8

Gender and Individuality

In selecting examples of dilemmatic aspects of common sense we have focused on contradictions apparent in everyday understandings of human nature: the relationship between mind and body; learning in childhood; individual expertise and human equality; the concept of prejudice as applied to human groups. This chapter will focus on everyday talk about men and women, relating this to the issue of ideological constructs of human nature more generally.

In contemporary Western society we have available to us a number of different ways of talking about ourselves and other people. On the one hand, the very notion of 'human nature' presupposes an identity common to those objects labelled 'human' (based on a capacity for 'rationality' according to the classical liberal theorists). On the other hand, we are also able to refer to the existence of infinite human variation. The assertions 'We are all human' and 'We are all individuals' are both equally and self-evidently 'true'. The potential for contradiction is further enhanced by the existence of a third type of explanation which refers to categories of persons. Not only is it true that we are all human and all individuals: it is also accepted as a fact of life that we are all either male or female (see Kessler and McKenna, 1978). The notion of 'types' of persons, of whatever kind, is opposed in some senses both to the adage that all human beings are essentially 'the same' and also to the assertion that all individuals are essentially 'different'. The collision of these various available notions of human nature may result in a dilemma between categorization and particularization, summed up by the question 'How far can we generalize?'

The use of gender categories

Social psychologists have long been concerned with the way in which people use gender categories when thinking about themselves and other people. Although theorists have differed in their approach to this issue, they have been united in a common tendency to presuppose consistency in the use and in the meaning of gender categories (see Condor, 1986 for a detailed account). Currently, academics have been concerned to document the content of gender categories (so-called 'sex stereotypes'). Social psychologists working in this area often presuppose that gender categories are stable, universal, cognitive structures which can be traced to 'real' differences in the external environment: 'The human race can be divided rather easily into two groups of males and females. *A consequence of this*

fact is the development of cognitive categories to describe and process gender-related information' (Deaux et al., 1985: 145; our emphasis). In conducting sex stereotype research, the social psychologist usually accepts gender categorization as a prior fact, and simply requests that respondents describe the given category labels 'men' and 'women'. Not only do studies of sex stereotyping tend to overlook the possibility of alternative discourses (for example, those asserting individual difference), but they also assume consistency in the meaning associated with gender categories. Moreover, in re-presenting their findings, researchers tend to overlook their own role as agenda-setter, and present gender categorization as an ubiquitous schema employed by their 'subjects' (see Condor, 1986).

An alternative perspective attempts to trace themes of 'gender', 'individual difference' and 'common human nature' to discrete belief systems. Just as academics have attempted to delineate separate, internally consistent, ideologies of education (see chapter 4), sociologists have distinguished 'differentiating' from 'non-differentiating' ideologies of gender (Holter, 1970). From this perspective, 'traditional' positions are identified with gender-based generalization, and 'non-traditional' positions are identified with discourses of 'common human nature' and 'individual difference'. Feminists, concerned to construct contradiction-free theory, may go further and attempt to subclassify 'types' of feminism on the basis of whether or not a particular perspective opts for a gender-categorical account. Hence, McFadden (1984) categorizes feminist theories into 'minimizers' (those which seek to unite male and female under a common 'human nature') and 'maximizers' (those which articulate difference and the unique perspective of the female).

Social psychologists may present talk about 'gender' or of 'individual differences' and 'common human nature' as reflecting stable, internally consistent 'sex role attitudes' espoused by particular individuals (for example Osmond and Martin, 1975; but see the criticisms of Wetherell, Stiven and Potter, 1987). A similar attempt to account for variation in the use of gender categories in terms of stable individual differences is also apparent in Bem's (1981) suggestion that people vary in the extent to which they interpret the world in terms of a prepacked 'gender schema' (cf. Wetherell, 1986).

The tendency to regard notions of 'gender', 'individuality' and 'common human nature' as distinct positions, which may be used as a reliable means by which to classify 'different' belief systems, necessarily minimizes the coincidence of these different themes *within* accounts. Notwithstanding her attempts to pigeon-hole feminist theories in terms of whether or not they adopt notions of gender distinction, McFadden (1984: 497) concedes that 'Many thinkers [seem] to vacillate on the question, so that it is often hard to discern their mature position.'

In this chapter we shall suggest that an acceptance of the reality of gender, far from representing a ubiquitous aspect of social cognition, or

being characteristic of a discrete belief system, may coexist with competing constructs of human nature. The consequence is that vacillation may not be confined to formal feminist rhetoric, but may rather represent a common feature of talk about men and women. In fact, such vacillation can sometimes be seen in psychology textbooks themselves. For example, Weinreich (1978: 19), in a chapter on 'sex role socialization', first suggests: 'The [psychological] evidence does not justify the stereotypical beliefs which exist in our society about major sex differences in ability and personality.' However, she subsequently goes on to consider the effect of such stereotypes in actually producing the sex differences which the psychological evidence does not supposedly justify: 'There are stereotypical myths about sex differences which, despite their inaccuracy, are reflected in behaviour. These myths influence beliefs about what sex roles should be, and in particular they influence the agents, content and process of socialization' (p. 20).

As this example illustrates, notions of common human nature and gender difference may be so closely related in talk that it is difficult to regard them even as separate 'positions' or discourses, let alone as aspects of discrete ideologies or attitudes. The use of different, and potentially contradictory, notions of human nature may pass unrecognized. On other occasions, however, demands for consistency may mean that the simultaneous recognition of gender distinction and a 'common human nature' come to be regarded as a problem. In the words of a psychology lecturer: 'I find myself saying silly things like, "Of course men and women are different, but they are not really."'

Theories of human nature and notions of fairness

In chapter 3 we noted the prevalence of the ethos of individualism in contemporary Western thought. Individualism involves an assertion not only of fact (that we are 'all different') but also of value (the moral prescription to appreciate the rights and liberty of the individual). Individualism questions both the validity and the morality of categorical thought. Authors of social psychology textbooks make it clear that 'prejudice' is to be deplored not only because of its associations with irrationality. 'Prejudiced thought', which focuses on social categories such as 'race' or gender, also contravenes the intellectual and moral prescription to recognize and value the unique qualities of the individual (see chapter 7). Data on psychological 'sex differences' is often presented in terms of two only slightly overlapping normal distribution curves, in order to illustrate the reality of individual variation and the limited validity of gender-based generalization.

Human variation is regarded not only as a fact which 'ought' to be appreciated, but also as a goal to be achieved in a 'fair' society. The notion of human variation is associated with the Aristotelian notion of distributive justice, which takes into consideration differences in deserts and needs

in the allocation of rights, duties and resources (equity). In so far as gender categories obscure individual variation, they can be seen to constitute an obstacle to the achievement of a 'fair' social hierarchy.

It is not, however, simply the case that we value notions of 'individual difference' and devalue alternative notions of human nature. The construct of 'common human nature' also has a moral, as well as a factual, status. This is reflected in the ambiguity of the term 'equality', often used, in formal theory as in everyday talk, both as an assertion of fact and as a value (see Williams, 1962). In fact, individualism hinges upon values of equality, since the autonomy of the individual can only be attained and maintained by an appreciation of 'equal liberty' and 'equal opportunity'. Talk about 'men' and 'women' not only contravenes the value of individuality: it also contravenes the value of human equality. This time the objection is that gender imposes (rather than obscures) differences between human beings.

The moral tension between on the one hand values of individualism and equality, and on the other hand the assertion of gender distinction, is expressed most clearly in debates utilizing the construct of 'sex role sociali-zation'. The argument that particular forms of gender distinction reflect the practice of a 'sex role socialization' or 'conditioning' – understood as an unfair external constraint upon the full development of individual potential – will be familiar to the modern reader of psychology textbooks. The construct of 'socialization' is often used to imply that, in so far as gender distinction has been (unfairly) imposed from without, differences between males and females cannot be construed as 'real'. In J.S. Mill's words: 'What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others' (1970). Similarly, Weinreich's contradictory state-ment concerning the 'existence' of sex differences (see above) is based on an assumption that, in so far as gender difference can be atttributed to external social influence, this difference is not 'real'.

However, despite the fact that values of human equality and individuality can both be used to question the validity and legitimacy of a categorical treatment of persons as 'male' and 'female', the problem cannot be resolved once and for all by simply denying the reality and significance of human gender. Although liberal feminists such as Bem (1978: 21) may look forward to a time when 'gender no longer functions like a prison', there remains the problem of how to construe this ideal 'gender-free' humanity. A prior assumption of the fact of human equality might lead us to assume that gender distinction would not exist in the absence of 'forced repres-sion' or 'unnatural stimulation' (see Jaggar, 1983). At the same time, however, the notion of gender distinction constitutes a ubiquitous intellec-tual and moral lens through which we perceive and evaluate the world. Ethnomethodologists have pointed to the existence of a 'natural attitude', a moral and intellectual demand that we attribute gender to persons

(Garfinkel, 1967). The common-sense assumption that every individual *must* be either 'male' or 'female', and that it is essential to determine which, is as apparent in biological and psychological 'science' as in everyday thought (see Kessler and McKenna, 1978). Whenever we think about human nature we are caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, values of individualism and equality suggest that talk about 'men' and 'women' is neither valid nor fair. On the other hand is the common-sense assumption that all people are, and must be, either male or female.

The dilemma between asserting human similarity and difference, summed up in the question 'How far should we generalize?', implies that there may be problems construing values of equity and equality as discrete or individual standpoints (cf. Rasinski, 1987; Sampson, 1975). Rather, notions of human similarity and values of equality may jostle for priority with notions of human variety and values of equity when deciding what is 'fair'. As Ginsberg (1965: 7) notes: 'The statement that equals should be treated equally and unequals unequally throws no light on what is to be done to or for equals and unequals. Nor, indeed, does this dictate what qualifies as equality.' The coincidence of beliefs and values in *both* a fundamental human equality and an infinite human variety means that the extent of similarity or difference between persons always constitutes a potentially contestable issue.

In everyday talk as well as formal theory it is important to acknowledge the range of contestability, both with respect to constructs of human nature ('How far should we generalize?') and with respect to notions of 'fairness'. Notions of 'gender', 'individual difference' and 'human equality' can all be used to support different rhetorical ends, and the meanings associated with the values of liberty and equality may vary. Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments, far from demonstrating a 'natural' affinity of notions of equality with feminist rhetoric, actually represented a conscious corruption of existing liberal discourse in which the slogan of 'equality' was used to justify female subordination. Notions of equality may still be used as a component of an essentially conservative discourse (see, for example, the discourse of 'equal but different' as described by Dworkin, 1983). An assertion of equality as a fact can, by denying the existence of power relations, foreclose a debate for social change ('Now that we have sex equality . . .'). Moreover, as we shall see later, the acceptance of equality as a fact can be used to portray feminist arguments as ('unfairly') limiting individual freedom and the 'right to choose'.

How far should we generalize? Gender categories in conversation

Up to this point we have been focusing on the use of gender categories in the abstract language of political and 'scientific' theory. Let us now

turn to consider the use of gender categories in conversations which may more closely mirror 'everyday' talk about 'men' and 'women'. In the following conversation five female students are discussing the way in which people choose their university course. In this excerpt they are talking about women and science. (Slashes are used to indicate pauses, with double slashes indicating a pause greater than one second.)

Colette: Like women all become// well not// a lot of women/ still er/ are less likely to do scientific jobs/ which is why I mean obviously/ at the moment everyone is trying to persuade women to do scientific/ jobs but// um say if you go along to a French lecture or something like that you see that it is mostly females/ and/ and sort of fewer males whereas if you go along to a physics lecture you are likely to see more blokes.

Sue: Why do you think that is?

Jill: Because it is conditioning isn't it?

Jane: It's the effects of school isn't it?

Jill: Yea.

Colette: A lot of schools I mean when I was at school

Jane [*interrupting*]: And your parents

Colette: the people who were at the top of the maths groups and the top of the physics and chemistry group were all were about three or four girls and then you had a sort of mixture of girls and boys and then another group of girls. But sort of you know mixed in together obviously more or less but the people who were actually best at it were girls funnily enough.

Jane: They must have been just discouraged when they were young.

Jill: Yea.

Sarah: Your parents discourage kids.

Jill: Yea.

Jane: And the teachers do.

Colette: It isn't possible to generalize at all/ but not in// um/ well you can't generalize in the sense that/ when you say that/ girls are better at one because of the way their brains work its just that// um/ it is conditioning isn't it?/ But there was some theory or other that I read somewhere which was that um/ the female in the female brain the two hemispheres are fused together more/ so that women are better at/ general thinking.

Jane: Yea.

Colette: We're just brilliant at everything.

This conversation may be seen to illustrate a dilemma over how far one may generalize about women; Colette hesitates and qualifies the generalizations she makes, from 'all' to 'a lot' or 'about three or four'. This is a dilemma which involves a clear confrontation of values as well as a quandary over facts.

The dominant tendency in the conversation is to deny or explain the 'reality' of sex differences, by accounting for women's failure to take up scientific subjects in terms of social pressure: 'It is conditioning isn't it?', 'It's the effects of school.' The assumption reigns that if sex differences are attributable to social pressure then they are not 'real': girls have been '*just* discouraged'. In her penultimate statement, Colette suggests that if

the behaviour of women is due to 'conditioning' then 'you can't generalize'. Throughout the conversation (and beyond the quoted extract), the participants continually pitted generalizations against a recognition of human variation. They also showed commitment both to a principle of equality, and also to a competitive individualism which assumes that some people are better than others, the issue being that of determining who are better and at what. Indeed, the conversation provides an interesting reflection of a contradiction which Jaggar (1983) identifies within liberal forms of feminism in which emphasis on the social bases of character ('socialization', 'conditioning') threatens to undermine coexisting notions of abstract individualism which regard human nature as 'basically' presocial.

Even an acceptance of gender-based generalization does not appear to activate a prepackaged 'gender schema' which leaves these young women with nothing more to ponder. Colette starts out by talking about female inferiority: asserting that women 'are less likely to do scientific jobs' or to take up scientific subjects at university. However, in her second statement she notes a distinction between her own personal experience and the generalized statement which she has just made: 'funnily enough' when she was at school, it was girls (or, at least some of them) who were *better* at science. In her last statement, notions of female inferiority or specialism ('mostly females' do French at university) give way to notions of generic female superiority: 'We're just brilliant at everything.'

Our short conversational extract illustrates a range of contradiction implicitly denied by most social psychological theories of sex stereotyping or sex role attitudes. Rather than sex simply constituting a 'salient' aspect of social perception, there is a *tension* between talking about sex differences and an acknowledgement of human variation. When generalization is accepted there is a tension between regarding differences as 'real' and as socially constructed. Even when differences are accepted as 'real', the interpretation of difference is not constrained by rigid stereotype templates. Rather, there is a problem in ascertaining the place of women in the comparative meritocracy. Does difference mean that women are worse or better than men?

Contradictory themes do not, in this case, appear to be the property of distinct belief systems or to constitute distinct individual standpoints. Contrary ideas may be articulated by the same individual. This is most apparent in Colette's third statement, in which her initial suggestion that 'It isn't possible to generalize at all' is followed by the observation that 'It is conditioning isn't it?' Both statements are then contradicted ('but') by generic reference to brain lateralization. We have already noted how humour may reveal tensions by emphasizing the less privileged pole of a contradiction in an unqualified, parodied manner (chapter 5). This seems to be the case with Colette's final statement, in which the shift to an apparently unqualified acceptance of the 'reality' of gender and of female

superiority ('We're just brilliant at everything') is marked by a jocular simplicity and manner of delivery.

Competing notions of gender and individual difference: opting for 'an answer'

Conversations such as the one we have just considered pose the researcher something of a problem: this is related to the distinction between implicit and explicit conflict outlined in chapter 2. In the students' discussion, contrasting themes may be identified, but contradiction is either unrecognized by the speakers or left largely unchallenged ('funnily enough'). In one sense it is, of course, legitimate that the researcher 'read' contradictions in transcripts. However, on the other hand there are problems in allowing ourselves the power of interpretation when we would (as social scientists) wish to say something about the meanings intended by, and the motivations of, the speakers themselves (see Parker, in press). Of course, it is not always the case that contradictions can be ignored or shrugged off with passing reference or humour. In many situations in our everyday life, contradiction poses an explicit dilemma of choice.

Although we may be content to use contrary themes in our everyday talk, occasions arise in which we are required to opt for a *single* 'answer'. *Men and Women: How Different Are They?* asks John Nicholson in the title of his book, and the psychologist's attempt to quantify 'sex differences' is, of course, a good example of an attempt to resolve the 'How far can you generalize?' dilemma. The need to opt for a single answer is not, of course, a problem facing the academic psychologist alone. Take, for example, the following advice given to a woman who finds that her 'kind and loving' husband has been hoarding pornography: 'Either you have to decide that all men are foul, that your husband has the mind of a psychopath in the body of a beast, making nonsense of his 33 years of tender devotion to your well-being. Or you have to agree that he himself is the victim of sexual shyness' (Phillip Hodson in *She* magazine, September 1986). The answer is phrased in terms of a *choice* between generalization ('all men are foul') and particularization ('he himself').

It is important to remember that although we may be encouraged to opt for a single explanation, answers need not represent a final resolution to any dilemma. An assertion of similarity or difference between human beings may remain essentially contestable even after the option has been made. In fact, rather than it being possible to establish a 'mature position', the distinction between assertions of human similarity, absolute variety and (gender) difference may be regarded as *inherently* unstable. Billig (1985, 1987) notes that categorization presupposes particularization and, conversely, particularization presupposes categorization. We might, on this basis, argue that people only use one type of account through a

recognition of the possibility of alternatives. Statements to the effect that there exist no essential sex differences would be both unnecessary and essentially meaningless, were it not for the implicit or explicit recognition of the alternative contention that differences do exist. Furthermore, to talk of 'men' and 'women' as distinct categories reminds us that ('however') it is *also* true that 'We are all human', and that 'We are all individuals.'

The meanings associated with any choice of explanation are, as we have already noted, also open to negotiation and to criticism. Since the woman who wrote to the *She* problem page is presumably a thoughtful individual, she could doubtless think of other possible solutions, not admitted by Phillip Hodson. She might, for example, choose to alter the allocation of blame by regarding men (in general) favourably but her husband as an (exceptional) bestial psychopath.

Some of these considerations are illustrated in the following extract from a conversation among six university students who were asked to provide a joint solution to a current social psychological sex role attitude scale. The experience of being 'subjected' to social psychological attitude research is an example (albeit a rather unusual one) of an everyday situation in which we may be confronted with an ostensibly simple choice. The following transcript has been taken from a study which investigated the range of contestability in 'sex role attitudes' by asking groups of 'subjects' to discuss, and reach a joint decision on, items drawn from Parry's (1983) British version of the Attitudes Toward Women scale. This particular transcript has been taken from a more detailed analysis of the 'sex role attitude' issue (Condor, 1987a and in submission). The question the students are considering is:

There are some jobs that men can do better than women.

The extract starts at the beginning of the discussion, and finishes at the point at which the students began to negotiate which point of the scale to choose as their answer.

Peter: Yes there are some.
Julie: Some.
Marie: Yes some.
Harriet: And there's a lot of jobs that women can do better than men.
Peter: Precisely. But even that's variable cos take a job that *in general* men can do better than women you're bound to find some women who can do the job just as well or better than the men.
Marie: Yes.
Harriet: Yes.
Peter: And vice versa you know.
Harriet: There's an exception to everything.

Raymond: There will/ there will be jobs that men can do better/ possibly/ *possibly* physical jobs.

Peter: Um.

Raymond: Men in general have twenty-five per cent more strength or so the books say/ but/

Harriet: Maybe for things like

Raymond [*interrupting*]: But that's not all/ in terms of manipulative skill in fact in terms of manipulative skill they're superior.

Peter: But surely it all depends on the individual though.

Marie: Well/ I think that men have less potential to do work that women do because women have more potential to do work that men do/ in general.

Peter: Why?

Marie: Because/ men don't have the sensitivity in general that women have. Like the nurturing faculty which is necessary in caring for people.

Cathy: I think it depends on the individual don't you?

Marie: The majority though I think in the majority sense

Peter [*interrupting*]: Also of course everybody always goes on about/ women are oppressed but of course surely to a great extent those particular aspects of men are quite repressed as well.

Harriet: Yea quite.

Peter: You know by upbringing because they've got to be tough little soldiers and they've got to be you know they've got to be men and masculine and all the rest of it like me of course but um

[*Laughter*]

Peter: You know what I mean? It's probably because it's repressed rather than being natural.

Marie: But with regard to jobs at the moment I think that women in general

Peter [*interrupting*]: and yet saying that a lot of the women I have met who are in social work etcetera are often very very hard very cold. And yet the men I've met they're extremely sort of warm and kind and all the rest of it you know.

Marie: But this isn't answering the question is it?

Harriet: Well there are many jobs.

Raymond: We'll have to say how many there are.

Julie: I wouldn't say there were many. There might be a few.

Peter: Many I suppose puts across the idea that there's more than half.

Julie: We need to qualify this statement.

Peter: But of course you can't do that with these things.

An analysis of conversation (which allows 'subjects' to 'show their working') reveals the presence of ideological dilemmas which may be obscured by the usual social psychological procedure of focusing on 'the answer'. Once again, we may identify a tension between generalization (the agreement that there are some jobs that men and women are able to perform differentially) and individuation. The fact that the discussants have been asked to come up with a single (unqualified) answer leads to a more direct confrontation with contradiction than was apparent in the earlier transcript. Although the framing of the question would appear to impose gender categorization, the discussion is characterized by a generalization–particularization chain

reaction, with each categorical statement sparking off a reference to individual difference. Initial agreement with the question is immediately qualified: 'But even that's variable', 'There's an exception to everything.' Raymond returns to the generalization theme, but provokes Peter to suggest 'But surely it all depends on the individual.' Marie then generalizes, but her statement is countered by Cathy: 'It depends on the individual.' Although the flip between sides of the argument is most apparent between speakers, particular individuals do not appear reliably to employ one theme rather than the other. Peter, in particular, is prepared to assert that there are some jobs that men can do better than women, but also to refer to individual variation. This comes out most clearly when he parodies his own generalization about the repression of male emotionality (the demand 'to be men and masculine and all the rest of it') by ironically including himself ('like me, of course').

Again, the problem of generalization is accompanied by an argument concerning what to make of gender difference. The 'natural difference' versus 'socialization' polarity is again apparent in this debate. Raymond suggests that there may be physical reasons why men can do some jobs better than women, and Peter accounts for men's lack of nurturance in terms of repressive upbringing 'rather than being natural'.

Even when generalization is accepted as valid there is still the problem of interpreting what this means. Although the discussion begins with a (qualified) agreement with the question, speakers tend to dissociate their own use of a gender generalization theme from a simple agreement that 'There are some jobs that men can do better than women.' Rather, the meaning as well as the viability of generalization is subject to debate. In particular, attempts are made to dissociate a recognition of difference from an assumption that men are, therefore, 'better'. Harriet suggests that 'There's a lot of jobs that women can do better than men' and Raymond follows with a comment about men's superior physical strength, but then switches focus to the more contentious domain of 'manipulative skill'. This direction is taken up by Marie, who further switches from the physical to the psychological aspects of difference and suggests that women can do more jobs than men because of their superior 'sensitivity' and 'nurturing faculty'. Marie's focus on the psychological characteristics of men and women is taken up by Peter, and the argument is again inverted, this time in a counter-stereotypic assertion, that in his experience 'a lot' of female social workers are 'very, very hard, very cold'.

In opting for 'an answer' to the ostensibly simply question posed to them, the choice which the discussion group had to make was not a simple one as implied by the usual request that respondents define their answer in terms of a particular point on the continuum between strong agreement and strong disagreement. The issues raised in our second conversational extract parallel some of those in the first. There is again a dilemma over how

far generalization is warranted given the fact of individual variation. And again this is no sterile debate about the descriptive validity of generalization, but an argument based on the ideological dilemma that talk about sex differences contravenes the prescription to appreciate individual differences. At the same time, it is recognized as impossible to reject entirely the 'fact' of gender. The individualistic ethos also brings with it the assumption that some people *are* better than others and, in so far as men and women do differ, it is necessary to ascertain who is better at what.

Freedom and control

One important aspect of liberal ideology which puts into question the morality of gender-categorial thought is the value of individual liberty. However, there is no straightforward equation whereby 'liberty' is assigned unambiguously to a positive pole and 'control' to a negative. One dilemma which has surfaced on several occasions in this book is the pull between recognizing the liberty of the individual and appreciating legitimate authority.

We shall now consider another transcript, taken from another discussion by the same students, which illustrates a tension between two notions of 'freedom': first, the notion of 'freedom *from*' external control; and secondly, the notion of 'freedom *to*' act. The particular issue we will consider is that of the individual 'right to choose'. These two notions of freedom are, of course, interconnected. Individuals must be *free from* external pressure before they can be deemed *free to* choose. However, predictably, things are not this straightforward. In the example we shall be considering a contradiction which is in some respects similar to the problem characterized in chapter 5 (on expertise) as a 'dilemma of democracy'. In this case, the dilemma can be broken down into two stages.

The first problem relates to the constructs of the 'free' and the 'socialized' individual. This involves the question of the extent to which an individual can be considered sufficiently free from external constraint to be fairly deemed able to exert freedom of choice. The second aspect of this problem concerns the limits of freedom of choice. Formal liberal theories tend to avoid making substantive claims concerning the nature of human desires or interests (the 'good'), and reject the legitimacy of any external agency or expert to do so. It is assumed that each individual is expert in defining his or her own interest. The prioritizing of the 'right' (individual freedom of choice) over the 'good' (which involves a definition of what is desired) has been termed the 'deontological perspective' in contemporary liberal thought (Sandel, 1982). A problem arises when the value of individual freedom of choice conflicts with the value of 'right' as the basic requisite of a 'fair' society. What happens when an individual, who is deemed free to choose, chooses against freedom?

In order to illustrate that these issues are not merely esoteric problems chewed over by formal political theorists, but may also provide food for everyday thought, we will consider the students' discussion of the question:

> Women are better off having their own jobs and freedom to do as they please rather than being treated like a lady in the old-fashioned way.

Again, this extract starts at the beginning of the discussion.

Cathy: Depends what they want.
Marie: Yes it depends on the individual.
Harriet: It does really/ It's hard// It's an awful question.
Peter: I mean why can't you have both you know?
Cathy: Yea.
Peter: I mean it's/
Cathy: So what do you think/ disagree or agree?
Harriet: I agree.
Cathy: You agree?
Peter: Sorry what was the question again?
Harriet: Women are better off having their own jobs and freedom to do as they please rather than being treated like a lady in the old-fashioned way.
Cathy: I agree but I don't agree 1 or 7 or whatever it is.
Julie: I agree cos if they carry on being treated like a lady in the old-fashioned way how are they going to
Marie: Yes but isn't it also
Cathy: Maybe if they have their own jobs and freedom to do as *they* please and what pleases them is to be treated/ in the old-fashioned way/ then
Julie: But if they are treated in the old-fashioned way how will they get freedom to do as they please?
Harriet: But if they want to be treated in the old-fashioned way that's up to them, really. We can't just decide for them. That's not fair.
Julie: But the question says 'better off'. Women might be better off having jobs/ even if some women *want* to be treated
Cathy: But then you are suggesting that they have to have jobs/ even if they don't want to. That's not fair.
Julie: But women often do *have* to be treated in the old-fashioned way./ If they don't want and that's not fair either.
Cathy: It should depend on the individual.
Harriet: But what if they don't know what's best for them?
Cathy: I agree. But a woman should be allowed to decide.
Peter: Can anybody truly be allowed to do as they please? Can anybody really truly be allowed to do as they please? To do anything they like? To be really horrible to everybody?
Julie: Well with a job they've got freedom of choice haven't they? Whereas/ the old-fashioned way they haven't got
Raymond: It must be up to the individual.
Paul: It's the right of the individual to choose.
Julie: Questions like this are really difficult/ because they only look at your results not/ they don't take into account all this discussion which went beforehand.
Harriet: Yea.

Peter: Exactly.
Julie: and it's the discussion that's the most important.

It is important to consider how the themes of this discussion are set by the question. The value of 'freedom to' (do as they please) is juxtaposed at the outset with a notion of 'freedom from' external pressure (*'rather than* being *treated* like a lady...'). Speakers wrestle with the idea that women both 'are' and 'are not' free individuals. On the one hand, as human beings, women have a right to equal liberty. The individual 'right to choose' is upheld. Cathy and Marie start off the discussion by suggesting that it is up to the individual to decide for herself. Later Cathy suggests that 'a woman should be allowed to decide', Raymond asserts that 'it must be up to the individual' and Peter agrees that 'it's up to the individual to choose'. On the other hand there is a recognition (particularly as stated by Julie) that women are *not* at present sufficiently free from external pressure for their choices to be valid reflections of their own self-interest: 'If they are treated in the old-fashioned way, how will they get freedom to do as they please?'

As socialized individuals, how far are women able to assess their own needs? 'What if they don't know what's best for them?' As Julie notes, the question poses 'better off' as an abstract concept. Women might be better off having jobs even if some women do not want them.

In opposing the imposition of rational authority (asserting the value of liberty) against a democratic respect for the opinions of others, this dilemma is similar to that addressed in the chapter on expertise. The dilemma is 'What if they don't want freedom to do as they please?', and the question is unanswerable. To allow women to choose against freedom is to contravene the value of freedom as an inalienable human right. On the other hand, to impose freedom is to deny the ability of the individual to choose not to be free, to impose 'unfair' constraints on individual freedom: 'We can't just decide for them' says Harriet, 'That's not fair.' Cathy remarks to Julie, 'You are suggesting that they have to have jobs even if they don't want to. That's not fair.' However, as Julie replies, the question is not whether or not women are free to choose, since women are already subjected to constraints on their freedom which are 'not fair either'.

Julie's suggestion that women in general might be 'better off' having jobs even if some women do not want them illustrates a quandary over the value of individual freedom versus the general good. This is also expressed by Peter in his rhetorical question, 'Can anybody, truly, be allowed to do as they please?'

'That is no lady: that is my wife': resolving the gender/individual-difference contradiction

In this final section we shall be focusing on one particular tension which has run through this discussion: how can we square the existence of

gender with the existence of infinite human variety? Although we shall still focus on the presence of dilemma in talk and in written text, some of the examples we shall be citing point to practical issues relating to the ways in which we are able to make sense of our everyday lives, as individuals and as men and women.

At various stages in this chapter we have noted how the moral pressure to talk of individual differences is such that, even when *opting* for a categorical explanation (in terms of 'men' and 'women'), there is often a tendency to acknowledge the truth of alternative accounts. In some cases this acknowlegement may be implicit in the conversation, as when a statement is qualified with 'but. . .' or 'and yet, saying that. . .'. In other cases this may be explicit, as in the first transcript in which Colette introduced her comment on brain lateralization with an acknowledgement that 'It isn't possible to generalize at all.' It is also worth noting how, in social psychological research, statements of gender distinction may be accomplished by initiating the research conversation with a disclaimer. Take, for example, Williams and Bennett's (1975: 329) instructions to their respondents:

> We are interested in studying what we have termed the typical characteristics of women. It is true that not all men are alike (e.g. some men are more aggressive than others) nor are all women alike (e.g. some women are more emotional). However, in our culture some characteristics are more frequently associated with men than with women. . . The attached answer sheet contains a list of 300 adjectives which are sometimes used to describe people. . . For each adjective you are to decide whether it is more frequently associated with men rather than women, or more frequently associated with women rather than men.

Another way in which generalization may be maintained is by redrawing category boundaries in such a way as to make difference appear exceptional (a process which Gordon Allport termed 'refencing'). An example of this was apparent in our first transcript, in which Colette treats the achievement of some girls as a 'funny' exception which does not affect the general rule that women fail to do well in scientific subjects. Other examples of refencing can be seen in the following quotations in which women talk about their relationship to other women (Condor, 1986):

> I've got a lot of things in common with other women. Interests and such like. Of course, by 'other women', I mean wives and mothers like me. Women with family commitments, not career girls or Greenham women who neglect their families or anyone like that.

> When I talk about 'women', I am taking it for granted that you understand that I am talking about women with careers outside the home.

> When I talk about 'women', obviously, what I mean is normal ordinary women. I don't mean lesbians or prostitutes or people like that. They are quite different.

Refencing does not, however, constitute any final resolution to the dilemma 'How far can we generalize?' The maintenance of generality by the exclusion of exceptions conflicts with notions of a universal human nature which dictates that everybody 'must' be attributed to one (and only one) gender (Kessler and McKenna, 1978). On the one hand, lesbians and prostitutes are 'quite different'. On the other hand, the fact that they 'are' women ('like me') cannot be denied.

Although, as we have seen, statements concerning individual difference may be *juxtaposed* with generalized statements about 'men' and 'women', we may also attempt to resolve contradiction by a deconstruction of the gender/individual-difference distinction. Theoretical attempts to resolve apparent contradictions between individualism and generalization have been identified as a prominent feature of 'modern' forms of formal liberalism (Gaus, 1983). For present purposes we may identify three ways in which the gender/individual-difference distinction may be managed in everyday talk.

The first example, 'androgyny', gives priority to the notion of individual differences and is consistent with liberal values of the 'full development' of the individual. The contemporary notion of psychological androgyny involves combining masculinity and femininity within the individual self (for example Bem, 1974). The location of the androgyny construct within a wider cultural ethos of self-contained individualism has been discussed in some detail by Sampson (1977; see also chapter 2). Although there is no need to repeat this argument here, it is worth noting that it provides a good illustration of the way in which competing notions of gender and individuality are located in a wider moral discourse which, through its relation to notions of fairness, may serve to legitimate certain forms of social action. Social psychologists' talk of the 'androgynous personality' is not merely a descriptive, but also a *prescriptive* device, as evidenced by the developing practice of 'counselling for androgyny' (see Cook, 1985).

A second example, the notion of 'unity in diversity', gives priority to the category as opposed to the individual. Feminists' autobiographies provide good examples of what Gergen and Gergen (1987) term 'unification myths': a progressive narrative from individuality to unity. However, an emphasis on unity as an end state need not imply, as Gergen and Gergen suggest, that themes asserting individuality therefore have been dropped. Rather, themes of relationship may be *blended* with those of individuality in a single explanation:

> Objectively speaking, there are a lot of ways in which I am very different from other women. However, although I am not oppressed like, say, gay women, or my oppression is not as obvious as say, prostitutes, I feel that their problems are really a reflection – or a magnification –of the problems facing all women.

> Being a [women] creates links between us all, but the day-to-day reality of
> my life is vastly different and more privileged than say a working-class single
> parent on [supplementary benefit] let alone black women in Third World
> countries. (Condor, 1986)

A third type of solution focuses on the heterosexual *couple* (rather than
the independent individual) as the basic social unit and emphasizes com-
plementarity between male and female (Condor, 1986). Contrary to
Sampson's (1977) suggestion that an emphasis on interdependence is
characteristic of a 'different historical perspective' to that which upholds
the values of individual self-sufficiency, it is clear that an emphasis on
human interdependence in general, and male–female interdependence in
particular, is prevalent in 'modern' liberal accounts of human nature (see
Gaus, 1983).

Rawls, for example, notes the impossibility of any individual realizing
all of his or her potential capacities and emphasizes intermeshing of
differences and the need for individuals to look to others to 'complete their
nature': 'It is a feature of human sociability that we are by ourselves but
parts of what we might be. We must look to others to attain the excellencies
that we must leave aside, or lack altogether.' (1971: 529). That formal
liberal theories emphasize *both* the value of full individual development
and interdependence is, in fact, often exemplified in discussions of gender:

> The function of society being the development of persons, the realization of
> the human spirit in society can only be attained according to the measure in
> which that function is fulfilled. It does not follow from this that all persons
> must be developed in the same way. The very existence of mankind presup-
> poses the distinction between the sexes; and as there is a necessary difference
> between their functions, there must be a corresponding difference between
> the modes in which the personality of men and women is developed. (Green,
> 1890: 201)

We can see, again, how notions of male–female complementarity may
represent more than an attempt to resolve a 'mere' intellectual puzzle.
These images of human nature are related to moral notions of fairness
and exchange and serve as the basis for explicit prescription for activity.
Complementarity through marriage has long represented the basis of 'good
advice' to young people:

> We are foolish, and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the 'superiority'
> of one sex to the other, as if they could be compared in similar things. Each
> has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the
> other: they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends
> on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give.
> (Ruskin, 1883: 90–1)

Gergen and Gergen suggest that notions of 'connectedness' of male and
female may represent one of the most common forms of unification myth

in Western society. The prevalence of this theme in common-sense understanding is perhaps unsurprising given its prominence in advice books, which may be viewed as representing a form of mediation between formal and common-sense ideologies. Take, for example, the following extract from *The Girl that You Marry* (subtitled 'A book for young men about young women'):

> Girls are built and designed to do certain things and boys to do different things. Girls excel in some things and lag behind in others just as boys do . . . Biologically speaking, girls and boys have been designed to act in pairs. Thus, nature has devised a very helpful arrangement, and if a husband and wife will recognize each other's relative abilities and disabilities, they can make a very effective team. If, on the other hand, they bicker over these differences, the load they can pull together will be smaller and they spoil a natural advantage. (Bossard and Boll, 1961: 14)

As an aside, it is worth noting the opening sentences of this book: 'The girl that you marry is not a man. To keep this in mind goes far towards making a marriage happy' (p. 7).

This 'happy ever after' solution, however, does not provide any permanent resolution to the dual moral pressure towards gender categorization and individuation. We have already suggested that unification myths may coexist with (and may, in fact, only exist with reference to) individuating themes. Although we may wish to focus our attention on marital unity, an alternative individuating discourse is always waiting in the wings. In contemporary Western society, the existence of a 'free market' interpersonal economy brings the unifying and individualizing discourses into direct opposition. People may, and do, express with pride how their partner is 'different from all the others' (Condor, 1986).

As an example, let us consider ('22-year-old model') Mandy Freedman's account of a meeting with ('Hollywood heart-throb') George Hamilton, as reported by Neil Wallis in the *Sun* newspaper (23 March 1987):

> 'We really got on well. He told me that I was like a breath of fresh air, so different from the hard-faced, bleached blonde Hollywood bitches he usually spent time with. I really got to like him. He was interested in me, particularly my stories about going to school in London's East End. He said that was real life, as distinct from the candyfloss world of Hollywood that he lived in.'
> It was dawn when George asked her back to his Belgravia mews cottage.
> 'By that time I really liked him,' Mandy says. 'He didn't seem blasé like so many of the stars I meet through my job. He appeared interested in something other than himself. . . *me*. I was having fun and wanted it to continue. He kept saying, "I've never met a girl like you before."

The mutual attraction is accounted for in terms of the unique qualities of the individual. George had 'never met a girl' like Mandy before, and Mandy, in her turn, found George to be unlike 'so many' other film stars. At the same time, however, it is unlikely that either Mandy or George

would contend that the other was not 'all' or 'a real' man/woman. In order to fulfil their side of the male–female synthesis the individual must both exemplify his or her sex, and also 'stand out' (be 'so different'). This contradiction is illustrated elegantly in a cartoon published in *Punch* magazine in 1919. A disappointed suitor who laments: 'I shall never find anyone else like you. You see, you're so different from other girls,' receives the reply: 'Oh, but you'll find lots of girls different from other girls.'

9

Theoretical Implications

The previous chapters have presented examples of the dilemmatic aspects of everyday thinking. These examples, taken from a number of research settings, have suggested that ordinary people do not necessarily have simple views about their social worlds and about their places in these worlds. Instead, their thinking is frequently characterized by the presence of opposing themes. These are not the oppositions which might be associated with a careless lack of thought. Rather they are the opposing themes which enable ordinary people to find the familiar puzzling and therefore worthy of thought. It has been a constant theme of the substantive chapters that ordinary people do find the familiar puzzling and talk about the contradictory themes in ordinary life.

The teachers in the classroom are operating in familiar surroundings. For many years teachers might hang their coat on the same peg, tell the same stories in the same classroom and sigh with exaggerated exasperation as the same mistakes are made. They might be completely at ease with the cries of school children and feel at home in the routines of the staff-room. Yet these same teachers, so at ease with the familiar, can also be perplexed by the strangeness of their profession. As was seen, they can puzzle over the quandary of the limitations and the unlimitedness of children's potential. Women students, confident of their awareness of the opportunities and restrictions of gender in the modern world, can puzzle over what can be said about women like themselves. Their answers do not spill out like well-learnt formulas, but their discourse shows the hesitations and contrary themes which characterize dilemmatic thinking. Similarly, white working-class school children are puzzled by their own views on non-whites, not because the non-whites are unfamiliar, but because they are so familiar. We should not be prejudiced, they say, but we are, or rather we are not really. And because the responses are not formulaic, we can observe people thinking in their discourse about the strangeness of the ordinary.

The dilemmatic nature of ordinary thought might be said to reveal that people possess contrary linguistic repertoires for talking about their social lives (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Prejudiced and tolerant themes lie to hand and are sometimes mingled together in the semantics of the same concepts. Thus the concept of 'prejudice' itself can be used to express theme and counter-theme in a way that criticizes and justifies racism. Teachers and experts possess an egalitarian and an authoritarian discourse, or, rather, their discourse blends both egalitarian and authoritarian themes.

The discourse on gender oscillates between judgements of similarity (categorization) and those of individuality (particularization). The availability of both ensures the continuation of the dilemma of generalization ('How far can you go?'). Similarly, the discourse of health and illness possesses its own internal ambivalences. At first sight, little could seem simpler than an unambiguous equation of illness with undesirability and health with desirability. Yet the ways of talking about health involve assumptions of illness and vice versa.

If there are opposing themes, this does not mean that the opposition is equally balanced. One theme might be the more dominant in particular discourses. Its terms might be the taken-for-granted ones, whose forms are unmarked. Health might be conceived as being normal, as opposed to illness. Whiteness or maleness might be assumed unless blackness or femaleness is specified (Guillaumin, 1972). Nevertheless, the counter-theme is recoverable, for it is frequently present in the major theme. Thus if health is to be equated with freedom, as opposed to the necessities of illness, then nevertheless the maintenance of health implies the subordination of freedom to a healthy regime. In this way the language of freedom includes within itself the language of necessity, just as the dialectic of prejudice includes both tolerant and intolerant themes, and as the former are being expressed so the latter are revealed.

The presence of contrary themes in discussions is revealed by the use of qualifications. The unqualified expression of one theme seems to call forth a counter-qualification in the name of the opposing theme. There is a tension in the discourse, which can make even monologue take the form of argumentation and argument occur, even when all participants share similar contrary themes. A statement about the individuality of all women invites a qualificatory generalization, as the speaker gives truth to the lie, and lie to the truth, that all women are the same or are different. The same teacher who expresses the progressive view of education is able to provide the counter-balancing 'on the other hand', with stories from everyday experience about the 'intelligence' or 'unintelligence' of various pupils. Too many stories of this ilk can then be countered by the progressivist discourse and its own experienced stories. As regards prejudice, the unashamed bigots refuse such balancing in order to live unambiguously within their bigotry. They might succeed in evacuating the dilemmatic aspects from their thinking, but the perceived nature of everyday reality is altered. Instead of being puzzling, it becomes unreal in its simplicity. The bigotry is experienced in a way that is unbelievable to the bigots themselves, but, of course, all too real to those who suffer the bigotry.

The dilemmatic aspects do not only concern contrary ways of talking about the world; they exist in practice as well as in discourse. Above all, the dilemmatic aspects can give rise to actual dilemmas in which choices have to be made. In its starkest form, the coronary patients had to choose

how to structure their own lives and how to conceive of their own simultaneous health and illness. The choice here could literally be one of life and death. The teachers in the classroom were constantly faced in each lesson by dilemmas: the teacher must choose when to ask a question, when to provide the answer and so on. Educational philosophy might claim to determine how questions are asked and answered. Yet there is no one dominant philosophy in practice. As one teacher stressed, there must be room for both educational philosophies – the progressive and the traditional. The room is not found by literally laying aside separate classrooms or even separate times. The teachers, with the daily problem of imparting and eliciting knowledge, meet the demands of the classrooms with strategies which simultaneously give room or expression to both philosophies. Cued elicitation, whose daily forms the children must learn to recognize, is a routine expression of the daily dilemma. Similarly, the chairperson at the committee meeting of experts has worked out a routine greeting for encouraging the contributions of the less expert. A display of friendly equality must be made, but not to such an extent that the authority of expertise is undermined. If the greeting has become as routinized, or as skilled, as the experienced teacher's cued elicitation, this does not mean that the dilemmas which have given rise to the routine have been resolved. Nor does it mean that the contrary thoughts, which themselves might give rise to the dilemmas of practice, have become any less puzzling.

It was possible to read into routines of cued elicitation, and those of the committee greetings, underlying dilemmatic aspects. One might say that these dilemmatic aspects involved the clash of contrary values. In this respect we are not dealing with values in general but with ideological values in particular, for it was possible to see ideological values in the operations of these everyday rituals. Similarly ideological values are involved in the discussions about gender, race and health and illness. In all instances some of the grand themes of ideology can be seen to flow through the thoughts of routines of everyday life. In this way, the history of ideology affects contemporary thoughts and routines, and thus this history is daily continued in everyday life. It is this historical dimension which distinguishes our analyses from most other social psychological analyses. Those social psychologists who might study the routines of everyday life seldom try to link the content of routines, or of cognitive schemata, to the processes of history. By contrast, we have sought to draw attention to the continuing ideological history of liberalism, and of the Enlightenment, in the comments of our respondents.

This inevitably raises a methodological problem, which cannot be resolved here. It might be argued that we have been able to find ideological elements in our data because we have selected our slices of everyday thinking in order to prove the point. Discussions about gender or race would seem to call out for ideological themes, for they invite talk about

the nature of the individual and the nature of the social group. It would be hard to see how people could discuss these issues without involving representations, in some form or another, of major ideological themes. On the other hand, it has been possible to read such themes into less overtly promising enterprises, such as the behaviour of the teacher in the classroom or the chairperson in the committee room. Of course, this cannot rule out the possibility that there might be many other activities into which it would be much harder to read ideological themes. And, of course, we have attempted no class comparisons. The flow of liberal ideology might have been reduced to a feeble trickle had we specifically looked at the routines of the underprivileged, rather than concentrating on the Niagara of liberalism in our middle-class teachers and committee members.

What is important is the form of ideology which has been detected in these discourses and incidents. Ideology is not seen in terms of single images, or even single values. We see the impact of the classic liberal values of individualism, freedom and equality, but not in isolation. The values are understood in relation to conflicting counter-values, so that ideology does not imprint single images but produces dilemmatic quandaries. In this respect the dilemmas are ideological ones, rather than dilemmas which might arise from conflicts between age-old commonsensical maxims. The teachers are heirs to the Enlightenment, and are reproducing Enlightenment traditions, not only because they share Rousseauesque notions about progressive education, but also because theirs is a practical philosophy to be applied and tested in the classroom. Moreover, the philosophy is not experienced as an abstract system. The progressive notions are continually conflicting with authoritarian ones, as room must be found for both themes. The experts in the child development unit are guided by rationalism and egalitarianism in the best Enlightenment traditions. The nursery nurses and the physiotherapists, the psychologists and the paediatricians, may or may not be familiar with eighteenth-century *philosophes*, but the dilemmas of Enlightenment philosophy run through the practices of the unit. Their answer to the dilemma of authority and equality might bear a resemblance to the solution of Durkheim, except that hard-pressed members of the unit know that no magical solution is possible in practice. Instead, each day new solutions have to be found to the problems, which are continually reconstituting themselves.

In the discourse on gender, egalitarianism also appears as an embattled value, conflicting with the demands of individuality. Similar conflicting themes are woven into the discourse of race, as egalitarianism is asserted and qualified at the moment of its assertion. Here also individual freedom finds itself conflicting with the demands of social necessity, for the discourse draws upon lay psychological themes which stress the freedom of the agent, and lay sociological ones which emphasize iron laws of social necessity. Again both themes can trace their heritage to the Enlightenment.

A similar opposition is detectable in the discourse on health and illness. The person is seen as an agent, with the healthy freedom of agency. Yet the person is simultaneously under the thrall of bodily movements, which are prey to the necessities of disease. Again the oppositions can be traced to common ideological roots, as modern notions of health and illness can be seen as part reflections of the Enlightenment tradition, which simultaneously declared the ethical freedom of the individual's human nature and the material necessity of the individual's bodily being. Just as the philosophical problem of free will and material causation is not readily soluble in abstract theory, so it is reproduced in everyday discourse about bodily disease and what can be done about it.

There is a further theme to be detected in the examples of the previous chapters. The democratic and egalitarian motivations seem to indicate an embarrassment with power. At times it is as if power were a social obscenity, whose naked limbs need to be chastely covered. At times the teachers talk as if power were absent in the classroom, and they and their charges were interacting in democratic equality. Educational theorists have even reinterpreted the history of philosophy so that drapes can be placed over the form of power. Socrates's quizzing of the slave in *Meno* has become the epitome of free educational dialogue, when it is the slave, of all the characters in the Platonic dialogue, who shows sullen obedience to his social better. The modern experts have to be experts in human relations, and this means presenting themselves in a non-authoritarian manner, as if they were the friends of the non-experts. However, the friendliness is itself a part of their expertise, and, as such, a part of their egalitarianly presented authority. Perhaps a parallel can be drawn with the uncomfortable comments of the white working-class teenagers, who wished to be reasonable in their prejudices. Their racism was not a simple expression of a belief in social or genetic superiority. In fact, far from expressing any superiority, these speakers felt the need to recast themselves as the victims of prejudice. It was as if they would be embarrassed to declare overtly that they wished for the unequal privilege to which their racial views implicitly laid claim. Similar themes were also detectable in the lives of the men recovering from coronaries: the more that authority was claimed over the lives of their wives, the more that it would be denied. Again authority, in this case authority within the family, needed to present itself as if it were egalitarian.

In all this we can see the operation of what has earlier been called, following Edward Shils, the 'equalization' of personal relations. However, the society in which this equalization must occur is not an equal one. Thus the dilemma between equality and freedom cannot be wished away, nor can an individual decision resolve the socially constituted dilemma. The child development unit, in true egalitarian spirit, attempted to create a haven of rationality from which the irrationality of rank would be expelled.

Yet the more that egalitarianism was reinforced within the unit, the stronger that the unit unwittingly cast the shadow of authoritarianism. The gulf between the unit and the non-experts outside was widened. The egalitarian motivation, operating within an inegalitarian social reality, had its unintended authoritarian consequences: the motivation on its own was not sufficient to overcome the socially rooted counter-tendencies. Similarly, one might predict that the dilemmas of tolerance and prejudice are not to be resolved merely by goodwill. The social conditions which underlie the realities of discrimination are not to be wished away by individuals striving to order their own thoughts in a rational manner.

The example of prejudice raises a further issue which must be faced. The present approach links dilemmas to the nature of thought. Ideology, in presenting dilemmas rather than systematized schemata, ensures that the ideological subject is a thinker. Thus we do not look forward to the end of dilemmas, and towards a pure consistency of thinking, for that would be to look forward to the end of thought. From this, a critic might conclude that our position does not hope for, or even envisage, any change to the present dilemmas of thinking. However, this would be a misreading of our position. This can be illustrated by taking the example of prejudice. Our position might be interpreted as suggesting that it is inevitable that people will talk about other nations and other races in the way that our National Front sympathizing respondents did. In other words, we might be interpreted as suggesting that the contemporary dilemmas of prejudice are inevitable, and, therefore, that social action to reduce prejudice, or any other unwanted ideological theme, is a waste of time.

Nothing, however, is further from our intention. Such an interpretation would ignore the stress which has been placed throughout the present work upon the ideological, and historical, nature of dilemmas. Dilemmas may be constant within society, but our present dilemmas will reflect our present society. That being so, it becomes entirely feasible to pursue social action to change the basis of society, not in order that dilemmas will be removed *tout court*, but so present dilemmas might be replaced by others. In short, this means seeking to change opinions by changing what people might talk, argue and think about. Prejudice is to be dispelled when the underlying conditions, on which prejudice depends, are changed and the terms of present discussions are altered. When such changes have been successfully brought about, it can be predicted that people will talk about different things than they do now. Present-day discussions about races and nationalities will then seem as remote as do medieval discussions on the intricacies of courtly chivalry, or as strange as those earnest eighteenth-century discussions on the issue of whether Africans were truly members of the human race. They will seem strange, not because people will have stopped talking and arguing amongst themselves, but because they will have found other topics for their discussions. In this

sense, one of the goals of social action or of social reform is to win a present argument, in order to change the agenda of argumentation.

This view implies a different conception of ideology, and indeed of social action, than that found in many contemporary social theories. On a general level, it implies that thinking is necessary for society, and that a society without thought is either an impossibility or a totalitarian nightmare. Therefore, utopian aspirations should not dream of a silent society, in which all dilemmas have been resolved and whose members, in consequence, have nothing to deliberate about. The stipulation that thought is necessary to society does not mean that all societies must think about the same things. Nor does it mean that all societies must think in the same way as do people in late-twentieth-century Britain. That would be a most arrogant, and unscholarly, assumption. It might be assumed that all societies must possess their own dilemmatic themes, but this does not mean that present-day dilemmatic themes are universal. In fact, if the dilemmatic aspects of thinking are ideologically created and the products of history, they can hardly be universal. From these assumptions, a number of critical, indeed technical, comments can be made about theories of ideology.

Contradictions and ideology

The main body of this book has undertaken some initial investigations into the nature of real and concrete dilemmas which confront individuals and groups in the flow of everyday life in our own contemporary society, whether it be at work, at school, at home or in the community. Of course these discussions have not claimed to be exhaustive. They play the role, rather, of key illustrations of some of the issues and problems which are brought to light when, instead of asking abstract or theoretical questions about 'action' or 'choice', we investigate dilemmas in terms of everyday practice and experience.

This book, then, has begun to examine the social elements in the dilemmatic character of thought and argument. It is launched within a particular intellectual tradition (Western rationalism applied to social phenomena) and background socio-political culture (Western parliamentary democracy). In this and the following sections it is time to reflect upon some of the implications of our investigations. It may be that this will in part result in a critique of contemporary psychological and social theory: for much of what is presented as 'interactional' or 'dialectical' social psychology and sociology, said to be inspired by a project in which the negotiations between social groups and classes is meant to be the central focus of interest and explanatory principle, has failed to fulfil the objective of examining social 'interaction' as expressing social dilemma. As will be argued, even the main forms of 'post-structuralist' theory have, in their attacks on dominant methodological tendencies, only produced new theoretical monologues, not

displaced them with a perspective in which the truly dialogic principle and its necessary conditions are of prime concern. In short, argument is downgraded in modern sociology and philosophy.

There is, we suggest, a consistent avoidance of examining social life as dilemmatic, and in this section we look at some of the principal ways in which this avoidance takes place. First of all we do not subscribe to the view that what has fundamentally deflected the development of analysis of the structures of argumentation is the development of scientific reason itself (understood as a new totalitarianism – an image that knowledge grows without human argument, out of either a special method or the special type of mind of the 'genius'). So many views of this kind, which are generally called 'positivist' doctrines of science whether in the social sciences or philosophy, simply reproduce old myths about the nature of the sciences as absolutist and dogmatic. It is hardly necessary to develop a sophisticated analysis of the practices of the sciences to grasp that much if not most of what is produced in theoretically structured experimentation is only made meaningful by an argumentative context. Neither is science a string of unambiguous truths, although no doubt what is aimed at is the discovery of incontrovertible law: the truth of the phenomena studied. Problems only arise when this goal is thought to be the only and easily attainable goal, or one where 'incontrovertible' means 'unchallengeable'. Nothing is gained by suggesting that no such ambition should be entertained, and that researchers should not – at one crucial stage – aim at presenting, in the most detached manner possible, the 'most plausible' demonstrations to an audience of the uninitiated. Whatever scientists say about their method, scientists will rightly expect such presentations to be met in a spirit of argumentation and contradiction (Billig, 1987). However, the idea that scientists and some philosophers of science present of scientific logic and practice, perhaps in order to argue against the idea that knowledge is relative to social experience and condition, is that it aims and in general achieves an order of validity beyond the constraints of social interest and power.

More erroneous still is the view that scientific method can be detached completely from controversy, either scientific or ideological, and, as extreme rationalists would say, is the only way to truth. The suggestion that all other forms of human knowledge are tainted as 'false' knowledge, as 'ideology', is to point analysis and research in the wrong direction. It will be suggested here that, to some degree, social science's avoidance of the analysis of the dilemmatic character of social argument may be traced to the simple application of some versions of 'scientific method' to the analysis of social phenomena. But what is curious is that those traditions which have most conspicuously eschewed 'positivistic' methods, for example existentialist and interactionist perspectives, have also failed to develop the means to analyse social argument. There is precious little that

can be cited in modern social theory which even hints that there is a problem here, let alone that the problem is crucial. This is all the more surprising since most modern anti-positivist social theory is inspired by a thoroughgoing rationalist approach to the study of social interactions.

But these difficulties are also registered in ordinary everyday discourse, where words like 'ideological' and 'political' are often used to identify a form of argument as having overtones of bias and duplicity, implying sometimes that judgements are not derived from an examination of the facts or evidence but are deduced from principles or, worse, from dogmas. One conclusion drawn from this is that social science methodology should try to separate out and dispel matters of value or resign itself to the position that disagreements that involve a clash of values cannot be logically resolved. Thus a conception of logic itself is invoked: truth is free from logical contradiction. One recent philosopher has remarked: 'If contradiction is tolerated, then, in a very literal sense, anything goes. This situation must itself be totally intolerable to anyone who has any concern at all to know what is in fact true' (Flew, 1975: 17). It is easy to see that it is but a short step from this to the view that the significantly dilemmatic and contradictory nature of everyday social life produces only forms of untruth and that philosophy must be hostile to it.

There is, of course, another philosophical tradition, that of dialectical philosophy, which claims to find a positive place for contradiction. But even here it is noticeable that the place of argument has been supplanted by that of 'dialectical logic', a logic which does not remain on the ground of human interaction but which has, within this tradition, emerged as universal if not cosmic. Hegel, the most important philosopher in this tradition, for instance, does not really value the logic of dialogue as such but rather the mysteries of its circles and negations of thought. That one should take the concept of life, he suggests, in order to oppose it to the concept of death is quite natural but false. 'Life involves the germ of death, and . . . the infinite, being radically self-contradictory, involves its own self-suppression.' Not only this, he says, 'Every abstract proposition of understanding, taken precisely as it is given, naturally veers round into its opposite.' The dialectic he suggests is found also in nature, for example the planets: they are in one place but are also moving (Hegel, 1975: 117–18). It was the last view which was to be taken up in the later writings of Engels in the formative period of dialectical materialism. The essential conclusion is that the dialectical tradition, instead of placing the real historical and social processes of dialectic at the centre of its concerns as was projected in the early writings of Marx and Engels (in for example *The German Ideology*), eventually allowed an abstract logic to take the stage.

One of the important elements of our argument is precisely that it is an argument. A significant part of this book is critical, but not for the sake simply of controversy itself; a key objective is the revitalization of

the study of ideology. Although the concept of ideology has been the subject of prolonged debate there is a widespread sense that much of the discussion has not been as fruitful as was hoped. One of the aims of these final sections will be to investigate some of the principal contributions to the debate and to attempt to show how a once promising field of inquiry has become a quagmire. Certainly the objective here is not at all to produce an exhaustive survey of work on ideology; it is rather to question leading representative schools or traditions of research and to begin to indicate new lines of inquiry which might reinvigorate this problem area, which is so central to the social sciences as a whole.

The argument in its broadest sense may be stated as follows. The major studies of ideology, with few notable exceptions, though acknowledging the importance of 'dialectic' and 'contradiction', have tended to treat ideology as one relatively coherent and internally consistent social structure or layer contained within a wider social whole. Where there is some acknowledgement of social conflict or antagonism, the modification to the basic approach has been to say that there is more than one ideology in the society and that one of them is dominant. But this does not go far enough and therefore does not recognize the complexity of everyday life as it has been revealed in the earlier chapters of this book; for example, there is no straightforward way for an expert to practise in a society in which egalitarian principles have a prominent place. Some previous lines of inquiry even point to the ideological layer specifically as the site in society where social contradictions are sorted out and resolved. In opposition to these suggestions the discussion in this work has in effect developed the idea that Marx was wrong to formulate the question as concerning 'ideological forms in which men become conscious of. . . conflict and fight it out' (1971: 21). It is necessary to conceive of human consciousness as arising as part of and implicated in, from the beginning, social oppositions (and consciousness is not only consciousness of something, for to begin to be conscious also implies the existence of inner oppositions which form the preconditions of inner reflection and deliberation). It is also necessary to question the highly rationalist assumption that ideological formations ever attain high degrees of internal consistency or that it would ever be desirable that they should.

As was mentioned in chapter 3, there is no single generally agreed conception of ideology in the social sciences. What exists is widely varying usage, not a little confusion and talk at cross purposes. But some principal points of debate can be perceived, for example, in the oppositions supporting many of these debates: between the social ideology or structure and the individual's soul/body or mind/body; between science (truth) and ideology (error); and between ideology (belief) and ritual (action). Some writers would place ideologies within a wider category of 'culture' along with myths, legends, proverbs, even 'mentalities'. Of course there is no

reason to demand uniformity of usage here; what is at stake is the conception of the nature of social consciousness itself (whether it be called mind, spirit, collective conscience, cultural system or whatever). Conceptions of ideology which ignore its dilemmatic character seem to encounter significant difficulties sooner or later.

Let us for a moment look at two examples taken from the Marxist tradition. In the late 1960s Sartre looked back over his own writing, and was astonished at some of the oversimple ways in which during his existentialist phase he had assumed that choice was a relatively straightforward issue, and one which could be reformed without difficulty:

> The other day I re-read a prefatory note of mine . . . and was truly scandalized. I had written: 'Whatever the circumstances, and whatever the site, a man is always free to choose to be a traitor or not.' When I read this, I said to myself: it's incredible, I actually believed that!

But Sartre continues by suggesting that within a short time he had moved to an almost diametrically opposed position:

> I later wanted precisely to refute myself by creating a character . . . who cannot choose. He wants to choose, of course, but he cannot choose either the church, which has abandoned the poor, or the poor, who have abandoned the church. He is thus a living contradiction, who will never choose. He is totally conditioned by his situation. (1969: 44)

This very dramatic switch from total freedom to total constraint illustrates the two poles of a modern ideological dilemma, but only by ruling out the very problem of dilemma itself. Even for Sartre it was unsatisfactory, for he went on to acknowledge that, although conditioned, freedom is that

> small movement which makes a totally conditioned social being someone who does not render back completely what conditioning has given him. (1969: 45)

Ultimately, then, Sartre was led to the view that the essential elements of the dialectic were to be found in the actions of individuals and groups in social life. Methodologically, this meant that analysis should always follow the courses of the actions (or praxes) of groups in situation (their projects). The dialectic is the nature of the flux of these groups, the processes of fusions and serialization of groups, not the active process of debate, argument and interlocution.

An alternative, opposing point of view is that of structural Marxism as represented by the writings of Althusser, a theme which we have already touched on in in chapter 3. Here the dominant problem is the difference between science and ideology, first in terms of a clarification of the epistemological pretensions of science (a specific practice), and then in terms of the social functions of ideology (ideological state apparatuses). In criticizing his own former views, Althusser in the 1970s suggested first that the distinction between science and ideology rested on an uncritical

acceptance of 'the point of view which "science" holds about itself' (1976: 122), and second that he had

> disregarded the difference between the regions of ideology and the antagonistic class tendencies which run through them, divide them, regroup them and bring them into opposition. The absence of 'contradiction' was taking its toll: the question of class struggle in ideology did not appear. (1976: 141)

Again the discussion develops the theme of contradiction, this time as a complex process of oppositions and displacements, a process occurring in the social body and not one through which social groups argue and consciously engage with one another in real encounters.

Both Sartre and Althusser recognized the limits of their initial perspectives and reflected that, because of rationalist assumptions, their work had failed to begin to grasp something of the contradictory nature of ideological relations. More than this, the very approach which leads to a conception of ideology as a formally consistent total social structure invariably fails to question the ways in which individual subjects and groups struggle to find their paths through the complexities with which they are confronted. Althusser, for instance, was interested in a general theory of ideology as a mechanism which transforms individuals into human subjects (through 'interpellation'). But the way in which his question is asked is implicitly linked to the thesis that each society produces a dominant ideology and a dominant ideological state apparatus. Even those who have questioned the dominant ideology thesis have tended to criticize either the notion of dominance or its rather weak epistemological ground rather than the concept of ideology it implies.

This is not to say that the Marxist contribution to the analysis of ideology is negligible. Althusser is certainly right to point to the weaknesses of pre-Marxist views: (a cynical theory) that there are religions because priests have invented seductive lies in order to maintain themselves in positions of privilege. Marx's critique of these and other similar propositions are recognized as a valuable contribution to modern social theory, which has focused on the structural analysis of functioning 'belief systems'. But in turning to the contributions from sociology it is possible to see that non-Marxist theory suffers from many of the same limitations as the Marxist tradition, indicating much the same kind of reluctance to examine social life as dilemmatic. They have not been able to come to grips with the issues which we have raised in this book. For example, teachers in schools do not simply aim to produce pupils who will be adequately self-disciplined social beings and who will respond to complex ideological instruments of social control and thus social constraint. They also aim to foster human beings who have within them the necessary social and cultural means for self-determination which, as we have pointed out, implies that there are adequate means of self-reflection and thought.

Thus citizens are encouraged to think for themselves within and beyond the limits imposed by the networks of constraints.

Sociology and ideological contradiction

If we now turn to sociological theories of the mainstream tradition as it has been influenced through the German tradition, for example, we can see once again that there seem to be very specific and limiting consequences of the methodological positions adopted. One of the most celebrated works which initiated the sociological study of ideology, Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, explicitly follows the ideas of Max Weber (in the construction of ideal types) and Alfred Weber (in constellational analysis). What this means is that Mannheim's project aims specifically to elaborate ideologies as whole constructs, and then to look at subtypes such as utopian structures: 'that type of orientation which transcends reality and which at the same time breaks the bonds of the existing order' (1960: 173). What Mannheim suggested therefore was something akin to defining common sense as ideology and some forms of ideology as utopian thought. This of course retained the idea of the strain, tension and even contradiction between certain kinds of belief and existing reality. On top of this, Mannheim attempted to reconstruct the main forms and stages of such utopian thinking, proceeding from the anabaptists to communism. It is emphasized in a phrase which quite nicely displaces the idea of the real:

> We will be concerned here with concrete thinking, acting, and feeling and their inner connections in concrete types of men. . . no individual mind, as it actually existed, ever corresponded completely to the types and their structural interconnections to be described. (1960: 189–90)

This 'methodological device' has very specific consequences, for it is only with the emergence of socialist-communist utopian thought that Mannheim begins to find a 'struggle' between these structures, a struggle aimed at the 'fundamental disintegration of the adversary's beliefs' (p. 217). In other words all the main utopian forms emerge and develop, and only then do they engage in mutual criticism. In the 'conflict' between Marx and the anarchist Bakunin, Karl Mannheim argues, the more primitive egalitarian, 'chiliastic' utopianism 'came to an end' (p. 219). The social basis of the collapse of this kind of anarchist utopianism is seen as follows:

> Bakunin's advanced guard, the anarchists of the Jura Federation, disintegrated when the domestic system of watch manufacture, in which they were engaged and which made possible their sectarian attitude, was supplanted by the factory system of production. In place of the unorganised oscillating experience of the ecstatic utopia, came the well-organised Marxian revolutionary movement. (p. 219)

It is clear that Mannheim is not really interested in the actual meeting of arguments between Marx and Bakunin, or even between the Marxists and the Bakuninists. Conceived at the level of ideal types, where quite explicitly 'no single individual represents a pure embodiment of any one of the historical-social types' (p. 189), such considerations could only be of marginal interest. The method also in one sense deflects the charge of oversimplification by pointing to the socio-economic forces at work – but this too can only be a suggestion at the level of 'types'. (If Mannheim did indeed intend to argue that ideological and utopian movements are directly determined by economic changes then of course this would require a different kind of analysis from the one he presents, and the example of Marx and Bakunin given here certainly could not stand without further and elaborate substantiation, if only to point to the real complexities of such processes when not considered as types.) No doubt unresolved dilemmas in social thought could be approached using the ideal-type method, but this raises questions of another kind as we shall discuss in a moment.

First, however, we wish to consider another sociological work which has had wide influence, namely *The Social Construction of Reality* by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1971). Influenced by both Weberian and Sartrean traditions, this work set out to eleborate a theoretical understanding of the ways in which the symbolic systems in modern societies are socially constructed. In its consideration of the general beliefs in society it approached them by examining the processes of conceptual maintenance of the symbolic universe. Four main types of 'machineries' were discussed: mythology, theology, philosophy and science (pp. 127–34). Myth is immediately stigmatized as naive, and its naivety is used to explain its inconsistent patterns. Indeed it is only the relatively more sophisticated systematization of the theological forms which it is argued distinguishes them from naive mythology. Systematization leads to the first real differentiation of forms of knowledge in society, and philosophical and scientific forms are really only further elaborations in the direction of systematization. In order to maintain the dominance of these more systematic thought systems, Berger and Luckmann argue that two further techniques are used: therapy and nihilation. The latter concerns ways in which the legitimacy of the dominant perspectives are secured through the rejection of the threat of alternative views:

> Nihilation involves the more ambitious attempt to account for all deviant definitions of reality in terms of concepts belonging to one's own universe . . . The deviant conceptions are not merely assigned a negative status, they are grappled with theoretically in detail. The final goal of this procedure is to incorporate the deviant conceptions . . . and thereby to liquidate them. (p. 133)

Berger and Luckmann move into a discussion of the 'social-structural base for competition between rival definitions', for it is this which will 'affect',

if not 'determine outright', the outcome of such struggles. The sphere of social organization of the 'experts' involved in such struggles is paramount, and Berger and Luckmann offer some 'types'. When experts hold an 'effective monopoly over ultimate definitions of reality' – where there is a specific power group which develops its own perspectives in a way which differentiates itself – this gives rise to an ideology proper (p. 141). In modern pluralistic societies where there is a 'shared core universe', experts have to be able to find ways of 'theoretically legitimating the demonopolization that has taken place' (p. 142). The relationship between ideas and institutions is 'dialectial', it is argued: 'Theories are concocted in order to legitimate already existing social institutions. But it also happens that social institutions are changed in order to bring them into conformity with already existing theories' (p. 145). Unlike the discussion which we have presented of the expert (in chapter 5), little in this presentation by Berger and Luckmann seems to indicate the existence of problems or dilemmas for the expert in any practical sense; these exist only for society.

It is clear then that in these examples of the sociology of knowledge, 'belief systems', whether called ideologies or some other term, are conceived as ideational totalities (more or less systematic and systematized) associated with certain kinds of social groups (more or less organized, more or less under strain). And these totalities are presented as a result of a certain way of looking at society: not as an aggregation of individuals, but as an outcome of typification by the sociologist. Somehow, in the process of constructing these ways of looking, the sociologist seems to have become predisposed to treat 'ideologies' or 'beliefs' as structures which possess remarkable degrees of inner coherence – even, it may be said, primitive ones. Conflicts, in so far as they are dealt with, seem to revolve around inter-ideological issues. These orientations have their complements in other discussions in modern sociology: from those views which see at the heart of any society a 'common conscience' or common value system which society has to protect if it is to survive, to those which see ideology in metaphorical terms as a 'social cement', even to those who see in ideological formations the principal ways in which social tensions and conflicts are not so much 'fought out' as resolved through (unconscious) structural transformations.

There is, however, a major writer who should also be considered here, for, in one sense, the work of the sociologist Talcott Parsons has as its basis the idea that social life must be analysed as a series of dilemmas which have to be decided in any social process. Out of a synthesis of the writings of major nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century writers, whose thoughts, Parsons argued, converged in an anti-positivist theory of action, he developed an action frame of reference into which was posed what he called basic 'pattern variables'. These were a limited set of oppositions which could form the means for analysing the pattern of all

social action. He argued that there were only five of these ideal-typical dilemmas: affectivity and affective neutrality; self or collectivity orientation; universalism or particularism; achievement or ascription; and finally specificity or diffuseness (Parsons, 1951: 58–67). These were turned into criteria for the classification of societies and for the analysis of processes.

An illustration of Parsonian analysis is his celebrated analysis of the modern medical process (1951: chapter 10; for a commentary see Devereux in Black, 1961). For Parsons the situation of the doctor is one of achievement, technical expertise, affective neutrality, functional specificity and collectivity orientation, while that of the patient or someone occupying the 'sick role' is one of relative need and helplessness often accompanied by problems of affective adjustment, and one of technical incompetence in the face of these problems. When Parsons comes to analyse the process itself he immediately admits that the logical model does not really operate at all (1951: 470). First of all, the knowledge system is radically incomplete and the technical means are highly limited. More than this, in order to make effective the techniques he does possess, the medical practitioner has had to build up an elaborate social mechanism for handling a number of crucial doctor–patient problems: access to the body of the patient, access to private knowledge of the patient, and so on. The outcome has been the development of the medical professional institutions and legal immunities, with specific rights and obligations which are built up to facilitate the technical tasks of the physician and the defence of the patient against exploitation and of the status of doctors and their profession. The specific dilemmas which Parsons examines, after a consideration of the 'sick role' as a significant legitimization of a possible deviant category within the social system, centre on the fallible expert in the face of limited knowledge and technique, and the strong desires of the sick and of friends and relatives who are exploitable (in more than one sense) and yet who, if there is an unfortunate outcome, may blame the doctor. (The doctor may indeed be guilty of malpractice – but who is to judge but the reluctant technical expert, who will throw the first stone?) Parsons insists that it is the modern professional institution which emerges specifically to resolve these dilemmas for the doctor, who then is subject to its beneficent discipline. Even the patient benefits, he suggests, from the reluctance of the physicians to judge themselves; for without this reluctance they would not take risks in their profession, which would then simply ossify.

A number of criticisms of Parsons's position have become well known, and seem telling (see Black, 1961). Most significantly here, the 'pattern variables' have been heavily criticized on several counts: their level of generality; whether they are 'choices' or 'dilemmas' at all; whether they are exhaustive; whether, indeed, they are even required for such forms of analysis. Certainly Parsons seems to find it useful to identify the 'sick role' and the institutional complex through them. When he begins his

analysis, however, he immediately begins to find concrete historical and social inconsistencies, discrepancies and illogicalities which appear to surprise him. As we have seen in chapter 6, the notion of the sick role is an oversimplification because of the complex interrelation of ideological dilemmas over health and illness. Indeed Parsons's own analysis develops in this direction when he considers the tensions in the medical process and the strains in its ideology.

At bottom, however, there are some remarkable misconceptualizations: the pattern variables are not 'dilemmas' in any sense of the term which can refer to acting agents or subjects. On the other hand, when he does talk of a medical practitioner as being in a dilemma, say a clash between scruples and advantage, or emotional involvement inhibiting technical competence, the battery of pattern variables seems redundant. Moreover it is not clear that this theoretical apparatus helps us to understand the nature of the situation of the expert in a democratic society as discussed in chapter 5. Parsons's claim then that his theory is founded on the dilemmatic character of social ideologies is thus quite misleading; the most that could be claimed is that at some points in his work, as with the work of other major thinkers, some elements of the real complexity of modern life are evoked, and symptomatically these are the elements which we have termed dilemmatic. That is why the type of discussion presented in this book is so different from that of Parsons. For example, neither the discussion of health, nor that of the expert, nor that of the dilemmas which confront teachers assumes that there are any dilemmas which can be identified through the application of ideal-type categories. Nevertheless it does appear to be the case that on analysis certain quite different but common and recurrent dilemmatic themes are discovered. Maybe it will be the case that some dilemmas will continue be found to be more important to social life than others, or to have significant implications for problems of social control or social reproduction; but these are not known in advance. Again looking at Parsons's own analysis, it is not really obvious that his empirical analysis has in any way benefited from the application of these Parsonian ideal-type dilemmas, and it could certainly have been carried out with an altogether more modest set of instruments as has been the case in this book.

Theoretical oppositions

It may help the reader to grasp the main theoretical orientation adopted here if we attempt very briefly to situate the ideas relative to some important contemporary dilemmatic currents in the social sciences. The way in which our position can be expressed most clearly involves making some oppositions, but in considering these it is important to remember that the realities to which they relate are not quite so clear cut. Nevertheless, two sets of

oppositions can be identified: the polarity of humanism and structuralism; and an epistemological polarity between absolutism and relativism (indifference). These all combine in different ways, but it is useful to identify them separately.

Humanism and structuralism
Humanist approaches such as that developed in the existentialist and interactionist traditions, as represented by a writer like Sartre, tend to focus on praxiology: they assume communication to involve the exchange of meanings formed prior to linguistic structures, the latter being only vehicles for the exchange. Acts translate such meanings into the physical world as projects. Everything is thus dependent on understanding original and derived meanings, which are seen as rich in meaning.

Structuralism, as represented by Althusser for example, can be seen as a response to humanism because it rightly stresses the necessity of theorizing the media of communication and investigating their effects on messages. But such approaches tend to go further and analyse the content of messages in terms of infrastructures which are independent of such media – and in social theory these infrastructures are thought of as being related to or transformations of social structures. This leads to attempts to simplify individual meanings in order to identify structures which exist between social groups. This endeavour is said by critics to lead to 'thin' descriptions of individual experience (as discussed for example in the work of Geertz (1975) or E.P. Thompson (1978)).

In the light of post-structuralism it can be seen that what these two approaches have in common is that they overemphasize the harmonic integration of action and structure in some posited unifying meaning in the individual or society. We go along with this critique. An important implication of this criticism is that the idea that investigation can find whole, seamless structures of meaning which somehow hold the social world together is not well founded.

Absolutism and relativism
Epistemologically, absolutist investigations, for example Durkheimian sociology, assume that there can be established a single truth about a phenomenon, either through a literary or historical method or through a logical or geometric method. These approaches rarely consider the position of the observer except in terms of an evolution of the rationalist spirit.

Relativists or indifferentists, for example symbolic interactionists or ethnomethodologists, in fact tend to be pale versions of absolutists in order to avoid the problems involved. Relativism, with its suggestion that knowledge can never attain high degrees of objectivity because of the social rootedness of the observer (a doctrine which nevertheless claims that its

own knowledge is objective and true), is safer or more palatable politically (because democratic) without this dilemma itself becoming an issue.

The way of dealing with the inevitable difficulties of this opposition seems to us to lie in developing two important forms of reflexivity: an understanding of the ways in which knowledge structures itself in relation to its own development (historical consciousness), and a recognition of knowledge as a social force. Both of these aspects have to be understood within 'argumentative' contexts, that is from the recognition of the dilemmatic character of knowledge and belief.

There is an important problem, however, if this line of argument is counterposed to the general thrust of post-structuralism, in the sense that the critique of these two sets of oppositions has been developed by post-structuralism in its attack on the idea that the goal of social science should be to discover determined structures. Post-structuralism, we think rightly, puts the stress on the fact that things can come apart in unexpected ways, for both the subject and the object of analysis. It stresses the discrepancies between structure and infrastructure, between sender and receiver of messages. While the ethnomethodologist gets round this by talking of contingency and the post-structural Marxist by social reproduction mechanisms overdetermined by class struggle, it seems to us that some process akin to rhetorical engagement in dilemmatic ideological formations is being acknowledged here. For example, Michel Foucault once explicitly formulated the problem admirably as follows:

> History . . . is intelligible . . . and should be analysed . . . according to the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. Neither the dialectic (as logic of contradiction) nor semiotics (as structure of communication) can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of confrontations. The 'dialectic' is a way of avoiding the always hazardous and open reality of this intelligibility, by reducing it to the Hegelian skeleton; and 'semiology' is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody and deadly character, by reducing it to the pacified and Platonic forms of language and dialogue. (In Morris and Patton, 1979: 33)

If what is in part aimed at by such approaches is that they consider textual and social strategies, we would also add that any such project must, as well as posing theoretical questions as to the nature of ideology, also recognize the necessity of grasping, within a social analysis, the play of ideologies as born and developed in social action and counteraction.

Studying dilemmas

It is now possible to turn to what we think is required in any adequate contemporary approach to the examination of the dilemmas of everyday life, and to sketch out some of the prospects for such a project.

First of all, it is evident after the brief survey of social science literature provided in this book, that many of the traditional methods seem particularly

weak as means to think about these problems and analyse social reality. In our presentations and analyses we have demonstrated that our preferred forms of approach are qualitative and interpretative, and have indicated that too early theoretical or empirical closure in the direction of social system thinking or cognitive consistency thinking makes it difficult to recognize the real object of investigation. In line with much contemporary thinking in the social sciences it is recommended that social life is viewed as complex and open; closed system thinking should for the present stage of research remain in suspension. This has implications for the image presented both of a person, here regarded from the point of view of a subject capable of argument (indeed dependent on argument), and of a society in which many of the resources for argument are produced in the complex nature of its demands and opportunities.

This must not be misunderstood as an appeal for a certain dose of confusion or illogicality in thought and analysis. It is however in line with a strong theme of modern social analysis which is that personality and society be considered as complex phenomena, as containing within them themes and structures which are contradictory in principle. If this theme has been developed most noticeably in the French tradition (for example in Durkheim and Foucault), as well as in the Marxist one, complexity has often meant formal logical complexity in which the structural principle of complexity is invoked. In this work, however, the idea of complexity which has been developed is that of historical and ideological complexity of the social world, where people have to grapple with issues which are rarely clear cut and where they have to struggle to come to terms with problems because there is not and cannot be a ready formed authoritative solution. The attempts to close down the world by programming or sacred formulas only explode in the face of the unforeseen surprises of everyday life and the fact that human life is vulnerable.

It is not suggested, however, that the social world is so complex it cannot be thought about. The progress that may have been made in the present work has been possible on the basis of a relatively modest reorganization of the problematics of ideology. It has been implied that social and social psychological analysis must be liberated from any principle of inherent or demiurgic logical dialectic. If there is a dialectic this will be structured into the argumentative context of real historical interaction as either explicit or implicit dilemmatic matrix. Neither is there any urgent need for a consideration of ideal communication forms (such as those examined by Habermas), since the only ones which are of interest for analysis are those which have played a significant role in the continuing problems of everyday life. Here, none has essential privileges. In the discussions in previous chapters, we have presented the voices of ordinary people in conversation and debate in order to reveal the tactics and strategies of dealing with recurring and novel difficulties of everyday judgement. Sometimes these

have been generalized into a discussion of an occupational role, for example, but not through the application of a prior set of formal 'dilemmas' to it in the manner of Parsons. It is not suggested that role conflicts do not exist. Rather, for the style of analysis developed here, these conflicts are of interest from an altogether different objective: not to find how they might be institutionally resolved or functional for the social system, but to show how they give rise to both problems and opportunities for reflection, doubt, thought, invention, argument, counter-argument. Hence our conception suggests that in everyday thought the individual is a lay philosopher, not a marionette dancing to the desires of a great design.

Thus we return to the nature of dilemma. If in the initial discussions we began the examination by looking at what appear to be simple dilemmas, for example, 'the wolves or the precipice', our analyses have shown that what is involved is clearly not a straightforward issue of choice, of alternative courses of action, or on the other hand a matter of intellectual puzzles or paradoxes. Whether or not to buy item A or item B is not in itself a dilemma (nor incidentally is whether to buy or steal item A). The characteristic of a dilemma which makes it significant for social analysis is that it is more complex than a simple choice or even a straightforward technical problem (even the existence for a doctor of barriers to access to the body is not a dilemma, it is simply an obstacle). Again the fact that actors may not be in possession of complete or adequate knowledge, or may have conflicting knowledge, is not a sufficient condition of either insecurity or dilemma. If we have begun to examine dilemmas as ideological, as social situations in which people are pushed and pulled in opposing directions, it is because they are also seen to impose an assessment of conflicting values. The technical problem is perhaps inescapably interwoven with problems concerning the involvement with or 'management' of clients. In this way the characteristics of dilemmas are revealed as fundamentally born out of a culture which produces more than one possible ideal world, more than one hierarchical arrangement of power, value and interest. In this sense social beings are confronted by and deal with dilemmatic situations as a condition of their humanity.