1. CORE PROPOSITION

The Constitution of Society (Giddens, 1984) brings together in one place an approach to social science – structuration theory (ST) – which Giddens had begun developing in earlier works.[1] In one sentence ST's thesis is that: **Structure is both the medium and outcome of action.**

Theoretically, ST's focus is on understanding human agency and social institutions, i.e., the social world (p. xvii). For Giddens, doing so coherently requires that the dualism between objectivism and subjectivism "be reconceptualized as a duality – the duality of structure" (p. xxi; see also Cohen, 2000).[2] The result is not "interpretive sociology," not "structural sociology" (p. xxi), and not "methodological individualism" (p. xxvii).[3]

> "The rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction… The constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality" (pp. 19, 25).

Methodologically, social practices are the locus of this duality; they are "at the root of the constitution of both subject and social object" (p. xxii).[4] For ST, practices are the central unit of analysis (Cohen, 2000: 95, 96), and they are always situated in time and space (p. xxii, xxiv). For Giddens, one implication of putting time and space at the heart of ST is a need to rethink arbitrary divisions between sociology, history and geography (p. xxi). In sum, ST privileges neither the individual nor the collective, "but social practices ordered across space and time" (p. 2).

Empirically, studying structuration "means studying the modes in which such systems… are produced and reproduced" as a result of the activities of situated actors (p. 25). ST can guide such research by drawing attention to (1) "the routinized intersection of practices which are the 'transformation points' in structural relations;" and (2) "the modes in which institutionalized practices connect social with system integration" (p. xxxi).

2. KEY CONCEPTS

Although Giddens claims **structure**, **system** and the **duality of structure** are the three core concepts (p. 16; see figure on p. 25), ST is actually quite conceptually dense.

Giddens summarizes functionalist conceptions of structure as external and akin to the skeleton of an organism or the girders of a building, "a patterning of presences" (p. 16); structuralist and post-structuralist conceptions of structure are characterized as "an intersection of presence and absence; underlying codes have to be inferred from surface manifestations" (p. 16). These distinctions lead Giddens to differentiate between **structure** and **system**.

Structure consists of (1) two aspects of **rules**, and (2) two kinds of **resources** (p. xxxi).[5] These rules and resources are "recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems" (p. 377). It is structure which allows "the binding of time-space in social systems" (p. 17). However, structure is **not external** to individuals (p. 25). Instead, it "exists only as memory traces, the organic

basis of human knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action" (p. 377). Thus, structure is always a "virtual order," i.e., social systems "do not have 'structures' but rather exhibit 'structural properties'" (p. 17). Finally, structure "is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling" (p. 25).[6] The most important aspect of structure, those practices with the greatest time-space extension,[7] are **institutions**, defined as "the more enduring feature of social life" (p. 24).

Rules are "generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices" (p. 21). Awareness of social rules is the "very core of that 'knowledgeability' which specifically characterizes human agents" (pp. 21-22). The most significant rules are those which are "locked into the reproduction of **institutionalized practices**, that is practices most deeply sedimented in time-space" (p. 22). Rules can be distinguished along 5 dimensions (see figure on p. 22). By contrast, formulated rules are codified interpretations of rules, not rules as such (p. 21). "The discursive formulation of a rule is already an interpretation of it" (pp. 23).

Resources may be allocative or authoritative (p. 33). **Authoritative** resources are non-material sources of power resulting in the dominion of some actors over others, i.e., command over the coordination of the activity of human agents (p. 33, 373). **Allocative** resources are material sources of power, i.e., natural and physical materials and artifacts (33, 373). Both are related to domination structures (vs. signification or legitimation structures; see figure on p. 33). Phenomena only become resources when incorporated within processes of structuration.

Action is not a combination of acts. "Acts are constituted only by a discursive moment of attention to the *durée*[8] of lived-through experience" (p. 3). Action cannot be discussed separately from the body, its mediations with the surrounding world and the coherence of the acting self.

Agents continuously monitor the flow of their activities, expect others to do the same, and routinely monitor aspects of their contexts (i.e., reflexive monitoring; p. 5). Giddens differentiates between reflexive monitoring, rationalization and motivation as embedded sets of processes (p. 3). "While competent actors can nearly always report discursively about their intentions in, and reasons for, acting as they do, they cannot necessarily do so of their motives" (p. 6). This leads him to differentiate between practical consciousness (i.e., what can be done), discursive consciousness (i.e., what can be said), and unconscious motives and cognition (p. 7). Human agents know how (i.e., practical consciousness) to "go on" in a wide variety of contexts (p. 26).

System refers to "the patterning of social relations across time-space, understood as reproduced practices. Social systems should be regarded as widely variable in terms of the degree of 'systemness' they display and rarely have the sort of internal unity which may be found in physical and biological systems" (p. 377; see figure on p. 25).

Duality of structure refers to "structure as the medium and outcome of the conduct it recursively organizes; the structural properties of social systems do not exist outside of action but are chronically implicated in its production and reproduction" (p. 376; see figure on p. 25).

3. OUTLINE OF *THE CONSTITUTION OF SOCIETY*

I. **Preface**

The Constitution of Society seeks to establish structuration theory as "an approach to social science which departs in a substantial fashion from existing traditions of social thought." In contrast with the natural sciences Giddens sees the implications of social theories as mostly methodological; they are "conceptual schemes that order and inform the processes of inquiry into social life." Although constructing established generalizations "is (perhaps) the lynchpin" of the natural sciences, this "is not an ambition of much relevance to social science."

II. **Introduction[9]**

Following World War II, American sociological thought became dominant, due to Talcott Parsons and *The Structure of Social Action*, a "sophisticated version of functionalism and a naturalistic conception of sociology."[10] Here Durkheim, Pareto and Weber "loomed large," while Marx "played a slight role" and G.H. Mead "received short shrift."

Ultimately, Parsons was criticized as "one-sided" by Dahrendorf, Lockwood, Rex and others for neglecting class division, conflict and power – all central Marxist concepts. Nonetheless, supporters of both Parsons and Marx found common ground in their shared "basic assumptions of functionalism and naturalism."

In the 1960s and 1970s the "orthodox consensus" dissolved in favor of "a baffling variety of competing theoretical perspectives." These included critical theory, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and language philosophy. "With these developments the center of gravity… moved back towards Europe."

From this "babble" Giddens distills three themes: 1) an emphasis on the active, reflexive character of human conduct; 2) a fundamental role for language and cognition in the explication of social life; and 3) the recognition of the declining importance of empiricist philosophies. These issues are taken up by structuration theory.

a. Preview of Chapter 1 (p. xxii)
b. Preview of Chapter 2 (pp. xxii-xxv)
c. Preview of Chapter 3 (pp. xxv-xxvi)
d. Preview of Chapter 4 (pp. xxvi-xxviii)
e. Preview of Chapter 5 (pp. xxviii-xxix)
f. Preview of Chapter 6 (pp. xxix-xxxvi)

III. **Chapter 1 – Elements of the Theory of Structuration**

a. Introduction (pp. 1-5)
b. The Agent, Agency (pp. 5-14)
c. Agency and Power (pp. 14-16)
d. Structure, Structuration (pp. 16-25)
e. The Duality of Structure (pp. 25-28)
f. Forms of Institution (pp. 28-34)

VIII. **Chapter 6 – Structuration Theory, Empirical Research and Social Critique**

4. BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Anthony Giddens is a British sociologist (b. 1938), and the author of 34 books and more than 200 articles. He graduated from the University of Hull (B.A., 1959), the London School of Economics (LSE; M.A.), and King's College at the University of Cambridge (Ph.D., 1974) (Bryant & Jary, 2003). Giddens became a lecturer at the University of Leicester in 1961. He moved to Cambridge in 1969, becoming professor of sociology in 1987. Giddens was director of the LSE from 1997 to 2003, where he remains an emeritus professor. He founded Polity Press in 1985.

Outside of academia, Giddens was an adviser to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who along with Bill Clinton, embraced his "third way," a political philosophy that seeks to redefine democracy in an era of globalization. As a result, Giddens became a vocal participant in British politics, supporting the center-left Labor Party through media appearances and editorial articles. In 2004 he was given life peerage, and as Baron Giddens now sits in the House of Lords.

5. ENDNOTES

[1] These previous works include: *New Rules of Sociological Methods* [1976], especially chapters 2 and 3, *Central Problems in Social Theory* [1979], and *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, [1981], especially chapters 1 and 2. See Giddens (1984: 37, fn. 1-5).

[2] Note: Because of its rejection of both objectivism and subjectivism, situating ST within Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigm framework – at least without misconstruing Giddens' ontological and epistemological commitments – appears problematic (p. 2). Similarly, ST is noticeably absent from Morgan's (1980, 1986) discussions of metaphors of organization. In fact, in a brief search I could find no papers discussing a metaphor for ST.

[3] Max Weber's student Joseph Schumpeter coined the phrase *methodische individualismus* in 1908, and used the English term "methodological individualism" in 1909. However, Schumpeter's use of the term is a reference to Weber's conception, later articulated in *Economy and Society* (1978/1922). Weber argued that when discussing social phenomena, we often talk about "social collectivities… as if they were individual persons" (1978: 13). They have plans, perform actions, suffer losses, and so forth. Without taking issue with these ordinary ways of speaking, methodological individualism stipulates that "in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as solely the

resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action" (Weber 1978: 13).

[4] Giddens appears to use the terms "action," "practice" and "*praxis*" more or less interchangeably. Of note, *praxis* (or acting), which promotes *phronesis* (or wisdom and judgment), is only one of three Aristotelian notions of activity. The other two are *theoria* (or theoretical action), which promotes *episteme* (or scientific skill), and *poeisis* (or making), which promotes *techne* (or skillfulness and proficiency). See Rämö (1999) for a review.

[5] Giddens also distinguishes "structure" from "structures" (p. 377). Structures are "rule-resources sets, implicated in the institutional articulation of social systems. To study structures, including structural principles, is to study major aspects of the transformation/mediation relations which influence social and system integration" (p. 377). Giddens suggests that "the identification of structural sets is a very useful device for conceptualizing some of the main features of a given institutional order" (p. 304).

[6] When structural properties become "deeply embedded," as in the case of "societal totalities," Giddens refers to them as "structural principles" (p. 17), defined as those structural features "involved in the overall institutional alignment of a society or type of society (p. 376).

[7] The concept of spatiotemporal extension likely originates with Husserl, although not cited by Giddens.

[8] On the concept of durée see Bergson.

[9] Following Locke and Golden-Biddle (1997), Giddens appears to use noncoherence as his form of intertextuality, particularly "dichotomizing approaches," and "differentiating internal challenges" (See Table 2, p. 1041). In terms of problematization, Giddens argues for incommensurability, specifically, "replacing an extant perspective with own view" (See Table 4, p. 1046).

[10] In *The Structure of Social Action* Parsons attempted to synthesize Émile Durkheim, Vilfredo Pareto, Max Weber and others into a single "action theory" based on the assumptions that human action is voluntary, intentional and symbolic. This approach came to be called structural functionalism.

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