

THEORETICAL STRUCTURES AND THE MICRO-MACRO
PROBLEM

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I. INTRODUCTION

The two parts into which the present volume is divided bear a misleading resemblance to the common distinction between micro- and macrosociology—a resemblance so misleading that it calls for some comment. The resemblance is misleading because the volume is a collection of theories. Theories are abstract and general. Because they are abstract and general, they have multiple interpretations. And many, though not all, multiply interpretable theories are capable of applications to both micro- and macrosociology. True, not all the theories in the present volume are pure abstract structures. Many, in fact, are given particular, concrete interpretations. Thus, Stryker's paper on identity (ch. 2) is applied to individuals and their relations, Hannan's paper on organizational ecology (ch. 14) is applied to organizations and their environments. By contrast, Wilier et al's paper on networks of power (ch. 12) is a purely abstract, general theory. It applies to "actors" and their relations. It is in some sense an "interactor" theory, but the actors might be individuals, formalized positions in an organization, organizations as a whole, or even nation-states. Insofar as a theory (interactor or not) is abstract and general, it is neither micro- nor macrosociology. It is only the interpretations of a theory that are micro or macro. The division of the present volume into parts is not a division into micro and macro, because

there are abstract theories in both parts. And even where the theories have particular micro or macro interpretations they have in most cases an underlying theoretical structure admitting interpretations at other "levels."

Multiple interpretability is a property of all abstract theories. It is in a sense what "abstract" and "general" mean. However, we do not claim that all theories are therefore capable of application to both micro- and macrophenomena. Hannan's population ecology of organizations is multiply interpretable theory with, for example, application also to ethnic conflict (Hannan, 1979). But, because of its underlying structure, it is unlikely to have any microapplication. It has no actors. It is a mistake, however, to over-generalize this kind of example. Though some abstract theories are not capable of application to both micro- and macrophenomena, there is at least one very large class of theories, interactor theories, which is.

Not that there are no differences between micro- and macroapplications. However one defines micro/macro, whether as scale, level, or institutionalization, or kind of actor, the differences between micro- and macroapplication are profound. But they are not differences between qualitatively different kinds of theory. The differences are analytic, they are caused by variables in or interpretations of a theory. Neither gives rise to concretely different kinds of theory, one of which is "micro," the other "macro." Scale, level, and institutionalization are all variables; individuals, formalized

positions, organizations, and nation-states are all different interpretations of the units of a theory. The differences to which they give rise are important, but they are differences within, not between theories.

The micro/macro problem has recently attracted a good deal of attention. (See Alexander et al, 1987; Coleman, 1986; Collins, 1981; Fine and Kleinman, 1983; Knorr-Certina and Cicourel, 1981; Ritzer, 1985.) Understood as "levels," the effort to solve the problem has led to a proliferation of distinctions, adding "meso" (Maines, 1979) and "mega" (Jones, 1988) to micro and macro. The proliferation of levels reveals a good deal about what is wrong in this debate. It continually waffles between treating the issue as analytic (for example, Alexander et al, 1987), which promises some sort of solution, and treating "levels" as if they were ontological realities (Maines, 1979; Jones, 1988), which promises only a dead end. The issues become clearer, we believe, if one examines more closely the structure of multiply interpreted interactor theories, which is one of the tasks we undertake in the present introduction.

Interactor theories describe interaction in systems of actors that occur with situations that are at least partly, though usually not wholly, governed by pre-given social frameworks. Though they are "methodologically situationalist" (Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981), they are often taken to be "methodologically individualist" by holists. For this reason, holists object even to macroapplications of such theories as

being "micro" because, though they might not be interpersonal, they are still interactor; though the actors might not be individuals, they still have agency; and though the action is situated in structures, the actors still act. From this viewpoint, the application of, say, Emerson's power-dependence theory (Emerson, 1962, 1972a, 1972b) to interorganizational relations is "reduction." But, except as ritual, it is difficult to misuse the concept of reduction in this way. (On reduction, for example, see Nagel, 1962; or Webster, 1973). It is an attitude that only gets in the way of the more practical purpose of understanding scale, level, and structure as analytic aspects of theories.

This argument holds no matter what meaning one gives to "micro/macro" in the technical, as distinct from metatheoretical, sense, whether small/large, actor/system, action/structure, or individual actor/group actor. But one of the difficulties of the problem is the tendency to treat all these meanings as if they were correlated when in fact they can be independent. In the present chapter we use the terms in their simplest meaning, scale. This makes it particularly easy to see the analytic, as opposed to concrete, nature of the micro/macro distinction. But we could equally well have taken level, institutionalization, or nature of the actor as a starting point for the same argument.

The present chapter is divided into three parts that correspond to three basic theses of this argument. The first part develops further the claim that the micro/macro distinction

is purely analytic, a variable in or interpretation of a theory rather than a difference between theories. The second part develops further the claim that theories, because they are abstract and general, are in themselves neither micro nor macro, it is only their applications that may be micro or macro. To do this, it briefly studies two applications, one micro and the other macro, that have a common underlying theoretical structure. The third part further develops the claim that there is a very large class of theories, interactor theories, capable of application to both micro- and macrosociological phenomena. It analyzes the elements, processes, and features of this class of theories, a class to which many, though not all, of the papers in the present volume belong.

II. MICRO, MESO, MACRO, MEGA.

The simplest meaning of "micro" versus "macro" is "small" versus "large." It is not clear how anyone could ever have entertained the idea that scale gives rise to qualitatively different kinds of theory. Scale has no natural break at which micro becomes readily distinguished from macro, and differences in scale are as important at the small as at any other part of the scale. Socially, the difference between two and three actors is possibly the most important break in the continuity of the natural numbers and certainly more significant than the break between, say, ten and eleven, or fifty and fifty-one, or one hundred and one-hundred-and-one actors, where one might more

naturally look for a distinction between micro and macro. The differences are again large at the larger end of the scale, where the difference between, say, a town of 5,000 people and a city of 500,000 people is very large, even though both are presumably macro. Scale may be lumpy, but it is still a continuum.

At first sight, levels seem to imply something both more discontinuous and more concretely "real." But what are the levels in the analysis of conjugal power structure? If Dick and Jane are married, both employed (by different employers), and live in a neighborhood of a city in the Eastern part of the United States, then individuals, family, neighborhood, city, region, and nation may all play a role in the analysis of the division of powers between Dick and Jane. But firm and industry probably are not among the relevant levels. Instead, they are likely to appear in the analysis as attributes of the two actors. On the other hand, what are the levels in the analysis of social mobility? Now firm and industry are important levels of analysis but neighborhood is probably not. The levels, in other words, are abstractions which shift with the purpose of the observer. In any case, there is no natural break in them that clearly distinguishes micro from macro. It is this analytic, as opposed to concrete, nature of levels that has given rise to their proliferation into micro, macro, then meso (Maines, 1979), and now mega (Jones, 1988). In some sense they are all real, but it is the phenomenal world that is concrete, not the "levels" abstracted by the observer. In particular, neither the individuals nor any of the higher levels are more real than any

other of the observer's abstractions. Collins' (1981) argument that microrelations are the foundations of macrosociology because encounters are what the observer actually observes and all the rest is constructed by the observer is not a tenable position, because the micro world is no less observer-constructed than the macro world.

The problem of structure/action is more subtle, especially because it is more difficult to separate technical from metatheoretical issues. Some theoretical strategies go so far as to insist that all behavior simply emanates from pre-given structure (as Meyer does in Meyer et al, 1987). Others insist that no behavior at all is pre-given: Because structure is open-textured, incomplete, cannot guarantee its own application, all behavior is action, has agency (Garfinkel, 1964). Neither position is tenable: If one adopts the view that there is no pre-given structure, one cannot even analyze the "background expectancies" that figure so largely in Garfinkel's analysis. If one adopts the view that there is only pre-given structure, it becomes difficult if not impossible to understand change. But if one adopts the position that structure too is a variable, that its institutionalization varies from situation to situation, but most situations combine structure with action, it becomes difficult to identify structure with macro and action with microsociology.

Thus, the arguments that "micro" and "macro" are analytic distinctions, not concrete realities, does not depend on the

meaning one gives to the terms. However, part of the micro/macro problem arises from the treating all three as a single dichotomy. It is often assumed that scale, level, and structure are somehow intercorrelated, giving "micro" the meaning of small, unstructured systems of action while "macro" means large, structured systems without action. But it is just as obvious that they can be uncorrelated as it is that they can be analytic.

The number of levels sometimes increases as the size of a system increases, but even the smallest system has at least two levels, actor and system. It is possible to equate micro with actor and macro with system, if consistently applied. One then has a view that every theory has both a micro and macro aspect, and solves the micro/macro problem by relating actor to system. But this has nothing to do with scale. It is certainly not what distinguishes interpersonal from inter-nation conflict or conjugal power from world-system dependency relations.

Nor is scale necessarily correlated with structure. Many sociologists focus increasingly on structure as size of system increases, but even the smallest system has structure and even the largest has action. The latter point is sometimes obscured by equating "structure", not with pre-given social framework, but with supra-individual "forces." The outcomes of action are often unintended; even when recognized they are often beyond the control of any individual; and this is especially noticed by sociologists in large-scale systems. But this is not a matter of increasing amounts of structure. "Macro" outcomes are still

outcomes of actions. "Structure" is given to action by pre-given social frameworks. Just as with levels, one could construct a consistent theory of micro- and macro-relations around the distinction between structure and action, but again the problem would be to relate structure to action within a theory. It would not give rise to different theories.

Correlating scale with structure has been less misleading than correlating it with levels because discussions of levels seldom rid themselves of the presupposition that levels are not simply analytic, they are ontologically real. If levels are reified, one is left with only three options: Treat theory at each level as independent, reduce one theory to the other, or interrelate them. All of these have been tried, repeatedly: Independence by Durkheim (1951/1897) and Parsons (Parsons and Shils, 1951) among others; reduction to microsociology by Homans (1964), Collins (1981), Denzen (1987), Fine and Kleinman (1983), and Knorr-Certina (1981); and to macrosociology by Althusser (1971) and Meyer et al (1987); as well as numerous syntheses, for example by Alexander (1987), Coleman (1986), Giddens (1979), and Ritzer (1985). But none has laid the problem to rest. They have not laid the problem to rest because, like the mind/body problem, the categories in terms of which we have come to think about the problem force us into asking fruitless questions about it. If levels are independent, they give rise to two separate kinds of theory, one micro and the other macro. But neither scale nor level give rise to qualitatively different kinds of theory. If they are not independent, possibly one is reducible to the other.

But no one has been able to accomplish the reduction (Webster, 1973)• If the levels are neither independent nor reducible, the only solution is synthesis. But even synthesis often still conceives of levels as concrete "parts" to be related.¹

Our conclusion up to this point is that scale, level, and structure are variables in, not differences between, theories. Do the same arguments hold for the difference between individual and corporate actors? Individual and corporate actors are not variables in a theory, they are interpretations of a theory.

III. Power in Families and Organizations

But this does not matter to the argument at all. The more general claim is that theories are not micro/macro, they are abstract and general. Because they are abstract and general, they are capable of multiple interpretation. Some, though not all, abstract theories are capable not only of multiple situational interpretation, but also to collective as well as individual actor interpretations.

Of the many examples of this kind of multiple interpretation, the one we will look at here is the application of the exchange theory of power to conjugal power structures and interorganizational relations. The "resource theory" of conjugal power is a theory of the power-dependence relations between two actors, a husband and a wife. The "resource dependency theory" of interorganizational relations is a theory of the

power-dependence relations among a sizeable community of organizations. The two differ from each other in a number of concrete details, some of which derive from differences in scale. Nevertheless, they have a common underlying theoretical structure. This theoretical structure has been abstractly formulated in various ways (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959; Emerson, 1962, 1972a, 1972b; Blau, 1964) but, especially in the organizations literature, it has been Emerson's theory of power-dependence relations that has been most often applied.

A. Emerson's Theory of Power-Dependence Relations and Related Theoretical Research

Emerson's theory is formulated in terms of two actors, A and B, whose social relations entail ties of mutual dependence (Emerson, 1962). It is capable of application, as Emerson notes, to relations between persons and persons, persons and groups, or groups and groups, providing the actors satisfy conditions of internal consistency, and are capable of action as single entities, of "choice" among alternatives. "Power" is a property of a relation between A and B (i.e., not of either A or B as individual actors) defined as the amount of resistance on the part of one actor, say B, that can be overcome by another, say A. Thus, it is potential rather than actual power that the theory describes. Power is founded on dependence, where "dependence" is a matter of the control by one actor of resources on which another depends for achieving his/her goals. (A "resource" is anything instrumental to attainment of a goal.) Dependence

varies with two factors, motivational investment in goals and the availability of alternatives: It is directly proportional to motivational investment, but inversely proportional to availability of alternative resources outside the AB relation. Power is a function of the net balance between B's dependence on A and A's on B. If dependence is asymmetric, power is "unbalanced." Emerson assumes that unbalanced relations are unstable and tend towards balance. They encourage the use of power by the more powerful actor which in turn sets in motion processes by the less powerful to restore balance. There are four kinds of "balancing" operations: B may reduce motivational investment in goals mediated by A (withdraw); gain alternative sources of resources other than A (extend networks); increase A's motivational investment in goals mediated by B (status emergence); or deny to A alternative sources of resources mediated by B (coalition formation). Emerson's theory does not specify conditions under which one rather than the other occurs; he says this will depend on conditions particular to concrete cases.

Thus, the logical structure of the theory consists of two definitions, power and balance, and three assumptions—that power is a function of dependence; that dependence is an increasing function of the value of resources mediated by the other and a decreasing function of the availability of alternatives; and that unbalanced power is unstable, tending towards balance.

In a major restatement of the theory, reformulated in purely

behavioral terms, Emerson (1972a) articulated its structure more explicitly, leading to both its refinement and extension. The two most notable refinements introduced uncertainty into the analysis of value and distinguished negative from positive relations between relations. (Two exchange relations are negatively related if exchange in one decreases the value of exchange in the other. They are positively related if exchange in one increases the value of exchange in the other.) The latter refinement prepared the way for the most notable extension of the theory, to more complex networks of relations (Emerson, 1972b; further developed by Cook, 1977). Both the earlier and later formulations of the theory have given rise to a substantial body of theoretical research, confirming the balance assumption (Emerson, 1964) and especially the implication that structural position determines the "use" of power, which in behavioral terms means asymmetries in the outcomes of exchange (Burgess and Nielson, 1974; Michaels and Wiggins, 1976; Stolte and Emerson, 1976). While the effects of position were repeatedly confirmed, a gap between potential and actual power was found (Cook and Emerson, 1978, 1984), especially when exchange is only implicitly bargained (Moire (1981b, 1985). This led to further theoretical elaboration of the process of "use" of power, left implicit in Emerson, by Molm (1981a, b) and to theory and research on normative constraints on the use of power (Cook and Emerson, 1978, 1984o). Meanwhile, the extension of the theory to complex networks was empirically tested by Cook (Cook et al, 1983), who introduced the idea of a network's dependence on a position ("vulnerability," as a determinant of power, and the theory was

further extended to control over negative as well as positive outcomes by Molm (1987).

B. The Resource Theory of Conjugal Power and Related Applied Research

Wolfe's (1959) theory of power and authority in the family is, like Emerson's, a theory of actors A, B (who Wolfe also notes may be persons, organizations, or groups of any kind) who are mutually interdependent and engaged in exchanges of goods and services. Wolfe's theory precedes Emerson's by several years, both in fact growing from the even earlier "field" theory of Lewin (1951, 335-336) which had already been used to formulate the concept of "power" by Festinger (1953). Although Wolfe's definition of power is more explicitly field-theoretic, it is essentially, like Emerson's, a resistance concept and, like Emerson's, it defines potential rather than actual power. Finally, like Emerson's, the central factor in power is dependence on resources, defined as any characteristic or any possession of one actor instrumental to the goals of and transferable to another. Like Emerson's concept of a resource, Wolfe's is highly general. Anything at all might be a resource, status as well as guns, love as well as money, skills as well as possessions.

Unlike Emerson's theory, Wolfe's does not take into account the alternatives available to the actors, and there is no balance

assumption, hence no balancing operations. The theory is applied to families by assuming that the actors are a husband and a wife and that resources include both what each does for the collective goals of the family and what each does for the needs of the other. Thus, resources include occupation, income, education, child-rearing skills, domestic skills, and skills in financial management. Following field-theoretic logic it is assumed that who makes what decisions varies from "region" to "region" of the family's space, but it is assumed that financial decisions are bound to be important to the family, and hence the more powerful actor is more likely to make final decisions about them. As in Emerson, it is the net balance of power that determines who has the most power, i.e., the husband's resources minus the wife's resources. There will be some pre-given structure of authority, derived from cultural tradition, but it will change if it is not congruent with power/resources.

This "resource" theory, though in many ways similar to Emerson, is brought even closer to "exchange" theory by Heer (1963)' Heer points out certain anomalies that resource theory cannot explain, for example that the wife's power decreases as the number of children increases. Heer clarifies these anomalies by taking alternatives outside the family into account. What varies as wife's power varies are her alternatives, both in terms of employment prospects and prospects for remarriage after divorce.

However, the Wolfe-Heer application of power-dependence ideas to conjugal power still differs from the more abstract theory of power-dependence in two significant ways. On the one hand, the application is less than the theory; it makes no use of the balance idea. On the other, it is more than the theory; it integrates into it a theory of (pre-given) authority. It is in fact the effect of pre-given authority that has been the most controversial issue in subsequent research grounded in the "resource" theory of conjugal power. Cross-national research at first seemed to suggest severe cultural constraints on the effects of resources on power (Rodman, 1967, 1972). However, these constraints seem themselves to depend on the extent to which women contribute to the process of production (Bossen, 1975; Rogers, 1975). (For reviews of this theory and related applied research, at various stages of its development, see particularly Lee, 1977; McDonald, 1980; and Scinowacz, 1987.)

C. The Resource-Dependency Theory of Interorganizational Relations and Related Applied Research

Emerson's theory of power-dependence relations (1962) was first applied to organizations by Thompson (1967). Even though Emerson had already abstracted the theory from interpersonal relations, it was not an obvious idea to apply a theory that at the time concerned the dyad AB to organizational interrelations. But Thompson's "open-systems" framework led him to think of the organization as an actor in relations of mutual dependence with

other organizations, which in turn led him to recognize and seize on the usefulness of Emerson's theory for formulating more explicit hypotheses about the nature and consequences of this dependence. But Thompson also thought of organizations as managing their environment, as acting on it as well as being determined by it. This made Emerson's theory, because of its balance hypothesis, a particularly suitable one for formulating organization-environment exchanges as Thompson understood them.

Although the language of the application changes, referring only to organizations and their relations, Thompson's use of Emerson corresponds closely, proposition by proposition, with Emerson, 1962. Dependence is directly proportional to the "organization's need for resources or performances" but inversely proportional to the ability of other elements to provide them (Thompson, 1967, 30). Power is the obverse of dependence. And Thompson makes especially prominent use of Emerson's balancing operations, which become the ways an organization manages its environment.

On the other hand, two balancing operations, withdrawal and status dynamics, disappear from the analysis while several ideas are added." Thompson has buffering mechanisms which play no role in Emerson, and uncertainty becomes the driving force of the theory earlier in Thompson (1967) than in Emerson (1972a). But most important, Thompson follows Cyert and March (1963) in viewing organizations as coalitions rather than unitary actors.

In order to apply Emerson's theory, an organization must satisfy the theory's criteria of actorness, but within the literature on organizations there is some doubt that organizations are unitary actors. That they are coalitions, instead, implies inconsistency in preferences even if they are capable at any given instant of action as a single actor. This problem, potentially fatal for use of Emerson's theory, is solved by doubly applying it: it explains not only interorganizational relations but also the power structure of coalitions within the organization, which depends on control over resources that are critical, but scarce, in managing uncertainty

Subsequent research on the resource-dependency theory of organizations has developed along basically three lines. One branch of it has been concerned with mechanisms through which organizations manage their environment, such as mergers, acquisitions, or boards of directors. (See Pfeffer, 1972a, 1972b; Pfeffer and Nowak, 1976; Usdiken, 1983.) The second has been concerned with how resources are allocated among organizations that form some kind of system of interorganizational relations. (See Pfeffer and Leong, 1977; Provan, 1982; Provan et al, 1980.) The third has been concerned with the allocation of resources to subunits within an organization. (See Hills and Mahoney, 1978; Pfeffer and Moore, 1980; Pfeffer, Salancik, and Leblebici, 1976; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1974.) Reformulation of Thompson's theory by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) substantially refines the concept of interdependence and explains the gap that especially the second

branch of this research had found between potential and actual power by formulating conditions under which potential power is enacted. (For reviews of this research see Aldrich, 1979; Aldrich and Pfeffer, 1976; Pfeffer, 1981.)

D. Conclusion

If we compare the resource theory of conjugal power to the resource-dependency theory of organizations, there are certainly substantial differences. The actors are persons in the first, groups in the second case. There are only two actors in the first, many in the second case. And the two applications differ not only in how they operationalize concepts but also in how they model the concrete phenomena with which they are concerned: The resource-dependency theory of organizations uses balancing operations, the resource theory of conjugal power does not. And each combines power-dependence with other theories, though in the case of the resource theory of conjugal power it is a theory of family authority while in the case of the resource-dependency theory of organizations it is theories of coalitions and of uncertain environments. But none of these differences can disguise the fact that the two applications have an underlying theoretical structure in common, that of the exchange theory of power.

Thus, like the difference made by size, level, and structure, the difference between person and group is analytic:

It is a difference in interpretations of one theory, not two qualitatively different kinds of theory. This conclusion is not confined to the particular theory we have used to illustrate the argument. It can be generalized to all interactor theories. Exchange theory is only one kind of interactor theory. It is reasonable to ask what, then, limits the scope of the argument? In the next section we characterize in a more general way the kind of theories to which the argument applies.

IV. THE STRUCTURE OF INTERACTOR THEORIES

Interactor theories are theories that describe the mechanisms or processes by which actors act in relation to other actors in situations of action. Here we will describe the underlying logic of such theories: Not all the theories in the present volume have all the elements, processes, and features we describe. A number, for example, do not fully describe how outcomes of interaction are institutionalized or the events that activate the processes they describe, though the logic of interactor theories requires it. Nevertheless, what we will describe is the structure of a full-fledged interactor theory, one that fully exploits the underlying logic of such theories.

We will describe them in terms of their elements, processes, and features. The elements of an interactor theory are systems of actors in situations characterized by their relations and the nature of the situation. The processes, which are generated by and addressed to some problematic event or condition, are both determined by and determine "states" of these systems of relations. The features that distinguish interactor theories have to do with the balance they strike between actor and situation, agency and external causation, structure and action.

A. Elements

While the "actor" seems the logical starting point for interactor theories, it is not the actor but the "actor-in-situation" that is their basic unit of analysis. A "situation" here refers to a specific set of conditions that can generate, define, and determine the course of a process.

(1) Situations. Because interactor theories are process theories, they require some state or event activating a process, which is part of the situation that governs the process. Processes can be activated by almost any kind of problematic event or condition. In Emerson's power-dependence theory, it is the balance of power that activates both the use of power and balance-restoring operations. In Berger, Fisek, and Norman's "Evolution of Status Expectations" (ch. 5) it is a goal or a task to perform; in Ridgeway's "Legitimation in Informal Status Orders" (ch. 6) it is differentiation by external status orders; in Sjörenson's "Processes of Allocation to Open and Closed Positions" (ch. 10), it is vacancies; in Jasso's "The Distributive Justice Force" (ch. 13) it is an external frame of reference that activates reward-expectations, the difference between actual and expected rewards that activates responses to inequity.

Given such an event or condition, a situation is "defined" and its course determined by three types of elements: (a) the

immediate conditions of action; (b) the larger social framework of the process; and (c) products of past interaction of the actors in the situation.

(a) Conditions of Action. Situations first of all consist of the immediate conditions of action. These include the nature of the goal, or of the disturbance, that activates the process; the ecology of the actors; and/or the amount of information available to them for defining the situation. In Foschi's "Status Characteristics, Standards, and Attributions" (ch. 3), Foddy and Smithson's "Fuzzy Sets" (ch. 4), and Cohen and Silver's "Group Structure and Information Exchange" (ch. 7), the goal is a decision. An important feature of the situation in each of these theories is whether the decision is individual or collective. If the decisions are individual, it will also matter how centralized or decentralized they are, the crucial variable differentiating open and closed labor markets in Sjörenson's vacancy competition model (ch. 10). The actors may be few or many, their relations direct or indirect, resources may be more or less transferable, all variables that play central roles in Fararo and Skvoretz's "Biased Net Theory" (ch. 9) and Wilier, Markovsky, and Patton's "Networks of Power" (ch. 12). A collection of conditions of this kind constitute the immediate conditions of action, though which conditions matter varies from theory to theory.

(b) The Social Framework of the Process. In any situation in an interactor theory there is some larger social framework,

some pre-given structure deriving from a larger social system. Again, there is wide variation from theory to theory in the particular mix of elements constituting this framework. It can include anything from purely cultural elements (myths, symbols, rituals, values, beliefs, rules) to purely structural elements (networks of ties, power-dependence relations) or any mix of cultural and structural elements. In Foschi's "Standards" (ch.3), Foddy and Smithson's "Fuzzy Sets" (ch. 4), and Cohen and Silver's "Information Exchange" (ch. 7), the status characteristics that define the situation are categories in the shared culture of the actors. In Fararo and Skvoretz's "Biased Net Theory" (ch. 9) and Wilier, Markovsky, and Patton's "Networks of Power" (ch. 12) it is networks of ties, and in Sri-enson's "Processes of Allocation" (ch. 10), it is hierarchies of positions. In Stryker's "Identity Theory" (ch. 2) and Samuel and Zelditch's "Expectations, Shared Awareness, and power" (ch. 11), it is a mix of the two, networks and role-expectations in Stryker's theory, power-dependence relations and prior assumptions about use of power and probabilities of compliance in Samuel and Zelditch's.

(c) Products of Past Interaction. In addition to a larger social framework, there is typically also some more particular, local knowledge that is the product of the past interaction of the particular actors in the situation. In Berger, Fisek, and Norman's "Evolution of Status Expectations" (ch. 5), expectation states formed in previous interaction are transferred to and form part of the initial situation in a subsequent task interaction.

In Fararo and Skvoretz's "Biased Nets" (ch. 9), weak ties derive from the larger social framework but some kinds of strong ties, such as friendship, derive from the past interaction of particular actors. In Samuel and Zelditch's "Expectations, Shared Awareness, and Power" (ch. 11), expectations about use of and compliance with power derive in part from cultural tradition (and thus a larger social framework), but also in part from past-interaction of the particular actors in a power-dependence relation. In Jasso's "Distributive Justice" (ch. 13), expectations derive from the larger social framework, but justice processes derive from differences between expectations and the actual distribution of rewards, which is local.

(2) Actors. The actors in such situations are conceived quite generally as any unit having the capacity to control some of the variation in its own actions. The fundamental property of an actor is agency. Actors make choices, decisions, evaluations; they "orient" themselves to situations and process information about them; they anticipate, expect, have policies. The particular capacities of the actor again vary from theory to theory. It is only the general notion of agency that they have in common. In Stryker's "Identity Theory" (ch. 2), actors make "commitments" (that, in turn, derive from the structure of opportunities and contingencies created by age, gender, class, and other social arrangements). In Foschi's "Standards" (ch. 3) and Foddy and Smithson's "Fuzzy Sets" (ch. 4), they infer abilities and make decisions. In Wilier, Markovsky, and Patton's "Networks of Power" (ch. 12), they bid for goods. In S/irenson's

"Processes of Allocation," actors do not simply move, they choose to move, into and out of positions.

Agency is a property that groups may have as well as individuals. All that is required is that the group be corporate, in the legal sense of the term. Typically, this means that the group has some means by which collective decisions are made and actions as a collective are taken, as armies invade nations, nations tax citizens, universities choose faculty and students, hospitals admit and release patients, unions make bargains, firms select product lines, set prices, employ labor, states make laws, enter into treaties, raise armies. Network theories have been especially explicit about this: Thus, Fararo and Skvoretz, in ch. 9, explicitly point out that their "Biased Net Theory" applies to mergers among organizations and trade relations among nations as well as marriages among persons. Wilier, Markovsky, and Patton's "Networks of Power" (ch. 12) explicitly applies to groups as well as persons.

Agency does not necessarily imply intention or awareness. Again, there is wide variation from theory to theory in how aware the actor is of the processes that engage them, particularly information-processing processes, or in how intended the outcomes of interactive processes are. Many, like Sorenson's "Processes of Allocation" (ch. 10), are hidden-hand theories in which aggregate outcomes are intended by no one, in which in fact, in "open" structures, the process compels actors even if their intention is to escape the outcome. In all of the "expectation

state" theories in the volume (such as Foschi's "Standards," Foddy and Smithson's "Fuzzy Sets," or Berger, Fisek, and Norman's "Evolution of Status" (chs. 3-5)), very complex inputs of initial status information are "processed" by the actors but the actors are not assumed to be fully or partially aware of the process and, if asked to describe it, cannot tell an interviewer much about it. But such hidden-hand and unconscious-processing theories are nevertheless interactor theories in the sense that the orientations of the actors are a fundamental aspect of the underlying process.

(3) Relations. Nor are actors necessarily aware of the pattern of relations that form them into systems. But, by definition, all interactor theories are made up of multiple actors, the actors form systems, and the systems are describable by the relations among the actors. The minimum required is that the actors are behaviorally interdependent, that two or more actors each affect the other, whether aware of the fact or not, as in Fararo and Skvoretz's "Biased Nets" (ch. 9) or Wilier, Markovsky, and Patton's "Networks of Power" (ch. 12). Furthermore, it is sufficient that this interdependence among actors be indirect: That is, what is required for a "system" is that every actor be at least indirectly connected to every other. But the interactor concept of a "system" does not require that each actor be directly connected to every other actor, it requires only that any one actor be directly connected to at least one other. Thus, Ridgeway's "Legitimation in Informal

Status Orders" (ch. 6) deals with a "system" in which all relations are direct, but interactor theories are not in general confined to pairwise, direct relations, and theories like Fararo and Skvoretz's (ch. 9), Srengson's (ch. 10), and Wilier, Markovsky, and Patton's (ch. 12) permit indirect relations, and therefore, action at a distance.

B. Processes

A full-fledged interactor theory describes mechanisms or processes by which the elements of the theory come to be related to each other. This requires that they explain how activating conditions, the social framework, and products of past interaction are transformed into definitions of particular actors in particular situations; it requires that they explain the nature, conditions, and consequences of particular processes of action; and it requires that they explain how the outcomes of such processes are transformed into elements of the history and social framework of subsequent interaction.

All this is typically organized around some kind of "state" of the system of actors in a given situation. States, in part determined by pre-given structure and in part by action in the present situation, are situationally specific, stable, relational structures. In theories like Foschi's (ch. 3), Foddy and Smithson's (ch. 4), or Cohen and Silver's (ch. 7), the states are patterns of status relations. In Stryker's "Identity Theory"

(ch. 2), they are salience hierarchies. In Fararo and Skvoretz's "Biased Nets" (ch. 9) the states are constituted out of ways of differentiating actors, out of the heterogeneity of their relations, and functions of them. In Jasso's "Distributive Justice" (ch. 13), the states are distributions of actual and expected rewards.

These states in general formulate in a precise fashion the "definition of the situation." Such definitions, though sometimes taken as givens, more typically require specific theoretical explanation because activation of a process is typically selective in the sense that a given social process uses some but not all of the available inputs into the situation. Thus, particular tasks make particular aspects of the social framework and particular aspects of past interaction relevant in theories like Foschi's (ch. 3), Foddy and Smithson's (ch. 4), or Cohen and Silver's (ch. 7). Particular external relations make particular legitimating formulae relevant in Ridgeway's "Legitimation in Informal Status Orders" (ch. 6). Whether the system is open or closed determines the role of characteristics like gender, race, and educational credentials in Sorenson's "Processes of Allocation" (ch. 10).

The behavior described by the processes of interactor theories are in the first instance governed by these states/relations. At the same time, interactor theories typically describe two-way processes. That is, states/relations not only determine behavior, the behavior they determine in turn

determines the states/relations of the processes. Thus, in Samuel and Zelditch's "Expectations, Shared Awareness, and Power" (ch. 11), Expectations about power shape both the use of and compliance with power, but use and compliance in turn feed back into the process by which expectations are created and maintained. In Fararo and Skvoretz's analysis of mobility (ch. 9), mobility both affects and is affected by intergroup relations. This often leads, as in expectation-states theories like chs. 3, 5, and 6, to explanations of stability (e.g., stability of expectation states) in terms of self-fulfilling prophecies: The state of the system of actors determines behaviors, such as influence, power, or allocations of rewards that in turn determine the states governing the system, making them effectively self-reinforcing.

In general, the social processes described by an interactor theory can be said to have some kind of outcome, such as coalition formation, division of labor, or elaboration of rules. Once a process has some outcome, an important question for an interactor theory is whether, and under what conditions, the outcome is transformed into an input into subsequent interaction. Berger, Fisek, and Norman's "Evolution of Status Expectations" (ch. 5) is explicitly addressed to this question. Especially important is the transformation of outcomes into elements of the social framework, i.e., their institutionalization. Fararo and Skvoretz (1984), for example, have dealt at length with this process, though not in their "Biased Net Theory" (ch. 9)- Berger and Luckmann's well-known Social Construction of Reality (1967),

another interactor theory, also deals with it. It is dealt with from an exchange point of view in Stolte's "Formation of Justice Norms" (Stolte, 1987). But in general, this process is neglected in the chapters in the present volume. We mention it here not because it is frequent in the present volume but because the logic of a full-fledged interactor theory seems to us to require it.

Finally, the fact that what interactor theories describe are processes, and therefore imply some event or condition activating them, also implies that the duration of the process depends on whether the activating event or condition continues or not. For example, an outcome that accomplishes a goal (ends in a decision or performance of a task) or ends a disturbance (e.g., redresses an inequity), also deactivates a process. Exogenous factors may also change the conditions of the process, altering its course. Thus, Ridgeway's "Legitimation of Informal Status Orders" (ch. 6) and Berger et al (ch. 5) take into account the effect that external evaluation of performance has in altering status orders. The whole concept of the duration of a process, in fact, depends on its activating events and conditions and may range from very short to extended time periods.

However, deactivation in interactor theories typically ends only manifest, observable features of a process. The states that govern the process are typically assumed to have a latent existence, in the sense that reactivation of the same process for the same actors activates initial conditions that depend in part

on past history. Thus, in a theory like the resource theory of family power structure, a family engaged in a decision-making task may differentiate in, say, an expressive phase, but differentiate again in the same way when the decision-making task recurs. Almost no interactor theory that we know about, and certainly none of the chapters in the present volume, assumes that a process begins de novo every time it is reactivated.

C. Features

In explaining processes of action, interactor theories assume explicitly or implicitly that no behavior is fully explained by (1) the biological or psychological dispositions of individual actors, (2) the external, environmental, structural, or cultural elements of the situation taken by themselves, or on the other hand, (3) by the process of action itself. Emphasis here is on the word "fully": Only in special cases do any of these factors fully account for, in and of themselves, how systems of actors behave. This assumption reflects three distinctive features of interactor theories: First, the role in them of situations; second, the role of pre-given structure; and third, the role of action.

The "actor-in-the-situation," not the actor, is the basic unit of interactor theories. They are relational, situational theories—by contrast, for example, with dispositional theories, like national-character or culture-of-poverty theories. In an

interactor theory the actor may well have any state describable in the theory, no matter what the actor's state in any other situation: Typically, there is no assumption of transituational constancy in the actor's behavior. This is especially true of theories like Fararo and Skvoretz's (ch. 9), S/Srenson's (ch. 10), or Wilier, Markovsky, and Patton's (ch. 12), in which all actors are assumed to have uniform actor-level dispositions, motives, or interests so that it is the situation, especially the larger social framework, that accounts for any variation in actor behavior. (This is true of many other theories that think of themselves as "structural"; they are "structural" because they deny that they have any special assumptions about actors, although what they mean by this is that they do not employ individual differences in explaining behavior.) Theories like Foschi's (ch. 3), Foddy and Smithson's (ch. 4), Berger, Fisek, and Norman (ch. 5), or Cohen and Silver (ch. 7), all expectation-states theories of status-influence relations, have a similar actor variability because expectation states are relations that depend on the characteristics of the other as well as the self. Even Stryker's theory of identity (ch. 2), the whole purpose of which is to explain actor constancies, assumes "singularity" (i.e., constancy) is a variable that is explained by variations in situational factors such as the stability and overlap of networks of relations. Actor and system, too, can vary from situation to situation. In multi-level theories, like Wilier, Markovsky, and Patton's (ch. 12), the internal power structure of an organization can be described by relations among departments, while the power structure of interorganizational

relations can be described by relations among organizations. In the former the organization is the system, in the latter it is the actor. The situational relativity of actor-states thus distinguishes interactor theories not only from dispositional theories but also from any use of concrete actors, like small groups, organizations, and nation-states, as the "levels" of sociological analysis. No concrete actor is in the same situation all the time. The analytic elements that make up the situation are present only under certain conditions. The actor-in-situation is therefore at once narrower and broader than any concrete actor; narrower because it does not describe a whole actor, broader because it is made up of elements in the situation as well as in the actor. Hence, the common practice of dividing sociology up into levels defined by concrete kinds of actors makes no sense from an interactor point of view.

Pre-given structure is an essential feature of the situation in an interactor theory. However varied the elements which constitute the social framework, all the theories in the present volume, and interactor theories more generally, presuppose some structure. Extreme variants of symbolic interactionism, in which the features of a social order are negotiated at every encounter (cf. Glaser and Strauss, 19xx; Denzin, 19xx) [REFS. MZ] are in this sense not interactor theories, though they have most other features of such theories.

On the other hand, while interactor theories all presuppose some pre-given structure, they also presuppose the agency of the

actor, and therefore that "action" also has a role in sociological explanation. This is usually accomplished by treating structure as, except in special cases, incomplete. The values, beliefs, rules, practices, and procedures that constitute a social framework do not cover every event and condition, are in any case not sufficiently specific to fully define every particular situation, and even if they were they cannot guarantee their own application to particular cases. Consequently, there are frequently conflicts of interpretation to resolve in particular situations or features of structure to elaborate. Theories in which there is no action are no more interactor theories than theories with no structure. Thus, unlike the other theories in this volume, Turner's "Macrostructural dynamics" (ch. 8) and Hannan's "Organizational Ecology" (ch. 14) are not interactor theories. They explain phenomena in terms of external conditions; the mechanism at work is selection; they presuppose neither actorhood nor action. Theories like Althusser, 1971, or Meyer et al, 1987, in which behavior emanates from pre-given structure, are also not interactor theories. Behavior sometimes may emanate from pre-given structure even in interactor theories: There are many cases in which patterns become so routinized that behavior follows only a well-cleared path. But in interactor theories this occurs only in particular cases, not in general.

Possibly it is of agency that some macrosociologists are thinking when they feel that interactor explanations of macro-phenomena are a "reduction to social psychology." Such explanations are not reduction in the technical sense (Nagel

1952). Nor is agency a matter of scale, level, kind of actor, or, except at the extreme, even of the extent of institutionalization. The micro/macro problem in this sense is a dispute over determinism, a metatheoretical rather than a technical question. Nothing in the present paper advances argument either pro or con with respect to determinism. We have described the common features of interactor theories; such theories do take a position with respect to agency/determinism; but we have not tried to justify this position. However, if in fact the issue is determinism, it would be useful to recognize what the issue is; to separate it from the technical, and more easily solved, question of how to model effects of scale, level, institutionalization, and kind of actor; and to focus attention explicitly on the metatheoretical issues, issues such as determinism, holism, and situationalism, instead of coding them "micro vs. macro."

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Theories are neither micro nor macro, they are abstract and general. It is only their particular interpretations that are micro or macro. Scale, level, institutionalization, and nature of the actor all make a difference, but they are variables in or interpretations of a theory, not differences between theories.

Some theories are capable of application to both micro- and macro-sociology, some not. "Interactor" theories are capable of

application to both. Such theories describe processes of action of systems of actors-in-situations. They characterize systems of actors by the states of their relations, and situations by the immediate conditions of action, past history, and the larger social framework. The states of the system of relations and the definition of the situation together determine, and are determined by, the process of action. The main features that differentiate the strategy of such theories from other strategies of theory construction are the agency of the actor, their situationalism, and their combination of structure and action: They are neither all structure nor all action.

It is possible that the qualitative differences between theories that have been attributed to differences between "micro-and macro-phenomena" are really metatheoretical differences between methodological holism, individualism, and situationalism or between agency and determinism. But if holism and agency are what the "micro-macro" problem is really about it is explicitly on the metatheoretical questions of holism and agency that we ought to focus the issues. As far as scale, level, institutionalization, and nature of the actor are concerned the problems to solve are practical questions of how to model the effects of these factors in any particular theory.

FOOTNOTES

1. We do not mean to object to synthesis either of levels or in principal. With respect to either/or formulations of questions like actor/system or structure/action, synthesis is the only useful solution. With respect to structure "versus" action, for example, it seems equally fruitless to argue that there is no pre-given structure, that all interaction is negotiated (ct. Denzin, 1987; Strauss et al, 1963), and that there is no action, that all behavior does nothing but act out pre-given structurp (ct. Meyer et al, 1987)•

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