

WHAT DOES THE USE OF SYMMETRICAL/ASYMMETRICAL-DISTINCTION MEAN FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL ORDER?

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1. In the Social Sciences (Social Theory) there exists a very peculiar but central problem, called 'the problem of social order': how is social order possible if the actions of individuals differ in their intentions? How is it possible for social order to emerge out of the totally different intentions of millions of persons?
2. If we want to act, we are forced to take a certain decision - consciously or unconsciously in order to do what we want to do. The form of a decision is a sort of bifurcation in the sense that we decide to do 'this' or 'that'. This means that for the realization of a decision we need a distinction of the sort: 'this' or 'that'. At the end of this argumentation we can formulate: every social act needs a distinction for its realization.
3. We start from the theory of distinctions, which means that information is only possible if we draw a distinction. Without distinctions there can be no information.
4. Now we must observe the actor first as an observer. Observing the observer, we can see that the starting point is always a distinction made by the observer. The observer distinguishes between himself and 'the observed', because the observer always observes 'something'. This is called the observed. The form of this beginning is an asymmetrical distinction: the observer observes something (it could be himself, which would generate a kind of self-observation).
5. And what happens with the observed? The observed is the realm that is generated through actions. Every action generates a kind of distinction through a decision. A distinction used for a decision is always symmetrical, which means: both possibilities have the same rank (to stay at home or to take a walk, to go by car or to go by bus, to do something or to 'do nothing' etc.).
6. So every 'social starting act' begins on the one side with an asymmetrical distinction: the 'observer' and the 'observed'. On the other side the observer acts in the realm of the 'observed' constructing a 'distinct world' through millions of sequences of acting-deciding-distinguishing.
7. In the realm of the observed ('this' or 'that') we call the construction of a symmetrical distinction 'communication', because it is a distinctional offer that generates information which must be understood. We call the construction of an asymmetrical distinction of the sort 'this' (not 'that') a 'decisional act', because 'to act' means to do something 'straight forward' (it is not possible 'to do' an act only 'a little bit').
8. Conclusion.. because the human being is forced to act, he 'invents' and 'discovers' a world full of distinctions. With the help of symmetrical and asymmetrical distinctions he generates a social order, where he is able to 'act', 'communicate' and 'understand'.

Book referring to the Abstract: Jokisch, Rodrigo, *Logic of Distinctions. A Protologic for a*

Theory of Society (Translated into Spanish bei 'Fondo de Cultura Economica', Mexico, 1998; Will soon be translated into English, probably by Stanford University Press). In German: Logik der Distinktionen. Zur Protologik einer Theorie der Gesellschaft Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996.