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For an integrative theory of social behaviour: Theorising with and beyond rational choice theory

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Abstract

Most sociologists are not content with merely relating macrosocial phenomena to preceding macrosocial causes in their causal explanations of social phenomena. Instead they are seeking to provide (non-reductive) microfoundations with which they can corroborate and make understandable the connection between macrosocial phenomena. In order to do so a theory (or theories) of human action is required. One such theory, rational choice theory (RCT), has long been viewed with strong suspicion in sociology. I show such suspicion to be partially justified. RCT cannot be a general theory of social behaviour. Nonetheless, there are important insights in various versions of RCT that should not be discarded. In order to improve upon RCT and move toward a more unified or integrative theory of action social-psychological research has to be taken note of. I demonstrate how dual-process theories and the research on heuristics can help sociologists move beyond RCT without contradicting some of its more basic insights.

KEYWORDS

dual-process theory, heuristics, microfoundations, non-deliberate behaviour, rational choice theory, social behaviour

1 | INTRODUCTION

Although theories of social action or social behaviour more generally have been a central focus of sociologists for some time – at least since Max Weber's (1978 [1922]) seminal writings on the topic – they have become even more so in recent decades. There is the new pragmatist movement led by Hans Joas (1993, 1996; Joas & Beckert, 2000), Andrew Abbott (2007) and Neil Gross (2009, 2018) who underscore the primary role of unreflective habits and spontaneous creativity in people's dealing with the social world. Then there is the Analytical Sociology movement which started out being tightly associated with a version of rational choice theory called the "DBO scheme" by Peter Hedström (2005), one of the leaders of the movement. Today analytical sociologists have a more pluralistic stance with regards to action theory (see Hedström & Ylikoski, 2010, 2014; Manzo, 2010) but nevertheless emphasize the need to refine existing theories of action and create new ones. Critical realism is another important contemporary movement in the philosophy of social science which concerns itself with how and why people act. Although their position is not uniform, most critical realists stand somewhere between analytical sociologists and new pragmatists, usually taking Margaret Archer and Pierre Bourdieu as points of departure for their discussions (see Archer, 2010; Porpora, 2015). Others like John Goldthorpe (2007), Karl-Dieter Opp (1999, 2017), Siegwert Lindenberg (1990, 2013; Lindenberg & Steg, 2007), Hartmut Esser (1994, 2017) and Raymond Boudon (1998, 2001, 2003) have similarly spent lots of effort calling attention to the need for sociological theories of social behaviour and have themselves notably contributed to the project.

This has roughly coincided with a related shift. More and more sociologists are turning away from methodological holism, the notion that social explanation involves primarily relating macro causes (e.g. types of social integration) to macro effects (e.g. rates of suicide) without examining what is happening on the more micro level of human individuals. The opposite perspective, sometimes called strong methodological individualism or, more precisely, atomism which disavows the existence of macro causes has also been waning for a long time in sociology. Convergence has been, at least in practice if not in theory, to various forms of structural individualism or what might be called the search for non-reductive microfoundations (Udehn, 2001). In general, this means that explaining the causal connections between two or more macrosocial phenomena requires uncovering *how* groups of individual agents and their action produced the phenomenon of interest. First, agents – their opportunities, goals and beliefs – are seen as influenced (i.e. constrained and enabled) by existing social relations, informal and formal rules or norms, resources etc. Second, agents are then viewed as choosing or otherwise producing specific actions out of all the possible ones. Third and finally, when a large number of such specific actions is produced contiguously they are taken as either simply aggregating to form macro outcomes or otherwise, and more interestingly, leading to unintended, emergent macro consequences. This is diagrammatically captured by the "macro–micro–macro" model or "Coleman's boat" (see, e.g. Raub, Buskens, & van Assen, 2011). To fill out this model a theory (or theories) of human action are needed to help the researcher hypothesize all three steps on a case by case basis.

One famous action theory, rational choice theory (RCT), has had most success in economics (and to a certain extent political science) but was and still is, on average, viewed with great suspicion in sociology. Its salient simplicity and tractability have both been sources of praise and critique (Archer & Tritter, 2000; Coleman & Fararo, 1992; Goldthorpe, 2007; Shapiro & Green, 1994). In sociology it gained quite a bit of attention in the 1980s and 1990s (for a review see Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997) but it generally remains frowned upon, especially in more radical

circles where, e.g., analytical marxism's mild connection to RCT in large part spelt its doom (see Carver & Thomas, 1995; Roberts, 1997). To give just one recent example, following the publication of Vivek Chibber's (2013) sociological critique of postcolonial theory and his sketch of an alternative approach to understanding the struggles of colonial and postcolonial subjects various scholars have scolded him specifically because his approach is ostensibly a gloss on RCT. Even friendly critics like William Sewell Jr. (2014, p. 301) called it, disapprovingly, "rationalism" and "very close to rational choice". For Stein Sundstol Eriksen (2015, p. 586) Chibber's book "is an impressive achievement", however he thinks "Chibber's appeal to the 'political psychology' of (soft) rational choice theory is ... unnecessary". Bruce Robbins (2016, p. 113) chastises Chibber for his "rational choice Marxism" which is "pre-dialectical" and generates a history that is "not really a history at all". I suggest below that RCT is less problematic for sociologists than is usually thought and that in any case there is not a single RCT that can be easily dispensed with.

The overarching purpose of this paper is twofold. First, I aim to tease apart RCT and salvage what is useful and justified. I show that although the assumptions of traditional RCT are to an important extent falsified there remain meaningful core and auxiliary assumptions that should be retained and enriched. I propose that in order to be somewhat more systematic and less *ad hoc* sociological research can and should, to an extent, be guided by an amended RCT. Second, drawing on social-psychological literature I suggest sociologists need not one-sidedly and simply *a priori* decide between what could be termed, on the one side, *intentionalist fundamentalism* of RCT which blinds us to the important unconscious ways in which people act and, on the other, Bourdieusian *habitualist imperialism* whereby deliberative decision-making is erased. More specifically and theoretically relevant, I claim there are insights from social psychology which help guide us as to when behaviour is more likely to be intentional or unintentional, and what the general logic of less deliberate or even unintentional behaviour is.

2 | RATIONAL CHOICE *THEORIES*

RCT is often severely criticized by sociologists (Archer & Tritter, 2000). Some critiques are thoughtful and on the mark as will be seen below. Such is the charge that some assumptions made by RCT are unrealistic. Other critiques can be less fruitful. For example, the repeated claim that RCT is inextricably positivist or that it is unable to register macrosocial causes is very unconvincing. RCT can, but need not, be positivist as it is perfectly compatible with anti-positivist, realist ontology and epistemology; it also can, but need not, be blind to macrosocial causes (Goode, 1997; Kiser & Hechter, 1998; Little, 1991). In general, the debate tends to be less clear and productive than it could be simply because there are many variants of RCT and those who criticize the overarching research program typically do not distinguish between them. One distinction that can be drawn and is usually employed by sociological defenders of RCT is between "narrow" and "wide" (Opp, 1999) version of the theory or between "objective" and "subjective" (Boudon, 1998, 2003) rationality, with the latter of both pairs preferred by them. The thought is that the general framework of RCT which emphasizes that human beings think or reason about themselves and their material and social surroundings, that they intentionally make choices about which actions to take in order to achieve certain goals, is correct but needs to be amended in its more concrete propositions. For example, it is claimed that vast empirical evidence is simply inconsistent with some of the specific assumptions and that they should (and can) be replaced with more realistic ones. So, in order to pass verdict on RCT these nuances have to be noted.

2.1 | Narrow RCT

The version of RCT most associated with economics and taken as *the* representative among its critics is usually the narrow one. It firstly holds, as do all versions of RCT, that human agents (a) have certain goals they wish to achieve (or desires they want to fulfil), and that they (b) choose their actions with the intention of achieving those goals (c) within the various opportunities and constraints they face. For example, if an agent (a) wants to contribute politically, she will (b) go the voting booth in order to cast a vote (c) if today is election day and if she can get there on time.

But because this is too abstract to provide more concrete theoretical traction in applied research further assumptions about the specific goals and choice procedures are posited. Narrow RCT holds that human agents, when making decisions about their actions, are (1) *selfishly* oriented, i.e. concerned only by their own (and their family's) welfare; (2) motivated solely by *monetary* or *material* costs and benefits; (3) possessed of *all* the relevant information in a *non-biased* way; and (4) choosing *the best* course of action in relation to their goals. The example I gave above would now change. An agent, if she wants to contribute politically, is predicted not to vote because she is fully informed that a single vote is, mathematically, almost impossible to affect the results (so virtually no material benefits) and carries with it some (although small) costs in terms of time and energy. Because she "maximizes" the cost–benefit ratio she will not participate.

These stringent presuppositions are implausible on their face not only for sociologists but probably for many economists. Everyday life itself demonstrates that people are not concerned solely with material benefits or their own welfare but also strive for less tangible goals and are other-regarding. Nor are people always completely informed and searching for the very best possible course of action with the lowest cost–benefit ratio. Social-scientific evidence, be it qualitative, quantitative or experimental (Blais, 2000; DellaVigna, 2009; Gambetta, 2005; Gintis, Bowles, & Boyd, 2005), corroborates this.

Defenders of narrow RCT hold their ground by making two claims. First, it does not matter that the presuppositions of the theory are unrealistic. What matters is its predictive power. This is the positivist or instrumentalist rebuttal (Friedman, 1953). As long as the theory makes precise predictions and these happen to be borne out it should be seen as useful and we should stick with it. Realism, i.e. whether the theory rests on empirically corroborated premises and whether it, in fact, accurately explains the causal pathways of phenomena, is of no concern. Even "wrong" theories can lead to "correct" observations.

This is highly problematic because although a theory's predictive power is important its explanatory accuracy is just as important. A case can even be made that in the sciences outside physics where robust predictions are hard to come by accurate, realistic explanation is *more* important. In fact, in recent decades there has been a strong programmatic movement in sociology, and even in political theory and international relations, away from instrumentalism and towards realism on this matter (Bennett, 2013; Elder-Vass, 2010; Goldthorpe, 2007; Gross, 2009; Hedström, 2005; Manzo, 2010; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2013; Porpora, 2015). We develop theories not only in order to generate successful predictions but also to explain, i.e. provide the really existing mechanisms through which the phenomena of interest are produced. In other words, we want to know not only *what* will happen but also *how* and *why* it happened. For this we need realistic theoretical inputs. An empirically false theory leading to a correct prediction is something like a formally valid argument based on false premises leading to a correct conclusion – it should not get the credit. Moreover, as evidenced by narrow RCT's false prediction regarding voting it is not even the case that the theory, although unrealistic, leads to correct predictions.

The other claim made by defenders of narrow RCT is more persuasive. It is said that every scientific theory has to find a balance between how realistic and how abstract it is. Too realistic a theory abstracts from too little to be of explanatory relevance or to possess sufficient analytical power. A completely accurate description of the world is not a theory at all, rather it is that which has yet to be theorized. The main purpose of theories is to simplify reality, to break it down so that it is less complex and messy, and thus more capable of human understanding. Theories sift through the world in order to find what is less relevant or more relevant for explaining a phenomenon. With this in mind RCT claims to be as realistic as possible without sacrificing explanatory relevance. For example, the claim could be made that people are definitely not completely self-regarding all of the time, however *most* of them *most of the time* are *close* to being such. So, the claim would go, presupposing selfishness is unrealistic, but it is only *somewhat* unrealistic, and we are willing to tolerate this only to the extent that without making such an assumption no theoretical traction or analytical power could be created.

The argument might be plausible, however more needs to be added for it to be convincing. I will return to it below. Still, this argument does not deal with the presuppositions (2), (3) and (4) which are outlandish even as approximations and on average. Let us, therefore, turn to the wide RCT.

2.2 | Wide RCT

What happens if the enumerated assumptions are relaxed? We get a more realistic theory which is, therefore, much harder to falsify. According to it agents sometimes act self-interestedly, other times they are other-regarding. On some occasions they care for money and material goods, on others for social status or even otherworldly sentiments. They can possess little information or they can be highly informed. They can act as "maximizers", searching for the optimal course of action, given their goals and constraints, or they can be "satisficers", picking those actions which they think will serve as not perfect but good enough means for achieving their ends under existing circumstances (on the latter see Simon, 1982; compare Schwartz, Ben-Haim, & Dacso, 2010). The only constant is that agents are viewed, like with the narrow version, as deliberators who choose which means they will use to (sensibly) pursue given ends. As Mancur Olson (1965, p. 65) has already put it in his seminal work:

> *"The only requirement is that the behaviour of individuals in large groups or organizations of the kind considered should generally be rational, in the sense that their objectives, whether selfish or unselfish, should be pursued by means that are efficient and effective for achieving these objectives."*

There are two notable problems with this. First, due to its generality the theory does not offer much in the way of orienting the researcher. There is little theory-guidance (Kroneberg & Kalter, 2012). It does not suggest what hypotheses to start with and what to look for first when handling empirical evidence. This is a pressing issue for the theory. Why do workers usually sell their labour-power to employers, even when work is unpleasant, risky and pays bad? Is it because workers want to unselfishly help their employer? Is it because workers want the money in order to pay for their bills and to feed their children? Is it because they like working but are misinformed as to what conditions to expect? Which hypothesis seem most likely and should be our starting point? We cannot say.

Second, theories are of special help when data is scarce. An otherwise empirically well corroborated theory can be used to plausibly infer what might have happened in cases where empirical evidence is lacking. But a general theory which is agnostic about the usual causes of phenomena it is meant to explain cannot help in such cases. Why did the revolution start? It might be because people wanted better lives for themselves; or perhaps because they were altruistic and just wanted to help others; better still, they might have suddenly just wanted to follow radical norms of dissent for their own sake. We cannot say.

Defenders of wide RCT (e.g. Opp, 1999, p. 183–4) respond to this by claiming that its openness is not *total* but partial. The theory is still constrained by the (general) assumption that agents make choices about which actions to take in order to accomplish their goals. This is true as far is goes. But it does not go very far. As intimated by the examples provided above this general conceptual constraint on wide RCT is much too little to provide more robust theory-guidance, especially when rich data is not on offer.

3 | AMENDING RCT

In order to resolve the tension between the two my proposition is to combine aspects of both. Turning firstly to the narrow version, sociologists can be too dismissive of the assumption of self-interest. One interesting and important fact in this regard is that although according to the World Giving Index Americans make up one of the most charitable nations on the planet, they only give 2–3% of their income to strangers (NCCS, 2015). Furthermore, on average only 25% of Americans perform volunteer work and, on average, they engage in only 50–52 hours of volunteer work per year (BLS, 2016). This means that the average volunteering American (a quarter of the whole population) works only an hour a week for strangers. Compare this to the 40+ hours of work per week the average American performs for pay, i.e. for self-regarding reasons. Surely those percentages and volunteering hours should be much higher if self-regarding behaviour was relegated to the margins of social life.

There are also simple evolutionary reasons to think humans, on average, tend not to neglect self-regard. On the one hand, there are pressing fundamental human needs like the need for material wellbeing, autonomy and social recognition which everybody has and feels as prerequisite because if these are not satisfied other, perhaps selfless, goals can hardly be pursued (compare Lindenberg, 2013). On the other is the fact that humans evolved in small hunter-gatherer bands where instincts for selfless help did not extend further than the immediate tribe. It is true, as was noted above, that experimental evidence (and everyday experience) contradicts the notion that most agents are *solely* self-regarding. However, experiments do not show self-interest to be inconsequential. In fact, agents are demonstrated to be "conditional co-operators" or "strong reciprocators" which means that they usually have a robust regard for their own wellbeing and will forgo it in the name of norms of fairness only to a certain extent, not letting themselves become unconditional altruists (Gintis et al., 2005).

In any case, that at least some assumptions of narrow RCT are in no way inimical to sociology is testified by Karl Marx's and Max Weber's (for the latter see Kiser, 2006) use of them in convincingly explaining various social phenomena, explanations that are praised by sociologists even today. It is actually interesting how Marxists tend to be highly critical of narrow RCT, while tolerating and even embracing it either when endorsing Marx's (implicitly RCT) arguments or making their own (implicitly RCT) explanatory claims (e.g., Callinicos, 2004). Marx's explanations for why workers accept exploitative labour contracts and why at the same time

they try bargaining with their employer over pay, hours worked and working conditions; why the enclosure movement happened; why capitalists seek higher profits or why they introduce labour-saving machinery in their firms; why there is a tendency in sectors for super-profits to disappear; why in the long run the economy's general rate of profit tends to fall etc. – all rely on the assumption of self-interest on the part of agents. Economic agents are viewed as pursuing their own material interests under various social constraints and motivations. For example, workers being property-less fear unemployment so they usually consent to exploitative labour contracts, especially if other better employment opportunities are scarce or non-existent. Capitalists faced with intense market competition on the market fear bankruptcy or takeover so they strive to minimize costs and maximize profits by employing labour-shedding technological innovation and by moving from less profitable sectors to more profitable ones. These famous Marx's arguments fall squarely within RCT.

I therefore suggest, as has often been practiced at least implicitly in microfounded historical-sociological analyses (for a review see Kiser & Hechter, 1998), to (i) assume self-interest, at least as an orienting starting point, and to further posit more specifically (ii) that people aim to achieve two more or less universal self-interested goals: securing or increasing their material wellbeing and securing or increasing social recognition (Lindenberg, 1990). As said, such assumptions have rightly guided much lauded historical-sociological research, e.g. Theda Skocpol's (1979) analyses of revolutions, Robert Brenner's (1985, 2007) account of the transition to capitalism and his theory of pre-capitalist political and economic development, Charles Tilly's (1990) explanation of medieval and early-modern European warfare, James Scott's (1985) theorizing of everyday forms of peasant resistance, Michael Mann's (1986, 1993, 2012a, 2012b) explorations of world history and so on. Mann (1986, p. 4) even explicitly posits for the purposes of his theoretical undertaking that "human beings are restless, purposive, and rational, striving to increase their enjoyment of the good things in life and capable of choosing and pursuing appropriate means for doing so."

Still, importantly, the assumption of self-interest only goes so far which is why the wide RCT is attractive and should be heeded where appropriate. Self-interest should be assumed to be more relevant in high-cost situations and there are plenty of aspects of social life that do not resemble them. However, even in high-cost situations an important small minority of agents is just not very self-regarding, otherwise suicide bombings would not exist (Caplan, 2006) and various risky political organizations would never get off the ground (Varshney, 2003). Altruistic goals need to be postulated in order to explain such phenomena. Here, narrow RCT will not do. However, weak or wide rationality still applies so wide RCT can be used. This is because even suicide bombers are sensitive to *incentives* and are therefore rational in the wide (or weak) sense. Their missions are not carried out without deliberation and for their own sake. As Caplan (2006, p. 94) observes, suicide bombings are used by terrorist organizations primarily against "hard targets" where a conventional attack is less likely to work. They are also, for example, "more common inside tightly-defended Israel, but they almost never happen in the West Bank and Gaza, where hit-and-run attacks are viable" (Ibid., p. 94). And although revolutionary and other risky political organizations would never have been founded without a small minority of selfless agents, these agents have to act at least somewhat efficiently and effectively so as to build their platforms. They have to choose appropriate means to fulfil their (selfless) goals. Moreover, such organizations usually swell and become mass organizations only by utilizing selective incentives to motivate more self-regarding agents, i.e. the majority, to join (Varshney, 2003, pp. 94–95).

The assumption of self-interest is more apt and valuable than some critics of narrow RCT give it credit as it is not completely empirically unjustified and because it provides analytical power,

i.e. the capacity to generate more precise hypotheses. However, the assumption should definitely be relaxed in low-cost situations or even in high-cost ones when empirical evidence contradicts it. In other words, instead of completely abandoning the narrow assumption the more measured *method of decreasing abstraction* should be embraced "whereby one would begin with a very simple model and gradually make it more realistic" (Lindenberg, 1992, p. 5). This way one preserves as much theoretical tractability as possible while gaining needed realism.

4 | LESS DELIBERATE BEHAVIOUR

It was said that the common core of narrow and wide RCT is the assumption of agents as deliberate, intentionally choosing means to serve ends. However, in real life even this general assumption can be violated. In sociology this was most famously pointed out in recent decades by Pierre Bourdieu who attempted to theorize social behaviour via the notion of "habitus", i.e. unconscious dispositions people have for acting which are ingrained in them by the social environment or "fields", bypassing any version of RCT completely.

Bourdieu's attempt is not wholly successful (see, e.g., Elder-Vass, 2010; Sayer, 2010). At least three issues are of concern for present purposes. First, he exaggerates the extent to which unconscious behaviour prevails in people's lives. He does note that, on occasion, people consciously choose their actions but this is always determined by the operation of habitus which is in turn determined by an agent's social environment. As Manuel DeLanda (2006, p. 65) put it:

> *"[F]ar from constituting exceptions to the automatism of the habitus, it is the latter that determines when and where such exceptions are allowed. The habitus then becomes a master process that 'makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions, and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production – and only those'. It is not necessary to follow Bourdieu in this regard."*

In other word, his account of human action is over-socialized (Archer, 2001; Mouzelis, 1995, 2008; Wrong, 1961). Second, Bourdieu does not recognize how important deliberation is in the *creation* of unconscious dispositions. Andrew Sayer (2010) illustrates this with the example of stopping in traffic when the red light turns on. This behaviour is usually the result of an unconscious disposition, a habit. However, it is only ingrained in an agent after it was acquired through teaching, experience and reflection. The same should be said for Bourdieu's favourite example of a skilled tennis player efficiently yet non-reflexively swinging her racket. This occurs only after years of training which involve lots of conscious communication between the player and the trainer, trials and errors, intentional readjusting etc. Third, the precise mechanisms by which habitus exerts its influence are not spelled out by Bourdieu so that habitus remains a black box whose inner workings remain mysterious to us (Boudon, 1998). Despite all this Bourdieu's general insistence that unintentional behaviour is important in social life and should therefore not be theoretically neglected is on the mark.

Social-psychological research is converging, at least in general, on the finding that human behaviour is guided by two main (sets of) processes. Whatever the differences between the various dual-process theories, there is agreement as to the existence of what is most abstractly called "System 1" and "System 2" (Evans, 2008). System 1 is a cluster of unconscious, quick and spontaneous processes, while System 2 groups together conscious, slow and deliberative

cognitive processes. Researchers agree that both matter and that idle theoretical, *a priori* judgements about which is more important or prevalent are not productive.

But to merely categorize human behaviour as the result of either the slow and reasoned mental system or the quick and unconscious system is not enough. In past criticisms of narrow RCT it was pointed out many times that RCT researchers should recognize people are not wholly or even primarily rational or that although deliberate, means-ends behaviour is sociologically important so too is the more unconscious, habitual norm-following and "value-rational" social behaviour. However, though empirically justified demanding mere recognition of norms and values is not of much theoretical help. Knowing that sometimes norms have to be cited as causes of behaviour does not tell us *when* to do so nor *how strong* the influence of norms is – e.g. are norms influential all of the time and do norms have the power to completely take over an agent? Or as Goldthorpe (2016, p. 33) has recently put it: "where the influence of social norms is invoked, the further questions must always be raised of why it is *these* norms, rather than others, are in place, and of why individuals conform with them – insofar as they do – rather than deviating from them or openly challenging them."

A sociological theory which hopes to guide research needs to accomplish two further tasks beyond cataloguing the many causal factors that exist in the world. A theory needs to (a) spell out the *conditions* under which one or the other system is more likely to be activated, and (b) provide some *framework or principles* that operate while one or the other is activated. As far as principles of slow and reasoned behaviour are concerned they are provided by the amended RCT discussed above. However, what are the principles that guide quick and unconscious behaviour? And what are some of the conditions that make one or the other system more likely to be activated? Here again we have to draw on social-psychological research to give some general orientation.

Usually at least two broad conditions are given that influence which of the two systems will be more pronounced: (1) the opportunity for reflection, and (2) the motivation for reflection (see Chaiken & Trope, 1999). The less opportunity in terms of time and effort an agent has, and the less she perceives a situation as a high-stakes one, the more likely a non-deliberative or spontaneous response will ensue. Other conditions such as (3) the quantity and complexity of information on offer, and (4) the familiarity of the situation are also relevant. The more information that an agent can potentially gather and the more complex the information is, the less likely it is that she will engage in slow, deliberative reasoning. The same holds for familiarity. More familiar and expected situations evoke less effortful and conscious cognition.

The sociological relevance of these insights is that one should expect RCT models to be more applicable in less urgent, high-cost, more unexpected situations. In mirror-opposite situations theorizing social behaviour will have to reference not solely or primarily intentions, rationality and self-interest but more so norms, values and habits. This, of course, does not mean norm-following has nothing to do with reasoning and intentions only that these are usually what *first grounds* norms and values and then recede when they norms are successfully internalized. For example, an agent can acquire the norm against stealing (especially from those who are most vulnerable) by reasoning about the likely consequences of such actions not only or even primarily for oneself but for others. Later, however, an agent will not usually deliberate on whether to steal or not and remind herself of the various arguments against stealing. She will just spontaneously, habitually not even consider stealing due to the norm she acquired long ago. Only in situations where strong conditions for the activation of System 2 are present, e.g. when one is homeless and starving, is it more likely for such a moral agent to make a deliberate effort to reconsider her norm-following behaviour and break the norm (compare Kroneberg, Heintze, & Mehlkop, 2010).

TABLE 1 An integrative theory of social behaviour based on social-psychological dual-process theory and RCT

	System 1	System 2
Characteristics	Quick, unconscious, automatic	Slow, conscious, deliberative
Conditions	1) less opportunity to reflect 2) lower motivation to make the right decision (low-cost situation) 3) more available information and more complex information 4) higher situational familiarity	1) more opportunity to reflect 2) higher motivation to make the right decision (higher-cost situation) 3) less available information and less complex information 4) lesser situational familiarity
Likely explanation	Heuristics, habits, norms.	Intentional means-ends behaviour. At first assume fairly informed self-interested agents striving to secure/increase material wellbeing and social recognition (calculating benefits and costs of particular means). If evidence contradicts these assumptions or if the situation is lower-cost, switch to wide RCT (relax assumptions of self-interest, optimization and information, postulate other goals beside wellbeing and recognition).

How about the other task facing sociologists I mentioned above? What are some of the general principles that can be used to explain behaviour not based on slow deliberation? One useful explanatory category for making sense of situations in which conditions favour System 1 and thus RCT is of not much help are the various heuristics (see already Manzo, 2010) discovered by psychologists such as Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (see Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982) or Gerd Gigerenzer (2008). Heuristics are very simple unconscious rules of the mind that help people make rapid, spontaneous decisions without much deliberation. They are mental shortcuts which ignore many aspects of the problem to be solved and ignore certain complex information. Sometimes they are called biases because they can lead to decisions that are in contradiction with those based on slow and deliberative thinking. However, some, e.g. Gigerenzer, view them as less pernicious and even somewhat optimal with regards to the outcomes they lead to.

One typical example of what can be achieved by theoretically employing various heuristics is called "the organ donor problem" (Gigerenzer, 2010, p. 538). In America and Germany only a small minority of citizens (28% in America, 12% in Germany) sign up to donate their organs post-mortem. Explanation-wise this is a problem because, first, a majority of Americans and Germans expressly approve of post-mortem donations, and secondly, because culturally very similar countries to America and Germany, such as Austria and France, have almost universal rates (99.9%) of potential donors. How is this possible?

The difference cannot be explained intentionally, either as self-regrading or other-regarding action. It can therefore probably be explained with reference to unintentional behaviour, especially as it is a low-cost situation. However, the sociologist's first instinct, i.e. to reference habits and norms, does not seem to be of much help either because the cultural differences between the countries are not likely to be vast. What does help is viewing the difference as a result of the operation of the same psychological heuristic under different institutional designs. What Gigerenzer calls "the default heuristic" (Gigerenzer, 2010, p. 539) is a simple mental rule which humans possess that says "If there is a default, do nothing about it." The operation of this

heuristic under the opt-in institutional systems of USA and Germany where one has to actively check a box on a form when getting a car licence to opt-in will generate low rates of potential organ donators. The same heuristic will produce much higher rates under the opt-out systems of France and Austria when one is by default a donator and has to explicitly say on the form to not be regarded as such. Heuristics can thus be usefully employed by sociologists to explain unintentional behaviour, and fortunately there exists a large and still growing list of heuristics than can be drawn upon.

5 | CONCLUSION

In his assessment of RCT William Goode (1997, p. 38) claims that "sociologists reject rational choice theory but use it just the same". He means this in a very general, Weberian sense, i.e. that in order to understand and explain social behaviour one has to imbue agents with goals and postulate that they seek means with which to achieve those goals. I have argued that for a *subset* of social behaviour this is indeed the case and that one should even go further and, at first, suppose agents to be primarily self-regarding (as many noted historical sociologists have done even if only implicitly). However, RCT in either its narrow or wide variant cannot deal with those aspects of social behaviour that are simply not the result of intentional, deliberative, reasoned cognitive processes. RCT cannot be a general theory. It is rather a special theory, restricted to only certain domains of social phenomena. This observation is very much in line with the growing emphasis on middle-range theorizing in sociology that eschews developing grand theories that are general and unbounded. As is now well known social life is practically devoid of interesting universal causal laws which, had they existed, would allow grand theories to be applied. The move towards middle-range theories therefore shouldn't be all that surprising and can hardly be resisted.

Empirical research, and further theoretical refinement, based on an integrative theory of social behaviour outlined above is already getting underway (Esser & Kroneberg, 2015). The theory has been applied and empirically corroborated in studying criminal acts (Kroneberg, Heintze, & Mehlkop, 2010), electoral participation and the historical rescuing of Jews in World War II (Kroneberg, Yaish, & Stocké, 2010), and protest participation (Opp, 2017). There are important, if ultimately reconcilable, differences between the various specific models employed. However, they rest on the same basic framework I discussed. The most important two tasks for further theoretical refinement are: (1) to specify even more conditions (or the existing ones in more detail) which are involved in activating either System 1 (spontaneous-automatic) or System 2 (the reflecting-calculating mode); and (2) to develop more theoretical tools (or the existing ones in more detail) that can be employed to discern the logic according to which both systems operate, and that can be used in providing empirically grounded causal explanations of social behaviour.

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