

BEYOND THE AUTOSUFFICIENCY OF COLLECTIVISTIC APPROACHES IN SOCIAL THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

The article presents an unified theoretical model in which the postulates encompass simultaneously the mental and the social, social microphenomena and social macrophenomena. Accordingly, the possibility of ampleness remains open to many theorems deduced or deducible from the axioms.

The model is confronted with a pretended methodological autosufficiency of collectivistic approaches in social thought and with the assumption, attributed to utilitarian theories (including expected utility theories), that individuals are rational in their behavior.

The article maintains that the choice between alternatives (to be made individually or socially) can be viewed with more comprehensiveness and consequently with a higher explanatory power if explicitly referred to the general basic traits of human mind (feeling-idea-volition).

1. A mental-social unified theoretical model

In other writings we have presented a sociological theoretical model whose universe of discourse is not restricted to collective phenomena (Souto 1976, p. 43-62, 1986, p. 353-368, 1988, p. 103-128). Such a model includes two postulates or axioms and about fifty theorems are deduced from them. Presumably, many other theorems are still deducible.

In a simplified form, the two postulates are: 1) The greater the idea of similarity that the actor of a mental or social behavior has, the greater the agreeableness felt by him, and the greater the latter, the more it will be desired by him; 2) The greater the similarity between a pole of (mental or social) interaction (such as defined by him this similarity in function of what he accepts) and another interactive pole(s), the smaller the mental or social distance of the first pole with relation to the other pole(s).

By mental behavior is here understood a way of acting in a situation of mental interaction, and by social behavior a way of acting in a situation of social interaction. Mental interaction is the related action between mental poles. Social interaction is the related and externalized action between mental poles.

It is worthy of notice that these two highly generic axioms encompass simultaneously the mental and the social, social microphenomena and social

macrophenomena. Accordingly, the possibility of amplexness remains open to many theorems deduced and deducible from them, although, of course, theorems are necessarily less generic than postulates.

It should be noted that the similarity is fundamentally defined by the pole of interaction with regard to the patterns that he accepts -he approaches or separates from what he considers, respectively, similar (more similar) or dissimilar (more dissimilar) to what he accepts. But the patterns that he accepts do not correspond necessarily to his own behavior. Thus a person may consider himself dissimilar to himself, that is, dissimilar, in his behavior, to the basic patterns¹.

It should be still noted that the evaluation of similarities and dissimilarities is not only quantitative, but also, and decisively, qualitative. This means that a relation may be evaluated as being preponderantly of similarity, even when the quantity of similarities is smaller than the one of dissimilarities, since the similarities, in smaller number, are considered fundamental. In the same manner, dissimilarities in smaller number may be considered much more important, in a relation, than more numerous similarities.

For instance: a fiancé may have more defects than qualities, as seen by his fiancée. However, if the qualities, in smaller number, are considered by her as fundamental ones, she will want to marry her fiancé. The same principle will be valid for the relations of macrogroups, as, for example, in an alliance between political parties or in their antagonism.

Last but not least: the propositions (theses) on mental or social distance may be presented in an objective or in a subjective way. Subjectively expressed, one would have, for instance: the greater the similarity between mental or social interactive poles, *such as evaluated by one or more than one of them* (quantitative and qualitative evaluation), the smaller the distance between these interactive poles. Objectively expressed, however, the proposition is accentuatedly probabilistic: the greater the *objective* similarity between mental or social interactive poles, *probably* the smaller the distance between these interactive poles.

In the second form, the word "probably" appears expressly (accentuatedly probabilistic character of the proposition) -because a subjective perception of similarity does not correspond necessarily to objective similarity. This means: human poles of mental or social interaction may consider dissimilar what is objectively similar, and conversely. That is: they may be mistaken in their evaluation of similarity or dissimilarity.

Some basic theorems in connection with the postulates mentioned above are the following (as expressed in a simplified manner):

- 1) In a mental or social interaction, if the idea of similarity (to what is accepted) prevails over the idea of dissimilarity, the respective system of interaction is equilibrated (counterbalanced); and conversely.
- 2) In a mental or social interaction, if there is permanent equilibrium of the interactive system, the resulting process is associative (integrative).

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3) In a mental or social interaction, the greater the (prevailing) similarity between interacting poles (such as defined by one or more than one of them), the greater the equilibrium of the corresponding system of interaction.

Many other generic theorems may be deduced, as for example:

4) The greater the equilibrium of a system of mental or social interacts, the more promptly it controls any event that may disturb the idea of similarity integrating the system.

5) In a mental or social interaction, the smaller the distance of the interacting pole(s) from another interacting pole(s), the less energy will be necessary for communication and control.

6) The more socialization (exposure to social patterns) is done in the direction of similarity between poles of mental or social interaction, the greater the equilibrium of the system of interacts corresponding to such poles.

7) To the extent that socialization is done in terms of dissimilarity between pole of mental or social interaction, to such extent the pole (or poles) socialized in that manner will tend to a behavior which is disequilibrating to the system of interacts corresponding to those poles.

8) The greater the standardization of the elemental "idea" of interacting mental or social poles, the greater the similarity between these poles and consequently the greater the equilibrium of the corresponding system of interaction.

9) If mental or social interacting poles have their element "idea" standardized in a scientific-empirical way, (to that extent) there is the highest possibility of conviction that this element "idea" conforms to the reality and therefore the highest possibility of standardization of such element "idea" and consequently there is the highest possibility of equilibrium of the corresponding system of interaction.

10) If a feeling and idea and volition compound has its element "idea" in accordance with present-day empirical science (the greatest possibility of precision and certitude), it is accepted or tends to be accepted as obligatory in a system of mental or social interacts.

11) If a system of mental or social interacts is considered essentially (principally) just by one, or more than one, interacting poles (and therefore essentially similar to what they accept), such poles experience a situation of relative and healthful affective mildness. If not, the oscillating situations of agreeableness and disagreeableness, above all those of disagreeableness, since they are not relatively mild situations, are favorable to pathologic conditions in the individual and consequently in the socio-interactive system.

12) In separation between mental or social interacting poles, the greater the separation, the greater the disagreeableness. And the greater such disagreeableness, the greater the tendency to conflict.

"Conflict" in this generic theorem express mental conflict (internal conflict) or social conflict (fight).

13) The greater the idea of similarity (and consequently the greater the agreeableness of feeling) in the mental or social space (of interaction), the more rapidly the passage of time (mental or social) will be experienced in the respective interactive system².

2. The theoretical-methodological insufficiency of the collectivistic approaches

The above proposed model of a precise general testable theory implies that the existence and properties of social groups -which are widely considered to be most typical social phenomena- *cannot* be explained only by propositions whose universe of discourse is strictly collective. In another words: a collectivistic approach in social thought could not be autosufficient.

Social groups do possess that which is termed "emergent properties", that is, "properties which cannot be assigned to individuals" (Opp 1988, p. 217). But this because such groups are patterns of behavior accepted in common by individuals and therefore a new phenomenon which results from the interaction between individual mental poles.

Social groups have therefore the individual mental reality in their origin (although they cannot be equated to such individual mental reality). The necessarily present marks of origin, since there is no real group mind, for social groups are not corporeal entities. Consequently they cannot feel, think or want: they are rather what is felt, thought and wanted in common by individuals minds.

Feelings, ideas and volitions are thus common elements to both individual and group reality. When mentally interiorized they are individual-psychological elements. When exteriorized by interhuman communication they become social and, if accepted in common by two or more individuals, group phenomena. What is interiorized in a moment may be exteriorized in another and conversely: what is mental may become social and vice-versa.

That is why, based on such common elements, the second postulate of the proposed model embraces simultaneously, with a slight variation, the mental and the social distance, while the first postulate is mainly, but not exclusively, of a mental nature, since it may be applied simultaneously to social phenomena. Hence the model's very high explanatory power, seeming to embrace all human behavior.

Collectivistic theories in social thought have been however much more popular, since in sociology "hypothetico-deductive thinking, the explicit formulation of testable hypotheses, and their empirical testing by methods which can be intersubjectively controlled are still the exception" (Opp 1985, p. 218).

The methodological autosufficiency of collectivistic approaches in social thought has implied less general and less precise theories, whose rigourously testable character has been doubtful. For, neglecting the individual and corporeally mental basis of production of social phenomena (a basis whose essential form "feeling-idea-volition" is reproduced in these social phenomena, with differentiation of contexts), such collectivistic theories tend to a separation from concrete empirical reality and to a metaphorical and sometimes paradoxically anthropomorphist discourse.

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Thus the social groups may have a "systemic equilibrium", or "objective relations" between social classes may exist, without explicit consideration of human concrete mental traits; or the social groups may "think" and have "opinions" as if they were corporal entities (cf. Opp 1988, p. 209).

Even Durkheim, however, who is considered the classical "sociologist", had to admit, referring to the "aggregation": "it is it that thinks, that feels, that wants, although it cannot want, feel or act but by means of particular consciences" (Durkheim 1951, p. 36).

It is noteworthy the reaction of the Soviet Bazarian against a Marxist "objectiveness" with disregard of the individual human factor: "In the concept of society's material basis we include another determinant factors that Marxist sociologists in general do not take into consideration, such as the geografic factor, the demographic factor and above all man's biophysic factor. The latter is, according to our point of view, the most important of all factors, for, after all, history and society are made by men and for men" (Bazarian 1982, p. 179).

The human choice between alternatives (to be made individually or socially), can be viewed with more comprehensiveness and consequently with a higher explanatory power if explicitly referred to the general basic traits of human mind (feeling-idea-volition). For instance, as the human idea is not necessarily rational, it follows that the human choice between alternatives is not necessarily rational.

This seems to avoid the criticism to the assumption, attributed to utilitarian theories (including expected utility theories), that individuals are rationals in their behavior, so that everything would be viewed ultimately as "some sort of investment", even phenomena like altruism, whose explication would be problematic within a "short-term utility function", but not within a "long-term utility function" (cf. Petroni 1988, pp. 227, 233, 228-229). Petroni (1988, p. 229) thinks that "the choice of a kamikaze is something very different from the choice of a gambler", and thus his behavior should not be reduced to the model of a gambler's or investor's behavior. However, this problem seems to vanish if the explanatory model is explicitly referred to those general basic traits of human mind, a model which would embrace in its very high level of generality these three behaviors to be explained.

On the other hand, the generality of that reference means the possibility of a theoretical unitary explanation valid not only for the social sciences, but for human sciences in general.

Moreover feelings, ideas, and volitions viewed *lato sensu* are basic elements common to men and to other superior animals (notwithstanding a greater complexity of human mind). This makes also possible a theoretical *very general* unitary explication of superior animal's behavior. Such a common explication could be carried out in strictly causal terms and not necessarily in a teleological or in a teleological-causal way (cf. Hendrichs 1985, p. 66 and *passim*; A. Souto 1990, *passim*; Petroni 1988, p. 230).

Feelings, ideas and volitions are elements that can be found together or separately in the sociological literature (for instance, Durkheim 1951, p. 36;

Weber 1972, p. 28; Loomis 1967, pp. 5 and 13). But the empirically undissociable compound formed by these elements (*fiv* compound) has been treated occasionally, and not systematically as a basic social category. This systematic treatment is however required because without feeling, idea and volition one has not basically the man and the social produced by him.

Opp refers, with regard to the rational choice model in the social sciences (individuals "choose the action that yields the highest net utility to them"), to what "seems to be a tendency towards dogmatization in several aspects. First of all, those problems are neglected that the rational choice model is unable to solve. This holds particularly for the explanations of preferences and expectancies. Secondly, research findings of social psychology that could lead to new applications of the rational choice model are neglected. For example, according to cognitive consistency theories (e.g., dissonance theory, balance theory) certain combinations of cognitions (opinions, attitudes) are dissonant (or unbalanced), i.e., unpleasant to an individual. To illustrate this with one of Festinger's (1957) examples: a heavy smoker who is at the same time aware that smoking is unhealthy, feels dissonance." (Opp 1988, pp. 217 and 220; cf. Opp 1985, pp. 235-236).

A *systematic* human science treatment based however on the highly comprehensive category "feeling and idea and volition", which is empirically undissociable in its elements, has, because of such high comprehensiveness, the clear possibility of a high explanatory power concerning individual and group preferences, as well as regarding individual and group dissonance, i.e., unpleasantness (disagreeableness). Such a theoretical treatment may even attain a testable axiomatic deterministic proposition (an "always" proposition), for instance: individuals or social groups always want to approach (hence to prefer) that which they think to be prevailing similar to what they accept (prevailing agreeableness of feeling) and always want to separate from (hence not to prefer) that which they think to be prevailing dissimilar to what they accept (prevailing disagreeableness of feeling).

It is not necessary to state that the group reference of such an axiom (postulate) is not restricted to social microgroups, but embraces groups of any size (naturally social groups cannot act but by means of individuals, that carry the group patterns and act as their representatives, since groups are no corporeal entities).

Consequently it seems possible to improve that the theoretical stating of deductive arguments, aiming at a so precise as possible human science. Statements describing historical facts, as well as any other specific events, would be then rigorously deduced (and so, rigorously explained) from postulates (most general propositions) and other less general propositions.

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Notes

- ¹ It is experimentally confirmed that similarity is a factor of mental and social approximation (for examples, see Freedman, Carlsmith and Sears 1975, pp. 92-95, Souto 1984, pp. 136-139 and 141).
Durkheim observes however that both similarity *and dissimilarity* may approximate -although this would only occur if dissimilarities complement each other, as in the case of a reciprocal sympathy (and approximation) between a theoretician and a practical man (Durkheim 1960, pp. 17 and 18). This theoretical problem, that might impair law-like deterministic propositions ("always" propositions, as in our postulates), vanishes if similarity is connected with its subjective definition (similarity to what is subjectively accepted). So, in the aforementioned case, both the theoretician and the practical man define the other's characteristics as similar to what they accept and consequently as capable of complementing their own characteristics.
- ² On the explanatory power and the experimental operationalization of the general theoretical model in which is to be included the present tentative sketch of a further theoretical reduction, see Souto 1988, pp. 119-126. For a detailed presentation of that general model, see Souto 1984, *passim*.

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