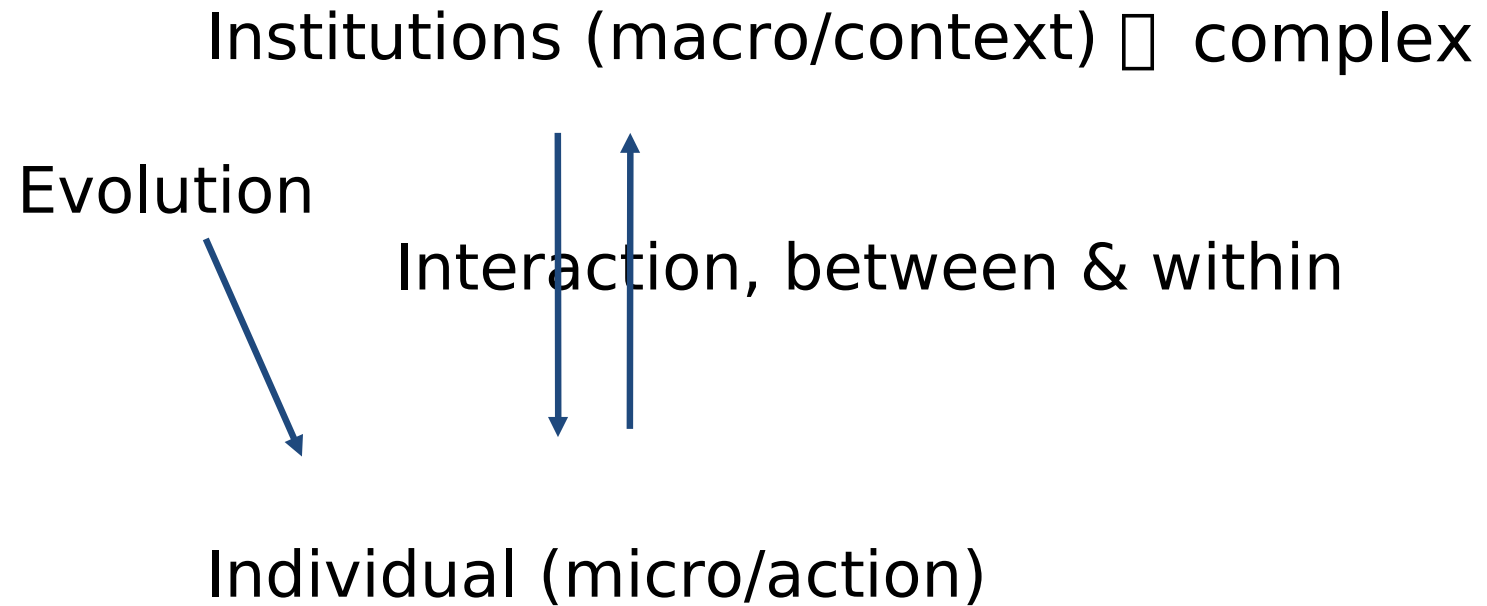


# Institutions and the individual

Institutions (macro/context) □ complex

Individual (micro/action)

# Institutions and the individual



# What is a puzzle?

When we have a well-established fact or event to which we do not have a well-established explanation □ 'puzzle'

- Counterintuitive fact, e.g. littering
- An unexplained correlation, e.g. alcoholism and parenting

# METHODS OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

What is a sociological question?

However, some of the most commonly used execution methods these days include:



FACT: **65%** Indians support capital punishment

How did these people come to support capital punishment?

## Attitudes

- Changes over time
- Differences across populations

# Puzzle

Why may harsh punishments increase the behaviour they target?

# Functional explanations

- Explaining a phenomenon from consequences
- Phenomenon persists because of consequence:  
Evidence?
  - Why do we have chairs? To sit.
  - Why do we sit? So that we can have chairs.

Tautology

# Functional explanations

- Punishment → reduced crime
- Crime → social cohesion (punishment a means): e.g. Emile Durkheim
- Explain from **prior** events and facts

Poverty?

Discrimination?

Mental health?

# Motivations and behaviour

**Motivations:** An individual's beliefs and desires that explain his/her behaviour. But,

- Competing motivations  
e.g. Faced by a bully, I am afraid and also angry. I want to run but also to hit him.

Motivational conflict



# Motivations and behaviour

## Examples

- I need a book desperately and I am tempted to steal it from the library, but I also want to behave morally.
- I want a candidate who favours economic development, but also one who favours freedom of religion.
- I want to reduce poverty, but do not give money to beggars because...

# Motivations and behaviour

## Examples

- I need a book desperately and I am tempted to steal it from the library, but I also want to behave morally.
- I want a candidate who favours economic development, but also one who favours freedom of religion.
- I want to reduce poverty, but do not give money to beggars because... I think giving to one individual makes no difference ( conflict 1) or I want to promote my own interest ( conflict 2)



# Motivations and behaviour

Motivational conflict: how is it resolved?

- Visceral motivations often stronger

# Motivations and behaviour

Motivational conflict: how is it resolved?

- **Visceral** motivations often stronger; urgent
  - physiology: hunger (through visual or olfactory cues)
  - emotion: fear, anger, shame, envy

# Motivations and behaviour

Motivational conflict: how is it resolved?

e.g. I have a craving for pizza, but want to remain healthy. Choose pizza, immediately regret!

- urgency leading to risk-taking behaviours

e.g. crimes of passion; breaking traffic rules

# Motivations and behaviour

Motivational conflict: how is it resolved?

## **Traffic rules**

- Speed thrills (motivation,) but also kills (conflict)...

## **Protest**

- I want to join a protest (motivation,) but...

# Motivations and behaviour

Motivational conflict: how is it resolved?

## **Traffic rules**

- Speed thrills (motivation,) but also kills (conflict)...  
sensation-seeking (motivation,) urgent

## **Protest**

- I want to join a protest (motivation,) but stay clear of police beatings. If concern for democratic rights is stronger than concern for self-preservation, I will join



# Motivations and behaviour

Motivational conflict: how is it resolved?

reducing cognitive dissonance (mechanism)

When one motivation is stronger than the other, we look for evidence to strengthen reasons on one side (unconscious mind). We do this to reduce dissonance.

- facilitates choice of behaviour
- can support confirmation bias

# Puzzle for Thursday

People rarely admit, to themselves and others, that they are ignorant.

Explain the theoretical basis and mechanism.

# Emotion

## **What is it?**

A mechanism that triggers action to satisfy a pressing concern (Petersen 2002)

e.g. I steal my friend's notebook. She finds out.

Emotion? Guilt.

Action? Apology.

Guilt (emotion) acts as mechanism to cause action (apology) because of a pressing concern (derision—moral norm).

# Emotion

## **What is it?**

A mechanism that triggers action to satisfy a pressing concern (Petersen 2002)

e.g. man in a forest hears sound of rustling leaves.

Emotion? Fear.

Action? Flee or Fight.

Fear (emotion) acts as mechanism (an individual level, recognizable pattern) to cause action (fight/flight) because of a pressing concern (safety—hardwired in our species)

# Emotion

## **What is it?**

A mechanism that can explain shifts in motivations; one desire becomes more dominant (Petersen 2002)

In example of the man in a forest, safety becomes the dominant concern over self-esteem.

e.g. You are not a wealthy person. You just bought bread. Suddenly a boy steals it and runs. You follow him to his shanty and come across an extremely poor family. What emotions and actions do you think you will go through?

# Evaluative emotions

A. Involve a positive or negative assessment of one's own or someone else's behaviour or character

- Guilt: triggered by -ve belief about own action
- Shame: triggered by -ve belief about own character

Behaviour or action?

Shame more intensely unpleasant than guilt

# Evaluative emotions

A. Involve a positive or negative assessment of one's own or someone else's behaviour or character

- Pride: triggered by +ve belief about own action
- Pridefulness: triggered by +ve belief about own character

Pride=achievement; pridefulness=arrogance

Behaviour or action?

# Evaluative emotions

A. Involve a positive or negative assessment of one's own or someone else's behaviour or character

- Anger: triggered by -ve belief about another's action
- Contempt or hatred :  
triggered by -ve belief about another's character

Behaviour or action?

Contempt: discrimination; hatred: violence



# Evaluative emotions

e.g. You are not a wealthy person. You just bought bread. Suddenly a boy steals it and runs. You follow him to his shanty and come across an extremely poor family. What emotions and actions do you think you will go through?

- -ve belief about another's action towards oneself: anger
- Sympathy/compassiondeserved good of someone else [emotions based on the deserved or undeserved good or bad of someone]

# Readings

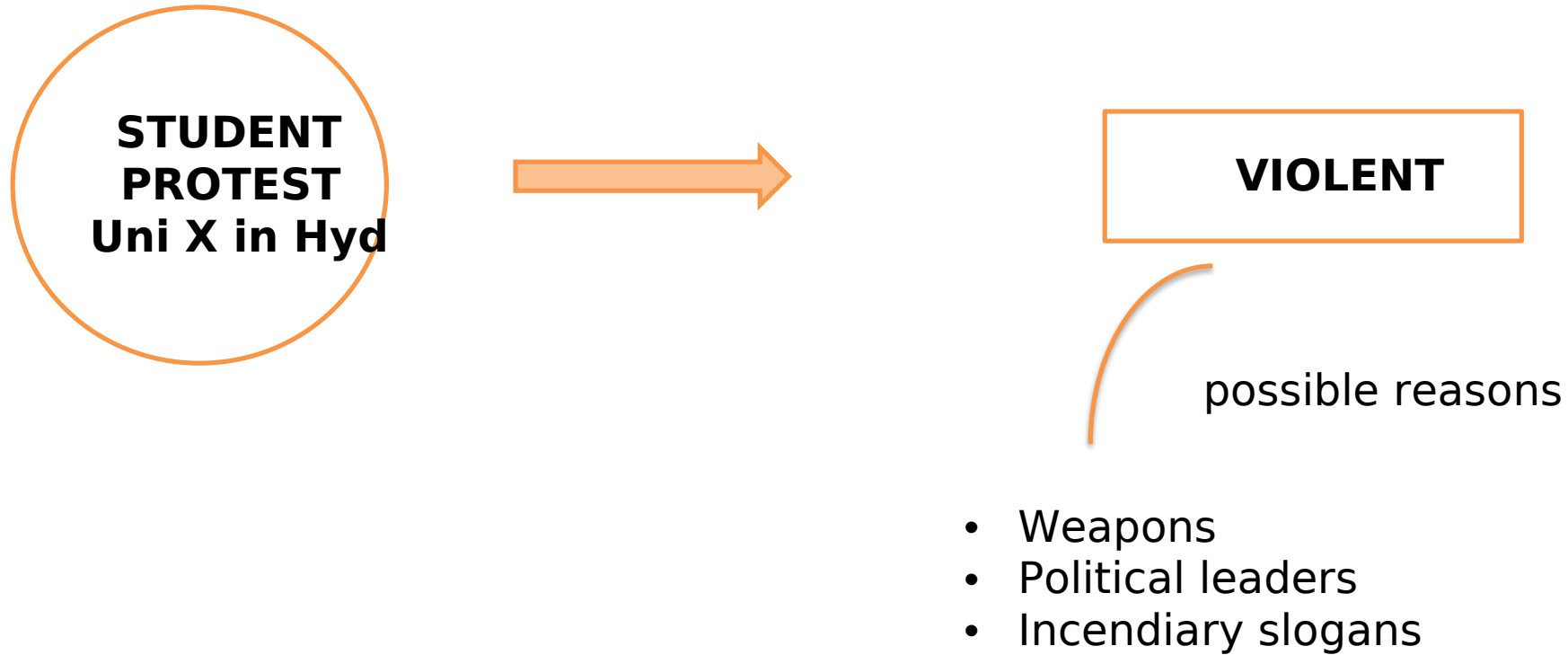
Petersen, Roger. 2002. Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elster, Jon (chapter 8, 'Emotions')

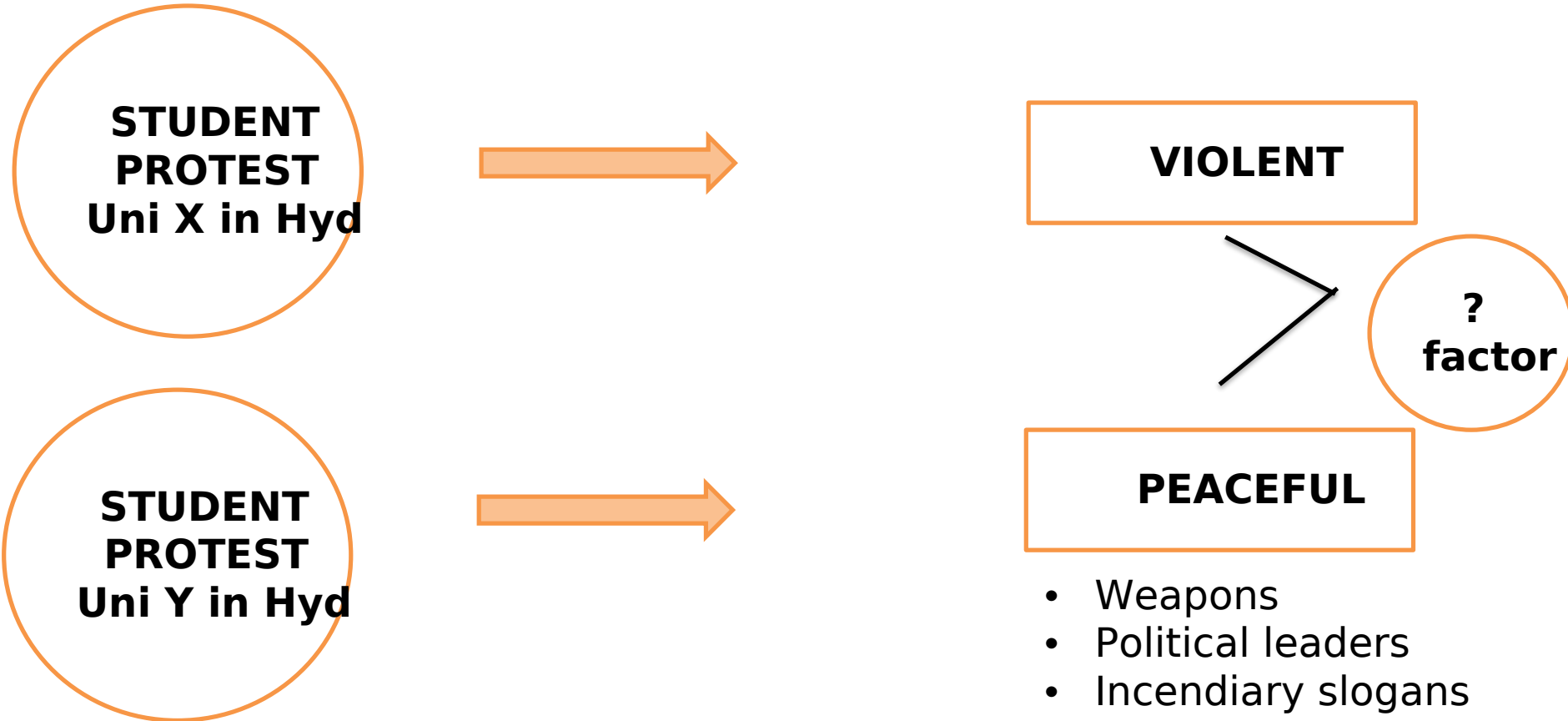
# Intuition

- Non-conscious reasoning; (usually) based on prior experiences
- Rarely leads to good decision outcomes; people unlikely to be able to judge the accuracy of their own intuition
- **Confirmation bias:** looking for or interpreting information consistent with prior beliefs or intuition; discard counter-evidence, e.g. the Earth is flat.

# How to make a reasoned analysis



# How to make a reasoned analysis



# How to make a reasoned analysis: Non-events

Why did something not happen when, given the conditions, it should have?



The curious incident  
of the dog in the night-time

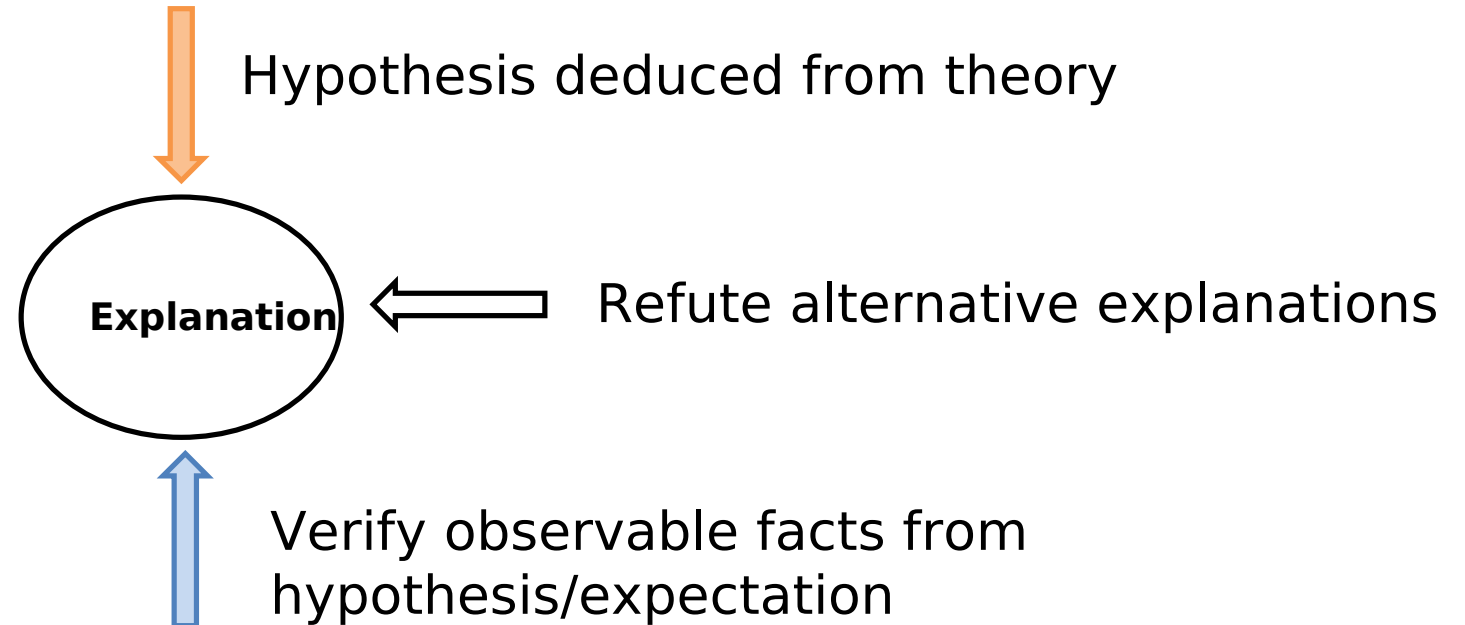
- Decisions
- Words
- Actions
- Events

# How to make a reasoned analysis

Fact: People in democracies live longer than those in non-democracies

# How to make a reasoned analysis

Theory → Hypothesis → Alternative Explanations →  
Can they be refuted?





## Puzzle for Thursday

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.

# Norms

What is it?

Set of shared values; socially enforced expectations

Moral vs. social: universal vs. variable over societies

How are norms different from rules?

Consequences of action are uncertain

# Moral norms examples

- Do not lie
- Treat everyone with respect
- Share equally
- Help others in distress
- Do not harm others

Unconditional: do not depend on how others behave;  
proactive

Universal: do not vary across societies

# Moral norms examples

Quasi-moral norms: conditional on the presence or behaviour of other people; reactive

- I help X if I see someone helping X: forced altruism
- I litter if I see others doing the same

Quasi-moral norms are triggered when I can observe  
what others are doing

# Saving water



Action triggered by moral norm?

- Unilateral

Action triggered by quasi-moral norm?

- Conditional on others doing it

Depends on unilateral good-will

# Social norms

Conditional, like quasi-moral norms, on the presence or behaviour of other people; reactive

Social norms are triggered when others can observe what  
I am doing

- Wear white clothes at a funeral (in some countries; black in others)
- Eat with your right hand (in some countries)
- Not renting out your house to \_\_\_ community (Black; Dalit; Muslim; Aborigine)

No desirable result; mandatory. Consequence of violation: uncertain

# Saving water

## Quasi-moral norms

Aggregate water consumption shown on TV

- Others doing it, why shouldn't we?

[my action depends on the action of others]

## Social norms

Neighbours and visitors monitored usage

- What if others disapprove of my behaviour?, e.g. 'why are you washing your car every day?'

[my action depends on others observing me]

## Puzzle for Thursday

I am a fair-skinned girl, who is good friends with a dark-skinned girl in my class. But I avoid her in front of other classmates.

Use emotions, actions, and social norms to explain the contradictory behaviour of the fair-skinned girl.

## Readings

Elster, Jon (chapter 22, 'Social norms')



# Magical thinking

‘Illusion is the first of all pleasures’

--Voltaire

# Magical thinking

The tendency to believe that we can influence the outcome, even when it is out of our control

e.g. I believe I am lucky. Buy a lottery ticket, spend x amount of money (cost to oneself).

Either I (realistically) wait for the outcome or (unrealistically) begin to spend money before the result is out.

# Magical thinking

- I believe vaccines are harmful. No counter evidence convinces me.  
[i.e. ignoring evidence]. **Confirmation bias**. Or, I abstain from sources giving counter evidence. **Self-deception**. Belief comes first, behaviour later.
- Someone in college is ignoring me. I conclude he/she does not like me.

# Magical thinking

- I hurt someone. I blame them for making me hurt them.

**Rationalization** (justification) of one's behaviour.

Behaviour comes first, belief later.

# Monday's puzzle

People rarely admit, to themselves and others, that they are ignorant.

Explain the theoretical basis and mechanism.

# Monday's puzzle

People rarely admit, to themselves and others, that they are ignorant.

- What are the components of the puzzle?
- Plausible explanation/hypothesis (what?)
- Mechanism (why?)

# Monday's puzzle

People rarely admit, to themselves and others, that they are ignorant.

- What are the components of the puzzle?
  - Ignorance to oneself; to others
- Plausible explanation/hypothesis (what?)
  - Admitting a mistake painful (to oneself)
  - Pride in appearing rational (to others)
- Mechanism (why?)
  - Intolerance of uncertainty; pattern-seeking

## Essay: deadline Thu, 6 Feb 2020

1. You are part of a group protesting on campus. You demand a change in University policy which could positively impact all students. Your friend is part of another group that opposes the protest. This group believes that protesting would make no difference. This conflict persuades a professor to present two research papers to both groups: one showing the positive effects of protests on policy, the other showing negative effects. In your opinion, how would your group and your friend's group assess the findings? Make a theoretically informed argument. Use examples.

OR

2. I am deeply motivated to do something. I, therefore, act on my motivation and do it. Would you agree with these statements? Discuss, giving examples.



# 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.

## From last lecture

### **What are norms?**

Set of shared values; socially enforced expectations

**Moral norms:** personal conscience; (mostly) unconditional

**Social norms:** socially acceptable; conditional

### **How are norms different from rules?**

Consequences of action are uncertain

# What happens to norm violators?

## Informal punishment

### **Social norms trigger emotions of shame and contempt**

- Induces shame in violator, contempt in observer
- Action tendency of observer: avoidance; at worst, murder
- Action tendency of violator: isolation; at worst, suicide

# Norms of hierarchy

Milgram's Obedience Experiment, 1963

To what extent can people go to hurt others,  
when commanded by authority

# Norms of hierarchy

The Stanford Prison Experiment, 1971

Authoritarian “guards”, submissive “prisoners”

# Norms of revenge

Seen as equivalent of organized law, where state is weak

- But more disruption than control (e.g. Middle East, South Asia)

# Norms of honour

- Inter-caste, inter-religion marriages
- Disappointment upon birth of a girl
- Marrying beneath one's class
- Men earn; women have children



## Next week

- What explains the existence of social norms?
- If many social norms are pointless and harmful, why don't we abandon them?

## Monday's puzzle

I am a fair-skinned girl, who is good friends with a dark-skinned girl in my class. But I avoid her in front of other classmates.

Use emotions, actions, and social norms to explain the contradictory behaviour of the fair-skinned girl.

Fair skin on top of the social hierarchy; norm violation can induce contempt in observer, shame in violator

# Readings

Albert Camus' The Outsider(on norm violation)

'The Real Lesson of the Stanford Prison Experiment', The New Yorker, June 12, 2015