

Problem Selection in the Social Sciences: Methodology

Wout Ultee, Radboud University Nijmegen, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Abstract

Sociological methodology has rules for testing hypotheses more severely, and for the formulation of theories rich in content. This article presents rules for problem selection by surveying cases from sociology's past and present. Among these rules are treating a seemingly small question as a subproblem of a larger one, expanding existing problem structures by adding new subquestions, revising a problem structure by a new overarching question, picking out contradictions between theories and research findings, and replacing false assumptions behind questions.

Social methodology textbooks state techniques of proper empirical analysis. For instance, they tell how partial coefficients of association are to be computed, adding that these coefficients provide a more severe test of multifactor explanations than bivariate associations. Books on theory building in sociology set standards for determining whether certain hypotheses are better than others. Logically unfalsifiable ones are out; future propositions should provide more information than current ones. Any science starts with problems. Are there precepts for selecting problems too? Yes, and this article draws upon principles intimated by sociologists (Lenski, 1966: p. 20; Blau and Duncan, 1967: pp. 9–10, 194–199, 402), proposed by philosophers of science (Bunge, 1967: pp. 165–221), and applied by sociologists to sociology (Merton, 1959; Ultee, 1980). These standards are elucidated by cases from sociology's past and present.

Overarching Problems and Subproblems

Durkheim 'was not interested in suicide at all,' so says Collins' (1994) textbook on sociological traditions. But then, why did Durkheim dub his 1897 study *Le Suicide*? Weber in 1910 grumbled that his critics understood him to explain the rise of capitalism fully from the ethos of Protestantism, and retorted that he only dealt with the question of whether this ethos fitted the spirit of entrepreneurial capitalism. Yet in the 1920 preface to his collected papers on world religions, Weber's interest was rationalization processes, including the rise of capitalism. These changes had gone furthest in the West, and Weber wondered why.

If these two stories about sociology's questions carry a moral, the lesson is not that persons nowadays regarded as sociology's founders, did not know what they were up to. The message amounts to a methodological command on meritorious problems. Durkheim grasped that seemingly small questions become pertinent when taken as subproblems of larger ones, and Weber understood that it is wise to divide mammoth problems into more modest ones, and those in their turn into even more tractable questions. Durkheim and Weber entered sociology's hall of fame because they pointed toward a bunch of smaller questions falling under one and the same heading. The subtitle of *Le Suicide* runs *Étude de sociologie*, lifting a phenomenon from psychology into that science which studies societies – and the extreme case of leaving them.

Problem Structures and Their Dynamics

For Durkheim, a society's suicide rate tells about its cohesion; the higher this rate, the less cohesive a society. Weber observed that a society's inhabitants do not always use their economic freedoms, for instance, those of enterprise and labor, and supplemented the problem of how these rights got included in a society's code of law, with the problem of the strength of a person's motivation to use these liberties. Both questions were part of the question of why entrepreneurial capitalism arose in the West. In its turn, the question of the rise of capitalism, including bankers' as well as entrepreneurial capitalism, was a subquestion of the even larger question of the speed of rationalization processes in the West during the last couple of centuries.

In Durkheim's *oeuvre*, the question of a society's degree of cohesion also comprises long-term trends in the prevalence of economic exchanges when comparing Ancient Israel, the Roman Empire, and medieval Burgundy, and the degree to which assemblies of hunters and gatherers are religious in nature. Weber's question of rationalization led to less grand ones on the rise of science and the bureaucratization of states. Any methodology of problem selection should contain the rule that questions should not be judged on their own, but according to their place in a structure of overarching problems and subproblems. However small a problem seems, it has more appeal if it is part of an overarching problem. And however towering a question appears, it grows less scary if it is broken down into subquestions.

The Durkheimian Problem Structure

Figure 1 depicts the Durkheimian problem structure. The novelty of *Le Suicide* was not simply that Durkheim turned the question of suicide into a subquestion of the larger one of societal cohesion. Hobbes (1651) took order and its opposite violence as the master problem of those studying the body politic. For him, civil wars and wars between sovereigns were part of the problem of order and violence. Next to it, Durkheim placed the problem of the presence and absence of ties between a society's members. The counterpart of the question 'why do people not always live in peace?' is not only 'why do they sometimes use violence?' but also 'why do they sometimes live relatively isolated from each other?' For Durkheim, suicide was the supreme example of severing the ties between persons and the society in which they live.

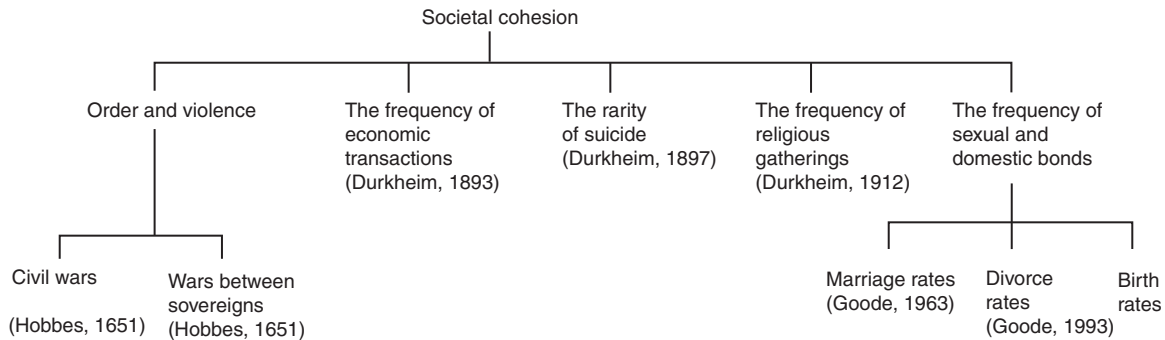


Figure 1 The Durkheimian problem structure and its dynamics.

Apart from *Le Suicide's* question, **Figure 1** encompasses the questions guiding Durkheim's two other main studies. *De la division du travail social* from 1893 focuses the frequency of economic transactions between a society's members at various points in history. It narrows this question down to that of the degree to which cooperative law (civil law regulating economic contracts by restitution) is more widespread than criminal law (penal law involving repressive sanctions). *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* from 1912 notes that Australian aboriginals disperse when hunting and gathering their food, and asks to what extent their leisurely meetings celebrate a totem and turn them into members of one society. Durkheim's questions involve a shift from questions on economic ties, by way of questions on coliving, to questions on religious ties, yet they always pertain to societal cohesion.

Given the Durkheimian problem structure, later scholars can raise questions on types of attachment to which Durkheim

paid limited or no attention. Examples are questions on changes in the rates of marriage, birth, and divorce in industrial societies. A wedding creates a sexual and domestic bond between two members of the opposite sex, divorce dissolves it, and a higher birth rate amounts to more parent-child relations in a society. focuses on the making and undoing of sexual and domestic ties. These monographs amount to a new branch of the Durkheimian problem structure.

The Weberian Problem Structure

The Weberian problem structure and its dynamics are given in **Figure 2**. The overarching problem is that of rationalization, and **Merton (1938)** pursued the subproblem of the rise of science in the West, and **Blau (1974)** that of bureaucratization. The art historian **Gombrich (1960)** studied questions on the skills of painters to furnish a faithful representation.

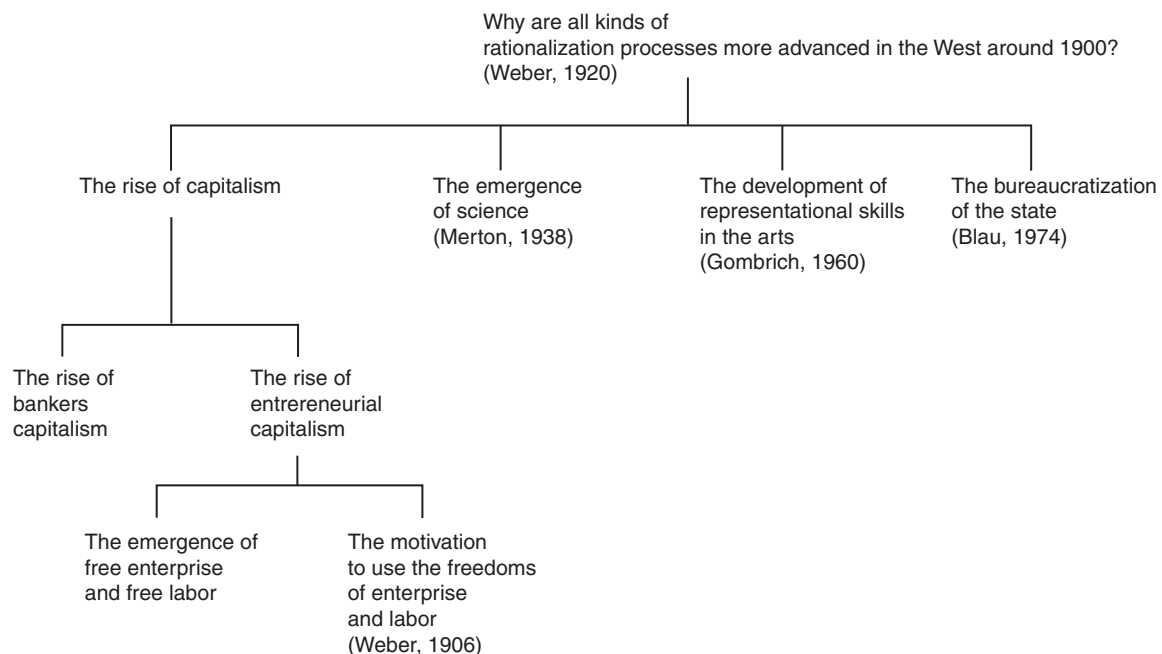


Figure 2 The Weberian problem structure and its dynamics.

The relation between problems as depicted in Figures 1 and 2 are logical in nature. An overarching problem, usually by way of uncontroversial auxiliary assumptions, implies subproblems. It is another, and less important, matter whether a person raising a subproblem of an overarching problem of an earlier scholar studied under that master or read a book by her or him. Merton and Blau took the lead from Weber; Gombrich was not influenced by him. Weber invokes Heinrich Wölfflin once when discussing the question of representational skills; Gombrich quotes Wölfflin frequently.

As stated, the step from an overarching question to a subquestion involves largely undisputed assumptions. Few would argue that capitalism is less efficient than slavery. Yet this proposition was belied by Fogel and Engerman's (1974) test for the American South shortly before slavery was abolished. A scholar working on a question can make progress by replacing these auxiliary assumptions by better approximations. Weber did not do so, but Durkheim did. In countries prescribing suicide under certain circumstances, suicide is not an instance of low cohesion, but of strong solidarity. In that case, Durkheim spoke of altruistic suicide.

Behind Weber's distinction between bankers' and entrepreneurial capitalism lurks evidence speaking against the hypothesis that the rise of capitalism is always accompanied by the growth of banking. Protestant businessmen did not take out loans. Their religion put a premium on frugality, and contributed to reinvestment of profits in their enterprise. The background of Weber's distinction between laws granting people economic freedoms and the use of these freedoms by a society's members forms the observation that people sometimes do not use their rights, as well as the hypothesis that they exercise these rights only if they are motivated to do so. Classical economics assumed that every person had this drive; Weber held that Protestantism strengthened it. A wise rule is to state the background of a question as fully as seems necessary for bringing out a problem structure.

The Weberian Problem Structure Radically Revised

The division of an overarching problem into subproblems may drastically alter. Studies by Smith (1776), Elias (1939),

Samuelson (1954), Van den Doel (1979), and De Swaan (1988) imply the revision of the Weberian problem in Figure 3. Weber never made clear what state bureaucracies were doing. States possess the legitimate monopoly on the means of violence; Elias added that states wield the legitimate monopoly on taxation. Were all taxes spent on armies, police, and prisons? This obviously is not the case. Here, the hypothesis is useful that markets make for the optimal production of individual goods (Smith), but not for the optimal production of collective goods (Samuelson). The production of collective goods approaches optimality in a state with universal suffrage and a bureaucracy that executes its laws (Van den Doel).

De Swaan listed collective bads and laws contributing to their elimination and to the production of collective goods. First, poverty is a collective bad. Poor people are more likely to trespass the law, and crimes form a general threat to life and property. Following De Swaan, this danger is alleviated by state insurance against disability and unemployment. Contagious diseases amount to a second collective bad. If local authorities provide each household with piped water and an outlet on the sewers, public health improves. Third, compulsory schooling lowers the percentage of children who cannot read and write, and makes for a more optimal functioning of markets and bureaucracies. Weber's conception of the state is saved by the assumption that armies, police, and prisons avert collective bads. Armies lessen a threat to a state's independence, police patrols contribute to safety on the streets, and prisons deter.

Problem Structures and Theories

As the saying goes, a question well put is a question half answered. If it is clear that some problem is part of a larger problem, and if a solution for the overarching problem is at hand, a possible solution to the smaller problem is available too. But then, if an answer to a particular smaller question of a larger one turns out to be false, the opportunities to disestablish a solution to another subproblem of the larger one increase. Additionally, the notion that problem structures exist and have a dynamic makes the project of sociology have more continuity than suggested by Boudon (1979) and Gove (1995).

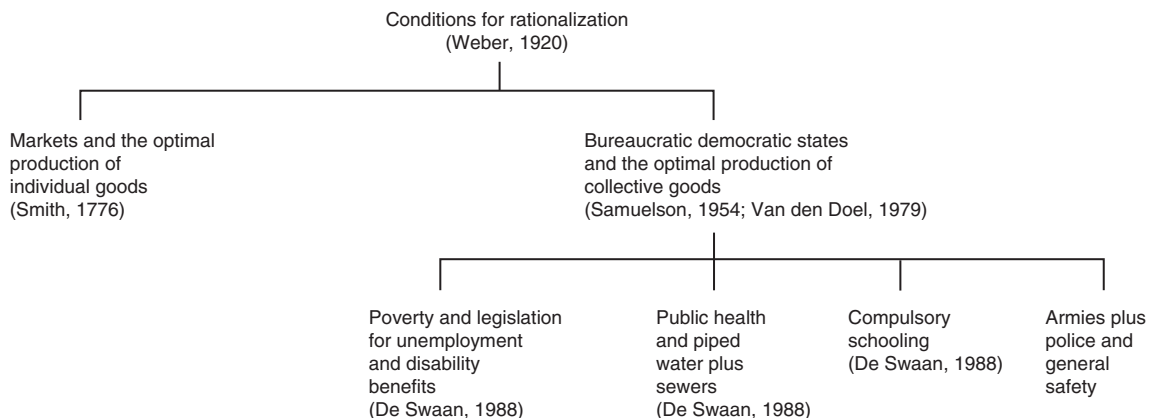


Figure 3 The Weberian problem structure radically revised.

They accepted that sociology's questions to outsiders show a bewildering variety, and bypassed the possibility that one and the same larger question may harbor a host of seemingly disparate questions.

Contradictions and Issues

One way of formulating a problem in a more useful way is to ascertain its place in a problem structure. Are there much injunctions for problem choice? Sociologists debating sociology have argued about the primacy of theory versus the supremacy of research. In contrast, Popper (1962) defended that every science, including sociology, most fruitfully starts with contradictions between general hypotheses and specific research findings.

Contradictions – or, to use (Kuhn's 1962) terms, puzzles and anomalies – contribute to sociology's growth. For Merton's (1973) sociology of science, the prevalence of priority disputes in a field was surprising in several respects. Its explanation was not the egotism of the scientists having made discoveries, since their part in the disputes was small. Nor was it to be accounted for by the increasing competition between scientists, since the frequency and intensity of priority disputes in the West decreased over time. A rule of method runs: single out contradictions.

Incompatibilities between hypotheses also invite new research and theorizing. They sometimes are called issues, but that term also refers to false alternatives. An example is the question of whether intelligence is determined by social or by genetic factors. Intermediate positions are possible, the list of social factors may be incomplete, and the location of intelligence on genes may be unknown. Popular science states issues in a metaphorical way; are we born with a brain hardwired with rules for language, or is the brain a big sponge, capable of creating rules for language by mopping up what we hear?

The phrasing of a contradiction problem sometimes contains seeds for its solution. For instance, Huizinga (1941) asked how it was possible that painting and other forms of culture flourished in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century, so shortly after this society became independent from Spain. His answer was that Dutch culture blossomed because the Netherlands was a new state. In states that have recently become independent, the upper strata have risen from the lower and the more open a country's elite, the more its culture will flower. Trevor-Roper (1976) wondered how it was possible that an emperor as preoccupied with expanding his territory as Charles V (1500–58) furthered the art of painting so much. In the end, Trevor-Roper surmised that Charles V commissioned paintings to the extent that, and precisely because, they legitimated his political power.

Apart from the rule for theory building to mobilize the information in a contradiction problem, there is the precept to turn the problem around. Rather than asking why the number of unruly passengers on airlines is increasing, it might be worthwhile to ponder why this number until now did not increase much more strongly. A more academic example is as follows. Marxism noted that a lot of workers

refrain from joining unions and strikes, and raised the question of how workers come to have a false consciousness. Olson (1965) held that unions and strikes produce collective rather than private goods, applied the prisoners' dilemma from game theory in mathematics, predicted that rational workers would not strike, and raised the question of why people participate in social movements. However, it should be clear that any theory with some substance to it should explain that some people join labor unions and certain others do not.

Strings of Questions

The terms problem and question sometimes are used interchangeably, referring to queries of any specificity. However, everyday usage of expressions like object of investigation, task, question, and problem suggests that some inquiries are more focused than others. What does the articulation of problems involve?

Problem Articulation

If it is maintained that sociology is about societies (and not about human beings taken on their own), it sometimes is said that the object of research has been stipulated. Yet no single feature of this unit has been singled out for explanation. If this property is taken to be, say, the 'functioning' of a society, the object of inquiry turns into what has been called a task. Yet the circumscription of this aspect remains limited, since the term does not focus any particular way of functioning. If a distinction is made between optimal and suboptimal functioning, the study involves a question, with that term being taken in a narrow sense. Of course, other types of functioning may be distinguished too. Questions in their turn do not allude to possible causes. If research on some sample of societies determines the extent to which less stability in a society's environment goes together with a less optimal functioning of this society, the matter at hand is articulated so fully that the problem now is whether some logically falsifiable hypothesis is true. Putting a question mark behind a falsifiable proposition amounts to posing a problem in some narrow sense of that word.

The example of a string of increasingly articulated queries just presented neglects any difficulty in obtaining measurements for the degree of stability in a society's environment, and the extent to which the functioning of a society approaches optimality. It has been held that questions should refer to directly observable phenomena only, and in the human sciences therefore to outward behavior and not to mental states. This rule is a leftover from a wrongheaded empiricist philosophy of science. All terms to some extent are theoretical, and any proposition whatsoever, whether about acts or thoughts of persons or processes and situations within of societies, never can be definitely proved.

From Descriptive to Explanatory Questions

There are strings of questions of another kind. A researcher's early questions often are descriptive: how many of the people

living in 1972 Britain and born to working-class parents had moved up to the higher classes? A follow-up question might be whether this probability to climb equals the chance to descend from the upper to the lower classes. A yet later question presupposes the answers to both earlier questions, and seeks to ascertain whether upward and downward mobilities were as prevalent in 1949 as in 1972. By raising additional descriptive questions, narratives become richer.

At some point, researchers leave descriptive questions behind them, to raise explanatory questions. The explanatory question following up on the previous string of descriptive questions ran as why was during the 1970s upward mobility less widespread in Britain than in Sweden, and more widespread than in France? The obvious answer to that question was that left-wing governments make for more upward mobility (Heath, 1981; Goldthorpe, 1987). And after a comparison of upward mobility in several industrial societies at the same point in time, the follow-up question may be raised how these societies compare over longer periods (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Breen, 2004).

From Superficial to Deeper Explanatory Questions

Some explanations 'scratch the surface only,' others delve deeper. Why would particular ideologies make for more upward mobility? Just like individuals, governments cannot always attain their goals. By which means then do social-democrats attain the goal of more upward mobility? Does Sweden have more upward mobility than Britain, because social-democrats make children branch out at a later age to schools that demand more or less of pupils? Or is this the case because social-democrats pursued a policy of full employment? And then, if the answer to the first question is 'no' and that to the second one 'yes,' why would there be more upwardly mobile persons in a society without unemployed persons?

There is no obvious point at which the hunt for deeper explanations should stop. Some theoreticians in effect defend that 'the buck stops here.' No one nowadays seriously defends that propositions about societies are logically independent from propositions about individuals. However, whether rock-bottom explanations of the features of societies always should refer to the motives and aversions of a society's members, as well as the opportunities they have and the barriers they face, is controversial. In the discussion on 'methodological individualism' (O'Neill, 1973), the borderline between methodological rules and substantive requirements was violated. Perhaps it is wise to no longer state this debate in terms of theories explaining societal phenomena, but to settle it by recognizing that short-hand statements of sociology's questions refer to societal features only, but that these questions, if they are stated fully, always refer to the persons making up a society's population, that is, to individuals and societies (Ultee, 1998).

From Meager to Thick Descriptive Questions

Some descriptive questions – and their ensuing explanatory questions – can be meager, whereas others aim for lavishness. Thus, it often has been ascertained that no society

ever has been and ever will be completely egalitarian. As Lenski (1966: p. 20) maintained, in the debate between the conservative and the radical tradition in sociology, it is possible to make headway by transforming problems stated in a categorical way into problems phrased in variable terms. It may indeed be the case that full equality never has been observed in any society; however, is the lowest degree of inequality observed until now the lowest that is possible? And do long-standing differences between highly industrialized countries in their ruling ideology explain differences in their degree of income inequality? Questions about equality that demand 'yes' or 'no' are less precise than questions about degree of inequality.

Following Lenski, progress also can be made by breaking down the compound concepts contained in problems into their constituent elements. Thus, the question of whether power – in the singular – determines privilege – in the singular – will not do. Rather, the question is to what extent differences in the consumption of a certain good in a particular society depend on the control of various resources. When answering this question, Lenski distinguished the skills of hunters and gatherers, the size of gardens in horticultural and of fields in agrarian societies, the possession of metal weapons, the private ownership of machines, the technical skills of the people designing machines, the range of legitimate command accruing to a political position, and the right to vote in elections. Lenski also suggested that the change from agriculture to industry was accompanied by a shift in the right to vote. Once elections were infrequent with only the propertied classes having the right to vote, whereas nowadays there is universal suffrage for periodic elections. By breaking down compound problems into their constituents, thick descriptions and detailed explanations are obtained.

Erroneous and Well-Stated Questions

If descriptive questions are logically prior to explanatory questions, explanatory questions may be wrong. Answers to questions can turn out false, questions themselves may be mistaken. The question of why in the 1970s social mobility was more widespread in France than in Sweden is erroneous, since in that decade mobility occurred more often in Sweden. The Olson question of exactly which selective incentive makes persons protest against the hunting of seals assumes that some selective incentive is always at work, which may not be the case. This example suggests that if a rock-bottom explanation slips into a question, that problem turns into leading question.

Methodological rules that stipulate conditions banishing erroneous questions and guaranteeing well-stated ones seem doomed. It is wise to review the presupposed description, but checking has to stop somewhere. In this respect, it is interesting that the answer to an explanatory question always implies that the original question may not have been fully right. When Durkheim asked why Protestantism goes together with more suicide than Catholicism, he devised the hypothesis that more tightly knit religions show a lower suicide rate. To derive what he wished to explain, Durkheim assumed that Catholics are more integrated than Protestants. He knew that this assumption was off the mark for England, since the Anglican Church

was a state church. Yet in this way, he could account for England as the deviant case to the regularity he wished to explain. Malewski (1964) showed with examples from social psychology that every explanation of a regularity predicts conditions under which exceptions occur to the regularity to be explained.

Duncan held that the question of factors influencing the chances that the members of a society move up or down poses the issue poorly. The prime factor is father's occupation. However, the proposition that the lower the occupational prestige of a person's father, the higher this person's chances of upward mobility forms a truism. After all, the hypothesis thrives on bottom and ceiling effects. To test more interesting hypotheses, according to Duncan, questions on change in a person's life should not be stated in terms of some difference score, but as questions on the strength of the relation between a person's earlier and later score, and on the factors influencing that relation.

Undertheorized Questions

Schütz (1932) raised the question of why human beings understand one another, and did so with a certain urgency by phrasing his question as 'how is it possible that people understand each other?' This query sounds like a contradiction, although casual observation suggests that some people at some places and in some times indeed understand one another. However, no particular hypothesis has been derived from a specific theory holding that it is impossible for human beings to understand each other. Thus, the theory rendering the question compelling is lacking. The Parsonian problem of how order is possible (Parsons, 1937) is undertheorized in a similar way. Any derivation of the hypothesis that society is violent, from the principle that persons follow their interests, involves additional assumptions. These can be wrong, which makes the question of how order is possible less pressing than it sounds. Indeed, a full statement of the question 'how is order possible' implies the conditions under which order occurs, and those under which it does not.

Research of the past decades not infrequently addressed the question of whether the association observed in a cross-sectional sample of a society's inhabitants between their year of birth and a particular characteristic is to be accounted for as an age, cohort, or period effect. As methodologists point out, this question is undertheorized too. The available hypotheses do not predict some age effect, some cohort effect, and some period effect. Those hypotheses are so vague that their conjunction is almost if not fully logically unfalsifiable. The hypotheses at hand have more substance; if people marry, grow up in lean times, and live through a war, then their values will be less postmaterialist (Inglehart, 1977). Those variables can be independently ascertained, making statistical models identifiable.

Conclusion

What are the prospects for more attention to problem selection in scholarly studies on human societies and in social methodology books? Since 1998, there is an English language

textbook aiming to state (and answer) sociology's questions: *Sociology, The Central Questions* by Kornblum. One of its questions runs as "Stratification and social class, are they inevitable, or can there be a classless society?" This question may be taken as erroneous, yet the text following it makes clear that students are taught to think in gradual instead of categorical terms about inequalities. Nevertheless, this type of textbook does not seem to have caught on. As to review articles, some now distinguish generations of research. They do so not only by pointing toward more advanced techniques for data analysis and new theories, but also by invoking problem shifts. Ultee (2006) did so in research on the theme of welfare states and inequalities, and Knutsen (2007) in research on class voting. But this type of review articles has not become common yet.

Lieberson (1985) subtitled one of his social methodology books 'the improvement of social research and theory,' but pointed toward the prevalence of 'unanswerable questions,' and he pleaded for social researchers to avoid them. Abbott (2004) sought to complement rules for testing hypotheses by stating rules for thinking them up. For this, he took his inspiration from Pólya's (1957) *How to Solve It*, with it being a problem. But in the final chapter, Abbott, fortunately, was concerned with 'how to pose it,' that is, how to arrive at interesting problems, pointing toward puzzles. Firebaugh (2008) presented seven rules for good social research. At first sight, none of them refers to problems. But upon studying the argument, it turns out that Firebaugh repeatedly points toward erroneous questions. His prime example is the question of why income disparities on a worldwide scale have been growing for the past few decades, whereas they have been declining (although they have been rising in most countries of the world taken on their own). Upon closer inspection, this example also illustrates the rule that a question well put is a question half answered (the rise in average income has been strongest in the poorest and most populous countries).

In everyday life, researchers consider some problems difficult, others significant, and yet others exciting. These notions are difficult to put into formal rules. However, a more difficult problem might be taken as an explanatory question to which several solutions have been proposed, none of which worked or led to closer approximations. Thus, difficult problems are specific kinds of Popperian contradictions. Also, a structure consisting of overarching problems and sub-questions goes some way toward formalizing the intuition that a problem is significant. Perhaps a problem area is called exciting, if, after many a failed attempt, the solution of an overarching problem seems near, because progress is being made on subproblems.

Of course, it may be argued, with Ziman (1987), that the question of how scientists choose their problems is erroneous, since most researchers do not have a choice. Their problems are pre-given by the organization that employs them. This observation does not do away with the question of problem choice, but makes the question of the formal rules for problem choice by the higher authorities of these organizations more pressing. The methods outlined above should be taken not only as principles for researchers who have a choice, but also as precepts for institutes run on a budget, and for foundations that award subsidies.

See also: Explanation: Conceptions in the Social Sciences; Generalization: Conceptions in the Social Sciences; Grounded Theory: Methodology and Theory Construction; Historical Explanation, Theories of: Philosophical Aspects; Kuhn, Thomas S. (1922–96); Logical Positivism and Logical Empiricism; Merton, Robert K (1910–2003); Objectivity: Philosophical Aspects; Popper, Karl Raimund (1902–94); Social Properties (Facts and Entities): Philosophical Aspects; Weber, Max (1864–1920); Weberian Social Thought, History of.

Bibliography

- Abbott, A., 2004. *Methods of Discovery, Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. Norton, New York.
- Agassi, J., 1975. *Science in Flux*. Reidel, Dordrecht.
- Blau, P.M., 1974. *On the Nature of Organizations*. Wiley, New York.
- Blau, P.M., Duncan, O.D., 1967. *The American Occupational Structure*. Wiley, New York.
- Boudon, R., 1979. *La Logique du Social*. Hachette, Paris (1981. *The Logic of Social Action*. Routledge, London).
- Breen, R. (Ed.), 2004. *Social Mobility in Europe*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Bunge, M., 1967. *Scientific Research I. The Search for System*. Springer, Berlin.
- Collins, R., 1994. *Four Sociological Traditions*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- De Swaan, A., 1988. *In Care of the State*. Polity, Cambridge.
- Durkheim, É., 1893. *De la Division du Travail Social*. Alcan, Paris (1933. *The Division of Labour in Society*. MacMillan, New York).
- Durkheim, É., 1897. *Le Suicide, Étude de Sociologie*. Alcan, Paris (1951. *Suicide. A Study in Sociology*. Free Press, Glencoe).
- Durkheim, É., 1912. *Les Formes Élémentaires de la Vie Religieuse*. Alcan, Paris (1995. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Free Press, New York).
- Elias, N., 1939. *Über den Prozess der Zivilization*. Franke, Bern (1994. *The Civilizing Process*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford).
- Erikson, R., Goldthorpe, J.H., 1992. *The Constant Flux, a Study of Class Mobility in Industrial Societies*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Firebaugh, G., 2008. *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Fogel, R.W., Engerman, S.L., 1974. *Time on the Cross. The Economics of American Negro Slavery*. Wildwood, London.
- Goldthorpe, J.H., 1987. *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, second ed. Clarendon, Oxford.
- Gombrich, E.H., 1960. *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. Phaidon, London.
- Goode, W.J., 1963. *World Revolution and Family Patterns*. Free Press, New York.
- Goode, W.J., 1993. *World Changes in Divorce Patterns*. Yale UP, New Haven, CT.
- Gove, W.R., 1995. Is sociology the integrative discipline in the study of human behavior? *Social Forces* 72, 1197–1206.
- Heath, A., 1981. *Social Mobility*. Fontana, Glasgow.
- Hobbes, T., 1651. *Leviathan* (1968 Penguin, Armondsworth).
- Huizinga, J., 1941. *Nederland's Beschaving in de 17de Eeuw*. Tjeenk Willink, Groningen (1969. *Dutch Civilization in the 17th Century*. Harper & Row, New York).
- Inglehart, R., 1977. *The Silent Revolution*. Princeton UP, Princeton.
- Knutsen, O., 2007. The decline of social class. In: Dalton, J.R., Klingemann, H. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 457–480.
- Korblum, W., 1998. *Sociology, the Central Questions*. Harcourt Brace, Fort Worth.
- Kuhn, T., 1962. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Lieberson, S., 1985. *Making it Count, the Improvement of Social Research and Theory*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Lenski, G.E., 1966. *Power and Privilege*. McGraw-Hill, New York.
- Malewski, A., 1964. Generality levels of theories concerning human behavior. In: Zetterberg, H.L., Lorenz, G. (Eds.), *A Symposium on Theoretical Sociology*. Bedminster, Totowa.
- Merton, R.K., 1938. *Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth-Century England*. Saint Catherine Press, Bruges.
- Merton, R.K., 1959. Notes on problem finding in sociology. In: Merton, R.K., Bloom, L., Cottrell Jr, L.S. (Eds.), *Sociology Today: Problems and Prospects*. Basic Books, New York.
- Merton, R.K., 1973. *The Sociology of Science*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Olson, M., 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action*. Harvard UP, Cambridge, MA.
- O'Neill, J. (Ed.), 1973. *Modes of Individualism and Collectivism*. Heinemann, London.
- Parsons, T., 1937. *The Structure of Action*. McGraw-Hill, New York.
- Pólya, G., 1957. *How to Solve It*. Double Day, Garden City.
- Popper, K.R., 1962. Die logik der sozialwissenschaften. *Kölnler Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 14, 233–248 (1976. *The logic of the social sciences*. In: Adorno, T.W., Albert, H., Dahrendorf, R., Habermas, J., Pilot, H., Popper, K.R. (Ed.), *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*. Harper & Row, New York).
- Samuelson, P., 1954. The pure theory of public expenditure. *Review of Economics and Statistics* 36, 387–389.
- Schütz, A., 1932. *sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*. Springer, Wien.
- Smith, A., 1776. *The Wealth of Nations* (1970 Penguin, Armondsworth).
- Trevor-Roper, H., 1976. *Princes and Artists*. Thames and Hudson, London.
- Ultee, W., 1980. Fortschritt und Stagnation in der Soziologie. *Luchterhand, Darmstadt*.
- Ultee, W., 1996. Do rational choice approaches have problems? *European Sociological Review* 12, 167–179.
- Ultee, W., 1998. Bringing individuals back into sociology. In: Blossfeld, H.P., Prein, G. (Eds.), *Rational Choice Theory and Large-Scale Data Analysis*. Westview, Boulder.
- Ultee, W., 2006. Problem shifts in the study of welfare states and societal inequalities. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 24, 377–386.
- Van den Doel, H., 1979. *Democracy and Welfare Economics*. Cambridge UP, Cambridge.
- Weber, M., 1920. *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*. Mohr, Tübingen (1930. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Allen & Unwin, London).
- Winckelmann, J. (Ed.), 1978. *Maw Weber. Die Protestantische Ethik II. Kritiken und Antikritiken*. Gütersloh, Mohn.
- Ziman, J.M., 1987. The problem of "problem choice". *Minerva* 25, 92–106.
- Zuckerman, H., 1978. Theory choice and problem choice in science. In: Gaston, J. (Ed.), *Sociology of Science*. Jossey-Bass, San-Francisco.