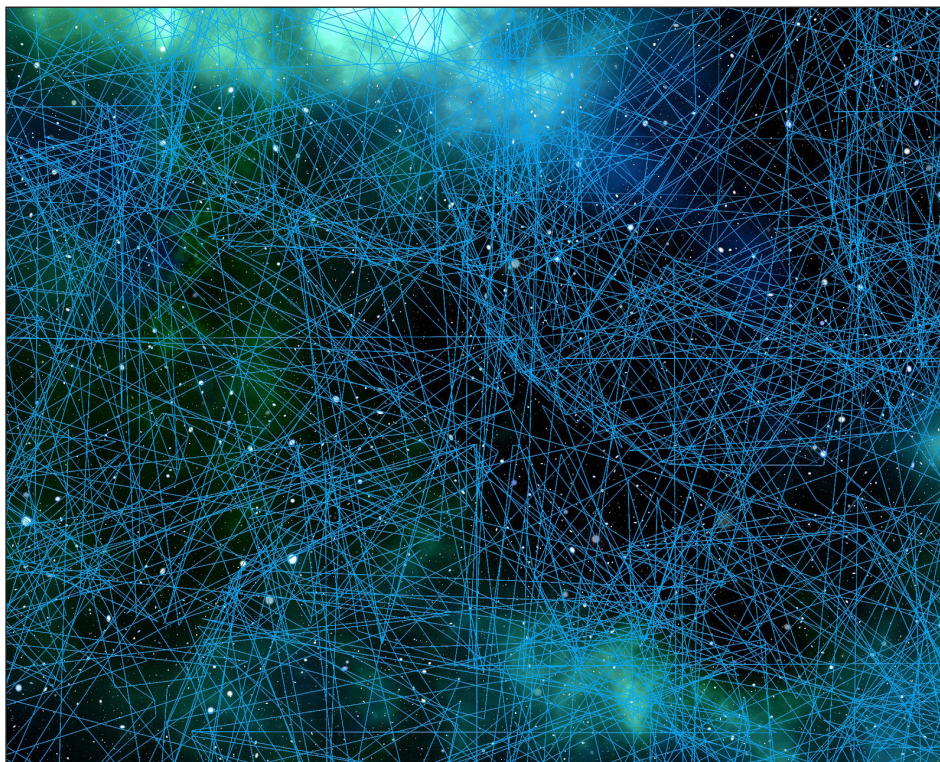


*Quaderni
di Teoria Sociale*

numero

1 | 2018



Morlacchi Editore

QUADERNI DI TEORIA SOCIALE

n. 1 | 2018

Morlacchi Editore

Quaderni di Teoria Sociale

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Per il triennio 2016-2018

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Nota per i collaboratori

I Quaderni di Teoria Sociale sono pubblicati con periodicità semestrale. I contributi devono essere inviati a: redazioneQTS@gmail.com; ambrogio.santambrogio@unipg.it.

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Impaginazione: Pierpaolo Papini

QUADERNI DI TEORIA SOCIALE, n. 1 | 2018

ISSN (print) 1824-4750 ISSN (online)-....

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MASSIMILIANO CERVINO

Linking Structure and Agency for Doing Research. A Comparison between Duality of Structure and Analytical Dualism

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to compare A. Giddens' Structuration Theory (ST) and M.S. Archer's Morphogenetic Approach (MA) by focusing on the keys they use to link structure and agency: duality of structure (DS) and analytical dualism (AD) respectively. The authors offered synthetic strategies to connect both instances and to analyse the characteristics and relation between both entities: what the structures are and how they influence individuals' actions; but also the reverse: what the characters of individuals are, how they react to structural constraints and produce feedback, modifying the structures through their actions. The theories concentrate upon the relation between multiple elements of social reality, their malleability and the capability of conditioning and modifying each other. This paper aims to deepen both approaches to understand which of them could be more helpful for empirical application. Several authors showed an interest in this debate as M. Bortolini and P. Donati [1999], J. Parker [2000], R. Stones [2005], N. Mouzelis [2008], and A. King [2010]. This paper enters the discussion by considering the empirical application of ST and MA.

Before presenting the comparison, we shall examine the backdrop in which the theories were developed, exposing a brief introduction on the dichotomous

conceptions that privilege either the structural analysis or the action, and two solutions to study the relation between macro and micro. The main body of the paper focuses on DS and AD, also considering some of Archer's criticisms of ST.

According to K. Mannheim, there are several types of sociologies [Mannheim 2000]. They are proposed by many research groups that analyse different aspects of reality: the social reality, being something as large as it is elusive, pushes each group of researchers to consider a single element excluded by others. The history of sociological thought divided these sociologies into two large categories: groups oriented to study the social action and the holistic ones. If from an analytical viewpoint this division permitted a deep study of an entity, from an ontological one it has created a dispute on the origin of social reality [Giddens 1976; Bhaskar 1979; Archer 1995]. Each group considers its own research objective the first referent from which the reality, as a whole, depends. Thus, theorists of action created models centred on individuals: individuals are the first object, the origin and the way to comprehend the rest of reality. The theorists of structure resolved oppositely: the structure is the first object and the key to explaining individuals' actions. The main effect of this division has been to deduce and conflate parts of reality from one another [Archer 1995].

The ontological difference brought Sociology to the creation of two epistemologies. By considering the classics, É. Durkheim proposed studying the social facts as if they were things [Durkheim 1982], and M. Weber suggested understanding the intentional sense of action [Weber 1978]. The *methodenstreit* in Sociology gave birth to the dualism objectivism/subjectivism, it transposed to the division of quantitative and qualitative methods.

The Seventies and Eighties represent the peak of the dispute between micro and macro Sociology by the so-called micro-sociological revolution of the Seventies and macro-sociological counterrevolution of the Eighties [Giesen 1994]. The Seventies however are when the development of synthesis attempts started to grow: theories aimed to overcome the dualism by systematic theoretical approaches. These theories include the social totality in general models that synthesise positions such as society and individuals, objectivism and subjectivism, determinism and voluntarism. This totality replaces the idea that society is either action, social interaction, institutions, or symbols, etc, with large models that

unite several aspects in a harmonic way. The sociological literature teaches us that it is something difficult to achieve because a synthetic theory needs to involve many aspects of such a multidimensional reality; it must be able to consider micro and macro elements and their relationships; it needs to enable a middle range of abstractiveness by an adaptation to the empirical field to analyse and describe it.

A strategy to categorise synthetic theories is to understand their purposes: intentional or effective. In other words, if the objective of the theory is to overcome the dualism or if the theory aims to grasp an object that overcomes the dualism. In the first case, the purpose is to discover a logical synthesis between elements: logical thinking to answer the very first problem of the origin of reality. In the second case, the theory is oriented to understand a topic in a way that transcends the classical dichotomy, presenting afterwards a systematic approach helpful for studying the same kind of topic. This distinction needs two considerations. All general theories were developed with close relation to the empirical research. For this reason, the border between the two categories is permeable. The second consideration is the role of theory and reason for its use. If the effective general theory exposes its *raison d'être* in its research objective, the intentional one needs to show the practical utility: the reason for which a researcher should use it instead of another one. This typology is loaned by R. Boudon who, on defining the structure, proposed two applications: intentional and effective [Boudon 1971]. The categorisation allows for comparing ST and MA, placing the approaches in the right position in the social theory. Before doing this, we shall present a theory for both categories.

The first attempt at an intentional general theory is T. Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* (1937). He compared the main theorists of action and order, suggesting a synthesis that gave birth to the system of action. Parsons found the key elements involved in the action: actor, purpose, situation and a normative order. With these elements, he linked subjectivist and objectivist theories and overcame the voluntarism/determinism divide. The voluntarism was linked to actors, their purposes and the means they use to achieve them. The order was related to the situational and normative elements. Parsons presented a logic of action that respected human voluntarism, remembering however the role of rules

coming from the normative order. By the idea of *function*, he proposed a theory oriented to connect antithetical viewpoints. Starting with *The Structure of Social Action* to *The Social System* (1951), he aimed to produce a systematic theory capable of integrating individuals and society, and oriented to analyse how a system maintains the stability during the time.

N. Elias, on the other hand, presented one of the first effective general theories with *The Civilizing Process* in 1939 [Elias 2000]. It is probably his main book because all his following works represented a further theoretical tessera that evolved and explained his theory. He considered civilisation as a configuration of psychological and social elements. To explain the civilising process, it is required an overall analysis of psychic and social structures. The psychogenesis aims to grasp the conflict and psychical energy of individuals, chiefly the processes of social constraints and self-restraints. The sociogenesis is the study of the historical field in which actions take place. Elias proved that individuals' psyche and symbolic, political and social structures change together during the historical process. He considered the idea that individuals and society were separated as mistaken. The winning way to analyse the civilising process is to use a unified theoretical key: the *figuration* or the chain of interdependence among people's actions. There is no society and individuals but a society of individuals.

Starting with these theories, other synthetic models followed, for example, Giddens' *Structuration Theory*, Bourdieu's *Genetical Structuralism*, Luhmann's *Functional Structuralism*, and Archer's *Morphogenetic Approach*. Each of them represents an attempt to link several aspects of reality. The focus in the following pages will be only on Giddens and Archer's theories by considering a key of interpretation: the comparison between DS and AD according to their ontologies and empirical application. ST and MA are intentional general theories because both oriented to link logically structure and agency, proposing afterwards an empirical application to analyse the outcome of their relationship.

1. Duality of structure and analytical dualism

DS and AD are the chief tools with which Giddens and Archer produced their models. They are the core of their approaches, the means through which they started the investigation of structure, agency, their relation, and the way by which they overcame the ontological dualism. The ontological dualism considers some elements of reality (such as mind and body, good and evil, spirit and material) as two opposite entities. The ontological division created in Sociology the idea that society and individuals were two different and even conflicting things. The overcoming in Giddens and Archer's theories is allowed by the idea that both instances can transform each other. The idea of linking structure and agency overtakes the incompatible by considering the mutual production: how structures shape individuals' actions and how individuals' actions shape structures [Giddens 1984; Archer 1995]. The essential elements of this relationship are oriented to the transformation. The agency considers humans' freedom of acting in social contexts, starting from structural and cultural conditioning. The agency highlights the potentiality of action, from projectuality to execution, by internal (reasons, reflexivity, etc.) and external (culture, economy, etc.) influences. The structure has the same transformative capability: the structure stresses the idea of conditioning human actions, denying however the condition of stability for contemplating the *sui generis* character of social reality, always involving agents' actions, unpredictability, and creativity. Starting with these premises, Giddens and Archer aimed to analyse the results of this relationship: the social system coming from the encounter between structure and agency. DS and AD are diverse and involve considerations on the origin of reality. Giddens formulated a circle in which every element is linked through language; Archer adopted a stratified ontology in which each layer is as independent as relational. We shall present both models and Archer's criticisms of the ST.

1.1 *The language as a linkage of Structuration Theory*

The ST aims to study how a social system is produced by individuals' social practices through the instruments of structural properties [Giddens 1976, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1985, 1990, 1991]. Giddens proposed a theoretical model that rejects the objectivism and subjectivism divide, introducing a recursivity between structure and agency. The circularity is sustained by a massive conceptual framework which, in turn, is maintained from the central idea, the DS: the structure is enabling and constraining individuals' actions, and it becomes the medium and outcome of social practices. The idea of DS comes from the critiques of Functionalism, the successes of hermeneutics and linguistics of De Saussure. The structure is associated with *langue* and the agency with *parole*. Like the *langue* owns virtual tools for the actuation of discourses, the structure owns structural properties for the practices. Like the *langue* can be transformed by the *parole*, the structure can be modified by the actions. Like the sense of a discourse is contextual, the sense of an action is contextual. The structure is constituted by the association of virtual rules and resources: signification, domination and legitimation. Agents use them in every action and their concretisation produces a specific type of social system. The social system becomes the empirical hypostatisation coming from the encounter between structure and agency: how individuals by their practices have drawn upon specific structural proprieties, producing a concrete systemic configuration. The social system, unlike the structure, is a regular relationship of interdependence and interaction between actors, situated in a specific social context and in a concrete time-space. Besides Parsons' Functionalism, that considers only a homeostatic regulation, and the theory of cybernetic systems, which uses a self-regulation by feedback, DS recognises the self-regulation by individuals' self-monitoring: individuals have the capability of creating the system by their actions and, at the same time, they own skills to ensure existence and to change the system itself.

Being a social system produced by agents' practices, the hermeneutics performs in ST an essential role: Giddens integrated several theories of action to acknowledge to individuals the capability to *go on* in an aproblematic way in daily life and therefore to reproduce the structure in a circular way. ST considers

agents as experts of contexts in which they act: individuals to act need to know rules, resources and the specific context in which such structural properties need to be applied. This idea does not require agents to be super-skilled. Giddens introduced a stratified model of social action in which proposes several agents' consciousness of situation, the unacknowledged conditions of action, and the unintended consequences of action.

Routine and motivations: daily life is moved mainly by routine or unmotivated actions. Individuals act by routine when they have learnt procedures and acquired competencies. Agents are aware of these competencies but because they know procedures, they act in an unreflective way. Giddens called awareness by routine *practical consciousness*: we act without reflecting but we can explain the reasons for our actions when anybody enquires. Individuals' actions are moved also by motivations: unconscious elements capable of pushing agents to do something. They are desires, wishes and emotions that agents cannot justify. An agent may understand a motivation at the end of the action by the ability to rationalise the event and the action itself.

Unacknowledged conditions of action: although individuals own reflexivity, and thus the capability to monitor their own actions, other agents' actions and social contexts in which they act, there are many elements that they cannot know by their skills.

Unintended consequences of action: the consequences that agents cannot anticipate before they act but are able to have effects on anyone involved in that action.

Agency: the agency, or intentional action, is placed among the previous elements. Agency is the capability of acting starting from the structural properties and oriented to a known outcome. Individuals have a consciousness of such actions because they reflect during project, course and ending of their actions. Actions are oriented to intervene in the world events (*making the difference*) and, according to agents' skills, they have a transformative capability to change the structural properties. Giddens called this agency awareness *discursive consciousness*: the capability to reflect on the action with words and discourses. By considering the agency as a transformative capability to intervene in world events, DS also considers the actions that agents can move in a group, recognising their role

in changing the society. He proposed a categorisation from the main institutions of modern society: peace, labour, democratic and ecological movements.

Giddens concentrated on the transposition of epistemology to ontology. He considered the difference between society and nature: society cannot exist without individuals' interpretations; nature is unaffected by this consideration. Starting from this hermeneutical idea, he found a way to link structure and agency, glorifying interpretative elements without falling in the only hermeneutic dimension. The philosophy of L. Wittgenstein becomes the way to create a unified ontology, the element to master the hermeneutics avoiding tools of structural sociology. A quote by Wittgenstein seems to be appropriate to explain this role in the ST: "... to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life ..." [Wittgenstein 1986, 8]. Giddens proposed a theory in line with Wittgenstein's philosophy for three reasons.

Circle between structure and agency: for Wittgenstein individuals use private language only if they know the public one; for Giddens agents act only if they use public tools coming from structural properties. To compare language and structure means to give attention to the limit of possibilities that those instruments allow to agents' interpretations and actions. Language and structure are both forms of life because they represent the limit of practicability. This is the main reason for Giddens' virtual existence of structure: it cannot exist once and for all but only when it comes from the practices. Social practices are regularised actions in daily life and allow the circularity between structure and agency. Without this regularity, agents would be forced to create every social system *ex novo*. Social practices in ST then perform an essential role: a researcher using them analyses the process of structuration. In other words, the social practices represent the link between structural properties and individuals' skills, and the ST research objective. Giddens proposed an innovative way to consider the classic problem of order: it is the problem of how social practices stretch social systems across time and space, incorporating presence and absence. To do so, he proposed the methodological application of bracketing: the exclusion of a part of DS to study the other one. The bracketing allows the institutional analysis and the strategic conduct. The former consents three kinds of structural analysis: structural principles, structures, and structural elements. The strategic conduct aims to understand

agents' interpretations and their skills, their capability to achieve an outcome and the way they act.

The double hermeneutic: Giddens linked common and scientific languages. He therefore considered the mutual influences capable of modifying structural properties, individuals' actions, and the system coming from their relationship. The double hermeneutic was the chief inspiration of *New Rules* (1976), and the opening way to bridge structure and agency. Giddens improved the philosophies of Winch and Gadamer, he critiqued the postulate of the adequacy of Schutz and the division of scientific and lay rationalities of Garfinkel. The reason for this effort is the following: common and scientific languages are logically tied (*mutual knowledge*); the common language is a form of life and the science needs to understand this form of life, and express it in the research. The results of the research might return however to daily life, changing the structural properties and consequently individuals' actions. Starting from this process, the double hermeneutic is the slippage of scientific interpretations of reality in daily life and vice versa [Giddens 1984]. This positive critique of interpretative Sociology allowed Giddens to propose a flexible theory of society capable of understanding the specificity of a social system. He developed – among others – the concepts of institutional reflexivity and historicity. The double hermeneutic represents the process by which the interpretations of reality return on daily life, operating an extension of the form of life, originating two consequences: the institutions can modify their form, influencing individuals' actions (*institutional reflexivity*); a big system can understand the trajectory of its story by collecting information and orient its actions to a specific outcome (*historicity*). Giddens for these reasons refused the idea of a linear systemic development since every system creates a specific historical growth with its own coherence and contradictions.

The double hermeneutic makes the critical dimension of the research a regular feature of social sciences. Giddens proposed the notion of validity criteria to assess individuals' interpretations. These criteria include an internal and external critique: through the internal one, the scientists put their ideas under the evaluation of the scientific community; the external critique moves from scientific interpretations to daily life, revealing misleading or wrong reasons and beliefs.

The conceptual synthesis: the last consideration about the language in ST is the way by which Giddens elaborated it. The complexity of ST comes from an impressive conceptual synthesis: he linked conflicting theories and the concepts that these involved in a circular way, softening unilateral tendencies of antithetical approaches and creating a circle in which every concept links semantically others. The ST in this way always involves everything. Just as it is not possible to understand the social reality by separating structure and agency, so it is not possible to comprehend the ST by paying the attention to a few concepts forgetting others. The result of this style is a tight conceptual envelopment because for Giddens the social reality is one, intricate and indivisible, bridged through interpretation and the forms of life allowed by language and structure.

1.2 Archer's criticisms of duality of structure

Margaret Archer replaced the ontological dualism and DS with the AD [Archer 1979, 1982, 1988, 1995, 2000, 2003, 2007]. Her purpose is to separate theoretically structure, culture (parts) and agency (people), and to analyse empirically their emergent relationship. The AD allows for identifying and characterising the elements of reality. The MA proposes the way of studying their relationship.

Before deepening Archer's ontology, it is interesting to expose the critiques that she held of ST. Being MA the competitor of ST, Archer's critiques of DS have been a permanent feature of her work. She noted a problem at the very core of ST: the DS. The transcendence of both instances (*central conflation*) produces more problems than it would propose to solve [Archer 1995]. Starting with this idea, Archer directed towards ST various critiques, focusing on the following objectives: the problems of structure; the weight on the social practices; the transcendence of voluntarism and determinism; the contradictions of agency's power; the over-social, over-active, and under-stratified conceptions of agency; the relation of mediation and transformation. We shall consider some concerns about the way of linking structure and agency.

Structure: finding the constraints. Giddens' structure seems to be only enabling. She analysed structural properties, social systems and social institutions, and affirmed that he avoided constraints in each of them.

Structure: ontological and epistemological problems of virtual existence. Archer remarked the idea that Giddens' structure differs from the mainstream's conception. He considered the structure as ideal principles that operate because individuals use them by their skills in their practices. This ontology of praxis causes an ontological problem: what is it virtual and real? It is confusing to understand what agents cannot accommodate by their practices. Archer, by the principles of Critical Realism, affirmed that structures and cultures are real because they are anterior and autonomous from people, and have a causal influence. The ontology of praxis also produces an epistemological problem: the classic idea of structure frees agents' interpretations. Giddens' structure cannot contemplate this possibility, permitting the only study of social practices.

The weight on the social practices. If the structure has a virtual existence, there is no possibility to observe it apart from the concretisation operated by individuals' practices. These are the only object that a researcher can observe and study. Archer wondered if a social practice can sustain all weight produced by the relation between structure and agency.

The relation between voluntarism and determinism. Agents seem to be too mighty. Archer critiqued Giddens' idea of linking agency and power because brings individuals to have no other possibilities than *making the difference* by their power and, moreover, that a person for *making the difference* has no other possibilities than acting. That is to say: the relation between voluntarism and determinism is won by powerful and over-active actors with a timid structural constraining.

The relation between mediation and transformation. Structural conditioning and agency transformation are central processes in Giddens and Archer's theories. Archer critiqued the ST because the recursiveness of DS makes the analysis between both instances difficult. It is hard to study how structure mediates and how individuals transform.

The main Archer's critique of ST is to have conflated structure and agency in a dual form, making difficult to investigate their empirical relationship. She

approved the mutual production of structure and agency but, replacing the DS with the AD, she suggested their analytical separation to deepen their relationship. There are two stages of AD: the first one ends with *Culture and Agency* (1988), the second one starts with *Realist Social Theory* (1995). The entrance to the second stage represents a placement of her outcomes on a steadier ontological base: R. Bhaskar's Critical Realism. We shall consider the second stage, regarding some of Critical Realism and AD features.

1.3 A stratified way to consider the reality

The Critical Realism is a philosophy of science that deepens the basis of reality, specifying the way by which it can be studied [Bhaskar 1979; Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, Norrie 1998]. Critical Realism's core idea is the stratification of reality: the reality is one but divisible and it reveals itself in a stratified way: nature, society and people are parts of the same reality, but they belong to separate strata. Each layer has its own properties and powers, but they are related to others: the layer shows its powers in specific conditions and following specific relations.

Critical Realism distinguishes ontology and epistemology: by the distinction of transitive and intransitive objects and the three domains of reality, it states that the reality is greater than any theorisation the science can produce of it. Against the epistemic fallacious, Critical Realism proposes increasing the scientific knowledge by introducing into the logic of scientific discovery *retroduction* and *retrodiction*: the science, on explaining a phenomenon, is oriented to add new causes on those already known, and to analyse how a specific event emerges through the interplay of several causes. In this way, Critical Realism reintroduced in social sciences the causal explanation: the science aims to study the generative mechanisms or, in easier words, the causes that influence the emergence of a specific object. It uses a relational method: it acknowledges and finds the causal influence of parts of reality, and analyses their relation in the specific case.

Critical Realism overcomes the ontological dualism because, by the principles of stratification and emergence, it asserts that neither structure nor people

could exist without their relation. It however suggests the theoretical separation to deeply analyse their relationship.

Critical Realism is a naturalist ontology but refuses scientist methods: nature is the first layer. For studying other strata, it applies the emergence principle: a layer emerges by another one, developing different powers that need to be studied with proper methods. Causal explanation, hermeneutic and description are tools offered to analyse the relation between society and people. Critical Realism in this way refuses the Hume's Law in social sciences: the possibility to derive the "ought from an is" is an essential condition of the sociological investigation. The theory of explanatory critique invites to find false beliefs, underlines the elements absent in the explanation, and stresses the necessity to have an emancipatory science for a human society.

The Analytical Dualism. Archer applied Critical Realism's ontological principles for improving her theory. She developed an approach that conciliates structure and agency, determinism and voluntarism, acknowledging the properties of reality, and proposing a methodology to study the relation between parts and people. The AD recognises the characters of culture, structure and agency, giving them a principle of reality. Parts and people are real and can be acknowledged.

The culture is a set of logical relations of propositions, ideas, theories and, as Popper's *World Three*, all humans' minds external products. The culture is objective and (relatively) autonomous from the knowledge of people: theories, for instance, exist in libraries waiting for being discovered. The structure represents unintended consequences of past actions: people live in material conditions that they have not created but capable of influencing them. The structure has an objective existence because is (relatively) autonomous, and influence people's projectuality and actions without their accommodations: land, food, institutions, a demographic distribution are real and constraint people without their interpretations.

Archer proposed four argumentations to explain the weight of parts conditioning. *Involuntaristic placement*: people act in already structured contexts; *vested interests*: starting from the involuntaristic placement, people also receive what they can wish and refuse; *opportunity costs*: the emotional, material and human costs that people pay to achieve something; *directional guidance*: the structural and cultural configurations produce either frustrating or fostering guidance for

people's projects and actions. Structures and/or cultures can be either incompatible or complementary: in situations of contradiction, the directional guidance may be more ambivalent than in conditions of complementarity. The structural and/or cultural configurations, their constraints and enablements cannot be presupposed but need to be empirically investigated since their powers are related to people's social positions, properties and powers.

Human beings emerge from the relation with three orders of reality: natural, practical and social order. Natural order regards the relation of human beings' bodies with the natural world; practical order regards human beings' capabilities in using some objects as extensions of their own body; social order regards human beings' capacities to interpret symbols. The practical order has a primacy over the others and precedes the influences coming from the social order. According to Archer, the set of human beings' powers and properties cannot be only emergent from the natural order otherwise people would be nothing but animals. They cannot only emerge from the social order otherwise people would experience just symbols. The practical order is the pivotal element between natural and social orders of reality because in daily life the *doing* precedes the *meaning*. Archer, thus, surpassed the idea that the person is only a social construction and placed the human being in the right position of reality, deepening its emergent properties. The AD considers a stratified model of human being in which specific properties and powers emerge from the relation with specific orders of reality: the sense of self emerges from the relation with natural order; the personal identity emerges from the relation with the three orders; the social identity emerges from the relation with social order; the person manages personal and social identities; the primary agent emerges from social positions and demographic distributions; the collective agent emerges from the consciousness of structural and cultural conditioning; the social actor emerges from social roles.

People act pushed by their reasons, after developing their personal and social identities, thanks to their own reflexivity. They experience the orders of reality and have the subjective capability to develop knowledge on them: the reflexivity allows us for considering the reality through a process of internal conversation, an inner dialogue in which we relate ourselves and social contexts, our ultimate concerns and constraints of reality. Archer presented a process defined *DDD*. The

AD, through the *DDD* model, can observe the processes of reality conditioning and human beings' transformation, and production and reproduction of reality. *Discernment*: we touch the world through the emotions of the first order and consider the set of constraints of reality. *Deliberation*: the internal conversation allows us for relating constraints and ultimate concerns; the emotions of the first order are changed in emotions of second order: the rationalisation of the emotion; we select the constraints in line with our ultimate concerns. *Dedication*: we find our ultimate concerns and develop a *modus vivendi* that represents a synthesis between internal and external world.

People through this process have the possibility to relate themselves to reality, develop knowledge of the three orders of reality and themselves, define their self-consciousness, find a place in the world, act in line with their ultimate concerns, and change (possibly) the social contexts. The internal conversation allows us to understand the world and ourselves: *we are who we are because of what we care about* or, more pragmatically, for what we consider, reflect and care about. When we find our ultimate concerns, we define also ourselves and create a *modus vivendi* in line with them [Archer 2000]. The *DDD* process takes place every time we reflect on the reality: the self-consciousness is a never-ending process, constantly open to new constraints and a change of life path.

The Morphogenetic Approach. Parts and people emerge through their relation: society cannot influence anything without people's relation; human beings cannot exist without relation to the orders of reality. The analytical separation is proposed to enhance the knowledge of the specific characteristics of parts and people, the empirical causes that have permitted their relation (generative mechanisms and reasons), and the systemic configuration emerged by their relationship. Starting with these ontological propositions, Archer presented the MA as an explanatory methodology to study the analytical history of emergence [Archer 1995]. The MA allows for analysing how a social object is produced by a set of objective causes. The result of this relationship is the emergent property that a researcher requires studying. We can explain this process by following Archer's logical thinking: a researcher can deepen the analysis by concentrating on *parts conditioning*: the structural/cultural influences that set people's social contexts; *social interaction*: how people have interpreted those influences and acted in line

with their reasons; *parts elaboration*: *a*) how both sets of causes produce the specific event, *b*) the analysis of processes of changing through double and triple morphogenesis, *c*) allowing the researcher for explaining and describing the event research objective, analysing the structural and/or cultural configurations, the processes of transformation and stability, and the processes of reality production and reproduction.

Conclusion

We said that the relation between structure and agency allows for overcoming the ontological dualism by considering as the research objective the relation between micro and macro elements. This relationship brought Giddens and Archer to formulate two distinct ontologies capable of linking aspects of reality such as structures, cultures and individuals. If the structure is created through agents' actions, there is no reason to consider the former as an incompatible element from the latter. At the same time, if agency means agents' capability to act starting from cultural and structural influences, there is no reason to disconnect it from these last ones. The relationship overcomes the ontological incompatibility by considering the capability to influence and transform each other during the time.

We began also saying that both approaches are intentional theoretical models: ST and MA need to prove their practical utility for the social research, the reason for which a researcher may use a theory instead of another one. We shall conclude with two considerations about this last question: the collocation of ST and MA in social theory, and the reasons for choosing DS or AD to analyse a social system.

Regarding the first question, we shall say that the relation between structure and agency has autonomy in social theory because it consents a researcher to study a specific research objective. It is not the only study of social action: agents' interpretation, projectuality, intentionality, aims and understanding of contexts in which they act. It is not the study of social contexts without actors, a network and an analysis that considers the agency as the environment. It is not the study of reasons for maintaining the system stability. It takes importance the outcome

of the relationship between society influences and individuals' interpretations, the empirical order of social forms extending from dyadic relationships to the world system. The relation between structure and agency allows researchers for observing, acknowledging and analysing how a system shapes its form by structural influences, through agents' social practices in the specific and empirical case.

Regarding the reasons for choosing DS or AD for doing research, we conclude with the main outcomes coming from the exposition of the two theories.

We said that Giddens proposed the DS as an essential medium to link structure and agency. The ST is a sensitising tool to bridge theoretically the reality through a massive conceptual framework apt to involve many concepts of social theory. A remarkable heritage of ST is also the double hermeneutic: the mutual knowledge between common sense and science is a tool to give a democratic space to lay individuals' interpretations of reality, increasing the opportunity of the collective agency to intervene in the world events. The ST gives an ontological relevance to experts' discussions and lay individuals' interpretations of reality. There are though a few concerns over its empirical application that encourage the use of MA.

The first concern is epistemological: the role of hermeneutic in ST and its research objective. ST accurately considers the idea that society is a social construction that requires being studied with proper methods. These methods however cannot be only focused on the analysis of social practices. As Archer stated, we can study people's reasons without excluding the analysis of society influences as demographic distributions whose people's interpretations are irrelevant to the scientific viewpoint. The ontology of praxis of ST seems to be blind to analyse these elements, giving significance only to individuals' exemplifications of structural properties. Critical Realism and AD give more space to the main aspects of social analysis: causal explanation, hermeneutic and description. The MA aims to explain how a social object emerges through society influences and people's practices. If ST gives importance to individuals' interpretation of reality, the MA reserves to them a place of honour but a single aspect of research, that aspect that follows the explanation of generative mechanisms and precedes the description of the social event. These aspects in Giddens' theory are linked: through the in-

terpretations of social practices, it is possible to describe the application of rules and resources in social systems.

The second concern regards the role of language as a linkage of social reality: Giddens proposed the language as a key to link ontology and epistemology, common and scientific languages, and structure and agency. Giddens' strategy was the creation of an extensive range of concepts to give borders and a theoretical consistency to his model. This strategy however makes hard to understand how those concepts answer the question about the analysis of empirical reality. M. Bortolini and P. Donati similarly wondered if all Giddens' neologisms are useful for improving the explicative capability of the sociological theory [Bortolini, Donati 1999]. Archer overcame this problem with the separation of ontology, methodology and practical social theory.

The ontology is limit and border of scientific observation. AD recognises the key aspects of social reality: society and people. The society represents structural and cultural parts that set people's contexts. A researcher can observe material (structure) and logical (culture) influences. People finally live in society; they are the product of society without however being the victims of society. The agency is, in fact, the capability to act starting with society influences, meditate on these influences and change them. The AD makes parts and people easy to observe, acknowledging their place in the reality.

The MA aims to explain how a social object emerges through the interplay of several causes. It covers all stages of scientific analysis: parts conditioning, social interaction, and parts elaboration.

Critical Realism and Archer give a place of honour to researchers and their own analysis. A researcher, on explaining the emergence of a social event, aims to add new causes to those already known. In other words, a research becomes a *tesera* to better understand a phenomenon, and the outcomes of the researcher can be used by other researchers to analyse the integration between several results.

The third concern is Giddens' methodological overcoming of objectivism and subjectivism. The application of bracketing seems to reintroduce the epistemological divide. This critique is in line with N. Mouzelis', who considered Giddens' distinction of micro and macro as decorative with a method that makes the ST an extension of micro-sociology [Mouzelis 2008]. That is to say: Giddens pro-

posed social practices as research objective and reintegrated the methodological distinction of the theory of action and institutional analysis. Regarding this last question, Archer proposed an interesting critique by saying that bracketing also produces two opposite outcomes: through strategic conduct, the agency seems to be always transformative; through institutional analysis, the structure seems to be always recursive [Archer 1995]. For this reason, even accepting the subjectivism/objectivism divide, the bracketing seems to produce conflicting results. Archer overcame this problem in two complementary ways. AD gives a criterion of reality to structural and cultural influences: the parts are neither epistemological nor virtual tools but concrete and real elements that influence people's projectuality and actions. MA offers a synergic union of explanation and hermeneutic: it is a relational method in which together both of them allow to analyse the processes of structural production and reproduction, the processes of structural conditioning and agency transformation and, in synthesis, a complete understanding of the production of social order.

This paper aimed to compare ST and MA by following a logical-descriptive path: we said that DS and AD are the main tools by which Giddens and Archer linked structure and agency. These theories allow a researcher for observing and considering the relation of several aspects of reality such as structures, cultures, individuals (DS and AD), and nature (AD); using the application of several tools as explanation (MA), interpretation, and description (ST and MA); analysing a new research objective: the social system coming from the relation between society influences and agents' practices (ST and MA). Besides these elements of similarity, ST and MA are diverse in their ontology: Giddens created a circle in which every element is bridged through language and interpretation; Archer used a stratified ontology to separate theoretically parts and people in order to analyse their empirical relationship. This last strategy is Archer's breakthrough: AD and MA allow a better empirical application of social theory: Archer proposed a stronger relationship between ontology, methodology and empirical research; AD allows an easier observation of structures, cultures and people; MA permits a wider synergy of causal explanation, hermeneutic and description.

We now conclude with a few words to recognise the value of ST and MA in social theory. We considered the approaches as intentional general theories to

compare them, explain their research objective and consider their practical utility. It is crucial to remember that both authors despite the differences shared the common credo to consider the theory as a necessary element to the reduction of complexity of reality, increasing at the same time the scientific trust on the possibility to observe and analyse it. Giddens' ST is an extraordinary tool to sensitise a researcher to the main elements and dynamics of social reality. Archer's MA is a striking instrument to link ontology, methodology and empirical research. We therefore believe that, even if the MA is more helpful for doing an empirical research, both approaches are essential tools for analysing the production of social reality.

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