Evaluating Theories Comparatively*

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Vergleich und Bewertung von Theorien*


Abstract: A case is made for comparison of the merits of two or more theories at a time as they are applied to the material of a single concrete case study. This method is very effective in highlighting the relative utility of any set of theories. A succinct classification of dimensions is given for such comparative analysis of theories on philosophical, methodological and substantive questions. A brief example is given of a fictional case study analyzed in terms of key elements of two theories, exchange theory and symbolic interactionism. The utility of the two theories, as applied, is then analyzed on the four most crucial dimensions for judging a good theory, namely, 1) explanatory power, 2) information value, 3) predictability, and 4) testability or ease of application. It is assumed in this application that the basic problem, which assumes or implies practically all other subproblems in social science, is that of answering the following question: How does this theory help to explain change (in a group or societal structure) over a period of time?

The aim of this paper is primarily to develop an untried strategy for analyzing, evaluating, and ultimately advancing sociological theory along the road to a new synthesis. The strategy is one of evaluating a selected set of basic concepts and particularly hypotheses which are considered essential to two or more theories considered simultaneously, as they are applied to the same concrete set of situations. Focus will be on a limited, practical or social problem which is also a theoretical problem. The situations (BLUMER 1972) in focus will be the most crucial ones of social or interpersonal change over time. The approach is global and designed to show up the similarities and differences of domain, depth, and effectiveness of the theories systematically considered.

This strategy may incidentally shed light on the paucity of extant theories or the lack of true or systematic theories in present-day sociology. We seem to have only partial, ad hoc applications of mostly expeditiously employed frames of reference. The strategy will only be illustrated here. Full and complete testing of the method will await future theoretical studies. The strategy employs a basically case study approach (for which BRUYN 1966 gives useful guidelines).

PARSONS in the Structure of Social Action (1937) attempted to do something like this in an analytical way. But he did not evaluate his theories as applied to concrete situations. A recent attempt by MULKAY (1971) compared five theories analytically (PARETO, PARSONS, MERTON, HOMANS and BLAU) suggesting an open, even eclectic strategy. TURK and SIMPSON (1971) brought together a set of essays analyzing and to some extent comparing PARSONS and HOMANS. VAN DEN BERGHE (1963) called for a synthesis of functionalism and dialectical analysis. DENZIN proposed a synthesis of symbolic interactionism and ethnomet hodology (1969). CUZZORT (1969) interpreted several theories for their humanistic value. Many others have taken a broadly critical or radical approach, generally perpetuating the cycle of academic in-fighting, cliquishness and even cultism (either exemplified or discussed in GOULDNER 1970; SOROKIN 1956;* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meetings of the Pacific Sociological Association, Scottsdale, Arizona, May 4, 1973.
C.W. MILLS 1959; COLFAK and ROACH 1971; BIRNBAUM 1971; ETZIONI 1968; FRIEDRICHS 1970; GLASS and STAUBE 1972). Conceptual analyses (e.g. COSER and ROSENBERG 1964; SIMMEL, ubiqu, COSE 1956; L. SCHNEIDER 1971; C. FINK 1968) and typological approaches (e.g., PARSONS, ubiqu; MARTINDALE 1964; STARK 1963; APPELBAUM 1970; WALLACE 1969; WARSHEW 1971) have abounded. Some have merely summarized theories (DEUTSCH and KRAUSS 1965; SHAW and COSTANZO 1970; and most textbooks in the history of sociology). Many are turning to theory construction, axiomatic method and abstract or generalizing research (e.g., BERGER et al. 1962 and 1972; HAGE 1972; BLAOCK 1969; DUBIN 1969; HOMANS 1967; L. GROSS 1959; M. MARX 1963; MEEHAN 1968; MULLINS 1971; STINCHCOMBE 1968; ZETTERBERG 1963; REYNOLDS 1971), or to the philosophy of social science (e.g., A. KAPLAN 1964; R. BROWN 1963; BRODHECK 1968; NAGEL 1961). Some few have tried to compare frames of reference (e.g., HILL and HANSEN 1960; NYE and BERARDO 1966), usually by merely juxtaposing analytical essays or classifications of concepts. SMELSER (1971) in his module is one of the first to begin a systematic comparison (of DURKHEIM, PARSONS, MARX and MICHELS), but again does not do so as the elements of the theories are applied to a single concrete case. There is a definite absence in the literature of applications, either systematic or unsystematic, of two or more theories, or even of two or more frames of reference, to even one situation or type of situation.

All of these other approaches, while useful in themselves, are limited by either the narrowness of their focus, which is sometimes on single concepts, sometimes on a single method, or on academic, arm-chair analysis, without application. Those in search of a synthesis typically either rush in prematurely or end up taking a wait-and-see attitude. Only a select few have even applied major notions (beyond a couple of hypotheses) of more than one theory to the same empirical question. LENSKI begins to do it in The Religious Factor (1961) and in Power and Privilege (1966). It seems that there is, as a partial result of his use of comparative evaluations, a strong move in LENSKI's work toward creative new syntheses of theory. The point is: What good are theories disembodied from concrete application, or restricted to a mere historical description of their origins? The use of pure abstraction or pure description is limited at best, and may well be mystifying, alienating, or simply incomprehensible. Now let us begin the task itself.

Evaluative Dimensions

The accompanying table (cf. appendix) lists a condensed array of dimensions on the basis of which we could comparatively evaluate two or more theories, either in general, or as applied to a particular case of personal or social change. For the sake of convenience the dimensions have been divided into three major types, philosophical, substantive, and methodological. Many conclusions could be drawn about a given theory depending on how it was classified or rated on each of these dimensions. If the reader is conversant with these dimensions he will be ahead of the game in analyzing theories. A much larger working table could easily be developed. There is space enough only to give the list here in the form of questions, as follows.

Philosophical Dimensions

Is the theory based on a realist vs. a nominalist approach? Does it use reductionism or the approach of emergence? Is it based on elementarism or holism? Is it pitched at a micro or macro level? Which school of philosophical thought does it represent, empiricism, rationalism, idealism, or positivism? Does it account for the very broad categories of analysis such as structures, functions, interactions?

Substantive Dimensions

Substantive dimensions can be divided roughly into simple and complex ones. The simpler ones include whether or not a theory implies an order vs. a conflict (perhaps a dialectical model (HORSE 1966). Does it have a conservative or a radical (change-oriented) bias? How concrete are its terms? What is its unit concept? How well does it account for a selected list of concepts basic to sociology, notably the concepts of exchange and power? What is the domain, or which action systems are relevant, the organismic, personality (or intrapersonal), societal or
Methodological Dimensions

Methodological questions will be divided into the categories of the form of the theory, procedure, and use. The form of the theory would ask whether it is pure description (or historical) or classificatory, whether it has implicit or explicit hypothetical statements. Does it have a generalizing or historical end? Is it parsimoniously stated (with simplicity, clarity, economy)? Does it have internal, logical consistency? Is it stated formally or informally?

Procedural dimensions will ask whether the theory is testable. Are the indices reliable and valid? Is it more useful in natural vs. laboratory settings? Does it unite theory and practice? Is it pure or applied? What mode of theory building does it primarily employ, deductive, the model, inductive or functional (M. MARX 1963)? Is the use of data synthetic or integrative so that there is a demonstration of external consistency with other theories? Instead of being synthetic, is it deductive or analytic in its use of data? Is the research design experimental, quasi-experimental, or the case study (CAMPBELL and STANLEY 1963)? Does the design have internal and external validity? Is the study or studies on which the theory is based longitudinal vs. cross-sectional? Is it synchronic vs. diachronic?

Regarding the methodological question of the use of the theory, how easy is it to apply to actual cases? How interpretable is it? Does it help us to predict (or to postdict, or to retrodict)? How productive has the theory been in generating research? Finally, does the theory direct us to operate or do research in the context of discovery or the context of verification?

All these questions, and undoubtedly many more could be asked of every theory, with a view to giving an overall evaluation. But it seems that there are no easy rules for judging the reliability or validity of our judgments about any of these dimensions. Thus it is essential that each rater gives explicit arguments or at least ethnographic evidence for his rating on each item as applied to his chosen concrete case. In addition, we could include a long list of possible sources of theory (MERTON et al. 1959), or a list of criteria for selection of research problems or application for our theories (YOUNG 1966). These selec-
tion criteria in general include theoretical, methodological and practical factors. After this somewhat bewildering array of comparative dimensions, it is incumbent upon us to step back and look at the purposes or functions of theories or explanations in general. Social theory should help us to adapt or control our environment, or simply to stimulate further enquiry. It should aid our understanding of truth by clarifying the rules of social interaction. It is a tool for understanding empirical findings, a stepping-stone on the road to an appreciation for social reality.

Four Key Criteria Defined

Mindful of these purposes, it is the author’s belief that most if not all of the above-listed criteria for judging theoretical cogency can be lumped under one or more of the following four criteria, in order of importance, explanatory power, information value, predictability and testability or ease of application. These will be treated here in order of typical chronological application, starting with testability or ease of application. In common sense applications of a theory, the relative ease of application depends on the understandability of the theory to the persons using it, and the degree to which the terms and hypotheses of the theory fit the facts of the case under analysis. Social scientists however are more likely to go beyond the intuitive and examine the question of testability of a theory. It involves the extent to which the variables can be separately and reliably measured by different researchers. If we could not measure the concepts our theory would not be reliably falsifiable. It would more likely be a tautology or mere opinion. We could not then gather evidence for and against the validity of the hypotheses contained in the theory. A result of testability is the degree to which the theory is productive for those doing research. That is, how fruitful is it in generating evidence? This too involves the applicability of the theory to real life events, to policy decisions of administrators or perhaps of counselors and change agents. Furthermore, a testable hypothesis is methodologically sound. The form of the theory as a whole must be clear, simply or economically stated, complete in application to the events to be explained. It should be elegantly stated as well (MULLINS 1971).

Finally, the indicators of each concept of the theory should be observable in a way that will allow us to quantify them.

Once we discern that a theory is applicable to the case under consideration, it is natural to look at the criterion of information value. How well does the theory help us to describe what actually happens, the nature of the events and their sequence? Do the concepts and hypotheses of the theory focus our attention on the meaningful and significant rather than the trivial or tautological? An informative theory is also proximate to experience rather than being purely conceptual.

The third crucial criterion for judging a theory is its predictive potential. Are the variables related in causal or functional statements? Do the statements tell us, for example, that if and when A happens, B will follow? Naturally, if we can predict, then we can more easily control our destiny, or at least set limits to it. We can also logically predict the past (known as “retroduction”). Still another aspect of prediction is postdiction, which is prediction of events occurring at time 2 (after the turning point) from the events or circumstances at time 1 (before the turning point), but making that prediction at a point in time after both “time 1” and “time 2” events have already transpired, or even where data have already been collected on both points or periods of time. We may be able to predict, however, on the basis of past experience alone, through correlations, even without being able to explain why the prediction held true. Finally, the best test of the validity of a theory is whether it predicts novel facts (LAKATOS 1970). This brings us to the fourth, and most important, of the criteria for judging a theory, namely, explanatory power.

Explanatory power is the essence of a theory. It tells how well a theory shows why there was change or stability in a person or group over a given period of time. More broadly, it tells why what actually happened did in fact occur. Finally, it evaluates how well the hypotheses of the theory order the data, the basic concepts, relationships and assumptions. Explanation is another word for theory. It goes beyond prediction. Prediction without reasons, without knowledge of conditions or causes or motives is a useful happening, but a poor substitute for understanding.
If we understand, we will also of course be more able to predict.

Overall Approach to Problems

The general theoretical problem which ought to be addressed in all applied analyses is the one which most social scientists consider the most basic. It deals with a kind of universally acceptable unit concept for social science, the primary analytical molecule, known variously as "dynamic structure", "dynamic systems" (ZNANIECKI 1952 and 1953: 322) or "patterned process" (BIDNEY 1953). The question is that of how a social order changes or is reinforced over a period of time. Alternately, how is joint action originated and sustained in the face of conflict? On a lower level of abstraction, the practical or social problem or issue may vary from that of troubled relationships between marriage or love partners, to that between boss and worker, between co-workers, between teacher and student, or that of conflicting social class interests, inter-ethnic conflict, war between nations, or union-management conflict in industry. On a methodological plane, it would be useful to limit the range of concepts to those considered most crucial by a consensus of social scientists. This means that a form of "limited reduction" (SWANSON 1965) is advocated. It is also extremely useful to analyze and diagram the relationship of constructs or variables of the theories, taken either separately or comparatively, as inserted into a general systems type of model. Space again prohibits elaboration of the latter strategy in the present paper.

Utility of Present Strategy

A crucial recommendation is for a program of study (LAKATOS 1970) to advance knowledge of each theory, as well as to approach an ultimate synthesis, or at least to begin to achieve convergence of social scientific theories. A practical beginning would be to analyze three or more theories simultaneously for their applicability to three or more instances or situation of the same type of sociological problem. Thus, we might analyze the formation of three labor unions using structural-functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and exchange theory, applying each theory to the formation of each union. Systematic comparison of the three theories as applied would begin to give us a feel for the overall utility of each theory. The same three theories might then be employed to analyze other sociological problems, such as adjustment to divorce, anomie as an effect of cybernation, escalation of the arms race, conformity in small groups, in short, to a very wide range of issues which will in turn give us a vision of the repertoire of applicability of each theory. Hopefully it will also lead to a tentative synthesis of the three theories or frames of reference. Existing case studies could be used as subject matter, as did HOMANS in The Human Group (1950). Another set of comparative case studies ripe for analysis is BEN-DAVID's The Scientist's Role in Society (1971). Thus, the present strategy is concrete. It addresses the ultimate test of a theory: How much data about social reality it explains.

Let us now look more closely at the utility of each of the four criteria, beginning with the methodological one of testability or ease of application. The earlier list of questions on methodology ought to begin with, but are also largely subordinated to this two-fold criterion. Very simply, if a theory is not testable, falsifiable, reliably measurable, and to some degree formalized, it is very difficult to compare it to another theory. If the theory is not easy to apply to concrete situations every researcher or observer will look for different phenomena under the aegis of the same theory. Or alternatively, two researchers will make different or even contradictory policy recommendations based on the same theory.

The earlier list of substantive dimensions falls mostly under the heading of information value. Information value is useful firstly because no explanation is possible without an economical, analytic, rich, exhaustive, inclusive, illustrative, plausible, i.e. informative description. It sensitizes us, facilitates reference to live experience, brings the reader closer to the concrete, observable realities of the situation being described. The more the terms and hypotheses of the theory aid us in assimilating information, visualizing the context and generating insight, the greater will be our understanding of the reality of the situation, or realization of the truth of the matter. Definitiveness is an ideal, but not normally
feasible in most contemporary sociological research. A good naturalistic case study, especially if it uses a multi-method approach to more valid data gathering usually gives us the best description. Adequate description reduces the likelihood of mere “variable analyses” (which BLUMER warned us against long ago, 1956) and the resultant proliferation of survey correlation. If information value were more appreciated we would have more case studies, comparison and syntheses. In present-day sociology it is common knowledge that it is much more difficult to publish a theoretical article than one emphasizing quantitative data. And case studies are rarely seen in the major sociological journals.

It is interesting to note that the inductive mode of research and theory building produces the highest information value. It has been said that detached yet empathetic immersion in one’s theoretical problem and human subject matter is the best way to achieve the goals of research. Vital description is, as we have noted, the necessary and primary step to valid conclusions to any study. This is so largely because good description often implies an explanation. The more cogent, complete in scope, precise and analytical, the more the description squares with the observations, the better will be the accompanying explanation.

**Predictability** is partly a kind of substantive criterion that deals also in part with the methodological use of the theory. It is, from one point of view, nonessential in itself. This is so because predictability is subordinate to or a result of being able to explain. Prediction aids us to cope with or to control our environment. Prediction is specific, as opposed to forecasting which is vague and non-rational. Some would consider prediction as the primary goal, the capstone which indicates the precision of a theory.

Finally, what is the utility of **explanatory power**? Explanation as stated above is synonymous with theory. The above list of philosophical and substantive questions partially falls under this heading. An explanatory theory must be in harmony with other extant explanations. An explanation generalizes about classes of events in the social order. It is a handy, multi-purpose tool, and even an end-in-itself, a provider of meaning. It makes sense of otherwise unrelated bits of data. It is a possible solution to the theoretical problem which must be at issue in every truly sociological study. Explanation provides us with causes or reasons or logic. Deductively interrelated statements are essential, necessary, even sufficient conditions for theory. Facts, correlations and tautologies are not substitutes. Principle and evidence are the distinguishing characteristics of social science.

No explanation is ever complete and definitive. Thus the **functional mode** of theory building (defined by M. MARX 1963 as an evolutionary or gradualist process of interplay between theory and data) is in the long run most fruitful, most appropriate for present-day social science. It consists in continual revision of theory based on ever better data gathering in successive waves and stages of research. The most useful approach to research is more likely then to be inductive at the start, deductive when stated in final form.

Moving beyond the four main criteria, the overall utility of comparative method can be seen in part by reference to its use by MAX WEBER whose cogent insights into the conditions of the development of capitalism resulted from his comparison of India, China and Western Europe at comparable stages of development. We can also look to C.W. MILLS’ “On Intellectual Craftsmanship” (1959) to see a strategy for comparison and cross-classification of ideas as means to creativity and the formulation of new and relevant problems and hypotheses. Comparison leads naturally to clarification of the value-assumptions of the researcher, a *sine qua non* of objective research and reporting. Validity varies with the researcher, observer and the reader of research reports. Validity is achieved in our view by means of triangulation or comparison of methods, but also by triangulation of theories as applied. Very very few contemporary writers, if any, systematically apply more than one major theory to their empirical research data.

Applied comparison is open to all theories, avoids premature closure on any one theory, and holds promise for directing us to new discoveries about extant theories. It is also an avenue to a more general synthesis than we social scientists have heretofore witnessed. This strategy also avoids the common temptation of theories to disembody theory from concrete application, to leave
us with concepts without percepts, which KANT reminded us are blind. But even common sense tells us that we must account for both percepts and concepts. We must have both information value and explanatory power. Immersion in practical and social problems is not contradictory to evaluation of theories. If sociology is to advance as a discipline, some of us must some of the time assess our progress and evaluate the relative utility or fruitfulness of extant theories per se. As a result of such efforts, succeeding researchers and students of society may better view the total picture, the state of the discipline, and thus gain directions for making the best use of their time. Hopefully, the type of comparison recommended, and to be illustrated here, will also serve as an exemplar to facilitate replacement of one scientific paradigm by another, either through substitution, synthesis, or revolution (KUHN 1962).

An Application

Theater plays are exceptionally useful for illustration and analysis because of their compactness of action, concreteness and high behavioral content. Angel Street, a play by P. HAMILTON (1939), will be used to illustrate two theories, first exchange theory, then symbolic interactionism. Although there are different varieties of exchange theory, including in sociology those of HOMANS (1958) and BLAU (1964), every variety is based primarily on the ultimate equation: Profit = Reward - Cost. Rewards and costs must be assessed or computed as far as possible from the point of view of the actor or person under investigation or scientific observation. Since this is practically impossible, the researcher must make the best estimate he can in order to decide whether and to what degree the interaction or relationship under consideration is profitable for the subject person. It is then useful to divide up the action into segments, before and after some crucial event. The event will typically be the cause of some notable change or reaffirmation of commitment on the part of the protagonist(s).

Let us look at the case, in Angel Street, of Mrs. Manningham. Mr. Manningham is a villain who tries to torture his wife into madness. These tortures are obviously costs for her. She is accused of little thefts and deceptions. She is the victim of insinuations that she too is insane just like her mother was before her. Mr. Manningham even used one of the servants as a shill to reproach his wife until she is half convinced that she is indeed mad. Yet she still trusts him and is the obedient wife. (In passing, the theoretical problem here can be stated as that of the type of accommodation style in the relationship that may result from pressures devastating her self concept. The practical problem is: How can she cope with the threat to her self concept?)

She does receive some rewards, but they are of less value than the costs, indicating that either her relationship with him is threatened, or, as is the case, her mental and emotional health is in jeopardy. She is happy at going to the theater with him, and enjoys serving tea and muffins, small consolation in the face of the insidiousness of his treachery.

The crucial intervening event is the visit of the benign police inspector who drops in one afternoon while Mr. Manningham is out of the house. The inspector suspects the truth, that Mr. Manningham is the maniacal murderer who fifteen years earlier, in the same house, killed a rich old woman but failed to steal her jewels. He could not find them, and is still looking for them.

After the inspector enlightens her, she is greatly relieved and thereby rewarded by the discovery of the truth and the reaffirmation of her sanity. The cost for her, if it can be considered such, is the loss of her husband (who is not legally married to her anyway because he still has an abandoned wife in a foreign country). The overall profit for her is her justification and freedom from torments, surely a more desirable situation than the one existing at the earlier point in time, at the beginning of the play. A similar evaluation could be made of the rewards and costs for Mr. Manningham, but for the sake of brevity and starkness of comparison we will forego that here.

Let us now directly examine some essential ideas of symbolic interactionism as applied to Mrs. Manningham, beginning with the notion of the social act. Mr. Manningham gestures to her (in a broad sense of that term) to indicate or insinuate that she is mad (e.g., accusing her of unknowingly moving a picture from the wall). She takes his role, and interprets it with trepidation, fear and need of support, doubting her own
sanity. Her gesture in response to his insinuation is to swear on the Bible that she did not do the things he accused her of (such as moving the picture from the wall). His gesture in response is to try to isolate her, to send her to her room alone, to refuse to discuss the matter openly with her, thus further insinuating that she is mad. He has attempted to cast her in the role of madwoman by so defining the situation for her, both by his direct actions and by circumscribing her round of life to this one old Victorian house. Her self concept is weakened by his onslaught, but she remains uncertain until the truth comes out in new social actions with the police inspector. In the beginning her “I” is confused and upset, while her “me” is merely upset over his insinuations which she sees as false. From the standpoint of her generalized other, she does not identify her circumstances immediately with those of her mother, but rather with the normal life’s role that she had been playing until now, with the forces for justice embodied in the older servant, Elisabeth, and later in the police inspector.

Some hypotheses in the symbolic interactionist tradition (taken from SHIBUTANI and KWAN 1965) also fit the main action. Consensus is facilitated by the use of common communication channels. A degree of consensus about her insanity occurs between Mr. Manningham and the young servant, Nancy, because Mrs. Manningham’s communication channels with the outside world are so narrowly restricted. When the channels are interrupted by the entrance on the scene of the police inspector and accompanying new communication channels, there is no longer consensus among a majority about her insanity. More specifically, patterns of concerted action persist as long as communication channels remain unchanged. The action to drive her insane persists until the police inspector enlightens her.

**Evaluation on the Four Criteria as Applied**

Exchange theory is easy to apply because it requires knowledge of only two basic concepts, reward and cost. If our interpretation of the subject person are accurate, then we need only evaluate the relative merits or weighting of the two concepts in order to compute the profit for that person. The difficulty in Angel Street is to decide what is rewarding for Mrs. Manningham. Her happiness at the beginning is only momentary, that of going to the theater and then serving her husband. Her costs are the suffering of accusations and insinuations that she is insane. There is little relative profit for her, at least until she finds out the truth about her husband.

Symbolic interactionism is also quite easy to apply, especially to this kind of two-person interaction. The major gesture and role taking processes are clear because of the limited boundaries of the action. The relevance of her self concept is apparent. Her internal confusion can easily be imputed to discern what is happening in her internalized conversation of gestures between her “I” and her “me”. As for the two hypotheses illustrated it is not difficult to pick out examples of consensus (about her insanity), communication channels (with the outside world), and patterns of concerted action (her husband and his use of the servant to help drive her insane). Some judgment (even subjective judgment, however trained) naturally had to be used in order to limit the application to the two specific hypotheses mentioned. This is a possible overall difficulty, or locus of possible error in interpretation. But then observer judgment is always a source of invalidity in social research.

The information value of exchange theory is only average because of its severely limited number of basic terms, though the basic equation does facilitate our cognitive understanding of each episode or scene on limited but crucial variables. Information value of symbolic interactionism is above average, better than exchange theory because of its wide range of concepts and at least implicit hypotheses. The concepts of definition of the situation, role taking, and communication channels are especially useful for the present story because they direct us to focus on methods used and the conditions determining the success of the attempt to drive Mrs. Manningham “crazy”. Exchange theory as stated is limited to an analysis of this crucial action in the rather superficial terms of a cost to her as an individual.

The predictability of either theory here is average at best. Exchange theory allows us to predict Mrs. Manningham’s actions only after the police inspector revels the plot to her, but not before. Until then we are kept in suspense. Sym
bolic interactionism with its focus on the definition of the situation does not allow us to predict beyond the space of a few minutes or a few lines, because its hypotheses are not yet specific enough in their predictions. It is not a true theory but only a frame of reference as are virtually all extant theories.

The explanatory power of both theories is above average. Mrs. Manningham’s perceived profit in remaining married, trusting her husband, and her relative isolation from the outside world, or isolation from additional sources of consensual support, explain rather pointedly why she did not suspect her husband’s intentions before the police inspector entered the picture. Again, for all practical purposes, the notion in symbolic interactionism of the “definition of the situation” explains her naivety about as equally as well as the reward-minus-cost model. Now let us try to generalize a bit from this concrete case by moving on to an overall comparative evaluation of the two perspectives treated.

Overall Evaluation on the Four Criteria for the Theories in General

Exchange theory is probably the easiest of any major perspective to apply to an almost unlimited number of situations. It is nearly universally applicable, which contributes to its outstanding degree of explanatory power. In situations with a limited number of variables operating, it has moderate information value and high predictive potential. However, its applicability is limited due to the difficulty of quantifying rewards and costs based on the inevitable lack of complete knowledge of persons, their feelings and situations. We can thus predict only after many imputations of the subjects’ perceptions of rewards and costs. Information value of the theory is limited for the most part to what can be described in terms of the three major concepts. As for explanatory power, emotions and sentiments as motivators are only indirectly importable into the theory of why the subject acted as he did.

Symbolic interactionism, except as interpreted by a very few writers, lacks specific and explicit hypotheses. Thus, its ease of application is limited in its present state of development. It is also a highly judgmental matter how to specify each concept, vague as they are, however true to reality. It is easy to apply in a partial way, but requires a considerable amount of thought to apply in detail because of the richness of its array of concepts. It fails to predict the direction of long-term change due to its fluidity, indefinite and here-and-now character. Hence the breadth and number of concepts of symbolic interactionism gives it relatively high information value in most applications. Explanatory power of this theory is imperfect because of the lack of specificity of the concepts and hypotheses. But when these basic notions of the theory are applied carefully, and in detail, the explanatory power is outstanding among extant sociological or social psychological theories.

Conclusion

The approach taken here, by insisting on theory as applied, and by the use of literary case material, has attempted to bridge the gap between the humanistic and scientific styles, the soft and hard-nosed, tender-minded and though-minded (James 1907), cool and warm (Maslow 1966). If calculated analysis fails, perhaps we can join with Maslow to obtain “religious” experience, a sense of mystery, or peak experiences from scientific reading and research. Or with Carl Rogers we could carry on research or construct theory simply because it is satisfying to perceive the world as having order and meaning (1961: 711). With this approach at least we might better see with Rogers and Maslow and Nisbet (1962) that there is no intrinsic contradiction between science and humanism. In the final analysis, a theory that does not provide aesthetic enjoyment is less attractive for scientist and layman alike. And hopefully each person in his own way and at his own level of analysis can increase his understanding of social life and social theory by applying the four criteria for a good theory.

Those who have funds for survey research are certainly not prohibited by this present strategy from applying and comparatively evaluating two or more theories at a time as applied to their research problem and findings. However, the strategy of using extant (even realistic literary) case material is less costly and probably has just as much validity for advancing theory, given our present state of knowledge. Certainly it
### Appendix

#### Comparative Rating Table

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<th>Dimensions</th>
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<td>2. Tradition: a) empiricism, b) rationalism, c) idealism, d) positivism.</td>
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<td>1. Social Form: space, particle, flux, or organic</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How much evidence exists for the theory.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Information value</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Explanatory Power</strong></td>
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<td>5. How much data the theory explains.</td>
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<td>6. Meta-school: evolutionary, equilibrium, conflict, rise-and-fall</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Methodological</strong></td>
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<td>Form:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Classificatory</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Explicit hypothetical statements</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Parsimony</td>
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<td>Procedure:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Testability</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Mode of theory building: deductive, model, inductive, functional</td>
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<td>Use:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Ease of application</strong></td>
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<td>2. <strong>Predictive potential</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Generation of research studies</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Anschrift des Verfassers:
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