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1971, for recent examples of this opposition between these two models of social science.

## II

One way of beginning to talk about the nature of social phenomena is to invoke the now familiar *prima facie* distinction between human action, on the one hand, and mere bodily movements on the other—between raising one's arm and one's arm rising, to use the time-worn example. According to this distinction, actions differ from mere movements in that they are intentional and rule-governed: they are performed in order to achieve a particular purpose, and in conformity to some rules. These purposes and rules constitute what we shall call the 'semantic dimension' of human behaviour<sup>2</sup>—its symbolic or expressive aspect. An action, then, is not simply a physical occurrence, but has a certain intentional content which specifies what sort of an action it is, and which can be grasped only in terms of the system of meanings in which the action is performed. A given movement counts as a vote, a signal, a salute or an attempt to reach something, only against the background of a set of applicable rules and conventions, and the purposes of the actor involved.

To the *prima facie* fact that human actions are intentional events in the sense that their identity is a function of their content—what they express or the states of affairs they refer to—and, consequently, that they are characterized by invoking the rules and intentions which define them to be what they are, there are three possible responses. The first of these is to accept this *prima facie* fact and to try to construct a science of intentional objects in terms of it; this is the intentionalist response.<sup>3</sup> The second is to attempt an analysis of the concepts 'intention', 'meaning' and 'action' in purely observational (usually behavioural) terms, so that one can use these concepts in one's science but in a purified form; this is the tack of the definitional behaviourist.<sup>4</sup> The third response is to accept that one cannot capture the meaning of intentional concepts without reference to mental states such as beliefs and institutional

2 Following von Wright, p. 6.

3 The intentionalist response may be adopted by a broad spectrum of what otherwise might be strange bedfellows, including humanists (such as phenomenologists) and naturalists who are not at the same time explanatory reductionists (such as those who adopt a functionalist theory of mind). Moreover, there are some who think that a simple intentionalist response is inadequate, because the science of man will ultimately be a hybrid science which employs both intentional and extensional terminology (much as computer science today employs both the language of programming and the language of electronics); for this, see Daniel Dennett, 'Intentional Systems', *Journal of Philosophy*, 68, 1971. Of course, in this case the problems associated with an intentionalist analysis would still remain.

4 The classical statement of such a position is G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, New York 1949. Behaviourist psychology is based on this response; see B. F. Skinner, *Verbal Behavior*, New York 1957. In *The Nature of Cultural Things*, New York 1964, Marvin Harris advocates such a programme for anthropology.

norms such as rules, and so conclude that these concepts are radically defective for scientific purposes; it therefore seeks to develop a science of behaviour without using these concepts at all. This is the position of the eliminative materialists who ultimately wish to confine their accounts of language and other social behaviour to a purely extensional terminology.<sup>5</sup>

The important thing to realize about the third response is that it requires a radically different approach from anything remotely resembling what is understood to be social science as it is practiced today. Broadly speaking, social scientists seek to offer accounts of events described in terms of their significance; thus, they want to understand why it is that a certain group is *dancing* (and not why the feet of its members are *twitching* in a manner describable in purely spatio-temporal terms), or *voting* (and not why the arms of certain bodies are rising), and they characterize the speech of people in terms of its content rather than in terms of its purely phonetic qualities. However, if the approach of the eliminative materialists came to dominate the science of behaviour, it would become a sort of mechanics or neurophysiology whose explanatory concepts would be drawn from the natural sciences.

Of course, this observation does not in itself show that this approach is incoherent, or that it cannot be realized. Just as natural science abandoned intentional concepts—a strategy that was unthinkable to many at the time—so the sciences of human behaviour might also be transformed in this way. The question of what might be called the conceptual solvency of a ‘natural science of man’, as well as the problems that would arise in attempting to implement this programme, are exceedingly interesting ones. However, in some sense they lie outside the boundaries of our inquiry, just because we are trying to offer an account of the many forms which *social* science now takes. It is for this reason that we feel justified in setting this position to one side.

Nor does the second response seem to be adequate. It appears to be the case that any attempt to translate intentional concepts, which involve reference to such things as rules and beliefs, into dispositional

5 See W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object*, Cambridge, Mass. 1960. Actually, the third response is more varied than it might at first appear. For, on the one hand, it characterizes those who think that the task of a science of man is to discover the contingent identities between those states and events now characterized in intentional terms and these same states and events designated in purely physical terms, such that a mapping of one terminology into the other via their supposed common extension, followed by the replacement of the intentionalist vocabulary by the physicalist one, would characterize the development of human sciences. (This is the view of the Identity theorists; see D. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of Mind*, London 1968.) And, on the other hand, it also characterizes those who believe that the intentionalist idiom should be abandoned altogether in the construction of a science of man. See P. K. Feyerabend, ‘Mental Events and the Brain’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 60, 1963.

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terms, which specify a set of dispositions to engage in overt movements under particular stimulus-conditions, is bound to fail. No matter how one tries to construe these concepts, it is ultimately necessary to employ another intentional concept in order to explicate its meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Take, for example, the statement, 'Jones asked the cashier to deposit the money into his account'; the concepts 'cashier', 'deposited' and 'money' are all *prima facie* intentional, in that their meanings involve certain rules (a cashier is a person who has a certain role to play in a specific institution, with certain duties and orders to follow), beliefs (in order to deposit the money, the cashier must believe that Jones has an account), and desires (Jones must want to put his money into his account in order for it to be said that he deposited it). Now, to take one of these intentional concepts, a behaviourist might argue that the beliefs involved in making a deposit can be explicated in purely dispositional terms. A line he might take is this: when a certain sound is made in the cashier's presence ('Do you think that Jones has an account?'), he will produce another ('yes'). But this construal is adequate only if the person understands the question, and understanding is an intentional state. The behaviourist, of course, may then try to give a non-intentionalist account of understanding a question—for example, that a person may be said to understand a question if he or she is able to answer it correctly most of the time. But this account also involves an intentional object, since an answer is correct only in terms of certain rules indicating what is appropriate and what is not. And so the discussion will proceed, until gradually it will become clear that what is wrong is not simply this particular attempt to reduce intentional concepts to non-intentional ones, but that there is something in principle wrong with the whole definitional behaviourist programme.

Thus, we are left with the intentionalist response to the *prima facie* meaningful character of human actions, mental events and social institutions. The question then arises. what implications does this have for social science? The most obvious task which an intentionalist perspective imposes on the study of human action is the need for interpretation. In order to study human behaviour as meaningful performances, we must grasp the meanings expressed in speech and action, and this requires that we understand the system of concepts, rules, conventions and beliefs which give such behaviour its meaning. This is the doctrine of understanding, or *verstehen*, which figures as a prominent methodological principle in the humanist account of social science. It marks an essential methodological difference between the human sciences and the study of nature, expressing itself most clearly in the principles of concept-formation appropriate to each. Briefly, concept-formation in the natural sciences is governed by two related sets of considerations—those of theory, and

<sup>6</sup> See Roderick Chisholm, *Perceiving*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1957, ch. 11.

those of measurement. We require that concepts be developed which permit the formation of testable laws and theories, and other issues—e.g., those deriving from ordinary language—may simply be set aside. But in the human sciences there is another set of considerations as well: the concepts we use to describe and explain human activity must be drawn from the social life that is being studied, and not from the observer's theories, at least in the first instance. Because the very identity of a particular action depends upon its meanings for the social actors, the concepts we use to describe it must capture this meaning.

Another way of putting this point is to say that concepts bear a fundamentally different relationship to social phenomena from that which they bear to natural phenomena. In the social sciences, concepts partially constitute the reality we study, while in the latter case they merely serve in describing and explaining it. As Winch has argued, something can be an 'order' only if the *social actors* involved have the concept of an order, and such related concepts as obedience, authority, etc.; but the natural event of lightning is the same whether it is conceptualized as an expression of Zeus's anger, or as an atmospheric electrical discharge: its identity is not a function of its meaning or intentional content.<sup>7</sup>

The interpretation of the meanings of actions, practices and cultural objects is an extremely difficult and complicated enterprise. The basic reason for this is that, as Wittgenstein has shown, the meaning of something depends upon the role which it has in the system of which it is a part. To understand a particular action, we must grasp the beliefs and intentions which motivated it, and this further requires that we know the social contexts of practices and institutions which specify what the action in question 'counts as', what sort of an action it is. To return to our check depositing example: in order for the social scientist to know what the overt movements he observes actually mean, i.e., to understand what action is being performed, it is necessary that he have an understanding of the beliefs, desires and values of the particular people involved. But in order to understand these, he must know the vocabulary in terms of which they are expressed, and this, in turn, will require that he know the social rules and conventions which specify what a certain movement or object will count as. Moreover, in order to grasp these particular rules, he will also have to know the set of institutional practices (in this case, those of banking) of which they are a part, and how these are related to other practices of the society (in this case, the institutions of a money economy).

Nor can our scientist stop here. For the conventions of a social group, as Taylor has convincingly argued,<sup>8</sup> presuppose a set of fundamental

<sup>7</sup> Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, London 1958, p. 125.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Taylor, 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man', *Review of Metaphysics*, 25, 1971.

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conceptualizations or basic assumptions regarding man, nature and society. These basic conceptualizations might be called the 'constitutive meanings of a form of life', for they are the basic ideas or notions in terms of which the meanings of specific practices and schemes of activity must be analyzed. For example, the social practice of banking can only occur given the shared constitutive meanings of (say) some conception of property, some notion of being a unit with a particular identity, some idea of exchange value. An adequate account of the practices of a particular society, by setting out the basic ideas and conceptualizations which underlie these practices, will show how various aspects of the social order are related to each other, and how (or the extent to which) the social order constitutes a coherent whole.

The need for such a high level of interpretation may be missed if one focusses one's attention only on studies of one's own culture by other members of it. For in these situations, the scientists do not have to make explicit their interpretive scheme in order to identify and characterize the class of actions and institutions in which they are interested. They, as well as their readers, already know what banks are and what depositing funds means. However, this point should not be pushed too far, because the sorts of implicit self-understandings which we have as practitioners are generally going to be inadequate for the tasks of social science. This is the reason why some of the very best work in social science will partially consist in explicating the sets of shared rules and constitutive meanings which underlie quite ordinary, everyday practices. (Here we are thinking of such works as Beer's *Modern British Politics*, Douglas' *The Social Meanings of Suicide*, Cicourel's *The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice*, and Goffman's *Asylums*.)<sup>9</sup>

Impressed by the elegance and penetration of interpretive theories, humanist philosophers of social science have assumed or argued that interpretation is all there is. They have gone from the correct observation that social theories must be interpretive, to the incorrect conclusion that they can *only* be interpretive. For social phenomena do not consist in abstract structures of meanings which can be set forth and analyzed, but they consist in actions (and other events) which actually occur in particular places at particular times. And, while we cannot even approach our subject without understanding what these actions *mean*, such understanding does not, by itself, constitute an explanation of why they *occur*. To know, e.g., what someone said, and what it means, is not to know why he or she said it.

<sup>9</sup> It is in anthropology that the need for interpretation is most obvious, because the anthropologist does not have an 'insider's' implicit understanding of the society he studies, and so he must develop an explicit scheme of the whole in his work. It is, thus, no accident that it is in anthropology that the interpretive enterprise is most highly developed.

Accounts of why something happened are commonly said to be causal explanations, for they explain why it occurred by setting out what led it to happen. In the case of actions, e.g., we explain why an agent does something by pointing out the motives, or purposes which led him or her to do it. Thus, for example, Weber explained the type of behaviour typical of capitalists in the 16th and 17th centuries by citing the set of religious beliefs and desires which caused certain sorts of Protestants to act in this manner.

One of the principal tenets of humanism over the last twenty years has been that beliefs, purposes, values, desires, and so forth—reasons, for short—cannot be causes, and that therefore there is no real ‘explanation’ in social science but only a further form of interpretation in which the scientist tries to uncover the rationale or warrant for the actions in question.<sup>10</sup> But such arguments are now generally recognized to have been inadequate because, while reasons cannot be causes (they *are* utterly different sorts of things), the *having* of reasons, the *believing* in reasons, the *giving* of reasons, etc., are all psychological events and, as such, nothing prevents them from figuring in causal explanations.<sup>11</sup> (We say this though we are aware that in order to actually detail the nature of these causes one needs to develop a philosophy of mental events which will do justice to their peculiar qualities, e.g., their having an intentional content, and their very close relationship to overt behaviour. Unfortunately, this sort of philosophical analysis has been strangely omitted in most discussions of action theory and its relationship to the philosophy of social science, even by those who advocate a causalist position.)<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, social scientists are interested in explaining a great many phenomena other than actions. They want to explain why it is that people have certain beliefs and values (as in the sociology of knowledge); to account for patterns of unintended consequences of actions; to discover why a social structure arose in the first place, and why it continues to exist despite a changing membership; and so forth. In these, and in all the other questions in which a social scientist is interested, the form of explanation is causal. For in each of them what is required as an explanation is the identification of the necessary and/or sufficient condition or events which produced the phenomena in question.

10 See, e.g., A. I. Melden, *Free Action*, London 1961, *passim*.

11 The classic statement of this position is Donald Davidson, ‘Actions, Reasons, and Causes’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 60, 1963.

12 The exception to this is Arthur Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of Action*, Cambridge 1973, and especially the writings of those who propound a functionalistic theory of mind, such as J. Fodor, *Psychological Explanation*, New York 1968; Daniel Dennett, *Content and Consciousness*, London 1969; and the essays by Hilary Putnam in his *Mind, Language and Reality*, Cambridge 1975.

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We will return to the question of causal explanations in social science in a moment when we come to discuss theory in social science, but already enough has been said to demonstrate that social science is an explanatory enterprise as well as an interpretive one. And so the questions which immediately arise are: What is the relationship between interpretation and explanation in social science? How does one influence or restrain the other? How do the criteria for a good interpretation fit with the criteria for a good explanation? These questions arise just because social science is the systematic scientific study of intentional phenomena. Because humanists have failed to appreciate the explanatory task of social sciences (i.e., they have failed to see in what way these disciplines are scientific), and because naturalists have misunderstood the crucial role which interpretation plays in the social sciences (i.e., they have given insufficient or misleading analysis of what it means for a phenomenon to be intentional), both of them have neglected such questions. This is one reason why the current traditions in the analytical philosophy of social science are not only inadequate but, given their terms of reference, incapable of getting onto the right track.<sup>13</sup>

III

The dichotomy between humanist and naturalist also makes it impossible to answer the second question which is critical for a science of behaviour: What is the nature of social-scientific theory? For many writers in the humanist tradition, particularly as represented in recent analytical philosophy, the question scarcely seems to exist; one can look in vain in the work of Louch, Winch, Taylor or von Wright—to mention the most important humanist statements of the last fifteen years—for even a mention of social-scientific theories, let alone a discussion of them.

The reason for this is not hard to find. From the humanist perspective, there is neither a need for theories nor a place for them in the study of society. (At least this is true if we understand 'theory' to refer to systematic, unified explanations of a diverse range of social phenomena.) There is no place for theories in the humanist position because its cardinal point is that social science is simply interpretive: it seeks to provide us with an understanding of the meanings of particular actions or practices of a given society. As we have already shown, such understanding may require that we grasp the world view of the society or culture in question, and elaborate and sophisticated intellectual structures may be necessary to do so.

<sup>13</sup> This was, of course, Max Weber's position, especially in his 'Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Science', and in this respect we feel a return to Weber would be a progressive step in the philosophy of social science. We say this even though we do not agree with his answers to our questions.

But an account of a society's world-view, or its intersubjective or constitutive meanings, is not a theory which explains why the society has the institutions it has, or why certain processes of social change occur, or why it is characterized by certain regularities, or why people of a certain sort perform particular kinds of actions. To explain such phenomena we need theories that are, broadly speaking, causal, and the fixation of the humanist tradition with the meaningful dimension of human action has prevented it from developing an account of this kind of social-scientific theory.

This failure to give an account of explanatory theory has proved a particular embarrassment to those espousing the humanist case because it has meant that they have failed to deal with just those aspects of social-scientific work which are of paramount importance to many of its practitioners, and which constitute some of its most conspicuous successes. The clearest example of this is Keynesian economic theory; but all the social sciences possess theories of one sort or another. Thus, kinship theory in anthropology, exchange theory in sociology, the theory of transformational grammar in linguistics, modernization theory in political science and cognitive dissonance theory in psychology are all examples of the theoretical dimension operative in modern social science. Although humanism is popular among analytical philosophers, naturalism is still the dominant position among social scientists; one of the reasons for this is that the anti-theoretical stance of the humanist model has made it appear patently deficient and even irrelevant to those actually engaged in doing substantive social scientific work.

Social science must be theoretical because one of its aims is to give causal explanations of events, and even singular causal explanations require some sort of general law or laws. To say that an event,  $x$ , causes another event,  $y$ , is to say (speaking very roughly) that  $x$ 's occurrence is a necessary and/or sufficient condition for the occurrence of  $y$ . The idea that the occurrence of one event is a condition for the occurrence of the other distinguishes causal statements of the form, 'Under  $C$ ,  $x$  caused  $y$ ', from mere statements of conjunction of the form, 'Under  $C$ ,  $x$  occurred and then  $y$  occurred'. But this is to say that when we give causal explanations we are implicitly asserting that, whenever an  $x$ -type event occurs under conditions  $C$ , a  $y$ -type event will also occur, which is to say that causal explanations ultimately rest on general laws.

This does not mean that we must actually be able to state a law in order to offer a valid causal explanation, for we may have good reasons for believing that two events are causally related even though we cannot provide the appropriate covering law. Indeed, it may even be the case that we will not be able to state the covering law until we redescribe the events in question in the language of some theory.<sup>14</sup> Thus, we may be

14 See Donald Davidson, 'Causal Relations', *Journal of Philosophy*, 64, 1967, and his 'Mental Events', in L. Foster and J. Swanson (eds.), *Experience and Theory*,

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warranted in explaining the decrease in the mass of a piece of wood by its having been burned, even though we cannot state the general law upon which this explanation rests, and even though we would have to re-describe this event in terms of the theory of oxidation before we could do so. In these cases we must justify our claim by presenting reasons to believe that there is a causal law operating here. Such reasons will consist of reports of other instances in which the two events are conjoined, together with evidence that the relationship is actually a causal one. Such evidence could include our ability to manipulate the putatively causal variables so as to bring about or suppress the effects in question, and/or a specification of the causal mechanisms by which one event produces the other.

In explaining the occurrence of one event or condition in terms of another, it is not sufficient merely to offer a generalization reporting the covariance of these two events. Rather, what we require is a general statement that is lawlike in the sense that it explains its instances. Take, for example, a social scientist trying to explain why it is that in Western Europe support for totalitarian parties is inversely related to education. In the first instance, he may attempt to explain this finding with the observation that, in Western Europe, less educated people tend to have authoritarian personalities, and with the generalization that people with authoritarian personalities support authoritarian political movements. Here he tries to offer an explanation by showing that the phenomenon in question is an instance of a deeper, generally recurring pattern by embedding descriptions of it in higher-level generalizations. However, there is something problematic about this putative explanation, and that is the status of the generalizations it contains. For it immediately leads us to ask what it is about people with authoritarian personalities which leads them to support anti-democratic parties. Is it just a coincidence that they do, or is their behaviour somehow necessitated by their having the kind of personality they have? If we could change a person's personality, would his or her political preferences change as well? In short, unless the general statement is not simply an empirical generalization, but what we have called a nomic generalization, so that it can support contrary-to-fact and subjunctive conditionals, then this account is not a genuine explanation. A generalization, we might say, cannot serve as the required basis for making a causal explanation unless it can explain its instances, and it cannot explain its instances unless one can give an account of *why* the generalization holds.

It is precisely at this point that theories are required, for it is in terms of theories that such an account can be forthcoming. (This is the reason

Amherst, Mass. 1970. In the latter essay Davidson argues that the causal relationships which hold between the having of reasons and actions can only be stated in a non-intentionalist vocabulary.

why it is said that causal generalizations must be theory-impregnated.) Theories provide a systematic account of a diverse set of phenomena by showing that the events in question all result from the operation of a few basic principles. A theory goes beyond particular generalizations by showing why the generalizations hold, and it does this by specifying the basic entities which constitute the phenomena to be explained, and their modes of interaction, from which the observed generalizations can be inferred. Thus, a theory not only provides unity and coherence to a field of inquiry, but it also gives us the grounds required for asserting subjunctive conditionals, or the reasons for believing that these generalizations are, in some sense, necessary. Thus, we are inevitably led from the need to explain particular occurrences to the need for social theories.

Moreover, as a social science attempts to become more rigorously scientific, it will naturally attempt to organize and structure its various particular causal explanations and the relatively specific nomic generalizations upon which they rest by systematically interrelating them, and by subjecting them to experimental and other empirical verification. In this process, the self-conscious development of 'large scale' theory is absolutely crucial, and it is for this reason that the sciences of behaviour have developed the social theories of extremely wide scope and power which we have already mentioned.

However, if the humanists fail to provide an account of social theories, we fare little better at the hands of the naturalists. Of course, the naturalists spend a great deal of time talking about scientific theories, but they analyze scientific theories in general, and give little attention to the specific problems of *social* theories. For the naturalists, the human sciences and the natural sciences share the same methodology, and so there is no need to discuss social theories apart from physical theories: what can be said of the latter applies *a fortiori* to the former. And since theories in the physical sciences are far more elaborate and developed than theories in the social sciences, discussion of the nature of theories is usually focussed on physical theories. Moreover, when social theories are discussed in the naturalist tradition, it is often to set forth their deficiencies in terms of the naturalist ideal, rather than to analyze them in their own right.<sup>15</sup>

This is not a happy situation, however, because theories in the social sciences are needed to explain phenomena which are different from those in the natural world—they are intentional—and therefore we cannot assume that they will have the same structure as, or be similar in all important respects to, theories in the natural sciences. Indeed, there

<sup>15</sup> Richard Rudner, e.g., in his discussion of social theory in his *Philosophy of Social Science*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1966, first gives an account of physical theories, and then discusses various theoretical formulations found in the social sciences, including typologies and analytical conceptual schemata, pointing out how these fail to meet the criteria for genuine theories.

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are at least three ways that it can be seen that theory-construction in the social sciences faces problems quite unlike theory-construction in the natural sciences.

In the first place, because intentional actions are rule-governed, they have an irreducibly normative character. Speech acts, e.g., are performed in accordance with linguistic rules, and so they can be assessed as correct or incorrect. Similarly, instrumental actions can be assessed as more or less rational depending on the extent to which they are likely to realize their intended aims. Because of this normative character of action, a distinction can be made between the *competence* of an actor and his or her *actual performance*. An actor's competence is his or her mastery of the rules (or norms of rationality) which apply to a particular area of activity; performance, on the other hand, refers to the person's actual behaviour, which is determined not only by his or her competence, but also by such other factors as fatigue, inattention, misperception, learning failure and the like.

Now, corresponding to this distinction between competence and performance is a distinction between two types of theory. A theory of competence is designed to explain the competence of an actor, or, more likely, the competence of an idealized actor who is perfectly rational, or has perfectly mastered the relevant rules. A theory of performance, on the other hand, while perhaps making use of, or presupposing, a theory of competence, is designed to explain what a person actually does, and so it would encompass all of the causal factors which bear upon behaviour. In his theory of transformational grammar, for example, Chomsky attempts to set forth the basic rules or principles which generate all grammatically well-formed sentences of a language, and only such sentences. An adequate theory, then, would model the (idealized) native speaker's *mastery* of his or language, his or her (potential) capacity to recognize well-formed utterances.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, modern economics is based upon a theory of choice which sets forth the rules which must be followed by an ideally rational actor in different kinds of choice situations.

In both linguistics and economics there is considerable controversy over the role of these theories of competence in accounting for actual performance, since it is not obvious what relevance such idealized accounts could have for explaining the behaviour of any particular actor. But what is crucial for our purposes is the failure of naturalists to recognize this problem at all. Because they take social theories to have the same structure as physical theories, they are not even able to ask what the relationship is between theories which model competence and causal theories which explain overt behaviour.

<sup>16</sup> Noam Chomsky discusses the relevance of competence theories for linguistics in *Aspects of a Theory of Syntax*, Cambridge, Mass. 1965, part I.

A second problem for theory-construction that is unique to the human sciences is the relationship between the concepts and principles which the scientist uses to account for social phenomena, and those which inform the actions and beliefs of social actors. As we have already shown, because social phenomena are intentional, their very identity depends upon the concepts and self-understandings of social actors, and so in order to explain social behaviour social scientists are constrained to use the actors' framework. If social scientists wish to go beyond these self-understandings by introducing concepts and principles which may be at variance with them, they face the problem of relating these new principles to those employed by the actors themselves. Failure to make this relationship would result in the scientists' failing to capture the phenomena they wish to explain, since the events in question would slip through the conceptual net the scientists had constructed.

Nor is this the problem that natural scientists face in giving empirical content to theoretical terms and principles by means of correspondence rules or bridge principles, since the concepts which the actors employ are no more 'empirical' or 'observable' than the concepts of the scientist: in terms of the distinction between theoretical and observational terms, concepts such as 'belief' or 'decision' are as 'theoretical' as concepts such as 'social structure' or 'national income'. Moreover, the problem of theoretical interpretation in the social sciences may not simply be one of developing bridge principles which specify, in part, what it is that theoretical terms refer to, or how statements employing theoretical terms can be tested. Rather, it may be a matter of establishing that different behaviours have the same or similar meanings, as when aspects of American Halloween customs are shown to be similar in meaning to the myths and rituals of the Kayapo, a people living in the Amazon basin.<sup>17</sup> Once again, because social theories are theories of intentional objects, they pose problems for analysis which cannot be grasped merely from an understanding of theories of physical things.

A third problem for theory-construction which the naturalists have failed to discuss is the nature of paradigms or research programmes in the social sciences. For a long time, of course, this was due to the dominance of positivism within the philosophy of science, and so it reflected a failure to discuss the conceptual presuppositions of scientific or theoretical work within all branches of empirical science. In the past decade or so this deficiency has been corrected, particularly with the seminal work of Kuhn and Lakatos. Lakatos's account of science in terms of the concept of a research programme is of particular importance, for the touchstone of his work is not the history of actual scientific developments, as it was for Kuhn, but the logic of science itself. A

17 See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, Chicago 1967, pp. 172ff.

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research programme, according to Lakatos,<sup>18</sup> sets out the fundamental conceptual framework or conceptualization of the phenomena we wish to explain, and the rules in accordance with which theoretical innovations or developments will be made. We require such rules, Lakatos argues, because we must have criteria which can be used to recognize adjustments to a theory which are essentially *ad hoc*, or unconnected with the rest of the theory. Theoretical developments which are *ad hoc* must then be rejected, for they do not represent genuine scientific progress.

Given that we recognize the need for research programmes for theory-construction in the social sciences, the question immediately arises whether the intentional nature of social phenomena constrains what can count as an adequate research programme. For to identify a phenomenon as intentional is to identify it as something which was brought about for some reason: it is part of what we mean by 'intentional' that it was done for a reason or purpose. And so describing something in intentional terms is implicitly to make an explanatory claim. If this argument is correct, it suggests that an adequate explanation of a social phenomenon would have to include, or be based upon, an account of the reasons or motivations which led to the behaviour which brought about the phenomenon in question. If this is the case, then research programmes in the social sciences would have to include a conception of human needs, purposes, rationality, etc., in terms of which these motivational accounts could be constructed. Research programmes, such as certain versions of systems theory, which dispensed entirely with the motivations and orientations of social actors, could be dismissed as inadequate to explain intentional phenomenon.<sup>19</sup>

The purpose of this discussion of research programmes in social science is not to show that they must have some particular form. Rather, it is to point to yet another problem that is distinctive to theory-construction in the social sciences, and which the naturalist tradition in the philosophy of social science cannot address, let alone solve. Until we can transcend the sterile antinomy between naturalist and humanist in the philosophy of social science, we will be completely unable to provide an adequate account of the nature of social theory.

#### IV

To this point we have argued that the self-understandings which people have play a causal role in bringing about the behaviour in which they

18 Imre Lakatos, 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes', in Lakatos and Musgrave (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge 1970.

19 For further discussion of the use of the idea of a 'research programme' in explicating the structure of social science theories, see J. Donald Moon, 'The Logic of Political

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engage. Now this fact has often served as the basis for humanist philosophers and social scientists to make the further claim that explanations of social behaviour consist solely of reconstructions of these self-understandings. Since actions are events that occur because they are warranted by the beliefs and desires of the actor, the task of explaining them is thought to consist of laying out the structure of reasons which justifies them. According to the humanist model, social science grasps the intelligibility of a particular form of behaviour by making explicit the conceptual links that, it is hypothesized, implicitly exist between various sorts of activities, institutions and psychological states like beliefs and desires. A good interpretation, then, is one which demonstrates the coherence which an initially unintelligible act, rule or belief has in terms of the whole of which it is a part.

Humanists often draw two important conclusions from this construal of social science. The first is that the social scientist must assume that the beliefs, practices and actions which he encounters are congruent with one another in so far as they are explicable. The second is that, since it is the conceptual linkages between the actors' beliefs, actions and practices which he must uncover, the explanations which the social scientist puts forward must employ essentially the same concepts which an ideal, fully informed and articulate participant would give.<sup>20</sup> Both of these conclusions support a view of social life which takes it to be, by definition, rational at some level and understandable in its own terms.

Unfortunately, such a view is woefully inadequate just because it ignores crucial elements of social experience which are obviously present in social life, and which are often studied by social scientists. These include cases in which people's self-understandings are at variance with their actual situation and behaviour, or in which a specific belief- and action-system is incompatible with other norms of the culture, or in which there are endemic conflicts as the result of conflicts in social-structural principles.<sup>21</sup>

In short, people may systematically misunderstand their own motives, wants, values and actions, as well as the nature of their social order, and—given what we have said about the constitutive role of self-understandings in social life—these misunderstandings may underlie and sustain particular forms of social interaction. In these situations, the actors' ideas may mask social reality as much as reveal it, and so the

Inquiry', in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *The Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 1, Reading, Mass. 1975, pp. 192ff.

20 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, New York 1945, pp. 308ff., and pp. 282ff.

21 For examples of studies investigating each of these three types of situations, see V. Aubert, *Sociology of the Law*, Oslo 1964; Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, Boston 1966; and Victor Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*, Manchester 1957, respectively.

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social scientist cannot confine himself to explicating the way in which the actors' concepts and self-understandings form a coherent system. In order to understand these cases, the social scientist must recognize how the actors' self-understandings are incoherent, and he must show what consequences these incoherencies have.

Concrete examples of social phenomena which cannot be understood in their own terms include the idea of nobility in feudal society, and the witch-craze of early modern Europe. The concept of 'nobility', as Gellner has pointed out,<sup>22</sup> was used to legitimate rulership in feudal society: one is entitled to rule because one is 'noble', or virtuous. But, at the same time, a person was a member of the ruling class, or a 'noble', simply by virtue of birth, not personal merit. Thus, the concept of nobility is at best equivocal, if not thoroughly incoherent, and the failure to notice and correct this incoherency is a misunderstanding or confusion that is a condition of the feudal form of political domination.

The European witch-craze is also a social phenomenon that is, in many significant respects, irrational. As Trevor-Roper has argued,<sup>23</sup> the belief in 'witches' was not necessarily irrational in the intellectual context of the time, but the belief in witches did not cause the witch-craze. What was distinctive about the witch-craze, and what requires explanation going beyond the self-understandings of the actors involved, are such factors as the ferocity of the persecutions, the sudden and dramatic increase in the number of putative witches who were discovered and condemned, the geographic and social patterns of persecution, and the widespread use of torture. By focussing only on the concepts available to the actors involved, we could not explain these phenomena adequately: it would certainly not do to say that the cause of the witch-craze was the fact that the number of witches had dramatically increased! Moreover, in doing so we would also fail to set the witch-craze in the context of the social tensions of the time, and we would fail to see how it involved a process of scapegoating that served to deflect social discontent. By focussing only on witchcraft in terms of the system of beliefs and values of which it was a part, we would miss much that is essential to the social reality of the witch-craze.

Irrational social phenomena, unfortunately, are quite common. Consider, e.g., sociologists' and psychologists' attempts to uncover the 'real meaning' of neurotic behaviour (like compulsive handwashing), of violent prejudicial behaviour toward minority groups, of recurring self-destructive patterns of social interaction, and so forth. Moreover, in

22 E. Gellner, 'Concepts and Society', reprinted in his *Cause and Meaning in the Social Sciences*, London 1973, pp. 18-46.

23 See H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze*, New York 1969, and Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Rationality and the Explanation of Action', in his *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, New York 1971.

situations such as these, the particular form of irrational behaviour may not be just an isolated feature of a person's life, but may instead be systematically related to a wide range of different emotions, beliefs and actions. The very basis of a person's life—the terms in which he talks about himself in his most lucid and reflective moments, and the fears, aspirations, beliefs, passions, and values which he ascribes to himself at these times—may be fundamentally mistaken, and, as a result, he may be unable to adequately explain his behaviour to himself or others. Worse than this, as a result of such misunderstanding he may pursue ends he cannot achieve, and the goals he does reach may not be satisfying. Such frustration may lead him to intensify his efforts, and so to perpetuate his misery. And just as it is possible for a person to be systematically mistaken, so whole forms of life may be based upon such self-misunderstandings, or what might be called 'false consciousness'. This is the picture of life that is painted for us by Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and, more recently, by Freud, Brown, Habermas, Becker, and a host of others.

The social scientist attempts to explain such irrational phenomena by treating the actors' beliefs and desires as ciphers for something else that constitutes the actors' actual reason for acting, or the real need which they are trying to fill. Thus, according to Rousseau, people desire wealth, but what they really want is social distinction, and money is an expression of social distinction in certain societies.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, according to Marx, people engage in religious practices because they desire to be complete and whole human beings, and they believe that God will provide that fulfillment; but God is really nothing more than a picture of themselves fully actualized, and what would really satisfy them is to develop and exercise their productive capacities in forms of cooperative, social labour.<sup>25</sup> Finally, to offer a third example, Becker argues that people pursue sexual romance and contact, because sex is a cipher for everlasting life, and what they really want is to overcome the fear of their own death.<sup>26</sup>

Such accounts of human motivation and behaviour immediately lead to the question, how is it possible for people to be so ignorant and confused about their own needs and motives, thereby leading them to engage in destructive and frustrating activities? To answer this question we must have an account of what causes people to mistake some purpose or object (wealth, God, sex), for what they really want (social distinction, happiness, eternal life), and how these delusions are main-

<sup>24</sup> *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, ed. Masters, New York 1964, pp. 265-66.

<sup>25</sup> See 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"', Introduction', in Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, ed. Joseph O'Malley, Cambridge 1970, pp. 129ff.

<sup>26</sup> See *The Denial of Death*, New York 1973, pp. 160-70.

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tained. Freud's notions of sublimation and repression, and Marx's notions of alienation and ideology, are examples of concepts created in order to explain the process by which an activity acquires symbolic import and with it causal power, and how this process itself is hidden from the agent's view.

Thus, systematic misunderstandings of the meanings of one's activities, reinforced by repressive mechanisms, can result in irrational behaviour whose upshot is social conflict and the experience of frustration. And this is the case just because human behaviour is intentional in the sense of being undertaken on the basis of the ideas, desires and perceptions of those who perform it. But in these situations the traditional humanist goal of understanding intentional phenomena by grasping the coherence which exists among their meanings must be replaced by the need to critique these phenomena. Or better, the only way to understand such a social situation is to engage in a critique in which one lays bare the ways in which the ideas people have of themselves mask the social reality which their behaviour creates, and in which one tries to demonstrate that the coherence of the relevant behaviour occurs at a level so deep that it is beyond the capacity of the actors to appreciate it given the conceptual and emotional responses open to them. In doing this, the social scientist will undoubtedly have to make use of concepts and conceptual distinctions which in a basic way go beyond those operative in the social life which is being studied. It is in this way that the humanist model will be transcended.

Of course, the naturalist model will be of no help in this matter either. For though the naturalists have always been insistent that social theorists need not be confined to the categories of thought of the people they are analyzing, there is nothing in the natural sciences comparable to assessing the rationality of a particular belief system, institution or system of actions, and deciding on a certain type of explanation depending on this assessment. Only of an intentional phenomenon can one ask: Are the factors which support it mistaken? Could it have been undertaken out of ignorance? What role does deception play in its continuation? And so forth.

The humanist cannot appreciate the role of critique in social science because he artificially confines himself to interpreting the meanings which various aspects of a social life are supposed to have by grasping the coherence which he thinks exists between these aspects understood in their own terms. By so confining himself, he not only insures that he will fail to see the conflict, irrationality and mechanisms of repression operative in all social orders, but also deprives himself of the means necessary to understand these phenomena, namely, a categorial scheme which allows him to speak about the relevant social order in terms radically opposed to that of the participants. The naturalist, on the other

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hand, cannot give an account of critique because, by neglecting the particular features of intentional phenomena, he cannot appreciate the crucial role which rationality plays in social life, or its assessment plays in social science. These inadequacies of both the humanist model and the naturalist model in elucidating the role of critique in social theory give a third reason why the dualist approach of humanism versus naturalism must be overcome if a satisfactory philosophy of social science is to be forthcoming.

V

In this essay we have not tried to set out a philosophical account of social science, but to show that neither of the two prevailing accounts is adequate. An adequate philosophy of social science must be capable of answering the three questions we have discussed: first, what is the relationship between interpretation and explanation; second, what is the nature of social scientific theory; and third, what is the role of critique in social science. Broadly speaking, these questions arise because of the conjunction of two important features of social science. In the first place, these sciences are *social*, which is to say that the phenomena they study are intentional phenomena, and so must be identified in terms of their meanings. Secondly, these sciences are *sciences*, in the sense that they try to develop systematic theories to explain the underlying causal interconnections among phenomena of a widely divergent sort. Because they each fasten on only one of these features, humanism and naturalism fail to provide an adequate account of social science.

This does not mean, however, that we reject both of these traditions of thought entirely. On the contrary, these philosophical metatheories are partial realizations of the task of giving an account of social science. What is wrong with them is not that they are false, but that they are one-sided. Indeed, as we have suggested throughout our analysis, these two positions can be reformulated in such a way as to render them compatible, and their insights complementary. By showing just where humanism and naturalism are inadequate, we hope to have contributed to the construction of the framework for a new synthesis in the philosophy of social science.