Mary Douglas’s Cultural Theory: Learning and the Ends of Inquiry

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Intention today

To distinguish four different kinds of enquiry and elucidate some features of their context and implications
A crash course in ‘Cultural Theory’
aka NeoDurkheimian Institutional Theory (NDIT)

Loyalty
Common Cause
Mutuality
(Dis)agreement…
‘Grid’

Constraints
Rules
Roles
Age
Rank
Stratification…
4 ‘solidarities’ or cultures emerge
4 ‘solidarities’ or cultures emerge as a result of small decisions or factors.
Relationships and authority

Diagram showing different structures:
- 'Grid'
- 'Group'

- Isolates
- Enclave
- Hierarchy
4 examples

- 'Grid':
  - Factory works who don’t talk
  - Marketplace
- 'Group':
  - Army
  - Pacifist group, village (tightly-knit)
Relationships give rise to behaviours

- **‘Group’**
  - Short-term pragmatic profit-orientated
  - Egalitarian, discursive

- **‘Grid’**
  - Piecemeal opportunism
  - Structured, contractual, process
and values of eg time

The exam board will ratify your marks in six months

What do we want? Something Important!
When do we want it? Now!
... thus recognition and value of knowledges

Isolated, tested, not linked to existing discourse

Tested, reliable, proven, encoded densely in symbols

Pragmatic, ‘next step’

Salvationary: existing knowledge redefined
Social media, internet (examples)

Static, stand-alone webpages

Authoritative webpages reflecting power and order located elsewhere

SMS

Twitter

Facebook

Wikipedia
What would be valued as *fruitful enquiry*?

- **‘Grid’**
  - Fascinating nuggets of underdetermined relevance

- **‘Group’**
  - Taxonomy, classification, verification within paradigm
  - Actionable insight
  - Furthers the cause
What would be valued as *engagement*?

**‘Grid’**
- Ipsative progress, independent, autonomous, maverick

**‘Group’**
- Flexibility, opportunity, prizes, status
- Finds niche, supports structure
- Belonging
as independent learning?

- Brilliant complex understanding unrelated to larger picture
- Innovative, promising idea
- Working responsibly to protocol without supervision
- Rethinking existing material to local agenda
What would groupwork look like?

- Eclectic, individualised
- Structured, bounded, distinct rules
- Multiple short-term transactions
- Egalitarian group lacking ‘final’ authority
Thoughts for discussion (aka ‘so what?’)

» Constructive (cultural) alignment just got harder
» there are four distinguishable ‘types’ of inquiry, independence and groupwork
» monomodal evaluation does not capture all four
» students are learning the cultural mode as much as the material
» we mix modes at our peril, creating inarticulable dissonance