CONCEPTUALISING CONSTRAINT: MOUZELIS, ARCHER AND THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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Abstract   This paper outlines and evaluates recent contributions by Nicos Mouzelis and Margaret Archer to the structure–agency debate. Mouzelis offers an internal reconstruction of Giddens's structuration theory; Archer an external alternative. I show that, although representing an advance on Giddens's position, Mouzelis's account fails because he relies on the former's definition of structure as comprising rules and resources. I then examine Archer's solution to the problem. I argue that her definition of activity-dependence makes her account of the relationship between agents and structures unclear. I outline an alternative account in terms of supervenience, and argue that it contains the minimum ontological claim necessary for a realist understanding of the structure–agent relationship.

Key words: Archer, Mouzelis, social ontology, social structure, supervenience.

This paper evaluates two recent attempts to prune the hardy perennial of structure and agency. In their recent writing, both Nicos Mouzelis and Margaret Archer offer alternatives to Anthony Giddens's structuration theory (Mouzelis 1995, 1996; Archer 1995, 1996b). The renewed attention paid to older writing in this field, and particularly to the work of David Lockwood, has caused McLennan (1995:117) to note 'a loose but noticeable neo-traditionalist revival' in sociological theory. The two authors exemplify this trend in different ways. Mouzelis says we should go 'back to sociological theory,' whereas Archer sees Lockwood as a forebear but explicitly tries to formulate a new research paradigm.

I begin by outlining the problem as inherited from Giddens. I then discuss Mouzelis's and Archer's solutions in detail. Mouzelis's work is a careful internal critique and reconstruction of Giddens's theory. Archer's is a distinct, external alternative to it. Both authors try to make a clear distinction between agents and structures in order to make these concepts (and particularly the latter) coherent and useful.

In their efforts to give the concept of social structure back its bite, both Archer and Mouzelis draw on Lockwood's (1956, 1964) distinction between social and system integration. Mouzelis attempts to build the distinction into Giddens's account. In doing so, he points to a number of important aspects of structure and agency that Giddens cannot grasp. However, Giddens's key idea that structure should be thought of as rules and resources is left largely untouched. I show that Mouzelis's refinements run into difficulty because of this.

Pursuing a different tack, Archer tries to ground the distinction ontologic-ally, relying on the work of Roy Bhaskar (1989a, 1989b). I contend that her account of the relationship between actors and structures is unclear in vital respects. In particular, the concept of 'activity dependence' is poorly defined and potentially misleading. In its place, I offer a more straightforward definition of the conceptual relationship between agents and structures in terms of supervenience. I argue that this better establishes the link Archer wants to make and has the added advantage of leaving us free to examine empirical relationships in a realist fashion without committing ourselves to Bhaskar's metaphysics.

The Problem: Actors and Structures

Giddens gives us a theoretical vocabulary that tries to capture the relationship between social systems and the actors who make them up (for a summary account see Giddens 1984:25ff). Structure, Giddens says, is what gives form and shape to social life, without itself being that form and shape (Giddens 1989: 256). By this he means that social structure is a set of rules analogous to the paradigmatic structure of language, the 'virtual structure of signi-ficance' which provides the underlying grid from which actual speech is generated.[1] The paradigmatic structure gives form and shape to a language but is only partially visible through particular instances of speech or writing. Such instances contribute to the reproduction of the whole structure, but they are never a full picture of it. What we see are syntagmatic instances of the paradigmatic structure. For Giddens, social systems correspond to this syntagmatic dimension. They are actual patterns of interaction and observable social relationships. Agents and structures are joined in a by now well-known duality (Giddens 1979:15):

> By the duality of structure I mean the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both the medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices and 'exists' in the generating moments of this constitution.

The problems with this view are also well known. Arguments presented by Urry (1982) and developed by Thompson (1989) show that, in his efforts to make them enabling as well as constraining, Giddens makes structures so vaporous that it is next to impossible to get a grip on them. In his discussions of rules (Giddens 1979:65–9, 1984:16–25), important distinctions between structure (as rules and resources), systems (as products of structures) and agents (as mediating producers) all seem to collapse into one another. Giddens will not allow a fixed and discursively available body of rules, a properly external system or a genuinely independent individual. The result is

analytic paralysis: he ends up being unable to separate out these elements at all. He cannot talk about differing degrees of constraint within or between systems (Archer 1982). His theory allows little room for definite statements about cause and effect. Everything is left floating around in the vicinity of the actor, and the various elements are impossible to separate.

These problems have further consequences for other parts of Giddens's theory. In particular, the idea that unintended consequences are an important source of order is threatened. As Craib (1992:159–61) points out, there is an assumption in Giddens's work that the unintended consequences of action will tend to have a patterned quality about them. His examples, despite usually being ironic or perverse in their effects, contribute to the maintenance of the system as a whole. But Giddens gives no general reason why this should be so. If we reject normative-functionalist explanations, as Giddens says we must, then clear cut, discursively available rules and norms with definite sanctions can no longer be an actor's guiding light. In Giddens's world, actors are generally unable to talk about the specific techniques they use to improvise everyday encounters with such consummate skill. If structure is produced through action in the way Giddens says it is (and that structure has no ulterior motives of its own), then it is not clear why, in general, unintended consequences tend to contribute to the maintenance of systems. Without functionalism, the patterned character of unintended consequences is a problem, not a solution.

An Internal Rescue Attempt: Mouzelis

Mouzelis (1989, 1995) attempts to salvage the valuable elements of Giddens's account by placing them within a more comprehensive framework. He argues that 'the type of subject–object relationship that the duality-of-structure scheme implies does not exhaust the types of relationship subjects have *vis-á-vis* rules and resources, or towards social "objects" in general' (Mouzelis 1995:119). The paradigm–syntagm distinction separates general rules from their specific instances. Mouzelis claims that, in both of these cases, actors may also be oriented to social objects in terms of a duality or dualism, depending on their situation. The result is a fourfold analytic table: actors may unthinkingly enact rules (paradigmatic duality) or contemplate them (paradigmatic dualism); actors may also be vital to an interaction-setting or game (syntagmatic duality) or be powerless to affect it (syntagmatic dualism).[2]

Where does this typology take us? I think Mouzelis shows quite convincingly that the reduction by Giddens of the structure–agency dualism into a duality is incomplete. Take, for example, an assembly-line worker in a car factory. It makes no analytic sense to think about such a person as having a genuine, mutually constitutive relationship with the company she works for. She has no influence over this huge structure, and relates to it in terms of a

subject–object dualism, not a duality. In general, according to Mouzelis (1995:120–1):

> Occupants of subordinate positions tend to relate to games played at higher organisational levels in terms of syntagmatic dualism (since as single individuals they cannot affect them significantly); whereas they relate to rules initiated from above predominantly in terms of paradigmatic duality (since they are supposed to, and often do, follow them in a taken-for-granted manner). The opposite combination (syntagmatic duality and paradigmatic dualism) obtains if one looks at how occupants of superordinate positions relate to games and rules respectively on lower organisational levels.

Mouzelis certainly seems to be on solid ground here. Although we can readily concede the point that actors and structures are bound very closely together, when the time comes to do some research we will inevitably need to make the kind of distinctions that Giddens wants us not to make. Mouzelis gives us a way to talk about *degrees* of constraint, rather than just making the general point that structures always constrain and enable actors. Our general understanding of structure now gives us – or at least does not outlaw – concepts we know we need. This is a significant advance on Giddens.

Yet it fails. In Mouzelis's work, 'dualism' implies that there is some sort of *distance* between actor and structure. He knows this gap varies empirically, and that, as a result, Giddens's partial view will not do. His scheme exploits this sense of distance. But note that it pulls in opposite directions for rules (the paradigmatic side) and games (the syntagmatic side). Being distant from the rules implies having some knowledge or power by virtue of that distance. Mouzelis offers the example of a linguist studying the rules of a language. Having the ability to distance herself from the structure, she may acquire a strong theoretic knowledge of it. By contrast, ordinary actors are very 'close' to their language and do not have this discursive knowledge. But in the syntagmatic case, distance between subject and object generally implies a *lack* of power, and most likely (though not necessarily) a lack of knowledge as well. My bank would not miss the withdrawal of my meagre funds from its reserves, and so I have next to no involvement with or power over it. I'm a small-time player in a very big game. Even if I had detailed paradigmatic knowledge of financial markets and economics generally, this would not significantly change my powerlessness in my day-to-day relations with the bank.

This metaphor of distance, shared between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels but with opposite implications in each case, makes these categories less exclusive than Mouzelis might like. In fact, it builds circularity into his argument. I argue that this problem has its roots in Mouzelis's acceptance of Giddens's basic view of structure, despite his rejection of structuration.

Mouzelis's fourfold typology goes hand in hand with an argument about social hierarchies. 'To talk about micro–macro, or about participant–social-whole linkages without taking into account social hierarchies is like trying to

swim in an empty pool' (Mouzelis 1995:126). All complex social wholes are hierarchised, a fact which must be taken seriously. Each box in the typology represents an orientation to system or rules. One's orientation depends largely on one's position in the hierarchy. Thus, 'whenever games are hierarchised, players higher up influence games and players at the lower levels by creating both limits and opportunities' (Mouzelis 1995:142). So, 'what is an external and non-malleable game from the perspective of a micro or meso actor, may be less external, and more malleable from the point of view of a macro actor' (Mouzelis 1995:141).

The relationship between orientations to action and social hierarchies threatens to confuse the distinctions Mouzelis wants to make. As we have seen, syntagmatic duality (SDY) is first characterised in terms of the necessity of a participant to the structure of the system. Mouzelis's examples deal with teachers and workers, relatively powerless micro-actors. The teacher and the workers have SDY relations to their respective games because their co-present participation is necessary for the system to exist in the form that it does. If we were to ask what the corresponding relation amongst *macro* actors might be, then the answer would appear to be some similar interaction setting or a group composed of such actors. For example, a company's board members might make up such a group. By virtue of their presence, each contributes something unique and important to the interaction. Now, if this were a true analogue, it would not make sense to think there was any link between the macro-actors and the micro-actors *on the SDY level of analysis*. There is no mutual interaction. The macro-actors are more powerful than the micro-actors (by virtue of their hierarchical position and consequent orientations to rules and resources), but it makes no sense to say that they have any inter-active, face-to-face orientation towards the latter, or vice versa. However, Mouzelis seems to suggest exactly this: he says (1995:121) that the more powerful macro-actors would have an SDY relationship to the less powerful micro-actors: 'The opposite combination (syntagmatic duality and para-digmatic dualism) obtains if one looks at how occupants of superordinate positions relate to games and rules respectively on lower organisational levels.'

This seems to confuse two different kinds of influence. A small, informal shopfloor group has a variety of characteristics. Some of these exist because the group is situated in the context of a particular factory organised according to specific rules. Insofar as the actions of managers or bosses help create this context – thus making them indispensable to the structure of the group – they have, according to Mouzelis, an SDY relationship to it. But this is different from the sort of SDY relationship suggested by all of his empirical examples. For instance, where 'blue collar workers relate in terms of subject–object duality to social systems or games for the construction and reproduction of which their participation is vital' (Mouzelis 1995:119). In the first case, for the bosses, an SDY relation means being able to set the general 'structural' context. This is something which can be done independently of co-presence,

and thus of participation as we would normally think of it. In the second case, for the workers an SDY relation means contributing something unique to the group by virtue of one's presence in it.

Now, we know that Mouzelis refuses to accept co-presence as the defining feature of the micro–macro distinction. 'Micro' interactions can be 'macro' events. Even though there may be only six people in a room, if they are all heads of corporations then what goes on in the room is far more macro than the similar (micro-interactive) situation of their six limo drivers who may be chatting downstairs. So once again, position in the hierarchy is everything. If co-presence is not required for a SDY relation, then the only way Mouzelis can maintain the coherence of the category is to further distinguish between co-presence and participation. This is, in fact, what he does (1995:138): ' "Participant" can refer to a rank and file member of a company (micro), to a branch manager (meso) or to the company president whose decisions directly affect thousands or even millions of people (macro)'.

It does not solve the problem. Mouzelis repeatedly makes the very strong point that, thanks to the hierarchised nature of social reality, institutional structures and actors exist with different powers and reaches at different levels. So it is true that macro-actors can have a strong influence on the local conditions of micro-actors, quite independently of co-presence. But in that case something awkward seems to happen to the SDY category. When such actors are considered, it becomes very difficult to separate the behaviour associated with an SDY relation from the behaviour associated with a Paradigmatic Dualism (PDM) relation. This is because, for macro-actors, the SDY influence they have is precisely *the ability to change the rules* which structure interaction between micro-actors. It is much easier to keep these two relations apart for micro-actors. Recall that my deep knowledge of the rules of economics and finance co-existed easily (though perhaps unhappily) with my powerlessness in relation to my bank. It is much more difficult to maintain the distinction for macro-actors. This may be why all Mouzelis's SDY examples are of the micro kind.

Why should a well-established distinction between syntagm and paradigm cause problems when combined with another well-regarded division between duality and dualism? The reason, I suggest, is that when Mouzelis speaks of syntagm and paradigm he is really thinking of social and system integration. For Mouzelis, Lockwood's distinction is an indispensable sociological tool, especially when it comes to explaining conflict and change (Mouzelis 1995: 26–7, 77–80). But it presupposes in an altogether stronger concept of social structure than we find in Giddens, one where structure really is outside of actors' heads, and people can have material interests that may be incompatible with their society's institutional arrangements (Lockwood 1956, 1964). Mouzelis finds that, while the idea of a non-normative substratum of material interests is untenable, the analytic separation of actors and parts is too useful to abandon. His solution is to suggest that social systems are made up of

institutions that are symbolically constructed and maintained to varying degrees of durability by actors (Mouzelis 1996). The durability of institutions 'lies not in their "materiality" or lack of norms, but in the fact that, on the level of social integration, powerful interest groups support them more or less purposely' (Mouzelis 1996:3). He updates Lockwood, adopts the syntagm/paradigm vocabulary, and thus avoids the charge of essentialism.

This move, however, has the (unintended?) consequence of making his basic concept of structure more or less the same as Giddens's. This in turn makes his definitions of social hierarchy and power circular. For Mouzelis, hierarchies certainly exist in reality – some people have more power than others – and the orientations of the actors that fill Mouzelis's boxes depend on it. But what is its conceptual basis? Macro-actors, to say it once more, have the power to reorganise rules and deploy resources. This power seems to come from one's position in the hierarchy. Struggles in various hierarchies amount to struggles to increase one's capital in these areas.[3] But where does this distribution, the hierarchy itself, come from? It turns out that actor orientations and hierarchies are defined in terms of each other: hierarchical position is defined as power to do something, but this power is specified in terms of position. The power of macro-actors is the power to change rules, but we can only find out who has this power if we rely on a pre-existing picture of the structure. If you want to examine one side of the coin, you must take the other for granted. We have come across this sort of problem before, in relation to Giddens's arguments about how structures produce systems (Thompson 1989).

Mouzelis's advance on Giddens is that he can classify power variations within a given social hierarchy, and Giddens cannot. Mouzelis's actors have differing orientations to structural rules that define hierarchised games. Some rules are much harder to change than others, and actors' orientation towards them vary on the basis of their position. When it comes to getting empirical leverage on a problem, this is clearly a significant improvement. But structure remains defined as a set of rules and resources. This means that asking where the hierarchy comes from leads us back to where we started. Despite the advance, Mouzelis's categories nevertheless tend to break down because they cry out for a sharper division between actors and structures than is entailed by his basic acceptance of Giddens's position.

The Critical Realist Alternative: Archer

The problem, in essence, is this: on the one hand, some aspects of social structure seem irreducible to the conceptions, beliefs or deliberate actions of agents. On the other, no one wants social structures wandering around by themselves like so many lost cows. The solution seems to be to find a way of understanding structure that avoids making it reducible to rules in Giddens's

sense, while at the same time avoiding the essentialism (or reification) that Mouzelis is justifiably worried about. To some partisans of the debate, my argument will by now seem to imply support for what has become known as 'critical' or 'transcendental' social realism (Archer 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Bhaskar 1989a, 1989b). In the language of critical realism, my argument shows that Mouzelis is a closet 'central conflationist' in something like the fashion of Sewell (Archer 1995:93ff; Sewell 1992).[4] He has tripped up by virtualising social systems. The solution seems to be to come clean and argue that such systems are not virtual at all, but actually exist. Societies are emergent from individuals and real in themselves: '[Individuals and societies] do not constitute two moments of the same process. Rather, they refer to radically different things' (Bhaskar 1989a:33). Critical realism appears to offer the solution to our problems.

Archer's effort to develop a coherent and empirically profitable view of structure and agency has much to recommend it. Her alternative has a number of advantages over that of Giddens, not least a strong effort to link theory and research. The approach proceeds on two fronts. The first, 'analytic dualism,' is the claim that effective sociological research depends on a clear distinction between actors and structures. Her claim is that our explanations will be unable to do justice to what we observe unless, for the sake of analysis, we think of societies and individuals as different things (Archer 1995:158). This seems sensible. But, in addition to this, Archer also promotes a specific ontology, critical realism (Bhaskar 1989a, 1989b). The two fronts are then fused into a research paradigm: the analytic dualism relies on this particular brand of realism.

I find important parts of Archer's account of structure ambiguous. In particular, she does not clearly explain how individuals and societies are related to one another. Her concept of 'activity dependence' is especially problematic. It may turn out that the arguments I am about to present in this regard are what Archer has had in mind all along. If so, then so much the better: I feel her position needs clarification. If they are not what she believes, I contend that my account gets us where we want to go with fewer complications.

Archer needs structures to be real, and so binds her arguments to Bhaskar's ontology (Archer 1995: 135–62). I argue that a simpler ontological claim can sustain her analytic dualism and avoid the problems faced by Giddens, Mouzelis and others. If we think of societies as abstract objects made up of relations that supervene on individuals, we can move towards a useful, non-reductive physicalism. This allows that social structures can have casual properties of their own, but makes it very clear what their relations to individual actors must be like. Allow me to develop this claim.

The concept of supervenience has been worked out and widely applied in recent analytic philosophy of mind and ethics (Kim 1984, 1990). To say that A supervenes on B is to say that there can be no differences in A without there

being differences in *B*. This implies that when cases agree in subvening respects they agree in supervening respects. Supervenience can help us untangle otherwise confusing or contentious claims about the reality of society. Take the example – one of Archer's favourite – of a demographic structure. A society's demographic structure supervenes on that society's individuals. There can be no changes in the former without changes in the latter. The relation is asymmetric: individuals can change in many ways that have no effect on the relations that comprise the demographic structure. Demographic structures have properties which can count as causes. As Archer notes, proportional relations between age cohorts may enable or constrain different actions. In so far as they do, it makes perfect sense to speak of the structure as having real effects (Archer 1995: 143–4).

Archer does not use the concept of supervenience. Instead, she says (1995: 148, emphasis in original) that social structures are *activity dependent*, which means that they

> are only efficacious through the activities of human beings, but in the only acceptable manner, by allowing that these [structures] are the effects of *past actions*, often by long dead people, which survive them (and this temporal escape is precisely what makes them *sui generis*). Thus they . . . [are the] autonomous possessors of causal powers.

This definition might be read as agreeing with that of supervenience, but its stress on the 'temporal escape' of structures from 'past actions' makes it confusing. The concept of activity dependence runs together two ideas which should be kept separate. The first is the relationship between present-day social structures and present-day actors. I argue that this is best understood as a supervenience relation, as defined above. The second is the relationship between the actors and social structures of the present and those in the past. I argue that these stand in some relation of causal dependence to one another: both the way individuals are distributed in the present population and the properties of the supervening demographic structures are causally dependent on the actions of past individuals who were probably, in their turn, constrained by the properties of the demographic structure which supervened on them.

Archer does not make this clear. She believes that methodological individualists are committed to saying that all social structures are 'attributable to contemporary actors,' that is, attributable to their knowledge, beliefs and actions (Archer 1995:78). She can rather easily show that this is untenable by describing situations where the best efforts of individuals to change their social structure are constrained by that structure (such as 'Castro's Example', Archer 1995:77). So, if we ask on whose 'activity' a demographic structure 'depends', Archer says (1995:143, emphasis in original) it is truistic to answer 'the people who make it up', because:

it was not *their* intention to structure it that way nor the unintended consequences
of *their* actions, not the intentionality of contemporary agents for we have presumed
they all seek its transformation. *Here the activity dependence of such structures can be
affirmed in only one acceptable way: by reference to the activities of the long dead.*

Thus we end up claiming that there are kinds of social structure whose very
existence is 'ontologically independent from the activities of those people here
present' (Archer 1995:145). For social structures in general 'it is an *empirical
question* whether their activity-dependence is *present tense or past tense*' (Archer
1995:145, emphasis in original). This is a very confusing and unhelpful way
to speak of the relationship between social structures and individuals. It makes
us believe in social structures whose existence in the present is entirely
independent of the people who make up society, which is impossible. Archer's
attempt to get past the truism of 'no people, no society' by saying that 'people'
includes dead people will not do.

Thinking in terms of supervenience and causal dependence clears up the
ambiguity. Of course my position in the demographic structure has little or
nothing to do with my intentions or actions. I cannot intend my own birth any
more than I can intend to defy gravity. However, that structure does super-
vene on me and everyone else who makes it up. Now, how does that structure
relate to the actions of individuals in the past, or the social structures of the
past? The answer is that there is a causal chain stretching back from the
present (or some specific state of affairs in the present) to other states of
affairs, actions or structures in the past. Take the demographic structure of a
society at time t. Its form supervenes on the population here present. It has
properties ('proportional relations between age cohorts' [Archer 1995:144],
for example) which can have affects on that population, constraining or
enabling actions, like adopting a pensions policy. Attempts to change its
properties may be frustrated despite the best efforts, intentions and actions of
everyone in the population. Why is this so? The answer is that the age,
distribution and even the existence of individuals living at time t is causally
dependent on the actions of the now-dead generation that lived at time $t-1$.
This causal chain is very complex, but there is no *conceptual* mystery about it.
If their parents hadn't met they wouldn't be here. But because their (and
everyone's) parents *did* meet, they find themselves alive today. They also find
that something called a demographic structure supervenes on them (and them
alone) and that (through no fault or action of theirs) it will make the cost of
adopting a generous pensions policy very high should they try to implement
one. Attempts to explain why today's demographic structure came to have one
set of properties rather than another will most likely involve referring to the
actions of the now-dead, or the structures of the past. However, such causal
explanations form no part of the conceptual relationship between actors and
structures. As it exists today, properties and all, the demographic structure
supervenes on those individuals here present.

Supervenience helps us to more easily avoid the pitfalls of Mill's 'social substance' (Archer 1996b:685). It may even be what Archer really means by activity dependence. If it is, I think my account is clearer: it avoids some potentially confusing pitfalls, and is independent of Bhaskar's ontology. I would add in passing that making a particular ontology a prerequisite for empirical work tends to narrow the range of debate and blind us to new or interesting phenomena. In a critical realist world, Archer (1995:160) claims,

> whilst it is perfectly possible to have fierce realist debates about the relative substantive importance of different structures (of the marxist versus anti-marxist variety), nevertheless in formal terms, such antagonists would also be co-protagonists of Methodological Realism . . . disagreements can flourish . . . but without any disagreement over the nature and format of explanation itself.

I do not think critical realism is so strong that it compels us all to sign up as Methodological Realists. If we want real structures, we can get an adequate statement of them without Archer's (and Bhaskar's) metaphysics. I have proposed a straightforward, nonreductive physicalism: abstract objects like societies supervene on people and their actions. Supervenience does *not* imply reductionism – supervening objects may have irreducible properties – and it is better defined than activity dependence.

Conclusion

How can we conceptualise constraint in an empirically useful way? This is the concern shared by Mouzelis and Archer. Both believe that our concept of structure should not be sacrificed to that of agency. At the same time, neither of them want to fetishise it. Mouzelis calls this danger 'essentialism' and Archer 'reification'. They try to solve the problem in different ways.

I argued that Mouzelis's internal reconstruction, though useful, fails on its own terms. Mouzelis presents a new and expanded analysis of ways in which actors may relate to structures. This goes beyond Giddens's work in some important ways. However, I showed that this analysis has a built-in contradiction that arises from Mouzelis's acceptance of Giddens's idea that structures are best understood as rules and resources. Such internal critiques seem bound to run into these problems sooner or later.

I then suggested that Archer's critical realism was an appealing external alternative to Giddens. However, her strictly conceptual arguments about structure and agency are unclear. I argued that we should think of social structures as sets of relations and relational properties which supervene on individuals and their actions. On this view, structures may well have relational properties that are independent of agents' intentions and conceptions. Archer's concept of activity dependence suggests something similar to supervenience – indeed, they may be the same – but the former is not

specified clearly enough. It allows us to talk about structures in a misleading and potentially mystifying way, as they break away from their dead authors and wreak havoc on the living.

Although I have reformulated some existing examples in my own terms, I have not laid out a theory of how structures supervene, or which relational properties have what effects. These are empirical questions, and the role of social theory at this general level should not be to answer such questions in advance. Instead, I have had three less ambitious aims in this paper. First, to show that the problems with Mouzelis's view have their origin in his rule-based account of structure; secondly (motivated by the same reasons as Archer), to argue for an externalist conception of social structure; and thirdly, to show that the idea of supervenience both clarifies and reduces the ontological claims that sociologists must make in order to think about social structure in a conceptually coherent way.

Notes

1. Strictly speaking, in Giddens's account structure is made up of rules and *resources.* However, the terms do not have equal weight. Giddens puts the emphasis overwhelmingly on rules. Resources are usually secondary to rules, or even indistinguishable from them. Giddens says that resources (such as land) 'might seem to have a "real existence" in a way which I have claimed that structural properties as a whole do not. But their "materiality" does not affect the fact that such phenomena become resources . . . only when incorporated within the process of structuration. The transformational character of resources is *logically equivalent to*, as well as inherently bound up with the instantiation of, that of codes and normative sanctions' (Giddens 1984:33, emphasis added). So resources are only resources when linked to (and presumably defined as such by) rules. As a result, most discussions of Giddens's concept of structure simply assume resources to be sets of certain kinds of rules.
2. It is important to be clear about these categories. (1) *Paradigmatic Duality* is what Giddens usually has in mind when he speaks of relationship of actors to structures. Actors are oriented towards rules and resources in a natural-performative way. Mouzelis gives the example of a teacher routinely drawing on rules and resources in order to teach a class. The rules are both the medium and outcome of action because 'by using them [teachers] contribute to their reproduction/transformation' (Mouzelis 1989:626). (2) *Paradigmatic Dualism* occurs when actors deliberately distance themselves from a set of rules and resources in order to examine them in some way. Teachers may meet to change some rules for the better, perhaps or see how they might be used to further exploit students. In any case, the orientation of the actor towards the rule has changed. There is some contemplative distance between them. (3) Next, *Syntagmatic Duality*. Sometimes actors contribute to the form of a specific interaction or game in such a way that things would be significantly different (or impossible) without them. In such a

case, it is inconceivable to see such a social system as "external" to the subject-participant. Let us call this type of subject–object relationship syntagmatic duality' (Mouzelis 1995:119). (4) Finally, and by contrast, agents are often involved in games where they can do nothing of importance. They would not be missed were they to leave. 'Here one can quite legitimately see this larger system as "external" to the subject, in which case one should speak of the relationship as one of *Syntagmatic Dualism*' (Mouzelis 1995:119–20, emphasis added).

3. 'Capital here meaning power, the overall capacity to mobilise not only economic and political resources but also social and cultural ones' (Mouzelis 1995:142).
4. Archer's critique of Sewell (1992) ends up in much the same place as may argument here. She shows how Sewell's attempt to reformulate Giddens's concept of structure is nevertheless unable to escape the problems associated with rules (Archer 1995:109–14). It seems to me that any attempt to revise Giddens's position from the inside will be prone to fall back into the kinds of circularities identified in this paper and by Archer.

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