Andy Blunden. April 2026

Part V. The Subject versus the Structure

1. Anthony Giddens' Critique of Structuralism

Introduction

Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration aims to find a 'third way' between two opposing currents in social theory. On the one hand, there are objectivist approaches like Functionalism, social systems theory, Structuralism, and Post-structuralism, which emphasise the pre-eminence of the social whole (structure) and the constraints they impose on individual participants whose knowledge about what they do is discounted as merely a product of the structure. On the other hand, we see subjectivist or voluntaristic approaches like Hermeneutics and Phenomenology, which see the social whole only in terms of the production and reproduction of individual agents who are essentially taken to be autonomous and understood in psychological terms.

People can be experts, too

Giddens pointed out that the individual subjects whose activity is being studied, Structuralism takes to be 'sociological dopes', simpleton prisoners of ideologies, discounting the knowledgeability of participants in social processes, their capacity to understand their own experiences. A distinctive feature of his theory of structuration is the idea of 'reflexivity':

> There is no mechanism of social organisation or social reproduction identified by social analysts which lay actors cannot also get to know about and actively incorporate into what they do.
>
> Giddens, 1984, p. 284

There are no 'natural forces' in social life

So when a sociologist describes a social phenomenon they must expect that those whose actions are being described will read or hear about the sociologist's ideas and to modify what they do in the light of those ideas. It is for this reason that the 'laws' which are the currency of natural science can never be manifested in social theory because the objects of research do not act independently of the knowing subject. Natural science itself had come across this problem at the turn of the century when physicists discovered that it was impossible to completely describe a particle independently of the material means used to measure it.

As a result, it can be seen that the predictability manifested in social life is largely *made to happen* by *strategically* placed social actors, rather than in spite of them or behind their backs. Far from people being driven to do what they do by remote or invisible 'structural forces', Giddens pointed out that:

> there is no such entity as a distinctive type of 'structural explanation' in the social sciences; all explanations will involve at least implicit references both to the purposive, reasoning behaviour of agents and to its intersection with constraining and enabling features of the social and material contexts.
>
> Giddens, 1984, p. 179

The appearance of inevitability in the actions of actors arises from the limited options available to them on condition that they act rationally, and therefore actually rests on the presumption that social actors have good reasons for doing what they do. This is the meaning Giddens attaches to Marx's famous maxim:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.
>
> Marx, 1852.

Agents

Giddens refers to 'agents' in the same sense as Althusser used the word, i.e., *persons acting on behalf of some institution*. However, Giddens grants agents the capacity to act rationally rather than as mere instruments in the hands of ideology and mythical 'structural forces'.

The relative predictability of events arises not only from the rationality of agents, however, but also from the material conditions as a whole, and the objects (i.e., motives) of the institutions on whose behalf agents act, together with the resources that the agents have at their disposal, and the capacity of these institutions to motivate their agents to act according to that object or motive.

The conjuncture

The social and political conditions which had motivated Parsons, Bourdieu and Althusser had been eroded by the time Giddens was writing.

By the mid-1980s, the stability of the post-war period had been shattered; Keynesian welfare economics had been discredited, the Soviet Union was losing its hold and labour, socialist and feminist movements in the West were fragmenting and in decline. The obvious fragility of the social structures cast their theoretical images into doubt. Fordist methods of production had become outmoded. The idea of compliance with the demands of structure failed to shed light on what was going on in the world. The labour process itself was demanding initiative from its subjects. People were crying out for the recognition of a human voice in social theory. The time was ripe for a rebellion against the complacent and inhuman theories of the Structuralists and Functionalists from both Left and Right. Anthony Giddens answered this call.

Reflexivity also implied that all social theorising is itself an intervention in social life and history. Althusser and Bourdieu's conviction that they belonged to an elite class of experts whose ideas were inaccessible to the actors in social life and could have no effect on social life was demolished. In a time of universal tertiary education in all the industrialised countries, there was no longer any sharp line between the experts and ordinary folk who, rightly or not, took themselves to be experts, especially in matters relating to their own life experiences.

> The 'findings' of the social sciences, as I have emphasised, are not necessarily news to those whom those findings are about.
>
> op. cit. p. 335

Taking object and subject together, to a great extent it can be said that events unfold in a way reflecting reasoned, reflective activity by many different actors, with varying resources. Ideology exists, but it is not impenetrable or unseen.

Nevertheless, an institution exists to the extent that it is the practical realisation of the concept of its object which constitutes its 'motive'. It exists only to the extent that its agents understand that motive and act rationally according to its meaning in their situation. There is no 'structural force' or 'system function' which obliges them to do so. This insight is transformative.

However, the consequential position now granted to agents opens up new question. The sociologist must appeal to the psychologist for the very existence of the basic units of their science.

Agents live in the world, and we are missing any account of how agents form and resolve the competing motives which necessarily act on every person.

Giddens, however, still takes for granted the agent's motivation *as* an agent of the relevant institution as it stands. This begs the question of how social change takes place. Social change is inexplicable under Giddens' conception because an agent is presumed to be an agent of *one* institution whose existence they monitor and preserve. But in reality, every person is a agent of *multiple* activities and understand the objects and motives each of them. Each such activity is therefore a potential source of motivation which interferes with the agents actions on behalf of another. The conflict between institutions, practices, movements, and so on, corresponds to conflict of motives in the agents' consciousness. The capacity a person to resolve a conflict of motives is the basis on which Augustine of Hippo had invented the concept of the Will to solve a problem: how could a conflict of motives be resolved? Giddens skirts around the problem of the conflict of motives, so this is a problem which Giddens never touches upon. It seems that after the Second World War, no one wanted to talk about the Will any longer, despite millennia of debate around the Will as a central problem of human life.

Giddens' critique of Functionalism

Giddens also makes a powerful critique of Functionalism, namely, the teleological fallacy which I dealt with in the earlier chapter. The teleological conception of causality can form part of a valid *explanation* of a regular feature of some social formation only to the extent that knowledge of this predictability forms part of *some* agents' reasons for doing what they do. The need for the prior action to *regularly* produce a given observed outcome is in itself no explanation, unless this outcome is the purpose of strategic agents, based on experience in the behaviour of the given social formation. People have reasons for what they do and any explanation for their actions has to be in terms of their own reasons and those of other actors, irrespective of whether the outcome is an expected result, or for some of the actors, is an unexpected consequence.

For example, the relatively predictable outcome of a 'frictionless' market relies on agents who make it their business to ensure that the market is indeed frictionless. The tendency of monopolies to exclude smaller competitors is found only when corporate managers act as predators and regulators allow them to.

Giddens' conception of the knowledgeability of social actors is not purely a sociological question, but is, on the contrary, also a question of Psychology.

This brings us to Giddens' conception of the knowledgeability of the social actors who are the objects of social theory, and the manner and extent to which the outcomes of their activity are a product of their reasons and their resources.

The Knowledgeability of Social Actors

The core of Giddens' ideas about agents' knowledgeability is his conception of practical and discursive consciousness.

The obvious fact, from which he makes a beginning, that social actors have a relatively sound practical knowledge of the activities in which they are engaged, is a vast improvement over structuralist and functionalist 'explanations' of the activity of ideologically determined actors.

The category of discursive consciousness is relatively clear, and 'every competent social actor ... is *ipso facto*, a social theorist on the level of discursive consciousness' (op. cit., p. 18). All this is a gigantic leap forward from the 'sociological dopes' of Structuralism and Functionalism. However, basis of this conception in psychological research is not so sound, and is contradicted by Vygotsky's psychological theory.

Giddens' Psychology

The limitations imposed on social theory by the segmentation of learning into academic disciplines is on display when Giddens sets out his psychology. Giddens has never participated, so far as I know, in psychological research, so he must put together a psychology to underpin his claims for the knowledgeability and motivation of social actors by picking and choosing from what is on offer from psychologists. His chosen psychologists are Erikson ('my appropriation [is] strictly limited and qualified'), Goffman, to shed light on the motivation of everyday interactions, and Freud.

It is to Giddens' great credit that he had the insight that Sociology could not stand on its own but required the support of Psychology. He can't be blamed for not being a psychologist. The work of integrating the psychology of Vygotsky and the Activity Theorists into social theory lies ahead of us, however.

In particular, Giddens' reliance on Freud is problematic to say the least.

Giddens is to some extent aware of the problems in using Freud, which he hopes to mitigate by substituting id, ego and superego in Freud's 1924 structural model with his own categories of basic security system, practical consciousness and discursive consciousness. This model bears no relation to Freud's, but 'practical consciousness' seems to approximate Freud's concept of the pre-conscious in his 1900 topographical model of the repressed unconscious, the preconscious and the conscious. In Giddens' schema:

> There is no bar between [practical and discursive consciousness], however, as there is between the unconscious and discursive consciousness. The unconscious includes those forms of cognition and impulsion which are either wholly repressed from consciousness or appear in consciousness only in distorted form.
>
> op. cit. pp. 4-5

But Giddens still takes an indeterminate slab of Freud at face value. Fr example, he refers to the 'back regions' where 'back-room deals' are made (p. 128), and so on. He takes it that Freudian ideas about anal fixation are relevant to understanding these phenomena; likewise, Freudian slips may provide insight into unacknowledged motives.

This really is not good enough. If one wants to create a social theory which genuinely overcomes the dichotomy between the reproduction of agents and structures, it is not good enough to equip a sophisticated social theory with a do-it-yourself bag of borrowed and unsubstantiated psychological tools.

However, this fact – that social actors have *good reasons* for their own actions, based on past experiences, reflection and therefore relatively sound knowledge – together with the fact that actors' knowledgeability and control over the consequences of their actions is *bounded*, constitute the rational core of the theory of structuration.

The central difficulty, however, lies with the concept of practical consciousness.

Practical Consciousness

The key category of practical consciousness is unclear, particularly in terms of its genesis and so far as I know not based on psychological research – it is just consciousness which is not discursive but is nonetheless implicated in behaviour.

Giddens' use of Freud is most problematic because he holds that cognition and motivation may also originate from what Freud called the Unconscious, a popular but entirely mythical construction (See Vygotsky, 1928, §7). Giddens says that there is no barrier between practical and discursive consciousness. But when asked to give reasons for what they do, an actor offers what must be taken to be an *interpretation* of their own practical consciousness, not a faithful reproduction. Through introspection and verbalising of their own consciousness, subjects transform their reasoning. Nonetheless, social actors will generally have a far-reaching practical knowledge of their activity and its context and ramifications and this knowledge will be reflected in their actions if not their words. Here, a theory about the genesis of practical and discursive consciousness is needed. It is absent however.

Resources

Giddens' conception of agency is also framed in terms of resources. However, whether or not a social actor is taken to be acting as an agent for some institution, they bring to the field certain resources, without necessarily having conscious awareness (more on this later) of their resources and their limits. Allocative resources are the right to deploy artefacts and natural resources as they see fit, broadly economic power. Authoritative resources is broadly power over people via organisational or political hierarchies or authority acquired by reputation or social standing.

These resources are explicit when we are considering an agent of some institution, but my central thesis is this. It is not only institutions which endow actors with resources. Actors are also agents of activities in the broader sense outlined in the chapter on development of the Will in Adulthood. Further,

resources should be understood in the broader sense outlined in the chapter on Bourdieu, as, allocative or authoritative.

To be an agent is to actor with resources, and the central issue is to grasp how these resources are acquired. But for the moment I will stay with Giddens.

Routines

The central mechanism through which Giddens explains the reproduction of social life is the concept of *routine*.

Giddens' unit of analysis seems to be a individual agent confronting an existing, ongoing practice which, the actor continuously reproduces through their participation. The underlying vision is one of individuals maintaining institutions by routinely enacting their role in the institution. These practices are taken to form a *continuous flow*, and in an infinite feedback loop, creating the conditions, motivations and reasons for their continuation. So people have their reasons for participating, but they do so under conditions already created by the existence of the practice itself and related practices. It is on the basis of this *routine* that agents' knowledgeability is deemed to be produced.

As Giddens sees it, institutions are essentially routines enacted by participants with the aid of *rules* and *resources*. It is in this concept of routine that the subject matter of Sociology overlaps with the subject matter of Psychology.

> The concept of *routinisation*, as grounded in practical consciousness, is vital to the theory of structuration. Routine is integral to both the continuity of the personality of the agent, as he or she moves along the paths of daily activities, and to the institutions of society, which *are* such only through their continued reproduction. An examination of routinisation ... provides us with a master key ...
>
> op. cit. p. 60

However, this concept of routine raises serious difficulties.

How does an agent come to know the limits of those resources other than through what is spelt out discursively? How do they learn what they can and can't do?

This is a problem for Giddens because *routine* the key concept underlying his conception of agents' knowledgeability. 'Routine' is not an adequate concept with which to explain a person's knowledge of their resources, obviously outside of formal organisations, but also within formal organisations. Refer to the chapter on Self-Control. The actions Giddens is referring to Vygotsky described as 'quasi-needs' and they differ from habits because once the goal is achieved, the need is exhausted and the person does not go on repeating the action like someone with OCD. Further, before the action is relegated to unthinking routine, it passes through conscious awareness where effort is required to master the routine. Any disturbance will force the action back into conscious awareness. Routine activities are not really *un*-conscious, merely *sub*-conscious. Nevertheless, the conception of practical knowledge as *scripts* (Mandler, 1984) is a viable idea, but scripts do not imply routines.

The question is not routines, but *routinisation*, the *formation* of routines and their acquisition by the individuals who are required to sustain them. But Giddens has not explained how a practice *becomes* a routine, thereafter taken for granted, or how routines are changed by the very people who apparently require them for their 'ontological security'. Giddens insists that routines are essentially *continuous*, and must be distinguished from acts, and on this basis, he claims that routines are essentially *unmotivated*.

> But it makes no more sense to claim that every act or gesture is motivated – meaning that a definite 'motive' can be attached to it – than it does to treat action as involving a string of intentions or reasons. … Action … cannot be satisfactorily be conceptualised as an aggregate of acts. …. [R]ather than supposing that every 'act' has a corresponding 'motive', we have to understand the term 'motivation' to be a processual one. What this means concretely is that the unconscious only rarely impinges directly upon the reflexive monitoring of conduct. Nor are the connections involved solely dependent upon psychological mechanisms within the personality of the individual actor; they are mediated by the social relations which individuals sustain in the routine practices of their daily lives.
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> op. cit., p. 50

It is, apparently, the sense of 'ontological security' that a person gains from the approval of colleagues and the predictability of day-to-day life which Giddens sees as sustaining practices. It seems to me that instead of the structuralists' 'sociological dope' what we have here is a 'motivational cripple'. But more importantly, I believe that this concept of unmotivated, continuous routines is a mistake.

Giddens' conception leaves the genesis and *development* of routines a mystery, preventing the true nature of routines from being revealed. Routines are evidently multi-actor performances, and it is difficult to conceive of how they can be formed and adjust themselves to disturbances without recourse to the 'discursive consciousness' and rationality of the agents.

This does not destroy the concept of routine but it does suggest that the idea of routine being 'unmotivated' is psychologically untenable. This issue also sheds light on the relation between what Giddens calls 'practical consciousness' and 'discursive consciousness'.

It can be seen that Giddens' category of 'practical consciousness' is quite inadequate to encompass the variety of forms of consciousness and their genesis relevant to acquiring, maintaining or changing routines. So long as routines are understood as unmotivated, continuous processes, it is impossible to reveal the sources of motivation and the potential for social change.

Motivation

I refer the reader to my appropriation of Activity Theory (Blunden, 2023).

I do not suggest that Giddens' sociology can simply be replaced by Activity Theory. Activity Theory is not a social theory in the sense of providing an account of institutions, social structures or historical formations. Rather, it

offers a psychology of activity – an account of how motives are formed, how actions are organised, and how agents resolve competing demands in practice. What is lacking in Giddens is precisely such an account. Activity Theory therefore enters here not as a substitute for sociology, but as a necessary complement to it.

I will deal here with the issue of actions with their goals, and activities with their motives only cursorily. Routines are surely composed of discrete, motivated actions, each constituting a *unit* of social action each with its own goal? Institutions are aggregates of activities which may or may not be 'routines', units of activity, each in turn having their own *motivation*. Institutions are activities which have become 'institutionalised', that is, fully integrated into social formation such that the object or 'motive' of the institution has come to be taken for granted, but nonetheless, *understood* by all the participants, irrespective of whether it functions as a really effective motive for the participant. The 'motive' of an institution is not a psychological category as is suggested by the word. I know of no word for the motive of an activity which is completely satisfactory, but what is meant by 'motive' in this context is the normative state of the object of the activity, the object being the material, human or otherwise, upon which the institution works (in German, its *Arbeitsgegenstand*). In this sense, 'motives' are known to the relevant actors, and may relate to activities of a single individual as much as to an institution or other social practice.

The Russian drama theorist Constantin Stanislavskii (1936) expressed the opinion opposite to Giddens' in his direction to actors performing a 'routine' series of actions. Action, he says, has a 'channel', the motivation for which flows from the plot, and it this channel which is motivating a whole series of actions (e.g. going home). The channel is divided into separate 'units' (e.g. looking in a shop window, crossing the road) each of which has its particular motive. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) agrees with this three-tier structure of motivation, a conception on which its analysis of action is based.

Practical Consciousness

Giddens calls 'practical consciousness' needs to be disaggregated, and I will draw on Activity Theory to do so.

As consciousness which is not discursive but nonetheless is implicated in activity, practical consciousness subsumes several distinct categories of consciousness distinguished by their genesis. On the one hand, practical intelligence is the first kind of intelligence acquired by an infant through their handling of their own body and artefacts. Practical intelligence continues to develop through adulthood in the acquisition of practical skills, but also underpins the development of discursive intelligence from when a child begins to master speech. Practical intelligence is indeed the kind of intelligence which is not manifested in words.

On the other hand, *operational* knowledge, exercised in *operations*, executed without conscious awareness and adapted to conditions, is genetically connected with the development of all kinds of skill, whether practical or discursive. The important category which is skated over by Giddens is *conscious*

awareness. Actions/operations, whether of a practical or symbolic character, may be executed either consciously or without conscious awareness.

Operational knowledge is the kind of knowledge and skill deployed continuously in carrying out relatively complex actions. Facility in using some word, gesture or tool, or in acting appropriately in relation to some person or context, is acquired at first with conscious effort. In time, as we become used to using the action under different conditions we begin to master it, and use it without conscious control – otherwise it would be impossible to type or walk down the street or engage in a conversation without suffering from mental overload! Each such action is enacted without conscious awareness and controlled, jointly by the goal of an action of which it is a part, and by the conditions, is called an *operation* (think of learning to tie your shoelaces, and then later doing so without thinking).

Included in operational knowledge are interpersonal skills including everyday language use, the capacity to use and read facial expressions, etc., which are acquired spontaneously. Vygotsky called this kind of knowledge *potential concepts* and it is indeed a kind of knowledge shared with nonhuman creatures.

However, in addition to everyday operations acquired spontaneously, when we participate in the activity of an *institution* we are required to conform to normative expectations in the institution and further its effort to bring its object into conformity with an ideal. Operations are acquired with conscious awareness and generally with a degree of effort. Although operations are executed without conscious control, when something goes awry, the action springs back into conscious awareness. For example, when walking down the street you automatically step over a curb without thinking about it, but if you trip, suddenly your feet and balance come under conscious control. When in the course of enacting a practice something goes awry – you inadvertently disrespect a boss, behave too freely with a customer or burn a burger – this has two effects. The operations routinely carried out without conscious control leap back into conscious awareness and are brought under conscious control, and the agents concerned suffer a moment of embarrassment (or a pay cut or some institutionalised sanction) not only leading to modification of the given routine, to better align it with its motive, but also to learning and personal development. If the operation has been adequately acquired, a moment's attention may be all that is required for a subject to know what was wrong.

Also, institutions may harbour legitimate conflicts over the proper ways to pursue the object of the institution, and conflict over these differences will be governed by institutional norms.

Such conflicts are discounted by Giddens:

> Awareness of social rules, expressed first and foremost in practical consciousness, is the very core of that 'knowledgeability', which specifically characterises human agents.
>
> Giddens, op. cit, pp. 22-23

The conception of institutions as being *rule-governed*, introduces deontology, which is inadequate to the tasks it is asked to perform.

Conflict of motives

An important category of action which could be subsumed under Giddens' concept of 'practical consciousness' arises when people are participating in institutions. Generally, and always to some extent, a person understands and embraces the aims (motives) of the institution. But in general people have their own reasons for participating in an institution, such as earning a wage, furthering their career, organising the union or simply to enjoy the social interaction. Such an alternative agenda may or may not be explicit, may be more or less repressed according to the relevant norms, and may be subordinate to the institutional requirements or may actually be, for that individual, the leading activity which plays the determining role in consciousness.

But a multiplicity of motives is always present, and only a study of the formation of the Will can answer the problems posed here.

Conscious awareness

Up to this point, I have considered only Giddens' agents, who are deemed to be rational actors who have knowledge, albeit bounded knowledge, of the field in which their authority and resources permit them to act. But they remain *agents*. The Will implicated in their regular actions is not 'their own' but the Will of an institution. The conception of their activity as routinised, emphasises this. If there is such a thing as 'Will' for Giddens, it is only the inhuman collective Will of the various components of 'the system'.

However, it is implausible to suppose that the behaviour of these agents can be conceived as simply routines. If the agents are adults, then they will most likely have conscious awareness of what they are doing, at least they will if we grant Giddens' own claim that these agents are *reflexive*, and not 'sociological dopes'.

I will recall Vygotsky's definition of 'conscious awareness':

> Conscious awareness consists of an act of consciousness the object of which consists in the very activity of consciousness … to generalize one's own psychological processes.
>
> Vygotsky, 2021a

In a modern economy, very few people work in jobs resembling those horses who walked in endless circles to operate ancient mines and such like. We are all consciously aware of what we are doing, or at least were when we trained ourselves in some routine operation, and increasingly over our lifetimes we become aware of the full consequences of what we do.

Unintended Consequences and Conceptual Development

The knowledgeability of agents is finite, and there are unintended consequences for what people do.

According to Giddens:

> Every research investigation in the social sciences or history is involved in relating action to structure, in tracing, explicitly or otherwise, the conjunction or disjunctions of intended and unintended consequences of activity and how these affect the fate

of individuals.

op. cit. p. 219

The *unintended consequences* of a practice form part of the conditions in which a person takes up a practice and thereby sustains it. They are also the domain of Sociology and Ethics. Neither Activity Theory nor any current of Psychology can obviate the need for social theory and its centuries of acquired wisdom which must be appropriated.

This important category of the unintended consequences of a practice form part of the conditions for agents to take up a practice (understood as an *ongoing* practice) and thereby sustain it. Giddens uses some examples such as the fallacy of composition (what is true of some parts must be true the whole) and the tragedy of the commons (individuals, acting independently and rationally in their own self-interest, will deplete a shared resource) to show how actions which are rational for each agent may have perverse effects when combined, to illustrate how the unintended consequences of rational practices may form systematic and predictable outcomes. Broadly, these are the kind of problems studied by *game theory* in which rational actors collectively produce irrational outcomes. Among such outcomes are the very conditions which sustain a practice, and make it into a kind of 'organism' which lives in the ecosystem created by the unintended consequences of other practices. Only an enquiry into Ethics can cover that irreducible part of social theory which has to deal with the unintended consequences of the activity of rational actors.

These problems basically underlie Hegel's argument for the necessity of the State, but more generally they also demonstrate the necessity for a common Will. Ethics is the domain where the responsibility of a person extends beyond the foreseeable consequences of their action.

Where Giddens' work reaches the limits of Psychology and passes over into sociology proper is when he transcends the limits of an agent's knowledgeability. While emphasising that social actors generally possess an extensive knowledge about the practices in which they are involved and their ramifications, there is a point beyond which they cannot predict or control the impact of what they do and their activity enters into the domain of unintended consequences.

> Specification of those bounds [on agents' knowledgeability] allows the analyst to show how unintended consequences of the activities in question derive from what the agents did intentionally.
>
> op. cit., p. 294

This is what produces the *appearance* of functional and purely structural causation – both of which are illusory. Such phenomena can be produced by the actions of perfectly rational individuals who are not 'sociological dopes'. And the reason that the theory of structuration, which has the knowledgeability of agents at its centre, does not descend into the fantasy of societies as intentional communities is because knowledgeability is always bounded.

Given the above considerations, a number of problems need to be addressed.

Agency

Agency, says Giddens, is the *capacity* to make a difference, and is not limited to a person's intentions, but incorporates the unintended consequences of an agent's action.

Holding some social position, such as an office in some institution, and in general participation in some project, does not mean that the agent *has* to play some *role*, as if acting out a script dictated by structural or functional imperatives, but simply that they have certain prerogatives and obligations (resources and authority), and it is in this that a person's agency, in the sense of Free Will, resides. The owners of a company producing asbestos can decide to disinvest in it, a policeman does not *have* to arrest an unlicensed driver.

Some unintended consequences may nevertheless be *foreseeable*, and within the scope of what a person could *control*, and these are consequences for which they are *morally responsible*, irrespective of their intentions. Some consequences are both unforeseeable and beyond the control of the person who carries out an initial action. In this case the actor should *not* be seen as the agent for those consequences.

This does not settle the question of agency. Individuals make a difference only by means of collaboration with others, whether that is as an office holder in some institution or as a participant in a social movement. Entering into such collaborations is almost invariably voluntary and done for good reason. Individuals exercise agency and bear moral responsibility for the difference they make *as part of collaborative projects*. People achieve very little on their own. It is only by the passive or active support of others that anything is achieved, It is really only the project that makes the difference, not the individual, but a project is not some ethereal social function or remote and invisible structure. It is an aggregate of the collaborative actions of participants, unified by the common motive of the project.

Institutions and Social Movements

I take it that there is no hard and fast line between an institution and a social movement. An institution is the objectification of a social movement. A movement's objectification is never permanent but always liable to disruption and reactivation of its aims. Social movement are always liable to find themselves institutionalised. At the very least, institutions form an arena in which social movements contest for dominion. It is only by making institutions continuous with social movements that the cultural and conceptual basis for an institution's existence can be grasped. For Giddens, however:

> I shall distinguish two main types of collectivity … associations and organisations (all reproduction occurs in and through the regularised conduct of knowledgeable agents) … [and on the other hand] social movements.
>
> op. cit., p. 199

Activities

The general concept of 'collectivity' is too ill-defined to comprehend this dichotomy, and yet this dichotomy is the basis for the conception of institutions

as ‘routines’. By comprehending both social movements *and* institutions under a single concept, as *activities,* the motivational springs of institutional life are made visible.

Following Stanislavskii, Vygotsky and the Activity Theorists, I argue that so-called routines are a series of actions each of which has its own goal and is consciously controlled by the subject, subject to conditions towards that goal. However, the goal of an action is not the same as its motive, i.e., the reason for doing it. That is, when we ask “why did the chicken cross the road?” a valid answer must be something other than “to get to the other side” – there has to be a reason. Conscious control is exercised over actions pursuant to the ‘motive’ of the entire *activity*, what Stanislavskii called ‘the channel’, which provides the motivation for all the component actions.

An activity is generally made up of many actions which may be carried out by many different social actors, and its object is represented by the actors as the *concept* of the activity, or institution. It is this concept which orients the actions of actors and provides them with a ‘channel’, and gives meaning to all their actions and regulates collaboration between agents. This concept is supported symbolically in multiple ways, both through the actions of other people, and in the case of institutions, the built environment, and all manner of ‘texts’. The various actions which make up the rules and practices of an institution flow from the concept of the institution in the same way as many different word-meanings are required to constitute a concrete concept. An abstract definition is insufficient, and the meanings of any concrete concept are always subject to challenge as conditions change.

Means must be appropriate to their ends. Conflicts within an institution manifest the differing nuances and contradictions within the concept, and the ideal culture of a community is found in the constellation of these concepts, reflecting the manifold interconnection of institutions with each other, everyday life and social movements. Thus, institutions must be understood as belonging to the broader category of *activities,* marked by their relative stability and integration within the norms of a given culture.

Every corporation, government department, school or hospital, profession, social movement, musical genre, football code or whatever, can be subsumed under the category of activities. Each is more or less established and recognised by participants and others, more or less formal in character, each with its own object and ideal. Every such activity is a unit of a common Will, and exists only so long as and insofar as that Will is expressed by people in action.

Not only do people sustain and further many different ideals in their capacity as agents for various activities, these activities provide resources for their agents. Every woman has resources which she has acquired directly or indirectly thanks to Feminism. Every soldier benefits even when out of uniform from the esteem patriotism has engendered in the people around them. ‘Agency’ is being an agent, not just of Althusser’s oppressive institutions or the broader category of institutions Giddens has in mind, but also of the vast array of projects which make up the social formation of which they are a part.

The formation of routines

This allows us to understand how routine practices are formed, how participants acquire them and learn to operate the prerogatives and obligations appropriate to their social position, and amend these over time in the light of experience and social interaction with others. The concept a person has of an institution within or in relation to which they are active, gives them a concrete form within which their knowledgeability of the practices in which they are participating is developed.

Institutions are always 'for' something by some means. No doubt, this contributes to the appearance of functionalism in people's activity. What an institution is for is something that can be solved concretely only through understanding its history. But it not a total mystery. Institutions in general *solve some problem* or a complex or series of such problems, for *someone*, and in this sense have to be understood as the continuation of a social movement, or a number of such social movements. The pursuit of the recognition of a concept which provides the motivation for actors is quite explicit in a social movement, but this does not disappear when it achieves that crucial moment of realisation when it is institutionalised. Concepts likewise have to be understood as capturing the solution of some problem (Vygotsky, 1934, p. 126).

Conscious awareness

The fact that people are not *consciously aware* of many these social rules does not take away from the fact that insofar as they relate to institutional life, they are invariably learnt through some kind of instruction, whether formal or informal, and generally grasped through concepts, and as soon as any such rule is violated it springs immediately into conscious awareness.

So people understand what is required of them and are able to problem-solve when contradictions arise. This does not in itself however resolve the problem of an agent's motivation. An individual may not be wholly committed to a project and nor will everyone have the same concept of it. People are always committed to a number of different projects and it is the relation between the various projects which determines the nature of a person's commitment to any one of them. The classic example of this would be the wage earner whose commitment to their employer's institution is purely instrumental, and their leading activity may be raising a family, using their wages for that purpose. This is a limiting case however, and most employees have some degree of commitment to where they work or their profession. The web of commitments which motivates a person certainly cannot be adequately represented in terms of unmotivated routines serving to bolster someone's 'ontological security'.

The above reflections are intended to indicate that the psychological theory developed by Vygotsky and the Activity Theorists is well adapted to understanding the behaviour of 'agents' engaged in institutions and activities more generally, and is well grounded in many decades of psychological research. But the 'agents' as conceived of in this psychology have *Will*, have resources which flow from their commitments, and within bounds are consciously aware of what they are doing.

According to Giddens:

> Homeostatic system reproduction in human society can be regarded as involving the operation of causal loops, in which a range of unintended consequences of action feed back to reconstitute the initiating circumstances.
>
> op. cit., p. 27

The concept of the boundedness of agents' knowledgeability in relation to their own activity encompasses the fact that in relation to social processes lying *outside* the sphere of their own immediate experience people may be profoundly ill-informed and misguided. Vygotsky used the term 'diffuse concept' to indicate the forms of knowledge which are constructed by extending local knowledge beyond the bounds of its validity. So even in relation to unintended consequences there is a psychological component. But also, unintended consequences belong to the domain of Ethics, and the acquisition of ethical norms is the business of Psychology.

Conclusion

Giddens' key insights are that (1) social actors must be recognised as having significant knowledgeability concerning their own activity, while this knowledgeability is *bounded*, so that (2) social phenomena must be understood and explained in terms that include understanding the good reasons social actors have for doing what they do.

It seems to me impossible that social theory can resolve the dichotomy aptly characterised by Giddens as the dualism of structure and agency so long as sociologists continue to rely on Freud or improvised psychological theories. Cultural Psychology and Activity Theory are *uniquely placed* to overcome the dichotomy which has its roots in the disciplinary structure of the academy.

Over and above his ungrounded psychological speculations, I see two specific methodological defects in Giddens' work: (1) that he makes his unit of analysis a *continuous process*, and (2) that he takes an taxonomic rather than a phylogenetic approach to analysis. These defects have prevented Giddens from achieving his goal of overcoming the dichotomy.

We are left with the domain of unforeseeable consequences as the exclusive domain of Sociology and Ethics, each drawing on the domain of the 'long view' in which events unfold over centuries. *Unforeseen* (but foreseeable) consequences remain within the domain where Psychology and Sociology overlap, where Sociologists must draw upon Activity Theory.

To Activity Theorists, I say this: Activity Theory cannot be 'expanded' into a social theory, any more than Giddens' Sociology could be expanded into Psychology.

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