

Functional Explanation

Functional, or consequence, explanation (loosely stated):

B occurs because it is beneficial for A.

Criticisms:

1. Just because B is good for A does not make B happen.
2. Functional explanation reverses cause and effect.

Functional Explanation

Three Propositions:

1. “A benefits from occurrence of B” \rightarrow “B occurs”
2. “B occurs” \rightarrow “A benefits from occurrence of B”
3. “If B occurred, A would benefit” \rightarrow “B occurs”

Functional Explanation (con't.)

Elaborations of Functional Explanation

1. Purposive: Some conscious agent acts for the purpose of achieving the beneficial result.
2. Darwinian: A process of natural selection operates through chance variation and competition for survival.
3. Lamarckian: An entity develops characteristics that are beneficial over time as a result of interaction with its environment.

Purposive or Darwinian Elaboration?



AP Photo

In your face *DOG* *98-9104*

A Silvered-leaf langur baby gets a leg up on an adult langur Thursday at the Bronx Zoo in New York. Langur babies are orange so members of the troupe can easily identify them, but change to silver gray as they mature.

Cohen on Primacy Thesis for FP and SRP

1. A relation of constraint exists between FP and SRP.

2. The FP tend to develop.

#1 and #2 imply that eventually a contradiction develops between FP and SRP so that either the FP must stop changing or the SRP must change .

#2 implies the outcome must be that eventually the SRP must change to accommodate changes in the FP.

Cohen on Why the Forces of Production Develop

Rationality: People will use the means that are available to satisfy their wants.

Intelligence: People can figure out superior ways of procuring what they want.

Scarcity: People can satisfy their wants only through labor that they prefer not to do.

Alternative View of Why the Forces of Production Develop

1. There is present in the human population individuals who have a propensity to invent more effective ways to produce.
2. Periodically the natural environment changes in ways that make existing methods of production less effective, which threatens the survival of the group.
3. During the long period when humans lived in small hunter-gatherer bands, those bands having individuals with an inventive propensity tended to survive periods of adverse environmental change.

Those bands not having any such individuals tended to die out.

Alternative View of Why the Forces of Production Develop (cont.)

Result: A propensity to invent new productive methods was selected for over time in the human population.

The mechanism of transmission of the trait of inventiveness within bands could be biological or cultural.

Note: This assumes intelligence and rationality -- but not scarcity, which implies a human dislike of labor.

Surplus, Exploitation, and Class

Surplus

Surplus product: total gross economic output less

- a. the portion consumed by the producers and reproducers
- b. the portion that replaces the means of production used up

Surplus labor: the hours of labor required to produce the surplus product.

Determinants of the existence of a surplus

- 1) productivity of labor
- 2) length of the work year (or workweek or workday)
- 3) living standard of the producers

Surplus, Exploitation, and Class (con't.)

Exploitation

Relation of exploitation: One group appropriates the surplus product produced by another.

Class

- A. A group with a particular relationship to the processes of production and distribution.
- B. A group with a particular relationship to the processes of production and appropriation of surplus product.

Combining the three concepts:

Exploitation is a relation between two classes in which one class appropriates the surplus product produced by the other.

Surplus, Exploitation, and Class (con't.)

Question: Does exploitation (appropriation by one class of surplus produced by another) necessarily entail domination?