

# Teoretická sociologie

2021 Podzim



Knowledge

“Explanation, as a goal for the study of human beings, can only function as a subcategory of the larger category of understanding.”



# The debates about methodology

- „We have disagreements, that is, not only about how we establish the sheer existence of this or that social phenomenon, but also about how we can claim to correctly and effectively explain, criticize, or interpret it.“
- „[P]ost-positivism has a somewhat clear historical meaning — the term refers to the break with certain taken-for-granted assumptions about the unity of the natural and social sciences that, like so many other breaks, happened sometime in “the sixties.”



# Positivism, empiricism, postpositivism

- „Thus the tendency toward empiricism in social research extends far beyond quantitative methodologies taken from the natural sciences. Positivism, as an approach to method, and empiricism, as a resistance to theory, are by no means coextensive.“
- „[H]ow do, and how should, theory and evidence interact? For there is much objection, in postpositivism, to the positivist answer to these questions (in short, that theory generates hypotheses and evidences tests them), but little agreement as to how this intersection should happen outside the positivist mold.“





# Epistemic modes

- „Epistemic modes dictate the *conceptual* method by which theory is brought into contact with evidence, structure the expectations about what such contact can accomplish, and provide more or less well-formed criteria of validity that are used to evaluate the knowledge that is thereby produced.“
- „That register must resist the twin temptations of formal logic, permanently distant from the messiness of social investigation, and the reductive sociology of knowledge, insensitive to how internal and impersonal imperatives, combined with informal argumentation and scholarly communication, can make communities of inquiry more than just clubs or networks.“



# Establishing the phenomenon

- „[I]n the case of human affairs, many of the most essential facts of the matter — the social facts — are not immediately observable.“
- „It is not our spatial or temporal distance from social facts that makes them a difficult category. It is that reporting on the carryings on of human beings requires a reference to the meaning of their actions, in a very minimal yet fundamental way.“



# From reporting to understanding

- „[I]t is the responsibility of the social researcher not only to report the facts, but to propose a deeper or broader comprehension of them.“
- „We need theory to help us explain and evaluate social life.“
- „[But] the world of social theory is meaningful in the basic human sense of providing a coherent model for and model of the (social) world. The hope is that this meaningful world is also a useful one, so that our attempts to develop a deeper understanding of social phenomena are sometimes successful.“



# Referential and conceptual signs

- „[W]e do not expect theory to reference the social world in the same concrete manner that we expect evidence to reference the social world. Indeed, the whole point of theory is to be abstract and conceptual.“
- „The necessary result of this is that what theory “references,” first and foremost, is not really a referent at all in the concrete sense of meaningful social actions that actually happened. Rather, the immediate reference of theoretical expressions is, as far as I can tell, (1) other theoretical expressions and (2) imagined societies, social actions, and social relations whose primary existence is in researchers’ heads.“





# From minimal to maximal interpretation

- „Maximal interpretations, then, are always organizing, explaining, judging—in a word, interpreting—minimal interpretations, drawing themselves into relationship with the facts, but also going “beyond” the facts.“
- „We do not just want to know that the Hawaiians killed Cook, we also want to know why they killed him, and furthermore, what this violent action means to us today.“



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# Meaning-making

- „Hence a new set of debates concerning what people do with symbols, how symbols intersect social networks and group processes, and, generally, how the study of symbols and their meanings for actors can help sociologists explain action. And symbols require human subjectivity to give them meaning.“
- „[R]ather than seeing natural science as pure and true knowledge that emerges from the encounter of an unblemished subjectivity with unmediated Nature, we can see it as a specification of the interpretive process that, at a more general level, characterizes all human thought and communication.“



“Explanation, as a goal for the study of human beings, can only function as a subcategory of the larger category of understanding.”



# Reality and Utopia

# Dialogue

- „At the core of normativism as an epistemic mode is the understanding that knowledge itself has a politics. From this premise, normativism draws the following implication: that when an investigator researches other people — even others long since dead — she constructs a dialogue between herself and her subjects.“
- „The philosophical problem of “what is a norm” is not what is at stake... [in the] epistemic mode for producing maximal interpretations — a mode whereby the investigator involves herself in a dialogue with her subjects that has as its subject normative validity.“





# Ethnography and history

- Normative maximal interpretations rely upon subject-to-subject dialogue so as to recover utopian and dystopian consciousness, and ultimately construct compelling social criticism. But there is another purpose for dialogue between investigator and investigated — to get into the meaning of social life in certain time and space.



# Relocating facts

- „Both realism and normativism use theory to produce ultimate and organizing referents for the research text. Theory relocates the facts in a second conceptual space, a larger world unknown to the facts themselves: a world of the fundamental structures of the social (realism) or a world of the fundamental problems and possibilities of critique (normativism).“



# Practical effect and explanatory theory

- Theory brings to bear the critical force of well-articulated utopia upon the empirical world, but in doing so, it brings together the intellectual's political philosophies with the utopian capacities immanent in social life as lived and experienced.
- „[I]f the social is denaturalized, then the question of the institutionalization and maintenance of social realities becomes connected to the question of how the social life is normatively imagined.“



# The concept-dependency of social life

- „That the “social world,” though different than the “natural world,” can also be thought of as an “intransitive” realm, to which the “transitive” theories produced by social research attempt to correspond.“
- „That though societies are “open systems” and thus subject to unpredictable historical changes, they can still be studied scientifically, despite the lack of experimental conditions for studying these systems. The reason for this is that societies already contain — as a part of themselves — a protoscientific conceptual account of themselves.“





# Reference and mechanism

- „[T]he premise of the realist epistemic mode — that at its core, the theoretical meaning-system is grounded in much the same way the factual meaning-system is: by reference to a reality that can be reported on. Theory, according to realism, reports upon a deeper social reality.“
- „There are aspects of social life here and there, and perhaps especially in modern social organizations, that function mechanistically. [But] realism’s constant use of ontological language makes it hard to keep in mind that mechanism is a metaphor, [referring to a clock] producing regularities via hidden machinery.“



# Subjectivity

- „Meaning and subjectivity in social life — or, in Bhaskar’s terms, the concept-dependence of social structure — provide a great deal of dynamism to the social object, particularly in so far as they are unrealistic.“
- „Subjectivity, understood literally as that element of the world that continually exceeds its objective constraints, gives to the social object of study a distinct historical dynamism and cultural difference.“





*Meaning*

# Focus on human experience

- „[S]he does not expect the answers to such questions as “What is a state?” or “What is radical criticism?” to provide the kind of direct intellectual leverage that is needed to do the work of the social analysis of evidence. Rather, these questions have to be approached indirectly, mediated through the interpretation of social meaning.“
- „She directs her efforts, then, to reconstructing the textures of human subjectivity, and to the meaningful worlds of social life in which subjects act in a certain place and a certain time.“



# Focus on the form of theorising

- „[T]he point of interpretivism is not only the focus on meaning and signification in social life, but also how the investigator uses theory to interpret meaning and signification in social life.“
- „[T]he aim of this mode is to resignify the evidence by recontextualizing it into a set of deeper meanings that are also historically and socially limited. The resignification moves from one set of social meanings to another set of social meanings: from the “surface” meanings easily inferred from the evidence to the “deep” meanings that require much more interpretive work to access.“





# Landscapes of meaning

- „The social actions of cockfight are situated within a larger context, and thus resignified as an expression of that context. So, Geertz is indeed in search of depth in interpretation. The point of such resignification is manifestly to resituate cockfighting as an expression of a set of larger tensions and themes within Balinese culture.“
- „This rather terrifying analysis of cultural pathology, in which subjective motivations are shown to be a crucible of social power precisely in so far as they are formed by overlapping discursive formations, is simultaneously an exercise in specifying historically the meaningful context for a certain set of social actions.“



# The efficacy of social meaning

- „The said and the sayable, the social imaginary, the symbolic framework, the discursive formation, and so on: these terms have quite different valences and different uses, but they are all impossible to use without some notion of the social consequences of collective representation. What is not necessary, however, is the idea that these meanings always work in the same way with the same social effects.“
- [T]he theories merge with the meanings of the evidence so as dig up the “double meaning” of the social actions under study—the hidden or tacit background within which actors act.“



# Using theory to dig out the underlying meanings

- „[T]o articulate how certain social forces (e.g., workers' solidarity) emerge within and through certain meaning-formations, informed by certain mythological themes.“
- „What we need, then, is a metaphor for the interpretive goal of understanding the meanings within which social processes take place, a metaphor that can capture the way in which meaning is the ground upon which social life proceeds.“





Explanation



# Motivation

- „Conscious intentions do help drive social life, but the investigator must also grasp those “springs of action” that result from interior states that are (relatively) opaque to the actor himself. So, I would change “reasons as causes” to “motivations as causes” and expand the focus on agent’s intentions to a more encompassing account of the effect upon the social world of the interior states of people.“
- „The point is that motivated actors have projects or lines of action-in-the-world that they pursue, and analysts who ignore these projects put the validity of their explanations in peril.“

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# Mechanism

- „Sometimes the mechanism produces the subject with the motive... A ritual, a repeated set of actions embedded in a social relationship of domination: confession is a mechanism, and a mechanism that has, as its regular outcome, a certain sort of human subject.“
- „[I]t is with the issue of modernity that this whole story of a mechanism's growth and dispersion becomes a story not only about forcing causes but also about forming causes—the causes that mould the productive mechanism of confession in a certain way, giving it a certain meaning.“



# Michel Foucault

- „The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes it and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated.“



# Forces and forms

- „[I]n the realist epistemic mode, the forcing conception of causality is affixed to the language of motives and mechanisms. Motives, within agents, “force the action,” and mechanisms exert pressure on willful actors and upon other (mechanistic) social processes.“
- „Forcing causes cannot be understood in their effectiveness without understanding the forming causes that mould them... forming causes are the arrangements of signification and representation that give forcing causes their concrete shape and meaningful character.“





# History

- „Both motivations and mechanisms, then, are given concrete form by signification. As a result the analysis of their causal effects is embedded within the interpretation of meaning.“
- „The interpretation of the history of a given landscape of meaning is itself the source of knowledge about what other meanings might have been available to certain motivated actors or what other discursively embedded mechanisms would have “worked.”“



# Max Weber

- „To the social researcher trained in naturalist ambition, meaning may appear elusive and epiphenomenal. But to the social actor, meaning is massively, unavoidably real, no matter how ultimately unrealistic its constructs, referents, or imaginings. The problem for the social researcher is, then, to interpret this meaning according to its causal consequences for social action.“

