

# Social Categories in Social Science - functional kinds, etiological kinds, and proper function

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Function is a widely applied concept in social science. Social scientists use functions to identify things of interest, classify them into social categories and propose functional explanations. But functions and functional explanations bring even more problems in social science than in biology (e.g., Rosenberg 2005). Two fundamental ones of the problems are where functions come from and how they persist in history. Or, more generally, how do the social categories (from conventions to social institutions) underlying the functions emerge and sustain?

One prominent approach to this more general problem is to engage game theory. In Lewis's groundbreaking work of applying game theory to philosophy (Lewis 2002), he argues that conventions emerge because they reflect equilibria of coordination games. While there are sometimes problems in selecting a specific equilibrium from possible ones, Lewis insists that the convention should be the salient equilibrium because of some possible unrelated reasons like chance or precedence. Moreover, once it emerges, a convention will sustain, according to Lewis, because it will become the new focal point in the future, which weights highly on any potential new selection of equilibria. Since then, many philosophers have attacked Lewis's resort to salience (or focal point), a problematic concept first coined by Thomas Schelling to resolve the equilibrium selection problem. Recently, O'Connor, among others, employs evolutionary game theory to explain the emergence of social categories (O'Connor 2019), which does not resort to salience and expands the scope from conventions to more general social categories.

In the presentation, I will discuss the employment of game theory in explaining the emergence and sustenance of social categories. I will point out that even though the evolutionary game theory is less problematic in equilibrium selection and might be a better approach to explain the emergence of social categories, it still cannot properly explain why social categories sustain. Moreover, I will argue that the game theorist approach has another problem raised by the manifest/latent function distinction. Robert Merton is the first to introduce this distinction to emphasize the difference between apparent and real functions. I will also argue that the social

categories as selected equilibria do not explain why some unfavorable real functions can be selected.

After discussing the problems, I will discuss Millikan's proper function (Millikan 1984, 2017). I will try to argue that Millikan's concept has the potential to resolve these problems. I will try to point out that many social categories are functional kinds and etiological kinds, and the idea of proper function can shed new light on the problems raised by the game theorist approach.

講演時の使用言語：英語。

#### References

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