

Notes from Soc Theory 2/9/06

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Change over time – The more organized the better (Durkheim)

Societies grow in size, density, and complexity. It is an evolutionary process that the Europeans see as Progress.

Recall intro- social change as a result of Protestant Reformation, industrial revolution, European colonial and imperial encounters with “other” societies.

According to Spencer, Europe has justified their progress/existence in a trajectory sense.

Jon Elster’s Modes of Scientific Explanation

1. Causal

Between two phenomena, one causes the other

1. What happens first? (TEMPORAL ASSYMETRY)
2. Is a (CONSISTENT) causal relationship?

Determinism

- A. Necessary-
- B. Sufficient-

Ex. If every time you brought a rabbit foot to class and you ace an exam without studying, the rabbit’s foot would be sufficient for success on the exam.

If you bring the rabbit’s foot and study and you ace the exam but one time forget the rabbit’s foot and you bomb the exam, the rabbit’s foot is necessary.

Cause come before the effect. Ex. Praying to Gods after a test is not applicable.

3. PROXIMITY- causal connection over distance.

Criteria for a causal explanation: Close enough, cause come first, pattern of consistent association.

2. Structural- Logic of specific institution. Ex. How family works. How it is that what happens in family to what happens in workforce to what happens in political system. It is to define/identify institutions and its interconnections.

3. Functional

The logic of system and which institutions you pick are dictated by needs of functions that need to be filled in order for society to reproduce itself.

Ex. We have public school → We have to systematically teach a skill (transmit knowledge)

- The social arrangements are functional for THAT society.

The ends explain the means

Effect Cause

This is tautology: This violates the temporal symmetry.

Personification

Anthropomorphic

- * * I got a little lost here* * * **Attributing “needs” to “society” can cross the border into treating something abstract or inanimate as though it were a person (personification) with human qualities**

(anthropomorphism). To ask, where does that chair want to be? is to anthropomorphize the chair by attributing human characteristics or agency to it. Note that in some ways, this is invoking what Elster calls an "intentionalist" explanation - quite inappropriately.

Durkheim states the functional explanation is not sufficient for sociology, causal explanations are also necessary.

4. Intentional- To explain something by the intent of the actors involved.

- **Structural** = describe and explain social order and social change with reference to the logic of institutions and their interconnections. For example, a structuralist might argue that societies are *systems of institutions* of kinship, labor, and sexuality/affect.

- **Functionalist** = the "logic" (and which institutions you pick) are dictated by the "needs" or "functions" that "must" be fulfilled in order for the society or institution to reproduce itself. Things are the way they are because arrangements at any given point in time are "functional" for society. Societies "need" to organize production and reproduction; the arrangements a given society develops to meet that need are "functional" for that society, which explains why they develop that way. This reasoning is tautological and anthropomorphic -- critics of structural-functionalism point out that societies don't really "need" anything, and the institutional arrangements we observe are the products of struggle and historical accident at a level that is much more sociologically meaningful than "the way things are fulfills the functions of society" (which doesn't explain variation). You can imagine "functional equivalents" -- counterfactuals (such as equality between women and men) that would do the job just as well, and might have other desirable effects -- structural functionalism, with its biological essentialism, can't accommodate this sort of critical approach.

Elster's criteria for evaluating functional arguments:

An institution or a behavioral pattern X (ancestor cults) is explained by its function Y (lineage solidarity) for group Z (worshippers) if and only if:

- (1) Y (lineage solidarity) is an effect of X (ancestor cults);
- (2) Y (lineage solidarity) is beneficial for Z (worshippers); (lineage solidarity maintains internal peace and external defense and so is good for worshippers)
- (3) Y is unintended by the actors producing X; (worshippers in ancestor cults do not intend thereby to maintain lineage solidarity)

(4) Y -- or at least some causal relation between X and Y -- is unrecognized by the actors in Z; (worshippers do not recognize that ancestor cults produce lineage solidarity)

(5) Y maintains X by a causal feedback loop passing through Z. THIS IS WHERE IT FAILS: There is a hidden causal loop that depends on "ritual attitudes"; performing the cult is supposed to produce emotions that contribute to solidarity, which goes against Durkheim's injunction against dipping at will into the psychological level to explain social facts.

Many cases of functionalist explanation fail because the feedback loop of criterion (5) is postulated or tacitly presupposed rather than demonstrated.

Second example:

(1) Y (more attention to food production) is an effect of X (garden magic);

(2) Y is beneficial for the community, Z, that eats the food.

Fails because no one supposes that the magic for gardening was not intended to increase the food supply. Likewise, to show that fishing magic is intended to act as improved technology is a straight causal (not functionalist) explanation.

If you want to be sure you "get it," create you own example(s) from Marx and from Durkheim.

- intentional: Behavior can be non-intentional or intentional. Intent can be irrational or rational. Rationality can be satisficing or optimizing. Optimization can be parametric or strategic. Parametric optimization can operate under conditions of complete or incomplete information, and incomplete information can be dealt with in terms of uncertainty or risk. Strategic optimization can play out in games with dominant strategies (which may have optimal or suboptimal solutions) or without dominant strategies (which may have solutions or be without solutions).

Division of Labor

The BIG idea and its concepts

Collective Consciousness

The more complex societies get, the more of a problem social cohesion is.

The problem: P. 128- Specialization creates more differences

Pre-industrial Traditional

Mechanical solidarity

Similarities to keep people doing

Industrial Modern

Organic solidarity

Specialization- creates

the same thing as ancestors; and
anyone who violates this is criminal
Criminal law
Punitive law (Repressive)

cooperation/interdependence
(like an organ, works as a
system)
Civil law
Restorative laws (Restitutive)

Industrialization undermines the similarities that were the basis for social cohesion in traditional societies. Restorative law regulates diversity and makes social cohesion possible even in the face of specialization/division of labor.