The aim of this chapter is to sketch (sometimes in rather sweeping strokes) the outline of an interpretive or hermeneutic approach to the study of social interaction, and to social and moral development. What shall be described here is a broad program within which only preliminary moves have been made, in terms of both planning and research. And since the hermeneutic approach is one with which most readers will have as yet little familiarity, some of what is said may seem obscure. The interested reader is referred to the author’s and others’ introductions to hermeneutics and its significance for the social sciences (Bleicher, 1980; Packer, 1985c; Palmer, 1969; Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979).

We shall begin by arguing that social interaction (indeed, human action in general) has certain unique and peculiar characteristics that require a method of research investigation (and an understanding of the research enterprise) that is radically different from the empiricist and experimentalist approaches psychologists generally employ, different from the formalist program that characterizes much of cognitive science (Gardner, 1985), and different from the methods of cognitive–developmental study of social and moral thinking. Nonetheless action seems to be the proper place to begin to study social and moral development, so we are obliged to confront these methodological requirements.

We shall discuss the characteristics of social action that we take to be unique with reference to a distinction first made by Heidegger between three modes of engagement people have in the world. These modes have been described in more detail elsewhere (Packer, 1985c), so the discussion here will be relatively brief. To anticipate the argument, it will be suggested that social interaction is best considered to be a practical activity, a definition that will be elaborated on. In the chapter’s second section, two research projects will be described in which a hermeneutic approach was emphasized, which throw light on the general theme of this book: influences that interactions among people have on their social and moral development. The first project examined exchanges between an infant girl and her mother; the second involved the interpretation of confrontations between young college students over a minor occasion of betrayal. Taken together, these studies point up one candidate social process—practical deliberation—as a social and psychological process in everyday social interaction that seems likely to influence social and moral development. The third section of the chapter addresses more speculatively the general form that an account of moral and social development might have, approached from the hermeneutic perspective. Here the interpretive approach is contrasted with the cognitive–developmental program and with Kohlberg’s views of philosophy. Kierkegaard’s analyses of spheres of ethical development are used to illustrate several aspects of what an interpretive–developmental account might look like.

**SOCIAL ACTION AS PRACTICAL ACTIVITY**

The preparation of this book signals a growing recognition that social and moral development are not the results of solitary construction by individual minds, but are fostered and organized by the social interchanges that people are constantly engaged in together. For the past 25 years social and moral thinking have been the focus of developmental research, as this has been defined by the cognitive–developmental paradigm. Reasoning about moral and social situations and issues has been the most frequent object of inquiry, with moral and social beliefs and attitudes a close second. But if social processes influence development then we need to conduct research on people’s action together as well as their reasoning and their knowledge. However, there is much confusion as to just what this means. Blasi (1980) describes two distinct approaches to the study of action: a behaviorist and a formalist, cognitive–developmental one. It has been argued by the author (Packer, 1985c) that these are both inadequate; the limitations of behaviorist approaches to human behavior are well known, and there are also many difficulties in conceptualizing human action within the cognitive–developmental paradigm (e.g., Locke, 1983). The ideas discussed in this chapter all rest in a particular account of the character of social action: Social interaction is viewed as a kind of practical activity. The account of practical activity that will be given here is based on Heidegger’s work (1927/1962), although similar accounts can be found in the writings of other recent philosophers in less articulated forms: Wittgenstein (1972), Merleau-Ponty (1942/1963) and Suzanne Langer (1967) are three examples. These thinkers turned to the examination of human action in response to the shortcomings they found in the formalism that characterizes rationalist philosophy. A similar formalist zeitgeist greatly influences current psychological theory, in a variety of forms. Structuralism, cognitive developmentalism, information processing theory, computer models; each continues to hold formalist or rationalist assumptions about the structure and the sources of knowledge (Packer, 1985c). Consequently, our research methods are biased toward reading logic and formalism into human phenomena that have a very different kind of organization.

Social action has a special ontological status. Unlike biological processes such as differentiation, growth, or digestion, it has a semantic level of organization to it. Social events and actions have influence and significance by virtue of the meanings people find in them, not by virtue of material causation, or logical necessity. Consequently practical activity is different from the formal, logical organization that characterizes abstract systems of systematic reasoning: axiomatic mathematics, programming languages, formal decision rules and procedures. One particular consequence of this semantic character is central to the argument of this chapter: Practical activity is intrinsically polysemous or ambiguous. Every social act can be understood in a variety of different ways, depending on the perspective from which one views it, and the context in which one encounters it. This is not to say that any interpretation can be made of an action; there are limits to the semantic range of a specific act. But in general any human action or event is open to being understood in a range of possible ways. Yet this central characteristic of human behavior is denied or ignored by the majority of methodologies currently employed in psychological research. Positivist methodologies insist that there are “facts” to human behavior: elements of behavior that can be observed and identified in an
interpretation-free manner. An obsession with reliability and objectivity has motivated attempts to reduce human action to a minimalist set of objective elements.

An interpretive method of investigation is needed if social interaction is to be studied appropriately by psychologists and other social scientists. Several characteristics of action necessitate this move. There is an intrinsic temporal organization to social episodes, lost entirely by empiricist correlational study, and distorted into a preorganized plan by sequential statistical analyses. Furthermore, social acts and events gain their meaning in a specific context or social setting that cannot be captured by operationalized coding schemes. Social exchanges are complex, intricate, and confusing. We can make sense of them only progressively, in an inductive manner that is ruled out of court by the traditional hypothetico-deductive research canons. More broadly, social interactions make sense to us as researchers, and are comprehensible as involving events of particular kinds, only because we are social beings and members of a shared culture. Our preunderstandings and prejudices are what make it possible for things to "count" for us in a social episode (Gadamer, 1976). However, since we are prejudiced we are capable of misunderstanding as well, and we need to introduce into our research ways of correcting the misinterpretations that inevitably arise.

To say that social interaction is a practical activity is to claim that it involves a certain kind of involvement between people. Following Heidegger, we shall distinguish between three modes of engagement people have with the world: the ready-to-hand, the unready-to-hand, and the present-at-hand. In their everyday practical activity people are in the ready-to-hand and the unready-to-hand modes. When they reason about abstract moral or social problems, when they speculate about hypothetical dilemmas, they are in a distinct detached mode, the present-at-hand.

The Ready-to-Hand

The ready-to-hand is the most fundamental of the three modes of engagement. The unready-to-hand is a mode of breakdown in activity while the present-at-hand is in contrast a derivative mode, one of detached contemplation. These modes cut across the social and nonsocial realms; they are found in manipulative acts such as hammering as much as in social activities such as casual conversation, selling a used car, or joking with a neighbor. When we are engaged in unproblematic forms of practical activity, when we are caught up in familiar patterns of action, we are in the ready-to-hand mode. Our way of dealing with events in this mode is not mediated by reflection, deliberation, or calculation. Our action is guided by social know-how, not by explicit knowing that. The ready-to-hand mode is one of active engagement in practical projects in the world, such as using a hammer, asking to borrow a pencil, teaching a class, playing a game of darts. It is the mode of unreflective practices, of skills and habits, and it is the mode exemplified by the forms of understanding characteristic of emotions and moods. Although they are unreflective, or prere-

flective, ready-to-hand practical activities are ongoing social constructions, the results of smooth and fluent interaction between skilled members of a culture (cf. Giddens, 1976).

In any ready-to-hand practical activity, our perception or "way of understanding" our world is essentially holistic. We are aware of the situation in which we find ourselves in an unreflective, absorbed manner. In ready-to-hand activity we don't experience ourselves as distinct individual agents; we don't act as though we are separate from a physical universe we are acting upon; instead we are acting within a world that we are always at home in and part of. We have no separate awareness of self, others, or tools: All these are fused into our activity or, more accurately, our activity is the single structure out of which we shall later be able to distinguish self, others, and tools. During an evening with a friend, for example, we experience not two individual selves, isolated egos, exchanging messages or acting instrumentally upon each other. Instead our primary experience is of the pleasures and interests of a joint project (going to a movie, say) and only subsequently, analytically, can we dissect out self and other, plan and social goal, instrumental communication, and other apparently discrete elements. And this dissection can be done only when our mode of engagement is no longer one of practical involvement.

The kind of engagement characteristic of ready-to-hand practical activity has been noticed by psychologists, but there has been a tendency to project upon it certain assumptions about the way it is organized. This tendency is: general one in human reflection, not an aberration peculiar to social scientists. We tend to assume that rules and procedures or rigid causal connection characterize the mode of ready-to-hand engagement. Human behavior has: always been understood by analogy with the most modern forms of technica apparatus: clockwork mechanism, telephone exchange, digital computer. If instead, we undertake a systematic description of the ready-to-hand mode of engagement in its own right, it turns out to have a very different kind of organization. Practical activity is not guided by means-ends planning; it is an ongoing response to the environment, within the boundaries of a flow of a chosen activity. It can be viewed in means-ends terms, but this is a mistaken interpretation, a reading in of the characteristics of detached theorizing and contemplative planning that arise, we shall see, only in the present-at-hand mode.

Breakdown: The Unready-to-Hand Mode

Practical activity can shift to a second mode of engagement: the unready-to-hand. This is the form our engagement takes when something has gone amiss, and a breakdown of some kind has occurred in our smoothly flowing activity. If I have, naively, gone into a city lending library seeking a copy of Carmichael's Manual, I will most likely find myself talking to a puzzle librarian. I will find myself, hitherto absorbed in a taken-for-granted course of action, suddenly brought up against the librarian's bewilderment, and I will cast about to try to understand what has happened and repair the breakdown. If a child at preschool innocently reaches out for a toy that another child has put aside only temporarily, she is likely to find herself faced with an indignan
peer. Suddenly an unanticipated problem has occurred, though at first the child will recognize not the precise form of moral or social wrong that has taken place, but instead an undifferentiated breakdown in the ongoing social activity.

Experience in the unready-to-hand mode has a structure analogous to the figure-ground structure the Gestalt school found in visual experience: Particular problematic aspects of the whole situation stand out, but they are still embedded in the background to the project they form part of, and in the interests and involvements guiding it.

The primary response to breakdown in the smooth flow of social interaction is not one of calculation and reasoned evaluation. Instead, we respond to breakdown in a particular and situated manner, in the search for a handy solution. Heidegger points to a special, engaged kind of reflection that occurs on occasions of breakdown. He calls this practical deliberation, but says little about its details. Much of this chapter will circle around the question of the nature of practical deliberation in social interactions.

**Disengagement: The Present-at-Hand Mode**

The sort of engagement that characterizes the third mode, present-at-hand engagement, is actually disengagement. This is our mode of drawing back and detaching ourselves from the ongoing flow of a project or social activity. This often occurs when we are unable to find a direct and circumspect solution (by deliberating) to a breakdown in that project. On such occasions we have to "step back," reflect and theorize, and try to solve the breakdown by turning to tools that are more general and abstract, and so more situation independent; tools such as logical analysis and formal calculation. We now perceive the situation and interchange in terms of discrete, definite, and measurable properties, a type of perception distinct from the situated aspects that characterize experience in the unready-to-hand mode. For example, we perceive social events in terms of roles, social strategies, institutions, and norms that appear to have an existence independent of particular people’s social situations, culture, and history.

This detached mode of engagement can come from leisure as well as from unresolved breakdown. In the comfort of an armchair we can contemplate our projects, carve them into plans and goals, roles and agents, means and ends. We can find rules and principles within them. Present-at-hand engagement is also encouraged as a type of scientific attitude. It provides the title of Nagel’s (1986) book *The View from Nowhere*. Nagel explores the relationships between this kind of detachment and the forms of understanding that are tied to specific human viewpoints. His aim is to avoid the problem that in the present-at-hand, objective mode “one will get a false objectification of an aspect of reality that cannot be better understood from a more objective viewpoint” (p. 4), which he calls the problem of excessive objectivity.

Generally the investigation of influences of social interaction on development has been of this objective type, too. Research efforts have involved the application of traditional research methodologies: experimental manipulation of operationally defined variables that reflect group processes, coding schemes for the identification of typologies of social behavior, and so forth. Such research approaches assume (fainly or explicitly) that social acts are objectively categorizable events that form series of causal connections or that are generated by internal formal or logical reasoning processes.

Social actions do not submit readily to this sort of treatment. They are understood by the participants themselves from involved perspectives, points of view, and positions, which means that different people will understand the same act or event differently (though, as stated, not in an unbounded number of ways). Every activity takes place in a context that we can view as a holistic network of interrelated projects, possible tasks, and thwarted potentialities. This network is not laid out explicitly but is present as a “background” to an interaction. Because of this embeddedness of meaning in a context or setting, once a social act (e.g., an utterance in a conversation) is removed from its original context (by a researcher employing an objectifying methodology, say) it becomes multiply ambiguous (Gergen, Hepburn, & Comer, in press).

We must allow that psychologists’ ability to understand other people’s actions is only human. We can comprehend only part of what we see, and we inevitably assimilate it to our preconceptions. Since the work of Freud and Marx, we can no longer assume that what goes on around us is just as it seems. Social and productive factors influence our lives and our behavior without our being explicitly aware of them, and our actions include paraprases, intentions only half-uncovered, and ambivalences. Any claim by social scientists to be able to observe and analyze social action in some apodictic objective manner, some way that isn’t filled through and through with judgments and interpretations, must be viewed with skepticism. An acknowledgement of these intrinsic limitations to the study of human action is not an admission of inadequacies in our research methods so much as it is the first step toward adopting a method of study that is adequate to the phenomena of practical social activity. The answer is not to strive somehow to achieve “objectivity,” in the sense of a value-free description of indisputable “facts.” Instead we must incorporate a reflexive component into our research; we must recognize our partiality, and acknowledge and do justice to the interpretation-loaded character of action.

**Adopting a Particularist Perspective: The Hermeneutic Paradigm**

It is important, then, to try to find a way of characterizing and describing practical activity that does not impose upon it categories from formal or causal present-at-hand reflection and contemplation. The analytic task of hermeneutics is one of characterizing ready-to-hand activity, and describing the shifts between the ready-to-hand and unready-to-hand modes of engagement. Social interactions are typically oriented to particular practical ends, to the mundane and trivial accomplishment of routine daily tasks, and as socially competent beings we are actively involved in these continuous accomplishments.

Hermeneutic methodology takes this ready-to-hand practical activity to be the primary origin of our understanding of the social world. People’s spontaneous everyday practical involvement with other people, with equipment and social artifacts, provides the foundation for all our organized knowledge.
about society, psychological development, history, and so on. Theorizing and abstract speculation would be impossible if we did not already have practically grounded ways of understanding our world. The ready-to-hand mode, then, gives us the most primordial and direct access to human phenomena. The kind of access of the ready-to-hand—emotions, habitual practices, and skills—is radically different from the access to phenomena provided by theoretical reflection: As Heidegger puts it "the ready-to-hand is not grasped theoretically at all" (p. 99). People both constitute and are constituted by the cultural and bodily skills and practices of their everyday activity. Practical activity—both ready-to-hand and ready-to-hand—has a structure distinct from that of reasoning and theory construction. Our studies of social processes must be able to characterize practical social activity as kinds of ready-to-hand and ready-to-hand practical engagement. This is not a trivial task, since practical activity does not make reference to context-free elements, which could be defined in an interpretation-free manner. Practical activity is tricky: it is intrinsically polymorphous, historically situated, context bound, and totally ambiguous when removed from its context, and for the large part it is as yet uncharted.

The approach that needs to be adopted is, as the author has argued elsewhere, a hermeneutic or interpretive one. Selman and Yeates and Shweder and Much also discuss aspects of this approach in their chapters in this volume. The general aim has been to develop a research methodology that takes account of and is sensitive to the particular characteristics of social action. Selman and Yeates see their method as being one that allows them to characterize with sensitivity the understanding they gain of children's social styles and strategies as a consequence of close clinical involvement with them over an extended period of time. Such involvement gives one access to the recurrent themes that develop as the children interact together. The hermeneutic approach avoids the decontextualization that positivist and formalist methods produce, as they abstract behaviors from their historical and personal situation.

For Shweder and Much, hermeneutics is a matter of making explicit what remains "unsaid" in everyday discourse. What is said in discourse can be contrasted with what is implied, suggested, or accomplished in that discourse. This kind of social interaction is itself, they argue, skilled, facile, and developmentally advanced, and involves a type of rationality that is as valid as formal reasoning. While agreeing with most of their position, we differ from Shweder and Much in maintaining that what is revealed in a hermeneutic analysis of discourse is not what they call propositions about the moral order, but accounts of practices and ways of comporting oneself socially that are not hidden so much as taken for granted. To express the unsaid in propositional terms may not be the appropriate level of description. It is applying present-at-hand categories to ready-to-hand phenomena.

Broadly speaking, the kind of empirical program one engages in when adopting the hermeneutic paradigm as a developmental psychologist is one of studying, describing, and interpreting episodes of social interaction in relevant situations in naturally occurring or analog settings. This program matches hermeneutic research in other disciplines, for example, Geertz's (1972) study of the Balinese cockfight and Kuhn's (1977) analysis of scientists' paradigms of understanding and research. More specifically, our aim has been to look at interactions among children and adults over substantive social and moral concerns. As Shweder (1982, p. 412) suggested, we need to "talk talk seriously" not as the outcome (viewed as mere performance) of internal cognitive structures and processes (competence), not as post facto rationalization of processes determined by factors outside individual agency, but as a substantive, structured, and structuring activity with intrinsic developmental significance.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PRACTICAL ACTIVITY

We shall explore further the notion that social interaction has intrinsic developmental significance, and that this becomes apparent when one examines interaction hermeneutically, as practical activity. We shall do this by discussing two studies of developmentally relevant social exchange that were conducted from the hermeneutic perspective. The first was of infant-adult interaction, the second of moral confrontation among young adults.

Exchanges Between Infant and Adult

In the first study we were interested to consider what was accomplished during exchanges between an adult and a very young child. In particular, we wondered what developmentally significant influences might be uncovered in such exchanges. This study involved repeated visits with a firstborn girl and her mother, between 6 weeks of age and 12 months. Videorecordings were made of semistructured interchanges between the two, once each month. Written narrative transcripts were developed from repeated viewing of the videotapes, and these and the tapes formed the basis for an interpretive analysis (see Packer, 1983, for a detailed account). The analysis was guided by intentions to describe the social interaction as negotiated exchanges between the two people involved. We were also interested in seeing to what extent the form the exchanges took could be adequately explained within an instrumental theory of communication in early infancy, such as the theories of Bates (1976), Stern (1977), and Ainsworth (1969). Three central assumptions are made by these and many other theorists: that communicative interaction is essentially instrumental; that meaning is transparent and unambiguous; and that development in communicative ability is the result of changes occurring in other cognitive "systems" such as operational thinking. These three assumptions follow if one uncritically takes the present-at-hand mode of engagement as characteristic of social interactions, since an information transfer account of interaction and communication and a means-ends instrumental account of social relations rest on a view of individuals as isolated entities exchanging context-free messages. And this, as was argued earlier, is a present-at-hand account of social activity.

It became apparent on examination of the videotaped exchanges of infant and adult that one could understand very little by viewing what occurred as being on the infant's part either instrumental (aimed at producing a specific effect on the adult) or deliberate (consciously planned). The infant was caught
up in forms of social exchange by virtue of the fact that the adult structured the interaction in such a way as to involve her, so one could hardly view the infant's engagement as deliberate. Furthermore, exchanges frequently ended not in the accomplishment of some concrete goal, but in a consensus (in the original sense of "feeling together"); a shared emotion, such as a feeling of excitement and satisfaction, an outcome that was not aimed at in an instrumental manner by either participant. (In their chapter of this volume Selman & Yeates also describe shared affect as a highly important component of significant social exchanges.)

The semantic organization of the interaction was salient, too. The meanings of the infant's actions were often ambiguous and problematic. Her mother frequently failed to understand fully what an act on her daughter's part meant; what it indicated about the infant's wishes. The following is a brief segment from the transcripts, illustrating this phenomenon:

Sarah lifts Jenny into a standing position and supports her by holding her hands. The posture necessitates that Jenny actively maintain her own balance, and in doing so her face turns to the front, toward Sarah. But she immediately looks away again, this time to the other side. Sarah asks again, "What's wrong?" She tries to keep Jenny upright, but Jenny bends at the waist, looking down. Sarah now looks irritated. She asks, "Do you want to sit up?" and sits Jenny down on her knee. Jenny looks impassive, and Sarah says, "I don't know what you want to do."

The adult is clearly strongly motivated here to make sense of her child's acts, and is engaged in a kind of hermeneutic endeavor in order to do this. It is equally clear that she finds her daughter's actions obscure. So she finds meaning in the actions, but not a transparent, obvious meaning. The way Sarah deals with this is interesting: She makes repeated attempts to disambiguate the infant's actions by working out in practice what they mean; what they tell her about what Jenny "wants to do." One way of doing this, as the example illustrates, was to hold Jenny in a series of physical postures each of which was appropriate as a possible way of understanding what the child wanted. The adult provided a series of contexts in which Jenny's actions might make sense, to see which one allowed their interaction to proceed successfully.

In the course of these exchanges with her daughter, Sarah was doing several things that are of consequence to a social developmental psychology. First, she was encouraging the infant in certain fundamental forms of conduct: standing upright; delaying gratification; maintaining an en face orientation. Second, she was channeling her child's interests and needs into their social interaction, although the child sometimes resisted. In both of these ways, the adult's actions played a structuring role in her interaction with the infant. The third way in which the adult structured their interaction is the most important for our discussion here. Sarah tacitly attributed to her daughter forms of social competence that Jenny did not as yet fully possess. She ascribed credit and agency to the infant for significant events and occurrences in their exchanges. For example, on one occasion she interpreted Jenny's tongue protrusion as a competent conversational bid in an exchange between them:

Sarah says, "I've never seen you do that before with your tongue, what is that?" Jenny sticks her tongue out once more, and smiles again. Then her smile goes, she becomes serious and looks down at Sarah's mouth. This time we see clearly that Sarah is sticking her tongue out at Jenny. Jenny continues looking intently at this, then she opens her own mouth slightly, and tongues a little. Although this tongue protrusion is smaller than those that preceded it, Sarah picks up on it immediately: "Yes, that's your tongue!" Jenny smiles, grins, apparently happy at what has occurred. Sarah laughs at her. Jenny throws her head back, waves her arms, and vocalizes "uuu!"

The consequence of this ascription is that the adult and infant together produce interactions that are not possible for the infant alone. Structured exchanges are actualized that are beyond Jenny's abilities in their initiation and organization. As a consequence of the form the interaction takes Jenny can appear to be, can be interpreted as, the initiator of key events. It is possible to perceive and describe the exchanges (to punctuate them, using a term from Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967) in such a way that Jenny has active skillful and constituting agency. This means that, inasmuch as the infant can appreciate what has occurred, she also will grasp a regularity in the social structure that she is the agent of. Once this agency is grasped, the possibility is created that the infant can subsequently initiate a structure of interaction that she has hitherto only participated in. Consequently, it would be possible for the infant, as a result of examining her exchanges with the adult, to gain mastery of those social activities that they do together, and that she has been engaged in. We are suggesting that the infant can appropriate social practices by finding an agency in them—her own—by virtue of their openness to reinterpretation.

Now clearly the way an infant does what we have called appreciating her agency in those social interactions she has been engaged in by adults is not by abstract reflection (still less by giving verbal accounts of them, as older children and adults can). Presumably her appreciation of her action is itself at the level of action. She will understand her actions in a ready-to-hand manner, and in part her understanding will take the form of moods and emotions. This is, perhaps, why the shared affect between Jenny and Sarah is important: The infant's glee and satisfaction may constitute a prerational appreciation of her own competence and agency.

It is worth saying a little more here about the ambiguity of responsibility or agency that makes this appreciation possible. Earlier the semantic ambiguity of practical activity was mentioned; one central aspect of this ambiguity is the polysyndecy of agency and responsibility in human action. This ambiguity is clearly apparent in our everyday experience, once we look for it. It is one of the reasons that we have a legal system, soap operas, gossip, and psychological clinicians. Trying to work out who did what, and why, to whom is something we all spend much of our time doing, and doing socially, talking and perhaps
arguing together to get it straight. This fascinating but frustrating practice would not be necessary if agency were not a polysemous matter: if it were not the case that the nature of a person's responsibility for an act is generally a matter of interpretation. This is not to deny that we generally have an unproblematic and doubt-free understanding of people's responsibility (including our own) in our everyday ready-to-hand practice. Agency and responsibility are contextual: They are unproblematic in the single context one has when engaged in a ready-to-hand project, but polysemous if one considers alternative contexts, in an unready-to-hand mode. Both gossip and the law courts deal with breakdowns in social practices. (And if all context is removed, agency becomes totally opaque and ungrounded, as happens in present-at-hand psychological and philosophical theories of determinism or free will.)

The way adults influence young children through their interactions with them has been described, by Bruner, Cole, and others, in terms of the metaphor of "scaffolding." As Damon and Colby point out in Chapter 1 of this volume, the metaphor is not fully adequate, because the infant, viewed as the "building," is not conceived as being active in the developmental construction process. Literally, scaffolding is a framework that holds a passive structure in place until external efforts to construct it have been completed. The metaphor here is a mechanical one, less adequate than the organic, biological metaphors (accommodation, differentiation, etc.) used by cognitive developmentalists. Both mechanical and biological metaphors miss the semantic character of human action; physical and organic systems have no equivalent to this psychological level of organization (Langer, 1967). An appreciation of the semantics of action, and the consequent polysemy and perspectival nature of social activity, is essential to the understanding of social development. Only when we recognize the intrinsic plurivocality of social exchanges— their necessary openness to several interpretations—can we begin to understand how the infant can appropriate and take over agency and expertise in social interaction. The infant is not "tricked into believing that this agenda arose spontaneously from within," as Damon and Colby critically describe attribution-theoretic conceptions of social change; she spontaneously and creatively gains control over forms of interchange she constructs together with her mother. On the other hand, if we continue to view social interaction in mechanical or biological terms, then we will be unable to find any sources of agency within it. Agency in an interaction can be appropriated by a socially naive infant only because a social episode can be opened to new ways of understanding it, and this is a semantic phenomenon that would not be possible if social exchanges were simply sequences of objectively describable events.

I want to go a little further and suggest that the infant develops her social agency and her independence as a skillful social being as a consequence of being involved in deeply intimate exchanges; so intimate, in fact, that there is great ambiguity about who is responsible for the course that interaction takes. This implies that the two themes that Selman and Yeates (Chapter 3, this volume) call autonomy—agency and intimacy—sharing are indeed, as they argue, closely interrelated in their developmental significance. Skillful agency or social expertise is always a development that is relative to a particular social group (as anyone traveling to a foreign culture rapidly appreciates), and it is a construction that only intimate membership in that group makes possible.

Moral Confrontation Among Young Adults

The second study to be described was an interpretive look at confrontations occurring among college students. The young adults participated, in groups of eight friends assigned to two teams, in an analog task in which they played a modified version of the Prisoner's Dilemma game (cf. Haan, Aert, & Cooper, 1985, for procedural details and a quantitative analysis of the sessions; the results of the author's interpretive analysis have been described in Packer, 1985b). As in the infant study, videorecordings were the basis of a hermeneutic analysis. The aim was to examine several occasions of a particular kind of confrontation that occurred when an agreement to cooperate was made and then broken by the team that was winning the most points. On these occasions the young adults were faced with a breakdown in their joint social activity.

First, three ways of understanding action were reviewed: as a unique mode of engagement in the world (the ready-to-hand); as aspects of emotion; and as rhetorical, having a social influence on others. From these common threads were drawn that provided a methodological focus: vertical and horizontal "movements" in social interaction, movements that involve changes in certain fundamental structures of social exchange. The first of these structures is the intimacy among the people involved; the second is the social and moral stances people adopt. These structures or aspects of social activity, among others, have been examined and described in detail by de Rivera and his students (de Rivera, 1977, 1981). They seem to be fundamental to our social interactions and social worlds. In their chapter of this volume Selman and Yeates also attend in their research to distancing and intimacy movements that are the result of the social strategies children employ in pair therapy. A third methodological focus was the "mythology" of the discourse: the way events were described in participants' accounts. Here particular attention will be paid to the rhetorical aspects of social action in these confrontations: to the way in which people's actions were moved and influenced one another, not necessarily in a planned and deliberate way. This aspect of social action is most closely tied to the topic of the influences, especially the developmental influences, that social interaction has upon the people engaged in it.

This study provided some further indications about the way people take stock of their own actions when a breakdown occurs in ongoing practical activity. We have suggested that a reflexive attitude is-a-vis one's own actions, in combination with the inherent ambiguity of all social action, together with the fact that socially skilled people inevitably engage others (sometimes naive and unskilled, like the infant) in their cultural and subcultural practices, can be a source of social development. Unlike reflection upon the physical realm, reflection on social action always involves the possibility of reinterpretation; of reascribing agency, and reinterpreting events that have occurred. The term reflection is misleading when we are discussing this examination of action.
because the word suggests that we can accurately "mirror" something when we turn to look at it. With a semantic domain such as practical social activity this could never be done; every description, every look at a social episode is an interpretation and reinterpretation.

Let us sketch the circumstances in which the college students found themselves, and the typical course of events in a session. The young people had been playing the Prisoners' Dilemma (for points worth one cent apiece), modified to allow much interaction among participants, in a psychology experiment at the University of California, Berkeley, campus. Within a short time one team had rapidly pulled ahead in points (this was a consequence of the contingencies of the "payoff" matrix used in Prisoners' Dilemma), and the losers soon started to feel bored and frustrated. Shortly afterward they decided that the best way for both teams to gain points was to cooperate. The teams talked together and agreed that they would play cooperatively. Then, in 4 of the 10 sessions I examined, the team of winners very rapidly broke this agreement, playing competitively so that they gained points at the losers' expense (the losers had points taken away from them).

This was a trivial and minor moral confrontation, of course, for obvious ethical reasons that we need not go into, but it is one that is still of interest. One reason for not dismissing it is that those involved in the confrontations gave many indications that they themselves took it seriously. Another reason it is an interesting situation is that the motivation on the part of the team of winners is a little harder to understand than it is in the couple of occasions where the losing team cheated. There, "everyone" understood that they did this simply because they were losing. In such cases their status in the game justified their action, which was consequently not seen as a problem morally. With the winning team cheating, the students seemed to be thrown into a much more problematic moral confrontation. This was largely because (to explain things in terms of discoveries that actually were made only far along into the analysis) the ways the two teams understood the "burning" were very different. The teams had divergent interests in the way the game should end, and these provided incommensurate contexts within which the broken agreement was taken up and understood very differently.

But having said this, it is crucial to add that the young people themselves did not appreciate this basic aspect of their situation and interaction. And this initial lack of appreciation of the multiple ways of understanding the situation in turn forced them to examine that situation, and their interactions up to that point. It is the nature of this deliberation on events that we shall describe. To anticipate, the major phenomenon of interest will be the manner in which concerns that were apparent to the researcher at the beginning of the confrontation at the level of unreflective action and the interests members of the two teams had developed in the game became, toward the end of confrontation and the beginning of resolution, issues that were explicitly talked about by the participants. Here again, we shall suggest we are seeing that people's "appreciation" of their interactions, their deliberation about it, has significant developmental influence.

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**Phase One**

The initial form of the confrontation was a rapid and thorough reorganization of the interactants' participation—both their action and their way of understanding what was going on. The losing team withdrew rapidly from their involvement in the game and from their participation with the other team, showing a rapid change in their mood. They refused to continue to play the game, and they sometimes refused to talk to the winning team, resorting instead to an occasional shouted sarcastic remark. Their uptake of the burning was one of outrage, disbelief, and shock. Any doubt we might have about whether the burning really constituted a breakdown in the ongoing practical activity for the teams was banished by the character of this first reaction.

Note that the withdrawal in response to the breakdown that the burning constituted was not one in which the teams stepped back and detached themselves, contemplating the event in a theoretical manner. This would have been a move to the present-at-hand mode, and we have argued that this does not happen while practical activity continues (though it is the mode upon which cognitive developmentalists base their theories of moral thinking and action). Although the losing team withdrew from their previous course of practical activity, their withdrawal was itself unreflective, structured by strong emotion, and took the form of rapid interpersonal and social movements of distancing and superiority. In this initial phase there was very little in the way of reflective "glossing" by participants: They did not make comments upon or describe to one another what they were doing. Comments during this phase were typically involuntary; there had been no time (or need) to examine and articulate what was happening. For example:

Well, that shows a lack of... eh... [He points at the winning team.]

No reasons are offered in accounts such as these (nor, it seems, were they considered necessary); instead the losing team acted in an immediate way, showing distrust and disdain. These movements correspond (in the language we slowly developed to talk about this) to two concerns, over trust and responsibility. By concern we mean a problematic aspect of the others' actions. Trust was a concern because, colloquially, it had been broken. It was not clear what the winning team would do next; whether they could be trusted. Responsibility was a concern because it was unclear in what manner the winning team had acted. Was it malevolence, foolishness, or pranks? These concerns were apparent in the losing team's action towards the burners; their anger, rejection, and self-protective withdrawal:

**SESSION LEADER:** The winning team wants to negotiate; does the losing team?
**GAIL (losing team):** No more, no more.
**PAT (losing team):** We don't trust them.
**GAIL:** We're not playing anymore.
Phase Two

The losing team's understanding of the burning was very different from that of the winning team. They placed the "immoral" act (or found it) in a different context. However, the teams themselves did not recognize this divergence: Each took for granted that their way of understanding was the "real" one. Phase two involved a progressive articulation by each team of aspects of their own understanding. In some sessions this proceeded until the teams gained an appreciation of the others' grasp of events; the first manifestation of this was the granting that the others' accounts were not "wrong" descriptions of the "facts," but were alternative and so at least provisionally valid ways of grasping things.

The teams' motivation for giving accounts to one another was a practical one: Each team had a notion of what should be done next in the session. The losing team wanted the burners to compensate for breaking the agreement, while the winning team wanted the losing team to continue playing the game, and not make such a fuss about the burning. Since these lines of action were incompatible, members of both teams needed to give accounts to the others that justified their own course of action. The losing team, faced with the winning team's seeming recalcitrance about undoing the wrong they had done, began to formulate accusations of the burners that were increasingly explicit and articulated. In some sessions members of the losing team demanded restitution; in others they were contemptuous. In response members of the winning team were generally dismissive of these accusations, and frequently joked. However, as the impasse continued, the winning team felt an increased pressure and irritation. Consider, for example, the following remarks, all made over a short period of time by Bob, a member of the winning team, talking to an angry losing team:

We only did it for the humor of it. We'll give you a... we'll give you a certain amount of points, then we... We feel shitty about this. You're not very logical about this. Well, this is, hey! Like, we gotta negotiate. We'll give you all of the points that you lost.

Bill, on the losing team, simply replies: "Shine on!"

Talk such as this did not take the form of appeals to justification, and was not a reasoned justification in the sense of logical argumentation. Generally justifications took the form of descriptions of the events that had occurred; of the "facts of the matter" that each team understood had taken place. What seemed to be happening was that each team took for granted their own understanding of events, although this understanding was structured by the interests (as winners and losers) that had arisen in the game, and by the concerns (over trust and responsibility) that the burning gave rise to. Consequently, for each team their justification to the others needed only to point out the "salient facts" of what had happened.

This lack of any doubt of the veracity of their understanding should not be surprising; the young adults were only beginning, as they tried to move one another, to articulate the way they had prereflectively understood things. As a consequence, however, while the concerns seen in the first phase were perhaps even more apparent to an observer in the actions of phase two, and could be seen structuring the discourse between the two teams, they were not themselves talked about. Instead, the major issue the teams talked about was the number of points they had won or lost. Even here, on this apparently entirely objective matter, there were different interpretations. Generally both teams gave accounts that presumed they had lost points. In one session, for example:

LM1 We want the points back, like, we got burnt the second time.
WM2 We would have more points. We didn't realize that we would have more points [i.e., if they hadn't burned again].

So in the second phase there was examination of events, and the beginning of giving persuasive accounts, both of which built upon the unreflective withdrawal of phase one. As yet the accounts were about the "facts" of what had occurred, with no move by the teams to uncover and examine their taken-for-granted way of understanding their interaction.

Phase Three

In the third phase the ambiguity of what had transpired, and the perspectival character of the teams' accounts of it, became appreciated for the first time by the young people themselves. This recognition seemed to be a sudden one, and was marked in several ways. The accounts of "facts" suddenly became conditional, phrased as involving a supposition now understood as questionable, possibly counterfactual. The "issue" of the second phase, that of points won and lost, vanished to be replaced in some of the sessions by new issues: the hypocrisy of the losing team, the winning team's motivation in the game (to "play" or to "make money"), whether broken trust can be restored, and the differences in status (as "winners" and "losers") at the start of the game. These issues all involved a new way of understanding events, with a variety of dimensions of motivation becoming suddenly ambiguous and at issue. The issues corresponded to the concerns acted upon in the earlier phases. Needless to say, they were not raised in a calm, reflective manner; they were hot topics of accusation and remorse.

To summarize, the confrontation among the students took the form of each team's attempting to move the other to act in the way that team found morally appropriate. This led to an articulation of the "facts," and an increased spelling out of events, starting from an understanding of what had happened that was holistic and almost inarticulate. This response to the breakdown and to the reorganized situation after the burning involved what we have called practical deliberation: an articulation of accounts of events, describing events in a way that purported (in linguistic structure and manner of presentation) to be objective and neutral, but that involved, from an observer's perspective, understanding that was organized by the interests and concerns people had come to
adopt, due to the tasks and kinds of engagement in their social situation. People's accounts of what had happened started as global, undifferentiated descriptions ("You guys screwed off!") but became more articulated statements of the events that stood out. The accounts were at first about the "facts of the matter," and only later did some of the young adults begin to recognize that there were at least two discrepant ways of understanding events, two perspectives on their social praxis, and so come to appreciate the ambiguity of their own interaction. And as this took place, the concerns and interests that had structured activity became talked about as issues, no longer acted upon in an unreflective, unquestioned manner.

Practical deliberation such as one sees here is a form of reflection in practical social activity that can not be regarded as an appeal to logical or moral principles or as transactive reasoning, that cannot be accurately described in terms of logical argumentation. Yet deliberation has an organization that makes it a strong candidate as motivator of social and even moral development. Put simply, what goes on is that people (motivated by the practical problems of a confrontation with others) look back at, describe, and inevitably interpret what they have done. In doing this, they begin to recognize the interests that played a structuring role in their initial understanding of events, and they begin to appreciate that there are other possible ways of understanding things.

Again the pluri-vocality of social action is central here. But notice that, while action is ambiguous when one turns and deliberates upon it, it is unambiguous while one is absorbed in a practical project. The college students' action was unproblematic before the burning occurred. Here the teams had a common project, which provided a common perspective to their action. After the burning the teams' actions clashed. The confrontation led to a reinterpreting and reappropriation of what had taken place, recognizable only if one understands practical activity to be perspectival. In this case the students' different uptake of the burning and of their own activity was the result of being "winners" or "losers" early in their interaction.

It seems that this "uncovering" of concerns and interests is one way in which people deal with a confrontation. What might be its developmental consequences? At the least, this deliberation and uncovering appear to foster resolution of the confrontation; renewed action in the game generally occurred in those sessions where the teams came to appreciate the existence of each other's interpretations of events. Some teams avoided deliberation; some, for example, decided to play on at random rather than address the betrayed agreement. In such cases, confrontation persisted in the form of maintained distance and distrust.

The strategy in this section has been not to attempt to demonstrate that practical deliberation upon action has actually stimulated development (which would require a longitudinal research strategy), but instead to look to see whether the conditions for development could be found, the seeds, as it were, in the course of significant episodes of social interaction. One important consequence of viewing social interaction or social process as practical activity is a rethinking of the relationship between action and thinking or reflection. Deliberation about social conflicts and social relationships does not occur in a contextless setting. We never come to a moral issue in an uninvolved manner, without prior history. Deliberation on a social process or a moral concern starts with what has already happened, and is an articulation or the giving of an account of events in context. Accounts are articulated as part of the ongoing social interaction: Deliberation is itself a social activity. Accounts are oriented toward other people; they are directed toward pragmatic persuasive purposes, and they are built on ways of understanding events that are necessarily not impartial. Deliberation is not theorizing; understanding social interaction is not like formulating a theory. There is a tendency to assume, when confrontations such as these occur, that they are well-defined disagreements to which explicit decision-making rules can be applied. But is there a clearly defined problem in the confrontations between the young students? Surely it changes its character several times, from phase to phase. At one time the problem is to get recreation for the burning; at another to decide upon a fitting course of action to recommence the game; at still another to convince others that they have misunderstood things. And the problems faced by the losing team are not the same as those the winning team have to deal with; they are complementary rather than identical. And they are at all times practical problems, not theoretical disagreements, or differences of opinion. The endpoint of these confrontations resembles the beginning of a Kohlberian hypothetical dilemma: The interests and concerns of the parties involved are finally laid out in an articulate manner, albeit preliminarily. And this in itself seems to foster a resolution of the conflict, rather than being the starting point for argumentation.

TOWARD AN ACCOUNT OF SOCIAL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Any account of development has three components. The first is a view of the relationship between people and their world; the second is the telos or direction in which development is considered to move; the third is a mechanism, a force, a process or activity that drives, motivates, causes, or generates that movement. (The multiplicity of terms reflects the diversity of levels—mechanical, organic, individual, social—on which this third component has been placed.) These three will be interrelated: The course of development can reasonably be viewed as more adequate functioning of the relationship with the world and the telos must be furthered by the process that results in development.

In this third and final section an attempt will be made to construct, rather speculatively, an account of social and moral development that does justice to the view of social interaction that has been described. Obviously any such account must be tentative, since little developmental research has thus far been conducted within a hermeneutic perspective. We want to explore the question of what a general account of social development looks like if we adopt the view that social interactions are forms of practical activity, and are structured in the ways described above. In doing so we want to propose the general outlines of an alternative to the structuralist account of development (and formalist approaches in general). On the other hand we don't want to hold to one alterna-
tive way of thinking about development that seems to be reappearing: the accretion view, in which children differ from adults in the size of their knowledge base, but not in the qualitative ways that Piaget above all grasped so well. We will then fit this account of social development into an overarching account of the development of moral concerns and practices, proceeding here by interpreting an already existing account of ethical development—that of Soren Kiekegaard—in terms of fluent practical activity. But first it is helpful to sketch the three developmental components described as they appear in cognitive developmentalism.

Cognitive Developmentalism

If we examine Piaget's account of cognitive development in terms of these components, we find that he conceived of people as individuals who are acting instrumentally on the world, and who consequently come to construct systems of knowledge about the world. He viewed the endpoint to cognitive development as achieving knowledge about the world similar in form to the operational intelligence that he took physicists to have: the result of planned operations upon objects, guided by theory and by the generation of hypotheses.

It is useful here to consider Piaget's work in the light of the Kantian philosophy that guided it. Piaget intended to give a developmental extension to Kant's notion that our experience is structured by transcendental categories of space, time, causality, and object. Piaget's earlier studies traced the construction of these categories in the instrumental actions of infants, and his later work was a continuation of this project. Piaget, like Kant, regarded knowledge as having an epistemological priority over action; as a result his account of the relationship between person and world has troublesome aspects. Kant described himself as a transcendental idealist, but at the same time an empirical realist. On the one hand "our experience is not limited to the private domain of our own representations, but includes an encounter with 'empirically real' spatiotemporal objects" (Allison, 1983 p. 7). On the other hand there are "subjective conditions in terms of which alone the human mind is capable of receiving the data for thought or experience" (Allison, 1983 p. 7). Objects are ideal in that they cannot be described independently of these conditions. "We assert, then, the empirical reality of space... and yet at the same time we assert its transcendental ideality" (Kant, 1781/1965, p. 72, cf. p. 79).

This combination of (transcendental) idealism and (empirical) realism, while consistent as an ahistorical epistemology, translates problematically into a developmental psychology. The idealist aspect gives mind a priority over world that would seem to preclude changes in mental categories or structures. If the categories are genuinely transcendental they will not change (save perhaps in a preordained unfolding unrelated to experience, as in Chomsky's interpretation of rationalist epistemology). Piaget's world alternates unhappily between an unknowable realm of things-in-themselves and a concrete objective universe, a naive scientific realism. Although Piaget gave strong theoretical emphasis to the interaction between subject and environment, this underlying naive realism leads to an odd equivocation in his statements about just what kind of organization the environment has. Is it made up of atomistic sensations? He sometimes talked that way. Or do objects have, in some subject-independent way, organization such as mass, length, and duration? It is hard to see how a new experience can resist assimilation to an old scheme, and require accommodation of that scheme, unless it has some structure of its own; something that resists assimilation by mind. But, on the other hand, how can we describe a structure that is intrinsically unknowable? One might say that, paradoxically, assimilation and accommodation always occur, for Piaget, as processes of interaction between a knower and the unknown. Damon and Colby are making, I think, a related point in their chapter in this volume when they point to an apparently unbridgeable gulf between pattern alpha and pattern beta; how can the mind accommodate to an unknown object?

For Kant this was less of a problem: The mind imposed categories upon our experience of things, while the things-in-themselves, although they must be considered real, were forever unknowable. Kant was not concerned with the possibility of historical or personal changes in these categories. As soon as one tries to fit such changes into the epistemological position Kant adopted, one runs into the problem of explaining how the "unknowable" influences (and forces accommodation of) the structures of knowledge. This epistemic split between subject and object shows the present-at-hand nature of the theories of both Kant and Piaget, and explains the difficulty of extending them to social understanding and social action. Ironically, Piaget gave us detailed and sensitive descriptions of ready-to-hand activity in his three studies of infancy (1951, 1952, 1954). There, he traced the Kantian categories—space, time, causality, and object—in the practical activity of children in their first 2 years: the sensorimotor stage. Unfortunately, in subsequent stages sensorimotor knowledge is, according to Piaget, reconstructed at new levels of representation, and he generally talks as though it is superseded and replaced. (And even in the sensorimotor stage children's activity is, for Piaget, instrumentally oriented and an individual construction.)

There is a parallel ambiguity to the development of knowledge in the cognitive-developmental scheme of things. Development is the progressive construction of representations of reality. Although nominally this is both a logical and an empirical process, at the same time it frequently has the connotation of a movement toward reconstruction of a fixed, objective reality (Bruner, 1986; Swedler, 1982). Adequately equilibrated cognitive constructions are, paradoxically, representations of an autonomous and defined real world. Piaget emphasized the development of reversibly applied cognitive operations, which he saw growing out of a reflexive abstraction from the instrumental nature of interaction with the material world. The mature form of representation of the world, seen from the cognitive-developmental perspective, explicitly parallels that of the physical or biological scientist. Piaget finds it helpful to "compare the elementary processes of the child's intelligence to those used by scientific thought" in understanding the object concept (1952, p. 87), and he finds three common methods: anticipation (prediction); experimentation; and production of the totality of a deductive system. So in the Piagetian model, cog-
itive development is a movement toward formal (and formalizable) operational intelligence, which has constructed an understanding of reality that is (in a covered-up way) in true correspondence with a real material world.

One test of the hermeneutic approach will be whether it can solve problems such as these. In place of instrumental, technical action, and instead of reflection as a rational reconstruction of this action into formalized, abstract representational structures, can we find an account of development, its telos and motive, that better explains empirical evidence and has increased internal coherence?

A Hermeneutic Account of Social and Moral Development

Relationship in the World

First, how shall we understand the interaction between people and their social world? This is the topic of the first section of this chapter; the view I have proposed is that people are reflective practitioners (the phrase is Schön's, 1983); they are always engaged in practical activity of a variety of kinds, and this is their primary mode of engagement in the world. Social reality is not an objective matter: It rests on and is constituted by the beliefs, wishes, interpretations, and actions of its members. Yet at the same time it has an objective aspect: "An institutional world is experienced as an objective reality. It was there before [the individual] was born, and it will be there after his death. He must "go out" and learn about [it], just as he must learn about nature. This remains true even though the social world, as a humanly produced reality, is potentially understandable in a way not possible in the case of the natural world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 60).

We can contrast the sorts of conflicts that arise on the practical level, for someone engaged in practical social projects, with those experienced by a Kantian or Piagetian intellectual subject. Breakdown of ready-to-hand practical activity discloses structures of practice, and conflicts in practices, which are not the products of individuals, or of thought alone. As social agents, we cannot simply construct our world the way a transcendent ego could. The social world resists in tangible ways our efforts to impose structure on it, because it is a joint social construction that we as individuals are partly able to structure but that also structures us (Giddens, 1976, terms this the double structuration of social reality).

Breakdown of a variety of kinds inevitably occurs in social interactions of any duration and complexity, and motivates the move from the realy-to-hand mode to that of the unready-to-hand. These are occasions where action becomes problematic. Such breakdown and conflict may spur development in the realm of practical social activity, just as we think forms of logical conflict do in intellectual development. However, the kinds of conflict that occur as breakdowns in social activity are very different from intellectual conflicts, though we tend to use the latter as our base metaphor for conflict. Even reasoned intellectual discussion, though it makes reference to the fruits of detached theoretical reflection, does so while embedded in ongoing practical social activity. And disagreements that are apparently "objective"—over "the facts of the matter"—are not just surrounded but actively structured by interests and concerns.

The Telos

In what direction do social and moral developments proceed, in their practice (as distinct from thinking)? The telos I want to emphasize is that of becoming increasingly skilled and fluent in social practical activity. I want to propose that social fluency is at least as important a telos for social development as is the formation of explicit theories, principles, and hypotheses about the social world. (I say "at least" because I believe we cannot formulate good theories unless we have practical social understanding.) More explicitly, social development consists in increasingly broadened fluency: becoming socially fluent in an increased range of situations or subworlds; the family, the workplace, and so on (cf. Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, for an exploration of the concept of the many distinct worlds that people act in).

Cognitive developmentalists have applied Piaget's conception of development to the social realm also, and looked for and theorized about the kind of development that involves becoming more and more explicitly aware of the fixed features of an objectively describable social reality. As a consequence, I think, these researchers have tended to focus on one kind of social development to the exclusion of another equally important kind. The mature individual, it is assumed, is explicitly aware of, and can form theories about, the habits and practices, the roles and norms of individuals, organizations, and cultures.

There is more to this focus than a simple analogizing between physical and social cognition. We value the development of principled reasoning because we believe that it frees us from internal contradictions and logical conflicts, in both the interpersonal and instrumental realms. Perhaps because this is what we value in our professional lives, as psychologists and social scientists, we have tended to look for the same burgeoning ability in children and young adults. We look for lucid, clear, and noncontradictory explanations of social events, coupled with principled reasoning about social action and moral dilemmas. Consider, for example, the table of Transacts ("reasoning about another's reasoning") in Berkowitz, Oser, and Althof (Chapter 11, this volume). Reading through the glosses they provide of paradigm examples of the different acts, one has a sense of overhearing a polite intellectual disagreement in the faculty club:

Do you understand or agree with my position?
No, what I am trying to say is the following . . .
Would you go to this implausible extreme with your reasoning?

... and so on. Of course Berkowitz and Oser code very different kinds of utterance when they study young children; my point is that this is the kind of conversation that is the model against which children's talk is compared. As academics we have been socialized into practices such as these, and take them for granted. This is a valuable kind of social development, and one we should
continue to study and foster, but there is a danger of ignoring its complement. For social development is also occurring when children become skilled in various forms of social action to the extent that these practices become habitual: that they become, so to speak, socially fluent at performing them. This is development even though the children become no more explicitly conscious of those skills; even though they do not behave like social scientists, if by that one means forming theories, testing hypotheses, and generally adopting an instrumental stance toward the social world.

The telos of development must not be confused with a final endpoint; this would be misleading. Human development is historically open ended: its highest achievements change over history. Development cannot anticipate its ending; it cannot even anticipate a specific historically grounded final form; to anticipate it would be to have already achieved it in some preliminary form. Development as a process can only deal with local improvements and with proximal change. So to say that the telos of development is fluency is to say not that this fully defines the outcome, but that this is what is proximally sought.

We are socially fluent when our actions form a coherent unity; when they are organized by an underlying concern (e.g., as was the case with the young college students before the burning took place). A persisting concern gives us a project, structure, or organization to our actions, and enables a clear identification of the “facts,” precisely because they are always aspects of a perspectival frame of understanding that has not been uncovered as the basis for action. Fluent action is action structured by a concern.

Accomplished social conduct has similarities, then, to habitual skills like touch typing or playing the piano (Sudnow, 1978), but it is a far more complex and subtle phenomenon. A variety of different kinds of concern arise in practical social action: concerns over moral responsibility, intimacy, and doubtless many others. Emotions play a central role. Multiple social worlds must be smoothly recognized, entered, and left (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Schutz, 1970). Meaningful social networks must be creatively modified. Accounts must be articulated, excuses made, descriptions given, reasons provided. Each of many social subworlds—classroom, playground, research laboratory, boardroom, bedroom—has its unique practices that “count.” Certain characteristics will be common to all of them: the structuring role of emotionality, movements of intimacy, movements of responsibility and status.

Now, in each subworld fluent action will be possible only insofar as one finds forms of practice lead that to success. Fluency in practical action occurs when one’s practices are meaningfully connected. For some activities (e.g., tennis) success criteria have been laid down by prior consensus. For other activities (e.g., teaching) what counts as success is more open to interpretation. Nonetheless, fluency is a value-laden concept, and a value-laden phenomenon: to achieve fluency is to know how it is to do things right.

Several areas of research bear directly or indirectly on my notion of social fluency, including studies of habits and skills in sport (e.g., Neisser), and studies of experts and novices in a variety of domains (e.g., Benner, 1984; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). These studies have shown that experts have a perception or way of understanding the subworld of their expertise that is qualitatively different from that of novices. There is a spontaneity to expert and skilled performance that is the consequence of having developed a creative understanding of the demands of a situation. There is a “flow” to fluent practical activity that cannot be accurately cut apart into goals and instrumental actions, nor does it need to be. Consider tennis, or teaching, or bridge, or lovemaking. Basic principles, in the logical sense, enter into none of these. People who are learning a new skill do not employ or refer back to formal principles. Instead, they begin their learning by applying rules of thumb and maxims (“third hand high” in bridge, “weight on the leading edge” in skiing, “put on your best face” in a job interview) and a few exemplary prototypical actions. As they become familiar with the domain of the skill, they become able to organize greater spans of action, and their understanding of what they are doing becomes more holistic: Relevant aspects of the situation stand out apparently of their own accord, and do not need to be searched for. For example, beginning science teachers appear to move through several forms of practical activity in their first year in the classroom. Each is organized by a distinct predominant concern: problems carried over from preschool training; survival in the classroom; how to teach; how it is that students learn (Russell, 1986).

The Influence on Development of Social Interaction

I want to propose that the influence that social interaction has on social and moral development stems from the practical deliberation that this interaction fosters. The role of interaction in development of fluent social practice has been the topic of research in a number of subworlds, including those of nursing, architecture, psychotherapy, and teaching. For example, Schon (1983) analyzed exchanges between expert and novice in several areas of expertise, including architectural design and psychotherapy. Development here is acquisition of skill in the practices constituting competent professional performance.

Experience alone is not enough to bring about the development of social fluency, and the move from one of these stages to the next. What has to happen, it seems, is that the frame that organizes action at each stage has to be uncovered. The student teachers studied by Russell (1986), for example, have to appreciate the concern that organizes their action at one level before they are able to move beyond that way of acting to a new stage. By appreciate I don’t mean necessarily conscious awareness; what is required is that the concern either is fulfilled or fails; in either case it can be (perhaps must be) abandoned. A teacher can feel that concern over surviving—generally managing a class so that chaos is staved off—dissolves because he or she can generally keep classes in control, or this concern may be abandoned as an inadequate way of organizing teaching activity, because it ignores the actions that constitute “teaching” (the concern of the next stage). Fulfillment and failure can occur together: Once a concern is satisfied its inadequacy at a higher level may become appreciated.

This is where telos and “mechanism” converge. Concerns become addressed and uncovered by practical deliberation. We can see this with the college students. Deliberation together led to an articulation and explicit entering into dis-
course of the concerns manifest in action, and of other components of the framework organizing that action: the emotions consequent on the burning interests in the outcome of the game. When expert practitioners supervise novices, one central thing they do is surface and criticize the novice’s framing of a practical situation, and talk themselves in a way that frames events in a more adequate manner (Schon, 1983). In such cases deliberation is guided by an expert. For the college students’ interactions, no expert was present and consequently deliberation took a more serendipitous course, with the result that only in some sessions did concerns become uncovered. It was suggested earlier that young children develop forms of expert conduct not in a deliberate and planful manner but, first, because they find themselves already involved in meaningful social practices; the culture’s forms of conduct that accomplish the myriad of everyday social tasks. It is impossible for a child not to be caught up and engaged in social praxis, short of autistic withdrawal. Children ultimately take up and acquire some degree of control and guidance over actions they find themselves already doing.

The General Form of an Account of Moral Development

Finally, moral development also can be understood as a sequence of forms of practical activity, and as motivated by a search for meaningfulness, expertise and fluency in practical action.

We shall begin to justify this claim by examining an account of ethical development that is very different from the view of moral judgment central to cognitive developmentalism: the account to be found in the writings of Soren Kierkegaard (1968, 1971). Kierkegaard's writings involve a conception of moral development that is an existential opposite in several respects to rationalist theories such as Piaget's and Kohlberg's. Kierkegaard described ethical development as the progressive movement through distinct ways of living or “spheres.” This account can be interpreted (without, it is to be hoped, too great a distortion) in the same terms as the developmental account that has been given: Social fluency is the telos, social reality is viewed as co-constructed, and deliberation on action is the motivator of development.

Kierkegaard distinguished four spheres, which he named the Aesthetic, the Ethical, Religiousness A, and Religiousness B. In addition there is a preliminary undifferentiated stage, the Present Age. These four resemble stages that a structuralist would recognize in that, as Kierkegaard describes them, they form an ordered sequence of maturity, self-development, and understanding, and are qualitatively distinct from one another, each involving a reorganization and a loss of the forms of activity of the previous way of living.

But there are several important differences between Kierkegaard's description and a structuralist characterization of developmental progression. Development for Kierkegaard is a matter of the struggle to form a self, a praxis that is correlative with the search for a meaningful way of living. Each sphere is a temporary solution to these problems; each fails precisely when it is lived to the fullest, in the most committed manner. In Kierkegaard’s account the move from one sphere to the next and progression within a sphere are emotional and valutative movements. The impetus to move on is provided not by logical contradiction or cognitive conflict, but by a leveling out: a meaninglessness and loss of significance to the world that is experienced as despair, and that renders action impossible. At the end of each sphere, a form of life whose telos was finding a coherent scheme of meaning to the world and to action results, instead, in a breakdown of coherence. Each sphere ends in despair, when it is discovered that the way of organizing one’s life that it entails has failed to fulfill the search for coherent and meaningful social relations. The transition to the next sphere requires a leap, with associated anxiety and fear, rather than being a smooth and logically necessary transition. Each leap is intrinsically unreasonable, since reasons are always defined by a sphere, and the sphere that one must leap out of has ceased to provide good reasons. And since it is a leap into a new form of ready-to-hand action, one has no reflective awareness of what is to come. A further difference from the cognitivist stage progression view of development we have come to take for granted is Kierkegaard’s view that the fourth sphere — Religiousness A — can itself fail, and the only move then is a return to the superficialities of the Present Age. As an example of a nonformal account of ethical development, Kierkegaard’s work could well bear further examination by developmental psychologists.

Interpreted in this light, Kierkegaard’s spheres represent a series of distinct forms of social fluency; of coherent and meaningful practice. Each involves a central project that provides a point of view (or, in some sense, is a point of view) within which situations are coherently understood. Each sphere is, at its best, a coherent way of living, a style of acting, that is fluent and meaningful. Each has its own unique central concern, providing focus and clarity to the world and enabling action to be conducted in an unproblematic manner. Fluency of action is the telos each sphere pursues, and action is fluent when it is organized as a whole project, as a coherent style of practical activity. The achievement of this fluency is what makes each of the spheres; the ultimate failure to sustain fluency leads to despair and the leap to a new sphere and lifestyle.

Now each of the spheres will be outlined in turn.

The Present Age

This is a way of living where the concerns over meaning that characterize later spheres have not become acted on. It is living and acting entirely in terms of the commonly accepted norms of one’s social milieu, it is a routinization of activity rather than expert fluency of action. Kierkegaard picked the newspapers of nineteenth century Sweden as exemplifying the trivialized, gossipy form of interchange characteristic of such a life; television would now surely be the object of his attack. The Present Age—even as Kierkegaard saw it then—is one of fashion and trends, of rapidly and meaninglessly changing norms of dress, appearance, and behavior. It is a way of living and of social action characterized by superficiality, where gossip about topics and evanescent events holds more weight than careful examination of moral and social issues.
The Aesthetic Sphere

This is the first kind of search for an escape from the triviality of the Present Age. Meaning is sought through a life-style of aestheticism, where the experience of pleasure is sought, together with the avoidance of pain. The aesthete finds good divided from bad on the basis of the pleasure or displeasure involved. This first sphere breaks down because the search for pleasure requires that one be open to experiencing it, and such openness necessarily involves an absence of defense against pain. Since the world is such that we have little control over the appearance or duration of pleasurable experiences, the aesthete finds pain and disappointment as corollaries of pleasure. The best way to avoid pain is to avoid pleasure also. The interdependence of pleasure and pain and the consequent lack of any way of living that captures the first while escaping the second are what drives the aesthete to a despairing recognition of the failure of his or her projected life-style.

The Ethical

In this sphere, planning and control are the mainstays of a life-style. A person living in this sphere attempts to determine rationally how to choose the best course of action. The ethical is the sphere of trying to apply to everyday practice the fruits of detached contemplation: a concern with social roles and duties, principled and universal rule following. Standards are sought upon which decisions can be based, allowing courses of action to be followed and right to be distinguished from wrong.

The importance of choosing, of making a decision that is the "reasonable" one, is central here. The concern is not with the particularities of what is done, but instead with how it is done. Clarity of reasoning and freedom from ambiguity and impulse are seen as the way toward making morally right choices. The rational justification of one's action to other people is also central. Once a decision is made strength of will is what will bring about the correct action.

The ethical sphere collapses because coherent universal principles cannot be found, and the consequent arbitrary nature of choice undercuts the individual's ability to act. The more clarity one obtains by becoming detached and rational, the more one begins to see that any practical situation has many sides, among which no rational basis for choice among right and wrong can be found.

Religiousness A

The attempted solution to this is the sphere of Religiousness A. The person in this sphere gives up the attempt to get security through either pleasure or intellectual clarity, seeing both as futile. Absorption in the moment is the solution of this sphere, not in the hedonistic manner of the aesthetic sphere, but in giving up all efforts to control outcomes and ends. Happiness is not guaranteed by such a life-style, but the fortunate events that happen can be appreciated and enjoyed, where in the aesthetic sphere they became spoiled through anxiety over their inevitable loss.

This sphere fails in its attempt to suppress or deny one's concrete desires and wishes. Giving them up is necessary if one is to accept things, good and bad, as they come, and so be able to experience them as meaningful. But as desires are sloughed off, the distinctions between good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, right and wrong are lost also. This leveling of significance leads again to a despair that motivates the leap to a new way of acting.

Religiousness B

The final sphere differs from the previous ones in that it gives up the attempt to achieve a coherence of action, a meaningful life-style, by developing a particular kind of internal relationship, such as aestheticizing pleasure, developing clarity, or renouncing desire. In Kierkegaard's Religiousness B one develops a constituting relationship to something outside oneself: a paradigmatic person or project that exemplifies a form of practice one can emulate. For Kierkegaard, it was Christ who was the prototypical paradigm, but the organization of this sphere would be the same with a different object of emulation. The paradigmatic project or person provides a clarity to one's actions that is quite unlike the lucidity of internal reflection that the ethical sphere seeks.

Kierkegaard's writing is an account of moral development that places meaningful action in a central position, as we have tried to do when discussing social development. As a result, we can consider the way in which moral development and social development might be interrelated, and our account goes somewhat as follows. Grounding the many social subworlds in which a person has more or less expertise we can articulate a more general level of description, and a more general concern: that of living a good life. What Kierkegaard's theory points out is that this too is a matter of fluency. Coherent and skillful action is possible in a social subworld only when a particular concern structures one's activity. Some concerns are evanescent; others have duration. Similarly, a coherent moral life-style is possible only by finding or creating an overarching concern, which provides a division between right and wrong, good and bad. Kierkegaard points out four different forms this concern can take, one for each of the spheres: the concern with pleasure; the concern with clarity and justice; the concern with openness to experience; and the concern found in a paradigmatic project accepted as one's own. Each of these concerns provides action with coherence. In contrast, one can have none of these concerns, have no concern with living the good life, have no unity to one's subworlds, and be swayed in one's action by fads and trends instead. This is what Kierkegaard called the Present Age.

Kierkegaard's account makes an interesting claim. This is that, when it comes to moral development and moral action, fluency can be achieved only temporarily. No matter which of his spheres we find ourselves trying to live fully, there is always the possibility that meaningfulness will be lost and expertise will collapse. While this may seem a pessimistic account of morality, I think it realistically reflects our sense that moral development is unlike cognitive development; its accomplishments are not automatically sustained. Both individuals and cultures are unlikely to regress in their level of cognition, but the same is not true of their ethical status. Loss of commitment, failure of nerve, weakness of the will: all these are phenomena of moral reversal, decline, and even collapse.
Interestingly the first two of Kierkegaard's spheres show similarities with the content of Kohlberg's earlier stages. But where Kohlberg then sees development proceeding to increased formalism, prescriptivism, and universalizability, for Kierkegaard it is the attempt to actualize these goals that leads to the demise of the Ethical sphere. Kierkegaard's spheres move instead to increased individualism and particularism. Is this unrealistic or unreasonable? We think not. Philosophers have by no means been able to settle on any sort of ethical 'calculus' or set of principles whereby judgments of appropriate action can be made. On the contrary, recent analyses have focused on the discord in moral theorizing. MacIntyre (1984a, 1984b) places current ethical theory in a historical context, and argues that as an intellectual enterprise it is based on a contradiction of efforts (cf. Packer, 1983a). Consequently, those of us interested in moral development find ourselves without a rational philosophical theory of ethics. The consequence of this, though, is by no means to return to philosophically naive empiricism. Instead, we must examine the possibility that a rational ethical theory is an impossible achievement, for a number of reasons. The separation of psychology and philosophy as academic disciplines notwithstanding, both are the products of human efforts. Rationalist philosophy, like rationalist psychology, assumes the priority of a present-at-hand, detached, calculative kind of engagement with the world. Consequently it assumes (but does not examine) morally relevant practices such as trusting, cooperation, even betrayal.

Like Kohlberg we think there is a place where philosophy and psychology converge. Kohlberg (1971) made the claim, controversial then and now, that a philosophical theory of the adequacy of one form of ethical reasoning over another and a psychological theory of the development from one stage to the next were "one and the same theory extended in different directions" (p. 154) (just as, for Piaget, development was a matter of logic). Rational appreciation of a system's inadequacy promoted the generation of a higher-order system of greater consistency and completeness. The parallel we want to point out is between hermeneutic inquiry, as a form of philosophical activity and a basis for a psychological method, and practical deliberation, something people do with their own actions. In other words, interpretation, the articulation of accounts of one's own unreflective actions, is, rather than logical reasoning, what unites psychology and philosophy, as we are interpreting them, and finds a link between both of them and ordinary everyday human activity. Theorizing grows out of practical activity, and surpasses it in its application across different content areas and in its transcendence of temporality. But practical activity surpasses theorizing in its appreciation of the social and personal context in which practical problems appear, and its essential role in the initial identification of a problem.

One theme running through the chapters in this book is an interest in alternatives to a universalistic type of morality. Friendship, for example, is mentioned on several occasions. Particularistic relations are discussed as an important source of morality. Commitment and caring in these specific relationships are described as valid content in a morality (cf. Kohlberg & Higgins, Chapter 4, Youniss, Chapter 5, this volume). The detached objective universalistic perspective and the involved, participating particular perspective are clearly distinct modes of engagement in the world. An important question is which one of them has ontological or moral priority. The dominant view has been that the universalistic is primary, but there is what one might call a growing suspicion that this view is misguided, and that the particularistic mode is the primary one. But we are minimally equipped—intelectually, methodologically, or personally—to deal with this. John Gardner confronted this theme recently in fictional form, in Michelsson's Ghosts. Here a professor, a philosopher of ethics, going through a profound personal crisis, finds that the intellectual tradition he has been trained in provides him with no basis for making the moral choices necessary for his life to become meaningful again. With the demise of God as a source of universally valid moral values and injunctions, various attempts have been made to find a Godlike perspective from which humanity can achieve a similar system. These attempts have failed, and Michelsson finds himself instead growing acutely aware of his own past, and the social context of his immediate social world; of ways of understanding others that a community of people develops, scarcely graspable in a rational manner. But, in Gardner's account, Michelsson has no way of successfully living in this new mode, and he descends into the irredeemable insanity that Nietzsche predicted would follow from the death of God. Perhaps Gardner paints too gloomy a picture of our intellectual moral condition, but the problems Michelsson lives out and deliberates on in anxiety and guilt are genuine ones. We need, perhaps, to look beyond ideals of rationality, confront the plurivocality of everyday activity in our various social worlds, and begin our psychological study there. The approach to social development that we have sketched here focuses our attention not on the acquisition of knowledge of social phenomena, or on patterns of thinking about the world, but first of all on the development of skillful social practices.

REFERENCES


