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Ladislav Holy and Milan Stuchlik

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# Actions, norms and representations

**Foundations of anthropological inquiry**

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and

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## Preface

This essay has grown out of several courses of lectures which Milan Stuchlik and I gave over the last few years at The Queen's University of Belfast. These lectures reflected our uneasiness about some rather basic aspects of normal anthropological procedures. It seemed to us that a careful consideration of what it actually is we are studying and how we carry out that study may well lead to a redefinition of at least some of the questions social anthropology is trying to answer. Consequently, what we are dealing with in this essay are some basic methodological problems of social anthropology, methodology being understood in the sense of epistemology rather than in the sense of practical techniques of research. Our main concern is the problem of the conceptualization and understanding of social reality as a precondition of its analysis and explanation. Addressing ourselves to this particular problem, we pay attention to specific analytical and explanatory procedures in anthropology only to the extent to which they are affected by the analyst's conceptualization and understanding of the social reality which he sets himself to explain. In this sense, the essay is concerned more with what rather than how anthropologists should explain. We would like to think that it is an essay about what anthropology is or has to be.

There now exists an extensive body of anthropological, sociological and philosophical literature dealing with issues similar to those we discuss. We refer to some of it, but we cannot possibly refer to it all. The selection of writings to which we refer reflects our specific theoretical and methodological bias as well as our ignorance. Some of the problems discussed in this essay were, at least partly, raised in papers we have written over the last few years. Wherever the exact wording or formulation of an argument is necessary, these papers are quoted. Otherwise they are treated simply as building material for the present essay.

Milan Stuchlik died suddenly and unexpectedly in the middle of our work on this essay, and I had to complete alone the project which we had planned and started together. Although I followed our original plans and intentions, I had to execute them without being guided by Milan's constant penetrating criticism. I am sure that this loss is reflected in many passages of the essay.

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It is not possible to express gratitude individually to the many colleagues and students who have helped us to shape our views, often without actually sharing them. However, apart from being grateful to all of them, I feel especially obliged to members of a series of research seminars held in the Department of Social Anthropology at The Queen's University of Belfast between 1974 and 1977, to Richard Fardon for a careful and critical reading of the manuscript and for pointing out particular areas in which the essay went beyond what we really meant to say or imply, and to David Riches for his advice on numerous specific points. Special thanks are due to Kay Milton, who has closely monitored the progress of this essay, corrected our English and, above all, helped through her criticism to formulate better a number of arguments. But foremost I want to express my personal gratitude for having been privileged to cooperate closely with Milan Stuchlik not only on this essay but throughout my whole career and for having been fortunate enough to benefit greatly from his knowledge and intellectual guidance.

L. HOLY