

# The Explanatory Potential of Artificial Societies

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## Abstract

It is often claimed that artificial society simulations contribute to the explanation of social phenomena. At the hand of a particular example, this paper argues that artificial societies often cannot provide full explanations, because their models are not or cannot be validated. Instead, artificial societies may sometimes provide potential explanations. It is shown that these potential explanations, if they contribute to our understanding, considerably differ from the standard kind of potential causal explanations. Instead of possible causal histories, simulations offer possible functional analyses of the explanandum. The paper discusses how these two kinds of potential explanations differ, and how possible functional analyses can be appraised.

**Keywords:** Simulation, Explanation, Agent-Based Models, Computational Social Science

[General Issues: Models and Idealization](#)

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