in which struggles, or exploitative domination, are oriented to the distribution of *scarce resources* is not made clear.

Fourth, Habermas's appeal to psychoanalysis as an exemplar of theory and practice for the social sciences as a whole has a definite attractiveness, because it seems to embody each of the features to which he draws attention: the mediation of 'interpretation' by 'explanation', involving the aim of furthering the rational autonomy of the analysand through dialogue with the analyst. Yet there are obvious difficulties with this, which Habermas has acknowledged.[60] Psychoanalysis seems a rather poor model for critical theory, since the relation between analyst and patient is after all a markedly skewed and even authoritarian one; once more, however, Habermas uses only an 'idealized' version of it. More relevant here is that psychoanalytic therapy is an encounter between *individual persons*, entered into voluntarily, in which hermeneutic and nomological analysis appear only in the form of uncovering hidden *motives*. Important as this may be, it give us little clue as to how to connect the explication of human action with the structural properties of social institutions.

I do not want to claim that the discussion offered in the preceding sections is exhaustive: I wish to use it only as a backdrop against which to develop the format of the rest of this study. Among the important issues raised by the various traditions or schools of thought I have examined, but not adequately resolved by any one of them, are the following: problems of agency and the characterization of action; problems of communication and hermeneutic analysis; problems of the explanation of action within the framework of sociological method. The remainder of the book is concerned with their further explication.

2

Agency, Act-identifications and Communicative Intent

A great deal of writing by British and American philosophers, often strongly influenced by the work of the later Wittgenstein even where critical of it, has been concerned with the 'philosophy of action'. In spite of the voluminous character of this literature, its yield has been rather slight. As treated by Anglo-American authors, the 'philosophy of action' mostly shares the limitations of post-Wittgensteinian philosophy as a whole, even where the writers in question are not close disciples of Wittgenstein and substantially diverge from at least certain of his views: in particular a lack of concern with social structure, with institutional development and change. This gap is more than a legitimate division of labour between philosophers and social scientists; it is a weakness that rifts deep into philosophical analyses of the character of human agency. A more immediate reason, however, for the confusing nature of the recent literature in the philosophy of action is a failure to separate out various issues which need clearly to be distinguished from one another. These are: the formulation of *the concept of action or agency*; the connections between the concept of action and that of *intention or purpose*; the *characterization* (*identification*) *of types of act*; the significance of *reasons and motives* in relation to agency; and the nature of *communicative acts*.

Problems of agency

It is clear that laypeople, in the course of their day-to-day lives, constantly refer to, or make use of, notions of agency in some way or another – although it is important to emphasize that only in certain instances or contexts (for example, in courts of law) are they likely to be able to give, or be interested in giving, accounts of why or how they do so in abstract terms. People regularly decide about 'responsibility' for outcomes, and monitor their conduct accordingly, as well as basing their responses upon accounts/justifications/excuses offered by others. A different assessment of, and reaction to, a person's conduct is deemed appropriate where someone 'couldn't help' what happened from where he or she 'could help' it. A person who falls ill, for example, may successfully make claims upon others for unusual solicitude, and take time off from ordinary duties. Falling ill is recognized as something which cannot be helped (in Western culture at least, although not universally). But different responses are appropriate if the individual is adjudged to be 'not really ill', or merely 'feigning' illness in order to receive the sympathy of others or to escape from rightful responsibilities. That the boundary line between these is not clear-cut is shown by the ambiguous character of hypochondria, which may be regarded by some as something a person can help, and by others as something for which she or he is not to be held responsible. In so far as they regard 'hypochondria' as a medical syndrome, doctors may of course draw different dividing lines from those accepted by others. Such ambiguities or blurrings between conduct for which agents are deemed responsible, and hence as potentially open to being asked for justifications, and that recognized as 'out of their hands' sustain various forms of manoeuvre or deceit whereby people either seek to escape sanctions upon what they do, or conversely claim a particular outcome as an accomplishment of their own.

In legal theory, a person may be treated as responsible for an act, even though that individual did not realize what he or she was doing or mean to contravene any law. The person is regarded as culpable if it is adjudged that he or she 'should have known',

as a citizen, that what he or she did was illegal. Of course, it may happen that the person's ignorance allows him or her to escape sanction altogether, or procures a reduction in the individual punishment (where, for instance, he or she is held not to be in a position to know 'what any competent person should know' – if he or she is diagnosed as 'mentally ill', or, rather more uncertainly, is a visitor to the country, and cannot be expected to be familiar with its laws). In this respect, legal theory represents a formalization of everyday practice, where avowals that one is ignorant of a given consequence of one's doings will not necessarily allow escape from moral sanction: there are certain things that everyone is 'expected to know', or that everyone in a certain category of persons is 'expected to know'. One may be blamed for something one did unintentionally. In day-to-day life, we tend to follow the equation: 'agency' = 'moral responsibility' = 'context of moral justification'. It is easy to see, therefore, why some philosophers have supposed that the concept of agency must be defined in terms of that of moral justification, and hence of moral norms alone.

More commonly, however, philosophers have appealed to a more embracing notion of convention or rule, in seeking to distinguish 'actions' from 'movements'. Peters, for example, quotes the case of signing a contract. This, he says, is an instance of an action because it presupposes the existence of social norms; there is a logical gulf between such statements as 'she sealed the bargain', and 'her hand closed about the hand of another', since the first, describing an action, is framed in relation to a norm, whereas the second is not.[1] But this is not at all convincing. For in endeavouring to specify what agency is, we are presumably interested in differentiating not only statements which refer in some way to the actualization of a norm, like 'she signed the contract', but also ones like 'she wrote with the pen', from ones like 'her hand made movements across the paper'.

A theme of many philosophical writings is that 'movements' can, under certain circumstances – usually those of their connection to particular conventions or rules – 'count' or be 'redescribed' as actions; and, vice versa, that any action can be 'redescribed' as a movement or series of movements (save perhaps for actions which have the character of refraining). This

implies that there are two alternative modes or languages of description in terms of which the same conduct may be referred to. Certain readings of Wittgenstein's 'what is left over?' between his raising of his arm and his arm going up readily sanctify this sort of conclusion. But it is an erroneous view if it is taken to mean that there are two alternative, *and equally correct*, modes of describing behaviour. For to refer to an act as a 'movement' is to imply that it is mechanical, something that 'happens to' someone; and it is simply mistaken to describe a piece of behaviour in this way if it is something that someone 'makes happen', or *does*. One can see from this, I think, that we would do well to drop the contrast between actions and movements altogether: the proper unit of reference for an analysis of action has to be the *person*, the *acting self*. There is a further matter related to this. If we use the terminology of 'movements' we tend to suppose that descriptions couched in such a form represent an observation language in a way in which 'action descriptions' do not. That is to say, we tend to presume that, while movements can be directly observed and described, descriptions of actions involve further processes, inference or 'interpretation' (for example, 'interpreting the movement in the light of a rule'). But there really is no basis for such a presumption. We surely observe actions just as immediately as we observe ('involuntary') movements; each equally involves 'interpretation', if this is taken to mean that descriptions of what is observed have to be couched in expressions which presuppose (divergent) theoretical terms.

An extraordinarily large number of philosophers have supposed that the concept of action is essentially centred upon that of intention: that it must refer to 'purposive behaviour'. Such a presumption appears in two guises: (1) in regard of the concept of action generically; (2) in regard of the characterization of *types of act*. But neither view withstands scrutiny. As far as (1) is concerned, it is enough to point out that the notion of intention logically implies that of action, and therefore presupposes it, rather than vice versa. As an instance of the phenomenological theme of intentionality, one can say that an actor cannot 'intend'; she or he has to intend to do something. Moreover, of course, as everybody admits, there are many things that people do, that are brought about through their

agency, which they do not do intentionally. The case of act-identifications I shall discuss in more detail subsequently, and I shall just categorically assert here that the characterization of action-types is no more logically derivable from intention than is the notion of action as such. However, we must be careful to separate the question of the general character of agency from that of the characterization of types of act; this is pointed out by Schutz, but is ignored in most Anglo-Saxon writings in the philosophy of action. Action is a continuous flow of 'lived-through experience'; its categorization into discrete sectors or 'pieces' depends upon a reflexive process of attention of the actor, or the regard of another. Although in the first part of this chapter I have not bothered to follow a strict differentiation, henceforth I shall refer to identified 'elements' or 'segments' of actions as *acts*, distinguishing these from 'action' or 'agency', which I shall use to refer generically to the lived-through process of everyday conduct. The idea that there are 'basic actions', which crops up in various forms in the philosophical literature, is a mistake which derives from not observing a distinction between action and acts. To talk of 'raising one's arm' is as much a categorization of an act as to talk of 'performing a blessing'; here we see another residue of the misleading opposition of action with 'movement'.[2]

I shall define action or agency as *the stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world*. The notion of agency connects directly with the concept of *Praxis*, and when speaking of regularized types of act I shall talk of human *practices*, as an ongoing series of 'practical activities'. It is analytical to the concept of agency: (1) that a person 'could have acted otherwise' and (2) that the world as constituted by a stream of events-in-process independent of the agent does not hold out a predetermined future. The sense of 'could have done otherwise' is manifestly a difficult and controversial one, and aspects of it will be explored in various sections of this study. But it is evidently not on a par with the usual locutions, 'I had no choice', etc., and therefore with Durkheim's social 'constraint' or 'obligation'. A man who is obliged by the duties of his occupation to stay in his office on a sunny day is not in the same situation as one who is obliged to stay in his home by having broken both

his legs. The same goes for forbearance, which involves the contemplation of a possible course of action – that which is refrained from. But there is one significant difference. While an ongoing stream of activity may, and very frequently does, involve reflexive anticipation of future courses of action, this is not necessary to the concept of action itself. Forbearance does, however, presuppose cognitive awareness of possible courses of action: it is not the same as simply 'not doing' things one could have done.

Intentions and projects

I shall use 'intention' and 'purpose' as equivalent terms, although everyday English usage recognizes distinctions between them. 'Purpose' in such usage, unlike 'intention', is not a wholly intentional term in the phenomenological sense: we speak of a person acting 'with purpose', or 'purposefully'. 'Purpose' seems to be related to 'resolve' or 'determination' in a way in which intention is not, implying that we tend to use the former word to refer to longer-term ambitions, while intention is more confined to day-to-day practices.[3] I shall, however, use the term 'project' to refer to such ambitions (for example, that of writing a book).

It is mistaken to presume, as some philosophers have done, that only those types of act can be called purposive of which actors themselves tend to ask for explanations in their everyday lives. Thus it has sometimes been claimed that since we do not usually ask someone to say what her intention was, for example, in putting salt on her dinner, such behaviour cannot be said to be intentional. Yet we might very well be inclined to make such an enquiry were she sprinkling her meal with talcum powder; and someone from another culture, where the custom is unfamiliar, might ask what the purpose of putting salt on the meal is. If we are not inclined to ask about it, this is certainly not because it makes no sense to pose such a question, but because we already know, or assume that we know, what her purpose is. The most mundane forms of day-to-day conduct can quite properly be called intentional. It is important to stress this, since otherwise it might be tempting to suppose that routine or habitual conduct

cannot be purposive (as Weber tended to do). However, neither intentions nor projects should be equated with *consciously held-in-mind* orientations towards a goal – as if an actor must be aware of an aim he or she is seeking to attain. Most of the stream of action which constitutes everyday conduct is pre-reflective in this sense. Purpose does, however, presuppose 'knowledge'. I shall define as 'intentional' or 'purposive' *any act which the agent knows (believes) can be expected to manifest a particular quality or outcome, and in which this knowledge is made use of by the actor in order to produce this quality or outcome*. Note, however, that this presupposes a resolution of a problem to be approached later: that of the nature of act-identifications.

Some further points:

1 For action to be purposive, agents do not have to be capable of formulating the knowledge they apply as an abstract proposition, nor does it have to be the case that such 'knowledge' is valid.

2 Purpose is certainly not limited to human action. I do not think it useful or appropriate to hold that the concept can be stretched to cover any sort of homeostatic system. But much animal behaviour is purposive according to the conceptualization I have made.

3 Purpose cannot be adequately defined as some (for example, Toulmin) have suggested as dependent upon the application of 'learned procedures'.[4] While it is true that all purposive conduct, as I use the term, involves 'learned procedures' (knowledge that is applied to secure outcomes), there are also responses, such as conditioned reflexes, which are learned but not purposive.

The dislocation of purpose from agency can be shown in two ways: that agents may achieve their intentions, what they intended to do, but not through their agency; and that intentional acts characteristically bring about whole series of consequences, which are quite legitimately to be regarded as doings of the actors but were not actually intended by them. The first case is of little interest: it merely means that the intended outcome came about through some fortunate, unforeseen

happening, not through the intervention of the agent as such. The second, however, is of great significance to social theory. The 'unintended consequences of intended acts' may take various forms. One is where the intended occurrence is not achieved, and instead the behaviour of the actor produces another outcome, or outcomes, which may come about either because the 'knowledge' applied as a 'means' is erroneous or irrelevant to the outcome that is sought, or because he or she is mistaken about the circumstances which are taken to call for the use of that 'means'.

Another is where the achievement of what was intended also brings about a range of other consequences. A person who switches on the light to illuminate the room perhaps also alerts a prowler.[5] Alerting the prowler is something the person *did*, although not something she intended to do. The examples which predominate in the philosophical literature of what has also been called the 'accordion effect' of action are of this simple kind. Notice that, first, the 'conclusion' of the chain appears an arbitrary one (if 'alerting the prowler' was something the actor 'did', was 'causing the prowler to flee' also something she 'did'?), and that, second, such examples do not help to illuminate those aspects of unintended consequences of most relevance to social theory, that is, those involved in what I shall later call the *reproduction of structure*.

The 'accordion effect' of action is not the same as what might be called the *hierarchy of purposes*, by which I mean the interlocking or interweaving of different purposes or projects. An act may be relevant to a number of intentions which the actor has in undertaking it; a project embodies a whole range of intentional modes of activity. The writing of a sentence on a sheet of paper is an act which relates also directly to the project of writing a book.

The identification of acts

It is generally accepted by most students of human conduct that such conduct has 'meanings', or is 'meaningful', in a way in which occurrences in the natural world are not. But a crude formulation of this sort will not suffice. For it is evident that the *natural world* is meaningful to us – and not just those aspects of

nature which have been materially transformed and 'humanized'. We seek, and normally manage, to render the natural world 'intelligible' just as we do the social world – indeed, in Western culture the grounding of this intelligibility rests precisely upon the 'inanimate' character of nature, as determined by the operation of impersonal forces. It is often supposed that there is some kind of radical break between what is demanded in questions which ask for a clarification of the intelligibility of a happening and what is required in questions which ask for an explanatory, particularly a causal, account of that happening. And obviously there are differences. But they are not as clear-cut as one might be led to believe. To answer a question such as 'What was that sudden flash of light?' with the 'meaning' of the phenomenon – 'sheet lightning' – is at the same time to locate it within a scheme of likely aetiological accounts. The identification of the event as 'the occurrence of sheet lightning' takes for granted at least a rudimentary understanding of a relevant causal backdrop – one of a different sort to that presupposed by an answer like 'A message from the Great Spirit'. The frames of meaning whereby we make sense of events are never purely 'descriptive', but are closely interwoven with more thoroughgoing explanatory schemes, and the one cannot be cleanly prised loose from the other: the intelligibility of such descriptions depends upon these assumed links. The intelligibility of nature and natural events is accomplished by the construction and sustaining of frames of meaning from which the interpretative schemes whereby everyday experience is assimilated and 'handled' are derived. This is true of both laypeople and scientists; although in each case it would be a serious error to exaggerate the internal unity of such frames (cf. below, pp. 149ff). The understanding of descriptions generated within divergent frames of meaning – their *mediation* – in regard to the natural world is already a hermeneutic problem.

The difference between the social and natural world is that the latter does not constitute itself as 'meaningful': the meanings it has are produced by human beings in the course of their practical life, and as a consequence of their endeavours to understand or explain it for themselves. Social life – of which these endeavours are a part – on the other hand, is *produced* by its

component actors precisely in terms of their active constitution and reconstitution of frames of meaning whereby they organize their experience.[6] The conceptual schemes of the social sciences therefore express a *double hermeneutic*, relating both to entering and grasping the frames of meaning involved in the production of social life by lay actors, and to reconstituting these within the new frames of meaning involved in technical conceptual schemes. I shall deal with some of the complicated issues raised by this at various later points in the book. But it is worthwhile pointing out at this juncture that the double hermeneutic of the social sciences places them in a quite different position to that of natural science in one basic respect. The concepts and theories produced in the natural sciences quite regularly filter into lay discourse and become appropriated as elements of everyday frames of reference. But this is of no relevance, of course, to the world of nature itself; whereas the appropriation of technical concepts and theories invented by social scientists can turn them into constituting elements of that very 'subject-matter' they were coined to characterize, and by that token *alter* the context of their application. This relation of reciprocity between common sense and technical theory is a peculiar, but eminently interesting, feature of social investigation.

The problem of the characterization of action-types immediately comes up against the difficulties posed by the double hermeneutic, and hence I shall first of all concentrate mainly upon the identification of acts within everyday conceptual frames, turning later (in the last chapter) to the relation between these and the technical concepts of social science.

Queries which prompt identifications of the meaning of events in nature, whether among lay observers or among scientists, are not of a unitary kind: that which is being asked for in the question 'What is happening?' is relative to, first, the interests that stimulate the enquiry, and, second, the level or type of knowledge already possessed by the enquirer (cf. Wittgenstein on ostensive definitions). The object or event exists or happens; but the characterization of it demanded in a query (it is not important here whether this is a question asked of another or of oneself) is dependent upon the above two considerations. The called-for answer to the question 'What have you got there?'

may be, in some circumstances, 'A book'; in another context it may be 'The new book by X'; or 'An object of a certain and definite mass'. All might be true characterizations, but there is no single one which is simply correct, the others being mistaken: it all depends upon the circumstances in which the query comes about.

The same thing holds in regard to queries oriented to identifications of human acts rather than of natural occurrences or objects. No end of trouble has been brought about by the tendency of philosophers to presume that the question 'What is X doing?' has a unitary answer; or that all answers to it must have a similar logical form. (In this respect it is definitely not the same as the question 'What is X intending to do?') For it soon becomes apparent that there are many possible responses to such a question: someone may be said to be 'bringing down a metal implement on wood', 'chopping logs', 'doing his job', 'having fun', etc. Since all of these are act-identifications, the philosopher then either looks for what they all have in common, or seeks to show that only some are 'correct' or 'valid' act-identifications and the others are not.[7] Yet all of these characterizations can be quite correct descriptions of what is going on – although, depending upon the context in which the query is formulated, only certain of them will be 'appropriate'. Picking up *which* is precisely one of the subtle skills which lay actors master as a routine characteristic of their participation in, and active production of, everyday interaction (and which they are able to manipulate to produce humour, irony, etc.).

It is evident that assumptions about purposiveness are as deeply intertwined with our characterizations of acts as beliefs about the causal features of impersonal forces are with our characterizations of natural events. Nevertheless, only a fairly restricted class of act-identifications logically presupposes that the type of doing must be intentional – such as 'suicide'. Most acts do not have this feature, that they cannot be done unintentionally. Of course, enquiries into an agent's conduct which seek not merely to characterize it intelligibly, but to penetrate to the individual's 'reasons' or 'motives' for what he or she does, certainly have to involve deciding what he or she was intending to do.

The rationalization of action

Ordinary English usage tends to elide distinctions between 'what-' and 'why-questions'. One might, in the appropriate context, ask either 'Why did that light suddenly flash across the sky?' or 'What was that sudden flash of light across the sky?' as equivalent sorts of enquiry; the answer 'It was sheet lightning' could be an acceptable one in either case. Similarly, act-identifications often serve as adequate responses to why-questions referring to human conduct. A person unfamiliar with British military procedure, seeing a soldier stiffly raising his hand to his forehead, might ask either 'What is he doing?' or 'Why is he doing that?'; to be informed that this is the mode of saluting in the British army might be enough to clarify the puzzle – that is to say, supposing the person were already familiar enough with what 'armies', 'soldiers', etc., are.

Distinctions between 'purposes', 'reasons' and 'motives' are also fuzzy in everyday discourse; these terms are quite often interchangeable. 'What was her purpose in doing that?' can be equivalent to 'What was her reason for doing that?' or 'What was her motive for doing that?' Most of those who have written on the philosophy of action are interested in arriving at clearer differentiations between these concepts than those recognized in everyday use; but the distinctions they have made by no means coincide. None the less, some such distinctions are necessary; those I propose to set out here develop the definition of intention or purpose which I have already established. Purposive conduct involves the application of 'knowledge' so as to produce a particular outcome or series of outcomes. To be sure, this is knowledge which is *applied*. But specification of which of an agent's doings are intentional necessarily involves establishing what the parameters of the knowledge which she or he applies are. Anscombe expresses this by saying that what is intentional 'under one description' is not intentional under another. A man may know, for example, that he is sawing a plank, but not that he is sawing Smith's plank.[8] Since it is analytical to the concept of an intended act that the agent 'knows' what he is doing, he cannot in this circumstance be said intentionally to have sawn

Smith's plank, even though he definitely did saw the plank on purpose and the plank was indeed Smith's. This is so even if the actor had temporarily forgotten the plank belonged to Smith at the time he was sawing it, and remembered afterwards. Human beings can provide us, directly or inadvertently, through what they say, with more or less clear-cut boundaries between which of their doings may be correctly called purposive, and which not; it is much more difficult to know where to draw such boundaries in the case of animal behaviour, where what 'knowledge' the animal applies has to be inferred.

The terms 'intention' and 'purpose' as such are rather misleading, or can easily become so, since they imply that the flux of the actor's life-activity can be clearly cut up into strings of intended outcomes. Only in rare circumstances does a person have a clear-cut 'end' in mind which organizes the energies unequivocally in one direction – for example, when the individual is set on winning a competitive game which, while he or she is playing it, completely absorbs the attention. In this sense the adjectives 'intentional' and 'purposive' are more accurate than their noun-forms. The purposive content of everyday action consists *in the continual successful 'monitoring' by the actor of her or his own activity*; it is indicative of a casual mastery of the course of day-to-day events that actors normally take for granted. To enquire into an actor's purposes for what he or she does is to enquire into in what ways, or from what aspects, the person is monitoring his or her involvement in the course of events in question. One's life-activity does not consist of a strung-out series of discrete purposes and projects, but of a continuing stream of purposive activity in interaction with others and with the world of nature; a 'purposive act', like act-identifications more generally, is only grasped reflexively by the actor, or isolated conceptually by another agent. It is in these terms that what I have referred to as the 'hierarchy of purposes' has to be understood; human agents are able to monitor their activities as various concurrent flows, most of which (as Schutz says) are 'held in stasis' at any point in time, but which the actor is 'aware' of, in the sense that he or she can recall them to mind as relevant to a particular event or situation that crops up.

What holds for 'intentions' and 'purposes' also applies to

'reasons'; that is, it is really appropriate to speak of the *rationalization of action* against the background of the agents' reflexive monitoring of their conduct. To ask for the reason for an act is to cut conceptually into the flow of action, which no more involves a strung-out series of discrete 'reasons' than it does such a series of 'intentions'. I have argued that purposive conduct may be usefully thought of as the application of 'knowledge' to secure certain outcomes, events or qualities. To enquire into the rationalization of such conduct, I shall say, *is to enquire into* (1) *the logical connection between various forms of purposive act, or projects, and* (2) *the 'technical grounding' of the knowledge that is applied as 'means' in purposive acts to secure particular outcomes.*

In spite of the overlap between the notions of 'purpose' and 'reason' in everyday usage, it is useful to separate out, in sociological analysis, various layers of enquiry which lay actors make into each other's activities. Where an actor's behaviour, 'what he is doing', is puzzling, another will first of all seek to make his behaviour intelligible by characterizing it meaningfully. However, she may be satisfied that she knows what the other is doing, and wish to ask what his purpose was in doing it, or if he did what he did intentionally at all (which may alter her initial characterization of the act, particularly where she is concerned with the attribution of moral responsibility: then 'killing' may become 'murder'). But she may wish to penetrate still more deeply than this, to the 'grounding' of what the actor did, which means asking about the *logical integration and the empirical content* of his monitoring of his activities.

'Reasons' may hence be defined as grounded principles of action, which agents 'keep in touch with' as a routine element of their reflexive monitoring of their behaviour. Let me offer an example from Schutz (cf. above, pp. 34–5): 'putting up an umbrella' is a characterization of an act; a person's intention in so doing might be expressed as 'to keep dry'; and the reason given for so doing as the awareness that a suitably shaped object held above the head will keep the rain off. A 'principle of action' thus constitutes an explanation of why a particular 'means' is the 'correct', 'proper' or 'appropriate' one to achieve a given outcome, as specified by a particular act-identification.

Expectation of the rationalization of 'technical effectiveness' in the reflexive monitoring of conduct is complemented by the expectation of logical consistency within what I have previously referred to as 'hierarchies of purpose': this is an integral feature of the rationality of action, because what is an 'end' (purpose) in relation to one act-identification may also be a 'means' within a broader project. In everyday life, agents' reasons, whether proffered directly or inferred by others, are clearly adjudged as 'adequate' in relation to the accepted parameters of common sense – of what is conventionally accepted in particular defined contexts of action.

Are reasons causes? This is one of the most hotly debated issues in the philosophy of action. Those who say reasons are not causes argue that the relation between reason and agency is a 'conceptual' one. There is no way, they claim, of describing what reasons are without referring to the conduct which they rationalize; since there are not two independent sets of events or states – that is, 'reasons' and 'actions' – there cannot be any question of the existence of any sort of causal relation connecting them. Authors, on the other hand, who have wished to make a case for the causal potency of reasons have looked for some way to establish their separation, as events, from the behaviour to which they relate. The matter obviously depends in some substantial part upon the notion of causality; I think it would be true to say that most of the contributions to the debate have been made, explicitly or otherwise, within a framework of Humean causality. A detailed discussion of the logic of causal analysis is impossible to undertake within the confines of this study, and here I shall dogmatically assert the need for an account of *agent causality*, according to which causality does not presuppose 'laws' of invariant connection (if anything, the reverse is the case), but rather (1) the *necessary connection* between cause and effect, and (2) the idea of causal efficacy. That action is caused by an agent's reflexive monitoring of his or her intentions in relation to both wants and appreciation of the demands of the 'outer' world, supplies a sufficient explication of freedom of conduct for the needs of this study; I do not therefore oppose freedom to causality, but rather 'agent causality' to 'event causality'. 'Determinism', in the social

sciences, then refers to any theoretical scheme which reduces human action solely to 'event causality'.[9]

I have argued that talk of 'reasons' can be misleading, and that the rationalization of conduct is a basic feature of the monitoring intrinsic to the reflexive behaviour of human actors as purposive beings. Now in the conceptualization of these matters which I have developed, purposiveness is necessarily intentional, in the phenomenological sense – that is, 'logically' tied to descriptions of 'purposive acts' – but the rationalization of action is not, since this refers to the principled grounding of such acts. The rationalization of conduct expresses the causal anchoring of agency in tying purposes to the conditions of their realization within the ongoing *Praxis* of day-to-day life. Rather than simply saying reasons are, or may be, causes, it is more accurate to say that rationalization is the causal expression of the grounding of the purposiveness of the agent in *self-knowledge* and in *knowledge of the social and material worlds* which are the environment of the acting self.

I shall use 'motivation' to refer to the *wants* which prompt action. The connection of motivation to the affective elements of personality is a direct one, and is recognized in everyday usage; motives often have 'names' – fear, jealousy, vanity, etc. – and these are at the same time commonly regarded as the 'names' of emotions. Everything I have dealt with so far is 'accessible' to the *awareness* of the actor: not in the sense that she or he can formulate theoretically how she or he does what she or he does, but in the sense that, given that she or he is not dissimulating, her or his testimony as to the purpose and reasons for her or his conduct is the most important, if not necessarily conclusive, source of evidence about it. This does not hold in the case of motivation. As I shall use the term, it covers both instances where actors are aware of their wants, and also those where their behaviour is influenced by sources not accessible to their consciousness; since Freud, we have to reckon with the likelihood that the revealing of these sources may be actively resisted by the agent. The notion of *interest* stands in close relation to that of motive; 'interests' can be simply defined as any outcomes or events that facilitate the fufilment of agents' wants. There are no interests without wants: but since people are not necessarily

aware of their motives for acting in a particular way, they are not necessarily aware of what, in any given situation, their interests are either. Neither, of course, do individuals inevitably act in accordance with their interests. Further, it would be wrong to suppose that intentions are always convergent with wants: a person may intend to do, and do, things which he or she does not want to do; and may want things that he or she does not intend to instigate any course of action to attain.[10]

Meaning and communicative intent

So far, I have been concerned only with problems of the 'meaning' of doings. When, in ordinary English usage, we refer to purposiveness we often talk about what a person 'means to do'; just as, in reference to utterances, we talk about what he or she 'means to say'. From this it would seem to be but a short step to the proposition, or the assumption, that to 'mean something' in doing is the same as to 'mean something' in saying. Here Austin's notions of illocutionary acts and illocutionary forces have done perhaps as much harm as good. Austin was struck by the fact that to say something is not always simply to state something. The utterance, 'With this ring I thee wed', is not a description of an action, but the very action (of marrying) itself. If, in such instances, to mean something in saying is *ipso facto* to mean something in doing, it would seem as though there is a single and sovereign form of meaning which does not necessitate making any differentiation between doing something and saying something. But this is not so. For virtually all utterances, with the exception of involuntary exclamations, cries of pain or ecstasy, have a communicative character. Some sorts of verbal communication, including ritual utterances such as 'With this ring I thee wed', are proclamatory in form, but this does not affect the point. In such cases the utterance is both a 'meaningful act' in itself, and is at the same time a mode of communicating a message or a meaning to others: the meaning in this case being perhaps something of the order 'the union of marriage is hereby sealed and made binding', as understood by the marital pair and others present on the scene.

The meaning of utterances as 'communicative acts' (if they have one) can thus always in principle be distinguished from the meaning of action, or the identification of action as particular acts. A communicative act is one in which an actor's purpose, or one of an actor's purposes, is linked to the achievement of passing on information to others. Such 'information', of course, does not have to be solely of a propositional sort, but can be comprised within an attempt to persuade or influence others to respond in a particular way. Now just as utterance may be both an act – something which is 'done' – and a 'communicative act', so something which is 'done' may also have communicative intent. The efforts that actors make to create specific sorts of impressions on others from the cues which they engineer their actions to 'give off' are well analysed in the writings of Erving Goffman, who is interested in comparing and contrasting such forms of communication with those conveyed in utterances. But again this does not detract from the point: chopping wood, and many other forms of action, are not communicative acts in this sense. There is, in sum, a difference between making sense of what someone is doing when she or he is doing something (including making ritual utterances in marriage ceremonies), and making sense of how others make sense of what she or he says or does in efforts at communication. I have noted that when actors or social scientists ask why-questions about actions, they may be asking either 'what' the action is, or for an explanation of why the actor should be inclined to conduct herself or himself in a particular way. We may ask such why-questions about utterances but when we want to know why a man said something in particular, rather than why he did something in particular, we are asking about his *communicative intent*. We may be asking what he meant, the first type of why-question; or we may be asking something such as 'What impelled him to say that to me in a situation when he knew it would embarrass me?'

Some, although only some, aspects of communicative intent in utterances have been explored by Strawson, Grice, Searle and others. The attempt to break away from older theories of meaning, represented by Wittgenstein's later studies, and by Austin's concentration on the instrumental uses of words, has undoubtedly had some welcome consequences. There is an obvious

convergence between recent work in the philosophy of language and the ideas developed by Chomsky and his followers on transformational grammars. Both see language-use as a skilled and creative performance. But in some philosophical writings the reaction against the assumption that all utterances have some form of propositional content has led to an equally exaggerated emphasis in which 'meaning' comes to be regarded as exhausted by communicative intent.

In concluding this section, I want now to show that the work of the authors mentioned at the beginning of the previous paragraph leads us back to considerations given great prominence by Schutz and Garfinkel: the role of 'common-sense understandings', or what I shall later refer to as taken-for-granted *mutual knowledge*, in human social interaction. The most influential analysis of meaning as communicative intent ('non-natural meaning') is that given by Grice. In his original formulation, Grice put forward the view that the statement that an actor S 'meant so-and-so by X' is usually expressible as 'S intended the utterance X to produce an effect upon another or others by means of their recognizing this to be his intention'. But this will not do as it stands, he later pointed out, because it may include cases which would not be examples of (non-natural) meaning. A person may discover that whenever he or she makes a certain sort of exclamation another collapses in agony, and once having made the discovery, intentionally repeats the effect; if, however, when the first person makes the exclamation, the other collapses, having recognized the exclamation, and with it the intention, we should not want to say that the exclamation 'meant' something. Thus Grice reaches the conclusion that the effect which S intends to produce 'must be something which in some sense is within the control of the audience, or that in some sense of "reason" the recognition of the intention behind X is for the audience a reason and not merely a cause'.[11]

Various ambiguities and difficulties have been exposed in this account by critics. One of these is that it seems to lead to an infinite regress, in which what S_1 intends to produce as an effect upon S_2 depends upon S_1 intending S_2 to recognize his or her intention to get S_1 to recognize his or her intention to get S_2 to recognize his or her intention . . . In his later discussion, Grice

claims that the possibility of such a regress creates no particular problems, since in any actual situation the refusal, or incapacity, of an actor to proceed very far along the line of regressive knowledge of intentions will impose practical limits.[12] But this is not very satisfactory, since the problem of regress is a logical one; the regress can only be escaped, I think, by introducing an element that does not directly figure in Grice's own discussions. This element is precisely that of the 'common-sense understandings' possessed by actors within shared cultural milieux – or, to adopt a different terminology, what one philosopher has called 'mutual knowledge'. (He says in fact that the phenomenon has no accepted name, and that hence he has to coin one.)[13] There are many things that an actor will assume or take for granted that any other competent agent will know when he addresses an utterance to her, and he will also take for granted that the other knows that he assumes this. This does not, I believe, introduce another infinite regress of 'knowing that the other knows that one knows that the other knows . . .'. The infinite regress of 'knowing that the other knows one knows . . .' threatens only in strategic circumstances, such as a poker game, in which the people involved are trying to out-manoeuvre or outguess one another: and here it is a practical problem for the actors, rather than a logical one to puzzle the philosopher or social scientist. The 'common-sense understanding' or mutual knowledge relevant to the theory of communicative intent involves, first, 'what any competent actor can be expected to know (believe)' about the properties of competent actors, including both herself or himself and others, and second, that the particular situation in which the actor is at a given time, and the other or others to whom an utterance is addressed, together comprise examples of a specific type of circumstance to which the attribution of definite forms of competence is therefore appropriate.

The view has been strongly urged, by Grice and others, that communicative intent is the fundamental form of 'meaning', in the sense that giving a satisfactory account of it will allow us to understand the (conventional) meanings of utterance types. In other words, 'S-meaning' (what an actor means in making an utterance) is the key to explicating 'X-meaning' (what a specific mark or symbol means).[14] I want to deny that this is

so. 'X-meaning' is both sociologically and logically prior to 'S-meaning'. Sociologically prior, because the framework of symbolic capacities necessary to the very existence of most human purposes, as these are acted upon by any individual person, presupposes the existence of a linguistic structure which mediates cultural forms. Logically prior, because any account which begins from 'S-meaning' cannot explain the origin of 'common-sense understandings' or mutual knowledge, but must assume them as givens. This can be made clear by looking at certain philosophical writings that mesh fairly closely with and have similar shortcomings to, Grice's theory of meaning.[15]

One such account, trimmed to its essentials, runs as follows. The meaning of a word in a linguistic community depends upon the norms or conventions which prevail in that community, to the effect that 'the word is conventionally accepted to mean *p*'. A convention can be understood as a resolution of a co-ordination problem, as the latter is defined in game-theory. In a co-ordination problem, two or more people have a shared end that they wish to bring about, to do which each has to select from a series of alternative, mutually exclusive means. The means selected have no significance in themselves, save that, combined with those chosen by the other or others, they serve to bring about what is mutually desired; the mutual responses of the actors are in equilibrium when there is an equivalence of outcomes, regardless of *what* means are used. Thus suppose two groups of individuals, one of whom is used to driving on the left, the other of whom is accustomed to driving on the right, come together to form a community in a new territory. The co-ordination problem is that of achieving the outcome that everyone drives on the same side of the road. There are two sets of equilibria that represent successful outcomes: where everyone drives on the right-hand side of the road, and where everyone drives on the left, and in terms of the initial problem as a problem of the co-ordination of actions, each is equally 'successful'. The significance of this is that it seems to indicate how communicative intent might be tied in with convention. For the actors involved in a co-ordination problem – at least, in so far as they conduct themselves 'rationally' – will all act in a way that they expect the others will expect that they will act.

But this view, while having a certain formal symmetry that is not unattractive, is misleading as an account of convention in general and as a theory of conventional aspects of meaning in particular. It is sociologically lacking, and I think logically untenable – in the latter respect in so far, at least, as it is focused on meaning conventions. In the first place, it seems evident that some sorts of norm or convention do not involve co-ordination problems at all. It is conventional in our culture, for example, for women to wear skirts and for men not to do so; but co-ordination problems are only associated with conventional styles of dress with regard to such matters in so far as, say, the fact that women now increasingly wear trousers rather than skirts creates a difficulty in telling the sexes apart, so that the achievement of mutually desired outcomes in sexual relationships may be compromised! More important, even in those conventions which might be said to involve co-ordination problems, the aims and expectations of those who are party to the conventions are characteristically defined *by* acceptance of the convention, rather than the convention being reached as an outcome of them. Co-ordination problems, as problems for *actors* (rather than for the social-scientific observer attempting to understand how the co-ordination of the actions of members is concretely realized), arise only in the circumstances I have already noted: when people are trying either to guess or to out-guess what others are going to do, having at their disposal the information that others are also trying to do the same with regard to their own likely actions. But in most circumstances in social life, actors do not (consciously) have to do this, in large part precisely *because* of the existence of conventions in terms of which 'appropriate' modes of response are taken for granted; this applies to norms as a whole, but with particular force to meaning conventions. When a person says something to another person, her or his aim is not that of co-ordinating her or his action to those of others, but of communicating with the other in some way, by the use *of* conventional symbols.

In this chapter, I have set out three main arguments. First, that neither the concept of action nor that of act-identification logically has anything to do with intentions; second, that the

significance of 'reasons' in human conduct can best be understood as the 'theoretical aspect' of the reflexive monitoring of conduct which lay actors expect each other to sustain, so that if asked why he or she acted as he or she did, an actor is able to offer a principled explanation of the act; third, that the communication of meaning in interaction poses problems in some part separable from those concerning the identification of meaning in non-communicative acts.

In the following two chapters I shall be concerned to use and build upon the conclusions I have reached in this, which offer a preparatory basis for a reconstruction of the logic of social-scientific method. It is only preparatory because, as it stands, what I have said so far does not begin to deal with what, in my preceding critical discussion, I have isolated as some of the basic difficulties of 'interpretative sociology' – the failure to cope with problems of institutional organization, power and struggle as integral features of social life. In the next chapter, then, I shall attempt to integrate some of the contributions made by the various schools of thought previously discussed within the outlines of a theoretical scheme that is able satisfactorily to encompass these problems. A necessary preliminary to this, however, is a brief examination of why such a reconciliation is not already to be found in those established traditions of social theory which place issues of institutional analysis in the forefront: the 'orthodox academic sociology' of Durkheim and Parsons, and the counter-tradition originating in the writings of Marx. To this question I shall now turn.