CHAPTER ONE

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF AGENCY

PROBABLY NO CONCEPT is as central to psychology and its aspirations, yet as poorly articulated within psychology, as that of *human agency*. Broadly speaking, agency is the freedom of individual human beings to make choices and to act on these choices in ways that make a difference in their lives. Exactly what is implied by such a freedom has been the subject of heated debate since at least the time of the Stoic sage Chrysippus (ca. 280–206 B.C.E.). Nonetheless, the assumption of some such freedom to choose and act as we will clearly undergirds much of our everyday activity. If we cannot be said to play an active role in the initiation of our actions, it is difficult to understand how we might be said to deserve the fruits of our achievements, to have moral responsibility for our conduct, or to be suitably in receipt of the admiration, gratitude, indignation, or resentment of others. Moreover, without some conception of agency it is difficult to conceive of ourselves as autonomously creative, as active contributors to our own lives and destinies, and as capable of giving and receiving meaningful friendship and love. In short, to dignify our very sense of ourselves as fully human seems to require the idea that we can initiate actions in relation to our hopes for our lives within the context of an open (not predetermined) future.

To date, disciplinary psychology has failed to achieve a coherent conception of agency. This failure is attributable, in large part, to disciplinary psychology's seemingly untenable joint commitment to fashioning a highly deterministic, reductive science in the manner of some branches and

approaches to physical science, while simultaneously appearing to respect as significant and influential the everyday experiences and actions of human individuals when it comes to the professional practice of psychology. The way in which psychology has historically positioned itself with respect to other disciplines and professions requires success in both of these ventures. Yet, it is difficult to understand how disciplinary psychology can have it both ways. For, if all of our decisions and actions are fully determined by conditions and factors outside of ourselves, in what coherent sense might we be said to initiate our own actions? Even if strict origination of actions is replaced by the lesser requirement of mere voluntariness in desiring and acting as we do, the requirements of deterministic psychological science and agentic psychological practice are not easily reconciled. For example, even if I act in accordance with my desire not to become upset by the political views of my colleague, in what sense is either my desire or my action free if both are located in a strictly causal sequence of events that prevent me from desiring and acting otherwise?

For the most part, psychologists and organized psychology have opted for an approach to psychological research that has disavowed human agency in order to identify itself with natural science and the latter's use of reductive methods and explanatory systems. Moreover by inventing what organized psychology has termed the "scientist–practitioner model," it also has pretended that this reductive approach to psychological science can undergird both personally and socially effective professional psychological practices, despite the fact that the concerns for which most individuals seek psychological assistance are mostly agentic, reflecting difficulties in deciding, choosing, and acting. At first glance, this combination of reductive, deterministic psychological science and professional practice targeted at goals such as self-empowerment, problem solving, and personal coping seems incomprehensible. This is especially so when it is realized that, if successful, reductive psychological science actually would do away with the very phenomena it purports to explain, and on which professional psychology is based: agentic phenomena such as human choice and intentional action. The paradoxical key to unlocking this irony lies in the recognition that the devaluing of agency through reductive psychological science actually serves the purposes of agency-enhancing professional psychology as well. The crucial insight is that agency, once devalued by the science thought to undergird psychological practice, becomes a detached, facile thing that seems readily pliable through the frequently and grossly oversimplified manipulations of professional psychology.

The aim of this book is to provide a coherent conception and approach to the question of agency that does not disparage serious scholarly and scientific work in psychology and related areas, but which resists the kind of reductive science upon which so much contemporary psychology rests. In particular, it is argued that human agency cannot be reduced to

purely biological and/or cultural determinants, yet must be understood as arising nonmysteriously within appropriate developmental, historical, and sociocultural context. Resolutions to two seemingly paradoxical ideas are critical to the success of this enterprise. First is the idea that agency can arise from biology and culture, without being reducible to any combination of biological and cultural determinants. Second is the idea that humans can be both determined and free, and not merely in the sense of demonstrating voluntariness in their activities.

However, before presenting and arguing for particular approaches to these ideas as resolutions to the very paradoxes they appear to contain, the topics of agency and the reduction of agency within psychology require further introduction. This task exhausts the rest of this first chapter and the chapter that follows. With such an introduction in place, chapters 3 and 4 present arguments for the nature, necessity, and irreducibility of agency in human affairs. Chapter 5 is then devoted to a detailed theoretical and practical explication of human agency, its development, and its indispensable role in human life. More specifically, in chapter 5, our own conception of situated, emergent, and deliberative agency is clarified and illustrated, both developmentally and theoretically. Finally, in the last chapter (chapter 6), psychological research, practice, and the societal impact (socioculturally, politically, and ethically) of psychology are reinterpreted in light of the conception of agency developed herein. In this final chapter, detailed examples are provided concerning what transpires when a historically and socioculturally constituted, situated, and deliberative agency (one that emerges developmentally within necessary physical and biological requirements) is assumed rather than disavowed and devalued. We believe that the resultant, interpretive reconfiguring of psychological research, practice, and societal impact provides a strong rationale for the theoretical work we undertake in this volume.

Some Relevant Background for What Follows

The issue of freedom of choice and action has taken a variety of forms since first broached by Chrysippus, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), and other classical Greek philosophers. It lies at the very center of human existence, both personally and socially. It is what imbues personal being with significance, and social being with virtue. For, if human individuals have no agency, no freedom to choose and act, personal life loses its possibilities and social life loses its responsibilities. If there is no agency, there is no praiseworthy accomplishment—no personal triumph, no service to a common good. In a very real sense, the assumption of agency is a metaphorical cornerstone to Western culture. It is difficult to understate the enormous impact of this assumption, even if seldom articulated explicitly, on our personal and collective existence.

And yet, at least since the Enlightenment, many philosophers, scientists, and social scientists have toiled to disavow or "downgrade" agency because it does not fit easily within a particular scientific viewpoint. They have taken the perspective that everything is caused in such a way that it can be reduced to a basic physical, microparticulate level of reality. The ambition of this scientific program is that we will discover that agency really is nothing more than the firing of neurons and fibers, and related neurophysiological activity of our bodies and brains made possible by our particular evolutionary history as a species. In the same way that water is composed of molecules consisting of two atoms of hydrogen joined to one atom of oxygen, that temperature is mean kinetic energy, and that light is electromagnetic radiation, we will learn that our choices and actions are reducible to physical states and processes of our biological brains and bodies. Moreover, these physical states and processes determine, sometimes in interaction with our physical and social environments, all that passes for our experiences of agentic freedom and responsibility to ourselves and to others. Our conventional phenomenology and morality are revealed as mere epiphenomena, without causal influence or real significance. Even though we may wish to retain our folksy way of talking as if we make choices about how to act based on our own sense of what is appropriate, practical, reasonable, and moral according to our beliefs and desires, all such talk really is beside the point. It is merely a kind of window dressing that could just as easily be eliminated with no resultant alteration in the real, correct, underlying scientific picture of how we are in the world.

The human genome project, advances in artificial intelligence and robotics, cloning, and reproductive and other biological technologies, we consistently are told, are converging in a way that soon will reveal how insignificant, almost childish, our everyday agentic assumptions and aspirations really are. The mere fact that such possibilities strike us at once as both so startling and so seemingly inevitable indicates the extent to which we have accepted a scientific and technological worldview, and the progressive, inexorable march of progress through which it manifests and confirms itself. Some envision a time when our languages and cultural practices will dissolve into a universal, more sophisticated, and scientifically correct way of speaking about our experiences and actions in ways that have little place for agency and associated ideas. Just as science has eclipsed other forms of superstition, our agency also will be eclipsed in ways that we now only can glimpse, but which soon will congeal into an efficient, parsimonious scientific discourse more consistent with our material, atomistically constituted being.

Thus, it is hardly surprising to learn that contemporary disciplinary psychology as a research enterprise has been, at least for most of its history, not much concerned with agency, understood as choosing and acting on the basis of one's own desires, beliefs, and reasons. Prior to the 1980s and 1990s,

the number of articles in journals of psychology that contained any reference to human agency was almost negligible when set against the vast number of articles produced within disciplinary psychology as a whole. As a science in the contemporary mode, psychology has been more concerned with the reductive explanation of agentic phenomena in terms of their supposed biological, neurophysiological, and environmental determinants. As most undergraduate university students can attest, for the most part the experiences, choices, and actions of everyday life have been redefined, resituated, reduced, and reinterpreted by scientific psychology to fit the language of variables, stimuli, factors, and conditions. Much of the modest increase in psychological work on aspects of human agency that has occurred since 1980 remains couched in such terms.

Of course, many (although certainly not all) psychologists admit to a gap between their research and theorizing and the understandings of the lay public. Indeed, some psychologists apparently regard such distance as evidence of the scientific status of their discipline. After all, how many automobile drivers understand the physical mechanics of their vehicles? How many recipients of medical care know anything about the neurophysiological, chemical, and biological mechanisms and functions of their bodies? The descriptions and explanations of science and its technical applications frequently differ from and exceed the understandings of nonscientists. Many psychologists believe that scientific psychology is capable of penetrating the everyday actions and experiences of human subjects in ways, and with results, that should not be expected to relate to lay impressions. After all, the methods and findings of psychological science are superior to those available to nonpsychologists. Although ordinary humans in their everyday lives believe that they make choices about what to do today and tomorrow, and sometimes act on these choices in ways that affect their lives, research psychologists expect that behind all of this agentic facade lies the real realm of their scientific aspirations: an underlying level of physical, material microparticulate entities and inanimate causal processes that determine all of what goes on above.

And yet, the attachment of disciplinary psychology to this reductively deterministic viewpoint is not complete, for contemporary psychology is a profession as well as a research enterprise. While the assumed scientific status of research psychology serves to support societal acceptance of the expert interventions of psychologists in many areas of contemporary life, such interventions and their practitioners cannot afford to be quite so dismissive of agency as experienced in everyday life. After all, those clients and communities who request the professional services of psychologists make their requests for assistance in mostly agentic form. Difficulties for which psychological services are sought are expressed in terms of alienation, depression, angst, uncertainty, and bewilderment, not in terms of biological and neurophysiological features of the brain and body. Moreover, such difficulties are

understood by clients and other consumers of psychological services to relate to their relationships, aspirations, work, and emotional states in ways that can best be captured in ordinary, everyday language, not in a scientific, materialistic vocabulary that seems mostly unrelated to relevant personal concerns and difficulties.

The obvious gap between what disciplinary psychology has to offer and what the clients of professional psychologists are seeking, may, in part, explain the drift of most psychological practitioners from the research traditions and theoretical orientations in which they were trained (e.g., Jensen, Bergin, & Greaves, 1990; Morrow-Bradley & Elliot, 1986). Practitioners, who are faced daily with the agentic, meaningful, and morally laden questions and concerns of their clients, surely must feel that they are dealing with subject matter that is entirely different from what they read about in the texts and research articles that populated their education. Whereas the psychological research literature aims at prediction using inferential statistical techniques and large samples, professional psychologists and their clients engage together in quests for idiographic, reflexive, narrative, practical, and evaluative self-understandings and meanings (Woolfolk, 1998). Researchers isolate variables of interest and statistically control others, while practitioners and their clients must deal with problems as they are lived, in complex, changing, and meaning-laden contexts.

Unfortunately, turning to the practice-oriented, clinical literature in psychology also is unlikely to assist professional psychologists, reflecting, as it does, a different, yet still unsituated, stance toward human agency. Humanistic psychotherapies, for example, with their Romantic roots, invest individuals with an innate, natural form of agency that, if unfettered, allows them to be radically "free agents" in determining their own behavior on the basis of access to immediate, inner, true experiencing. As Louis Sass (1988) has pointed out, the humanist view of human nature is deficient in that its valuing of privacy, freedom, and uniqueness, as defining and desirable human qualities, leads to a devaluation of and blindness to the potential importance of cultural practices, social structures, tradition, history, and even biology. From the humanistic perspective, culture and tradition, for example, are seen mostly as external barriers to individual freedom and uniqueness. The pursuit of a radical freedom "to follow true feelings" ignores the socially constructed, value-laden nature of emotions, and necessary and inevitable historical, sociocultural constraints on possibilities for action. For example, imagine an individual in psychotherapy deciding whether to end a marriage solely on the basis of accessing and acting on "true" feelings about the marriage, feelings that are completely free of personal history and sociocultural background, of what is right, good, responsible, acceptable, traditional, or practically possible. Clients' feelings and possible actions in such circumstances are not unconstrained by sociocultural, historical, and personal factors, conditions, and contexts. Clients and psychological therapists cannot help but

realize that psychological agency and change involve much more than discovering true feelings and acting on them.

Yet, despite such obvious shortcomings in its agentic attachments, disciplinary psychology continues to hold simultaneously to the idea of psychology as a kind of deterministic, reductive science and to the idea that psychology somehow can contribute to the empowerment of human beings with respect to attaining goals they set for themselves in their everyday lives. For example, in a recent volume entitled, "On the Self-Regulation of Behavior," Charles Carver and Michael Scheier (1998) cling tenaciously to a conception of self-regulation in terms of a cybernetic system of input functions, reference values, and output functions that they claim operates equally well in machines or animals (including human animals). At the same time, they repetitively claim that it is human beings who experience personal growth through "decisions made by the self" (p. 315) and who "live life by identifying goals and moving toward them, and by identifying anti-goals and staying away from them" (p. 346). Such unsettling juxtapositionings have become so common in the writings of contemporary psychologists that they frequently escape close scrutiny. However, even a modestly critical sensibility must regard the partnering of such claims as jarring. What possibly viable, coherent conception of agency might fit deterministically and reductively within a nonhuman animal without language or a machine, yet also fit with a human individual's free pursuit of self-set decisions and goals? Perhaps such writings reflect a misunderstanding of the conventional meanings associated with the idea of agency, or perhaps their authors have developed an unarticulated theory of agency that somehow transcends and transforms those conventional meanings in convincingly coherent ways. However, it seems more likely that the joint concerns of disciplinary psychology for a foundation in deterministic, reductive science coupled with a marketable set of self-empowering methods and practices simply have deflected the usual kinds of critical attention found in most branches of scholarly activity. And, moreover, it seems that many psychologists have been caught up unthinkingly in this disciplinary background within which they work.

As will become clear in chapter 2, our own view is that psychologists' conflicting "double take" on agency has avoided critical scrutiny within psychology for the simple reason that it works for both psychological scientists and practitioners. The reductive disavowal of agency within psychological science serves to devalue and simplify it in ways that allow it to be picked up by psychological practitioners as an easily malleable thing, one that can be readily detached from its complex human context and probed and serviced by psychological professionals. Of course, we do not believe that such a connection between psychological science and practice has been strategically preplanned by disciplinary psychology and the psychological establishment. Ours is not a conspiracy theory. Rather, over the

course of the twentieth century, a host of influential cultural, historical, social, and institutional events have come together in ways that have made it sensible and practical for psychology and psychologists to adopt the stance that psychology constitutes a seamless, progressive program for the scientific understanding of human experience and action that can be placed in the service of bettering human kind through the ministrations of its practitioners.

Whatever the reasons for disciplinary psychology's failure to come to grips with the issue of human agency and its implications for psychological research and practice, it seems appropriate to call for greater critical attention to these matters. We hope that the arguments attempted herein will contribute in some small measure to such critical study. What we will argue is that psychology, if it is truly to be about human agents, must give up its pretensions of being a highly deterministic, reductive science. This is not to say that psychology should cease attempts to attain a rigorous scholarly standing, even one based on an appropriate model of science, only that its subject matter should not be misconstrued or inappropriately transformed to fit the methods and models extant in areas of scholarship and science that do not encompass human agency as a central aspect of their subject matter. However, before arguing for the necessity of nonreductive agency in human affairs and for a viable conception of agency in appropriate developmental, historical, and sociocultural context, a brief overview of reductive programs within the history of psychology will serve to set the stage more completely for what will follow. For it is important to understand the extent to which disciplinary psychology has attempted to avoid the implications of agency for psychological science by different means of reducing agency to biology, behavior, neurophysiology, computational and other machine mechanisms, and even to disembodied systems of language and social practice.

PSYCHOLOGY'S DISAVOWAL OF AGENCY

To understand why disciplinary psychology has attempted so consistently to reduce agency to nonagentic determinants, it helps to recapture something of the enthrallment with the natural sciences that typified the latter part of the nineteenth century. At the time of the founding of psychology as an independent discipline, all theoretically inclined studies were in considerable turmoil. The natural sciences were in full swing, piling up success after success, in a way that was widely accepted as far outstripping the more uncertain, debatable output typically associated with work in philosophy and the humanities. This was a time when a newly born attachment to positivism and empiricism, which were thought to explain the success of the natural sciences, was stifling speculation about what things were and how they might be understood. The triumphant march of the natural sciences in industry and medicine seemed based on an exact knowledge of, and tech-

nical command over, nature. Moreover, all of this seemed to have been achieved by shelving traditional metaphysical concerns and focusing on how things functioned. Hypothesis, experiment, and verification made up a new and better logic of inquiry that was accepted unquestioningly as capable of penetrating all of nature, including human nature.

This was the intellectual climate in which disciplinary psychology emerged. In fact, given the persistent scientific temper of our times, it is no accident that the birth of psychology usually is marked by the establishment of a scientific laboratory devoted to psychological experimentation by Wilhelm Wundt in 1879 at the University of Leipzig, despite the fact that formal university courses in applied areas of psychology had been offered in the United States as early as 1839 (Glover & Ronning, 1987). In association with certain branches of physiology and brain chemistry, the new laboratory psychology claimed to be a kind of natural science of the psyche. The guiding idea was that the new experimental psychology would explore and understand the psyche on a mostly inductive, mechanistic basis. By employing what then were understood to be the methods of natural science, psychology would keep the psyche in front of psychological researchers in neat isolation. From the very beginning, there was a strong tendency to treat the psyche as an aseptic object, whose functioning could be formulated in causal, mechanistic laws. Questions of reason and meaning were converted into physiological stimuli, empirical regularities, and idea images and complexes.

From these beginnings, the idea of psychology as a natural, experimental science committed to the functional explanation of a natural psyche persisted across what commonly is perceived as a steady march of scientific and technological progress throughout the twentieth century. Models and metaphors drawn from computer and biotechnology gradually have gained ascendance over previously favored models and metaphors drawn from mechanics and the study of physical systems and lower organisms. However, the core commitment to psychology as natural science has continued to dominate disciplinary psychology in both its research and clinical practices.

Thus, throughout the history of disciplinary psychology, the lofty idea of "psychological science" looms large. By equating human action and experience with the inanimate phenomena of physics and the involuntary phenomena of biology, psychologists have aligned themselves with the methods and explanations of natural, physical science. In so doing, they have bestowed upon themselves (with society's apparent blessing, or at least little demur) all of the prestige and privilege of modern science and technology. So powerful a move has psychology's identification with natural science proven to be, that a steady stream of well-reasoned criticism has done little to deter it. Such criticism has consistently attended the steady march of psychological science throughout the twentieth century, but just as consistently has failed to capture the attention of most psychologists and nonpsychologists. When occasional notice has been taken, it is to dismiss the critics as uninformed,

antiscientific, and/or emotional, even though many critics have themselves been prominent scientists, philosophers of science, and not infrequently, prominent psychologists. Seldom has organized psychology felt the need to mount any serious defense of its natural scientific practices and identifications.

The Basic Error

And yet, the basic assumption that undergirds the idea of psychology as a natural science is in error. Human actions and experiences are not the same kinds of things as are rocks, chemicals, plants, and brain tissue. Psychological kinds differ from natural kinds and other "indifferent" kinds of things in rather obvious ways. Moreover, these differences matter a great deal when it comes to understanding psychological kinds. When these differences are clarified, it makes little sense to conduct psychological inquiry using only the methods and strategies that have proven to be so very successful and undeniably powerful with respect to the description and explanation of physical and strictly biological phenomena.

The phenomena of psychology—human action and experience—are not indifferent to the ways in which they are classified by researchers and others, but interact with these classifications in ways that must be considered if they are to be understood. Ian Hacking (1995) uses the term *human kinds* to refer to kinds of people, kinds of human action, and varieties of human behavior. For Hacking, the important feature of human kinds is that they can exert effects on themselves. Human kinds are affected by their classifications and can interact with their classifications in ways that affect the classifications themselves. For example, if a person is aware that she is upsetting her friends because she is unhappy, she might make a special effort to "put on a good face," in their company.

On the other hand, chemicals, inanimate physical entities, and even nonhuman species, forests, and ecosystems exhibit no ability to exert such effects. These are natural kinds. Natural kinds are unaware of how they are classified and do not interact with their classifications. Unlike people, water, salt, horse, lemon, influenza, heat, and the color green are indifferent to their classifications. Even though, for example, horses may interact with people, horses are no different for being classified as pintos or thoroughbreds. Even though it may make a difference to a horse if it is considered by its owners to be mean-spirited or not, any such difference is not because the horse knows how it is considered or classified.

People are self-conscious and capable of self-knowledge. They are agents, for whom autonomy (at least since the days of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant) is a central Western value. Humans can become aware of how they are classified within their groups, societies, and cultures and can experience themselves in particular ways as a consequence of these classifications. They also can act to alter their classifications. Because human

psychological beings are agents who are aware and reflective, their courses of action and ways of being are affected not only by the classifications of societies and cultures but also by their own conceptions of, and reactions to, such classifications.

Having drawn the foregoing distinction between human and natural kinds, Hacking (1995) also is quick to point out that just because they are not natural does not mean that human kinds are not real. Human kinds definitely are real, but it is a reality in which they themselves are deeply involved. It is a reality of which they are a part. Hacking's point here is that just because human psychological beings are contingently molded by the practices and classifications of their cultures and societies does not mean that they are not real entities or that they can be construed in any way whatsoever. Human psychological being may be mostly a matter of social construction, and as psychological beings, humans may have no fixed essence outside of their particular sociocultural constitution. However, once evolved as self-referring, self-knowing individuals, humans can exert real influence on their societies and cultures through their informed actions and activities. Human psychological beings require sociocultural, biological, and physical reality for their existence, but they are not entirely determined by, nor reducible to, these other levels of reality (Hacking, 1999; Martin & Sugarman, 1999).

More recently, Hacking (1999) has referred to "human kinds" as interactive kinds and natural kinds as indifferent kinds. We mostly have retained his earlier use of natural kinds and use the term *psychological kinds* to refer to what he previously called human kinds. Nonetheless, at times we use the terms *interactive* or *indifferent kinds* or add them to the terms *psychological kinds* or *natural kinds,* respectively, so as to capture more precisely particular distinctions we wish to draw. Of course, the important point to emphasize in all of this is that human or psychological or interactive kinds are as they are because they are the beliefs, desires, reasons, imaginings, memories, experiences, and actions of human agents. They are agentic phenomena in a way that the inanimate phenomena of physics and the animate, but nonagentic, phenomena of biology are not.

Hacking's (1995, 1999) views on human psychological beings are consistent with those expressed in our own previously espoused theory of human psychological development (Martin & Sugarman, 1999). We have argued that human psychological being is emergent within particular sociocultural contexts but, once emergent, is not reducible to these sociocultural contexts, even while continuing to be affected by them. Given the biological makeup of humans, it is inevitable that they will develop some kind of psychological being by virtue of being embedded from birth in sociocultural contexts and practices that constitute particular forms of personhood and identity. The claim is that if this basic premise is accepted there is no need to resort to anything further in the way of natural or essential arguments

concerning the nature of human psychology. In short, human psychology issues from the developmental embeddedness of biological humans within established cultures and societies, but once emergent within sociocultural contexts that include practices of self-reflective agency, human psychological beings and their actions and experiences are not entirely determined nor constrained by such contexts. As Hacking (1995) claims, human psychological beings are human kinds capable of affecting the very classifications that enable and identify them.

Psychological individuals, and their memories, imaginings, beliefs, and goals, are possessed and reflective of human agency. Human or psychological kinds are agentic. They interact with their classifications in ways that natural, indifferent kinds do not precisely because they are self-interpretive and self-determining, reflecting the human capacity to choose and decide with respect to purpose and action. In other words, they are encased in the life projects and understandings of intentional, reflective beings.

This broad understanding of human psychological being has important consequences for psychology and psychological inquiry. With such an understanding in place, it becomes difficult to accept the naturalistic, essentialistic, ahistorical, and reductionistic assumptions that have attended most psychological inquiry since the formal establishment of psychology as an independent scientific discipline in the late 1800s. Psychologists have, for the most part, failed to recognize that their subject matter consists of human kinds that are historically and socioculturally constituted but capable of agentically influencing how they are classified and understood. This failure has led to an uncritical infatuation with psychological research as a natural science and with psychological practice as a technologically related form of human psychological engineering. Moreover, as hinted at earlier, the social consequences of all of this are far from benign in that the words and work of psychological scientists and expert practitioners increasingly are invading our everyday interpersonal interactions and practices. Ironically, such debatable consequences are possible precisely because human individuals are interactive agents, even if such agency is mostly unrecognized by psychology and psychologists.

METHOD OVER SUBSTANCE

One of the most remarkable hallmarks of the natural science approach to psychology is to pretend ignorance, in the sense of acting as if one knows nothing whatsoever, about the psyche. Such pretense is, of course, consistent with the desire for scientific objectivity, understood as indifference or neutrality with respect to one's subject matter, and explanation. The aim of natural science is to explain in causal, functional terms not to understand. The search is for empirical regularities not for meaning. In this spirit, the everyday understandings of the psychologist are to be left at the laboratory

door. Under no circumstances is the psychological researcher to turn into an accomplice of the subjects under study.

One of the most startling examples of the implications of this attitude for the development of psychology can be found in the early-twentieth-century turn to behaviorism in American psychology. At this time, the study of behavior largely replaced the earlier study of consciousness for reasons expressed by Harold S. Jennings in his early text *Behavior of the Lower Organisms* (1906/1962): "[A]ssertions regarding consciousness in animals, whether affirmative or negative, are not susceptible of verification" (p. v). For purposes of scientific study, Jennings proclaimed that one must turn elsewhere, namely, to behavior. Jennings was discussing the behavior of lower animals, but the comparative psychology of the time drew a sharp line between the study of consciousness and other psychological phenomena and the conduct of science. Over time, the subsequent experimental work and logic of an entire generation of American psychological behaviorists from John Watson to Burrhus F. Skinner succeeded in expanding the category of behavior to include almost everything from washing a dish to learning a second language, including the supposedly epiphenomenal thoughts and sensations accompanying all of the action. A scientific method of detached objectivity could now prevail over an entire range of psychological phenomena reduced to behavioral form.

Sigmund Koch (1981) described the scientistic "methodology" that has enveloped psychological science, in the most colorful of language, as

> a view of all aspects of the cognitive enterprise as so thoroughly rule-regulated as to make the role of the cognizer superfluous . . . [the] tendency to persist so rigidly, blindly, patiently in the application of rules . . . despite fulsome indications of the disutility—that the behavior would have to be characterized as schizophrenic in any other context. . . . It presumes that knowledge is an almost automatic result of a gimmickry, an assembly line, a "methodology." It assumes that inquiring action is so rigidly and fully regulated by rule that in its conception of inquiry it often allows the rules totally to displace their human users. (pp. 258–259)

One of the great ironies of this methodological fetishism is that even in physical science there is considerable evidence that researchers do not engage in atheoretical, value-free, rule-bounded inquiry. Many important insights and discoveries in natural science reflect the broad cultural competence, everyday understanding, and speculative theorizing of researchers (cf. Hanson, 1958). In psychology, such scientistic methodologism is even more suspect, given the highly contextualized, historically and socioculturally situated nature of human psychological kinds. It seems almost inconceivable that generations of experimental and other psychologists could be so convinced

about the everyday relevance of their greatly simplified, highly controlled, and artificially induced results. A large part of the answer to this conundrum concerns the powerful influence on psycholologists' inquiry and clinical practices that has been exerted by various kinds of reductionism. It is a deeply rooted commitment to a scientistic, reductionistic strategy that more than anything else has convinced psychologists that they can, and should, mistrust and dismiss their everyday understanding of themselves as agents, rather than use it as a basis for their inquiries. To summarize, the methodolatry of disciplinary psychology, by which it has pretended to the status of natural science, has ensured that psychologists consistently have put their methodological cart ahead of their substantive horse, even when such confusion disavows that which is most uniquely and importantly human, that is, agency.

ASPIRATIONS

In concluding this first, introductory chapter, we want to give the reader a more direct sense of the aspirations that lie behind what we attempt herein. To do this, we reproduce excerpts from the later-twentieth-century writings of three prominent psychologists who have called for a different kind of psychology, one which recognizes that psychological kinds are interactive and agentic, not indifferent and natural. In presenting the following quotations, we hope to indicate that the work in this book is embedded in a considerable history of related aspirations and works of many others, from many of whom we have drawn directly in the pages to follow, but from all of whom we have benefited. It is this legacy that constitutes an important part of the relevant context of this current undertaking.

> Characteristically, psychological events . . . are multiply determined, ambiguous in their human meaning, polymorphous, contextually environed or embedded in complex and vaguely bounded ways, evanescent and labile in the extreme. . . . One is tempted to laugh off the ludicrous prescriptionism of self-anointed visionaries like Watson, Skinner, and even certain infinitely confident prophets of the theory of finite automata, but their actual impact on history is no laughing matter. . . . [P]sychologists must finally accept the circumstance that extensive and important sectors of psychological study require modes of inquiry rather more like those of the humanities than the sciences. (Koch, 1981, pp. 268–269)

> Human kinds . . . are not natural kinds, but neither are they mere legends. They do refer to features that are real. But it is a reality in which they are themselves heavily implicated, a reality of which they are a part. The reality to which human kinds refer

> is a cultural reality, and that in several senses: first, because the phenomena depicted are ones which exist only in some cultural context; secondly, because these phenomena commonly depend on a certain social technology for their visibility and their production; thirdly . . . because the categories used in their representation are culturally grounded. (Danziger, 1997, pp. 191–192)

> [P]sychologists should study the people around them. More than this, . . . we should scrutinize our work; our social, political, and cultural loyalties; the lives we live in the privacy of our own homes; and the lives we live in the privacy of our own heads. Psychology students have for generations been encouraged to see themselves as taking ruler and stopwatch to the world, measuring people with all the dispassion that they might show in recording the orbit of Jupiter, or the structure of a fruit fly's wing. This self-image has been strengthened by our need for academic respectability, as a fledgling profession; but it has led us to overlook the intuitive processes whereby we decide to collect one set of evidence rather than another, and to place upon it one interpretation rather than another. . . . [E]vidence about people is less determinate than evidence about animals or about inanimate objects. If we are in the least interested in the rigor of what we do, we are forced to abandon the conception of ourselves as impersonal measurers, and to see ourselves more modestly as interpreters. . . .
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> If we disavow the false objectivity that scientifically minded psychologists have claimed for themselves, we are under no obligation to plunge to the other extreme. We can analyze and explore the elements of uncertainty that psychological knowledge contains without committing ourselves to a complete relativism of judgment, in which all interpretations of human thought or deed are ultimately of equal value. An interpreter works with evidence: he deals not in black or white, but in the subtly shifting and graduated shades of gray that reasoned doubt entails. His search, in practice, is always for the best reading that his evidence permits. (Hudson, 1975, pp. 8–9)

We very much hope that the perspective and arguments we offer in the pages that follow are worthy of this heritage. What we want to do is convince you that psychology cannot avoid the fact that human beings are embodied agents active in the world. Moreover, such agency goes beyond mere voluntariness (acting consistently with one's desires) by encompassing a modest capability to "originate" courses of action, at least in the sense of imagining and selecting possibilities for acting that are broadly within or

suggested by one's historical, sociocultural situation. In our view, this is the kind of agency that cannot be ignored by disciplinary psychology, in either its research or professional arms.

We will argue that human agency arises nonmysteriously from biology and culture but cannot be reduced back to these origins. We also will argue that human beings are both determined and free. These two central theses are connected in that while the kind of agentic emergence we champion is determined by physical and biological requirements and sociocultural constituents, once emergent the agent's own self-determination always may figure into the determination of her or his choices and actions. Together these theses make possible a perspective on agency that fits coherently within a nonreductive scientific and scholarly framework, on the one hand, and a professional orientation toward practical understanding, on the other hand.

However, before turning to these matters, we first, in the very next chapter, offer a more complete historical sketch of reductionism in disciplinary psychology, indicating why we believe that such reductionism has been central to psychology's traditional disavowal and/or devaluation of human agency. Chapter 3 then provides a brief history of various debates and positions within both philosophy and psychology with respect to the question of human agency. Such a history allows us to locate our work within those broader traditions of scholarly writing and inquiry that relate to our topic. It also sets the stage for chapter 4, in which we offer arguments for the kind of agency we wish to champion in this volume and provide a critical reading of various reductionist, competitor programs in contemporary cognitive science, neuroscience, and philosophy of mind. Finally, in chapters 5 and 6 we turn, respectively, to a detailed consideration of the core theses mentioned in the preceding paragraph and to their implications for psychological inquiry, practice, and social impact.