

- *Kevin Eric Saunders ca. March 1980 - Cornell Sociology (Bonze Anne Rose Blayk)* - My interest in pursuing a degree in Sociology is a consequence of a personal decision to concentrate my studies on the general theory of specialization, with the intention of gaining an understanding of the theoretical bases of arguments about the division of labor, and the consequences of specialization for social and political life. Hopefully this will issue in a work suitable for publication, surveying the current body of theory and its background, while exploring the operation of specialization in American society and possible future trends in its development.

The research for this project will necessarily be interdisciplinary. Much of the inspiration for my interest in this topic is derived from the work of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend in philosophy of science, which deals with the theory and sociology of knowledge: how do we define “science,” and what institutional structures are most appropriate to the goal of producing worthwhile knowledge? Similarly, for any other type of specialization, we must ask what kind of knowledge is acquired, whether it is useful, and if so, what are the best means of making this knowledge available.

Economic theory may also provide insights into the role of specialization in modern society. Since most discussions on the function of the division of labor focus on the economic benefits of the practice (though, as Emile Durkheim pointed out, it leads to the multiplication of otherwise unnecessary needs), a firm grasp of the foundations of this type of argument is indispensable. I hope to do a minor concentration in the economics of self-management, where work discussing present realities and outlining alternative strategies for organizing specialized fields should prove quite useful.

Finally, the problem must be considered from a sociological standpoint. What role does specialization play in the organization of contemporary society — how does it work to provide a context which defines the roles of social actors, and what rewards and sanctions exist to encourage adherence to these roles? A crucial issue here is the relationship between work and one’s self-concept: how does the organization of work serve to provide self-esteem and a feeling of participation in society? Further questions involve the consequences of different approaches to specialization, and the manner in which our society has been affected by the chosen mode of developing and employing expertise.

I believe that these questions, pursued with respect for the breadth and complexity of the issues involved, can lead to a better understanding of social phenomena. Given the entrenchment of specialization in economic life, and the proliferation of new breeds of experts alongside the more established, a critical appreciation of the phenomenon itself is desperately needed, not only to enhance our understanding of social organization, but also to point to new possibilities for the organization of social and economic life.

My interest in pursuing a degree in Sociology is a consequence of a personal decision to concentrate my studies on the general theory of specialization, with the intention of gaining an understanding of the theoretical bases of arguments about the division of labor, and the consequences of specialization for social and political life. Hopefully this will issue in a work suitable for publication, surveying the current body of theory and its background, while exploring the operation of specialization in American society and possible future trends in its development.

The research for this project will necessarily be interdisciplinary. Much of the inspiration for my interest in this topic is derived from the work of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend in philosophy of science, which deals with the theory and sociology of knowledge: how do we define "science," and what institutional structures are most appropriate to the goal of producing worthwhile knowledge? Similarly, for any other type of specialization, we must ask what kind of knowledge is acquired, whether it is useful, and, if so, what are the best means of making this knowledge available.

Economic theory may also provide insights into the role of specialization in modern society. Since most discussions on the function of the division of labor focus on the economic benefits of the practice (though, as Emile Durkheim pointed out, it leads to the multiplication of otherwise unnecessary needs), a firm grasp of the foundations of this type of argument is indispensable.

I hope to do a minor concentration in the economics of self-management, where work discussing present realities and outlining alternative strategies for organizing specialized fields should prove quite useful.

Finally, the problem must be considered from a sociological standpoint. What role does specialization play in the organization of contemporary society -- how does it work to provide a context which defines the roles of social actors, and what rewards and sanctions exist to encourage adherence to these roles? A crucial issue here is the relationship between work and one's self-concept: how does the organization of work serve to provide self-esteem and a feeling of participation in society? Further questions involve the consequences of different approaches to specialization, and the manner in which our society has been affected by the chosen mode of developing and employing expertise.

I believe that these questions, pursued with respect for the breadth and complexity of the issues involved, can lead to a better understanding of social phenomena. Given the entrenchment of specialization in economic life, and the proliferation of new breeds of experts alongside the more established, a critical appreciation of the phenomenon itself is desperately needed, not only to enhance our understanding of social organization, but also to point to new possibilities for the organization of social and economic life.