Approaches to Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract. This paper provides an accessible overview of the various approaches to concept analysis in order to provide a field for discussion of what ontological theorizing might entail. The article advances the notion of concepts as “basic” and sets out the parameters by which they acquire meaning, followed by a discussion of three approaches that address the multifaceted nature of basic concepts in and between different contexts. With the help of conceptual analysis, researchers can identify the first symptoms and manifestations of a particular problem or thesis, as well as establish the course of its development, from its very beginnings to the present day. This technique allows you to connect and explain the individual elements of the language idea, consider its internal structure and study it as a single system.

1 Introduction

In a recent contribution to the debate on the state of international relations theory, Stefano Guzzini calls for what he called “ontological theorizing”, namely reflexive engagement with central concepts. Guzzini argues that such interaction is necessary, even unavoidable, mainly for two reasons. First, concepts give the field of international relations its ontology. They give analysts an idea of what is “outside” and thereby help to understand the relevant phenomena by naming and giving meaning to their features. Thus, Guzzini writes: “one could also call it ‘constitutive’ [theorizing], since it is mainly about the theorizing of the central phenomena that constitute the field of study.” Second, concepts are necessary for theory building: they not only provide the ontological building blocks of a theory, often in the form of basic assumptions, but also the components from which theorists generate their arguments. In other words, concepts give us a language both for articulating the phenomena we seek to explain/understand and for building the structures we create to explain/understand them. With this in mind, calling on theorists to pay attention to key concepts and reflect on their use makes sense, especially after the so-called third debate, which, among other things, prompted scientists to question the underlying assumptions on which theoretical arguments are based.

Stefano Guzzini’s main areas of research were international theory, security studies (ontological security), approaches to foreign policy analysis (mainly in relation to France, Germany and Italy), as well as conceptual analysis and theories of power.

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2 Research Methodology

An important historical and philosophical group of historians and philosophers has long been interested in the study of concepts, a number of whom are cited in this article. First generation of international relations scholars, it was not difficult to understand the complexity and intricacy of key concepts. But later this sense disappeared due to economic development as well as decrease into variable-based ideas. Following two interrelated developments, the attention to concepts has returned into international relations. After an increased linguistic turn, some of the specialists who are interested in this field have grown more careful of terms and terminology we use, as well as the mentality that is behind them. All scholars disillusioned with the main paradigms as an effective method of comprehending and understanding this world, so organize them around well-known concepts such as security, power or sovereignty. At the moment, it is possible to track them in history through multiple interpretations of manifestations and politics. How many people are now studying about this topic? And in this time we are going through an evolutionary process of social and geopolitical transformation. We are in this new world, with difficulties to the structure of Western dominance that have influenced the discipline of international relations since its beginning and our language change on all paths. All these things can be perceived in different ways, even though they are seen in different ways. So, the consequences of this change are not quite similar. Dissatisfaction with current concepts and more specifically an opinion about its meaning is outdated or inadequate; also innovation as shown by the emergence of new terms (such globalization, regionalizing), but also restoration from long forgotten concepts like race.

3 Results and Discussions

Until the 1990s of the last century, the term "ontology" belonged exclusively to the philosophical vocabulary and seemed alien to the social sciences. Even among their highly abstract theorists, one can hardly find any coherent system of ontological argumentation. On the contrary, everything happens as if the social sciences neglect ontological questions or treat them as derivative or secondary. There are two main reasons for this neglect. On the one hand, the suspicious attitude towards ontology is due to the fact that it is traditionally identified, even indirectly, with metaphysics, distrust of which was a hallmark of the emerging social sciences. The social sciences had to limit themselves to the description of real and observed events and avoid metaphysical ways of justifying knowledge. The study of things in themselves, of being, of substance is a project that is not only alien, but also destructive for the social sciences: K. Marx, E. Durkheim and M. Weber agree on this issue, despite all their epistemological differences. On the other hand, and this is the main thing, if there can be no question of ontological argumentation, it is only because sociological theorizing focuses on the self-evident "social ontology", namely on the intrinsic nature of the always already given social reality, without questioning her existence. As a result, most mainstream sociological concepts focus on the epistemological problem, such as how a science of society is possible, that is, what are the conditions for its possibility. The predominant interest in questions of an epistemological nature is no less obvious when the task is to build a positive picture of social life, but necessarily commensurate with the conditions of the possibility of scientific analysis. Mainstream sociology could offer different and sometimes completely contradictory analytical perspectives, but it did not question the existence of an autonomous, self-contained social reality and focused on its description. Here we confine ourselves to highlighting the basic principles of the implicit ontology characteristic of mainstream sociology in order to isolate
its content and better outline its limits. The decisive principle of this ontology is substantivism/essentialism. The latter singles out a special element, a substance in sociality (“production” by K. Marx, “social facts” by E. Durkheim or “social actions” by M. Weber) and endows it with the status of an explanatory principle or an analytical root cause. That is, this substance receives the privilege of foundation, essence, or, if you like, the "universal equivalent" of the social. In this perspective, all objects are considered by the researcher as manifestations of a single social entity. Moreover, thanks to this foundation, the external and internal certainty of the social is ensured. First, essentialism contributes to the ontological identification of the social, its delimitation from other spheres of reality, for example, from nature. Secondly, even if the social is recognized in some respects as internally divided, indefinite and dynamic, it is nevertheless regarded as having an essential commonality that overcomes all differences and multiplicity. But substantivism/essentialism is only a necessary but not sufficient condition for the ontology of the social. Since the latter in its first principle prescribes in a certain sense to understand everything as manifestations of a single essence, the second principle of reductionism requires the reduction of the entire diversity of the social to a given essence. But reductionism, in turn, is possible due to the elimination of the originality of objects, as a result of which they are deprived of their individuality, uniqueness, potentiality, and thereby equalize with each other, which allows individual differences to be reduced to a single essence.

4 Conclusions

The theory of concepts advances our knowledge and influences how we think about and “do” theory, that is what it affects the practice of theorizing. The fact that the concept is embedded in one particular study, how it relates to other concepts and what forms the conceptual network on basis of whose argument we can build this type of idea. It helps to understand how such an important thing exists as part of the structure of the system for building a specific methodology. A better idea of the internal structure and a theory, it is possible to see its merits and limitations. And having a better idea of the internal structure of an object, it is easier to see its merits and limitations. This is one consequence of the historical approach. It invites, if not require it to historicize this picture in some way or else.

References

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