

Choosing Social Science Paradigms

Merging Disciplines

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Editor's Note: If part of the job of the scholar is to evaluate paradigms in the disciplines, interdisciplinary thinking should produce that skill. We have included this piece by Professor Etzioni because it exemplifies paradigm evaluation.

The dialogue between the prevailing and the challenging social science paradigms builds on basic differences in social philosophy: the two positions contain divergent views of human nature (are people basically knaves or nobles?) and of social order (are individuals naturally harmonious—or is man wolf to man?).

While not every neoclassicist who works on wage differentials or saving rates subscribes to the social philosophy of Adam Smith's invisible hand and to its *laissez-faire* implications, these concepts obviously lie at the base of the prevailing neoclassical paradigm. Sociologists refer to the implied view of the person as "undersocialized" because individuals are assumed to be the effective actors, able to act independently and to be psychologically complete unto themselves. It is a view of the social order as resting on the marketplace, as basically composed of individual transactions (even if those are of households and small firms), and as basically self-regulating. The state has a minimal and negative role. If this view recognizes the role of the community at all, it plays no role in the main frame of the paradigm. "The community is a fictitious body, composed

of . . . individual persons." (Bentham, 1960 Chapter 1, paragraph 2.) Here lies the deeper root of the view of economics not as a science that deals with goods and services but with the logic of choice (Barry, 1978, p. 5). Whose choice? Neoclassicists answer: That of unfettered individuals.

The historical roots of this social philosophy of radical individualism explain much about its slant. It was promulgated and advanced by a political movement of intellectuals referred to as Whigs (in those days, "liberals"), in opposition to an authoritarian monarchy and a tightly woven society that imposed its moral code via the established religion. While Whigs embraced many other ideas, the essence of their position continues to have influence in contemporary social sciences, in intellectual circles, and in the public-at-large, long after the historical circumstances against

which the original Whigs railed have vanished. Leading contemporary Whigs include Friedrich Von Hayek, Milton Friedman, and Robert Nozick.

Historically, the main challenge to the Whig's worldview, that underlies the neoclassical paradigm, has been, not the recent liberal notion of a significant and positive role of the state, but the social-conservative, Tory, view that considers community and authority as social foundations. Here the nation, the fatherland, the church, or society take priority over the individual. While *laissez-faire* Whigs perceive the state to be created by individuals, for individuals, Tory conservatives view the community as a body into which individual cells are incorporated. Individuals are assumed to be born with unsavory predispositions and not at all inclined to live harmoniously with one another. They must be inoculated with values to develop their moral character, and authority is needed to keep on the lid of social order. The danger of mob anarchy is seen as greater than that of authoritarianism.

Sociologists refer to this collectivist "Tory" view as the "oversocialized" view of human nature (Wrong, 1961). Historically it preceded the Whigs; it was the medieval social philosophy of the church and the monarchy that, at the onset of modernity, argued against claims for individual rights and those of new, rising classes. It is at the root of Emile Durkheim's main works, Talcott Parsons's sociology, some branches of political science (especially

that of Leo Strauss), and a good part of anthropology.

Durkheim argued that morality is a system of rules and values provided by society, embedded in its culture, and that individual children acquire these as part of the general transmission of culture. Non-rational processes, such as identification with parents, play a key role. (Durkheim developed this position in direct response and opposition to the utilitarian view that moral values were the product of individual adults, and their intelligent judgment of other adults' actions.

For Parsons, the core concept is functionalism: the acts of individuals are, in effect, evaluated in terms of their contribution to the social order, which in turn is introduced into the individuals via socialization, and reinforced by social control. These concepts do not exactly parallel but reflect the notions of a strong community (focused around one set of ultimate values, drawing on tightly knit social relations) and a potent state (to reinforce the values of the community). Typically, authority in this context is viewed as legitimate power. A wit suggested that while economics shows us how to make choices, sociology shows us that we have none. That is not quite a correct rendition of the two disciplines, but it does apply to the ideal type of Whig and Tory positions.

The centuries-old tug-of-war between these Whig and Tory worldviews, and their effects on social science paradigms, are far from defunct. See, for example, the treatment of trust. Trust would seem at first to be one of those typical Tory social-scientist concepts that Whiggish economists may assume exist but need not bother to explain. Trust, of course, is pivotal to the economy, and not merely to social relations, as, without it, currency will not be used, saving makes no sense, and transactions costs rise precipitously; in short, it is hard to conceive a modern economy without a strong element of trust running through it. But when one asks what accounts for the extent to which individuals do trust one another, and for the level of trust in society, the differences between the two worldviews come into sharp relief.

Tory social scientists have a simple answer: trust is a value with which youngsters are inoculated by their "socialization agents" (parents, educators, peers). Those who violate the value are either re-educated to embrace it, or punished until they abide by it, and others are deterred from transgressing. Whiggish economists see trust as arising out of previous transactions, based on rational calculations and efficient "rules of thumb." For example, if A is your customer, and you verified his credit worthiness for the last N transactions, it is rational to skip checking it the N + 1 time (assuming the transactions are relatively small and the costs of checking

are relatively high). Thus, to Whigs a high level of trust reflects not successful socialization but either numerous prior reiterations, small stakes, or high verification costs. The differences in perspective, illustrated by their perspectives on trust, hold for a myriad of other such concepts encompassed by the two paradigms.

I&We, The Responsive Community. I want to advance a third position. Its social philosophical foundation may be characterized as the responsive community, or, in deference to my master-teacher, Martin Buber, the "I&We" view. At the core is the assumption of creative tension and perpetual search for balance between two primary forces—those of the individual, and those of the community, of which they are members. If one views the community as merely an aggregation of individuals temporarily joined for their convenience, one leaves out the need for commitment to serve shared needs and for involvement in the community that attends to these needs. If one sees the community as the source of authority and legitimacy, and seeks, in the name of duty, to impose behavioral standards on individuals—and on oneself—this leaves an insufficient basis for individual freedom and other individual rights. It also prevents the community from being creative and responsive to a changing world, by constricting the evolution of differing positions, which could in time replace the community's dominant values, thereby benefitting it.

The term *responsive community* is used to accord full status both to individuals and to their shared union. A responsive community is much more integrated than an aggregate of self-maximizing individuals; however, it is much less hierarchical and much less structured and "socializing," than an authoritarian community. We need to reject the Hobbesian notion that individuals must subordinate their basic rights as a prerequisite for security. Threats to security are not so high as to require that we all yield to the Leviathan to shield us. Nor can we build on the Lockean notion that all rights are vested in individuals, who may or may not wish to delegate some of these rights, on the basis of their deliberations, to a community. *Individuals and community are both completely essential, and hence have the same fundamental standing.*

From this synthesis there results an unavoidable, indeed a deeply productive tension between the two basic elements of the responsive community. Individuals may pull to diminish the community; the community may pull excessively to incorporate individuals. But if neither element gains ascendancy, and if the excesses of one are corrected by shoring up the other, a balanced, responsive community may be sustained. Schopenhauer is credited with the aphorism that people are like porcupines in

the cold: they freeze if they get too far apart, but stick each other if they get too close.

As a first approximation, the discussion so far has used the traditional reference to individuals and to the community as two clearly distinct entities. In this terminology it makes sense to refer to assemblages of individuals deciding to form a polity, and to discuss aggregates of individuals without community, for example in exploring the notion of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." However, a basic insight of sociology and psychology is that this concept of an individual is an optical illusion. *The individual and the community make each other and require each other.* The society is not a "constraint," not even an "opportunity"; *it is us.* (Radicals may say that "the" society is not of the people, but imposed on them. If enough people share this view, they may change the society to be more "theirs." Hence, while any particular societal structure may be viewed by some as imposed, society in principle is ours and part of us.)

While it is possible to think abstractly about individuals apart from a community, if individuals were actually without community, they would have very few of the attributes commonly associated with the notion of an individual person. Such individuals typically are mentally unstable, impulsive, prone to suicide, and otherwise mentally and psychosomatically ill. Certainly such isolated individuals have little in common with the level-headed maximizers assumed by the Whiggish neoclassical paradigm. The I's need a We to be.

Misplaced Liberty. The significance of viewing individuals as members of social collectivities (such as ethnic groups and local communities) rather than as free-standing beings, is highlighted by the different treatment accorded to liberty in the neoclassical and the I&We paradigms.

At the core of the neoclassical paradigm is the assumption that freestanding individuals are the decision-making unit, the actors. This is much more than a working hypothesis; it is an article of faith grounded in a deep commitment to the value of liberty. Neoclassicists argue that if one assumes that the preferences of individuals can be manipulated or changed by social forces, one undermines the foundations of liberty—the notion that each individual is able to render decisions on his own. This is the reason neoclassicists assume that preferences are given, why they ignore the effects of education, of persuasion (including persuasive advertising), and the role of leadership, as if economic man was a biological-psychological miracle, born fully formed, say in his mid-twenties (Maital and Maital, 1984, p. 65) with his preferences "immaculately conceived" (as Kenneth Boulding put it to a 1985 George Washington University Seminar on socio-

economics).

The same commitment to liberty is at the root of the assumption of consumer sovereignty and the tendency of neoclassical economists to disregard the role of class, power, and societal structures. Typical neoclassicists argue that people know best what is best for them, and hence should not be interfered with by the government. However, to recognize that people's preferences are in part socially shaped is not to argue for a government to make decisions for them, but to acknowledge the need to deal in one's theory with significant historical, cultural, and societal forces. Only when these are allowed into one's paradigm can a systematic search begin for the conditions under which liberty may be protected from—or enhanced by—these forces.

The insights and findings of psychologists and sociologists indicate that individuals who are typically cut-off and isolated, the actors of the neoclassical world, are unable to act freely, while they find that individuals who are bonded into comprehensive and stable relationships, and into cohesive groups and communities, are much more able to make sensible choices, to render judgment, and be free. Indeed, the greatest danger for liberty arises when the social moorings of individuals are cut. The atomization of the individuals, the reduction of communities into mobs, which resulted in the individuals' loss of competence, of their capacity to reason, and their self-identity is the societal condition that has preceded the rise of totalitarian movements and governments. The best protection against totalitarianism is a pluralistic society laced with communities and voluntary associations, as observed so keenly

by Alexis de Tocqueville. The I&We paradigm is as much concerned with individual liberties as is the neoclassical. However, it assumes that liberty requires a viable—albeit not overbearing—community, and seeks to study the conditions under which such a community evolves and is sustained.

As we see it, *individuals are neither simply depositories of their society's values nor free agents*. They struggle to form their individual course, both building on and fending off the values their societies set, never free of them, yet never mere subjects. Similarly, on the macro or societal level, competition is beneficial as long as it is properly embedded in a supportive societal context, which ensures that the prerequisites of competition are met while limiting its scope. That is, social order is not the result of imposition by authority, or an aggregation of individual pursuits, but a community setting within which people are free, and without which they are not, and within which they continuously vie over the borderline between freedom and order.

While some individuals may be over-socialized, say, to the point they lose their self-identity and self-control in the We of a charismatic social movement, while some others are undersocialized, often deviant, criminal or insane—society requires a balance, and builds on properly socialized individuals. These individuals balance shared and self needs, respond to internalized values, but are also able to calculate consequences. To be properly socialized does not mean that one is unable to compete, act rationally, or to be self-oriented; there are areas in which such behavior is compatible with the community's values. However, in each such area there are moral

limits beyond which such behavior may not be carried (for instance, those embedded in the "rules of the game," in sports, politics, and in the economy). And, there are significant differences among sub-areas of behavior as to the appropriate mix of the two modes of behavior (e.g., within the family or among friends, vs. at work). Hence, it might be useful to think about competition/cooperation ratios, and ratio differences among areas of behavior, noting that proper socialization never favors all-out competition.

While a thorough analysis of the reasons for the need for a new social science paradigm would require looking at every aspect of human social behavior to ascertain where inadequacies lie, it should be obvious that interdisciplinary thinking about new social science paradigms is very much needed. **NI**

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Sources

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