

Respuesta

Response

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I thank my Spanish colleagues for their insightful comments on the theory of Intellectual Ritual Chains.

Juan Manuel Iranzo raises some difficulties with the concept of emotional energy [EE]. I agree with his point that EE is a global emotional complex rather than a distinct emotion; some specialists in emotion have suggested that EE should be regarded as a mood, rather than an emotion. The trouble is there is much less research on moods than on emotions; and the term, emotion, is preferable since is now connected to a growing body of theory and research which is becoming central to human cognition and motivation. Also a word like “mood-energy” would be even stranger than EE. Happily, Iranzo contributes an impressive sketch, integrating neuro-physiological research with emotional processes and the social action of interaction rituals. Iranzo’s statement helps to move us forward towards a solution of how to study EE in a more adequate manner.

Iranzo also questions whether IRC theory adequately explains which particular symbol becomes the emblem of collective identity. My theoretical argument is that this is arbitrary in content, but the social choice is determined by the collective focus of attention, initially in an IR that is successful in building collective effervescence, and then reinforced when the IR is repeated many times. Why Jesus rather than John the Baptist, or others? On this level of analysis, we must study the chain of interactions over time, to see which one has the greatest success in building emotional solidarity. In this case, the IRs carried out by John the Baptist led directly into those surrounding Jesus; the sacredness of John the Baptist is transferred and eclipsed by the sacredness of Jesus. This is also a network effect, as the crowds that surrounded John the Baptist are some of the same people who surrounded Jesus.

These chains can go on for many years, even hundreds of years, and during that time the emotions connected to a particular symbol can become transferred to another symbol — from the person of Jesus, for instance, to the sign of the cross (which becomes more central during the period of the martyrs), and centuries later to the person of the Blessed Virgin

Mary, and so onwards. The emotional strength — and sometimes the diminishing attraction — of a symbol must be analyzed historically, in what is now referred to as path dependence. This should be an analytical history, concentrating on the history of social gatherings, and whether they maintain a chain of emotionally successful IRs, or on the other hand, failing IRs or weak IRs which lose attention in the competition with new social movements and their rituals. It is in this sense that I have argued for a micro-history, a history of IR chains.

Miguel Beltrán Villalva questions my radical micro-translation of macro-sociology, emphasizing that without the alternative explanatory pathway from macro to micro, one cannot understand the contents of socialization, differences of class, or the origins of conflicts. Role theory, in contrast to situational interaction rituals, presents the macro-to-micro connection because the roles are already socially defined, the dramatic script already written. My response is a pragmatic one. This is not an ontological question — do roles really exist? Do macro-structures (social class, economic property, cultural forms, etc.) really exist? In a manner of speaking, yes; in another manner, they are all ways of talking about large numbers of micro-situational interactions which repeat and which chain together so that micro-actions in one time and place have effects elsewhere, and are effected by what happens elsewhere in these chains. For a long time social theory did not worry about these questions, and treated social “things” as if they were solid objects, because we express them in nouns. Then Garfinkel, radically, pointed out they are only verbal glosses, tacit understandings that people invoke in conversations; and Blumer challenged his students to point empirically to a social class, an organization, a structure — where do you see it? What does it look like? In empirical reality, the world only meets us on the level of immediate micro-encounters. All macro structure is put together from aggregating these micro-encounters, even if this is expressed in the form of statistics, which are collected by someone asking questions to particular people and going through the micro-activity of creating mathematics.

To be sure, pragmatically, it is much easier for us to talk about macro “things” rather than to reconstruct these huge networks of micro-encounters from which they are built. What does radical micro-sociology offer us, then, except a lot of tedious detail that obscures the big patterns across time and space? This was the most important criticism against the ethnomethodologists — that they were useless for the big questions, and boring in their infinite detail. So the practical challenge for radical micro-sociology is to show how it provides key mechanisms for such things as social classes, for class conflict or stability, for political power or breakdown into revolution, etc.

I have attempted to do this in a series of steps: First, to formulate clearly the Durkheimian mechanism which produces variations in social solidarity, in cultural symbols, in motivational energy, and in morality — i.e. the “glue” that holds groups together, and that fill our thinking, and give us our motivations to act. In other words, these are the mechanisms that make the link from one micro situation to another, and thereby link together the macro structure. Second, to emphasize the variables which cause changes in micro-situations, and therefore which cause changes in macro-structures. Radical micro-sociology does not try to be a-historical (in the manner of the ethnomethodologists), but instead to understand history with an x-ray vision. History is a flow of manners which are including and excluding, and

thus make up the everyday life of social classes, religious groups, national/ethnic groups, organized power groups; and these lines of exclusion are one of the major causes of conflict. History is also a series of events, most of which have a low level of emotion, routine and self-reproducing. But at some moments, the micro-flows of groups build into larger networks, larger concentrations of attention and emotion — then we have social movements, crowds, confrontations, scandals, political dramas, breakdowns and revolutions. Radical micro-sociology, through the mechanism of IR chains, attempts to make clear the dynamic mechanisms of macro-change, and therefore also of times of macro-stability.

The same issue arises in my current work, on the sociology of violence. The first volume on this work [*Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*, Princeton Univ. Press, 2008] looks very closely at violent interactions, and proposes some emotional mechanisms that make violence succeed or fail. In further work now going on, I am attempting to use these micro-mechanisms of violence to explain larger macro patterns. Will this strategy of explanation be successful? We shall see.

José Luis Moreno Pestaña juxtaposes my analysis in *Sociology of Philosophies*, with the method of *Interaction Ritual Chains*. A central problem is that, on one level of analysis, any intellectual field is organized by its conflicts; and the law of small numbers — found throughout the history of philosophy — indicates that these conflicts will continue to apply to sociology. But IRC attempts to integrate the field (at least in micro-sociology), bringing together the lines of research from Symbolic Interactionism and from Durkheimian ritual analysis, strengthening this composite theory with many kinds of empirical research. This cuts against the NeoKantian and Weberian tradition of theoretical concepts as merely provisional, partial and self-consciously ironic, a tradition which fits well with the law of small numbers, of endless conflicts between rival paradigms. Does IRC abandon this level of reflexive self-knowledge, and shift to a kind of scientific imperialism?

I am tempted to say, that when you are inside an intellectual field, you do what you have to do. While we are building a theory and trying to make it work to its maximum extent with both old and new research, we get the most energy and the most success by keeping our focus of concentration. One becomes monomaniac, rather than reflexively setting limits on what one can expect to accomplish. On this level, this ambitious energy — the high EE that a successful research field builds — pushes towards a systematic explanatory theory; and this theoretical ambition has a pragmatic value. Systematic theory is a way of symbolically uniting an alliance of many researchers, a coalition in the mind, since the theoretical organization shows how different pieces of research support each other, and open up new possibilities, new creative combinations for future research. Pragmatically, the strongest intellectual alliance is expressed in the clearest explanatory theory, for this makes the links between one piece of research and another the clearest; and a clear theory of what causes what, what are the links and mechanisms, invites more participants to add to the theory, but also to attack particular parts of the theory, with the confidence that the attacks may add an improvement that makes weak links into stronger links.

In this sense, I believe that a bold theory is the path to the most successful theory. In contrast, theories which are self-consciously vague, incomplete, or convoluted, are pursuing a different social strategy in the network of intellectuals. For instance, post-structuralist or

deconstructionist theory is deliberately difficult in its concepts and argumentation; it is a strategy of eliteness, of excluding participants from its network who do not play the acrobatic balancing act on the reflexive-epistemological level. My point is that what level one chooses is not a matter of epistemological necessity; it is a pragmatic choice, a strategy. When one writes the history of philosophy, especially from the reflexive vantage point of a sociology of intellectual networks, of course one must enter to some extent into the reflexivity game. But when one writes inside sociology, attempting to build a comprehensive and realistic theory of the dynamics of micro-interaction, the best pragmatic choice — at least it is my pragmatic choice — is to push as energetically as possible for the maximal amount of explanation, and the maximal amount of alliance between one part of the research network and another. This is only one possible choice; many symbolic interactionists choose to play a more reflexive, self-limiting game; and the ethnomethodologists at one time were strong enemies of systematic empirical explanation, although ironically the branch of ethnomethodology which has survived best is conversation analysis, which has become very systematic in a limited empirical area.

Since these are pragmatic choices, we can move back and forth among them at different times. On one level, the Neo-Kantians are correct; there are always multiple perspectives that can be taken; and no one of them will exhaust reality. On another level, this is a hopeful point for intellectuals who do research in sociology; even as the number of intellectuals increases (with the expansion of universities, etc.), there will always be possible new problems for them to make their intellectual careers upon. But for now, where we are in the midst of an intellectual field, we can concentrate our attention on what we can accomplish on the immediate horizon, and say, full speed ahead!