

444 Lecture 17

O'Connor Chapter 4

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Day Plan

Conventionality

Pairing

MFEO Games

Multiple Games

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.

Language

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 MFEQ 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.