

Thinking about Social Phenomena

Constructing Puzzles



Lecture dt. Jan 16, 2020

Open the 'black box'

- The 'billiard ball' model: Event E occurs if X1, X2, etc. precedes
- **Why?** What is it about X1, X2 etc. that leads to E?

MECHANISM

Opening the 'black box'

Distinguish between correlation and causation

Chain smokers more likely to get cancer

Correlation between **smoking** and **cancer**

Either because

A. Smoking itself causes cancer

B. People with genes predisposed to cancer also have genes predisposed to nicotine addiction, i.e. genes cause cancer (through addiction)

Distinguish between correlation and causation

Assume that unemployment is correlated with violence

That is, unemployment leads to violence, or
 some other factor leads to violence, where
 unemployment plays a role

Distinguish between correlation and causation

Assume that unemployment is correlated with violence

Positive association

- Opportunity cost low for youth to voluntarily join armed groups (e.g. Paul Collier's work on civil wars)

Distinguish between correlation and causation

Assume that unemployment is correlated with violence

Positive association

- **Opportunity cost=trade-off** low for youth to voluntarily join armed groups (e.g. Paul Collier's work on civil wars)
- Economic threat (real or perceived): can reduce opportunity cost to join armed groups; punishment
- Material benefit: paid to join

Distinguish between correlation and causation

Assume that unemployment is correlated with violence

Negative association

- Opportunity cost to join armed groups is high: risk of death
- Punishment possible by voting for a populist party; why participate in violence?

Monday's puzzle

A group of children are asked to estimate the size of coins from memory. Children from poorer backgrounds overestimated the size of the coins to a greater degree than the more affluent children.

Analyze.

Monday's puzzle

Bruner, J. S., & Goodman, C. C. (1947). Value and need as organizing factors in perception. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 42(1), 33–44

Confirmation bias

Looking for evidence that confirms what we believe.

“We are what we believe we are”: Lewis Carroll

Readings for Thursday

Elster, J. Chapter 2 ('Mechanisms')

Varese, F., & Yaish, M. (2000). The Importance of Being Asked: The Rescue of Jews in Nazi Europe. *Rationality and Society*, 12(3), 307–334.