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ARTICLE DE RECHERCHE

Necessity of a Unified Field Theory of Power and Social Interaction

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Résumé

Cet article discute de la nécessité d'une théorie unificatrice du domaine qui peut expliquer l'interaction sociale dans les conflits sans l'encombrement des interprétations symboliques et des modèles interactifs normatifs fixes. L'utilisation du pouvoir comme champ de filtrage et son interface systématique avec les besoins humains comme prétexte au déplacement des normes sociales à un niveau micro ou macro sociologique sont discutés en utilisant l'arène de la guerre comme outil descriptif. Il est entendu que des recherches quantifiables sont nécessaires à l'avenir.

Mots-clés :

Abstract

This paper discusses the need for a unifying field theory that can explain social interaction in conflict without the encumbrance of symbolic interpretations and fixed normative interactive patterns. The use of power as a filtering field and its systematic interface with human needs as a pretense to the shifting of social norms on a micro or macro sociological level is discussed using the arena of war as a descriptive tool. It is understood that quantifiable research is necessary in the future.

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Introduction

The purpose of any theory is to try to explain the probable causes of phenomena occurring within specified parameters of action and independent environmental influences. A theory must also have a certain predictive capacity inherent to its purpose otherwise, it is not allowed into the realm of homothetics merely occupying and not contributing to academic progress. Social scientific inquiry was founded upon this predictive capacity and in its pre-modern genesis was not subject to the elements of Gidden's structuration (Ritzer, 2008) although served as the positivistic foundation of public policy and social action. Indeed, social theory was often quite simplistic not being the beneficiary of post-modern reflexivity (Giddens, 1987). However, the post-modern world is much more complex than when the early social theorists were developing their concepts of social action and often the influences of their work hinder a comprehensive understanding of how the social system truly operates within its self-replicative pursuits. Functionalism was founded upon the organic pretense of the natural sciences seeing its way into the constructs of St. Simon, Comte, Durkheim, and Weber. Even in the 1950's, when more radical times and minds like C. Wright Mills tried to dislodge the notion of functionalism as a panacea to the explanation of social action, the reification of the social system having characteristics of a sentient thing or as a reflection of its human parts persisted in the writings of Talcott Parsons (1968). The closest exit door to this organic theater was to be found in Durkheim's description of the social fact (Durkheim, 1982) as an interface between humankind, uncontrollable outside forces and the consequences inherent to their meeting. Modernism did not offer too much more in the quest for a comprehensive and unified explanation of social interaction. Each theorist developed thoughts that were more stand-alone in their contribution as opposed to an integrative explanation of so-

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cial interaction. The theoretical lens of functionalism, conflict, symbolic interactionism and their offspring were niche theories. Each was reflective of the theoretical epoch in which it was developed and was limited by its own lack of reflexivity to social change. A comprehensive examination of social theory shows certain linearity to its development that fails in its primary task of explaining how we are and how we continue to be. Any unified theory should cut across structural and politicaleconomic lines to serve as a baseline for comparison on a broader scale than is currently being offered in academic circles. This was done by Habermas (1975) where he discusses a baseline of undistorted communication was compared to

modern synthetics created by technologies. Marx (1854) also set a baseline for homothetic comparison in his political goal of undisputed work in communism. However, again each theory was true to itself and lacked the necessary application to a broader and evolving social field. Much of the reason for this myopia is the protectionism seen between individual sociologists, each trying to become the standout performer in a very competitive field. What this paper will try to develop, albeit in a very primitive configuration, is a unified theory of social interaction that incorporates the theoretical lenses of several historic and contemporary works representative of the range of social inquiry; functionalism, conflict theory seen in Marxist and neo-Marxian comment, and postmodernism through the eyes of Habermas, Simmel, Mead and Giddens. The paper will also incorporate a micro level of analysis in looking at eh significance of human needs in the justification for participation in conflict. This in itself is a daunting task indeed, but one that is the result of the perfect storm of post-modern influences and a need for a newer broad based paradigm. The muse this theory will be built upon is the myth of war perpetrated by the power elite and the conflict that results when this myth is shattered by the process Giddens (1987) calls reflexivity.

The Myth of War

Dante's inner circle of hell, has served as an apt description of internecine military conflict over ten thousand years of human history. Mephistopheles has permitted global peace to rein for only twenty nine years of that time according to the historian Will Durant (Hedges, 2003). But the concept of war, its motivations and its face have changed. Motivations have changed from a Malthusian paradigm of hunger and land, to St. Augustine's Just War Doctrine that stipulated humankind's responsibilities to God and evolving into an elite quest for a political goal incited by moral panic and synthetic realities perpetrated on those who would fight and die by those who would most profit (Hunt, 1997). It became incumbent upon the political elite then, to establish a social system where the use of deadly force in certain instances was normative and the denial of this force regarded as deviant by those who may well participate in its prosecution. The value system in which these norms were embedded ran counter to other established rules that declared killing anathema and actionable in the superordinate system of social control (Parsons, 1968). The Pope's sixth century challenge was how to maintain a standing military engaged in the Hegelian paradox of committing a mortal sin while at the same time doing God's work. Working from Roman and Catholic philosophies, Just War Doctrine, the pax dei

and the tregua dei (Aquinas, 1274) provided the ammunition needed to kill in the name of God while vanquishing evil became a cultural landmark. From that point on, Christians served in the army as a matter of course. One could now love his enemies, but in a merciful war waged by the good, it did not prohibit them from killing their enemies as well. Giddens (1998) writes that this sentiment is not lost on a post-modern society that still must overcome humankind's natural passivity. Those who waged the war must still pursue an attempt to influence the public's normative interpretation of right and wrong and to give value to inter arma silent legens, "in time of war the law is silent". Michael Mann labels this "ideological power" in that whoever monopolistically owns the definition of a norm, and also possesses the means for its enforcement controls that aspect of social action legitimately and by consensus. It is still necessary for the political elite to retain legitimate authority for the use and maintenance of military resources from the citizenry of a western democracy by establishing the use of untrammeled violence as a manifestation of nationalism and the pursuit of good as a normative position (Shaw, 2007). The question is how this is accomplished.

A Brief Sociology of War

Carl von Clausewitz seminal work, "On War", (Roxborough, 1994) is considered the cornerstone of contemporary military theory to include a new sociology of conflict. Clausewitz wrote during the time of the Napoleonic campaigns where the instruments of destruction were changing from a preindustrial to an industrial configuration. Along with this change came the Faustian element of multivariate expense that made private wars waged by the elite prohibitive. Industrialization made for a new political economy that minimized individual responsibility and creative investment in favor of capitalist development as a mechanism for capital accumulation and extraction by the State (Marx, 1852). In order to procure the troops, weapons and weapon systems necessary to control vast geopolitical holdings, the political elite needed to obtain as much funding as possible. In the rural areas, Rassler (1985) speaks of coercive extraction needed in rural areas while in the urban areas, Tilly (1994) speaks to tribute-taking extraction; each dependent upon the concentration of the economic elite but each critical for military power. The process for the extraction of resources from the people evolved from tyrannical to participative. The appearance of participatory contribution came in

two steps incumbent upon the elite. First, it was essential to identify concentrations of wealth (or its mere presence) in both urban and rural settings. Second, the participants had to be convinced, or the normative line drawn that this contribution was necessary, just, and that a return at some level was assured. How to convince the people to of their own accord surrender their financial and personal holdings remained a problematic (Scruton, 1994). It was only parenthetically addressed by social theorists like Comte, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber who maintained the position that the needs necessitating armed conflict would be reduced to immaterial with continued development of technology and its implied consensus that provided for basal human needs. Immanuel Kant was a bit more succinct when he hypothesized that the more democracies at play in the global community, the closer humankind would come to perpetual peace. Contemporary theorists like C. Wright Mills were less optimistic than their earlier counterparts. In his work, "The Causes of World War Three", C. Wright Mills (1958) maintained that competition for power and global hegemony would always keep competing ideologies at odds. Further, this competition would be perpetrated by the power elite with the blind allegiance and support of a deluded public. Dahrendorf (1958) supported Mills in his assertion that power as opposed to minimalist economic determinism served as a root cause of internecine conflict. To emote the perception of just (violent) intervention through legitimate authority they knew that the power elite needed to objectively move the normative line of peace, something ad-

dressed by Clausewitz in his later work. Clausewitz spoke of a "war trinity" composed of Reason, Chance, and Passion as elements common to the rational construct of justice and the pursuit of unfettered violence and conflict. First, he considered "reason" a task of the government in determining whether or not the course of war would be 'absolute' or 'limited' in its prosecution. Absolute wars took on a mind of their own and were ultimately uncontrollable, while limited wars were planned and as described later by Weber, an exercise of "intense administration" Weber, (2009). Second, Clausewitz spoke to 'chance' describing the inevitable difficulties, or frictions that plague any planned conflict. His association of chance with field military officers shows his trust in their ability to overcome what friction might arise. Finally, Clausewitz spoke of 'passion', which he associated with the rage and hatred of soldiers in response to the enmity, and mythic presumptions that surround all war participants. The animus of primitive wars revolved around the vengeance of the aggressed in retaliation of family and invasive carnage. Postindustrial warfare became increasingly complex with the size and nature of

geopolitical positions held by Nation-States. With this complexity came the subsequent cost of weapons and weapon systems, a necessity in the prosecution of a war of efficiency and (social) impact (Foucault, 1979). An ideology of voluntary service to the States had to be developed parallel to the fog of absolution offered by the church doctrine. Wars were now fought for ideological principles and as a first step by the State towards voluntary service relied on the demonization of the opposing forces, by the distorted images which in post-modern times are developed by large public relations firms employed by the State (Shaw, 2003). This is clearly an abomination of Habermas' baseline for undistorted communication also a normalization of unjust purposive rational action. The State now became a significant agent of image management (Goffman, 1959) by controlling the information concerning the 'enemy' and its actions in its own pursuit of political goals thus 'creating' a synthetic or mediated reality for those who would serve in some capacity. These images perpetrated and created by the State were necessary to extract resources from a participative public who now demanded accountability and legitimacy. The people must not only be convinced in the spirit of tregua dei and Jus ad Bellum, but also to sacrifice their children and treasure in its pursuit. Again, from Clausewitz (1816), war had indeed become a "business of the people". His statement was to posit the rational direction of war as a whole but at the same time foretold of the State's potentially insidious methodologies to assure the influx of necessary resources by manipulations of fact and the depiction of fiction as fact; clearly a 'dummying down' of society (Marx, 1854). The motivations for war in the post-industrial society were no longer for basic human needs but for basic political wants. Now the political goal was the endpoint and the use of military force was its methodology.

When War Goes Wrong

The Vietnam Syndrome (Ankersen, 2004) was an example of a public emerging from the myth of war. During its tenure, the people maintained a normative line of support for government decisions that escalated US involvement despite intelligence reported by the press in conjunction with the observations of liberal journalists that countered the reality of what they were being told by their elected officials. The key to their emergence was a free press; at that time in US history, a relatively uncensored and purposive line of communication between the battlefield and the American people.

The same situation can be seen in the Iraq war. The Bush administration created a myth (of war) that was supported by a significant percentage of Americans and members of the global community. This was the result of the government's control and manipulation of several primary mass media sources concerning the preparation for and the prosecution of the conflict (Powlick and Katz, 1998). Embedded in those reports was the aforementioned demonization of the enemy State and its people, manufactured yet terrifying institutional associations, and the nuanced image of imminent attack on home soil. Truly, this threatened many levels of Maslow's hierarchy creating a moral panic and completely destabilizing the normative lines of peaceful normative rational action (Habermas, 1984). The world is now asking itself why an earlier emergence from the myth created by the State did not occur. The answers can be found in Marx's observations of worker passivity in the face of management exploitation (1844). He posited that the worker, in this case the volunteers to State service and finance, would not rebel as they were convinced that what management (government) was doing was in the best interest of the worker. This is accomplished through the application of a combination of two power types, ideological and political (Mann, 1960). Ideological power is the ability to monopolize a claim to a meaning, monopolize norms and aesthetic and ritual practices. Clearly, there existed an asymmetry of communicative action (Habermas, 1984) in light of factual revelations. Political Power is the consensual use of resources to enforce punishment and reward and to conduct State business. Use of these resources allows the State to alter the agenda in public conversation through its use of the media (Kastenbaum and Skocpol, 1993). To control these meanings allows one to define and interpret the perceptions of the receiver. Durkheim (1972) observed that in order to control the (political) thought of the electorate, having the ability (by the State) to draw the normative line that defines acceptable behavior is paramount to State power and control. In effect, the political elite are able to define who is deviant and who should be marginalized, and who is conformist. Being a conformist presumes one is making a rational choice to be conformist, thereby perpetuating a synthetic reality as normative accepting the synthetic reality of the State media apparatus. This political and moral ambiguity is then transmitted to other members of the social group assuring the continuance of legitimate authority and the use of military power through a combination of ideological and political power (Keating, 2004). In the early days of the State, the creation and diffusion of the myth was not such as difficult task as the complexity of the population and its conflicts were minimal, often being defined and perceived through bloodlines. The post-modern Nation State is a dispersed polyglot requiring complex technology to accomplish a complex task. It is this complexity, and the non-universal definition of symbols in line with the difficulties inherent to symbolic interactionism as described by Blumer (1969) and others that dooms a State attempting to globalize the myth of war to ultimate failure. However, the methodology of the sequential requirements for myth building elements and the subsequent application of political power is timeless. Human nature has changed little in its need for trust (Habermas, 1984) and other human needs (Maslow, 1943).

A Unified (field) Theory of Social Interaction

(Prelude)

What we know so far in physics is that forces between two objects do not act directly on one another. Instead, they pass through intermediary entities called "fields". Within these fields, a systematic and sequential set of events transpire that eventuates the transfer of power between elementary particles. Our observations only see what appears to be a causal process;

for example, the affect of an electric coil on a magnet. The purpose of a unified (field) theory in physics is to arrive at the description of a common, single field that perpetuates a single set of exchange parameters. This would allow us certain symmetry in viewing not only the cosmos through the general theory of relativity (the macro theory) but the subatomic world of quantum mechanics (the micro theory) using the same conceptual dictionary. The purpose of developing a unified theory of interaction in the social sciences would lend itself to understanding the actions of the global community without the distortions of cultural and historical influence. A unified theory would also lend itself to more powerful predictive tools in the practice of peace and conflict resolution in that a symmetrical theory of interaction would produce a more workable set of diplomatic understandings regardless of symbolic definitions and relevancies, to a certain basal level. The development of this unified theory, then, requires the identification of common practices that have been repeated over observable time in situations as large as international conflict (the macro theory) and as seemingly small as interpersonal relationships (the micro theory). In developing any theory it is first necessary to 1) identify the set of variables we wish to study, 2) establish a baseline for their measurement, i.e., an ideal state,

3) design the parameters in which they will operate, 4) identify a replicated and replicable pattern of activity, and 5) test their applicability to a wide audience of environments. For the purpose of this paper, we will limit ourselves to only the first three criteria. In pursuit of this investigation, it will be agreed that while all other social theories are important in their own right and are integrative at a basic level, that they are only parts of the whole, which will (hopefully) evolve into a new and useful unified theory of social interaction.

Basic Elements of a Unified Theory

1) Power: First, it is essential to understand the essence of nature as it relates to human interaction since it serves as a significant part of all social interactions. The simple definition of this dynamic is one's ability to make another perform as you would have them perform. The methodology for having this occur comes from several types power and from several power centers. The two major types of power are a) force, or the use of physical methods and b) communicative, which encompasses many coercive and non-coercive methods such as persuasion, pathos, ethos and their sub categories (Simmel, 1994). The use of power is the cornerstone of our discussion as it is pervasive into any social interaction; the degree of its influence is not relevant at this stage of the theoretical development but suffice it to say it is linear and quantifiable. However, a reexamination of human interaction and the application of power in its many forms indicates that more than wishing Party to simply 'do' what Other wishes, Party would wish Other to think as s/he does. If this can be accomplished Other can be assured that Party will not at a later date return with similar or more acute conflicts as they are of one mind thanks to an overt strategy applied by Party. This is important and a more efficient use of power likened to Foucault's discussion of prisons and torture being preferred by the State over execution (Foucault, 1979). How Party might exercise this methodological strategy of power in a consistent fashion and one, which might be applied on a broad scale whether or not there is the presence of a manifest conflict is left for future research. It can be hypothesized that one element of that methodology is the breaking down of Other's feeling of safety or self-confidence. This can be accomplished in many (distorted) communicative ways that may seem overtly threatening, or insidious (Folger, et al., 2009). In the context of normal conversation, it can also be unintentional to Party that s/he is doing

it at all, but the results are the same. We can extend this to any speech action between individuals, groups, or organizations (Blau, 1968). (2) Basic Needs: Maslow developed a hierarchy of human needs as a way to underscore and interpret human interaction by providing a set of motivational variables (Maslow, 1943). The pursuit of those needs is to provide a level of predictability manifesting itself in less psychosocial stress. If those needs are threatened, conflict can result and the individual will according to Merton (1938) enter into a series of actions to reduce that strain. He refers to this as Social Strain Theory, but it is resultant of an interaction with the power variable(s) described above. (3) Resetting the Normative Line: Once the basic needs of an individual or organization has been compromised through the exercise of communicative power methods, whether purposive overtly or in the course of casual interaction, Party can attempt to reset the normative line. On a broad scale, when the US was preparing for war in Iraq, the media was flooded with stories of imminent threats from terror groups. Performative language used by Tom Ridge such as, "Al Qaeda is going to hit the US hard…" had as its intent the frightening of the general population; both those who Clausewitz says must provide legitimate authority and funding, as well as those who will fight the war.

The State then instituted a new set of rules that compromised long-standing norms of liberty and freedom. This change to State policy was accepted by the population as normative and remains unchallenged. Those who do question these changes and see a systemic conflict with the State's ideology are labeled and thereby controlled. No legal challenges or social movements are in evidence at this point. We see this same sequencing of events in domestic conflicts as well. One partner breaks down the basal needs of the other and then resets the normative line by overt rule setting or a series of punishments and rewards. The outcome is the same, emotional stability or a sense of 'winning' by the dominant partner. Again, additional research is needed to quantify what on the surface seems intuitive.

The Unifying Field: It would appear that all communications on a micro and macro sociological level pass through the common field of Power. This 'field' will be referred to as a power nexus pervading all human communication both verbal and non-verbal.

In its purest form, it is not dependent upon universal symbolic interaction and interpretation as it attacks the basis of human psychology in compromising Maslow's lowest tier. Following the undermining of these elements, party will seek to redraw a normative line, either singularly or as a multivariate exercise, in order to bring Other over to his or her way of thinking either overtly, or through further interactions. In turn, the repetitive utilization of this methodology will reduce the strain experienced by Party who wishes to (psychosocially) dominate and in a perverted sense Other who believes his or herself to be in the right place in any particular interaction relative to normative role fulfillment. Finally, the use of a unified theory of social interaction while appreciating and recognizing the contribution of earlier theories in conflict and functionalism, also shows them to be inadequate in general explanation and not responsive to rapidly changing social facts. Power is the first field all human interaction passes through on its way to social interpretation and response. The elements within that field, such as the heretofore-addressed "sources of power" outlined by Simmel and Mann only play a small part in its affect on the social action resultant of its interface. A unified field theory of social interaction allows us to see beyond the limitations of

symbols and other significant social facts' influence through socialization as relates to human behavior in the main. Additional research will show this unified field theory far less elusive for the social sciences than it has proven for the physical sciences, although the debate as to its efficacy may approximate its social science cousin.

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