

The 4 Social Actions and Actors: A Fresh Sociology

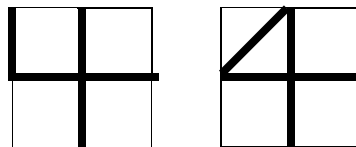
by

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INTRODUCTION

The Sociologist, blown by the wind of the day, must steer the boat between Scylla (the rock) and Charybdis (the whirlpool). Scylla is the always growing pile of data and Charybdis is the never calm whirlpool of judgment. But the modern Sociologist sometimes examines small matters that are obvious to the already observant and other times pontificates like a handmaiden for one group or political “side.” Can we escape those two dangers and sail on through to a light that exposes something real and significant about social life? Can social science actually *be* a science, or does the blasted adjective ‘social’ hung on the noun science doom it to partisanship or obviousness?

This short book attempts a slip through Scylla and Charybdis. We describe a pattern of 4 social actions and 4 social types among which we can always find ourselves and of which our groups and actions are comprised. Although not grammatically preferred, the title of this manuscript uses the *numeral 4* rather than the *word four* because of how the numeral 4 organizes the actions, the words, the discussion, and the examples. On a 2 x 2 grid, the numeral 4 can look either one of these two waysⁱ:



No other digit is so cooperative in gracing each cell of four by virtue of only three straight lines. At the end of this manuscript, we turn to the symbolic and operational tension between 4 and 3.

Either grid above illustrates the separation of two basic forces: Each force divides into two and the two forces cross each other and form a 4 fold table. We find again and again *one* pattern, the *same* pattern—as though it were a fingerprint on our social organization. We see it when we sort individuals into types, when we see individual goal setting and taking action, we see it in the components of every

group, and we see it in many cultural symbols that communicate to our psyches. The pattern is like a fingerprint. We will see it wherever we look.

There are two methods to fortify this 4-fold typology:

First, we attempt to unearth the external *sources* of the two forces so that our pattern of 4 does not float in nothing. It is grounded. It is not a closed “system”; it has an environment.

Second, we attempt to see how the 4 parts work together as a mechanism: what is the pattern of movement of energy within the 4 and what impact does that sequence have on organizational maturity or vibrancy? What directions lead to fissure, ossification, conflict, or decay? This is the tougher test of the two. To name things is relatively simple: we declare new nouns. But to see pieces move together is to see them as verbs: Is there a sequence of dispatch among the cells that leads to growth or decay of a goal or of an entire grouping? Envision this two-part examination of the fingerprint as, first, a separation into 4 nouns and, second, to watch as nouns become verbs.ⁱⁱ The first is classification. The second is change.

Of course, the 4 fold table is an abstraction of parts; it is a “model”. When we hold the model up against social life, we can see it because the lens “distorts” reality in order to capture it. It is a closed system; tautological, self-propelling and self-proving. Is that all, or is there something compelling about the pattern? You be the judge. It is uncanny how many fingerprints are on us. Are the fingerprints on our eyes or within that at which we look? When the physicist looks at light as a wave, she sees the wave whereas when her partner looks at the same light as a particle, he sees particles. That’s the way seeing goes if seeing gives way to words about what it sees. In real life, individuals and social actions occur not as exemplars of a model, but, rather, in their wholeness or entirety. Still, it is illuminating to use a model and repeatedly find the same fingerprint of parts and movement among them. If it cannot lead

us to what “is”—to a “unified theory”—it can, perhaps aid us in avoiding the dangers of Charybdis and declaring what is to be done as if it were science and not a moral decision, an action plan.

A physicist would not say that a Higgs boson should not act the way it does or that those electrons better get in line. A chemist does not root for a certain gas nor does a mathematician vote for one digit over another. But a sociologist frequently makes assumptions that his model or framework allows for his morality as “an expert.” It does not; patterns of human behavior tell us about patterns of human behavior. If you look at human history, you would see that we kill each other a lot. It takes a Moses to say we *should* not do that. To say what we *should* do is an ethical act, not a social scientific discovery.

But besides *is* and *should* there is a *could*. Social science can venture into how we *could* be. To be clear about this simple point, let’s keep it simple and use the body. We know that proper sleep, exercise, and good diet lead to greater health and laziness, sugar and fat, and irregular sleep lead to ailments. Does that mean that we should eat well? Well, *yes if being fit is our stated goal, then we could* eat well for a better body. But when we move to whole groups or total societies or the global totality, things get murky. How to educate our children may be the question. Who’s to say? What’s the goal? How to work in all the special interests besides children: unions, pensions, government, parents, industry that needs workers, households that need trades people, souls and psyches that need art and creativity. Who’s to say what geo-political jig-saw pieces could be re-arranged to form a new picture?

A model with moving pieces can guide the actor or group leader in the willful question of “What is to be done?” Make no mistake about it, however: this is a question of choice, not science. It is a “*could*”, not an “*is*” or a “*should*”. I was tempted to title the manuscript “The Geometry of Democracy”

but it assumes democracy as the end point of human development. Since the close of phase I of the American Exceptionalism movement, we question that

Each person can be classified as one of 4 social types facing other types; each group has 4 components, forces, or functions; each component of a group holds a position facing the three others; each action begins or has its impetus in one of 4 sectors and moves through the other three. So, we have fours within four linked to of fours—like fractals. They move and shift with us as we move within them. In three-dimensional space, the fours have a top and a bottom, so they become cubes within cubes. Thus, the whole is a kaleidoscope of cubic social organization, a medley of fractals. What sort of analysis is this? If each Sociologist could be distilled in his essence and then likened to a painter, Karl Marx might be Rothko (making divisions upon divisions with tension between them), Emile Durkheim might be Raphael (painting the stasis of the dual nature of each being), Weber could be Michelangelo (grand and containing it all), Goffman could be Paul Klee (tinkering around and making a new whole with a bit of this and a bit of that which strain to add up to a big picture), and Bourdieu throws it down like a Pollack and walks all over it. The moving, breathing fractals presented here evoke an Escher. I do not mean to hoist my observations alongside the Sociology greats to lodge a place for myself in the Rushmore of theorists; rather, I call upon the image of Escher simply to convey the nature of the model to the reader.

Simply to name parts is to name parts, but to propose a model which moves is to encourage hypotheses and predictions as we see in the chapter “The Social Pyramid.” You will see no hierarchy in this pyramid, however. This pyramid is built over time by a particular flow of social action. Nouns are the nouns that they are because of their verbing. What does this mean? In his book, “The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,” Emile Durkheim analyzed totemic groups, i.e., groups organized around an extraordinary relationship to one animal or plant. In coming to a conclusion, Durkheim almost but not quite says that the worship of god is the worship of society or that God is society. In the original French,

perhaps he did attain that very statement, but the English translation just toes up to it. The brilliance of what Durkheim accomplishes in this book is his pointings *prior to* this statement. If I say God is society, I make of God a thing and society a thing: two nouns. Durkheim's revelation to us in this dear book is that society is an action: a verb. Society is not only a verb at one point in time; it is a verb that takes continual re-creation or re-enactment. Society is the very active and periodic dividing into a "this" and a "that." It is the act of dividing that creates the sacred. My clan *is* turtle. Then "turtle" is not a turtle, not a thing. It is the spirit which disallows me to eat a turtle at the same time that it allows you (in another clan) to eat that turtle—but you not to eat your pigeon. It is the spark that galvanizes my clan to engage in certain ritual participation and does something else for your clan. It could be argued that in today's world, urban graffiti is ritual enactment. It is that which distinguishes the sacred from the profane; this creation is continually re-affirmed and the paint-overs by social control agents is their own re-creation of their sacred and their profane. These actions are the power that allows me to forget my individuality and also to join as one into a larger force of community. It brings down meaning to a living creature or group. More than a "thing", God is the God-ding. God is a verb—as is society.

God is the human ability to classify, but the classifications are actions in motion, not things. To take another contemporary and controversial example of creation, some people are allowed to use what we gingerly call "the n-word" while others are not. Why? And why do we all get so excited about it? Because the n-word collects (action, verb) in a special way which must be taken in context, in action. Action occurs, defines, stands, moves. If we were to use the n-word to collect and corral a group of individuals, it would, indeed be prejudicial, backwards-looking, and morally wrong. If in some use of the n-word we are revelatory, we are "with" the verb-ing which society is. I once was attempting to make clear to a group of students how social assumptions both form and blind us. I asked the students to categorize me. I waited: would it be "teacher," "woman", "old person", maybe even "old white woman," "hippy"—or what? I was trying to get them to see that their own classification of me would

shape what they would acquire from me. One black student came up with the label on which they all agreed: Head Nigga. She was verb-ing. She revealed. I learned something, and we could move on—with me as Head Nigga. They would respect what I had to say *if* I actually *had* something to say. Maybe “you had to be there”—which is precisely the point. Words and things move.

Durkheim tells us how we think: that we are caught in a pattern of yes: no; I: O; either: or, sacred: profane. To be caught continually before bifurcation is to continually to bifurcate. Existence *is* bifurcating. The doing of it *is* society. And to understand Durkheim’s insistent reminder that we are “duplex” creatures also helps to understand our own lives and choices. We each exist as individuals with individual needs to survive and interest in our survival. We also exist, on another level, as members of groups, which is to say together we ritualize our ... well, our turtle. The group level of existence is sacred; it pulls us up out of ourselves. In a personal relationship, for example, your partner might tell you all about his aches and pains and inner workings including self-doubts and conceits. You listen, you care. And you partly listen and care because when it is your time, you get to speak of yours and he will listen—if only to get his turn again to speak of his. But if a stranger tells you about his constipation, you rebuke it! And you choose not to ritualize your togetherness. With your significant other you listen and you re-create the group continually by engaging in your unique rituals, be it the text before midnight, the evening supper, the anniversary, the agreement about who picks up “Junior” on Thursdays, the way you say “I love you,” or the ritual prayer, or whatever routines keep your group a group. Indeed, falling in love is encountering someone whose private existence you do not mind sharing and with whom you choose to share your privacy; it is that *plus* the working set of rituals that you create that defines and maintains your personal love if you continue them. So it is not that “God is society,” it is that society is the very God-ding that is being done. I may have just lost half my audience by spending time with this distinction, but so it goes. We are not here to create new nouns. We are here to ride some verbs. I shape them into cubic fractals so we can get on and ride.

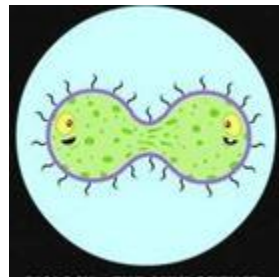
Just a few decades after sweet Durkheim wrote his heart out to train us to grasp the true nature of “the social”, Sociology turned, instead, to political proclamations, condemning social forces the Sociologists themselves thought would not lead to what they saw as ‘good.’ If socialization into cultural traditions was training into a culture of which they did not approve, then socialization was oppression, colonialism, violence, or micro aggression. If socialization was into symbols and words of which they approved, then socialization was invisible to them; they could not see this as “indoctrination.” They also began to attach adjectives to their nouns. Some favored adjectives are: oppressive, discriminatory, colonial, sexist, racist, ageist. The “ist” might fool some into thinking these are scientific terms, but they are largely judgments. The vibrancy of verbs or, rather, verb-ing, to which Durkheim had drawn our attention in order to unlock the essence of Sociology was lost. Scholars’ adjectives strangled the verb-ness of group nature, they also strangled nouns: Sexist voters; racist businesses; and ageist players were found and condemned. Sociology was never granted the “right” to proclaim how to “fix” society, and yet because of the adjective “science” in social science that “right” was sometimes presumed. But the adjective “social” before science urges caution rather than superiority. Max Weber knew this when he spoke so passionately of not bringing bias into the classroom in a cloak of expertise.

August Comte was the token father of “Sociology.” He was a 19th century Positivist. Positivism in his case came to mean that he was positively sure that Sociology was going to save the world by answering how we operate in groups so we could make the right choices. He called Sociology the “Religion of Humanity.” Not so simple, that.

Word smiths may try to erase the political from the conceptual. Utilitarians suggest that we simply opt for the greatest good for the greatest number and we will wiggle out of being moralists. But upon what sub-group does this “good” rest? Is it short term good or long term good? Is it retributive good or current good? Do girls think it is good or do boys think it is good? We each see things our unique way and social life is fueled by what we see; we want to be called what we want to be called, but

when classified by someone else as a type we might squirm to get out of the category. Am I a chick? Depends upon who calls me one. Comte coined the word altruism. He *wanted* there to be altruism. It is safe to say we all do. But what is it? Do we see altruism in romance, marriage, and the family? Do we see it in the administrations of Communists, Fascists, Capitalists, Progressives, or Conservatives? Or is altruism a guiding light, an ideal—a value? Can social scientists analyze value? Is Sociology a guide, a coach, philosophy, an accounting—or is it a science?

Frangere is the verb form of fractal: to make into fractals. Before we frangere our 4s, a note on how we think: there is left, right, front, and back, up down. We two-eyed beings divide into four, and the four becomes six. Here is a telling cartoon caption of the mystery of mitosis of single cell from which we each and all mysteriously emerged:



“Biology – the only science where multiplication and division mean the same thing.” ~ source unknown (internet)

In duality, we are the turtles, you are not. We are the hawks, you are the doves. We are the Lakers, you are the Celtics. This is the sacred, that the profane. There are boys and girls; men, women; old, young; outsiders, insiders; there are extroverts and introverts; first-borns and babies, the strong and the weak, the Alphas, the Betas, the citizens and the foreigners, Madonnas and whores, those in whom kundalini rose and those for whom kundalini remains trapped, Crips and Bloods, short and tall, incarcerated and free, and you and me. All these divisions are fictions at the same time as they grasp at truth. The divisions are shorthand conventions. The shorthand might be false or even hurtful. Boys have feminine qualities, girls are courageous, prisoners can feel free, free people can be bottled up, players get traded, kids grow up, whores can be holy, nuns can be whores—and so on. There are hearty women and femmy

ones; there are straights and gays, blacks and whites and everything in between—young geniuses and old fools. There are; Muslims and Christians, militant and “in name only”. At some level “we are one” and distinctions vanish. This “we are all one” truism may be saccharine and sentimental, but it can comfort and guide us. Typologies are lies; platitudes are bromides. Names organize and inflame. Patterns can blind us, but it helps to know patterns or we can be trapped by them, illusory though they may be. And they are all we have. That we have and use them creates action which is society.

The bifurcating mind does this to us. One begets two and once we have two, we have four. As one wise guy said, “There are two types of people: People who divide people into two types, and people who don’t.” There are seven billion sides to this human world we inhabit, but that daunting truth cannot be contained in the brain, so we “type” and divide and come up with names. It simplifies things and creates possibilities. So a division invokes a re-division, dividing the sub-category into those who strongly represent and others who are darned close to their alleged opposite. So, two becomes four, then the fours become sixes. And the fractals frangere.

Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle (HUP) does not say that we actually *change* reality by looking at it; it is more that our language and mathematics are not quick enough to describe electrons.ⁱⁱⁱ Things are hermetically what they are; you could say the thing releases a word about it, but the word is never the thing. Any written translation from Arabic of The Koran cannot be The Koran. Allah speaks, and that is that—in fact the only way really to digest it is to hear it intoned. Better yet, intone it yourself, and God gets behind your breastbone. That is just the way it is. “New Agers” sometimes conclude from the alleged open season on reality which they think they derive from HUP is that you “get” whatever you visualize if you visualize it correctly: Visualize a sweet parking place, and presto! If one doesn’t appear, you didn’t visualize right. This zigzag upon HUP builds ego or guilt—two residues of “New Age” thinking. We conceptualize (name) because we can—it’s what we do—not because it actually re-produces the empirical world.

Conceptualization is a gate to action. Action may end in satisfaction, balance, frustration, or injustice. The truth remains always beyond our grasp, unspeakable by language and ungraspable by science; science only disproves; it cannot prove. And the good is a by-product of many elements, only partly concepts. Enter, Plato. Justice always remains an ideal rather than a reality. *The square is not this square.* We live in a history of mystery, and it is only as clumsy three dimensional observers that we slog through it to say what we see. Language is the map, not the territory. Georgia O'Keefe in 1976 said, "Colors and shapes make a more definite statement than words." Schepisi made a movie about the issue: "Words and Pictures." Schepisi's answer to the which came first, words or pictures, is love comes first and creates both words and pictures. Is love real or an ideal? If you live with, by, and through the ideal, it becomes real. Love is an up-giving of our lower beings which we continue to drag with us from eons of evolution to a belonging to a group. The only question is which group: just you and me or all humanity?

We must see the brilliance of the stained-glass windows of St. Patrick's cathedral from the inside with the sun shining in. If you only see the windows from the outside, you do not "get it". I learned this from a Cardinal at St. Pat's speaking at a marriage ceremony. In a moment, this manuscript invites you to climb in a six-sided, conceptual cube to see this world from the inside, looking out. The fractals are guides to see and to act. Pre-Copernican? Well ... I just cannot find the telephone wire on which to sit and observe social life from outside of it; I cannot fly up to a place where I am not in society. I am stuck right here in the center of being a three-dimensional human—and so are you.

In a few decades, humans may occupy a world of more than three dimensions. In a cyborg reality, my manufactured arms might operate at a distance from "my" body in such a way that grammar has to stretch too since I will then be co-located, and I will not even know how to use "my" "me" or "mine" any more in this cyber world. Some gender pioneers already shudder at having to use "his" or "her"—and this might extend to me and mine and yours. I might live forever in another dimension, and

I might live with scientific and spiritual assumptions only dreamed of now. Who knows what will guide us when we cut off from roots of evolution and cartwheel deep into multiplicity.

I go on a walk and I am stopped in my tracks by a burst of yellow flowers: “Ahh.” The soul melds into the golden yellow. Someone named them: “Daisies.” Daisies. I step back for the Latin: *bellis perennis* (“pretty everlasting”). Now I am twice removed. Which “is” the flower: the burst, the “Ahh”, the friendly “Daisy” name, or “*bellis perennis*”? Only the daisies are. In the universe as it is—prior to extraction and conceptualization—there are only daisies, daisy-ing. Nouns are verbs; there are no edges, no borders. But for action and amusement, we distinguish: we separate, divide things up, and name. Let’s do some! Enough of this introduction. Let’s get on with the 4s and the 6s.

ⁱ Schneider (1994): 66

ⁱⁱ Kerk (2016)

ⁱⁱⁱ I heard a physicist on the radio say this, but I did not catch his name. It must be right.