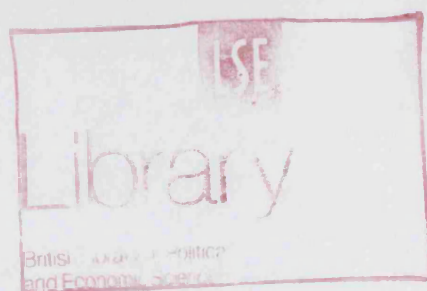


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**‘Dualism and Duality: An Examination of the Structure-
Agency Debate’**

by

Shaun Le Boutilier

Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method,

The London School of Economics and Political Science

Ph.D Thesis

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Abstract

Within the structure-agency debate the works of Margaret Archer and Anthony Giddens represent opposite opinions of the society-person connection and the status of social types. Their views are defined, respectively, by an adherence to dualism or duality. Whilst Archer's theory requires ontological proof that social structures, as emergent phenomena, exist *sui generis* Giddens' argument, based on a commitment to hermeneutics and pragmatism carries no such ontological baggage. I argue that the demands of Archer's and Bhaskar's realism are unmet and that duality is the most plausible position to hold in the structure-agency debate.

In Chapter One I set out Giddens' theory and note his rejection of relativism in favour of pragmatism. In Chapter Two I argue that the bedrock of Archer's theory, Bhaskar's naturalism, when carried to the social sciences, is flawed by the inability to 'close' systems. In Chapter Three I show how realists have modified Bhaskar's realism in order to separate structure from agency. However, as with past attempts at basing realism on the concept of emergence this raises the spectre of reification. In Chapter Four I discuss and demonstrate the ways in which the concept of supervenience may or may not be helpful in proving the *sui generis* status of social facts. In the first half of Chapter 5 I make a distinction between morphological and cultural types and demonstrate that separating 'ideas' from those individuals who hold them is nonsensical and therefore dualism is fundamentally flawed. In the second half of the chapter I argue that there are logical grounds for rejecting the transposition of realism from the natural to the social sciences. In Chapter Six I defend Giddens' thesis against criticisms concerning voluntarism, the clarity of the notion of social structure and its relationship to system.

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Introduction

One primary concern of this thesis is, to alter a chapter heading from Margaret Archer's (1995) text, the vexatious problem of social facts¹. This issue is never far from the agenda as it is central to what has come to be known as the structure-agency debate in sociology. Social facts are fundamental because they are analytical to the definition of social structure. Social structures are just social facts but the question that commentators both old and new have asked is: just where are they to be located? Answers to this question are as old as the subject-matter itself. Mainly these have focused on the connection or relationship between individual(s) and society and taken the title of the 'structure-agency debate'.

In recent years the structure-agency debate has, *inter alia*, centred around two very ambitious theoretical projects of the social sciences: Anthony Giddens' (1976, 1977, 1979, 1984) structuration theory and Margaret Archer's (1982, 1988, 1995, 2000) morphogenetic realism². Each is responsible for a radical re-conceptualisation of the key terms in the debate and each has, at its heart, a particular way of interpreting social facts and their relationship to agents. For Giddens the relationship between structure and agency or the connection between individual and society is that of a 'duality'; structure is both medium and outcome of social action. For Archer, and realism in general, social facts, and the society-person connection, are to be understood in terms of a dualism; social structures exist in separation from agents and represent the pre-conditions of individual actions. As such, Archer's theoretical work is premised on the notion of emergent properties. 'Emergent properties' (in short 'emergence') are read by social scientists not as empirically given or situated phenomena, but in a post-empiricist manner as the 'capacities' or 'generative mechanisms' of a social object. Social objects, or what Archer refers to as the stratified parts of society, exist, *sui generis*, in 'relative autonomy' from the people that make up society. And, it is in this sense that her version of realism might be described as a dualist response to the structure-agency or person-society connection. Thus

dualism, as opposed to duality, suggests that the stratified parts of society and the agents that exist as a part of society exist in relative distinction.

Anthony Giddens holds an opposite, or antithesis position. For him, social facts, and the agent-structure relationship, cannot be explained in terms of emergent properties. Emergence implies a mechanistic relationship between social structures and actions or agents. Instead, social structures ultimately reside in the minds of agents as memory traces that tell us, as actors, ways of 'going on' or how to act in social circumstances. That we, as actors, cannot escape or are indeed constituted of social structures, suggests that the relationship between agent and structure is that of a duality: analytically distinguishable but ontologically inseparable. Thus, duality provides two faces on the same coin. Social structures exist in a virtual realm but as actors we are nothing more than the intelligent beings that are socialised and re-socialised through a nexus of social structural interactions.

Each of these authors has been influenced by different sources and each has different concerns (see below) beyond the main objective of the structure-agency debate which aimed to overcome the obstacle of the so-called subject-object divide in social science. This divide, as it was presented until relatively recently, pitted structuralist's theories of society against theories of individual or subjective actions. The resulting reduction on one side or the other (structure or agency) has been described, by Archer (1995:6), as 'conflationary thinking' or 'one-dimensional theorizing'. Most contemporary theorists would now agree with Archer on this point. The result of this kind of theorizing is, on the one hand, and typified in the early works of Emile Durkheim³, and, *inter alia*, both structural-functionalism⁴ and French structuralism⁵, the absence of agency or free will or, as Giddens' (1976:22) observes, 'the conceptual blotting-out of the active subject'. On the other hand, both methodological individualism⁶ and action theories,⁷ and theories that focus upon the subjective interpretation of the social world lacked an adequate theory of institutions, institutional change, or, more generally, an account of how social structures may influence and/or constrain individuals' actions, wants, and purposes. The aim of both structuration theory and Archer's realist morphogenetic account was to

overcome the problem of thinking and explaining, exclusively, from one side (social structure) or the other (subjective or interpretive accounts of action). With regard to this, both theorists approvingly recall and cite Marx's dictum that: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past' (Marx, 1977:300). At the same time, both theorists agree that agency is the driving force of history.

Equally, for Archer and Giddens history provides a ready made social world into which the agent is absorbed. However, the post-Bhaskarian realist conception of this is to view history in terms of social structural properties which are external to the individual and provide pre-conditions of action. Thus, social structures are externally 'real' to the individual who must fashion or re-fashion them according to the parameters that they provide. For Giddens, whilst socialisation runs throughout an individual's life, and social life is he says, an 'on-going process' which cannot be dissected into discrete acts, social causes (or social facts) cannot be separated from individuals' actions in this way. Giddens views the problems of past social theorising as a consequence of the dualisms of structural and subjectivist sociologies. Ultimately, history enters into the social realm through the memories of those individuals who constitute society. Hence, the fundamental difference between Giddens and Archer lies in their respective re-conceptualisations of the terms of the debate itself. Neither adheres to the rigidity of the traditional micro-macro divide but in the place of this each conceptualises structure and agency differently. For Giddens, as noted, social structure and agency are intertwined and the former exists only as memory traces for Archer the causal capacities of an array of social objects are what give meaning to the term 'structure'.

For realists, such as Archer, social structure is defined as having causal potency or powers and it is this that makes it 'real' or allows realists to claim that it has *sui generis* status. This leads Archer to depict society as a stratified system or an array of social objects. Each strata, according to Archer, may be differentiated from the others by level (individual, group, social, and cultural) rather than by

conceptual content. And the thing that makes each level 'real' is conceptually (although not empirically) identical. So, agent, social structure and cultural system all possess a natural necessity which is defined by hers and Bhaskar's concept of emergence.

Bhaskar and Archer, of course, were not the first social theorists to use the concept of emergent properties as a defining principle of the reality of social structures. Durkheim (1982:39, originally, 1895), first drew the attention of the community of sociologists to the possibility that an analogy to the emergence of (the hard metal) bronze from the combination of (the soft metals) lead, tin, and copper may be of relevance to the social sciences. Thus, for Durkheim the coming together of individuals led to a 'synthesis *sui generis*, which constitutes every society, gives rise to new phenomena, different from those which occur in consciousness in isolation (*ibid*)'⁸ Where Durkheim led Anglo-American structural-functionalism followed. For Parsons (1968, originally 1937), Merton (1963) and others, emergent properties could explain the existence of functional imperatives or what Parsons' called 'functional prerequisite'⁹. In general functionalism, despite caution concerning the *sui generis* status of emergent properties¹⁰, was concerned with the observable objective consequences of action and not at all interested in the subjective disposition (such as motives and purposes) which, as later critics were to point out, served to constitute the basis of social outcomes. With the demise of structural-functionalism emergence lost ground in the social sciences but the works of cautionary 'collectivists', such as Lockwood (1964) and Gellner (1971), remained popular. Mainly, according to Archer (1995:23), because of the 'frequent success of their explanatory programme'. Nevertheless, neither Lockwood nor Gellner was prepared to imbue social structures with causal powers. This is where, in the late 1970s, Roy Bhaskar's (1975 & 1979) post-empiricist version of naturalism enters into the structure-agency debate and 'emergence', so to speak, re-emerges as the explanation for 'social structure' and a realist based dualism¹¹.

However, prior to the arrival of realism an altogether different account of the relationship between structure and agency, published in 1976, and authored by Anthony Giddens had entered the debate over the individual-society connection.

And it is here, in Chapter 1, that the thesis begins its investigation into the merits and demerits of the duality and dualism of social structure and agency; and, by consequence, considers what the status of social facts might be.

What is duality? In sum, it involves a re-conceptualisation of the two key terms in the aforementioned debate, 'agency' and 'structure', and a demonstration of how the two might be mapped onto one another. Thus, and on the one hand, social structure is both the 'medium' and 'outcome' of what Giddens calls the production and reproduction of social life. On the other hand, in order to understand his use of the terms 'production' and 'reproduction' we need to observe that, as noted above, social structures are in Giddens' terminology 'virtual' they exist as memory traces in the minds of agents. Now, the terms 'production' and 'reproduction' can be understood in relation to what Giddens (1976:102) calls 'the Marxian ontology of Praxis'. Or, in Marx's words: 'As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and how they produce' (Marx, 1968:42)¹². Social structures are produced or reproduced through Giddens' model of 'action'. The conditions for their production or reproduction, through action, are threefold, and Giddens argues, only analytically separable. These are structures of 'signification', 'domination', and 'legitimation'. The first and last of these Giddens calls 'rules' the other, which is tied to Giddens' (enabling and constraining) conception of 'power' he refers to as 'resources'. Each form of structure has a *modus operandi* or 'modality' through which agents conceptualise meanings, facilities, and normative codes (respectively). Whilst at the level of interaction the three structures, again respectively, are expressions of communication, power, and sanctions. Giddens' aim, and the purpose of a duality, is to demonstrate the inseparable relation between social structures and action.

Action, in Giddens' framework, is conceived as: the reflexive monitoring of action, the rationalization of action, and the motivation of action. However, on either side of his 'Stratification Model of Action' (see Chapter 1), which contains as its central spine the aforementioned concepts, lies the unacknowledged conditions of action and the unintended consequences of

action. The unacknowledged conditions of action refer to both conscious and unconscious elements of 'intentionality'. Consciously, as Garfinkel's (1967) breaching experiments have made clear, the vast majority of our actions are known to us only tacitly. In fact it is only through 'breaching' habits and routines that we are made to account for them and understand what is happening¹³. This is, of course, one of the main tasks of sociology. Giddens also refers to motivations and desires that arise in the unconscious part of the mind. Whilst this is an issue that this thesis does not deal with it is nevertheless interesting in respect of one point – the sense in which Giddens' duality exists above and below conscious experience or rather the dialectic between the social world and the unconscious level of experience. The unintended consequences of action refer to the reproductive aspects of action that, at the level of system, are not known to individuals. This is best explained by way of an example, Giddens refers to a possible (homeostatic) link between material deprivation and low-level unemployment. Paul Willis' (1977) working-class lads provide evidence for this.) To return to the duality of social structure and agency, Giddens' theory proposes that the human mind is made up, and only made up, of social structural knowledge which enables individuals 'to go on' in the Wittgensteinian sense of knowing how to follow a 'rule'. This is coupled with the essential feature of agency; that is, what Giddens calls 'reflexivity' or the monitoring of and acting upon social conduct.

The main purpose of Chapter 1 is simply to set out Giddens' structuration theory but in the final section of the chapter, and its conclusion, I give some reasons for differentiating Giddens' account from Bhaskar's naturalism. As noted above, Giddens, I argue, adheres to a pragmatist philosophy centred on what Stones (2005:5) has described as a 'structural-hermeneutic'. Thus, for him, all knowledge is obtained from hermeneutical principles, whether this is knowledge of the natural world or the social world. The concept of *verstehen*, he argues, is not simply a social scientific method but the very ontology of human existence. As such, and contrary to the implications of Bhaskar's naturalism, there can be no 'protocol language' or foundational principle from which, in either the natural or social sciences, scientific theories can be established as true. Further, the natural and social science, whilst both subject to hermeneutical

investigation, differ from one another because of their respective subject-matter. Without adding detail, one key point which I note at the end of the chapter is that generalizations in the social sciences can never hope to be of the type found in the natural sciences. This is for Giddens not simply a consequence of what Bhaskar refers to as intervening or countervailing causes but because of the very nature of action and of being human: the causal relations of the social sciences involve a mesh of antecedent factors which Giddens describes in his 'stratification model of action'. I discuss Bhaskar's naturalism in Chapter 2.

Bhaskar's (1975, 1979, 1998) reconfiguration or post-empiricist conception of naturalism provides the backdrop, or ontological underpinning, of most contemporary realist accounts of society. Given the recent ascendancy of realism in the social sciences it stands, at present, as a pillar of contemporary social scientific thought. In some respects it may be thought that Bhaskar's (1979 & 1998) 'possibility of naturalism' for the social sciences could serve as a bridge between Giddens' structuration theory and Archer's morphogenetic account of the structure-agency relationship. This follows primarily from two points. First, structuration theory and Bhaskar's transformation model of society share many key terms and concepts. Second, as already noted, Archer requires Bhaskar's realist ontological framework to avoid the problem that beset Durkheimian structural sociology; namely, the reification of social facts or social structures. Thus, it is important to set out both of these aspects of Bhaskar's approach even if, as I shall argue, the bridge between Giddens and Archer is somewhat misaligned.

Chapter 2 begins with an overview or summary of Bhaskar's (1975) earlier work, *A Realist Theory of Science*. I argue that although this text focuses on the philosophy of the natural sciences and has little to say about sociology its content is of primary importance. For it is in this work that Bhaskar develops his defining formula of realism. This entails, in brief, focusing upon the nature of scientific laws, the context in which they are verified or refuted, and the possibility of establishing transcendental realism. Unpacking this provides us with an ontology which is carried forward, with some important caveats, from the natural science to the social sciences in his subsequent works (see Bhaskar,

1979, 1989, & 1999). In *A Realist Theory of Science* Bhaskar argues that the law-like or 'intransitive objects'¹⁴ of the natural world exist not as empirical regularities, as is assumed by empiricist accounts of causation, but as the 'powers' or the 'tendencies' of a thing. The capacities of an object, he argues, may or may be instantiated in the natural world because the world is an 'open system' in which intervening or countervailing causes may prevent a law from holding true. The way to establish the reality of an intransitive object is through a process of closing the system and this is achieved, Bhaskar argues, through scientific method, or more particularly, through scientific experimentation. The scientific experiment, he claims, leads to the discovery of an objects (Humean) invariances, its (Lockean) natural necessity, and finally, the objects transcendently real qualities or its (Leibnizean) generative mechanisms.

These aspects of natural objects are carried forward to the philosophy of the social world in *The Possibility of Naturalism*. Thus, just as intransitive objects exist in the natural world so too in the social world. And, what defines these objects as 'real' in both realms is their causal 'powers' or 'tendencies'. However, Bhaskar observes that the social world, unlike the natural world, is not closable, the experimental method is not available and, therefore, social scientific research must take place in the full 'openness' of the social realm. Such a conclusion, I argue, seems to undermine the status of a realism for the social sciences. For if we cannot close social systems how can we hope to establish the Leibnizean generative mechanisms that are what makes an intransitive object 'real'. However, setting this aside, I lay out the general framework of Bhaskar's 'transformational model of the society/person connection' and note the similarities between Bhaskar's thesis and Giddens' theory.

There is one important point left to note with regard to this chapter and that is the limitations that Bhaskar places upon a naturalism of the social sciences. Throughout his text Bhaskar is very cautious of the implications that may follow from allowing social structures *sui generis* status. The main threat is, of course, the reification of social objects or the idea that social structures are somehow detached from those individuals that responsible for their production or

reproduction. Consequently, Bhaskar keeps his conception of ‘social structures’ firmly tethered to those individuals that make up society. Thus, he places three limitations upon social scientific naturalism: that social structures ‘do not exist independently of the activities they govern’ (Bhaskar, 1998:38); that social structures ‘do not exist independently of the agents’ conceptions of what they are doing in their activity’ (*ibid*); and, that social structures ‘may only be relatively enduring’ (*ibid*). In the conclusion to this chapter I argue that these ‘limitations’ as well as Bhaskar’s appropriation of much of Giddens’ conceptual framework give the appearance of a shared philosophy but that there are important, albeit concealed, differences of an ontological nature. Bhaskar’s ‘limitations to naturalism’ re-appear as an important issue in Chapter 3 where I discuss Margaret Archer’s (1982, 1995, 1996a, & 2000) morphogenetic theory.

Archer’s first step, following Benton (1981), is to dispense with Bhaskar’s ‘limitations to naturalism’ for they prevent her, and other realists from stating categorically that social structures can be said to exist *sui generis*. That is to say, following Bhaskar’s original formula for emergence, Archer (and other social realists) claim that when two or more entities combine they produce emergent properties that possess new higher-level generative mechanisms that she, and others, classify as the relatively autonomous structural components of society. Such capacities may not be ‘actualised’ but they are, nevertheless, what makes a phenomenon ‘real’ in the critical realist sense. These phenomena, in Archer’s scheme, now become the pre-conditions of social action; they either facilitate morphogenesis (the transformation of social structure) or prevent change (morphostasis). The key point for Archer’s theory, and what differentiates her view from structuration theory in general, is the status she affords to social structures (or social facts). Whilst Bhaskar’s limitations upon social structures appears to undermine this status and (for Archer) needs to be dispensed with the key ingredients of a realism of the social world follow from the adoption of Bhaskar’s (1979) non-Humean (or post-empiricist) account of causation.

By adhering to Bhaskar’s philosophical model and untying social structures from individuals involved in social activities, Archer and other critical realists such as Lawson (1997), Layder (1981 & 1994), Harvey (2002), and Sayer

(1992), believe that they can say with confidence that collective or social phenomena exists as a 'reality'. Furthermore, it is by defining social structures as objects with generative mechanisms that this new variety of emergence can be distinguished from the poorly thought through Durkheimian naturalism. For Bhaskar's version of realism, Archer believes, allows her to avoid the key problem that beset Durkheim's (1982) discussion of social facts in *The Rules of Sociological Method*: the reification of the social world. As Archer, herself, notes: emergence is vital to the realist's project as 'their consistent insistence upon the differentiation and stratification of the social world leads [them] to separate "parts" and "people" in order to examine their distinctive emergent properties' (Archer, 1995:63). Emergence not only provides ontological substance for critical realism but is also seen as a methodological necessity for social investigation: as a requirement to examine the interplay and thus enable the researcher 'to explain why things are "so and not otherwise" in society' (Archer, 1995:64). It allows for a study of the stratification of the social world and as such allows the investigator to witness the interplay between structure and agent as well revealing circumstances of both morphogenesis and morphostasis.

Archer's un-tethering of structure from people leads her to distinguish between various strata of the social world in terms of their temporal disjunctions. Thus, for her, structures emerge and pre-date those actors who are, at some subsequent time, caught up with them in relations of constraint or freedom¹⁵. Archer's (1995:65ff.), analytical dualism is, therefore, based on two premises:

(1) The social world is stratified, such that the emergent properties of structures and agents are irreducible to one another, meaning that in principle they are analytically separable;

(2) [Given that] structures and agents are also temporally distinguishable (... it is justifiable and feasible to talk of pre-existence and posteriority when dealing with specific instances of the two), and this can be used methodologically in order to examine the interplay between them and thus explain changes in both – over time.

These features, according to Archer, lead to the avoidance of excessive voluntarism and unwarranted determinism and allow for a clear distinction between analytical dualism and Archer's own interpretation of Giddens' structuration theory which she variously labels as 'central conflation' or the 'elision' of structure and agency. It is condition (1), structural emergence or the notion of emergent properties, which supplies Archer with a base for a realist ontology of the social world and, she argues, rules out, by definition, the claim that social structures are 'virtual' or memory traces held in the minds of agents. Emergence, as Archer (1995: 66) notes, 'means that the two ['structure' and 'agent'] are analytically separable, but also since given "structures" and given "agents" occupy and operate over different tracts of the time dimension they therefore are distinguishable from each other'.

However, as may be obvious from my cursory discussion of the history of 'emergence' the use of this concept always courts controversy and, this is especially true, when, like Archer, a theorist is proposing that social structures exist, in separation from actors' wants, motives and reasons for acting, as the pre-conditions of social action. 'Social structure' as such stands prior to action and must, therefore, stand separately from those actors who engage in social activities. Such a viewpoint, however popular critical realism may now be, is always going to be greeted with suspicion by some in the social scientific community. Indeed, until relatively recently, as Ira Cohen (1990:42) observes, it was deemed a relief not to hold such a view:

To affirm that enduring properties of collectivities are embedded in disappearing and reappearing practices and relations both clarifies and demystifies the ontological obscurities associated with emergence. In particular it is no longer necessary to pose the uncomfortable question of how emergence actually occurs: a question which no collectivist theorist, to my knowledge has answered in a persuasive fashion.

For others, such as Healy (1998), King (1999), Domingues (2000), and Le Boutillier (2001 and 2003), questions have been raised about the character or nature of the so-called emergent properties of social structures, and how, to use Archer's own terminology, the 'parts' and the 'people' can be distinguished

from each other in terms of an ontology of the social world. This issue is my main concern in Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 4 the main topic of discussion is the concept of supervenience and whether its introduction into the structure-agency debate may help to clarify the relationship between Archer's 'parts' and 'people'.

The concept of supervenience was introduced into the structure-agency debate by Kieron Healy (1998) as a way of shoring-up Archer's realist programme in the face of reification or, in his words, the idea of unpeopled 'social structures wandering around by themselves like so many lost cows' (Healy, 1998:515). I argue, first, that the meaning of the concept is perhaps more complicated than Healy's use of it might suggest. In one sense it works, contra to emergence, as a defence of methodological individualism: leading directly to what has come to be known as the exhaustion principle (Watkins, 1968). On the other hand, in its usage in the philosophy of the mind, the concept more closely resembles 'emergence', but here, unfortunately, it has not proved to be very successful, as Kim (1996) has demonstrated. Healy particular gripe with Archer's thesis surrounds one of her major and often repeated example of social structural constraint: the demographic structure. Healy asserts that supervenience may be useful as a way of understanding the relationship between the demographic structure and those individuals that populate a society. My conclusion on this point is that the use of supervenience here, like counterpart examples in the philosophy of mind debate, does little more than point out that causation may come from the top (structure) or the bottom (individuals) which seems far from satisfactory from a realist point of view.

The chapter also contains a discussion of a concept borrowed from Geech (1969) and known as 'Cambridge change'. The concept helps to clarify events that are of a non-causal nature or changes that happen to objects only indirectly and may in this sense help to clarify a sense of helplessness that some individuals may feel in reaction to systemic changes that seem far removed from their own activities. A simple example of Cambridge change is the following: Whilst it is true that X was taller than his son Y, at time₁ it may be false to say that X was taller than his son Y at time₂. Now, nothing has happened to X

between time₁ and time₂ although he is now shorter than his son all of the real changes have occurred in Y. Geech called this kind of change, which he contrasted with real changes (where something changes in the object itself) 'mere Cambridge changes', and I argue that the concept may help to explain feelings surrounding the inability of governments to set generous pensions' policies. I conclude Chapter 4 by questioning the validity of one particular example that Archer uses in relation to the 'reality' of an undiscovered object. This relates to what Archer calls 'knowledge without a current knowing subject'. And this point feeds indirectly into one of the main themes of Chapter 5, where my attention is drawn to Archer's notion of the 'Cultural System'.

Chapter 5 contains a minor premise which refers to the reduction of the special sciences and a major premise concerning the status of social kinds; each relates to the other. Thus, my opening question is why, in the debate concerning the reduction of the special sciences to the natural sciences has nobody thought to distinguish between what Durkheim called morphological kinds – for example, the distributions of populations – and what I, in general, label 'cultural kinds'. Although the distinction is in one respect mildly artificial, as becomes clear in the subsequent chapter, the two types of social facts do not appear to 'reduce' in the same way. The distinction between morphological kinds and cultural kinds is, of course, consistent with Archer's stratification model of society which includes, *inter alia*, 'social structures' and the 'Cultural System'. The distinction in terms of the possibility of reduction throws up some interesting results. The supervenient/emergentist proposal works quite well for many morphological types where it is clear that the higher-level phenomenon (the morphological structure) may be said to be qualitatively different from the lower level properties that constitute it (individuals).

However, serious problems arise for emergentism when we attempt to reduce cultural types. In the first instance, Archer's attempt to set up a Cultural System containing a logically ordered propositional register from which agents in social interaction draw on ideas, I argue, simply looks artificial, and indeed, a throw back to sociological structuralism in its heyday. This register, which, she claims, emerges from social interaction must contain all of a culture's stock of

knowledge and, must, she argues, adhere to the law of non-contradiction. But, I argue, why must it? And, where exactly is this register? The only correct conclusion to draw from this is that the Cultural System exists for reasons of theoretical expediency. Furthermore, Archer makes matters worse by including in her propositional register ideas and knowledge that, as noted before, do not have a current knowing subject. To suggest that such knowledge is real, I claim, leads to a contravention the exhaustion principle, something Archer is frequently unafraid of doing, and makes a mockery of the relationship between the critical realists' realms of existence. That is, the relationship between what Bhaskar called the 'actual' and the 'real'. Having concluded that knowledge can only exist in the aggregate of people and not as a higher-level phenomenon I complete the chapter by discussing cultural types in relation to a peculiar type of supervenience employed by R.M. Hare (1952) in *The Language of Morals*. This, which I call simply 'Hare's supervenience', is anti-naturalist and corresponds more closely with the phenomenological/ ethnomethodological concept of 'common stocks of knowledge' or, what Giddens calls 'mutual knowledge'.

Having more or less completed my critique of dualism I return to Giddens' structuration theory in Chapter 6 and attempt to respond to some of the many criticism that have been levelled at the duality of structure and agency. I will simply note these at this stage. Critics have complained that the adoption of a duality model (and especially the reconstruction of social structure as consisting of 'rules' and 'resources') leads to major concerns about what a social structure actually is and how we are to account for the objective realities associated with social constraint. Thompson (1989), in this context, argues that Giddens' Wittgensteinian reformulation of social structure leads to a confusion over what purpose structure is to serve in sociology. Friendly critics, such as Stones (2005) and Sewell (1992) have suggested that the idea that 'resources' exist, exclusively, as virtual or as memory traces in agents minds leaves no room for the material existence of allocative resources. Finally, Archer (1982 & 1995) and Carlstein (1981) have claimed that Giddens' argument that agency 'concerns events of which an individual is a perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently' (Giddens, 1984:9) provides agents with far too much free-will or

voluntarism and is unable to account for circumstances of social constraint. I set out various replies to all of these criticisms. In general, I argue that the critics of structuration theory have misunderstood the centrality in Giddens' framework of Schutz' social phenomenological rejection of Husserl's attempt to epoché the 'natural attitude'. In the light of this, constant attempts, by friends and foe, to 'naturalise' structuration theory have, I argue, simply led to confusion and inconsistency. In the final section of this Chapter I extend an earlier argument I made in relation to the concept of Cambridge change in order to show how Baert's (1998) critique of structuration theory on the grounds that it seems too conservative may overestimate the general character of social change. In sum, I argue that much social change is gradual and it seeps (rather than pours) into the lives of members of societies one-by-one whilst eventually leaving others to experience Cambridge change to feel cut a drift from a rising 'consensus'. Thus, social change is more often than not a slow process and a process that is far more consistent with a Giddensian model than is normally presumed.

Taken as a whole the thesis represents not only a strong defence of Giddens' structuration theory and a repudiation of critical realist attempts to solve the structure-agency problem through the application of post-empiricist naturalism but a study or analysis of the two theories through the use of a number of analytical tools from philosophy. Thus, a substantial part of the originality of the thesis belongs to the application of analytical tools from philosophy to compare, contrast and judge the two sides of the debate between structuration theory and critical realism. This is most clearly evident in my application of such concepts as 'supervenience' and 'Cambridge change.' Whilst the origin of these concepts belongs to areas most often associated with analytical philosophy their significance to key issues in the structure-agency debate in terms of deciphering the ontological status or causal relations of and between social phenomena is most apparent in my critique of critical realism (see especially Chapter 5) and my defence of structuration theory (see Chapter 6).

Of equal importance to this thesis is the way in which I approach the theories of the key protagonists, Anthony Giddens, Roy Bhaskar, and Margaret Archer, by systematically breaking down the origins and main philosophical points of both structuration theory and critical realism. In so doing, hopefully, I am able to show how legitimate the claims each of the authors make. For example, my analysis of structuration theory emphasises the importance of recognising that Giddens' definition of 'agency' does not lead to a full-blown voluntarism as critics such as Archer (1982) and Carlstein (1981) have complained, but instead must be read in a fashion that, logically, implies that there are very few circumstances in which an actor is could not act otherwise. Also, I stress how important it is to avoid adjustments (see, especially, Sewell, 1992; Mouzelis, 1995; and Stones, 2005) to structuration theory that may inadvertently turn transform the theory into a watered down version of dualism or naturalism. With respect to realism, amongst other things, I trace its fundamental tenets to Bhaskar's (1978, 1979, 1998) key works, demonstrate how his attempts philosophical naturalism is adopted and re-configured to produce Archer's 'analytical realism', but also show how the consistency of naturalism in relation to its transference from a philosophy of the natural sciences to one of the social sciences is undermined in this process.

There is one final point that I need to make in this introduction and this relates to the structure of this thesis. The thesis may be divided into two related parts. In the first three chapters I set out, in a relatively uncritical manner, the two positions this thesis is concerned with: the 'dualism' and 'duality' of structure and agency. Moving from Giddens to Bhaskar and, finally, to Archer the journey might be described as an excursion from 'duality' to 'dualism'. However, the second part of the thesis (from Chapter 4 through to Chapter 6) involves a critical assessment or a return path from dualism to duality. Thus, as must be obvious by now, my sympathies, in general, lie with the duality of structure and agency, an anti-naturalist position, and an opinion that social facts do not exist *sui generis*.

Notes to the Introduction

¹ I use the terms 'social fact', 'social object', and, sometimes 'social thing' interchangeably. Likewise, sometimes, I refer explicitly to 'social structures' whilst at other time I simply use the term 'structure' to denote the former.

² I am fully aware that the structure-agency debate has been cast in a different light by rational choice theorists or methodological individualist such as Coleman (1990) and Elster (1985 & 1989). These authors account for macro phenomena at the level of purposive individual action. Thus, for Coleman (1990:198) the switch from micro action to 'collective behaviour is a simple (and rational) transfer of control over one's action to another actor [that is] made unilaterally, not as part of an exchange'. Such a transfer, it is claimed, is explicable in terms of individual utility maximization. This, Coleman argues, also explains the maintenance and continued existence of social norms which are recognised, by at least some actors, as having either beneficial results or leading, in their violation, to harmful consequences. Whilst acknowledging the existence of such accounts my concern in this thesis is strictly with the debate between critical realists and structuration theorists.

³ Archer (1995:3) comments in relation to Durkheim's wholist project that it

'was a direct and early statement of what I term "Downwards Conflation" in social theorizing, where the "solution" to the problem of structure and agency consists in rendering the latter epiphenomenal. Individuals are held to be "indeterminate material" which is unilaterally moulded by society, whose holistic properties have complete monopoly over causation, and which therefore operate in a unilateral and downward manner.

⁴ As Giddens (1976:16) notes: '*There is no action in Parsons' "action frame of reference", only behaviour which is propelled by need-dispositions or role-expectations.*' Parsons was, of course, heavily influenced by the later Durkheim who recognised, post *The Rules of Sociological Method*, that moral phenomena may be both positively motivating as well as constraining (cf. Giddens, 1979:51).

⁵ Lévi-Strauss' (1945, 1963, & 1969) work was also greatly influenced by Durkheim's 'social Kantianism'. Each society has its 'unconscious' organising mechanisms of which its individuals know very little. The same may also be said, in general, of the works of both Louis Althusser (1969) and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Michel Foucault (1965, 1969).

⁶ The classical example is that of J.S. Mill (1987, originally 1872). Mill, a keen advocate of the new science of society, nevertheless believed that ultimately it must rest on a science of human nature. Thus, to take a typical statement:

All phenomena of society are phenomena of human nature, generated by the action of outward circumstances upon masses of human beings: and, if, therefore, the phenomena of human thought, feeling, and action, are subject to fixed laws, the phenomena of society cannot but conform to fixed laws, the consequence of the preceding (Mill, 1987:63)

Watkins' (1968) more recent version of methodological individualism more-or-less parallels this but uses the concept of supervenience to declare in favour of individualism. A slightly different version of methodological individualism can be found in rational choice theory. However, the latter, and, especially Elster (1989) is non-reductive in the sense that Elster incorporates collective concepts – social norms – into his conceptual framework.

⁷ Primarily symbolic interactionism and the works of Ervime Goffman. In particular see Mead (1962) and Goffman (1959, 1961 & 1963).

⁸ As Giddens (1979:51) discerns, ironically, the coming together of so many atoms to form a new social property only really works 'for those very types of perspective Durkheim set out to criticise, such as utilitarian individualism'.

⁹ The functional prerequisites refer to those aspects of a society, or system, that must be done in order for the system to continue as a going-concern. Specifically for Parsons' (1968) this includes, grouped under four broad headings: Adaptation; Goal Attainment; Integration; and Latency. In short, AGIL.

¹⁰ See Parsons' (1968:36-6). He was well aware of the dangers of suggesting that emergent properties might exist independently of those individuals responsible for their creation.

¹¹ I am well aware of the importance of other theorists such as: Hesse (1963), Harré and Secord (1972), and Keat & Urry (1975).

¹² Carried forward, Giddens, (1976: 102). There are some further points to note here. As a rough guide we might note that production refers to transformations of social structures whereas reproduction implies continuity. Although Giddens claims '*All reproduction is necessarily production*', however: and the seed of change is there in *every act* which contributes towards the reproduction of any 'ordered' form of social life (*ibid*, emphasis in original). This is to point out, firstly, that the production and reproduction of social life is a skilled accomplishment and, secondly, that, Giddens is following in the footsteps of Alfred Schutz' social phenomenological interpretation of Husserl's 'natural attitude'. To actors 'social structures' (Giddens' 'mutual knowledge') often appear natural, rigid, and unchangeable; for example, the proper or right way to do things. In fact, Schutz (1967) claimed they are really quite fragile.

¹³ The point is interesting in relation to comedy for much of the 'stand-up' material of good comedians looks below the surface of such habits and routines; and, very often at the expense of the two genders.

¹⁴ By this Bhaskar means the real objects of the world rather than the 'transitive' or changing objects of scientific theories.

¹⁵ As Domingues (2000:226) notes '... she does think that emergent properties are ontologically extant (Archer: 1995:51, 62). Accordingly, her dualism is, of course, ontological and should be viewed as theoretically, and not merely analytically and methodologically, justified.' As noted earlier the notion of emergence is not, in its use in social theory, new. Neither is it, as it is further pointed out by Domingues (2000:227), novel in terms of contemporary social theory. Aside from Bhaskar's (1979:25); 1989:79) use, the concept is also important to Alexander's (1982 & 1988) neo-functionalism.

1. Structuration Theory: An Overview

Introduction

Anthony Giddens' conception and development of structuration theory took place from the mid-seventies through to the mid-eighties (see Giddens, 1976; 1977; 1979; and, 1984). His work since this time has been mainly concerned with issues related to 'late modernity', 'risk', and 'reflexivity' (see Giddens, 1990; 1991; and, 1992). In this thesis my primary interest is with Giddens' early work; with structuration theory. The main complexity and difficulty of understanding this theory lies in its essence: the duality of structure and agency. It is because Giddens proposes a duality between structure and agency that conceptually it becomes so difficult to grasp an understanding of both the parts and the sum of the theory. In a sense, one needs to understand the whole of the theory before one can fully account for the concepts employed. Every concept in the theory is intertwined with other concepts in such a manner that what belongs in one place can only be grasped by gaining knowledge of a host of concepts in other places. Most significantly, the meaning of agency, as a generic concept, requires an understanding of social structure as a generic concept and *vice versa*. For this reason I hope that the reader of this summary will trawl through this mainly descriptive summary patiently.

As noted in the introduction, the purpose of the first three chapters of this thesis is to move from Giddens' duality of agency and structure to Archer's dualism of structure and agency; from a theoretical approach that clamps the two concepts together to one in which the two are separated and set out as relatively independent phenomena. This move from duality to dualism will be achieved in a largely uncritical fashion. However, it is also true that structuration theory has been criticised from many quarters: from realists, from traditional structural sociologists, and from sympathetic admirer. In this chapter I intend only to set out Giddens' model of social life but reply to his critics later in the thesis (see Chapter 6 and the Conclusion). However, it is perhaps worth noting, even at this early stage, that the two points I have just noted – the need to look at

Giddens' theory as a whole and the breadth of criticism of structuration – mostly meet, I think, in relation to our sociologists propensity to naturalise not just the social world but also interpretation of the social world. It seems, caught up in Schutz' 'natural attitude', this cannot be helped.

Giddens' starting point is to overcome the dualism inherent in structuralist and subjectivist accounts of action. His approach is to adopt a project of re-thinking from two opposite directions. First, beginning with so-called action theories and the overall interpretivist perspective and second, observing aspects of functionalism and the French structuralist perspectives. His method is the same in each case; to re-fashion certain ideas from each tradition and to re-constitute a theory of structuration. However, Giddens repeatedly emphasises that structuration theory should not be seen as a mere conflation of other approaches but as a salvage of social theory through a new framework. This framework, Giddens claims, recognises the significance of structure (absent in many action theories) but avoids the inherent reification of structure (present in much functionalism and structuralism). Consequently, Giddens states:

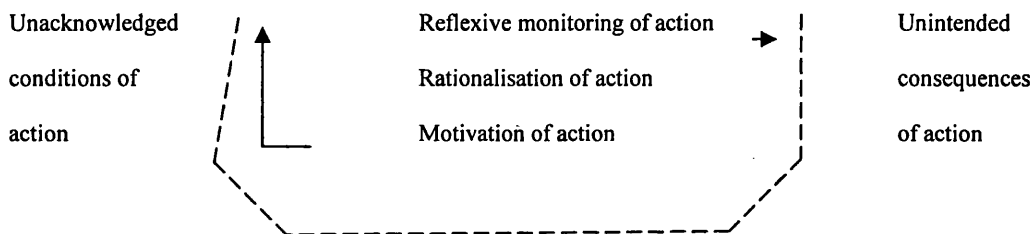
... the traditional dualism of action theories and institutional theories can be avoided by the emphasis that action and structure ... form a duality. That is to say, action and structure stand in a relation of logical entailment: the concept of action presumes that of structure and vice versa. I use the phrase 'duality of structure' to mean that structure is both the medium and outcome of social practices it recursively organizes. Giddens (1981:171)

The Duality of Action or Agency

The amalgamation of social structure and agency (or action) is evident in Giddens' 'stratification model of action' (see Figure 1 below) whereby action is premised upon actors' reflexivity, rationalisation, and motivation and situated against a backdrop of unacknowledged conditions of action and the unintended consequences of action. Each of these concepts is unpacked in relation to a range of sources including Garfinkel, Schutz, Wittgenstein, and structural functionalism. Giddens presents us with a theory of action, a theory of structure, and a framework for system or institutional analysis. His theory of action

combines elements of all of these and is presented, initially, in diagrammatic form:

Figure 1. The Stratification Model of Action



Adapted from Giddens (1979:56)

Before looking more closely at the above model two points need to be made. One concerns Giddens' adoption and adaptation of Marx's conception of *Praxis* and the relationship between the objective consequences of action and the inter-subjective realm of social structure, the other relates to the way in which his concept of 'agency' is presented as a counterfactual in which the agent 'could have done otherwise'.

First, Giddens observes, action or agency does not take place within a series of discrete acts but refers to 'a continuous flow of conduct' (1979:55). For Giddens the concept of agency relates directly to *Praxis* which he takes and develops from Marx's statement in *The German Ideology*: 'As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and how they produce' (Marx, 1968:42; cf. Giddens, 1976:102). However, he observes that 'production' 'has to be understood in a very broad sense' (*ibid*): as a skilled accomplishment of the members of society and as 'the shifting relations between the production and reproduction of social life' (*ibid*). Human beings, he says, are differentiated in the animal kingdom because they lack an instinct. As such, they must engage with their (natural and social) environment reflexively, through 'monitoring their place in it' (1976:103). Human beings have no choice but to do this and no choice but to constitute in themselves the 'rules' and 'resources' of their social world. This, then, is starting point of the duality of structure and agency; the two, when the

latter is conceived of as a de-centred self, are inseparable¹. Another way of conceiving this inseparability is to observe what Giddens has to say about Alfred Schutz' adaptation of Husserl's phenomenology:

Schutz' concerns are with the 'natural attitude' itself, inverting Husserl's *epoché*. Man in the 'natural attitude' does not suspend his belief in material and social reality, but the very opposite; he suspends doubt that it is anything other than how it appears (Giddens, 1976:27)

However, Giddens notes, the problem of inter-subjectivity is never properly resolved by Schutz as the social world is, for him, 'strictly speaking, my world' (1976:31). As such Schutz' phenomenology struggles to account and explain for the 'outer world', 'the "objective consequences", both intended and unintended, that any course of action may have for others' (Giddens, 1976:32). For Giddens, action leads to the production (or adaptation) and reproduction of 'rules' and 'resources' and its systemic consequences may be known, unknown, intended and unintended by those actors that are responsible for its being.

This leads to a second point concerning agency or the sense in which it is presented as a counterfactual relation concerned with an agent's powers or capabilities. Giddens has often been misunderstood on this point. His critics, and Archer (1995:94ff) in particular², have often taken the following kinds of statement to imply that his theory provides an excessive form of voluntarism:

it is a necessary feature of action that, at any point in time, the agent 'could have acted: either positively in terms of attempted intervention in the process of 'events in the world', or negatively in terms of forbearance (Giddens, 1979:56)³.

Giddens has repeatedly defended himself from charges of excessive voluntarism and attempted to clarify matters⁴. He argues that the concept of agency is inextricably tied to power, 'understood as transformative capacity⁵' and 'action', he says, 'only exists when an agent has the capability of intervening, or refraining from intervening, in a series of events so as to be able to influence their course' (Giddens, 1979:256). Although there may exist some confusion in Giddens' writings on this issue I take this to refer to both an ontological point,

following Marx and Schutz, and a pragmatic statement, following Goffman's research findings on patients in confinement. With regard to the former, both Marx and Schutz referred to how 'fragile' the social world/ 'natural attitude' is and how its continued existence (its reproduction) is dependent upon the 'compliance' of social actors. This is summed up in one way by Marx's famous dictum from *The Communist Manifesto*:

All fixed, fast-frozen relation, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind (Marx, 1977:224)

And, in a slightly different way by Giddens (1976:102) himself, when he observes '[a]ll reproduction is necessarily production ... and the seed of change is there in every act which contributes towards the reproduction of any "ordered" form of social life'. And, again in a related way by Ira Cohen (1987:285), an admirer of Giddens', who states that 'the proviso that, in principle, agents are always capable of "acting otherwise", represents only a denial of a thoroughgoing determinism'. As I discuss this issue, and in particular the influence of Goffman on Giddens' theory, in some detail in Chapter 6 I will say no more on the subject for now. We can now turn to Giddens' 'Stratification Model of Action'.

Figure 1 represents Giddens' incorporation of the core interpretivist idea that sociological knowledge has always to include the actor's knowledge as s/he is motivated to act, monitors actions, and rationalises acts. The reflexive monitoring of action is action that is purposive. Actors are continually surveying what they are doing and how others are reacting to what they are doing. Actors monitor their actions by explaining or rationalizing either to themselves or to others why they act as they do. However, Giddens' scheme also recognises the wider conditions and consequences of action for which the actor might only be vaguely aware; that is, the unacknowledged conditions of action and the unintended consequences of action. To account for the former he distinguishes between what he calls 'practical consciousness' and 'discursive consciousness'.

The second of these refers to the reasons that actors may provide for their conduct or, following Garfinkel (1967), 'the accounts that actors are able to offer of their conduct' (Giddens, 1979:57). The introduction of 'practical consciousness' acknowledges the significance of the tacit knowledge employed by actors in social interaction. This is to be distinguished from consciously monitored action, and is of a habitual or taken for granted nature. Practical consciousness, Giddens argues, represents the vast majority of activities of daily life, again, implied in Garfinkel's (1967) research.⁶

The 'unacknowledged conditions of action' also refers to components of action which, Giddens claims, straddle conscious and unconscious elements of cognition and emotion. Although in this thesis I am largely unconcerned with Giddens' discussion of such desires and motives, in one sense, namely, in terms of the depth of his 'duality' (here a duality of the unconscious self, the conscious self, and so-forth) it is at least important to note what he says on the subject. For Giddens is keen to develop a psychoanalytic component of social theory which, in a non-reductive form (i.e. the existence of institutions cannot simply be reduced to unconscious wants or needs), incorporates unconscious motives, operating or existing 'outside' of the range of the self-understanding of the agent' (Giddens, 1979:59).

In the process of development, in particular, and socialisation in general the role of the unconscious – the subjective self – is, for Giddens, of considerable importance. Referring first to G.H. Mead's work on the self, Giddens notes that whilst Mead rightly emphasises that a 'positioned subject' only emerges in the course of development, his work suffers from two deficiencies. First, the 'I' 'appears as a given or unexplained component of the human psyche' (Giddens, 1979:121). And, second, Mead's model of the 'I'/'Me' relationship appears as a distinctively harmonious one: whilst there is space left for conflict Mead makes little use of this. Instead, whilst noting the limitations of Lacan's psychoanalytic approach in general, Giddens argues in favour of its superior account of the development of the self⁷. Lacan's interpretation of Freud may be profitable in overcoming the dualism of subject/object interpretations of socialisation and social reproduction as well as accounting for the emergence of subjectivity.

Giddens' incorporation of the unconscious into structuration theory is both an acknowledgement that since Freud social theorists have no option but to deal with it but also represents a refusal to allow its management to be taken away from the agent⁸. To begin with, Giddens observes, Lacan's discussion of development takes the essential significance of the Freudian emphasis that '“it” thinks in the space where ‘I’ has yet to appear” (Giddens, 1979:120). Thus, something exists prior to the emergence of the ‘I’ and its emergence is linked to the ‘predicative object-relation, with basic features of language as Other’ (ibid). The key point for Giddens is that Lacan's ‘I’ develops in the ‘mirror phase’ in which an ‘I’/‘Me’ dialectic is formed. And, one in which the ‘self’, if taken as an ‘I’ and a ‘Me’, developed in the mirror phase when repression is present, is internally divided. The key point, for this thesis, is the way in which, so to speak, Giddens' ‘duality’ stretches in either direction: inwardly towards the self and outwardly towards social structure.

Turning next to the right-hand side of Figure 1, Giddens, writing at a time when the importance of structural functionalism was rapidly diminishing⁹ nevertheless adhered to the significant role that Robert Merton's (1949) ‘unintended consequences of action’ may play in social life. He comments:

...purposiveness in human action involves not just self-regulation, but self-consciousness or reflexivity. ‘Purpose’ in relation to human affairs is related in an integral way to the processing of reasons for actions, or to the rationalization of action in processes of self-reflection. In this respect it is quite different from whatever teleology is involved in self-regulating processes in nature (Giddens, 1977:116)¹⁰

However, whilst we should abandon the concept of ‘latent function’ (see, Merton, 1949) we need to salvage from structural functionalism the key notions of ‘social structure’ and ‘system’ and with them the idea that the parts or structures of society are almost always interdependent. And, furthermore, the idea that such interdependence is not always clear to those actors who are somehow caught up in such homeostatic processes. The unintended consequences of action refer to the structural functionalist analysis of ‘the escape of activity from the scope of the purposes of the actor’ (Giddens, 1979:59)¹¹.

If we now return to Giddens' diagram we can see, by following the direction of the arrows, action is determined by factors we know about and can talk about, by things we know but cannot talk about, and by unconscious desires that we may not even be aware are playing a role in shaping our actions in everyday life. Giddens' concepts of 'agency', 'social structure' and the 'duality of structure and agency' can be mapped on to (or over) his theory of action.

The Duality of Structure

To look in more detail at structural properties Giddens needs first to reformulate the way in which social theorists have usually used the concept of structure. The changes he makes are set out in the following comparison with structural functionalist theory:

Figure 2. A Comparison of Structural-functionalist Theory and the Theory of Structuration

(Structural-) functionalist theory	Theory of structuration
<p>Basic concepts:</p> <p>A. system</p> <p>B. structure</p> <p>C. function/dysfunction</p> <p>D. manifest/ latent functions</p>	<p>Basic concepts:</p> <p>A. system</p> <p>B. structure</p> <p>C. structuration</p> <p>D. production and reproduction of society</p>
<p>Explication</p> <p>A. System = interdependence of action, conceived of as homeostatic causal loops</p> <p>B. Structure = stable patterns</p> <p>C. Function = contribution of system 'part' in promoting integration of system</p> <p>Dysfunction = contribution of system 'part' in promoting disintegration of system</p> <p>D. Manifest function = intended (anticipated) contribution of action to system integration</p> <p>Latent function = unintended (unanticipated) contribution of action to system integration</p> <p>Distinction also in principle applicable to dysfunction</p>	<p>Explication</p> <p>A. System = interdependence of action, conceived of as (i) homeostatic causal loops; (ii) self-regulation through feedback; (iii) reflexive self-regulation</p> <p>B. Structure = generative rules and resources</p> <p>C. Structuration = generation of systems of interaction through 'duality of structure'</p> <p>D. Production and reproduction of society = accomplishment of interaction under bounded conditions of the rationalization of action</p>
	<p>Additional concepts:</p> <p>E. Social integration/ system integration</p> <p>F. Social conflict/ system contradiction</p>

See Giddens (1977:122)

The structural functionalist approach relies on a concept of societies as systems of integrated parts, using an organic analogy to explain the existence of the different structures or institutions of society in terms of the contribution they each make to the survival of the system as a stable and external framework. Giddens intends to replace this organic analogy with a notion of structure he develops from a comparison of the relationship between everyday speech and the formal rules of language. With reference to Saussure's discussion of the 'utterance' Giddens (1982:37) observes:

When I utter a sentence I draw upon various syntactical rules (sedimented in my practical consciousness of the language) in order to do so. These structural features of the language are the medium whereby I generate the utterance. But in producing a syntactically correct utterance I simultaneously contribute to the reproduction of the language as a whole ... The importance of this relation between moment and totality for social theory can hardly be exaggerated, involving as it does a dialectic of presence and absence which ties the most minor or trivial of social action to structural properties of the overall society, and to the coalescence of institutions over long stretches of historical time.

The main point of this comparison with language is to shift away from the traditional idea of structure as a constraining framework around social life. For Giddens social structures are both enabling and constraining, we use them to make sense of and try to achieve what we want in the world, but as structures they also limit our room for manoeuvre. However, there will also be times when our actions and motives can alter these structures in the course of using them. And, structuration theory intends to help to specify when structures of interaction are likely to be reproduced or when they are likely to be altered or even transformed. To look at how structuration theory approaches the relationship between individual action and social structures we need to look again at Giddens' comparison of action and structure with the relationship between everyday speech and the rules of language.

Languages are structured by rules which speakers draw on in their everyday speech, and Giddens suggests that the relationship between speech and formal rules in language carries over into all other systems of social interaction. It is important to note that Giddens is not claiming that we should see society, or all

social structures, as like a language, but that because language is a practical activity, central to social life, it can serve in some respects as exemplifying social processes in general.

Speech and dialogue are each the complex accomplishments of their producers, each piece of speech or dialogue is made or constituted through the actual activities of individual speakers. But we can only use and understand speech acts because each individual act of speaking employs the rules of language. These rules structure the speech act, and, to return to matters discussed in relation to Giddens' notion of practical consciousness, we draw on these rules even though many of us may not be able to formally state them. So our everyday usage also unintentionally reproduces the rules of the language being spoken. The key point here, and one that distinguishes duality from dualism, is that just as language, as the system of syntactical rules, only continues to exist insofar as it is spoken by people in their everyday life, so social structures are not things which exist separately to everyday interaction. They are produced and reproduced in and only in everyday interaction.

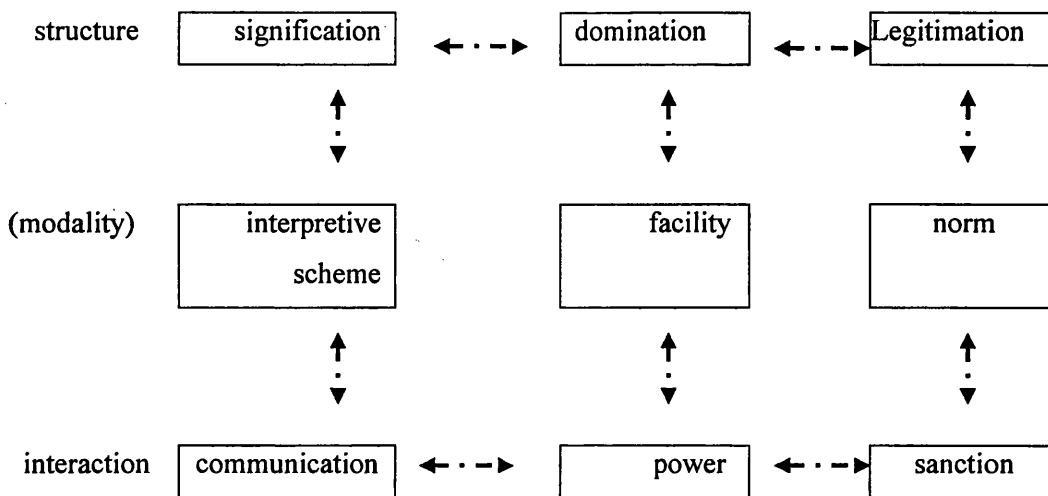
Just as speech acts are made possible by the rules or structure of a language so that language is unintentionally reproduced by each act of speech and dialogue, so societies exist only insofar as they are created and re-created in every encounter as the active accomplishments of subjects. We cannot think of social systems independently of these acts. So structures generate and are in turn generated by specific daily social interaction. The two parts of the duality, structure and action, are dynamically related and mutually affect each other. Giddens contrasts this to the dualism of conventional structuralism and/or action theories where one of these aspects of society cancels out the other. And, Giddens' way around dualism is to argue that small scale everyday interaction is structured in the same way – belongs to the same order – as large scale properties; the latter is simply the former writ large. These properties are, of course, different generative 'rules' and 'resources'. However, ultimately these rules and resources have a 'virtual' existence. They exist only as memory traces in those actors involved in their instantiation.

The virtual nature of rules and resources can be demonstrated by once more referring, as an example, to the relationship between speech and language. Just as the rules of language were not produced by any one subject, or directed at any one other person, they only have an existence insofar as they are actually employed in speech. They are in a sense outside of time and space or not specific to one time or space. They exist only insofar as they are instantiated by real people. A short paragraph from *Central Problems in Social Theory* draws out the stark contrast between structuration theory and dualism. Giddens observes:

As I shall employ it, 'structure' refers to 'structural property', or more exactly, to 'structuring property', structuring properties providing the 'binding' of time and space in social systems. I argue that these properties can be understood as rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems. Structures exist paradigmatically, as an absent set of differences, temporally 'present' only in their instantiation, in the constituting moments of social systems. To regard structure as involving a 'virtual order' of differences, as I have already indicated, ... implies recognising the existence of: (a) knowledge – as memory traces – of 'how things are to be done' (said, written), on the part of social actors; (b) social practices organised through the recursive mobilisation of that knowledge; (c) capabilities that the production of those practices presupposes. (Giddens, 1979:64)

The production and reproduction of language is, as noted, constitutive of social life and is discussed as an example of the production and reproduction of social structures. To be specific, social structures are made up of 'rules' and 'resources' as summed up in the following diagram:

Figure 3. The Duality of Structure



Adapted from Giddens (1984:29)

Giddens' 'rules' refer to 'signification' and 'legitimation' whilst 'resources' are covariant with what he labels 'domination'. The two way arrows signify that any deconstruction of the elements of social structures (signification, domination, and legitimation) is purely analytic. Social structures necessarily contain all three aspects or both 'rules' and 'resources'. This is in one sense, very important, because some interpreters have taken Giddens' analytical distinction between 'resources' and 'rules' and interpreted this as referring, respectively, to material and non-material phenomena¹². Just as this depiction of social structures can be mapped over Giddens' 'Stratification Model of Action' (see Figure 1) so the Action model be mapped on to the above diagram. This can be demonstrated by observing what Giddens has to say in relation to the modalities of social structure:

- (1) 'Interpretative schemes' are the modes of typification incorporated within actors' stocks of knowledge, applied reflexively in the sustaining of communication (Giddens, 1984:29);
- (2) 'Domination depends upon the mobilization of two distinguishable types of resource. Allocative resources refer to capabilities – or, more accurately, to forms of transformative capacity – generating command over objects, goods or

material phenomena. Authoritative resources refer to types of transformative capacity generating command over persons or actors' (Giddens, 1984:33);

and,

- (3) Normative components of interaction always centre upon relations between the rights and obligations 'expected' of those participating in a range of interaction contexts (Giddens, 1984:30)

Giddens observes that at the level of interaction meaning or signification refers equally to communicative intent (what an actor means to say) and the ordering of sign systems. Signification is also context dependent. Meaning and legitimation typically come together in Garfinkel's notion of 'accountability'; or giving accounts for one's actions. Giddens argues that normativity is sometimes depicted in structural social theory (for example, Parsons' functionalism or Althusser's Marxism), as an 'internalized' (that is, rigidly adhered to) component of members of a society. However, he claims this is an exaggeration which fails to recognise either the indexical character of social interaction or the reflexive monitoring of action¹³. Finally, we come to the relationship between 'power' and 'resources', which, in one sense, brings us full circle, for in order to understand what Giddens has to say about 'power' one needs to understand what he has said about 'agency'.

As Giddens observes frequently, the relationship between 'agency' and 'power' is one of logical entailment: 'power characterizes not specific types of conduct but all action' (Giddens, 1984:16). On the one hand, Giddens (1979:69) observes, it is common, following Weber, to associate power with 'the capability of an actor to achieve his or her will', on the other hand, following Parsons, 'power' has been conceived of 'as a property of the collectivity' (*ibid*). Giddens argues that neither of these will do but both, together, must count. Thus, power must be conceived of in terms of enabling actors to do things as well as getting '{other agents] to comply with [my] wants'(Giddens, 1979:93). That is, as noted previously, for Giddens (1984:25): '[s]tructure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling'.

Enablement and constraint are tied to the defining modality of 'domination' which refers to 'resources'. These come in two forms; either 'allocative resources' or 'authoritative resources'. The former corresponds, roughly, with the Parsonian definition of power. That is, it refers to: (a) '[m]aterial features of the environment (raw materials, material power sources)' (Giddens, 1984:258); (b) '[m]eans of material production /reproduction (instruments of production, technology)' (*ibid*); and, (c) '[p]roduced goods (artefacts created by [material features and the means of material production] (*ibid*)'¹⁴. 'Authoritative resources' refers more specifically to relations between actors. Again there are three types: (a) '[o]rganization of social space-time (temporal-spatial constitution of paths and regions)' (*ibid*); (b) '[p]roduction/reproduction of the body (organization and relation of human beings in mutual association)' (*ibid*); and, (c) '[o]rganization of life chances (constitution of chances of self-development and self-expression' (*ibid*).¹⁵ At first sight, it appears that Giddens is providing a distinction between the 'external' or material phenomena and 'internal' or abstract phenomena of the social world. I shall argue in Chapter 6 that this is not the case.

This brings us to the final element of structuration theory, social systems. And, once again, we come full circle. For to talk of social systems is, first of all, to refer to social structures as the 'medium' and 'outcome' of social action, and second, it is to observe the important role of both the unacknowledged conditions of action and the unintended consequences of action. Action, as such, that escapes its makers. Both of these points are captured in Giddens' (1984:25) definition of social systems as: 'reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organized as regular social practices'. Systems are, then, reproduced social structures and they may appear, from an 'objectified' gaze, to be unalterable. But this, of course, ignores the duality or inter-subjective nature of the definition of 'agency' and 'structure'. Now, whilst Giddens introduces various concepts to explain how systems may, so to speak, exist behind the backs of agents, how social practices may be deeply embedded in time-space, and how individuals – such as Willis' (1977) working class 'lads' – may be constrained by structural reproduction I will refrain from discussing these at this time. The only point I need to note is that Giddens introduces a number of

concepts in order to explain and describe the embedded character of social structure (more accurately, clusters of structures) or their existence over long periods of time: structural principles; structural sets, time-space edges; institutions; etc.

On this issue I partially agree with Stones' (2005:44) conclusion that: '[n]one of these concepts listed are in and of themselves concepts of structuration, and Giddens's uses of them at a substantive level, likewise, are not instances of structuration-in-situ'. This seems to imply that the empirical realm or the regularised practices of the social world eludes structuration theory. However, as I make in Chapter 6 the existence of the systemic substance is, by definition, wholly dependent upon social structures and can easily be read into a structuration theory without having to resort to carrying certain ontological baggage.

To conclude this summary, Giddens tries to unify structure and action as two moments of a process of the production and reproduction of social structures by claiming that just as language, as a system of syntactical rules only continues to exist insofar as it is spoken by people in their everyday lives, so social structures are not things that can be said to exist separately to everyday interaction. They are produced and reproduced in *and only in* interactions that are (a) the skilled and active accomplishments of agents, and, (b) where social structures exist in the knowledgeability of social actors engaged in interaction. For Giddens, to place social structure outside of the 'memory traces' of agents invariably leads to the reification of the social world. And, it is to this point we can turn next or, more specifically, to Giddens' views on attempts to naturalise sociology.

Giddens on Dualism and Naturalism

In this section I shall argue that Giddens' ontological position is one of pragmatism coupled with an epistemology which relies on a hermeneutic understanding of both the natural and the social world. In so doing I will rely heavily on Giddens' chapter on 'The form of explanatory accounts' in his *New*

*Rules of Sociological Method*¹⁶. We can begin with a quotation that brings out, immediately, the contrast between empirical naturalism and structuration theory. Giddens (1984:25) says 'Structure is not "external" to individuals: as memory traces, and as instantiated in social practices, it is in a certain sense more "internal" than exterior to their activities in a Durkheimian sense'. More strongly, and in response to Durkheim's comparison of social objects with the emergence of bronze from the coming together of copper, tin, and lead, he asserts:

Social systems do have structural properties that cannot be described in terms of concepts referring to the consciousness of agents. But human actors, as recognizable 'competent agents', do not exist in separation from one another as copper, tin and lead do. They do not come together *ex nihilo* to form a new entity by their fusion or association. Durkheim here confuses a hypothetical conception of individuals in a state of nature (untainted by association with others) and real processes of social reproduction (Giddens, 1984:171-2)

Thus, it is clear (but hardly surprising) that Giddens will not advocate any crude or base form of naturalism. His rejection of this kind of naturalism is stated in many of his texts, although there is not any prolonged discussion on the subject, and almost none at all on either Bhaskar's or Archer's newer versions of realism. However, as a starting-point on the subject of naturalism versus anti-naturalism, in the 'Introduction' to *New Rules of Sociological Method* Giddens states:

...any approach to the social sciences which seeks to express their epistemology and ambitions as directly similar to those of the sciences of nature is condemned to failure in its own terms, and can only result in a limited understanding of the condition of man in society' (Giddens, 1976:14).

And, it is this claim that we now need to unpack. Giddens begins his discussion of 'The form of explanatory accounts' with a commentary on 'recent' developments in the philosophy of the natural sciences and the vexing issue of hermeneutical relativism and 'meaning frames'. He begins by rejecting the position he calls 'the orthodoxy' and/or logical positivism. Unsurprisingly, he follows Popper (1972), Quine (1961) and other critics of the logical positivists'

verification principle. For, he observes, 'there can be no "foundations" of knowledge that are unshakeably secure, or which are not theory-impregnated' (Giddens, 1976:135).¹⁷ He then argues that the importance of Popper's thesis, as translated and improved upon in the form of Lakatos' (1970) 'sophisticated falsificationism' needs to be maintained, that a break from empiricism is of fundamental importance, and, that science must be viewed as 'bold, innovating, yet always retaining an essential radical scepticism' (Giddens, 1976: 141). This, then, for Giddens, leaves the problem of hermeneutical relativism. With respect to this Giddens argues that the 'the significance of hermeneutics can be properly grasped only if it is stripped away from the traditions of philosophical idealism which generated it' (Giddens, 1976:143). This, combined with aforementioned factors implying an anti-empiricist but pro-scientific sophisticated falsificationism, I believe, leads him in the direction of pragmatism. A view confirmed by his adoption – following Lakatos' adaptation – of Kuhn's paradigmatic approach to the history of science. Thus, for Giddens, Lakatos'(1970) amalgamation of Popper and Kuhn with its distinction between 'degenerative research programmes' and 'progressive problem-shifts' represents the basis of a sound philosophy of the natural sciences.

However, one well-known problem with Kuhn's thesis, even at the time when Giddens was formulating his *New Rules of Sociological Method*, was the claim that scientific paradigms are incommensurable. Kuhn's (1970) 'gestalt switch' seemed not to fit with the history of science¹⁸. Giddens, characteristically, solves this problem in the following way:

The problem is an insuperable one as it stands. But this is because it is wrongly posed in the first place. Frames of meaning appear as discrete, thus: () () (). In lieu of this, we must substitute, as a starting-point, that all paradigms (read 'language-games', etc.) are mediated by others. This is so both on the level of the successive development of paradigms within science, and of the actor's learning to 'find his way about' within a paradigm. (Giddens, 1976:144)

I say characteristic because the relationship between paradigms is a dialectical one, and quite in keeping with a duality of structure. For Giddens, this, in a sense, takes us most of the way towards solving the problem of meaning frames

in relation to relativism. For it rules out both the logical difficulties surrounding 'closed' frames of meaning (Kuhn's incommensurable paradigms) and the problems associated with 'the view that different frames of meaning express different "realities" each of which forms a specific universe of experience that is logically equivalent to any other' (Winch's judgemental relativism)¹⁹. Each of these, argues Giddens, develops self-negating version of hermeneutics, creating paradoxes and making the circle of hermeneutics 'a vicious rather than a fruitful one' (1976:144-5). Thus, Giddens' philosophy with regard to the natural sciences is: (a) to accept that there are no theory-free observations; (b) to adopt a position close to Lakatos' 'sophisticated falsification'; and (c) to employ, in order to deal with the problem of different but relatable meaning-frames, a fruitful hermeneutic circle. Thus, with regard to the latter, he says: '[t]he mediation of frames of meaning is a hermeneutic problem, whether this concerns the relation between paradigms, within science, the understanding of distant historical periods, or of alien cultures' (Giddens, 1976:145) And, a fruitful hermeneutic demands a respect for authenticity but, it should be noted, Giddens has no intention of slipping into a form of philosophical idealism.

What holds true for the natural sciences applies, with some modification, to the social sciences. However, as per Bhaskar (and countless others), the devil lies in the detail of the subject-matter of the social sciences. For Giddens, the social sciences employ a double hermeneutic. He comments:

Sociology, unlike natural science, stands in a subject-subject relation to its 'field-of-study', not a subject-object relation; it deals with a pre-interpreted world, in which the meanings developed by active subjects actually enter into the actual constitution or production of that world; the construction of social theory thus involves a double hermeneutic that has no parallel elsewhere ...²⁰ (Giddens, 1976:146)

Two points can be made with respect to this. First, as we observed in our discussion of Giddens' 'Stratification Model of Action' social actors are themselves, by definition, social theorists or social interpreters who reflexively monitor the on-going processes of their actions and the actions of others around them. As such, they devise and develop their own concepts and give their own reasons, intentions and motives for their conduct. Given this, Giddens argues

that *verstehen* is not simply the method of doing sociology it is the ontological condition of human society and the production and reproduction of society. As such social scientists enjoy some reciprocity in their processes of developing conceptual frameworks. Second, Giddens comments, this subject-subject relation cannot be one in which frames of meaning are treated in terms of the premises of formal logic but must be based upon contextuality. Formal logic, Giddens (1976:147) notes, 'does not deal in metaphor, irony, sarcasm, deliberate contradiction and other subtleties of language as practical activity'²¹. This, he says, is not intended to imply that there is no place in hermeneutical analysis for logic, or the notion of contradiction, but simply to state the need, again, for an authentic hermeneutic and, one in which such terms are grasped contextually (cf. Giddens, 1976:148).

Giddens has two reasons for rejecting naturalism and both are, in an important sense, related to the causal conditions of social activity. The first, discussed in the preceding pages, refers to his characterisation of human beings. If the ontological condition of human society is premised on *verstehen* and understanding and if, as a result, the 'frames of meaning' in the social world are not open to objectification but must be analysed according to contextuality it seems unlikely, as Giddens noted, that any approach to studying society which is directly similar to the sciences of nature is going to succeed. A second, and related, reason why Giddens' position tends towards anti-naturalism follows from a brief discussion (in both *New Rules of Sociological Method* and *The Constitution of Society*) on the absence of universal laws in the social sciences. He begins by observing the situation concerning causal relations in the natural sciences. Thus, Giddens (1977:153) notes, whatever the complexities or logical form of causal laws 'it seems clear that causal generalizations in the natural sciences presuppose a set of invariant relations, expressed either in terms of probabilities or as a set of universal connections'.

Now, in the social sciences Structuralist theories, he observes, such as those of Comte, Durkheim and certain readings of Marx, have taken this to be the model of the social sciences. It is in the area of the study of the unintended consequences of action, in particular, that social scientists have been inclined

toward objectivism or structuralism²². Social structures are portrayed as if they are 'natural kinds' as if they conform to the universal type. But Giddens (1984:344-5) argues: '[i]n social science – and I would include economics as well as sociology within this judgement – there is not a single candidate which could be offered uncontentionally as an instance of such a law in the realm of human conduct'²³. Further, he says, it is 'not just happenstance' (Giddens, 1984:345) that none of the laws in social science are universal. The reason for this is because the causal mechanisms in social science depend upon a 'mesh' of intended and unintended consequences of action, the content of agents' knowledgeability²⁴, the situated character of acts, and the validity of agents' knowledge. Further, he claims, causation may be something that is 'made to happen' in a purposive manner (the rationalization of action) or something that 'happens'. If it is the former we can claim that reasons are causes. But the latter, he says, also refers to 'unconscious influences and influences which affect the circumstances of action' ((Giddens, 1984:346). All of this, for Giddens, counters against universality. Whilst these factors do not rule out generalizations in the social sciences they do count against naturalism and the idea that a model of universal causation might apply to the social realm²⁵.

Pragmatism and Structuration Theory

In describing Giddens' structuration theory as a form of pragmatism it is in a particular sense that I use this term which may now require some clarification and elaboration. Most importantly, as will become clear as this thesis progresses, I am referring to the sense in which a model of society based upon a duality of structure and agency, as opposed to one based upon a dualism, does not require the kind of ontological foundation that suppositions about the *sui generis* status of emergent properties need. In other words, propositions concerning the existence of social structures as *sui generis* I take, in a fashion similar to the critique that Rorty (1980) makes of foundationalist philosophies, to carry the kind of ontological baggage that simply is not necessary for a defence of the pragmatic values of science or the study of the social world. In this sense Giddens' model of the social world, at least comparatively, requires little in the way of ontological assertions. Ultimately, the social scientific

discovery of social structures belongs to a hermeneutical investigation of the social world whilst the existence of structures is dependent upon, and can never stray from, the 'virtual' reality of actors' memory traces.

Nevertheless, the claim that structuration theory is of a pragmatist variety is likely to court some controversy for, according to at least one contemporary social theorist, structuration theory shares in common with critical realism a propensity towards a form of objectivism that supposes, in Baert's (2005:151) words, and following Dewey, 'a spectator theory of knowledge'. That is, a philosophical position that presupposes that (social or natural) scientists can somehow gain a privileged vantage point, 'a view of knowledge as mainly, if not exclusively, representing the intrinsic nature of an external world' (Baert, 2005: 151-2). Furthermore, Baert (2005:152) claims, this view of social theory seems to attribute 'a mysterious capacity to individual researchers to "step outside history", or to assume what Quine called a "a God's eye view", stripped from their own culture ...' Such a view of structuration theory, or, more accurately the sense in which structuration theory may be interpreted²⁶, seems to imply that Giddens' endeavour when mapping out a theoretical model for the study of the social realm may lead not to a pragmatist philosophy but to a form of objectivism and one in which, for want of a better term, the interpretive baggage of the social researcher is largely ignored. In response to this claim, and to clarify the sense in which I have read into Giddens' work a pragmatist framework I will do two related things. First, I shall re-iterate why I believe that Giddens holds, or why his work can be interpreted as an anti-foundational view of knowledge. Second, I shall discuss briefly, in the context of structuration theory what the role of social science knowledge is in relation to the study of its subject-matter: common sense knowledge.

As noted above, Giddens adheres to a philosophy of the social sciences that purports to avoid a hermeneutic idealism whilst rejecting the need or value of foundational principles of knowledge. First, he objects to the view that scientific theory is either unshakeably secure or free from theory impregnation. In so doing his sympathies in relation to how (natural) science works lie, via Imre Lakatos' re-working of those models, with an amalgamation of the works of

Thomas Kuhn and Karl Popper. Second, the claim that *verstehen* or interpretation is the ontological condition of human society implies that the 'frames of meaning' which (social) scientists analyse may, and often do, exist in a plural form, must be contextualised to take account of the meanings that actors place upon their own actions, and that, contrary to 'revelatory' accounts of the role of the social sciences, the hermeneutic or ethnographic understanding of social life is what constitutes social understanding. The role of social theory in this context is to set out, analytically, without grandiose ontological assertions, how this may be achieved. In this sense, I see Giddens' approach as being conducive although critically not identical, to a Rortian version of pragmatism (see Rorty, 1980)²⁷.

Giddens' position seems quite consistent with Kuhn's (1975:322) conclusion, within a pragmatist framework, that the value of a (good) scientific theory lies in its 'accuracy, consistency, scope, simplicity, and fruitfulness'. The list is somewhat standard (cf. Rorty, 1980:327) and should not court controversy provided that we do not attribute to the scientist or researcher an ability to observe the social world from a position of value neutrality. But this is not necessary. The advantages that social scientific knowledge has over common sense knowledge that Giddens refers to do not necessarily assume such a viewpoint. In relation to this, and in advocating a hermeneutic framework for research methods he distinguishes between what he calls 'credibility criteria' and 'validity criteria'. He observes:

Credibility criteria refer to criteria, hermeneutic in character, used to indicate how the grasping of actors' reasons illuminates what exactly they are doing in the light of those reasons. Validity criteria concern criteria of factual evidence and theoretical understanding employed by the social sciences in the assessment of reasons as good reasons. (Giddens, 1984: 339)

The credibility criteria of discursively formulated beliefs is arrived at through a hermeneutic investigation of the meanings that lie behind reasons for acting. Giddens (1984:339), for example, refers to the famous case of the red macaws of the Bororo of central Brazil to make his point. The Bororo claim that 'we are red macaws' can be shown to be a credible statement when it is understood that

it is only made by male Bororo, that women tend to keep red macaws as pets, that Bororo men are dependent upon Bororo women, and that contact with the spirit world is made, independently of women, by men and red macaws. In this context the Bororo claim that 'we are red macaws' seems credible. And, as Giddens (1984:339) observes: '[c]redibility criteria refer to criteria hermeneutic in character, used to indicate how the grasping of actors' reasons illuminates what exactly they are doing in the light of those reasons'.

Such illumination says nothing about the validity of these actors' reasons when spelt out in relation to social scientific judgements. For Giddens 'validity criteria' refer to the main role of the social sciences as a critique of common sense. That is, common sense may fail a validity test because the reasons that actors put forward for acting on a belief turn out not to be good reasons either because some social knowledge is unavailable to those actors or because their reasons are construed in a different way to those formulated in the metalanguages of social theory. What exactly he means by this statement is not worked out fully. On the one hand, it could be the case that he is making a strong statement about a particular 'epistemological standpoint'. For example, he claims without elaboration but with a hint of qualification: 'I presume ... that it is possible to demonstrate that some belief claims are false, while others are true, although what "demonstrate" means here would need to be examined as closely as would "false" and "true".' On the other hand, his reply to Richard Bernstein on the role of the social scientist in relation to making moral criticisms of states of affairs suggests that this claim should be read weakly and certainly does not imply an objectivist stance. Thus, he notes:

According to this perspective, as practising social scientists we may legitimately make moral criticisms of states of affairs, although we must seek to justify those criticisms when called upon to do so. We cannot ground moral critique in the mode of such justification (or argumentation) itself, and in the sense of finding 'pure foundations' cannot ground it all. But this does not mean that moral critique derives merely from whims or feelings, or that we are at the mercy of a particular historical juncture. Dialogue with any and every moral standpoint is possible, and always involves a fusion of moral and factual dispute. (Giddens, 1989:291).

Hence, my claim that Giddens holds a pragmatist position is based upon three substantive points. First, a duality of the structure-agency model of society does not require the establishment of an ontological or foundational ground for the *sui generis* existence of social structures. As such it is, within the context of this debate, ontologically minimalist. Second, Giddens' observations on the progress and/or debates in the philosophy of science suggest an adherence to a non-foundational theory of knowledge. Third, in rejecting the excesses of both hermeneutic idealism or relativism and objectivism Giddens advocates a middle ground in which social science may serve the role of critiquing common sense though acknowledging that social scientific knowledge cannot itself be grounded in a pure foundation. This position is neither relativist nor objectivist it is in my view and in the context of this thesis a pragmatic assertion that, like Kuhn's (1975) claims in *The Essential Tension*, do not abandon the idea of a scientific enterprise altogether. Scientific knowledge is in some senses – practically or pragmatically – superior to common sense knowledge simply because of the organising principles, the gathering and processing of evidence and the submission of claims to an internal critique, around which it is based. Put another way, its methods are better than those of common sense knowledge. Denying this point, it seems to me, leads to a form of relativism that ignores the pragmatic value that the gathering of evidence, *qua* knowledge, may have.

Conclusion

To sum this Chapter up, Giddens' aim is to overcome the traditional subject-object problem of the social sciences or the structure-agency problem, to present us with a social theoretical model that does not blot-out the active subject, that does not reduce the agent to mere products of socialisation or social structures, whilst at one and the same time acknowledging the important institutional or systemic influences of social life on the agent. Thus, the subjects of the social realm are portrayed as skilled and creative actors, knowledgeable in two senses: in the discursive sense of the reflexive monitoring of on-going social processes and social encounters; and, in the practical sense in which, both consciously and unconsciously, actors routinely or habitually reproduce social structures.

Action, however, may have, through the clustering of social structures, and despite the intentions of social actors involved in this, unintended consequences. Although such consequences may escape the attention of their makers, it is, nonetheless actors that through the medium of social structures who are responsible for the production and reproduction of social life. Thus, for Giddens, overcoming the subject-object problem requires a radically different definition of both 'structure' and 'agency' and a conceptualisation that combines the two concepts into a duality. So, as noted earlier, just as his 'stratification model of action' can be mapped onto his representation of social structure, so vice versa, his model of social structure can be mapped onto his presentation of the processes of action. The two logically entail one another. So the reflexive monitoring of action, the unacknowledged conditions of action, and the unintended consequences of action all require, for the instantiation and sense-making of action or interaction, a subject or a medium (or modality) of: signification, domination, and legitimation. There is, for Giddens, no escaping this point. On the other hand, this medium is but an empty shell without those actors who produce and reproduce social life. For this reason 'social structure' and the regularised practices or systemic properties of societies never truly escape their makers and, consequently, 'social structure' the medium and outcome of action is tied into a duality with agency. Social structures, therefore, exist only as 'memory traces' in the minds of agents.

Now, the duality of structure-agency is of primary interest for the debate between naturalism and anti-naturalism in the social sciences because of the status that may or may not be accorded to the outcomes of social interaction. The claim that 'social structures' exist only as memory traces in the minds of agents denies any *independent* existence to the objects of the social world. It does not deny their existence, as such, but it is a position that disallows *sui generis* status to social kinds. For Giddens, all knowledge is obtained from hermeneutical principles, for him, *verstehen* is the ontological condition of human society. However, this leads him towards a philosophical position that is both anti-relativist (cf. his rejection of both judgemental relativism and closed frames of meaning) and anti-realist. It is a version of pragmatism that avoids the excessive ontological baggage of realism but does not deny the practical and

methodological superiority of scientific investigation. However, as noted, this scientific investigation, whether of the natural world or the social world, involves in principle, an authentic hermeneutical understanding of the objects of those world. This leads to the main distinction between the natural and social sciences.

A pragmatism of natural scientific investigation acknowledges that there can be no 'protocol language' or foundational principles by which the theories of science can be said to be sure, and that all data or empirical evidence is subject to interpretation, but, nevertheless, there is a sense in which we can claim that one theory is superior to another. In this respect Giddens adheres to Lakatos' (1970) sophisticated falsificationism which combines *fecund* elements of Popper's (1972) conjectures and refutations and Kuhn's (1970) paradigmatic science. This leaves Giddens to conclude that the natural sciences (once we have rejected a self-negating hermeneutic) with their bold, innovative, but essentially sceptical character, lead to what he calls a 'fruitful hermeneutic circle'. However, the method of the social sciences is complicated by its subject-matter or by the existence of a subject-subject relationship (a double hermeneutic) as opposed to (in the natural sciences) a subject-object relationship (a single hermeneutic). For Giddens, this has two related consequences, each of which leads him away from naturalism.

In the first instance, if *verstehen* is the ontological condition of human society it entails a reflexive subject that is responsible not just for understanding the social world but also for its constitution (production or reproduction). For Giddens, two important points follows from this: (i) that the subject-matter of the social world (its rules and resources) are always and everywhere open to change; and (ii) that the rules of formal logic cannot do the same work for the social sciences as they do for the natural sciences. In the second instance, it lies in the very nature of the subject-matter of the social sciences that the kind of generalizations employed in the natural sciences – the application of universal laws or causes – are not going to be available to the social scientist. Regardless of the assertions of some versions of structural social theory the causal relations of the social sciences simply will not fit into a universal format, they are the

outcome of a mesh of the types of action supposed in Giddens' 'stratification model of action'.

My next objective is to set out, summarise, and discuss the two key works of Roy Bhaskar: *A Realist Theory of Science* and *The Possibility of Naturalism*. Unlike most commentators of Bhaskar's work on the philosophy of the social sciences I take these works to be of at least equal importance. In fact, I argue that the former – if naturalism, qua dualism, is going to succeed – is of primary importance. With this in mind, and returning briefly to a discussion of Giddens' account in the conclusion of the next chapter, I shall argue that despite obvious conceptual similarities between the works of the two authors Bhaskar's qualified version of realism or naturalism is more distant from structuration theory than contemporary commentators usually suppose.

Notes for Chapter 1.

¹ By de-centred I mean only to refer to the fact that individuals share 'common stocks of knowledge' or what Giddens calls 'mutual knowledge'. A de-centred notion of agency therefore refers not to any particular individual but the 'mutual knowledge' of a community or society. Such knowledge, not belonging to any particular individual, may be, therefore, more plastic and more stretched than the concept of 'shared norms' is usually perceived. An example of the former, although somewhat distant from Giddens' theory, is Michel Foucault's account of 'discursive formations' in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Contrary to most interpretations of Foucault's early work, he allows discursive formations to float far more freely within, following Althusser (1965), as 'the same'. An example of the latter is the norms contained Durkheim's (1982) 'conscience collective' or Parsons' 'action system'. In both cases social norms are represented in a non-plastic and rigid fashion, which is not to say that they are always adhered to. 'Deviance' is of considerable importance to Durkheim's theory. Another example of this, I claim in Chapter 7, is the overly-rationalistic accounts of normative moral philosophers from all kinds of philosophical backgrounds.

² See, also, Carlestein (1981:52-3).

³ Giddens (1976:75) notes that 'could have done otherwise' is evidently not equivalent to 'I had no choice' and, therefore, to Durkheim's social 'constraint'. He observes: 'A man who is obliged by the duties of his occupation to stay in his office on a sunny day is not in the same situation as one who is obliged to stay in his home by having broken both his legs (*ibid*).

⁴ See especially, Giddens (1984:169ff) in which he responds to the claims that structuration theory is unable to account for social constraint.

⁵ The transformative capacity of human action, Giddens observes, refers to the connection of 'action' and 'power'. He states:

Action intrinsically involves the application of 'means' to achieve outcomes, brought about through the direct intervention of an actor in a course of events, 'intended action' being a sub-class of the actor's doing, or his refraining from doing; power represents the capacity of the agent to mobilize resources to constitute those 'means' (Giddens, 1976:110)

⁶ Tacit or taken-for-granted knowledge means that, motivation and rationalisation may be only known once an event or action is reflected upon and then often vaguely. Giddens (1979:57) observes: '[l]ike "intentions", "reasons" only form discrete accounts in the context of queries, whether initiated by others, or as elements of a process of self-examination by the actor'.

⁷ As Boyne (1991:71) observes, Giddens' discussion of Lacan 'has the form of a power play, a raid into enemy territory with the intention with the intention of removing from their home territory certain things that can perform a legitimating function upon the return to the home ground'. As Giddens (1979:121) comments: 'I do not mean to suggest that the conception of socialisation I wish to outline here depends upon accepting the main body of Lacan's writings. I want to claim only that, in respect of interpreting the emergence of subjectivity, Lacan's Freud can be drawn upon with profit'.

⁸ Giddens' conception of socialisation departs considerably from the orthodox characterisation of the psychological development of the child who is successfully, or not, moulded to carry out already formed roles. Giddens abandons role theory altogether. He sees it as propagating an unacceptable dualism between subject and object. Instead, role prescription is made dependent upon *practices* (the points of articulation between actors and structures) which are themselves the outcomes of temporally and spatially situated processes of interaction. In this context both roles in particular and socialisation in general must be seen as on-going in an individual's life; a process involving continuing dialogue between individual and social structures (see Giddens, 1979:129ff).

⁹ For a full discussion of problems associated with functionalism, see, especially Giddens' (1977) 'Functionalism: *après la lutte*', in *Studies in Social and Political Theory*.

¹⁰ Giddens (1984: 12) observes that whilst, for example, a ceremonial rain dance may lead to stronger group identity (cf. Merton, 1963), we cannot assume that it (group identity) 'provides a reason for the existence of a practice...'

¹¹ Most versions of structural sociology presuppose the existence of structural phenomena that exist unbeknown to actors who are responsible for their reproduction. This is true of both continental forms of structuralism, such as those of Levi-Strauss or Foucault, certain forms of Marxist sociology, as well as Anglo-American structural functionalism. However, structural analysis is achieved by almost entirely dismissing the intentions and skills of individual agents.

¹² See, in particular, Sewell (1992). I deal with this issue in considerable depth in Chapter 6.

¹³ This is an issue I am particularly concerned with in Chapter 7 as I demonstrate the ways in which moral norms are neither adhered to rigidly, as many morally philosophies imply in their own normative frameworks, and, that there exists a reflexive and indexical character to moral accountability.

¹⁴ Both forms of resources are, Giddens argues, 'infrastructural'. They are in this sense closely tied to system production and reproduction or regularised social practices. As such, he says, 'the garnering of allocative resources is closely involved with time-space distantiation, the continuity of societies across time and space and thus the generation of power' (Giddens, 1984:259). But it should be noted that (in echoing of Marx) 'allocative resources cannot be developed without the transmutation of authoritative resources...' (Giddens, 1984:260).

¹⁵ For Giddens structures of domination always involve an asymmetry of resource employment. Observing Giddens' unusual definition of power, individuals, he claims, use resources, allocative and authoritative in order to produce and reproduce social structures and systems. At the level of interaction 'power' should be understood as the 'facilities' (the transformative capacity to secure an outcome) that agents bring to and use in their social relations with others.

¹⁶ Giddens (1976:8) uses the term 'method', he says: 'in the sense in which European social philosophers characteristically employ the term ... It is primarily an exercise in clarification of logical issues'.

¹⁷ In relation to this, Giddens notes:

'The idea of a 'protocol language' – as Quine once put it, a 'fancyfully fancyless medium of unvarnished news' – depends upon what Popper sardonically labels the 'bucket theory of knowledge': the human mind is treated as if it were a sort of container, empty at birth, into which material pours through our senses, and in which it accumulates' (1976:135).

¹⁸ Giddens (1976:144) observes:

While Einsteinian physics broke profoundly with Newtonian physics, it none the less had direct continuities with it at the same time; if Protestantism differs in basic ways from Catholicism, the content of the former cannot be fully understood apart from its relation to the latter as critique.

I am not entirely in agreement with Giddens on this point. The problem of incommensurability in Kuhn's theory stems not from stating the similarities between the theory of relativity and mechanics but in the very examples that Kuhn focused on. Whilst there is continuity between Newton's mechanics and Einstein's relativity there is, in the latter, such a radical break, at least partly due to the development of non-Euclidean geometry, that the idea of a *Gestalt* switch makes sense; as too in the case of Copernicus' succession of Ptolemy. Giddens is clearly on firmer ground when comparing Protestantism and Catholicism. Perhaps it is permissible to not take Kuhn's incommensurability thesis literally.

¹⁹ By which Giddens is referring to Winch's (1958) conclusions concerning the validity and/or comparison of Azande witchcraft with science. Giddens' position on this debate is that whilst the anthropologist must maintain an authentic hermeneutical understanding of Azande witchcraft we need not accept it as true.

²⁰ See, also, Giddens (1984:348ff) for additional discussions of these points.

²¹ Indeed, from my point of view it is these kinds of human traits that prevent normative moral philosophy from capturing moral behaviour. See Chapter 7.

²² Giddens observes that it is odd that when structuralists refer to laws they almost always have in mind laws derived from the non-purposive or unintended activities of agents. A purposive act, such as obeying traffic lights, is never referred to.

²³ 'If they do not exist', he asks, 'and will never exist, in social science, why have so many supposed that the social sciences should pursue such a chimera?' (Giddens, 1984:345) The answer, he believes, lies in two sources. First, the influence of empirical philosophies upon the social sciences. And, second, the desire to show that the social sciences produce knowledge about subjects that the subjects themselves are not aware of.

²⁴ Furthermore, he argues, generalizations of the social world cannot be expressed as a mechanical connection, as they are in the natural sciences, for each and every one is dependent upon human knowledgeability. And, whilst conditions resulting from the unintended consequences of action (a structuring of the social system) may appear to escape agency they are, ultimately, 'the reproduced unintended consequences of intended acts, and are malleable in the light of the development of human knowledge' (Giddens, 1976:154). Thus, everything begins and ends in social encounters or social interaction and must be understood by both actors and researchers alike in terms of a hermeneutic.

²⁵ The matter is further complicated by the double hermeneutic of social scientific knowledge. Namely, that social scientific knowledge feeds back into social life and as such changes the knowledge of actors participating in social practices and, consequently, changes the practices themselves.

²⁶ It should be noted that Baert is primarily referring to Derek Layder's (1990 & 1993) interpretation of structuration theory and does not make any direct claims about Giddens' intentions.

²⁷ Giddens also asserts that the relationship between 'frames of meaning' or 'paradigms' or 'language games' should be seen as 'dialectical' rather than incommensurable (see Giddens, 1976:144). And, it might be claimed, 'if different reasons for action, elicited through a hermeneutical method, are tied into a 'dialectic' his position may not turn out to be too far removed from Rorty's (1980) 'edifying philosophy' or Bernstein's (1991) notion of a 'dialogical encounter'.

2. The Possibility of Naturalism (?)

Introduction

The main concern of Chapter 1 was to set out and review, in a largely uncritical fashion, Giddens' account of structuration theory; a theory that has become synonymous with the duality of structure and agency. Now, as I have said, my aim in this first part of this thesis is to set out the framework of both the duality and the dualism of structure and agency. The work of Roy Bhaskar is imperative for doing this for several reasons. First, as many commentators have noted, and as will become obvious below, the works of Giddens and Bhaskar appear to be very similar. The rhetoric is largely different but the conceptual apparatus seems, at first sight at least, to be roughly the same. Second, the importance of Bhaskar's work in the development of critical realism cannot be understated. And, it is to critical realism, or more particularly Archer's morphogenetic account that I turn Chapter 3 for a statement on dualism. Given these two points, and given, further, that both Giddens and Bhaskar have cited each other's works favourably, it therefore seems possible that Bhaskar's 'Possibility of Naturalism' may act as bridge between duality and dualism. Or, at least, following the limitations that Bhaskar places upon naturalism, it appears to do this.

The roots or basis of 'critical realism' in general, and Archer's morphogenetic theory in particular, can be traced back to a specific form of realist (or naturalist) philosophy of science. As Baert (1998:189) observes the two most influential 'first-wave' realists were Mary Hesse and Rom Harré, both aimed to avoid problems associated with logical positivism and Popper's falsificationism. However, as Baert also notes, it was the second-wave of realist explanations that took realism into the social realm: '[t]hree publications were central to the spread of realist social science: Harré and Secord's *Explanation of Social Behaviour*, Keat and Urry's *Social Theory as Science*, and Bhaskar's *The Possibility of Naturalism*' (ibid). Of these, the last, as noted, was the primary influence upon Margaret Archer's morphogenetic account of the social world

and it is to it and its, predecessor, *A Realist Theory of Science* that I know turn. However, whilst Bhaskar maintains a similar account of naturalism in both texts, what becomes clear, is that the distinctive subject matter of the social sciences will require him to make some radical adjustments to the method of study. Thus, like Giddens, one of Bhaskar's main aims in *The Possibility of Naturalism* is, through the introduction of the 'transformational model of social action', to overcome the divide between theories that place too much emphasis upon action at the expense of social structure and, vice versa, those that abandon the 'subject' of social science, human agents, in favour of the 'object', social structures.

In *A Realist Theory of Science* Bhaskar sets out a model for establishing a new version of scientific realism, this serves as the bedrock or basis of *The Possibility of Naturalism* which, in turn, underpins critical realist accounts of the social sciences. It, therefore, supplies naturalism with its key concepts and a method for discovering the 'transcendentally real' objects of the world. First, he observes that whilst the study of scientific phenomena may have the general character of being 'transitive', subject to the interests and influences of the social realm, the phenomena itself, that which is being studied, must be 'intransitive' in nature. This, he says, can be demonstrated from a simple *reductio ad absurdum* argument i.e. there must be something there that is being studied and something – beyond the experimenter – that is causing something to happen. Second, he claims the true nature of a phenomenon (its real properties) does not lie in the occurrences of constant conjunctions or empirical outcomes (the model of causation of the classical empiricists), nor in the idealised models of neo-Kantians, but in the generative mechanisms or 'powers', 'tendencies', or 'liabilities' of the thing. Put another way, what makes a phenomenon real is its causal capacity rather than the actualisation of this potential (or, strictly speaking, potentials). Third, Bhaskar proposes a method for discovering the nature of objects (establishing their true nature) by overcoming the problem of what he calls 'open systems'. The latter, combined with a misplaced philosophical assumption about the nature of scientific laws (a Humean model of causation), he claims, has prevented philosophers of science from establishing the reality of the objects of the natural world. Bhaskar asserts that

the method of scientific experimentation enables scientists to ‘close systems’ and thus rigorously test and manipulate the phenomena at hand. This, he argues, leads to the discovery, or unveiling of the intransitive objects of the natural world: the emergent properties or generative mechanisms that may or may not be actualised in open systems. This, I shall take as the basis of the naturalist’s ontology.

Bhaskar’s analysis of the social world, in *The Possibility of Naturalism*, leads him (but not other realists, such as Archer) to a modification of the ontology of *A Realist Theory of Science*. Whilst he maintains that a naturalism is possible and he supplies us with relevant tools for overcoming the structure-agency problem, what differentiates the social world from the natural world, for Bhaskar, is not the existence of ‘transitive’ and ‘intransitive’ objects or the causal capacity of social phenomena but the fact that social structures, unlike natural structures, are wholly dependent upon human beings for their existence. This fact, Bhaskar believes, prevents separation of structure and agency for to do so would necessarily lead to the reification of social structures. Bhaskar therefore places three limitations upon his naturalism of the social world, these relate to: (a) the independence of the activities that social structures govern; (b) the relationship between structures and the conceptions that agents have of their social activities; and, (c) the temporal endurance or existence of social structures.

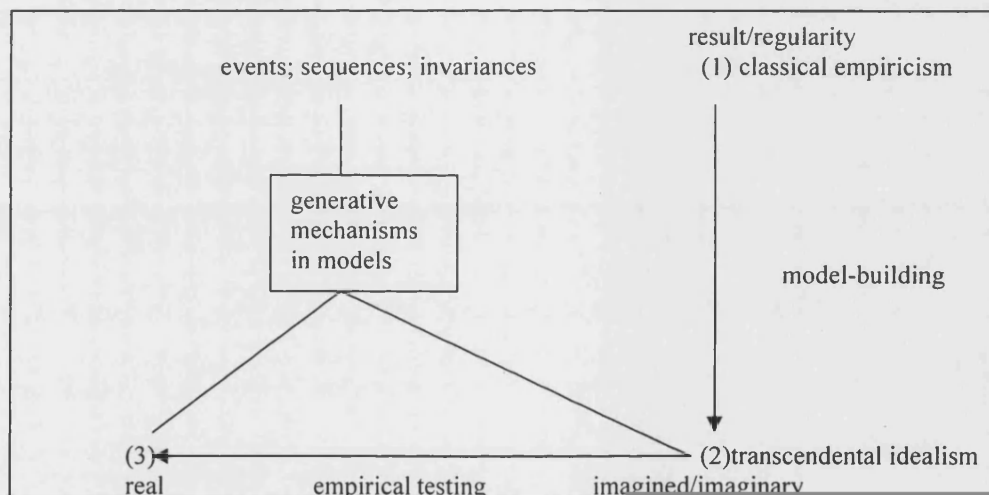
After setting out and reviewing Bhaskar’s claims concerning a realism of both the natural and social sciences, I argue, in the main text, that Bhaskar’s limitations are not consistent with the Leibnizean demands set out in *A Realist Theory of Science*. This problem relates especially to the nature of social phenomena, which, as Bhaskar observes, are not open to the same kind of rigorous testing (via experiments) that much natural phenomena avails its self to. In short, it is impossible to ‘close’ systems. And, if it is impossible to do so it may be impossible to verify Bhaskarian naturalism. I do not dwell on this issue. In the conclusion I begin to assess what the consequences may be of placing limitations upon a realism of the social sciences before noting, in particular the

main differences between Bhaskar's predominantly naturalist thesis and Giddens's principally hermeneutical account of the social sciences.

Bhaskar's Naturalism: A Realist Theory of Science

Central to Bhaskar's thesis in *A Realist Theory of Science* is the idea of 'transcendental realism'. This is derived from distinguishing between epistemological levels or modes of scientific discovery and accompanying ontological assumptions. Bhaskar contrasts transcendental realism with both classical empiricism and transcendental idealism. In so doing, he sets out the following diagram of the 'logic of scientific discovery':

Figure 4. The Logic of Scientific Discovery



Bhaskar observes that there are two dimensions of the objects of our scientific knowledge: the transitive and the intransitive. The former refers to the scientific explanations that we develop on the basis of observation of empirical regularities, from which we build models to explain the phenomena we are investigating. These theories, Bhaskar notes, are a 'produced means of production'¹ which are open to change and refutation. However, he asserts, alongside the transitive dimension of the scientific community there exists an intransitive realm of the objects of the world². To grasp this point, he argues, we must establish that there is a clear distinction to be drawn between what we know or observe (an epistemology) and what exists (an ontology). Our failings in the past are a consequence of ignoring this distinction leading to what Bhaskar calls the 'epistemic fallacy'. Classical empiricism, he argues, serves as an example of a philosophy of science which, falsely, equates what exists with what is perceived or observed³. This leads Bhaskar to a fuller statement about the role of science in relation to naturalism or realism:

The aim of science is the production of the knowledge of the mechanisms of the production of phenomena in nature that combine to generate the actual flux of phenomena of the world. These mechanisms which are the intransitive objects of scientific enquiry, endure and act quite independently of men. The statements that describe their operations, which may be termed 'laws', are not statements about experiences (empirical statements, properly so called) or statements about events. Rather they are statements about the way things act in the world (that is, about the forms of activity of the things of the world) and would act in a world without men, where there would be no experiences and few, if any, constant conjunctions of events (Bhaskar, 1978:17)

Realism, Bhaskar argues, in contrast to empiricism and idealism employs a retroductive method of assessing the status of laws, objects, and things. This is based upon the discovery of the normic qualities, or natural necessity, of an object. It looks to the essence of things in relation to what Bhaskar calls an object's tendencies or causal powers. These powers (or liabilities) of objects may or may not be present in 'open' systems where intervening (or absent) causes may 'refute' the empiricist's law-like statements. Further, he argues, it is the causal powers of things 'that constitute its identity and allow us to talk of the same thing persisting through change' (Bhaskar, 1978:88). And, it is only

through the closing of systems – preventing intervention and allowing for manipulation – that we can discover the true nature of things and the validity of scientific laws. Central to closure is the scientific experiment and central to discovery is the transcendental process.

For Bhaskar, the process leading to the discovery of the intransitive objects of science involves three developmental levels of knowledge: the Humean; the Lockean; and the Leibnizean. At the Humean level scientists study the invariances that result from experimental activity. At the Lockean level scientists establish *a posteriori* explanations for phenomena based upon the natural necessity of objects. This refers to the relationship between model building and testing as an attempt to discover a thing's natural tendencies or powers. At the Leibnizean level, there is an attempt to distinguish the phenomena from its empirical base; to discover the natural mechanisms that lie behind the phenomena. It is at this final level that realism can be said to have overcome the problems associated with both empiricism and idealism. For Bhaskar, empiricism is, as noted, guilty of committing the epistemic fallacy whilst idealism fails because it does not acknowledge the *a posteriori analytic* character of model building.

Several questions arise from this cursory discussion of the basis of Bhaskar's realism of the natural sciences. First, how can we be certain that we have captured the true nature of the intransitive objects of the world, and, therefore, establish a basis for naturalism? Second, how, it might be asked, can we step from the realm of the transcendently ideal to the realm of the transcendently real? These questions provide a different slant on one issue: how can we know the real if all we have available to us is the transitive dimension of knowledge? Bhaskar's answer to this question, I would argue, is not entirely satisfactory for the natural sciences. Further, as we shall see, when this version of naturalism is applied to the social sciences a very large chunk of justification is denied to him. That is, the ability to 'close' conditions in order to ensure the development of knowledge. I will begin, in a less than bold fashion, by attempting to establish, via Bhaskar's framework, that something 'real' actually 'exists'.

Early in his text, Bhaskar makes the following observation: 'it is a condition of the intelligibility of experimental activity that in an experiment the experimenter is a causal agent of a sequence of events but not of the causal law which the sequence of events enables him to identify' (Bhaskar, 1978:12). This, he suggests, implies an ontological distinction between scientific laws and patterns of events. Or, more strongly, it demonstrates that real structures exist independently of what actually takes place at the empirical level. Two points follow. First, Bhaskar (1978:12ff) adopts an argument that seems to be of a *reductio ad absurdum* form. Namely, that if there were nothing taking place in the experimental environment there would be nothing for the scientist to observe. Therefore, something external to the scientist must exist. This, he says, 'suggests that there is a (*sic*) ontological distinction between scientific laws and patterns of events' (Bhaskar, 1978:12). Furthermore, it is only if we assume that the mechanisms involved here have 'real independence' that we can say that they will go on acting in the way do outside of the experimental setting. And, of course, it is the task of the scientist to establish the character of these external objects. Second, he argues, probably correctly, that without making assumptions concerning the existence of 'real' objects it would be 'impossible to sustain the rationality of scientific growth and change' (Bhaskar, 1978:15). Therefore, it does not make sense to think of science without an object with real causal powers and it does not make sense to observe that science has made real progress but deny the reality of science's objects of investigation.

But, of course, Bhaskar wants his naturalism to do more than simply establish that intransitive objects really exist but the nature of them may or may not be known to us. Or that we may have misinterpreted the real character of these objects. And, Bhaskar's main contribution in this respect is twofold. First, he observes that the phenomena of the world exist, generally, in 'open systems'. Such systems are ones in which the Humean conception of causation is an inadequate postulate. This allows him to then furnish his objects of the natural world with 'tendencies' or 'capacities'. In turn, Bhaskar claims, this allows a scientist to assert that a particular causal law may be true regardless of whether it actually holds true in an open system. This is not achieved lightly, as his model suggests. So, second, he grants experimental testing and experimental

observation a special status. That is, the ability to establish, within a controlled environment, the reality of a things generative mechanisms (its tendencies or capacities). These are, it turns out, the intransitive objects of the world and, importantly, it is the discovered (through experimentation) aspects (or the natural necessity) of these things that allows us to say that they are real. Thus, he notes:

... the aim of science is the production of the knowledge of the mechanisms of the production of phenomena in nature that combine to generate the actual flux of phenomena of the world. These mechanisms which are the intransitive objects of scientific enquiry, endure and act quite independently of men (Bhaskar, 1978:17)

Following this brief exposition of Bhaskar's naturalism there are, straightaway, three points that require a commentary. Firstly, Bhaskar should be congratulated for the distinction that he makes between 'closed' and 'open' systems in this context. In this respect, his model bears some similarities to the works of both Nancy Cartwright (1983 & 1989) and Ian Hacking (1983)⁴. It also allows Bhaskar to avoid the pitfalls of empiricism (and, specifically, problems associated with induction) by claiming that the real of objects of the world are not factual but transfactual⁵. Secondly, there is some resemblance in Bhaskar's theory to Giddens' claims concerning the virtual character of social structures. For, the epistemological project of transcendental realism posits 'generative mechanisms' as non-Humean (or post-empiricist) tendencies which, once discovered, may be 'virtual' in character or held as memory traces in the minds of scientists. Put another way, like Giddens' rules and resources they exist as possibilities⁶. Both theorists might be described as working on post-empiricist projects.

However, and thirdly, it may be questionable, to say the least, to claim that the methods of the scientific experiment allow for the discovery of 'real' transfactuality. That is, whilst it may be true to say that some 'thing' in the experiment is being manipulated so as to bring about some effect this is not the same as saying that we know for sure what the 'thing' or, for that matter, the effect are. And, claims concerning the 'progress of science' hardly dent the

insights of, in Bhaskar's (1998:11) words, 'those philosophers, such as Popper and Kuhn, who, in opposition to the classical inductivist view, have drawn attention to the phenomena of scientific discontinuity and change...' Regardless of experimental observations, even manipulations, it may still be the case, for all we know, that, as Chalmers (1999:240) puts it, the 'electron ... face[s] the same fate as the ether'. Whilst this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis and will not be dwelt upon, it may go some way towards explaining why Bhaskar's thesis has had a minimal impact upon contemporary philosophy of science.

On the other hand, Bhaskar's other major work *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*, has had a considerable amount of success in the social sciences. It is to this that I now turn. In so doing, I take Bhaskar's well-worked first text, *A Realist Theory of Science*, as laying down the basic principles of what is now to become known as critical realism⁷. These principles are: the non-Humean nature of generative mechanisms; and, the key steps in Bhaskar's epistemological project or his model of scientific discovery i.e. the steps from observation to imagination (or model building) to the discovery of an object's normic qualities. As we have seen the latter entails, according to Bhaskar's theory, the closing of open systems.

The Possibility of (Social) Naturalism: Critical Realism

Bhaskar (1998:3)⁸ begins his critique of the human sciences with a definition of naturalism. Namely, that naturalism 'may be defined as the thesis that there is (or can be) an essential unity of method between the natural and social sciences'. However, Bhaskar argues, this unity of method must be distinguished from both reductionism, which presumes that the subject-matter of the two sciences is the same, and, scientism, which advocates the use of the same methods for the discovery of laws in the natural and social worlds. Instead, Bhaskar (1998:4) proposes a 'qualified anti-positivist naturalism, based on an essentially realist view of science'⁹. Nevertheless, Bhaskar argues that because the social realm deals with different objects to that of the natural world a different (epistemological) method will be required to uncover its objects. And,

it will be from within the nature of these (intransitive) objects that this method will be defined or determined. This, as we shall see, will limit the possibility of a naturalism of the social world. To start the process of uncovering we must look at the character of social objects. And, in very many respects Bhaskar's claims concerning actions and structure turn out to be remarkably similar to those of Giddens¹⁰.

The history of social theory, Bhaskar (1998:31-32) claims, has resulted in two broad camps. The first of these is Weberian and assumes that social objects are the result of intentional or meaningful human behaviour. The other is based upon the Durkheimian view of 'social objects' as objects that exist in their own right or as somehow external to the individuals that use them. Attempts in the social sciences to marry these disparate views, Bhaskar argues, have failed¹¹. This, therefore, is one of the main purposes of *The Possibility of Naturalism*. The first step in this process is to observe that individuals do not create society as such because society is always pre-given. Thus, as Durkheim observed, 'the member of a church (or let us say the user of a language) find the beliefs and practices of his or her religious life (or the structure of his or her language) ready-made at birth (see Bhaskar, 1998:33). However, it is the actions of individuals that reproduce these social relations. This creates a quandary, for whilst we must accept that society only exists by virtue of individuals' activities it is also true that society stands to individuals as something they never make. We must therefore say that individuals either reproduce or transform society.

Social activity in this context, Bhaskar argues, takes on an Aristotelian conception 'in which the paradigm is that of a sculptress at work, fashioning a product out of the material and tools available to her' (Bhaskar, 1998:34). However, most of what follows in Bhaskar's description of this activity seems to run parallel to Giddens' own account of the driving forces of the social world. So, for example, social structures may be both enabling and constraining¹². And, individuals possess the capacity not to just 'initiate changes in a purposeful way, to monitor and control their performances, but to monitor the monitoring of these performances...' Bhaskar (1979:44). Furthermore, 'people, in their conscious activity, for the most part unconsciously reproduce (and occasionally

transform) the structures governing their substantive activities' (*ibid*). Hence, it could be fairly argued that in Bhaskar's 'transformational model of the society/person connection' (see below) most of the key factors that make up structuration theory are present: the unacknowledged conditions of social life, the unintended consequences of action, discursive consciousness, practical consciousness, action as a skilled accomplishment, the notion of praxis, and, even, a duality¹³. As Bhaskar (1998:35) notes:

Now if, following Durkheim, one regards society as providing the material causes of human action, and following Weber, one refuses to reify it, it is easy to see that both society and human praxis must possess a dual character. Society is both the ever-present condition (material cause) and the continually reproduced outcome of human agency. And praxis is both work, that is, conscious production, and (normally unconscious) reproduction of the conditions of production, that is society¹⁴

The difference between the two theories is the emphasis that Bhaskar places upon dualism or what he, and Archer in his footsteps, call a stratified model of the social world. That is, despite (the occasional) reference to Giddens' *New Rules of Sociological Method*, and the borrowing of so many fundamental concepts Bhaskar demarcates 'agency' and 'social structure'. Or, at least, in his assertion of a dualism he wants to do this. In light of this we now need to do three things: set out Bhaskar's definition of agency; his account of social structure; and, then, observe the link that he makes between the two.

The concept of agency is defined in a straightforward (and dualistic) manner as pertaining to the intentional actions of individuals. The key voluntaristic feature of individuals i.e. that which allows for social change or the transformation of social relations, follows from this. Hence, 'persons are material things with a degree of neurophysiological complexity which enables them ... to initiate changes in a purposeful way, to monitor and control their performances [and] to monitor the monitoring of these performances...' (Bhaskar, 1979:44)¹⁵. Agency, Bhaskar argues, is most properly the subject matter of psychology. With regard to this point and in what appears to be a fundamental breach with structuration theory¹⁶, Bhaskar (1979:45) observes:

I want to distinguish sharply, then, between the genesis of human actions, lying in the reasons, intentions and plans of people, on the one hand, and the structures governing the reproduction and transformation of social activities, on the other; and hence between the domains of the psychological and social sciences. The problem of how people reproduce any particular society belongs to a linking science of 'social-psychology'.

Bhaskar argues that this distinction, or the autonomy of the social and psychological realms, fits with our intuitions. For example, we do not suppose that the reasons why our garbage is collected is the same reason that the collector has for collecting it. I come back to this point later, but first, we need to consider how Bhaskar defines 'social structure' in this dualist model.

'Social structure', Bhaskar says, acts as a governor or provider of the material resources with which actors reproduce or transform social activities. The task of the social sciences, as opposed to the psychological sciences, is to 'lay out the structural conditions for various forms of conscious human action' (1979:45). The form that these structural conditions take is defined by Bhaskar as 'relations between individuals' (*ibid*). And, this 'relational' conception of sociology holds that:

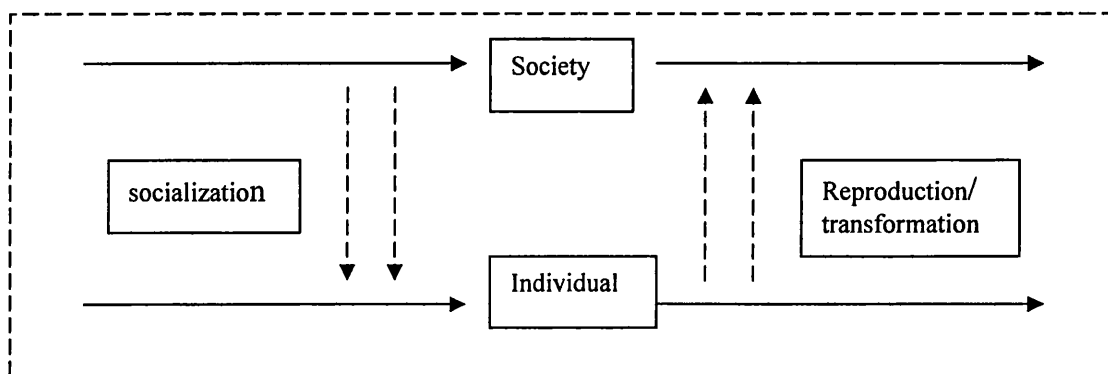
...being social, as distinct from (or rather in addition to) material objects, and their consisting in social rules, as distinct from purely 'anankastic' ones (which depend upon the operation of natural laws alone), depends essentially on, and indeed in a sense consists entirely in, the relationships between people and between such relationships and nature (and the products and functions of such relationships) that such objects and rules causally presuppose or entail (Bhaskar, 1979:51)¹⁷

These relations are exercised only in human agency, but are evidenced in what Bhaskar (*ibid*) calls 'a system of mediating concepts' which designate the point of contact between agency and structure; a 'position-practice' system. That is, 'the positions (places, functions, rules, tasks, duties, rights, etc.) occupied (filled, assumed, enacted, etc.) by individuals, and of the practices (activities, etc.) in which, in virtue of their occupancy of these positions (and vice-versa), they engage' (*ibid*). Relations may be either 'internal' or 'external' to the individual and Bhaskar (1979:54) supplies us with a definition of the former: 'A relation R_{AB} may be defined as internal if and only if A would not be what it

essentially is unless B is related to it in the way that it is. R_{AB} is symmetrically internal if the same applies also to B.’¹⁸ And, we are given four examples or types of position-practice relations: ‘[t]he relation bourgeoisie-proletariat is symmetrically internal; traffic warden-state asymmetrically internal; passing motorist-policeman not (in general) internal at all’. Explanation in the social sciences, which always refers to or makes use of position-practice systems, Bhaskar claims, most often requires ‘totalization’ (a ‘totality of aspects’ or nexus of causes). Explanation in the social sciences is further complicated by a multiplicity of causes and because of this, he says, social science often appears to be chameleon-like. This is not because the objects of the social sciences are continuously changing or because its objects may be re-described according to our cognitive interests as social scientists. It is because of the totalising aspect of social relations. Such totalization may be quite distant or it may be quite near: the net or nexus of social relations is never fixed but always remains an empirical question.

With this partial understanding of ‘agency’ and ‘social structure’ we can now observe Bhaskar’s (1998:36) diagrammatic representation of the society/person connection.

Figure 5. The Transformational Model of the Society/Person Connection



See, Bhaskar, (1998: 36)

At this stage, it may be necessary to take stock of the link between society and person that Bhaskar is proposing. First, to repeat, Bhaskar's social structures are the relations that hold between individuals and these may be of an 'internal' or 'external' type. If they are the former, they refer to things like Durkheim's members of a church who between themselves are subject to a set of pre-given religious beliefs, or, more generally, social actions that centre on a nexus of what we call social conventions or 'common stocks of knowledge'. If relations exist as 'external' to the individual, one assumes, they are of a non-causally significant kind that refers to the absence of a relationship 'between two cyclists crossing on a hilltop' (Bhaskar, 1998:42) or a 'passing-motorist-policeman' (Bhaskar, 1998:43) neither of which, in each case, is necessary for the definition of the other. Whether or not a relation may be said to be internal or external, Bhaskar (1998:42) observes, is 'in principle an open question.'

One question that seems to arise immediately, given the 'internal' character of Bhaskar's social relations, is whether Bhaskar's separation of 'agency' and 'structure' is legitimate. For, it seems quite proper to assume that 'internal relations' belong, by definition, to the individuals who are in possession of them. Bhaskar does not provide an adequate discussion of this issue and neither does he elaborate on the distinction between 'external' and 'internal' relations. Both of these matters, which are constitutive of the dualism/duality debate, are left (primarily) for his successors, (and principally, Margaret Archer) to grapple with (see Chapter 3). However, it is worth noting that with regard to the society-person connection, Bhaskar rules out the idea that a dialectical relationship between social structures and agency exists. Thus, in response to Berger and Luckman's model he argues that 'people' and 'society' 'do not constitute two moments of the same process. Rather they refer to radically different kinds of things' (Bhaskar, 1998:33)¹⁹; a statement that is often repeated by Margaret Archer in her more overt form of realism. However, Bhaskar, at one and the same time, and confusingly, refuses to untie people from society. Hence, in relation to the differences between natural and social phenomena, he observes that 'not only can society not be identified independently of its effects, it does not exist independently of them either' (Bhaskar, 1998:57). This issue leads Bhaskar to place certain limitations upon his critical realism. These are:

- 1 Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the activities they govern.
- 2 Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity.
- 3 Social structures, unlike natural structures, may only be relatively enduring (so that the tendencies they ground may not be universal in the sense of space-time invariant) (see Bhaskar, 1998:38)

To my mind, and to those of Archer and Benton, as we shall see in the next chapter, this is simply confusing. For, such limits, it might be fairly argued, completely change the shape or form of Bhaskar's 'Transformational Model of the Society/Person Connection'. As strictly speaking all of the boxes, especially those of 'Society' and 'Individual' are compressed together. Similar, in fact, to what Archer describes in her frequent criticism of Giddens' theory as 'elision' or 'central conflation'. I will come back to this point briefly in the conclusion of this chapter and in more depth in Chapter 3. However, now, I would like to observe a further problem of Bhaskar's *Possibility of Naturalism* and this relates to an issue of consistency between what was claimed in *A Realist Theory of Science* and, to be frank, what is glossed over in later work: the verification process or method used to establish the transcendental reality of an object or thing.

In what follows, I will question why Bhaskar places such a minimal effort in shoring up naturalism in the social sciences in the face of one very severe difficulty: the social scientist's inability to 'close off' the world she is investigating. This brings us back to, and, indeed, highlights the importance of Bhaskar's original work: *A Realist Theory of Science*. As noted in the first section of this chapter, for Bhaskar two things are required in order to achieve a transcendently real explanation of a given set of events. First, we must abandon the traditional empiricist conception of realism. Something may be said to be real if it can be shown to exhibit what Bhaskar calls tendencies, liabilities, or powers. Such capacities or potentials are what gives an object its normic qualities, what, essentially – through natural necessity – makes it 'real'.

However, moving to our second requirement, things are often stopped from exhibiting their capacities because of interventions elsewhere. Nevertheless, intervening variables do not invalidate laws but simply prevent them from operating. And, mostly, this is a consequence of attempting to verify laws in 'open' systems. So, Bhaskar claims, it follows that if we can close a system we can verify a law and move beyond the realms of classical empiricism and transcendental idealism. We achieve such closure, and in so doing reveal the intransitive objects of the world, in the experimental procedures of the natural sciences. Thus asserting the truth of naturalism or realism.

Bhaskar immediately realises, in *The Possibility of Naturalism*, that the kind of closure that, seemingly, allows for a demonstration of realism in the natural world is not going to be available to the social scientist. To take one of many quotations on this point, Bhaskar (1979:57) observes:

The chief epistemological limit on naturalism is not raised by the necessarily unperceivable character of the objects of social scientific enquiry. But rather by the fact that they only ever manifest themselves in open systems; that is, in systems where invariant empirical regularities do not obtain. For social systems are not spontaneously, and cannot be experimentally, closed.

Although a reading of a *Realist Theory of Science* might suggest that this is a fundamental flaw in the possibility of establishing what the 'natural mechanisms' of social phenomena may be, Bhaskar's response is to turn the problem to his own advantage before, it seems, wishing it as far away as possible.

First, Bhaskar claims that transcendental realism is the only philosophy of science to recognise the importance of the distinction between 'open' and 'closed' systems. Therefore, all other theories must be totally discarded as social science 'need only consider them as objects of substantive explanation' (Bhaskar, 1998:45)²⁰. Unfortunately, one rather obvious logical point that follows from not being able to close a system is that for all we know all we may actually have is a 'substantive explanation' of a phenomenon. But, second, it seems, now, that the problem of open systems is not as grave for

Bhaskar as it was in his earlier work. For, he says, the ‘real methodological import of the absence of closed systems is strictly limited: it is that the social sciences are denied, in principle, decisive test situations for their theories’ (ibid).²¹ Again this is a somewhat surprising conclusion. For recalling Bhaskar’s ‘Logic of Scientific Discovery’ diagram (see Figure 4) and its accompanying text it seemed to me that it was these ‘decisive test situations’ that allowed scientists to establish what was and what was not to count as an intransitive object. Furthermore, it is these very same test situations which allowed scientists to work out both the (Lockean) ‘natural necessity’ of an object and the (Leibnizean) non-contingent definition of a thing²². Without access to experimentation there seems no way that a law may achieve the status of ‘real’. So, by definition, it seems, the social sciences may be denied entry into the realm of the transcendently real. How, in these circumstances, it might be asked, can we ever establish the merits (or, otherwise) of naturalism? Bhaskar’s response is, to my mind, somewhat half-hearted. First, he re-iterates, via what he calls ‘existential intransitivity’, the now familiar *reductio* claim that something must exist beyond the realm of the interpreter or researcher²³. Second, he lists some general methodological requirements of the social scientist²⁴. Third, he hints vaguely at some occasional circumstances in which the generative structures ‘become more visible to agents’ (Bhaskar, 1998:48)²⁵. His more general solution to the problem of the openness of the social world, and to that of the possibility of agential changes to the form of social structures, is to assert that attempts at real definitions will precede rather than follow successful causal hypotheses. Therefore, the social sciences, he says, may only ever be explanatory rather than predictive.

But, it might be asked, given the importance that Bhaskar placed, and continues to place, on establishing the merits of a non-Humean conception of causation, should he not at least spend more time on explaining how the social sciences are going to be able to replicate a methodology as powerful as the scientific experiment? For if no such method is available to the social scientist it is hard to see quite how social scientists are going to fill this knowledge gap without resort to assertion²⁶. How, for example, without the kind of repetitive observation and manipulation of phenomena that is

available to some natural scientists are social scientists ever going to be able to distinguish between 'interference' and 'reality'?²⁷ All of this, it might be claimed, gives something of a lie to David Harvey's (2002:165) rather grandiose claims that 'by inverting the order of his original question' Bhaskar turns Kant's method on its head²⁸. Bhaskar's original thesis in *A Realist Theory of Science* is wholly dependent upon *epistemic* proof of the reality of natural sciences' objects of investigation. It is the absence of this epistemological programme in the social sciences that results in the underplaying of the significance of scientific methodology in *The Possibility of Naturalism*. And, it could be argued it is the absence of a 'scientific methodology' in the social sciences that undermines Bhaskar's critical realist project.

Conclusion

I need only briefly summarise once again the key points of Bhaskar's realist programme. A realist theory of science (and the possibility of naturalism) needs to recognise that in general neither natural nor social scientific laws hold true in 'open systems'. However, this fact does not, alone, refute natural or social scientific laws. Laws may be true but countervailing or interfering causes may prevent events unfolding in the way in which these laws suggest. The key to solving the problems that open systems create is to view natural and social scientific phenomena in a post-empiricist manner. Thus, we can argue that some object or thing is real if we can ascertain its true nature; its generative mechanisms (or, variously, 'powers', 'tendencies', and 'capacities'). Whilst this is relatively straightforward for the natural sciences where the method of scientific experiment closes off the openness of systems it is more problematic for the social sciences. This is for two reasons: first, agents are able to monitor their actions and change the structural conditions of action; second, social scientists are denied the essential tool of the natural scientist, the experiment, and as such, are unable to close open systems. Therefore, social science may only ever be explanatory rather than prescriptive. In addition to this, and finally, Bhaskar observes that social structures are dependent, for their existence, on those agents whose activities

they govern. This, he believes, avoids the age-old problem of structural sociology: the reification of social structures.

With this in mind we can observe in this conclusion the main similarities and differences between Bhaskar's and Giddens' theories as well as some difficulties that may follow from Bhaskar's framework (in particular, the idea that 'social structures' exist as relatively autonomous 'phenomena' dependent upon the activities they govern). I shall argue that Bhaskar's model, situated between duality and dualism, requires a leap in one direction or the other and that logically, given his general framework (and as Archer (1995) and Benton (1981) presume) this move ought to be towards a dualism of structure and agency rather than a duality.

As noted in the introduction many contemporary social theorists have rightly pointed to some fundamental similarities between Bhaskar's thesis and Giddens' structuration theory. Most obviously, Bhaskar seems to have inherited from Giddens a number of concepts or ways of understanding social action and its consequences. In the 'Transformational Model of the Society/ Person Connection' he includes, *inter alia*, the 'unintended consequences of action', and both 'practical' and 'discursive knowledge'. Indeed, Baert (1998:196) is correct in his observation that:

... the core presuppositions of the critical realist programme are not exceptionally new, and unquestionably not as original or unseasoned as they have sometimes been presented. The cardinal assumptions of realist social theory were anticipated by others.

However, it is not in the partial sharing of aims and objectives or concepts that is of most interest at this point. It is the ontological and epistemological differences between Giddens' work and that of Bhaskar's that is of most importance for this thesis. For, although their theories share much in common there also exists a stark contrast that suggests that really Bhaskar wants (or ought to want) a dualism for 'social structure' and 'agency' (although he cannot have one through fear of reification) and really Giddens will have no truck with any version of naturalism that is so closely tied to emergence (although his theory is rather vague in relation to the location in the social world of the

structural/systemic outcomes of action). With regard to the former this is evident in the rhetoric that Bhaskar uses: social structures lay out the conditions for conscious human actions; the Transformational Model of the Society/Person Connection presents social structures as separate but linked to individuals; and, even his first limitation on the possibility of naturalism for the social sciences states that social structures ‘govern’ the activities they are none the less dependent upon. All of this seems to imply that ‘social structures’ provide the pre-conditions of action and are real in the sense of having causally efficacious potential; or, possessing generative mechanisms. However, Bhaskar pulls back from this position offering them *sui generis* status only under the condition of their being tied to social activities which is, of course, not a real *sui generis* status (as Benton (1981) makes clear).

With respect to Giddens’ anti-naturalist thesis whilst I need not, I think, return to the issue of invariant laws or the nature of causation in the social realm in general it is patently obvious that neither of these views is in keeping with a naturalist framework of the type suggested by Bhaskar in either *A Realist Theory of Science* or *The Possibility of Naturalism*. Also, the view that the individual-society connection involves a dialectic is roundly rejected by Bhaskar (see above). And, neither, it would seem, is the idea that *verstehen* is the ontological condition human of society compatible with a naturalist philosophy that places so much emphasis upon the establishment of – through open or closed methods – invariant causal mechanisms. All of these factors point towards a concealed, but significant, difference between Giddens’ structuration theory and Bhaskar’s realism. This, I think, can be traced to the origins or influences upon each of these theories of the society-person connection; setting aside Giddens’ own influence upon Bhaskar’s work.

The main difference between the two approaches lies in Bhaskar’s inheritance of ‘social structure’ from Durkheim and Giddens’ notion of ‘mutual knowledge’. So, on the one hand, Bhaskar’s model of social structure or ‘relations’ seems to take from Durkheimian structuralism the trait of conceptualising structures as the ‘material’ foundations which actors must take as the conditions of social action. On the other hand, Giddens’ ‘rules and resources’ are predisposed

towards principles to be found in a social phenomenological/ethnomethodological, or Wittgensteinian discourse. To deal with the latter first, such a schema of the 'social structure- agency' connection, as was discussed in Chapter 1, allows for the mapping of each concept on to the other: agency is constituted through social structure in the *on-going processes* of social life and *vice versa* social structure is both medium and outcome of agents' rationalizations, unacknowledged actions, and the unintended consequences of social life²⁹. However, for Bhaskar's model we should substitute in the first sentence above the 'on-going processes of social life' for the 'conditions of social activity'³⁰. Thus, 'social structure' is partially prised away from agency, which is, anyway, conceptualised (confusingly) as a psychological phenomenon. As a consequence of this social structure is given relative autonomy and begins to resemble (although, following Giddens, Bhaskar claims that social structures are both enabling and constraining) the kind of conditions of social life that Durkheim's 'external' obligations 'to speak French' or 'to follow the technical procedures of industrial capitalism' (see Durkheim, 1982:3) indicate. However, Bhaskar must, he believes, at all costs avoid reifying social structures. As such, the conditions of social life are tethered to individuals through his 'limitations on a naturalism of the social sciences'; an issue which will be discussed in the next chapter.

What seems to follow from this, for Bhaskar, is that the social structure-agency connection turns out to signify not a duality as such but a conjunction of two 'phenomena' one of which (social structure) cannot be a phenomenon without 'being conceptualised in the experience of the agents concerned' (Bhaskar, 1998:51). Nevertheless, Bhaskar claims:

The conditions for the phenomena (namely social activities as conceptualised in experience) exist intransitively and may therefore exist independently of their appropriate conceptualisation, and as such be subject to an unacknowledged possibility of historical transformation (*ibid*)

All of this, as Bhaskar (1998:45) himself observes leads to a strange 'ontological point of view'. For the limits on the possibility of naturalism require that the

‘relations’ of society exist as a *sui generis* reality, with emergent features, only in conjunction with agents. In general, the impression that the reader is left with is that, although he prescribes social structures with a semi-autonomous status,³¹ Bhaskar’s ‘limitations on naturalism’ are really, so to speak, much unwanted baggage that is necessary only to avoid the (apparent) threat of reification but prevents the realist from bestowing a vital feature of ‘emergence’ to the notion of ‘social structure’. Certainly, as we will now see, that was the opinion of Margaret Archer.

Notes for Chapter 2.

¹ By which he means they are a social product. Thus departing company with earlier and crude accounts of scientific realism. However, the fact that they are a social product does not invalidate the possibility of naturalism. One of Bhaskar's (1978:17) aims is to sustain two criteria of 'the adequacy of an account of science'. These are: (i) its capacity to sustain the idea of knowledge as a produced means of production; and (ii) its capacity to sustain the idea of the independent existence and activity of the objects of scientific thought'.

² We are never really given an explanation as to what the relationship between the transitive and intransitive realm is in relation to the development of scientific theories. The transitive realm, it seems, is both an empirical and a hermeneutical realm. It is empirical in the sense that it contains sense-data, the meaning of which may change according to scientific developments. It is hermeneutical in the sense of accounting for social and political influences upon scientific investigation. Given what Bhaskar is soon to tell us about closing open systems and the power of the scientific experiment one might wonder if his transitive realm is somewhat redundant to his explanation of scientific discovery.

³ This is, essentially, what Bhaskar calls the 'epistemic fallacy'. And, he observes:

The epistemic fallacy is most marked, perhaps, in the concept of the empirical world. But it is manifest in the criteria of significance and even the problems associated with the tradition of empirical realism. Kant committed it in arguing that the categories 'allow only of empirical employment and have no meaning whatsoever when not applied to objects of possible experience; that is to the world of sense' [see I, Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B724] ... Similarly the logical positivists committed it when arguing, in the spirit of Hume, that if a proposition was not empirically verifiable (or falsifiable) or a tautology, it was meaningless. (Bhaskar, 1978:37).

⁴ Hacking, similarly, makes a strong claim concerning the reality of entities in science. He argues that if an entity can be shown to be practically manipulated in a controlled manner and used to bring about effects in some other phenomena it must be deemed to be real. Like Bhaskar, he starts from the premise that the philosophy of science is not simply a substitute instance of a more general theory of knowledge but has much to teach us about epistemology and ontology.

⁵ The '...idea that things possess powers and liabilities to do and suffer things that they are not actually doing and suffering and may never actually do or suffer' (Bhaskar, 1978:87).

⁶ Ira Cohen has described Giddens' theory as 'an ontology of possibilities'.

⁷ I am fully aware of Bhaskar's (1998:3) claims concerning the 'real differences in their [i.e. natural and social] subject-matters' and will only apply those elements from *A Realist Theory of Science* that can be deemed necessary to establish naturalism. For example, the necessity in Bhaskar's model of scientific discovery to traverse the three realms of the transitive dimension: the Humean, the Lockean, and the Leibnizean.

⁸ In this section I move between the two editions of *The Possibility of Naturalism* i.e. those of 1979 and 1989/1998. The second edition contains both additional commentary as well as excluded notes and quotations.

⁹ Just how similar critical realism is to naturalism remains a mute point (see below).

¹⁰ Where the two have used the same or similar concept I will not discuss or describe these concepts unless it seems pertinent to my discussion of critical realism.

¹¹ He refers, in particular, to Peter Berger's (1966) introduction of the concept of 'objectivation' as a replacement of Durkheim's social structure. 'Objectivation' is, as Bhaskar (1998:41) observes, 'the process whereby human subjectivity embodies itself in products that are available to oneself and one's fellow men as elements of a common world'. Society, therefore, becomes an objectivation or externalization of man. On the other hand, 'man, for his part, is an internalization or re-appropriation in consciousness of society'. This model, Bhaskar (1998: 41-2) argues, 'encourages, on the one hand, a

voluntaristic idealism with respect to our understanding of social structure and, on the other, a mechanistic determinism with respect to our understanding of people’.

¹² For example: ‘The rules of grammar, like natural structures, impose limits on the speech acts we can perform, but they do not determine our performances’ (Bhaskar, 1998:36).

¹³ Interestingly, it may be, given that Bhaskar’s work post-dates Giddens’ *New Rules of Sociological Method* by several years, that the similarity between the two approaches leads Bhaskar to have doubts about granting social structures independence from agents.

¹⁴ Archer (1995:150) observes, in relation to this quote, that although its similarity to structuration theory cannot be denied Bhaskar ought properly to have re-worded ‘condition’ to mean ‘pre-condition’ and ‘outcome’ should imply that which post-dates the given actions. Without such temporal emphasis, she argues, the full force of emergence is lost and with it the *sui generis* status of ‘social structure’ trapped in the individuals who partake in social activities. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this.

¹⁵ There is again a strong similarity between this definition and what Giddens (add ref plus quote) describes in terms of the reflexivity of agents

¹⁶ This will become clear in subsequent chapters. And, in particular, Chapter 5.

¹⁷ In defining structures as ‘relations’ Bhaskar quotes Marx from *Grundrisse*: ‘society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of the relations within which individuals stand’ (see Bhaskar, 1993:26). This claim serves partly as a critique of methodological individualists who have, Bhaskar argues, misunderstood the proper subject-matter of sociology and partly as an explication of the relatively enduring nature of social relations: such as those ‘between capitalist and worker, MP and constituent, student and teacher, husband and wife’ (Bhaskar, 1993:29).

¹⁸ He notes also that :‘A’ and ‘B’ ‘may designate universals or particulars, concepts or things, including relations’ (*ibid*)

¹⁹ The reasoning behind this is, I think, an individualistic conception of agency. One in which an artificial distinction is made between a individual and an inter-subjective realm that defines, in Bhaskar’s terminology, positions and practices. The inter-subjective realm is then allocated a place in the realm of social structures whilst the individual (the single individual or group) is *epochéd* of social knowledge or stripped bear to his reflexive self, then re-allocated a set of position-practices to face a seemingly unalterable social force leading realists such as Bhaskar (1998:35) to observe:

the properties possessed by social forms may be very different from those possessed by the individuals upon whose activity they depend. Thus one can allow, without paradox or strain, that purposefulness, intentionality and sometimes self-consciousness characterize human actions but not transformations in the social structure

²⁰ To quote in full:

For as I have shown in detail elsewhere, practically all the theories of orthodox philosophy of science, and the methodological directives they secrete, presuppose closed systems. Because of this, they are totally inapplicable in the social sciences (which is not of course to say that the attempt cannot be made to apply them – to disastrous effect). Humean theories of causality and law, deductive-nomological and statistical models of explanation, inductivist theories of scientific development and criteria of conformation, Popperian theories of scientific rationality and criteria of falsification, together with the hermeneutical contrasts parasitic upon them, must all be totally discarded. Social science need only consider them as objects of substantive explanation (Bhaskar, 1998:45)

²² Bhaskar claimed that in the proper (closed) circumstances creative model building and rigorous empirical testing of a power or a liability i.e. to do (or suffer) ϕ , allows scientists to say:

x comes to do ϕ in virtue of its having a certain constitution or intrinsic structure, e.g. genetic constitution, atomic structure, or electric charge ... it is contingent that x has the nature (e.g. constitution or structure) that it has. But given that it has, it is necessary that it behaves the way it does ... at the third Leibnizean level possession of that structure or constitution comes to be regarded as defining the kind of thing that x is. Now it is necessary that x has the structure it has if it is to be the kind of thing it is. (Bhaskar, 1978:172-3)

Indeed, he congratulates himself for discovering a method of obtaining *analytical a posteriori* truths or laws of nature deduced *a posteriori*.

²³ In relation to this Bhaskar (1998:47) observes that 'although the conditions of the processes of production [of social research and the social activity under investigation] may be interdependent, once some object O_i exists, if it exists, however it has been produced, it constitutes a possible object of scientific investigation'.

²⁴ For example, the capacity of a theory to be developed in a non-ad hoc way '... so as to situate, and preferably explain, without strain, a possibility once (and perhaps even before) it is realized, when it could never, given the openness of the social world, have predicted it ...' (Bhaskar, 1998:46). Unfortunately this does not square with two claims that Bhaskar has made. First, with regard to social objects and causal explanation, he emphasises the complex multi-causal character of social scientific phenomena. Second, and to make matters seem much much worse, in *A Realist Theory of Science*, he tells us that in '...nature, constant conjunctions are the rare exception; not, as supposed by actualism, the universal rule' (Bhaskar, 1978:103). Well if both points are true it seems that the social sciences are more-or-less obliged to accept that the kind of model of scientific discovery espoused in Bhaskar's earlier work is simply not available to the social scientist. In fact, this is exactly the conclusion that Beed and Beed (2002) reach in their comparison of 'natural kinds' and 'social kinds'. Now, I do not necessarily agree with that conclusion, but what is clear is that *A Realist Theory of Science*, in its endeavour to claim a realism for science, places some not inconsiderable methodological and epistemological demands upon both types of science.

²⁵ In what is certainly alluding to a crisis of capitalism or moment of enlightenment ('a class in itself and for itself'), Bhaskar (1998:48) comments:

It might be conjectured that in periods of transition or crisis generative structures, previously opaque, become more visible to agents. And that this, though it never yields quite the epistemic possibilities of a closure (even when agents are self-consciously seeking to transform the social conditions of their existence), does provide a partial analogue to the role played by experimentation in natural science.

²⁶ Given Bhaskar's own predilection to an ideological explanation of history the option of the social scientist becoming 'judge and jury' in explaining social relations becomes a real possibility. Without evidence as to how the investigator has 'closed' the 'system' we are left only with an assumption that it has been closed. My thanks to Liz Bradbury for this point. In fact Bhaskar's text seems to imply that history, itself, is a closing system. This may be true in one sense but as any social analyst worth her salt will tell you the kind of explanatory detail that allows us to separate and manipulate phenomena in the same fashion as the scientific experiment is simply not available to the social scientist. A fuller discussion of problems associated with causation in the social sciences is contained in the Conclusion of this thesis.

²⁷ The answer, it could be claimed, lies in Archer's (1988:290;1995:76; 2000:277) depiction and discussion of the 'morphogenetic cycle'. But, see Chapter 3.

²⁸ The quote in full is:

... Bhaskar asks: Assuming the findings and organized practices of scientific inquiry are correct, what must the structure of the world be like for scientific knowledge to be possible? With this query he counters Kant's 'Epistemological Turn' with an 'Ontological Turn' of his own. That is, Bhaskar maintains the categories of scientific knowledge must conform to the obdurate structures of the world (Harvey, 2002:165)

²⁹ This inevitably causes problems in terms of setting out the relationship between 'system' and 'structure' which does not appear to be properly worked through in Giddens' framework. Generally, although he places considerable importance on the unintended consequences of actions, he seems cautious about simply equating structural properties or properties of the system with an externally given empirical realm. This follows, perhaps, for three reasons: because every aspect of the social realm must be refracted through agents; because, ultimately, everything that happens in the social world is a product of social interaction; and, because, social structures, as the medium and outcome of production and reproduction exist as memory traces in the minds of agents. The problem is, and it is an unresolvable Kantian problem, that in the last instance nothing can exist outside of the realm of signification which, of course, brings us back to 'memory traces'. I will not say anymore on this subject – its scope is beyond this thesis.

³⁰ One further problem that seems to arise from Bhaskar's TMSA model is exactly where, or even how, socialization fits into his scheme. If social structures are the condition of action and agency is a purely psychological phenomenon referring to individuals wants, motives, etc. the role of socialization has a considerable amount of work to do but receives only cursory discussion which spells out that it relates to 'stocks of skills, competences and habits' (see Bhaskar, 1998:36) but does not spell out whether these exist at the psychological level of agency or the structural level of conditions. Surely, one imagines that they cannot be situated just at the level of structure and yet, equally, skills, competences, and habits (as defined in relation to socialisation) must be, within Bhaskar's framework, structural.

³¹ As Bhaskar (1998:38) frequently observes: 'unlike natural mechanisms, they exist only in virtue of the activities they govern and cannot be empirically identified independently of them'.

3. Margaret Archer and the Limitations of Naturalism

Introduction

Let me briefly re-cap on two of the most important issues of Bhaskar's account. First, Bhaskar rejects the Humean conception of causation. Phenomena whether social or natural possess tendencies and liabilities which may or may not be realised according to either their absence in the environment or the presence of intervening or countervailing phenomena (or variables). According to this post-empiricist version of naturalism the presence or absence of phenomena bears no consequence on the 'reality' of an object, law, or thing. Thus, a law is said to be true (transcendentally real) when a conjunction of phenomena produces emergent properties which necessarily entail generative mechanisms. Second, the laws of social phenomena (or social structures) are no different, conceptually, to the laws of natural phenomena. In each case the focus of the realist will be upon the causal capacities of emergent features whether these are of a natural kind or a social kind. The laws that pertain to social structures are invariant, and refer to relations between individuals. These relations, which may be either 'internal' or 'external', are mediated to agents through totalities (or a nexus) of position-practices. Bhaskar's successors, whilst maintaining these key aspects of his theory re-shuffled realist terminology and insisted on one thing: the unleashing of social structures from agents. The leash that Bhaskar insisted upon in relation to the society/person connection followed from two points. First, he argued that social structures could not, so to speak, 'escape their makers'. They must always depend upon individuals and their actions. Second, and related, Bhaskar placed what he called, ontological limitations on the possibility of a naturalism for the social sciences (see previous chapter and below).

Now, whilst these limitations did not prevent Margaret Archer, and others, from stressing the importance of what she calls the 'temporal interplay' between social structure and agency they hardly helped to promote it. By utilising more effectively Bhaskar's non-Humean conception of the 'real', as we shall see, she

is able to make the 'emergent properties or powers' of social phenomena work towards explaining both past and future tense production of position-practice structures. Equally, important she feels that this is an area in which sociology has floundered. She comments:

Generations of sociologists have made present tense distinctions between offices and their holders or formal role requirements and informal doings, but these are confined to the empirical level, they are based on observable current affairs and this will not do for the realist since it omits, *inter alia*, the powers of many role structures to pre-determine *who* was eligible to be an occupant and the powers of incumbents to reflectively re-monitor their activities. The former introduces the past tense and the latter the future tense, but neither are observable at all (Archer, 1995:71)

Archer, it seems, is less concerned with the details surrounding the logic of scientific discovery, and more interested in demonstrating in terms of societal relations the pre-given character of social structures and how this often leads to social constraint. This is not to say that the reflective or monitoring role of 'the agent' is suddenly neglected in favour of social or cultural determinism. But, importantly, she says, this emphasis upon the pre-given character of social structure is very much in keeping with two other influences upon her work. That is, David Lockwood's (1964) distinction between 'system' and 'social' integration and the introduction by Walter Buckley (1967) of structural processes or models of social stasis and change¹. Put another way, her concern is not simply with the actual realm of production or transformation of social structures but with the 'tendencies' or 'powers' that emergence furnishes both agents and social structures. Thus, it is the principle of causation, or more accurately, the causal potential that a generative mechanism provides a social structure with, that comes to the fore in Archer's critical realism.

Bhaskar's Limitations on a Naturalism or Realism of the Social Sciences

Now, I mentioned earlier that Bhaskar is aware of the (at least) epistemological limitations of a 'naturalism' of the social world because of the 'open' character of social systems. The inability to close off the social 'system' appears to prevent social researchers from reaching the vital stages, in the logic of scientific discovery, of rigorously testing their models and manipulating their

phenomena. For in *A Realist Theory of Science* it is the Leibnizean realm that presents us with knowledge about the real structure of things or objects; its natural necessity is derived from its generative mechanism rather than its actualization. I also noted Bhaskar's observance of the link between social activities and social structures. In addition to this he argued that social structures unlike natural structures only exist (in comparison to natural structures) for a relatively short period of time. That is, the intransitivity of social structures is limited by changes and modifications in the social realm. It was for these reasons that Bhaskar was reluctant to define social structures in the same way as he defined natural structures. Initially, at least, Bhaskar therefore placed three ontological limitations on a possible naturalism/ realism of the social sciences². These are, to repeat:

- 1 Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the activities they govern.
- 2 Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity.
- 3 Social structures, unlike natural structures, may only be relatively enduring (so that the tendencies they ground may not be universal in the sense of space-time invariant) (see Bhaskar, 1998:38)

The differences between 'the possible objects of knowledge in the case of the natural and social sciences' (ibid) are summed up in the following statement:

Society, then, is an articulated ensemble of tendencies and powers which, unlike natural ones, exist only as long as they (or at least some of them) are being exercised; are exercised in the last instance via intentional activity of human beings; and are not necessarily space-time invariant. (Bhaskar, 1998:39)

The first point to note is that this appears to undermine the very logic of an anti-Humean post-empiricist project. In *A Realist Theory of Science* we were told that we were not to treat phenomena of scientific investigation as factual but to consider them to be transfactual. And, in keeping with a post-empiricist ontology, transfactualism must refer to a Leibnizean realm of possibilities. Thus,

in circumstances where conditions A, B, and C are present, in the absence of intervening and countervailing causes, X must always follow. This law holds true for all time. It is intransitive. This logic also led us to believe that tendencies, discoverable at a Leibnizean level, are 'powers which may be exercised unfulfilled'. In the light of this, Bhaskar's demand for the 'exercising' of tendencies and powers seems to suggest a return to the realm of the empirical but, it might be asked, is that not the Humean realm? Bhaskar's successors largely agree with these conclusions and set about putting his theory of the person/society connection right.

Both Benton (1981) and Archer (1995) have objected to the ontological limits that Bhaskar placed upon social structures. With regard to limitation 1 Benton has argued that if the operative word is 'govern' the claim cannot be upheld. For, clearly, 'govern' implies pre-existence which entails independent existence. The point is given more force by Archer (1995:143) who claims that some social structures are, in fact, more dependent upon past-tense human activity (even the long-since dead) than present tense intentionality or purpose and, as such, absolutely refuse to yield to present-tense activity. One of the examples she uses is that of a demographic structure, where, she says 'suppose all activities were harnessed to transforming it, the (top-heavy or whatever) structure would not disappear for several generations' (Archer, 1995:143). 'We are', she says, 'dealing with a relatively enduring emergent property'. The point is well made but may return to haunt analytical dualism (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Limitation 2, as Archer points out, is somewhat confusing and may be interpreted in several ways. It may be the case that Bhaskar is simply re-iterating the truism of 'no people; no society'. Or, he could be asserting, more strongly, a thesis of concept-dependence i.e. 'that the existence of social structures depends upon agents having the particular conceptions they do of what they are doing' (*ibid*). But, Archer argues, many structural relations are maintained (such as those by law, coercion, censorship, ideological manipulation, etc.) 'by overriding the diversity (and conflicting nature) of agents' concepts of what they are doing – or inducing mystificatory ones' (*ibid*). Given this, and given his own admission concerning the distorting consequences of ideology, Bhaskar has no

choice, Archer claims, but to concede ground on this point. And, she argues, implicitly he already has in his acceptance, in *The Possibility of Naturalism*, that 'the conditions for the phenomena (namely social activities as conceptualized in experience) exist intransitively and may therefore exist independently of their appropriate conceptualization' (1998:146)³. The third and final limitation on the possibility of naturalism is, as both Archer and Benton have pointed out, quite out of keeping with critical realism and threatens 'the very existence of emergent properties' (Archer, 1995:147). My initial comments concerning Bhaskar's limitations more-or-less cover the points made by both theorists on this issue⁴.

Eventually, Bhaskar (1998:174) conceded some ground. In the Postscript to the second and third editions of *The Possibility of Naturalism*, written in 1989, he claims that social structures 'can exist independently of the activities that govern them...' and may indeed be relatively enduring (ibid). He concludes:

It would be better perhaps to say that social structures and mechanisms are *more highly space-time specific* than natural (e.g. biological and geological) ones typically are; rather than to say that they are (more) space-time-dependent (Emphases in original, Bhaskar, 1998:175).

However, this partial correction is insufficiently strong one further logical reason already implied above. Now, other than the general fact that it appears to be inconsistent with Bhaskar's naturalist framework, to maintain a difference between natural structures and social structures in any form is likely create a problem of insufficiency. Given Bhaskar's rejection of Humean empirical regularities, his more general framework is, as noted previously, heavily dependent upon a Leibnizean model of possibility which is, it turns out, ultimately dependent upon experimental proof or the establishment of a thing's tendencies or powers. Once such a thing's generative or natural mechanism have been established in the intransitive realm, Bhaskar (1979:14) observes, they may 'continue to endure, and the law it grounds be applicable and true (that is, not falsified) though its effect, that is the consequent, be unrealized'.

Now, it would seem odd to apply this rule to natural structures but to add a 'time-space' limitation to its social structural counterparts. For it surely is not

the case that a Leibnizean realm can be conceived of as time-space dependent. Once a mechanism has been confirmed through empirical observation and theoretical construction it must always, at the Leibnizean level, remain 'real'. As such, its existence is deliberately virtual and does not depend upon actualization or empirical invariance. If it depends upon actuality, as Bhaskar's qualifications seems to suggest, it cannot be said to be transcendently real but is, instead, real in the empirical sense of having existed materially at point X and time Y. But to argue this is, of course, to ignore the leap of faith we took when we declared for transcendental realism as opposed to empirical realism. Thus, logically, both Benton and Archer are correct when they assert that critical realism should not be restricted in the way in which Bhaskar has suggested.

Margaret Archer's Pre-conditions of Social Activity

I finished the last section by observing the limitations of Bhaskar's model of social realism I begin this section with a discussion of Margaret Archer's reconstruction of this approach. Archer's reconstruction of Bhaskar's social realism maintains the emphasis he placed upon a non-Humean account of causation. Thus, for Archer, it is the discovery of the emergent properties or the generative capacities of social structures, which may or may not be realised in the empirical realm, that allow for the separation of society and people; or, as she puts it the separability of the 'parts' and the 'people'. For Archer, as further noted, the first problem with Bhaskar's social realism related to his unwillingness to un-tether social structures from people. In contrast to this Archer wants to show, using the remainder of Bhaskar's ontological framework, the way in which social structures may have real causal powers, *sui generis*, rather than properties that are present-tense dependent on the activities of agents. In a nutshell, she wants to show that social structures may be both enabling but also place constraints upon individuals regardless of their wants and purposes. Earlier I noted a second key problem with Bhaskar's critical realism. That is, the need to support realism with a methodology that can underpin its strong ontological claims; a substitute or equivalent to the natural sciences method of experimentation.

Now, Archer, in her reconstitution of realism attempts to provide us with a solution to both of the problems she perceives in Bhaskar's model of critical realism. In so doing she presents us with a full-blown dualism of the structure-agency relationship. With regard to the first point, she sets out to demonstrate the need to account for the pre-given character of social structures in terms of a temporal disjunction between the conditions of action and the intentions or purposes of agents. Whilst not completely satisfactory as a substitute methodology for the experiment, Archer then incorporates a model (which she calls analytical dualism) for exploring structural elaboration or change: the morphogenesis of structure. All of the above is summed up in Archer's (1995:66) observation that analytical dualism 'is a methodology based upon the historicity of emergence'⁵. In the remainder of this chapter I will unpack this view on the pre-given conditions of social action

Margaret Archer's variety of social realism, set out in her numerous publications (see Archer, 1995, 1996a, 2000)⁶, has, as its primary goal, following Lockwood's (1964) seminal paper on the subject, to draw an ontological distinction between the 'parts' and 'people' of society, *qua*, 'analytical dualism'. Like earlier realists, this entails the development of a theory that depicts a society which, she says, nobody wants, in the form in which they encounter it, for it is an unintended consequence, whilst at one and the same time capturing the essence of the human condition to feel both constraint and freedom. Thus, she comments:

Its [society's] constitution could be expressed as a riddle: what is that depends on human intentionality but never conforms to their intentions? What is it that relies upon people's concepts but which they never fully know? What is it that depends upon action but never corresponds to the actions of even the most powerful? What is it that has no form without us, yet which forms us as we seek its transformation? And what is it that never satisfies the precise designs of anyone yet because of this always motivates its attempted reconstitution? (Archer, 1995:165)

These facts, that each and every human being is born into a world that is not of his or her own making but that once actors are placed in this realm they mould

or remould the circumstances that are presented to them, acts as a driving force for Archer's account. It is an assertion often repeated and one that predicates almost all of her main arguments.⁷

The basis of the agent-structure dualism for Archer, like Bhaskar before, is to present the reader with stratified model of society in each stratum may be said to *sui generis*; in the sense of possessing emergent properties. These emergent properties are described, following Bhaskar, as 'relations' (see below). And, for Archer (1995:173), such relationism is of primary importance. For, again following Bhaskar, an account of natural necessity is presupposed by the internal relations of a structure's emergent properties 'for what the entity is and its very existence depends upon' these internal relations (*ibid*). However, and bringing together emergence, relationism, and the relative autonomy of social structures she asserts that natural necessity 'only states that X cannot be what it is without certain constituents ...' the important distinguishing property of X is that, as a relational property, X 'has the generative capacity to modify the powers of its constituents in fundamental ways and to exercise causal influences *sui generis*' (Archer, 1995:174)⁸. Thus, Archer's emphasis upon emergence is almost entirely in keeping with Bhaskar's seminal philosophical works. However, as a working sociologist⁹, she provides more detail or depth than Bhaskar when describing the various strata or levels of the social world. I begin with her account of agency and then discuss her distinction between 'social structure' and 'cultural system'

Her conception of the self or the agent can be summarised, briefly for the purposes of this chapter, as reflective makers or shapers of society. This is, of course, very much in keeping with Bhaskar's Aristotelian sculptor. However, unlike Bhaskar, the concept of agent is not reduced to a mere psychological phenomena and neither, although this is not entirely clear, are agents simply reduced to the level of individual being. Agents may be groups, which she divides, on the basis of their organisational skills, into 'corporate agents' (well-organised and well-articulated interest groups) and 'primary agents' (which lack a say in structural and cultural moulding)¹⁰. 'Actors', Archer argues, are member of groups, their identities are formed through group membership and

they, as role-bearers, interact at group level, and in so-doing either transform or reproduce the shape of the group. But 'agency', she says fathers the 'actor': 'roles' are pre-existent but they are not cast in stone. Finally, in her account of agency, Archer introduces the notion of 'Person' in order to distinguish between the 'social self' and the 'universal self'. The former moulds the latter, but, she says, it is the universal self that possesses a continuous 'sense of self' (Archer, 1995:282) and has the unique potential to conceive of new social forms: 'because of this, society can never be held to shape [individuals] entirely since the very shaping of society itself is due to them being the kind of beings who can envisage their own social forms' (Archer, 1995:289)¹¹

Above the level of Agents (the 'people') in Archer's stratified model of society are 'social structures' and 'cultural systems' (the 'parts'). Each, again, is characterised by emergent properties that make structures/systems real and, consequently, define what they are. Thus, in relation to social structure, she says:

Structural emergent properties (SEPs), irreducible to people and relatively enduring, as with all incidences of emergence, are specifically defined as those internal and necessary relationships which entail material resources, whether physical or human, and which generate causal powers proper to the relation itself (Archer, 1995:177)

Other than noting that Archer's definition of social structure corresponds roughly to Durkheim's notion of morphological facts¹² there is not much more that can be added to this definition. Archer does, however, offer a number of examples (perhaps more in this area than anywhere else): the demographic structure, the education systems of France and England; the persistence of distributional phenomena in post-totalitarian societies; and literacy rates in post-revolution Cuba. We can take the latter as a hypothetical case study that draws out the nature of Archer's social structures (see Archer's (1982: 468-70, 1995: 76-9, 143).

In this example, referred to as 'Castro's example', Archer attempts to demonstrate how a morphogenetic sequence of events may lead towards

structural change or elaboration¹³. In the example the proportion of people who were deemed literate in post-revolution Cuba stood at 5 per cent, Castro's policy for increasing literacy was to use a method of 'each one teach one' i.e. every literate person had responsibility for teaching an illiterate person to read and write. Archer notes that assuming that it takes one year to teach a person and that this policy is 95 per cent successful, in five years from the start of the programme the whole Cuban population might be expected to be able to read and write. In this simple example we can see, according to Archer, key reasons for distinguishing between social structure and agency. Firstly, structural properties, namely those relating to the education system of pre-revolution Cuba, pre-date and influence indirectly what can and cannot be achieved. Thus, according to Archer (1982: 468, 1995:77), 'all structures manifest temporal resistance and do so generically through conditioning the context of action'. In this case, as Archer further notes, 'those who were literate initially were not responsible for their distribution in the population' (Archer, 1995:78). Secondly, when change does come about it is as a consequence of group activity. Two points follow from this. First, it is necessary to study the pre-conditions of change, social structure at 'time 1' (or, T_1 , see Figure 6, below), in order to establish when change took place and who was primarily responsible for this change. Second, once agency has exerted itself, in processes of social interaction, it becomes necessary to study the direction that change takes. In the Castro example it may be sped up by commitment or slowed down by apathy. The nature of structural elaboration is never clear, for Archer notes that 'determinism is not built in to the morphogenetic perspective' (Archer, 1995:78) whilst '[v]oluntarism has an important place in morphogenesis' (Archer, 1995:79)¹⁴.

Thus, for Archer social structure and agency are treated as two separate but inter-related phenomena both of which possess generative powers that may prevent or enable changes from taking place. Archer makes clear that the pre-revolution education system was not the product of agents who wished to see its demise. However, its change – or permanence – is a product of social interaction, of agents' interventions. Thus, agents drive the system, they

construct it and/or reconstruct it but they do not do so in conditions of their own making¹⁵.

Archer's cultural system (CS) stands logically in the same relation to the people as her social structure. It is for Archer society's 'propositional register' the place where ideas and values are held in a truth-functional labyrinth which may be drawn upon by members of a given culture when interacting with other members of that culture. In this account Archer relies heavily upon Popper's (1972) notion of 'Third World Knowledge'. Her procedure follows his: to delineate between subject mental experiences (socio-cultural interaction) on the one hand and objective ideas (the cultural system) on the other. The distinction refers to 'culture with a knowing subject' and 'culture without a knowing subject'; Socio-Cultural interaction (S-C) and the Cultural System (CS), respectively. The Cultural System contains *all* of a society's ideas ordered, and unbeknown to actors, in a *logical* register. Or, as Archer notes:

Culture as a whole is taken to refer to all intelligibilia, that is to any item which has the dispositional capacity of being understood by someone. Within this, the CS is distinguished as that sub-set of items to which the law of non-contradiction can be applied – that is propositions, for only statements which assert truth or falsity can be deemed to be in contradiction or to be consistent with one another. In turn this makes the propositional register equivalent to the CS at any given time; a distinction which is not only workable but justifiable because of the indubitable importance of what is held to be true or false in particular society (Archer, 1995:180)

At first sight it would appear that Archer is advocating a rationalist account of cultural activity. However, she is fully aware that at the level of Socio-Cultural interaction we do not live by propositions alone that 'we generate myths, are moved by mysteries, become rich in symbolism and ruthless in manipulating hidden persuaders' (ibid). But these traits, these 'irrational' uses of ideas, she asserts, pertain to the knowing subject and properly belong to the realm of socio-cultural interaction. Thus, symbiotically, actors draw upon the well of ideas that are deposited in the CS, ideas, that as emergent entities, have an objective and relatively autonomous existence, make use of these ideas and in the process agents may be constrained to live by such ideas or freed to adjust the

objective ideas that exist in their culture's propositional register. Consequently, culture is to be approached analytically in the same way as structure. Ideas, cultural emergent properties (CEPs) pre-exist interaction, may resist change, and, in the same manner as structural emergent properties (SEPs), are pregnant with generative powers. Although the Cultural System and Socio-Cultural level are intertwined and are properly constituted in their conjunction Archer believes considerable advantage is to be obtained in the disentanglement of ideas from meanings; by studying the two as an analytical dual. As with her analysis of social structures, pivotal to this is Archer's analysis of the time differences between agent and cultural system.

We can now turn to Archer's 'morphogenetic cycle', her model structural elaboration. However, it is important to note that Archer's intention is to avoid reification by making both realms, the structural and cultural, dependent upon human action or agency. As she notes, 'the first phase of the morphogenetic cycle is therefore concerned with mediatory processes' (Archer, 1995:195). Mediation, that is, between 'people' and 'parts'. Archer defines this mediation process 'as an objective influence which conditions action patterns and supplies agents with strategic directional guidance' (Archer, 1995:196). Consequently, we ought properly to view structures (social and cultural) as passive entities that assert their authority only in relation to the situations that actors find themselves in. So, structures may still exist in their own right, as *sui generis*, but their dependence relation to 'agents' can never be ignored; to do so is to reify the relationship between 'structure' and 'agent'. We can now observe the way in which Archer brings together 'structure' and 'agency' in a dualistic model of social reproduction and change known as the basic morphogenetic cycle:

Figure 6. The Basic Morphogenetic Cycle

Structural conditioning



T¹

Social-cultural interaction



T²

T³

Structural elaboration (morphogenesis)



Structural reproduction (morphostasis)

T⁴

(Adapted from Archer, 1995:157)

Figure 6 demonstrates the way in which structure and agent come together to either transform or reproduce a social structure or cultural system. Agents draw upon (T¹) and engage with pre-existing structural features of a society (T²) (SEPs, & CEPs) and in the process reconstitute or reproduce what belongs to the social or cultural realm (T² - T³). The process is cyclical insofar as (T⁴), structural or cultural elaboration, represents the start of the next round of possible change. Both 'structures' and 'cultural systems' are continuously operative in society and are interrelated because they intersect in their middle element, which, in each case is dependent upon people. At the same time, Archer claims, structures exist in a relatively autonomous form and may therefore be out of synchrony (see discussion below) with agency. Thus, causation is two way and never-ending: coming from structure(s) to agent(s), and agent(s) to structure(s). Structural elaboration, follows agents' to structure(s) causation. Thus, just as the social activities of agents are moulded by social structure so too the social structure is re-shaped or reproduced by agents. The model, Archer claims, approximates to both Bhaskar's (1983:85) refined TMSA and Sayer's (1992) methodological realist figure. In each case,

she argues, there is a pre-supposition concerning emergence, structure, (agent-structure) interplay, and outcome¹⁶.

The main difference between Archer's model and Bhaskar's TMSA is the *explicit* claim of analytical dualism: that social structures are pre-conditions of action. This may be expressed in what Archer calls the propositions of the practical application of the morphogenetic cycle. These are¹⁷:

- (i) there are internal and necessary relations within and between social structures (SS);
- (ii) causal influences are exerted by social structure(s) (SS) on social interaction (SI);
- (iii) there are causal relationships between groups and individuals at the level of social interaction (SI);
- (iv) social interaction (SI) elaborates upon the composition of social structure(s)

(Archer, 1995:168)

Each proposition corresponds to the temporal locations on her diagram. The key claim lies in proposition (i)¹⁸. This, Archer (1995:169) argues, 'represents the charter for analytical dualism for it entails the possibility of being able to make statements about the components of social structure(s) without reference to current agents' Or, in effect, it places emergence, the conditions of social action, in the past tense, dependent upon 'the activities of previous "generations"' (ibid).

In order to bring out the full strength of this claim our discussion needs to return, very briefly, to the tie that Bhaskar placed upon the society-person connection. The main problem, to recall, lay in his claim that social structures only exists as long as the tendencies and powers that constitute social relations are exercised through the intentional activity of human beings (see Bhaskar, 1998:39). Archer's response to this was to claim that Bhaskar's position on the society-person connection must be revised and this must lead to a clear separation of the 'parts' and the 'people'. The alternative, she claimed, was to

adopt a position that is akin to structuration theory or a duality of structure and agency. Furthermore, she brought forward good reasons from *The Possibility of Naturalism* to support her claim and the need for consistency in realism. Namely, that Bhaskar's model of society, and his accompanying rhetoric, was much closer to her position, that is, separation or dualism, than it is to duality. Why, Archer (1995:149) implies, inhere social structures with 'powers', 'tendencies', 'transfactuality', and 'generative mechanisms' only to then tie these objective features of the social world to agents' present tense activities or 'instantiations'? However, she says, Bhaskar gets off the hook in the 'Postscript' to *The Possibility of Naturalism* when he writes: 'What remains of individualism is a residual truth: that nothing happens in society save in or in virtue of something human beings do *or have done*' (Bhaskar, 1998:174; cf. Archer, 1995: 148; Archer's emphasis).

The 'or have done', she argues has to be given full force or otherwise we are left with an argument that cannot escape from a methodological individualist reduction.¹⁹ The result is that we can now talk about past actions determining the pre-conditions of present activities. These past actions, the results of which exist in the various strata of the social world, are emergent properties. Thus, Archer argues

it is now perfectly possible to talk about emergent properties and the results (or the results of the results) of past actions, which pre-date all current actions of contemporary agents and yet condition them – in the form of enablements or constraints which are not dependent upon current activities nor influential because of their contemporary conceptualization (be it correctly, incorrectly, or not at all) (ibid).

There is now just one more step that Archer needs to make in order to complete her transformation of Bhaskar's realism and to fulfill what she refers to as human being's intuitive feelings of both freedom and constraint. The former is explained in terms of the synchrony of structure and agents' intentions. The latter, therefore, must be explicable in terms of an absence of synchrony between agents' intentions and structural pre-conditions. Agents, in a sense, simply come up against a brick wall; an edifice built by the 'long dead'²⁰ that will not allow for change, at least in the short-run. This is the case, Archer

claims, in relation to a top-heavy demographic structure and the best intentions of a government that wishes to implement a generous pensions' policy (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of this). It is also vital, therefore, that we adopt a methodology that separates 'parts' from 'people' or what Archer (1995:149) describes as 'the inescapable need for a two-part account'²¹. The introduction of 'past-tense activity dependence' combined with agency and presented in the morphogenetic model, is expressed, in ontological terms, in the following way:

Necessarily action is continuous ('no people: no society) but because of their actions over time, structures are discontinuous (only relatively enduring) and once they are changed, then subsequent activities are conditioned and shaped quite differently (this society is not exclusively the product of those here present any more than future society is solely what our heirs produce). (Archer, 1995:154)

The 'morphogenetic cycle' is both consistent with this statement and seems to support a methodology that is similar in form to that of the experiment or is comparative in the fashion of Mill's (1987) 'Method of Difference' (morphogenesis) and 'Method of Agreement' (morphostasis). However, what such a method lacks, and what realism continues to be short of, is the rigour of a natural scientific method; the openness of the social system remains and the social researcher has to prise out and deduce cases that are influenced by intervening and countervailing causes.²²

Conclusion

We have now reached the completion of our theoretical move from duality to dualism. Building on Bhaskar's use of 'emergent properties' (with both latent and actual causal powers) Archer models social structures and agents into separated but intertwined phenomena. The separateness of social structure from agency is explained in terms of temporal interplay. Social structures (or cultural systems) always provide the pre-conditions of action. On occasions, and in the same way as Lockwood (1964) explained the alignment or misalignment of system and social integration, structures (or conditions) and agency (or wants) may be out of synchrony, that is, the conditions are unable to afford the wants of agents. Such circumstances are not only, and clearly, dualistic, but, for Archer,

allow for an explanation of social constraint. Thus, the main advantage of such a dualism is that it incorporates a combination of voluntarism and determinism but not, unlike one-dimensional theorizing, too much of one or the other.

However, the main disadvantage of the separation of structure and agency, regardless of whether it is premised upon a latent or possible causality, is that it seems to imply the reification of social structure. Now Archer believes that because the shape, mould, or form of social structures is the consequence of (past) social activity reification cannot threaten her model. Thus, in a strong defence against this claim, she notes:

Reification does not threaten. It is affirmed that social structures are only efficacious through the activities of human beings, but in the only acceptable manner, by allowing that these are the effects of past actions, often by long dead people, which survive them (and this temporal escape is precisely what makes them *sui generis*). Thus they continue to exert their effects upon subsequent actors and their activities, as autonomous possessors of causal powers (Archer, 1995;148)

However, as Healy (1999) and others (see Dominguez, 2000, and, Le Boutillier 2001 & 2003) have noted there is an odd sense in claiming that social structures pre-exist social activity. Or, more specifically, the relationship between social structure and those people that make it up seems compromised. Now Healy writes from a position that is largely sympathetic to the realist's cause. Thus, he puts forward, albeit tentatively, an idea that may lead to placing Archer's theory on a firmer philosophical foundation. That is, he suggests that Archer incorporate into her account, as an explanation for the relationship between parts and people, the concept of supervenience. And, it is to this concept and to the related concept of emergence that I now turn.

Notes for Chapter 3.

¹ It is the significance of the causal capacity of emergent properties in Bhaskar's re-conceptualisation of naturalism that Archer uses to overcome, or so she argues, the traditional limitations upon collectivism or holism. Ernest Gellner (1971), she claims, came close to pushing forward a causal criterion for the existence of group variables. But he, like almost all collectivists at this time was 'shyly tentative about drawing robust ontological conclusions from the frequent success of [the holist] explanatory programme' (Archer, 1995:23). Instead, she observes,

To have pressed home this argument and extracted its full ontological value (given it was first advanced in 1956), needed not only a complete break with empiricist assumptions, positivistic prescriptions and the underlying Humean notion of causality, but also an articulated alternative. (Archer, 1995:23-4)

This 'articulated alternative' is, of course, Bhaskar's re-formulation of emergence.

² He notes, further, that these 'all indicate real differences in the possible objects of knowledge in the case of the natural and social sciences' (Bhaskar, 1998:38).

³ Whilst I would grant Archer the point for other reasons. Namely, consistency. This appears to be a misreading of Bhaskar's text. The quotation she takes is not referring to the concept-dependence of those actors caught up in structural relations but to the (apparent) mistakes of the hermeneutic tradition. That is, its claims concern the relativity of social scientific interpretation.

⁴ Thus, Benton (1981:17) responds by concluding that Bhaskar's 'conception of social structures does not, after all, sustain them as autonomous possessors of causal powers, or, therefore, as *sui genesis* realities' (cf. Archer, 1995:147). The most probable conclusion to draw is simply that Bhaskar was hesitant about detaching 'structure' and 'agency'. As my earlier references to the similarities between the works of Bhaskar and Giddens shows, and Archer's notes imply, *The Possibility of Naturalism* does provide a distinct theory of the society-person connection the indebtedness to Giddens' *New Rules of Sociological Method* is all too clear. This, as Benton concludes, leads to some confusion surrounding his conceptual framework.

⁵ Archer's 'analytical dualism' is not simply a methodology. There are two reasons for this. First, it presupposes that structures, rather than people, have emergent properties. Second, like Bhaskar's use of the 'scientific experiment' in *A Realist Theory of Science*, it is an epistemic tool that has a great deal of ontological work to perform.

⁶ For clarity I will focus mainly on her *Realist Social Theory: the morphogenetic approach*. This text is perhaps the most comprehensive of her trilogy.

⁷ The claim is inherited from Bhaskar. Thus,

The model of the society/person connection I am proposing could be summarized as follows: people do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so (Bhaskar, 1998:36).

The original source, and inspiration, for Bhaskar was probably Marx's well known quotation from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living' (Marx, 1963:15). All three authors discussed in this thesis quote this approvingly.

⁸ Natural necessity is of primary importance as it sets out the key distinction between a Humean account of causation and that of realism. This point is made with most clarity and conviction by Harré and Madden (1975: 8ff) who observe that whilst a Humean conception of causation treats

cause and antecedent as two different properties the realist account attributes the causal powers of a thing to the property itself. Thus, part of the meaning of the description of, say, 'acid' is the dispositional predicate 'can turn logwood solution red'.

⁹ Archer's expertise lies in the sociology of education. See, for example, Archer (1979)

¹⁰ All of the various levels of her stratified model of the social world are real in the sense of possessing emergent properties. Agents' 'typical powers are capacities for articulating shared interest, organizing for collective action, generating social movements and exercising corporate influence in decision-making' (Archer, 1995:259-60)

¹¹ I have, necessarily, glossed over Archer's discussion of 'agents', 'actors', and 'persons'. Archer provides a critique of what she calls Durkheim's social-Kantianism as well as borrowing heavily from Merleau-Ponty's assessment of individuals' perceptions of themselves as a separate entity. For considerably more discussion see Archer (2000).

¹² For more detailed commentary on this issue see Chapter 4.

¹³ The term 'morphogenesis' is imported from Buckley's (1967) system theory and refers to 'those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, state or structure' (cf. Archer, 1995:166; see Buckley, 1967:58).

¹⁴ But note the full quotation qualifies this: 'Voluntarism has an important place in morphogenesis but is ever trammelled by past structural and cultural constraints and by the current politics of the possible' (ibid).

¹⁵ Both claims can be traced back to Bhaskar's writings. He observes: '[p]eople and society are not ... related dialectically. They do not constitute two moments of the same process. Rather they refer to radically different kinds of things' Bhaskar (1993:33).

¹⁶ Archer claims that the introduction of the morphogenetic cycle is particularly relevant to practical social theorising for it captures Lockwood's distinction between 'system integration' and 'social integration'. She notes that the variance between social and system integration may be measured at T^1 , whilst explaining the outcome of the variance involves examining their interplay at T^2 - T^3 (Archer, 1995:151).

¹⁷ There is equivalence with the propositions she puts forward for the practical application of the cultural realm. One need substitute 'social' for 'cultural' and 'social interaction' for 'socio-cultural interaction'. See Archer (1995:169).

¹⁸ It is not difficult, Archer (1995:169-170) claims, to find other (non-'realist') theorists who (setting terminological differences aside) subscribe to one or more of the proposition (ii)-(iv). What she calls 'downward conflation' (she has in mind structural-functionalism) would readily accept proposition (ii) and reject all others. Subscribers to 'upward conflation' (methodological individualism) show special enthusiasm for proposition (iii), consider proposition (iv) inoffensive but reject (i) and (ii). Advocates of 'central conflation' (structuration theory) would, she claims, tentatively accept proposition (iv) but deny the separation of (ii) and (iii).

¹⁹ A conclusion drawn by Benton (1981: 17) in his critique of Bhaskar's 'limitations'. Archer (1995:148) comments: 'full force can be given to Auguste Comte's insight that the majority of actors are dead'.

²⁰ The term should not be taken literally, Archer's use of it is simply intended to bring out the importance of past actions for the shape of present conditions.

²¹ Whereby: 'Part 1 seeks to disengage the properties (their 'powers' etc) per se of social structure: part 2 conceptualizes the experiential, namely that which is accessible to actors at any

given time in its incompleteness and distortion and replete with its blind spots of ignorance' (Archer, 1995: 149-150).

²² I say more on this subject in the Conclusion of this thesis. For now, I should point out that there exists a serious problem for critical realism in relation to the types of causes that are to be found in the social world. The problem that Bhaskar has focused upon, issues to do with intervening and countervailing causes, are not the main reason why there are not any universal causes in the social sciences.

4. Supervenience & Social Realism¹

In an article in the British Sociological Association journal *Sociology* Kieran Healy (1998) has argued that not only might Margaret Archer's model of critical realism lead to the reification of social structure but that the concept of supervenience might serve as a useful tool in rectifying this problem. He believes that not only does it lead to a simpler realist ontological claim but that it will help to overcome the confusion implicit in Archer's (1995, 1996a, and 1996b) idea that some social structures are past tense 'activity dependent'². The primary purpose of this chapter is to assess the usefulness of 'supervenience' with respect to the structure-agency problem that Healy raises and to suggest some preliminary thoughts on the ways in which social theory might capture the feeling of social constraint inherent in situations described by Archer as 'morphostasis'. As the concept of supervenience has a variety of meanings I begin by defining its potential. This will involve looking at the way in which the concept has been used elsewhere - specifically in the field of ethics and the philosophy of mind (the mind-body debate). Having established a full and accurate interpretation of supervenience it may then be possible to both assess the concepts use in the Archer-Healy context of 'analytical dualism', and apply it to the structure-agency problem more generally.

Given that the concept of supervenience is frequently used in a debate over reductionism and dualism in the philosophy of mind it could offer some promise in a structure-agency context. The mind-body debate, which has a much longer history than its sociology counterpart, shows many similarities to what has happened in social theory in recent decades and has included contributions from all sides ranging from an out-and-out reduction of the mental to the physical to a Cartesian dualism. As in sociology in recent years questions have been raised about the validity of these extreme positions; physical reductionists appear to have failed to overcome problems of 'multiple realisation' and qualia (the intuitive feeling that the mental is qualitatively distinct from its physical base) whilst traditional dualists have not managed to explain, beyond the mysterious

existence of a soul, in what way mental phenomena might be causally efficacious. It was in this context that supervenience was introduced as a rescue package that appeared to enable philosophers of mind to combine ontological monism (physicalism) with substance dualism (mind and body) - a non-reductive physicalism. The concept has also played a significant role in the fields of both ethics and aesthetics. In these domains it has been used as a way of overcoming faults associated with naturalism (see below).

At first sight then, the introduction of 'supervenience' into the field of social theory would seem like no bad thing. Perhaps it can do for social theory in general, and realism in particular, what its advocates claim it has done for psychology. That is, to allow us to escape from a crude reduction whilst maintaining the importance of base properties. This, it is assumed, is what Healy is hoping for. Before we can begin to assess its merits in this sense we need to clearly understand what 'supervenience' entails. The concept has multiple meanings and these must be clarified before we attempt to apply it to the realm of social realism.

What is supervenience?

As the supervenience thesis in its structure-agency context is proposed by Healy I shall begin with his explication. Healy (1998:516-7) states

To say that A supervenes on B is to say there can be no difference in A without there being differences in B. This implies that when cases agree in subvening respects they agree in supervening respects.

Although this cursory description of supervenience is in a sense accurate it is also insufficient. In the philosophy of mind, in ethics, and in aesthetics, where the concept has been most often applied, there is much more to supervenience than a simple covariance between two or more associated entities. In fact, Healy's brief summary is consistent with full-blown reductionism. That is, to say that there exists a covariance between A properties and B properties may be construed as saying: A can be reduced to B³ in terms of Nagelian reduction⁴. Furthermore, as Kincaid (1994:498) notes, in the old debate between

methodological individualists and collectivists Watkins (1968) claimed that supervenience leads to the conclusion that:

the social supervenes on the individual in the sense that any two social domains exactly alike in terms of the individuals and individual relations composing them would share the same social properties

Here, supervenience is governed by the 'exhaustion principle'. This states, simply and uncontroversially, that: '[i]ndividuals exhaust the social world in that every entity in the social realm is either an individual or a sum of such individuals' (Kincaid, 1994:499). A methodological individualist ontology, the notion that social entities are nothing more than resultant properties, requires that supervenience entails reduction. This, it is claimed, follows from the 'determination principle' which has been defined as meaning that '[i]ndividuals determine the social world in the intuitive sense that once all the relevant facts ... about individuals are set, then so too are all the facts about social entities, events, etc.' (*ibid.*). However, it is clear in the structure-agency debate that the key protagonists do not want this kind of explanation of social activities. Archer (1996:xii) sums this up when she asks sociologists to accept, *a priori*, the common sense intuition that:

it is part and parcel of daily experience to feel both free and enchained, capable of shaping our own futures and yet confronted by towering, seemingly impersonal constraints⁵

Thus, a clear understanding of non- reductive supervenience is our first priority. This brings us back to the uses of supervenience in other areas of philosophy.

I will begin with an example adapted from R.M. Hare's (1952) *The Language of Morals*, concerning the use of value words such as 'good', 'bad', 'ought', etc. Hare (1952:79ff) looks first at a non-moral use of the word 'good'. He asks us to suppose that before us are two paintings which are in all respects identical; imagine that one is a replica of the other. He claims that it would cause puzzlement or confusion to a listener should somebody claim that these two paintings are identical in all respects apart from the fact that one is good and the other is not. At first sight this implies that the meaning of the word 'good' might

be reduced (or deduced from) to the physical components of the two paintings; the definitely recognisable features of the paintings⁶. However, Hare argues, a reduction of 'good' in this way would make a nonsense of our use of evaluative terminology.

Why should this be so? Well, suppose that one such descriptive feature was 'her enigmatic smile' (strictly speaking, the physical composition of Mona Lisa's smile) if we now accept that the goodness of this picture can be reduced it becomes impossible to say, for example, 'this picture is good because of her enigmatic smile'. This would be equivalent of saying this picture is good (i.e. enigmatic smile ...) because it is good (i.e. enigmatic smile ...). This leaves us in a difficult position. We can see how the goodness of the picture is dependent upon certain physically descriptive characteristics but we do not want to reduce 'good' to these features because we lose our evaluative conception of 'good'.

Hare's circumvention of this problem involved the introduction of a qualified notion of supervenience. He argued, we may begin by stating the obvious dependence relationship between the goodness of Da Vinci's Mona Lisa and such characteristics as 'her enigmatic smile'. However, in order to avoid reductionism we may qualify this statement by adding that 'good' is a higher level property that is *distinct* from such base descriptive properties as 'her enigmatic smile'. The descriptive property of the picture (the enigmatic smile, etc.) forms a minor premise whilst the evaluative property of the picture (general standards of assessing pictures) forms a major premise. The evaluative is clearly dependent upon the descriptive but the former cannot be reduced to the latter *à la* naturalism/reductionism⁷.

A further example of the use of supervenience can be found in many physicalist theories of mind (see Chalmers 1996). It is suggested that supervenience accounts of the mind-body problem emerged from the need to explain characteristics of consciousness (specifically the problem of qualia) in a physicalist ontology. This was necessary because simple reductionism failed to capture the qualitative character of mental properties. How does supervenience help?

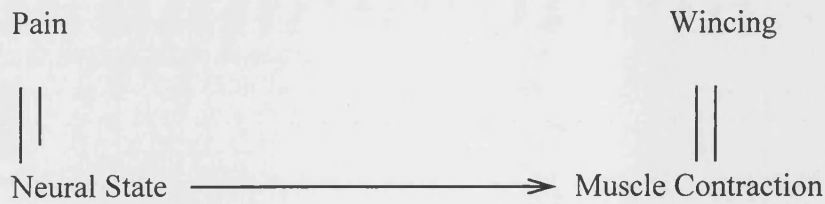
The matter is similar to Hare's analytical philosophy problem in so far that the higher level properties are dependent upon their higher level physical properties. Following the developments in neurophysiology it is evident that conscious experiences are correlated with neurophysiological measures of electrical activity, blood flow, etc. (see Hobson 1999). However, simple reductionist models fail to explain how these physical changes can instantiate the co-occurring conscious experiences of the mind. This problem, defined by Levine (1983) as the explanatory gap, has become a central focus for philosophers of mind (Chalmers 1996). Typically it is expressed in terms of a hypothetical relationship between cortical-fibres and the qualitative character of mental phenomena such as pain, joy, love, etc. Advocates of supervenience in this context want, in short, to recognise that mental phenomena possess emergent properties. It is argued that we can do this by placing conditions on the supervenient entity and its relation to its physical base. Kim (1996:149) sets out three such conditions for mind-body supervenience:

- (1) If N is a neural state on which mental property M supervenes, then N is a sufficient condition for the occurrence of M.
- (2) M can have multiple supervenience bases, N_1, N_2, \dots, N_n each of which is sufficient to give rise to M
- (3) M is distinct from each of its many bases, N_1, N_2, \dots "

The main problems with mind-body reduction arise from the contingency of (2) known as the problem of multiple realisation which hinders physical reduction⁸.

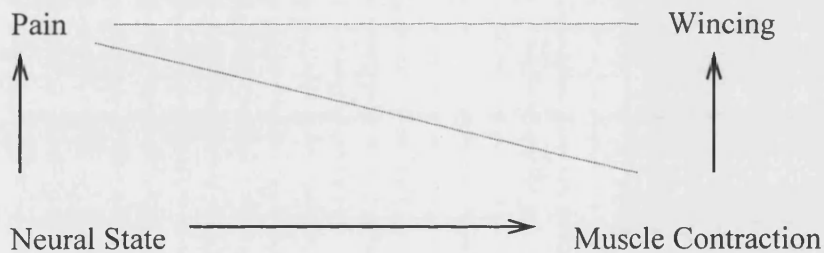
Following Kim (1996:150f) we can see how an account of pain based on a supervenience model might differ from reductionism:

Figure 7. A Reductionist Model of Pain



In this model pain is simply identical to neural state, wincing is identical to muscle contraction and the neural state, and it alone, causes muscle contraction.

Figure 8. A Physical Supervenient Model



The introduction of a conditional form of supervenience allows several things. First, it provides pain and wincing with their own identities, these mental properties supervene on, respectively, the neural state and muscle contraction. The mental in this model, it is important to note, is a property in its own right; it is not reducible to, although it is dependent upon, its physical realiser(s). Thus, where both models capture the dependence of the mental phenomenon on its physical realiser(s) the physical supervenient model grants, in addition to this, the mental the status of a distinct or *sui generis* phenomenon. It appears to have solved the qualia problem. But has it?

As Kim further notes, at best the jury is still out. The special status of distinct entity attributed to mental phenomena quickly dissipates upon closer inspection

of the above model. For we can see that the causal powers of the mental phenomenon are, as with the reductionist model, wholly derived from its physical realiser(s); the mental may possess new properties in a qualitative sense but in terms of causation it remains vacuous. Thus, on all accounts, if the phenomenon cannot be shown to be causally efficacious, without slipping back into the mysterious realm of Cartesianism, the reality of the mental, with respect to explanation, is doubtful⁹.

Healy's use of Supervenience: the demographic structure

How does this bode for the introduction of supervenience in the structure-agency debate? At first sight, the prospect of success still seems promising. The structure-agency debate does not appear to be riddled with the type of monism that has resulted in so many problems in the mind-body debate. We might therefore avoid the pitfalls of reductionism by anticipating that both supervenient and subvenient phenomena will be causally efficacious¹⁰. Before assessing this strong view of supervenience, let us look, first, at the example of the usefulness of supervenience as it is applied by Healy to the description and explanation of the so-called 'demographic structure'.

As noted in Chapter 3 the demographic structure was introduced into the structure-agency debate by Archer (1995 and 1996b): it was used as an example of how the form of a structure (its so-called emergent property or properties) might continue over a period of time despite the best efforts of agents to change it; what Archer refers to as a morphostatic circumstance. One effect of a top-heavy demographic structure, noted by Archer (1995: 174), is the inability of a government to implement a generous pensions' policy. How should we explain this situation? Archer argues that the endurance of the demographic structure cannot be attributed to contemporary actors. That is, we cannot lay the blame on the current generation, even though they constitute the demographic structure, because:

it was not *their* intention to structure it that way nor the unintended consequences of *their* actions, nor the intentionality of contemporary agents

for we have presumed they all seek its transformation. (Archer 1995:143 emphasis in original)

Consequently,

the activity dependence of such structures can be affirmed in only one acceptable way: by reference to the activities of the long dead (ibid. emphasis in original)

It is at this point that Healy (1998:518) takes exception to Archer's use of 'activity dependence'. He argues:

This is a very confusing and unhelpful way to speak of the relationship between social structures and individuals. It makes us believe in social structures whose existence in the present is entirely independent of the people who make up society, which is impossible¹¹

Healy's response is surprising as the implication of this statement is that he is not entirely convinced by a social realist conception of social structures. For if we accept realism *à la* Archer (1995) and, according to her re-interpretation of Bhaskar (1975 & 1998) we must accept the ontological independence of social structures¹². Nevertheless, he is in a sense correct, it does seem rather odd that those who make up the 'aggregate' are left out of Archer's discussion of the demographic structure. According to Healy (1998:516) the introduction of supervenience at this point leads to 'a simpler ontological claim [which] can sustain ... analytical dualism and avoid the problems faced by Giddens, Mouzelis and others'. He claims we can proceed in the following way: first, we state the demographic structure supervenes on everyone who makes it up; second, we acknowledge that there exists a causal chain stretching back from the present to past actions that explains why the demographic structure is top-heavy.

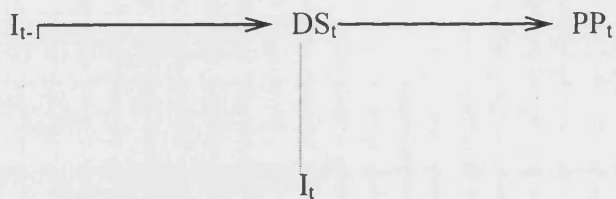
Consequently, both Healy and Archer agree that the present demographic structure (DS_t) might, amongst other things one presumes, determine in the present the adoption of a pensions' policy (PP_t) and that this can be explained by the actions of individuals in the past (I_{t-1}). We can, with relevant causal arrows, set this out in diagrammatic form

Figure 9. The Causal Relationship between Demography and Pensions' Policies



Both Archer and Healy acknowledge that members of DS_t are unable to do anything about DS_t and both agree that members of DS_t will be active with regard to some future demographic structure (DS_{t+1}). But Healy wants a role for members of DS_t now. The question is whether supervenience allows for such a role. Let us now adapt our diagram to show Healy's supervenience relationship between I_t and DS_t

Figure 10. Healy's (Supervenience) Relationship between Demography and Pensions' Policies



We can now see that today's individuals make up today's demographic structure. But how far does this get us with regard to a description or explanation of contemporary events? Namely, the problem that Archer points to: the inability of government to provide a generous pensions policy. The broken line represents a supervenient relationship. It is broken for a purpose: because Healy acknowledges that in terms of explanation it is I_{t-1} that is doing all the causal work. Thus, like the mind-body example, the role of one of the phenomena is vacuous (although here it is the subvenient kind). As such it has no explanatory force. The introduction of supervenience has achieved very little! Healy's 'supervenience' is nothing like the relation hoped for by non-reductionist physicalists because in this (somewhat contrived and simplified) example we find that reduction gives us all that we need¹³. Which, of course, is what Archer predicted it would do. In addition to the careful distinction we made between 'supervenience' and reductionism (bottom-up form) and

supervenience and nonreductionism (the holy grail of mind-body substance dualism) we can add a further supervenience category, again reductionist but this time of the top-down form¹⁴. The explanation of PP_t is captured (by the realist) fully by ‘downward conflation’: the demographic structure has reduced ‘agents’ to “*träger* or bearers of its properties” (Archer, 1995:80).

What Healy appears to have captured is the truism of methodological individualism: no people - no society. However, both Archer (1995:143) and Bhaskar (1979:37) claim to acknowledge this point. Supervenience, it would seem, is in this format quite consistent with Archer’s realist framework. Furthermore, supervenience appears to be nothing more than the aforementioned exhaustion principle; a principle that no sociologist could possibly doubt. If we are to be generous to Healy we might conclude that supervenience has highlighted this truism in a way that Archer took for granted. But, against Healy’s claim that supervenience captures the present tense relation between agents and the demographic structure we ought to note that the above diagrams are in at least one important respect inaccurate. In the place of the predicate I_{t-1} , I ought to have introduced a new predicate, say A_{t-1} , to capture past tense activity dependence. This is because the physical realisers of DS_t ought to be held to be distinct from the agents who are somehow responsible for its form. As we shall see when I apply the concept of supervenience to present tense activity dependence the concept of ‘agent’ is not simply equal to ‘individual’.

Healy may well be aware of this distinction between agent and physical being, if so, he should also be cognizant of the fact that the physical composition of the demographic structure does not capture an abstract feeling of social constraint. Supervenience, in this weak sense, describes in a most basic way a necessary (but far from sufficient) condition of any circumstance we label social; without people there can be no social. There is a better way of capturing the feeling of constraint felt by present tense actors than simply stating a trivially true covariance relationship that owes more to the nature of this so-called structure¹⁵ than anything special about supervenience. That is to see Archer’s ‘long dead’ actions as of a kind known non-causal Cambridge events.

Activity Dependence and Cambridge Dependence

As I have already noted, Healy introduced the notion of supervenience in order to clear up what he saw as a confusing use of activity dependence. One which, in his mind, seemed to leave the impression of reification. In fact, as our discussion so far has suggested, Archer is in some sense correct when she describes the relationship between the present social structure and the activities of the 'long dead'. Although I would argue that the explanation is, at best, elliptic (see the conclusion of this chapter). We can also agree with Healy with respect to the supervenience relationship between the physical (human beings) and the demographic structure. Where we might disagree with him is with his claim that this kind of supervenience captures social constraint.

On the other hand, in one important sense Healy has a valid point to make. Archer's notion of past tense activity dependence, her explanation of present tense social constraint, requires further elaboration. There are two reasons for this. First, talk of actions 'long ago' does not capture contemporary feelings of constraint as well as it might. Second, the causal relation that Archer is attempting to establish with respect to the actions of the 'long-dead' does not stand up to close inspection. The second point is perhaps more important than the first; if we get a good grip on it I hope a 'feeling of constraint' will follow automatically. In order to deal with this let me introduce an example from the philosophy of causation. Consider the following set of events¹⁶:

Socrates was married to Xantippe

Socrates drank hemlock and died in prison

Xantippe became a widow

One question that follows from this is: what *caused* Xantippe's widowhood? The normal response would be to claim that Socrates' death caused it. This seems to fit neatly with Humean regularity: whenever a husband dies his wife becomes a widow. However, in terms of causation we face a problem, for Socrates died in prison and Xantippe was not in the prison with him. The two events occurred in an instant and simultaneously but there is a spatial gap

between the antecedent and the consequent and no causal mechanism to link the two. As Kim (1993:23) notes:

if it is plausible to locate these events at different spatial locations, we would have to accept this case as one in which causal action is propagated instantaneously through spatial distance

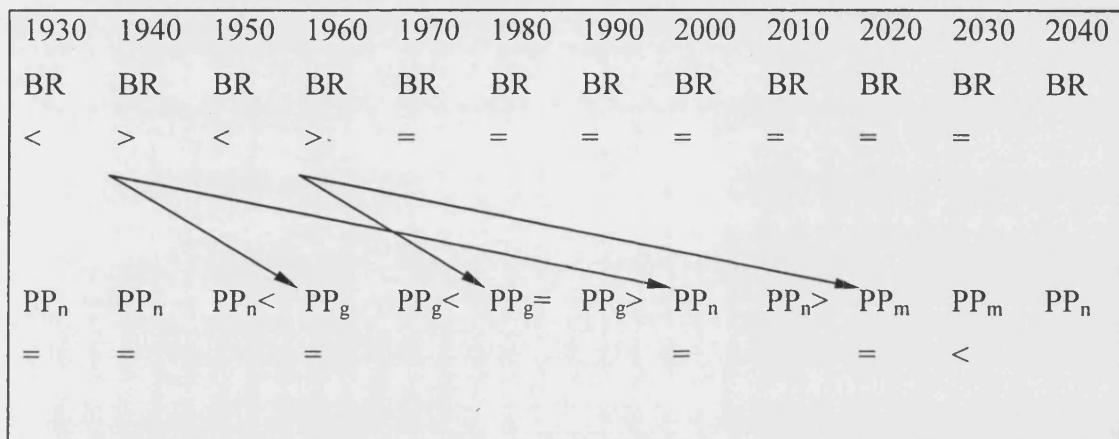
How are we to explain the event of Xantippe's widowhood? Kim argues that Xantippe's widowhood is a noncausal event that is dependent upon another event (the death of Socrates). It is, following his terminology, a 'Cambridge event', an event that 'does not represent a condition in the object to which it is attributed' (Kim 1993:29). The idea of a Cambridge event, or Cambridge change, can be traced to Peter Geach's (1969) critique of Russell's and McTaggart's definition of 'change.' A change, according to these Cambridge philosophers, can be said to have occurred to an object if there is a predicate true of it at one time but false at a later time. This is most obviously true for the above example: let the predicate *F* stand for being the wife of Socrates, let *t* stand for the moment prior to Socrates' death and *t*₁ stand for some time after Socrates' death. Whilst *t* is true *t*₁ is false. What Geach (1969:71ff) observed, by reference to a different example, was that this type of change does not represent a change to the actual object in question but a change to an object that is somehow related to it. In terms of explanation and causation we must, therefore, distinguish between what Geach called 'mere Cambridge changes' and 'real changes.'¹⁷

Might Archer's past tense 'activity dependence', with its part-reliance upon the 'long-dead', parallel this example? Let us return to the demographic structure. Here we need, for the sake of simplicity, to make some rather crude assumptions. First, let it be assumed that all that matters with regard to setting a pensions policy are demographic factors i.e. the demographic is both necessary and sufficient (we know in fact that fiscal policy and life expectancy are, *inter alia*, equally important). We can also assume that other drains upon government spending remain constant (again extremely unrealistic). Second, assume that all people are educated to the age of 20, work between 20 and 60, thereafter retire

and then die at age 80. Given these assumptions we can draw up the following diagram to demonstrate, approximately, the relationship between the birth rate and government policy.

Let BR stand for birth rate and PP stand for governments' pensions' policies (where the subscript indicates normal (n), generous (g) and mean (m))

Figure 11. A Model of Demographic Trends 1930-2040



As crude as this example may be there are some points that equate roughly to the problems facing governments who fail to 'save for tomorrow'. There are four key effects (highlighted by arrows) that respond to baby boom periods during the 1940s and 1960s (the above diagram simplifies by placing all birth-

in 1940 and 1960 but the effect would be the same):

ing increased

(1) The 1940 cohort join the employment market in 1960 generat tax revenue and allowing for a generous pensions' policy.

ing increased
policy for 20

(2) The 1960 cohort join the employment market in 1980 generat tax revenue and allowing for an even more generous pensions' ; years (a halcyon period but for unemployment levels)

lowering tax

(3) The 1940 cohort leave the employment market in 2000 thus

(4) The 1960 cohort leave the employment market in 2020 lowering tax revenue and increasing government spending on pensions. We are now faced with a mean pensions' policy.

Firstly, we should note the temporal gaps between birth, employment, retirement, and death and the problem this causes to those setting government policy. Similar to Socrates' death and Xantippe's widowhood pre-birth agency (the decision of war brides and grooms) and retirement (contemporary government policy making) represent two distinct events. The latter is, in this contrived example, entirely dependent (historically) on the former. However, the gap between agency and structural constraint is not spatial but temporal.

Secondly, we can observe that the changes that have occurred are not 'real' changes for those who now receive a less generous pension but represent changes elsewhere that have reduced the amount of revenue that today's government obtains. The set of people receiving a pension in the year 2000 have not changed throughout their lives, and they worked the same number of years as the 1990 cohort and made the same financial contributions, and they are the same age as the 1990 cohort were when they first received their pensions. It is not a change in pension qualifications or anything else to do with pensions that brought about this situation. Quite simply, today's pensioners are victims of Cambridge event(s). Distinguishing between the real changes to the demographic structure and non-causal Cambridge changes may help us to understand both feelings of frustration and constraint. Today's pensioners want more and expect more because their circumstances are no different to yesterday's pensioners who received more. Governments are exasperated by their failure to implement a generous pensions' policy. Perhaps, this example of constraint captures Archer's (1995:165) 'human condition':

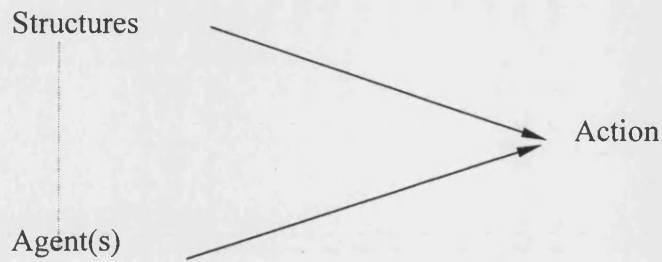
Society is that which nobody wants, in the form in which they encounter it for it is an unintended consequence. Its constitution could be expressed as a riddle: what is it that depends on human intentionality but never conforms to their intentions?

Let me finish this section by proposing, tentatively, that Cambridge change and Cambridge events are ubiquitous in structure-agent relations. Very often the outcome for actors attached to particular structural conditions is a feeling of dismay. One such example might be new initiatives arising from what we can call the 'education structure'; models indicating ways of teaching pupils at all levels of schooling. Some teachers teach in approximately the same way as they taught ten years ago. However, then they were deemed to be 'good' teachers now they are 'bad' teachers. Similarly, many of today's 'unfashionable' might be classified as being 'left behind' by Cambridge events. This said, I should warn against placing too much explanatory emphasis upon Cambridge change. Behind labels such as unfashionable and 'poor teacher' lie differences in interpretation or signification; themes I have indirectly touched on in my discussion of Hare's use of supervenience. In Chapter 5 I will elaborate upon this in relation to cultural types.

Supervenience in the present tense: The Marriage Structure

As we have seen, mind-body supervenience is a strange sort of concept. The role of mental phenomena is not entirely clear. Advocates wanted some sort of role for mental phenomena but ultimately they failed to obtain a meaningful one. Healy also wanted a role for supervenience but his choice of example simply led to the trivially true statement: 'the material presence of society = persons and the (material) results of their actions' (Bhaskar 1979:37). However, I have implied that the position in sociology might be, if we so wished, different from that in the mind-body debate. Let us assume, therefore, that Healy's choice of example was ill-judged; perhaps there are situations where both the subvenient (individuals) and the supervenient (the social) are causally efficacious. If so our supervenience model might look something like this:

Figure 11 A Subvenient-Supervenient Model of Action



You will notice that in order to avoid simply re-iterating the exhaustion principle I have made some changes to Healy's vocabulary. Thus, instead of the term 'individual' we now have 'agents' this is necessary in order to give our subvenient phenomenon some causal efficacy. Let us call this 'strong supervenience' as opposed to the weaker variety that deals with the individuals-society relationship.

We can begin by noting two important points. First, in terms of strong supervenience, if realism is true, we must expect co-variance between the emergent properties of a structure and the emergent properties of agents. As Archer (1996:694) comments agency is just equal to 'creativity, innovativeness and reflexivity'. So, unlike our previous examples we are not seeking a co-variance between a *physical* entity and a *non-physical* entity but covariance between two *abstract* entities where both are causally efficacious (we want to avoid the vacuous phenomena problem). This is important, for Healy (1998:509) far from supplying us with 'the minimum ontological claim necessary for a realist understanding of the structure-agent relationship' has, in fact, begged-the-ontological-question. He frequently muddies the water by an interchangeable use of the terms physical and agent. This is a category error for agency entails much more than physical realisation. Only in so far as we can talk of an individual-structure-agent relationship is physical realisation of base importance. In short, realists do not want to express a non-reductive physicalism for it fails to capture agency which is not physical but is a mind-structure relationship.

Second, agency invites voluntarism. As Giddens (1984:9) comments:

Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently.

Acknowledging these two points and earlier issues leads us to conclude that strong supervenience, where both agent and structure possess causal powers, must entail voluntarism. If we want this form of supervenience we must also accept that structures are *always* sufficiently malleable to afford choice to those individuals in the present who come up against them. Unfortunately, this position turns out to be far closer to Archer's interpretation of Giddens' notion of the duality of structures¹⁸ than it is to Archer's analytical dualism.. Not only is this problematic for a theorist, like Healy, who seems to want to advocate analytical dualism but it is hard to see how, in practice, co-variance might be maintained in situations where constraint prevails. An example may demonstrate the kind of problem that strong supervenience encourages.

Let us assume, from a realist perspective, that there is something that we can call a marriage structure. It has the following emergent properties: division of labour, prohibition of incest, formalization of reproduction, and exogenous affinity. Agency we have already defined. If we add the two together we have a (partial) explanation as to why, say, X married Y. But in doing this we must, in order to satisfy co-variance, clamp X's and Y's reasons for marrying to the emergent properties of the marriage structure. The two must be temporally conjoined. Looking at our marriage relations it is quite clear that a strong form of supervenience is simply unrealistic. Until relatively recently brides were expected to "love, honour, cherish and obey" their husbands. Quite understandably many women (and men) felt that such a relationship between husband and wife was unsatisfactory - it went against their intentions and plans when marrying. For a while there was little that could be done, marriage had to be entered into, the promise had to be made and obedience for many may have been reluctantly given. During this period can we seriously maintain that the structure of marriage (the properties of husband-wife relations) and agency (to marry or not to marry, to create new relations, to innovate, etc.) were co-variant?

Eventually, and gradually, matters changed and, from a realist perspective, it seems that the pre-conditions of marriage altered. But, in the short-run there was no agency and, therefore, no co-variance.

The kind of voluntarism that strong supervenience entails is precisely that which Archer (1995:65) wished to avoid:

The central argument is that structure and agency can only be linked by examining the interplay between them over time, and that without the proper incorporation of time the problem of structure and agency can never be satisfactorily resolved

Furthermore, she categorically states that the two must be treated distinctly in all aspects. They are 'neither co-extensive nor co-variant through time' (Archer 1995:66)¹⁹.

Where weak supervenience simply fails to address the structure-agent issue, strong supervenience addresses it in ontological terms but misleads us into supposing that a person is always capable of reflecting and acting so as to change unwanted structural constraints. Strong supervenience is, for a realist, far too strong far too often²⁰.

Conclusion

The intention of those philosophers of mind who introduced the concept of supervenience into the mind-body debate was to overcome problems inherent to forms of reduction. So far it would appear that they have failed. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise, aside from their success or failure, that the structure-agent issue in sociology is a different animal. Where the debate in psychology surrounds whether the supervenient qualia entity plays a leading role in the explanation of conscious phenomena such as pain its role in explaining the past-tense activity dependence of resistant (to change) social structural relations is minimal. It will not help because, by definition, the subvenient entities are stuck with their lot. At best Healy's notion of supervenience covers physical presence; it requires us to acknowledge that without physical presence there can be no

structure and no agent. For most of us this is unproblematic. What is problematic is the application of supervenience to the structure-agent debate in this way.

Archer's contention is that in certain social circumstances agency may well be absent but she makes no reference to the 'individual', who, by definition, cannot be so. Archer's distinction between the morphogenetic and the morphostatic was aimed at, respectively, the presence and absence of agents; the individual is not a part of her framework. This said, as noted earlier, Healy makes a valid point when he points to the unappealing character of the absence of contemporary actors in Archer's explanation of governments that are unable to implement, due to the presence of a top-heavy demographic structure, a generous pensions' policy. One problem we are grappling with here is the fact that social realism proposes that there are different types of 'structure' and, I shall argue in Chapter 5, that these types may reduce in different ways.

I have also argued that Cambridge change helps to clarify the relationship between past tense activity and present tense constraint. It does this in a peculiar way, in a way that is far closer to Giddens' structuration theory or Hare's version of supervenience than Archer's notion of the past-tense activity dependence that has resulted in a top-heavy demographic structure. It is closer because it captures something that a morphological interpretation can never hope to obtain: the interpretation and knowledge of social actors caught up in social change. Thus, what needs to be made clear, and I will elaborate on this point in the Conclusion of this thesis, is that morphological explanations of causation accounts may be useful to the realist in describing the sometimes (seemingly) absent agent and his wants but they are at best elliptical explanations of otherwise complex phenomena. Healy is right to point to the need for further causal analysis or incorporation of contemporary actors in any such explanation. Archer, in my view, is guilty of simplification and imbuing social structures with a life of their-own that is simply not possible to sustain. What is clearly missing in her explanation (as well as Healy's) is the signification or interpretive schema of present day actors (see Giddens, 184:28ff). Without this neither the demographic structure nor a pensions' policy

makes any sense. Later, this obvious insight shall lead us away from dualist solutions in particular and critical realism in general, but for the moment there is one more point that needs to be addressed.

I noted earlier that at least implicitly both Archer and Bhaskar acknowledge the exhaustion principle as a prerequisite for sociological investigation. However, there are occasions when Archer allows her realism to extend beyond this principle. For instance, in discussing knowledge, she comments:

If we think of culture then all knowledge was certainly activity dependent for its genesis and elaboration. Nevertheless, once recorded (chiselled into runes or gathering dust in the British Museum), it constitutes knowledge without a current knowing subject. It is knowledge because it retains the dispositional character to be understood, though it persists unrecognized, sustaining potential powers (of contradiction and complementarity with other cultural items) which remain unexercised (Archer, 1995:144).

If Archer describes such materials as real in any social sense it would appear that she has contravened a principle she herself acknowledged as true. In the following chapter I will assess Archer's position on this issue and place it into the context of the differences that Archer (following Bhaskar) places upon the 'actual' and the 'real' and, (following, indirectly, Durkheim) the morphological and the cultural. However, I deal with one issue which is of an aside but nevertheless important in relation to the status of social facts, and, by consequence, the structure-agency debate: the reduction of the social sciences.

Notes for Chapter 4.

¹ This chapter draws largely on my publication in *Sociology*. See Le Boutillier (2001).

² By which she means the form (emergent properties) of a structure is dependent upon agential actions of, in her words, the 'long dead'. Archer demonstrates that in many cases actors in the present tense are unable to change a structures form, they are constrained by the structure.

³ Clearly, Healy did not intend to put forward a reductionist account. He states : 'If we think of societies as abstract objects made up of relations that supervene on individuals, we can move towards a useful , non-reductive physicalism' (1998:516). The idea of physicalism in sociology is something I will return to later.

⁴ See E. Nagel (1961) Note, also, as Kim (1996) makes clear reductionism is not a necessarily bad thing - provided we can ascertain 'bridge laws' between the two theories it leads to a simplification of the way in which we see the world as well as allowing us to see how certain high level properties, say, temperature, are just equal to certain low level properties, say, mean kinetic energy. For a further elaboration of Nagelian reduction see note 7. below.

⁵ The rationale of structure-agency sociology is captured neatly by Andrew Sayer (1992:96ff) when he argues that structuralism turns actors into mere dupes, or 'automata' whilst voluntarism gives actors' accounts a false privilege. This is also Giddens's (1979) and Mouzelis' (1995) starting point, both of whom offer criticisms of voluntarism and social determinism.

⁶ A naturalist interpretation of 'good'. Hare asks that we suppose that there are some 'defining characteristics' of a good picture (it does not matter if this is a conjunction of characteristics, a disjunction of characteristics (but see, below, the problem of multiple realisation) or a single characteristics). Let P stand for the picture and C stand for the characteristics. Following 'naturalism' we might then say 'P is a picture and P is C'.

⁷ In a similar example, where Hare is concerned with good in the moral sense, he states: 'It is that a statement of the characteristics of the man (the minor or factual premise) *together with* a specification of a standard for judging men morally (the major premise), entails a moral judgement upon him' (Hare 1952:145), emphasis in original. The 'standard for judging', it is made clear in other examples, is relative (relational) to the class of good and bad characteristics.

⁸ The problem is this. Our aim is to reduce the target theory (the mental) to the base theory (the physical). However, we know that our mental states, such as pain, can be realised in wildly diverse physical ways e.g. the variety of neural-biological structures in, say, humans (N_h), reptiles (N_r), molluscs (N_m), etc. (N_i). We have, therefore, a set of disjunctive realisers. Unfortunately, the obvious step of treating this set as a single kind, i.e. $\{N_h \vee N_r \vee N_m \vee \dots \vee N_n\}$, is closed off to us because the heterogeneity of the predicates prevents Nagel reduction; the logical relation between the properties of the target theory and the base theory will not be biconditional. Multiple realisation therefore defeats psychophysical reduction.

⁹ Given this unfavourable outcome, Kim (1993) abandons a non-reductionist account of mind-body relations. In its place he advocates 'local physical reduction'. Multiple realisation means that the physical has to be relativised. But, Kim argues, we have overlooked the fact that if the antecedent (the physical) is heterogeneous then the consequent (the mental) must also be heterogeneous. The solution, therefore, is to relativise both neural substrates and mental phenomena producing 'structure-restricted correlations'. In this way multiple realisation becomes an obsolete term associated with what is now defined as a 'loose' concept known inaccurately, in general parlance, as 'pain'. Unfortunately, Kim does not comment on the qualitative aspect of mental phenomena.

¹⁰ The situation is not as clear cut as I have implied. For example, Archer, following Bhaskar, distinguishes between 'continuity' and 'change' (in social activity) in terms of, respectively, 'morphostasis' and 'morphogenesis'. Where these terms are defined in the following way: morphostasis refers to 'those processes in complex system-environmental exchanges which tend to preserve or maintain a system's given form, organisation or state' (Archer 1995:166); morphogenesis relates to 'those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given

form, state or structure' (ibid.). According to Archer description and explanation of social activity involves deciding, from an empirical base, between morphostasis or morphogenesis. It seems to me that we are, therefore, always faced with an *exclusive* disjunction and our explanatory schemes look much like the mind-body ontological monism and substance dualism.

¹¹ According to Archer (199:145) not all structures behave in this way; it is always an empirical question as to whether 'activity dependence' is past or present tense. Healy notes this point.

¹² Healy is not entirely consistent on this point. Later in his article he notes 'structures may well have relational properties that are independent of agents' intentions and conceptions' (Healy 1998:519). This inconsistency follows, I believe, from a category error in his application of supervenience; see below.

¹³ The model is terribly simplified and in fact it doesn't 'give us all that we need' it provides the reader with all that a realist like Archer is prepared to specify about explaining something as complex as pensions' policies. To put this another way, it by-passes characteristic aspects of social construction and meaning without which it simply makes no sense to talk, other than elliptically, of explanation. (see, especially, Chapter 6)

¹⁴ I am not convinced that we can talk of the demographic structure as a social structure. There are two reasons for this. First, it looks suspiciously like a taxonomic collective - see Harré (1981:140). Healy's introduction of supervenience highlights this weakness: the set of people who make up society (I_s) are by definition equal to DS_s. Second, even if we might permit the 'demographic' the status of 'structure' we may still be barred from granting it the status of 'social'. For reasons noted in footnote 15, and explained in footnote 13 and Chapter 6.

¹⁵ The so-called demographic structure is of a morphological type. I will argue in the next chapter that such types appear to reduce in a different way to what I call cultural types of facts.

¹⁶ I have lifted this example straight out of Kim (1993).

¹⁷ A further example of a Cambridge event is the following: let H stand for being taller than my son, let t stand for 1975 and t₁ stand for 1985. H (x) was true for my father in 1975 and false ten years later. However, my father's height did not vary during this time period. The change that occurred to him was a Cambridge change. Conversely, if we let H stand for being shorter than my father and keep t and t₁ constant, we can say that a 'real' change occurred to me between these time periods. Geech argued that all changes are Cambridge changes but not all changes are real changes. Like Kim, I am making a virtue out of what Geech (1969:72) saw as an 'intuitively quite unsatisfactory' criterion for a thing having changed.

¹⁸ Note it is close to Archer's interpretation of Giddens, not my own. On this issue, see Chapter 6.

¹⁹ Archer inherited this key aspect of dualism from Lockwood (1964).

²⁰ Of course there are circumstances when, from Archer's perspective, strong supervenience may be relevant. This is when structure and agents' wants are synchronized.

5. Realism, Emergence and Social Kinds¹

Introduction

Whilst the reduction of the special sciences debate² rumbles on it has, at the very least, thrown up some rudimentary conclusions with respect to issues of an ontological character and an explanatory nature³. The concept of supervenience lies at the heart of these formulations⁴. Regardless of whether the unity or disunity of science is sought almost all agree that some one or other version of a supervenience relation between higher- and lower-level entities exists. And, although multiple realisation, emergent properties, or supervenient properties⁵ may (or may not) foil unity ontological identity necessitates that ultimately the world is made up of quantum particles. Thus, those who adhere to a disunity thesis nevertheless recognise that the different levels of reality are necessarily connected. For example, even if a mental qualia, such as pain, cannot be wholly reduced to a fixed set of (physical) base properties base it is simply not feasible to imagine 'pain' existing without some one or other set of physical entities. Equally, collectivists may claim that the whole (or the parts) of society – things we call 'structure', 'culture', 'supra-individuals', etc. – is distinguishable from the people or agents that make it up but they do not, in general, claim that the whole (or parts) could exist without the agents who make it up. On ontological grounds it just does not make sense to think of higher-level things in any such a way.

In the last chapter, and in relation to the social sciences, I referred to this fundamental way of seeing the world as 'weak supervenience' (or the supervenience principle) or the truism of methodological individualism: no people – no society⁶. Further, I assumed, on Archer's (1995:143) word, that she and Bhaskar (1979:37) both adhered to this view, that it could be taken for granted in their social theories, and that Healy (1998: 515) was unduly worrying about the spectre, in Archer's version of social realism, of 'social structures wandering around by themselves like so many lost cows'. In this chapter we will

look again at this issue and consider exactly what Archer means when she observes that the parts of society, the 'social structure' and 'Cultural System', are objective and relatively autonomous 'entities'. As we shall see Healy's claim that Archer's 'analytical dualism' leads to 'structures without the people who make them up' is not entirely groundless. However, the force of this point, the contravention of the exhaustion principle, does not necessarily take place in her analysis of what she calls 'social structures' (and, what I shall call, following Durkheim (1982) morphological social kinds) such as the 'demographic structure'. Setting aside some fundamental issues (and problems for realism) relating to the referent or signification of things like demography which I shall discuss in the next chapter, I shall argue quite simply that morphological kinds or 'social structures' can be shown to possess emergent properties⁷. And, what is more, analytical dualism, when its relationship to the 'actual' rather than the 'real' is re-introduced, either conforms to the supervenience principle on this matter or can be made to do so without damage to 'analytical dualism'.

However, I shall make two further claims that, in my view, make the prospects of defending a naturalism of the social world untenable. First, I shall argue that the main (supervenience) problem with 'analytical dualism' relates to what Archer calls the 'Cultural System'. That is, the social realm of ideas and beliefs. For, unlike Giddens and other social theorists involved in the 'structure-agency' debate, Archer does not want (all) ideas and beliefs to reside exclusively in the minds of agents or actors⁸. Instead, she places truth-functional ideas and beliefs into what she calls the 'propositional register' of society, *qua*, the Cultural System. The constituent bits ('truthful' – logically consistent – knowledge) of this register may pre-exist actors, are autonomous of them, and may be durable over time (see Archer, 1995:179ff, and 1996, Chapter 5). Consequently, for Archer, cultural emergent properties are to be analysed in the same morphogenetic/ morphostatic frame as social structural emergent properties. It is this aspect of Archer's 'parts'- 'people' account that seems most problematic. As we shall see, treating ideas and beliefs as autonomous of those actors or agents who apply them is almost certainly going to contravene the exhaustion principle; and, in such a way as to make a reconciliation between analytical dualism and the supervenience principle impossible⁹.

Second, I shall claim that the transference of realism from the realm of the natural sciences, following Bhaskar's seminal work, only makes sense if we can assume that both social and natural phenomena face identical problems concerning causation. Thus, the main aim of *A Realist Theory of Science* was to overcome problems associated with countervailing and intervening and in so doing to offer some way in which the laws of the natural world could be sealed or closed against such forces. This assumes, rightly or wrongly, that the laws of the natural world are mechanistically fixed; they are, in Bhaskar's words, the intransient objects of the natural world. This assumption, I will argue, is somewhat overlooked in the transference of the realist model to the social sciences. For, aside from either the success (or otherwise) of Bhaskar's model in the natural sciences or problems associated with closing open systems in the social world, the assumption leads wide open a question of validity. For, treating social phenomena (pertaining to human beings) as adhering to the kind of causal structure that *A Realist Theory of Science* assumes is problematic to say the least. In short, it shall be claimed, that the 'laws' of the social sciences cannot be universalised in the fashion of the laws of the natural sciences and, if this is the case, then the project of realism (or naturalism) is doomed to failure.

The chapter proceeds in the following way. I will begin with a brief reminder of Archer's position; a discussion that highlights the essence of her dualism and why emergence is fundamental to her approach and distinguishes it from its main rivals¹⁰. After this I will for the purpose of this analysis, follow Durkheim (1982) in distinguishing between two types of social fact. First, what I shall call morphological kinds or structures. These types are largely similar to what Archer denotes as 'social structure'. The second type consists of norms, beliefs, and ideas and will approximate to Archer's notion of culture (although not her 'Cultural System'). After analysing Archer's claims concerning the generative powers of both 'social emergent properties' and 'cultural emergent properties' (those things that make her structures/systems real) in relation to the supervenience principle I incorporate an (alternative) account of supervenience that borrows heavily from R.M. Hare's attempts to overcome the 'naturalistic fallacy'. Finally, as noted above, I ask whether in relation to the causal

properties of the social world the transfer of realism from the natural sciences to the social sciences has any legitimate foundation.

The Morphogenetic Approach: A Brief Summary

Let us begin by briefly reminding ourselves of the main tenets of Margaret Archer's version of social realism. The theory of analytical dualism, is consistently and clearly set out in her numerous publications (see Archer, 1995, 1996, 2000¹¹). There is one primary goal. Following Lockwood's (1964) seminal paper on the subject, Archer attempts to draw an ontological distinction between the 'parts' and 'people' of society, *qua*, 'analytical dualism'. Like Bhaskar (1978, 1991), Sayer (1992), and other social realists, this entails the development of an irreducible account of the 'social' whilst at one and the same time capturing the essence of the human condition to feel both constraint and freedom. The latter represents the easier part of this task. Freedom can be elicited by reference to the open nature of society¹² or the emergence of new 'structural' arrangements ('structural elaboration') or cultural variants ('cultural elaboration') in society. However, freedom and structural change is given ultimate force by the individuation of the 'self': a distinct, separate, but socially conditioned person (Adam is an 'agent' prior to being an 'actor'). Thus, Archer observes

One of our fundamental human potentials is also the source of the typically human predicament: homo sapiens has an imagination which can succeed in over-reaching their animal status ... One crucial implication of this creativity is that human beings have the unique potential to conceive of new social forms. Because of this, society can never be held to shape them entirely since the very shaping of society itself is due to them being the kind of beings who can envisage their own social forms (Archer, 1995: 289).¹³

Juxtaposing this sense of the 'self' (intertwined in and through social interaction) is a stratified array of irreducible social entities that are classified in terms of the 'parts' and 'people' of society: the social structural; the Cultural System; agents ('corporate' and 'primary'); and actors. All are 'real' in the sense of existing – within the analytical dual of the social world – in their own right.

That is, in the important sense of both having emergent properties and being temporally distinct from one another and relatively enduring despite the best efforts of agents. Thus, to repeat from Chapter 3, according to Archer (1995:66), analytical dualism is based on two premises:

- (i) The social world is stratified, such that the emergent properties of structures and agents are irreducible to one another, meaning that in principle they are analytically separable
- (ii) [Given that] structures and agents are also temporally distinguishable (... it is justifiable and feasible to talk of pre-existence and posteriority when dealing with specific instances of the two), and this can be used methodologically in order to examine the interplay between them and thus explain changes in both – over time

These features, according to Archer, lead to the avoidance of excessive voluntarism and unwarranted determinism and allow for a clear distinction between analytical dualism and Giddens' (1976, 1977, 1979, & 1984) structuration theory or duality of structure and agency. For, within this model it can be shown that social structures emerge (structural or cultural elaboration) through social interaction but also that constraints, via lingering structural properties, proliferate within society. The last point is significant. For, according to Archer, some structures despite the best intentions of actors simply resist change: the top-heavy demographic structure, the educational system of post-Revolutionary Cubans, or, the totalitarian political systems of communist regimes.

However, it is structural emergence or the notion of 'emergent properties' which supplies Archer with a base for a realist ontology and rules out, for her, the claim that social structures are 'virtual' or mere memory traces (see Giddens, 1979, 1984, 1993)¹⁴. Emergence, as Archer (1995: 66) notes:

...means that the two [structure and agent] are analytically separable, but also since given "structures" and given "agents" occupy and operate over different tracts of the time dimension they therefore are distinguishable from each other

As such, emergence is of primary ontological force. Without it, it would be impossible to justify not only the 'reality' of structure but also the relative autonomy of structure, structural elaboration, and structural constraint. Emergence also supplies the realist with a way of talking about social structures without implying reification (of the social world). It was this fear, Archer claims, that prevented collectivists such as Gellner (1971) and Lockwood (1964) from taking the leap from methodologically indispensable 'structures' to ontologically real 'structures'. Hence, a realist ontology:

furnishes that which collectivism lacked – an activity-dependent concept of structure, which is both genuinely irreducible yet in no danger of hypostatisation, and a non-atomistic conception of agents, to rectify the deficiencies of Individualism's individual – without, however, regarding the two elements as part of an inseparable 'duality' (Archer, 1996b:691)

With this brief summary of Archer's account we can begin to assess the ontological validity of Archer's distinction between 'structure' and 'agent' and its reliance upon emergent properties. I will do this in the following way. First, like Archer, and many others beside, I will divide social facts ('structures') into two kinds: morphological kinds and cultural kinds. I will define each in more detail but let us say for now that the latter approximates to what Durkheim meant by the *conscience collective* whilst the former refers to distributional aspects of society. Following this division, I will then consider the validity, given my adherence to 'weak' or 'dependence' supervenience, of maintaining that each of these two kinds have emergent properties and may therefore be said to exist *sui generis* or with relative autonomy from those lower-level entities that serve to compose the thing itself. But first a general word on the reduction debate.

Social Kinds

Central to any exposition of social supervenience or the reduction of the social sciences is the question of what kinds of things we are referring to when we talk of different levels or strata of reality. The reductionist cannot begin to talk of type-type reductions whilst the non-reductionist cannot talk of the (multiple)

realisation of supervenient entities unless there is some clearly defined notion of what social supervenient types we are referring to. Conceptually, there often appears to be something of a muddle surrounding what is and what is not to count as a higher level social phenomenon. Sometimes the higher level consists of beliefs, values, ideas, roles, rules and other products of socialisation whilst at other times it is resource distribution (inflation, employment, age, and so forth) which authors are referring to. The fact that the two classes appear to be fundamentally different, and may as such imply something different in terms of either reduction is usually passed over.

This occurs on both sides of the debate. On the one hand, Mellor (1982), for example, finds the reduction of sociology to psychology straightforward but in the process of reducing he frequently conflates psychological dispositions with what are quite clearly cultural features of a society. Smith (1992), although he rightly acknowledges the incompatible taxonomies of neuroscience and what he calls 'common-sense psychology', seems not to want to even mention sociological types in his discussion despite referring to events that are clearly social or cultural in character.¹⁵ On the other hand, non-reductionists such as Kincaid (1994) and Jackson and Pettit (1992a, 1992b) often invoke examples of both morphological and cultural kinds to refute explanatory reduction with little or no reference to the fact that these types may reduce (or not reduce) in different ways¹⁶. I have no gripe with most of these authors but I think it would be helpful to spell out the differences between the two more clearly rather than making vague references to 'social context', 'folk psychology', or 'cultural context'.

A starting point, in this respect, is Durkheim's (1982) distinction between social facts in *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Durkheim distinguishes between three types of social facts: morphological or anatomical facts, institutional norms, and non-institutional norms. For the purposes of this chapter it does no harm to the essence (those norms and values that pertain to socialisation/interaction) of the institutional and non-institutional types to conflate them into one category. And, to signify that these facts are properties of a group or society we might re-name them generically: 'structures'. Let us call

these social kinds 'morphological structures' and 'cultural structures'. Following Durkheim, 'morphological structures' may account for:

the number and nature of the elementary parts which constitute society, the way in which they are articulated, the degree of coalescence they have attained, the distribution of population over the earth's surface, the extent and nature of the network of communications, the design of dwellings, etc. (Durkheim, 1982:57)

A definition of this form requires some qualification. Most notably it needs to be tagged with a warning label for it can only serve as a preliminary demarcation from cultural types. As I will make clear later, whilst there is some value and necessity in distinguishing between these types there is no need to make an ontological assertion of a form that excludes, for example, conjoining morphological types with the kind of cultural dependence that they must, by definition, have. This, I shall claim, in the next chapter, is the main fault of Sewell's (1992) critique of structuration theory. Other than this I do not mean to include within this category mere taxonomic collectives or artificial constructs. Thus, like Archer, I am proposing – as a preliminary step – that when we talk of morphological structures we are referring to 'entities' which are not merely products of the sociologist's classification methods. Also, I think that this 'morphological structure' is more or less consistent with what Archer describes as the 'social structure'.

The second type of 'structure', based on Durkheim's *conscience collective*, I will define in a relatively straightforward manner – i.e. without delving into the depths of meaning, interpretation, and understanding – as shared ideas and beliefs that are not just common to some social group, that we might label a 'culture', but are a prerequisite for social interaction (and in many ways social integration). As numerous commentators in the social phenomenological or post-Wittgenstein traditions have observed, such beliefs and ideas are clearly not psychological dispositions¹⁷.

Now it is my contention that discussions about reduction, emergent properties, and supervenience relations have generally failed, or not considered it necessary

to that debate, to disentangle these two types: the morphological and cultural. I should stress that for the reduction debate, other than clarity, it probably has little bearing. That is, provided that it can be demonstrated that at least one of these social kinds is not reducible, which is relatively simple, the non-reductionist will win any argument concerning the validity, necessity, and autonomous status of social science. However, the implications for social theory, and social explanation, are fundamental. For, although the two types may play an equally fundamental role in explanation, when we observe them separately – which in social research it is difficult if not impossible to do – it is clear that something very different (in terms of reduction, structure, or supervenience) is happening in one case to that which is happening in the other. To demonstrate this we need first to return to the notion of an emergent or supervenient properties.

Emergence and Morphological Kinds

It is generally noted by realist that the reason why we cannot reduce social phenomena to psychological phenomena is because at the higher level there exist ('causally' significant) emergent properties which cannot be captured by the parts or atoms of the lower level. Social theoretical emergentism, in full flow, often makes this claim by way of analogies to properties in nature or the physical realm. Durkheim (1982: 39) proceeded in just this way:

Whenever elements of any kind combine, by virtue of this combination they give rise to new phenomena. One is therefore forced to conceive of these phenomena as residing, not in the elements, but in the entity formed by the union of these elements ... The hardness of bronze lies neither in the copper, nor in the tin, nor in the lead which have been used to form it, which are all soft or malleable bodies. The hardness arises from the mixing of them. The liquidity of water, its sustaining and other properties, are not in the two gases of which it is composed, but in the complex substance which they form by coming together¹⁸.

Durkheim thought this analogy to be sufficiently obvious to rest his case that social reality must be viewed as distinct, indeed *sui generis*, of individuals¹⁹. In this sense, as Lukes (1973:16) observes, 'he was a good disciple of Comte'. However, the analogy is frequently repeated by contemporary critical realists.

Following Bhaskar's commitment to emergence, Archer (1995:50) observes that 'it is nonsense to discuss whether something (like water) is more real than something else (like hydrogen and oxygen)'. She then, approvingly, quotes Sayer (1992:119) who, borrowing another analogy from Durkheim, observes that we would not try to explain the power of people by reference to the cells that make them up 'as if cells possessed this power too. [And again] Nor would we explain the power of water to extinguish fire by deriving it from the powers of its constituents, for oxygen and hydrogen are highly inflammable' (cf. Archer, 1995:51). Clearly, it must be admitted, that water and bronze lie in some regular (supervenience) relation with their constituent parts. The fundamental question for social realism is how useful such analogies might be for the society-individual relation?

On the one hand the analogy works well. When we apply it to 'morphological' kinds the lower-level/ upper-level relation is not only clear but it becomes quite obvious that, because of emergence, neither sociology nor economics can be reduced to psychology. Archer, herself, provides a simple but powerful example of this in a reference to group behaviour (and its effects), where she comments:

Whether or not the emergent factor, which now has to be incorporated if the explanation is to work, happens to look innocuously individualistic (like 'fear of large groups', which makes the difference between small talkative seminars and the silence which ensues when the same people are asked to comment during a lecture), the fact remains that it has come into play and is identifiable only in the new context of the lecture itself.

In cases like this something may be said to be effecting the agents' actions by dint of numbers, distribution, and relation. And, in each case this can be clearly seen by plotting subvenient and supervenient entities. Consequently, the ontological status of the higher-level phenomenon is maintained and there is no need to slip into the realms of mystery to explain the events happening. At the same time those who advocate the necessity of higher-level properties for explanation (the irreducibility of the social or economic) are vindicated by the incorporation of emergent properties in their various explanantia. So, for example, the 'generative powers'²⁰ of a demographic structure, *inter alia*, may prevent or enable the output of a generous pensions policy or military

recruitment for a standing army. Thus, inclusion of higher-level entities is warranted in explanations of these type of events.

Although not unproblematic for social (and economic) analysis²¹ analogies with nature, regular supervenience, do seem to correspond with morphological social kinds. The only problem that remains for the analytical dualist is how to reconcile the claim that (morphological) structures may be relatively enduring – resisting change or constraining actors – with the fact that they are wholly dependent upon their subvenient or base properties. This is not an easy situation to deal with but I think analytical dualism may be consistent, in this context, with the supervenience principle. The way to understand this is to make it clear that the type of thing Archer is talking about when she observes that structures are relatively autonomous is different to the type of thing we refer to when discussing higher- and lower-levels of reality.

For Archer 'structures' (social, cultural, or agential) are relatively autonomous in the sense of existing independently of lower level entities. As noted, this point is central to understanding structural elaboration and constraint. Structures precede action and may, on occasions, resist change. In one important way this seems to rule out correspondence to conventional supervenience. For it seems, as Healy (1998) noted, that the social structure is out of kilter with the present; that is, it does not correspond or depend upon the present-tense actors that most people would assume actually make it what it is. And yet, since Parsons (1968) at least, we are aware that emergent things exist only by virtue of the things that make them up²². Why then does Archer appear to breach this fundamental principle of supervenience? The answer, I presume (or at the very least her 'get out of jail free card'), lies in her rejection, following Bhaskar (1978) of an ontology premised upon 'actualism'. Instead, when Archer talks of structures she is primarily interested in the 'generative powers' or causal propensity of its emergent properties. It is these powers or properties that provide the thing with a 'real', as opposed to 'actual', existence. Thus, in a social realist sense something like water might be said to be both 'real' and 'actual'. It is 'actual' in the Humean empirical sense of being what it is and doing whatever it is currently doing but it is 'real' in the sense of having properties that are proven to make it

useful, *ceteris paribus*, to put out fires. Similarly, the demographic structure is 'actual' in terms of the present agents that compose it, but 'real', in a social realist's sense, of having the generative power to prevent (or enable) a generous pensions' policy. Thus, '[t]he crucial distinguishing property is that X itself [an emergent property], and itself being a relational property, has the generative capacity to modify the powers of its constituents in fundamental ways and to exercise causal influence *sui generis*'. (Archer, 1995:64)

If we take Archer's theory seriously, we must assume that whenever she talks about morphostasis and/or morphogenesis it is always in the sense of the 'real', as opposed to 'actual'; that is, in the context of 'generative powers'. In this way, provided we do not confuse 'real' with 'actual' we can, in principle at least, reconstitute the actual demographic structure so as to remain consistent with supervenience; it is just a case of translating what is happening in the 'real' from what is happening in the 'actual'. Thus, when Archer refers to something like a top-heavy demographic structure preventing something else like either a generous pensions' policy or effective military recruitment from taking place it is clear that she is talking not of the 'actual' thing itself (the demographic structure) but of how the demographic structure can *really* affect other things. Now, it may well be the case that government (and people) are not interested in effecting a generous pensions' policy or see no need for further military recruitment. Nevertheless, Archer, following Bhaskar, would respond, by saying that the demographic structure still has the capacity to prevent either of these from happening. Furthermore, she would argue that denying this fact leads to what Bhaskar has called the epistemic fallacy. The conclusion we must draw with regard to realism and advocates of the supervenience principle is that they are in a sense talking at cross-purposes. They are, so to speak, operating under different ontological banners. Sensible negotiation requires a translation. As it turns out this is easy to make and seemingly clarifies and alleviates, with regard to morphological types, all of the muddle and worry about un-tethered social structures.

So, to return to our key example from the last chapter, the 'real' features of the demographic structure translate straightforwardly into its 'actual' form and we

can readily plot subvenient and supervenient entities. But it is also true that the 'actual' demographic make-up changes constantly. In this sense, at the level of the actual, to talk in terms of morphostasis makes little sense. However, as the realist is concerned with the generative capacity of this phenomenon this is not a problem. And, indeed, the demographic structure would need to change significantly in order to fulfil the goal of a generous pensions' policy and its failure to do this is not indicative of 'actual' morphostasis (which is hardly likely for such a structure) but, more accurately, a failure to change or elaborate to a state that may accommodate a generous pensions' policy. Thus the realist's definition of morphostasis (and morphogenesis) is dependent on seeing the world as 'real' in terms of the generative capacities of a phenomenon rather than the actual shape of that same phenomenon. On the other hand, the philosopher of supervenience relations is, Hume like, plotting the actual relationship between the subvenient and the supervenient. Acknowledging this not only makes the problem of 'social structures without people' less relevant but it also highlights – given that all actual morphological types are dependent on populations – that 'actual' morphostasis is in fact a rare state²³.

All of this, I assume, makes talk of supervenience (without translation) in a realist framework largely irrelevant. Instead, our focus on emergence or emerging properties looks at outcomes of entities coming together to produce causal capacities to either maintain or transform a current social circumstance or situation. We can turn next to the so-called emergence of cultural phenomena.

Emergence and Cultural Systems

In this section I shall put forward two objections to treating cultural types in the straightforward manner in which the realist appears to have dealt with morphological kinds. Emergence in the arena of beliefs or ideas is a very different matter and one which is essentially compromised by the place in which ideas reside: the minds of people. First, it seems to me that the constituent elements, the people, appear to exist in a quite different relationship to the structural feature that Archer and others refer to as the Cultural System. Second, as noted at the end of the last chapter, Archer sails close to the wind when she

asserts that long forgotten remnants of knowledge are to count as real phenomena. Whilst they may exist as *sui generis* material properties with a logical potential to produce effects they are some long way removed from Archer's Socio-Cultural interaction. One possible result of this kind of thinking is that whilst we have acknowledged that realist ontology is one step removed from supervenience ontology the translation between the two – something we would surely wish to maintain – seems completely lost. A further point to note is the way in which these 'relatively autonomous emergent features' of what are essentially aspects of personal, social and cultural life are being torn away from individuals by the dualism of Archer's realist ontology. As we shall see later, the only sense in which distinctions between personal, social, and cultural types is legitimate is for heuristic purposes. And, this certainly is not the intent of Margaret Archer who from the outset stipulates that getting the ontology right is her first and foremost priority.

Let us begin with cultural artefacts and their similarities and differences to morphological types. From a realist framework the main similarity between the two is obvious. Ideas and beliefs are, like resources or social artefacts, causally pregnant. Ideas change history or prevent changes to history. And, of course, they are to be found in social interaction or are products of interaction. So much, I think, is obvious. Thus, should a women's aid advocate influence a government minister's department to propose and facilitate changes to pre-school childcare arrangements on grounds of assisting mothers back into the workplace we can clearly see that ideas as well as resources possess generative powers. But, it is one thing to admit this point and quite another to assume that they exist *sui generis*. For there does appear to be a fundamental difference between such an example and that of our earlier case: the demographic structure. The difference is that even on Archer's own terms, it looks impossible to separate ideas from those people who are in possession of them. Archer acknowledges this point when she insists that culture's ideas must be examined 'at their nexus with social life...' (Archer, 1996:130). Of course they must, where else should we find them (although see Archer's claims below)? The same, it seems, is not true of the demographic structure, or the literacy rates of

Cuba, or any of the other example of morphological structural emergent properties presented to us by Archer.

Given this, depositing a so-called 'Cultural System', a propositional register of ideas from which actors draw upon, starts to look like theory or ontology by *fiat*. Indeed, it might well be asked why we need such, un-locatable, excessive baggage.

Furthermore, when we attempt to plot ideas and beliefs onto a subvenient-supervenient dichotomy the so-called emergent phenomena of the cultural realm appears to be co-variant or identical at each level. In other words, what is held to be at the higher level of knowledge or belief for a culture is just equal to the sum of knowledge of those entities (the people) that adhere to a particular belief system within a culture²⁴. Of course, ideas and beliefs amongst those individuals that may be said to make up the total will differ but ultimately the stock of ideas is nothing more than what the different people, individually, believe.

Archer, of course, would deny this point and would be especially indignant with the assertion that the 'Cultural System' is nothing more than an aggregate of cultured individuals' knowledge. Given her reliance on emergence and her claim that the social emergent properties and cultural emergent properties are to be treated the same it is worth considering how she justifies the autonomous and objective existence of the Cultural System. As noted in Chapter 3, she begins by drawing a clear distinction between what she calls the Cultural System and Socio-Cultural Interaction. The Cultural System is an emergent entity, it emerges from Socio-Cultural Interaction but once emerged it has, according to Archer, an objective existence. It contains a culture's entire stock of knowledge (in propositional form) and this knowledge (theories, beliefs, values) stand in some logical relationship to one another; which means, they must adhere to the law of non-contradiction. But why must they? Certainly, as Archer observes, at the Socio-Cultural level they do not adhere to the principles of logic. Here, '...we generate myths, are moved by mysteries, become rich in symbolism and ruthless in manipulating hidden persuaders' (Archer, 1995:180). But if this is true why should we expect there to exist an objective World 3 in which a culture stores its stocks of knowledge in a propositional register? Indeed the only reason

to suppose that there is such a stock of knowledge floating in the ether of society is the theoretical demand that Archer's account requires it to have. Thus, whilst we may accept that ideas have a generative capacity or power that may or may not emerge through social interaction the necessity of a cultural system is far from clear. This brings me to the second point.

According to Archer, the Cultural-System includes not only knowledge that is known to present-tense actors but what has emerged, generation-after-generation through interaction and is held in store in World 3. Archer (1996:108) notes, for example, 'as a CEP [cultural emergent property], a soufflé recipe might not have been used by anyone living, but would still work for the cook who eventually tried it'. Furthermore, and to return to a quotation I used at the end of the last chapter:

If we think of culture then all knowledge was certainly activity dependent for its genesis and elaboration. Nevertheless, once recorded (chiselled into runes or gathering dust in the British Museum), it constitutes knowledge without a current knowing subject. It is knowledge because it retains the dispositional character to be understood, though it persists unrecognised, sustaining *potential powers* (of contradiction and complementarity with other cultural items) which remain unexercised (My emphasis, Archer, 1995:144).

This is an extremely contentious claim. For, to conceive of the Cultural System in this manner appears to make no explanatory sense. In terms of explanation and causation the vast majority of what belongs to Archer's Cultural System is, and always will be, redundant. Perhaps we can live with this, but from an ontological perspective by insisting that knowledge and beliefs can somehow exist 'behind the backs' of the people (in emergent form) Archer has not only contravened the exhaustion principle but rules out, in this sphere at least, any correspondence to a regular supervenience relationship between 'part' and 'people'. Although Archer is consistent in her use of emergence her extension of its application to the sphere of beliefs and ideas highlights a fundamental problem with her version of realism. This relates directly to her application of the 'generative power' or 'potential' of a thing.

In the case of the demographic structure the potential of its emergent property, its top-heavy nature, was considered sufficient (presumably in an INUS fashion, see Mackie, 1974) to explain why a generous pensions' policy might not be forthcoming should some governmental agent(s) choose to recommend one. As such it could be applied to the actual world. However, it is clear that in the case of unknown beliefs and unknown ideas we cannot even begin to apply these to the actual world and by defining these things as belonging to the realm of the 'real' the 'real' itself loses touch with the 'actual world'. But the source of the problem, I think, relates to Archer's definition of 'potential' or 'generative' powers. All kinds of things, too many, may possess this quality and by allowing all such potentialities into our frame of reference, by classifying them as emergent properties, our list of real things would quickly resemble infinity. The most logical way around this problem is to define 'potential' in accordance with actual potential rather than a potential that requires some additional yet unknown and possibly unlikely act.

Indeed Archer's definition of potential or generative power resembles claims made by pro-life supporters, in the debate surrounding abortion, that an *in vitro* embryo is a 'potential person'. In some sort of abstract way it is but the point is, as Harris (1985) observes, it requires an actual intervention in order to become a 'potential person', i.e. an act to transform it into an *in vivo* embryo. Otherwise it is spurious to talk of the thing as a 'potential person', for logically, we would have to accept that spermatozoa and ova are also potential persons. The similarity with the forgotten 'chiselled runes' or the soufflé recipe is clear to see: some sort of direct, and not necessarily forthcoming, intervention in the shape of the discovery of these artefacts is required in order to supply them with real potential²⁵. Given these failings in Archer's account it may be asked whether beliefs and ideas can be accounted for in terms of ontological supervenience relations without the reificationary spectre of so many social structures floating around un-tethered to their base properties. In answering this question in the affirmative my response moves us back towards a duality of structure and agency and an acknowledgement that social structures, in the Giddensian sense of that term, properly belong in the minds of those community of individuals who constitute society. I think that R.M. Hare's (co-variance) use of

supervenience may carry us some of the way towards understanding the nature of ideas and beliefs in relation to groups and cultures.²⁶

Hare's Supervenience

As noted previously (see Chapter 4) Hare's intention when he used the concept of supervenience in *The Language of Morals* was to overcome the naturalistic fallacy that 'good' could be reduced to the characteristics of a thing, event, action, or person. Hare provides plenty of useful demonstrations (both moral and non-moral) of the absurd consequence of using 'good' in this way. For example, if when talking of strawberries we reduce 'good' to the attributes of being 'sweet, juicy, firm, red, and large' it becomes impossible to say such things as 'this strawberry is good because it is sweet' because this would be the same as saying 'this strawberry is sweet because it is sweet'. The reduction of 'good' in this way deprives us of what Hare calls its 'value usage' (its function to commend or do the opposite). In wishing to maintain the latter, he resolves the fallacy by re-defining 'good' and 'characteristics of being good' in a supervenient-subvenient relation. Thus, 'good' (strawberry, picture, person, etc.) supervenes on the characteristics of the thing we call good ('firm ... sweet'; 'composition, ... admiration by members of the Royal Academy'; 'benevolence ... honesty'; respectively).

At first sight this may appear to be rather deterministic and this is no real surprise for the similarity to a Winchian sociology, or a poorly constructed interpretation of Giddens' 'mutual knowledge' is all too apparent. However, there is, in principle no reason why we should not allow the values of what constitutes a good strawberry, picture, or person to be more plastic and changeable over time and between people and places. Indeed, other than the fact that we wish to prevent social structures wandering around behind our backs and we do not want to restrict them to rational or logical qualities, Hare's supervenience has the advantage over Archer's notion of a Cultural-System in not requiring the same sort of ontological baggage that a World 3 implies and in providing a broader notion of what is meant by 'valuing' words such as 'good', 'right', and 'ought' (words used for instruction or guidance). This allows us,

unlike Archer's strictly logical phenomena, to exploit or stress the playful and pragmatic nuances of a culture or a particular society or group.

It also seems to me that the supervenient character of 'value' can be mapped on to our understanding of cultures, both our own and others, with far more fecundity than reducing shared ideas to a logical formula of what, under these auspices, counts and what doesn't. Indeed it seems quite consistent with Rom Harré's (1981) epistemological or methodological notions of 'competence' and 'performance'. Where competence refers to a corpus of knowledge that members of a group 'have to be able to act in ways recognizably appropriate to, and constitutive of, the collectivities to which they belong' (1981:152).

Performance refers to how, on given occasions, an actor draws on the corpus of knowledge relevant to a particular situation. Although both terms clearly refer to value-orientation, it is, as Harré observes, in a methodological sense, 'competence' (where value/instruction supervene) that most interests the sociologist. Although it is, of course, through performance, similar to Aristotle's *phrônesis* or Giddens' practical knowledge, that the true characteristics of valued things are configured. Observing values as supervening on things is also consistent with the interpretation and understanding of people and cultures that hold different beliefs to our own. For although we may often disagree in terms of what makes a thing *good* or makes an action the *right* thing to do we can, with some little effort (and we do it all the time) understand when something is being commended, or the opposite.

A Final Problem with Realism

In the final section of this chapter I will return to some more general concerns related to critical realism. Namely, problems surrounding the nature of social scientific laws or, more specifically, the reasons that lie behind the absence of universal laws in the social world. I shall argue that the most fundamental precept, or the very basis, of critical realism depends upon establishing the existence of universal laws that this was the underlying message of *A Realist Theory of Science* and that the main requirements of this have been lost or

ignored in the transfer of realism from the natural sciences to the social sciences. I will begin by noting some points that Giddens raises on the topic of universal laws and the social sciences. I will then note some of Bhaskar's claims concerning the purpose of closing systems before discussing Archer's observations on the significance of emergent properties for critical realism. The notion of universal causal laws, I shall argue, is both implicit to critical/analytical realism and of necessity to the idea of a naturalism of realism of the social sciences.

As discussed in Chapter 1, and again briefly in Chapter 2, Giddens rejects the idea of the existence of universal laws in the social sciences. However, he does not view the absence of such laws as merely accident and for him, unlike Bhaskar (see Chapter Two) their absence is not simply a consequence of intervening or countervailing causes interrupting or interfering with what takes place in open systems. The absence of universal laws in the social sciences is, in particular, the outcome of a number of factors specific to the subject matter of the special sciences whilst, in general, it is ultimately a consequence of human reflexivity. To quote Giddens at length this time:

That there are no known universal laws in social science is not just happenstance. If it is correct to say, as I have argued, that the causal mechanisms in social scientific generalizations depend upon actors' reasons, in the context of a 'mesh' of intended and unintended consequences of action, we can readily see why such generalizations do not have a universal form. For the content of agents' knowledgeability, the question of how 'situated' it is and the validity of the propositional content of that knowledge – all these will influence the circumstances in which those generalizations hold. (Giddens, 1984:345)

As the above quotation from Giddens implies the development, transformation, use, or production of social structures (more accurately, clusters of rules and resources in situated frameworks of interaction) is always open to accidental as well as deliberate change. A further point that bears this out and is consistent with Giddens' views on socialisation may be taken from the Dreyfus Model (see Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988). Competence is not a simple given, different social actors have different ways of performing. They may be, according to the

Dreyfus Model, novices, advanced beginners, competent performers, proficient performers, and experts. Each will impact upon the variance of causation. Thus, the main point to take from the above quotation is that it implies a kind of complexity in causal relations that are not generally present in the natural world. Now, it is not just Giddens who has observed this point, numerous philosophers and theorists of the social sciences have pointed to the various short-comings in social scientific laws in comparison to natural scientific laws. Social scientific laws suffer from problems related to specificity, clarity, and they have a tendency to be elliptic in character.

Let us now return to one of the issues I discussed first in Chapter Two, the problem of causation and the closing of social systems. One key reason why Bhaskar adopts a post-empiricist conception of natural objects and laws is because he believes that a fundamental problem with empiricist accounts of the progress of science and the status of scientific laws is that in open systems laws may be prevented, intervened upon, or countervailed. However, none of these things, he argued, can be said to extinguish the 'real' nature of the objects of science: their tendencies, powers, and liabilities. Furthermore, these subjunctive mechanisms may be excluded and the tendencies of the intransient objects of the world can be understood fully through the scientist's key method of discovery: the experiment. As I have already noted and as Bhaskar rightly observed, such experiments are not available to the social scientist who has to make do with historical reconstruction (explanation rather than prediction). Now, this is all very well but given that the status of social scientific laws is far from secure this becomes a very real problem for realism and not just because of intervening and countervailing causes.

Regardless of caveats concerning the temporal endurance of social structures (see Bhaskar, 1998:38) naturalism necessarily asserts that the methods of the social sciences are the same as those of the natural sciences and that the objects that belong to both realms are, in terms of ontology, the same. As such, the causal capacities of natural and social objects must be assumed to be identical. Both Archer and Bhaskar are explicit on this point: it is emergent properties or causal capacities that furnish the objects of the world with their status of being

real. Indeed, the whole edifice of critical realism rests upon this assertion about causal capacity. But, as first noted in Chapter 1, it turns out that the causal capacity of social objects is not at all like the capacity of natural objects; laws, at best, hold only in a variable fashion and the reason for this has much more to do with the non-mechanistic character of causation in the social world than with anything the presence of causal interference from elsewhere in the system.

We can elaborate on this by recalling one of Giddens' response to the analogy that Durkheim drew between the emergent properties of social facts and the mixing of copper and tin to make bronze:

Human actors, as recognisable 'competent agents,' do not exist in separation from one another as copper, tin and lead do. They do not come together *ex nihilo* to form a new entity by their fusion or association. Durkheim here confuses a hypothetical conception of individuals in a state of nature (maintained by association with others) and real processes of social reproduction (Giddens, 1984:171-2)

The point that Giddens is making here is that a mechanistic model of the social world is simply inadequate for understanding social relations. Human beings are reflexive as well as existing in a world in which the on-going processes of life represent, to repeat from above, a mesh of intended and unintended consequences of action (their own and others), the plasticity of shared rules and resources, the situated context of social interaction, and the variability of competence or knowing 'how to go on'. Given all of this it is logical to point out that the laws of the social sciences are *not* invariant for just the same reasons that the laws of the natural sciences may not be invariant. But if this is the case it leaves us with a very real problem concerning a legitimate transfer of realism from the natural world to the social world. Let us now refer back to the importance that Archer places on emergent properties, the way in which she uses them to avoid the charge of reification and their (apparent) propensity to establish a realism of the social world.

Whilst the main problem with Durkheim's conception of emergence is that it seems to lead towards a reification of social objects Archer believes this can be overcome by associating emergence with Bhaskar's non-Humean or post-

empiricist account of causation (see Archer, 1995:ff). For Archer, the non-Humean account of emergence appears to explain why social structures do not express, for want of a better term, regular (i.e. constant conjunctions) causal interventions. In fact, as noted previously, some of the causal tendencies of social structures/emergent properties need never be instantiated; so long as their existence can be established (perhaps through deduction) it is enough to say that they are (structurally) 'real'. Thus, it is perhaps possible to think of the demographic structure as preventing either generous pensions' policies or the formation of an adequate standing army. Now there are two points to note in relation to these properties. The first suggests that realism works, at its best, when we are observing causal relations that pertain to morphological types. The second point is I shall argue decisive in condemning the application of realism to the social realm.

First, and to appear to digress, one point to note about the examples that Archer uses to verify her claims concerning the *sui generis* character of emergent properties is that the ones that seem to carry most evidential force are of what I have described as a morphological type. Few if any of her other examples imply the necessary existence of emergent properties. Why might this be so? The reason, I think, is clear. Morphological types, such as demographic compositions, literacy rates, sizes of lectures, or soldiers needed to raise an army are all of a numerical composition which implies a mechanistic and largely asocial causal relation between what is wanted and what is prevented or enabled. As causal relations they are far similar (because they imply numerical consequences) to phenomena of the natural world. This point we might concede, although tentatively, to a critical realist ontology.

However, second, and more importantly, Bhaskar's original post-empiricist conception of causation was based upon a problem to do with the 'openness' of natural systems. Both Bhaskar and Archer carry this view forward to the social sciences and although there seems to be no real way of 'closing off' the social world they seem to think – or at least imply – that the problem of causation in the social world is the same as it is in the natural world. Of course the social world is an open system and the problem of its openness has been known and

discussed and '*ceteris paribus*(ed)' for decades and decades. But this is not, as noted above, the only causation-linked problem with the social sciences. It is not simply a case of intervening and countervailing causes that disrupt universal causation it is more than this. It is people or agents, with minds, with mistakes, with wilful intent, with love, with ignorance, and with intelligence. A causally efficacious social structure would have to deal with all of these types (and no doubt many others besides). Regardless of what an apparent social structure is 'conditioning' or pre-conditioning them to do some of them will not do it. The result is *really* not like the result in the natural sciences because of the character of the cause itself. Therefore, closing systems is not only not possible but also nonsensical. Consider the following statement from Bhaskar's *Realist Theory of Science*):

To say that a thing, X, has a tendency₂ to do \emptyset is thus to say²⁷:-

- (i) X has the power (or liability) to do (or suffer) \emptyset
 - (ii) X is an enduring condition to do \emptyset , i.e. it is predisposed or oriented towards doing \emptyset
 - (iii) X will do \emptyset , given an appropriate set of circumstances, in virtue of its predisposition, in the absence of intervening (or countervailing) causes
- Bhaskar (1978:231)

It is clear that this model simply does not reflect the causal processes of the social world. Whilst it may (or may not) be true that natural systems are replete with intervening and countervailing causes and that once we establish what these are and close them off we can establish direct causation this is not the case in the social sciences for the intervening or countervailing cause may be the agent herself. And if it is always agents how can social structures be causally efficacious? Ira Cohen makes some interesting points in relation to this. First, he observes:

As Giddens insists, at any phase in any given sequence of conduct any given agent could have acted in a manner somewhat different than she did (CS:9, CCHM:53, CPST:92, 267n.15). To the extent that this point is granted, it becomes difficult to presume that social activity will be

produced everywhere and always in a manner that corresponds to the order of nature. In principle, any given pattern of social conduct may be altered by the actors who are engaged in its production (Cohen, 1990:24-5)

For one or other reason she simply will not be conditioned or pre-conditioned. And if she will not be conditioned our next question, concerning our (*sui generis*) social structure is: what kind of causal capacity is this? What kind of causality works at one time, but not the next, but perhaps then the next? It must be admitted that this is not causation (even non-Humean) as we know it. And, the reason why it is not causation as we know it is not, to repeat, because the social world cannot be closed off or because intervening or countervailing causes are at work but because non-morphological 'social structures' are not, in the sense in which realists define this term, causally efficacious.

Now, even if we accept everything that Archer has presumed the capacities or tendencies of her social structures are not like the 'capacities' or 'tendencies' of the realist paradigm because the realist paradigm is only applicable to mechanistic causal relations and not to what might be better termed the possibilities of normative structures. Therefore, if possibilities are not the same as capacities, realism (and naturalism) in the social sciences is logically invalidated. It must be asked, where does this leave critical realism? If causation is what makes things real in realism and if causation is not in way determinable then realism must reside in the same ether as its social structures.

Conclusion

Let me begin this conclusion with the minor premise of this chapter. Regardless of the conclusions I have drawn a Watkins' style of methodological individualism remains an inadequate form of social theorising. This follows from two facts. First, emergence, at a higher level than the individual, can and has been shown to be present in the shape of morphological structures. Second, methodological individualism (or reduction) of the types advocated by Watkins

(1971), Mellor (1982), or even some rational choice theorists, seems equally moribund by the non-psychological character of a culture's ideas and beliefs. However, just how a non-reductionist approach deals with culture remains an open question, and a question that warrants serious attention for good reason. For, whilst morphological structures and psychological dispositions may be of absolute relevance to social scientific investigation or explanation some subjects – sociology, social anthropology, and history – rely heavily on the discovery of, and incorporation into explanation, of 'cultural facts'. It is these social kinds that play the main role in social explanation. Take, for example, Jackson and Pettit's (1993a) claim that (the higher-level macro- phenomenon) observation that an increase in unemployment may explain a co-occurring increase in crime. Indeed, in an INUS (Mackie, 1974) sense it does. But, stated on its own, as the explanation (with motive and desire conjoined to it) it resembles what Hempel (1993) described as an elliptic explanation. It is of this variety because the sociologist's 'why questions' are always answered through a frame of reference that includes cultural kinds. We may begin with 'unemployment' but we end with an array of cultural why questions. How did unemployment feed into an individual's sense of 'masculinity'? How did values alter within the 'youth culture'? Why is employment so important in this society? Answering such questions tells us not only why some unemployed individuals turned to crime but why other unemployed individuals (an important contrast class) did not.

Finally, I should stress that I do not think Archer was entirely wrong to place so much emphasis upon the importance of truth and falsity and the logical ordering of ideas. Where she fails, in my view, is in making the assumption that such an ordering could take place in any other place than the minds of individuals. This is surprising given Archer's rebuke of Durkheim and Mauss' (1963) social Kantianism (see footnote 12) for her own strategy seems to be little better. However, this does not mean that we should abandon realism in this area in total but perhaps limit it to its proper sites: in 'the self', 'the other' and the social interaction which takes place when the two meet. Thus, I have in mind something like Christine Korsgaard's (1996: 166) response to Mackie's deliberations on the issue of realism: '[i]t is the most familiar fact of human life that the world contains entities that can tell us what to do and make us do it.

They are people, and other animals.' That other people and other objects exist is not in doubt that their thoughts and motives can be externalized in the way in which critical realists presume certainly is. This more or less completes my return from dualism to duality. The use of emergent properties as an ontological support for critical realism in relation to cultural or normative kinds has been undermined although its use in regard to morphological types remains an open question. In the next chapter I return to structuration theory in order to respond to some of the criticisms that have been levelled at that approach.

Notes for Chapter 5.

¹ This chapter draws largely on my publication in *Philosophica*. See Le Boutillier (2003).

² We can distinguish between the 'disunity or unity of the special sciences' claims on the one hand (amongst others, see Fodor, 1994, Jackson and Pettit, 1992, Pettit, 1993, and the collection of essays in Charles and Lennon (eds), 1992) and cross-cutting or closely related 'methodological individualism versus collectivism' claims on the other hand (amongst many others, see Watkins, 1971, Brodbeck, 1971, Kincaid, 1994 & 1996).

³ My main concerns in this chapter are not related to explanation in this way. Of course, often, if not always, ontological problems underlie explanation problems and the two are inescapably linked. Of the most interesting problems to arise in reduction is that of causal over-determination. Given that we accept that there are different levels of reality it becomes hard to avoid over-determination in our explanation frameworks. In my view Jackson and Pettit's (1992a & 1992b) explanatory ecumenism provides a sound solution to this problem.

⁴ Supervenience may be presented in a number of ways (see previous chapter and, in particular, Kim, 1993). I am here concerned with the straightforward and uncontroversial dependence relation between two related levels of reality e.g. the mental is dependent on the physical. And, later, of course, emergent properties of higher level entities.

⁵ The two are, essentially, the same. Where philosophers used to talk of emergent properties they now discuss supervenient properties. Social theorists, such as Archer, have never used the term supervenience but instead refer, following Bhasker (1978), to emergence. If there is any difference between the two concepts it is that emergence is never associated with a simple identity relation such as 'society is just equal to the sum of individuals that constitute it'. The same cannot be said of supervenience as Watkins's (1968) use testifies. This said I will use the terms not just interchangeably but in a way that is consistent with their uses (and occasional misuse) in social theory and philosophy.

⁶ Which can be derived from the exhaustion principle: 'individuals exhaust the social world in that every entity in the social realm is either an individual or a sum of such individuals' (Kincaid, 1994:499).

⁷ And the fact that they do defeats those, like Watkins (1968) and Mellor (1982), who wished to reduce sociology to psychology in Nagel's (1961) terms.

⁸ The fact that she excludes non-propositional ideas and beliefs from her Cultural System suggests that her approach may be closer to some of those theorists she critiques under the banner of 'central conflation'.

⁹ Leaving us, perhaps, with no other alternative than to treat ideas and beliefs as 'structural' (see Giddens) properties; possessing a 'virtual' rather than a 'real' existence.

¹⁰ Giddens (1979, 1984, 1993) and Bauman (1973) are the main contenders. Both of whom, according to Archer commit the error, in relation to structure/culture-agent relations, of central conflation or elision i.e. clamping 'structure' and 'agent' together. In *Realist Social Theory* it is Giddens alone, and other structuration theorists, that take most of the pounding. In *Culture and Agency*, Archer turns her attention to Bauman's early work where she claims he commits the same central conflation error as Giddens through the 'simultaneity' of the 'Socio-Cultural level' and the 'Cultural System level'. Thus, 'the Socio-Cultural level and the Cultural System level are elided, for at any moment in time the formulation CS \leftrightarrow S-C holds good. It is this formula which essentially unites the theories of Bauman and Giddens' (Archer, 1995:78).

¹¹ For clarity I will focus mainly on her *Realist Social Theory: the morphogenetic approach*. This text is perhaps the clearest and comprehensive of her trilogy i.e. it contains considerable reference and content on 'social structure', 'cultural system', and 'agency'.

¹² See Bhaskar (1978, Chapter 2).

¹³ Archer's account of the individuated self is clearly dependent upon both Aristotelian notions of identity and a Kantian or transcendental notion of reality. With regard to the former she stresses the importance of personal identity and a continued sense of the self (reminiscent of both MacIntyre (1981) and Williams (1973)). With regard to the latter she rebukes Durkheim and Mauss (1963) for attempting to give primacy to the social classification of humankind. Their argument, she claims, is circular for to contend that 'the classification of things reproduces the classification men' confuses 'the capacities of the (human) mind with its (social) contents'. Consequently, as Kant observed, the transcendental unity of apperception is necessarily prior to social classification: 'before we can receive particular concepts of self from our society, we have to be the kind of (human) being who can master social concepts' (see Archer, 1995: 285-6).

¹⁴ A paragraph from Giddens's (1979:64) *Central Problems in Social Theory*, draws out the stark contrast, due to emergence, between analytical dualism and structuration theory. Giddens observes

As I shall employ it, 'structure' refers to 'structural property', or more exactly, to 'structuring property', structuring properties providing the 'binding' of time and space in social systems. I argue that these properties can be understood as rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems. Structures exist paradigmatically, as an absent set of differences, temporally 'present' only in their instantiation, in the constituting moments of social systems. To regard structure as involving 'virtual order' of differences, as I have already indicated, ... implies recognising the existence of: (a) knowledge – as memory traces – of 'how things are to be done' (said, written), on the part of social actors; (b) social practices organised through the recursive mobilisation of that knowledge; (c) capabilities that the production of those practices presupposes.

¹⁵ Hence,

Since neuroscience is simply blind to the taxonomies involved in the explanations of common-sense psychology, it cannot hope to explain, for example, why Alice wrote a cheque, rather than paid cash or used a credit card; it can only yield explanations of (say) why Alice's fingers moved in these trajectories rather than those (Smith, 1992:22-3).

¹⁶ It is perhaps not their job to make this distinction count in terms of reduction. These authors do distinguish between types of 'structural explanation' and their separate usefulness in terms of explaining events. My point is that two types, social and cultural, are certainly very different in kind and as such, in terms of reduction, this difference warrants exploration.

¹⁷ Geertz (1983) sums this up beautifully when he observes

The generalized attacks on privacy theories of meaning is, since early Husserl and late Wittgenstein, so much a part of modern thought that it need not be developed once more here. What is necessary ... and in particular ... made clear that to say that culture consists of socially established structures of meaning in terms of which people do such things as signal conspiracies and join them or perceive insults and answer them, is no more to say that it is a psychological phenomenon, a characteristic of someone's mind, personality, cognitive structure, or whatever, than to say that Tantrism, genetics, the progressive form of the verb, the classification of wines, the Common Law, or the notion of 'a conditional curse...' is.

¹⁸ G.H. Mead repeats this analogy in both *The Philosophy of the Act* and *Mind, Self and Society*.

¹⁹ 'society is not a mere sum of individuals; rather the system formed by their association represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics' and it was 'in the nature of this individuality, not in that of its component units, that one must seek the immediate and determining causes of the facts appearing there' Durkheim (1982:30) cf. Lukes (1973:19).

²⁰ It is important to clarify the meaning and implications of this term, which I will do shortly.

²¹ As Giddens (1984:171-2) observes: 'Social systems do have structural properties that cannot be described in terms of concepts referring to the consciousness of agents. But human actors, as recognizable 'competent agents', do not exist in separation from one another as copper, tin and lead do. They do not come together *ex nihilo* to form a new entity by their fusion or association. Durkheim here confuses a hypothetical conception of individuals in a state of nature (untainted by association with others) and real processes of social reproduction". Much economic explanation/ prediction seems to be of a morphological type conjoined with rational action. The latter, when applied to the social in the form of rational choice theory strips down agency in failing to deal with our normativity and emotionality (cf. Archer, 2000, see Chapter 2).

²² Interestingly, this point was made clear in Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action*. In reviewing Durkheim's work, Parsons (1968:35-6) observed:

Those features of organic systems which are emergent at any given level of the complexity of systems cannot, by definition, exist concretely apart from the relevant combinations of the more elementary units of the systems. They cannot be isolated, even conceptually, from these more elementary units in the sense of being thought of as existing independently ... They have in common with elements such as mass the fact that the conception of 'existing by themselves' [*sui generis*] is non-sensical.

²³ I presume that I have interpreted Archer's thesis correctly. If I have it does raise some methodological and explanatory queries. Presumably, Archer would want to claim that an explanation of why the demographic structure, *inter alia*, prevents a generous pensions policy would contain a description of the 'actual' as well as the 'real' as well as a 'contrast' (Van Fraassen, 1980). But, perhaps these are implied.

²⁴ This would make it consistent with some kind of methodological individualist theory. Although not of the kind that reduces the agent to psychological dispositions or rational choices. For it must be admitted that what is cultural may elide with these but certainly is not identical.

²⁵ Clearly, no such intervention was required in the case of the demographic structure. The generative power was already in place.

²⁶ It should be noted from the start that the kind of supervenience relation Hare refers to is, in its reference to values or prescriptions, dissimilar to other uses of this term. It refers to covariant symmetrical relations.

²⁷ Although it makes no difference to the point I am making I should note that a tendency¹ refers to powers that are possessed but may not be realized for reasons other than those stated above e.g. all men can smoke; but some men are non-smokers (cf. Bhaskar:230)

6. Structuration Theory and its Critics.

Introduction

In this Chapter my attention is drawn back to structuration theory. My main aims here are threefold. First, and foremost, to consider and respond to the now numerous critics of structuration theory. Second, to clarify and unite the often confusing terminology that surrounds Giddens' use of 'structure', 'agency', 'rules', 'resources', and 'social systems'. And, third, to demonstrate the general coherence of structuration theory and its (ontological) dependence on what Giddens calls 'praxis'. From this perspective I shall argue that structuration theory must be interpreted for what it is (a duality between a de-centred subject and 'social structure') and not in terms of what critics have frequently perceived it to be¹. Thus, any evaluation of structuration theory must recognise the radical difference between it and traditional dualistic conceptions of 'agency' and 'structure'. For in structuration theory action entails structure and vice versa structure entails action. As such, and as premised on the notion of praxis, 'agency', as defined by Giddens, can never be disentangled from 'structure'. In short, Giddens abandons dualism, replacing it with the ontological necessity of praxis.

Since its inception structuration theory has been subjected to both fierce criticism and more friendly attempts to adulterate and reformulate some of its key concepts. With regard to both I set out replies to four key authors: Margaret Archer (1982,1995), John Thompson (1989), William Sewell (1992), and Rob Stones (2005). Archer's rather forthright interpretation of structuration theory as a 'conflation' or 'elision' of structure and agency leads her to question its validity in relation to voluntarism and social constraint as well as its methodological value. Thomson's concerns about Giddens' definitions of both 'agency' and 'structure' directs him to question, primarily, the way in which structuration theory can account for the unequal distribution of power relations and material resources (from an 'institutional' perspective) in the social realm;

Both Sewell and Stones are concerned, following Giddens' claim that social structures are 'virtual', with the ontological status of material objects or the distinction between what is 'internal' to the agent and what is 'external'. Sewell believes that structuration theory needs to be rescued on this matter and, thus, reformulates the ontological status of 'material' objects and distinguishes them from what he calls 'cultural schema'. Stones' approach, although somewhat more sophisticated, is similar. He too introduces a new 'external' realm to structuration theory.

My reply to the criticisms levelled at Giddens' theory are split (somewhat artificially) into two sections detailing apparent problems surrounding 'agency' and 'social structure/system'. The first deals, mainly, with the view that Giddens' definition of agency as a counterfactual 'could have done otherwise' leads to excessive voluntarism. Although it begins with Giddens' critique of the viewpoint of ordinary language philosophy and a discussion concerning the centrality of the concept of praxis to Giddens' theory. In the second section I deal with a number of complaints about, for example, the adequacy (or ambiguity) of defining 'social structure' as consisting of 'rules' and 'resources' as well as problems concerning Giddens' claim that ultimately 'social structures' exist as 'memory traces' in actors' minds. The final section of this chapter is a response to the claim, by Patrick Baert (1998) that structuration theory is conservative in nature. In this section I re-introduce the concept of 'Cambridge change' on order to demonstrate, tentatively at least, that the vast majority of social changes take place slowly rather than swiftly. The chapter concludes with a summary or evaluation of Giddens' theoretical or ontological position qua the duality of structure. However, I begin with a brief re-cap of his theory's main tenets (the key points are elaborated upon in subsequent sections).

Structuration Theory: A Brief Re-cap

To repeat, Anthony Giddens' aim in developing structuration theory was to transcend the subject-object divide in social theorising. Objectivist social theory, whether this is Parsonian functionalism² or reductive French structuralism³, Giddens (1976:22) argues, leads 'to the blotting-out of the active subject'. At the

same time those theories that have dealt directly or indirectly with action or the creativity (or reflexivity) of individuals have either failed to incorporate an institutional analysis (such as the explanation of the recursive nature of social life) into social practices or cannot explain transformations in social life⁴. One particular step in resolving these problems may be to attempt, in Mouzelis' (1995, 2000) terminology, 'bridge-building' between what has been commonly labelled (in relation to American social theory) the macro- and micro- versions of sociology. Giddens rejects this solution. Instead he opts for the more radical solution of abandoning what he describes as the dualisms of voluntaristic and deterministic types of social theory and replacing this with a theory based upon the 'duality of structure and agency'. That is, where 'structure' acts as both medium and outcome of the production and reproduction of social life..

'Structure', as noted earlier, is defined as a virtual order, it exists as mutual knowledge (in the sense of Schutz' conception of 'typifications' or 'stocks of knowledge' or the Wittgensteinian sense of 'to follow a rule' or 'to know how to go on') held in the memory traces of the participants of social practices. These memory traces consist of knowledge of what Giddens defines as a communities' 'rules' and 'resources'. The former refers to the signification (norms relating to communication in interaction) and legitimation (norms relating to morality or sanctions in interaction) of objects and practices whilst the latter relates to domination or power relations amongst and between individuals (again, held as 'memory traces'). In Giddens' later work in this area (see, especially, 1984: 258ff.) power is explicated in some detail and in two ways: as 'allocative resources' (pertaining to material features of the environment, production, and produce); and 'authoritative resources' (relating to the organization of social time-space, human beings in mutual association, and the constitution of life chances). In both cases power – and its umbrella 'structure' - is in general to be conceived of as both enabling and constraining.

Of primary importance to Giddens' anti-reductionist thesis is the view that at a base ontological level society is made and re-made, if not *ex nihilo*, by its participants. That is, through the skilled performances of knowledgeable actors. For Giddens, the phenomenological and ethnomethodological analysis of

‘practical consciousness’ has taught us that: ‘every social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he or she is a member’ (Giddens, 1979:5). Actors are both knowledgeable and reflexive monitors of action. And, whilst they may not be fully aware of the conditions of their actions – which are always subject to the unintended consequences or unacknowledged conditions of action, utilised as practical consciousness rather than discursive consciousness – action is determined by individuals⁵. And, it is through individuals’ acts (social practices) that Giddens’ social structures are reproduced or produced. For Giddens (1979:53), ‘in social theory, the notions of action and structure presuppose one another’ in a dialectical relation. This represents the duality of structure and agency, where the latter is defined as actors’ capabilities of doing things (not their intentions to do something).⁶ Or, put alternatively: ‘[a]gency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently’ (Giddens, 1984:9).

Now, whilst structuration theory incorporates a number of systemic properties (see below) Giddens makes clear that the social realm is wholly dependent upon individuals and individuals alone for its constitution. In his discussion of teleological social theories Giddens observes that for the theory of structuration ‘social systems have no purposes, reasons or needs whatsoever: only human individuals do so’ (Giddens, 1979:7). Still, the social system, as the structured outcome of social practices does remain pivotal to Giddens’ theory and, certainly in his later work, Giddens was at pains to elaborate upon aspects of this system which he felt would help to better understand the recursive character of social life. Thus, he introduces various concepts, such as ‘structural principles’ or ‘institutions’, to describe what he calls the ‘most deeply embedded structural properties’ (Giddens, 1984:17).

With this brief summary in mind (I will add detail to aspects of the above as required) we can discuss and evaluate the criticisms that have been levelled at Giddens’ approach. I will divide these, conceptually, into two types: those that pertain to agency and those that refer to structure and system. With regard to the former critics (see, especially, Archer, 1982; Carlstein, 1981; and Thompson,

1989) have complained that Giddens' model is overly-voluntaristic or his definition of agency, in terms of the counterfactual claim that an agent 'could have done otherwise', appears to make it impossible for an individual not to be an agent. In both cases authors have argued that structuration theory, with its (apparent) abandonment of a traditional (in my view, descriptive) conception of social structure, provides us with an inadequate model for explaining social constraint. Criticisms levelled at Giddens' definition of social structures and systems have varied considerably, but roughly they fall into the following categories: the notion of 'rule' is either ambiguous (Thompson, 1989) or cannot do the job required of it (Thompson, 1989; Archer, 1995; and Mouzelis, 1995 & 2000); 'Resources' are not 'virtual' in the sense in which Giddens portrays them (Sewell, 1992; and, Stones, 2005); and, finally, that the study of 'rules' is methodologically flawed. If we are to maintain the central tenets of structuration theory some sort of reply to these critics is necessary. I begin with the issue of agency and social constraint.

Agency and Social Constraint

In terms of understanding structuration theory and its differences to, for example, Margaret Archer's dualism, it is important to recognise that Giddens provides us with two over-lapping conceptions of action. On the one hand, he supplies an account, or model, of the acting subject. This leads him to the conclusion that 'reflexivity' 'is the very ontological condition of human life in society' (Giddens, 1976:19). On the other hand, his notion of 'agency' must be read, in relation to structuration theory, as a de-centred or inter-subjective self (although, it is always dependent on the acting subject and causation at the level of social interaction). I shall begin this section by discussing Giddens' conception of the acting subject and how this differs from dualist accounts such as those of the philosophy of action. I will then look more closely at his definition of agency (including its dependence on the related notions of power and *praxis*) which will lead directly to Giddens' arguments concerning the conception of voluntarism and the (diametrically opposed) notion of social constraint in structuration theory.

As discussed earlier the stratification model (see Figure 1, Chapter 1) of the agent refers to various aspects of action that may or may not lead to the production or reproduction of the social world (the instantiation of structures and systems). Included here is: the reflexive monitoring of action, the rationalization of action, and the motivation of action. Each of these is set (theoretically speaking) against the backdrop of both the unintended consequences of action and the unacknowledged conditions of action. There is a temptation at this juncture, and one that is taken by most commentators, to try to disentangle the individual and his or her motives or intentions from the circumstance in which the actor finds him- or herself. This has been, Giddens notes, the project of analytical approaches to the philosophy of action (ordinary language philosophy in particular) which have tended to equate agency with the intentions of individuals in their social setting (or, more particularly, to that of purposive behaviour). Giddens, following Schutz' critique of Max Weber's theory of action, argues that this is misleading in two ways. First, with regard to the concept of action generically, the notion of intention presupposes action: an actor cannot 'intend' but must 'intend to do something'. Giddens notes:

The terms 'intention' and 'purpose' ... are rather misleading, or can easily become so, since they imply that the flux of the actor's life-activity can be clearly desiccated into strings of intended outcomes. But only in rare circumstances does a person have a clear-cut 'end' in mind which organizes his energies unequivocally in one direction ... (Giddens, 1976:82)

Giddens then re-conceptualises the adjective 'purposive' to imply 'the successful "monitoring" by the actor of his own activity' (ibid). This specialised use of the term will no doubt lead philosophers of action to question quite why one would want to clamp purpose with monitoring when it is not clear that all purposive action is in fact monitored action. At first sight, the invocation of the tautological assertion that 'a "purposive act", like act-identification more generally, is only grasped reflexively by the actor' (ibid) does not seem helpful in this respect. However, such statements must be read in the light of Giddens' adherence to the phenomenological/ ethnomethodological insight that the categorization of any act necessarily involves an actor in a reflexive process.

And, it is perhaps in this sense that purpose can be perceived as always entailing what Giddens calls monitoring.

Second, Giddens notes that the dissection of discrete acts within 'lived through experience' depends upon 'a reflexive process of attention of the actor, or the regard of another' (Giddens, 1976: 74). To confuse the designation of agency with the giving of act-descriptions is to mistake the general character of agency from the characterization of types of acts. It is a mistake, Giddens observes, that has occurred largely as a result of a philosophical tradition that has conceptualised acts, intentions, purposes, reasons, etc. as 'distinct unities or elements [which can be] in some way aggregated or strung together in action' (Giddens, 1979:55)⁷. Henceforward Giddens refers to 'elements' or 'segments' of actions as acts which must be distinguished from 'action' or 'agency' which he equates with the 'lived-through process of everyday conduct' (Giddens, 1976:75, 1979:55, & 1984:9).

This leads to what I see as the primary characteristic of Giddens's definition of agency. Giddens observes: 'I shall define action or agency as *the stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world*' (Giddens, 1976:75 emphasizes in original) The key point to note in relation to Giddens' conception of action or agency is that it connects directly with his theoretical dependence on the concept of *praxis*. In so doing it dissects subjectivity from agency. Giddens takes from Marx's early (humanist) writings the importance of practical activities (or *praxis*) and the reflections of actors in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world. Implicitly at least, the main critique of ordinary language philosophers' analyses of action is their over-reliance upon 'meaning' or signification at the expense of power relations. There exists a parallel here, not wasted by Giddens (1979:151ff), with Marx's critique of Feuerbach in particular and materialism in general (see McLellan, 1977:156ff).

For Marx, both idealism and materialism had erred in their definitions of human subjectivity. The concept of *praxis* allowed Marx to re-instate, within a broadly materialist framework, human sensuousness: 'The chief defect of all hitherto

existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively' (McLellan, 1973:156).⁸ For Giddens, the problem with both objectivism (in its 'structuralist' varieties) and subjectivism (in its interpretivist format) is the absence of an adequate theory of the subject. Thus, structuralism needs to be 'grounded in a broader theory of social practice' (Giddens, 1979:48) whilst interpretivist sociology 'deals with action as meaning rather than with action as *praxis*' (Giddens, 1976:53). In cutting this final quotation short I have omitted Giddens' own definition of *praxis*, which is: 'the involvement of actors with the practical realization of interests, including the material transformation of nature through human activity' (*ibid*).

Giddens' reference to 'interests' in the last quotation brings us to the second key feature of agency in Giddens' structuration theory, that is, its association with power and power relations⁹. Giddens claims that the very notion of 'agency' is logically tied to that of 'power' (cf. Giddens, 1976:110). There are two related senses in the way in which Giddens employs this logical relationship: power as 'transformative capacity' and power as 'domination'. The former refers to 'the capability of the actor to intervene in a series of events so as to alter their course...' (Giddens, 1976:111). The latter, which he describes as the more narrow sense of power, denotes relational circumstances in which outcomes of action are dependent upon the agency of others. In both cases power in interaction must be understood in terms of the mobilization of structural resources which actors bring to situations and in so-doing influence the course of events.

Central to Giddens' definition of power is the further caveat that agency 'concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently' (Giddens, 1984:9). This counterfactual characteristic of agency has attracted considerable controversy which, taken together with Giddens' definition of power, has led critics, such as Archer (1982:459-60) and Carlstein (1981:53-3) to complain that his model provides agents with an over generous

degree of freedom. Furthermore, others, such as Thompson (1989:73-74), have been led to wonder whether the very definition of agency makes it impossible for an individual not to be an agent. There are two responses we may make to these claims.

First, Cohen (1989:25) has argued that Giddens' caveat in *The Constitution of Society* that 'the nature of constraint is historically variable, as are the enabling qualities generated by the contextualities of human action' (Giddens, 1984:179) provides an adequate response to Archer's and Carlstein's claims. For Giddens, Cohen argues, is simply (and rightly) signifying 'an unwillingness to establish an *a priori* position on questions of freedom or determinism' (Cohen, 1989:25). And, he observes: 'Considered in this light, the proviso that, in principle, agents are always capable of "acting otherwise" represents only a denial of a thoroughgoing determinism of agency by forces to which the agent must respond automatically' (ibid). Cohen's point is surely valid. And, it is consistent with one of Giddens' responses to Thompson on this subject. Namely, that we should avoid talking of restraint in the ways in which structuralists or naturalists do: as 'causal properties of an invariant kind supposedly parallel to those characteristic of the physical world' (Giddens, 1989: 258). However, this interpretation – taken singularly – is not strong enough.

Thus, second, and to clarify further, one thing that stands out clearly in this debate surrounding the related concerns of 'social constraint' and 'voluntarism' is the sense in which the parties concerned in this debate seem to be talking at cross-purposes to one another. For Archer in particular, but for Carlstein and Thompson also, restraint seems to refer to not being able to do a specific thing, for example, implement a generous pensions' policy at times when there exists a top-heavy demographic structure. Their notions of constraint are, in this sense, tied to a definition of agency that connects directly with wants or purpose. We have already seen that Giddens has abandoned such a conception of agency in favour of one in which agency is premised upon *praxis*. Aside from this, or perhaps because of this, Giddens places considerable emphasis upon the fact that structures are both enabling and constraining. Logically, 'could have done otherwise' refers not just to the specifically defined purpose of an agent (the

exclusive disjunction) but to a general sense in which actors are adept (or skilled) performers (the more general disjunction). He doesn't deny that there exist limitations upon what agents can and cannot do; indeed, the very incorporation of a concept like *praxis* suggests that social life is constrained (or limited) by nature and the social environment in which an individual finds herself. Thus, Giddens' emphasis upon enablement together with his counterfactual definition of agency does not imply a full-blown voluntarism, as Archer suggests, but a recognition (derived partly from Goffman's studies) that the ontological condition of human existence is *verstehen* and its subsequent response: reflexivity. Let me unfold this point further.

As noted previously, Giddens asserts that the relationship between power and agency (or action) is a logical one: 'power characterizes not specific types of conduct but all action' (Giddens, 1984:16)¹⁰. However, as discussed, 'power' must not be simply equated with 'domination', that is, the realization of outcomes where such outcomes depend upon the activities of others (cf. Giddens, 1976:111), but also, and more importantly, the 'transformative capacity' of an agent: 'the capability of the actor to intervene in a series of events so as to alter their course'. And, it is in this sense that we should respond to Archer's and Carlstein's criticism that structuration theory is overly-voluntaristic. For, the voluntarism that Giddens is referring to springs from the claim that even in circumstances where the imbalance of power relations is acute actors are still 'often very adept at converting whatever resources they possess into some degree of control over the conditions of reproduction of the system' (Giddens, 1982:199). This is not to say that in such circumstances those who are least powerful are able to radically change the situation they find themselves in but to make reference to the real nature of the reflexivity of the human condition. This, in turn, demands that we look at an agent's full set of options and not simply an exclusive disjunction of options where one half of that particular formula is not available to the actor. Thus, in its exclusivity, the context in which Archer introduces the notion of 'morphostasis' is (almost) an anathema to structuration theory: only in very rare circumstances can we conclude that an actor could not have acted otherwise¹¹.

This final point is attested most clearly in Goffman's (1961) study of patients' 'secondary adjustments' to the stigmata of mental illness in asylum hospitals¹². Prior to or upon entering a total institution, such as an asylum, Goffman observes, mental patients are – following their activities on the 'outside' – routinely stigmatized. For a while, stigmatisation as mentally ill is a way in which a patient answers the impropriety of his offences on the outside. The manifestation of new symptoms after entering the hospital is common. But the persistence or acceptance of stigma cannot serve the patient for long; it cannot be re-joined to her sense of self. Thus, the patient must satisfy her disaffection. The rejection of stigma, of what the institution's view of her is, may take many forms. It may be for the inmate, as Goffman (1961:268) observed, that to decline 'to exchange a word with the staff or with his fellow patients may be ample evidence of rejecting the institution's views of what he is'¹³. Such adjustments exist, as Goffman shows, even in those more extreme circumstances where patients may reside on 'bad' wards or be held in confinement. Even here there are ways of repudiating the institution, of re-asserting one's liberty or autonomy. Whilst these may appear to us to be silly or symptomatic of the patient's condition 'such as banging a chair against the floor or striking a sheet of newspaper sharply so as to make an annoying explosive sound' (Goffman, 1961:269) in Goffman's analysis they are meaningful events¹⁴. Giddens' definition of agency, like any other notion of this concept, must be able to capture these kinds of meaningful action as well as those that imply social constraint. In short, agency must be able to account for a host of enabling and constraining aspects of *praxis*. Thus, Giddens' intention is not to instil in the individual unlimited powers or capabilities so as to utterly transform the social practices they are engaged in but to recognise, following Goffman, that even 'the most seemingly 'powerless' individuals are able to mobilise resources so as to carve out "spaces of control" with respect to their day-to-day lives and in respect of the activities of the more powerful' (Giddens, 1982:197-8).

The foregoing section has shown the need to treat Giddens' concept of agency as one in which actors, situated within the life-world, reflexively select and/or develop the rules and resources they are endowed with. However, it is equally important to observe that the concept of agency is not a 'self' as such but, in

structuration theory, it represents an inter-subjective self or a de-centred subject. The self, as Mead made clear, belongs to the community. This brings us directly to the criticism related to the duality of structure.

Rules, Resources, and Systems

The criticisms that have been levelled at structuration theory in terms of Giddens' novel interpretations of 'rules', 'social structures', and 'social systems' seem to arise mainly from a dualistic reading of his work (or a 'dualistic frame of mind'). For the sake of clarity, I will bracket these criticisms in the following way: first, the notion of 'rule' is either ambiguous (Thompson, 1989) and/or not up to the job it is 'intended' to perform (Thompson, 1989; Archer, 1982 & 1995; Mouzelis, 1995 & 2000); second, the 'virtual' character of social structures does not hold water when we subject the concept of 'resources' to closer scrutiny (Sewell, 1992; Stones, 2005); finally, social analysis is prohibited by placing social structure in such proximity to social practices (Thompson, 1989; and, Archer, 1995). I'll deal with these issues in this order.

John Thompson (1989: 62ff), in what is perhaps the best known critique of structuration theory, complains that Giddens' substitution of a traditional conception of 'social structure' for one based upon 'rules' and 'resources' is ambiguous and does not coincide with many of the structural features prevalent in society. The problem of rule, he observes, is that by its very nature it is both vague and ambiguous:

We use the expression 'rule' in a great variety of ways. We speak of moral rules, traffic rules, bureaucratic rules, rules of grammar, rules of etiquette, rules of football. We say of someone who regularly does something at a certain time that, 'as a rule', this is what he or she does. Workers who resist employers by sticking to the letter of their contracts are said to be 'working to rule' (Thompson, 1989:63)

Thompson argues that the use of Wittgenstein's formula does little to clarify the situation for it is not clear how Giddens is using this. Is he, for example, suggesting that rules are of a quasi mathematical formula? What then, Thompson asks, are the rules that comprise social structure? That is the first

point. The second is somewhat more convoluted and involves four closely related arguments. First, Thompson (1989:64) observes that 'Giddens cannot clarify the sense of "rule" and the kinds of rules which are relevant to social structure without presupposing a criterion of importance, and this criterion can never be derived from attending to rules alone'.¹⁵ Secondly and thirdly, he argues that a study of 'rules' both fails to capture structural differentiation, that is, differences pertaining to class, sex, region, etc (see, Thompson, 1989:65) as well as restricted (institutional) opportunities of access such as those evident in the education structure of Britain. Fourth, he claims that structuration provides no way of formulating the idea of structural identity, that is, for example, the rules that are held in common within and between capitalistic enterprises.

Giddens' responses to these issues are enlightening in terms of the role that he sees not only for 'rules' and 'resources' but also with regard to elements of the social system. The first thing he does is clarify the meaning of 'rules'. Rules are not to be understood in terms of a quasi-mathematical formulae but should be viewed as specifying generalisable procedures or conventions that agents follow. And, whilst it is true that they are very general, this is not the same as vague or ambiguous (Giddens, 1989: 255). Indeed, the many and empirically differentiated examples that Thompson provides in relation to this (moral rules, traffic rules, bureaucratic rules, rules of grammar, rules of etiquette, etc) highlights, first, as Giddens (ibid) notes, the diversity of social life, and second, the need to capture this diversity within a conceptual framework that can account for such a broad-spectrum. Thus, Giddens' responses to Thompson's critique concerning the ambiguity of rules is both straightforward, and in my view, quite satisfactory. And, to my knowledge, the matter has not been raised by critics since.

Giddens' response to the four related issues concerning the relationship between rules and what Thompson has in mind when he refers to 'structures' frequently alludes to the fact that what Thompson (and Bauman in the same text) call structures are what he thinks of as social systems. Thus, he observes: '[w]hen Thompson uses the phrase 'social structure', he has in mind what I mean in speaking of the structural properties of social systems' (Giddens, 1989: 256). Or,

on the subject of differential life chances, he notes, 'I have consistently stressed that power is an elemental characteristic of all social systems...' (Giddens, 1989: 256-7). And, again, on the topic of structural differentiation (in relation to restricted education opportunities), he responds, first, by noting that we 'could not answer such a question by looking for a social rule which is somehow responsible for this phenomenon. Rather, we would be looking at certain forms of system reproduction, in which complexes of rules and resources are implicated' (Giddens, 1989:257). All of these quotations point towards the importance of recognising the actual human outcomes of social practices and how these outcomes may not run parallel to the intentions of actors who use social structures in interaction processes. In this respect, Giddens (1989:256) himself, observes, crucially, that '[i]n my usage, structure is what gives form and shape to social life, but it is not itself that form and shape'. Giddens is, of course, referring to the unintended consequences of action. Although this brief reply to Thompson's concerns is not entirely satisfactory we can, for the moment, leave the matter here for later it will become clear that structuration theory is not, as some of its critics have assumed, solely concerned with a virtual realm of rules and resources but provides space for unintended systemic relations.

I shall now argue that some of the friends of structuration theory have, in their endeavours to modify structuration theory, inadvertently transformed the approach into a pseudo version of naturalism. I shall claim that Sewell's modifications of structuration theory are based upon a simplistic (but common) distinction between the real and the virtual (or, equally base, the 'external' and the 'internal') and that whilst Stones' attempt to reformulate structuration theory is more sophisticated it too moves towards naturalism or dualism. Because both accounts are concerned with a similar problem which may be loosely called the internal/external dilemma over social objects or, as described above, the virtual character of Giddens' 'social structures' I will discuss their claims together. I will begin with Sewell's modifications, draw in Stones' critique of Sewell, and then discuss two further problems raised by Stones himself.

Both William Sewell and Rob Stones profess to be sympathetic admirers of Giddens' reformulation of the concept of structure. Thus, in relation to his own examination of the concept Sewell (1992:4) observes that his strategy is 'to begin from what I regard as the most promising existing formulations – Anthony Giddens's notion of the "duality of structure" ...'.¹⁶ Rob Stones, writing some time after Sewell and after much dust has settled on structuration theory is more cautious about the 'abstract nature of Giddens's theory' but clearly intends to reformulate, or reinvigorate, structuration theory in line with the original spirit of the project. This spirit, original at the time of Giddens' first endeavours, is to go beyond looking simply at structures or agents, or giving primacy to one over the other, and to emphasise the significance in any social conduct of both. And, limitations aside, this is what most advocates of structuration theory have found wanting elsewhere. So, we must take it as given that Sewell, Stones, (and others such as Mouzelis) are advocates of structuration theory and intend that their reformulations of the 'duality of structure' will build on what Giddens has already contributed to the structure-agency debate.

Aside from generally agreeing with Giddens's aims and intentions and more general complaints concerning the adequacy of the development of the concepts of structuration theory Sewell's main concern is with the way in which 'resources' are defined in Giddens' theory¹⁷. In particular, he argues that grouping 'rules' and 'resources' into one class is unhelpful and, from the perspective of what does and does not exist in *substantiare* makes little sense. He offers the following examples:

It is clear that factories, armaments, land, and Hudson Bay blankets have had a crucial weight in shaping and constraining social life in particular times and places, and it therefore seems sensible to include them in some way in a concept of structure. But it is also hard to see how much material resources can be considered as 'virtual', since material things by definition exist in space and time (Sewell, 1992: 10)

Sewell's solution is to reformulate Giddens' definition of rules and resources. 'Rules' he renames 'cultural schemas' and, following the research findings of cultural anthropology,¹⁸ he claims, we can say that exist in a virtual realm and operate 'at widely varying levels of depth'. Thus, cultural schemas do not

simply refer to Lévi-Strauss' (1963) deep and hidden structures but to the more mundane surface rules of everyday life. Examples of such rules may include those of etiquette, aesthetic norms, or the rules concerning royal progress, democratic vote, or a set of equivalences between male and female, nature and nurture, public and private, and so forth. What, for Sewell, determines their virtual character, is their generalizability or transposability. That is, to say they are virtual is to say 'that they cannot be reduced to their existence in any particular practice or any particular location in space and time: they can be actualised in a potentially broad and undetermined range of situations' (Sewell, 1993:8). This is, of course, mostly consistent with Giddens' original definition of rules. However, these virtual schema are to be distinguished from 'resources' which, reformulated from the Giddensian original, are of two types: human and non-human. The latter are objects 'that can be used to enhance or maintain power' (Sewell, 1992: 9) whilst the former are human resources such as knowledge, physical strength or dexterity. Both are media of power and are unevenly distributed, presumably, in any given social encounter. And, agency itself is equated with the distribution of resources: to be an agent is to be empowered by access to resources.

From here, Sewell concludes that Giddens is mistaken in defining both rules and resources as 'virtual' entities. Rules remain virtual whilst resources are actual. And, what makes a rule 'virtual' for Sewell (following Bourdieu), as noted, is its transposable quality. On the other hand, allocative resources, which he labels non human resources, are by definition actual rather than virtual entities. And, he says, if doubt about the virtual/material divide exists in relation to resources it lies with human attributes such as knowledge and emotional commitment. However, Sewell opts in favour of labelling these resources as actual rather than virtual, by claiming that they are observable characteristics of real people (in time-space relations) and that 'it is their actualisation in people's minds and bodies that make them resources' (Sewell, 1992:10).

As Sewell rightly points out in conclusion, if he is correct Giddens' notion of structure turns out to be self-contradictory; for if structures are virtual they cannot include both schemas and resources. Sewell's solution is to reformulate

the term structure and to limit its referent to rules or schemas whilst advocating that resources should be treated as the effects of structures¹⁹. There is some similarity in this claim to the argument I put forward in the last chapter; although instead of complaining that dualism reifies the relationship between cultural artefacts and memory traces the argument here is that duality fails to capture, minimally, the differences between material and cultural artefacts, and maximally the actuality of material objects. I will deal with Stones' critique of Sewell's reconstruction of structuration theory whilst setting out the Stones' own problems with Giddens' conceptualisation of resources.

Stones has two main problems with Giddens's presentation of structuration theory. First, he comments in relation to Giddens' rules and resources 'that there is a certain lack of analytical clarity here with respect to two issues' (Stones, 2005:18). He complains that Giddens seems unsure as to whether to treat resources as material entities or as having a virtual existence. He further notes, that in *Central Problems in Social Theory* Giddens refers to resources as 'material levers' whilst in *The Constitution of Society* resources are said to exist only as memory traces. However, Stones argues:

The latter definition logically rules out structures as resources having any prior material content, a conclusion that Giddens would be hard put to defend as consistent with many of the points he makes about power and transformative capacity. It is the first, earlier, definition that is ultimately more coherent. Thus whilst noting the ambiguity in Giddens's writings I will, for the rest of the argument of this book, work with the assumption that 'structures as resources' has both phenomenological and material dimensions. . . Stones (2005:18).

To return briefly to Sewell's critique, by stating that resources possess both a 'phenomenological and material dimension' Stones means to say, contra Sewell, that resources do not always exist simply in a material form. Stones uses one of Sewell's own examples to demonstrate, quite straightforwardly, that resources may also be of a virtual quality. He writes:

Thus, for example, when writing of the power resources or capabilities of the priest, the mother and the king, Sewell is mistaken to reduce these to the actual ... Once one begins to speak of what happens in people's minds

and bodies in relation to their orientation to social context, then one necessarily involves the realm of the virtual. (Stones, 2005:70)

Stones is quite right. So too is Archer when she points out that Sewell's re-classification of formal rules as resources is a step in the wrong direction for structuration theory for it leads to such absurd conclusions as 'having more of the Highway Code than other people or of accumulating the law of trespass' (Archer, 1995:109-110).

Stones' second, and related, point makes reference to or asks 'where one should draw the boundaries' between the agent and the structures the agent draws upon in social action. Stones notes that it is all very well asserting that structures are internal to the individual but this has ramifications in terms of how we deal with resources and power relations between individuals. Indeed the whole issue of 'internal' and 'external' objects (from the perspective of the individual), Stones asserts, seems somewhat confused. For example, he adds, should

... material objects employed by an agent in the performance of an action – from tokens of exchange through clothes and weapons to technologically sophisticated means of transportation or communication – be thought of as part of the agent's embodied capability informed by the hermeneutic structures within that 'body', or should they be thought of as material things external to the agent? (ibid)

Our common sense response to this, and one which we find consistently hard to detract from, is to treat all material objects as 'external' to the individual and all psychological phenomena as internal to the individual. Almost all of the 'friends' of structuration theory have attempted, in one way or another, to 'rescue' Giddens' theory in this way. Thus, Stones' response to Sewell is to accept that 'resources' may be both virtual and material and that they have in fact a fourfold existence in the structuration cycle (see Stones, 2005: 71-2). However, his account is sophisticated enough to recognise, unlike Sewell, that material resources such as 'blankets, land, factories and weapons ...[require] a phenomenology of resources' (Stones, 2005:72). Nevertheless, he argues, these objects' prior existence (to social interaction) also demands that they be treated as actual objects in the first phase of the structuration cycle. This sounds, at the

very least, like a circular argument and is not helped by Stones' (2005:71) claim that in the first moment, in the four moments of structuration, resources are to be viewed 'as external, latent or potential, material and ideational conditions of action...' Do not, it might be asked, 'latent', 'potential', and 'ideational' all imply 'virtual'? Some other way of defining these material objects is required for all such attempts to save structuration theory in this way either jeopardise the 'duality of structure and agency' or leave a trail of confusion²⁰. Furthermore, it must be conceded that if material resources are 'external' in the sense in which Stones and others suppose then by definition we are imposing a dualist conception of structure upon our framework through the prising apart of agency and (part of) structure²¹.

How, it might be asked, would Giddens respond to these issues? I think he might say something along the following lines. On one point, on the issue of a phenomenology of the material objects of the world, Stones is correct. Every social object, by definition, requires for its existence 'signification', 'domination', and 'legitimation'. But on another point he is wrong to suppose that there exists an avenue for 'externality' in the description of resources as material levers undermines the essence of the human condition, which is, *verstehen*. Further, a careful reading of the section of *The Central Problems in Social Theory* suggests that Stones has seized upon a reference to 'material levers' and largely ignored the fact that what was being referred to here is the transformation of 'empirical contents'. Of course, the confusion may have arisen from an artificial separation of the two element of social structure (rules and resources) which I (Giddens) transposed from the 'virtual realm' to the 'social system' in a clumsy fashion. This seemed to give the impression that resources, in the literal sense of that term, are self-referencing.

But, to be clear, 'social structures', strictly speaking, consist of *knowledge* of things objects, social practices, and what to do, and how to do things, what is important here, who is important here, what works here, and, so forth. The point is, 'social structures', as memory traces, as a virtual order, relates to, and only to, human knowledge. This is consistent with the hermeneutic tradition, but when used pragmatic philosophy need not lead to judgemental relativism.

'Resources', in this sense, i.e. not in the literal sense in which we generally use the word, refers to 'memory traces' (of the collective) or knowledge about relations of things/objects (i.e. allocative resources) or knowledge about relations of authority (i.e. authoritative resources). Resources, in the ordinary sense in which we use the term (for example, Sewell's blankets, land, factories and weapons) are employed in social practices but require, for their instantiation in the real world, to repeat, 'signification', 'domination', and 'legitimation'. That they are physically external to the human being, or real in either a historical or empirical way, is in a sense irrelevant to the validity of structuration theory. If we are now wondering what role resources, in the literal sense, plays in social practices the only logical answer that can be given is: whatever role(s) the rules and resources permit them to play. Are such objects causally efficacious? Of course they are, but their *sui generis* status is both natural and social. In terms of the latter, as noted before, it must be remembered that ultimately the 'only moving objects in human social relations are individual agents, who employ resources to make things happen, intentionally or otherwise' (Giddens, 1984:181).

Is this a legitimate move? It may require some shoring up but it would certainly help to explain Giddens' almost bewildered response to Thompson and other critics. These authors seem to have taken Giddens' re-conceptualisation of social structures as virtual to mean that the (often descriptive) circumstances they had previously called 'social structures' cannot be 'empirically' real. But does arguing that rules and resources structure social systems lead to such a conclusion? Well, yes if one is insisting upon following the path of empiricism. But no, if like Giddens, one is holding to a form of hermeneutical pragmatism. That is, to recall from the final section of Chapter 1, Giddens adheres to a version of hermeneutics that is pragmatic in rejecting judgemental relativism and the view that 'frames of meaning' are incommensurable, whilst at the same time acknowledging, against Winch (but not Kuhn, 1977) the superiority of some forms or types of knowledge over others. Thus, his hermeneutical framework has both the advantages that pragmatism bestows upon it and the added benefit (in my view) of not having to carry around the kind of ontological baggage that naturalism/ realism warrants necessary.

Furthermore, given Giddens' desire to incorporate into his framework (re-worked) elements of both interpretive and structural social theory it certainly makes it unlikely that he would have intended to conclude in the manner in which his critics imply. So, a second way of perhaps answering the question of whether rules and resources structure social systems so as to produce an 'empirical' reality is to observe what Giddens actually has to say about what he calls the social system. This will also allow us to answer, briefly, the third and final criticism levelled at structuration theory. Namely, that it is flawed in terms of actual social analysis or methodology. I will begin with this.

Both Archer and Thompson complain that defining social structures as memory traces instantiated in social practices prevents analysis of the most important features of social life. Thompson critique is, on this issue, implied. He observes that Giddens' introduction of social system terms such as 'institution', 'structural principles', 'structural sets', and 'elements or axes of structuration' leads to more conceptual confusion. Thus, he notes:

A structural principle, such as that which 'operates along an axis' relating urban areas top rural hinterland, is not a 'rule' in any ordinary sense: it is neither a semantic rule nor a moral rule nor a 'formula' which expresses what actors know in knowing how to go on in social life. To insist that a structural principle must be some such rule, or must be capable of being analysed in terms of rules, is to force on to the material a mode of conceptualisation which is not appropriate to it, and which stems less from a reflection upon the structural features of social life than from an implicit ontology of structure. (Thompson, 1989:68)²²

Archer (1995:107) makes a similar point when she complains that 'the re-definition shifts the referent of 'structure' away from identifiable forms of organization (the division of labour, educational systems, political parties ...) and links them instead to underlying organizing principles ...'²³ There is a sense in both of these commentaries that structuration theory is unable to guide analysis in those traditional areas of social studies that some sociologists have called 'structural analysis'. At the same time, as noted above, Giddens provides us with a set of conceptual tools for the investigation of these areas. The

question arises as to whether these are genuinely useful and/or ontologically sound. I take the latter to be of most importance.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Giddens presents us with both a virtual realm of social structures and a world, erring on the side of caution, which relates to the existence of 'social objects' in time and space. The social system, he says, refers to 'regularised relations of interdependence between individuals and groups' (Giddens, 1979:66). That is, the reproduction of social practices and relations between practices. Thus, the social system refers to 'reproduced interdependence of action' (Giddens, 1979:73). And, he says, changes in one or more of the component parts of the system may initiate changes in other component parts. The smallest of systems is dyadic. That is, it is structured by two regularised practices. However, the largest of systems is not simply the smallest writ large. In each case we may define a system as constituted through clusters of social structures. Importantly, we should refer to 'social structures' structuring 'social systems'. It is wrong, therefore, to simply equate, as Thompson and other critics have assumed, systems with clusters of social structures. Whilst the latter structure systems they are not identical to them. In assuming identity such authors are ignoring the importance that Giddens places upon both the unacknowledged conditions of action and the unintended consequences of action: each of which refers to the outcomes of action in time-space. However, whilst system, and system relations, may not be identical to social structure they remain, for their constitution, entirely dependent on social practices, As Giddens (1979:77) notes in relation to social and system integration:

... the systemness of social integration is fundamental to the systemness of society as a whole. System integration cannot be adequately conceptualised via the modalities of social integration; none the less the latter is always the chief prop of the former, via the reproduction of institutions in the duality of structure

To talk of systems escaping their makers in the way in which realists claim makes no real sense in the context of causality because systems are produced through social practices which are, in turn, dependent upon the agency-social

structure duality.²⁴ There are several alternative ways of stating this point. None of which is entirely adequate for reasons given by Giddens in Chapter 1 of *New Rules of Sociological Method* but each provides an ontological critique of dualism. First, in terms of Marx's response to Feuerbach's materialism we may say that humanity cannot escape its humanness: 'the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations' (see McLellan, 1977:157). Second, in Husserl's failed attempt to *epoché* the bric-à-brac of the 'lived-in-world' in order to reveal subjectivity in its pure form. The trouble with this bric-à-brac, as Giddens (1976:25) puts it so well 'is that it refuses to be reconstituted'. Or, lastly, in the absolute repudiation of solipsism in Wittgenstein's formulation of 'language games' or 'forms of life' within which the individual plays out life.

To return to social systems. Giddens suggests that system reproduction may relate to the unacknowledged conditions of action (such as when I utter a sentence in the English language) or the unintended consequences of action. Examples of the latter include: homeostatic causal loops (or homeostasis); self-regulation through feedback; and reflexive self-regulation. The first of these, as noted, leads to homeostasis but the other two may promote either stasis or change. The example that Giddens (1979:79) uses is that of the 'poverty cycle'. Initially we may want to say that the following homestatic system leads to the reproduction of 'poverty': material deprivation → poor schooling → low-level employment → material deprivation²⁵. However, it may be the case that there are controlling influences, such as an entry examination to secondary school at age 11, which leads to the maintenance of the cycle. In which case the cycle may be described as operating under 'self-regulation through feed-back'. Now, if, following some or other social investigation, the components of the cycle are discovered and a government decides upon intervening to end or reduce the numbers caught up in the cycle we can then talk of system reproduction in terms of 'reflexive self-regulation'.

Each of the forms of system reproduction described by Giddens are products of social practices which he describes as deeply sedimented in time-space. These,

he calls, 'institutions' and, characteristically, they 'are enduring and inclusive "laterally" in the sense that they are widespread among the members of a community or society' (Giddens, 1979:80). The study of such institutions is quite permissible within structuration theory. Giddens then notes a methodological distinction between institutional analysis and the study of strategic conduct. (To clarify, we need to note that the proper study of sociology is the analysis of social systems, that is, the observed outcomes of social practices or the study of the production and reproduction of social life.) Institutional analysis and the study of strategic conduct both, in their own ways, capture this. An example of the former is Giddens' (1981) own study of *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* whilst Goffman's numerous contributions to the analysis of practical consciousness is representative of what Giddens calls the study of strategic conduct. Both represent legitimate forms of sociological analysis. As Giddens (1979:80) observes: 'The point of the distinctions is to indicate two principle ways in which the study of system properties may be approached in the social sciences: each of which is separated out, however, only by methodological *epoché*'. Without the bracketing of either institutional analysis (which relies heavily upon both the unacknowledged conditions of action and the unintended consequences of action) or strategic conduct (which studies the ways in 'which actors draw upon structural elements' (*ibid*) in social practices) we allow a dualism of subject and object to creep back into our philosophy. Recognising the importance of both social structure and social system brings us back to the real ontological grounding of structuration theory which lies in Giddens' understanding of *praxis* which Ira Cohen describes in the following way:

Praxis should be regarded as synonymous with the constitution of social life, i.e. the manner in which all aspects, elements, and dimensions of social life, from instances of conduct in themselves to the most complicated and extensive types of collectivities, are generated in and through the performance of social conduct, the consequences which ensue, and the social relations which are thereby established. Cohen (1989:12)

In the final section of my responses to the critics of structuration theory I wish, briefly, to respond to one criticism levelled at this approach by Patrick Baert

(1998). This is the claim that Giddens' theory tends towards a conservative account of social life or that it is not a useful tool for explaining social change. I will only defend Giddens' theory against this charge in a partial manner, and, very briefly, note some ways in which we might, as social scientists, better conceive the ways in which social change takes place. The second issue concerns the problem of social scientific laws or, more specifically, the reasons that lie behind the absence of universal laws that are applicable to the social world. I shall argue that the most fundamental precept, or the very basis, of critical realism depends upon establishing universal laws. This was the underlying message of *A Realist Theory of Science*. And, it is a message that somehow got lost in the transfer of realism from the natural world to the social world. What is more, and following this, I shall claim that critical realism can only succeed if it can establish that the laws of the social world are, like the laws of natural world, mechanistic. And, of course it cannot, but without this it must fail, for closure and non-Humean causation as a solution to the openness of systems makes no sense.

On the Problem of Social Change

Baert claims that like other grand social theories, structuration theory tends towards a conservative observation of the social world, it looks towards order rather than social change. He claims that although 'structuration theory provides a different answer from the "normative integration model" of Durkheim and Parsons, it tends to focus on the same question of how social order (as opposed to change) comes about' (Baert, 1998:109). Now in some respects I do not disagree with this conclusion which, as Baert observes, coincides with Mouzelis' categorization of the duality of structure with what he refers to as a 'natural-performative' model of action. But I would like to make two points in Giddens' defence.

First, it is may be partially true, if harsh, given Giddens' incorporation of reflexivity, and system and social integration into his thesis to say that structuration theory does not readily allow for explanations of social change. However, as it is at least partially constituted by other theories that draw on or

place considerable emphasis upon either the phenomenological insight of the 'natural attitude' or something akin to Wittgenstein's notion of 'how to go on' its tendency towards order is perhaps not surprising. Both of these theories have, too, a tendency towards expressing that which resides in 'mutual knowledge' or that which is hidden in tacit forms of knowledge as somehow solid even if, like Schutz, they assert that the 'natural attitude' is really quite fragile, or if, like Garfinkel they demonstrate through experimentation that this is the case. This seems true, and has been referred to also in relation to Winch's work and it is also implied in symbolic interactionism and, despite assertions by Becker (1963) and others of the voluntaristic nature of their accounts, the 'labelling' perspective too. Indeed, Giddens, in his Introduction to *New Rules of Sociological Method* perhaps, and inadvertently, supplies us with an explanation as to why this is so often the case with theories of action. He notes:

Mead's social philosophy, in an important sense, was built around reflexivity: the reciprocity of the 'I' and the 'me'. But even in Mead's own writings, the constituting activity of the 'I' is not stressed. Rather, it is the 'social self' with which Mead was preoccupied; and this emphasis has become even more pronounced in the writings of most of his followers (Giddens, 1976:22)

The result, as Giddens (*ibid*) also notes is that it becomes possible to simply re-interpret the 'social self' as the 'socially determined self'. Or, at least this is what appears to be the case. Theories of action do not lend themselves to explaining change if they are, and most of this type of research is, isolated in time. And, again, as with Willis' lads this is especially true of ethnographic studies. Structuralism, although not structural-functionalism, has in this sense, the advantage of time. Nevertheless, like Mead's social philosophy, there is no real theoretical reason why social change should not be incorporated into a structurationist explanation. There has been, after all, an effort to incorporate the rationalization of action, purposive conduct, and the unintended consequences of action into the stratification model of action. And Giddens has given us ways in which, for the purpose of institutional analysis, researchers might (and should) engage in a bracketing off process with respect to 'social interaction'. Further, my own account of the reflexivity and rationalization of moral incontinence points, I would argue, in two directions. On the one hand, our affirmation to

moral norms seems solid, on the other hand, our frequent breaches of moral imperatives – although mainly minor – point towards possibilities of change.

Second, whilst structuralism (and historical sociology) are advantaged by an incorporation of time into their explanatory schema they have not always shown an insight into the temporal nature of social change itself. Throughout the history of social theory there has been a temptation to see and explain social change in terms of ‘ruptures’, ‘breaks’, and ‘revolutions’ or, in general, to exaggerate the gradualness of change.²⁶ Whilst there are undoubtedly periods in history when social change is more rapid and more dramatic than is normally the case I think, in general, the processes of social change do not entail ruptures or a breaks or even happen very quickly. The gradualness of most social change is seldom, if ever, discussed. In fact I would go much further than this and claim that the vast majority of change has a ‘Cambridge change’ feel about it, or at least it does for those who are left behind on, for example, issues such as gender relations or sexuality. Contrary to post-modern myth most social change is not at all reminiscent of the advertisers’ branding or the short production run. It builds up slowly, gathers momentum and then, at some point, there is a realisation amongst a certain population that changes have actually taken place. That, for example, the homophobe has not to simply assume the rightness of his or her prejudices but must justify or account for them or that the father cannot simply take for granted his failure to take some responsibility for looking after the children. Both of these examples are Cambridge change cases.

Now, of course, I am not claiming that Cambridge change is necessarily slow, it is not, and neither am I arguing that the concept should apply to anybody else other than those who have somehow been left behind. Logically neither of these would make sense. However, what I am saying is that the ubiquity of Cambridge change is interesting in relation to social change because it helps to clarify at least one point which mitigates against Baert’s claim that structuration theory tends towards social order as opposed to change. This refers to what Giddens has to say about socialization. On this issue Giddens abandons role theory altogether. He sees it as propagating an unacceptable dualism between subject and object. Instead, role prescription is made dependent upon *practices* (the

points of articulation between actors and structures) which are themselves the outcomes of temporally and spatially situated processes of interaction. In this context both roles in particular and socialisation in general must be seen as an on-going process, a continuing dialogue between individual(s) and structures. Giddens makes three points in relation to this which I have attempted to condense in the following quote:

First, socialisation is never anything like the passive imprinting by 'society' upon each individual. From its very earliest experiences, the infant is an active partner in the double contingency of interaction and in a progressive 'involvement with society'. Second ... socialisation should really be understood as referring to the whole life-cycle of the individual ... Third, we cannot appropriately speak of *the* process of socialisation, except very loosely. Such a phrase implies too much standardisation or uniformity on two sides: as if there were a single and simply mapped type of 'process' which every individual undergoes, and as if there were a consensual unity into which each individual is socialised. (Giddens, 1979:129)

This quote highlights or at least implies that from the perspective of the individual agent that his or her life endures a never-ending change. The consequence of Cambridge change when combined with this model of socialisation suggests that whilst some come into contact with change – are re-socialised in one form or another through the medium of interaction – others are simply left behind. Being left behind may come about for any number of reasons. In Chapter 4, our teachers were left behind because they had not, for one reason or another, re-trained or re-focused their knowledge of how children ought to be taught. Likewise the unfashionable, they simply stopped paying attention. In each case an element of re-socialisation is required in order to restore the Cambridge changers to the generalised ranks. And, this it seems to me is often how change takes place: slowly and surely.

Conclusion

Giddens' social structures are virtual and retain the character of the 'Me' in Mead's scheme or Schutz' model of typifications (or recipe book knowledge) or Wittgenstein's rules in terms of knowing 'how to go on'. Thus, they remain consistent with Giddens' emphasis upon praxis or the dialectical relation between action and structure. Specifically, structuration theory maintains its adherence to Marx's illumination of the defining character of 'social objects' in *Grundrisse*. Giddens (1976:63) observes in this respect:

Marx writes in the Grundrisse that every social item 'that has a fixed form' appears as merely 'a vanishing moment' in the movement of society. 'The conditions and objectifications of the process, he continues, 'are themselves equally moments of it, and its only subjects are individuals, but individuals in mutual relationships, which they equally reproduce and produce anew ...'

The point here is that everything in the social world must, by definition, traverse the consciousness of the human mind²⁷. The social world is in this respect, as Giddens observes quite different from the natural world. Whilst it may or may not be possible to shore up Bhaskar's transcendentally real world so as to be able to state categorically that phenomenon X would exist regardless of human existence the same certainly cannot be said of the social world. Thus, Giddens (1976;15) observes:

The difference between society and nature is that nature is not man-made, is not produced by man. Human beings, of course, transform nature, and such transformation is both the condition of social existence and a driving force of cultural development. But nature is not a human production; society is. While not made by any single person, society is created and recreated afresh, if not *ex nihilo*, by the participants in every social encounter.

Put another way our knowledge or understanding of all (social) phenomena is dependent upon the Giddensian notions of signification, legitimation, and domination. To fail to acknowledge this is to ignore what Giddens has to say about the human condition in relation to *verstehen*. It is to place a (culturally specific) anthropomorphic character upon non-human objects; a version of

reification²⁸. This, of course, is exactly what Archer does when she talks of the separateness of the 'education' structure or the 'demographic' structure. Giddens makes the point well in the following reference to some types of allocative resources:

Some forms of allocative resources (such as raw materials, land, etc.) might seem to have a 'real existence' in a way which I have claimed that structural properties as a whole do not. In the sense of having time-space 'presence', in a certain way such is obviously the case. But their 'materiality' does not affect the fact that such phenomena become resources, in the manner in which I apply that term here, only when incorporated within processes of structuration. The transformational character of resources is logically equivalent to, as well as inherently bound up with the instantiation, that of codes and normative sanctions (Giddens, 1984:33)

This is, after all, largely consistent with Schutz' inversion of Husserl's *epoché*²⁹. Thus, if we wish to maintain that the relationship between structure and agency (however we define the former) is based upon a virtual reality rather than a real reality (however we define this term) we may do so. And, in this sense, 'social structures' must always exist as (a) of a virtual character, and (b) as a modality of interpretation, facility, and norm. This is of primary ontological importance to a structural-hermeneutic.

Given his novel definition of structure and agency it makes sense to regard Giddens' virtual order of 'social structures' as 'structuring' social systems or giving shape to the human empirical world. Thus, social systems are not to be treated as the mere products of rules and resources but as something that, in Giddens' words, 'exhibit "structural properties"' (cf. Giddens, 1984:17)³⁰. In this way, what exists in the 'material' or 'empirical' realm of social systems can return to haunt the consciousness of the virtual realm. Thus, for example, top-heavy demographic structures can prevent generous pensions' policies from coming about even if the general consensus is that these should be in place. Why Archer should believe that structuration theory would not be willing to allow this point can only be explained in terms of a misreading of Giddens' ontology. For such circumstances are perfectly consistent with Giddens' emphasis upon the importance of both the unintended consequences of action, the

unacknowledged conditions of action and his structural hermeneutic position.³¹

To quote Giddens at length:

[H]uman knowledgeability is always bounded. The flow of action continually produces consequences which are unintended by actors, and these unintended consequences also may form unacknowledged conditions of action in a feedback fashion. Human history is created by intentional activities but is not an intended project; it persistently eludes efforts to bring it under direct conscious direction. However, such attempts are continually made by human beings, who operate under the threat and the promise of the circumstance that they are the only creatures who make their 'history' in cognizance of that fact. (Giddens, 1984:27)

This suggests, rightly, that the very idea of 'unintended consequences of action' or 'unacknowledged conditions of action' implies that there is more going on in social life than, in Archer's misplaced terminology, the 'elision of structure and agency' would suggest. In turn it confirms that Giddens thought this to be the case too.

In the final chapter of this thesis I turn to a different kind of dualism one which is derived from a tradition of atomism and one which takes as its 'structure' sets of normative moral principles. However, my main intention is not to set out a critique of traditional moral philosophy but to demonstrate that a socio-philosophical approach to the issue of moral conduct and moral status may benefit our understanding how morality really is. The framework for this is a duality of structure but I employ various aids from within both sociology and philosophy. These include, Giddens' conceptualization of 'rules' (I largely, at error, by-pass power relations) act rationalization, and reflexivity, Michael Slotes' (1985) idea that moral imperatives (read 'rules') are 'scalar' in character, David Matza's (1964) 'techniques of neutralization', and Donald Davidson's (1984) 'principle of charity'.

Notes for Chapter 6.

¹ Structuration theory has been, on the whole, misconceived or misread by its critics. At base this is a consequence of reading an approach that is centred on a notion of praxis (as an amendment to the interpretivist's leaning towards 'action as meaning') from a dualist framework. Thus, critics of all persuasions have re-introduced traditional notions of 'structure' and 'agent' at every turn in their proceedings. In light of this it is hardly surprising that where Giddens' has responded to his critics his replies have frequently appeared to be that of bafflement. Hence, where John Thompson (1989) has complained that structuration theory's concept of rule cannot explain or account for the fixity of properties of institutions Giddens (1989) responds: 'When Thompson uses the phrase "social structure", he has in mind what I mean in speaking of the structural properties of social systems'. Debates surrounding the usefulness and/or validity of structuration theory seem to be bound up in a partially incommensurable dialogue.

² Giddens comments that Parsons' attempt to develop a 'voluntaristic' frame within his approach resulted in identifying voluntarism with the 'internalization of values'. Consequently, Giddens observes, there 'is no action in Parsons' "action frame of reference", only behaviour which is propelled by need-dispositions or role-expectations' (Giddens, 1976:16).

³ See especially, Chapter 1 of *Central Problems in Social Theory* for Giddens' critique of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Derrida.

⁴ Giddens has in mind the following: Anglo-American philosophy of action, symbolic interaction, phenomenology, and Winch. See, in particular, his introductions in *New Rules of Sociological Method* and *Central Problems in Social Theory*.

⁵ Although not purposive motivation. Giddens observes:

Motivation refers to potential for action rather than to mode in which action is chronically carried on by the agent. Motives tend to have a direct purchase on action only in relatively unusual circumstances, situations which in some way break with the routine. For the most part motives supply overall plans or programmes – 'projects', in Schutz's terms – within which a range of conduct is enacted. Much of our day-to-day conduct is not directly motivated. (Giddens, 1984:6).

By knowledgeability Giddens mean both practical and discursive knowledge. The former, rather than the latter, dominates social life. This, of course, follows from Garfinkel's studies in ethnomethodology.

⁶ Defining 'agency' in terms of intent, Giddens argues, confuses the designation of agency with the giving of act-descriptions (see Giddens, 1976: Chapter 2).

⁸ The relevance of this statement to Archer's rather crude attempts at explaining the consequences of top-heavy demographic structures and generous pensions' policies or army recruitment need not, I think, require attention.

⁹ In the first edition of NRSM and CP Giddens discusses power in different sections, and later in the text, to agency. It is interesting to note that in the *Constitution of Society* his reference to power in relation to agency occurs simultaneously. Again, he observes, agency 'refers not to the intentions people have in doing things' but 'to their capability of doing those things in the first place (which is why agency implies power: cf. the Oxford English Dictionary definition of an agent, as "one who exerts power or produces an effect")' (Giddens, 1984:9). This is most probably a result of the criticisms he received in relation to voluntarism. An issue I will discuss shortly.

¹⁰ See also Giddens (1976:112): 'power is a feature of every form of human interaction'.

¹¹ This is not to say that structuration theory is unable to account for stasis. See, especially, the next section.

¹² What Goffman means by a 'secondary adjustment' is probably best summed as a response to an expectation upon an individual that challenges his or her sense of autonomy or liberty:

Whenever we look at a social establishment, we find a counter [response in the individual] ...: we find that participants declines in some way to accept the official view of what they should be putting into and getting out of the organization and, behind this, of what sort of self and world they are to accept for

themselves. Where enthusiasm is expected, there will be apathy; where loyalty, there will be disaffection; where attendance, absenteeism; where robustness, some kind of illness; where deeds are to be done, varieties of inactivity. We find a multitude of homely little histories, each in its way a movement of liberty. Whenever worlds are laid on, under-lives develop (Goffman, 1961:267)

¹³ Ironically, as Goffman notes, such acts may be misconstrued by those in authority as evidence 'that the patient properly belongs where he now finds himself' (Goffman, 1961:268-9). Regardless, Goffman's conclusion in relation to organisations is both interesting and pertinent: 'There is a general implication here. Perhaps every activity that an establishment obliges or permits its members to participate in is a potential threat to the organization, for it would seem that there is no activity in which the individual cannot become over-engrossed' (Goffman, 1961:274).

¹⁴ Giddens's (1982:198) example of prisoners held in solitary confinement who still maintain the capacity for 'dirty protests' or hunger strikes mirrors Goffman's claims.

¹⁵ There are, in fact, two related claims here. First, that Giddens has failed to capture the really crucial social phenomena and, second, that there is a methodological flaw in Giddens' theory. A similar claim, concerning the latter is made by Archer (1995:107) when she complains that Giddens':
...redefinition shifts the referents of 'structure' away from identifiable forms of social organization (the division of labour, educational systems, political parties ...) and links them instead to underlying organizing principles, which generate what they do only because agents draw upon them in particular ways in the course of the social practices in which they engage

¹⁶ He also invokes Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus.

¹⁷ Of course, the transformation of a single concept may have implications in relation to the way in which other concepts are defined and applied. Thus, as we shall see, Sewell's reformulation of the Giddens's notion of 'resource' leads to a reformulation of the 'rules and resources' nexus in relation to the term structure. In fact, invariably the consequence is to transform Giddens's theory into a pseudo-naturalist form.

¹⁸ In particular, whilst making reference to Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology, he draws on the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz and Marshall Sahlins.

¹⁹ 'In this way', he observes, 'structures would retain their virtual quality, and concrete distributions of resources would be seen not as structures but as media animated and shaped by structures, that is, by cultural schemas' (Sewell, 1992:11). The solution is similar to the distinction I drew upon in when critically assessing Archer's model; namely, separating social kinds and cultural kinds. As we shall see a similar point is made by other critics of Giddens's approach.

²⁰ The situation is confused further by the proposed bridge-building of Nicos Mouzelis (1995 & 2000) who argues that rules may be internal or external. In relation to rules we can talk, in relation to the agent, of natural performative rules (duality) and strategic orientation which is dualism or represents an agent's sense of distance from the rule (see Mouzelis, 1995:119ff). In a later publication, see Mouzelis (2000), we are told that structures may exist according to a two-by-two matrix based upon distinctions between the 'virtual' and the 'actual' and the 'social relational' and the 'statistical-numerical'.

²¹ At least Parker (2000) who interprets 'resources' in the same way presents an avowedly dualist position. Parker first claims that Giddens' conception of agency results in the conclusion that social practices are random. This follows from, *à la* Layder and Archer, the counterfactual in Giddens' definition, Giddens' support for indexicality, and Giddens' emphasis (in later works) on reflexivity. He then notes that Giddens realises that 'social practices are not, in fact, as random as his account of social agency in principle allows' (Parker, 2000: 60). And, given this, he claims Giddens needed some conceptual tools to account for social regularities or patterned activity. And, it is at this point that Parker discusses Giddens's notion of 'distanciation', which he believes, leads to an internal contradiction in structuration theory or the re-introduction through the backdoor of dualism. Once again this relates primarily to Giddens's definition of 'resources' in general and 'allocative resources' in particular. Distanciation refers to the 'storing up' of 'resources' for the future. To use the example of food storage: agrarian communities may store grain for the future 'fields are allowed to lie fallow to protect productive capacity...' (Giddens, 1984:259) Parker's key point of criticism is that 'the maintenance of the capability of acting in the future, allows that agents try to "load up the future" by enhancing their power to control outcomes' (Parker, 2000: 61-2) But, according to Parker, 'loading up' as such takes the definition of resources out of the realm of virtuality and makes resources real and creates a tension in terms of Giddens' definitions of 'agency' and 'power'. Thus, Giddens' discussion of 'distanciation' and 'storing' mean that he himself 'recognizes that resources (structures) are not simply internal to agency, as asserted by the "duality of structure" principle, but pre-

existing, objective, socially distributed conditions of action' (Parker, 2000: 62). My response to Parker follows from my response to Sewell and Stones. This said, Parker could have found a good enough hint at the answer to his problem two pages further into Giddens (1984:261): 'All [storage] depend for their retrieval upon the recall capacities of the human memory but also upon the skills of interpretation that may be possessed by only a minority ...'

²² In the first sentence of this quotation Thompson is referring to Giddens' (1984: 182-3) description of the 'dominant structural principle of class divided society [which] is to be found along an axis relating urban areas to their rural hinterlands ... The differentiation of city and countryside is the means of separation of social and system integration'. A full analysis is provided in Giddens (1981).

²³ Archer is far more forthright in her views on this issue later in the same text. She argues that from a methodological perspective:

... we cannot make our entrée into practical social analysis through 'rules' and 'resources' because (a) these rules are too vaguely defined as formulaic ways of knowing how to go on in everyday life to direct our attention to anything in particular, and (b) since instantiation of any single rule invokes the whole matrix, we are no better off, and (c) since the potential for transformation is inherent in every instantiation of a rule, we are even worse off in terms of being given a sense of direction. It follows that it is necessary to work the other way round (Archer, 1995:114)

That Giddens is not asking us to make our entrance in the way described by Archer will be shortly demonstrated. Criticisms (a) and (c) have been largely dealt with in my earlier section on agency, (b) is correct only in a superficial sense as the social system refers to regularised patterns of practice. I have refrained from discussing Archer's critique of Giddens in full detail. I am largely in agreement with Stones' (2005:54) conclusion that both Archer and Layder (1981) provide a 'highly selective and doggedly unsympathetic' reading of Giddens' work.

²⁴ Giddens (1979:77) observes: 'The duality of structure relates the smallest item of day-to-day behaviour to attributes of far more inclusive social systems: when I utter a grammatical English sentence in a casual conversation, I contribute to the reproduction of the English language as a whole.'

²⁵ Giddens (1979:79) notes: 'A poverty cycle forms a homeostatic loop if each of these factors participates in a reciprocal series of influences, without any one acting as a "controlling filter" for the others'.

²⁶ It was perhaps no surprise that David Lockwood's (1964) considerations concerning 'system' and 'social integration' were written right in the middle of such a period in modern history; during a post-war enlightenment that witnessed the break-up of empires.

²⁷ In *New Rules of Sociological Method* Giddens observes that 'signification, domination and legitimation are only analytically separable properties of structures' (1976:123).

²⁸ It also leads to the imposition of invariant causal laws.

²⁹ 'Man in the "natural attitude" does not suspend his belief in material and social reality, but the very opposite; he suspends doubt that it is anything other than how it appears' Giddens (1976:27)

³⁰ The full quotation makes this interpretation clearer:

To say that structure is a 'virtual order' of transformative relations means that social systems, as reproduced social practices, do not have 'structures' but rather exhibit 'structural properties' and that structure exists, as time-space presence, only in its instantiations in such practices and as memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents. (Giddens, 1984:17)

³¹ And, for that matter, his definition of constraint as 'placing limits upon the range of options open to an actor' (Giddens, 1984:177). The duality of structure is, properly, as much concerned with the possibilities of action as it is with restraint. It is for this reason, *inter alia*, that structures are defined as both enabling and constraining. That they are both does not mean that they cannot be the latter.

Conclusion

This thesis has primarily involved a study of the works of three authors and their accounts of the society-person connection in what has come to be known as the structure-agency debate. In this conclusion I will summarise the main findings of this dissertation and assess the sense in which these authors' theories are related to each other and how this impacts upon claims concerning the validity of either a dualism or duality of social structure. In so doing I will divide the conclusion into two parts according to my overall stance: a critique of critical realism and a defence of structuration theory. In relation to the former I will argue or re-iterate two points. First, that what according to Archer constitutes a social structure is not strictly adhered to in her account of cultural emergent properties of the Cultural System. Second, I point to the sense in which critical realism is dependent not simply upon Bhaskar's defining text on this subject – *A Possibility of Naturalism* – but also upon his brief in *A Realist Theory of Science*. It was in this text that the key assertions and rules concerning what should constitute a 'real' object of the world was first set out. From this basis I shall argue that objects such as social structures cannot exist *sui generis* in the way in which Archer claims and Bhaskar implies. My defence of Giddens' structuration theory operates along a similar trajectory. Having established earlier in the thesis that Giddens does not adhere to a naturalist or foundational philosophy I will repeat my defence of his approach against those theorists who deny that it may properly account for social constraint or that structuration theory is, in relation to its account of social structures and social rules, an example (too far) of idealism.

From A Realist Theory of Science to the Possibility of Naturalism

Bhaskar's realism or naturalism of the social realm is fundamental to the argument of this thesis because it is usually assumed to be the bedrock of later versions of critical realism. Its significance to the development of what has

come to be regarded as a philosophy with its own identity and large scale following amongst social scientists is attested to by the approving and frequent citations from authors¹ whose zeal is endorsed and attested to in David Harvey's (2002:165) claim that:

... Bhaskar asks: Assuming the findings and organized practices of scientific inquiry are correct, what must the structure of the world be like for scientific knowledge to be possible? With this query he counters Kant's 'Epistemological Turn' with an 'Ontological Turn' of his own. That is, Bhaskar maintains the categories of scientific knowledge must conform to the obdurate structures of the world.

As I noted earlier, claims of this magnitude over-look some fundamental questions about the character of scientific progress in general. For example, there exists an uneasy or uncomfortable relationship between the way in which Bhaskar deliberates upon and distinguishes between what he calls the 'transitive' and 'intransitive' objects of the natural world (the sense of uncertainty that surrounds the truth of any particular scientific theory) and the way in which the notion or legitimation of transcendental realism is set out as a taken-for-granted truth. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, regardless of all of the experimentation, modelling, and manipulation techniques history has taught us that it remains the case that the objects of the scientists' world simply may not be what those scientists take them to be. And, whilst Bhaskar (1998:11) is right to claim that such a conclusion follows from the works of Kuhn and Popper and others who opposed the classical inductivists' view of the nature and progress of science he is wrong to assume that his own philosophy of science has managed to transcend the problems of scientific change and discontinuity. In one important respect, it could be argued the ontology of Bhaskar's realism – his ontological turn - appears to rest on not much more secure ground than that of older versions of scientific realism and that the claims of Kuhn, Popper, Lakatos whom Bhaskar berates still merit considerable attention.

As noted and discussed throughout this thesis, Bhaskar's philosophy of science is central to Margaret Archer's work and whilst *The Possibility of Naturalism*, is of paramount importance it should not be ignored that that text is itself deeply indebted to and dependent upon the claims that Bhaskar first put forward in *A*

Realist Theory of Science. It was in the latter that Bhaskar proposed the abandonment of Hume's criteria of causality and laws and there also that he rejected the necessity and sufficiency of the new forms of deductivism.² In their place and in *A Realist Theory of Science* we find the genesis and essential ingredients of realism *qua* naturalism: the presence of emergent properties in 'open' systems.

The notion of an open system is of considerable importance to Bhaskar's thesis and his claims concerning Humean regularity or constant conjunction. An 'open system' represents his main defence for the existence of scientific laws for they can withstand the presence of empirical irregularities or explain these away in terms of intervening and/or countervailing variables which prevent the initiation of the natural 'tendencies' or 'capacities' of the objects of the natural world. In the place of Humean regularity transcendental realism focuses attention on establishing what the generative mechanisms of objects of the natural world are and tied to this is the ontological turn that Harvey refers to. That is, for Bhaskar, and for critical realists in general, what exists in the world are objects with Leibnizean qualities or possibilities which may or may not realised in the actual world of phenomena.

One question that immediately follows from this is quite how we are going to establish the reality of such tendencies or capacities. Bhaskar's response, his 'logic of scientific discovery', posits to science a particular and superior method of observation and discovery. Especially, he claims, the scientific experiment acts as an exemplary method of closing open systems and allowing for the manipulation of phenomena as well as the testing of theoretical models³. Regardless of the relative absence of experimentation in the human sciences my assumption in this thesis has been to take this model of scientific discovery at face value valid and as the basis upon which a realism or naturalism of the social world can be established. And, it is from this basis that we should begin any examination of the validity of a realism of the social world.

Bhaskar (1998:3ff) begins his discussion of a naturalism of the human sciences by noting the important differences between the subject-matter of the natural

sciences and those of the social sciences. The fundamental difference between the two is, he says, is the sense in which the objects of the social world are dependent upon the actions of individuals for their existence. A causal relation or dependency of this type is rare in the natural world. Whilst I noted some confusion or inconsistency in Bhaskar's claims concerning the relationship between society and people this distinction forces Bhaskar to place certain limitations upon the status of social structures⁴. These limitations, as Benton (1981) observed, effectively deny social structures a *sui generis* status as their existence and form is tied to the activities that constitute them as well as agents' conceptions of what they are doing in these activities. Philosophically this amounts to an adherence to a duality of structure. Hence, it could be argued that Bhaskar's position in *A Possibility of Naturalism* is not entirely consistent with the current views of critical realists such as Archer, Layder, and Lawson. Furthermore, and as noted, the critical realist of *A Possibility of Naturalism* is hampered by Bhaskar's contention that the main limit to a naturalism of the social sciences lies in our (social scientific) inability to close off open systems through the experimental method which results in the demotion of social science to an explanatory rather than predictive science⁵. As I further noted, the downplay of the status of social science as well as its methodology may well have left many a critical realist down hearted. Their response was to attempt to undo or untie social structures from persons or agents and to impute back to social objects the status of *sui generis* things.

As discussed in Chapter 3, one of Margaret Archer's key tasks in *Realist Social Theory* is to put right what she sees as Bhaskar's errors in *A Possibility of Naturalism*. Essentially this means a return to a dualism whereby social structures are accorded independent causal powers that (following Bhaskar's adherence to an anti-Humean stance on causation and emphasis upon open systems) may or may not be instantiated in the actual world. Without returning to the details of this, Archer argues that Bhaskar's limitations upon the ontological existence of social structures are quite confusing. For example, she notes, in Bhaskar's text 'limitation 1' states that 'Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the activities they govern' (Bhaskar, 1998:38). But surely, Archer (1995:143ff) asks, does not 'govern'

imply pre-existence which in turn entails independent existence. Whilst 'limitation 2', she claims, seems to be either asserting the obvious truism of society 'no people; no society' or, is just plain wrong. For to insist that social structures 'do not exist independently of the agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity' (Bhaskar, 1998:38) seems to ignore the prevalence of structural relations of an ideological or coercive character. Archer's revision of Bhaskar's model of the society-individual connection is radical and involves the explicit claim that social structures represent not the conditions of action but the pre-conditions of all social activities. That is, that there exists a temporal disjunction between what agents want, desire, and do and those activities that according to existing structural relations can be done. Such a strong version of dualism requires an equally forceful ontological stance on both the character and nature of entities associated with a wide range of social and cultural artefacts; including (cultural) ideas as well as (social) material objects.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I set out to test the validity of Archer's model first in the sense in which the concept of emergence might be said to be similar to the concept of supervenience and second with respect to a closer scrutiny of what constitutes a 'social' or 'cultural'. Chapter 4, following Healy's (1998) intervention into the debate, looked at the concept of supervenience as a method of overcoming what Healy took to be a problem of reification. The issue, as Healy pointed out, is that Archer's claim that some social structures are 'past-tense activity dependent' seems to suggest that some social structures are peopleless. Put with more poetic license it implies the spectre of 'social structures wandering around by themselves like so many lost cows' (Healy, 1998: 515). Healy's solution to this apparent anomaly is to tie social structures to people through a subvenient-supervenient relationship. Whilst the Chapter concludes largely in favour of Healy on this point it also shows how Healy's analysis of the demographic structure as an example of a supervenience relation does not significantly help in an attempt to shore up an ontological base for dualism. In fact, as noted, Healy's notion of supervenience seems at best to cover the physical presence of individuals in society. Furthermore, I argued that both Healy's supervenience model and Archer's definition of 'social structure' by-pass the cultural or interpretative frameworks that may surround present

tense relations between material conglomerates like the demographic structure and the perceived need to implement, let us say as relevant examples, a generous pensions' policy or a large standing army.

It follows from this point that the main problem with Archer's attempts to untie social structures from agents arises in relation to what she calls 'cultural emergent properties'. And, this in my main line of questioning in Chapter 5: the terrain of ideas and knowledge. The critical realist assertion that the emergent properties of the Cultural System exist *sui generis* poses, by definition, a set of different difficulties to their claims concerning the separate existence of the social or morphological features of a society. This is because, most obviously, ideas and knowledge exist and are instantiated through the minds or thoughts of human agents. How, then, it might be asked can we talk of ideas existing as *sui generis* properties? Archer attempts to circumvent this problem by maintaining that a culture's ideas can only be examined at the nexus of social life whilst at one and the same time arguing that despite this ideas have a separate existence from agents. Thus, for Archer, ideas, beliefs and values arise at the level of what she calls 'socio-cultural interaction' and are therefore (past-tense) dependent upon agents for their existence or being but once in existence they may separate from agents and reside in what she calls generally the Cultural System and specifically a 'propositional register'. Agents, it follows, are then able to re-draw upon stocks of knowledge in their socio-cultural interactions with other individuals. And, in so doing new ideas may arise⁶.

The main problem with this viewpoint, I have argued, is that it is difficult if not impossible to see how ideas can be separated in the way in which Archer claims from the minds of those individuals who make up a society's cultural realm. This matter is confounded further when we ask where Archer's 'Cultural System' actually resides. For there does not appear to be a straightforward answer to this question and Archer's attempts to clarify what the status of ideas is by making references to undiscovered soufflé recipes (1996:108) and historic chiselled runes (1995:144) not only contravenes regular supervenience relations but brings into question the validity of the realist's distinction between the 'real' and the 'actual' as well as the fecundity or usefulness of equating structures with

emergent properties. So, on the one hand, we are reminded once again of Healy's metaphor concerning so many wandering lost cows whilst on the other hand, in defining unknown beliefs and unknown ideas as *sui generis* properties we are left asking how useful the realist's concept of structure or emergence is.

My final complaint against advocating a realism or naturalism for the social sciences returns us to the issue of causation and the nature of social entities in comparison to natural phenomena. The argument is a relatively straightforward one that comes down to rejecting for the social sciences that which I claim is entailed by naturalism: the existence of universal laws. Understanding how I come to this position is a little more complicated. As noted above, most of what Bhaskar, Archer and other critical realists have had to say about the social world is predicated upon claims made about structures and emergent properties by Bhaskar in *A Realist Theory of Science*. Whilst the language and terms may be changed in later texts the conceptual apparatus remains the same: for emergent properties and social and cultural structures read generative mechanisms, capacities, and tendencies. As such *A Realist Theory of Science* provides the ontological grounding for *The Possibility of Naturalism* and, *inter alia*, Archer's *Realist Social Theory*. Hence, Bhaskar's key assertions and the reasoning behind these assertions cannot be passed over when realism or naturalism is applied to the social realm.

Whilst Bhaskar, in *The Possibility of Naturalism*, was aware of some of the problems that may arise in transferring these concepts from one domain to the other and attempted to overcome these by placing limits upon the ontological standing of social phenomena I have argued that he fails to pay sufficient attention to the causal processes of social phenomena. Thus, one of the defining problems that Bhaskar's original enterprise attempted to overcome in relation to causation was the existence of countervailing and or intervening variables or the way in which external variables may lead to what he and others saw as a misappropriate falsification of natural laws. And it was this issue that led Bhaskar in *A Realist Theory of Science* into a long and winding discussion about, first, 'open systems' and closure through scientific experimentation, and second, the generative mechanisms, capacities, or tendencies of objects.

This brings us to a point that leads, in my view, to the most compelling problem of a realism of the social sciences. Bhaskar's discussion of a realism of the natural sciences is predicated on assumptions about causation that are largely true of natural phenomena and largely false in relation to social phenomena. In particular, I am referring to the mechanistic character of causation in the natural world i.e. if A then B follows. Defenders of realism might point to Bhaskar's rejection of a Humean conception of causation. That is, that Bhaskar firmly rejects a scientific realists' conception of cause and effect. But I argue that this should not and cannot be inferred from his writings. For Bhaskar does not reject a mechanistic account of causation but simply rejects Hume's notion of constant conjunction. Bhaskar rejection of this comes down to asserting that the natural world is an 'open system' in which countervailing and/or intervening variables may prevent B from following A. However, as noted previously, Bhaskar's argument suggests that in the closed system of the scientific experiment those treasured certainties or mechanistic relations between phenomena will hold true. Hence, objects of the natural world have causal capacities or generative mechanisms that will ensure, in the right conditions, that, for example, B always follows from A. This element of *A Realist Theory of Science* has managed to cross the boundary from the natural to the social realm without much notice or discussion by those advocating a naturalism of the social realm. Indeed, in this context, any reference to emergence or conceptual adherence to 'emergent properties' must by definition imply a mechanistic relationship between social entities. But, I have argued, social entities operate quite unlike natural entities in this respect. Causation in the social realm involves unpredictable agential inputs that cannot be assumed to be mechanical in character.

Not only does this claim undermine assertions relating to the *sui generis* character of social structures it implies that the only credible account of structure-agent relations must begin by asserting the validity of a duality of structure-agent relations. It was in this vein that I turned back to Giddens' theory of structuration. However, a brief perusal of the criticisms that have been levelled at Giddens' account suggested, at first sight, that some of methodological or conceptual benefits of dualism might outweigh the

ontological justification of a duality of structure. For example, Giddens' account of social structural relations seems to allow for far too much freedom of action and far too little social constraint. At the same time critics have also complained about the definition of 'social structure' and the sense in which Giddens' claims about the virtual character of social structures seemed to run contrary to the presence, in society, of material artefacts. In Chapter 6 I attempted to show how structuration theory may be interpreted so as to avoid some of these problems.

In Defence of Structuration Theory

As noted above, whilst Archer's dualism with its emphasis upon social structures as the pre-given conditions of social activity seems to have no problem in explaining social constraint, Giddens' model of agency appears to invite criticism in this respect⁷. However, the main problem with adopting this stance seems to revolve around talking at cross-purposes. On the one hand Giddens' critics appear to be interpreting what it is possible for an agent to do in terms of structure and power relations from a zero-sum perspective, i.e. structure X prevents agent Y from doing Z. On the other hand Giddens' account of structure and power relations (social structures are both enabling and constraining) acknowledges the ways in which even in the most constraining and difficult circumstances agents remain adept at converting the resources they are in control of into conditions that allow for some degree of control or freedom. Thus, his critics' account of freedom puts structure first and agent second whilst Giddens' account of these phenomena puts the agent first and (in the plural) structures second. Put another way: whilst X may be prevented from doing Z she is able to do Z' (Z prime) or V. Seen in this light one could argue that the differences between the two sides has much more to do with the logical connectives they are employing than with the truth of their claims. Indeed, both may be true.

A second major problem that a duality of structure and agency appeared to face referred to the ontological status of social objects or social structures. Giddens' theory re-defined social structures in a quite radical form and in so doing his approach seemed to threaten traditional assumptions about the character, nature,

and study of the structural features of society. This followed in particular from Giddens' claim that social structures are essentially 'rules' that exist in a virtual reality or as pertaining to and representing the memory traces of agents involved in social activities. For Thompson (1989) this seemed to run counter to traditional views of structural differentiation and to notions of restricted institutional opportunities and/or structural identity. For Sewell (1992), Archer (1995), Stones (2005) and others the interpretation of structures in this way seemed to imply an adherence to a form of idealism that could not account for the material existence of social resources.⁸ As I noted in Chapter 6 the normal response to both of these issues is to treat material phenomena as 'external' to the individual (pre-existent to social interaction according to Stones (2005:71)) and psychological phenomena as 'internal' to agents. But in so doing we are effectively returning to a dualist position with the accompanying and aforementioned problems associated with causal mechanisms.

Without re-running those arguments once again (see above and Chapter 5) I have proposed in this thesis that a particular reading of Giddens' philosophical position (on agent, social structure and social system) may allow us to avoid some of the problems of analysing structural differentiation whilst avoiding a resort to anthropomorphism. To take the latter first, I have argued that Giddens' position takes seriously the phenomenological insight that every material object of this world requires for its meaning and usage the modalities of social structure that Giddens refers to as 'signification', 'domination' and 'legitimation'. The fact that social objects may have causal powers that are of a natural kind, e.g. Hudson Bay blankets may keep Americans warm at night, does not provide in itself an avenue for the externality of these objects as structural features of the social world. On this point Giddens is right: objects are mere objects whereas social objects require knowledge (social expertise) of what to do with things how to do things and what is important here and what works here and so on. And, it is in this sense that what Sewell, Stones and others refer to as problems pertaining to the distinction between 'rules' and (allocative) 'resources' evaporates. As Giddens made clear that particular distinction was only ever intended to be analytical. To return to our base phenomenological principle: the social world requires that 'rules' and 'resources' depend upon

'signification', 'domination', and 'legitimation'. As such 'resources' cannot be truly separated from 'rules'. However, in saying this we need not deny that social objects exist in an empirical form in time and space and that there exists a historical definiteness about certain social practices. And, it is in this sense that Giddens responded to fears concerning issues surrounding structural differentiation and identity. To explain this we need to return briefly to the role that Giddens allocates to the social system.

According to Giddens (1979:66) social systems refer to 'regularised relations of interdependence between individuals and groups'. That is the social system represents the site of the production and reproduction of social practices and relations between practices. The latter suggests that practices (and social structures) are interdependent activities and that changes in one area of the social system may affect other practices. Thus we can talk of system relations and observe that the social system is not simply identical to social structures. And, in a sense the continued existence of social practices or system reproduction could be said to make changes to social practices more difficult and perhaps leads to the existence of social constraints. There may be several interrelated ways in which this happens. First, social structures may cluster into a form that leads to the reproduction of unintended outcomes. Thus, Giddens' (1979:79) description of the 'poverty cycle' falls into this category (see Chapter 6). Second, some forms of activities may exist in an unacknowledged manner; that is, as activities that are practiced by actors who are not 'discursively' aware of their actions. Or, certain practices may be so deeply sedimented in time and space that they become institutionalised activities. Each of these forms of system reproduction are products of the instantiation of social structures or rules. For, whilst the system is not identical to social structures it is wholly dependent upon the latter for its constitution and being. This point allows Giddens to maintain that whilst it requires a methodological bracketing (ultimately we are studying social structures and relations between social structures) the study of systems and institutions remains central to sociological analysis but its study does not compromise claims concerning the duality of structure-agency.

Finally, on these issues, I should note that my responses to the criticisms levelled at Giddens' works in Chapter 6 are intended only to re-invigorate the debate about the usefulness of structuration theory. It is quite clear that a great deal more clarity and philosophical analysis of the relationship between 'agent', 'social structure', and 'social system' may be required before we can say that structuration theory fits the requirements of explaining adequately the person-society connection. Further, the interpretation of structuration theory that I have put forward is not common to all or most accounts of this approach. Instead, in my reading of Giddens I have attempted to stress the importance that he placed upon rejecting foundational models of society as well accounts of social relations that attempted to mimic the natural sciences.

However, in this thesis it is the duality of structure and agency that has appeared to be the most plausible way of explaining the Society-Person connection. In a sense I have argued it must win. Even if by default! For the separation of social structure from agency must lead to a reification of the social world. My defence of Giddens' structuration theory follows from this conclusion. Whilst his model may be far from perfect, in his 'stratification model of action' and his formulation of social structures as rules and resources existing as memory traces in the minds of agents, we find the main ingredients for explaining social life. This he combines with a structural-hermeneutic that, in its pragmatist rejection of the worst excesses of relativism and its freedom from the kind of ontological baggage that critical realism implores us to accept makes it the most obvious candidate in this debate. However, as many commentators have observed, its popularity in sociology in recent years has waned⁹ and Giddens, himself, has barely discussed (let alone defended) his project in a decade or more. In this thesis I have argued that his critics, friends and enemies, have misinterpreted his position on voluntarism, on social structures, the relationship between structure and system, and the very nature of social objects. When taken as a pragmatic version of hermeneutics Giddens structuration theory has a great deal to commend it.

Finally, what now is left for emergentism or critical realism? I would say that the concept of emergent properties is not without some methodological worth

but it must be located in its proper place. As I made clear in Chapter 6 all things pertaining to social structures must traverse the consciousness of those actors involved in the processes of social life. This is a necessity when studying causal relations in the social world. However, as Stones (2005) has recently observed, perhaps we can think of 'emergent properties' as the historically determined conditions of social life and as thoughts or memories (some reflected upon and others unacknowledged) that exist as memory traces in the minds of agents and are passed from agent to agent through the never ending processes and developments of social interaction and socialization.

¹ Leaving aside Archer's works, see, *inter alia*: Collier (1988), Lawson (1996), Layder (1994), and Sayer (1992).

² As the following quotation makes clear:

The deductivist theory of structure of structure initially came under fire from, among others Michael Scriven, Mary Hesse and Rom Harré for the lack of *sufficiency* of Humean criteria for causality and law, Hempelian criteria for explanation and Nagelian criteria for the reduction of one science to another more basic one. This critique was then generalized by Roy Bhaskar to incorporate the lack of *necessity* for them also. (Bhaskar, 1998:xi)

³ Whilst this response permits some form of explanation for the progress and rationality of science it appears, as noted above, to more-or-less by-pass many of the problems that arose from historical studies of science. Bhaskar's response to such problems is to acknowledge the 'transitive' character of scientific knowledge whilst also holding fast to the idea that the world is made up of 'intransitive' objects from which science is able to discover knowledge of the generative mechanisms of these features of the natural world. Whether we can ever truly establish, *qua* realism, the transcendental qualities of the objects scientists study remains an open question.

⁴ To repeat Bhaskar (1998:38) notes the following limitations:

1. Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the activities they govern.
2. Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity.
3. Social structures, unlike natural structures, may only be relatively enduring (so that the tendencies they ground may not be universal in the sense of space-time invariant).

⁵ Serious scrutiny of the unfolding argument in *A Realist Theory of Science* suggests that the matter is far worse than a casual observation might suggest. In this text Bhaskar set his stool up in terms of distinguishing between the inferior Humean process of observing mere empirical regularities and the far superior realms of analysis in which an object's natural necessity and true nature is revealed through the manipulation and modelling of events. None of this is possible without the possibility of closing open systems.

⁶ Archer, indeed, takes her analysis of cultural artefacts one step further by claiming that a culture's stocks of knowledge, its theories, beliefs, and values, stand in some sort of logical relationship to one another implying, it seems, that cultural restraints surround what can and cannot be said to be true.

⁷ Giddens defines agency as concerning 'events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently' (Giddens, 1984:9). This counterfactual definition was then combined with an insistence by Giddens (1982, 1984) that circumstance in which an agent could not have acted otherwise are extremely rare. Such claims inevitably attracted criticism from a host of authors; see Archer (1982); Carlstein (1981) & Thomson (1989).

⁸ Sewell (1992:10) notes material resources such as 'factories, armaments, land, and Hudson Bay blankets' exist not in a virtual sphere but actually in space and time.

⁹ See, for example, Baert (1998) and Parker (2000).

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