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# Rational Choice Theory and Large-Scale Data Analysis

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EDITED BY

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## Bringing Individuals Back into Sociology. Three Aspects of Cohesion in Dutch Society During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

*Wout Ultee*

### **Which Rational Choice Approach to Which Sociological Questions?**

Functionalism developed into a theory dysfunctional to sociology. Historical materialism did not materialize as an alternative paradigm and became a historical phenomenon. Nowadays "rational choice" is the required approach to sociological questions. However, Goldthorpe in the present volume pinpoints an unwholesome disposition among proponents of "rational action theory" (RAT), a label which is a bit more inclusive than "rational choice approach". Distinguishing between explaining a particular set of research findings and solving a theoretical problem *per se*, Goldthorpe contends that RAT until now has eschewed the explanation of regularities unearthed by the quantitative analysis of large-scale data-sets (QAD). Yet for sociology to progress, RAT-theories must focus on QAD-findings. In the present chapter, concerned in general with the relation between theory and research in sociology, and in particular with the interplay of various rational choice approaches and the statistical results of empirical social investigations, I apply RAT to QAD-findings on Dutch society.

Although RAT has been around for some decades, its proponents until now have not said much about sociology's long-standing or classical questions. RAT-advocates to some extent exploit contemporary sociology's proverbial lack of a core of subjects by dealing opportunistically with a heterogeneous list of subjects. They more or less take their pick when arguing in favor of their approach. However, for progress to oc-

cur, an approach has to be convincing to impartial spectators, newcomers, and established sociologists who maintain that sociology advances by hard-nosed data-analysis rather than ethereal theories. Avoiding easy targets helps. By taking illustrations from research on social stratification, Goldthorpe shows in this volume what RAT could and should do for a set of long standing issues within sociology. In the present chapter I take up the classical sociological question of cohesion (Ultee 1991) and analyse QAD-regularities which indicate the extent to which Dutch society was cohesive in various respects during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Sociology's questions address about features of society, while RAT-answers apply to individuals. Until now much attention has been given to deriving macro-predictions from micro-premises. In my opinion the first step is to reformulate questions which treat societies as questions which refer explicitly to their inhabitants. A possible disadvantage of such a procedure is that it tailors down a macro-question. Proponents of an autonomous macro-sociology are likely to stress this. I will show, however, that this approach yields interesting follow-up questions. In the present chapter I enrich three questions regarding the cohesion of Dutch society during the 20<sup>th</sup> century by "bringing individuals back in" (Homans 1964).

Having said what the present chapter is about, I hasten to add what it does not do. The prime purpose of this chapter is neither to test explanations nor to propose a theory. It mainly specifies questions. It is commonly accepted in sociology that empirical research is not to be undertaken on its own, but has to be preceded by theory. I argue that theory construction has to be attuned to specific questions, and that the articulation of questions in sociology until now has not received the attention it deserves. The present chapter is primarily an exercise in formulating questions.

### **Cohesion: Durkheimian and Individualistic Subquestions**

Hobbes raised the question of the war of all against all. Now, if people do not kill each other, they may be said to live in peace. But do they then live *together* peacefully? Societies with a low murder rate may differ in the extent to which their inhabitants are connected to one other. The extreme case of suicide indicates, according to Durkheim, a preference for death above living in the company of others. Thus, the Hobbesian problem of war and peace is a subquestion of the classical question of cohesion. So is the Durkheimian question of the propensity towards suicide within a population, and the Nisbetian one of the strength of the ties between the inhabitants of a society. In what follows I use RAT to enrich the classical question of societal cohesion.

Individualistic approaches assume that people act by choosing in a rational way. One current version also presupposes that the resources peo-

ple use when deciding include time and money. Hechter (1987:19) uses the latter assumption to derive indicators of solidarity between persons. They refer to the time people spend with each other and the money they spend on others. My specification of the problem of the cohesion of Dutch society during the 20<sup>th</sup> century uses this distinction too. However, in the same way that Hobbes did not distinguish between living in peace and living together peacefully, Hechter with his stipulation that time and money are resources which people employ to create solidarity, conflates "letting people die" and "killing people" into one category. People may spend money on food for those who are hungry, but they can also let them go hungry. They can also spend money on weapons and then take their time killing others with these same weapons. Thus, my partitioning of the problem of cohesion suggests several subproblems.

This chapter specifies three subquestions of the cohesion problem by using RAT. The first one concerns a feature of Dutch society before and after the Second World War: it is divided not so much in horizontal strata with better and worse living conditions, but in vertical pillars founded on specific denominations. The second question concerns the high percentage of Dutch Jews that did not survive the Second World War. My third question concerns the rise and demise of the solidarity of society in general with its weakest members as embodied in the regulations of the Dutch welfare state after the Second World War. The following presentation of these issues consists of a mixture of empirical analysis, theoretical explanation, and methodological commentary. To obtain an enriched restatements of problems, I complement encyclopedia dates with findings from administrative statistics and results of large-scale data-sets.

### **The (De)Pillarization of the Netherlands**

Lijphart (1968) finds it puzzling that the Netherlands did not turn into a battlefield during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Catholics, Reformed Protestants, Re-reformed Protestants, and non-believers had separate political parties, their own schools, newspapers, building societies, soccer clubs, trade unions and what not. Because Dutch society was pillarized, its cohesion was weak. Lijphart poses the question how it is possible in a pillarized society that political issues continued to be decided by votes and not by violence.

#### ***Why No Civil War?***

To answer this question, Lijphart proposes a theory of political elites. According to this theory, the Netherlands survived because the leaders of the pillars gathered from time to time to make wise decisions. Driven by

the fear of a long and bitter electoral battle by Protestants and Catholics against laws that grant governmental subsidies only to religiously neutral schools, the leaders of the political parties decided in 1913 to "pacify" the country by granting full subsidies to denominational schools, thus socially separating the denominations from one another.

Lijphart's explanation is not very satisfactory. Common people do not follow their leaders so easily, and leaders are not that judicious. As Van den Doel (1979) showed, log-rolling explains state subsidies for denominational schools. In 1913, the confessional parties supported general suffrage in exchange for socialist support for government-funded confessional schools. This explanation of the production of one good not supported by a majority in parliament invokes another good whose production is advocated by another political minority. I will present another "two-goods" explanation of an aspect of the cohesion of Dutch society later on.

#### *The Trend in (De)Pillarization Charted*

In the tradition of Lijphart, the problem of the rise and decline of the pillars turns into a question of the establishment and dissolution of confessional political parties and other denominational organizations. A Re-reformed Protestant party was founded in 1879, a Catholic one in 1904. They became part of a unified Christian party in 1977. A Catholic labor union was founded in 1909, and merged with a social-democratic one in 1982. A separate Protestant union, founded in 1908, has survived. The first Catholic daily newspaper was founded in 1845; the last one ceased to exist in 1974. The first Re-reformed Protestant daily appeared in 1872, and this paper is still being published. A Re-reformed Protestant university was founded in 1880, and a Catholic one in 1923. Both currently flourish. All in all, the Re-reformed Protestant pillar was erected before the Catholic pillar was built, and the Catholic pillar was the first to reel. Why did de-pillarization occur in the Netherlands in the 1970s? This is, in my opinion, the wrong question.

Upon inspection, the Lijphartien question of when the denominational organizations were founded and dissolved in the Netherlands, upon inspection turns out to be a question concerning organizations in a society. It is not about the inhabitants of a society who are, or are not, members of these organizations. Of course, corporate actors are the product of a founding act of natural persons, and Coleman (1982) broadened RAT by allowing for corporate actors next to natural persons. Yet the question of (de)pillarization encompasses more than a question of the birth and death of collective actors. The following list invokes the increasingly individualistic nature of questions on pillarization in the Netherlands:

1. When were political parties for the separate denominations founded and dissolved?
2. When did the vote for confessional parties peak?
3. When was the relation between a person's denomination and his/her vote for a confessional party strongest?
4. When were the chances of marriage between Catholics and Re-reformed Protestants highest?

The first question pertains to a society and its denominations; the last question addresses the links between the inhabitants of a society and its religious organizations, addresses ties between two members of a society.

Strictly organizational data answer the question of when pillarization (dis)appeared, but do not answer the question concerning the peak in pillarization. To answer the latter question, the question of pillarization has to be specified in more individualistic terms. One possible approach is to look at when the percentage of a country's inhabitants voting for denominational parties was the highest. Column 2 of Table 12.1 answers this question. In 1925, for the first time in Dutch history, every man and woman had the right to vote. Pillarization was stable between that year and 1963, and decreased sharply afterwards.

TABLE 12.1: (De)pillarization and Vote

<i>Year</i>	<i>(a)</i>	<i>(b)</i>
1925	53	?
1937	55	?
1946	54	4.2
1956	53	3.6
1963	52	?
1967	47	3.2
1971	40	2.6
1972	35	2.5
1977	36	2.6
1981	35	3.1
1982	34	2.9
1986	38	2.1
1989	39	2.2
1994	27	2.6

The question of (de)pillarization as (a) the question of the percentage of the vote for confessional parties, and (b) as the relation between belonging to a denomination or not and voting for a confessional party or not as measured by log odds ratios; the Netherlands 1925-1994 (the higher a log odds ratio, the stronger the relation between denomination and confessional vote)

Sources: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (1994) and Ultee et al. (1996)

I shall bypass the question of why depillarization started in the 1960s. If the percentage of the population who were members of Catholic,

Reformed-Protestant or Re-reformed Protestant denominations decreased in the preceding decades and recently unchurched persons kept voting for a confessional party, depillarization was underway before the 1960s. Further evidence of earlier depillarization would be provided if the percentage of denominationally affiliated persons rose while the confessional vote remained the same. If the percentage of unchurched voters did not change while the tendency of denominationally affiliated persons to vote confessional decreased and that of non-affiliated persons to vote confessional increased, that would also suggest earlier depillarization. Apparently, the question of the percentage of votes for confessional parties is not pitched closely enough to the individual level.

More pertinent questions of (de)pillarization search for types of individual voting patterns. One such question is that of the trend in the odds that people belonging to a denomination vote for a confessional rather than another party, compared to the odds that non-believers vote for the former rather than the latter party. Column 3 of Table 12.1 gives the trend in the log odds ratio for the relation between denomination and voting for a confessional party. The higher this log, the stronger the relation between these variables. Since surveys were conducted in the Netherlands before the Second World War, the figures in Column 3 of Table 12.1 do not cover the full 20<sup>th</sup> century. But the trend they portray is clear: depillarization started quite soon after the Second World War, and certainly not in the 1970s, or even in the 1960s.

Does the question concerning the odds of denominationally affiliated persons to vote confessional rather than non-confessional, compared with those of persons without a denomination to do so, get at the heart of the matter? Until now my questions on depillarization, although involving individuals, pertained to links between individuals and corporate actors: people vote for parties. However, questions may be devised that do not involve these ties but that focus instead on relations between people. The latter approach accepts that questions of pillarization are subquestions of the cohesion problem. Given that marriage represents a strong tie between persons, what do data on religiously mixed marriages in the Netherlands during the 20<sup>th</sup> century suggest? Other things remaining equal, a higher incidence of religiously mixed marriages in a society increases its cohesion. I measure the extent to which marriages take place between two denominations by log odds ratios. The higher a log, the more unequal the outcome of a competition between Catholic and Re-reformed Protestant men for Catholic rather than Re-reformed Protestant wives, and the less mixed the marriage.

I chart the trend in marriages between the two most organizationally pillarized denominations in Table 12.2. It contains data for the whole of the Netherlands and for four of its major cities: Amsterdam, Utrecht,

and Groningen in the North of the Netherlands, and Eindhoven in the South. I add data for cities since they come closer to forming the "marriage market" of individuals than the Netherlands itself. The data refer to all marriages entered into in a certain year, not all existing marriages. Table 12.2 provides a clear picture. To begin with, mixed marriage decreased between 1938 and 1955. Secondly, marriages between Catholics and Reformed Protestants reached their nadir in 1955. Thirdly, mixed marriage rose a bit in the second part of the 1950s, more in the first part of the 1960s, and even more in the second part of the 1960s. Fourthly, the increase in mixed marriage levelled off in the 1980s.

TABLE 12.2. (De)Pillarization and Marriage

Year	Amsterdam	Utrecht	Groningen	Eindhoven	Netherlands
1938	5.6	6.6	6.9	?	8.2
1940	5.9	5.3	9.1	?	8.6
1946	5.8	6.1	9.4	8.3	8.4
1950	5.4	5.9	∞	7.5	8.2
1951	5.9	6.3	8.2	∞	8.6
1952	6.0	6.2	9.0	7.5	8.3
1953	5.8	6.1	∞	10.2	8.8
1954	7.1	6.4	∞	∞	9.0
1955	7.2	6.7	10.2	10.4	8.9
1956	7.1	6.3	9.7	7.5	8.9
1957	6.6	6.2	∞	8.0	8.8
1958	6.4	6.2	∞	7.5	8.6
1959	6.1	6.6	∞	8.7	8.8
1960	6.1	5.8	8.7	8.2	8.6
1965	5.7	6.3	6.5	7.1	8.2
1970	4.6	4.8	5.9	5.6	6.6
1975	3.4	3.6	5.4	4.6	5.4
1980	3.0	2.9	3.8	4.3	5.4
1985	2.9	4.3	4.6	4.2	5.2

The question of (de)pillarization as the question of marriages between Reformed Protestants and Catholics; log odds ratios for all marriages concluded in a certain year in Amsterdam, Utrecht, Groningen, Eindhoven, and the Netherlands, 1938-1945 (the higher a log odds ratio, the less mixed the marriage)

Source: unpublished raw frequencies of Statistics Netherlands

### *Depillarization Explained*

I am now in a position to raise the question of why pillars started reeling at some point in time. The picture provided by my tables may seem messy, but it is not. When interpreting findings, I follow the rule that answers to questions on societal features stated in such a way that they refer as strongly as possible to individuals, are to be preferred over answers to seemingly purely societal questions. The latter are less informative and less accurate than the former. The question that was phrased in terms

of Dutch society and its political parties received an answer maintaining that pillarization started around 1900, and ceased to exist in 1977. No answer was provided on when pillarization was at its peak. The question on Dutch society, its political parties and the percentage of the vote for confessional parties received an answer attesting to a high plateau of pillarization until the mid 1960s, and a drop afterwards. According to the answer to the question on changes in Dutch society in connection with a person's denomination and his/her vote, depillarization was underway in the 1950s. The answer to the question concerning ties between individuals stipulates a decrease in mixed marriages until the mid-1950s and a rise afterwards. Thus, depillarization took off in the Netherlands in the mid-1950s. The popular view that things started to change in the Netherlands in the mid-1960s fails to engage the level of the inhabitants of a society, and remain at the level of various organizations, hence possibly lagging behind developments. For people losing their religion or no longer viewing politics religiously, existing secular political parties are not always attractive. For new political parties to emerge, the number of potential breakaway voters must have become sufficiently large.

Why did the denominations lose their hold on Dutch society? It is too easy to ascribe their waning influence to the rising level of education. Perhaps secular education turns people into non-believers, but how could education in denominational schools do this? After all, since the First World War the denominations tried to maintain their grip by providing full government-funding to denominational schools. That increased the attendance of confessional schools and initially resulted in less mixed marriage. In the end, however, this strategy failed.

My explanation is a "two-goods" one. Religion in the Netherlands during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provided not only salvation in the hereafter. The Dutch government granted hardly any welfare, adhered to a law that old people without sufficient means had to be taken care of by their children, and supported the administration of welfare by the churches. When, after a provisional law in 1948, a law providing old-age pensions for every person above the age of 65 came into force in 1956, the churches stopped dispensing one of the material goods they had provided for several centuries. A law awarding social assistance in other circumstances came into force in 1965. According to my "two-goods" hypothesis, these laws turned the churches of the Netherlands into collective actors that no longer provided the material good of income to persons in a stage of life that all persons would like to attain (everybody wants to live a long time), and this caused pillarization to decline in the Netherlands after the mid-1950s. My next case of enriching macro-questions by bringing individuals back in stems from the Netherlands during the Second World War.

### **The War that Hitler Won—in Which the Dutch Were a Third Party**

It is generally accepted that the Second World War ended in a victory of the Allies over Germany. However, Hitler also waged war against the Jews and Hitler won that war. A comparison of various European countries with regard to the percentage of Jewish inhabitants who did not survive the Second World War raises the following question: why was the percentage of Dutch Jews that was killed higher than the percentages for other West-European countries, and close to those for Eastern Europe (Blom 1989)? This question may be viewed as a question about the weak cohesion of Dutch society under German occupation and the limited solidarity of Gentiles with Jews. When Jews were ordered to go to concentration camps in the Netherlands and then await their deportation to work camps in Poland, offers for hiding places were not forthcoming. However, when somewhat later during the Second World War Gentile Dutch men were ordered to work in factories in Germany to produce materials for the war, more places became available where these men could conceal themselves. In addition, Dutch policemen, not only members of the Dutch National Socialist Party (NSB) or of the SS (*Schutzstaffeln*), rounded up Jews, and mayors of cities encouraged people to declare themselves as Jewish in accordance with the Nuremberg definition. Finally, Jews that went into hiding were sometimes betrayed by "ordinary" Dutchmen.

### ***The Dutch Paradox and its Subquestions***

Fein (1979) performed a quantitative analysis with countries as the unit of analysis, the percentage of Jewish inhabitants that died in the Second World War as the variable to be explained, and pre-war anti-Semitism and the presence of the SS as predictors. The results of this analysis deserve careful study. Not every country is exactly on the regression line, and the Netherlands is an outlier. This country with its relatively low pre-war anti-Semitism and its limited SS-presence had a higher percentage of murdered Jews than predicted on the basis of these two pieces of information. Hence the *Dutch Paradox*: why were more Dutch Jews killed than the situation in the Netherlands would lead one to expect?

Fein's analysis involving countries went as far as it could. However, if the causal factors he identified are indeed pivotal, they should explain not only differences between countries, but also differences between the municipalities within one country. Thus, the Dutch Paradox may be addressed in a roundabout way, by comparing for Dutch municipalities the percentages of Jews that did not survive the Second World War. For the various Dutch municipalities, lists have been preserved with the name, place and date of birth of the Jews who lived there in 1941 or 1942. Lists with the name, place and date of birth, and place and date of death of all

Dutch Jews killed in the Second World War also exist. In addition, files were compiled shortly after the Second World War on mayors and policemen who collaborated with Germany. It is also known when most Dutch Jews were sent from Dutch camps to Polish ones. Finally, there are lists of Jewish survivors. Thus, the following attempt to enrich questions may give rise to new empirical findings bearing on the Dutch Paradox.

When restating the Dutch Paradox for municipalities, I use a RAT-principle proposed by Boudon (1973) for a different topic. According to this precept, when accounting for the level of education attained by a person, an explanation has to be devised that does not regard this level as the outcome of one big decision taken by a person, but as the accumulated result of several smaller ones. An educational system has numerous branching points, and at each point decisions occur. Generalizing this idea, and applying this principle to the persecution of the Jews, the percentage of a country's or municipality's Jews killed in the Second World War is the result of human action, but not the outcome of one action by any person. This divides the Dutch Paradox into subquestions. To begin with, Jews had to register as Jews in the municipality where they lived. Secondly, those registered were ordered by local authorities to camps in the Netherlands. Those not following these orders and going into hiding may have been deported anyway. Those in the Dutch camps were or were not deported to Poland. Those arriving in Polish camps may have been killed at once, they may have lived for some time to die of exhaustion or disease, or they may have survived. In this way the following sequence of descriptive questions is obtained:

1. What the percentage of Jews living in a municipality of the Netherlands was registered as Jewish?
2. What the percentage of Jews registered in a Dutch town followed the first deportation orders to a Dutch camp?
3. For each Dutch municipality, what the percentage of Jews in hiding was eventually deported to a Dutch camp?
4. For each Dutch municipality, what the percentage of Jews in Dutch camps was deported to camps in Poland?
5. For each Dutch municipality, what the percentage of Jews killed was upon arrival in a camp in Poland?
6. For each Dutch municipality, what the percentage of Jews not immediately killed in a Polish camp survived the Second World War?

#### *Dutch Perpetrators and Dutch Bystanders*

After answering the descriptive questions just listed, explanatory ones may be raised. When addressing them, it is useful to replace a particular

RAT-assumption by a more realistic one. The old assumption amounts to the initial condition of two types of actors, in this case perpetrators and victims. Of course, in the case of the Netherlands, not only Hitler and the Germans were perpetrators, but also Dutch mayors and policemen. According to Hilberg (1992), bystanders formed a third type of actor in the destruction of European Jewry. Some people watched or turned their head during the persecution of the Jews, while others offered help. Yet others betrayed Jews that had gone into hiding. With a "three-actor" assumption Ultee and Flap (1996) derived the following hypotheses:

1. in municipalities that had a mayor sympathetic to the German occupation, a higher percentage of Jews was registered as Jewish than in municipalities with a mayor without such sympathies, and in the former municipalities the percentage of registered Jews that was deported was higher than in the latter,
2. in municipalities with police agreeable to the German occupation, a higher percentage of registered Jews was deported upon first orders than in municipalities where police were not sympathetic,
3. in municipalities where the NSB drew a higher percentage of the vote before the Second World War, the percentage of registered Jews that went into hiding and the percentage of Jews in hiding that remained undiscovered, was lower than in the municipalities where the NSB drew a smaller percentage of the vote,
4. in municipalities where pillarization was stronger, the percentage of registered Jews going underground was smaller than in municipalities with weaker pillarization (assuming that when the difference between the percentage of the vote for non-confessional parties and the percentage of the population without a denomination is larger, pillarization is weaker).

A first report on the tenability of these hypotheses concerning one aspect of the cohesion of Dutch society during the Second World War is Flap, Geurts and Ultee (1997). My next illustration of enriching questions on an aspect of the cohesion of Dutch society pertains to the period after the Second World War.

#### **Solidarity and the Welfare State: Giving and Receiving**

Studies on welfare states are clearly important for sociology's long-standing question of stratification. Yet, when the number of unemployed and disabled persons grew sharply in the Netherlands in the early 1980s, the total level of benefits rose, and proposals were made to lower individual benefits. At that time it was said that the solidarity underpinning

the welfare state was eroding. Was it really? It could be that a recipient of social benefits now receives less than before and that the amount of premium paid by an employed person rises. The latter does not indicate weaker solidarity. I add that the word solidarity may not be a good term, since it suggests voluntarism. However, social security is not charity. The expression cohesion therefore might be more appropriate than the term solidarity (used for instance by Baldwin 1990).

### *Two Traditional but Possibly Misleading Questions*

Wilensky (1975) calculated the amount of social security benefits as a percentage of gross or net national income. Column 2 in Table 12.3 presents the trend in the total level of social security benefits as a percentage of net national income in the Netherlands from 1952 and 1992. To ease computing, I assume that being employed and drawing benefits are mutually exclusive. According to Column 2 of Table 12.3, benefits peaked in 1983, dropped a bit until 1989, and then rose again slightly afterwards without attaining the level of 1983.

TABLE 12.3. Misleading Questions on Solidarity and the Welfare State

<i>Year</i>	<i>(a)</i>	<i>(b)</i>
1952	10	33
1955	10	40
1960	13	36
1965	17	44
1970	20	41
1975	28	51
1980	32	52
1981	33	49
1982	35	54
1983	36	52
1984	34	52
1985	33	40
1986	33	40
1987	34	39
1988	34	37
1989	33	37
1990	34	41
1991	34	40
1992	35	39

The question of solidarity by way of the welfare state as (a) the misleading question of the percentage of net national income consisting of social security benefits and (b) the misleading question of the average income of a person receiving social security as a percentage of the average income of an employed person

*Source:* Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (1994)

This answer to the question of the trend in total social security benefits as a percentage of national income may provide no more than a rough

indication of the year in which solidarity between employed persons and benefit recipients was maximal. After all, if the percentage of persons on benefits rises and individual benefit levels remain constant, the employed "give" more to the recipients taken as a whole, and thus show more solidarity.

Korpi (1989) calculated the average income of a social security recipient as a percentage of the average income of an employed person. Column 3 in Table 12.3 makes clear that in the Netherlands this percentage rose until 1982, dropped sharply until 1989, to rise somewhat afterwards. Thus Column 3 provides a somewhat different picture than the first column. But does Column 3 say anything about cohesion? Social security benefits are transmissions of money among individuals, though these transfers are coerced by the state. If the figures in Column 3 of Table 12.3 do not change, and the number of people on benefits rises, then an employed person transfers a higher percentage of his/her income to people on social benefits. In addition, the transfer payment received by a person on social benefits could be financed by a higher or lower number of employed persons. Questions on differences in income between the average person on social benefits and the average employed person do not provide an accurate picture of cohesion.

#### *Two New Questions Providing a More Accurate Picture*

The question of how much money states spend on social security refers neither to the amount of benefits received by the average person living on social security, nor to the amount of social security premium paid by the average employed person. That is, this question is not investigated on an individual level; the unit invoked is the government. The question concerning the income of the average benefits recipient compared to the income of an employed person does refer to persons paying social security premiums and persons receiving social benefits. However, it pertains neither to the amount of money flowing from the average employed person to all benefit recipients, nor to the money received by one person on benefits from one employed person as a percentage of the latter's income. That is, the flow of money is an asymmetric relation. When the state transfers income, there are givers and there are receivers, and two questions on cohesion.

Thus, two questions on social security premiums paid and social benefits received should be posed, the answer to each question illuminating in its own way the issue of solidarity. The first question concerns the trend in the average amount of income "given" by an employed person to all social benefit recipients taken as a whole as a percentage of the average income of an employed person. This question quantifies the solidarity given by

an employed person to all recipients taken together. The second question concerns the trend in the average amount "received" by a person on social benefits from one employed person (the average employed person) as a percentage of the average income of an employed person. This question quantifies the solidarity received by a social benefits recipient from the average employed person.

TABLE 12.4. Solidarity and the Welfare State

Year	Employed Persons		Benefit Recipients		(a)	(b)
	Total Income (dfl. mln.) (=1)	Total Number (1000s) (=2)	Total Income (dfl. mln.) (=3)	Total Number (1000s) (=4)		
1952	13243	3711	668	564	5	0.009
1955	16598	3948	1019	605	6	0.010
1960	21662	4089	2319	1203	11	0.009
1965	33938	4380	5553	1642	15	0.010
1970	59531	4504	11289	2057	19	0.009
1975	99289	4425	29661	2570	30	0.012
1980	153252	4538	52528	2982	34	0.011
1981	155385	4128	57845	3156	37	0.012
1982	157339	4381	64491	3355	41	0.012
1983	161861	4303	67999	3495	42	0.012
1984	168361	4298	68389	3357	41	0.012
1985	187277	4505	65633	3935	35	0.009
1986	193588	4592	66642	3953	34	0.009
1987	200780	4659	67160	4021	33	0.008
1988	203610	4728	68030	4082	33	0.008
1989	215238	4767	69252	4177	32	0.008
1990	223370	4855	79730	4239	36	0.008
1991	239919	4931	83081	4268	35	0.008
1992	254311	4987	86609	4321	34	0.008

$$(a) = \frac{3 \cdot 2}{1 \cdot 2} = \frac{3}{1}$$

$$(b) = \frac{3 \cdot 2}{4 \cdot 2 + 1} = \frac{3}{1 \cdot 4}$$

The question of solidarity by way of the welfare state as (a) the question of the average amount of income "donated" by an employed person to all social security benefit recipients as a percentage of the average income of an employed person and (b) the question of the average amount "received" by a benefits recipient from one employed person as a percentage of the average income of an employed person

Source: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (1994)

The last two columns in Table 12.4 chart the trends just specified for the Netherlands in the years from 1952 through 1992. The solidarity given by an employed person to all recipients put together was at its peak in 1983, dropped rather sharply until 1989, and rose somewhat until 1992. The solidarity received by one benefit recipient from one employed person was at its peak in 1975; it more or less remained at this level until 1984, dropped sharply in 1985 and remained at this much lower level until 1992. Looking at the answers to these more clear-cut questions, differences are not large.

The one important observation is that the solidarity received by one benefit recipient from one employed person increased until 1975, to remain at this level until 1984. This does not really square with the common assumption that social solidarity kept growing in the Netherlands until the mid-1980s.

#### *Political Effects of Discrepancies Between Two Types of Solidarity*

In a sense, the exercise just performed failed. Although the answer to the question when "given" solidarity was at its height differs somewhat from the answer to the question on "received" solidarity, differences were not large. If they had been important, it would have been worthwhile to speculate on the question of what might happen in politics. When will employed persons move to the right, when will social security recipients move to the left, when will there be a strong electoral polarization? Do social benefit recipients move more to the left when the received and given solidarity decrease than when the received solidarity decreases? If given and received solidarity increase, will the employed react more strongly by moving to the right than when only given solidarity increases? I will let these questions rest for now.

#### **Summing Up**

In this chapter, I proposed to state questions on societal characteristics in such a way that these questions would involve as much as possible the individuals making up a society. I applied this principle when charting trends in three aspects of the cohesion of Dutch society during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These trends were not only mapped with encyclopedic dates, but also by administrative statistics and findings from the quantitative analysis of large-scale data-sets. It became clear that current questions are not sufficiently attuned to the individual level. In some cases the wrong question is being asked, while in other cases the question unwittingly conflates several questions into one.

A point of debate in current sociological theory is the usefulness, when answering questions about societal features, of the assumption that individuals act rationally. This assumption is often made within economics, perhaps the most successful social science, and by proponents of a narrowly conceived rational choice approach within sociology. I think the prime objection against this approach is not the supposition that people behave rationally. The main criticism involves the initial condition under which economists traditionally have applied this premise: the prevalence of free markets. That is, economics and its little brother in sociology not only presuppose a hypothesis about how individuals behave. They also

offer a thesis about the societal institutions. Problem articulation, theory formation and empirical research in sociology should focus on the latter supposition.

I therefore sympathize with the attempt by many sociologists to "sociologize" the study of markets (White 1981; Granovetter 1985). To begin with, free markets never fully prevail. Further, there are organizations (duties to perform, and physical punishment meted out by a person at the top of a hierarchy). There are also traditions (injunctions to leave things as they are through disapproval by bystanders). Beside markets (universal rights and financial competition by similar actors), organizations and traditions are the mechanisms which to some extent coordinate the actions of individuals.

In my opinion, however, these attempts do not go far enough. By analyzing substantive research problems on various aspects of the cohesion of Dutch society during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I hope to have shown that additional progress can be made by applying four specific rules that may be viewed as part of a "rational choice approach" or a "rational action theory", emphasizing the varying societal situation in which people act. To begin with, societal features like cohesion should not be regarded as the outcome of one action pursued by individuals, but as the cumulated outcome of several kinds of action. Secondly, between persons, within a dyad, asymmetric relations are possible. Thirdly, hypotheses should not refer to only one type of actor or to two, but to a third party and triads. Finally, the actions of individuals do not need to be directed to one good, but to two. These principles form not only guidelines for theorizing, but also precepts for articulating research questions.