

Opp, Karl-Dieter (1982). "The Evolutionary Emergence of Norms". British Journal of Social Psychology 21: 139-49.

Norms, says Opp, may emerge in a variety of ways. Institutions may prescribe them, social contracts may demand them, and various social forces may gradually create them. The central purpose of this article, however, is to formulate a hypothesis relating only to the last of these processes--so-called evolutionary norm formation.

Since norms, argues the author, are but "expectations stating that something should or must be the case", in explaining the emergence of norms, "we explain under what conditions individuals express new normative statements" (p. 139). In the case of evolutionary processes, of course, "norms and/or measures for their enforcement are not explicitly stated or planned" (p. 141). Rather they are, argues the author, the result of gradual social development.

In tracing the evolutionary emergence of norms in large groups where bargaining is impossible and a single, coercive institution is lacking, Opp draws heavily from studies on man's transition to agricultural societies, the activities of Indian tribes, and class behaviour. According to his theory, the process of evolutionary norm formation has at least five distinct phases. First, there occurs, he says, "the emergence of recurrent behavior" where "patterns are associated with relatively high benefits and low cost", where "behavioral regularities emerge through initiation of successful models" (p. 142) and/or where such structural variables as communication and the degree of homogeneity are not "a constraint which restricts the realization of certain preferences" (p. 143). Second, says Opp, comes "the formation of preferences", based on the "net utility of recurrent

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follows

behavior", on its "intrinsic value" (p. 144). Third, Opp hypothesizes, the articulation of normative statements, which are merely "the easiest strategy for informing others (about) what one wants them to do" (p. 145). Fourth, theorizes the author, comes the acceptance and internalization of norms, provided that they themselves are "~~intrinsically rewarding~~ and that deviating from the norm is intrinsically rewarding and that deviating from the norm is intrinsically costly". Finally, thinks Opp, there comes the articulation of "measures for enforcing norms" (p. 146).

What implications does this hypothesis have for economic models of norm formation that scholars like Olson have posited? Opp says that they are threefold. First, since "transaction costs entailed in reaching an agreement on a particular norm do not occur if the conditions described in our model are given", it means, explains the author, that "even if the costs of organizing a collective decision on a certain norm are tremendous, the norm may nevertheless emerge" (p. 147). Second, says Opp, "according to our model, the perceived influence on providing a norm in a group is irrelevant", and "the same holds true for the different effects of group size". And the externalities that are relevant to the emergence of norms, lastly, "may be of a different kind from those usually dealt with in economics" (p. 148).

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