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Explanatory Form in Social Theory

—How Can “Contingency” be Coped with?—

ABSTRACT

There seems to be no doubt that social theory would attempt to explain cause-and-effect relations between social events. But it is difficult to explain such events because “contingent factors”, which theorists cannot recognize, are likely to mediate cause-and-effect relations. However contemporary social theories have tried to cope with “contingency”.

In this paper, Luhmann’s “autopoietic system theory” and Bourdieu’s “pratique” theory are first examined as examples which try to contain “contingency” in causal explanation. “Autopoietic system theory”, in which “structural coupling” between two systems is supposed, “destroys” causal relations when “contingency” is included in explanatory form. “Pratique” theory, in which “habitus” mediates between “structure” and “agent”, “conditions” immediate causal relations in explanatory form.

Secondly this paper clarifies that dialectical social theory in Marxist social science can also cope with “contingency” adequately by “extending” (fields of) cause-and-effect relations. In dialectical social theory, relations between two complementary but opposite factors, for example, capital and labor explain social events by third factors being attached to those relations. In addition this paper makes it evident that dialectical social theory can explain social events which have not been usually thought to be explained by Marxist social theory.

Keywords: social theory, contingency, dialectic