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## Social psychology: Social or psychological?

G. R. Semin and A. S. R. Manstead

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It is argued that the difficulties inherent in present-day social psychology stem largely from the fact that insufficient consideration has been given to the psychological properties of social behaviour. An analytic distinction between nomic, idiosyncratic and reconstructive aspects of social behaviour is introduced and used to show that what is typically revealed in experiments is *not* the operation of *psychological* processes, i.e. the different ways in which individuals discover, apply and otherwise use the rules regulating everyday social life in pursuing their own purposes. Rather, it is argued that such investigations reveal merely the shared rules regulating behaviour in the situation under investigation, due to the fact that the experimental situation tends to enforce the operation of nomic models, thereby eliciting behaviour which does no more than reflect the sources of regulative influence working in experimental episodes. It is further argued that this emphasis on nomic social behaviour, together with a failure to distinguish between the social and psychological levels of analysis in social behaviour, leads to inferential dilemmas. A method (the thought experiment) is offered as a means of detecting the operation of nomic models. It is contended that once the nomic aspects of social behaviour are identified, it will be possible to study the psychological processes employed in utilizing rules. While the study of nomic aspects of social behaviour is seen as necessary, it is argued that different methodologies need also to be adopted in order to establish a psychologically informative social psychology.

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A brief examination of social psychological journals provides convincing evidence that a high percentage of research activities within the discipline are experimental in nature. The explicit criteria guiding this preferred mode of inquiry are rigour, precision and causal inference. (Cf. sources on the use of the experimental method in social psychology: Aronson & Carlsmith, 1968; Runkel & McGrath, 1972; Crano & Brewer, 1973; Hendrick & Jones, 1972; *inter alia*; or in relation to psychology in general, e.g. Barratt, 1971.) Yet little has been said about the general properties of experimental behaviours, i.e. the interactions which take place within the experimental episode. Whatever the object of an experimental inquiry, a pervasive maxim seems to apply to the encounter between experimenter and subject: the maxim of anonymity.\* It is undoubtedly the case that in most experiments the relation between the experimenter and subject can best be described as that between two (or more) strangers who have a meeting of a highly contractual nature (cf. Holzkamp, 1972) and with specific temporal constraints. (This maxim also applies in most cases to the subjects brought together for group studies.) This paper consists of an inquiry into those *particular* types of social behaviour studied within mainstream experimental social psychology. While the nature of such behaviours has rarely been questioned, it should not be taken for granted that they are unproblematic.

In order to clarify the nature and implications of the problem pertaining to experimental behaviours, we shall begin by introducing an analytic distinction between three aspects of everyday social behaviour, and identify which of these aspects is most characteristic of experimental behaviours. The next section will discuss a parallel distinction, this time between the *social* and *psychological* aspects of social behaviour. By social aspects are meant the conventions, rules or background knowledge shared by members of a culture which enable them

\* The problematic nature of the subject-object relation in psychology was noted as early as 1933, by Rosenweig. Bentley (1937) noted '... (the) experiment prospered in the sense of the physicist and the physiologist but to the neglect of the organism regarded as an active and relatively independent living physical system and of certain of its operations' (p. 457). Concern with the consequent issues was not taken up seriously until relatively late in the history of experimentation in psychology (Rieken, 1958; Orne, 1959, 1962, 1969, 1970; Rosenthal, 1966; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969; Weber & Cook, 1972).

to interact flawlessly, even as anonymous strangers. By psychological properties are meant those properties which enable the employment and deployment of such conventions, rules or shared background knowledge. It will be argued that these related distinctions have implications for the practice of social psychology, implications about both subject matter and methodology. The specific question which arises is whether experimental social psychologists are studying conventions or the properties enabling the use of such conventions. It will be argued that the difficulties inherent in present-day social psychology, which have already given rise to some comment (e.g. Smith, 1972; Gergen, 1973; McGuire, 1973; Schlenker, 1974; Elms, 1975, etc.), have arisen because insufficient consideration has been given to the psychological properties of social behaviour.

Finally, a general method is presented and discussed which in the view of the present authors develops directly from the earlier analysis of the nature of social behaviour, and which enables the identification of culturally shared and historically transient properties of social behaviour, as distinct from its transhistorical psychological properties.

### Three aspects of social behaviour

Episodes of social interaction contain various properties such as the use of highly conventionalized forms of verbal and non-verbal sequences, the strategies employed by individuals or groups in decoding incomprehensible conventions, the degree to which and the means through which personal or impersonal motives are displayed in social interaction, and so on. We suggest that these properties can be classified, and to this end we propose a broad analytic distinction between three general aspects of social behaviour: (a) nomic social behaviour,\* (b) idiosyncratic social behaviour, and (c) reconstructive social behaviour. All three aspects coexist simultaneously in any social interaction, although, as will be seen later, one may predominate over the others in specific episodes.

The first of these three aspects of social behaviour refers to behaviours which are highly consensual and, therefore, are understood and interpreted intersubjectively by all, or most, members belonging to the same culture (cf. Schütz, 1953, p. 7). (As will be apparent, this section owes a great deal to Schütz's phenomenological sociology, and borrows from it extensively, e.g. Schütz, 1932, 1953; Schütz & Luckmann, 1974.) The knowledge underlying nomic behaviours is implicitly available to the agent in the episode and potentially to his counterpart as 'everyman's knowledge' and is objective and anonymous, i.e. detached from the agent's and his counterpart's *personal* circumstances. This knowledge is part of our common-sense knowledge of the world and is of a highly socialized and shared nature. It, therefore, supersedes the unique or private knowledge of an agent which is determined through personal history. The essential characteristic of such knowledge is that it is functionally independent of the individual. We assume that this knowledge is encapsulated in what we shall call 'nomic models'.

Nomic models make possible the reciprocity of perspectives through their detachment from the uniqueness of the individual involved, and through the fact that in behaviour guided by such knowledge few individual aspects of personality and behaviour are expressed. They therefore facilitate the successful monitoring of one's behaviour in anonymous social situations, as well as the prediction of other persons' behaviours. Examples of episodes where nomic behaviours are preponderant over the two other aspects are manifold. All interaction which involves individuals in their capacities as occupants of clearly defined roles is characterized by nomic behaviour. Personal motives do not come to the foreground in such interaction. Thus, when I assume the role of a customer in a bank and draw money from an account, my immediate role enables the clerk behind the counter to attribute invariant motives to me, and in the same way I can attribute invariant motives to the clerk. The personal motives which guide our behaviours do not impinge on the encounter. I might be drawing money because I wish to repay a loan; the clerk might be behind the counter because he is replacing a colleague who is on vacation; but neither

\* The concept 'nomic' was suggested to us by Neil Warren in earlier discussions on this topic.

of us needs to explain these personal motives on the other in order to complete the interchange.

Schütz (1953) provides a fuller illustration of the interlocking assumptions and attributions which underpin such an anonymous encounter:

(1) I take it for granted that my action (say putting a stamped and duly addressed envelope in a mailbox) will induce anonymous fellowmen (postmen) to perform typical actions (handling the mail) in accordance with typical in-order-to motives (to live up to their occupational duties) with the result that the state of affairs projected by me (delivery of the letter to the addressee within reasonable time) will be achieved.

(2) I also take it for granted that my construct of the other's course-of-action type corresponds substantially to his own self-typification and that to the latter belongs a typified construct of my, his anonymous partner's, typical way of behaviour based on typically and supposedly invariant motives ('Whoever puts a duly addressed and stamped envelope in the mailbox is assumed to intend to have it delivered to the addressee in due time').

(3) Even more, in my own self-typification – that is by assuming the role of a customer of the mail service – I have to project my action in such a typical way as I suppose the typical post office employee expects a typical customer to behave. Such a construct of mutually interlocked behaviour patterns reveals itself as a construct of mutually interlocked in-order-to and because motives which are supposedly invariant. The more institutionalized or standardized such a behaviour pattern is, that is, the more typified it is in a socially approved way by laws, rules, regulations, customs, habits, etc., the greater is the chance that my own self-typifying behaviour will bring about the state of affairs aimed at (pp. 19–20).

The operation of nomic models has been explored by social psychologists in an area commonly referred to as 'implicit personality theory' (Bruner & Tagiuri, 1954). This research investigates the everyday assumptions regarding the relationships between personality traits which allow the generation of information about others from partial cues. There is a substantial body of evidence which suggests that implicit personality theory is strongly influenced by linguistic factors (cf. D'Anrade, 1965; Chapman, 1967; Rosenberg & Olshan, 1970), and that it is not very sensitive to the actual distribution of traits among stimulus persons (cf. Mulaik, 1964; Passini & Norman, 1966). It would seem, therefore, that implicit personality theory is to some extent a culturally supplied and intersubjectively agreed means of organizing our perception of other persons. As Hastorf *et al.* (1970) point out, however, this is not to say that each and every individual utilizes the theory in precisely the same fashion or invariably across different situations. Thus Koltuv (1962) showed that perceived intertrait relationships were usually stronger when perceivers rated people whom they did not know well, which suggests that implicit theories of personality are employed in a more objective fashion where anonymity prevails.

*Idiosyncratic* aspects of social behaviour are manifested in interactions between two (or more) individuals who share a (close) personal relationship. Within such interaction, each party is respected as a unique person with a unique biography, whose individuality unfolds through successive encounters with the other. While shared knowledge may also guide behaviour during such interactions, it is shared only by the parties to the relationship, and is therefore not functionally independent of the individuals involved. It is not suggested that close personal relationships are characterized by an uninterrupted flow of idiosyncratic social behaviour, but rather that idiosyncratic aspects are much more likely to predominate over the other two aspects within such relationships.

The third aspect of social behaviour, *reconstructive* refers to the ways in which individuals respond to modifications of the objective structure of the familiar known-in-common environment which make it difficult for them to interpret the situation within the framework of existing conventionalized knowledge. Demonstrations of the operation of reconstructive behaviour have been provided by the work of Garfinkel and his students (1967). For example:

Students were instructed to play tictacktoe and to mix their subjects by age, sex, and degrees of

acquaintance. After drawing the tictacktoe matrix they invited the subject to move first. After the subject made his move the experimenter erased the subject's mark, moved it to another square and made his own mark but without giving any indication that anything about the play was unusual. In half of 247 trials students reported that subjects treated the move with hidden but definite significance. Subjects were convinced that the experimenter was 'after something' that he was not saying and whatever he 'really' was doing had nothing to do with tictacktoe. He was making a sexual pass; he was commenting on the subject's stupidity; he was making a slurring or an impudent gesture (pp. 71-72).

This is an example of a situation where the individual has to manage the reconstruction of the situation by himself, without consensual validation. Alternatively, reconstructive social behaviour is invoked by situations where the individual does not have access to applicable models which provide guides to appropriate action. It is interesting to note that this guiding function is often adopted by a 'master-of-ceremonies' in everyday life, such as the undertaker at funerals, and nurses in hospitals, who provide such guides for persons who 'are' mourners and patients, respectively. Further examples of situations which invoke reconstructive behaviour can be found in studies of 'extreme environments', e.g. sensory deprivation, prisoner of war camps, etc. We are not directly concerned with this class of behaviours, interesting as they are, in the context of the present paper.

Finally, it is important to point out again that this threefold distinction between nomic, idiosyncratic and reconstructive aspects of social behaviour is in no way meant to imply that these three aspects operate exclusively of each other. We recognize that in most situations, social behaviour is an interactive product of all three aspects, and that the relative contributions of each aspect will vary depending on how the situation is defined by the individual.

#### Principles of experimentation enforcing the anonymity maxim

Assuming for the moment the validity of the analytic distinction made in the preceding section, we now wish to argue that there are a number of principles guiding experimentation in social psychology which enforce the operation of nomic models. This implies (a) that the predominant testbed for social psychological theory revolves around the interaction of anonymous participants; and (b) that the knowledge tapped by experimentation consists mainly of the invariant motives manifested in the adoption of nomic behaviours. In other words, we shall argue that anonymity prevails in experimental encounters; that nomic aspects of social behaviour therefore predominate in such interactions; and that this is the consequence of certain 'principles' guiding the use of the experimental method, based in part on considerations derived from the scientific method, and in part on considerations extraneous to it. Gadlin & Ingle (1975) comment as follows:

... The experimenter-subject relationship is *depersonalized* because the 'objectivity' of the experimental method requires it. ... Our present methodology prescribes these relationships as impersonal ones, leads us to minimize the effects of 'personal' factors, turns our attention away from a consideration of the relationships, and facilitates treating our subjects as objects (pp. 1005, 1008)

The principles of experimental method contain explicit 'rules' concerning the contract between experimenter and subject(s) during the experimental episode. Let us identify some of these principles and rules:

(1) The experimenter has specific theoretical sentences which he wishes to translate into experimental sentences (some of the problems involved here will be discussed later in this paper). In devising his experimental realization the experimenter will be very concerned that the parts of the reality he wishes to mediate are equally and highly comprehended by all members of his participant population. This inevitably means that he will resort to nomic models in order to establish reciprocity of perspectives, given that he is encountering persons about whom he knows little (cf. (2) below) besides their cultural membership. In other words, the experimenter seeks to reduce error variance arising from differential interpretations of the situation within conditions.

(2) It is generally the case in psychological experimentation that experimenter and subject(s) know nothing about one another's biographies,\* which gives rise quite literally to anonymity. Where subjects interact during the course of the study, care is often taken to ensure that they do not know each other well, prior to the experiment.

(3) The subjects are usually unfamiliar with the particular ecological context of the inquiry and special care is often taken to ensure this. This context is generally the depersonalized atmosphere of the psychology laboratory, with its cubicles, observation rooms, and so on (cf. Adair, 1973).

(4) An authority relation between experimenter and subject is essential for the running of the experiment. If the subject simply decided that he was going to take matters into his own hands the experiment would rapidly be reduced to chaos.

(5) The experimental interaction has an episodic character, i.e. there is a very specific time constraint imposed on the encounter, and it is detached from all other events in the course of the subjects' everyday life (cf. Orne, 1962, 1970).

There are three further factors which encourage the operation of the anonymity maxim in experimental contexts. These are less explicitly derived from the use of the experimental method, but are no less important for that fact.

(6) The subject's desire to contribute to the experimenter's understanding will pressure him to take courses of action which are *nomie* rather than *idiosyncratic* in nature (cf. Weber & Cook, 1973, for a discussion of properties of the 'good' subject).

(7) The wish to contribute to 'scientific knowledge' may be thought of as a similar, but less personal pressure on the subject which also contributes to the elicitation of *nomie* behaviours.

(8) Most important, perhaps, is a general tendency within social psychological research to concentrate virtually exclusively on the exploration of issues within a situation-specific model (e.g. studies of group decision-making and polarization, interpersonal attraction, social facilitation, etc.). This ensures that the research problem is divorced from its peculiar historical and social context. In conjunction with the use of the interchangeable participant, who is likewise divorced from his biographical background, this type of research has led Bowers to conclude that '... the experimental method as generally employed is differentially sensitive to the impact of situational variables, and correspondingly insensitive to organismic variables' (1973, p. 302).

#### Inferential dilemmas

Having argued that behaviour in experimental encounters is predominantly guided by *nomie* models, we shall now turn to the particular problems which beset the experimental social psychologist in his attempt to explain social phenomena. These are consequent upon a general failure to make sufficiently clear analytic distinctions between his usual object of inquiry, namely the *psychology* of social behaviour, and those aspects of social behaviour which are secondary to the psychological questions. It is contended that these problems arise largely as a consequence of faith in the experimental method.

The types of dilemma which result can best be illustrated if we proceed through the steps of hypothesis 'testing' in experimental social psychology. In its most general formulation hypothesis testing takes the following format: given some precipitating conditions (PCs), an intervening process (IP) will result in some consequent behaviour (CB). So:

PCs → [IP] → CB.

Since the point of departure for the empirical study of social behaviour is controlled

\* The general assumption is that biographical data are taken into account through *sedimentary measures*, i.e. *personality indices*. The irony of such a procedure is apparent in that these indices are predicated on *nomothetic* concepts of personality, and therefore trade on shared, rather than unique, aspects of the individual. For a fuller discussion of these points, see Bowers (1973); and for a pure example of the *idiographic* approach, see de Waele (1971).

observation, the variables to be manipulated and observed (PCs and CB) must be perceptible. In experimental social psychology it is usually the case that these are overtly accessible events.

The investigator has access to an enormous set of PCs and CB from which he can choose those to be incorporated in his study. The question which arises at this stage is: how does he arrive at *one particular* set of PCs and CB, rather than any other? In order to answer this we have to look at the possible 'sources' of PCs-CB sets available to him. It is generally expected and implicitly assumed that his PCs-CB set was derived from an 'explicit' theory which contains statements about the nature of IP, as well as abstract statements about the nature of PCs and CB. However, most, if not all, theories in social psychology do not lay down any *specific criteria* for the definition of the behaviour domains for which their formal deductive framework is applicable. It would appear that there are other equally likely sources of the derivation of PC and CB sets. One of these is the investigator's extra-theoretical implicit notions, based on nomic models which he employs in his everyday life, i.e. those models of social behaviour which were earlier identified as guiding behaviour in experimental episodes. Another readily accessible extra-theoretical source of hypotheses regarding the relationships between PCs and CB is knowledge derived simply from observations of regular and repeated contiguity between the two sets of events. Thus, there are three potential sources for the derivation of PCs-CB sets: (a) explicit theory; (b) implicit theory based on nomic models deployed in everyday life; and (c) naive empirical observations. Whatever the precise source of the final product, any experimental test of hypotheses can at best be described as a result of a mixed operationalization, based on any combination of the three above sources.

In fact, the argument that this mixed approach is the rule in experimentation is supported by the very fact that the sharp distinction which is made in the philosophy of science (cf. Hempel, 1966) between 'testing' and 'discovery' experiments, is not made in social psychological experimentation. This is partly due to the fact that demonstrated regularities of relations between PCs and CB are part and parcel of our everyday knowledge and therefore have the quality of self-evidence: consequently the explanation proffered to account for the intervening process, in itself a mixture between implicit and explicit theory, is often merely a description of rule patterns which operate in everyday life. As a result, social psychology has become an unsystematic account of rules rather than an account of processes guiding the use of these rules.

This last criticism applies particularly to 'theories of social behaviour' which are in fact explications of implicit nomic models. This, in our view, is exemplified by the Milgram (1963, 1965, 1974) obedience studies, or the polarization or so-called 'risky-shift' phenomenon (e.g. Stoner, 1961). Let us pursue the latter case a little further: the 'explanations' of the 'risky-shift' phenomenon often bear no relation whatsoever to the data collected. Most of the explanations (e.g. diffusion of responsibility and leadership) and the tests of these explanations have centred on hypothetical processes which are presumed to take place during the group discussion phase; but there are very few studies which have directly observed the processes which operate during this phase (cf. Cartwright, 1971, p. 376). It is evident that the 'explanatory frameworks' are simply explications of implicit models about the phenomenon under observation.

Where there is a theoretical statement resembling a formal deductive theory, e.g. dissonance theory, different types of problems are encountered. These arise as a consequence of the application of the neo-positivist model (which is concerned with the discovery of certain patterns *in nature*) to those consistent PCs-CB patterns which are generated by and for experimentation in experimental social psychology. Typical examples of the latter are the forced compliance, free choice and exposure-to-information 'paradigms'.

A formal deductive theory, in the shape of dissonance theory, is then developed, from which the laws of nature can be deduced, i.e. behaviour observed in the previously mentioned 'paradigms'. The particular problem which arises in this type of approach to the study of social behaviour is that the nature of the formal deductive theory is ambiguous: as Harré has observed,

it can either 'be treated as the device for bringing order into . . . data [or] . . . it can be treated as the name of a real state of mind whose phenomenology can actively be explored, and upon whose real existence the theory can be judged' (1974, p. 241).

### The implications for social psychology

In our view the most important quality of behaviour guided by nomic models is its objectivity, i.e. its functional independence of the individual. For this reason, the exclusive study of nomic behaviour from a synchronic perspective is regarded as psychologically uninformative. Nevertheless, the view prevails that the experimental social psychologist should concern himself with the study of 'spontaneously' elicited behaviour (cf. Aronson & Carlsmith, 1968; Freedman, 1969; Mills, 1969). Such an approach, by definition of the scientific paradigm within which it operates, is *a-historical* and encourages concentration on nomic behaviours. Only in conjunction with a very specific methodology can the synchronic approach yield information about psychological processes. Let us examine the issues involved by using an example, and then suggest some possible means of overcoming the limitations we have described.

An example from the realm of language will serve as an illustration. It is obvious that an analysis of the syntactical rules utilized by speakers in sentence construction cannot in itself provide any insight into the speaker's psychological processes. Nevertheless, it is equally obvious that a full account of this rule system is essential to the understanding of psychological processes. This apparent contradiction can be resolved by bringing different methodologies, of a psychological nature, to bear on the issue. For example, the introduction of a diachronic perspective allows the analysis of acquisition of syntactical rules, while an idiographic approach within such a perspective enables the psychological analysis of deviations from these rules.

Even an analysis of conversational rules, from a non-linguistic point of view (cf. Sacks, 1972; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), is uninformative about psychological processes. In analysing conversational rules pertaining to openings, turn-taking, closings, etc., one is defining the *domain* of a nomic model and the *boundaries* of its use in everyday life. This in itself reveals little about psychological processes, unless different methodologies are brought to bear. One possibility would be to attend to idiosyncracies in the use of conversational rules. As a note of caution it should be added that this kind of approach is only informative about psychological processes if the idiosyncratic performance reveals an underlying pathology in the individual; an anthropologically interesting but psychologically uninformative case is exemplified by Frake's (1964) analysis of how to ask for a drink in Subanon.

A second possibility would be to study the psychological implications of rule breaking. Again a cautionary note is needed. It seems possible that rule breaking results in the onset of an alternative rule repertoire which entails physiological responses and guides for coping behaviour (cf. Averill, 1974, 1975). The consequences of rule breaking are, therefore, only psychologically informative when the coping behaviour is of a reconstructive nature, i.e. where there is no immediate recourse to an existing nomic repertoire.

The third possibility is the ontogenetic approach to rule-acquisition behaviour, typical of a developmental method and exemplified by Piagetian genetic epistemology. A fourth possibility is to study the processes involved in rule search, elicitation, and application. This would entail the direct study of the cognitive processes involved in the deployment of nomic models.

We have sought to demonstrate that a large proportion of social psychological studies and theories relies on nomic models of social behaviour, not only with respect to the behaviours that are elicited in experimental tests of hypotheses, but also in the construction of the theories themselves: it is by no means clear when nomic 'language' ends and when data and theory 'language' begins. Given that it is indeed extremely difficult to make this distinction, we shall describe one method, the thought experiment, in an attempt to provide a means by which the operation of such models can be detected.



### The thought experiment

So far we have endeavoured to identify the types of dilemma which beset causal inference in social psychology, and we have argued that these arise from (a) the type of framework adopted by investigators, and (b) assumptions and practices which arise either directly or indirectly from the use of the experimental method. We have also argued that the behaviours elicited in experimental encounters are predominantly based on nomic models which are extensively shared by members of a culture. It might, however, be argued that the generation of regular patterns of PCs and CB relations is based on 'laws' extraneous to shared knowledge. We shall now briefly outline the rationale for a method which enables the detection of the operation of nomic models in experimental episodes. This method may also prove to be a powerful means of revealing the nomic models utilized in everyday life.

The methodology of the thought experiment (*Gedankenexperiment*) which will be outlined has similarities to earlier formulations and discussions of this technique (e.g. Müller, 1911; Mach, 1920; Ach, 1935). Let us therefore begin by summarizing the premises underlying the thought experiment in these early formulations and subsequently discuss the method we have derived for use in the present context.

In its previous formulations, the thought experiment is generally seen as a heuristic device, which can either be a precursor to the laboratory experiment proper (cf. Mach, 1920, p. 187) or as a device '... confronting the scientist with a contradiction or conflict implicit in his mode of thought' (Kuhn, 1968, p. 228). The function served by the thought experiment is very close to that of the laboratory experiment, the basic difference being that the experiment is conducted in the mind of the investigator rather than in reality. Thus, experimentally plausible but practically unrealizable manipulations and conditions can be created. Kuhn (1968, p. 211) cites as an example the famous train experiment used in Einstein's popularization of relativity theory.

The type of thought experiment referred to above is labelled the thought experiment improper (*uneigentliches Gedankenexperiment*) by Müller, who contrasts it with the thought experiment proper (*eigentliches Gedankenexperiment*). He maintains that this latter type of thought experiment is the one which is more directly relevant for psychological experimentation (Müller, 1911, p. 153ff; cf. also Ach, 1935, pp. 36-37). Thought experimentation in this latter context entails empathy (*Einfühlung*), described by both Ach and Müller as a process through which the scientist observes particular behaviours which are consequences of internal states and, by means of a mental (*innerliches*) understanding, is able to empathize with the thoughts and feelings of others which occur in a given situation.

Underlying all these suggestions regarding the nature and role of the thought experiment is one basic premise, namely that the execution of any thought experiment rests upon prior experience of 'nature'. In other words the performance of the thought experiment relies entirely on the knowledge that the person has available to himself at the time of conducting the thought experiment as a member of the same culture as those he is studying (cf. Müller, 1911, p. 148ff; Mach, 1920, p. 183; Ach, 1935, p. 34; Kuhn, 1968, pp. 221-228). This premise is also basic to the methodology we shall now describe.

Since we have argued in the previous sections that the behaviours taking place in experimental situations are based on nomic models which are intersubjectively shared with a culture, it follows that a disinterested observer, i.e. one who has no involvement in the experimental episode, and who has no access to the backgrounds and personal histories of the participants, should be able to predict their behaviour. If he is able to do this, then nomic models must be guiding experimental behaviour. The rationale for this conclusion is neatly expressed by Schütz (1953) in a passage discussing actor-observer relations:

The motives of the observer are not interlocked with those of the observed person or persons; he is 'tuned-in' upon them but not they upon him. In other words the observer does not participate in the

complicated mirror-reflexes by which in the interaction pattern among contemporaries the actor's in-order-to motives become understandable to the partner as his own because motives and vice versa. Precisely this fact constitutes the so-called 'disinterestedness' or detachment of the observer. . . Thus his system of relevances differs from that of the interested parties and permits him to see at the same time more or less than what is seen by them. But under all circumstances, it is merely the manifested fragments of the action of *both* partners that are accessible to his observation. In order to understand them the observer has to avail himself of his knowledge of typically similar patterns of interaction in typically similar situational settings and has to construct the motives of the actors from that sector of the course of action which is patent to his observation. The constructs of the observer are, therefore, different ones than those used by the participants in the interaction, if for no other reason than the fact that the purpose of the observer is different from that of the interactors and therewith the systems of relevances attached to such purposes are also different. There is a mere chance, although a chance sufficient for many practical purposes, that the observer in daily life can grasp the subjective meaning of actors' acts. *This chance increases with the degree of anonymity and standardization of observed behaviour* (p. 20, latter emphasis ours).

To extend this line of reasoning a little further, we would argue that thought experiments performed by observers will be predictive of so-called 'actual and spontaneous' experimental behaviours, since the latter are based on nomic models which satisfy precisely those criteria which are necessary for an observer to make accurate predictions, namely standardization within a culture and anonymity of behaviour. We therefore suggest the methodology of thought experiment as a viable means of detecting the operation of nomic models. Thought experimentation entails the replication of an experimental episode, and the prediction by an observer of the dependent variable employed in the original study. Of course such an approach has been employed before, both in connection with the method of interpersonal simulations (Bem, 1967, 1972) and in some more sophisticated examples of role-playing studies (e.g. Mixon, 1972). From the perspective developed in this paper, the interpersonal simulation *method* is a special case of the thought experiment, although the rationale of self-perception *theory* naturally does not have any affinity with the present framework at all. Mixon's use of a role-playing methodology in his re-examination of the processes responsible for the outcomes of Milgram's well-known studies of obedience (e.g. 1963, 1965) provide a better illustration of how thought experimentation could serve to diagnose the operation of nomic models. Mixon (1972) was highly successful in replicating Milgram's original findings, even though his 'observer-subjects' merely listened to a 'script' which described Milgram's experiment, and then made predictions regarding the percentage of obedient subjects and the mean shock level administered. More importantly, however, Mixon was able to manipulate the amount of predicted obedience by changing certain elements in his script. While Milgram accounts for his own findings in terms of the psychology of 'the agentic state', which in his view is characterized by 'shifts in the pattern of neurological functioning. . . and. . . an alteration of attitude' (1974, p. 133), Mixon was able to provide a rather more economical explanation. He found that those changes in his script which produced massive alterations in the amount of obedience predicted by his observer-subjects all pertained to the presence of safeguards which prevent experimental participants coming to any harm. Thus, the absence of the verbal labels (e.g. 'Danger: Severe Shock') on the shock-generator, which flatly contradicted the experimenter's assurances that the shocks were not harmful, greatly increased predicted obedience; on the other hand, changes such as having the experimenter appear 'worried and agitated' rather than 'calm and confident' when the learner began to pound the wall greatly reduced predicted obedience. In short, Mixon's role-playing replications show that what is generally taken to be a *psychologically* informative demonstration of the failure of individual morality is more adequately explained in terms of the roles and rules which are typically perceived to be operating in experimental encounters.

The thought experiment need not be utilized exclusively as a counterpart to the laboratory experimental approach in studying social behaviour, but further discussion of the properties of

this method are beyond the scope of the present paper. The central relevance of the method in the context of this paper pertains to the facilities which it affords in the detection of nomic models.

### Conclusion

A pervasive quality of nomic models is the autonomy which they have acquired as guides for social behaviour. We would argue that this quality has implications for the reconsideration of the social and psychological in social psychology. In so far as nomic models are situationally elicited models for the execution and monitoring of behaviour in social situations, which are highly habitualized and detached from biographical circumstances and are thus objective and anonymous, they represent the 'structure' of social behaviour. It appears to us that there is a need to clarify the distinction between the 'works' of social behaviour and its 'rules' (cf. Semin & Rogers, 1973). The processes involved in the *definition of the situation* and the ensuing processes of search, elicitation and application of 'adequate' nomic models, are the *works* of social behaviour; while nomic models might be said to embody the *rules* of social behaviour. Because this distinction is not generally made in social psychology, it seems to us that there has been some confounding of these two aspects of social behaviour, with the psychological aspect remaining very much the poor relation. Our analysis suggests how we might begin to study these more individual and personal aspects of social behaviour. Thus, the distinctions we have made point on the one hand to a psychological social psychology concerned with search, elicitation, and application processes; and, on the other, to a sociological social psychology concerned with rule structures. In the case of psychological social psychology, the 'social' is regarded as one of a number of ways in which cognitive processes can be studied, and comparable in this respect to the methods of achieving the same goal which are afforded by, for example, developmental psychology or cross-cultural psychology. However, it is also important to have a precise understanding of the rules which are involved in social behaviour, and it seems possible that this enterprise can be tackled most adequately by following a form of inquiry which has the explication of rules in social behaviour as one of its fundamental objectives, namely ethnomethodology. Given a fuller understanding of the role played by rules in social behaviour, it will become possible to tackle the *social* in social psychology and begin studying the *psychology* involved in social behaviour.

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