Chapter 11
On Practice Theory, or What's Practices Got to Do (Got to Do) with It?

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Abstract This essay surveys the current state of practice theory, along the way charting Stephen Kemmis's position in the current constellation. Section one, "What Are Theories of Practice?", demarcates the domain of practice theory. Section two, "The Popularity of Practice Theory", then seeks to explain the rise of practice theory as an approach to social analysis, identifying sociological, disciplinary, linguistic, and subject matter reasons. After this, Section three, "Are Theories of Practice Better Than Other Social Ontologies?", suggests that multiple good social ontological approaches exist and that the family of practice ontologies is one of them. Section four, "What Are Theories of Practice Good for?", then considers the sorts of phenomena for which illuminating practice-based analyses exist, arguing that this approach is constantly expanding the range of phenomena it can handle. The essay concludes, however, by arguing that practice theory cannot analyze everything and needs to form theoretical alliances with compatible theories to cover more of human life.

Social theorists have long taken different approaches to conceptualizing and explaining social affairs. The classic nineteenth-century opposition between J. S. Mill's individualism and G. W. F. Hegel's corporatism identifies two important forms these approaches have taken. Waves of succession have passed over the forest of contending approaches since the Second World War, leaving behind a dense thicket of competitors: not just individualism and corporatism (or collectivism), but also functionalism, structuralism, structural-functionalism, poststructuralism, systems theory, complexity theory, emergentism, critical realism, pragmatism, interactionism, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, genealogy, field theory, actor–network theory, assemblage theory, materialism, new materialism, theories of performativity, theories of process or becoming, institutionalism, evolutionism, and cognitivism, not to mention competing epistemological theories such as realism, relativism, historicism, hermeneutics, social constructivism, and feminist epistemology.

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In recent years, a new entrant has appeared: practice theory, or better, theories of practice. The label "practice theory" was first, to my knowledge, used in 1984 by the anthropologist Sherry Ortner (1984) to name the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu. Since then, the term has come to denote a stream of thought boasting varied theorists whose ideas have been appropriated in numerous disciplines for the investigation of diverse social phenomena. The disciplines involved include education, sociology, geography, organization studies, political science, and history; the phenomena and issues addressed are diverse, including consumption, economic production, high-tech start-ups, migration, teaching, learning, art, natural resource use, energy use, organizations, professions, the secondary insurance market, and international relations.

This essay provides an overview of this stream of thought and inquiry. It does not advance theories of practice in the sense of providing new practice-theoretical ideas or using such theories to investigate further phenomena. Nor does it focus on any particular discipline or domain, for example, education. Rather, it mainly provides a sense of what this theoretical stream is about, why it is spreading, what it is good for, and some of its limits. In addition, the essay gives some indication of Stephen Kemmis's place in it.

What Are Theories of Practice?

The social sciences include anthropology, economics, geography, history, organization studies, political science, and sociology, parts of linguistics, psychology, and education, and the occasional humanistic endeavor. What these disciplines share is the study of social life. Sayings this presumes that the range of phenomena that qualify as social is quite broad, from pas de deux to international arms agreements, from school classes to mortgage markets, from trepidation before a public appearance to the European Union, and from mass movements of peoples and goods and nonstandard forms of language to racial prejudice, heated arguments, and uneven distributions of educational and economic opportunities.

The study of these phenomena has a theoretical dimension, where by "theory" I mean abstract, general thought. Theories come in different flavors and the approaches called "theories of practice" are theories of what I call a "humanistic" sort, in a broad sense of this word. Unlike more "scientific" researchers, investigators of a more "humanistic" character do not believe that the point of theory is to yield explanations alone. Their theories often do deliver explanations. But their theories aim at wider comprehension: not just explanation, but understanding and interpretation as well; not just why and how, but what things mean and what they add up to as well. Humanistic theories, as a result, do not formulate laws or develop models, though they are replete with generalizations, even universal ones. These theories instead address topics of an abstract, general nature, for example, ontology, the determination of action and social reproduction. And what they say on these topics gives researchers conceptual tools for describing, explaining, and interpreting social phenomena and for collecting

their findings and analyses under particular conceptual schemes; what they say also suggests interesting topics or angles for investigation. Theories of practice form one of many streams in the social disciplines that develop "general frameworks" through which researchers investigate particular phenomena.

Although "practice theory" is now a well-established label, there is no one, definitive way to demarcate what qualifies as one. Most observers will attest that the theories I call "theories of practice" qualify. But not only can practice theory be defined in multiple ways, but theorists have identified wider collections of approaches that can be called "theories of a practice sort"; an example is the collection of approaches called "practice-based accounts" in organization studies. I will not here explore relations between the narrower range of theories I call "theories of practice" and the wider vista of practice approaches.

The first feature of the theories I call "theories of practice" is that they treat social life as composed, at least principally, of practices. These theories agree on neither what a practice is nor what it is for social phenomena to be composed of them. But they concur that practices are central to social affairs, and, in fact, their conceptions of practices reveal deep similarities. For example, all practice theorists conceptualize practices as carried on by multiple, indeed indefinitely many people: A practice is not something that one person alone could enact. A second key feature of practice theories arises from the fact that the world does not contain one practice but many. Practices connect: The different practices that make up social life hang together and form complexes, which in turn connect into larger constellations. This vision of practices forming complexes and constellations is the second feature of practice theories.

The third feature arises from the second. It is the idea that social phenomena —including power, science and religion, racial and ethnic prejudice, migration, organizations, and the dissemination of knowledge—are either aspects of, constellations of, or rooted in nexuses of practices. Upholding this idea requires treating one's subject matters as constituted or rooted in practice nexuses. It also requires explaining these matters by reference to phenomena that either are aspects or features of practice nexuses or are compatible with the social world consisting in these. For example, someone who studies competition among education companies might (1) conceptualize these companies and competition among them in terms of nexuses of such practices as advertising, faculty input, strategic planning, price-determination, teaching, and purchasing; and (2) explain how such competition works, as well as the fates of particular firms and markets, through the dynamics of such nexuses.

A fourth feature is that practice theories arise on the background of philosophical ideas of Wittgenstein (1957) and Heidegger (1978). An especially crucial idea in this context is that human activity rests on something that cannot be formulated. Diverse conceptions or names exist of this something, including habitus, practical consciousness, skills, and, Kemmis's choice from Wittgenstein, knowing how to go on. These expressions all denote capacities or dispositions to do things, whose bearing on human activity are inadequately captured by the significance or implications for such activity of any finite collection of symbolic formulations. Capacities

and dispositions also correspond to what Ryle (1971) dubbed "know-how," which according to him is a fundamental type of knowledge alongside "know that."

In sum, the four features I use to demarcate theories of practice are, first, viewing practices as central to the composition of social life; second, holding that practices form wider complexes and constellations; third, claiming that social phenomena are constituted or rooted in these complexes and constellations; and fourth, believing that human activity rests on practical capacities that cannot be put into words. Prominent practice theorists include Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., 1976), Anthony Giddens (e.g., 1979), Jean Lave (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991), and less explicitly Taylor (1985). These four can be dubbed "first-generation" practice theorists. A second generation of practice theorists includes Andreas Reckwitz (e.g., 2002), Stephen Kemmis (e.g., Kemmis et al., 2014), Joe Rouse (e.g., 2003), Elizabeth Shove and associates (e.g., Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012), Silvia Gherardi (e.g., 2006), Thomas Alkemeyer (e.g., Alkemeyer & Buschmann, 2017), and Robert Schmidt (e.g., 2012).

Anyone who knows these individuals' ideas knows how disparate these ideas are. They promulgate different conceptions of practices, of the connections among practices, of the relations of social phenomena to the complexes and constellations of practices, and of the capacities that underlie action. Despite this diversity, it is important to emphasize two general commonalities in their conceptions of practice. The first is that practices are organized activities (for practice theorists, consequently, organized activities are central to social life). This core idea implies that uncovering and understanding particular practices—for example, those of teaching, politics, or commerce—requires identifying both the actions that compose them and their organization. Of course, theorists of practice—as I am demarcating them—are not alone in emphasizing the centrality to social affairs of organized activities: closely related approaches such as MacIntyrian accounts of practice, social-cultural action theory, and neo-Marxist praxis theory share this intuition. These and further approaches also share an opposition to individualism since organized actions are not reducible to individuals and their properties.

A second commonality in practice theorists' conceptions of practices is that practices are intimately entwined with materiality. Some theorists of practice treat materiality as part of practices, whereas others believe that materiality is distinct from but intimately connected to practices. Members of both camps, however, see materiality wherever they espy practices. Again, theorists of practice are not alone in emphasizing materiality: Attention to materiality is a major feature of social thought in the past twenty-five years.

The Popularity of Practice Theory

As mentioned, practice theoretical ideas have been appropriated in various disciplines to study a range of phenomena. Before offering several shaky ideas about why these ideas have attained modest notoriety, it is advisable first to give another illustration of what it is to appropriate them.

As explained, appropriating a practice-theoretical approach involves treating the phenomenon or topic one studies as either constituted or rooted in complexes and constellations of practices. Suppose one wants to study teaching and how teachers interact with children of different backgrounds and statuses. Doing so practice theoretically requires conceptualizing teaching as a practice or as something that takes place in multiple practices and uncovering the wider nexuses of practices of which this practice or practices are part. Doing this, in turn, requires tracing connections among the practices involved. Details of these practices—their constituent activities and organization—will likely also be relevant, as will the material entities and settings amid which they are carried on. In proceeding thus, an investigator employs the conceptual apparatus of practice theory to conceptualize her subject matter. Explaining whatever differences are discovered in interactions between teachers and students of different backgrounds/statuses is a further step. Appropriating practice-theoretical ideas in giving explanations involves two moves. The first move is restricting possible explanatory factors to matters that either pertain to practices and nexuses thereof (e.g., relatings à la Kemmis) or are compatible with a practice construal of the phenomenon to be explained (e.g., beliefs). The second move is treating possible explanatory factors as occurring in the context of practices when gauging their significance.

The present question, therefore, is why have increasing numbers of steadily more disciplinary diverse researchers both conceptualized subject matters with practice-theoretical frameworks and funnelled searches for explanations through such frameworks? Note that theories of practice hardly form the only theoretical stream to gather followers in the last twenty years. Critical realism and process approaches have grown during the same period, as has actor–network theory, which has enjoyed great popularity. Other ways of thinking have maintained long-standing strength during this time, for example, interactionism and individualism. Still, practice-theoretical research has spread during this period and this is what we want to understand.

Whenever changes in scientific practices are the subject of study, the discussion confronts the unholy duality of cause and reason and the likelihood that some mix of the two is responsible for the changes to be understood. For example, part of the causal explanation of the rise of theories of practice likely lies in the attraction that particular theorists have exerted as dissertation and postdissertation supervisors. Kemmis (like Elizabeth Shove and Andreas Reckwitz) has been unusually prolific in this regard, spawning a productive practice-theoretical wing in the Australian and European educational research establishments. His personality and penchant of coauthoring texts with students and colleagues are important sources of his gravitational pull. The significance of pulls such as his should not be underestimated, especially in a domain such as social theory that contains an accumulating archive of new or enduring approaches to social life. Of course, poles of attraction are impotent if people are not sensitive to them. Here, too, causality plays a role, in the form, for instance, of suggestions from teachers and peers that lead someone to study with a particular individual instead of others. Reasons, too, presumably have something to do with the matter.

Another causal factor that should be mentioned in this context is restlessness. Disciplines differ in how theoretically restless their students and professors are, thus

in the degrees to which practitioners are susceptible to and seek out new approaches, whether Indigenous to the discipline or imported from without. I mention this factor because theories of practice have enjoyed success in some disciplines—such as geography and organization studies—that manifest great restlessness.

A final, and related, cause lies in the concept or word "practice" itself. In contemporary humanistic social theory, "practice" sounds both ancient and cutting edge. Aristotle was the first philosopher to make extensive use of the concept, and the remarkable depth of his insights on practice has lent the concept considerable gravitas. At the same time, since the middle of the twentieth century the word "practice" has been carried on the banner of offensives against cognitivism, intellectualism, theoristic conceptions of science and such dualisms as subject–object and synchronic–diachronic. This fact lends the concept exciting intellectual cache. This powerful combination of venerableness and progressiveness has created an aura of ferment and fascination that favors the dissemination of practice thinking in social research.

What sort of reasons, meanwhile, might have led researchers to practice theoretical frameworks? One reason (or is this a cause?) lies in the majesty of the work of first-generation practice theorists, Bourdieu, Giddens, Lave, and Taylor. These thinkers have attracted extensive followings that extend or apply their ideas. They have also inspired second-generation practice theorists and sparked the dissemination of practice theoretical ideas.

A related reason concerns the role that early success plays in attracting believers. Practice-theoretical approaches were made more credible through the illumination found in such theoretically informed empirical analyses as Bourdieu (1984) on French society, Lave (1998) on mathematics, Shove (2003) on consumption, Kemmis on education, Gherardi on organizational learning and knowing, Reckwitz (2006) on subject cultures, and Warde (2005, 2016) on eating.

A third reason lies in the relation of practice to action. Practice theory, as stated, opposes individualism. It claims, for instance, that actions are essentially social events. It also holds, however, that practices are composed of actions, though not only this. So practices are at once more than actions but closely bound up with actions. As a result, theories of practice simultaneously satisfy two itches: The first itch is the desire to transcend individualism, the second the evidentness of upholding the central role of action in social and human life. Of course, theories of practice are not the only approach to satisfy these two desires; interactionism, process approaches, and social-cultural activity theory, to take just three examples, do so, too. Moreover, many researchers do not seek to transcend individualism. Still, I believe that this intimate relationship of practices to actions helps explain why practice theory has attracted increasing numbers of researchers.

Are Theories of Practice Better Than Other Social Ontologies?

As mentioned in the introduction, a large number of theoretical approaches to social life coexist today in the social disciplines. This multiplicity naturally raises questions such as Are any of these approaches better than the others? and, If so, How do we know which approach(es) are better or best? A related question is whether any of these approaches is true or at least truer than the others. To simplify my remarks on these topics, I will temporarily set aside both theory in general and practice theory in general and focus on one kind of theory—or, rather, one component of the theoretical dimension of social investigation—namely, ontology, in particular, practice theoretical ontologies.

Social theories offer abstract, general, and systematic thoughts about social life. The most abstract of such theories are ontologies. Ontologies specify the basic or fundamental nature, elements, dimensions, or structures of things, in this case, the basic nature or elements etc. of social life. The claim that social practices are central to the composition of social phenomena is an ontological assertion. So, too, is the "old" actor network claim that society is composed of networks of human and nonhuman actors, the symbolic interactionist claim that meaningful interactions are the building block of social affairs, the individualist claim that all social phenomena are ultimately composed of individuals and their properties, and Kemmis's (e.g., Kemmis et al., 2014) claim that practices are shaped in cultural-discursive, social-political and material-economic architectures. A different sort of ontological thesis is the proposition that human action is the principal cause in social life or Bourdieu's thesis that the habitus that underlies human activity is structurally homologous with both social spaces and the layouts of material environments. Note that ontologies can take different forms: books, chapters, chapter sections, and sentences. Ontologies can also be presupposed, unformulated, by any or all of these. Good examples of ontological texts by Kemmis are chapter three of *Enabling Praxis* (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) and chapters two and three of *Changing Practices,Changing Education* (Kemmis et al., 2014). It is to Kemmis's credit that, unlike many social researchers, he attends to ontology and makes sure that his students and colleagues pay careful heed to the topic. His collaborators and mentees have thereby learned to articulate, discuss, and defend the ontologies that inform and constrain their research. Given that the social disciplines boast a multiplicity of ontologies, this is a propitious, but too often missing, practice.

The most prominent social ontological families include individualism, interactionism, wholism (including systems theory and structural-functionalism), theories of process or becoming, and different flavors of structuralism including classic French, American network, and British critical realist. This variety ensures that incompatible structural accounts can be given of the same phenomena. I have already indicated that which ontology a researcher appropriates can rest on contingent features of her biography and experience and that the space for reason to help determine ontological

choices is circumscribed. Despite this, discerning observers and participants want to know, Which ontologies are better or best?

One approach to this issue is to say that an ontology is better the truer it is, hence, that the truest theory is the best. I am not going to pursue this idea here, in part because the topic of truth is arcane. For example, some philosophers hold that it is not clear what it is for one set of propositions or sentences to be truer than another. Moreover, even if the idea of degrees of truth is set aside, it is not clear that one ontology is simply true and the others false. One could, for example, plausibly claim that just as truth is multiple—any set of events and entities is subject to multiple true descriptions—different ontologies each get something right about the world. To complicate matters still further, different understandings exist of how this might be the case.

Once truth is bracketed, two principal criteria of a good ontology emerge.

Theories, including ontologies, are developed through argument, elaboration, and appropriation. Argument is the provision of considerations for and against claims, whereas elaboration is the spinning out of an idea's or theory's meanings or implications and appropriation is the interpretation of preceding ideas. Since ontologies are developed through argument, elaboration, and appropriation, an ontology is good, first, if it is rationally sensible.

Rationally sensible means that convincing arguments and interpretations can be provided for the ontology, that elaborating the ontology does not reveal deficiencies and that the ontology jibes with, or at least is not contravened by, experience and knowledge. Of course, convincingness, like deficiency and consistency, lies in the eye of the beholder and is subject to all the kinds of contingent biographical and contextual factors that lead researchers to favor one ontology over others. No argument, for instance, is likely to convince an individualist that human actions are essentially organized as practices, just like no argument is likely to convince a theorist of practice that practices—like other social phenomena—are nothing but compendia of features of individual people. In addition, an argument or interpretation is convincing only until a more convincing one appears. Still, within a given community of social theorists and researchers, and despite their frailty and contingency, argument, elaboration, and interpretation do provide reasons for upholding certain positions versus others. They do, therefore, rationally support some ontologies while undermining others.

As for the second criterion, I said earlier that a central contribution of theory to empirical investigation is the provision of concepts and ways of thinking for use in describing, explaining, and interpreting the world. It follows that a second criterion of a good ontology is usefulness: An ontology is good if researchers can use its concepts to do these things. Accordingly, evidence for this goodness lies in the prevalence of these uses of an ontology and in trends in such usage over time: If an ontology's concepts are increasingly used, its goodness is steadily revealed.

It is important to point out that neither argument nor usefulness is likely to reduce a field of competing ontologies to a single best one. As indicated, arguments, [etc.] are provisional, and their convincingness is relative to biographical and contextual factors. Often, consequently, researchers will stand by different arguments. What's more, the number of contending arguments and so on can become so great as to

make it impossible to discern which are right. This is the situation in many areas of philosophy and social ontology is moving in that direction. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that rational discourse can thin the field of contenders.

Usefulness, too, does not pick out unique best ontologies. Practice theory enjoys a growing following among empirical researchers, but other ontologies enjoy or retain significant, indeed, larger followings, including actor–network theory, symbolic interactionism, and individualisms of various sorts. All four ontological approaches, as a result, qualify as good. People tend to think that there is a single best theory for anything. Social research, by contrast, needs to embrace the idea that there are multiple good ontologies. Note that the existence of this multiplicity should not be turned back to impugn the value of usefulness as a criterion of goodness. For the criterion does play a useful whittling role: Only a subset of extant and past ontologies are appropriated in empirical social research. Others are ignored or forgotten as empirical research proceeds. So usefulness does narrow the range of good ontologies, though it will never—outside a totalitarian society, and even there—identify a single best one.

Hence, the family of practice ontologies is good and looks better all the time. But there are other good ontological families, too.

What Are Theories of Practice Good for?

For exactly what, however, is practice theory good, that is, useful? Consider a partial list of phenomena of which illuminating practice theoretical analyses have been given: eating, Nordic walking, teaching, learning, washing machine use, cycling, mobility, day trading on the Nasdaq market, domestic energy use, household waste, sustainable design, sustainable consumption, temporalities of consumption, the work of ambulance paramedics or lawyers, anxiety, memory, communities of practice, and organizational learning and knowing. At first glance, these phenomena might seem to be small, local, or somehow limited in scope—for they seem to be nothing more than people doing particular things in particular settings. In fact, of course, the activities involved can be pervasive and their effects cumulative and significant. Learning, for instance, occurs everywhere, and its effects are long-lasting and powerful. It is not small, local, or relevantly limited in scope. What is true, however, is that the above list is missing familiar large, even global phenomena such as governments, wars, international finance systems, the Premier League, the commercial music industry and education sectors. Indeed, word is out that practice theory is good at analyzing local or small phenomena but not good at analyzing larger ones. If this claim were true, the goodness of practice ontologies would be circumscribed: They would be good for exploring only some of the things social researchers study.

The first thing to say about this situation is that most families of ontology face a predicament of this sort. For example, the rumor going about practice theory also applies to actor–network theory: It, too, seems best at analyzing smaller, more local phenomena. In fact, today few ontologies beyond individualism are actively appro-

priated in the study of both small or local and large or global social phenomena. Theorists such as Bourdieu and Niklas Luhmann claimed that their theories apply to just about everything in social life. But I am not sure that their optimism has been borne out by empirical research.

A second thing to say about this situation is that it might not be problematic if certain families of ontology are good for studying things of certain types and other families are good for studying things of other types. Perhaps it is best to think of an ontological division of labor. I am not, however, going to pursue this suggestion presently. For just about all social ontologies aspire, theoretically, to capture social life at large. This is certainly true of practice ontologies. I just cited Bourdieu as someone who wants his theories to capture social life in toto. Giddens harbors the same aspiration. Consider his great 1979 book, *Central Problems in Social Theory*. The second chapter of that book outlines the chief concepts of a general ontology (further elaborated in *The Constitution of Society*, 1984), while subsequent chapters use that ontology to formulate positions on various prominent social theoretical issues. Similar ambitions have informed the work of Shove et al., Reckwitz and myself. Kemmis's theoretical work on practice architecture and ecologies carries the same intention.

However, and this is the third thing I want to say, practice theory ontology and research is an expanding enterprise. As I speak, practice theorists are seeking to develop conceptual resources for analyzing large or distributed phenomena. The earliest example of such an analysis is, I think, Reckwitz's (2006) account of subject cultures, where a subject culture is a dominant regime of ways of being a person that holds sway over a large expanse of space and time. A more recent example is Kemmis et al.'s (2014) book on the education complex that conceptualizes this complex as composed of five interrelated practice constellations: student learning, teaching, teacher education and professional development, educational leadership/administration, and educational research and evaluation. At present writing, further authors (e.g., Bueger & Gadinger, 2014, Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Spee, 2015; Schatzki, 2016; multiple essays in Hui, Schatzki, & Shove, 2017 and in Brandes & Zierenberg, 2017) are developing practice theoretical analyses of and ways of thinking about large phenomena. Consequently, the jury is still out on how wide a range of phenomena practice theory is useful for analyzing.

Another subject matter that some observers have claimed practice ontologies are not good at illuminating is people. The criticism in this context is that practice theories are so fixated on practices and connections among them that they neglect to analyze the people whose actions constitute those practices. These ontologies do conceptualize people as practitioners, but, so the complaint, such a conceptualization does not amount to, but instead is only the starting point for, an analysis of individuals.

Like the observation about large phenomena, there is something to this claim. It is, however, a little inaccurate. For example, a rather robust account of people is found in Bourdieu's account of habitus and fields—it is just that the account makes people versions of one another and has not found much favor! Moreover, Reckwitz's aforecited work on subject cultures is all about the formation of individuals, though it does admittedly focus on the social matrix in which they are formed. More recently,

authors such as Schmidt (2017) and Weenink and Spaargaren (2006) have developed practice analyses of further key dimensions of being an individual: reflection and emotions. And one must not forget the fascinating work of Ole Dreier (e.g., 1999), which is all about the twists and turns of being an individual person moving through a world of practices and organizing his or her life. Finally, my own work has always incorporated detailed analysis of mind and action (as conditions attributed to individuals) in its account of practices. In short, practice theory offers promising ideas for analyzing people (on this entire issue, see Schatzki, 2017). And, of course, it is quite good at comprehending the social context in which individuals form and persist.

In short, the goodness of particular ontologies as measured by usefulness can wax or wane. Topics for which theories of practice have not been useful might become ones for whose analysis it provides advantageous concepts and ideas. Because practice researchers seek to add to and extend the reach of practice-theoretical frameworks, observers should keep an open mind. In addition to building out these frameworks, practice theorists should also continue developing arguments for, elaborations of, and interpretations of them.

The Frontiers of Practice Theory

Although practice theory might be useful for analyzing more topics than those for which it has already proved valuable, the extension of practice-theoretical concepts and ways of thinking is not potentially endless. I do not believe that practice theory is or should aspire to be a TOE—a theory of everything. For instance, practice theory is not likely to provide insight into the anatomical development of human fetuses, though it is not implausible that it might help explain variations in how the brain is wired. Similarly, practice theory is not going to explain persistent adult depression, though it might contribute to better understandings of emotions more generally. An inaccurate, but still revealing way of putting the matter is that practice theory illuminates the *social* dimension of human existence, whereas other ways of thinking explain the biological and psychological dimensions. An advantage of putting the matter thus is that it suggests, sotto voce, that these three dimensions of human life fit together and that the corpuses of research that study them must be mutually compatible and supportive. At the same time, this way of putting the matter is misleading because distinct social, biological, and psychological realms are a fiction and because the disciplines that investigate different aspects of human life continually evolve and occasionally hybridize, divide, or arise new, in the process redefining these erstwhile "realms" and the putative dividing lines among them.

The starting point for getting a handle on which phenomena theories of practice can analyze is to realize that a fundamental tenet of practice theories is that practices and the complexes/constellations they form are a basic reality: Human activities take place as elements of interconnected organized arrays of activities. The significance of this fact for the present discussion is that, as a basic reality, the plenum of practices forms a fundamental scaffolding or background for other dimensions of human lives.

The metaphysical assumption that the different aspects of reality fit together implies that the different aspects of human life, too, must fit together, that is, be mutually compatible. This implication does not preclude people from, say, acting inconsistently or contrary to their beliefs. It means only that there is a broader context in which these apparently inconsistent matters fit together (i.e., there is a reason for or explanation of the situation). Since practices form a basic reality, the facts about fetal anatomical development and brain wiring (whatever these are)—like the facts about trenchant depression and the emotions (whatever they are)—must fit with activities being organized as interconnected practices. Indeed, each of these sets of facts serves as a background for the others. However, in Sayings that the plenum of practices forms a scaffolding or background for other dimensions of human life I primarily have phenomena other than fetal development and brain structure in mind. I should add that even though practices, on the one hand, and the human brain and anatomy on the other have often been conceptualized and studied as separate domains, it would be productive to investigate the interface and links between them.

Many social aspects of human life are analyzable as components, slices or aspects of the complexes and constellations of practices. Examples are many of the phenomena mentioned earlier of which theories of practice have produced illuminating analyses. Other examples are individuals and large social entities, which are presently succumbing to practice-theoretical analysis. But even though these social matters are aspects of the plenum of practices, and even though the conceptual armature of practice theory constantly evolves and expands, it is not likely that theories of practice are going to illuminate everything about them. I already suggested this regarding individuals. Consider also, in this regard, interactions. An example of what theories of practice have to say about interactions is that interactions take place as part of practices: The actions that make up the action chains that constitute interactions are beholden to the normative organizations of practices. This proposition, however, does not exhaust what there is to interactions. A fuller account of them must explore further matters such as physical presence, nonlinguistic communication, emotional energy (à la Collins, 2004) and power differentials. It is true that the conceptual armature of practice theory can expand. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that practice theory as such will have much to say about most of these matters. To comprehend them, other bodies of theory must be harnessed, for example, symbolic interactionism, conversation analysis, or a Foucauldian conception of power.

What's more, there are other features of human life, some social and others either mental or simultaneously mental and social in character, that are not simply slices or features of the practice plenum. The practice plenum forms a scaffolding or background for these phenomena in the sense that they take place dependent on aspects and components of the plenum. In more philosophical language, the plenum forms a constitutive context for them. Examples of such phenomena are power, the dissemination of knowledge and ideas, experience, learning and the constant adjustments people make in the flow of conduct. Consider power. Giddens builds power into his account of practices. Alternatively, the idea that practices are a basic reality can serve as the starting point of an account of power, whose filling out requires marshaling ideas from beyond practice theories through which power is defined and

its forms, sources, and modalities are analyzed. These ideas can be those of Weber (1978), Lukes (1974), Foucault (1982), or someone else. On this approach, practices simply form the constitutive context in which power—however defined—transpires. Or take learning. As the work of Kemmis (and others such as Alkemeyer; e.g., Alkemeyer & Buschmann, 2017) has shown, practices form a context in which learning occurs. In particular, practices affect the contents, occasions, possibilities, and depth of learning. But this is only part of an account of learning. A fuller account must encompass matters beyond the context in which learning occurs. Comprehending learning thus requires calling on other theoretical corpuses and combining these with practice theories. The only stricture on which ways of thinking can be drawn on in analyzing phenomena that take place in the context of practices is that the theories not contravene the practice-theoretical tenet that the plenum of practices is a basic reality.

In this way, practice theory can build alliances with other theoretical approaches and traditions to provide advantageous accounts of phenomena that transpire in the context of practices. To repeat, the main constraint on building these alliances is that these approaches be compatible with the thesis that practices are a basic reality. I believe that this stricture allows considerable free space for a range of approaches to join practice theories in broader theoretical coalitions.

This essay has offered an overview of social theoretical practice theories: What they are, why they are increasingly popular, why they are not necessarily better than alternatives, what they are good for, and the frontiers where they need to partner with other theoretical approaches in building up broader accounts of human life. The essay also tried to locate some of Kemmis's important contributions in the overall edifice of practice theory. I hope that you all now have a better idea of what practices have got to do with it.

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