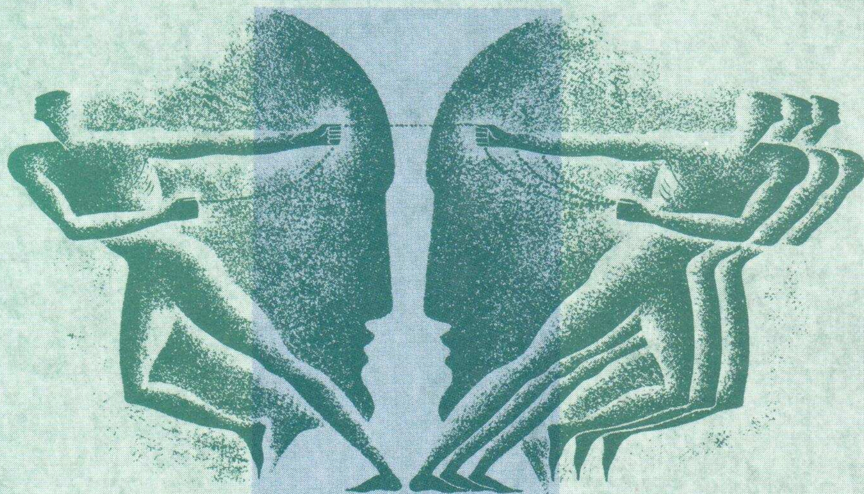
IDEOLOGICAL DILEMMAS

A Social Psychology of Everyday Thinking



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1
Introduction

A teacher is giving a lesson on the way that a pendulum swings. A young girl is talking about a fight at a local dance. After a heart attack a man is pondering how to adjust to the limitations of his life. In a hospital for children a nurse asks a colleague for a piece of equipment. All these are mundane events, which seem to have little connection except for their mundaneness. Perhaps brief film of such scenes might be used to introduce the sort of serious television programme which likes to boast that it includes all human life. Beneath the programme's title, and in time to its theme music, the image will dart from scene to scene in a way that stresses the variety of the filmed episodes. The evocation of the scenes at the start of a social science book is a different matter. Far from announcing the possibility that all human life might make a guest appearance, it suggests that a single theoretical thread will pull the episodes along in a common intellectual direction.

The single thread is provided by the notion of ideological dilemmas. The episodes will feature as later chapters explore the dilemmatic aspects of everyday life, and ideologically dilemmatic themes will be explored in such mundane events. To say that this book is concerned with the way that ideological dilemmas appear in everyday thinking may be not particularly meaningful. The problem is not merely that the notion of 'ideological dilemmas' may be an unfamiliar one, which will need to be explained at length. There is also the problem that approaches in the social sciences, especially those which might introduce unfamiliar concepts, are often best understood, not so much in their own terms, but in relation to those notions which they seek to supplant. Therefore, it might be helpful to identify briefly at the outset the rival approaches to the study of social life and the claims of the dilemmatic approach.

In attacking the dominant theoretical trends of contemporary social psychology, Serge Moscovici (1984a) has argued that one of the prime tasks of contemporary social science is to study 'the thinking society'. The label 'the thinking society' is a deliberately provocative one, for in a literal sense societies do not think; only individuals do. However, Moscovici was drawing critical attention to those psychological theories of thinking which ignore the social context of thought, or the way that society provides the basis for thinking. Similarly he was criticizing those sociological theories which ignore the thinking of individuals. Our approach also stresses the importance of studying the 'thinking society', by exploring the way that thinking takes places through the dilemmatic aspects of

ideology. In outlining these notions, we too will be criticizing those psychological and sociological approaches which overlook the thinking society.

On the one hand, dominant trends in cognitive psychology, including what is called cognitive social psychology, have studied in detail the way that individuals process information, draw inferences and categorize the social world. By and large, cognitive psychologists have looked at these processes in terms of the psychology of the individual. If the functions of categorization or inference are discussed, they will be in relation to tasks which these processes enable the individual to perform. It is as if the individual is an isolated Robinson Crusoe, who has been yanked out of the flow of historical time to be placed amongst the formidable equipment of the psychology laboratory. What tends to be overlooked is the social nature and content of thought. Cognitive psychologists have been notably remiss in examining how the processes of cultural and ideological history flow through the minds of their laboratory subjects.

However, it is not merely a matter of turning to experts in the study of ideology in order to find the 'thinking society'. Theorists of ideology typically do not ignore the processes of history, nor do they ignore how these processes create the norms and beliefs of particular societies. However, they often ignore the thinking of individuals, for individuals are often seen as the blinded bearers of a received ideological tradition. All the individual can do is to act according to these received constraints and to pass them on to the next generation. In this respect, ideology is seen as something which closes the mind and switches off thought.

In stressing the dilemmatic aspects of ideology, we hope to oppose the implications of both cognitive and ideological theory, which ignore the social nature of thinking. In contrast to the cognitive psychologists, we stress the *ideological* nature of thought; in contrast to theorists of ideology, we stress the *thoughtful* nature of ideology. This emphasis is achieved by stressing the dilemmatic aspects of ideology and of thinking generally. Ideology is not seen as a complete, unified system of beliefs which tells the individual how to react, feel and think. Instead ideology, and indeed common sense, are seen to comprise contrary themes. Without contrary themes, individuals could neither puzzle over their social worlds nor experience dilemmas. And without this, so much thought would be impossible.

These notions, and the critique of cognitive psychology and contemporary theories of ideology, are outlined in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 discusses the notion of dilemmas in relation to the contrary themes of common sense. The existence of contrary maxims, or opposing pieces of folk wisdom, illustrates that common sense possesses a dilemmatic nature. These contrary themes are the preconditions for those dilemmas in which people are faced with difficult decisions. It is not our intention

to explore how people cope with these situations and how decisions are made. Our concern is more with the dilemmatic preconditions, in other words with those contrary themes which under normal circumstances are reflected in people's thoughts. In fact, the existence of the contrary themes ensures that there is a need for thought. Individuals are not to be seen as being fully preprogrammed by neatly systematized plans of action, which are awaiting the appropriate triggering stimulus and which obviate the need for all deliberation. Rather, the contrary themes enable people to discuss and puzzle over their everyday life, and in this respect the rhetorical skills of argument are closely linked to the skills of thinking (Billig, 1987).

In chapter 3 the ideological nature of dilemmas is discussed. We are concerned not merely with the dilemmatic aspects of common sense in general, but particularly with those dilemmatic aspects which have ideological roots. Here the historical creation of thinking is emphasized. Our concepts and our ideas reflect our own times, and they also reflect the history which has produced these current moments. Of particular interest for a study of contemporary ideology is the ideology of liberalism. Not only have concepts of liberalism been transmitted into everyday thinking, but they are reproduced dilemmatically. Thus liberalism contains opposing themes, whose opposition enables endless debate and argument. If chapter 2 is aimed primarily at the cognitive psychologists who ignore the dilemmatic aspects of thinking, chapter 3 criticizes those sociological theorists who ignore the dilemmatic aspects of ideology. In consequence, passing criticisms will be made of such figures as Karl Mannheim and Louis Althusser, although some of the theoretical implications of this critique will be taken up again and developed in the final chapter of the the book.

Each of chapters 4 to 8 examines the ideas of the dilemmatic approach in relation to a particular empirical issue. A preliminary word of explanation needs to said about these chapters. They are all based upon research projects which were started and conducted in isolation from each other and from the development of the dilemmatic approach. The authors, who formed the Loughborough Discourse and Rhetoric Group, had been engaged upon these individual projects before they came together to work out common themes. Having discussed issues of theory which interested us, we decided to discover whether we could apply our theoretical notions to our particular projects. In one sense this constitutes a demanding test of theoretical ideas. It is the customary practice to design research projects in order to reveal the sorts of phenomena which the theorist believes to exist. Thus one might have expected us to design projects which would specifically reveal the dilemmatic aspects of social life; having found what we were searching for, we might then declare the theories proved. Theoretical opponents might then have the task of displaying those aspects of social reality which fail to contain the required dilemmatic characteristics.

However, in our case the projects came before the formulation of the dilemmatic approach. Therefore we set ourselves the task of going back to our data (or more precisely, going back to our transcripts) to see whether we could find ideologically dilemmatic elements. In each case, these elements were not difficult to find. Chapters 4 to 8 give examples of these interpretations. None of these chapters is a research report in the true sense of the term. All of the projects have been reported more fully elsewhere. Nor do the chapters stick closely to the details of the individual projects. Rather they draw upon examples from the projects in order to illustrate wider themes, as the dilemmatic perspective is used to illustrate some of the complexities of different aspects of modern life. Unlike the television producer, we can make no claim to have included all of modern life. Moreover, we must be aware of the arbitrary manner in which the substantive topics were selected for the book, or rather were thrust upon the book. We cannot say that the contrary themes of liberal ideology underwrite all aspects of modern life. What we can claim, however, is that ideological themes of a dilemmatic character can be found in the conversations, routines and interviews which we were studying. In all of these, we found more ideological influence than might have been expected by cognitive psychologists and more dilemmatic perplexity than might have been predicted by theorists of ideology.

The research projects, which the substantive chapters draw upon, share the characteristic of being based primarily on qualitative investigations. We shall not be citing the statistical analyses of vast surveys, or presenting tables of numerical data. We are interested in interpreting remarks and actions, often bringing to the surface counter-meanings. In this respect, our approach shares features with other qualitative approaches to social psychological investigations. In common with the approach of discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) we seek to elucidate social psychological processes through an understanding of discourse. In so doing, however, we do not seek to separate discourse from social action. Similarly the goal of understanding 'the thinking society' is one which is specifically adopted by the social representation approach of Moscovici (1984a and 1984b). The social representation theorists have identified the representation of scientific concepts in everyday discourse as a major issue to be studied by social psychologists (Moscovici, 1976; Jodelet, 1984). The general issue of the way that intellectual ideas can be translated into commonsensical ones appears in our research projects. They reveal how the philosophical concepts of liberalism appear in everyday contemporary discourse, often with complex and contrary meanings, so that liberalism, as experience, has a dilemmatic rather than systematized form. In fact, our approach can be seen as suggesting an extension to the social representation approach by stressing the role of argumentation in the thinking society (Billig, 1988a and in press).

In chapter 4 these notions are applied to the issue of education. The contrary themes of equality and authority are identified in the thinking of teachers. Moreover, the dilemmatic contrast between these themes is represented in the classroom practices of the teachers. Close observation of the ways in which teachers speak and behave in the classroom reveals the balancing of democratic and authoritarian elements, as teachers attempt simultaneously to impart knowledge as well as elicit it from the pupils. In all this, teaching is not itself a neutral act by which an ideology is transmitted, often by paid employees of the state. The act of teaching is itself a representation of the ideology and it is a dilemmatic representation. The teachers are aware of the dilemmatic themes in their discourse on education, for they themselves discuss the nature of education and the nature of their own role.

The same basic dilemma between equality and authority appears in chapter 5, which concentrates upon the behaviour of experts. In particular, examples are taken from a research project that looked at a child development unit attached to a hospital. The members of the unit had followed egalitarian principles in seeking to reduce the authoritarianism of rank in the position of the various qualified experts. In this, they were following the traditions of liberal ideology. However, as experts they were fulfilling non-egalitarian roles, and in the modern role of the expert we find ambivalences between democratic egalitarianism and authoritarian expertise. Again these ambivalences provide matters of debate and thought for the experts themselves, who are aware of the dilemmas of the position.

Chapter 6 focuses upon issues of health and illness, and in particular upon a group of men who, having suffered heart attacks, have undergone major heart surgery. These men are forced to contemplate their lives and the dialectic of being simultaneously a supposedly free agent but also a physical body, constrained by laws of material necessity. However, the dialectic between health and illness is not a simple one, for each concept implies the existence of the other. Moreover, these concepts are not ideologically neutral, for they draw upon conflicting themes of Enlightenment philosophy, which simultaneously stress the reality of free individual will and the necessity of bodily materialism. These contrary themes recur in ordinary discourse, and especially in the discourse of these men forced to confront the dilemmas of their own situation.

Again contrary themes from the Enlightenment surface in chapter 7, on prejudice and tolerance. The very notion of 'prejudice' is an Enlightenment concept and is one that has passed into everyday discourse. The dialectic of prejudice is not a simple one, but includes contrary themes. We find the concept of prejudice being used in a way that simultaneously claims a rationality for the speaker, by criticizing the irrational prejudices of others, and that permits the expression of discriminatory views against other groups. Instances are given of how adolescents who claim to support

a racist political party use the discourse of the Enlightenment, which overtly appears to criticize the irrationalism of racism. However, the ambiguities and dilemmas are built deeply into the discourse of the Enlightenment. As previously, this analysis relies on an interpretive exercise to uncover the different and contrary themes in this dialectic of prejudice.

Chapter 8 – the final substantive chapter – concerns the discourse of gender. The liberal heritage of individualism is expressed in this discourse, as it is clear that all individuals are different, and thus women as individuals should be considered individually. Yet on the other hand there is a reality to the gender categorization, for there are similarities of identity and perceived common fate between women. In consequence, the question is raised of how far one can generalize across individuals. This question, and the answers offered, possess ideological roots, for the construction of gender categories can hardly be considered in the abstract, apart from the history of ideology and social power. Also in the discourse of gender there is the underlying ideological theme of competition, as speakers make their distinctions and categorizations in order to discuss who is better or superior to whom. In this respect, the dialectic between egalitarianism and authoritarianism again appears.

The different projects have yielded different sorts of data. Some have been based upon recordings of natural interaction, in which the observer has not intruded. Others have been based upon recorded in-depth interviews. Then there are recorded discussions, which may or may not have included the academic observer. Despite the methodological differences, and despite the differences in the original theoretical preoccupations of the research projects, some common themes emerge. It has been possible to see the reproduction of the great problems of philosophy, and in particular of liberal philosophy, in everyday discourse. This philosophy is reproduced neither as a series of philosophical solutions, nor as singular positions that people consistently occupy, but as dilemmas. Even when solutions are found by individuals – at least solutions for the everyday reproduction of the underlying dilemma – other problems emerge as the ideologically constituted dilemma expresses itself in other forms. In this way, the ideology is not reproduced as a closed system for talking about the world. Instead it is reproduced as an incomplete set of contrary themes, which continually give rise to discussion, argumentation and dilemmas.

It is hoped that this perspective bridges the gap between the individualism of much contemporary psychological theorizing about thinking and the social level of analysis contained in many theories of ideology. By stressing the dilemmatic and rhetorical nature of thinking, we see thinking as inherently social. In fact, thinking is frequently a form of dialogue within the individual (Billig, 1987). Yet the content of the dialogue has historical and ideological roots, for the concepts involved, and their meanings, are constructed through the history of social dialogue and debate. In this sense

the social pattern of ideology is mapped on to individual consciousness. Similarly, because of its dilemmatic nature, ideology cannot preclude thought and debate. Thus, the paradox of the term 'the thinking society' describes the reality that our dilemmas of ideology are social dilemmas and that our ideology cannot but produce dilemmas to think about.

2
The Nature of Dilemmas

This chapter will discuss what is meant by the concept of 'the dilemmatic aspects of thinking'. In so doing, it will introduce a number of key themes in our approach, whilst offering criticisms of other social psychological approaches to the study of dilemmas. In social psychology, and indeed in other social sciences, it is customary to offer definitions for every official-sounding concept used and to offer these definitions at the earliest possible stage of a discussion. Thus, the reader might be expecting at this point a precisely worded sentence, explicating what we mean by 'the dilemmatic aspects of thinking'. Some readers might even be discomforted by the absence of such a definition, which might be seen as the only safe map reference on a journey through a terrain of dangerously shifting word meanings. However, it can be argued that a concept is best explicated in the course of a theoretical discussion about its possible uses, the sorts of phenomena which it might describe, and why competing concepts may be unsatisfactory. The simple map reference, for all its precision, may be less helpful than a discursive travelogue which offers reasons why one path and not another can be recommended and what views can be expected by travellers along the way.

Nevertheless, a general warning can be offered about the concept of 'the dilemmatic aspects of thinking'. Just as a guidebook might advise tourists not to expect glorious views on a forest walk or ancient archaeological ruins on a directed stroll around Manhattan, so a warning can be given about the present chapter. There will be no detailed analysis of the psychology of decision-making. The dilemmatic aspects of thinking do not refer to the agonized mental states of the decision-maker, who is faced with a difficult choice. Our concern is not with decision-making as such, but with the general preconditions of decision-making. In addition, the focus is upon social preconditions, as revealed in common sense or in ideology. As a consequence, attention is directed not to the individual thinker as such, but to those aspects of socially shared beliefs which give rise to the dilemmatic thinking of individuals. The discussion will start by considering how social psychologists have typically studied dilemmas. Because social psychologists have often restricted their attention to choice-making, they have overlooked the dilemmatic aspects of thinking. It will be suggested that common sense contains contrary themes, and these enable the emergence of social dilemmas. In this sense, common sense is dilemmatic. More than this, the contrary themes of common sense represent the materials through which people can argue and think about their lives, for

people need to possess contrary themes if they are to think and argue. Therefore a consideration of these socially produced, dilemmatic aspects has implications for the psychological study of thinking.

Dilemmas and choices

Most social psychologists who have studied the topic of dilemmas have seen dilemmas in terms of individuals making difficult decisions. We will argue that this narrow focus has prevented social psychologists from appreciating the dilemmatic quality of much everyday thinking, which can be revealed whether or not individuals are actually faced with decisions to be made. Although our use of 'dilemmatic' is not confined to decision-making as such, it must be conceded that the term is derived from the narrower focus of choice. Semantically it could hardly be otherwise, because in normal speech dilemmas are associated with awkward decisions. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a dilemma involves 'a choice between two (or, *loosely*, several) alternatives which are or appear equally unfavourable' (emphasis in original). A strict interpretation of this definition might imply that the choice is hardly a choice at all, for whatever the decision-maker decides, the outcome will be equally appalling. The lack of manoeuvrability is caught by the Latin proverb 'In front the precipice, behind the wolf.' However, the difficulty of a dilemma may not be confined to the inevitable unfavourability of the outcome. Aristotle in *Rhetoric* noted that dilemmas could often be turned around. He cited the example of the priestess warning her son against speaking in public: 'If you speak justly, you will be hated by men; if unjustly, by the gods' (II, xxiii, 15). The problem, according to Aristotle, could have been posed in positive terms: if just words are spoken the gods will love the speaker, whilst men will love him for his unjust speeches. Whether the choice is phrased in terms of the unfavourable outcome, or positively in terms of being loved, the choice is just as difficult. Either way, the dilemma still remains a dilemma.

The obvious psychological interest in dilemmas is to analyse the psychological state of the decision-maker. Others have described the troubled mind of the decision-maker, haunted by doubt and wishing to creep away from all the problems set by gods and man (Janis and Mann, 1977). Our concern, by contrast, is to examine the social preconditions for dilemmas in order to show how ordinary life, which seems far removed from the dramas of wolves and precipices, is shaped by dilemmatic qualities. It will be suggested that the mentality of the ordinary person, not placed in the dramatic situation of choosing between precipice and wolf, nevertheless contains the conflicting themes which surface so vividly in the dilemmatic situation *per se*. In order to show how these dilemmatic aspects of thinking characterize social beliefs, it may be helpful to give examples

of dilemmas. Then, it will be possible to illustrate how particular dilemmas presuppose much more general dilemmatic aspects of thinking. For this purpose three different dilemmas will be considered.

The first dilemma is one which is recounted by the Epicurean philosopher Diogenes Laertius in his description of the life of Socrates. Apparently a young Athenian man was perplexed about whether or not to get married. He approached Socrates, hoping for sagacious advice to solve his dilemma. All he received from the great philosopher was the reply: 'Whichever you do, you will repent it' (1972: 163).

Socrates can provide a connection between the first example and our second one, whose general form, according to some social psychologists, resembles a much studied dilemma (Dawes, 1973; see below). This second example is that faced by soldiers in war: whether or not to flee from the prospect of death in battle. Socrates, when accused of corrupting the youth of Athens by his immoral philosophy, replied that he had stuck to his philosophical duties just as doggedly as he had remained at his post on the battlefield. He had not deserted the field of either military or philosophical conflict. Instead he had shown his firm decision in an age-old dilemma, which pits individual interest against collective interest. Individual soldiers can save their own skins by slipping away unobtrusively from the hubbub of the battlefield. However, if all the soldiers on a particular side follow this piece of self-interest, then the enemy can advance unimpeded, to slaughter the individually retreating army. Thus self-interest, if repeatedly followed by all members of one army (but not by the other side), would lead to collective loss and thereby, from the individual's point of view, would be self-defeating (Dawes, 1973).

The third illustrative dilemma is a purely hypothetical one. It is possible to imagine a person with a very particular and individual skill. Perhaps this is the skill of a potter, an interior decorator or a speciality cook. Whatever the particular skill, our craftsperson faces a problem. More products are suddenly required than the craftsperson in question can produce. Perhaps the speciality cook has been given an order by a regular customer for an unusually large number of consommés. Help could be summoned: family and friends might lend a hand in the emergency. However, the quality of the product is bound to decline were non-specialists, lacking the mysterious talents of the craftsperson, to be recruited at the last moment. If no help is accepted then the regular customer might be disappointed by the hungry wolf of empty plates; but if help is given, then there looms the precipice of declining quality.

In each of the three dilemmas the decision-maker is faced with a choice, in which the balance of profits and losses seem to be equally weighted between the alternative courses of action. There would be little dilemma if one possible choice promised much reward and few losses whilst the other held out nothing but the vista of precipices, wolves and the enmity

of the gods. The dilemma arises from the difficulty in assessing the various possible gains and losses, and also from attempting to estimate the probabilities of obtaining the various profits and losses. Thus it is not just the prospect of losses which makes the choice so difficult. After all, the choice of certain death by plunging down a precipice or being mauled to death by wolves is not so difficult. What makes the choice so hard is the chance that the decision might matter. There might just be the faintest prospect of survival. Maybe the wolves are not hungry, or there is a concealed ledge on the precipice. All would depend upon making the right choice. And the right choice depends upon judging the likelihood of the unlikely fortune.

Of course, one person's dilemma may not be another's, should the profits and losses be perceived differently. Socrates so much valued honour, and so little his own life, that the soldier's dilemma hardly appeared as a dilemma to him. The balance was firmly tilted to one side: the matter was not worth a moment of the great man's thinking. It was the same when he was imprisoned, awaiting execution. Crito told him that an escape could be arranged, but Socrates was having nothing of that. Dismissively he declared that it was his duty to obey the decisions of the state (Plato, 1959: 44f). Socrates also dismissed, or appeared to dismiss, the dilemma of the young man. Effectively he was saying 'It doesn't matter what you do, so don't worry about the choice.' He dismissed the dilemma because of his knowledge of the male psyche, which ensures that the balance of profits and losses would be the same regardless of decision: whichever step was taken, the grass would always seem greener beyond the other precipice.

In all these examples, choices have to be made. Even inactivity is a choice, once the possibility of activity has been raised. Not getting married is a choice, when one has considered choosing marriage. So is refusing to desert one's regiment, or spurning the chance of escaping from the condemned cell. These situations are dilemmas if the choices are difficult to make because the balance of profits and losses seems to be evenly matched.

Psychological study of dilemmas

It is the choice-making aspects of dilemmas which have been extensively studied by psychologists. There have been hundreds of experiments which have put volunteer subjects in dilemmas and then have observed their responses. The curious thing about the majority of these studies is that the social nature and contents of the dilemmas have been abstracted from the situation. The subjects are left with the sparse forms of a dilemma, and the psychologists are interested in the resulting choices and the variables which effect the choice. Consequently, the type of psychological study to be described in this section has been concerned with the output of the

choice-maker who has been placed in a dilemma. This sort of study takes the dilemma itself for granted by not inquiring how dilemmas might arise in the first place. In so doing, psychologists do not go beyond the narrowly defined situation of the dilemma to probe the more general dilemmatic aspects of thinking.

This point can be illustrated by returning to the second example of a dilemma given in the previous section. This was the dilemma of the soldier wondering whether to flee the battlefield to save his own skin. Dawes (1973) comments that this is a particularly dramatic instance of the commons dilemma. This is a much studied dilemma, and is based upon a real historical problem. In England during the eighteenth century, small farmers were faced with the problem of whether to exercise their ancient right to graze cattle on common land. Because of land enclosures much of this common land had been lost, so that there was insufficient common grazing land. Individual farmers might improve the state of their own herds by grazing them on the commons, but if all farmers did so, the grazing land would quickly become barren through overgrazing. As a result, everyone's cattle would suffer from hunger.

When the commons dilemma is studied experimentally by social psychologists, subjects are not asked to imagine that they are eighteenth-century small farmers. Nor are they required to see themselves as frightened foot soldiers in the middle of battle. In fact, they are not asked to imagine anything. They are instructed to press one of two buttons, in order to gain points, in a 'game' to be played by two persons. Depending on which button is pressed, the subject stands to gain a specified goodly number of points, unless the other subject, or 'game-player', also presses the equivalent button: then both will lose heavily a specified number of points. The balance of rewards and penalties is so arranged in order to represent the formal properties of the dilemma of the commons, in which individual interest conflicts with joint interest (see Colman, 1982 for a review of experimental gaming studies of this and other dilemmas).

In these laboratory studies, everything has been reduced to its barest form. The choices of the dilemma have been expressed in terms of payoffs of a single desired utility – whether points or, as in some well-appointed laboratories, actual money. The experimental subjects have to maximize profit by their choices. What is missing is the great moral and ideological complexities of the original dilemmas. The subject does not have to defend the ancient right to graze cattle, or to ponder upon the morality of cowardice. Everything has been given its price. The psychologist has abstracted the clash of historic values, and has subordinated wider issues to the discovery of what makes experimental subjects press one or other button in pursuit of a single value.

It would be misleading to suggest that social psychologists have only studied dilemmas in this abstracted form. For a number of years there

was great interest shown by social psychologists in comparing group with individual decision-making. Much of this research used the choice dilemmas questionnaire of Kogan and Wallach (1964). This questionnaire set respondents a series of tricky dilemmas. Respondents were required to imagine hypothetical situations in which a choice had to made between risking much to achieve a highly desirable but uncertain outcome, or settling for a secure but definitely second-best outcome. For example, one hypothetical situation involved deciding about venturing an operation, which would result in a complete cure but which could kill the patient, or opting for an incapacitated life. Initially, research results suggested that groups made riskier decisions than individuals (for reviews see Cartwright, 1971, 1973; Doise and Moscovici, 1984; Fraser and Foster, 1984; Wetherell, 1987). There was much intellectual excitement about the possibility that groups were enhancing the value of risk in order to appear bold risk-takers (Brown, 1965). As so often happens in experimental social psychology, clear findings soon disappear under the accumulated rubble of contradictory results. Later studies produced the somewhat less exciting conclusion that sometimes groups produce riskier decisions than the lone decision-maker and sometimes more cautious ones, and that sometimes groups and individuals come to similar conclusions.

It is not the results of these studies which are of interest here, but two other factors. First, the social psychologists tended not to be interested in the dilemmas themselves. From the psychologists' perspectives the dilemmas were just means for studying the processes of decision-making. The precise contents of the dilemmas were unimportant, so long as they set the subjects tricky problems which involved choosing between risky and conservative options. There is a resemblance between this line of research and the gaming research: the content of dilemmas was less important than the output, or the subjects' decisions.

There is another point to note about the choice dilemmas research. The experimental subjects typically became quite involved in their discussions of the dilemmas. They would argue animatedly about the hypothetical situations. Although social psychologists have tended to analyse these arguments (Burnstein and Vinokur, 1975), we can ask what sorts of social knowledge the subjects were using to make these hypothetical dilemmas seem real. The subjects were not arguing about the particularities of a given case or about the personalities of the individuals involved, because the dilemmas involved hypothetical persons and situations. Rather the subjects were employing common sense, which, quite literally, is the sense commonly shared by a community. They were talking about the suitable ways of behaving, and about the worth of particular outcomes; whether, for example, the life of an invalid could be a satisfactory life. In so doing they were discussing the nature and relative merits of social values, just as Socrates and Crito discussed in the Athenian prison the relative value

of sacrificing one's life for duty, as against the value of escaping from the law to continue one's philosophical calling. Such discussions centre upon socially shared beliefs, images, moral values and the sort of social knowledge which has been generally grouped under the label of 'social representations' (Moscovici, 1981, 1984a, 1984b).

These sorts of social knowledge are quite different from the mathematical calculations of gain and loss which the decision-maker in the abstracted gaming situation is presumed to employ. We are dealing here with the type of social knowledge which is often represented by well-known maxims and proverbs. When social psychologists believed that the group discussions enhanced the value of risk-taking, it was as if the discussions reaffirmed the common-sense maxim 'Nothing ventured nothing gained.' But when it was realized that the discussions could also offer the counsel of caution, it was as if reckless venturing were being restrained by the admonition to 'Look before you leap.' What, of course, provoked endless discussion was whether each situation was suitable for the daredevil venturing or for timid looking.

The three dilemmas discussed in the previous section can be seen as presenting situations which involve more than the mathematical calculation of profits and losses, as if the complex dilemmas of social life can be reduced to a single utility. In each of the three dilemmas, socially shared images, representations and values can be seen to conflict. It is this conflict which produces the difficulty of the dilemma. In fact, without the conflict of values the dilemma could not occur in social life.

The dilemma of the young man asking Socrates about marriage depends upon culturally shared images of bachelorhood and marriage. The dilemma would not operate in the same way if spinsterhood were substituted for bachelorhood, at least in those societies in which the unmarried woman was a figure of social stigma. The dilemma does not depend upon the particular character of the young man. Modern readers can smile at Diogenes Laertius's account, even though (or perhaps because) the young man is anonymous. The dilemma is a social dilemma, in that it refers to social images about male attitudes towards responsibility and freedom, love and lust, and about the wish to have all values, even when these so obviously conflict in life.

The second dilemma represents the clash between individual interest and social interest. Of course, in any real case of the soldier's dilemma, wider values are of direct relevance: for example, the value of the war itself and whether the soldier would be deserting a just or an unjust cause; or whether the soldier wished to avoid taking life just as much as losing life; or whether the soldier was aware of responsibilities to family at home, who would starve if he were to be slain by an enemy in an absurd conflict. All these considerations raise deep moral issues, and ordinary people can debate such matters, just as Socrates and Crito did in the prison cell.

Of all the three dilemmas, the one about the speciality cook seems to be the most narrowly economic. It would seem to be a dilemma in which value conflicts can be stripped away, in order to reduce the situation to those bare essentials with which game theorists feel most at ease. The dilemma can be seen in terms of choosing which course of action will produce the greatest payoff, or least damage, to the trade of the speciality cook. However, the dilemma need not be perceived in this way. The specialist cook may want to preserve a small enterprise which does not sacrifice the quality of the product, or the quality of the producer's life, to the pursuit of profit. One the other hand, the dilemma might refer to a particular emergency rather than to a long-term plan for the enterprise. Here again the situation can involve a clash of old maxims, or elements of what is commonly sensible. As our proverb will remind us, if the consommé is produced by many hands then the work will be lightened. But against this, as is known to all of us whether or not we are culinary experts, too many cooks spoil the consommé.

It is these bits and pieces of social knowledge which give rise to the three dilemmas, or to the social dilemmas depicted in the choice dilemmas questionnaire. These dilemmas can only arise because people share values, norms, social expectations, duties, guilt feelings, wishful hopes and so on. In this respect the individual decision-maker is not alone, although the act of choosing can itself be a lonely act. Social psychologists, who wish to study real dilemmas, need to reinstate the social elements which have been abstracted by the game-playing approach. However, it is not merely that the bits and pieces of social knowledge are themselves socially shared, but that what are shared are conflicting bits and pieces. The maxims and values, which are held by all, can be brought into conflict with each other. Because common sense comprises such potentially conflicting elements, it can be said to possess a dilemmatic quality. If common sense did not possess this quality, then the dilemmas of choice could not arise with the full force of moral and social dramas.

Contradictions of common sense

It might be thought that the dilemmas in the preceding sections have been carefully selected, in order to exaggerate the conflicting themes of common sense. Had other themes been chosen, a more unitary image of common sense might have resulted. However, it is fundamental to the present approach that the contrary themes of common sense are neither rare nor unimportant. Nor are they of recent origin. Francis Bacon, in *Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning*, included an appendix which listed commonplace maxims arranged in antithetical pairs. For every maxim there was a counter-maxim which seemed to recommend the opposite. Bacon noted that in arguments people draw upon the maxims or upon the themes

expressed by the maxims, and therefore the maxims he listed contained 'the *seeds*, not *flowers* of arguments' (Bacon, 1858: 492, emphasis in original).

The clash of common-sense beliefs has also been recognized by many social psychological textbooks. Typically, textbook writers cite contrary common-sense beliefs about people, such as 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder' and 'Out of sight, out of mind' (see Billig, 1987: 206f for examples taken from the textbooks). The existence of such contrary beliefs is then taken as evidence for the hopeless confusion of common sense, and the need for the methods and rigours of science to clear up matters once and for all. Unfortunately, experimentation has failed to sort common-sense maxims into the useful, partially useful and useless in a clear, unambiguous way. The research about group risk-taking seemed to suggest that the palm of victory was about to be awarded to the maxim 'Nothing ventured nothing gained' in its age-old competition with 'Look before you leap.' But then with further experimentation the old rival drew level, and bets are still being taken as the two continue galloping around their endless course.

It is quite appropriate that no palm of victory be awarded, for the social world is not divided into opposing camps, each supporting one or other of the antithetical maxims. 'Many hands make light work' does not have its zealous adherents, seeing nothing but truth in their chosen maxim, and looking with distaste upon these who muster beneath the false banner of 'Too many cooks spoil the broth.' Both maxims contain their own bits of truth and their own limitations, and both are shared by the same people. Thus they are both part of the common sense which is commonly shared by the English-speaking tradition. In the same way, everyone in a given society can admit to the desirability of looking after family responsibilities, as well as showing social responsibility. All can agree in principle with the maxims 'Charity begins at home' and 'Love thy neighbour.' The trouble starts not because one maxim has the monopoly of common sense, but because the various elements of common sense are seen to collide in a way which on occasions necessitates difficult decisions.

Not only does common sense contain maxims which conflict, but the very vocabulary at our disposal expresses conflicting themes. Many words are not mere labels which neutrally package up the world. They also express moral evaluations, and such terms frequently come in antithetical opposites which enable opposing moral judgements to be made. The risk-taker can be described as reckless or courageous: the conservative decision-maker can be labelled timid or prudent. The mere availability of these words encourages the dilemma whether to approve or disapprove of a given person. Should Socrates be labelled as morally courageous or stubbornly obstinate? It makes all the difference which term is chosen, and the moral evaluation can only be made because a commonly sensible alternative could also have been made.

It is not haphazard that common sense contains its contrary themes, or, to use the term introduced at the beginning of this chapter, that it possesses its dilemmatic character. The very existence of these opposing images, words, evaluations, maxims and so on is crucial, in that they permit the possibility not just of social dilemmas but of social thinking itself. Without these oppositions there would be no way of arguing about dilemmas or understanding how opposing values can come into collision. As Bacon noted, the contrary maxims provide the seeds of arguments. Here Bacon was drawing attention to the role which maxims play in rhetoric, for debaters about social issues commonly draw upon the commonplaces shared by themselves and their audiences.

There is a further implication. The contrary themes of common sense provide more than the seeds for arguments: they also provide the seeds for thought itself. The justification for suggesting this is based upon the notion that thinking and arguing are closely connected. When one thinks about a dilemma, wondering whether to pursue one or other course, one arranges the reasons as in an argument, sifting through the balance of justifications and criticisms using the pros as arguments against the cons and vice versa. In a real sense social argumentation can be seen as providing the model for social thinking (Billig, 1987). These are not necessarily the sort of acrimonious arguments which take place between different communities and whose acrimony derives from the lack of comprehension of each other's strangely nonsensical common sense. These are the arguments which arise *within* a particular common sense, as people debate about the common sense which they share.

Moreover, these are the sorts of arguments which people must have with themselves if they are to deliberate about matters. For example, if people are to wonder whether to marry or not, they must conduct some sort of internal debate. If they only echo the reasons for one action, they will not have deliberated properly. Or if they wonder whether to praise friends as courageous or to condemn them as reckless, they must weigh the different factors, going to the trouble to make sure that both sides are given a hearing in the debating chamber of the single mind. This sort of deliberation is, of course, possible only if the individual possesses the dilemmatic aspects of social belief. If all elements of social belief were in complete harmony, and there were no possibility of ever confusing recklessness with courage, then there would be no possibility for arguing about such matters. Nor would there be the possibility for deliberation about choice, for without the possibility of such deliberation an awareness of choice can disappear:

> If the process of spelling out in words through adopting different perspectives is a way that a person may deliberate upon possible courses of action, then repeated failure to spell out an alternative perspective will leave the person unaware of the possibility of there being any choice at all. (Radley, 1978)

There are a number of social psychological implications from this link between arguing and thinking and from linking both to the dilemmatic aspects of common sense. We consider these implications under the two following headings.

Universality of argumentation

It should not be thought that the dilemmatic aspects of common sense are confined to the social beliefs of particular communities, so that only some societies possess the conflicting elements which give rise to arguments, whilst the common sense of other societies exists in whole-hearted harmony. Much of this book will be concerned with the specific ideological dilemmas of modern society. However, at this stage a much more general point can be made. The common sense of all societies will possess contrary themes, which provide the possibility of argument and deliberation. Of course, the content of the contrary themes will vary from society to society. And it is not the case that all members of all societies think, argue and are perplexed about exactly the same things. In fact, the forms of the ideological dilemmas which are discussed later are often particular to contemporary society and its particular ideological traditions.

Here it is sufficient to make a general point about the psychological universality of rhetoric. If thinking and arguing are linked, then the capacity for using rhetoric is universal. In all societies one can expect people to justify themselves and to criticize the views of others, and in so doing they will be employing the rhetoric of argumentation (see Billig, 1988a). The fact that rhetorical capacities may be socially universal does not mean that rhetoric takes the same forms in all societies. What it does imply is that dilemmas about values and commonsensical beliefs are not confined to modern Western societies, in which consensus agreement about traditional truths may have collapsed. In suggesting the psychological importance of rhetoric, Billig (1987) specifically drew examples from the traditions of orthodox Judaism. Here is a community which seeks to live by fixed, agreed rules and which seeks to arrest the passage of historical progress by continually referring back to past authorities. Yet here also is a community whose culture is marked by dilemmatic argument, as, for example, the conflicting values of justice and mercy continually create and re-create the possibilities for further dilemmatic discussion. Even the Deity is believed to join in these discussions, as he argues with His prophets and even with Himself.

Perhaps it might be objected that orthodox Judaism represents a highly literate society, and that one should not expect rhetorical argument in simpler, preliterate societies. If this were so, the psychological implication would be that preliterate people do not, or indeed cannot, deliberate about their lives. Happily the implication is incorrect, for the anthropological evidence suggests that rhetoric is by no means confined to the literate

(Bloch, 1975). Even when formal oratory in preliterate societies seems to possess the character of set-piece speeches, rather than the cut-and-thrust of debate, there often have been lively arguments behind the scenes before the solemn oratorical ritual has been agreed upon (see for example Keenan's 1975 anthropology of Merinan oratory).

The person as argumentative debater

The stress upon argumentation and the dilemmatic aspects of common sense provides a different image of the person from that encountered in much current social psychological theorizing. Our view sees the individual as existing within a social context, in which all dilemmas and oppositions cannot possibly have been worked out. Moreover the individual, by possessing the common sense of the community, also possesses the contrary aspects of beliefs which permit debates to continue both internally and externally. This is a different image from that conveyed by psychological theories, which see thinking in terms of a desire for inner attitudinal harmony or in terms of the processing of incoming information.

One of the most influential theories in social psychology has been Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. This theory, as well as a number of similar 'balance theories', depicts thinkers as being motivated by the desire to maintain consistency in their thoughts. Inconsistency is seen as being essentially uncomfortable. The assumption of consistency can be detected in common social psychological terms such as 'attitudinal system' or 'value system'. These concepts imply that thoughts are well systematized within the human mind. Any belief which a person might hold is seen to be a reflection of an inner 'belief system'. If persons express an opinion on an issue, then they are revealing their 'attitudinal system'. Each thought we hold or action we perform will take its meaning from its place in the psychological system. If it is discrepant with the system, then the individual needs to engage in some attitudinal repair work in order to rectify the damage and restore the calmness of consistency. It is as if social psychologists imagine that locked up in the human head is some sort of blood-red silicon chip, which organizes thoughts and actions. This chip is the psychologist's Rosetta Stone: if only it could be discovered and then decoded, the hidden plan of the mind would be revealed.

Some social psychologists, interested in cognitive processes, have sought this silicon chip in the schemata which the mind is said to possess for the processing of information. The mind needs procedures and rules in order to organize the stimuli which are forever bombarding the sense organs. These schemata not only enable the person to make sense of the physical world, but provide the rules for directing actions and thoughts in the social world. Thus, in general, schemata 'tell the perceiver what to look for' (Taylor and Crocker, 1981: 90). Because people so often find what they look for, the schemata tend to ensure that people notice and receive information

which confirms their original schematic assumptions (Bruner, 1957; Greenwald, 1980; Snyder, 1981). For example, those people who possess the schema that black people are aggressive are forever coming up with evidence to support their *idée fixe*, and seem unable to notice any information which might disturb their belief (Duncan, 1976). In this way, the schematic processing of information can aid the motivation to avoid inconsistency.

It cannot be denied that people have assumptions and that they frequently allow their thoughts to be directed by unthinking prejudices. However, what is at issue is whether the schematic or balance theories of social psychology overlook the dilemmatic aspects of thinking and whether, in so doing, they promote a different image of the thinker from that suggested here. The balance theories suggest that people will avoid thinking, for internal disharmony is uncomfortable, and all inner pressures are operating in the direction of producing a clean, shiny mental system. The schematic theories, when they equate cognition with the schematic processing of information, tend to view thinking as what we do unthinkingly. In this way they tend to demean thinking and overlook the dilemmatic, or deliberative, aspects (Billig, 1985; Edwards and Middleton, 1986, 1987).

By contrast the rhetorical approach does not start by considering individual motivations or individual information processing. It starts from the assumption that knowledge is socially shared and that common sense contains conflicting, indeed dissonant, themes. It is not neatly systematized in a way that permits the individual who has dutifully accepted society's values to generate automatically all necessary thoughts, actions and argumentative discourse. Instead, common sense provides the individual with the seeds for contrary themes, which can conflict dramatically in dilemmatic situations. Because these are seeds, not flowers, all is not fully systematized. Contained within the conflicting general principles are many different possibilities, which may on occasions give rise to argument and debate. Rather than apply their systems unthinkingly, people must also deliberate and argue about which seeds need planting at which times in order to develop into flowers. And when people so deliberate or argue, their thinking has a dilemmatic quality.

Explicit and implicit dilemmatic aspects

It is one thing to outline a general theoretical approach, but it is quite another to say how it might be applied to the study of social phenomena. The preceding discussion only conveys the broad notion that researchers ought to look for the contrary, or dilemmatic, aspects of social beliefs. It recommends the examination of beliefs from a social perspective which does not assume that individuals have systematized their thoughts. Over and above this, it does not tell researchers how they might possibly go

about their quest for the dilemmatic aspects of thoughts. This is a matter not merely of recommending a favoured methodology, but also of giving hints about whether all dilemmatic aspects might be equally interesting or whether attention might be more profitably directed in one direction or another. For example, one might concentrate upon the discrepancies between actions and words or between theory and practice, or upon the inconsistencies between expressed ends and chosen means. Although the preceding discussion was phrased in general terms, it did hint that the hunters of the dilemmatic aspects might direct their hawks and hounds towards the conflicting themes within shared social images, beliefs, norms and above all values. There, amongst maxims and familiar bits and pieces of shared everyday knowledge, might lie the main dilemmatic quarry.

Particular interest will be paid to examining how contrary themes of social knowledge are revealed in everyday discourse. This will include analysing the meaning of pieces of discourse in order to interpret themes and counter-themes. This sort of interpretative task will involve what are conventionally called qualitative, rather than quantitative, analyses. In this respect, the analyses will be consistent with the broad outlines of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) recommendation that social psychologists should give especial attention to the study of discourse. However, this preference for the qualitative study of discourse should not be taken to imply that opinion surveys, which involve the administration of standard questionnaires to large samples of respondents, cannot be used to study the dilemmatic aspects of thinking. In fact, surveys can be analysed to reveal broad patterns of attitudinal inconsistency within populations (see for example Nilson, 1981). However, the discovery that people might agree to two questionnaire items, which appear at first sight inconsistent, leads to questions of meaning. One might wish to know how respondents interpret the items, and whether they give a reasoned justification which explains away the seeming inconsistency (see Heath, 1986 for a discussion of survey research and the study of attitudinal consistency).

In order to facilitate the study of the dilemmatic aspects of discourse, a rough distinction can be made between those conflicting themes which are explicitly expressed and those which are implicit (for a more detailed discussion of the theoretical differences between the explicit and the implicit aspects of social attitudes see Billig, 1988b). The distinction between the implicit and the explicit is not presented as being an absolute one, and in the later chapters both implicit and explicit aspects of ideological dilemmas will be analysed. In practice it may be difficult to determine where the explicit ends and the implicit starts. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to make such a distinction, in order to say a few words about the analysis of dilemmatic aspects.

The analysis of explicit dilemmatic aspects

Sometimes people can express quite explicitly their simultaneous adherence to the conflicting themes of common sense. According to *The New Rhetoric* of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971), it is a feature of rhetoric that both sides of an argument may be reasonable. An individual, even in an argumentative situation, may wish to express this rhetorical assumption by simultaneously asserting the reasonableness, or truth, of two rhetorically conflicting elements of social belief. For example, both maxims of an antithetical pair can simultaneously be upheld. Politicians, wishing to appeal to all the values of their audiences, often fill their speeches with this kind of thing: 'On the one hand one cannot gain without venturing, but on the other hand one must look before leaping.' Sometimes, whilst keeping the appearance of two-handed reasonableness, the speaker might wish to carry the weapon of argumentative assault in one or other hand: 'Whilst I fully appreciate that without venture there can be no gain, nevertheless we must be sure to look carefully and not leap into the dark.' Just subtly the edge is given to the latter maxim of the antithetical pair, although the audience may be reassured that the recommendation is only for this particular occasion: at other times, the speaker is suggesting, there may be a recommendation to venture all in a courageous, but not reckless, gesture.

The analyst, examining the dilemmatic aspects of discourse, must pay especial attention to the nuances of the different strategies which might be employed for the equal and unequal expression of conflicting themes (Wetherell, Stiven and Potter, 1987). Of course, the unequal expression can be used in order to ward off potential criticisms. The speaker, who fully appreciates the worth of venturing, will be seeking to avoid being branded as a timorous coward who undervalues boldness: a pledge is being offered for future, and perhaps past, risk-taking (see Billig, 1987, chapters 9 and 10 for a discussion of such rhetorical strategies). The analysis of the discourse of racial and gender inequality will show how these strategies can be employed so that the evocation of one value will ease the expression of the contrasting one. In this sort of analysis, one is essentially laying bare the meanings which are being expressed, and examining the dilemmatic aspects which are explicit in discourse or thought. However, as one probes deeper the negative meaning expressed, one is moving towards uncovering implicit meanings.

The analysis of implicit dilemmatic aspects

In examining the explicitly expressed dilemmatic aspects, the analyst can broadly follow the meanings which the communicator intended to express. However, the implicit meanings can go beyond the overt intentions of the communicator, for they can be contained within the semantic structure of the discourse itself. To bring these implicit meanings to the surface

the analyst faces a greater interpretative or hermeneutic task, for a counter-theme needs to be interpreted within discourse which seems *prima facie* to be arguing straightforwardly for a particular point. If contrary counter-themes can be said to be concealed within discourse, they are not hidden in the way that Freudian theorists believe that certain inconsistent themes are hidden by repression from the conscious mind. The concealment is not a deliberate or even subconscious concealment, but may operate within layers of meaning of language. Discourse which seems to be arguing for one point may contain implicit meanings which could be made explicit to argue for the counter-point. Thus discourse can contain its own negations, and these are part of its implicit, rather than explicit, meaning. The analyst should not be afraid to engage in hermeneutics in order to read these implicit meanings.

The maxim 'Too many cooks spoil the broth' can illustrate how a negative meaning can be contained implicitly within discourse. 'Too many' implies that the maxim is to be used to counter those who might be overdoing a multiplicity of production. In this way the phrase has an argumentative meaning, and can be expected to be used in debate when too many hands are being proposed. As Bacon realized, the maxims contain the seeds of argument: they are not infallible guides to conduct, but in their antithetical pairs they enable us to deliberate about conduct in a way which would not be possible if all we possessed were a single, unopposed and unopposable guide. The maxim 'Too many cooks' is not attacking multiplicity of production as such: many cooks are not taken to spoil the broth, only too many of them. The maxim could have been phrased with the specificity of 'Two's company, but three's a crowd', but significantly it is not. In fact, the maxim can be interpreted as supporting the multiplicity which it appears at first sight to attack: in counselling against the spoiling tendencies of 'too many', it explicitly avoids counselling against 'many'. The omission can be taken as having semantic significance. Implicitly the semantics concede the negative point that the hands of many cooks can lighten the load of producing unspoiled consommés. Thus implicitly it concedes the legitimacy of its old proverbial antithesis.

Chapter 4 will employ the hermeneutic approach to search for the implicit contrary themes within the liberal beliefs of education. In addition to the outward themes of egalitarianism, held both by theorists and also by practising teachers, are themes which contain their own implicit authoritarian meanings, as indeed do the egalitarian themes in the discourse of expertise discussed in chapter 5. The point behind this hermeneutic analysis is not to expose inconsistencies as signs of hypocrisy, or to undermine the intentions of the educationalists. In fact, the charge of hypocrisy is completely misplaced, because the counter-themes are implicit rather than explicit: as such, the person expressing the discourse may not be fully aware of these counter-meanings in the way that an out-and-out hypocrite

would be. The purpose is not to undermine but to explore the complexities of meaning. To use an overused phrase, the aim is to explore the dialectic of discourse meanings. The meaning of the discourse of liberal educational philosophy, in its theoretical and everyday forms, is shown to be dialectical: it simultaneously contains its own dominant explicit meanings as well as its counter-meanings or negation. Thus the discourse combines its own thesis and antithesis. Similarly the discourse of 'prejudice' shows a similar dialectic, in that the concept of 'prejudice' is used in discourse to express the very same ideas as it ostensibly appears to contradict. And the discourse of illness presupposes an opposing discourse of health.

The examples reveal a further feature of the subsequent analyses. The dilemmatic aspects, with which we are principally concerned, are those which emerge from contemporary ideology. This is in contrast to most of the examples used earlier in the present chapter. These have referred to general dilemmas of common sense, with some being taken from the common sense of ancient societies. The purpose of these examples has been to illustrate general points of theory. In particular they have been used in support of the theme that the study of dilemmas should not be confined to actual choice-making behaviour. There is a need to recognize the dilemmatic aspects of thought, which are preconditions for any dilemmatic choice and which continue to exist in common sense, even in the absence of actual situations which necessitate the taking of difficult choices. However, the interest in ideological dilemmas means a narrowing of focus to particular dilemmatic themes, rather than dealing with all sorts of dilemmatic thinking. Because of this, it is unsatisfactory to continue talking in a non-specific way about common sense and its dilemmatic aspects. It is necessary to turn from the general discussion of common sense to an examination of the nature of ideology and its role in modern society. Only then will it be possible to analyse how ideology can shape the dilemmatic aspects of contemporary thinking.

3
Dilemmas of Ideology

The existence of dilemmatic thinking may well be universal, in that it is to be found in all social arrangements. Nevertheless, the content of dilemmas will vary from society to society and from epoch to epoch, and it will do so for a simple reason: varying patterns of cultural norms, beliefs and values will give rise to varying patterns of dilemmatic concerns. Modern consumers may not be beset by the problems of heaven and hell which troubled their medieval forebears. Yet each cultural and economic condition produces its own particular dilemmatic arguments. Our interest here is in modern society and its dilemmas. In particular, it is in those dilemmas which involve values and beliefs that could be said to be ideological.

At once this raises the difficult concept of 'ideology'. Most social scientific concepts lack clear and precise definitions which are accepted by all theorists, and the concept of 'ideology' has been particularly troublesome in this respect. Different theorists have used the concept in very different ways, whilst disputing each other's intellectual right to do so; moreover, the same theorists have often found themselves slipping into different meanings as they talk about 'ideology'. As Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1980: 187) have remarked: 'It is widely agreed that the notion of "ideology" has given rise to more analytical and conceptual difficulties than almost any other in the social sciences'. In the same spirit, David McLellan begins his excellent book *Ideology* with the warning to readers that 'Ideology is the most elusive concept in the whole of social science' (1986: 1). (For conceptual and historial discussions of the concept see also Abercrombie, 1980; Larrain, 1979, 1983; Thompson, 1986.)

It is not the present intention to wade through the different definitions of 'ideology', or through the complex theoretical arguments underlying the definitions. Neither will it be the strategy to parade before the reader the various conceptions, stripped down to their skimpiest theoretical swimsuits, in order to award the prize to the most beautiful definition of them all. Instead, there will be a discussion of several issues relating to the values and conceptions of modern society. These issues relate centrally to what theorists have broadly identified as 'ideological issues'. In order to simplify the discussion, it might be helpful to identify two key themes of the discussion: the first concerns the links between formal ideological systems and informal common sense, and the second relates to the dilemmatic nature of modern common sense.

It will be assumed that the great political and philosophical systems of the modern world are not just the property of professional theoreticians.

Marx may have been a Hegelian philosopher by training, and he may have been a solitary figure in the British Museum as he wrote his unreadably complex manuscripts, but his effect upon the thought patterns of the twentieth century has been incalculable. However, our main emphasis is not upon the traditions of Marxism, but upon those of the liberal philosophy of the Enlightenment, in order to see how the concepts of the intellectual ideologists have become represented in modern everyday consciousness. Particular attention will be directed towards the notion of 'individualism', which is sometimes thought to characterize the values and philosophy of the capitalist world. Later chapters will observe how the great ideas of individualism have been transformed into everyday concepts, which possess dilemmatic qualities.

In examining this transformation from formal philosophy to everyday thinking, the analysis will be investigating similar sorts of problems to those which Serge Moscovici has identified as being central to social psychology (Moscovici, 1981, 1984a, 1984b). One important part of Moscovici's project is to investigate how the concepts of science have become represented into common sense. He himself has studied in detail the mass diffusion of psychoanalytic ideas in everyday thinking (Moscovici, 1976). It is part of his argument that modern common sense has become so dominated by socially shared representations of abstract scientific concepts that it is qualitatively different from the common sense of traditional societies.

Although Moscovici's theories of social representations concentrate upon the passage of concepts from scientific discourse to lay discourse, similar transformations can be observed with philosophy: notions can be observed to pass from formal ideological theories into the lived ideology of ordinary life. It can be expected that this passage will transform the concepts, just as scientific notions are altered in their social representation in everyday discourse. A further point needs to be made. The passage need not be unidirectional, going from intellectual discourse to mass discourse. The reverse journey is also made, as intellectuals take up the concepts of everyday life and embellish them in their theorizing. This can be observed in a number of modern intellectual activities. Perhaps most dramatically it occurred when theorists of race claimed to be using scientific procedures to confirm widespread notions about racial differences of superiority and inferiority (Billig, 1981). However, in the present work the emphasis is not upon the commonsensical origin of intellectual notions, which can be returned in a transformed state back to common sense and thereby be further transformed. Nevertheless one point must be stressed. The emphases of the present work should not be interpreted as implying that the process by which commonsensical ideas become transformed into intellectual theory is any less socially important than the reverse process. A more complete and ambitious work than the present might care to examine both passages of ideas in relation to each other.

A study of the way that intellectual ideology is transformed into everyday ideology need not of itself recognize the importance of the dilemmatic aspects of thinking. In fact, many of the conventional images of ideology assume that ideological thinking is non-dilemmatic. They tend to treat ideological systems as integrated systems of thinking, or, to use a current psychological term, as schemata *par excellence*. Therefore the passage from intellectual ideology to everyday ideology is often assumed to be one in which an elitely constructed consistency is imposed upon mass thinking, with the result that ideological consistency becomes socially diffused. Our approach, with its emphasis upon the dilemmatic aspects, questions this image, for it focuses upon the contrary elements of thinking.

As will be discussed below, these contrary elements can arise from different sources. They could be represented by the contradiction between possessing a theoretical ideology and at the same time living within a society whose everyday life seems to negate that ideology. Examples of this will be given, but these illustrations will not carry the main burden of the argument, which is to portray the contrary themes within ideology itself. In particular, it will be suggested that the liberal traditions of modern capitalist society contain their own contrary themes or unresolved theoretical tensions. Within the ideology of liberalism is a dialectic, which contains negative counter-themes and which gives rise to debates. These debates are not confined to the level of intellectual analysis; both themes and counter-themes have arisen from, and passed into, everyday consciousness. And, of course, this everyday consciousness provides the material for further intellectual debate.

In analysing the ideological representation of dilemmas in modern consciousness, we are not viewing individual thinkers as blindly following the dictates of ideological schemata. We see them thinking, but within the constraints of ideology and with the elements of ideology. Thus ideologies in everyday life should not be equated with the concealment, or prevention, of thought. Also, in a real sense ideologies shape what people actually do think about, and permit the possibility of thought.

Lived and intellectual ideology

In order to sustain the argument outlined in the preceding section, it is necessary to make a distinction between two meanings of ideology. There is first of all 'lived ideology', which refers to ideology as a society's way of life. This sort of ideology includes what passes for common sense within a society. On the other hand there is 'intellectual ideology', which is a system of political, religious or philosophical thinking and, as such, is very much the product of intellectuals or professional thinkers. There are, of course, some theorists who claim that the lived ideology constitutes the essence of the concept of 'ideology', whilst others says that the intellectual

ideology is the prototypical example. For present purposes it is unnecessary to take sides in that dispute, but it is necessary to distinguish the sorts of phenomena which are denoted by these rival interpretations of the concept.

Lived ideology
The notion of an ideology as representing a society's way of life is to be found in Karl Mannheim's influential *Ideology and Utopia*. Mannheim characterized an ideology in the following way: 'Here we refer to the ideology of an age or of a concrete historico-social group, e.g. of a class, when we are concerned with the characteristics and composition of the total structure of the mind of this epoch or of this group' (1960: 49–50). Beliefs, values, cultural practices and so on are crucial components of the total mental structure. This conception comes close to equating the ideology of a society or epoch with its culture. Thompson has drawn attention to the similarity between this interpretation of ideology and the notion of culture. He writes that 'The broadest and most inclusive definition of ideology is one which makes it almost coterminous with culture' (1986: 66). He adds that investigators of ideology are typically interested in the relations between social beliefs and the operation of power in society, in a way that investigators of culture frequently are not. Despite this difference of emphasis, the concepts of culture and lived ideology are similar because both seek to describe the social patterning of everyday thinking. It might be said that ordinary people living in a particular society partake of the general cultural patterns of that society, and their thinking is shaped by these patterns. The word 'culture' could easily be substituted by 'ideology' in the previous sentence and the essence of Mannheim's conception would still be preserved.

Intellectual ideology
The notion of a lived ideology is very different from a view of ideology as an intellectual system of ideas. Here we are talking about ideology not as the everyday way of thinking of a particular group, but as a formalized philosophy. The French sociologist, Raymond Aron, used the term in this sense when he wrote that 'An ideology presupposes an apparently systematic formalization of facts, interpretations, desires and predictions' (1977: 309). According to this conception, the ideology of liberalism is not represented by the maxims, casual beliefs and informal values expressed by those who might be contemplating voting for a liberal party at a general election. It will be expressed by the great theorists of liberal philosophy such as Voltaire, Locke and Adam Smith: in other words, by those who have attempted to construct the ideas of liberalism into a systematic philosophy.

The distinction between lived and intellectual ideology is the difference between a formalized and a non-formalized consciousness. Lane made a

similar distinction in his examination of the political consciousness of the American working man, when he talked of 'forensic' and 'latent' ideologies. Lane suggested that it was necessary to 'distinguish between the "forensic" ideologies of the conscious ideologist and the "latent" ideologies of the common man' (1960: 16). The ordinary working men of his study might not have possessed a formal system of political thinking, but nevertheless they partook of the political and cultural values, or latent ideology, of their society. Perhaps one of the most famous distinctions between lived and intellectual ideology is to be found in Lenin's essay 'What is to be done?' Lenin called upon middle-class intellectuals to develop the ideology of Marxism. He claimed that the working class would be unequal to the task. Workers only possessed a 'trade-union consciousness' and, as a result, they lacked the philosophical insight to construct a genuinely radical ideology. In other words, the working class could not transcend its lived ideology to produce the intellectual ideology, which would eventually transform the lived ideology.

The distinction between the two forms of ideology is crucial for posing the question whether the ideas of intellectual ideology can travel beyond the mythical ivy-covered walls of theory in order to enter into the hustle and bustle of ordinary life. Moscovici's theory of social representations rests upon a similar distinction between the ideas of science, formulated by an intellectual minority, and the more general common sense, into which the social representations of scientific concepts are translated. It will be suggested later than many of the grand notions of liberal philosophy have become transformed into everyday thinking. However, the present analysis is not intended merely to document the passage from intellectual to lived ideology. It is also intended to provide a social psychological commentary on the nature of ideology. This is possible because the present conception of ideology, whether lived or intellectual, departs from that of many theorists. The difference resides, above all, in the images of the thinker, or bearer of ideology, to emerge from those views which stress the dilemmatic aspects of ideology, as against those which assume the basic internal consistency of ideology.

According to most conceptions, ideology is seen as some sort of mould which patterns the thoughts of its bearers. Ideology is often seen to provide an internally consistent pattern, so that the thoughts, beliefs, values and so on fit together into the total mental structure. There is a similarity between this conception of ideology and the psychological notion of cognitive schemata, through which incoming stimuli are filtered. Accordingly, ideology is conceived to be some sort of giant, socially shared schema, through which the world is experienced. In the last chapter the ideas of the schema theorists in social psychology were criticized because they underestimated the importance of deliberative, or dilemmatic, thinking. So analogous criticisms can be applied to the respective notions of

ideology – lived and intellectual – which suggest that the individual thinker is essentially an unthinking bearer of a present programme for thinking.

The assumption of internal consistency is most apparent in the notion of intellectual ideology. Aron's (1977) depiction of ideology suggests that the ideologist possesses some sort of grand theory, from which all manner of attitudinal positions and stances can be systematically derived. It is rather like a mathematical theory, which permits a wide number of propositions to be derived from a few axioms which are free from dilemmatic inconsistency. If the Marxist ideologist wants to know what stance to take on the latest world event, the basic themes of dialectical materialism must be computed to provide an answer. It is unthinkable to the ideologist that the all-encompassing ideology will have nothing to say on the matter (for descriptions of the way that ideologists use the ideology of Marxism to formulate such stances, see Almond, 1954; Newton, 1969). In this way the bearer of the ideology will appear to have an answer to all major questions. Critics of such ideological thinking often depict the bearer of ideology as an unthinking bigot, and such criticisms are expressed in social psychological theories of authoritarianism or dogmatism (Adorno et al., 1950; Rokeach, 1960; Altemeyer, 1981). These theories suggest that the bearer of intellectual ideologies has a closed mind, for all has been settled psychologically in advance. All contradictions are dismissed, or are explained away by the ideology. The cost of this consistency is a high degree of unreality and a brittle personality, which cannot abide ambiguity. Although this psychological characterization is undoubtedly an exaggeration (Billig, 1985), it does reinforce the image that an intellectual ideology provides the ideologist with an internally consistent system.

In the same way, the lived ideology is frequently depicted as possessing some sort of inner consistency. This notion can be traced back to Marx and Engels's (1970) discussion of ideology in *The German Ideology*. There they suggested that the dominant ideas of an epoch, and in particular the dominant ideas of capitalism, tend to depict society as a coherent whole. Contradictions are concealed by ideology. From this it is a short step to suggesting that those who live within an ideology possess thoughts, actions and values which form some sort of internally consistent pattern. This internal consistency hides from consciousness any notions which might contradict the ideological view. According to Mannheim, the mental structure of each epoch contained an 'inner unity' (1953: 76). Mannheim also suggested that each ideology can only provide a partial view of reality. It blots out views which may be discrepant to its inner unity, just as schema theorists, describing information processing at the level of the individual, suggest that schemata systematically distort the views of the individual.

The image of the thinker living within ideology is not a more flattering one than that provided by schema theorists in psychology. The image depicts a person whose mental structure is systematically biased and who

helplessly, and unseeingly, conforms to the dictates of this structure. Such an image is apparent, for example, in the writings of Louis Althusser on ideology. It is a central part of Althusser's thesis that modern society does not command the acquiescence of its members by physical force alone. Modern capitalism has it ideological state apparatuses, which ensure that the members of the state pick up and abide by the socially correct values and beliefs. Althusser's images of the ideologically influenced citizenry suggest obedient and unthinking conformity. For example, in one of his most important discussions of ideology, Althusser illustrates his arguments by considering the religious believer as the bearer of the state's ideology. The religious person has not only a set of doctrinal beliefs, but also a set of associated behaviours: 'If he believes in God, he goes to Church to attend Mass, kneels, prays, confesses, does penance. . .and naturally repents and so on.' The citizen who has absorbed the socially approved ideology will 'have the corresponding attitudes, inscribed in ritual practices "according to the correct principles"' (Althusser, 1971: 167).

Althusser's believer is an obedient citizen, who is following prescribed rules of behaviour. In this respect the religious believer resembles the information processor, whose mind is continually following the cognitive rules of the schema. It is significant that one of the major theoretical examinations of schema theory, that of Schank and Abelson (1977), possesses an extended example to show how the ordinary person must follow social rules and must possess an internal schema if a meal is to be purchased, eaten and paid for in a restaurant. Both Althusser's citizen obeying the rules of ideology, and Schank and Abelson's hypothetical schema follower, are obediently engaging in social rituals in going to church or the restaurant. Both are unthinkingly following predetermined norms. There is a further parallel, in that the neither the ideology follower nor the schema follower are presumed to have an undistorted view of reality. Schema theorists assume that schemas simplify and thereby distort social reality (Billig, 1985). So also Althusser depicts his church-goer as unthinkingly accepting the unrealistically consistent consciousness which is provided by the ideological state apparatus (Gane, 1983).

The dilemmatic approach, by contrast, does not start with the assumption that there is an 'inner unity' to schemata or ideologies. By assuming that there are contrary themes, a different image of the thinker can emerge. The person is not necessarily pushed into an unthinking obedience, in which conformity to ritual has replaced deliberation. Ideology may produce such conformity, but it can also provide the dilemmatic elements which enable deliberation to occur. The person living within ideology need not be seen merely as a follower of rules or as a well-programmed machine. However, to uncover the dilemmatic aspects of ideology, it is necessary to look for the contrary themes of lived ideology. This means rejecting any assumption that the relations between lived and intellectual ideology are in any sense

simple. It should not be assumed that the consistencies of theory are somehow imposed upon the schemata of everyday life, so that everyday life is a social representation of the consistent intellectual ideology, albeit in a baser, more conventional and essentially unthinking form. Instead it is necessary to consider the contradictory themes both between and within lived and intellectual ideology.

Conflicts between lived and intellectual ideologies

The very distinction between lived and intellectual ideology suggests one obvious source of an ideological dilemma. Ideologues and social theorists may face particular dilemmas because they simultaneously possess both sorts of ideology. Their thinking embraces both the great theory, constructed in the calm of the study and realized in its systematic completeness on paper, and the everyday beliefs which enable the theorists to go about the normal business of society. For instance, a revolutionary idealist might hold grand notions about how society should operate. These idealistic visions of the future will also be criticisms of the present state of society. Yet this idealist may have to conduct everyday activities and, in fact, may be quite well adjusted to many of the society's practices. Sometimes the head of the lived ideology and the heart of the utopian ideology may pull in different directions. And at all times, the possibility of dilemmas may be present.

Marx and Engels provide examples of intellectuals whose theories seem at odds with the details of their everyday lives. These great critics of bourgeois society lived eminently bourgeois lives themselves. Engels was a businessman and, in fact, was quite a good one. He was constantly offering financial advice to his less fortunate friend. Although reduced to straitened circumstances, the Marx family maintained a respectable domesticity. *The Communist Manifesto* may have sneered at the conventional family and its morality, but Karl Marx was always the concerned father and husband. Of course there was that business with the family maid, but thankfully with the help of kind Engels it was hushed up without a nasty scandal. Nor are such contradictions confined to the radical left. Today, there are right-wing theorists who wish to transform society into the utopia of Adam Smith's imagination. They hope to reduce the state's role to the absolute minimum, yet they formulate their theories from their offices in state-funded universities or from homes purchased with financial assistance from the state.

One further example will illustrate the tensions between the demands of intellectual theory and those of everyday life. David Hume's philosophy represented an exposition of radical scepticism, but his personal leanings were to genial conviviality. In the conclusion to the first book of *A Treatise of Human Nature* he described the dilemma of being a cold theorist with

a warm inclination. He knew his scepticism, which doubted causality and religion, was out of sorts with the prevailing mood: 'I foresee on every side dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny and detraction. . . all the world conspires to oppose and contradict me' (1964, vol. I: 250). Not only were his philosophical ideas creating enemies, but also they were directly cutting him off from the life he wished to lead. He wrote about the 'philosophical melancholy' which attends intense philosophical doubt. Luckily, nature provides its own cure for such melancholy. The mind relaxes itself, and 'I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when, after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter them further' (p. 254). Despite the pleasant backgammon games, Hume recognized there still remained a conflict between his 'natural propensity' for philosophical reasoning and the 'animal spirits and passions' which drove him to an 'indolent belief in the general maxims of the world' (p. 254).

Whether or not Hume's philosophy could be called an ideology, he was describing in vivid form a conflict between intellectual ideas and the lived world. In Hume's case the conflict is presented as a dilemma in which a choice is to be made: he has to decide whether to sit at the study desk or the backgammon table. However, the problem is not merely one of a choice of which room to enter or which piece of furniture to sit upon. There are also the contrary elements of Hume's thinking, which can culminate in the painful choice each evening between serious solitude and cheerful company, but which possess wider dilemmatic quality. Hume's rationalism and his conservative respect for tradition were mingled, so that part of him could cling fiercely to the value of intellectual inquiry, whilst the other part urged him to reject the whole business of philosophy as ridiculous. Had his outlook been wholly rationalist, or had it been wholly based upon respect for traditional custom and the general maxims of the world, the nightly dilemma might not have arisen with such force. Nor might Hume have included in an overtly rationalist work of philosophy a passage which seems to mock the whole pretensions of sceptical philosophy in favour of the superior good sense of ordinary life.

Hume's image of the lived world was a social one: it was a world where people met and basically got on with one another. Like the ideological world described by Althusser, it is a world of unreflective routines, although for Hume, but not for Althusser, it is a world of good sense. In playing backgammon, probably with a glass in hand by a roaring fire, one is following the same sort of cognitive script which enables the customer to have a pleasant trip to a restaurant and which permitted the Marx family to enjoy their walks on Hampstead Heath. It is a script to be followed, rather than thought about. This image portrays ordinary life as being essentially undilemmatic. All would have been peace and

backgammon had not Hume had his unfortunate propensity for melancholy philosophy. He would have been a happy, untroubled man following the scripts and maxims of everyday life.

In this image there is a clear disjunction between the thoughts of the theorist and the unthinking routines of everyday life. Dilemmas are not seen as properties of everyday living, but originate from thinking which is somehow external to ordinary life, or more precisely from the clash between the contemplative and the non-contemplative life. Yet this is a simplification. Ordinary life is not so routinely organized that it does not possess its dilemmas and more generally its dilemmatic qualities of thinking. Moreover, these dilemmas and dilemmatic thoughts are not untouched by the thinking of the theorist. Many of the great themes of ideology and philosophy have entered into the consciousness of epochs, thereby ensuring that the lived ideology has its own dilemmatic elements.

Individualism and its limitations

Dilemmas may arise from the possession of the two different ideologies: a lived ideology that adjusts one to mundane life, and an intellectual ideology that seeks to overturn everyday reality. However, ideological dilemmas may also arise within ideologies. The person who possesses only a lived ideology, or perhaps has an intellectual ideology which justifies present conditions, does not necessarily escape from ideological dilemmas to sit by the fireside. In outlining how dilemmas can arise within an ideology we shall be taking issue with the assumption, or at least with a simple interpretation of the assumption, that ideologies as mental structures possess an inner unity. This assumption suggests that an ideology, although it might contain a variety of beliefs, norms, representations and so on, will be based around a dominant theme or value. As regards modern capitalist society, a number of theorists have claimed that the dominating principle is that of 'individualism'. This assumption will be outlined, and then criticized because of its underestimation of the dilemmatic aspects of ideology.

The equation of individualism with capitalist ideology is meant to highlight the link between intellectual and lived ideology. Here, it might be thought, is the principle which dominated the liberal philosophy of the Enlightenment, and now is represented in the thinking of modern mass publics and their tendency to vote for politicians who praise the value of individual achievement. Abercrombie, who criticizes those who identify individualism as the ideology of capitalism, offers a useful definition of individualism: it is a 'set of social theories whose distinguishing feature is the insistence on the social priority of the individual *vis-à-vis* the State, the established Church, social classes. . . or other social groups' (1980: 56). The identification of this set of beliefs with capitalist ideology can be found

in the writings of the Marxist critic Georg Lukacs. In *History and Class Consciousness* Lukacs referred to the 'individual' principle of bourgeois society. This principle dominated the economic, cultural, political and philosophical life of bourgeois society, and would, claimed Lukacs, be swept aside by the 'social' principle of the proletarian society.

Another example of the identification of individualism with the ideology of modern capitalism is provided by the social psychologist Edward Sampson. In a perceptive critique of individualist assumptions in psychological theory, Sampson suggests that 'a predominant theme that describes our cultural ethos is *self-contained individualism.*' Sampson characterizes this ethos as emphasizing 'individuality, in particular a kind of self-sufficiency that describes an extreme of the individualistic dimension' (1977: 769). Sampson points to the development of modern psychology as expressing and justifying this culture of self-contained individualism. Modern psychologists, he argues, take the goal of individual adjustment as their psychological ideal and, in consequence, they reinforce values derived from the individualist culture of which they themselves are a part.

There is no denying that the values of individual rights are strongly held in modern capitalist, democratic societies. No serious politician in the United States or Britain or France would declare him or herself to be opposed to individual freedom. Nor would any march behind a banner which proclaimed 'Down with individual rights.' Yet this does not mean that a value for individual freedom has itself an unopposed freedom in the modern world. In the previous chapter, it was argued that the maxims of common sense find themselves held in check by their antithetical rivals. Similarly, the noble themes of individualism, it will be suggested, find themselves opposed in modern ideology by counter-values that are just as high-minded. If the maxim of 'Too many cooks' curtailed the dangerously extremist tendencies of an unchecked 'Many hands make light work', so the philosophy of individualism needs its strictures against selfishness and lack of social responsibility. And who, likewise, would unashamedly declare themself in favour of 'selfish, social irresponsibility'?

It is not difficult to see why there might be a requirement for counter-values to the obvious values of individualism. The great values of the French Revolution can be taken in illustration. Freedom, equality and fraternity sound undeniably desirable to the modern ear (except for the masculinity evoked by the third term of the triad). When faced by absolutism, these values could be proclaimed with an unlimited enthusiasm, which suggested that all three would be perfectly attainable in reality once the crown had been removed from the tyrannical head. But once the crown, and indeed the head itself, had been removed, then not merely could values be proclaimed; dilemmas had also to be faced. Limitations to the great principles needed to be established, and these limitations, of course, needed to be just as principled as the principles which they limited.

If liberty were to be individual freedom, then it was necessary to establish why the individual should show loyalty to the state and social responsibility to fellow individuals. Liberty would result in anarchy lest some form of authority could be established. Nor should it be forgotten that the modern capitalist era may have freed individuals from feudal restrictions, but it has also seen the emergence of the state in its most powerful form.

In theory, equality may be the value of the modern democracy: all are theoretically equal in the eyes of the law and in the privacy of the ballot box. However, equality cannot get out of hand in a society whose commercial and cultural life seems to be so devoted to proving the productive reality of inequality. Every day there is evidence of success and failure: some businesses are proved to be more successful than others, some popular songs are greater hits than other less fortunate recordings, some football teams win more matches than their rivals, and some children pass more examinations. If there is equality in this cultural climate, it is not a straightforward equality; it is an equality which allows the successful to be more equal than the rest.

As for fraternity, this too needs its qualification. The message of individual freedom and equality seems to be a universal message. The rationality of the Enlightenment *philosophes* was a universal rationality, which knew no national boundaries. The value of freedom was not to stop at the foothills of the Pyrenees, nor was it presumed to get fatally seasick if crossed the Channel. The *philosophes* talked grandly of the rights of man, meaning all men regardless of nationality (but perhaps not regardless of gender). In this vision, national boundaries would collapse as all joined together to submit freely and individually to the universal authority of reason. Yet the world of individualism has not been a world which has seen the crumbling of nationality. Far from it; the governmental states, which have grown so powerful in the past two hundred years, have been national states demanding national allegiance from their freely individual and politically equal members. The fraternity cannot be universal when it is the fraternity of the fatherland or the mother country.

All this suggests that the major themes of individualism need to be considered in relation to their counter-themes. Nor should the dialectic between themes and counter-themes be interpreted as a conflict between philosophically derived notions and those existing in an older, pre-philosophical common sense. The major themes of the Enlightenment did not meet counter-themes because they confronted maxims of common sense, which warned in a traditional manner against the evils of selfishness or a failure to respect one's elders and betters. It is within the ideological traditions of liberalism itself that the counter-themes can be detected. As will be shown in later chapters, these themes and counter-themes are not confined to the printed volumes of the great thinkers, but are reproduced in everyday thinking in a way which gives it a dilemmatic quality.

Individualism and counter-themes

The obvious way to examine counter-themes in philosophy is by detailed exegesis. The work of an individual philosopher could be examined to show how dilemmas, which the thinker had believed to be successfully resolved, still continue to nag away. For example, one might take a liberal philosopher who attempted to square individual liberty with the responsiblity of the state, in order to demonstrate the underlying tension in the arguments. This would be a philosophical task. It is, of course, one that has been done many times, especially in relation to a thinker like Rousseau who, faced with the political reality of absolutism, could propound that the true freedom of the individual would be a socially conscious freedom. The ambiguities would become apparent once the Jacobins attempted to put this doctrine into practice with the aid of Monsieur Guillotin's invention. Later analysts can then examine the philosophical texts to point out the themes and counter-themes, which can be used both to criticize and to justify political authority. Chapter 5 will give a brief example of a continuing ideological dilemma in the writings of Durkheim: egalitarian and authoritarian themes continue to jostle dilemmatically despite Durkheim's claim to have effected an intellectual solution (Gane, 1988: 8–11).

Another way to demonstrate counter-themes is less philosophical and more social scientific. This is to set philosophy in its social and argumentative context. It can be assumed that the meaning of argumentative discourse must be understood in terms of its argumentative context: what is being justified by argument takes its sense from what is being criticized (Billig, 1987: chapter 4; 1988a, 1988b). Philosophy is above all argumentative discourse, and even the most self-contained of philosophical systems takes meaning from the fact that it is an argument against other possible philosophies. That being so, it is possible that a philosophy's counter-themes can be contained within its argumentative context. For example, the philosophy may take for granted values which *prima facie* seem to be attacked because it assumes that no one would seriously attack such values. Or it may leave opponents in debate to voice the counter-themes, tacitly assuming the reasonableness of the opponents whilst a particular point is pushed to its logical, or rather its rhetorical, conclusion.

Examples of both forms of philosophical counter-themes within liberalism can be briefly given. Geoffrey Hawthorn, in his book *Enlightenment and Despair*, discusses the differences between English and German individualism in the early nineteenth century. Unlike its German counterpart, English individualism seemed to be the more thoroughgoing, in that it was focused primarily upon individuals and their freedom to pursue their own ends. German individualism, by contrast, appeared to be more concerned with discussing the rights of the individual in relation to the rights of the state. Hawthorn argues that this difference must be understood

in relation to the social context. If one just examines the philosophies in themselves, one might conclude that the English utilitarians were the more anti-statist. In fact, England possessed a comparatively secure political authority, which none of the English theorists would have dreamt of questioning. As Hawthorn said of Mill, he 'took his society for granted in a way that Continental intellectuals did not' (1987: 88). By contrast Germany, divided and weak, possessed no central political authority, and themes of authority, which the English could take for granted and therefore ignore, were uppermost in German writings. Therefore, to understand the ideological significance of the texts, it is necessary to go beyond the texts themselves.

The argumentative context can be all-important for examining ideological counter-themes. A philosophical treatise, which pushes a single principle as far as it can be pushed, may achieve great contemporary prominence, and so may be thought to express 'the spirit of the age'. However, the treatise may only represent one side of an argument. Moreover, the other side, which might be expressed with equal philosophical one-sidedness, may come from the same cultural or ideological tradition. Thus the 'spirit of the age' may be more accurately represented by the debate between the two adversaries rather by either party individually. For example, Edward Sampson has already been cited as suggesting that the individualism of psychology expresses the dominant ethos of capitalist culture. However, one should not forget the debates between psychologists and sociologists, and that the cultural tradition which has produced modern individualist psychology has also produced sociology. In fact, psychologists and sociologists may snipe at each other from across the corridors of the same educational institution, receiving their salary cheques from precisely the same source. In consequence, it seems an oversimplification to equate psychology with the dominant ethos, rather than to suggest that the dominant ethos is characterized by dilemmas about the role of the individual and the society.

A philosophical example can be given of the argumentative context of individualism. Theorists of individualism, like all philosophers, were engaged in debate, and their opponents were not necessarily representatives of opposing political ideologies. Some debates were debates between ideologies, but by no means all. When Marx attacked Mill, this was a debate between ideologies, as Marx explicitly wished to overthrow the society which Mill took for granted. However, when Walter Bagehot wrote *The English Constitution* as an indirect critique of Mill, it was to defend the society of which they were both notable parts. Bagehot's arguments, about the need of the state to seduce the hearts and minds of the masses, may have a passing resemblance to some of Marx and Engels's notions about the function of ideology, but there is no ideological resemblance. Bagehot fully approved of the constitution possessing its 'dignified part',

to win the allegiance of the ill-educated and badly paid. His criticism of Mill was that, in constructing a philosophy and indeed a psychology based upon principles of individual interest, the great philosopher had forgotten social motives, which act as a conservative force for preserving tradition. Without taking into account these social motives, suggested Bagehot, one could not understand why the English have still clung to the symbols of monarchy whilst accepting a constitution whose effective aspects are in reality republican. The point is that the opposition between Mill and Bagehot was an opposition within an ideology, for politically they concurred more than they differed. Neither the abstract individualism of Mill nor the social conservatism of Bagehot can be taken as expressing 'the ideological spirit'. However, the debate between the two may catch better than does either singly an ideology which has not destroyed civil authority in favour of individual freedom, but which sets continual dilemmas regarding the competing claims of individual freedom and social authority.

It is not only in the debates between theorists that themes and counter-themes can be observed. They can also be clearly visible when theorists, not quite of the first rank, attempt the grand systematization to include all aspects of human knowledge. Unoriginal philosophers, lacking the innovatory obsession to develop a single theme, may attempt to synthesize all that there is. They may claim to resolve all contradictions in their systematizations, only to succeed in laying bare the terms of the contradictions, thereby revealing the dilemmatic quality of their own thinking. A good example is provided by the work of Destutt de Tracy, the Enlightenment *philosophe* who bequeathed to posterity the very word 'ideology'. De Tracy's *Élémens d'idéologie* was intended to provide the summation of all philosophical knowledge in a textbook to be used as the basis for advanced education in post-revolutionary France. Despite de Tracy's hopes, it is not difficult for the modern reader to detect contradictory themes within a work which proudly called itself 'ideology'.

Destutt de Tracy, like most Enlightenment *philosophes*, was an avowed champion of liberty. He declared in *Élémens* that the object of all intellectual inquiry was to satisfy the passion for liberty (vol. IV, p. 41). Volume V dealt with physiological knowledge, and in this volume the philosophical champion of human freedom became the materialist sceptic. De Tracy argued that all human thinking could be reduced to physiological movements which obeyed the physical laws of necessity. Human movements were just as obedient to these laws as any animal movements. Even the feeling of freedom was no more than a chimera, 'a sham liberty', produced by underlying changes in physiology (vol. V, p. 378). A more rigorous thinker than de Tracy might have attempted to reconcile these themes, subverting one to another. However, de Tracy, oblivious to contradiction, assumed that all elements of his rational ideology were equally true. In this, he reminds us that the French Enlightenment produced Voltaire and

La Mettrie, and that, at one and the same time, notions of individual freedom and the lack of freedom were being produced.

Nor was the contradiction between human freedom and physiological necessity the only contradiction in *Élémens*. De Tracy declared the essential equality of man, only to suggest that not all are created biologically equal: only some intelligences could be entrusted with the vote and be permitted to study 'ideology' to an advanced level. The others, unable to exercise freedom, needed to be directed by rational authority. Similarly, de Tracy described the basis of social life as the free exchange of goods between individuals. Yet at other stages he recognized the social divisions between the rich and the poor, suggesting that these divisions ensured that the poor, under the necessity of their poverty, were unable to bargain freely with the rich. As such, he was advocating a doctrine of free individual exchange whilst sympathizing with the unfree, who could only act under the compulsion of the cruel necessities of poverty. Freedom and necessity, equality and inequality, individualism and fraternity were limiting each other in this semantically original, but philosophically unoriginal, ideology (see Billig, 1982 for further details of the ideological contradictions of the French ideologists; see also Kennedy, 1978 and Head, 1985). And if these themes and counter-themes still seem to be grandly universal, upholding the global rationalism of the Enlightenment, the context should be remembered: the whole textbook was designed for a rigidly controlled curriculum of education within one country. For a time de Tracy himself was proud to serve the state in the Ministry of Education to oversee the creation of the national curriculum. In this way, the project of 'ideology' in its very existence took for granted the national state and its political authority.

These examples suggest that the ideological heritage is not a simple one. The intellectual ideology may not donate a series of solved problems to common sense. Instead, it may provide the conflicting themes of theoretical dilemmas to common sense, where dilemmas can be re-created and experienced in practical terms. Just as antithetical maxims represent the contrary themes of common sense, so ideology may be characterized by its dilemmatic qualities, which ensure that those living within the ideology cannot escape from the difficulties of dilemmas. The contrary themes of intellectual ideology can be represented in lived ideology, where, of course, they may be attached to the antithetical themes of older common sense. Murray Edelman (1977), in his analysis of the way that poverty is talked about today, suggests that the modern person possesses two contrary myths about poverty. On the one hand people share the myth that the poor are to blame for their own plight: themes of drunkenness, laziness and weakness of individual character figure largely in this mythology. It is a myth which concentrates upon the essential justice of the world (Lerner, 1977). If this myth is an individualist one, it is not the only myth used to describe

poverty. There is another social myth, which expresses sympathy with the poor as helpless victims of an unjust society.

Survey analysis confirms that attitudes towards poverty and inequality are complex. Very few people believe that the world is just in a simple sense (Verba and Orren, 1986). Instead there is a tension in the discourse about poverty and equality between blame and sympathy (for example Furnham, 1982; Furnham and Lewis, 1986; Nilson, 1981). Contrary values are asserted, as the same people believe that the state should aid the poor and also that state aid is liable to undermine the moral worth of the poor (Golding and Middleton, 1982; Taylor-Gooby, 1983, 1985). These reactions might be thought to be a modern representation of the age-old dilemma between justice and mercy. Classical orators recognized in their controversies that there is much to be said on both sides of the dilemma: on the one hand it is good to show mercy, but on the other hand too much mercy will undermine justice. In the same way, the evidence from opinion surveys suggests that the modern public finds a similar simultaneous reasonableness in justice and mercy, believing that one must be merciful towards the poor, but on the other hand that too much mercy (in the shape of large welfare payments) will be unjust.

The point is not that the modern dilemmas and the modern discourse of dilemma can be seen to be a continuation of a much older dilemma. No doubt, in talking of poverty, people can bring to mind maxims and proverbs formulated long before the creation of the modern welfare state ('God helps those who help themselves'; 'Giving to the poor increases a man's store'). However, the modern form of the dilemma has been crucially shaped by ideology. The philosophy of individualism has not resolved the dilemma by vanquishing social mercy in the name of individual justice; instead, new force and discourse has been added to both of the dilemmatic horns. Therefore, in today's ordinary discourse one might expect to find the representation of Enlightenment philosophy in its dilemmatic, rather than systematized, aspect.

This representation can occur regardless of whether people are aware of the ideological traditions in which they are living. The traditions can even be structured semantically in the vocabulary used in everyday discourse. Today one might hear somebody justifying a decision to jettison family responsibilities with the words that they wish to 'maximize their chances of personal fulfilment'. Perhaps such a person envisages that their action is likely to attract criticism. Maybe they have already rehearsed the criticisms in their own internal deliberations, and have succeeded in dismissing the criticisms as being old-fashioned, even Victorian. Our deliberator and potential personal fulfiller may not be aware just how much their own justification seems to express the nineteenth-century philosophy of Benthamite utilitarianism. Even the vocabulary is Benthamite in a literal sense: the sentiment for personal fulfilment can be expressed without

awareness that the very word 'maximization' was coined by Bentham himself. Unaware of our ideological and semantic heritage, we can still live within its tradition. In this way the currents of ideological history can quietly pass through our own thinking, in a way which ensures that our thinking is not purely our own. Moreover, the cross-currents and contrary tendencies of this history can continue to shape the contents of our thinking about the dilemmas of present ordinary life.