MACS Assignment 7
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Question 1: Incomplete

Question 2: Incomplete

Question 3: Watts

After rational choice theory was introduced in the 1960s, a great number of sociologists and even some economists criticized the theory's reliance on assumptions made on an actor's preferences, knowledge, and abilities, arguing that these assumptions were either implausible or had been proven wrong. Following the reliance on such assumptions, the rational choice theory would yield outcomes or predictions that went against observed outcomes or empirical evidence.

The main pitfall of commonsense theories as explained by Watts is that understandability, or the rationalization of an observed behavior, and causality, or making predictions based on a type of behavior, are not the same. That is, a logical explanation of an observed situation isn't necessarily generalizable to causality and may not be a meaningful explanation of the observed outcome.

In response to this issue of understandability and causality, Watts proposes that sociologists engage in one of three approaches. The first is experimental methods, such as the much-preferred field experiments, followed by natural experiments and lab experiments. Another approach is to estimate a statistical model, specifically the counterfactual model of causal inference. Additionally, another proposed solution is to evaluate explanations based on how well they are able to accurately make predictions.

Theoretical models with simplifications and assumptions can be useful frameworks for making predictions and inferring causality in that they can isolate the estimated effects of certain factors on a particular outcome based on data provided. Additionally, they are efficient even with limited resources such as time and money, and can easily be changed given new factors. While it may not be generalizable to every situation, models allow us to better understand certain levers and pieces of the system we are studying.