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Reasons, Causes, and Intentional Explanation

Abstract: The reasons-causes debate concerns whether explanations of human behavior in terms of an agent's reasons presuppose causal laws. This paper considers three approaches to this debate: the covering law model which holds that there are causal laws covering both reasons and behavior, the intentionalist approach which denies any role to causal laws, and Donald Davidson's point of view which denies that causal laws connect reasons and behavior, but holds that reasons and behavior must be covered by physical laws if reasons explanations are to be valid. I defend the intentionalist approach against the two causalist approaches and conclude with reflections on the significance of the debate for the social sciences.

I. Introduction

In just a few pages of a widely read anthology, The Sociology of Modern Britain (Butterworth/Weir 1970, 8 ff., 58 ff.), there occur over thirty terms with explanatory import. Among them are: "influenced by", "had a bearing on", "arises from", "is the product of", "reflects", "affects", "has an impact on", "leads to", "depends on", "helps to determine", "brings about", "is responsible for", "is conducive to". All of these are causal in a broad sense: as species of the general relation "because of", they express an explanatory relation between an explanandum and an explanans.

But there is a narrow sense of "cause", confined to explanatory relations which are law-like and rest on empirical generalizations - the sense of "cause" in which antecedents necessitate their effects. The question then arises whether terms which are causal in the broad sense, are also causal in this narrow sense. Philosophers in the 'unity of science' tradition have said that they are. Their opponents have said they are not. The center of the controversy has been whether explanations of human behavior in terms of an agent's reasons refer to causes in the narrow sense (and from now on I shall use the term "cause" in the narrow sense), and this is the question which the reasons-causes debate in recent anglo-american philosophy is about.

This debate has been lively since the work of Wittgenstein (in his lectures and in such posthumously published works as Wittgenstein 1958 - which date from 1933 to 1935 - and Wittgenstein 1953) and Ryle (1949) renewed interest in philosophy of action. Their influence dominated the work done in this area in the fifties and early sixties by such philosophers as Anscombe (1957), Peters (1958), Winch (1958), Melden (1963), Charles Taylor (1964) and Kenny (1965), all of whom argued against the view that reasons are causes. While the alternative causalist view did not lack distinguished proponents - Hempel (1942; 1962; 1966), for example - the anti-causalist view was in the ascendency.

By the early seventies, however, although the anti-causalist tradition remained vigorous in the work of philosophers like von Wright (1971), the causalist view had become dominant. This was due largely to the work of Donald Davidson, who published in 1963 a paper called, Actions, Reasons, and Causes (now in Davidson 1980), which defended the view that reasons are causes but in a way significantly different from philosophers in the unity of science tradition, whose notion of causal explanation conformed to the 'covering law' model. Davidson's argument that reasons could be causes even without this model led to a vigorous revival of causalist views.

We have, then, three points of view on the reasons-causes debate. I shall discuss all three, beginning with a critical discussion of the covering law approach, then turning to the view that reasons are not causes - the 'intentionalist view' - which I shall defend, and finally considering Davidson's point of view. I shall conclude with some comments on the significance of this debate for the social sciences. But first there are a number of preliminary matters to be discussed.

II. Intentional Explanations and Intentional Descriptions

1. Explanations of human behavior in terms of an agent's reasons cite such things as beliefs, desires, values, obligations, emotions, opportunities, needs, in the light of which the behavior seems rational. Someone steps back suddenly; we ask why and learn that he thinks he is on the edge of a precipice and is afraid of heights. His behavior may not be rational externally - his belief may be an illusion and his fear unfounded - but internally, relative to his belief and fear, his behavior was rational, and if he behaved for those reasons, we have an explanation of his behavior.

Contrast this with a case where someone begins to perspire profusely, also because of his belief that he is at the edge of a precipice and is afraid of heights. Here we have no rationale for his behavior. His perspiring is not reasonable in the light of his belief and fear, since perspiration is neither reasonable nor unreasonable: the belief and fear cause the perspiration

without being a rationale for it. This explanation is straightforwardly causal and differs, therefore, in a significant way from the previous one in terms of the agent's reasons. The reasons-causes debate is over whether the previous one is, nevertheless, causal.

Explanations which give a rationale for behavior are sometimes called "rational" ("rational-choice") or "purposive". I shall call them "intentional" because of their close connection with the notion of intentional behavior. For what distinguishes stepping back from perspiring is that the former is intentional behavior, the latter not. As this case illustrates, intentional behavior need not be the result of deliberation, nor need it be calculated or rational in an external sense. What distinguishes it is that it is behavior for which a rationale is relevant.

The concept of intentional behavior is in turn central to the concept of human behavior generally. Much human behavior is, of course, not intentional, but even where people behave contrary to their intentions or not knowing what they are doing, there is still behavior, and some way is needed of marking out human behavior, whether or not intentional, as the subject matter of the social sciences.

Not every process or event involving human beings is human behavior: perspiration or digestion is not, nor the growth of the fingernails, nor our movement through space as the earth turns. Human behavior is either intentional or, if not intentional, is performed in behaving intentionally.² An example of the former is stepping back because of fear one is on a precipice; an example of the latter is inadvertently killing a bug while stepping back.

This point can be clarified by introducing the notion of "under a description".³ If I step back intentionally, and in so doing inadvertently kill a bug, I have acted only once.⁴ It does not follow that the same act is both intentional and unintentional (inadvertent); for acts are intentional or unintentional only under a description (as described in such and such a way).⁵ My act has (at least) two descriptions: "stepping back" and "killing a bug"; it is intentional under the first, inadvertent under the second. Human behavior, then, as the subject matter of the social sciences, can be marked out as behavior which is intentional under at least one description. Perspiring doesn't count because there is no description under which it is intentional; my killing a bug counts because it is intentional under the description "stepping back".

2. While intentional explanations are not the only kind found in the social sciences, they are more prevalent than is often thought. Weber, for example, distinguished four kinds of action (see Aron 1970, 186 ff.): 1) Zweckrational action: action in relation to a goal; 2) Wertrational action:

action in relation to a value; 3) affective or emotional action: action dictated immediately by the agent's emotions; 4) traditional action: action determined by custom. All fit the notion of behavior explained in terms of reasons, each specifying a different kind of rationale. In the first the rationale is that steps must be taken to realize a clearly conceived goal; in the second that failure to act is to be unfaithful to some value; in the third that one has an emotion like anger: anger is the reason why one behaves in a certain way; in the fourth that one wants to fulfill a role or do what is expected.

Philosophers have tended to speak of intentional explanations as always involving beliefs and desires - the 'belief-desire model'. If this is construed simply as shorthand for the variety of cognitive and affective factors of the kind Weber spelled out, then it is acceptable terminology, and in this paper I shall adopt this philosophers' shorthand.

In addition to intentional explanations at least two other sorts of explanations occur in the social sciences. One is explanations of the reasons themselves, of why persons have the reasons they do. These will range from psychological accounts of personal development, through sociological accounts of how social groups determine beliefs and preferences, to socio-historical accounts of the origins of concepts that make various kinds of reason possible. The reasons available for explaining behavior are not a fixed stock to be drawn on independent of culture and history, and there is much scope here for explanation.

The second is explanation of phenomena as unintended consequences of human behavior. Most of these tend to undermine our efforts and frustrate our intentions. Some turn out to be beneficial, however, and this raises the question whether they explain the behavior which gave rise to them - the question of 'functional explanation'.

These two sorts of explanation conform to no simple model. Some are straightforwardly causal, but not all are, and hence the reasons-causes debate is relevant to them as well. But I shall focus on intentional explanation, because it is central and because the issues are more manageable.

3. I said that not all behavior can be explained intentionally. This is misleading; it is better to say that behavior can be explained intentionally only under certain kinds of descriptions, which I shall call intentional descriptions. They are not limited to descriptions under which behavior is intentional. "Killing a bug" is an intentional description even though my behavior was not intentional under that description. But my behavior could have been intentional under that description - I could have acted that way for a reason - and hence the description is intentional.

Descriptions of behavior which are not intentional are often referred to as "bodily movement descriptions" and contrasted with "action descriptions". Thus Melden in Free Action contrasts "my arm rises" - a bodily movement description - with "my raising my arm" - an action description. This is a contrast between two different kinds of description of the same behavior: described in the former way no rationale can be given; described in the latter way there may be reasons for the behavior.

A similar point applies to descriptions of the reasons themselves: something can be a reason for action only if described intentionally. My belief that I am on a precipice was a reason for my stepping back. Physicalists argue that a belief can also be described as a certain state of the brain; but even if they are right, my brain being in a certain state cannot be a reason for my stepping back.

Intentional descriptions, therefore, are descriptions that figure in intentional explanations, whether they describe behavior or the reasons for behavior. What qualifies a description as intentional - and here I shall be brisk⁶ - is its essential relation to verbs which express beliefs and desires. These verbs are always directed to objects - to believe is always to believe something, to desire is always to desire something - but the objects to which they are directed are what the scholastics called "intentional objects" since their nature depends on how they are intended, that is conceived or described. To believe I am stepping back is not also to believe I am killing a bug, even when my stepping back is my killing a bug: the content of my belief - what I believe - is just my stepping back. That is its intentional object, i.e., the object intended by my believing, the object described as the reason for my behavior.

The essential relation intentional descriptions must have to verbs which express beliefs and desires is that either 1) they contain such verbs essentially or 2) they presuppose descriptions which contain such verbs essentially. An example of 1) is "believing I am on a precipice"; that class covers descriptions which apply to reasons for behavior. An example of 2) is "intentionally stepping back", for that cannot be true of a person unless she has some belief or desire which is her reason for that behavior. Another example of 2) is "inadvertently killing a bug", for that cannot be true of an agent's behavior unless there is another description true of her behavior under which it is intentional, which in turn implies there was a reason for her behavior. Class 2), therefore, covers intentional descriptions which apply to behavior.

Intentional descriptions are important because they represent the 'mental aspect' of explanations of human behavior, and they might be characterized as 'mental' to indicate a contrast with the physical descriptions of the physical sciences. But "intentional" marks this contrast in a less misleading

way, for "mental" suggests the private or the subjective. As we have seen, however, intentional descriptions apply as much to behavior as to the beliefs and desires which are reasons for behavior. What is distinctive about them is not that they describe private or subjective phenomena but that the phenomena described must be dealt with in terms tied to the descriptions under which the phenomena occur.

It does not follow that the social sciences are limited to descriptions understood by the actors themselves - that technical terms are out of place or that terms drawn from one culture may not be applied to another (this point of view is argued in Winch 1958). But it does follow, given the centrality of intentional explanations, that terms in the social science must be tied to descriptions intelligible to the persons whose behavior is being explained, for the intentional descriptions which make intentional explanations possible are essentially related to verbs which express beliefs and desires, and these are distinguished precisely by the ineliminable role of descriptions of their objects.

4. A brief note about one distinction of special interest to the social sciences, that between thin and thick intentional descriptions (cf. Hollis/Lukes 1982, 300 ff.). Not a sharp distinction, this marks a range from minimally thin to maximally thick descriptions. Thin descriptions (for example, "moving his feet") imply nothing about specific beliefs and desires as reasons for behavior, though as intentional descriptions they imply that there was some reason or other for the behavior. Thick descriptions (for example, "marching in a demonstration") describe behavior in terms of specific beliefs and desires as reasons for the behavior. Thin descriptions, therefore, are more observational than interpretative, can be used to describe a wide variety of behavior, are cross-cultural, and have minimal explanatory import. Thick descriptions require justification and are heavily interpretative, apply only to specific kinds of behavior, tend to be internal to a culture, and have maximal explanatory import.

III. The Covering Law Model

1. The covering law model of reasons as causes has been best articulated by C.G. Hempel, whose basic point of view is that "the nature of understanding, in the sense in which explanation is meant to give us an understanding of empirical phenomena, is basically the same in all areas of scientific inquiry" (Hempel 1966, 123). Explanation in the social sciences is distinctive only in its content - making references to beliefs and desires as reasons for behavior.

For Hempel all explanation is nomological, involving empirical laws which connect the explanandum with its explanans. Laws themselves may be

explained by derivation from higher level laws, but the focus of explanation in the social sciences is instances of behavior described intentionally. Hempel assumes that intentional descriptions are explanatorily neutral; they acquire explanatory force only when it is discovered empirically that the descriptions can be used to formulate laws which state connections between them. "The laws connect the explanandum event with the particular conditions cited in the explanans, and this is what confers upon the latter the status of explanatory ... factors in regard to the phenomena to be explained." (99, my emphasis)

Hempel distinguishes two kinds of scientific explanation: 1) the deductive-nomological and 2) the probabilistic. Both involve laws and both have explanatory force because they allow inference of (a description of) the explanandum from a conjunction of the law and descriptions of the conditions which, in virtue of the law, explain the explanandum. They differ in two respects: in 1) the law is a universal generalization which is law-like; in 2) the law is statistical, stating that phenomena are correlated not universally but probabilistically. This implies the second difference: in 1) the explanandum can be inferred from the explanatory premisses with deductive necessity; in 2) the explanandum can be inferred only inductively - relative to the premisses the explanandum is at best highly likely.

Only the first type is, strictly speaking, relevant to the reasons-causes debate because, as Hempel argues, only deductive-nomological explanations are causal; I shall come to this type in a moment, but want first to comment briefly on probabilistic explanation since many explanatory statements in the social sciences are couched in probabilistic terms. Does this mean that Hempel is right about the uniformity of explanation in the physical and social sciences, as far as the probabilistic form is concerned?

I think there are two differences. On the one hand, a statistical generalization is an explanation only if there is a background theory explaining why the explanation must be probabilistic. In the physical sciences, statistical or quantum mechanics serve this function; in the social sciences the background 'theories' are of a different sort. In the case of intentional explanations the best we can hope for in terms of generalizations are probabilistic: persons or groups who have such and such beliefs and desires generally do such and such. The reason for this is that intentional explanations require that we preserve the internal rationality of an agent not only relative to the beliefs and desires being cited in the explanation but relative to whatever other beliefs and desires the agent has, and this rules out universal generalizations about what behavior results from any specific beliefs and desires.⁷ This background "theory" is obviously different from anything found in the physical sciences.

On the other hand, many probabilistic generalizations are not explanatory: mere statistical correlations are easy to come by, and they may allow for predictions without being at all explanatory. Discovering that 85% of the voters in a Minnesota county vote Democratic enables accurate predictions about the outcome of an election, but it hardly explains why those persons vote Democratic or why Democrats win in that county. On the other hand, discovering that 85% of the voters in a Minnesota county come from unionized blue collar families not only enables prediction about the outcome of an election but provides the basis for an explanation of why. The reason is that the latter generalization is in terms of descriptions which have explanatory import apart from the generalization itself; they are not explanatorily neutral.

The pertinent question, then, is why certain descriptions have explanatory import. Hempel says that it is because empirical laws confer it on them. This does not seem true, however, in the social sciences, for there we are able to generalize about how people with certain reasons for acting will (probably) behave only because we can already explain their behavior in terms of their reasons for acting. The generalizations follow on our grasp of explanatory connections, they do not provide their basis.

2. The best way to make out this point is to look at the deductive-nomological model, for if universal generalizations do not give intentional explanations their force, then a fortiori probabilistic generalizations do not. Universal generalizations are explanatory, provided 1) they are supported by their instances - i.e., they are empirically confirmable, and 2) they support counterfactuals. The latter enables us to distinguish accidental generalizations from genuine laws. "All persons who sit on this bench are male" is a universal generalization, but not a law because it does not support the counterfactual, "If someone, who is not sitting on this bench, were to sit on it, he (she) would be male". This in turn means that the statement is not causal: sitting on the bench does not cause one to become a male. On the other hand, "Sugar dissolves in water" does support the counterfactual, "If this piece of sugar, which is not in water, were placed in water, it would dissolve", and the statement is causal: putting sugar in water causes it to dissolve.

Causal explanations, then, must be nomological-deductive. This is Hempel's way of expressing the Humean thesis that attributions of causation imply the existence of causal laws.⁸ But this thesis is ambiguous. It may mean 1): to say "A causes B" implies that there is a causal law which includes the descriptions "A" and "B" - that the law "covers" A and B (hence "covering law model"). For example, "putting this piece of sugar in water caused it to dissolve" implies that there is a law that "Whenever sugar is put in water it dissolves". Or it may mean 2): to say "A causes B" implies that there is a causal law which includes descriptions which do in fact

refer to A and B, but does not necessarily include the descriptions "A" and "B" themselves. Under 2) to say "dropping this dish caused it to break" does not imply that there is a law that "Whenever dishes of a certain kind are dropped they break" but only that there is some description of the dish-dropping (presumably in terms drawn from Physics) connected by law with some description (again in terms of Physics) of the event of breaking. On this interpretation of the Humean thesis, an attribution of causation entails that there exists a causal law, but it does not entail any particular causal law (nor that we know what it is), for the descriptions we use to attribute causation may be quite different from the descriptions in the underlying law.

This distinction was clearly articulated by Davidson⁹ and forms the basis of his new version of the causalist thesis, for he takes the second interpretation of the Humean thesis. But Hempel assumes the first, which yields the covering law model of intentional explanation: an explanation of behavior in terms of reasons requires a causal law which connects intentional descriptions of the reasons with a description of the behavior under which it was intentional.

There are good reasons for taking this interpretation - as we shall see when discussing Davidson - but it means that there must be causal laws in intentional terms to give an intentional explanation its force. It seems to me, however, that there are good reasons for thinking there are no such laws.

Consider this case: an assassin drops a poisonous pill in the President's wine because he wants to replace the President with the Vice-President and believes the only way to do it is to poison the President. The causalist thesis is that this desire and belief explain behavior only if they cause it. On the covering law model this requires a law to the effect that anyone who wants to get someone out of the way and believes the only way to do it is poison her, will poison her. But that is not a true generalization - many people with strong desires to kill someone and opportunities to do so, fail to act - nor is it law-like.

The causalist will respond that this overlooks two considerations. First, the explanation is incomplete because it leaves out reference to other beliefs and desires, which may bear on the situation. The explanation assumes that the poisoner did not have conflicting beliefs, such as that he would surely get caught, or desires, like a desire not to violate the moral prohibition against killing. The generalization should reflect these things, and if it reflected enough, it would be law-like. Second, intentional explanations assume that the agent was a rational agent: even if certain behavior is such that any rational agent, given her reasons, would perform

it, it may be that the agent was not rational. Thus Hempel offers this schema (1962, 261):

- a. S was in a situation of type C.
- b. S was a rational agent.
- c. In a situation of type C any rational agent will do x.
- d. Therefore, S did x.

a) is supposed to state all the beliefs and desires relevant to the behavior; b) specifies that the agent was rational on this occasion; c) is the law which confers explanatory import on the factors specified in a).

One difficulty is that these two considerations conflict. The first assumes that we can determine a broad range of the agent's beliefs and desires as possible reasons for her behavior. The only way we can do that, however, is by reference to her behavior, and necessarily by reference to intentional descriptions of it, for we cannot determine beliefs and desires as possible reasons for behavior on the basis of bodily movement descriptions, since only under intentional descriptions is behavior explained by reasons. But the concept of behavior performed for reasons presupposes persons who are internally rational - whose behavior is rational relative to their reasons. We can make no sense of persons who are not internally rational - who are psychotic, for example - not so much because we cannot determine their beliefs and desires as because we find it difficult to attribute beliefs and desires to them at all: their speech makes no sense, their action seems unmotivated, or if motivated, only by what we refer to as "beliefs" and "desires" in square quotes. Internal rationality is not something we attribute to persons on the basis of their beliefs and desires but a precondition for ascribing beliefs and desires to them at all.

This leaves the question of whether we can formulate a law connecting reasons with behavior if we admit enough information about other, possibly conflicting, beliefs and desires. This is sometimes done by talking about a person's strongest desires: any agent whose strongest desire is for y and who believes he must do x to get y will do x. But if "strongest" is taken empirically, this is false: persons do not always act on those desires which are strongest by any empirical measure - the 'still small voice of conscience', for example, can counter them. Otherwise the strongest desire is just the one acted on, which makes the law not an empirical generalization confirmable by its instances, but an instance of a logical law. (I have discussed this point further in Stoutland 1976).

3. This latter point raises the basic issue, namely, whether the principles connecting reasons and behavior really are empirically confirmable law-like generalizations. The so-called 'logical connection argument' is relevant at

this point (see my 1970). Its best known statement is in Melden's Free Action, where it is argued that a desire like wanting to kill the President cannot be a cause of killing the President because the description of the desire is 'logically connected' with the description of the behavior (the description of the desire as wanting to kill the President includes a description of the purported effect). As the argument goes, this rules out causality since causes presuppose causal laws, which, being confirmable by their instances, cannot involve logically connected descriptions.

This form of the argument is easily refuted by noting that a statement like "overexposure to the sun causes sun-stroke" does not fail to be causal just because descriptions of the cause and effect are logically connected. One event can cause another even if the descriptions of them we happen to choose are logically connected. Moreover, while "wanting to kill the President" includes "killing the President", it is not a logical truth that anyone who wants to kill the President will (or will even try).

But what motivates the logical connection argument can be freed from these defects. To establish a generalization about reasons and behavior which might be law-like, we have to be able to establish empirically of each of many agents that whenever each has certain beliefs and desires, each behaves in a certain intentionally described way. Given that all explanatory connections are (law-like) generalizations, this will be possible only if we can know both the agent's reasons and the relevant intentional descriptions of his behavior without knowledge of any explanatory connection between the reasons and the (intentional descriptions of the) behavior. Otherwise we will have to assume knowledge of generalizations prior to knowledge of the beliefs, desires, and behavior on which such generalizations are supposed to be based.

In other words, the covering law model assumes that we must first know what an agent's reasons are on a given occasion and what her behavior is on that occasion, before we can know what generalizations can be made about her reasons and behavior. But, given its claim that only generalizations connect behavior with the reasons that explain it, this assumes that we can know what an agent's beliefs and desires are without knowing her behavior, (and vice versa). It is this epistemic - or conceptual - interdependence of beliefs, desires, and behavior which motivates the logical connection argument.

Hempel is aware of the epistemic interdependence of belief and desire (or goal) attribution:

"We assume that the overt behavior shown by a person pursuing a certain objective will depend on his beliefs, and conversely. Thus the attribution, to Henry, of the belief that the streets are slushy will be taken to imply that he will put on galoshes only on suitable further assumptions about his

objectives and indeed about his further beliefs; such as that he wants to go out, wants to keep his feet dry, believes that his galoshes will serve the purpose, does not feel in too much of a hurry to put them on, *et cetera* ... A hypothesis about an agent's objectives can be taken to imply the occurrence of specific overt action only when conjoined with appropriate hypotheses about his beliefs; and *vice versa*. Hence, strictly speaking, an examination of an agent's behavior cannot serve to test assumptions about his beliefs or about his objectives separately, but only in separate pairs, as it were; or briefly, belief attributions and goal attributions are epistemically interdependent."(1962, 294 ff.)

What Hempel overlooks is the epistemic interdependence of belief-desire attributions with attributions of intentional descriptions to behavior. On the one hand, to think of behavior in terms of reasons requires intentional descriptions of it. Hempel grants this in writing that a "hypothesis about an agent's objectives can be taken to imply the occurrence of specific overt actions...": this can be true only if "overt actions" means behavior described intentionally, for the overt actions which fulfill one's objectives can be described in any number of ways (which may be inconsistent) in terms of bodily movement descriptions. There may not be a wide range of bodily movement descriptions of putting on galoshes, but there is no uniquely specifiable set.¹⁰

On the other hand, to get intentional descriptions of behavior, we need knowledge of beliefs and desires. To describe Henry as putting on his galoshes implies that he has reasons for his behavior. This everyday description of behavior, being relatively thin, does not presuppose much about specific reasons. But it presupposes something, which we may fail to notice because of the unproblematic nature of such a thin description. We know off-hand why such behavior is done - beliefs about wet ground and desires to keep one's feet dry, and so on - which are the background conditions for describing behavior in this way. The behavior is observed in terms of these background conditions. If they do not obtain - if the ground isn't wet, for example, and Henry cannot possibly believe it is - then things become more problematic, and we begin to look for other beliefs and desires. These may leave the description of the behavior intact (he is still putting on his galoshes), and since the description is so thin, it takes a good deal to alter it. But we might alter it: maybe he thinks those are running shoes, not galoshes, maybe he is taking them off, maybe we've misperceived what he is doing, and so on. Although the description implies relatively little about further beliefs and desires, it is not independent of belief-desire attribution generally.

It is this epistemic or conceptual interdependence of attributions of beliefs and desires with attributions of intentional descriptions to behavior which the covering law theory neglects. We can, of course, make generalizations about people's behavior, given their beliefs and desires. But these generalizations presuppose that we know what beliefs and desires and what

(intentional) descriptions of behavior to attribute to them. The epistemic interdependence of these attributions cannot rest on the very generalizations for which they provide evidence. But the covering law theory allows for no account of this interdependence other than in terms of empirical generalizations.

IV. The Intentionalist Approach

1. The criticisms just made of the covering law model are applications of a fundamentally different model of intentional explanation - the intentionalist account. The two views agree that explanation should be seen as an inference scheme: reasons explain behavior when we can infer (intentional) descriptions of the behavior from statements about the agent's reasons. The covering law model regards these inferences as requiring causal laws. The intentionalist approach rejects this, arguing that the inference rests on 'principles of practical reason', which are not causal laws, but conceptual principles in a sense to be explained.

What is at stake here can be introduced by looking at von Wright's view of the 'practical syllogism', a term he used for the inference scheme of intentional explanation. Von Wright characterized a practical syllogism as having two premisses, one describing the agent's intention, the other his belief about the means necessary to attain that intention, and a conclusion describing the behavior explained by the premisses. Here is an example:

- a) S intends to get rid of a bat.
- b) S believes he cannot do that unless he opens a door.
- c) Therefore, S opens a door.

Von Wright argued that this schema expresses a logically valid inference just as it stands and, no causal law being needed to link the premisses with the conclusion (as in Hempel's scheme discussed above), this form of explanation is not causal.

To be logically valid the scheme requires some refinements: for example, a) must be taken as describing S as intending right now to get rid of a bat, b) as attributing a belief of which S is fully aware. The conclusion must be taken not as characterizing what S actually achieved, for he may have been unable to realize his intention, but what he meant by his behavior whatever it was - that is, what intentional description it should take whatever bodily movements actually occurred. The premisses do not describe what produced the behavior - that requires causal laws covering its non-intentional (bodily movement) descriptions - but set out the descriptions which logically yield the description in terms of which the agent's behavior has (logically) to be described if it is to take an intentional description. Given that S had that intention and belief, his

behavior would have (logically) to be described in terms of his opening a door; even if he wasn't able to open the door, that would still be true: his behavior would be described as trying to open a door.

This is von Wright's version of the logical connection argument. The explanatory connections in the practical syllogism are made by logically necessary principles, which are thus markedly different from the causal laws appealed to by causalists. Reasons are not causes, for causes presuppose causal laws, which are confirmed by their instances, not principles which logically entail intentional descriptions of behavior.

2. This view nicely illustrates the central claim of the intentionalist account by drawing a stark contrast between the causal principles of the covering law model and the logical principles of the practical syllogism. But the contrast is too stark. On the one hand, even as refined, the premisses of the practical syllogism do not entail the conclusion, for S might not do anything at all, and there would then be no behavior to take intentional descriptions. On the other hand, the practical syllogism does not cover many intentional explanations - for example, those which make no reference to an agent's intentions or which do not involve beliefs about what has to be done to realize an end. These do not even approach the logical validity von Wright was after.

The problem is that the principles of practical reason which mediate the inference from reasons as explanans to behavior as explanandum are not simply principles of logic. Principles of logic play a role in working out the rationality of an agent's behavior relative to his beliefs and desires, but by no means the only role. Many other principles are required which are not formal, which are complex and interconnected, and which are very difficult (some would say impossible (see Dreyfus 1980)) to articulate.

Von Wright's fundamental point remains, however, which is that in intentional explanation the inference from explanans to explanandum is mediated not by causal laws but by explanatory principles of the sort called principles of practical reason. If not truths of logic, these are not empirical generalizations either. Perhaps the best term for them is "conceptual principles", by which I mean two things.

First, we acquire and establish them not by empirical observation or generalization but in acquiring the ability to describe behavior in intentional terms, an ability which makes observation of intentional behavior possible. For intentional behavior is observed: we do not apply intentional descriptions to behavior only on the basis of inference or interpretation but also on the basis of observing behavior under intentional descriptions.¹¹ Our normal observations of human behavior yield, not bodily movement descriptions, but intentional descriptions. We observe

people looking for a book, setting a meal, trying to open a door, hurrying home - all intentional descriptions which we acquire as we learn our language and which make possible that participation in human society which enable such activities as explicit language learning or empirical generalizations.

Intentional descriptions of behavior presuppose that there are beliefs and desires which explain it, and they are not, therefore, explanatorily neutral but have varying degrees of explanatory import. To articulate this explanatory import is just to articulate the explanatory principles which provide the basis of intentional explanation - which enable explicit inference from reasons as explanans to behavior as explanandum. These principles are not empirical generalizations since such generalizations are based on observation possible only in terms of intentional descriptions which already embody these explanatory principles of practical reason. In this sense these principles precede rather than follow on observation.

This does not mean the principles are innate - they are learned when we learn our language - nor self-evidently true - it is not inconceivable that our intentional descriptions might change radically or that we might link up reasons and behavior very differently than we do. The best description of their status is in Wittgenstein's On Certainty (1969). He suggests that a sentence like "Human history has gone on for a very long time before my birth" has the form of an empirical claim. Yet if we try to confirm it, we realize that any evidence we could offer - for example, that the Pharaohs existed several thousand years ago - has no import for anyone who denies the claim about the antiquity of human history. The latter claim is the background for any investigation into human history. It is conceivable that it is false, but it would be very difficult for us to understand anyone who claimed it was or who offered historical evidence for or against it.

So principles of practical reason are conceivably false. But we would not know what to make of anyone who thought they were or who offered descriptions of human behavior which falsified them. For without the ability to interpret behavior in the light of beliefs and desires or to ascribe reasons for behavior, we could make no sense of human beings, and making no sense of human beings we would have no reason at all to ascribe any intentional descriptions to them.

Second, the principles which mediate the inferences of intentional explanation are conceptual in the sense that the explanans and the explanandum are not conceptually independent. This is the point made earlier in criticizing the covering law model for neglecting the epistemic interdependence of reasons and behavior. We can, of course, describe an agent's behavior without knowing why he behaves in that way. He keeps opening the door, and we may have no idea why. But describing his

behavior as "opening the door" is already different from describing it, say, as "exercising his arm" or "testing the latch", and we thereby determine the range of possible reasons. Moreover, a lot of other behavior is going on at the time - he's moving his leg, twisting his head, grimacing - behavior which we ignore or subsume under the description "opening the door", again determining the range of reasons. And as we try to describe more specifically his behavior - is he letting in fresh air or trying to get some insects out or testing the latch? - we bring in possible beliefs and desires, considering what he is attempting to do in opening the door, thus fixing the descriptions to which an explanation is relevant.

At the same time determining beliefs and desires is not independent of descriptions of behavior. What people say their reasons are may be crucial, but speech is behavior which has to be understood. Consider, for example Putnam on the significance of Amos Tversky's work: "People's sincere verbal reports of their own preferences are totally incoherent. If we acted on the maxim of ascribing to people all of the preferences they say (sincerely) they have, then we would be unable to interpret their behavior at all, for expressed preferences are totally contradictory (e.g., they violate the logical property of the transitivity of preference very badly)." (Putnam 1983, 153) This holds true for all attitudes, where we must consider what people say, what they do in various situations, what their other attitudes are, trying to construe all of these in the light of the internal rationality of the agent, recognizing, as Davidson puts it, that "if we are intelligibly to attribute attitudes and beliefs, or usefully to describe motions as behavior, then we are committed to finding, in the pattern of behavior, belief and desire, a large degree of rationality and consistency." (1980, 237)

This conceptual interdependence of behavior descriptions and attitude descriptions means that there is no sharp line between observational descriptions of human behavior and intentional explanations. A prerequisite of intentional explanation is intentional description, and intentional descriptions have explanatory import. We approach the limit of pure description with maximally thin descriptions, which leave open a very wide range of explanation. But they do not lack explanatory import, and in the process of formulating an explanation, the descriptions of the explanandum may change in the direction of thick explanations. When an explicit scheme of explanatory inference is articulated, this 'dialectical' process will have been completed, and the explanatory scheme may make it appear that the explanandum was independently described and explanatory premisses found for it. This may be true for a particular case, but what gives a scheme its explanatory power is the set of principles in the background which determine the descriptions both of the reasons and the behavior.

The principles of intentional explanation are, then, conceptual in two senses: they are embedded in any observation of intentional behavior, and they link up reasons and behavior not by conferring explanatory import on them but because they are assumed both in ascribing reasons and in describing behavior intentionally. Since causal laws are not conceptual in either of these senses, intentional explanation must be seen as a distinct type of explanation.

V. Davidson's Causal Theory

1. It has been convenient to develop the intentionalist approach before looking at Davidson's point of view because he accepts much of that approach in his arguments for what he calls the "autonomy of psychology". There can be no causal laws involving intentional descriptions, he maintains, but only involving physical descriptions. "It is a feature of physical reality that physical change can be explained by laws that connect it with other changes and conditions physically described";¹² this is not a feature of "intentional reality", which is, as Davidson puts it, "anomalous". Intentional explanations are not, therefore, mediated by causal laws, which means a rejection of the covering law account.

Davidson's understanding of the principles which do connect behavior with the reasons that explain it is markedly similar to the intentionalist approach, and his powerful and original arguments, drawing on his own work in the philosophy of language, serve to strengthen that approach (for discussion of this see my 1982 and 1985). The principles of practical reason are, he argues, unlike causal laws in three respects. They are normative because "There is no way psychology can avoid considerations of the nature of rationality, of coherence, and consistency ... (It) cannot be divorced from such questions as what constitutes a good argument, a valid inference, a rational plan, or a good reason for acting." (Davidson 1980, 241) They are holistic because "Beliefs and desires issue in behavior only as modified and mediated by further beliefs and desires, attitudes and attendings, without limit." (217) They are interpretative, because they cannot assume fixed descriptions either of reasons or of behavior since these descriptions are conceptually interdependent in the way discussed above.

2. What distinguishes Davidson's approach from the intentionalist is that he wants to combine this intentionalist understanding of the principles of practical reason with a causal account of intentional explanation. "Two ideas", he writes, "are built into the concept of acting on a reason (and hence the concept of behavior generally): the idea of cause and the idea of rationality. A reason is a rational cause." (233) This involves two theses: 1) that it is consistent to hold both that the principles which relate reasons and behavior are non-causal and that reasons can be causes

of behavior; 2) that unless reasons are causes of behavior, reasons do not function as genuine explanations.

The first thesis is the important one as far as Davidson's influence is concerned, for it was seen as undermining the logical connection argument. Melden had written that "Motives and desires are not causal factors; their connection with action is logical not causal." (1963, 171) Davidson replied that while the second part of this may be true, the first part does not follow from it. Prior to his work the reasons-causes debate had been over the covering law model, its defenders holding there were causal laws in intentional terms, its critics countering, by appeal to the logical connection argument, that there were not. Davidson argued that this was besides the point: the causal account of intentional explanation is consistent with the idea that the principles which connect reasons and behavior are conceptual rather than causal. Reasons can cause behavior even if there are no causal laws in intentional terms.

This presumes the second interpretation (discussed in Section III) of the Humean thesis that attributions of causality imply the existence of causal laws. Davidson argued that while reasons cause behavior if both have descriptions which are part of a causal law, the descriptions need not be the ones used to cite the reasons nor the ones under which the behavior is intentional, and the causal laws may be unknown. Indeed, given the anomalousness of the intentional, the descriptions must be physical: reasons can cause behavior only if both have physical descriptions which are connected by a causal law.

While the very concept of behavior entails that behavior has physical descriptions, it is a different matter to claim that reasons do - that, for example, a desire to get rid of a bat is describable (also) in neurological terms. As Davidson saw, however, this must be granted once it is granted that causality is nomological, that causal laws must be in physical terms, and that reasons cause behavior. This is tantamount to a form of physicalism - a non-reductivist kind which simply says that whatever else anything is, it is also physical.

All this is by way of explaining Davidson's thesis that it is consistent to hold both that the principles which relate reasons and behavior are non-causal and that reasons can be causes of behavior. That thesis I shall not dispute. Desires and beliefs may have nomological, even physical, descriptions, and may, therefore, cause behavior. None of the arguments I have given, and that includes defensible versions of the logical connection argument, entails that reasons cannot cause behavior.

But this is not to accept a causalist account of intentional explanation; that requires the second thesis, which is logically independent of the

first: that unless a reason is a cause of behavior, it is not a genuine explanation of it. Davidson's argument for this is that only by appeal to causation can we distinguish between an agent's acting and (merely) having reasons and his acting because of those reasons. One may justify behavior - give a rationalization of it - by citing reasons an agent had even if he did not act because of them, but one cannot explain his behavior unless he acted because of those reasons. This "because" Davidson argues, must be causal: an agent acts because of reasons - they genuinely explain, rather than merely justify his behavior - only if the reasons cause his behavior.

3. This second thesis, however, which is the center of Davidson's causal account of intentional explanation, faces a deep difficulty. In rejecting the covering law model and its appeal to causal laws in intentional terms, Davidson must hold that reasons explain behavior only when both have physical descriptions which are part of a causal law which governs the agent's behavior. I have granted that there may be such a law; Davidson's view requires that there must be - even if we do not know what it is - if a reason is to explain behavior.

It is important to see that it is not sufficient for Davidson's account that reasons and behavior have physical descriptions (in addition to intentional descriptions) nor even that they have descriptions which are part of a causal law. What is required is that each reason have a physical description which is connected by causal law with a physical description of the very behavior which is intentional under the description inferrable from that reason. For example, if S wants to get rid of a bat and, believing the best way to do it is to let it out the door, opens the door for that reason, what is required is both that there be physical descriptions of his belief and his desire and a physical description of the behavior which is intentional under the description "opening a door", and that those descriptions be part of a true causal law which governs his behavior. Otherwise the desire to let out a bat was no part of the explanation of why S opened a door.

Davidson's account, however, while requiring such causal laws, makes it a mystery that there should be any, for his view that intentional descriptions enter into no laws entails that there are no laws connecting intentional and physical descriptions. That a desire with an intentional description should, therefore, have any particular physical description - to say nothing of a physical description connected by law to a physical description of the behavior for which the desire is a reason - is entirely without explanation. There is, in principle, no accounting for the fact that reasons and behavior with intentional descriptions should take any particular physical description (even if it is granted that they take some physical descriptions or other). There is, therefore, no accounting for the

fact that an agent who has a reason for behaving in a certain way should ever behave for that reason, no matter how good his reason is, for being a good reason is a matter of intentional descriptions, while being an explanatory reason is a matter of physical descriptions. That reasons cause behavior is one thing; that they are reasons - that behavior is rational in the light of them - must be another unrelated thing, given the anomalousness of the intentional and the consequent impossibility of laws connecting intentional and physical descriptions.

The contrast with the covering law model is instructive. On that model the explanatory connection between reasons and behavior is made directly by causal laws which contain intentional descriptions of the reasons and of the behavior. Reasons are causes, not because they have (physical) descriptions, but because the intentional descriptions themselves enter into causal laws. To put it in other terms, reasons are causes not because they also have physical properties with causal powers but because they have causal powers in virtue of their very nature as reasons. To recognize a reason as a good reason is thereby to recognize the causal power of the reason. If it does not in fact cause the behavior, that is because other reasons with stronger causal powers are present. There is on this account, therefore, an intelligible connection between a reason being a reason - the behavior being rational in the light of the reason - and its having causal power.

It is this intelligible connection which is in principle ruled out on Davidson's view. His claim that a reason is a rational cause falls into two disconnected parts: that it is rational is one thing, that it causes behavior another, and there cannot be any account of why a reason in the light of which an agent's behavior is rational should have the slightest tendency to cause it. His view implies that we may know what a person did and what reasons he had, but have no knowledge of whether these reasons explained his behavior since we may have no knowledge of what caused his behavior. This could be true, however, only if we assume that reason descriptions are conceptually independent of intentional descriptions of behavior, an assumption which it is the great strength of Davidson's view precisely to deny.

4. I shall not pursue this line of objection to Davidson's approach, for I have dealt with possible replies to it elsewhere (Stoutland 1980). His approach is an ingenious attempt to circumvent the difficulties in the covering law model, but I believe the objection that it sunders the rationality of a reason from its causal power undercuts its plausibility. The covering law model does not face that objection, but it faces others equally decisive, among which are objections Davidson himself¹³ has pressed with great force. No other versions of the causal approach¹³ strike me as any more plausible.

But even if these difficulties in the causal approach are granted, there remains Davidson's claim that causation is necessary to distinguish between reasons that explain behavior and those that, at best, justify it. I do not believe, however, that we need causation to make out that distinction.

The essential point is that reasons an agent merely has and does not act on - which do not explain his behavior - do not connect with his behavior through the principles of practical reason and do not, therefore, yield any descriptions of his behavior. An agent who both wants to let out a bat and who opens a door, but not for that reason (even if the bat flew out), cannot be characterized as intentionally letting out a bat or even as trying to. To determine the reasons which do explain his behavior, when this is not clear, we first have to determine how to describe it. This may be a complex process: we may have to ask him some questions, we may have to check out what else he did before opening the door (did he see the bat?); we may have to see how he behaved afterwards (was he surprised to see the bat go out?). The inquiry obviously involves considering beliefs and desires, not only behavior, but this is an instance of the conceptual interdependence of descriptions of reasons and behavior. The inquiry does not beg the question as to what accounts for this particular behavior, though it does assume we know what reasons account for other stretches of his behavior (which we may know simply by observation) but that too may be called in question, in which case we consider still further behavior and reasons in the light of which to describe it. None of this involves appeals to causation, but it is sufficient to distinguish idle reasons from reasons which explain the behavior.

One thing an intentionalist approach without appeal to causation will not do is yield a sharp distinction between an agent's reasons explaining her behavior and their merely justifying (or rationalizing) it. But a sharp distinction is not what we should expect. We often know by observation what someone did and precisely why. But at other times we must seek evidence, and it will come in degrees - we will have greater or lesser evidence for how to describe an agent's behavior and for which beliefs and desires explain it. Davidson should not disagree. "The cogency of an (intentional) explanation rests", he writes, "on its ability to discover a coherent pattern in the behavior of an agent. Coherence here includes the idea of rationality both in the sense that the action to be explained must be reasonable in the light of the assigned desires and beliefs, but also in the sense that the assigned desires and beliefs must fit with one another." (Davidson 1984, 159) This characterizes our determination both of an agent's reasons and which of them she acted on, and in any complex situation, it will call for assessment and judgment which are matters of degree.

A causalist approach might reply that even when our evidence is a matter of degree, what it is evidence for is not: reasons explain behavior when they cause it, otherwise not. But here too we have to deny a sharp distinction: there may be no final truth of the matter of what accounts for an agent's behavior.

The reason is the conceptual connection between describing behavior and attributing reasons - the interpretative dimension of intentional explanation - which Davidson refers to as "discovering a coherent pattern in the behavior of an agent". The truth of intentional explanation is necessarily tied to the coherence of the patterns we discover. This need not commit us to a coherence theory of truth - that is another story - but it does mean, since the coherence of patterns is a matter of degree, rejecting the idea that either a given reason explains an agent's behavior or it does not.

That claim should be rejected. Some behavior carries its explanation on its face, so to speak, but some does not, and definitive explanations of human behavior may not only be difficult to find, they may not exist. Allowing this is an advantage rather than a liability of the intentionalist approach.

VI. Conclusion: Implications for the Social Sciences

Developing the implications of this debate would require another paper, so I shall have to confine myself to some suggestions on its significance for the social sciences. I shall consider briefly its significance 1) for the controversy over methodological individualism; 2) for the issue of determinism; 3) for the role of 'empirical' versus 'interpretative' sociology; and 4) for the question of truth in the social sciences.

1. Many intentional explanations in the social sciences are couched in terms of the beliefs and desires, not of individuals but of social groups, such as labor unions, corporations, families, social classes, the military, and so on. This suggests a distinction between individual and social intentional descriptions. A description is individual if a sentence containing it entails that the description is true of individual persons, social if the description is true of social groups. 'Methodological individualism' is the thesis that all legitimate intentional explanations must be in terms of descriptions reducible to individual descriptions.

This paper has been neutral on this issue. Characterizing intentional descriptions as essentially related to verbs which express beliefs and desires does not beg the question in favor of methodological individualism, for beliefs and desires need not be ascribed only to individual persons - they can also be ascribed to social groups, and not only metaphorically.

We can speak of the reasons why a social group behaves in a certain way as easily as we can of an individual.

At the same time, methodological individualism will appear to be the only acceptable view for most causalists, for they require that beliefs and desires have causal powers, either directly (as in the covering law model) or indirectly (as in Davidson). But the idea that the beliefs and desires of social groups have causal powers not reducible to the causal powers of the beliefs and desires of individual persons assumes what Isaiah Berlin characterizes as belief in "invisible powers and dominions" conceived as "impersonal entities at once patterns and realities, in terms of which ... men and institutions must behave as they do." (Berlin 1954) This assumption, however, is both metaphysically dubious and morally suspect, and given a causalist view of intentional explanation, the only way to avoid it is to adopt methodological individualism.

An intentionalist approach, however, does not think of beliefs and desires in terms of their causal powers, so that in ascribing beliefs and desires to social groups, it is not ascribing irreducible causal powers to them. It need not, therefore, reject methodological individualism to avoid the assumption Berlin justly criticizes, for not thinking of beliefs and desires in terms of their causal powers, it can irreducibly ascribe beliefs and desires to social groups without being committed to the belief that these groups are entities which necessitate the behavior of their members.

2. The covering law approach inevitably raises the problems associated with a deterministic view of human behavior, for if intentional explanations require covering laws in intentional terms, then reasons will causally necessitate behavior. This makes moral responsibility for intentional behavior questionable, for behavior performed for reasons will be causally necessitated and behavior performed for no reasons will be completely unmotivated. The intentionalist approach avoids this issue, since, not regarding the connection between behavior and the reasons which explain it as being made by causal laws, it rejects the idea that reasons causally necessitate behavior.

Davidson's position is more complex. On the one hand, he agrees that the connection between explanatory reasons and behavior is not one of causal law; on the other hand, he makes it a necessary condition of this connection that the reasons cause the behavior, and he understands causality in terms of causal laws which are deterministic. He is, therefore, committed to determinism in the sense that all behavior performed for reasons has a (physical) description deterministically related to (physical) descriptions of its reasons. But this does not imply that reasons are deterministically connected with behavior in the sense of the covering law approach: we might, for example, be unable to predict the descriptions

under which an agent would behave even if we knew all her reasons and knew everything about her physical condition.

Davidson's position, therefore, also sidesteps determinism as far as problems of moral responsibility are concerned. It differs from the intentionalist approach in being committed to the existence of causal laws which govern all intentional behavior. The intentionalist approach leaves that question open - reasons may explain behavior whether or not the behavior is governed by causal laws in physical terms - and that ought to be an open question.

3. The reasons-causes debate bears on the controversy whether sociology should be 'empirical' or 'interpretative', though more by calling in question the terms of the controversy than by taking sides. Advocates of the covering law approach, for example, will lean toward the empirical by urging observation of behavior to establish the empirical generalizations they put at the center of the social sciences. But random generalizations will overwhelm the investigator, and hypotheses about significant generalizations will draw on the interpretative dimension of sociology.

Those who deny the covering law model will emphasize the centrality of discovering interpretative patterns in human behavior, but this is not possible apart from observation, for the behavior to be interpreted presents itself only to observation. The conceptual interdependence of reasons and behavior does not rule out the necessity of observation, both to discover what reasons people in fact have and what behavior they exhibit.

What I have emphasized is the error of the empiricist idea that intentional descriptions are explanatorily neutral, so that observations can be carried on in terms that have no explanatory import. To reject that is to undermine the covering law model. But to reject an empiricist conception of observation is not to reject observation nor is to reject the significance of empirical generalizations in establishing intentional explanations.

What should be rejected is the dichotomy between empirical and interpretative sociology. Interpretation without observation will slide from well-grounded conceptual investigation into mere speculation. Observation without interpretation will pile up statistical generalizations without explanatory value. Both are needed, and the intentionalist approach explains why.

4. I shall conclude with a brief comment about truth in the social sciences. The causalist view is that the truth of intentional explanation rests on the existence of the right kind of causal relations, causal relations which obtain independently of what the agent may think. I have given my reasons for rejecting this view.

At the other extreme is the view that the truth of intentional explanation depends on their being accepted by the agent: a true intentional explanation is one the agent would accept were he free of self-deception. But this view also seems to me mistaken. Any account of intentional explanation must allow that others may be in a better position to explain agents' behavior than the agents themselves. It is the job of the sociologist, writes Aron, "to render social or historical content more intelligible than it is in the experience of those who lived it." (1970, 207) This is consistent with my earlier claim (p. 33) that "terms in the social sciences must be tied to descriptions intelligible to the persons whose behavior is being explained". Social scientists, even if they accept the descriptions of the agents themselves, may be able to link up reasons and behavior better than the agents - they may discover more of the pattern in the behavior than the agents can. They may discover a great deal about the origins of the desires and beliefs which govern person's behavior, origins unknown to the agents. And they may create concepts or descriptions which, although tied to descriptions intelligible to the agents, uncover relationships between these descriptions quite unknown to the agents - relationships which may alter descriptions gradually over time until they lose their ties to the original, and the agents begin thinking of themselves in terms of these new descriptions, and new kinds of reasons will emerge and with them new kinds of behavior.

The social sciences do not, therefore, merely discover the truth about human behavior. They may also create it - and this is the deepest sense in which there may be no final truth of the matter about what accounts for an agent's behavior. "All Sociology", wrote Aron, "is a reconstruction that aspires to confer intelligibility on human existences which, like all human existences, are confused and obscure."¹⁴

Notes

- 1) This term was introduced by W.H. Dray in his Laws and Explanation in History (1957), which took an anti-causalist view of historical explanation, responding primarily to Patrick Gardiner's The Nature of Historical Explanation (1952).
- 2) Some animal behavior is also intentional, but I believe the concept of intentional animal behavior is derivative from the concept of intentional human behavior. A sharp line need not be drawn to make sense out of anything said in this paper.
- 3) The concept was introduced into the current discussion by Anscombe in her Intention (1957). She clarifies it in a helpful way in Under A Description (in her 1981).

- 4) Not all philosophers agree with this - for example, Goldman in A Theory of Human Action (1970). This book is an often cited defense of a causal account of intentional explanation.
- 5) Though their being intentional does not require that they actually be described. A cat can intentionally pounce on a mouse even if no one ever describes that incident. Still the cat's behavior is intentional under the description "pouncing on a mouse" but not under the description "frightening its master".
- 6) Compare Davidson's discussion (1980, 210 ff.). Although this characterization of intentional descriptions is compatible with a number of ways of understanding the nature of the intentional, it does rule out the behaviorist claim that intentional explanations should be excluded from the sciences. Quine has maintained this thesis (1960, 221) as has B.F. Skinner, who wants to exclude intentional explanations and descriptions from psychology. Skinner sometimes proposes simply to do without them; at other times he maintains that intentional descriptions can be translated into physical ones ('logical behaviorism'). My own point of view is that, while a number of the results of Skinnerian behaviorism are interesting and useful, as a general program it has not been a success. The translation thesis has been shown to be false, the proposal that we simply do without intentional descriptions has insurmountable objections (see Dennett 1980, esp. 13-14), and the program seems in full retreat in psychology.
- 7) The argument here is due to Davidson; see 1980, 221 ff. or 232 ff. For an interesting discussion of this issue see MacIntyre 1981, chap. 8.
- 8) This is not an uncontroversial claim but I shall accept it without argument. Anscombe has denied it in Causality and Determination (1981, 133-147).
- 9) See, for example, Mental Events or Causal Relations in Davidson 1980.
- 10) Putting on galoshes fulfills one's objective to keep one's feet dry, but they can be put on with the hands, stepped into, put on by someone else, etc; there is no unique set of bodily movements involved in the intentional behavior.
- 11) This, I believe is what Weber and his followers mean by "verstehen". Cf. Aron's discussion of the term (1970, 191): "In the case of human behavior, comprehension may be immediate ... I understand why the driver stops in front of a red light, I do not need to observe how often drivers regularly stop before red lights in order to understand why they do it. The subjective meaning of the action of others is often immediately comprehensive to me in daily life ... Human life presents an intrinsic intelligibility..."
- 12) (1980, 241). For the autonomy of psychology and related matters see other essays in this book, especially Mental Events, Psychology as Philosophy, and The Material Mind.

- 13) For causalist accounts which vary somewhat from those discussed here see, for example, Pears 1975; Tuomela 1977; Davis 1979.
- 14) I am grateful to my colleague, Edward Langerak, for reading this paper and helping me avoid some excesses.

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