

The correspondences between Rational Choice Theory, Functionalism, Evolutionary Psychology and Social Constructivism

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Abstract: With the version of Functionalism that affirmed the Interconnection Thesis, Functional Interconnection Thesis, and Explanatory Functional Interconnection Thesis, the Rational Choice Theory, Functionalism, Evolutionary Psychology and Social Constructivism correspond with each-others, as Rational Choice Theory can contribute to justify that the factors of subjective intentionality are compatible with functional explanations, and Functionalism contributed to provide theoretical basis for the theory of evolution psychology and the theory of Social Constructivism. In a way, as philosophical theories of social science, the Rational Choice Theory provided an account of explanation of what human beings are on the metaphysical level, and upon that Functionalism provided the methodological theory for the epistemologies of Evolutionary Psychology and Social Constructivism. Hence, I would like to suggest that the explanatory power of these different theories are interdependent with each-others, with the soundness and problems of one influencing the others on different levels.

1. Introduction

In this essay, I would like to discuss the question of whether the Rational Choice Theory, Functionalism, Evolutionary Psychology and Social Constructivism correspond with each-others. As we learned from Ferejohn and Satz's "Rational Choice and Social Theory", Rational Choice Theory is often taken as a psychological theory that explains human beings' actions in terms of their mental states. A rational choice or action is one in which the agent takes the best available action given the agent's preferences and beliefs. The theory is also usually taken to be an individualistic theory in that it applies directly only to individuals, since only individuals have preferences. We can learn that the Rational Choice Theory has application in any domain where folk psychology has appeal, with the law of diminishing return of the Rational Choice Theory in our minds, which states that in all processes of productions, when one factor of production has been added while all other constants have been held the same, lower incremental per-unit returns will be yielded, we can see that it seems like a promise of making folk psychology more scientific has been offered [1]. Furthermore, with a wide application including on topics of different subjects such as the behaviors of "nation-states", the Rational Choice Theory appeals to has enabled us to explain and predict a wide variety of behaviors, and some remarkable phenomena on the "macro-level" such as the stability of the markets, hence making it useful in formulation of social policies in fields such as the economics in regards of welfares, as Alexander Rosenberg has pointed out in "Philosophy of Social Science", "Problems of Rational Choice Theory" [2].

2. Correlation between Functionalism and the Rational Choice Theory

The suggestion of that the Rational Choice Theory provide a base for Functionalism on the

individual agent level is not a recent one. The Functionalism we talk about here is one that affirmed the Interconnection Thesis, Functional Interconnection Thesis, and Explanatory Functional Interconnection Thesis, correspondingly, functional explanations can be made, though different scholars have given different accounts for what makes a functional explanation. A functional explanation in Cohen's account is an explanation that explains the explanandum--the occurrence of an effect with explanans as the cause or causes which occurred because of their propensities to make the effect occurred, affirming the Interconnection Thesis, Functional Interconnection Thesis, and the Explanatory Functional Interconnection Thesis [3]. An example of a functional explanation in this account would be: The price of a certain product was held still for a period of time in the market, then more purchases of the said products occurred and so the price of it raised for a significant amount, because more purchases have the propensities to make the price of this product raised. In this example, the raising of the price of said product in the market is the explanandum--the occurrence of an effect; the explanans is the occurrences of more purchases of the said products in the market which occurred because they have the propensities to make the price of this product raised, together they make a functional explanation, with the elements in it being as they are because of their contributions to the whole.

Taken notices of critics' opinions of functional explanations, such as the ones of Elster's [4], Kincaid suggested that Cohen's account of functional explanation fails to be a good one for functional explanation, for a various of reasons. First, he thinks it is not necessary for functional explanations, since consequence laws are too strong a requirement for functional explanations, because "Organisms that are mobile probably are so because mobility contributed to fitness. Yet, there is no reason to believe that when mobility would be useful, it comes to exist." Second, he thinks it is not sufficient for functional explanations, since "it is possible for a trait to exist when it is useful without it existing because it is useful." He suggested that the correlations between a being's function and its existence does not establish causation unless we rule out third factors, and since consequence laws are too strong a requirement for functional explanations. Hence, Kincaid developed his own account of functional explanations. Distinguished different usings of Functionalism within different contexts, Kincaid define functional explanations in social sciences as explanations that suggest "A given social practice has certain social effect. When it has that effect, there is some causal mechanism that ensures A continues to exist." [5] An example of a functional explanation in this account would be: Talking gets people's thoughts expressed, and when talking gets people's thoughts expressed, there is some causal mechanism that ensures talking continues to exist.

In my opinions, for functional explanations in Cohen's account and functional explanations in Kincaid's account, intentional agents are required, since the explanandum of the functional explanations here--the society within which social situations occur is after all indeed a system assembled with intentional agents, and claiming that no intentional agents are required for functional explanations might not be the most accurate statement about functional explanations and intentional agents, rather, the intentions of individual intentional agents by themselves would not always qualify as the only and complete sufficient conditions for the occurrences of effects in social sciences. Social agents' subjective intentionalities can be part or whole of the reason why the cause has its propensity to have that effect, why the effect was demanded, or the causal mechanism, hence the factors of subjective intentionality are compatible with functional explanations in these accounts. And here we can draw a correlation between the Rational Choice Theory and Functionalism, because human beings, as rational agents who take the best available actions given the agents' preferences and beliefs, can be deem as ones whose subjective intentionalities qualify to be the cause or causes which occurred because of their propensities to make their effects occurred, or the causal mechanisms that ensure existing social practices continues to exist. An example in which a rational agent's subjective intentionality qualifies to be the cause or causes which occurred because of its propensities to make their effects occurred would be: A person intends to eat, because intending to eat can have the said person eats. An example in which a rational agent's subjective intentionality qualifies to be the causal mechanisms that ensure existing social practices continue to

exist would be the talking case described above. Hence, we can see that if the Rational Choice Theory is true, then it can contribute to justify that social agents' subjective intentionalities can be part or whole of the reason why the cause has its propensity to have that effect, why the effect was demanded, or the causal mechanism, making the factors of subjective intentionality are compatible with functional explanations. Now that we saw the correlation between Functionalism and the Rational Choice Theory, I would like to move on to analyze the correlations they have with Evolutionary Psychology.

3. The theoretical basis for the theory of Evolutionary Psychology that Functionalism contributed to provide

As we can learn from Laland and Brown's article, trying to use the theory of evolution to study human behaviors, evolutionary psychologists stressed that contemporary human populations live in an environment that is drastically different from the environment in which contemporary human populations' ancestors live, suggesting that there are mismatches between contemporary human population's psychological adaptations and the modern artificially constructed world they currently live in, suggesting that "our modern skulls house stone age minds" [6]. I suggest that Functionalism contributed to provide theoretical basis for the theory of evolution psychology. Evolutionary Psychology has came up with several distinctive theoretical concepts with their arguments, three of them are discussed in Laland and Brown's article: evolved psychological mechanisms as the adaptations that underlies human behaviors; the environment of evolutionary adaptedness, a concept used to reconstruct the adaptive problems faced by contemporary human populations' ancestors; and the domain-specific mental organs, as evolved solutions to ancestral problems [6]. With these key concepts, Tooby and Cosmides have developed their methods of Evolutionary Psychology, with steps that researchers must go through to do Evolutionary Psychology [7]. With the key concepts and methods of Evolutionary Psychology, corresponding explanations can be developed in many cases. In my opinions, in a way the reasonings of the theory of Evolutionary Psychology can be understood as a functional one: Domain-specific mental organs, as evolved solutions and evolved psychological mechanisms as the adaptations that underlies human behaviors occurred to evolve, because they have propensities to make their effects--solving ancestral problems occurred; or, their effects of solving ancestral problems ensure existing domain-specific mental organs, as evolved solutions and evolved psychological mechanisms as the adaptations that underlies human behaviors continues to exist. If it is true that explanations given in accordance with Evolutionary Psychology are functional ones, affirming the Interconnection Thesis, Functional Interconnection Thesis, and Explanatory Functional Interconnection Thesis, then I think the claim that suggests that Functionalism contributed to provide theoretical basis for the theory of evolution psychology can be fortified.

4. The theoretical basis for the theory of Social Constructivism that Functionalism contributed to provide

Can any correlation be established between Functionalism and Social Constructivism? Saying that "Something is a social construction in the generic sense if it is an intended or unintended product of a social practice"; "A socially constructed object is the way it is, at least in part because what is attributed (and/or self-attributed) to it"; "a classificatory apparatus (be it a full-blown classification scheme or just a conceptual distinction or descriptive term) is socially constructed just in case its use is determined, at least in part, by social factors" [8], Sally Haslanger has given us her definitions of three different kinds of social constructions: Generic social construction, discursive construction, like the constructions of individual women and cool dudes, and pragmatic construction, with the strong ones being like women's nature and intrinsic coolness, and the weak ones being like the distinction between men and women, between males and females, and the distinctions between people who wear black t-shirts more than once a week and those who don't. With her theory, Haslanger has made attempts to examine the argument that suggests the idea of

objective reality is a kind of social projection, and reached the conclusion that there are significant possibility that the terms we use are defined by and in the interest of dominant social groups, our points of views might always be socially conditioned [8].

In “The Social Construction of What?” [8], Hacking suggested that there are three “sticking points”: Contingency, nominalism and external explanations of stability, in the debates between social constructivists and those who oppose them, Hacking has composed his own approach to analyze constructivism. Saying that “to say X is constructed, is to say that it is not ‘in the nature of things’, not inevitable, perhaps, could have been otherwise”, Hacking has Categorized constructed things in three categories: Individual objects for ones such as an individual woman refugee; Concepts, ideas, conceptual schemes for ones such as undocumented worker; “Elevator terms”, the meta-level terms to talk about the things in the first two categories, for things such as facts, truth and reality. With this three categories, Hacking made the distinction between “interactive” and “indifferent” kinds, a distinction he suggests that is fundamental to the difference between the social and natural sciences, with social sciences belong to the interactive kind as things studied in social sciences are aware of how they are classified and interact with their classifications, making “looping effects”, while natural sciences belong to indifferent kind as things studied in natural sciences are aware of how they are classified and do not interact with their classifications. Distinguished natural and social sciences this way, Hacking suggested that things that belongs to the indifferent kind are real and not necessarily socially constructed, while things--objects that belongs to the interactive kind are socially constructed [8].

With these information about Social Constructivism, I would like to suggest that its reasonings are functional ones as well, if we perceive them in this way: Objects that belong to the interactive kinds are socially constructed and are the ways they are at least in part because what are attributed (and/or self-attributed) to them, or just in case their use are determined, at least in part, by social factors, because they have propensities to make their effects--serving the interests of dominant social groups occurred; or, their effects of serving the interests of dominant social groups ensure existing objects that belong to the interactive kinds are socially constructed and are the way they are at least in part because what are attributed (and/or self-attributed) to them, or just in case its use is determined, at least in part, by social factor continue to exist. If it is true that explanations given in accordance with Social Constructivism are functional ones, affirming the Interconnection Thesis, Functional Interconnection Thesis, and Explanatory Functional Interconnection Thesis, then I think the claim that suggests that Functionalism contributed to provide theoretical basis for the theory of Social Constructivism can be fortified.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, as discussed in this essay, I find that the Rational Choice Theory, Functionalism, Evolutionary Psychology and Social Constructivism correspond with each-others, as Rational Choice Theory can contribute to justify that the factors of subjective intentionality are compatible with functional explanations, and Functionalism contributed to provide theoretical basis for the theory of evolution psychology and the theory of Social Constructivism. In a way, as philosophical theories of social science, the Rational Choice Theory provided an account of explanation of what human beings are on the metaphysical level, and upon that Functionalism provided the methodological theory for the epistemologies of Evolutionary Psychology and Social Constructivism. Hence, I would like to suggest that the explanatory power of these different theories are interdependent with each-others, with the soundness and problems of one influencing the others on different levels, and for one to learn about any one of them, it would be beneficial for one to learn about all of them.

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