

444 Lecture 9.3 - O'Connor Chapter 4

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Day Plan

Conventionality

Pairing

MFEO Games

Multiple Games

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Degrees of Conventionality

This is a really good point - we shouldn't think of social outcomes as being either purely conventional, or explained by the superiority of the ultimate outcome.

- There are in between cases.
- And there are cases that are closer to one end than the other.
- We need a scale.

To see this, think about how we ended up with the distribution of languages we have today.

- Why are English, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese spoken so widely, and other languages less so?

Non-Conventional Stories

- Some languages are easier to learn than others.
- They don't have large dictionaries (though English does);
- They don't make you learn messy things like gender or formality (though Spanish does);
- They don't make you produce sounds that are hard to acquire in adulthood (I'm not sure if any of these three do)
- These are all reasons why it would be surprising for Welsh or Xhosa to become widespread.

Conventional Stories

- But none of these factors explain why English is more widely spoken than, say, Dutch.
- The reason for that seems more connected to how New Amsterdam became New York than to anything about language.
- It happened that various English-speaking settlements in the Americas thrived, Dutch-speaking ones did not, and here we are.

Measuring Conventionality

- O'Connor offers a measure of how conventional an outcome is.
- I don't love it as a measure; as she notes, it varies depending on how finely we divide up the alternative options.
- Better I think to do pairwise comparisons directly.
- English is more widely spoken than Welsh for somewhat functional reasons.
- English is more widely spoken than Dutch for almost entirely conventional reasons.

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Normal Households

Here's a quote from page 101.

Especially in recent Western history, the vast majority of households involved one man and one woman.

And I don't really know if this is true, especially in the time frame needed to make the explanation work.

Post War America

In post-war America, you see the following three factors.

1. Few households with multiple adult generations.
2. High marriage rates and low divorce rates.
3. Low rates of mid-life death.

You really need all three to get “the vast majority of households involved one man and one woman”, and I don’t really know how many times/places have all three.

Household Structure

So open question.

- In what societies (other than mid-20th-century America/Canada/Australia) was it true that the vast majority of households involved one man and one woman?

My guess is not that many. And since gender divisions are everywhere, this can't really be the story.

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How Common are MFEO Games?

- We need specialisation to make modern society run.
- But question: how many real world situations are there where we need $1/2$ the (adult) population to do X, and the other half to do Y?
- A lot of specialisation tasks are more than we need some single digit percentage of the population to do them.
- Why don't we get more types correlating with those needed specialisations.

Households and MFEO

- This is really a version of the previous question.
- If it is really common to have 1M/1F households, then sure there will be lots of MFEO games where it is useful to have 50/50 splits.
- But without that, I don't really see them being frequent enough for this analysis.

Child Making

Now there's one thing that does require 1M/1F, namely child making.

- If you have a society where the two biological parents of a child have a distinctive role in child rearing, then sure, that will lead to these two player games.
- But this leads us back to questions of household composition, and I'm not sure there is a good answer.

Functionality Given Pregnancy

Can you get more out of thinking about reproduction?

- Some jobs are hard to do while pregnant or nursing.
- Now 'hard' doesn't mean impossible, but maybe there is a story here.
- But do you need 1/2 the population to engage in those jobs?
- Some of this might turn on hard questions about the prevalence of big game hunting in human societies.

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Hawk-Dove and MFEQ

- This I thought was one of the best parts of the chapter.
- It seems really crucial to understanding what's going on.
- The point of gender roles is not that there is this one thing where men do one thing and women do another.
- It's that there is a systematic pattern of differential behavior across a huge range of parts of life.
- Thinking about how games interact could be a big part of the story.

To Be Explained

One challenge in this chapter is to go beyond explaining why typing occurs to explaining why gender is universal.

- There is an attempt at this by noting the benefits of the equal division.
- But this is, I think, an artifact of the game chosen.
- It comes back to whether it is useful to have 50% specialise in some task.
- I think it's more likely that thinking about interlocking games is more promising.