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**Anti-Foundationalism And Social Ontology:
Towards A Realist Sociology**

by

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Abstract

My concern in this thesis is with the transcendental question concerning the condition of possibility for social science. I argue that for social scientific knowledge to obtain one must: (1) have a conception of *knowledge formation* as theoretically mediated and fallible; and (2), social scientific knowledge claims must be about an *object* of study which conceptualises social structure as an *enablement* as well as an *external constraint* upon agency. This means: (1) arguing for an *anti-foundational epistemology*, which avoids becoming truth-relativism, by being complemented with a *metaphysical realist ontology* (giving us the position of ‘realist anti-foundationalism’); and (2), using a *social realist meta-theory of emergent properties* to explain how *methodology* (i.e. the construction of specific theories and empirical research) has a conceptually mediated and fallible access to social reality.

Developing a critical (i.e. transcendental) examination of the presuppositions of social scientific knowledge also means, *a fortiori*, using realism as an underlabourer. The *negative underlabouring role* is to proscribe theories based on some form of epistemic immediacy, or being-knowing identity. It therefore means rejecting positivist, empiricist and essentialist versions of social science. The form of essentialism dealt with is called the sociological logic of immediacy, and this pertains to definitive ontologies of social structures or human being. Whereas the use of positivist and empiricist *epistemology* as a positive underlabourer produces a methodology that conflates the real into the ‘actual’ (i.e. decontextualised empirical ‘facts’), the use of an essentialist *ontology* makes methodology either redundant (as the ontology mirrors all the essential properties which determine human behaviour), or an exercise in arbitrary verificationism. Against this, realist anti-foundationalism can act as a *positive underlabourer* for the social sciences if it is complemented by a social realist ontology of emergent properties, to act as a meta-theory which guides methodology.

In developing this argument my chief concern is to show that realism (as developed by Archer and Bhaskar) is a more adequate position than post-Wittgensteinian positions which focus on ‘practices’ and how people ‘go on’ in ‘forms of life’. ‘Adequacy’ in this sense pertains to epistemological discussions about the status of knowledge, together with ramifications of post-Wittgensteinianism for knowledge of the socio-political realm. This means providing a critique of Rorty and Giddens, after dealing with the issue of empiricism. Although Rorty’s critique of ‘postmodernism’ as essentialist is accepted. Whereas realism can explain how we have a conceptually mediated and fallible knowledge of reality, including social reality, post-Wittgensteinian positions fall into truth-relativism and essentialist conceptions of human being and social structures.

Preface

(1) Dichotomies

Sociology, and social science more generally, is marked by a number of dichotomies. The most characteristic and pervasive of these dichotomies are: structure and agency, continuity and change, consensus and conflict, and the theory-methods divide. One conclusion that can be drawn straight away is that, with the exception of the last dichotomy, it is clearly erroneous to prioritise either aspect of the dichotomy. Thus to prioritise 'social structure' to the detriment of individuals' 'agency', would be to say that individuals had no free will (or were unable to effectively operationalise free will), because to emphasise structure is to take the view that structures are determining external constraints upon agency. In other words, individuals' agency would not be equal in explanatory import (at any time) to the focus on social structures, because individuals would be regarded as 'passive' entities which were acted upon by external (structural) factors which 'pushed' individuals into certain forms of behaviour. To avoid the reification and determinism entailed by such a position one may be tempted to prioritise agency.

One could argue that all reference to social structures or social contexts was reducible down to the level of individuals. However, this might not escape determinism, because the reduction from social structures / social context to individuals may continue, with the emphasis being upon brain states or biology, giving us a psychologistic or biological determinism, respectively. If one does try to

resist such a reduction then one confronts the problem that excluding any form of non-individual 'social' factor precludes any form of social description. For example, one cannot describe what a social agent is, let alone what they are doing, by trying to remove any contextual reference. One could explain the action of a man in purely physical terms (referring to an arm picking up a piece of flat metal, and legs moving the body to pieces of wood, where people sat), but this would be a signal failure to explain the action itself, which was a social action set in a particular social context (a waiter picking up a tray in a restaurant to serve some customers, celebrating a special occasion).

Thus one needs to explain how the social context is objectively real and thus irreducible to individuals, whilst avoiding a structural determinism which turns individuals into passive 'puppets', who are pushed around by external forces. This means *conceptualising structure as an enablement as well as a constraint. An objectively real social context is the 'stuff' of agency: the social context, which pre-exists specific acts of individuals, not only provides limits on what may be achieved, but is also actually the medium of agency, because agents can rework that social context* (given that agents are not atomistic elements which exist in a situation devoid of a social context).

Similarly, it would be wrong to have an *a priori* emphasis on continuity or change, conflict or consensus, as the social world is marked by all four aspects. In which case social research has to explain the specific situations where change or continuity occurs, and whether this is marked by conflict or not. Thus one ought to eschew 'normative functionalism' which conceptualises society as an 'organism', holding that continuity and consensus are 'healthy', and that conflict is 'pathological'. Such a view obviously breaks down because societies are always marked by some form of conflict,

and this does not result in societies being ‘dysfunctional’ (i.e. institutions still ‘work’). This does not mean we ought to accept the anti-functionalist view put forward by ‘conflict theorists’ which holds that conflict *per se* occasions change. The problem with the view that we ought to prioritise the explanatory import of conflict, to explain change, is that high levels of conflict can exist without significant social change occurring.¹

What this suggests is that sociological explanation needs to explain how social agents find themselves located in a particular social context, and how their actions may, or may not, change that social context. Whether conflict produces structural change is not a matter for *a priori* theorising, but for empirical research into how, over time, agency changes or does not change the structural context. This raises the issue of the theory-methods dichotomy, because one might say that grand theoretical attempts to give explanations of the social world ought to be rejected for empirical research which actually deals with substantive material. In other words, we could prioritise the ‘methods’ side of the dichotomy and reject ‘theory’, with no deleterious consequences, because theory - or at least ‘grand theory’ - attempts to ‘carve up’ and ‘freeze’ the ‘fluid’ and complex realm of social relations into *a priori* categories or fixed essences.

Against this it must be argued that any attempt to evacuate theory, to reduce methods into atheoretical ‘fact gathering’, will result in a positivism which either tries to make reference to individuals devoid of a social context, or turns to statistical findings (with the context removed) which are taken to be facts that ‘speak for themselves’. Without replicating the critique of positivism set out in chapters one and five, we can simply note here that this would fail as an explanation, because it would

¹ This issue is discussed in detail by Archer 1995:66-9.

remove any reference to a social context which explained why people acted as they did, and the positivist use of quantitative data would mistake a correlation between variables for a causal relation.

The upshot of the argument so far is that, contrary to such positivism, we need to link theory and methods, with theory supplying some guiding precepts for methodology (with methodology being defined here as the formulation of specific theories and empirical research). Or, to put it another way, we need a ‘meta-theory’ to inform the construction of specific theories and empirical research. We need meta-theory to explain how an objectively real social context can both enable and constrain individuals’ actions, and use such theoretical precepts to explain, via empirical research (informed by more specific or ‘middle-range’ theory) how specific agents in specific contexts were enabled and constrained. We may then explain how their agency (and any conflict) resulted in either change or continuity. In short, by resolving the structure-agency ‘problematic’, we can link theory and methods, and engage in substantive social research which does not have an *a priori* emphasis on continuity or change, conflict or consensus; and, as a result, it can explain situations where there is conflict but no change, together with situations where there is conflict and change.

(2) Anti-Realism

It may be objected that although positivism has been rejected, there is still a belief that sociology can have an immediate access to a manifest truth which, in this case, would not be in the form of atomistic individuals existing in situation devoid of a (non-reducible) social context, or statistical variables, but in terms of structures. It could be maintained that if one thinks that empirical research ought to be guided by a theory about structures (even if it purports to be a theory about structure *and agency*) then the theory about structures will (ultimately) seek to be a definitive explanation, listing all the structures which influence (and ultimately determine) human behaviour.

That is, any reference to ‘structures’ may be taken as a form of ‘essentialism’, whereby the theory seeks to list all the ‘essential properties’ (in this case social structures, but essential properties may include human nature) which are essential in the sense that: (1) they are the factors which control human behaviour and so, (2) knowledge of such properties is definitive knowledge, as one would know why people (re) acted, or behaved, as they do, in any situation. In such a case, theory would presume to have all the knowledge required to explain the social world, and thus methodology would be redundant or, at the very least, an exercise in arbitrary verificationism, ‘proving’ that any observed behaviour Y corresponded to - because it was determined by - essential property X; with X being, for example, capitalist structures.² Or, similarly, if one individualised such essentialism, turning to notions of ‘human nature’, then X could refer to mental states (‘psychologism’) or biology (‘biological determinism’).

² I have in mind here vulgar Marxism. Whether Marxism *per se* is a deterministic doctrine is beyond the scope of this thesis.

One response to these, and similar concerns in the philosophy of natural science, is to reject the view that theories can ‘correspond’ to real objects outside the theory or perspective, and to focus on ‘practices’ (i.e. how people ‘go on’) instead of general theories which seek some general definitions of social (or natural) reality. Such positions would regard themselves as ‘anti-realist’, taking ‘realism’ to mean the attempt by theory to have a relationship of epistemic immediacy to certain essential properties. Such a conception of realism is erroneous, and my task in this thesis is to defend both philosophical and social realism.³

(3) Pro-Realism

It is necessary to defend philosophical realism in order to advocate the social realist resolution of the structure-agency problematic. Philosophical realism is opposed to the foundationalist philosophies of mind which held that individuals had an immediate or direct access to a manifest truth. Such positions commit the ‘epistemic fallacy’ (Bhaskar 1997:16) of transposing questions of being (i.e. questions about reality) into questions about knowing, with the result that *what* is known or knowable is defined to fit some model of the mind which purports to explain *how* we know. To avoid this, we need to take an anti-foundational approach, which holds that knowledge is mediated by theories, perspectives, conceptual frameworks, etc.

In advocating such anti-foundationalism it is necessary to maintain that our knowledge still corresponds to objects beyond the perspective. This does not mean that the perspective has a relationship of immediacy to the object (because

³ I prefer the term ‘social realism’ to ‘critical realism’ because: (a) my concern is with social methodology; and (b), the meaning of the adjective ‘critical’ goes beyond a recognition that knowledge claims are fallible (and so open to revision), to meaning that normative conclusions (about capitalism) can be derived from factual premises (knowledge of capitalist structures), and this philosophical issue is beyond the scope of the thesis.

correspondence is a *definition* of truth and not a *criterion* of truth), but it does mean that we can avoid truth-relativism. Unless one maintains the ‘metaphysical realist’ view that knowledge claims are about real objects beyond our beliefs and perspectives, then beliefs, propositions and perspectives become wholly self-referential. This results in the ‘genetic fallacy’, whereby the truth of a concept or proposition would be determined solely by its origin within some perspective; and all perspectives would, necessarily, be equally ‘true’. So, in place of fallible truth claims, which were fallible because we had a conceptually mediated (and not immediate) access to an external reality, there would be a multiplicity of infallible truth claims.

Thus we need to complement an *anti-foundational epistemology* with a *metaphysical realist ontology*, to say how we have knowledge of a world that exists beyond our representations of it. This means accepting the position I term ‘realist anti-foundationalism’, in contrast to the position referred to here as the ‘philosophical logic of immediacy’. The philosophical logic of immediacy, in both its foundationalist and relativist versions, is marked by a failure to explain how we have a conceptually mediated and fallible knowledge of a real world external to our representations of it. Foundationalism may wish to eschew the notion that knowledge is conceptually mediated and fallible, but in holding that we have an immediate access to the ‘facts’, foundationalism commits the epistemic fallacy and, further, this paves the way to the genetic fallacy. For having reduced being into knowing, relativism simply replaces the lone mind of the rational individual with the collective norms of a community, meaning that the object of knowledge and truth claims about ‘reality’ are self-referential concepts within a particular perspective. With the philosophical logic of immediacy, the position that we have an immediate access to the facts reduces *what* exists into questions of *how* it can be known, with truth being defined in terms of how

the mind mirrors reality-in-itself; and if the mind is replaced by social perspectives, then truth, together with the object of knowledge, are immediately identical with the perspective. With neither foundationalism nor relativism therefore can we sustain the notion of truth being a conceptually mediated and fallible attempt to know an external reality; and instead the putative truth is knowable immediately.

Realist anti-foundationalism can act as a negative ‘underlabourer’ for the social sciences, rejecting positions based on the assumption that we can have an immediate access to the facts. It would thus reject positivist forms of social science, because as noted in section one of this chapter, such positivism would entail an extreme individualism which could not describe individual acts. It could also pertain to an interpretation of quantitative data, whereby statistical correlations were mistakenly thought to be manifestations of causal relations. One may adopt a more moderate empiricism, as used by ‘methodological individualism’ which makes reference to ‘social situations’, for instance, but this ends up begging the question as to what social reality actually is, with the result that ‘situations’ can be defined arbitrarily, to emphasise agency or constraint. In short, empiricism and positivism cannot be used as a positive underlabourer for social science because the result is an untenable methodology.

Realist anti-foundationalism would also proscribe any position based upon essentialism. Switching from empiricist *epistemology* to *ontology*, essentialist positions would claim to have knowledge of the essential properties which were to be used to explain what determined human behaviour. Thus from an ontology of either social structures or human being, one could read-off human behaviour, making methodology redundant, or, alternatively, read the ontology into any observed behaviour to verify the ontology, making methodology a specious form of

verificationism. In this thesis I use the term ‘sociological logic of immediacy’ to refer to such forms of essentialism, because the claim is, in effect, that such ontologies take their concepts to have a relationship of epistemic immediacy to their referents (social structures or human nature). The ontology therefore presumes to be definitive because it not only has an immediate access to the facts but, moreover, the facts to which it has an immediate access are the essential properties which control human behaviour.

Against positivism and the sociological logic of immediacy, realist anti-foundationalism can act as a positive underlabourer, if it is complemented by a ‘social realist’ ontology, which resolves the structure-agency problematic. Social realism defines social structures as both *enabling and constraining human agency*, meaning that *structures condition but do not determine action*. This avoids the sociological logic of immediacy, because the ontology of social structures does not claim to have an immediate knowledge of specific social structures, let alone knowledge of structures determining behaviour. Rather, social realism provides some general precepts, defining social structures as ‘emergent properties’ which are potentially transformable by individuals’ agency over time, and it is the task of methodology (i.e. the formation of specific theories and empirical research) to study specific structure-agency interactions, producing fallible knowledge claims about an objectively real social object (structures and agency). Further, the claim that social realism is a form of essentialism can be rebutted by noting that the idea of social structures being emergent properties which enable and constrain individuals’ agency, is derived from an immanent critique of alternative positions, which over-emphasise structure or agency. The notion of social structures being emergent properties is neither derived from the dogmatic tautology that structures are emergent properties because that is how social

realism defines them, nor from some claim to have an immediate access to a reality which is manifest as (specific) emergent properties.

Implicit in the above is the transcendental question concerning the condition of possibility for social science. This question pertains to both the *object* of social scientific knowledge and the form of *knowledge claim* made about the said object. With regard to the former, we can note that the object must be construed in terms of an objectively real social context which enables and constrains the actions of individuals (whose free will is conditioned by the social context). With regard to the latter, we can note that the knowledge claims must be regarded as theoretically mediated and fallible; based upon empirical research, guided by specific theories which are informed by a more general theory (or meta-theory) of emergent properties. If, conversely, one adheres to positivism or the sociological logic of immediacy, then social scientific knowledge is not possible. This is because, with positivism, we have a specious methodology, which is specious because it either tries to evacuate the social context, referring to decontextualised ‘facts’ about individuals or, moving from facts about individuals to quantitative facts, positivism confuses correlation for causation. With the sociological logic of immediacy, either methodology is redundant, or alternatively, an exercise in arbitrary verificationism. In place of empiricist epistemology, and essentialist master-ontologies which seek definitive knowledge of social structures or human nature, we need to say how methodology can be guided by ontology, and social realism can accomplish this, because it supplies some general precepts to guide method, without presuming a direct access to certain putative essential properties.

(4) Chapter Overview

Chapter one develops the argument about how knowledge formation is to be conceptualised in terms of a theoretically mediated and fallible access to an external reality. It therefore argues that realist anti-foundationalism overcomes the problems with the foundationalist and relativist versions of the philosophical logic of immediacy, *viz.* the epistemic fallacy and the genetic fallacy, respectively. It develops this argument by discussing Popper's neo-Kantianism. Popper did reject foundationalism and he did argue for metaphysical realism, but he also argued that metaphysical realism was not a necessary or legitimate presupposition for natural science methodology, meaning that we were left with self-referential conceptual schemes. This point is developed by discussing the post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism of Putnam, which is rejected for falling into truth-relativism.

Chapter two moves from philosophy to social science. It begins by explaining how realist anti-foundationalism would act as a negative underlabourer, to reject positivistic forms of social science. It then argues that methodological individualism anticipated the sociological logic of immediacy, by rejecting psychologism and holism, or the individualist sociological logic of immediacy, and the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, respectively. That is, it rejected the notion of having a definitive ontology of human being or social structures to explain what determined human behaviour. However, methodological individualism used a moderate empiricist epistemology as a positive underlabourer, with the result that the question was begged as to defining what social situations were, meaning that the emphasis could be on both unconstrained free will and constraint within the same explanation. A similar problem also affected methodological collectivism, although this position ended up as a form of determinism, given its argument about individuals' 'dispositions' being social facts

which were external and constraining, i.e. individuals' dispositions are an epiphenomenon of determining social norms, meaning that individuals become 'cultural dopes'.

Having discussed the problems associated with empiricist and positivist versions of social science I turn my attention in the next two chapters to the issue of post-Wittgensteinian philosophy *vis-à-vis* social science. This post-Wittgensteinianism is divided into two versions: 'pragmatic' and 'sociological'. Chapter three deals with Rorty's post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism. Rorty rejects what he calls 'realism', meaning foundationalist epistemology and essentialist ontology, together with 'anti-realism' (i.e. truth-relativism), to focus on practices, or how people 'go on' in different 'language games'. This means that Rorty would reject the following: (1) philosophical realism, because metaphysical realism is thought to seek a God's eye view; (2) social realism, because reference to structures would imply a definitive knowledge of specific essential properties (i.e. structures); and (3) social science *per se*, as the notion of theories and empirical research producing truth claims that 'represented' social reality would imply that we could compare our perspectives (theories used to inform empirical research) with reality-in-itself (social facts of some sort).

Thus Rorty's post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism would act as a negative underlabourer, to reject 'realism' and social science; and instead, it would focus upon the practices of people with regard to the natural and social world. Specifically, the focus would be on: (1) how natural scientific practices enable us to go on in the natural world; (2a) *how liberal democracy as a political philosophy is to be justified because it argues for allowing individuals the freedom to go in ways which are self-enriching*; and (2b) how actual politics is to be understood in terms of *policy being*

driven by practical piece-meal reactive problem-solving, which Rorty contrasts with (Marxist and ‘deconstructionist’) attempts to unmask ‘real’ structures or ideologies, that exploit people and distort their consciousness, respectively. In place of ‘realist’ attempts at *knowing* some form of reality-in-itself immediately, the concern would be with what people *do* - *doing* replaces arcane attempts at *knowing*.

It is argued though that Rorty’s post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism is untenable. This is because the rejection of realism entails the relativist philosophical logic of immediacy (together, interestingly enough, with the foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy too). Further, the account of politics turns upon importing a universal pre-social essence for the self (to support an argument about ‘poetic’ self-enrichment), which gives us a definitive account of human behaviour via an *a priori* ontology of human nature (the individualist sociological logic of immediacy); and a positivist ‘end-of-ideology’ account of policy formation in terms of ‘factual’ problem-solving (the foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy).

Thus Rorty’s post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism has to be rejected because it violates its own rejection of truth-relativism, and ‘realism’ (i.e. foundationalism and essentialism), by embracing such positions. Moreover, as realist anti-foundationalism does explain how knowledge can be anti-foundational without falling into truth-relativism, we can rely on this rather than pragmatism, which also means using realist anti-foundationalism as both a *negative underlabourer* (to reject positivism, and essentialism in the form of the sociological logic of immediacy), and a *positive underlabourer*. That is, we can say that, *contra* Rorty’s post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism, social science is possible in principle, because *knowledge* claims about (social) reality are not necessarily based upon foundationalist epistemology or essentialism, and that social science ought not to be construed in a way that violates

realist anti-foundationalism. How this may be achieved is the subject of chapters five and six, which complement realist anti-foundationalism, or ‘philosophical realism’, with social realism.

In chapter four I deal with a different form of post-Wittgensteinianism, which is ‘sociological’. Specifically my concern is with Giddens’ ‘structuration’ theory, which seeks to resolve the structure-agency problematic, by defining structures in terms of rule-following practices. This is different from post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism because it seeks a general definition of social reality, i.e. it seeks to furnish a meta-theory to link structure and agency, which Rorty (and others, who are mentioned in chapter five on social realism) would regard as essentialist. It is also different from post-Wittgensteinian sociological positions which take a more ‘interpretative’ approach, as these take rules, and consensus, as an unquestioned background, focusing instead on individuals’ meanings. Giddens rejects the latter for failing to explain how individuals actually rework a social context which is ‘more than’ individuals’ meanings, and how such interpretativism downplays the constraint of social rules together with social conflict. The problem with Giddens’ work though is that it is predicated upon both the individualist and structuralist sociological logics of immediacy, meaning that it is an untenable meta-theory for social methodology.

In chapter five realist anti-foundationalism is complemented by social realism, meaning that realism can act as a positive underlabourer for social science methodology. In this chapter various theoretical and philosophical critiques of social realism are dealt with. These critiques hold that realism is either an empty abstraction, or a form of essentialism (the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy). These views are rejected by showing how social realism is developed from an immanent critique of alternative positions, and how it is a fallible (meta-) theory which does not

seek to list specific essences; meaning that social realism can guide methodology, allowing methodology to avoid positivism and the sociological logic of immediacy.

Chapter six concludes by giving a quick summary of the arguments, and then moves on to illustrate the practical usefulness of realism. The practical usefulness of realism for methodology is illustrated by turning to the debate about an underclass. Here debates are polarised between (1) positions which argue that there is an underclass and which are predicated upon the individualist or structuralist sociological logic of immediacy; and (2) empirical studies which reject the concept of an underclass as essentialist. It is argued that whilst the empirical studies are useful discussions of individuals' coping strategies with chronic unemployment, they suffer from an implicit individualism (i.e. a moderate empiricism) which cannot explain how the social context conditions agency. Social realism is then used to explain the interaction of material structures, culture, and agency, in a non-essentialist fashion, thus avoiding the twin pitfalls of empiricism and the sociological logic of immediacy, to explain how individuals in an underclass deal with different enablements and constraints from those in the working class.

Addendum

In my writing I use inclusive language, rather than exclusive language which uses the male pronoun to refer to the whole of humanity, because of the sexism involved.

Therefore when exclusive language is cited in a quotation it ought not to be inferred that I condone such misuse of language. The purpose of this note is to avoid the necessity of inserting '[*sic*]' in every quotation where such misuse obtains.

Chapter One

The Philosophical Logic Of Immediacy:

The Epistemic Fallacy And The Genetic Fallacy

(1) Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to argue that knowledge formation is to be understood in terms of a conceptually mediated access to a reality that is itself external to conceptual schemes. These conceptual schemes may approximate to the truth, or have varying degrees of verisimilitude, as Popper would say, but conceptual schemes do not mirror reality. Conceptual schemes are therefore fallible, because given the lack of a direct fit between concepts and external referents, conceptual schemes can always be improved upon. We know the world - and the universe - through different conceptual schemes, so knowledge is to be understood in terms of conceptual relativity. What we know is always relative to some conceptual scheme, but this is not to endorse truth-relativism. Although we may know the world through different conceptual schemes, it does not follow that all schemes are equally true, because some are better approximations to an external reality than others. Conceptual relativity rests on fallibilism not truth-relativism: truth pertains to an external reality and not to the conceptual scheme alone.

This notion of conceptually mediated fallible knowledge of an external reality is opposed to the 'philosophical logic of immediacy'. The philosophical logic of immediacy underpins both the foundationalist search for the certainty and the truth-relativist position that knowledge is wholly contingent upon - i.e. reducible into - the prevailing social

norms, or conceptual schemes. The foundationalist search for certainty used a philosophy of mind to define knowledge. In this chapter I focus on the empiricist philosophy of mind, which holds that we have a *direct or immediate access to a manifest truth* through experience. Put bluntly, the 'facts speak for themselves'. It is argued that empiricist foundationalism commits the epistemic fallacy, of defining ontological questions about reality in terms of epistemological questions concerning knowledge. This reduction of ontology into epistemology is always fallacious in itself but, with empiricism, it also creates another problem, *viz.* it results in idealism, as what is experienced is reducible into ideas of sensation. Further, empiricist epistemology is criticised for producing an untenable inductivist methodology for natural science.

Truth-relativism occurs when truth and knowledge are wholly contingent upon, i.e. wholly relative to, conceptual frameworks or the prevailing social norms. This reduction of truth into conceptual frameworks and social norms commits the genetic fallacy, because the truth of a concept is derived from its *origin* within a conceptual scheme, and not *in relation to an external referent*. This genetic fallacy arises from the epistemic fallacy. After reality is defined in terms of knowledge, one may define knowledge not in terms of the individual mind, but in terms of a community's conceptual scheme or norms, so reality is defined in terms of the conceptual scheme or norms. Concepts are self-referential (given the loss of any external referent), and so truth is immediately identical with the concepts within a conceptual scheme. The object of knowledge and a knowledge claim are identical, as a self-referential concept within a conceptual scheme.

In making my argument, I draw upon the works of Popper and Putnam. Popper's critiques of empiricism and positivism are discussed and then Popper's own epistemology and methodology are assessed. I focus on Popper's neo-Kantian epistemology, and argue that this commits the epistemic fallacy and the genetic fallacy. Popper criticises the logic of immediacy in foundationalism, locating the problem with the emphasis on the

philosophy of mind, but he fails to stress the need for metaphysical realism within methodology. That is, Popper argues for conceptual relativity, but he fails to complement this with a necessary emphasis on a reality that is external to the mind and conceptual schemes. This emphasis on an independent reality may be called either ‘metaphysical realism’, because the thesis concerning what lies beyond knowledge is metaphysical; or ‘external realism’, because reality is external to the concepts that seek to grasp it. Given conceptual relativity without metaphysical realism, reality becomes what we know, and what we know is wholly relative to our conceptual scheme. Popper criticises the logic of immediacy in foundationalism, but ends up inadvertently producing a philosophy that is predicated upon the relativist version of the philosophical logic of immediacy.

After discussing Popper I turn to Putnam's philosophy of internal realism. Putnam argues for conceptual relativity and against metaphysical realism / external realism. His argument is that metaphysical realism seeks a ‘God's eye view’, and is predicated upon the ‘similitude theory of reference’, which holds that we can have a direct or immediate access to an external reality. I draw upon Searle to argue that Putnam misconstrues metaphysical realism, because metaphysical realism is an ontological thesis which says nothing about the epistemological issue of how we may know the reality beyond our conceptual schemes.¹ By arguing for conceptual relativity without a metaphysical realist ontology, Putnam commits the epistemic and genetic fallacies: what exists is defined by what we can know, and what we can know is wholly relative to the conceptual scheme.

To avoid the foundationalist and truth-relativist versions of the philosophical logic of immediacy, we need to adopt the position which I refer to as ‘realist anti-

¹ Although if reality is separate from our knowledge, the sceptic could always argue that we do not have knowledge - we could never know that reality. However, if one accepts that there is a reality that exists independently of it being known, then knowledge of it may be possible at some point in the future, if people improve their beliefs by whatever procedure is necessary. Unless that is, one holds that under no circumstances can we have knowledge. In this case, one has actually committed the epistemic fallacy, because ontology is defined in terms of epistemology. To say that it is *necessarily* the case that we can never know reality, is to define reality in terms of knowledge: reality is defined as that which our beliefs do not relate with. Reality is that which we cannot know.

foundationalism'. This position is anti-foundationalist because it rejects the foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy, and it avoids truth-relativism by complementing the thesis for conceptual relativity with the realist metaphysical ontological argument about a reality existing independently of our knowledge and perspectives. It is therefore able to provide us with a workable theory of knowledge by complementing epistemology with ontology. Without such an ontology, anti-foundationalism would become an anti-epistemology. This is because the truth-relativism entailed would render the notions of truth and falsity meaningless, as every conceptual scheme would be equally 'true', in which case there could be no theory of knowledge.

(2) Popper And The Critique Of Positivism

If knowledge refers to beliefs which are true, and true in a non-accidental way, then knowledge would seem to require certainty. Unless we could say, *with certainty*, that a belief was true, then knowledge would be impossible. Without certainty there would only be *mere beliefs*, rather than knowledge. This view that knowledge requires certainty has been the defining feature of western philosophy from Plato, through the Middle Ages, to the Renaissance. In Mediaeval Europe, the source of certainty in knowledge was the received wisdom provided by the Church, but the rise of the nascent natural sciences corroded this authority. With the slow loss of this *institutional* authority for knowledge, philosophy turned to the *individual* to provide the foundation for certainty, arguing that the mind was capable of recognising the manifest truth, through either pure reason or empirical sense-data.

There is not the space to go into detail about the various foundationalist epistemologies, and so I will discuss Popper's critique of the positivist philosophy of

science, as a way into discussing the problems with empiricist foundationalism.² Popper responded critically to the logical-empiricism, or logical-positivism, advocated by the Vienna Circle. According to such positivism, meaningful propositions and science, were to be demarcated from meaningless propositions, pseudo-science and empty metaphysical speculation, by the verification principle. A proposition was meaningful if it could be verified by sense-data / empirical observation. So, the proposition that the faster an engine runs, *ceteris paribus*, the more fuel it will consume, is meaningful, whereas propositions about art being beautiful, or not, God existing, or not, etc., would be meaningless. In searching for causal laws in nature, the verification principle was operationalised via an inductivist methodology. A causal law was said to exist if there was a constant conjunction between two observed events. From observing one event following another, it was assumed that one could derive a relationship of natural necessity. Science was thus based on the certainty that in observing regularities, it was observing laws, or relations of necessity, whilst any proposition which could not be grounded in certainty, by being empirically verifiable, was meaningless.

One problem with trying to ground knowledge on certainty, by arguing that meaningful propositions can be open to empirical verification, is that the verification principle itself cannot be verified. As Trigg argues, '[t]he starting-point of logical-positivism cannot itself be justified and indeed by its own lights should be regarded as meaningless' (1993:20). As Trigg notes though, Ayer argued that the verification principle should be treated as an axiom rather than a criterion of truth. However, Trigg continues, this failed to explain why we should retain a failed criterion of truth (1993:20). If the verification principle failed to do its job, it seems rather arbitrary to redefine its job, so that it can do some limited 'guiding' work. Nevertheless Ayer's suggestion is useful in that it illustrates how

² For a lucid description of the rationalist philosophies of mind, see Hollis 1973:11-36.

epistemic certainty may be rather elusive, with the attempt to ground knowledge claims in verified empirical regularities proving problematic.

If we move from the verificationist criterion of meaningfulness, to the attempt to operationalise this via the inductivist search for empirical regularities, we meet another problem. The logical problem with induction is that from a limited set of observations one cannot say that one has observed a relationship of natural necessity, whereby the observed regularity will necessarily obtain in the future. As Popper argues

it is far from obvious, from a logical point of view, that we are justified in inferring universal statements from singular ones, no matter how numerous; for any conclusion drawn in this way may always turn out to be false: no matter how many instances of white swans we may have observed, this does not justify the conclusion that *all* swans are white (1972(a):27. Emphasis in original).

Popper argues that this logical 'problem of induction' was first recognised by Hume, but that Hume drew the wrong conclusion (1975:96). Hume argued that even though induction is logically wrong, we still use it in practice, with habit and repetition being used to locate 'causal' relations, or constant conjunctions. We may *only* locate constant conjunctions which habit and custom pick out, but *this is all we can do* according to Hume. Popper though rejects this view, on the grounds that as induction is based on a logical fallacy, an alternative methodology is required; and Popper's alternative will be discussed below.

In addition to criticising the logical-positivist conception of scientific methodology, Popper also criticised the empiricist philosophy of mind, upon which positivism was premised. For Popper, the very attempt to define knowledge in terms of the mind is a

fallacious endeavour.³ The problem is that reality ends up being defined in terms of the mind: what *exists* is defined as what can be *known*, and what can be known, is defined by *how the mind knows* via sense experience. We have certainty in knowledge because *what* the mind can know, meaning what exists, is defined to fit the conception of *how* the mind can know the world. Popper argues that

The empiricist philosopher's belief 'that all knowledge is derived from sense experience' leads with necessity to the view that all knowledge must be knowledge of either of our present sense experience (Hume's 'ideas of impressions') or of our past sense experience (Hume's 'ideas of reflection'). Thus all knowledge becomes knowledge of what is going on in our minds. *On this subjective basis, no objective theory can be built*: the world becomes the totality of my ideas, of my dreams (1996:82. Emphasis in original).

The problem with the empiricist philosophy of mind therefore is that what is known is what is experienced, and all we can experience are our *ideas* of sensation, and not a material realm beyond those ideas of sensation. Therefore

we are never 'justified' or 'entitled' to claim the truth of a theory, or of a belief, by reason of the alleged immediacy or directness of the belief. This, in my view, is putting the cart before the horse: immediacy or directness may be the result of the biological fact that a theory is true and also (partly for this reason) very useful for us. But to argue that immediacy or directness establishes truth, or is a criterion of truth, is *the fundamental mistake of idealism* (1975:68. Emphasis in original).

³ Popper 1975 refers to the philosophy of mind as 'subjectivism', and against it, he argues for 'objective knowledge' which does not mean knowledge based on verified certainty, but knowledge that exists as theories. Popper argues that there are three ontologically distinct sub-worlds, which are the physical world (first world), the world of mental states (second world), and the world of theories and the possible objects of

So, we may think that having burnt our hand on a fire we will avoid such contact again, and the belief that the fire caused the pain will be true. Nonetheless, we cannot infer from this the conclusion that a belief is true *because we immediately recognise the truth*, through sensation. Sensation refers to ideas of sensation and not to the mind seeing an external reality as it really is.

Against the view that we have an immediate access to a manifest truth via sense-data, Popper argues that our experience of the external world is mediated via concepts and beliefs. Popper argues that

According to my view, observations (or 'sensations' or 'sense-data', etc.) are [...] not the raw material of knowledge. On the contrary, observations always presupposed previous dispositional knowledge. An observation is the result of a stimulus that *rings a bell*. What does this mean? The stimulus must be *significant*, relative to our system of expectations or anticipations, in order to ring a bell, and thus to be observed (1996:99. Emphasis in original).

If knowledge came from sense-data alone then we would be overwhelmed by a constant barrage of data. This is avoided because the incoming data are interpreted and filtered by a set of interests, and concepts which may be either unreflective or explicitly formulated. Access to the world is always via a 'prejudice', '[y]et we proceed perfectly rationally: we learn, we extend our knowledge, by *testing* our prejudices; by trial and error rather than by induction through repetition' (Popper 1996:100. Emphasis in original). All of which brings us to the distinction between the bucket and the searchlight.

(3) Truth Without Certainty: Popper On Neo-Kantian Epistemology, Scientific Methodology And Metaphysical Realism

With foundationalism the criterion of certainty presupposes passivity in the subject. Knowledge is held to be possible because the truth can be recognised with certainty, which meant, as regards empiricism, that the manifest truth could be immediately experienced. Provided the subject does not apply a distorting prejudice, the subject will immediately experience the manifest truth. Popper refers to this conception of knowledge as the 'bucket theory of science', or the 'bucket theory of mind' (1975:341). He argues that

The starting point of this theory is the persuasive doctrine that before we can know or say anything about the world, we must first have had perceptions - sense experiences. It is supposed to follow from this doctrine that our knowledge, our experiences, consists either of accumulated perceptions (naive empiricism) or else of assimilated, sorted, and classified perceptions (a view held by Bacon and, in a more radical form, by Kant). [...] According to this view, then, our mind resembles a container - a kind of bucket - in which perceptions and knowledge accumulate (1975:341).

For the bucket theory of mind then, the subject is passive, because knowledge formation is simply a matter of allowing the facts to flow into the bucket-mind.

Against this bucket theory of the mind, and the notion that the truth is manifest, Popper argues for the 'searchlight' theory of knowledge. Instead of arguing that we have a direct access to a manifest truth, Popper argues that access to reality is an *active* affair, whereby scientists have to construct theories, or theoretical searchlights, to obtain a conceptually mediated access to reality. Drawing a distinction between observation and perception, Popper argues that

In science it is observation rather than perception which plays the decisive part. But observation is a process in which we play an intensely *active* part. An observation is a perception, but one which is planned and prepared. We do not 'have' an observation [...] but we 'make' an observation [...]. An observation is always preceded by a particular interest, a question, or a problem - in short, by something theoretical (1975:342).

In place of the *passive* mind recognising the *manifest truth*, science has a theoretically *mediated* access to reality, meaning that knowledge arises from the *active* application of theories to interpret reality, from a particular perspective.

The general epistemological position here is that of neo-Kantianism. Popper regards Kant's epistemology as an activist theory of knowledge because it argues that knowledge arises from the mind imposing order on a ('noumenal') reality that is unknowable in itself. In Popper's words, 'Kant argued that knowledge is not a collection of gifts received by the senses and stored in the mind as if it were a museum, but that it is very largely the result of our own mental activity' (1962:214). For Kant, knowledge was a matter of actively imposing our 'categories' upon the noumenal realm, with knowledge of reality being 'filtered' through the categories. Instead of the rationalist emphasis on *a priori* ideas, or the empiricist emphasis on *a posteriori* (immediate) experience, we have the synthetic *a priori*. Here knowledge is possible because we have a fixed set of categories, with which the mind 'imposes its stamp' on the mass of raw sensations, stemming from an unknowable reality-in-itself, or noumenal realm. For Popper, 'the creative is the *a priori*' (cited in Corvi 1997:137), meaning that our concepts, 'prejudices', etc., exist prior to

experience and interpret that experience. Concepts make knowledge from experienced sensation.

The problem though is that by putting all the emphasis on the categories, the notion of a unknowable noumenal realm may become redundant. If we cannot know the noumenal realm, and we can explain knowledge by reference to our categories, then one could apply Ockham's razor, and remove the noumenal realm from the explanation. Alternatively, one could place more emphasis on the reality external to our concepts. To give reality more of a role to play, one would have to argue that the categories changed. Here one would be arguing that although we had a conceptually mediated access to reality, this reality could undermine our concepts, and we could recognise such an undermining. As Popper argues

Kant was right that it is our intellect which imposes its laws - its ideas, its rules - upon the inarticulate mass of our 'sensations' and thereby brings order into them. Where he was wrong is that he did not see that we rarely succeed with our imposition, and that we try and err again and again, and that the result - our knowledge of the world - owes as much to the resisting reality as to our self-produced ideas (1975:68. n.31. See also 1972(b):26-7 & 95-6).

So, Kant gave us an activist theory of knowledge, by stressing the mediating role of categories. However, this was still a form of bucket theory, because the emphasis is on the properties of the mind-bucket. In this case, rather than hold that reality can be immediately grasped by the mind (with reality defined in terms of the mind), reality-in-itself (the noumenal realm) is unknowable, meaning that we are simply left with the properties of the mind (the categories). The emphasis is on the contents bucket which are

self-contained and fixed. This is because for Kant's 'transcendental idealist' epistemology, the condition of possibility for knowledge was that there existed a fixed set of categories which would 'impose their stamp' upon disparate sensations and give meaning and order to the phenomenal realm.

Against this, Popper's neo-Kantianism argues for fallibilism. As we have a conceptually mediated access to a reality which can be grasped via our concepts, those concepts will be fallible, given the lack of direct access. Although we can never see reality-in-itself, we can recognise when our concepts fail or are false, and we can recognise better attempts at interpreting reality, so our categories change, as we try to improve our knowledge of reality. Against the transcendental idealist argument that the categories must be fixed for knowledge to be possible, Popper wishes to switch the emphasis from the categories *per se*, to an external reality, to which categories may or may not relate to with different degrees of veracity, or 'verisimilitude'.

Now Popper does agree with the correspondence theory of truth, as put forward by Tarski. This theory holds that a statement is true if, and only if (or 'iff'), it corresponds with the facts. Such a view may seem to imply a return to the bucket theory, with reality being defined in such a way that the mind can grasp it directly, so that one can see that a belief corresponds to reality. This however is not a view shared by Popper. He argues that the correspondence theory of truth provides us with an objectivist or absolutist notion of truth, whilst not providing us with certainty. The reason for this is that there is no criterion of truth. In Popper's words, 'the idea of truth is absolutist, but no claim can be made for absolute certainty: *we are the seekers for truth but we are not its possessors*' (1975:46-7. Emphasis in original). A statement is true if, and only if, it corresponds to the facts, but there can be no general *a priori* criterion of truth, with which to say how a theory may be judged against the facts. We cannot step outside perspectives to define how perspectives.

or propositions, may directly mirror facts. Instead, theories have varying degrees of 'verisimilitude', meaning that they approximate to the truth to varying degrees (Popper 1975:47).

If empiricist epistemology results in idealism, and if its use as a epistemic foundation for scientific methodology results in a criterion of meaningfulness which cannot be applied to itself, and an inductivism which is logically flawed, then *the foundation and the methodology need replacing*. In place of empiricism we have a neo-Kantian epistemology, and this informs a methodology which holds that we have a conceptually mediated (not immediate) access to reality, and that these concepts are fallible. This emphasis on fallibilism, rather than verificationist certainty, led Popper to define scientific methodology in terms of falsifiability. In place of verification, Popper argues that science can be *demarcated* from non-science by the principle of falsifiability (see 1972(a), especially 78-92; plus 1972(b):253-92 and 1996:xix-xxxix). To be classed as scientific, a proposition must be testable and open (in principle and actuality) to empirical refutation. In constructing a theory, it ought to be clear under what circumstances the theory could be refuted. The clearer and bolder the theory the better, for this will make testing easier. Science therefore turns on making bold empirical conjectures open to empirical refutation.⁴ Applying this principle to social science, Popper argues that Marxism and psycho-analysis are unscientific because they are unfalsifiable. Popper argues that Marxism and psycho-analysis 'opened the eyes' of those initiated, who could find proof of the theory everywhere.

⁴ This notion of making bold conjectures which may then be refuted *in toto* has been subject to extensive critical debate, with one argument being that it is unnecessary to reject an entire theory if part of it is falsified. Hence Lakatos 1993 draws a distinction between the 'hard core' of a research programmes, and a 'protective belt', arguing that falsification of the latter does not imply falsification of the former.

Once your eyes were thus opened you saw confirming instances everywhere: the world was full of *verifications* of the theory. Whatever happened always confirmed it. Thus its truth appeared manifest; and unbelievers were clearly people who did not want to see the manifest truth; who refused to see it, either because it was against their class interest, or because of their repressions which were still 'un-analysed' and crying aloud for treatment (1972(b):35. Emphasis in original).⁵

Any event could thus be used to prove that, for instance, the state served capital, or that the conscious self was influenced by unconscious drives, respectively. Therefore theories such as Marxism and psycho-analysis are unscientific because they rely on propositions that cannot be refuted. The propositions are general enough for any event to be interpreted as a *verification of the universal truth of the proposition in question*. The advocates of Marxism and psycho-analysis may regard irrefutability as a virtue but for Popper this is a vice, because it seeks to verify a theory by *fiat*: the theory is *absolutely* right which is why any attempt to test the theory will *necessarily* prove it to be correct. The propositions of the theory are exhaustive of their subject-matter, which is why no revisions are necessary in the light of experience, which just furnishes verifications. In contrast to this form of social science, Popper advocates methodological individualism, which puts forward empirical propositions about specific individuals in specific situations; and this individualism will be discussed and criticised in the following chapter.

Having discussed epistemology and methodology, I will now turn to the issue of metaphysics. Earlier, empiricism was criticised for entailing idealism, but idealism itself

⁵ Such theories are therefore authoritarian because if one disagrees one *must necessarily be in the wrong*. Popper does not restrict the charge of epistemic authoritarianism to Marxism and psycho-analysis though. He also argues that Bacon and Descartes put forward doctrines which set up experience and reason, respectively, as authorities 1972b:15-7. So if every individual has the capacity for knowledge then every individual is guilty for ignorance and error.

was not criticised, and here I will set out Popper's view on the metaphysical positions of idealism and realism. Logical positivists would seek to reject idealism on the grounds that it is metaphysical and therefore meaningless. Popper though holds that untestable metaphysical propositions need not necessarily be meaningless. Consequently, rather than dismissing idealism as meaningless, Popper considers plausible reasons for not accepting idealism. I say 'not accepting' rather than 'disproving' or 'refuting', because as idealism is a metaphysical thesis it cannot be empirically refuted and, as regards internal logical consistency, idealism is a coherent position. (Although, of course, an empirically testable belief may be refuted even if it is internally coherent - internal coherence does not make a proposition a necessary truth, akin to mathematical truths).

Popper considers idealism in relation to another metaphysical thesis, *viz.* metaphysical realism, which holds that there is a material reality beyond our ideas of it. Popper begins by defining idealism as the position that the world is just my dream. This, incidentally, implies (correctly in my view) that idealism results in solipsism, because other minds would be dependent upon my idea of them for their existence: what exists are the ideas I have and nothing more. Popper puts forward five arguments in favour of realism (1975:38-42). The first is that (a) realism is acceptable common-sense, (b) whereas idealism is 'philosophical' in the pejorative sense, meaning that it is sophistry. Although ironically, idealism whilst being sophistical draws upon common-sense, in the form of the bucket theory of mind. It begins uncritically with the view that mind sees reality as it really is, and then moves to the conclusion that this reality is a posit of the mind. That is, what exists is what we can know, and what we can know are our ideas, so what exist are our ideas, and nothing more. The second argument is that science purports to explain reality and so the success of scientific ideas suggests that there is a reality which is irreducible to ideas. The third argument moves from science to language, holding that

language is used to describe reality, which suggests that there is a reality beyond our ideas of it (or, in more contemporary argot, there is a reality beyond our 'language-game', or 'discourse'). The fourth argument is that aesthetic appreciation is not reducible to my ideas, and to argue otherwise is to fall into megalomania. Finally, Popper argues that if realism were true, then it would be impossible to prove. This is because our knowledge is fallible: we cannot see reality as it really is, because there is no manifest truth. Yet '[a]t the same time, the whole question of the truth and falsity of our opinions and theories clearly becomes pointless if there is no reality, only dreams or illusions' (1975:41-2).

Metaphysical realism therefore should be favoured in place of idealism. We may not be able to disprove idealism and prove realism (or disprove realism and prove idealism), but we can say that realism is more *useful*. With idealism there is no point in doing science, as the total expanse of reality is set by the confines of the mind (i.e. my mind). Science is about acquiring knowledge, and if knowledge comes from within, there is little point in an activity that purports to gain knowledge of a reality beyond our opinions and dreams. Nevertheless, the usefulness of realism is circumscribed by its metaphysical nature. We can say that it makes more sense to be a realist than an idealist, if one wants to accept that science gives us knowledge of the world, but science, or rather scientific methodology, does *not need to presuppose* metaphysical realism.

Popper does argue that science 'can hardly be understood if we are not realists' (1996:145). He continues though by saying, '[a]nd yet it seems to me that *within methodology we do not have to presuppose metaphysical realism*. Nor can we derive any help from it, except of an intuitive kind' (1996:145. Emphasis added). His point is that if science is about exploring the world, then in constructing a theory, the scientist will be seeking knowledge of that world. This does not mean however that scientific methodology requires a metaphysical realist philosophy. Metaphysical realism may be a

useful *psychological* presupposition, but it is not a *methodological* presupposition (1996:75).⁶ This view arises given the demarcation criterion, which demarcates science from non-science and metaphysics, by using the principle of empirical falsifiability. Given the demarcation criterion, we have a clear divide between science, which concerns empirical testability, and non-science, which includes metaphysical arguments for and against idealism. Therefore metaphysical realism cannot be used as a transcendental argument, to say that the condition of possibility for empirical science is a *necessary* commitment to the metaphysical presupposition that there is a reality beyond our concepts. Science is to be understood in terms of empirically testing different theoretical searchlights, seeking increased verisimilitude, and this does not *need* to be explained by reference to the bucket-mind, or *metaphysical conjectures* about a reality beyond ideas.⁷

(4) Recapping

Before continuing I will briefly recap. The purpose of this section of the chapter has been to criticise foundationalism, or more specifically, the empiricist philosophy of mind. Empiricism held that the mind could achieve knowledge, because it could recognise the manifest truth. The mind, that is to say, had a direct, or immediate, access to the facts. We may refer to this as the 'foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy', because it holds that knowledge is predicated on immediacy, in the twofold sense of the noun: the

⁶ For an argument which insists that science is only possible if we are metaphysical realists, see Trigg 1989 and 1993. Note though that Trigg fails to link metaphysical realism to methodology, meaning that the upshot of his argument is actually quite similar to Popper's, *viz.* that realism is a *psychological* presupposition. The reason for this was pointed out in a conversation with Professor Trigg, where he maintained that if metaphysical realism were a methodological presupposition then it would posit some definitive conception of reality; which means that Trigg is agreeing with Putnam's description of metaphysical realism (described below). Such a view is wrong because as Searle argues (see below), metaphysical realism is an ontological and not an epistemological thesis.

⁷ Note that Popper does accept that scientific theories may have some metaphysical elements within them 1996:179, and that a metaphysical theory may be developed into a falsifiable (scientific) theory 1996:191. This does not contradict the above, because there is a major difference between having some untestable elements within a theory, and having an untestable theory. Where Popper does contradict himself though, is where he says that methodology 'can be or, I think, even has to be, to a great extent based on realism' 1974:966. A more ambivalent passage exists in 1996:81, where Popper argues that whilst realism is not a

manifest truth is recognised as such straight away by the passive subject, and following on from this, the *truth is recognised without the mediation of conceptual schemes*, or theories, which change, owing to their fallibilism. For knowledge to obtain, the truth must be knowable with certainty, and such certainty is procured by the empiricist philosophy of mind by maintaining that, via the senses, the mind has an immediate access to the truth.

The problem with the foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy is that it entails what Bhaskar (1997:36) calls the 'epistemic fallacy'. Certainty was sought for knowledge, by defining the world to fit the (posited properties of) the mind. To put it another way, the theory of reality was defined wholly in terms of a theory of knowledge: ontological questions were reduced into epistemological questions. Such a reduction is fallacious in itself because the *end* of knowledge is defined by the *means*. What is meant to be discovered about the world, is discovered by reflection on the inner workings of the mind. The possible objects of knowledge are arbitrarily delineated to suit the method which is used to know those objects. *What* exists is defined by *how* the mind can *know*, which is to define what exists by presuming that it will be describable in terms of the mind / bucket.

The result of the epistemic fallacy, as regards empiricism specifically, was to produce an unrealistic epistemology and an untenable methodology. The epistemology which informed this methodology was unrealistic, because by basing knowledge on the immediacy of experience, it meant that the outcome could only be idealism. By holding that the truth was known directly, and without any conceptual mediation, the emphasis was on the senses. This however meant that what was known directly was not an external reality but the ideas of sensation. We have immediate access to our ideas but not to the world beyond those ideas. The methodology premised upon empiricism was defined to fit the view that knowledge comes from observation. So the logical-positivist methodology

presumption, it is a 'background that give point to our search for the truth', which 'permeates' his work the

held that observed regularities were to be regarded as universal laws. This inductivist methodology was logically fallacious though because it sought to derive universal statements from singular statements.

Against this empiricism, Popper argued for an epistemology which holds that knowledge is conceptually mediated and fallible, rather than immediate and a reflection of a manifest truth. Popper regarded his work as neo-Kantian, calling it 'critical rationalism', meaning that his argument for conceptual mediation and fallibilism, 'merely puts the finishing touches to Kant's own critical philosophy' (1972(b):27). Kant provided an activist philosophy of knowledge but failed to give sufficient input to external reality, which is why his epistemology was a form of bucket theory of mind. Popper's neo-Kantianism corrected this over emphasis on the categories in the mind, by putting the emphasis on fallibilism, in the form of empirical refutations. The concepts change because the emphasis is not on the mind containing the condition of possibility for knowledge, but because the emphasis is on how an external reality reacts back upon our concepts. Consequently, the form of methodology argued for by Popper was one based upon falsifiability, rather than verification. In place of methodology seeking causal laws in observed finite constant conjunctions, which could be observed directly, scientific method was based on testing theoretical searchlights, which were designed to be open to empirical refutation.

(5) Popper, The Epistemic Fallacy And The Genetic Fallacy

(5.1) Popper As A Positivist?

The problem with Popper's philosophy of knowledge is that although it rejects positivism, it does end up committing the epistemic fallacy. Before discussing this though, I shall start by considering how Popper could be read as a positivist. To begin with the view that Popper is a positivist, we can start by making a distinction between two 'ideal-typical' conceptions of natural laws. The first type conceptualises natural laws as observed regularities. This conception is positivist and relies on an inductivist methodology. The second conception holds that reality is stratified, with causal laws not being directly observable in their effects. For the second conception, whilst it is obviously acknowledge that causal laws (by definition) produce effects, which may be observed in one way or another, we cannot say that the law, or the cause, is directly manifest in the effect it produces. In other words, a causal law may result in different types of (observable) effects, because the said law will interact with other laws in a contingent way. For example, in seeing a leaf fall, one is seeing the effect of gravity, combined with the effects of meteorological factors. One is not seeing gravity itself in its effect, combined with other effects. This stratified ontology will be discussed in chapter five and rather than preempt the discussion of 'transcendental realism', the key point to note here is that, contrary to positivism, laws may be separate from their observed effects.

Falsification could be said to rest upon a positivist conception of natural laws.⁸ For a theory to be scientific it must make conjectures that are open to empirical refutation or falsification. Unless this criterion is met the theory will be unscientific, and open to arbitrary verification. To be testable the theory must put forward a proposition about a

⁸ This positivism though would rely not on the inductive methodology, but on deductivism. This methodology complements a set of universal statements about a causal law, with singular statements about the initial conditions, to posit a dual set of premises for empirical testing,; and is known as the 'deductive-nominological method'. More will be said about these forms of methodology, in relation to social science, in chapter five, on social realism.

causal law, by saying that law X, under condition Y, will result in Z. That is, a theory is scientific if it can be tested by reference to an expected sequence of events being observed. If the observed events differ from the expected sequence of events then the theory is said to be refuted. The conjectured causal law cannot be said to obtain if the expected regularities were not observed. This means that a theory is *decisively* refuted if there is no supporting regularity to observe. The refutation is decisive because there are no other factors to consider. The conjectured theory put forward an empirical claim, and through observation of the facts, the theory was refuted. In testing a theory, one tests the propositions against a reality that one has an immediate access to, meaning that one contrasts the theory with the manifest truth.

Given such immediacy, the need for a theory or conceptual scheme can disappear, because if we have an immediate access to reality, there is no need to construct some form of interpretative scheme, with which to explain reality. Hence Sayer (1994:172) argues that universal statements concerning laws, and statements about the specific conditions (or initial conditions), do nothing to explain the observed regularity. There is no need to say that a theory conjectures that law X, to be tested under conditions Y, will produce result Z, because observed regularity Z will do the work of statements concerning the universal law and its initial conditions. As one cannot make reference to causal laws which are directly observable in their effects, one must define laws in terms of observed regularities. Therefore when one observes and describes an empirical regularity, one is explaining the existence of a law. Explanation is conflated into description because there is no need to move beyond repeating a description of regularities. To observe a regularity is to observe a law, and one can therefore 'explain' a law, by describing the observation of B following A. In which case, one can verify the existence of a law by reference to the manifest truth. If one can *decisively falsify* a theory by reference to observed regularities, then those regularities are laws that we have an immediate access to, *and so instead of*

falsifying redundant theories qua explanations, one could verify a description of a causal law.

Popper however rejects such decisive falsificationism. He argues that it is not possible to have a definitive refutation or falsification of a theory. Popper argues that '[a]lthough, following Tarski, I do not believe that a criterion of truth is possible, I have proposed a criterion of demarcation - the criterion of falsifiability' (1996:xix). Scientific theories can be demarcated from non-scientific theories, by being open to empirical testing and refutation, but such testing cannot rest on a decisive truth claim about reality. Thus in place of *falsificationism*, or 'naive falsificationism', which seeks to make definitive truth claims, Popper talks of *falsifiability* (1996:xxxiii. Emphasis added). He argues that a falsification is not definitive, because there is no direct comparison, or immediate recognition, of a manifest truth. In observing regularities, we are not observing fixed laws, and so reference to an expected regularity failing to occur is not a definitive refutation of a theory. Therefore '[a]ll knowledge remains fallible, conjectural. There is no justification, including, of course, no final justification of a refutation. Nevertheless we learn by refutations, i.e., by the elimination of error, by feedback' (Popper 1996:xxxv). In short, reference to empirical regularities is not sufficient wholly to falsify a theory about a causal law, because observing regularities does not provide an immediate access to casual laws.⁹

⁹ Popper 1974 and 1996 refers to the view that he is a naive falsificationist as 'the Popper Legend'; and this legend underpins most reactions to Popper's methodological writing in the critical literature.

(5.2) Popper And The Epistemic Fallacy

This argument against naive falsification indicates Popper's emphasis on conceptual mediation and fallibilism, in contrast to epistemic immediacy. However, Popper's work still results in the epistemic fallacy. To understand this we can turn to Popper's arguments on necessity and contingency. The laws of nature may be described as relations of natural necessity. For Popper the aim of science is to gain increased verisimilitude which, as we have seen, does not mean that we can have an immediate access to these relations of necessity. Such relations of necessity are not to be conceptualised in terms of a manifest truth. As Popper puts it

The apparent 'uniformity of nature' is quite unreliable; and although we can say that the laws of nature do not change, this is dangerously close to saying that there are in our world some abstract connections which do not change (which is quite trivial if we admit that we do not know, but at best conjecture, what these connections are) and that we call them 'laws of nature' (1975:99).

So, *unknown* 'abstract connections' are *unknowable* in themselves, given that observed regularities, or the 'apparent uniformity of nature', does not provide an immediate access to relations of natural necessity (i.e. laws of nature in themselves). If the relations of natural necessity are unknowable then discussion of their existence is metaphysical. There can be no empirical test to see if there are unknowable relations of natural necessity. As the proposition about such relations existing is metaphysical then, given the demarcation criterion, it cannot be presupposed within scientific methodology. As far as empirical investigation goes, the notion of relations of natural necessity does no work. It is unnecessary - and useless - to presuppose relations of natural necessity.

Popper may argue that it is trivial to say that the laws of nature really exist independently of our knowledge of them. This may seem to imply that we ought to presuppose the existence of unknowable relations of natural necessity: we ought to presuppose the trivial because it is truistic. What this reference means though is that such 'realistic' references to a reality beyond our beliefs and concepts is 'acceptable common-sense'. Nevertheless, as was noted in the discussion on Popper's views on metaphysical realism *vis-à-vis* idealism, such common-sense is metaphysical and therefore external to scientific knowledge formation. Given that the notion of a reality-in-itself is metaphysical, and separate from discussions of epistemology and methodology, knowledge formation is to be understood in terms of *contingency*.

The contingency involved can be explained in the following way. For Popper, knowledge comes from observation. This observation is observation of empirical regularities. These observed regularities are not to be understood in terms of either verification or naive falsificationism. There is no immediate access to a manifest truth, whereby the laws of nature (i.e. relations of natural necessity) are observable in themselves as empirical regularities, to verify or decisively falsify a theory. Instead, the laws of nature that we know are contingent upon our perspectives, to the extent that a theory will *determine* the regularities observed. The laws of nature that we observe are *totally contingent upon our perspectives*. There can be no reference to any factors other than the concepts which determine the regularities we observe. This requires some unpacking.

The reason why concepts determine the regularities observed, is that there is no way to sustain the notion of fallibilism: there is no way to sustain the notion that a reality beyond our concepts acts back upon those concepts. The notion of a reality beyond our beliefs and concepts, including the view that there really are laws of nature which exist independently of being known, is a metaphysical notion, and therefore external to epistemology and

methodology. We may have *faith* in such realism, but Popper argues we cannot *prove* it correct, and so we cannot say that there is a reality beyond our knowledge which *necessarily* affects our concepts. We cannot incorporate reality-in-itself into scientific methodology, given the demarcation criterion, because *we cannot presuppose that empirical science has a metaphysical foundation*. Thus we have concepts but we cannot presuppose the existence of an external reality (within scientific methodology), to which those concepts give us a mediated access.

Further, within methodology, ontology is defined in terms of epistemology. There are two forms of ontology in Popper's work. The first would define ontology as a theory of reality that was specific to a particular conjecture, and we may refer to such ontologies as 'embedded ontologies'.¹⁰ The second type of ontology is generic, rather than specific to particular conjectures about reality. By being generic this ontology is meta-theoretical, meaning that it informs the construction of specific embedded ontologies, by informing methodology. This generic ontology defines reality in terms of observed regularities. There is no reference to causal laws that are non-observable, and *what* we can know is defined in terms of *how* we can know. Reality is defined in terms of experienced regularities. So, the specific embedded ontologies are to be constructed in accord with the generic, meta-theoretical ontology, which defines reality in terms of observed regularities. Such observed regularities are located via concepts, and given that there is no workable notion of an external reality effecting those concepts, the concepts determine what we see.

So, Popper replaces the notion of immediacy with the argument that we have a conceptually mediated and fallible access to an external reality. His neo-Kantianism though entails the epistemic fallacy. This is because ontology is defined in terms of epistemology: *what* we can know is defined in terms of *how* we know. Scientific methodology has an ontology (generic and specific) which has no notion of causal laws

existing as entities that are unobservable in their effects. What exists is what we can observe. There may be reference to conceptual mediation, but this does not save matters though. Instead, given that we cannot sustain the notion of an external reality acting back upon concepts, because such a notion is an untestable metaphysical conjecture, we end up only being able to refer to our concepts. Rather than being able to maintain that we have a fallible mediated access to reality via our concepts, all we can know are the concepts themselves. Any notion of reality is conflated into an epistemology which defines knowledge in terms of experience, and this experience is of concepts that determine what is observed. We may speculate that there is something beyond the concepts but such speculation is of no practical use for scientific methodology.

The upshot of Popper's neo-Kantianism then is to make reality redundant. Even if we had faith that the relations of natural necessity *really* did exist, this would have no practical effect upon science. We could not make reference to something 'other' than the observed regularities, so we can only refer to the observed regularities posited by our concepts, which means only making reference to our concepts. Reality is defined in terms of experience, and what we experience are our concepts, not something beyond those concepts (or if we do have contact with a reality beyond our concepts we cannot *know* this, let alone *presuppose* it, for a scientific investigation of the world).

¹⁰ I take the term 'embedded ontology' from Wisdom 1974. When Popper 1974 replies to the article he does not object to the term.

(5.3) Popper, Kuhn And The Genetic Fallacy

Against the view that all we can know and refer to are our concepts, Popper argues that

I do admit that we are prisoners caught in the framework of our theories; our expectations; our past experiences; our language. But we are prisoners in a Pickwickian sense: if we try, we can break out of our framework at any time. Admittedly, we shall find ourselves again in a framework, but it will be a better and roomier one; and we can at any moment break out of it again (1993:56).

Here Popper is arguing against what he calls the 'myth of the framework', which is the truth-relativist view that what we can know is *wholly* relative to our theoretical framework. With the myth of the framework truth is wholly relative to the framework, as there is no external referent. If a concept is part of a theory it is necessarily 'true' for the relativist myth. In putting this view forward, Popper is criticising Kuhn's argument that what constitutes scientific knowledge is determined by the prevailing paradigm (or theoretical framework), to the extent that failures of a theory are misperceived as failures of the individual to apply the theory properly. Popper argues that whilst knowledge is relative to a framework, it is not wholly relative, because an external reality means that such frameworks are fallible and can be recognised as such.

Such a conception of Kuhn is too narrow though, because Kuhn is rather ambivalent about the status of truth. On the one hand Kuhn appears to be a clear-cut relativist, arguing that paradigms determine knowledge. Here knowledge would be relative to a paradigm in that it would be reduced into a paradigm. In place of reference to external objects, truth would be definable in terms of a concept being part of a paradigm. Thus Kuhn famously argues for instance that 'in so far as [scientists] only recourse to the world is through what they see and do, we may say that after a revolution [i.e. change of

paradigm] scientists are responding to *a different world* (1970:111). Emphasis added). On the other hand though, Kuhn makes reference to a reality that is external to the paradigm, separating what is known and what exists. He argues that '[w]hatever he may then see, the scientist after a revolution is still *looking at the same world*' (1970:129. Emphasis added). Here then truth cannot be wholly reducible to a paradigm because there is a referent beyond the paradigm. A concept or theory may be false, as it may not approximate to the external object of knowledge to any degree.

To be sure, there is a strong aspect to Kuhn's work which does adhere to the myth of the framework, but Kuhn's argument is essentially a socio-historical study of scientific development, which says that scientists are heavily influenced by socio-cultural factors, meaning the norms of their (professional) community influence what 'normal science' is. It is not a clear-cut defence of the view that truth is relative to a paradigm, with every paradigm being equally true. Now although Popper does not place so much emphasis on socio-cultural influences, his position is much closer to Kuhn's than either he or Kuhn thought.¹¹ The reason for this being that Popper, like Kuhn, put a lot of emphasis on the 'framework', with reference to a reality beyond this, but without being able to say how this external reality affected the framework.

It is all very well for Popper to say that we are Pickwickian prisoners who can break out of the framework we are in, and move into a better one, but there is no ontological support for this assertion. We cannot make a meaningful and useful reference to a reality that is external to our framework, and so we cannot make sense of the notion of having a *better* framework. Although we may be able to change frameworks, we cannot have a

¹¹ Contrary to the epistemic individualism of empiricism, Popper does accept that individuals' perceptions are influenced by the prevailing norms and concepts. As regards Kuhn's list of similarities between himself and Popper, see Kuhn 1993(a), and 1993(b). His point is that both reject positivism for an emphasis on theories and traditions, although Popper is criticised for believing that we can change framework easily, and for downplaying the way theories influence perception.

rational reason for doing so.¹² Without any notion of how an external reality can affect a framework, there is no way to say that one framework has more verisimilitude than another. Instead, every framework would be equally true. Devoid of any meaningful notion of an independent reality, concepts thus become self-referential, so every framework becomes equally true, as truth could only be relative to - i.e. reducible into - a framework.

This brings us to the notion of the genetic fallacy. The genetic fallacy occurs with relativism, because as relativism reduces truth into a framework, the *origin* of a belief (in such a framework), rather than its relationship to an external referent, is held to determine its truth. A logical fallacy therefore occurs because it is impossible for the origin of a belief to determine its truth or falsity. Reducing issues of truth to issues of the origin of a concept in a framework results in absurdity, as every framework is equally true, even if frameworks are mutually exclusive. In addition to this, it is of course impossible to state such a thesis without blatant self-contradiction: one cannot make a universal statement about truth being relative.

This relativism - or truth reductionism - is also predicated upon the philosophical logic of immediacy. Relativism may make 'knowledge' wholly *contingent* upon a framework, whereas foundationalism sought *certainty*, but both entail the philosophical logic of immediacy. Foundationalism was predicated on the philosophical logic of immediacy because instead of a mediated and fallible access to reality, there was an immediate access to a manifest truth. Similarly, with relativism, there could be no notion of a fallible conceptually mediated access to an external reality, as the framework itself would be the manifest truth. By committing the genetic fallacy of reducing truth into its origin in a conceptual framework, relativism would put one in the position of immediately knowing

¹² On the subject of paradigm change, Kuhn argued that a change would be rational during a revolution when an old paradigm was being superseded, as anomalies were recognised. It is not clear though how 'anomalies' may be recognised within a paradigm, without a stronger reference to an external reality.

the truth by simply knowing the framework. So, knowledge may be contingent upon the framework, but such knowledge would still be based on certainty, because to know the concepts is to know the truth. There may be different frameworks, but this does not preclude certainty, even though it would result in the absurd conclusion that every framework was necessarily the manifest truth.

To summarise, foundationalism was premised upon the philosophical logic of immediacy. This committed the epistemic fallacy of defining ontology in terms of epistemology, and the empiricist epistemology in question resulted in idealism. Unfortunately, Popper's neo-Kantianism also committed the epistemic fallacy, and this too results in idealism, as there was no way to sustain any reference to an external reality. Instead of having a fallible conceptually mediated access to an external reality, we had concepts that were self-referential. This resulted in relativism and the genetic fallacy, because given such self-referentiality, truth was reduced into the origin of a concept, in the framework. Relativism also entails the philosophical logic of immediacy, because one's framework of concepts does not provide a mediating conduit to an external reality, but rather, the framework constitutes the manifest truth. Concepts are not fallible tools for seeking knowledge, but become knowledge itself. The result, with both forms of the philosophical logic of immediacy is idealism, because no reference to an external material reality is meaningful.

(6) Putnam's Critique Of Metaphysical Realism

In contrast to Popper, who defended the same philosophical position, Putnam has changed his position over the course of time. Rather than chart the course of Putnam's work, I will concentrate on his arguments concerning 'internal realism', as it is this position (rather

than Putnam's intellectual trajectory) which is germane for this chapter.¹³ Putnam has some similarities with Popper. Both seek to overcome the foundationalist search for certainty, and both take Kant as their starting point. Popper, as we saw, argued that Kant gave us the first activist philosophy of knowledge, and criticised Kant for not arguing that the categories were changeable. Putnam describes Kant as the first 'internal realist', but argues that Wittgenstein improved upon this internal realism, by rooting concepts in practices. Unlike Popper though, who regarded metaphysical realism as acceptable common-sense, Putnam is hostile to metaphysical realism; although Putnam has a broader view of metaphysical realism, taking it to include a theory of knowledge as well as a theory that reality exists outside our ideas of it.

Putnam defines metaphysical realism in terms of the following propositions: (1) the world consists of a fixed totality of objects, or essences; (2) there is one true and complete description of this world; and (3), truth is based upon a correspondence between linguistic / thought signs and external objects (1981:49 and 1992(a):30). This realism is referred to by Putnam (1981:49) as 'externalism', because of its belief that there is one true and complete description of the fixed set of objects that constitute the world, which is external to our particular perspectives. Such externalism thus favours the 'God's eye point of view', whereby knowledge is absolute. Instead of knowledge being perspectival (which is, by definition, partial) and fallible, knowledge is knowledge because it maps all the existing and knowable facts. Knowledge can only exist if we can step outside our perspectives to achieve an absolute conception of reality; although the time required to attain such a view is unclear.

The metaphysical realist is described by Putnam as an 'evil seducer' of the 'Innocent Maiden' (1991:4). The Realist promises to protect the common-sense view that contrary to idealism (and relativism), the world does exist outside our ideas. However, such beguiling

¹³ For Putnam's more recent work see Putnam 1994, 1995(b), and 1996. Basically, Putnam adopts a far more

promises to the Innocent Maiden are empty. The Seducer fails to deliver what was promised. As Putnam puts it, the Maiden chooses to travel with the Realist,

But when they have travelled together for a little while the 'Scientific Realist' breaks the news that the Maiden is going to get *isn't* her ice cubes and tables and chairs. In fact, all there *really* is - the Scientific Realist tells her over breakfast - is what 'finished science' will say there is - whatever that may be. She is left with a promissory note for She Knows Not What, and the assurance that even if there *aren't* tables and chairs, still there are some *dinge an sich* [i.e. noumenal 'things-in-themselves'] that her 'manifest image' [...] 'picture'. Some will say that the lady has been had (1991:4. Emphasis in original).

If knowledge only exists with a finished science, which is the position taken up by the first two defining propositions of metaphysical realism, then metaphysical realism does nothing to support the notion that reality exists. We cannot *know* what exists until we know everything. So, given human fallibilism, we cannot say reality exists, i.e. *we cannot say anything exists, because we cannot know everything*.¹⁴ In which case, to turn to metaphysical realism as a guarantor that reality 'really exists' is misguided, because it cannot deliver what it promises.

Putnam also attacks the correspondence theory of truth, which is the third defining proposition for metaphysical realism. For Putnam knowledge is not to be understood in terms of propositions corresponding to fixed, discrete external referents. The theory of truth, or theory of reference which holds that propositions correspond to external referents is referred to by Putnam as the 'similitude theory of reference'. This theory 'holds that the

Wittgensteinian position, moving away from defending philosophical propositions as such.

¹⁴ For an attempt to defend the God's eye view, see Williams' 1978 discussion of Descartes. For Putnam's response to this book, see Putnam 1992(b).

relation between the representation in our minds and the external objects that they refer to is literally a *similarity*' (1981:57). In the seventeenth century, according to Putnam, this theory of reference became more restricted, with a distinction being made between primary qualities and secondary qualities; i.e. between 'real' properties of the object, such as size, and secondly qualities, such as colour, which are not intrinsic to the object as such (1981:56-9 and 1991:4-8).

However, this distinction pointed to the Achilles' Heel of the similitude theory of reference, because it led people, such as Berkeley, to argue that all sense-data are of secondary qualities. As Putnam puts it

To state Berkeley's conclusion another way, *Nothing can be similar to a sensation or image except another sensation or image*. Given this, and given the (still unquestioned) assumption that the mechanism of reference is similitude between our 'ideas' [...] and what they represent, it at once follows that no 'idea' (mental image) can represent or refer to anything but another image or sensation (1981:59. Emphasis in original).

So, just as Popper criticised the foundationalist philosophies of mind for resulting in idealism, so Putnam argues that to define knowledge in terms of mental images that have similarity to their referent, results in idealism. Mental images are similar to mental images, not external material referents.

(7) Internal Realism: Conceptual Relativity And Realism

The philosopher who first broke away from the similitude theory of reference was Kant, who argued that the object of knowledge was as much a product of our concepts, as it was

of the noumenal thing-in-itself, to which it pertained. Instead of having direct knowledge (of our ideas) we have, for Kant, a mediated access to reality. So 'the representation is never a mere copy; it is always a joint product of our interaction with the external world and the active powers of the mind. The world as we know it bears the stamp of our conceptual activity' (Putnam 1992(a):261). Concepts contribute to the object of knowledge, rather than having a relationship of immediacy to an external object. As Popper argued, Kant gave us an activist philosophy of mind, with concepts being applied to reality, as opposed to ideas passively reflecting reality.

Putnam (1991:52) argues that Kant 'celebrates the loss of essences', meaning that Kant breaks from (what Putnam takes to be) the metaphysical realist conviction that there are a set number of fixed essences, which concepts mirror. However, to break fully from such essentialism, we need to break from the notion of unknowable things-in-themselves. We need to break from the concept of a noumenal realm. For to say that there is a world of things-in-themselves is to open the door to the metaphysical realist question, enquiring what these things are (Putnam 1995(a):29). This, for Putnam of course, would be to entail the externalist view that we can step outside our perspectives to know fixed essences. The notion of a noumenal realm leads one back to essentialism. Or rather, it would lead one back to essentialism, were it not for the fact that the concept of a noumenal realm did no work. As the things-in-themselves cannot be known, one may apply Ockham's razor, and remove the noumenal world, leaving concepts as the sole constituent of the putative object of knowledge. If concepts which are known contribute to the object of knowledge there is no need to make reference to an unknowable noumenal thing-in-itself also contributing to the object of knowledge.

What is needed, Putnam believes, is a way to retain the emphasis on concepts in constituting the object of knowledge, whilst avoiding reference to an unknowable reality.

The answer lies in the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein, who Putnam (1995(a):39) describes as 'deflating' Kant. Putnam interprets Wittgenstein as a form of pragmatist, meaning that Wittgenstein rejected epistemology for practices. Instead of asking questions about how knowledge was possible or achieved, the focus should be on how people 'go on' within a 'form of life', or 'language game'. Instead of asking how beliefs copy non-beliefs, etc., we should see how people follow practical rules, in different forms of life. This means that we do not just drop the notion of a noumenal realm, but also drop the notion that the concepts - or categories - are fixed. We should drop Kant's transcendental idealism, which argues that the condition of possibility for knowledge is that we have a fixed set of categories, that impose their 'stamp' on the noumenal realm. Instead we ought to recognise there are different concepts, formed in different perspectives, that are relative to their location within a particular culture or form of life. In short, concepts pertain to the practical life within a *community* rather than a fixed set of entities in the *mind*; and we should replace questions about concepts somehow connecting with mysterious unknowable things-in-themselves, to root concepts in the social realm of a community's practical life.¹⁵

So, although Kant broke from the similitude theory of reference, his philosophy may either entail externalism, with a definition of the noumenal realm being required, or idealism (the outcome of the similitude theory of reference) if we remove reference to the noumenal realm. The way to continue Kant's argument about knowledge being conceptually mediated is to move from a metaphysical and transcendental argument about a fixed set of categories being the condition of possibility for knowledge, to an argument about practices. In the latter case, concepts would be contingent upon the different ways

¹⁵ Putnam argues that there may be an implicit pluralism, as regards concepts, in Kant's work, and links the ideas on practical reason to Wittgenstein. The specifics of this argument have been avoided because the point is to describe Putnam's views on conceptual relativity and realism, rather than become side-tracked

of going on within different forms of life. Such a position is realist, but it is realism with a small 'r', which accepts the common sense view that reality really exists, rather than realism with a big 'R', which seeks a direct access to a reality-in-itself beyond perspectives.

Putnam contrasts the external realism of metaphysical realism with what he refers to as 'internal realism'; a position which maintains that we can be both realists (with a small 'r') and conceptual relativists (1991:17). This means replacing the metaphysical realist correspondence theory of truth, which is premised upon similitude, with a coherence theory of truth. As Putnam argues

'Truth', in an internalist view, is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability - some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences *as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system* - and not correspondence with mind-independent 'states of affairs'. There is no God's eye point of view that we can usefully imagine; there are only the various points of view of actual persons reflecting various interests and purposes that their descriptions and theories subserve (1981:49-50. Emphasis in original).

Given this, Putnam (1981:60 and 1991:43) can describe Kant as the 'first internal realist', because Kant broke from the similitude emphasis on truth as correspondence to a mind-independent reality, to emphasis the importance of concepts.¹⁶ The next step was to argue

into detailed exegesis concerning Kant and Wittgenstein. For Putnam's arguments on this topic see 1991:41-4 and 1995(a)27-52; and on Wittgenstein specifically see 1995(b):158-179.

¹⁶ As Putnam 1981:63 notes, Kant did not explicitly say he was rejecting the correspondence theory of truth, let alone advocate a coherence theory of truth. However, Kant's epistemology is opposed to correspondence by being opposed to the similitude theory of reference.

for conceptual relativity, with concepts being contingent upon their location within a particular form of life. What we know is via a particular perspective, which helps us go on within our form of life. Knowledge is to be understood in terms of internally coherent perspectives, that serve our practical interests, rather than discrete propositions mirroring discrete essences or facts.

Conceptual relativism does not mean truth-relativism for Putnam. What we know may be relative to some perspective, but this does not mean that there are as many truths as there are perspectives with every perspective being equally true. When Putnam talks of holding a coherence theory of truth, he does not want this to imply that truth can be reduced into the origin of a concept within a conceptual scheme. He wants to avoid the genetic fallacy. He does therefore say that concepts deal with reality, rather than just being self-referential components of an internally coherent framework. Putnam argues thus

Internalism does not deny that there are experiential *inputs* to knowledge; knowledge formation is not a story with no constraints except *internal* coherence; but it does deny that there are inputs *which are not themselves to some extent shaped by our concepts*, by the vocabulary we use to report and describe them, or any inputs *which admit of only one description, independent of all conceptual choices* (1981:54. Emphasis in original).

We deal with reality, but our experience and knowledge of reality are always mediated through some conceptual scheme: there is no immediate access. As we deal with reality, it follows that some perspectives may be better than others; and it does not follow that we can adopt a God's eye view, to say that from a God's eye view there is no God's eye view,

meaning that we cannot step outside all perspectives to say that all perspectives are *necessarily* equal in truth (Putnam 1992(a):25).

For internal realism, knowledge is contingent upon a perspective, although relativism is avoided because knowledge is fallible. This emphasis on fallibilism is clear, when Putnam defines truth in terms of ‘warranted assertability’, rather than in terms of beliefs corresponding to external essences. What he does is set out five points to define warranted assertability, and these points may be classed under the heading of contingency or fallibilism. Under the heading of contingency he argues that our norms and standards always reflect our interests and values. Under the heading of fallibilism we may place the following propositions: (1) in ordinary circumstances there is usually a *fact of the matter* as to whether statements are warranted or not; (2) whether or not a statement is warranted or not is *independent of what one's cultural peers say is warranted or not*; (3) that our norms and standards are historical in that they evolve over time;¹⁷ and (4) our norms and standards are capable of reform - there are *better and worse norms and standards* (1992(a):21. Emphasis added). From this it seems clear that warranted assertability and conceptual relativity are defined more in terms of fallibilism (i.e. in relation to reality) than in terms of social contingency.

Putnam may seem to have a tenable theory of knowledge, with internal realism replacing metaphysical realism (as he defines it), because he is arguing that we have a conceptually mediated and fallible access to reality. However Putnam’s internal realism is based on the relativist philosophical logic of immediacy, and this is because he misunderstands metaphysical realism. To show why this is, I will begin by discussing Searle’s arguments about realism.

¹⁷ This is an example of fallibilism, rather than contingency as such, because in the context of the other points, it means that we get better perspectives - we learn from our mistakes. Or in Popperian language, we learn by trial and error, making conjectures and moving on, in the light of refutations.

(8) Searle On External Realism And Conceptual Relativity

For Putnam metaphysical realism is fallacious because it is *metaphysical*. Metaphysics is regarded as trying to be a pure science of being, with metaphysical realism being based on the presumption that we can have a direct access to a reality that is beyond mere perspectives, via the correspondence theory of truth. In other words, the metaphysical realist ontology (that a reality exists beyond conceptual schemes), is taken to be a definitive *master*-ontology, whereby what exists is defined in terms of fixed, discrete essences, that the 'realist' ontology can, or will eventually, mirror *in toto*.

As Searle (1995) argues though, Putnam's position is subject to confusion. Searle puts forward six propositions that define his realism, in contrast to Putnam' (1995:150-1. Paraphrased). These are:

- (1) The world and the universe exist independently of our representations of it. This view is called 'external realism'; and it is the same as the 'metaphysical realist' position, as defined by Popper, *viz.* that there is a reality independent of our conceptions of it.
- (2) Access to the world is via representations.
- (3) Representations are true if and only if they correspond to the facts in reality. This is a correspondence theory of truth.
- (4) The same reality can be represented in any number of ways. This is the thesis of 'conceptual relativity'.
- (5) Social, historical and psychological factors influence representations.

(6) Knowledge consists of true representations, which can be justified and supported by evidence.

Searle argues that the first proposition concerning external realism is an ontological proposition because it asserts that reality exists independently of our representations of it: it is a statement about *being*, not a statement about *knowing*. As this is an *ontological* statement only, it has no necessarily *epistemological* implications. To assert that there is a reality which is independent of our representations of it, is not to assert that we can know this reality directly, or immediately. From the ontological premise that our representations which seek to be knowledge pertain to something external to the representations, one cannot necessarily conclude that we can know this external reality with immediacy. External realism says nothing about how we may come to have knowledge, for that concerns epistemology, and not ontology. In other words, external realism may be a metaphysical thesis, but *it does not follow that a metaphysical thesis is an epistemic thesis concerning how we know reality*. Metaphysical assertions concerning ontology, which say that reality is separate from representations of it, say nothing of how we can know reality, or even whether we can know reality. So metaphysics ought not to be regarded as a quasi-religious attempt to fashion a master-science of being, or a definitive master-ontology, which has absolute knowledge. Metaphysics *per se* does not imply a presumption of omnipotence; and it does not even maintain that knowledge is necessarily possible.

If external realism is an ontological thesis with no necessary epistemic corollary, then it follows that the fourth proposition concerning conceptual relativity does not contradict the first proposition concerning the external realism thesis. The representations of the world may be from different conceptual schemes, but these representations are still of the world. As Searle argues, 'if conceptual relativity is to be used as an argument against realism, it seems to presuppose realism, because it presupposes a language-independent

reality that can be carved up or divided up in different ways, by different vocabularies' (1995:165). The example Searle (1995:165) gives is of describing his weight as being one hundred and sixty pounds in one conceptual scheme, and seventy three kilograms in another conceptual scheme. Similarly a room's temperature may be measured in either Centigrade or Fahrenheit. One cannot conclude that given different conceptual schemes for measuring weight or temperature, that there is no John Searle or room with a certain temperature, outside the conceptual schemes.

It may be objected that the third proposition concerning the correspondence theory of truth clashes with the fourth proposition concerning conceptual relativity. As Collier (1994:239) argues though, the correspondence theory of truth is a *definition* of truth and not a *criterion* of truth. So, Kant held a correspondence theory of truth, arguing that knowledge was in agreement with its object; which is not to attempt meaningless task of defining *a priori* what truth is in specific instances (Collier 1994:239). Thus a correspondence theory is not a resemblance - or similitude - theory (1994:240). As Collier puts it '[e]veryone understands that if the inspector says "your inventory did not correspond to what was really in the warehouse", she is not complaining that a sheet of paper did not resemble a stack of tinned fruit' (1994:240). A proposition may be true iff it corresponds to an external referent, but this does not imply that the proposition must itself somehow *picture* the referent. The empiricist view that propositions have a relationship of immediacy to their referents relies on a picture theory of truth, as concepts *qua* isomorphs directly mirror objects. Correspondence though need not presume a picture theory of truth, or similitude.

The correspondence theory of truth may simply hold that a proposition about an external reality has some truth content. Or, as Popper argued, we can accept the correspondence theory of truth, and argue that instead of having access to a definitive

truth, our theories have varying degrees of verisimilitude. So, as regards conceptual relativity, we can say that there are better and worse conceptual schemes for representing reality. The *choice between conceptual schemes* such as kilograms or pounds, miles or kilometres, etc., may be rather arbitrary, but *the relationship of the conceptual scheme to reality* is not arbitrary. For Searle

once we have fixed the meaning of such terms in our vocabulary by arbitrary definitions, it is no longer a matter of any kind of relativism or arbitrariness whether representation-independent features of the world satisfy those definitions, because the features of the world that satisfy or fail to satisfy the definitions exist independently of those or any other definitions (1995:166. Emphasis removed from original).

To talk is to talk about the world, and the world is not made by our discourse, so talk, to be true, must correspond to the external world. There may be no direct resemblance or similitude, but truth still requires some form of correspondence.

(9) Putnam And The Philosophical Logic Of Immediacy

Putnam's argument therefore rests on two mistakes. Firstly, he mistakenly argues that external realism, or metaphysical realism, is an epistemic thesis, which seeks a God's eye view, and which necessarily implies the correspondence theory of truth. Secondly, he mistakenly argues that the correspondence theory of truth is premised upon a similitude theory of reference. Thus, if we make reference to referents that are external to conceptual schemes, we are metaphysical realists who hold to a correspondence theory of truth, which rests on similitude. Unless we adhere to the principle of conceptual relativity without external realism, we will mistakenly think that we can have a direct access to

reality. We have a dichotomy between internal realism and similitude. These are taken to be exhaustive positions.

If we try and avoid the essentialist position that concepts have a relationship of immediacy to referents *qua* discrete fixed essences, by accepting Putnam's conceptual relativism, then we would actually be accepting truth-relativism, because the thesis for conceptual relativity is not *complemented* by the thesis for external realism, in Searle's sense. This truth-relativism commits the genetic fallacy, and stems from the epistemic fallacy, of reducing questions about being into questions about knowing.

Given that any reference to a reality that is external to our concepts implies 'metaphysical realism', in Putnam's sense, meaning that it implies the similitude theory of reference, all referents must be wholly internal to a conceptual framework. *What* we can know is defined by *how* we can know; which in this case pertains to conceptual schemes (rather than minds). Conceptual relativity without external realism results in the epistemic fallacy therefore, because ontology has to be defined in terms of conceptual relativity, in order to avoid 'metaphysical realism'. Reality is definable only in terms that are wholly relative to a conceptual scheme. In other words, the thesis of conceptual relativity moves from the acceptable view that how we interpret the world is relative to a conceptual scheme, to the objectionable view *that the world we interpret is relative to our conceptual scheme*. As reference to anything beyond conceptual schemes implies, according to Putnam, an essentialist conception of knowledge, all referents - i.e. all objects of knowledge - are wholly definable in terms of their location within a conceptual scheme.

The genetic fallacy stems from this epistemic fallacy, because having defined the object of knowledge in terms of conceptual schemes, it follows that truth pertains to the origin of a concept within a conceptual scheme. Given the emphasis on conceptual relativity, and denial of external realism, correspondence must be replaced by coherence,

as it would not make sense to say that propositions corresponded to something beyond conceptual schemes (whether such correspondence was defined in terms of similitude or verisimilitude). Putnam may say that his coherence theory does not mean that truth is definable wholly in terms of internal coherence, but as he has no way to support his common-sense realism (realism with a little 'r'), without contradicting his denial of external realism, questions of truth are reduced in questions of coherence alone. One cannot simply presume that there is a reality beyond conceptual schemes, when one argues for the very denial of external realism, on the mistaken ground that such realism erroneously argues for epistemic immediacy and a God's eye view. Without external realism, concepts become self-referential, as there is no external object of knowledge to act as a separate referent. Concepts correspond to nothing but themselves, and so truth turns on whether a concept forms part of an internally coherent conceptual framework and nothing more. Truth is made wholly relative to a conceptual framework. The result is the relativist philosophical logic of immediacy, because truth is manifest in the sense that in knowing a framework, we know the truth. The result is also idealism, because internal realism internalises reality to conceptual schemes, with such schemes being self-referential.

Without external realism, the argument for conceptual relativism makes truth wholly contingent upon a concept's origin with a framework. In other words, truth-relativism stems from such conceptual relativism, in this instance, because one cannot support any notion of *fallibilism*. There is no way to say that a concept is untrue if it is located within an internally coherent conceptual scheme. Having said this though, it could be pointed out that when Putnam discussed warranted assertability, he put forward propositions that pertained to fallibilism. What are we to make of this? The propositions concerning a fact of the matter, warrant being independent of peer approval, norms evolving over time, and

norms being reformed, all imply that an external reality is used to test the utility of beliefs. However the appeal to such an external reality is explicitly denied. Putnam wants to assist the Innocent Maiden, by saying that there is a reality. However, by denying the thesis of external realism for an internal realism, which is an epistemic doctrine concerning conceptual relativity, devoid of any ontological reference to reality, the result is that the Innocent Maiden has, in Putnam's words, 'been had'. What this means is that Putnam is in the same position as Kant. As Searle argues (1995:174), for both Kant and Putnam the notion of a reality beyond the concepts becomes redundant. Reference is just reference to our concepts.

(10) Concluding Notes On Epistemology, The Philosophical Logic Of Immediacy, And Realism

Foundationalist philosophy wanted to base knowledge on certainty. Certainty was to be achieved by explaining how the mind could have a direct access to a manifest truth. Every individual had the capacity to recognise The Truth. Specifically, empiricist epistemology argued that knowledge was to be understood in terms of sense-data. This search for certainty was therefore predicated upon the foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy: concepts and beliefs are epistemic isomorphs which have a relationship of immediacy to their referent, by picturing them. This philosophy of knowledge committed the epistemic fallacy, because questions of ontology were reduced into questions of epistemology. Such a reduction is fallacious in itself and, as regards empiricism, it results in other problems. These are that the empiricist epistemology results in idealism, and that the logical-positivist methodology that was based on this epistemology, had a criterion of meaningfulness which could not be applied to itself, and a logically fallacious inductivism, which sought to make universal statements based upon limited observations.

One can break from this *foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy* by arguing for conceptual relativity. The problem though is that such conceptual relativism can end up as another version of the philosophical logic of immediacy: it can end up as *the relativist philosophical logic of immediacy*. If one argues, as Popper and Putnam do, for an emphasis on conceptual frameworks, then this must be complemented by external realism / metaphysical realism. Without such realism, ontology is defined in terms of epistemology, with the object of knowledge being wholly relative to, and constituted by, a conceptual framework. From this epistemic fallacy, the genetic fallacy ensues, as truth is wholly relative to, i.e. reduced into, a conceptual scheme. When Popper argues that metaphysical realism is not part of methodology, and Putnam rejects external / metaphysical realism (mistaking it for an epistemic thesis), they are both putting all the emphasis on the conceptual framework, and making any notion of fallibilism impossible to sustain. Without any meaningful reference to a reality in itself beyond concepts, we cannot say that concepts are falsified by reference to reality. Instead, a concept is true if it is part of a framework, as concepts become self-referential. Truth is knowable immediately, because concepts in a framework *are the Truth*.

Another way of putting this is to say that the foundationalist and relativist philosophical logics of immediacy are based on a relationship of being-knowing identity. With foundationalism concepts, or propositions, picture the manifest truth (conceived of as fixed discrete essences), and with truth-relativism, the framework is the truth. Such relationship of identity results in the epistemic fallacy and the genetic fallacy, respectively; with the latter stemming from the former, as the reduction of truth into conceptual frameworks stems from the reduction of ontology into epistemology. Against this, realist anti-foundationalism avoids the foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy by advocating conceptual relativity, and it avoids truth-relativism by

complementing an anti-foundational epistemology with the ontological argument for metaphysical realism. By complementing conceptual relativity with metaphysical realism, we can sustain the notion of a reality external to our conceptual schemes, because the object of knowledge is not reduced into a conceptual scheme. Thus realist anti-foundationalism is able to overcome the philosophical logic of immediacy, and the epistemic and genetic fallacies.

Chapter Two

Philosophy And Social Theory:

The Logic Of Immediacy And Sociology

(1) Introduction: From The Philosophical Logic Of Immediacy To The Sociological Logic Of Immediacy

In the previous chapter it was argued that realist anti-foundationalism was able to overcome the philosophical logic of immediacy and, in doing so, it was able to develop a theory of knowledge which avoided the epistemic and genetic fallacies. By arguing that knowledge is to be understood in terms of a conceptually mediated and fallible access to an external reality, realist anti-foundationalism was able to avoid the problem of reducing what is known or knowable to the properties of the mind (the epistemic fallacy), and the problem of reducing truth to conceptual schemes or social norms (the genetic fallacy).

Thus realist anti-foundationalism was able to conceptualise knowledge in a way that avoided a relationship of epistemic immediacy, and its attendant problems.

These problems are *not simply logical and epistemological problems concerning the fallacious reduction of ontology into epistemology and of truth into the origin of a concept within a conceptual scheme*. Rather, *these problems have methodological ramifications for the natural and social sciences*. So, as we saw in the previous chapter, the attempt to base natural science *methodology* on empiricist *epistemology* produced a methodology based upon inductivism, and a demarcation criterion for science (the verification criterion) which was unjustified because it could not be applied to itself. The

problems with inductivism and verificationism may be logical problems (i.e. logical fallacies), but they have practical implications, simply because any attempt to operationalise such principles will produce a scientific methodology which is erroneous. The search for scientific knowledge cannot be based upon the search for epistemic certainty, with observed regularities being taken to be causal laws; and so science itself cannot be demarcated from non-science by empirically verifying a proposition about a causal law *qua* observed constant conjunction. To base scientific knowledge upon observation is to mistake observed contingent regularities for causal laws, or relations of natural necessity.

What this means is that empiricist epistemology cannot act as an ‘underlabourer’ (Locke 1988:xlii-xliii), because it ends up as a ‘master-builder’. For Locke, empiricist epistemology ought to be used to ‘clear the way’ for scientific methodology, removing pseudo-problems by basing methodology on clear empirical propositions. This empiricist underlabourer acted as a master-builder though, because scientific methodology would be wholly definable in terms of the empiricist philosophy of mind. The exploration of the external world (and universe) would be in terms that pertained to the inner workings of the mind. Science would be predicated upon the epistemic fallacy, which tells us about the putative properties of the mind and not about the world we wish - and need - to explore and understand; and, if one did try to operationalise such an epistemology, then one would encounter the methodological problems noted above.

This does not mean that we ought to reject the concept of an underlabourer though. That would be to ‘throw the baby out with the bathwater’, so to speak. Rather, we may argue that realist anti-foundationalism can act as a *negative underlabourer*, as regards social and natural science methodology. This negative underlabouring function would be to proscribe any theory of epistemic immediacy, which would mean rejecting positivism, because positivism maintains that propositions can mirror discrete facts. Now although

we have already discussed positivism in the previous chapter, this was in relation to the natural sciences, and that discussion was more oriented to epistemological issues, rather than methodology as such. Here, and in the following chapters, my concern is with social science ontology and methodology, which means in this context, that realist anti-foundationalism would prevent one holding a positivist individualistic position, or a position that C.W. Mills calls ‘abstracted empiricism’.

The individualist version of positivism would hold that as we have a direct access to the manifest truth, then all we can refer to are individuals and their acts, because we can only experience (i.e. observe) individuals and not non-individual ‘social’ factors.¹ Consequently, one could not begin to *describe what* individuals were doing, let alone *explain why* they acted as they did. This is because one would be unable to situate their acts in a social context, and so one could not explain what an act was, let alone move on to analyse the agents’ motives for acting as they did, because that would mean introducing non-observable factors. One may be able to describe how human beings wore clothes of certain types and how they moved their bodies in particular ways (ignoring the fact that language itself was a social product), but one could not describe the norms involved in the situation of individuals dancing in a party environment, or explain their motivations for seeking out this sort of social situation, because one would be unable to make reference to any form of social context. The facts would not speak for themselves.

Another form of positivism is the version described by C.W. Mills (1967:50-75) as ‘abstracted empiricism’. What this refers to is the use of statistics, whereby the *described correlation* of two (or more) factors is thought to provide an *explanation* of social phenomena. Mills states that studies of voting behaviour are a favourite of this approach, and he describes a study of the 1940 election in Erie County, Ohio, called ‘The People’s Choice’. ‘From this we learn that rich, rural, and Protestant persons tend to vote

Republican; people of the opposite type incline toward the Democrats; and so on. But we learn little about the dynamics of American politics' (Mills 1967:52-3).

Here there is a relationship of foundational epistemic immediacy, because the statistical findings are taken to reflect a manifest truth. The observed correlation of two variables is taken to be a causal explanation (thus confounding causation with correlation) with, in this instance, membership of a particular socio-economic group being taken as an (unexplained) cause of one group voting in a particular way. As Mills argues though, such descriptions are empty, because they abstract - or remove - their findings from the social context. Given that the context is evacuated from the study, the 'facts' are meant to 'speak for themselves' and, as description is not explanation, these facts fail to explain voting. The act of voting for one party to further one's (perceived) interests is not explained, so we have no explanation of why particular agents vote in particular ways, to further their perceived political, social and economic interests. Again, the facts would not speak for themselves.²

So, realist anti-foundationalism would prevent one from adopting a positivist social science. Realist anti-foundationalism would also preclude positions which turn on another form of epistemic immediacy, which I describe as the 'sociological logic of immediacy'. The sociological logic of immediacy, unlike positivism, would be based not on empty empirical descriptions (or non-descriptions), but upon the notion that a set of concepts could furnish a definitive 'map', or 'filing cabinet' of all the factors pertinent to the explanation of human behaviour.³ This means that, unlike positivism, the sociological logic of immediacy concerns ontology rather than epistemology. The sociological logic of

¹ This individualist version of empiricism, unlike abstracted empiricism, is only a limiting device, to explain the potential contours of positivism.

² Abstracted empiricism is discussed in more depth in chapter five, where it is discussed in relation to Bhaskar's notion of an 'actualist closed systems ontology'.

³ I take the term 'filing cabinet' from Craib 1992(a), who uses the term to describe Parsons' normative functionalism.

immediacy concerns positions which end up positing a definitive *master-ontology* of social being, meaning that the ontology presumes to serve as an explanation for all forms of social behaviour. This ontology may pertain to either human nature (or psychological features) or social structures. In the former case we have the individualist sociological logic of immediacy, and in the latter case, we have the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy.⁴ Such positions would be premised upon epistemic immediacy, because the concepts of the ontology would be regarded as directly mirroring a set number of discrete facts. Another way of putting this is to say that the sociological logic of immediacy is a form of essentialism. An ontology of social being can presume to be a master-ontology of social being, capable of explaining all forms of behaviour, by supplying knowledge of a fixed number of essential properties, to which behaviour directly conforms, with the concepts in the ontology being a direct reflection of the said essences.

This master-builder conception of ontology would either make social scientific methodology redundant, or alternatively, social scientific methodology would be based upon an arbitrary verificationism. In the former case, as the ontology was taken to be definitive there would be no need for methodology, defined here as the formulation of specific theories and empirical investigation, because one could *read-off* behaviour from the ontology. So, for example, if one had an ontology of human nature which one took to be definitive, then one would 'know' all the causes of human behaviour. In the latter case, one may try to apply the ontology, but here one would simply *read it into* any observed event. The ontology would be taken to be not only correct, but also an exhaustive account of human behaviour, so any observed event would verify the ontology, and require no further development of explanatory concepts.

⁴ Although the individualist position would make reference only to human nature or psychological states, it is still possible to refer to this as the sociological logic of immediacy, because it seeks to explain social relations and institutions as manifestations of an innate human essence (rather than as epiphenomena of social structures).

The examples Popper gave in the previous chapter, of unfalsifiable positions, are germane here. For when Popper talked of unfalsifiable theories, such as Marxism and psycho-analysis, he was making a point similar to mine, because he was holding that these ontologies of social structures or psychologistic features of the mind are definitive. Therefore any attempt to apply them results in an arbitrary verification, with any observed event 'proving' the ontology, and no event being able to disprove the ontology. This is not to endorse falsification as a methodology, but the point remains that ontologies which are taken to be definitive are always verified via observation, by those who adhere to the tenets of the ontology in question.

Popper, along with others such as Watkins, advocated a methodological individualist approach to social science. This was influenced by a moderate empiricism which, in contrast to positivist individualism noted above, does make reference to the social context.⁵ Further, *those who advocated methodological individualism anticipated the sociological logic of immediacy*. Authors such as Popper and Watkins tried to argue for a position which on the one hand avoided psychologistic reductionism, whilst on the other hand, avoiding reified holism. That is, they eschewed positions which they regarded as trying to posit a definitive ontology of social being, either in terms of determining psychological properties or determining social structures. Unfortunately, the lack of an ontology of social reality other than individuals ends up begging the question as to what the social context is and how it may influence individuals. *As methodological individualism begs the question about social reality, it furnishes an ontology which was unable to guide methodology*. Methodological individualism cannot act as an underlabourer for the social sciences because it cannot supply workable precepts to guide

⁵ This moderate empiricism is not wholly antithetical to Popper's neo-Kantianism, because by avoiding the more hard-line positivism just described, it can retain some notion of having a conceptually mediated access to the world, rather than a direct access to 'facts' which, in this case, would be atomistic individuals divorced from any social context.

methodology, as it begs the question as to what the object of study actually is. If one did try to base methodology on such a position, then the social context could be interpreted arbitrarily in ways which both emphasised constraint and unconstrained free will.

To overcome these problems we can use realist anti-foundationalism as a *positive underlabourer*, by complementing it with a social realist ontology of ‘emergent properties’ (in ‘open systems’), to say how social structures condition but do not determine individuals’ agency. This would mean using a *meta-theory* which supplied some *general precepts* about how an objectively real (and non-reducible) social context both *enabled and constrained individuals’ agency*, to *guide methodology* (i.e. the formation of specific theories and empirical research). This would then enable us to address the transcendental question concerning the condition of possibility for social scientific knowledge. This is because one could argue that: (1) the object of social scientific knowledge had to be conceptualised in terms of an objectively real social context, to avoid holism or atomistic individualism; and (2) that the knowledge claims about this object were conceptually mediated and fallible. In other words, we would avoid: (1) positivism which failed to explain (or describe) social reality; (2) question-begging methodological individualism which failed to explain what the object of study was (thus leading to an arbitrary definition of social reality); and (3) an essentialism, in the form of the sociological logic of immediacy, which either rendered methodology redundant or an exercise in arbitrary verificationism. Instead, sociological knowledge would be based upon a conceptually mediated and fallible access, via empirical research, to social reality (structure and agency).

This though is starting to get ahead of ourselves, and anticipating the argument of a later chapter. Here we need to survey the arguments put forward by the positions of methodological individualism and methodological collectivism. This will allow us to see

not only that methodological individualism, in effect, anticipated the sociological logic of immediacy, and its problems with regard to the conception of the social object. It will also allow us to see how the use of a moderate form of empiricism (rather than a strong form of positivism) as an epistemic underlabourer results in a position which cannot itself adequately conceptualise the object of study, because the reference to 'individuals' ends up begging the question about 'social' references. Methodological collectivism tried to overcome the problems associated with methodological individualism, although it also failed to define social reality, because of an adherence to a moderate empiricism. Methodological collectivism also ended up as a form of holistic determinism because 'social facts' were regarded as being external constraints upon the individual.

(2) Anticipating The Sociological Logic Of Immediacy

Methodological individualists anticipated the sociological logic of immediacy, arguing against the notion that social science can be based upon a definitive ontology of either human being or social structures. Against the notion that to understand human behaviour we can reduce the level of explanation down to the level of mental states, or human nature, Popper argues that

It [psychologism] can hardly be seriously discussed, for we have every reason to believe that man or rather his ancestor was social prior to being human [...]. But this implies that social institutions, and with them, typical social regularities or sociological laws, must have existed prior to what some people are pleased to call 'human nature', and to human psychology. If a reduction is to be attempted at all, it would therefore be more helpful to

attempt a reduction or interpretation of psychology in terms of sociology than the other way round (1962:93).

In other words, the social context pre-exists specific individual acts. So, to understand the actions of individuals therefore, we need to understand how individuals are influenced by the prevailing social context and how, as this context is not determining, individuals may act back upon the context to effect social change.

This would obviously require empirical investigation, to see exactly how individuals interacted with the social context. If one had a definitive ontology of human being or social structures though, then one would not have to engage in empirical research, as one could simply read-off from the ontology the categories which mirrored the essences that determined human behaviour. Or, if one did engage in empirical research, then it would be based upon verifying an ontology which was known to be 'correct'. As Watkins argues,

There is a parallel between holism [the view that structures determine behaviour] and psychologism which explains their common failure to make surprising discoveries. A large-scale social characteristic should be explained, according to psychologism, as the manifestation of an analogous small-scale psychological tendencies in individuals, and according to holism as the manifestation of a large-scale tendency in the social whole. In both cases, the *explicans* does little more than duplicate the *explanandum* (1992(a):175-6. Emphasis in original).

With both psychologism and holism therefore, there can be no 'surprising discoveries' because the ontologies in both cases are taken to be definitive. Thus the *explicans* mirrors the *explanandum*, because the phenomena explained are identical with the theory which seeks to explain it, given that observed human behaviour mirrors the determining essence which causes that behaviour. Conversely, to make surprising discoveries is to discover how the social context interacts with individual agency in specific circumstances. Which brings us to the question of whether or not methodological individualism is able to achieve what it implies is the nature of social scientific explanation.

(3) Methodological Individualism Defined

In his critique of psychologism, Popper argues that human actions are to a large extent explicable in terms of the situations in which they are located. He admits that psychological factors may have some role to play. However, 'this "psychological" part of the explanation is often very trivial, as compared with the detailed determination of [an agent's] action by what we may call *the logic of the situation*' (1962:97. Emphasis in original). So, one may refer to self-interest for instance, but this would not go very far in explaining how capitalist economies actually worked. Rather than refer to some general notion such as self-interest, we would need to know the 'logic of the situation', to explain why, for instance, people withdrew money from the stockmarket and produced, unintentionally, an economic crash. Rather than read-off behaviour from a model of human being, social science should be concerned with 'the difficulties which stand in the way of social action - the study, as it were, of the unwieldiness, the resilience or the brittleness of the social stuff, of its resistance to our attempts to mould it and work with it' (Popper 1962:94). What we need then is a study of individuals in relation to 'social stuff',

or the logic of the situation, meaning a context which gives meaning to, enables and constrains individuals' actions.

How are we to study individuals *vis-à-vis* social stuff? Watkins argues that '[e]very complex social situation, institution, or event is the result of a particular configuration of individuals, their dispositions, situations, beliefs, and physical resources and environment' (1992(a):168). He goes on to draw a distinction between 'half-way explanations' of 'large-scale social phenomena', and 'rock-bottom explanations'. Watkins argues that we may explain one large-scale phenomenon (such as inflation) in terms of another large-scale phenomenon (such as full employment). To reach a rock-bottom explanation though, we must 'deduce' an explanation in terms of the dispositions, beliefs, resources and interrelations of individuals (1992(a):168).⁶ The methodology then is to be reductionist. One is to reduce explanations of large-scale phenomena down to the level of individuals and their beliefs and interrelations. Thus sociological explanations are derived from statements concerning '(a) principles governing the behaviour of participating individuals and (b) descriptions of their situations (Watkins 1992(b):149).

The alternative to methodological individualism is sociological holism according to Watkins (1992(a):168 and 1992(b):149-50). Such holism would maintain that social systems constitute 'organic wholes' which are controlled by macro-level laws. Therefore the level of analysis concerns *sui generis* laws, rather than individuals. Watkins argues that

If methodological individualism means that human beings are supposed to be the only moving agents in history, and if sociological holism means that some superhuman agents

⁶ Note the anti-Keynesian / interventionist flavour of his example.

or factors are supposed to be at work in history, then *these two alternatives are exhaustive* (1992(a):168. Emphasis added).

So unless one adopts methodological individualism one will have to adopt an holist position. If one ends up adopting an holist position then one will be holding a position which reifies social forces, by invoking some notion of ‘superhuman’ social structures. Such reference to structures beyond individuals will also be deterministic, because instead of dealing with individuals who can make decisions (within situations, i.e. a particular context), one would be referring to structures which controlled individuals. Individuals’ behaviour would be epiphenomenal: individuals would be mere puppets controlled by some form of mysterious social structures.

Further, such holist-determinism would also be ‘well-nigh equivalent to historicism’ (Watkins 1992(a):168). This is because if one moved from the synchronic issue of structures controlling society to the diachronic issue, of factors influencing historical development, then the emphasis would still be on superhuman structures. These structures would not only exert a causal deterministic influence over individuals in the present, but they would also determine the course of historical development. Consequently, if one argued for historicism then one would be presuming to know the laws which controlled human development, and this could be used by authoritarian regimes to legitimatise their rule by appeal to the ‘laws of historical development’ (Popper 1989).

In short, one can explain how individuals interact within a specific social situation, by reducing the explanation down the level of individuals, or one can turn to a definitive ontology of human being or social structures. Such definitive ontologies fail as social scientific positions because they fail to make surprising discoveries and, in addition to

this, an holist ontology may well have authoritarian political ramifications if applied to history.

(4) Assessing Methodological Individualism: The Need For A Non-Individualist Ontology

*Empiricist epistemology acts as a negative underlabourer by proscribing holism (and psychologism), by rejecting references to unobservable social forces (and unobservable asocial mental / brain states), and a positive underlabourer by prescribing a meta-theoretical ontology of individuals.*⁷ That is, methodology is to turn on forming theories whose objects of analysis are individuals, and any reference to non-reducible social or non-individual factors having a role to play, would result in a reified holist (and historicist) ontology (although one must also avoid psychologistic reduction). One either has an individualist ontology to guide methodology, or one has an holist ontology (which makes research redundant or arbitrary). The empiricist underlabourer for social science leads to the dichotomy between individuals and reified super-human forces, *but if one were consistently empiricist, then one would have to adopt the position of positivist individualism noted earlier*, whereby the removal of any reference to non-observable social contextual features prevented the description of social acts or explanations of why agents acted as they did.

In such a case, one would have an ‘epistemic purism’, with any non-observable (i.e. social) factor being deemed not to exist, because it cannot be known directly through observation. (It would also preclude reference to dispositions as these too are

⁷ Psychologism may be proscribed because an ontology of human being is making reference to unobservable factors, but methodological individualists such as Popper and Watkins reject psychologism because it removes the social context, or social situations, from the explanation. Nonetheless psychologism may claim to be ‘methodologically individualist’ by trying to explain *social* phenomena in reductive terms. For example, a psycho-analyst may try to explain capitalism solely in terms that relate to the unconscious of individuals’ minds.

unobservable). This would, obviously, be to base methodology on the epistemic fallacy, holding that no social factors (which were irreducible to individuals) existed because they could not be known according to the empiricist philosophy of mind. Consequently, empiricism would be more of a master-builder than an underlabourer, because what could be known would be defined wholly in terms of how we could have knowledge. There could be no surprising discoveries, not because one had a definitive ontology, but because one had a definitive epistemology, with knowledge claims seeking epistemic certainty, removing reference to the social context, and thus preventing social science discussing what agents are doing in particular contexts. There could be no surprising discoveries because social science methodology could not actually *explain*, let alone discover, anything about the social realm, as that methodology was simply a re-statement of positivist epistemology.

What this means, given that methodological individualism is not such a dogmatic form of positivism, is that there is a marked tension between the epistemic underlabourer and the methodology. On the one hand, the empiricist underlabourer holds that specific theories are to be constructed using an ontology which defines social reality as exhaustively constituted by individuals. On the other hand, when one comes to formulate specific theories, then methodology does not follow this ontology, as reference can be made to situations and inter-relations. To remain true to the former (empiricist epistemology) is to commit the epistemic fallacy, by defining the objects of knowledge in terms of how we have knowledge, which precludes the possibility of social explanation. To remain true to the latter (methodological individualist methodology) enables one to make reference to social factors influencing and giving meaning to individual acts, but it commits the fallacy of begging the question.

This point about begging the question is nicely illustrated by Lukes (1968). Lukes raises two questions, addressing the issues of what a fact about an individual is, and what

an explanation about an individual is. As regards facts about individuals, Lukes lists four such facts ranging from the most non-social to the most social, such as brain-states, stimulus response, co-operation and cashing cheques, respectively (1968:123). Dealing with facts that pertain to the most social type of predicates about individuals, Lukes argues that '[h]ere the relevant features of the context are, so to speak, built into the individual' (1968:125). So, for instance, when describing facts concerning such acts as cashing cheques, saluting and voting (the examples come from Lukes), one is describing individual acts by drawing upon a prior knowledge of the social context. One could not meaningfully describe an individual act of the type mentioned without drawing upon a social context that gives meaning to the act. Thus Army is more than the plural of soldier, because to understand why someone dresses in a particular type of uniform, and performs acts such as those called saluting, one must know what the social context is, which gives meaning and purpose to individual acts. One cannot understand the concept of an *individual* soldier, and the acts deemed appropriate to that role, without knowing what the *collective* Army is.

As regards the question concerning explanations about individuals, Lukes argues that '[i]t is important to see, and it is often forgotten, that to *identify* a piece of behaviour, a set of beliefs, etc., is sometimes to explain it' (1968:125. Emphasis in original). Lukes draws upon the apocryphal 'Martian' social scientist, saying that an action such as cashing a cheque in a bank, can be explained by being identified. In other words, by saying what the individual act is, by drawing upon the social context, one explains the act. Lukes goes on to say that if an individualist were to restrict him / herself to explanations concerning the first three types of individual predicates (such as brain states etc.), then the result would arbitrarily rule out what most people and (presumably all) social scientists find interesting, which is explanations about social action.

Alternatively, if reference is made to the fourth type of individual predicate, then the individualist is 'proposing nothing more than a futile linguistic purism. Why should we be compelled to talk about the tribesman but not the tribe, the bank-teller but not the bank?' (Lukes 1968:125). Or the soldier but not the Army? Further, if the fourth type of individual predicate is accepted then, whatever the use of language, one will have violated the criterion of reducing all reference down to individuals, in order to identify and explain just what it is that individuals are doing. Propositions about individuals often 'presuppose and / or entail other propositions about social phenomena. Thus the latter have not really been eliminated; they have merely been swept under the carpet' (Lukes 1968:127). This, understandably, leads Lukes to say '[i]t is worth adding that since Popper and Watkins allow "situations" and "inter-relations between individuals" to enter into explanations, it is difficult to see why they insist on calling their doctrine "methodological individualism"' (1968:127).

Given that, as Lukes noted above, to identify a piece of behaviour can be to explain it, because one is explaining the social context, a pure form of empiricist individualism would be prevented from explaining social phenomena because it could not proffer such identifications. Nonetheless, because some social reference is always necessary, the putative individualism of Popper and Watkins 'smuggles' social references in implicitly, and in doing this, the question is begged as to what social reality is. 'Sweeping it under the carpet' or 'building it into the individual' may avoid the impossibility of a purely atomistic view, but it tells us nothing about how the social context which gives meaning to individuals' actions enables and constrains individuals.

This is not just a logical problem though. Any putative methodological individualist could subscribe to the ontology of 'individualism' and then put forward theories and explanations that make reference to non-individual factors. As these non-individual, or putatively social factors, are not defined, they can be used in any way that suits the social

scientist concerned. One could talk of a situational logic of employer-employee relations in a way that both prioritised individual agency and which made the situational logic a determining constraint, without explaining how it may influence individuals in different ways at different times. One would confusingly adhere to a meta-theory of individuals, and then escape from empty descriptions to provide social explanations, by making reference to undefined social factors, that could be used in the most elastic fashion, to mean whatever one wanted to imply. One could not know how the social context acted as both a constraint and an enablement, because the question-begging reference to situational logics would do the work of an explanation concerning how individuals with free will had their agency affected by a social reality that was irreducible to individuals.

If the individualist was confronted with the accusation of begging the question then s/he would simply opt for a reduction to individuals, explaining the situational logic in terms of individuals' dispositions and beliefs. This however builds the social context into the individual. If one described the situational logic of employment relations, for instance, in terms of individuals' dispositions to act in certain ways, then one would be providing an explanation which defined individuals' dispositions in terms of the prevailing social context. In other words, reference to individuals' dispositions is not sufficient to warrant a reduction down to individuals, unless one were seeking to produce a psychologistic explanation, whereby 'social' relations were a direct expression of fixed mental states, and nothing else.

As Goldstein argues

The point here is that the kinds of dispositions to be found in people of any given type are socially induced dispositions. It seems odd to talk about widely occurring dispositions among Huguenot entrepreneurs and not to wonder about the coincidence of the recurrence in just this group. It was, to be sure, individual Huguenots who successfully competed in

the business world of the seventeenth century. But this was presumably because the Huguenot upbringing or enculturation produced people who could operate effectively within the socio-economic framework of the time (1992:284).

To this Watkins replies that methodological individualism can sustain the notion of socially induced dispositions. Watkins argues that

I agree that methodological individualism allows for the formation, or 'cultural conditioning', of a widespread disposition to be explained only in terms of other human factors and not in terms of something *inhuman*, such as an alleged historicist law which impels people willy-nilly along some pre-determined course. But this is just the anti-historicist point of methodological individualism (1992(a):172. Emphasis in original).

So, Watkins allows for cultural conditioning, but then holds that this must be reduced to individuals to avoid references to reified super-human structures.

Given the adherence to an empiricist epistemology, Watkins retains the dichotomy between individuals and reified structures, and consequently he argues that dispositions are a product of cultural conditioning, which is to be explained in terms of other individuals, rather than sinister structural forces. Dispositions then are to be explained in terms of individuals creating and transmitting a set of ideas. Now whilst it would be erroneous to say that individuals did not create and transmit ideas, this is not sufficient to support Watkins' case. This is because Watkins cannot tell us where dispositions 'come from'. Individuals may transmit and change beliefs, but cultural systems pre-date and post-date particular individuals. Thus we can talk of Christianity separate from any particular individual's beliefs. People get socialised into pre-existing belief systems, and these belief systems are separate from the individuals who adhere to them. This is not to

say that individuals are determined puppets, doomed to have a 'false consciousness' because of some structural determinism. Rather, it is just to say that cultures influence the beliefs and acts of individuals, and that cultures do not only exist in the present-tense, when they are explicitly articulated or acted upon. Cultural systems are 'more than' the individuals who happen to adhere to the beliefs of a particular culture, because cultures have a continuity that far exceeds that of individuals. With Watkins' view, one is left with the impression that a culture could change at a minute's notice. This is not to deny that individuals can change their minds, but this cannot explain the longevity of cultures. How we are to conceptualise cultures as enabling and constraining factors upon agency, will be discussed in chapter five, when it is argued that cultures exist as emergent properties.

The beguiling simplicity of methodological individualism is a siren call into unresolvable problems. It may make sense to avoid holism (and psychologism), but if one holds that any reference to social factors that cannot be reducible down to the level of individuals entails reification, then one ends up with positivist individualism. This meant that methodological individualism had to keep a 'double set of books', so to speak. On the one hand, it adhered to an empiricist epistemology as an underlabourer, arguing that one must reduce to individuals or reify social structures, whilst on the other hand, it recognised the impossibility of realising this for actual *social* research, and made reference to situations and situational logics. This means that methodological individualism had to violate its own epistemic underlabourer, and that in doing so, it produced a question-begging ontology of undefined social situations which could be interpreted in any way possible. If pushed, individualists could turn to individual dispositions, but the danger here is of falling into psychologism, by explaining social relations as a manifestation of fixed mental states or a fixed human nature. Individualists may reject this, to try and give an account of cultural conditioning in individualist terms, but this fails to say why cultures exist as cohesive entities over very long periods of time.

(5) Methodological Collectivism: Overcoming The problems?

The reason why methodological individualists were so opposed to the notion of admitting that social reality may be definable in terms which are not wholly reducible to individuals. is that methodological individualists wrote in the context of the Cold War. One was, according to the individualists, either a liberal and a methodological individualist, or a Marxist and an holist / methodological collectivist. Whatever form of Marxism a Marxist adhered to, it was deemed to be holist and historicist. There is not the space to enter into the seemingly endless fray about how to interpret Marx, but we can say that such an ontological dichotomy between only individuals being 'real' and only structures having causal powers, is too restrictive; as even the individualists tacitly conceded by making reference to situations. The attack on this dichotomy was occasioned by methodological collectivists who were opposed to holism and Marxism as well as methodological individualism. Gellner (1969) and Mandelbaum (1992(a) and (b)) will be used to illustrate this methodological collectivist position.

Gellner rejects the 'reduce or reify' dichotomy by arguing that a reduction down to the level of individuals would result in psychologism. For Gellner (1969: 266) an individualist would have to reduce explanation down to the level of individuals, which means reducing explanation down to the level of individuals' dispositions (Gellner ignores the reference to situations). The result is psychologism, because what one is doing is explaining how individuals act by reference to psychological states. Here individuals' dispositions would be the independent variable and all 'social' actions would be the dependent variable, explainable wholly in terms of mental states. With such a reduction then, one could read-into any behaviour the categories used to define one's model of human nature or mental states, and verify one's ontology of human being.

Against this psychologistic reductionism, Gellner argues that dispositions should be regarded as the dependent variable. He argues that '[t]he real oddity of the reductionist case is that it seems to preclude *a priori* the possibility of human dispositions being the dependent variable in an historical explanation - when in fact they often or always are' (1969:260). This is not to say that Gellner endorses the holistic notion that individuals are determined by social structures. Rather, it is just to say that individuals' dispositions are created within an irreducible social context that gives meaning to those dispositions. Thus, to use Goldsteins's example, we can explain the dispositions of individual Huguenots in terms of socially induced dispositions. Rather than explaining Huguenots' dispositions in terms of an ontology of human nature, which held that these individuals' behaviour was a direct reflection of human nature, or their unique individual mental states. Gellner argues that the individualist may argue that every social event depends upon individuals acting upon their individual - and asocial - dispositions. To this Gellner argues thus

Now this must be conceded: if Individualism is to degenerate into what could be called social Monadism, the desperate incorporation of complex and diffuse relations into the related terms of individuals, then it must be admitted to be true 'in a sense'. 'Algy met a bear, the bear was bulgy, the bulge was Algy'; the individual may have consumed what Durkheim and others have called social facts, but he will still bulge most uncomfortably, and Algy will still be there. I suspect that actual investigators will often, though perhaps not always, prefer to have Algy outside the bear (1969:267-8).

Gellner goes on to argue that in trying to explain dispositions in a purely individualistic sense, one either invents dispositions in an *ad hoc* way, or alternatively, one relies upon 'highly generalized social factors' to explain dispositions (1969:268). That is, to explain

dispositions, in the latter case, one makes a general reference to the social context. This leads Gellner to state that '[h]istory is *about* chaps. It does not follow that its explanations are always in terms of chaps. Societies are what people do, but social scientists are not biographers *en grande série*' (1969:268. Emphasis in original).

Similarly, Mandelbaum argues that the concepts in 'sociological language "S"' are irreducible to concepts in 'psychological language "P"' without remainder (1992(a): 226). Mandelbaum's point is that statements in the language S cannot be wholly reduced to the language P, as any discussion of individuals actions would draw upon some form of social referent. Mandelbaum gives the example of the institution of marriage changing from monogamous to polygamous marriage within the Mormon community. He argues that this could be translated into statements about the actions of an aggregate of individuals. 'However, it is by no means certain that such translations could be effected without using the concepts which appear in the sociological language' (Mandelbaum 1992(a):227). To discuss the actions of individuals we need to make some reference to a social context. Thus instead of saying that individuals A, B, C, etc., decided to change the institution of marriage, and that this was a direct reflection of individual psychological features, we should say that individuals changed an institution because the socio-historical conditions had changed. Mandelbaum also draws upon the classical example of banking to explain how social concepts are irreducible into individualist concepts. He argues that we can only explain the actions of an individual engaged in a banking transaction by reference to the norms and roles of the banking system, which influence the actions of individuals. Without such social reference, we could not understand why a bank teller behaved in different ways at the bank and at a party (1992(a):225). Thus the dispositions which inform acts are not the independent variable, as there is always some social 'remainder'.

As methodological collectivists recognise the need for reference to social factors, the next step is to enquire as to their definition of social ontology. Here we meet problems.

Gellner says that '[w]e cannot even describe the state of mind of typical individual participants in the situation [military drill] without referring to the situation as a whole' (1969:264). Yet he then goes straight on to say that the patterns of behaviour in different situations 'is not "merely abstracted" but is, as I am somewhat *sheepishly tempted to say*, "really there"' (1969:264. Emphasis added). So, having stressed the need for reference to a social context that is irreducible down to the level of individuals, Gellner feels rather guilty about accepting his conclusion, that social reality is 'more than' individuals.

Mandelbaum considers the issue of ontology when he discusses objections to methodological collectivism. Mandelbaum refers to what he calls the 'ontological objection', which is that without individuals there would be no society or social facts (1992(a):230). Against this he puts forward two arguments. The first is that social facts are not independent of the individuals existing in the present, but that they are independent of individuals in the past, meaning that the past acts of individuals affect actors in the future, because past forms of social organisation influence how people act now. The second argument is that social facts may depend upon individual facts without being identical. The argument here is a bit vague and Mandelbaum uses an analogy to make his point. He says that as the content of consciousness is dependent upon brain states whilst not being identical with brain states, so the 'component parts of a society' are irreducible to individuals (1992(a):231-2). Mandelbaum says that he prefers the second argument to the ontological objection. The reason for this seems to be that the second argument is more intuitive whilst the first makes the issue of definition more pertinent. Of course both raise the question of how to define social reality, but the first response raises this directly, by saying that present actions are in some way *constrained* by the past, whereas the second response relies on metaphor to make its point.

The other objections to methodological collectivism that Mandelbaum considers are the epistemological objection that one cannot observe, or 'point to', social facts, and the

objection that non-individualism is holism. Against the epistemic objection, Mandelbaum argues that such a conception of knowledge cannot understand individuals' intentions as these too are unobservable, and so all it can make reference to are observed acts (1992(a):233). If we could make reference to individual intentions then, according to Mandelbaum, there is no reason why we should not refer to social statuses and roles, which are also not observable as such. Against the charge of holism he argues that it is perhaps worth suggesting that if we wish to understand many of the dilemmas by which individuals are faced, we can do no better than to hold the view that there are societal facts which exercise *external constraints over individuals* no less than there are facts concerning individual volition which often come into conflict with these constraints (1992(a):234. Emphasis added).

Thus social facts may be *external constraints*, but individuals still have free will.⁸

The rejection of empiricism in the form of the epistemic objection to methodological collectivism should not prevent us from observing that Mandelbaum, like Gellner, does retain a tacit empiricism *qua* underlabourer. This empiricism is the reason why Gellner is so 'sheepish' about the real existence of social facts, and it also accounts for Mandelbaum's reticence to define social ontology. In Mandelbaum's words, '[t]o be sure, I have not attempted to say what position should be designated to societal facts when one is constructing a general ontology' (1992(a):232). Neither Mandelbaum nor Gellner define what exactly the social reality is that is irreducible to individuals, and so we have no way

⁸ Note that Mandelbaum 1992(b) holds that it is possible to refer to some forms of socio-historic laws without entailing reification or determinism. Such laws are referred to as 'functional' and 'abstractive'. What this means is that taking a synchronic rather than diachronic approach, one may refer to specific elements, rather than 'global laws', saying that in certain situations, the outcome will necessarily reflection the constituent aspects of the situation. This is against holism and historicism because it is not discussing fixed general laws or temporal laws. Instead it is saying that certain specific situations will have certain specific outcomes. So, social reality is still defined as only an external constraint, and not as enabling as well as constraining.

of knowing how it *constrains* individuals. A tacit empiricism precludes a defined ontology, which means that methodological collectivism, like methodological individualism, begs the question about what social reality actually is.

Further, it is important to note that Mandelbaum regards social facts as an *external constraint* upon individuals, which is why in his argument against the third objection to methodological collectivism, he argues that individuals may act back upon and resist the external constraining influence of social facts (1992(a):234). Similarly, Gellner refers to the individual / bear swallowing Durkheimian social facts (which were objective, external and constraining) / Algy (1969:267-8). The problem here is that if dispositions are to be understood in terms of social influences, then one ought not to define social facts as solely external and constraining. For if one does, then the outcome is an holistic determinism. The reason for this is quite simple. Dispositions and actions based on dispositions are socially induced, and if the concept one has of the social realm beyond individuals is one of external constraint, then it follows that dispositions will be a product of the external and constraining social facts. Thus behaviour will mirror the existing social facts: behaviour will be determined by the prevailing social structures. Therefore we can abandon any reference to inner states such as dispositions, as we would have a behaviouristic model of behaviour, whereby bodily acts were to be explained solely by reference to external constraining social facts.

Now it may be pointed out that Mandelbaum does say that individuals can act back upon social facts. In order to sustain such a notion though one would have to say that individual dispositions were an independent variable, and that dispositions enabled the individual to exert a free will over social facts. Such a position would, *contra* methodological collectivism, support the methodological individualist notion that dispositions were *individual* and not *social*, and the individualist argument that reference to social facts entailed holism, as social facts were a reified non-human causal force over

human conduct. In other words, the external constraint of social facts would be reduced into individual dispositions, in order to avoid a deterministic holism.

To sum up then, we can say that methodological collectivism correctly notes the flaws with methodological individualism, by pointing out that we cannot reduce down to the level of individuals without remainder. Any reference to individual dispositions and acts draws upon social referents to contextualise the dispositions and acts. However methodological individualists tacitly admit as much by including reference to situational logics and inter-relations. Moreover, the key problem with methodological individualism, *viz.* its failure to define 'situations', owing to its empiricism, is replicated in the failure of methodological collectivism to define social facts. Plenty of reference is made to a social reality that is more than individuals, but neither Gellner nor Mandelbaum tell us what this social reality really is. We are told that it is external and constraining, but this does not help at all. For such a conception of social reality results in a determinism when coupled to the argument that dispositions are socially induced. To say that dispositions are a dependent variable, and that they are dependent upon social facts which are external and constraining is to say that dispositions are epiphenomena of social facts.

(6) Conclusion

Empiricism acts as a negative underlabourer for methodological individualism because it prevents any reference to a social reality that is irreducible to individuals. To be consistently empiricist would entail positivistic individualism, and against this, methodological individualists violated the underlabourer by introducing reference to social situations. However, to apply methodological individualism in methodology would be to use a question-begging reference to undefined social situations, which would mean that methodology was arbitrary, to the extent that social situations could be interpreted in ways that prioritised either agency or situation / structural constraints. There would be no

guiding precepts to explain how the social context enabled and constrained agency, or how the social context influenced but did not determine agency.

Methodological collectivism was also prevented from defining a social ontology because of its adherence to a moderate empiricism, fearing that such references would entail reified holism. Part of the reason for this concern was the definition of social facts as external constraints, rather than as enablements and constraints. Such a definition leads to a dichotomy between individuals with free will and structures that determine behaviour, meaning that too much emphasis on the latter entails holism. Unfortunately the reticence of methodological collectivists to define social structures did not prevent determinism. This is because if we accept their argument then dispositions are epiphenomena of structures. In which case, we would have a definitive ontology, whereby knowledge of behaviour could be read-off from an ontology of structures, or read-into any observed behaviour. Thus methodological collectivism could end up as a form of the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, because in knowing the structures which constituted the social whole, one would know all the causes of human behaviour.

Methodological individualism may also be taken to give a definitive ontology, in terms of an ontology of human being, if one accepted Gellner's charge of psychologism, but as we saw though, methodological individualism argued against this, to refer to social situations.

So, methodological individualism anticipated the position which I refer to as the sociological logic of immediacy. Methodological collectivism tried to overcome the problems with methodological individualism, but it misunderstood the problem, and ended up begging the question and resulting in the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy. The debates in the later literature move from empiricism to a post-Wittgensteinian emphasis on practices, but the problem with the sociological logic of immediacy remains, with a definitive ontology of human being or social structures being implied by such theories.

Chapter Three

Post-Wittgensteinian Pragmatism:

Rorty, Epistemology And Politics

(1) Introduction

(1.1) Post-Wittgensteinian Pragmatism And Social Science

If realist anti-foundationalism were adopted then this would not only overcome the philosophical logic of immediacy (i.e. foundationalist epistemology and truth-relativism), but it could also act as a negative underlabourer for the social sciences. In its capacity as such a negative underlabourer, realist anti-foundationalism would proscribe theories based upon epistemic immediacy, so it would proscribe the use of empiricism. If one did base social science methodology on the empiricist notion that the ‘facts’ are manifest, then the result, to recap on the argument of chapter two, would be: (1) an extreme individualism that could not describe individual acts; (2) abstracted empiricism which failed to explain the context or why correlations were causal relations; or (3), methodological individualism which begged the question about defining social reality, meaning that methodology would be arbitrary.

An alternative to positivism may be ‘postmodernism’, but I agree with Rorty’s critique of postmodernism (set out below), which is that: (1) it is based upon some definitive ontology of the ‘Other’; (2) a ‘deconstructionist’ ‘method’ for ‘unveiling’ the truth as it ‘really is’; and (3) that it is of little practical use, becoming arcane theory for the sake of arcane theory; which, we can note, ends up in a relativist position, holding that everything

is a construct of ‘discourse’.¹ Using my terms of reference, this would mean that postmodernism was premised upon the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, the foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy, and the relativist philosophical logic of immediacy, respectively. However, this is not to imply a convergence between Rorty’s position and mine. Rather, it serves to signal that as soon as one moves beyond the *positivist* veneration for putatively manifest ‘facts’, and currently fashionable ‘*postmodern*’ approaches which explicitly reject the notions of truth (even though reference to the other may imply a definitive truth claim, and deconstruction is often turned into a mechanical method *qua* algorithm to attain the Truth), *one is left with a choice between post-Wittgensteinianism and realism.*

Post-Wittgensteinianism is concerned with understanding practices, or how people ‘go on’ in ‘forms of life’. This post-Wittgensteinianism has two forms: pragmatic and sociological. The former is espoused by Putnam (see chapter one) and Rorty (this chapter), whilst one version (the contemporaneous version) of latter is espoused by Giddens (see chapter four). Putnam has already been discussed in the context of the philosophical logic of immediacy, whereby it was argued that his ‘internal realism’ results in truth-relativism; and in this chapter, it will be argued that Rorty’s ‘anti-representationalist’ argument about knowledge also results in truth-relativism. Obviously any form of truth-relativism would preclude social science as there could be no way to gain a critical distance from the prevailing social norms, and no way to make a meaningful truth claim, as all views would be equally true.

¹ Of course postmodernism may also take the form of qualitative research, where the researcher seeks to avoid imposing their narrative on the respondent’s reply, so as to avoid doing intellectual violence to that person’s subjectivity. This meets the problem though that the less interpretation provided, the less informative the data are going to be, with the *reductio ad absurdum* of this position being that permanent recording of lay conversations ought to replace any form of social science. Another form of postmodern approach would be to eschew truth claims and focus instead on rhetorical manoeuvring. Such a view is dealt with by Norris 1993, who argues that the outcome is a loss of criticism, with the status quo being justified by default, given the impossibility of saying why there are real problems. Note that a similar point is made against Rorty by Geras 1995 (a) and (b).

As regards social science, Rorty would reject the attempt to argue that realist anti-foundationalism can act as a positive underlabourer for social science methodology by being complemented with ‘social realism’. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, realism, for Rorty, hopes that knowledge mirrors facts, with ontology being a definitive list of all the relevant facts (i.e. realism is perceived as a form of foundationalism and essentialism, respectively). Secondly, it is not possible to have a methodology (meaning specific theories and empirical research), which has some form of truth-content about an object of study beyond the theory, i.e. theory and empirical research cannot ‘represent’ some real object external to their own perspective. Instead of being concerned with *knowing* what is going on, Rorty’s pragmatism leads him to focus on *doing*. What this means is that he is concerned to justify *liberalism as a political philosophy* by arguing that it allows individuals the *freedom to go on in ways that are self-enriching*; and to explain political *policy-formation* in terms of ‘practices’, dealing with *reactive piece-meal problem-solving*, rather than ‘theory’ which purports to give us ‘truth’ by somehow mirroring something beyond the perspective of a theory.

In the course of this chapter it will be argued that Rorty’s post-Wittgensteinian pragmatic approach to politics is premised upon the logic of immediacy, in the form of positivism and a definitive ontology of human being. This, together with the argument about truth-relativism, means that *post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism is untenable because it ends up being based upon a definitive account of knowing and being*: we have a relativism whereby to know the norms is to know the truth; a positivism which holds that the truth is manifest; and a definitive ontology of human being, from which all behaviour can be explained in an *a priori* fashion. In other words, post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism cannot be ‘better’ (i.e. more ‘useful’) than realism, because the attempt to ‘deflate’ the ‘realist’ attempt at providing a definitive grasp of the world (by having an immediate access to the facts or essential properties of the world), results in an inflated position,

which seeks definitive knowledge itself. Moreover, realism is misunderstood, because as was argued in chapter one, metaphysical realism, as Searle pointed out, says nothing about epistemology, and realist anti-foundationalism holds that our knowledge is conceptually mediated and fallible. Further, as will be argued in chapter five, the social realist theory of social reality is not an essentialist attempt to have definitive knowledge of every specific structure.

If Rorty's position were tenable then we would have to accept that post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism, rather than realist anti-foundationalism, was the alternative to foundationalism and essentialism, and that social science could not hope to exist as a discipline which gave us (some form of) truth about social reality. In other words, post-Wittgensteinianism could be used as a negative underlabourer to reject foundationalism, and 'realism', together with social science *per se*. As I argue though, post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism is not the way to overcome positivism and postmodernism, together with, more generally, foundationalism, essentialism and the truth-relativist antithesis of such positions, because it merely replicates such positions. Instead we need to turn to realist anti-foundationalism because this, unlike post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism, can say how we have a conceptually mediated knowledge of an external reality, which includes social reality.

The other form of post-Wittgensteinianism (i.e. Giddens' 'sociological' post-Wittgensteinianism) breaks with the notion that ontology and epistemology must be eschewed, with reference only being to practices, by seeking to develop a general ontology to guide methodology - i.e. it seeks some general precepts to explain how we may approach the complexity of the social world. This ontology though, developed by Giddens, is also premised upon the logic of immediacy; whereas social realism can avoid such problems and so it can complement realist anti-foundationalism, to say how social scientific knowledge is possible. However, our task now is to examine the work of Rorty

rather than Giddens, and to begin this, I will now begin to describe Rorty's post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism in more detail.

(1.2) Introducing Rorty's Pragmatism: From Certainty To Contingency

Rorty's pragmatism, or 'anti-representationalism', is post-Wittgensteinian in the sense that Rorty wanted to shift attention from *abstract philosophical* (epistemological) issues, to a post-philosophical concern with *practices*, meaning ways of 'going on' within a 'form of life', and how individuals follow public / social rules within a 'language game'. As with Wittgenstein, Rorty does not try to define what a language game is, because that would mean stepping outside a set of practices to seek a general ontology. This would be regarded as erroneous because one could not step outside a perspective, or in this case a language game, to procure such a view, and further, there could be no general defining features. One could not say that under a multiplicity of practices there were certain essential features, without turning to an essentialist argument. Such essentialism would maintain that human nature, someone's sex and / or 'race', or capitalism, etc., could be defined in terms of certain key properties, or essences, and that this would furnish a definitive ontology, whereby one would know all there was to know about social relations. In contrast to this essentialist search for a definitive ontology, Rorty's emphasis is on practices.

For Rorty, the *practices* of the natural sciences can be said to 'work', in the sense that natural science is of practical utility. Natural scientific practices help us *go on* in the natural world. This does not mean though that Rorty would accept that science furnishes *knowledge*. Science may work, but this should not lead us to talk of 'knowledge', for we cannot conclude that science has a relationship of immediacy to The Truth. Science helps us go on in the natural environment, and we should not try and turn to philosophy to explain how this is possible, or how beliefs mirror non-beliefs. *Consequently Rorty is*

opposed to the Lockean notion of foundationalist underlabouring. Scientific methodology does not need to be philosophically informed, by a guiding philosophy of knowledge, because there is no 'algorithm' with which methodology can be guided to The Truth. So, beliefs do not mirror non-beliefs, or have a relationship of epistemic immediacy, and there is no code to instruct methodology to mirror all The Facts, but scientific practices are of practical utility. To be sure, Rorty does say that his pragmatism 'clears the road', or underlabours (1998(a):214-5 and Footnote 26), but all this means is that pragmatism will warn us against trying to explain why practices work, by using a philosophy of knowledge, such as empiricism. It commits us to no methodological principles unlike empiricist (or realist) underlabouring: it is purely negative.

A similar view obtains for the social sciences. On the one hand, Rorty would reject the idea that the social sciences could make truth claims about individuals, groups, institutions, etc., as he rejects the notion that concepts can become something called truth by mirroring discrete facts. On the other hand, social science may 'work', in that policy-decisions may be judged to work, or to fail. In other words, the closer social scientific research comes to practical policy making, the better. If social science concerns practical decisions then it is acceptable, but if it entails theorising, then it is unacceptable. For theorising is removed from practices, and its purpose is to make truth claims by interpreting research, or to try and guide research using some prior conceptual framework, which presumes that such a conceptual framework can provide the algorithm for methodology to attain access to The Truth. Hence Rorty would be utterly opposed to the attempt to use a meta-theoretical ontology (as briefly mentioned in chapter two, and defended in chapter five) to define social reality, and act as a positive underlabourer, supplying some general precepts to guide methodology.

This pragmatic emphasis on practices is therefore 'post-philosophical', in the sense that it wants to change the terms of debate from philosophical questions about truth and

knowledge, and abstract theories about the social and political realm, to practical questions concerning how we go on, within a particular form of life. This post-philosophical stance is opposed not just to the foundationalist search for epistemological certainty, but also to the postmodernist view that all meaning is unstable and endlessly deferred. Rorty does not accept the postmodern view that everything is a construct of 'discourse', and that discourses may have their pretensions debunked or 'deconstructed', by showing that their putative truth claims are devoid of stable meaning. Such postmodernism may oppose foundationalism, but it is of no *use* because it remains a *theoretical debunking* exercise, divorced from *practical* concerns.

Thus Rorty defends science, which postmodernism would regard as a technocratic Enlightenment discourse of instrumental rationality, that was ultimately devoid of meaning, even though Rorty rejects the notion that science mirrors The Facts. Similarly, Rorty does not want to reject liberal democracy as a discourse whose claims about human nature and justice are arbitrary constructions in discourse. Rather, Rorty wants to defend liberal democratic *practices*, whilst rejecting the *philosophical justifications* which make *truth claims* about an ontology of human being. He does this by arguing that liberal democratic practices are good for those who have been socialised as liberal democrats. Rorty's emphasis on practical policy-making decisions is also contrasted with postmodern deconstructions. The latter are taken by Rorty to be the latest version of 'ideology-critique', whereby abstract theory is used to debunk the claims of the prevailing / dominant bourgeois ideology / discourse; with such debunking leading us to an underlying Truth or essence.

Rorty wants to move from the certainty sought by foundationalist epistemology and political arguments which hold that liberalism corresponds to a fixed human essence, in order to argue that truth and human being are *contingent* upon their social environment. The result however is that Rorty embraces *certainty*, because his arguments turn on the

philosophical and sociological logics of immediacy. As regards the philosophical logic of immediacy, Rorty's rejection of truth results in truth-relativism, whereby to know the social norms is to know the truth and, later on, his arguments about policy formation turn on a positivistic conception of political issues as discrete empirical 'facts'. Thus Rorty's philosophy turns on both the relativist and foundationalist philosophical logics of immediacy in different places. As regards the sociological logic of immediacy, Rorty imports an essence for the self, whereby a definitive ontology of human being is used to justify liberalism and explain away issues of inequality (as reflections of innate ability), which means that he ends up using the individualist sociological logic of immediacy. In short, what Rorty takes away with one hand is replaced by the other: he denies foundationalism to become a relativist, before returning to foundationalism; and he denies an ontology of human being, only to rely on it later on.

(2) Realism And Representation

Rorty uses the term 'realism' to refer to philosophical positions which argue that we can have *knowledge of an external reality*. This realism is premised upon a correspondence theory of truth, because it holds that knowledge is to be defined in terms of beliefs corresponding to non-beliefs. We can make a distinction here between a linguistic correspondence theory and metaphysic of mind correspondence theory. Beginning with the former means reversing the temporal sequence in which the philosophies developed, but this will aid exposition. Rorty argues that the twentieth century debates about knowledge turned from the philosophy of mind (discussed below) to the linguistic thesis that a proposition was truth if and only if (iff) it corresponded to an external referent (1994(a):2). Against this Rorty argues that such a notion of reference requires one to assume a God's eye view by stepping outside language and perspectives, to see if they do indeed correspond to an external reality (1994(a):6).

As regards the metaphysic of mind correspondence theory of truth, this concerns the idea that knowledge is possible because the mind has an immediate access to the manifest truth. In other words, the debate turned upon metaphysical speculation about the mind, rather than on arguments concerning how language hooks up with reality. Rorty regards the philosophy of mind as a presumptuous attempt on the part of philosophy to explain why it was that science worked. Such an endeavour may be referred to as presumptuous because it presumed that the success of science was in need of explanation, and that such an explanation was to turn upon anthropocentric terms of reference, using the properties of the human mind. Clearly there is a residue of the theological metaphysic here, for as religion had explained this world in terms of other-worldly activity, so philosophy sought to explain mastery of this world in terms of something removed from the material world. To be sure, God had been replaced by 'rational man', or the mind of rational man to be more precise, but the point was the same, *viz.* that practical activity in the world needed to be explained by something beyond our practices.

What this means is that the search for epistemic foundations to furnish certainty, and the positive underlabouring task, with philosophy being separate from scientific methodology, in order to explain how that methodology worked, are necessarily linked, for Rorty (and thus, conversely, it would follow that to reject foundationalism is to reject positive underlabouring). Philosophy sought to explain how knowledge was possible and therefore it would assume the mantle of a 'general theory of representation' (1994(b):3) which, *a fortiori*, means that it could legislate upon different intellectual areas of enquiry, including scientific methodology. As Rorty puts it '[p]hilosophy as a discipline thus sees itself as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art or religion' (1994(b):3). To know the mind is to know that we can know, because to know the mind is to know how knowledge is constituted. From this it follows

that the search for knowledge, in any area of study, must conform to the dictates of the philosophy of knowledge.

Rorty argues that

The very idea of 'philosophy' as something distinct from 'science' would make very little sense without the Cartesian claim that by turning inward we could find ineluctable truth, and the Kantian claim that this truth imposes limits on the possible results of empirical inquiry (1994(b):9).

To keep philosophy separate from science, and to secure a role for philosophy, given the *apparent* success of the nascent natural sciences, philosophy had to explain what it was that science was really doing, by saying how scientific knowledge could be *knowledge*.

Without such an account of knowledge, the apparent success of science would be nothing but an illusion. Philosophy had therefore moved from being the *handmaiden of theology* to the *master-builder of science*, because given its unique understanding of how knowledge was possible, it could legislate upon empirical investigation of the world.

Once rational man was the master of his mind he could then master the natural world. To *separate philosophy from science is thus to separate knowing from doing*, in order to explain why certain activities (such as science) were successful. The problem though is that in turning from the world to the mind, the result can only be a detached idealism, which is why the foundationalist search for certainty, in the form of a manifest truth, ended up with Kant's transcendental idealism. Hence Rorty argues that the defining feature of philosophy after Descartes' turn to the mind, was 'methodological solipsism' (1994(b):191), because what could be known ended up being defined in terms of the individual's mind. Rorty notes that when Locke responded to Descartes' notion that knowledge was *a priori*, to argue that we had *a posteriori* knowledge via the senses, his

distinction between primary and secondary qualities gave the game away. 'This distinction was so dubious as to lead us, via Berkeley and Hume, to Kant's rather desperate suggestion that the key only worked because we had, behind our own backs, constructed the lock it was to fit' (Rorty 1982:192).

Thus the attempt to argue that we had an immediate access to a manifest truth via experience ran into problems, because the distinction between properties in the object itself and properties relative to the observer could not obtain. It could not obtain because all experienced properties were relative to the observer, in that we experienced ideas of sensation, and not object 'speaking in its own language'. Kant's response to the problems of previous philosophy was to hold that we had a fixed set of categories, which decoded our disparate experiences. However, with Kant's transcendental idealism, the object of knowledge (the lock) was constituted partly by the categories in the mind (the key). This was not to argue for metaphysical idealism, but given that we could never know the noumenal realm, and that the categories played quite a strong role in constituting the object of knowledge, the notion of a reality beyond our categories could easily become redundant. At the very least, the world which was supposed to be known by the properties of the mind has receded from the remit of the mind, which seemed best suited to knowing itself.

At this point, one may be tempted to adopt an irrealism, such as: (1) the sceptical denial of knowledge (and science), (2) the truth-relativist view that all knowledge is wholly relative to contingent social norms (so science only exists for those who believe in the norms of science), or (3) the idealist view that there is nothing beyond our ideas (so science is just about ideas). Rorty would counsel against such a reaction however, because such irrealism is still within the confines of what Rorty (1994(a)) refers to as the 'representationalist problematic'. The sceptical or relativist denial of knowledge, and the idealist argument that we know ideas, are operating within the frame of reference set by

the realist conviction that beliefs can represent - or correspond to - non-beliefs. To argue for or against representation is to remain with the problematic that turns on the issue of beliefs being able, or unable, to represent something beyond them. What is needed, according to Rorty, is not an argument defending or rejecting the idea about beliefs corresponding to an external reality, but a break from this paradigm, to a pragmatic focus on ways for going on, within different forms of life.²

(3) Anti-Representationalism And The Philosophical Logic Of Immediacy

Instead of swapping realism for irrealism, we ought to swap the representationalist problematic for the anti-representationalist problematic. Whereas the former is concerned with the relationship - or not - between an individual's beliefs and non-beliefs, the latter is concerned with practices within different cultures. Whereas realism searches for 'skyhooks', to pull the mind beyond the corrupting influence of social and cultural beliefs *qua* prejudices which impede epistemic immediacy, Rorty's anti-representationalism has a pragmatic concern with improving our practices for going on. As Rorty puts it, '[b]y an anti-representational account I mean one which *does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right*, but rather as a matter of *acquiring habits of action for coping with reality*' (1994(a):1. Emphasis added).

This does not mean that Rorty is arguing for a form of behaviourism whereby the body acts on practices which work (positive reinforcement stimuli) and avoids practices which do not work (negative reinforcement stimuli). Confusion may arise though when Rorty refers to his position as 'epistemological behaviourism' (1994(b):174). Rorty says this in the context of signalling his affiliation with the work of the later Wittgenstein. This may

² This critique of epistemology is similar to Putnam's arguments, and although Rorty regards Putnam as a fellow post-Wittgensteinian pragmatist, Putnam rejects the link, arguing that Rorty is a relativist. The 'debate' between them occurs mainly in scattered references in various works, although Rorty does address the issues specifically at one point: see Rorty 1993 (reprinted in 1998(a):43-62). For defence of Putnam's

be doubly confusing as it may lead one to think that Rorty reads Wittgenstein as a behaviourist, and that he agrees with such behaviourism. Wittgenstein could be read as a behaviourist because he rejects any reference to an inner self, and argues that people's actions are based on following public rules within their language game. Thus social action is based on following public rules, concerning appropriate behaviour in particular circumstances. A behaviourist reading would hold that the social rules constituted the positive and negative reinforcement stimuli which determined the behaviour of the body, which did not possess an 'inner self'. Although there is not the space to go into a detailed interpretation of Wittgenstein, we can note the following. Unlike behaviourism, Wittgenstein would reject the denial of the self, and that view that the body was a determined mechanism (controlled by external stimuli). For Wittgenstein it makes no sense to deny the existence of a self because the notion of an inner self is itself empty. The denial of an empty proposition is itself empty.³ Further, to say that the body was a determined mechanism would be to assume some form of meta-language game, via which one could explain all forms of individual behaviour, whatever the form of life, or community, involved. Against this, Wittgenstein would argue that one could not step outside a language game to assume such a master-view of reality-in-itself. One could not explain all forms of action via a master-ontology of the body.

This raises the spectre of relativism, and Wittgenstein's arguments are ambivalent on this topic. On the one hand, Wittgenstein argues that if a lion could talk we could not understand him (1995:223), which means that language games are hermetic. Here normative relativism would lead onto truth-relativism, because one could not step beyond the community's norm to understand how others go on in a different language game, which implies that one could not recognise that one's views about an external reality were

view see C.G. Hartz 1991. For reading of Putnam which agrees with me that he is a relativist, see Trigg 1989, 1993:116-121 and 1997.

³ This was pointed out to me in conversation by Professor Roger Trigg.

fallible. One would have no notion of truth that was external to the norms of the language game. On the other hand though, Wittgenstein does make reference to human universals, when he talks of the common behaviour of mankind (1995:82. # 206). A similar divide occurs with Rorty's arguments, but before pursuing that issue, we need to connect Rorty's pragmatism to the above quick sketch of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

Although Rorty's pragmatism puts the emphasis on practices for coping with reality this does not exclude any reference to beliefs. Rorty's epistemological behaviourism is Wittgensteinian in the sense that for Rorty, actors' beliefs are connected to their social practices, which follow the rules of a language game; and beliefs do not picture or mirror non-beliefs *qua* discrete facts. Thus instead of having an 'atomistic' view whereby a proposition is justified if it 'corresponds' to a discrete fact, we have an 'holistic' view, whereby justification of beliefs is grounded in the community's norms and practices, i.e. its customary ways of going on. As Rorty puts it '[c]onversational justification, so to speak, is naturally holistic, whereas the notion of justification embedded in the epistemological tradition is reductive and atomistic' (1994(b):170). Such a position then is holistic in the sense that to understand a belief one must understand that it is a component of a broader language game. This is 'behaviourist' in the sense that we are dealing with beliefs as being connected with the practical activity - or behaviour - within a particular community, and that there is no transcendent essence for the self which can step beyond social perspectives to see that propositions do indeed correspond to atomistic facts. Instead of a transcendent self which has an immediate access to a manifest truth, there are people within different language games that go on in different ways.

Rorty argues that this anti-representationalism 'leaves one without a skyhook with which to escape from the ethnocentrism produced by acculturation, [and] that the liberal culture of recent times has found a strategy for avoiding the disadvantages of ethnocentrism' (1994(a):2). So, what we believe reflects our spatial and temporal location

within a particular community, and we cannot climb beyond this to see things as they really are, but liberalism rests on tolerance which helps foster new views and better practices for going on, by allowing for critique and the exchange of ideas. Contrary to deterministic behaviourism then, we can challenge and improve our community's ways of going on, given a culture of tolerance. The argument here is close to Popper's (1962) notion that an 'open society' (i.e. liberal democratic) allows science to flourish. Popper argues that as liberalism allows free speech, critique, and the open dissemination of ideas, science can freely develop without being retarded by having to conform to some politico-philosophical ideology, such as 'dialectical materialism'. Given free speech, science can freely develop.⁴ Rorty is advocating a similar argument because he is saying that although we cannot escape our enculturation, liberalism fosters tolerance and indeed encourages dissent, so we can improve our practices. We cannot find the finished Truth, and nor can we step outside the norms of our culture so our beliefs correspond to reality-in-itself, but we can have *progress*, in the sense that we can *improve our ways of going on*, and *liberalism allows the freedom to do this* (in science, and culture more generally).

This leads Rorty to argue that scientists should be regarded as moral exemplars, not because they have replaced religion to find The Truth in a secular way, but because science is based on 'unforced agreement' (1994(a):39). He says that

On this view, to say that truth will win in [an open] encounter is not to make a metaphysical claim about the connection between human reason and the nature of things. It is merely to say that the best way to find out what to believe is to listen to as many suggestions and arguments as you can (Rorty 1994(a):39).

⁴ Gellner 1993:51 criticises Popper for putting the emphasis on the difference between liberal and Stalinist states, arguing that there was no 'Big Ditch', or discontinuity, in scientific method (*viz.* trial and error) from Ancient times to modern, except when authoritarian states perverted this tried and tested method. For Gellner this is too politically driven, and amounts to an ideological linkage of free enquiry, and scientific success, with commercial interests, or the 'free' market.

We can go on in better ways, not by getting better representations, but by improving our practices in the light of open debate. Scientists are to be praised therefore as exemplary liberals rather than as Modern Schoolmen.

Before dealing with Rorty's views on liberalism, I will concentrate here upon the notion that we can improve our beliefs and practices. Such a notion requires some criteria by which to judge one way of going on more favourably than another. There are three forms of criteria by which one may make such a judgement. One may say that: (1) the standards for judgement are wholly internal to a conceptual framework / set of cultural norms, (2) the standards for judgement turn on beliefs corresponding to an external referent, with correspondence implying a relationship of epistemic immediacy, (3) or that judgement turns upon correspondence between a theory and an object, with correspondence turning upon fallible conceptual schemes approximating to the truth (as argued for in chapter one).

Rorty's rejection of representationalism for pragmatism can be read as supporting position (1). He argues that

All talk about *doing things to objects* must, in a pragmatic account of inquiry 'into' objects, be paraphraseable as talk about *reweaving beliefs*. [...] Once one drops the traditional opposition between context and thing contextualized, *there is no way to divide things up into those which are what they are independent of context and those which are context-dependent* [...]. For a belief is what it is only by virtue of its position in a web. Once we view the 'representation' and 'aboutness' relations (which some philosophers have supposed to 'fix the content' of belief) as fallout from a given contextualization of those beliefs, *a belief becomes simply a position in a web* (1994(a):98. Emphasis added).

Here then the object of knowledge is reducible into the conceptual scheme used to get knowledge. No reference can be made to anything other than the beliefs of the conceptual scheme. In which case, questions of reality would become questions of knowledge and questions of truth would be reduced into the origin of a belief within a conceptual scheme. What could be talked about, would be what could be known, and what could be known were the beliefs that constituted a conceptual scheme. It follows from this that truth would also be reducible into a conceptual scheme, because to collapse the distinction between the object of knowledge and the beliefs about the object, is to make beliefs self-referential. In which case, a belief would be true by virtue of its origin within a conceptual scheme. Thus we have the epistemic fallacy, as ontology is reduced into epistemology, by conflating the object to be known into the conceptual scheme with which we have 'knowledge'; and the genetic fallacy, as truth turns on the origin of a concept in a self-referential conceptual scheme. In short, to collapse the distinction between the object of knowledge and conceptual schemes is to predicate explanation on the relativist philosophical logic of immediacy. The result being that any belief within a conceptual framework or language game would be justified because beliefs were self-referential.

Rorty would of course object, by pointing out that truth-relativism was predicated upon the representationalist problematic and that as he was not concerned with issues of how beliefs did, or did not, mirror external non-beliefs, then he could not be a relativist. As he argues, '[n]ot having *any* epistemology, *a fortiori*, [the pragmatist] does not have a relativistic one' (1994(a):24. Emphasis in original). The problem though is that relativism is an anti-epistemology rather than an epistemology. If epistemology concerns the relationship of beliefs with an external reality (whether the relationship is one of immediacy or not), and relativism holds that what is true is relative to a community's norms, then relativism is based on negating any reference to a reality beyond norms (or conceptual schemes). In other words, truth-relativism is opposed to any form of

epistemology, whether foundational or anti-foundational, as it rejects the notion of truth claims being made about referents external to norms or concepts. Relativism reduces truth into norms, and thus renders the notion of truth redundant. Truth becomes a mere synonym for norms. Thus an enquiry into justification will turn on an enquiry into the origin of a belief within a particular set of norms. So, to reject epistemology *per se* is, in effect, the same as adopting a truth-relativist position, as both cut beliefs free from a relationship to an external reality. In which case 'progress' becomes a meaningless noun, as whatever beliefs obtain are true within one community; whilst other beliefs are necessarily false (except for those in different communities).

A better denial of relativism would be to say that as pragmatism is concerned with improving practices, or finding better ways of going on, then there must be some reference to an external reality. After all, Rorty is happy to admit that 'science works', as it helps us 'cope with reality', and he only takes issue with the attempt to explain why science works, using foundationalist epistemology. Without any reference to an external reality, with which our beliefs and practices connect, in some way, it would make little sense to argue that liberalism is good for promoting a culture of open discussion which will allow for the improvement of our ways of going on (including scientific practices).

Despite saying that there is no distinction between the context and thing contextualised, Rorty does actually make a distinction between the 'thing' itself and the context in which it is understood. Having put a lot of emphasis on denying that beliefs correspond to non-beliefs, Rorty argues that this should not be read as a form of idealism, whereby all we can refer to are self-referential beliefs. He argues that unlike idealism, pragmatism has

a wholehearted acceptance of the brute, inhuman, causal stubbornness of the gold or the text. But they think this should not be confused with, so to speak, an *intentional*

stubbornness, an insistence on being *described in a certain way*, its *own way*. The object can, given a prior agreement on a language game, cause us to hold beliefs, but it cannot suggest which beliefs to hold. It can only do things which our practices will react to with preprogrammed changes in beliefs (1994(a):83-4. Emphasis in original).

Similarly, Rorty argues that the pragmatist

agrees that there is such a thing as brute physical resistance - the pressure of light waves on Galileo's eye, or of the stone on Dr. Johnson's boot. But he sees no way of transferring this nonlinguistic brutality to *facts*, to the truth of sentences. The way in which a blank takes on the form of the die which stamps it has no analogy to the relation between the truth of a sentence and the event the sentence is about. When the die hits the blank something causal happens, but as many *facts* are brought into the world as there are languages for describing that causal transaction. [...] To say that we must have respect for the facts is just to say that we must, if we are to play a certain language game, play by the rules (1994(a):81. Emphasis in original).

Now there is something beyond the context, or the web of beliefs, and it has some causal effect as regards those beliefs. The 'brute causal stubbornness' of an object *exists prior to* any interpretative framework being brought to it.

It may seem that Rorty is now advocating position (3), which holds that we have a fallible and conceptually mediated access to reality. Rorty wants to say that although our beliefs do not mirror reality, there is still a reality beyond our beliefs, which means he is defending the metaphysical realist rejection of idealism.⁵ So, whilst there can be no correspondence in the sense of having a direct access to an external reality, *our beliefs are*

about a reality that has a causal effect upon us, even if it cannot cause us to have a belief which is an epistemic isomorph of a non-belief. The problem though is that beliefs become divorced from the external reality. Rorty may admit that there is a thing beyond the context, and that it has some causal influence over us, but this realm of reality becomes redundant. Rorty is so concerned with avoiding epistemic immediacy, whereby beliefs picture external essences, that he qualifies reality out of the picture, so to speak, by saying that *the object cannot suggest what beliefs to hold*. In other words, *all the work is done by the language game*. We thus have a form of post-Kantianism, with a divide between a knowable phenomenal realm, constituted by a language game, and an unknowable noumenal realm, which can 'cause' us to hold beliefs without suggesting what beliefs to hold. This is an odd use of the noun 'cause', given that to hold any belief not only requires prior agreement on a language game, but that having influenced us via a language game, reality still cannot tell -or even suggest - what beliefs to hold. Reality, in short, has no effective causal power at all, and instead all the explanatory work is done by a language game.

As Rorty puts it, when the die hits the blank there are *as many facts as there are languages* for describing this. All languages for describing this event are therefore of equal value. In other words, Rorty's argument entails the epistemic and genetic fallacies. What we can know is defined in terms of how we can know it (via language games), which is why there are as many facts as languages, and given the loss of any external referent, truth is reducible to a language game. There can be no better or worse languages for describing how the die hits the blank, because what we know is reducible to the language game we have to know it with. Therefore we cannot say that some practices are better than others, because there is no meaningful way to sustain any reference to an extra-discursive reality. We can go on as the language game dictates, but we cannot say that a

⁵ Here I am referring to the metaphysical realism as described and defended in chapter one, rather than

language game is fallible, or that one language game is better than another because, given the loss of an extra-discursive reality, what we can know is wholly reducible to our language game. There may always be a perspective via which we interpret the world, but this does not mean that there can be no truth claims made about the world.

In addition to this relativist form of the philosophical logic of immediacy, Rorty's work also adheres to the positivist / foundationalist version of the philosophical logic of immediacy. This much is suggested in the quoted passages above where Rorty implies that causal relations are to be defined in terms of observed regularities, such as the die hitting the blank and, presumably, leaving an imprint. Where the positivist definition of causal laws as observed constant conjunctions is clear in Rorty's work, is in discussion of physicalism.⁶ Rorty argues that '[p]hysicalism is probably right in saying that we shall someday be able, "in principle", to predict every movement of a person's body [...] by reference to microstructures within his body' (1994:b):354). Later on Rorty has less reservations, and the 'in principle' clause is dropped. He argues that

Every speech, thought, theory, poem, composition, and philosophy *will* turn out to be *completely predictable* in purely naturalistic terms. Some atoms-and-the void account of micro-processes within individual human beings *will permit the prediction of every sound or inscription which will ever be uttered*. There are no ghosts (1994(b):387. Emphasis added).

Rorty does not regard such a deterministic account of behaviour to be a threat to human freedom. This is because: (a) if we retain the 'in principle' version, then conditions will be too complex to carry out a real prediction, 'except as an occasional pedagogical exercise'

Rorty's definition of realism as an epistemic thesis.

⁶ For slightly different accounts of Rorty's positivism, see Bhaskar 1991:5-23, and Harré and Krausz 1996: 204-5.

(1994(b):354); and (b), if drop this qualification, then there is still the fact that there will be many vocabularies to describe humans which are irreducible to atoms-and-the-void accounts (1994(b):388).

With the former account (account (a)), Rorty is arguing that causal laws can be observed in their effects, human behaviour is a result of causal laws, and the cause - effect relationship could be directly observed, *if it were not that there were many other factors at work*. Note though that the complexity clause is qualified itself, when Rorty argues that prediction could occur as an 'occasional pedagogical exercise'. In other words, if the number of causal factors influencing behaviour could be narrowed down, then we could directly observe a causal law by observing how a physical process produced certain types of behaviour. Thus if human behaviour were subject to experimental closure, we could observe causal laws at work. What this means is that Rorty does not just accept the obvious fact that science works, but that he tacitly proffers an explanation of *why* science works, using empiricism as an epistemological underlabourer (rather than an ontology of underlying causal laws which are not observable in their effects). The message given out in the argument on empirical complexity is that causal laws are to be identified in their effects, as observed regularities, and that as observed events are complex, scientific method ought to be based on limiting the number of factors, so that we can just observe the relevant constant conjunction. *Scientific method is to be based upon experimental closure which limits the number of observable factors*.

As regards the latter account (account (b)) about irreducibility, Rorty argues that irreducibility does not entail incompatibility (1994(b):388). What this means is that vocabularies about aesthetic value, morals, political norms, etc., are irreducible to the physicalist vocabulary, but physicalism is still true. This argument though cannot prevent a determinist account of behaviour, because if behaviour *per se* is to be explained by physicalism, then it follows that different types of behaviour, such as formulating

aesthetic, political, and moral arguments (etc.) will be subject to such a reductionist and determinist account too. Thus aesthetic, political, moral, religious, etc., languages will be epiphenomena that are explainable by a reduction down to observable physical causal laws. The languages are obviously incompatible in the sense that they have different frames of reference, yet they are reducible to physicalism, simply because if one accepts physicalist view then it follows that other languages and ways of going on are to be explained by a reduction to the causal laws that control how individuals go on.

Rorty is, as Bhaskar notes, trying to have a Kantian conception of the self as both free and determined. As Kant held that the noumenal self was free, and the phenomenal / empirical self was determined, so Rorty holds that the social self that uses language games is free, whilst the physical self is determined (Bhaskar 1991:47-69). In both cases the self that has free will is redundant, because there is no way to explain how it can influence the determined self. The self which operates in the language game can be explained in terms of the determined brain processes at work in that individual.

So, Rorty rejects the representationalist problematic, defined in terms of realism and anti-realism, in favour of the anti-representationalist problematic. The former concerns the realist attempt to say how knowledge is possible, and the anti-realist (relativist or sceptical) denial of knowledge. The latter moves beyond defences and refutations of how beliefs represent reality, to shift the terms of reference to how we have different customary ways of going on. The problem though is that this pragmatic anti-representationalism collapses into truth-relativism, because beliefs become self-referential, as language games are prevented from being causally influenced by an external reality. Reality cannot 'suggest' what beliefs to hold, or which beliefs not to hold, and so language games become self-referential.

In addition to this, Rorty's account of physicalism indicates that he has a positivistic conception of scientific methodology. Rorty advocates such a physicalism in order to

reject the notion that there is a transcendent self, or metaphysical mind, which stands above its location within a culture. Rorty wants to expunge the Ghost in the machine (1994(b):387). More will be said about this rejection of the transcendent self below, and here we can say that the result was a determinism which would reduce all explanation of behaviour to brain states.⁷

(4) Liberalism And Ethnocentrism

In the rest of this chapter I will turn my attention from epistemological issues *per se* to discuss Rorty's arguments about politics and the ramifications of such arguments for social science. This discussion of politics will cover three topics: Rorty's 'ethnocentrism', Nietzschean liberalism and positivistic-conservatism. A discussion of politics may seem far removed from a discussion of epistemology, but for Rorty the anti-representationalist problematic has a political aspect, in that a concern with how we go on will necessarily concern how we go on in a social and political context. A concern with practices for coping with reality includes the social and political realm of dealing with others.

Rorty wants to defend liberal democracy, but given his anti-representationalism, he cannot argue for liberal democracy by making some truth claim about a universal, pre-social human essence. Thus Rorty cannot make a truth claim about human nature being materially acquisitive, in order to justify liberalism as a political system which allows people the freedom to engage in material competition, with the state regulating such competition to protect private property from being taken illegitimately by force or fraud. Nor can Rorty justify (representative) democracy in terms of individuals being rational, in the sense that they can apply some form of neutral method to select the best representative of their (perceived) interests. This is not to say that people can be characterised as irrational, but rather, it is to say that individuals have no defining essence, and that there is

⁷ Note though that positivism would be opposed to determinism because determinism is a metaphysical

no way to step beyond one's enculturation, or ways of going on in an inherited language game, to base political decisions on the 'facts' about some pre-social human essence, or 'Reason'.

For Rorty the self is a decentred contingency. The self is decentred because there is no central defining essence which separates the self from its location within a particular language game, and so what the self *is*, is contingent upon what the self *does* within a particular language game. Rorty argues that, as noted above, beliefs are 'habits of action' (1994(a):93), meaning that beliefs are connected to communal ways of going on in a language game. Thus to understand the self all one has to do is understand its socio-historical location within a particular language game. Against the metaphor of 'inner mental states' in the 'mind' Rorty argues that

For this traditional metaphor, a non-reductive physicalist model substitutes the picture of a network of beliefs and desires which is continually in process of being rewoven [...].

This network is not one which is rewoven by an agent distinct from the network - a master weaver so to speak. Rather, *it reweaves itself*, in response to stimuli such as new beliefs acquired when, e.g., doors are opened (1994(a):123. Emphasis added).

So, in contrast to the lone mind of foundationalism which transcends social norms to see the manifest truth, we have a self which is contingent upon its socio-historical location, and which reacts to its environment in ways deemed appropriate by the rules of the prevailing language game.

The position that Rorty is in then, is one whereby he wants to defend liberal democracy, whilst arguing that the self, together with, as we saw earlier, truth, is contingent upon the norms of a particular community. *This means that the only defence of*

liberal democracy can be in terms of ethnocentrism. As there can be no reference to 'facts' independent of a given language game, especially facts about human being, there can only be reference to the rules of a language game, or the norms of a particular community.

Political systems are therefore only assessable by reference to their own norms and customary ways of going on. In which case, the anti-representationalist concern for practices which work will, in the context of political practices, mean that *political systems can be defended if they work according to their own terms of reference.* So, providing that liberal democracy works according to its own terms of reference (i.e. providing that liberal democracy *is* actually liberal democracy) then it can be defended as good for liberal democrats. Or, to put it another way, liberal democracy is good for those who have been socialised into being liberal democrats, because liberal democratic practices are good for those who go on in liberal democratic ways. Such an argument is obviously circular, but for Rorty the circularity would be virtuous rather than vicious, because it merely acknowledges that we cannot step beyond our socially contingent perspectives, and that we must judge our political practices in terms of the perspective in which we are located. Just as there is no epistemic foundation for knowledge in the philosophy of mind, so there is no foundation for politics in an ontology of human being. As Wittgenstein argued, '[i]f I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "this is simply what I do"' (1995:85 #217).

There are three points to make about this argument about contingency. The first point is that, as argued in the previous section, the notion of a non-reductive physicalism is a contradiction in terms, because incompatibility is not sufficient to prevent reducibility. A neo-Kantian conception of the self as free and determined is simply untenable. The second point is that in adhering to physicalism Rorty is differing from Wittgenstein, because he is using a master language game to explain how all individuals will go on. Furthermore, in denying the existence of the self (arguing that in place of the inner self /

mind we should talk of determined brain processes), Rorty is differing from Wittgenstein, who held that to deny the existence of the self was as empty as an affirmation of the self. This is not to say that Rorty must adhere to Wittgenstein, but it is slightly incongruous that given a general adherence to Wittgenstein's philosophy, Rorty does give an account of the self, albeit an account of the self as a self-reweaving web. This gives us a hint of what is to come, because it suggests there Rorty does want to say something about the self, rather than dismiss the concept by refusing to discuss it. It suggests that there is 'something at work' which plays an active role in the agency of the individual.

Before pursuing this, we can note the third point, which is that if there is no self which is an active spinner of a web of beliefs, i.e. a 'master weaver', then the decentred self, *qua* network, would be too passive. As Shusterman argues,

this absence of a structuring centre prevents [the self] from being the sort of *Bildungsroman* it seems to want to be. [...] But without such a conception of the self that is capable of identity through change or changing description, there can be no self capable of self-enrichment or enlargement, and this would nullify the Rortian aesthetic life of self-enrichment, by rendering it meaningless (1988:346).⁸

If the self were a network devoid of a master weaver, then it would be a mere automaton. For to remove the master weaver from the web is to remove the creative force to change the web. Without such a self, the decentred self would be an epiphenomenon of the prevailing language game. The self *qua* decentred web would just be a reflection of the prevailing social norms. Individuals would therefore have their behaviour determined by the rules of the language game. This is a problem not just as regards individual creativity, but as regards the defence of liberal democracy.

If we are a position where not only is truth reduced into social norms as argued in the previous section, but that the self is a passive epiphenomenon of the prevailing norms, then any political system would be 'justified', in the eyes of those who lived within that system. Liberalism would be justified along with state socialism and fascism. As regards this argument about truth-relativism, Geras argues that if we lose the notion of truth then we lose the notion of injustice. As Geras argues

if truth is wholly relativized or internalized to particular discourses or language games or social practices, there is no injustice. The victims and protesters of any *putative* injustice are deprived of their last weapon, that of telling what really happened. They can only tell their story which is something else. Morally and politically, therefore, anything goes (1995(a):107. Emphasis in original).⁹

Such a problem is compounded by the determinism which arises if one holds that the self is a mere decentred contingency. For in such a case there is no self which can be the possessor of universal human rights, and the self *qua* determined automaton will only regard its political system as correct. The result of this determinism would be tribalism, because at best there could be no communication between different groups and, at worse, there would be conflict between groups who would *necessarily* perceive other political systems as wrong. Difference would mean 'not us', and 'not us' would be wrong, because what it was to be right (epistemically and normatively) would be 'us - how we go on in our community'. Those in the wrong, by being different, may be tolerated, but then again, they may not.

⁸ See also Hollis 1990:247 for a similar argument.

⁹ The argument about truth and justice is also published in the *New Left Review* 209, cited as Geras 1995(b) in my bibliography.

Rorty would obviously not want to endorse ethnocentrism in the sense of blind nationalism, racism, etc.¹⁰ Hence Rorty argues against Lyotard on the interpretation of Wittgenstein. He argues that '[w]hereas Lyotard takes Wittgenstein to be pointing to unbridgeable divisions between linguistic islets, I see him as recommending the construction of causeways which will, in time, make the archipelago in question continuous with the mainland' (1994(a):216). He continues by arguing that

On my reading, Wittgenstein was not warning us against attempts to translate the untranslatable but rather against the unfortunate philosophical habit of seeing different languages as embodying incompatible systems of rules. If one does see them in this way, then the lack of an overarching system of metarules for pairing off sentences - the sort of system which metanarratives were once supposed to help us get - will strike one as a disaster. But if one sees language learning as the acquisition of a skill, one will not be tempted to ask what metaskill permits such acquisition. One will assume that curiosity, tolerance, patience, luck, and hard work are all that is needed (1994(a):216).

Thus on Rorty's pragmatic reading of Wittgenstein, we may not be able to have a meta-language game for translating different language games, but we can learn to *go on in different ways*.

Here Rorty would seem to be edging from his weak ethnocentrism, as opposed to strong tribalistic ethnocentrism (assuming that we can maintain such a difference), to a form of universalism. It would seem to be the case that Rorty is not just saying that different communities have different ways of going on. Rather, it would seem to be that

¹⁰ On the subject of nationalism note that Rorty has often been read, by both friendly and hostile critics, as advocating an American nationalism. For an example of the former see Rée 1988(a):20, and for an example of the latter, see Billig 1993. See also Wagner 1994:152-3 who argues that a recommendation for practising political liberalism, based on reference to contingencies which are not grounded in any substantive socio-historical explanation, are empty and amount to whiggish historiography.

he is adding another argument, which is that tribalism is bad, and that liberalism is good *for everyone*, because liberalism allows the requisite tolerance to help prevent conflict rooted in ethnic, national, religious, etc., difference. *The cornerstone of Rorty's argument with Lyotard over reading Wittgenstein is the belief that we (liberals) are tolerant of others, and that we want to, and ought to, understand others in their own terms.* We can therefore, according to Rorty, maintain a distinction between persuasion and force, when dealing with other cultures, because we can, to some extent, understand those cultures in their own terms. Whereas Lyotard 'would argue that the existence of incommensurable, untranslatable discourses throws doubt on this distinction between force and persuasion' (Rorty 1994(a):214), Rorty's liberalism allows such a distinction to obtain. What Rorty is doing therefore, is presupposing liberal values, reading these into Wittgenstein, and using this as an argument about how different communities can avoid conflict, by not being locked into hermetic language games, where 'persuasion' entails imperialist violence. Without liberalism there would be 'unbridgeable linguistic islets', so liberal values underpin non-violent relations between *all* communities, with their different language games.

It is not just that communication is premised upon a liberal commitment to tolerate difference, but that liberalism allows us to go on in the sense of improving scientific practices. It will be remembered that Rorty did not say that science only worked for those communities which believed in science (although this was the outcome of truth-relativism). Instead, he held that *science worked for every community*, and that scientists were to be praised as exemplary liberals, meaning that liberalism is predicated upon the tolerance which makes open debate and innovation possible, and which therefore allows us to *improve our practical ways of going on*. So we can say that political liberalism is good for all, because it allows us to improve our practices as regards the natural world, and as regards the social world, with good practices in the latter instance being defined in

terms of tolerance lessening the likelihood of conflict based on difference. Liberalism allows science to progress, and it encourages cosmopolitan understanding in place of tribalism, thus allowing inter-cultural communication to progress.

Without a prior commitment to liberal values there is the very real danger that people may say that their spade has turned simply upon encountering difference. However, there is the danger that even liberals may not be able to understand how others go on, because they may not be able to get a reflexive distance from their own norms. Certainly Rorty seems to recognise this when he argues that those who question the Enlightenment liberal belief in a transcendent rational self are regarded as mad, because they are opposing the Enlightenment culture's norms. As he puts it '[t]hey [e.g. Nietzsche] are crazy because the limits of sanity are set by what *we* can take seriously. This, in turn, is determined by our upbringing, our historical situation' (1994(a):188. *Emphasis in original*). If people who question are 'crazy', in the sense that their arguments simply cannot be made sense of, because they are in contrast with the prevailing norms, then the same would apply to differences between cultures. Other cultures would appear crazy, even if one were a liberal, simply because one could not understand difference, and so one would not want to learn how to go on in a crazy way. However, if the limits of sanity are set by our culture or the rules of our language game, and if the self is decentred and therefore determined, then it is impossible for someone to acquire the requisite reflexive distance from their norms, in order to challenge those norms. It would not be individuals, but only communities which were crazy. This means that there could be no understanding between linguistic islets, even if one were a liberal.

We can sum up this section as follows. Rorty's arguments about ethnocentrism are predicated upon the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy. This is because the argument places all the emphasis on the social object, in the form of an ontology of social norms, with the social subject being a passive and determined epiphenomenal puppet, or

'cultural dope'. To understand the behaviour of individuals it would be sufficient to simply refer to an ontology which described the prevailing norms. One would have a definitive master-ontology. This not only entails philosophical problems, because it turns on the notion that concepts have a relationship of epistemic immediacy to their referents (as argued in chapter two). It also results in a determinism that negates any justification for a particular political system, and this is compounded by the argument about truth which entails an anything-goes truth-relativism, thus rendering critique of injustice impossible.

(5) Nietzschean Liberalism

One way of summarising Rorty's position is to say that he wants to replace being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology) with becoming. In place of having truth claims which mirror discrete essences, such as a universal pre-social human essence, the emphasis is placed upon how people have different practices and how the self is different in different socio-historical contexts. Instead of fixed 'realist' certainties, there is an emphasis on contingency.¹¹ Now as we have seen, contingency may imply relativism and determinism, producing results contrary to Rorty's intentions. To escape from this, the emphasis on contingency could be regarded as an emphasis on creativity. That is, instead of adhering to an *ontology of human being* which sought to define humanity in terms of a fixed essence, there is an emphasis upon individual self-creation, with the contingent character of the self allowing for a *continuous process of becoming*. Whereas certainties about the essence of the self impose constraint, recognising the contingency of selfhood allows for creativity.

¹¹ Reé 1998(a):19 argues that whereas realism would base political action on fixed certainties, which cannot be attained, pragmatism would allow for intervention based upon immediate sentimentality. This however could have very illiberal results, as Reé 1998(b):10 accepts, when he says that Rorty's prioritising of politics (i.e. action) over theorising could justify the actions of a Leninist 'vanguard party' manoeuvring for power.

However, to support the notion of the self changing its web of beliefs, and to avoid determinism, one must posit an essence for the self as a poetic master weaver. The creative self would not be a decentred contingency, but a poetic master weaver, acting upon its web of beliefs (which it was separate from), which means that whilst the web may be contingent, the self certainly is not. *For contingency to mean creativity and not determinism, there has to be a self separate from the web of beliefs.* Rorty seems to recognise this, and against his stated argument that there is no essence for the self, he tacitly imports an essence for the self, with which to justify liberalism, as an abstract political ideology. In place of an *ethnocentric defence of our liberal social practices* Rorty moves on to argue that liberalism, meaning the classical liberal abstract ideology which simply talks in terms of public and private spheres, is *justified because it is in accord with a universal human essence.*

We can see how Rorty ends up importing an essence for the self by turning to his discussion of Nietzsche's view on selfhood. Rorty approvingly cites Nietzsche's aphorism that truth is a 'mobile army of metaphors', in support of his claim that we cannot uncover the truth to arrive at a point of epistemic immediacy (1992:27). This is extended to the issue of selfhood, with Rorty arguing that

He [Nietzsche] did not give up the idea that an individual might track home the blind impress all his behavings bore. He only rejected the idea that this tracking was a process of discovery. In his view, in achieving this sort of self-knowledge we are not coming to know a truth which was out there (or in here) all the time. Rather he saw self-knowledge as self-creation. The process of coming to know oneself, confronting one's contingency, tracking one's causes home, is identical with the process of inventing a new language - that is, of thinking up new metaphors (1992:27).

Thus Rorty describes the identity of the self as its 'final vocabulary' (1992:73), in order to illustrate his view that the self is a contingency: one *is* what one *describes* oneself as using a particular set of words at a particular point in time, and there is no real essence behind this.

Of course, some individuals may mistakenly think that their contingent identity reflects some form of fixed truth. Those who can recognise the contingency of selfhood are referred to as 'ironists', because having recognised such contingency, they will not mistake their metaphors for literal descriptions, and so they will not regard identity issues as wholly serious (1992:73). They will not be wholly serious about their identity because they recognise it is not a defining truth but a moveable feast, which they are free to recreate. Instead of being *serious philosophers concerned with knowing about the nature of human being*, ironists will be *poets who will revel in the freedom to create and recreate what it is to be human*. In place of taking identities seriously, poets will redescribe themselves, reworking the prevailing language game in novel ways, by taking an ironic approach to the language game. Instead of following Plato's argument that above the world of changing appearances there were fixed essences (forms), known by philosophers, we should be Nietzschean poets, celebrating contingency: poetry ought to replace philosophy, with becoming replacing the attempt at knowing being.

Such poets will be engaged in a process Nietzschean self-overcoming, meaning that they will overcome settled descriptions which others take unquestioningly as given: they will adopt an ironic attitude to the given, and recreate it in a novel, poetic way. To fail to do this is to fail to be human. As Rorty notes,

To fail as a poet - and thus, for Nietzsche, to fail as a human being - is to accept someone else's description of oneself, to execute a previously prepared program, to write, at most, elegant variations on previously written programmes. So the only way to trace home the causes of one's being as one is would be to tell a story about one's causes in a *new language* (1992:28. Emphasis added).

To be a poet, and thus to be truly human, one must invent a private language. Rorty's adherence to Nietzschean philosophy is thus at odds with his Wittgensteinianism, given Wittgenstein's argument that there can be no private languages, because meaning requires non-arbitrary verification, which relies on public rules.¹² Another way of putting this, is to say that instead of the self being a contingent collection of beliefs, with no master-weaver, the self has a defining essence as a master-weaver. This enables the self to exercise a poetic ability to create private languages. Without a master-weaver that was separate from the web of beliefs, the self would be a passive automation. There would be no self which could stand back from the prevailing norms, take an ironic attitude to those norms, and then poetically create a private language.

As the self has a poetic essence it will benefit from being allowed the freedom to exercise its discursive agency, enriching itself by creating new private languages. Without the freedom for such discursive agency the poet could not practice poetry, and would therefore be impoverished. This means that the *citizens* of a liberal democracy benefit from the formal freedom allowed, and the informal culture of tolerance which is meant to accompany liberalism, whereas the *subjects* of an authoritarian state will be impoverished. The subjects of an authoritarian state will not just lack the freedom to enrich themselves by poetically reworking their final vocabularies. They will also have their very humanity denied, because they will be subject to the worst form of pain, which is the pain of

humiliation. In place of having the freedom to exercise their poetic ability and enrich themselves by creating private languages, the subjects of an authoritarian state would have an identity imposed upon them.

On this issue of humiliation Rorty basically admits that he is dealing with an 'human universal', or essence, when talking about the self. He argues that

She [the liberal ironist] thinks that what unites her with the rest of the species is not a common language but *just* susceptibility to pain and in particular to that special sort of pain which the brutes do not share with the humans - humiliation (1992:92. Emphasis in original).

Whatever language game one is situated within, one is definable as a human by the susceptibility to redescription, i.e. humiliation. As various commentators note, this notion of harm appeals to a human universal, saying that such susceptibility applies to all people *qua* people.¹³ However, this conception of harm trades upon another notion of human being. It is not simply that humanity can be defined as open to humiliation in terms of redescription. For that would beg the question as to why and how redescription functioned as an harming influence to humanity *per se*. *To address this question, one must recognise that Rorty already has an essence for the self, in terms of poetic ability. Redescription is harmful because what it is to be human, is to be a poet enriching oneself via the creation of private languages.* If this expression of human nature is *limited*, individuals are impoverished as humans, and if poetry is *denied*, with individuals having an identity imposed upon them, then what it is to be human is *violated*. Rorty (1992:91) may state that there is no universal human essence, and that people find solidarity through fear of

¹² For Wittgenstein's argument against the possibility of private languages, see Wittgenstein 1995: #241 - 346.

¹³ On this issue see Critchley 1996:26, Dews 1990:112, and Geras 1995:47-70.

humiliation, but unless there were a poetic self which would have its humanity abnegated by not being poetic, then there could be no such singular fear.¹⁴

At this juncture one could say that if redescription is so harmful then liberalism ought to be harmful, because if individuals are free to create new languages, they could redescribe others, and thus harm them. However, Rorty defends liberalism by arguing that one may be a Nietzschean poet in the private sphere, and a liberal like J.S. Mill in the public sphere. Whereas Nietzsche was an anti-liberal elitist, Rorty gives us a Nietzschean liberalism, by demarcating self-overcoming away from the public realm, where one must not harm others. Enrichment need not be at the cost of humiliation. So, the argument then is a justification of *liberalism as an abstract political philosophy, using an ontology of human being as poetic, to support the liberal conception of politics as defending freedom, and preventing harm*. This justification of liberalism is very similar to the classical justification of liberalism put forward by the social contract theorists, holding as it does that individuals ought to accept the legitimacy of liberalism, because it is in accord with a pre-social human nature. Unlike the social contract theorists though, Rorty's conception of enrichment and harm are discursive rather than materialist. Rorty talks in terms of individuals' reworking their private identities rather than competing over material resources in the public (civil society) sphere of the market. This Nietzschean argument about discursive enrichment though ends up in serious difficulty as will soon see.

(6) Poetry *Contra* Politics

Before developing my critique of Rorty's Nietzschean liberalism, I will note the two pertinent critical issues on this topic. The first issue is that Rorty is essentialising the

¹⁴ Whereas Critchley links this conception of harm and human nature to Rousseau's notion of *pitié*, Warren 1990 argues that by basing solidarity upon fear of harm, Rorty's argument is similar to Hobbes' conception of the reasons behind setting up the social contract.

public-private distinction.¹⁵ That is, he is making a reference to the spheres of the state and the domestic sphere, without saying what these spheres are in substantive terms, or even recognising that boundary between these spheres is permeable, and subject to change. Ironically, there is no recognition of the historical contingency of such a division. Instead, the implication is that the terms public and private pertain to fixed essences, in which case, a definition is being used to do the work of an intellectual defence. Liberalism is *legitimised by fiat* if one holds that the justification for liberalism is in terms of a public-private divide which protects freedom and prevents harm, because one is simply accepting the claims of an abstract political ideology. One is not exploring concrete issues concerning power and social justice, but accepting a real system by accepting the terms of reference of an ideology.

The second issue is that there is a tension between Nietzschean poetry and liberalism. According to Fraser (1990), and Bhaskar (1991), who draws upon Fraser, there are three possible configurations, which I will quickly sketch out, using Bhaskar's rubrics. Firstly, there is the 'complementary position', whereby the poetic reworking of a language game results in a 'trickle-down' effect, to benefit all. Secondly, there is the 'opposition position', whereby poetry and liberalism are antithetical, with a marked tension existing between poets who want to expand poetic expression and liberals who want to prevent harm. Thirdly, there is the 'separatist position', whereby elitist poetry and liberalism are incompatible, but not in tension, as both can happily exist in their respective spheres. The third position is described as the 'Official Resolution of *Contingency, Irony And Solidarity*' (Bhaskar 1991:89).¹⁶ Against this, Bhaskar argues that

¹⁵ On this issue see Ball 1990:103, Bhaskar 1991: 90 & 103, Laclau 1996:64, and Warren 1990:119-121.

¹⁶ This work of Rorty's is referred to in my text as Rorty 1992.

it is not possible to distinguish redescrptions that affect actions with consequences for others and those that do not. Personal agency requires and uses social forms as its conditions, means and media and almost always has social consequences (1991:89).

In short, agency reworks a social context, and thus it cuts across the public-private boundary, which means that the tension between poetry and liberalism will be problematic, as poetic acts cannot be wholly confined to the private sphere.

My argument is that Rorty's Nietzschean liberalism is actually antithetical to liberal politics. With Rorty's Nietzschean liberalism the private sphere is where the poet creates private languages and the public sphere consists of the state and the public language game. The language game to which the self reacts ironically is a public resource open to all. The language game is public capital which may be utilised by any individual to enrich him / herself. This discursive capital cannot be appropriated by any individual, as no-one can appropriate a language, given the lack of its material character, and thus it remains a resource of *potentially* equal benefit to any individual. Thus to be enriched, an individual has to take a public resource and use it in a private way. In which case, politics would turn not on regulating social interaction, in the form of material competition in the market (i.e. on regulating material interaction in civil society), but on preventing one poet from humiliating another. It would prevent one poet invading the private sphere of another poet. Politics then would be based on *preventing inter-private sphere harm, rather than harm in the public sphere*. The liberal state would exist to prevent individuals' invading another individual's private sphere and redescrbing them, rather than regulating public material relations in civil society.

This raises the question of why such inter-private sphere harm would occur. If every individual were a poet then every individual would be able to defend themselves from redescription. Some individuals may be less poetic than others though, in which case the

state may be required to protect the less able from the more able. Such a justification however would break down for two reasons. Firstly, it is hard to see why a poet would want to redescribe a non-poet, because s/he would literally gain nothing from it. If enrichment turns upon having a poetic language game then enrichment is based upon individuals improving themselves, using a public discursive resource that cannot be appropriated, and not on taking a material resource from another individual.

If a less poetic person were redescribed by a poet then, and this brings us to the second point, the less poetic person would gain, not the poet. Such a position would be very odd though. The poet would force an identity onto someone despite gaining nothing from it, and the individual would be harmed, despite being enriched, because they would not have created the identity themselves. Unless one works for one's enrichment, such enrichment will be a source of humiliation. The state may try to prevent such harm but there is the obvious difficulty of trying to separate an identity that is not entirely of one's making from that which is an utterly unique private language. For any poetic redescription will be a reworking of a public language game, rather than an entirely new invented language. When the less poetic draw upon the public language game they will, to some extent, be drawing upon a language game that has been modified by the more poetic. So, every identity will have some trace of another's influence in it and, further, if someone is able to complain about having an identity imposed upon them, then the imposition is far from total, in which case it would be difficult to ascertain how much harm, if any, had been done, without falling into sheer subjectivism.

There will be trickle-down because language crosses the public-private boundary. Language may be 'more than individuals', in which case it is 'public', but not only does the existence of language depend upon individuals using it in the private sphere, but the creation of private languages which ironically rework the prevailing language, will feed back into the prevailing public language. Language is not static precisely because the

ways that some people rework language in private end up becoming normal aspects of public language. Therefore, language depends upon the poetic for linguistic development. This means that in reworking the language game the poetic are not only enriching themselves, but that they are creating a richer resource for future use. Without such innovation, the public language game would cease to be a resource for enrichment, because it would eventually be exhausted. Without innovation, there are only a finite number of truly novel changes possible. Thus poets are needed to keep the *possibility* of enrichment open. *This may result in harm for the less poetic, who depend on others to rework the public language game, but such harm would be a necessary evil, because without it, all of humanity would become impoverished.*

Given this, complete protection from harm would require the less poetic to live in an impoverished separatist community. This however would make the liberal state similar to an authoritarian state, because although it would not force an identity onto individuals and abnegate their humanity, it would place them in a position of permanent severe impoverishment. This would harm such individuals because human nature is defined as essentially poetic, and some enrichment via trickle-down would be better than having nothing. Such separatism would also violate the liberal emphasis on equality of opportunity, as those in the separatist community would be, in effect, a lower caste, that were condemned as being unable to realise what it was to be truly human.

According to Ansell-Pearson, the upshot of Rorty's philosophy is a solipsistic retreat from the social world to a private sphere, where a pre-social, or pre-political, self indulges in private fantasy (1994:170-1). This is too extreme, because we are dealing with language, which cuts across the public-private boundary. There is a poetic reworking of the public language game into a private language, not an *ex nihilo* creation of language, and this will affect others when they draw upon that language game. The public sphere will though be devoid of a civil society where individuals interact directly in person, and

there can be no legitimate basis for the state to exist. Apart from the fact that individuals would have no motivation to harm others, the liberal state could not prevent such humiliation occurring to the less poetic anyway. A socialist state would fare no better either, as there could be no fairer redistribution of capital and resources, given individuals already had access to all the (discursive) resources they required. A state could separate the communities, but this is entering dangerous ground because it would amount to a form of proto-racism, whereby the less human (i.e. less poetic) were kept impoverished for their own security from the more human / poetic. The upshot of Rorty's Nietzschean liberalism therefore is a world with no state or civil society, and just disparate private spheres and a rather abstract public language game.

(7) Pragmatism And Female Being

I now want to move the discussion from Rorty's justification of liberalism as an abstract political ideology to Rorty's treatment of substantive political issues, viz. ascribed status inequality limiting the life-chances of women, and policy-formation by the state. In this section I will deal with the former issue, by discussing Rorty's arguments about feminism. From his ontology of human being as poetic, Rorty conceptualises issues of inequality in terms of individuals' ability alone. There are not the conceptual resources to deal with social factors influencing individuals' life chances and attainment. Reference can only be made to the poetic essence of each individual. In which case, inequality would be a direct reflection of innate poetic ability, and any notion of unjust inequality would be inconceivable.

Rorty's (1998(a):202-27)¹⁷ discussion of feminism is framed in terms of his anti-representationalist rejection of epistemology, and his rejection of the self having an

¹⁷ Also published in *Radical Philosophy* 59, cited as Rorty 1991 in the bibliography. This article received a critical rejoinder in *Radical Philosophy* 62, from Wilson 1992 and Skillen 1992, who both argue that feminism necessarily implies a commitment to truth claims.

essence. He argues that there can be no truth claims about the self, because the self is a contingency, and we cannot accept the idea of reality 'making beliefs true'. In which case, we cannot accept the view that feminism provides us with a truth claim about a really-existing injustice. We cannot say that there is a real injustice if some people are defined by another person as being subordinate. As long as that person is defined as subordinate they will be subordinate. One may not be able to say that this is 'objectively wrong', but one can recognise the potential for change. Although we cannot say that some practices are really wrong, because they damage human nature, or offend really-existing universal rights, we may say that people can escape from subordination by describing themselves differently. They can escape from subordination by being the author of their own final vocabulary: freedom stems from the authority of the author to create their own final vocabulary, or private language.

The first point to note about this, is that taken at face value it ends up in the same position as the ethnocentric argument, whereby people were determined automata.

Without a self that was separate from its web of beliefs the self would be a passive entity controlled and defined by the prevailing social norms. Or, specifically, women would be puppets controlled by a patriarchal language game. Thus there could be no harm in the form of humiliation, because there was no free and creative self which could be harmed by having an identity imposed upon it: the self would simply mirror the prevailing (patriarchal) norms. Patriarchy would be 'good' for those socialised into its gender roles (whether male or female), because patriarchy would work according to its own terms of reference, and individuals' behaviour would be determined by the prevailing norms.

However, and this brings us to the second point, the ability to change oneself implies that there is a master weaver behind the contingent web of beliefs. What it is to be a woman (and a man) is a social construct, but such constructs can change (1998(a):210); which

implies, as argued earlier, a constructor behind the veil of discourse, a self behind its web of beliefs.

Thus when discussing the poet Adrienne Rich, Rorty argues that the prevailing (patriarchal) language game makes women treat themselves like the dependent variable, and men as the independent variable, although Rich was 'split' between this public language game and her own private poetry (1998(a):221). She could not be a 'full-time poet' because she could not be a 'full-time female' (1998(a):221), meaning that she could not have a public voice as a poet. This gives the game away, so to speak, because instead of saying that women are wholly defined in terms of the patriarchal language game, Rorty is saying that (some) women have the ability to rework language. The *possibility* for change comes from the *potential* to poetically rework female identity, and this potential must be innate (in some women at least), otherwise women would passively remain defined in male patriarchal terms of reference, posited by the patriarchal language game.

To escape from inequality then, women must redefine their final vocabularies. Women must become poets, to escape from inequality, and this means creating a new experience of what it means to be female, by creating a new language, tradition and identity (1998(a):212). By having a new voice women will have a new being (1998(a):226). To assist in this process Rorty acknowledges the need for separatism, as feminist practices would not 'work' in a patriarchal culture (i.e. they would be dysfunctional for the status quo). Rorty does not think though that such separation is permanent. It is just until the day when feminist practice seeps into the prevailing language game and become normal discourse. Although there is the risk of a permanent divide, Rorty says

it may also happen that, as the generations succeed one another, the masters, those in control, gradually find their conceptions of the possibilities open to human beings

changing. [...] The new language spoken by the separatist group may gradually get woven into the language taught in schools (1998(a):223).

Thus if men change then (feminist) women may be reintegrated into mainstream society, and the two forms of being could co-exist.

So, Rorty acknowledges that there is a problem an issue regarding gender inequality. However, we are to explain this solely in terms of individuals' poetic ability. If women want change then it is up to them to change. If women do not exercise their poetic ability they will only have themselves to blame for the prevailing inequality, and from this we can infer that women are to blame for allowing themselves to be described as subordinates in the first place. Without a reference to how an ascribed status helps to create, sustain and legitimise unequal material / power relations, all we can say is that an ascribed status of inequality arises when one group allows an identity to be ascribed to it. Unless of course one group is intrinsically less poetic, in which case its inequality is, *ex hypothesi*, a direct expression of its less able state. In both cases, there is no unjust inequality, as women are to blame for either not acting sooner, or women are innately less poetic than men. In short, all we can do is turn to a definitive ontology of human being, saying that humans are poetic, and that inequality is a direct reflection of innate ability, or the failure to realise that ability. One has the answer to questions concerning inequality by having access to a definitive ontology of human being which makes empirical investigation of the causes of inequality redundant.

As there could be no unjust inequality liberalism would be legitimate because every individual would have equality of opportunity. All individuals would have to do is rework the public language game to realise their innate ability and enrich themselves. The problem with women has been that they allowed the public patriarchal language game to define their identity, and that in private, or in a separatist community, they need to rework

poetically their final vocabularies. Women cannot impose this change on men, because that would mean imposing a new final vocabulary upon men, and the liberal state would prevent men being humiliated in the public sphere. A change in male identity and practices could only legitimately occur if men allowed this to happen, and after several generations, allowed the presentation of gender relations in schools to reflect this change. Even without such a change in the patriarchal language game, women would still benefit because in putting forward feminist critique they would be reworking the public language game into an edifying private language for self-enrichment. In which case, feminist *critique* would not exist *as critique*, because it would not be a public criticism of social relations but a private language for private enrichment. Thus, if our concepts to understand politics are just the self *qua* poet, and the public language game, we can reach the Panglossian conclusion that (in liberal states) all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. This is because there is no unjust inequality, and women can enrich themselves without challenging the public language game of patriarchy. Thus political questions about the distribution of power and the legitimacy of power distribution, can be understood simply in terms of whether the self has exercised its ability, with liberalism allowing the necessary equality of opportunity.

In short, a discussion of a substantive political issue concerning equality of opportunity is addressed using a definitive ontology. Here the ontology deals with the subject rather than the object. Instead of an argument about the social object (i.e. social rules which determine behaviour), we have an argument about the subject, with a definitive ontology of human being. The ontology of human being holds that the self has a poetic essence, and that the self can enrich itself by poetically reworking the public language game into private languages. This functions as a definitive explanation of human behaviour because no other factors are adduced in the explanation of inequality. To understand different levels of attainment, we simply make reference to individuals' innate (poetic) ability *and*

nothing else. Therefore there is no need to engage in empirical research to investigate if factors such as ascribed status inequality affect equality of opportunity, because one can simply say that attainment reflects ability. Thus a substantive political issue concerning social justice becomes an abstract issue, because the definitive ontology of the self is used to explain all forms of inequality in a wholly reductionist way, excluding any social factors to focus exclusively on individuals' innate ability. *By holding to the individualist sociological logic of immediacy, no empirical investigation is required, because one can read-off from the definitive ontology of human being, all forms of human behaviour, and 'know' that there are no non-individual (i.e. social) factors influencing individuals' agency.* This may mean that existing patterns of inequality are justified, because inequality is taken as a direct expression of ability, in which case liberalism would be justified; but this is to forget that given the ontology of human being as poetic, there can actually be no legitimate basis for the liberal polity, as argued in the previous section.

(8) From Postmodernism To Positivistic-Conservatism

In this section I will turn my attention from the individualist sociological logic of immediacy to the foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy. I will argue that although Rorty did align himself with postmodernism, his subsequent rejection of postmodernism ended up propelling his work on policy-formation into a positivism, which is also conservative because it deals with 'facts' that cannot be subject to legitimate normative critique or contestation. Rorty recoils from postmodernism taking it to be trapped within the representationalist problematic, but the result is also squarely fixed within that problematic too.

Rorty defined himself as a postmodernist in his essay *Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism*.¹⁸ In this essay Rorty argues that his defence of liberal *institutions* can be separated from the Enlightenment *justification* of liberalism in terms of a universal human nature. Liberal practices are good for us liberals - because we are liberals - but we can dispense with what Lyotard referred to as 'metanarratives': there are no grand philosophical stories (about a Kantian transcendental self, or human nature) to justify any particular set of social practices. In this case then, Rorty's postmodern rejection of metanarratives can simply serve as a synonym for anti-representationalism and ethnocentrism. Rorty also describes his position as 'bourgeois', because he accepts the Marxist view that liberal political institutions are historically contingent upon certain material conditions obtaining. Without any metanarrative to justify liberalism we can only justify it in its own terms, by saying that it works for us, in certain material circumstances.

Metanarratives represent an appeal to metaphysics, the purpose of which is to go beyond the social and historical contingency of lived practices, justifying (or rejecting) a political system by reference to something 'other'. To be a pragmatist is to give up the temptation of metaphysics and have courage to improve our practices for going on in the world. To overcome metaphysics is to overcome a self-imposed immaturity. Metaphysics is immature because it means that humanity tries to fetishise some non-existent non-human entity with human powers, in order to remove responsibility from itself to a super-human 'moving force'. This metaphysical impulse to find meaning by turning away from the world characterised Christianity and political philosophies of history.¹⁹ Rorty argues that

¹⁸ Cited here from Rorty 1994(a):197-202.

¹⁹ This is not to say either that God exists or does not exist, but as far as anti-representationalism is concerned, there could be no metanarrative about a non / super-human moving-force.

By inventing 'History' as the name of an object that could be conceptually grasped, Hegel and Marx made it possible to keep both the romance of the Christian story about incarnate Logos, and the Christian sense of solidarity against injustice, even after we lost religious faith (1998(a):235).

Against such fetishism we ought to focus on actual practices, but postmodernists took another route and replaced History, or the Universal Class, with Language and Discourse.

If we accepted pragmatism though,

We might then stop trying to find a successor to 'the working class' - for example, 'Difference' or 'Otherness' - as a name for the latest incarnation of the Logos. [... This] might help us avoid what Stanley Fish calls 'anti-foundational theory hope' - the idea that a materialism and a sense of historicity more radical than even that of Marx's will somehow provide a brand-new, still bigger, albeit still blurrier, object - an object called, perhaps, 'Language' or 'Discourse' - around which to weave our fantasies (1998(a):242).

So, although Rorty described himself as 'postmodern', he is not actually a postmodernist. If postmodernism is a synonym for anti-representationalism (and ethnocentrism) then Rorty obviously has no argument with it, but as we have just seen, Rorty is critical of the way that postmodernists have turned to metanarratives which reject actual practices to embrace metaphysics. This means that postmodernism is actually predicated upon the representationalist problematic, and is a form of realism (in Rorty's sense of the term), because instead of dealing with improving contingent practices, it seeks to move beyond practices, and base politics on epistemic certainty, by knowing some metaphysical moving force that is separate from actual empirical practices.

Postmodernists also adhere to the representationalist problematic when they use a methodology called 'deconstruction' to move from surface appearances to an underlying essence. At this point it is necessary to note Rorty's views on Derrida before discussing Rorty's critique of deconstruction. Rorty argues that Derrida is of use in the private sphere. It is useful to read Derrida's literary philosophy as a discourse of self-creation which we too may find edifying, but Derrida is not of use in the public sphere of politics (1996(a):15-7). Now although Derrida coined the term 'deconstruction', in putting forward a basically post-structuralist position, which held that as meaning was endlessly deferred from signifier to signifier, the apparent stability of meaning in texts could be deconstructed, by pointing to its inherent instability, this term has been used in a non-Derridean way, according to Rorty.²⁰ Rorty notes that something called 'deconstruction' has been turned into a (social / scientific-) 'methodology', meaning that deconstruction has become a way of unmasking an underlying essence (1996(a):15). Thus deconstruction is concerned with moving from illusory appearances to the underlying real essence, and so it is predicated upon the representationalist problematic.

This means that such deconstructionists are adopting a position similar to Marxist ideology-critique. Rorty argues that

Many self-consciously 'postmodern' writers seem to be trying to have it both ways - to view things as masks going all the way down while still making invidious comparisons between other people's masks and the way things will look when all the masks have been stripped off. These postmodernists continue to indulge in the bad habits characteristic of those Marxists who insist that morality is a matter of class interest and then add that everybody has a moral obligation to identify with the interests of a particular class (1998(a):209. Footnote 17).

²⁰ The term 'text' here pertains to philosophical and political arguments as well as literary texts.

Indeed, Rorty notes that academic leftists, who were concerned with unmasking 'bourgeois ideology', ended up drawing upon deconstruction to take a more pluralistic approach which was still concerned with unmasking. The result, Rorty argues, was an 'idiot jargon' of 'leftspeak', which is 'a dreadful mishmash of Marx, Adorno, Foucault and Lacan [... that] resulted in articles that offer unmaskings of the propositions of earlier unmaskings of still earlier unmaskings' (1987:570).

We could criticise such deconstruction for being based on verificationism in the worse sense, whereby every formulaic deconstruction would 'find' what it was looking for. In other words, there would be a definitive ontology, which turned on the logic of immediacy, in that an ontology of class-interest (structuralist sociological logic of immediacy) or repressed psychological states (individualist sociological logic of immediacy), would provide all the information that was necessary. Thus either methodology would be redundant, as one could read-off agents' real motivations from the ontology, or verify the ontology by reading it into anything.

Rorty's reaction though is not to argue for the use of fallible theories to interpret the social and political world, but to argue for a positivistic approach to politics. Rorty's position is that theory ought to be confined to the private sphere, with the public sphere of politics, and civil society, being evacuated of theory for atheoretical factual problem-solving. Another way of putting this is to say that in private we may read Derrida, or Marx for that matter, but in public we will pursue what Popper (1989) called 'piecemeal social engineering', meaning that politics is to be based on small-scale improvements to a system which already functions well. Note that whereas Popper would have allowed some room for theorisation (albeit in individualist terms, influenced by a moderate empiricism),

Rorty's position is far more empiricist, because it debars any notion of theory from the public sphere.²¹

Rorty argues that '[t]here is nothing sacred about the free market or about central planning; the proper balance between the two is a matter of experimental tinkering' (1987:564). Here then the public sphere has now been broadened out from a rather disembodied and abstract language game which people react to in private, to the material realm of civil society, in the form of economic markets. This argument about economic policy may seem unobjectionable - even truistic. However, it overlooks the problem that defining what is a successful economy is not simply a purely 'factual' matter. It is not just that monetarists and Keynesians etc., or pro and anti-European single currency advocates, would disagree about the means to achieve sustained economic growth, but that people may disagree about going for maximum growth, given environmental concerns, or argue that more profits should be redistributed via progressive taxation, to help the less well-off and improve equality of opportunity. One cannot remove theoretical and normative issues as these inform our perspectives of the goals to aim for and the means to achieve those goals.

Rorty however would have none of this. For Rorty politics is a matter of dealing with discrete atheoretical facts, and thus accepting the legitimacy of the given, with policies being generated *reactively* to overcome specific factual problems. Against Critchley (1996) who argues that Derrida ought not to be confined to the private sphere, Rorty argues that '[o]ur [pragmatic] attitude is: if it isn't broken, don't fix it. Keep on using it until you can find some other sort of tool which might do the job better' (1996(b):44). Hence we ought to 'save problematizing for the weekends' (1996(b):44); assuming that the weekends are when we are in the private sphere, and away from work. In the public sphere then, the state would generate policies reactively, to overcome discrete factual

²¹ Mouffe 1996:3 notes that Rorty has a piecemeal social engineering approach to policy, but she fails to

problems in civil society as they emerged, in order to restore the status quo, and normative critique - or theorising more generally - would be confined to the private sphere, for personal use only (making it politically pointless). Thus Rorty wants to argue for a form of 'end-of-ideology' politics, whereby we can simply accept the fact that liberalism 'works', *contra* those committed to an ideological fantasy such as Marxism, who argue that there are unseen forces driving society, and distorting the truth.²²

So, postmodernism and deconstruction are rejected for being based on the representationalist problematic, and against this, Rorty's anti-representationalist pragmatism holds that politics is a matter of factual problem-solving, to improve our practices. By removing theory *per se* from the public sphere though, to focus on 'facts', the result is a positivism which is also based on the representationalist problematic. This is also conservative because it precludes any normative questioning of the given, maintaining that politics concerns the state reactively creating policies to improve an already good society. The result of this would be an elitist and technocratic conception of politics, with political action being instigated by the state, whereby 'experts' solved 'technical problems'. Against this, it could be argued that in his work on the 'American Left' Rorty (1998(b)) does recognise the legitimacy of groups mobilising in civil society, to bring pressure upon the state, in order to achieve some specific policy objectives.

In this work, on the left in the USA, Rorty defines the left as seeking to improve social justice, whereas the right believes that the existing social and political relationships and institutions embody social justice. Rorty does not accept that the right is correct, but he does not think that the right is illegitimate. Rather, he believes that politics is - and *ought* to be - based on a constant argument between right and left. He argues that

bring out the positivistic implications of this.

²² See Bell 1960 for the classical statement of the end-of-ideology position.

As long as our country has a politically active Right and a politically active Left, this argument will continue. It is at the heart of the nation's political life, but the Left is responsible for keeping it going. For the Right never thinks that anything much needs to be changed: it thinks the country is basically in good shape, and may well have been in better shape in the past. It sees the Left's struggle for social justice as mere trouble making, as utopian foolishness. The Left, by definition is the party of hope. It insists that our nation remains unachieved (1998(b):14).

Rather than save problematizing for the weekends, confining it to the private sphere, it is now legitimate to question the given. Normative issues are allowed in the realm of public political discussion and, indeed, are perceived to drive politics. Without the left, politics would become rather static, and the importance of the left is that it provides the dynamism to seek out and resolve previously overlooked issues of social justice. The left is the force to improve society by pursuing reformist politics.

Rorty is quite critical of the left though because it has surrendered its public responsibility to improve society, and has become detached from the lived practices of real people. The left has become obsessed with theory for the sake of theory. The left is castigated for retreating from the public sphere of civil society, where its critical voice is needed. The problem (as regards the American left) is that the left moved from being a 'reformist left' to a 'cultural left'. Instead of being concerned with substantive issues concerning distributive justice, for instance, the left is only concerned with theorising cultural 'Otherness'. The change in emphasis can be seen in 'cultural studies', which Rorty takes to mean 'victim studies'. The concern with 'otherness' has resulted in disciplines such as women's studies, black history, gay studies, Hispanic-American studies and migrant studies. There are no unemployment studies, homeless studies, or trailer-park studies, because these are not 'other' in the relevant sense (1998(b):79-80). Consequently

the left has become 'spectatorial' because it only theorises culture, instead of getting involved with concrete policy-issues, and so it has ceased to be a left (1998(b):14).

The left, to function as a left, needs to move from the private study and into (public) politics to try and influence the formation of policy. Rorty obviously recognises that the state will be influenced by monied interests, but he thinks that change in the interests of the less well-off is possible. That state is not taken to be intrinsically - or necessarily - biased towards capital (or the rich 'overclass' as Rorty calls international capitalists), and with the help of the better off middle-class, the working class may mobilise successfully to effect improvements in pay and conditions (1998(b):54). This does not mean that the left ought to mount a general 'structural' - and theoretical - critique of society. There should be mobilisations over specific issues rather than general movements for radical change. As Rorty puts it, '[m]ovements are suited to onto-theological Platonists, campaigns to many-minded men of letters' (1998(b):118). The left can help Americans achieve their country by realising the potential within liberal capitalist America for people to 'get on', or at least have a decent standard of living, and it ought to pursue this rather than indulge in abstract theorisation of the 'Other', or formulaic 'deconstructions'.

Now clearly Rorty does allow for 'bottom-up' (or bottom-with-the-help-of-the-middle-up) changes, which pulls sharply away from the technocratic elitism that only allowed for top-down reactive changes. Yet the change is not as radical as it may appear. This is because the approach is still positivist and conservative. It is positivist because it is still dealing with specific 'factual' issues. Campaigns form to seek a specific empirical change, and when this is achieved, the campaign concerned is redundant. To be sure, there may be some form of normative debate between right and left, but this would not amount to theoretical considerations about the structural features of liberal capitalism. Rather, it would be premised upon a shared acceptance of the defining features of liberal capitalism, and difference would arise from the left arguing that some specific empirical changes

would be justified because they would improve equality of opportunity and the basic standard of living for the less well-off. In place of theory there would be facts, and norms would help select which set of facts one sought to obtain. Political discussion would not go beyond the observed realm of actual facts to question the context which structured the events which gave meaning to individuals' acts.

This implies that there is agreement over what the putative facts actually are, which brings us to the point that Rorty's argument is also conservative. The left is akin to a maintenance worker, making sure a machine works properly, by checking its oil levels and fitting new parts, rather than questioning the overall design of the machine. Whereas the right is complacent and reactionary, in that it dislikes change and has a tendency to romanticise the past, the left deals not with *innovation* (i.e. change for the sake of change), but with *necessary* small-scale reforms / 'repairs'. Instead of questioning the status quo, or pressing for structural change, localised and specific reforms are sought to maintain the socio-political equilibrium. Such reforms may come from groups mobilising in civil society, but this does not mean that they are challenging the legitimacy of the state. Rather, there is a classical pluralist view of the state in Rorty's work on the left in the USA, whereby the state is basically neutral, and creates policy outputs in response to rational well-argued inputs from pressure groups.²³ These groups are mature enough to focus on improving specific practices, rather than being immature, and turning to metaphysical metanarratives, to furnish some form of all-encompassing structural critique of liberal-capitalist society. Thus instead of 'movements' joined by 'onto-theological Platonists', the responsible citizenry join pragmatic 'campaigns'.

So, in criticising postmodernism, the 'idiot jargon' of 'leftspeak', and a 'spectatorial left', Rorty argues for a pragmatism whereby the left seeks to enhance social justice by effecting policy-change, and the upshot is that Rorty's pragmatism becomes a form of

positivistic-conservative social science, repeating the tenets of classical pluralism, as espoused in the 1960s (which, incidentally, is when Rorty charts the decline of a reformist left into a spectatorial left). In doing this, Rorty is basing methodology on a form of the positivist philosophical logic of immediacy, as explanations of the social world are reduced to observed events, carried out by individuals, with no reference to social structures, or a wider social context acting as an enablement and constraint upon individuals' agency.

(9) Conclusion: From Contingency To Certainty

Rorty's anti-representationalism is in agreement with my rejection of the philosophical logic of immediacy, meaning the search for epistemic certainty, and the truth-relativist emphasis on contingency. However, Rorty presumes, as Putnam also did, that realism is an epistemic thesis, which means he rejects the attempt to develop a realist ontology in favour of a post-Wittgensteinian emphasis on practices. Consequently Rorty rejected the metaphysical realist ontology about extra-discursive objects existing beyond representations, believing such metaphysical realism, or external realism, to entail a relationship of epistemic immediacy, and a God's eye view (or 'skyhook'), beyond contingent perspectives. Rejecting such realism meant that Rorty's discussion of knowledge entailed the relativist version of the philosophical logic of immediacy, reducing truth to norms, and committing the genetic fallacy. Thus we would have a specious certainty whereby to know the norms would be to know The Truth. Interestingly, Rorty's work also entailed the foundationalist version of the philosophical logic of immediacy, in the form of positivism, when he tried to deny the existence of a rational self, in favour a determinist physicalism.

²³ For a classical statement of pluralism, or plural elite theory, see Dahl 1956 and 1961.

When it came to discussing politics Rorty wanted to emphasise contingency, in the sense that justification was contingent upon one's socio-historical location, and that the self was an ironic contingency, created in the free-play of private language construction. The former argument, about 'ethnocentrism', entailed the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, because the social object (the language game, or the prevailing norms and customs) would determine the social subject. Therefore the description of the language game would be a description of a definitive ontology, from which one may read-off behaviour, which was determined by the norms. This determinism would mean that any political system was justified as all behaviour was determined by the local norms, in which case one would end up with tribalism rather than the moderate ethnocentrism, espoused by Rorty. Here certainty would be the certainty afforded by an essentialist ontology which presumed to mirror all the essences which controlled behaviour and, ironically, the certainty of ignorance.

The latter argument, about the poetic self, entailed the individualist sociological logic of immediacy. An ontology of human being as poetically creative was used to justify liberalism. This meant that issues of social justice about inequality could be decided by reference to the ontology and not via a study of substantive social relations. Using the ontology of human being as poetically creative, one could infer that inequality was a direct reflection of innate ability. This not only failed to engage in study of how different constraints and enablements influenced equality of opportunity, it also dogmatically 'blamed the victim'. There was certainty afforded by a master-ontology which eschewed knowledge of substantive social relations; although ironically the system it may have justified was illegitimate, given that a liberal polity was a unnecessary hindrance upon poetic individuals.

When it came to discussing policy-formation Rorty's work moved back from the sociological logic of immediacy to the philosophical logic of immediacy in the form of

positivism. Unlike positivist social science which entailed atomistic individualism or abstracted empiricism, the issue here was not upon studying the social realm, but upon how the political realm was conceptualised. Rorty's positivistic-conservative argument held that politics concerned atheoretical and non-normative 'facts'. The problem here is that, in addition to forcing discussion into terms of reference which presume the status quo to be legitimate, the putative facts were normative, insofar as the given was assumed to be the manifest truth: left and right could agree on the facts because they agreed on ultimate values, about the sanctity of the given.

Chapter Four

Post-Wittgensteinian Sociology: Giddens' Ontology Of Practices

(1) Introduction

Giddens' work spans the sociology of modernity (which includes a study of possible institutional changes as well as works on the identity of the self), and 'general' social theory, together with a definition and defence of 'Third Way' politics espoused by Tony Blair's British Labour administration. Accompanying this is much expository and critical literature, which seeks to discuss the whole of Giddens' work.¹ My concern though is just with Giddens' general social theory, meaning his attempt to define a social ontology, which will explain how individuals are connected to a broader social context, which enables and constrains individuals' actions. *Giddens wants to overcome the subject-object dualism, or agency-structure dualism, whereby social reality is defined in terms of an objective structure that is an external and determining constraint upon the individual subject.* This does not mean that he wants to advocate an individualist sociology, which is either based upon empiricism (methodological individualism), or which just seeks to understand individuals' meanings (interpretative sociology, ethnomethodology, etc.), without theorising the broader social context in its own right.

¹ For collections of critical commentaries see O'Brien *et al* (eds.) 1999, Bryant and Jary (eds.) 1991, Clark, Modgil and Modgil (eds.) 1990, and Held and Thompson (eds.) 1991. See also Craib 1992(b), and Cohen 1989, for a book length studies on Giddens.

Rather, Giddens wants to link up an interpretative approach which treats individuals as knowledgeable social agents, and which recognises that individuals' meanings are important, to an account of how a prevailing social context sets limits to individuals' actions. *For Giddens this task means replacing a dualism with a duality.* Instead of focusing upon individuals or structures, we need to link agency and structures, and this is done by arguing that they are mutually implicated. This means that structures cannot, for Giddens, be defined as emergent properties, because for him, that would mean that structures were defined as external constraints upon agency. Such a definition would be objectionable because it would turn on a subject-object dualism, where structures (the social object) were reified, and held to determine the behaviour of agents (the subjects). To overcome this, Giddens draws upon the work of the later Wittgenstein, to conceptualise agency in terms of rule-following practices, with social structure pertaining to rules (and resources).

It will be argued that there are two problems with Giddens' social ontology. The first is that rules (structures) become conflated into individuals' practices. This produces an individualist sociology which ultimately results in the individualist sociological logic of immediacy, that removes any notion of a 'real' social context setting limits upon agents' actions. The account of rules, which brings us to the second point, also entails a subject-object dualism, whereby rules may be conceptualised as emergent properties. This is not, to stress a point that will be made at various junctures in this chapter, meant to imply that the notion of emergent properties *necessarily* entails a subject-object dualism, whereby structures are external and determining constraints upon individuals. As Giddens regards emergent properties as entailing a subject-object dualism though, it does mean that *by his own perspective, rules end up entailing a deterministic dualism.* The same point is made when discussing Giddens' concepts which move from rule-following practices as such, to broader definitions of social reality. In this discussion of social systems, and the argument

for methodological bracketing, it is argued that Giddens' work again unfolds into an individualist sociology and a subject-object dualism.

The last section of the chapter deals with Giddens' purpose in trying to resolve the structure-agency problem. Giddens maintains that his work can be read-into completed research, and used in a selective way to guide future research. I argue here that if taken at face-value then his concepts are too vague and elastic to be of any use in re-interpreting existing research. If we draw upon the analysis as noted above though, then a subject-object dualism would emerge, meaning that research would become either redundant or an exercise in specious verificationism. For if we have a subject-object dualism then we have the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy. This is because with a subject-object dualism the ontology would be definitive: it would hold that structure determined agency and that from an ontology of structures we could either read-off behaviour, or verify the ontology by reading it into observed behaviour.

Giddens is concerned that his ontology may be thought of as setting up a subject-object dualism, whereby concepts pertain to fixed essences in the social realm. This leads him to argue that his concepts are 'sensitising devices', and that these devices should be applied to methodology in a flexible fashion. The problem here though is that if a subject-object dualism is entailed then research will be redundant or entail verificationism, even if the concepts are used in piecemeal way.

(2) The Importance Of Ontology

We can begin to understand Giddens' ontological project by quickly noting his 'New Rules of Sociological Method' (1976). These can be summarised as follows. Interpretative sociologies are correct insofar as they stress that the subject matter of sociology deals with a universe of actively created meanings (rule 1), and that the production and reproduction of society is carried out by knowledgeable social agents (rule 2). So we may say that

social reality is 'socially constructed', in the sense that activities only have the meaning that agents ascribe to them. This does not imply that social reality can be understood simply in terms of the free development of meanings / norms. Instead, limits are set by the social context (rule 3). As Giddens puts it (making an allusion to Marx²), '*human agency is bounded. Men produce society, but they do so as historically located agents, and not under conditions of their own choosing*' (1976:160. Emphasis in original).

To understand agency we must therefore locate it within some structural context. This does not mean that structures will determine agency though, *as structures furnish the conditions which enable as well as constrain agency*. Agents may not choose their circumstances, but they can rework those circumstances. Thus for Giddens structures should be conceptualised as enabling as well as constraining, and this twin feature is referred to as the 'duality of structure' (rule 4). As structures enable as well as constrain for Giddens, it follows that *structures are the medium and outcome of agency*, because agency requires structures, and reworks structures (1995(a):374). That is, agency reworks the social context it is located within. This duality of structure means that

Structures can always in principle be examined in terms of their *structuration* as a series of reproduced practices. To enquire into the structuration of social practices is to seek to explain how it comes about that structures are constituted through action, and reciprocally how action is constituted structurally (1976:161. Emphasis in original).

What this means is that *structure and agency are mutually implicated*. Instead of agency meaning free will and structures being conceptualised as external determining forces upon the agent, structure and agency are definable only in relation to one another. Structures require agency not simply in the sense that without individuals there would be no social

² Marx, K. 1990 'The Eighteenth Brumaire Of Louis Bonaparte', in D. McLellan (ed.), *Selected Writings*.

reality, but because structures are the medium through which agency is exercised:

structures are the 'stuff' of agency. Agency does not exist in the form of discrete acts

which occur in a social vacuum, devoid of social constraints or shared norms which give

meaning to the acts. Rather, agency always exists in some social context, so to understand

agency is to understand the structures which act as the medium for the practices of agents.

Without regard for structures as the medium and outcome of agency, agency would be

divorced from any social context, leaving us with an extreme atomistic individualism, that

not even methodological individualists would endorse (given their reference to

situations). The final rules (rules 6-8) amount to the view that social science has to entail

'immersion' in a form of life, and that social science concepts may react back upon lay

knowledge: the so-called 'double hermeneutic' (1976:161-2).³

Giddens' project therefore is concerned with placing ontology at the centre of social theory, to reconceptualise notions of, in his words, 'human being and doing, social reproduction and social transformation' (1995(a):xx). To understand social change and continuity one must understand structure and agency, which means understanding agency in terms of situated practices, to see how agents may alter their customary ways of going on. In this case, 'human being' is defined in terms of 'human doing', i.e. situated practices, meaning that an agent is definable by their actions, and their ability to effect change. So, agents are not passive determined automata, because they have the capacity to act freely, but such actions are always mediated by social structures, which the agents' practices may reproduce or change.

³ An example would be the concept of inflation. Note though that this point is rather weak as most social science concepts are not used, even in simplified ways under different names, in lay discourse. Unless that is, one holds that the structure-agency problem is being discussed when lay agents talk of problems in getting better employment, etc., in which case the social science concepts are evacuated of meaning.

(3) Rule-Following Practices

(3.1) Defining Rules, Resources And Power

Having indicated that for Giddens structure and agency are mutually implicated, the next task is to define structure and agency. Giddens defines social structure in terms of rules and resources (1993(a) & 1995(a)). Rules can be sub-divided into normative elements and codes of signification, and resources are sub-divided, into authoritative resources and allocative resources (1995(a):xxxix). Giddens also describes the sub-division of rules as a division between the aspect of rules that relate to sanctions governing social conduct and the aspect of rules which constitutes meaning (1993(a):82 & 1995(a):18). Or, to put it another way, all rules are both constitutive and regulative (1993(a):66). What this means is that rules both ascribe meaning to actions and delimit acceptable from unacceptable actions. This distinction though is an *abstract conceptual distinction, because in actuality, practices draw upon both aspects of rules* (1993(a):82). Turning to resources we noted a two-fold distinction between allocative resources and authoritative resources. Allocative resources are defined as material resources which derive from the domination over nature (such as capital), whilst authoritative resources are defined as non-material resources (such as status), which result from the domination of some agents over others (1995(a):258 & 373). It is important to note though that although *resources constitute structures of domination, because they entail the use of power, this is not to say that power is a resource.*

Instead of power being a resource, resources are used in the articulation of power, with power itself only belonging to agents. For Giddens, agents are definable as agents because they have power, meaning the ability to make a difference. *This means that everyone is an agent, because everyone can exercise some form of choice which will make a difference in some way or another.* So, power characterises all action, with resources being the media

through which power is exercised (1995(a):15-6). Therefore power is a capability and not a description of affairs (1993(a):68). In other words, one cannot use the concept of power to describe a set of resources, because power is the ability to be an agent, which means that we can describe this capability, and its exercise via resources, but we cannot define power by describing a fixed set of relations or resources. Understanding power means understanding what agents do, rather than, for example, saying that power stems from material resources, such as capital.⁴ As Giddens puts it, '[p]ower is generated by definite forms of domination in a parallel way to the involvement of rules with social practices: and, indeed, as an integral element or aspect of those practices' (1993(a):69). We can describe the use of resources, such as capital, in terms of how agents use these resources in relations of power, but we cannot conflate power into resources, and say that capital is itself a *source* of power, as capital is a *medium* for the exercise of power.

Giddens rejects the Nietzschean reduction of truth to power (1995(a):257 & 1995(c):259-68), which influenced Weber with his belief that there was no rational way to adjudicate ultimate values, giving us 'normative irrationalism' (1993(a):68), and more recent (post-structuralist) thinkers like Foucault, for whom truth is the will to power. However, Giddens does argue that 'power is logically prior to subjectivity, to the constitution of the reflexive monitoring of conduct' (1995(a):15). What this means is that the agent must possess the ability to make a difference, i.e. the ability to make decisions and act upon them, before that agent can engage in practices and monitor those practices. Putting power before subjectivity is not a recipe for irrationalism if one holds that agreement can be reached, rather than imposed via force, on the basis of agreements made

⁴ According to Sayer 1990, Giddens' structuration theory is very similar to the key points made by Marx, except that Marx emphasised history, whereas Giddens evacuates any historical context, producing concepts which are too abstract. Against this, Giddens 1990 replies that (a) Marx can be anything to anyone, and (b), that Marxism places too much emphasis on allocative resources, meaning that it is economically reductionist and determinist. See also Giddens 1982 where, in an interview with Bleicher and Featherstone, Giddens argues that Marx's evolutionism (like all evolutionary and teleological theories) is untenable, and that we need to 'deconstruct' historical materialism, rather than trying to reinterpret it. Such a deconstruction would

in particular contexts, according to Giddens. Instead of power being a force to impose on people, power allows decisions to be made, so power in this sense allows agreement to be reached.

So, to be an agent is to have power. Power is the power to act in the world, and this power enables agents to use rules and resources. Moreover, power requires rules and resources because rules and resources (structures) are the medium and outcome of agency, which means that for power to be exercised (i.e. for agents to act as agents), they must act using some rules and resources. This is not to say that agency will necessarily result in social change, but it is to say that social continuity is not a result of structures (rules and resources) determining behaviour, but rather, of at least some agents actively reproducing the existing rules and resources. People make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing, and these circumstances (understood in terms of structures *qua* rules and resources) are the medium and outcome of agency (meaning the realised ability of agents of act), which may or may not change the circumstances, even though history is 'made' by practices (agency), not circumstances (structures).

(3.2) Rules: Formal And Practical

Having defined structures and rules and resources, noting that power is irreducible to resources because it is a capacity of agents to use resources, I will now say more about the definition of rules. Giddens argues that most social rules cannot best be understood as analogous to formal rules, such as rules in games like chess. This is not just because the legitimacy of such rules is not subject to chronic contestation, as social rules are (1993(a):67). It is also because rules cannot be regarded as 'isolated formulae', which pertain to discrete 'moves' (1993(a):65). There are two reasons why rules cannot be regarded as isolated formulae. Firstly, instead of a 'singular relation' between an activity

mean putting the emphasis on praxis (i.e. agents' practices) rather than moving forces of history, such as

and a rule, practices are subject to numerous rules. The way that people go on in specific circumstance requires them to draw upon a plurality of practical rules concerning appropriate conduct. Secondly,

Rules cannot be exhaustively described or analysed in terms of their own content, as prescriptions, prohibitions, etc.: precisely because, apart from those circumstances where a relevant lexicon exists, *rules and practices only exist in conjunction with one another*' (1993(a):65. Emphasis in original).

Whilst some rules may be formal and prescriptive (such as the rules of games, legal codes, etc.), most social rules cannot be conceptualised as discursively codified formal rules, because they concern practical knowledge rather than discursive knowledge. That is, most rules remain without discursive codification, because they concern agents' practical skills about how to go on in different contexts.

Giddens argues we should regard rules

as techniques or generalizable procedures applied in the enactment / reproduction of social practices. Formulated rules - those that are given verbal expression as canons of law, bureaucratic rules, rules of the game and so on - are thus codified interpretations of rules rather than rules as such. They should be taken not as exemplifying rules in general but as specific types of formulated rule, which, by virtue of their overt formulation, take on various specific qualities (1995(a):21).

These specific qualities being the determination of practices according to formal criteria, rather than the mutual implication of rules in practices. Or to put it another way, instead

of rules being the medium and outcome of practices, as the duality of structures suggests, there is a clear *dualism between object (formulated rules) and subject (agents and their practices)*, with rules *qua* structure being external and constraining, rather than enabling and constraining. The reason for this is that all the examples given by Giddens of formalised rules (bureaucracy, games and law), are prescriptive rules which define what is appropriate in terms of agents following those rules *to the letter*. When confronted by formal rules the agent simply has to conform, if s/he is to follow the rule, which means that in such cases practices mirror the rules, leaving little or no room for deviation.

(3.3) Wittgenstein And Sociology

The issue of a subject-object dualism replacing the duality of structure advocated by Giddens will be explored later on. Here I wish to continue the exegesis of Giddens' ontology, by noting that the conception of agency as rule-following practices, with rules being regarded as the practical ability to go on, derives from the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein. Such a conception of rules as the practical ability to go on overcomes, Wittgenstein argues, the paradox of rule-following. The paradox would be that if one based action on rule-following, then any observed act could be taken as an illustration of both rule-following and rule-breaking. Wittgenstein's resolution of this paradox is, Giddens notes, to argue that it is based on a misunderstanding, 'a confusing of the interpretation or verbal expression of a rule with following the rule' (1995(a):21). The point behind this resolution of the paradox is that rule-following turns on the use of practical knowledge about how to 'go on' within a form of life, whereas discussion about how practice P is an example of rule R turns on using discursive knowledge to interpret and codify a rule, which results in the paradox. The paradox only arises if one tries to approach rule-following in terms of discursive rather than practical knowledge, because trying discursively to codify on-going practices will result in different rules being read-

into observed practices by different observers. Consequently one type of action may be held to follow one observer's rules whilst breaking the rules of another observer.

Underlying this, of course, is the doctrine that meaning is linked to use. Or as Giddens puts it,

‘Don’t look for the meaning, look for the use’ does not imply that meaning and use are synonymous, but that the sense of linguistic items can only be sought in the practices which they express and in which they are expressed (1993(a):38).⁵

To parody Cartesian terminology, we may say simply that 'I go on, therefore I am'; as one's being and knowledge arise from, and are defined in terms of, the practical ability to go on within a form of life. Agents have the power to act in the world and exercising the power in on-going practices defines what the agent is: human being is definable in terms of human doing, which is understandable in terms of rule-following practices.

This is not to say that Giddens is in agreement with much post-Wittgensteinian discussions of social reality. Such post-Wittgensteinian positions would hold that there could be no general ontology (such as Giddens’ ‘structuration theory’), because that would mean reifying the concept of ‘form of life’, or ‘language game’, by moving from some specific ways of going-on, to a meta-theory, which tried to find some underlying universal essence. So instead of trying to explain structure and agency in general terms, the emphasis would be on *understanding the meanings of individuals*. The approach would turn on *understanding*, and this would be juxtaposed to *explanations* which discussed individuals’ behaviour in causal terms, by reference to deterministic structures.

⁵ For more on this issue, see Giddens 1993(a):34, where he discusses the different conceptions concerning the limits of language, in the early and later works of Wittgenstein. See also Giddens 1993(a):9-48 and 1993(b):59-65, where Wittgenstein’s emphasis on language and practices is contrasted with structuralist and post-structuralist emphasis on linguistic signs which are divorced from agents’ practices.

The result of such an approach is to produce a sociology which presumes consensus and which, in effect, conceptualises agents as cultural dopes, because it lacks any understanding of how agents may change the prevailing rules. The emphasis is on how agents conform to an unexplained background of social norms and conventions. On such Wittgensteinian theories, Giddens argues that

Established rules set the boundary of investigation, and while the conduct of agents is portrayed as purposeful and cogent, the origins of 'conventions' are shrouded in mystery, and perhaps even as *necessarily inexplicable; they do not appear as 'negotiated', as themselves the product of human action*, but rather as the backdrop against which such action becomes intelligible (1976:51. Emphasis added).

Similarly, Giddens says that

as expressed in forms of life, institutions are analysed only in so far as they form a consensual backdrop against which action is negotiated and its meanings formed.

Wittgensteinian philosophy has not led towards any sort of concern with social change, with power relations, or with conflict in society (1993(a):50).

One of the thinkers who commits such an error is Winch who, according to Giddens, simply takes rules as given, without dealing with conflictual responses to rules. For Giddens, rules may be contested, which has the consequence that following a rule could have very different meanings for different agents, so Winch is wrong to conflate meaning into occurrence (1976:48). If we are to understand social reality then we must switch from a perspective which takes institutions and norms as simply given, in order to analyse and explain social institutions and the contested nature of institutions and norms.

To summarise, we may note the following points. Giddens' structuration theory holds that structures are rules and resources, which are enabling as well as constraining. Agents have power and this is mediated through resources, with power being irreducible to resources. Agency also requires the mediation of rules, as agents' practices are rule-following practices. Such rules are to be understood as practical ways of going on rather than discursively codified formal rules. To conceptualise social rules as discursive rules would be to open up the problem of the rule-following paradox, and to assume that social rules were analogous to formal rules, such as the rules of chess, would misunderstand that rules and practices are mutually implicated. They are mutually implicated because the rules do not exist as sets of isolated discursively codified formulae which are separate from on-going practices. In this sense then, rules (structure) and agency are only understandable in terms of one another: they are mutually implicated.

This means that Giddens' sociology is post-Wittgensteinian because whilst it conceptualises agency in terms of rule-following, and rules in terms of practices (not formal discursive rules), it goes against Wittgenstein's philosophy by trying to give a general ontology. *Instead of making reference to different ways of going on, Giddens introduces concepts such as structure and agency, which are abstracted from any specific practices.* This is meant to enable Giddens to break from the interpretative approach of Wittgensteinian philosophers such as Winch, because such a general ontology, or meta-theory, seeks to connect agents actions within a broader context. Rather than seek to understand why a specific act is meaningful, for the individuals concerned, Giddens' ontology would link a practice to a prevailing structure, which means linking the meaningful acts of an individual to a broader social context, defined in terms of rules and resources. It also means that social conflict may enter into the explanation, because instead of seeking the meaning of individual acts against an unexamined backdrop of norms, the norms themselves would be explained, and it would be recognised that

different groups may respond to rules in different ways. To secure a purchase upon how Giddens differs from Wittgensteinian theorists we need to get stronger grasp of how his ontology is constructed as a general ontology, whereby structure is not just a synonym for specific practices in specific forms of life.

(4) The Ontological Status Of Structures

Giddens argues that structures only have a 'virtual existence'. What this means is that structures have a virtual existence outside time and space, becoming real as memory traces, or when 'instantiated' in practices situated within time-space (1993(a):63-4).

Structures only 'really' exist in the form of 'structural properties'. Structures (rules and resources) are virtual, and exist outside time-space, until they are put into practice, whereupon they become structural properties, and structural properties are simply the instantiated structures which are repeated in social practices. The structural properties most deeply embedded in time-space are called structural principles. The instantiated structures constitute social systems, which are defined as recursive social practices (1993(a):65-6 & 1995(a):23-5). So, rules and resources are virtual until instantiated in praxis, where upon they become 'real', and form structural properties, of social systems (which are repeated practices). As Giddens puts it

To say that structure is a 'virtual order' of transformative relations means that social systems, as reproduced social practices, do not have 'structures' but rather exhibit 'structural properties' and that structure exists only in its instantiations in such practices and as memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents (1995(a):17).

In more simple language, we may say that society is based on repeated practices, and these practices are based on rules and resources which only have an existence as such,

when used in interaction. For example, the institution of the family is deeply embedded in time-space, with individuals repeatedly engaging in the practices which constitute family relations. The rules which constitute meaning for, and which sanction such practices, are virtual until drawn upon by individuals in the appropriate context, whereupon they serve to continue a way of going on which is ubiquitous (i.e. which is deeply embedded in time-space). So, this way of going on is a structural property (it exists), and the practices which sustain it draw upon rules (structures) which are virtual (they exist 'in suspension' when not acted upon). As regards structural principles, these concern the interconnection of different institutions or structural properties, such as the modern nuclear family and industrial capitalism.

This conception of social structure is rather different from the established usage. Often, the term structure is used to mean an objective entity which is external to, and constrains, subjectivity and agency. This usage began with Durkheim's (1993(a)) definition of social rules as objective, external and constraining, which was coupled to the methodological injunction to study one social fact by another, because the social facts were *sui generis*. Hence the study of suicide (1993(b)) which was in terms of explaining the national suicide rate (one social fact) by reference to 'suicidogenic currents' (another social fact), without any reference to individuals'.⁶ Durkheim's latter work (1995) though stressed the importance of internalised norms, which eroded to some extent the subject-object divide. The problem here was that the notion of collective values, and the later development of this idea in Parsons' 'normative functionalism', placed the emphasis on how behaviour conformed to internalised social norms, which compromised the notion of agency

⁶ As many have pointed out, it was naive for Durkheim to accept suicide statistics as a valid and reliable indicator given the difficulty of ascertaining the individuals' intention, the different national criteria for defining a death as suicide, and the impact of religion, influencing some to make a suicide look like accidental death. More importantly though, Durkheim could not avoid reference to individuals. He discussed how a suicidogenic current, such as lack of integration (or 'egoism') may result in suicide amongst educated Protestants, but the only way to explain why not all members of a group affected by a suicidogenic current committed suicide was to say that some individuals were 'suicide prone'. Which, as Lukes 1992:214-5 argues, introduces a social psychology, connecting individuals' mental states to a broader social context.

(Giddens 1993(a):51). In other words, the subject is held to be a 'cultural dope', who *reacts to the constraining pressure of internalised norms, rather than acting upon rules which allow change* (Giddens 1993(a):53). Giddens relates this to contemporary sociology, referring to the structuralist work of Blau, and Althusser's structuralist Marxism. On Blau, Giddens makes the same point he made against Durkheim, arguing that Blau gives us something of a 'Durkheimian manifesto', because it defines structures as external and constraining (1995(a):210). Against Althusser, Giddens argues agents are 'structural dopes' of even more stunning mediocrity than Parsons' cultural dopes, because agents are just bearers of structures; or subjects are just vehicles for the object (1993(a):52). In other words, whereas cultural dopes have some agency, even though it is to conform, structural dopes are just de-centred reflections of structures.

This rejection of structures as being only external and constraining leads Giddens to reject the notion of emergent properties, which Durkheim used to define social facts. For Giddens social structures are not ontologically distinct from individuals' practices. He argues that

Social systems do have structural properties that cannot be described in terms of concepts referring to the consciousness of agents. But human actors, as recognizable 'competent agents', do not exist in separation from one another as copper, tin and lead do. They do not come together *ex nihilo* to form a new entity by their fusion or association (1995(a):171).

Thus Cohen argues that it would be entirely inconsistent for structuration theory to talk of emergent properties, because the emphasis is on inter-related practices, not individuals confronting some mysterious - and undefined - stratum which 'emerges' from the interaction of individuals, to exert an 'objective' constraint upon them (1990:42).

For Giddens, one may say that structures are real, which is why he notes, in passing, that his concepts concerning structures are compatible with a 'realist epistemology' (1993(a):63), but one should not juxtapose objectivity to subjectivity, nor externality to internality. The point that Giddens wants to make is that structures are the medium and outcome of interaction: this is the duality of structure (1995(a):25). Agency turns upon the instantiation of structures, and this instantiation reproduces or changes these structures. Instead of rules *qua* structure being an external constraint, rules are enabling as well as constraining, because agents' practices draw upon structures, and can initiate change, as well as reproducing structural properties in social systems: *a duality replaces the subject - object dualism.*

Given this it is clear that Giddens has little sympathy with the methodological individualist counter to structuralism (or holism). Such individualism is criticised for making reference to social factors without being able to define them or even accept them (1993(a): 95 & 1995(a):213-221).⁷ Giddens may argue that '[s]tructure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity' (1995(a):26), but this is not meant to commit him to methodological individualism. His point is that *instead of being cultural or structural dopes, social agents are knowledgeable, in the sense that they have the practical knowledge, i.e. the practical ability to 'go on', by knowing what practices are appropriate.* In other words, we can talk of structural properties and social systems, because knowledgeable agents instantiate the rules that recursively organise practices. Thus to understand social practices, or the agency of individuals, we need to understand how such practices are mediated through structures (rules).

(5) Problems With Rules

(5.1) An Individualist Ontology: Conflating Structure Into Agency

Switching from exegesis to critique, we can say that Giddens' general ontology unfolds into individualism on the one hand, and a subject-object dualism on the other hand. In this section I will explore the former issue, and as a way into describing Giddens as an individualist, I will begin by discussing Archer's (1995) view that Giddens elides structure and agency together, with structuration theory being guilty of 'central conflationism'.⁸

Archer, who will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, begins by criticising methodological individualism for upwards conflationism, which denies the existence of a non-individualist social reality, and Durkheimian 'methodological collectivism' (as opposed to Gellner's and Mandelbaum's methodological collectivism) for downwards conflationism, which makes agency epiphenomenal. Following this, Archer then notes that Giddens' attempt to resolve the structure-agency problem, by moving from a subject-object dualism to a duality, results in structure and agency being elided, or run together. Rather than prioritise structures or agency, '[c]entral conflationism instead deprives *both* elements of their relative autonomy, not through *reducing* one to the other, but by *compacting* the two together inseparably' (Archer 1995:101. Emphasis in original). This is regarded as a strength by 'elisionists', because it is thought to resolve the structure-agency dilemma without reducing structures to individuals or reifying structures.

Such central conflationism is erroneous for Archer though, because it fails to conceptualise structures as emergent properties. Without such a notion of emergent properties, structures are activity-dependent in the *present tense*. As Archer puts it, '[a] leap is made from the truistic statement, "no people: no society", to the fallacy, "[T]his society because of these people here present" and its necessary by-product, a sociology of

⁷ In other words, Giddens is making the same criticisms of methodological individualism that were discussed in chapter three.

⁸ See also Archer 1982, 1990, 1993, 1996(a) and 1996(b).

the present tense' (1990:86). So although Giddens is correct to stress the activity-dependence of structures in order to avoid reification, we should recognise that *structures are activity-dependent in the past-tense*. What this means is that instead of conflating structure and agency together, as practices in the present, we should recognise that structures are emergent properties which were created by past acts, and which are now ontologically distinct from agency.

For Archer, social structures may enable and constrain agency as Giddens argues, but we can only study this by conceptualising structures as being ontologically separate from agency. By eliding structure and agency together, one prevents the possibility of studying how structures furnish a social context which will provide objective constraints upon individuals' practices (and which may nonetheless be eventually modified by agents). Or, to put it another way, with this sociology of the present tense, there is no way to analyse how people make history in circumstances not of their own choosing, as the said circumstances become conflated into agents' practices in the here and now: circumstances are identical with individuals' choices in the present tense. So when Craib (1992(b):3-4) notes that for Giddens structure and agency are two sides of the same coin, with observed practices being conceptualisable as either structure or agency, we may paraphrase this as 'individuals make history, and they do so in circumstances of their own making and choosing, in this instant': to disavow the notion of emergent properties is to endorse a sociology of the present tense, which will evacuate any notion of an historically derived social context, leaving us with just individuals' practices in the here and now.

Moving from the issue of structure and agency in general, to the specific issue of defining structures in terms of rules, Archer argues that rules ought to be considered as emergent properties. There are three reasons for this (1995:108). The first is that many rules, such as laws, contracts, constitutions, etc., have *autonomy* from their instantiation, because they have an independent existence in time and space. The second is that rules are

anterior to practices, because rules pre-exist practices. The third reason, is that rules have an independent *causal influence*, so that the law will be applied to a miscreant even if the miscreant is ignorant of the law. This does not reify rules, according to Archer, as rules are activity-dependent in the *past tense*, as emergent properties. What this means is that emergent properties may be created by people in the past, but they then have an independent existence. Rules therefore have a real existence outside present practices, because individuals made the rules in the past, and those rules now exert an independent influence over individuals.

Now it may have been noticed that the examples of rules given by Archer are the sort of rules that Giddens refers to as formulated rules, or discursively codified rules, which are not the normal type of rule. Rules concerning the law, bureaucracy, contracts, games, etc., are not typical of social rules according to Giddens. This is because such rules rest on a subject-object dualism, given the formalism of the rules concerned. When confronting the rules of law, or the rules of a game, for instance, one is confronting formulated rules, prescribing what one ought to do, and what one ought not to do. The rules are external and constraining. In this case, such rules may be characterised as emergent properties, as Archer argues, because such rules are not reducible to individuals instantiating them in practices. This is not to imply that conceptualising structures as emergent properties necessarily results in a subject-object dualism, for as we will see in the next chapter, social realism links structure and agency without making structures just external determining constraints upon agency, by using the notion of emergent properties. Rather, the point here is just that formal rules, as Giddens' notes, have a prescriptive function and, as Giddens fails to note, this means that such rules are ontologically distinct from agency in the present tense. Such rules would be the object, which was separate from the subject, and which functioned as an external constraint upon the subject:

My concern in this section though is not with the issue of a subject-object dualism arising from behaviour corresponding to formal rules, but with the way in which Giddens' argument about non-formal rules ends up as a form of individualism. If we consider what Giddens takes to be archetypal social rules, then we are dealing with informal rules. These informal rules are only understandable in terms of practices. That is, such rules are to be understood in terms of agents' practical knowledge about how to go on in different situations, rather than discursive codifications of rules. This could imply a concern with an interpretative sociology that dealt just with agents' meanings and understanding of the world. As we have seen though, Giddens wants to move beyond interpretative sociology, in order to link agency to structure, so as to emphasise the importance of the prevailing social context (as an enablement and constraint) upon agency. In which case, it is incumbent upon Giddens to operationalise the concept of structure in a way that will enable us to analyse how rules influence practices. We need to understand how the historical circumstances influence the individuals who make history, whilst not being able to choose their circumstances.

However, this is precisely what Giddens cannot do. If we try and analyse rules then we meet the problem that rules are definable in terms of practices and practices are definable in terms of rules. Rules are not something separate from agents' practices, but are intrinsic to agents going on. That is, rules are to be understood not as enablements, but as enabled action: rules are not to be understood as entities with the potential to enable action, but as the action itself. Rules are practices-in-action. This could seem like a 'chicken-and-egg' situation, with rules being defined as practices and practices being defined in terms of rules. The chicken and the egg though are ontologically distinct, and the point behind the paradox concerns the temporal sequence of events. In which case such an analogy will not work, for we cannot begin to ask how rules *qua* pre-existing structure influence the course

of agency over time (by providing a context which is eventually reworked by agents), because rules are reduced into agency.

This means that we have a sociology of the present tense as Archer argues, but it does not mean that Giddens' ontology may be described as elisionist, or central conflationism. Non-formal rules cannot be regarded as being ontologically distinct from agents' practices. The result of this is that rules becomes conflated into practices: structure is conflated into agency. There is no way to operationise the concept of rules, except to use it as a synonym for individuals' practices, in which case 'structure' would be a synonym for agency, meaning that structure would be redundant as a concept in its own right (and misleading as a noun). Structure and agency are *not elided* simply *because structure is reduced into agency*: rules are nothing more than individuals' practices. *This produces a sociology of the present tense because we could not understand how individuals made history in circumstances not of their choosing.* We could not explain how structures furnished a social context which enabled and constrained individuals' practices. Instead, all we could refer to would be individuals' practices. Such a position would clearly be individualist, because there could be no reference to anything other than individuals and their acts. Hence it would appear that Giddens' social ontology would put us in the same position as those theories he criticised for focusing on agents' meanings without linking this to a broader social context. We may analyse agents' practices, and their meanings, but we cannot move beyond this to examine how a social reality which is irreducible to individuals constrains as well as enables agency. *In short, we have upwards conflationism (rather than central conflationism), which can only explore individuals' acts and meanings in the here and now, because it cannot conceptualise the existence of a broader social context influencing individuals (and changing only slowly).*⁹

⁹ Layder 1985:131 & 1994:141 has a similar point, arguing that Giddens' attempt to resolve the structure-agency problematic ends up 'resolving' his own agency-based problematic which prioritises agency over structure, by changing the meaning of structure.

(5.2) Rules And The Subject-Object Dualism

In this section I will shift the concern, to argue that a subject-object dualism can emerge in Giddens' ontology. To see how this arises we can begin by noting that for Giddens, we may conceptualise practices as having either a pluralist or a singular relationship to rules. With the pluralist conception of rules *vis-à-vis* practices, one would argue that in the *flow* of on-going *practices*, agents draw upon *multiple rules*, as each context requires different practical *skills*, in which case, we cannot hope to identify rules by deriving *a rule* from *a practice*. For example, a male factory worker may have to be able to conform to the employer's orders (formal rules), but he would also have to go on within a male workers' subculture, which links into social life, with gender norms about appropriate 'masculine conduct' pertaining to both work and social spheres. In acting as a masculine worker, the male factory worker would be using different practices to continue reproducing his gender identity. These practices may be regarded as embodying multiple rules, because the agent concerned would draw upon sets of practical skills in each specific circumstance: it would not be the case that the worker mechanically followed a rule, to which his behaviour conformed. Instead, he would draw upon sets of practical skills about how to go on. As argued above though, unless we can distinguish rules from practices, by saying that structures are ontologically distinct, the result is an individualism which reduces structure into agency.

Alternatively, one could argue that a singular relationship obtains between *a rule* and *a practice*, with *a practice necessarily conforming to the rule qua causal factor*. In this case one could turn to the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, in order to procure a definitive social ontology. With such an ontology one could have a filing cabinet of discrete essences, or rules, and one would then either read-off behaviour from the ontology, or read the ontology into observed events. The paradox of rule-following would

not arise, because one would be using an essentialist conception of rules, which maintained that *a discrete act* corresponded directed to *a rule*. One could not hold up an act as an illustration of breaking and following a rule, because to know a rule would be to know the discrete act which would necessarily correspond to it.

Of course Giddens would not endorse such a view. However, such an issue arises when we consider how Giddens' account of rules can imply a subject-object dualism. To recap, Giddens holds that social rules are not to be thought of as analogous to rules in a game, because social rules only exist in conjunction with practices: rules are ways of going on (1993(a):65). Subsequently Giddens qualifies this, saying that there are formal rules, such as laws, bureaucratic rules and the rules of games, etc. Although he equivocates, saying in the same paragraph that such rules are (a) 'codified interpretations of rules rather than rules as such', and (b), that they are 'specific types of formulated rule', which do not 'exemplify rules in general' (1995(a):21). An example of formal rules being 'codified interpretations' would be laws, using juridic discourse to codify different forms of practices according to prevailing norms. What this means then, is that laws *qua* discursive codifications of rules *qua* practices, are just restatements of accepted norms: they are discursive knowledge which repeats practical knowledge.

Another way of putting this is to say that laws follow practices, and that laws are not ontologically distinct from practices (which follow norms), because laws are just re-interpretations of really-existing ways of going on. *Against this, we can say that even if laws are initially developed to codify accepted ways of going on (by, for instance, upholding contract obligations), laws do become ontologically distinct, because they exert an objective influence over practices.* So if some people decided not to uphold contractual obligations, they would not just be violating a set of cultural norms, but in violation of a rule, which would have very real consequences, in the form of legal penalties. The law would pre-exist their action and act as an objective effect upon it. We

may also note that laws may be used in changing norms rather than tracking the prevailing consensus. Thus laws could be put in place to help counter widespread discrimination based on racism and sexism for instance. Here the ontological separation of laws *qua* rules from practices would be clearly illustrated with laws being objective constraints upon previously accepted ways of going on.

So, laws *qua* formal rules have to be regarded *as rules in their own right*, rather than as discursive codifications - or interpretations - of rules, and these 'specific types of formulated rule' may be regarded as emergent properties. They have an ontological status which is not dependent in the present tense upon instantiation: formal rules exist before the acts they may constrain. Of course past actions will have created formal rules, but now they are not reducible to individuals' practices. Whether we are discussing laws (as above) or other types of formal rules, such as bureaucratic rules, these rules really exist outside instantiation, as Archer argued. Whereas Archer defends the conception of structures as emergent properties, in her realist attempt to link structure and agency (as described in chapter five), Giddens would regard the conception of structures as emergent properties as an illustration of the subject-object dualism. Giddens has an ontological dichotomy between: (a) the duality of structure, whereby structures exist in their instantiation within practices, and enable as well as constrain agency; and (b), the subject-object dualism, whereby structures are Durkheimian emergent properties which are external constraints upon agency. The recognition that formal rules were emergent properties would, given this dichotomy, mean that structure and agency became separated, resulting in structures being constraints upon agency, with agents' practices simply conforming to the external and determining influence of structures. The notion of purposeful social agents would be lost as the emphasis shifted onto the way that behaviour conformed to structural determinism.

Moreover, note that when Giddens says that rules are not like formal rules in games such as chess, because social rules are contested, he is implicitly saying that rules can be objective constraints upon practices, and that these rules may be resented, because they are perceived as unjust *impositions*, i.e. unjust restrictions upon freedom. This could, as has been suggested, apply to legal rules, as laws are often the site for conflict over values precisely because laws exist as ontologically distinct entities from practices, which can restrict agents' practices. Nevertheless this also applies to informal rules, or practices *qua* established ways of going on. If we reject the emphasis upon consensus, as Giddens does, in order to recognise that the social world is made up of a plurality of groups, some of whom will actively question prevailing norms and practices, then we will recognise the ubiquity of conflict (in the broadest sense of the term). The corollary of this is that whilst some agents will see the accepted ways of going on (i.e. informal rules) as normal, and will probably take them for granted, others may see the existing practices as an unjust constraint.

Mouzelis (1989) argues that a subject-object dualism will emerge as soon as some agents 'step back' from prevailing norms, in order to question and criticise (or even analyse) such norms. As he puts it, '[w]hen specialists or lay-persons use metalanguages, their orientations to rules and resources [i.e. structures] can be understood better in terms of a subject/object dualism than in terms of duality' (1989:617). In other words, when social scientists, or agents, produce a questioning or critical language, they are stepping back from a structure which then becomes external to them. We can extend this point though, saying that *rules are an external object, whether perceived as such or not.*

Structures can be external constraints before they are recognised or perceived as such.

So, if some regard the prevailing gender norms as normal and 'natural', and take them for granted, whilst others analyse, question and / or criticise such norms, then it is not simply the case that such norms only have an objective existence for the latter group. Rather,

such norms or rules about how men and women ought to go on, would exist as (to use Archer's 1995 terms) an objectively real *cultural emergent property*.¹⁰ Whatever one thought about gender, one would be born into a system of rules concerning appearance, sexuality, rights to employment, rights to birth control, the acceptance of homosexuality, etc., which would be irreducible to the practices of particular individuals, and which would constrain one's actions. Therefore in order to understand social and political discussion about changing the prevailing practices which influence how we go on, we need to talk of emergent properties, which for Giddens means talking of a subject-object dualism.¹¹

So, on the one hand, structure is reduced into agency, with structures being rules which exist as the actions of individual agents. In this case, we would have an individualist sociologist which, if it was influenced by Wittgenstein (rather than empiricism), would mean putting the emphasis on individuals' meanings; which is what Giddens tries to move beyond. On the other hand, when Giddens accepts that formal rules exist, their existence would be as entities that are external constraints upon agents' practices. Such entities would be emergent properties which, according to Giddens, results in a subject-object dualism, whereby the individual subject has their behaviour determined by the social object. Further, we may extend this point to informal rules, or customary ways of going on, using the example of gender and established practices as *cultural emergent properties*. As emergent properties entails a subject-object dualism for Giddens, this

¹⁰ This is simplifying Archer's discussion slightly, but the point is to say that informal practices can be objective constraints, rather than pre-empting a full discussion of Archer's ontology.

¹¹ Problems similar to those discussed in this section on rules also arise when considering resources. One follower of Giddens, Sewell 1992, realises the problem in arguing that resources are virtual until instantiated. His response is to argue that resources, quite simply, are not virtual until instantiated, and further, he admits that formal rules have such a 'real' existence too, which leads him to reclassify formal rules as resources. Archer 1995:109 criticises this, pointing out that resources, unlike formal rules, can be procured in different amounts by different individuals. She also argues that Sewell cannot sustain an argument for the duality of structure because his argument that the actual and the virtual are mutually dependent fails to say how this is so, without making one side of the equation epiphenomenal 1995:110-14. For a defence of Lockwood, which argues that he does adequately connect structure and agency, see Mouzelis 1997.

means that he escapes from interpretivist sociology by posing a subject-object dualism. This dualism would entail the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy because it would be a definitive list of the social essences. One could simply read-off different forms of behaviour from the ontology of emergent properties which determined individuals' behaviour. In place of a flow of practices using a plurality of rules / social skills, there would be a singular causal relationship between a rule and a discrete form of behaviour which was determined by that rule / essence.

(6) Problems With Linking The Micro And Macro Levels

(6.1) Voluntarism

In this section I will deal with Giddens' arguments concerning social systems and methodological *epoché*. As with the argument about rules, my case against Giddens will be that his work unfolds into a individualism and a subject-object dualism. Giddens argues that social systems are to be understood as '[r]eproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organised as regular social practices' (1993(a):66. Fig. 2.2). Such reproduced relations can, in turn be broken down into 'social integration', concerning relations of reciprocity between actors, and 'system integration', concerning relations of reciprocity between groups or collectivities (1993(a):76-7). Further, he talks of 'institutional analysis' and the analysis of 'strategic conduct', referring to the study of 'system properties', and individuals, respectively; whilst stressing that this division is just a 'methodological *epoché*' that does not correspond to system and social integration, respectively (1993(a):80).

Another way of putting this is to say that Giddens wants to connect individuals into a wider social context, not just by talking of individual acts as following social rules, but also by linking individual practices to broader social continuities, or 'social systems'. He seeks to do this, obviously, in terms of a duality, rather than a subject-object, or structure-

agency, dualism. Therefore when Giddens talks of social systems he is not referring to systems in the sense used by structuralists and functionalists, whereby social systems are emergent properties that are constraints upon agents (1993(a):50). External and constraining emergent properties are not to be set up in a dualism with individuals. Instead, '[s]ocial systems involve regularised relations of interdependence between individuals or groups, that typically can best be analysed as *recurrent social practices*' (1993(a):65-6. Emphasis in original). Structures are virtual, and are therefore characterised by 'an absence of the subject' (1993(a):66), but when individuals instantiate structures in particular practices, they contribute to the continuance of social systems, which are 'more than' particular individuals and their acts. So systems are not objectively real structures that are external to agents' practices.

The problem though is that if emergent properties are denied, on the grounds that they necessarily result in a subject-object dualism, then it is hard to see what prevents the concept of 'social system' becoming redundant. For if social systems are not emergent properties then, *a fortiori*, they are not ontologically distinct from agents' practices, which would mean that social systems were simply synonyms for agents' practices. Or, to be more accurate, they would be synonyms for the practices which agents *chose* to repeat. This position would not just be individualist, focusing upon individuals, but also voluntarist, because there would be very little (if any) constraint upon individual acts.

If we accepted such an individualist and voluntarist sociology, it would be difficult to explain how there was any form of social continuity, or 'recurrent social practices', i.e. social systems. As Craib argues, one could not explain continuity or regularity in terms of 'unintended consequences', because chaos is just as likely (if not more so) than order (1992(a):116). To put it another way, if ten individuals were told to speak a word in private it is unlikely that their words would collectively come close to forming a coherent sentence. If those individuals were removed from their isolation though, then they would

be able to produce sentences which were appropriate to an on-going dialogue. That is, individuals would be able to 'mesh' their practices in with others, resulting in continuity. In this case, social systems may be understandable via a linguistic analogy, with the reproduction of society being akin to the reproduction of language.

Although Giddens denies that he thinks of society as akin to a language, because he wants to distance himself from structuralism and interpretative sociologies (1993(a):4), he does draw upon the linguistic analogy, when describing how the utterance of a grammatical English sentence contributes to the reproduction of the English language as a whole, and the same may apply to social reality (1993(a):77). Giddens draws upon this analogy when discussing the relationship between social and system integration. He argues that

the systemness of social integration is fundamental to the systemness of society as a whole. System integration cannot be adequately conceptualised via the modalities of social integration; none the less the latter is always the chief prop of the former, via the reproduction of institutions in the duality of structure. [...] The duality of structure relates the smallest item of day-to-day behaviour to attributes of far more inclusive social systems: when I utter a grammatical English sentence in a casual conversation, I contribute to the reproduction of the English language as a whole (1993(a):77. Emphasis in original).

This turn to the linguistic analogy does not resolve the matter though. We are still left with a very individualist and voluntarist account which cannot really explain how the social context may be ontologically distinct from individuals, and how this context may constrain agency. Just as agents may choose to speak French rather than English tomorrow, so it follows that agents may just change their social practices and thus

transform society, simply by an exercise of unconstrained free will; assuming that they agree on the outcome, so as to avoid chaos, given that social order cannot be a fortuitous 'unintended consequence'. Individuals may choose to mesh their sentences into an on-going dialogue, but the dialogue, or even the language itself, can be changed simply by exercising free will. In which case, the social system, or continuity, is to be understood in terms of an *intended consequence* continuity obtains because different individuals chose it. *The existence of social systems therefore seems to be entirely dependent upon individuals consciously deciding to reproduce certain ways of going on.* Thus social systems depend upon actions in the *present tense*, as there is no way to conceptualise social reality as a pre-existing emergent property, that acts as a mediating constraint upon agency, and which can only be changed slowly, given that it is ontological distinct from agency. In short, social systems depend upon agents' dispositions in the present here and now.

What this means is that to understand social relations a reduction is necessary, whereby social reality is explained by reference to psychological dispositions. As social systems are not to be understood in terms of emergent properties which are separate from individuals' practices in the present tense, and as systems cannot be understood in terms of accidental unintended consequences, it follows that systems are an intended consequence, produced by agents choosing to act in a particular way *en masse*. Social systems, i.e. continuing practices, obtain because individuals desire this to be the case. If individuals 'changed their minds', the practices would change, and the existing social system would simply cease to be. Layder picks up on this point about the dependency of social systems with the practices of knowledgeable agents. He argues that

This seems to imply that reproduced practices are virtually the same thing as people's reasons and motivations. If this is so, it strongly suggests that social reality is dependent

upon psychological phenomena - something which Giddens is otherwise strongly against (1994:141).

This implies not only that the discussion of social systems in a way that is antithetical to the notion of emergent properties implies an individualist conception of social reality. It means that the argument turns on the individualist sociological logic of immediacy. This is because one would be turning to a psychologism, whereby an ontology of human being would be a definitive master-ontology, whereby all social phenomena could be explained by an explanation which reduced social relations down to expressions of psychological states. Thus to know the ontology of psychological states is to know all the causes of human behaviour. Therefore any research will be redundant or, alternatively, one may prove the ontology, reading it into any observed behaviour.

(6.2) Parallel Universes

Having noted this, we can say that a subject-object dualism also appears in Giddens' discussion of systems. Giddens contrasts social integration, defined in terms of reciprocity between individual agents, and system integration, defined in terms of reciprocity between groups or collectivities. The means, as Mouzelis argues, that co-presence becomes the defining feature, with individual co-presence defining social integration (1995:124), and lack of co-presence defining system integration. Therefore social and system integration are the same, in effect, as the micro and the macro level units of analysis, where the micro is defined in terms of face-to-face interaction, whilst the macro level is 'above' this (Mouzelis 1995:124). Now some defend such a micro-macro divide, such as Wagner (1964), who argues that sociology can be divided up according to small-scale studies of individuals, and large-scale macro quantitative studies, with the units of analysis pertaining to 'size', i.e. individuals, or social processes (measured in a quantitative way).

Against this, as Alexander (1987) argues, it is misleading to formulate the issue as one of size. Alexander argues that '[t]here can be no empirical referents for micro and macro as such. They are analytical contrasts, suggesting emergent levels within empirical units, not antagonistic empirical units themselves' (1987:290). So we should try and link macro or systemic factors, to the micro level of individual agency, as the two are intertwined, and separating them would result in a marked subject-object dualism. To use a micro-macro divide would necessarily result in a subject-object dualism, because one would be trying to artificially contrast the realm of actual individuals with the realm of social processes cut off from, and 'above the heads of' individuals.¹²

With such a subject-object dualism there would be parallel universes, whereby agents scurried around in an unconstrained way at the micro level, whilst social reproduction, in the form of macro-level processes or statistical regularities simply 'occurred', presumably as some form of unintended consequence. *This is important to note, because it means that instead of the social subject being determined by the social object, the two realms would be cut off from each other.* Such a view is reinforced by Giddens' argument about the analysis of strategic conduct and institutional analysis. The study of strategic conduct is the study of agents' discursive and practical consciousness, whilst institutional analysis brackets agents' practices, to focus on the 'chronically reproduced features of social systems' (1993(a):80 & 1995(a):288). As Archer argues, '[t]his methodological bracketing has produced a pendular swing between contradictory images - of chronic recursiveness and total transformation' (1995:88). On the one hand we have agents and their ways of going on, or their discursive and practical consciousness, meaning agents acting on the

¹² So to use a micro-macro dichotomy would result in a subject-object dualism, whereby the social object was divorced from the individual subject, which is not to say that defining structure and agency as emergent properties - and therefore *not* as a duality, results in a subject-object divide, because an emergent properties ontology can link structure and agency. It is misleading therefore, as Archer 1995:7 points out, to claim as Layder 1994:3 does, that the micro-macro, agency-structure, and individual-society distinctions are the same.

basis of their knowledge, or dispositions and changing practices; and on the other hand, we have systems which are, by definition here, characterised in terms of continuity.

With institutional analysis we are dealing with social systems which are unchanging, and with strategic conduct, we are dealing with unconstrained free will and change. Strategic conduct turns on such a voluntarist notion of agency because the emphasis is just on the individual's consciousness and practices, meaning that actions could be derived from dispositions. There could be no reference to a social context influencing the individual, because given the methodological dualism, reference to non-individual factors commits one to the study of regularities which are unchanging and separate from individuals. Agency therefore is unconstrained by a wider social context, and this unconstrained agency, whereby acts mirror dispositions, would result in an emphasis on change. We would be dealing with how individuals *chose* to act in different ways. There could be no 'middle way' as there is no way, given this methodological dualism, predicated upon macro-continuity and micro-change, to say how a social context influenced and constrained agency, and was, in turn, eventually altered by agency. We just have a dualism between unchanging systems and individuals' practices, meaning a dualism between structural continuity and individuals' effecting change.

So, whilst the definition of social systems resulted in individualism and psychologism, the discussion of social and system integration, together with the arguments for methodological bracketing, resulted in a subject-object dualism. This dualism did not mean, as it usually does, that the object dominates the subject, but that there were parallel universes. This divide between the micro and macro levels is overcome though when Giddens considers how social systems may influence individuals' practices. *Giddens may define social systems in terms of recurrent social practices, rather than emergent properties, but he does go on to say that social systems may act as external constraints upon individuals.* He argues that 'the greater the time-space distancing of social systems

- the more their institutions bite into time and space - the more resistant they are to manipulation or change by any individual agent' (1995(a):171). Admittedly Giddens does move straight on to talk of enablement, saying that although time-space distancing may close some possibilities off, it will nonetheless open up others. This may well be true, as individuals could, for instance, accept legislation on some issue or mobilise to change it.

Nevertheless, the point has been conceded that there are strata of social reality which are ontologically distinct from individuals, and which can act as external constraints upon individuals. In which case, it must be an emergent property of some sort, which is not necessarily a problem, unless one holds, as Giddens does, that emergence implies a subject-object dualism whereby emergent properties are only external constraints and not enablements, with the object determining the subject. As Layder comments, Giddens' account of institutional durability (in terms of routinisation) is not convincing (or internally coherent), because Giddens' lacks the conceptual resources to explain how there can be 'objective structures' which pre-exist and post-date the life of particular individuals (1994:141-2). So Giddens' concepts are premised upon a sociology of the present-tense, meaning that the focus is on the practices of individual agents in the here-and-now. His attempt to overcome the voluntaristic implications of this led him to talk of contextual constraints, which are irreducible to present acts, and we can only escape from the present-tense by invoking an ontology of emergent properties, which for Giddens would mean a subject-object dualism.

With such a subject-object dualism, the agency of the individual subject would be an epiphenomenon of the object, and Giddens comes to admit as much. When discussing the issue of structural constraint, Giddens argues that 'it is best described as *placing limits upon the range of options open to an actor, or plurality of actors, in a given circumstance*' (1995(a):176-7. Emphasis in original). Giddens goes on to talk of the capitalist labour market, where the propertyless worker has to sell his / her labour power.

This is described as the agent's 'only one feasible option' (1995(a):177). Giddens then notes that '[a]ll structural properties of social systems have a similar "objectivity" *vis-à-vis* the individual agent [...although] the feasible options open to agents may be greater than in the labour contract example' (1995(a):177). Concern that all the emphasis is upon constraint leads Giddens to state that there are enablements as well.

However, his example of is workers being enabled to get a living from having to enter the labour contract on the terms of the capitalist. What this means, as Thompson argues, is that there has been a move from defining agency in terms of the power to make a change, to defining agency in terms of 'feasible options', meaning recognition of lack of choice (1991:73-4). Instead of being able to 'make a difference' the agent has only one option - or one *feasible* option - which is, in effect, the same as having no options (Thompson 1991:73). One has to accept that one has no real choice. Consequently the concept of agency is, for 'practical purposes', irrelevant (Thompson 1991:74). Thus Thompson argues that 'Giddens manages to preserve the complementary between structure and agency only by *defining* agency in such a way that any individual in any situation could *not* be an agent' (1991:74. Emphasis in original).

In a reply to this, Giddens argues that what constitutes a feasible option will change if agents' 'wants' and 'motivations' change, and that potential new courses of action may emerge as a result (1991(a):259). This is not a satisfactory rejoinder though because in addition to the psychologistic reductionism it entails, conflating the outcome of agency with dispositions, it redefines 'feasible options' as any option, by failing to admit that the objective constraints of a situation will limit the realistic courses of action. One may avoid the constraints of the labour market by becoming a New Age traveller, which is as option if one's wants and motivations adapt to this, but it is not a feasible option for most people. To maintain the meaning of feasible options, we have to realise that realistic options are embedded into contexts which may severely limit the freedom of an

individual. Recognition of such objective constraints would mean a subject-object dualism for Giddens though, because social reality would be an external constraint upon freedom of choice and action. The discussion of structural constraint therefore entails the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, because one would be dealing with an objective structure that was conceptualised as a determining factor upon agency, with knowledge of the structure being definitive: to know the structure would be to read-off behaviour that was determined by it.

(7) What Is The Purpose Of Structuration Theory? Or, What Is The Link Between Ontology And Methodology?

For Giddens a social ontology is required to inform a critical attitude towards previous research, and to guide current on-going research. On the point about reading previous research, Giddens reads selected parts of his ontology into several pieces of completed research. One of the pieces of research chosen is Willis's study of working class school boys, whilst another discussion is about a study of how the City of London came to economic prominence (1995(a):281-354). In Willis's (1977) study, the working class boys are not simply deviant, but knowledgeable social agents. These agents realise that formal schooling will make little difference to their life-chances, and they draw upon the macho culture inherited from their fathers, to distance themselves from the school culture, and to adopt a 'tough' attitude, appropriate to their future working environments. The unwitting outcome of this is that their rebellious attitude ends up making them accept dead-end jobs with no chance of career progression. Giddens uses this study as an example of the analysis of strategic conduct, with 'institutional' concerns being bracketed off. He agrees with Willis's study, dismissing a functionalist interpretation of the boys' conduct in terms of 'imperfect socialisation', to say that the boys - or the 'lads' - are knowledgeable social agents who are engaged in rule-following practices. The unintended consequence of the

lads following a rebellious macho way of going on though is to reproduce the institutional relations of the capitalist labour market.

The problem here is not that Giddens distorts Willis's work, but that he does not add anything to it. All Giddens has done, basically, is to redescribe certain aspects of Willis's study in new language. For Willis's 'counter-culture' we now have Giddens' 'knowledgeable agents' engaged in 'rule-following practices', and whereas Willis talks of the oppositional culture reproducing capitalism, Giddens talks of unintended consequences, and the activities of knowledgeable social agents reproducing the 'structural properties' of 'social systems', which are 'embedded in spans of time-space'. This may redescribe Willis's study, but it does not challenge or reinterpret Willis. Indeed, we may apply Ockham's razor and remove the supplementary layer of (structuration theory) concepts, as they add nothing to the understanding of the original work. As Giddens' concepts are just supplementary rather than complementary, they may be removed because the supplement merely replicates the main body of research.

Against the charge of redundancy we can note that Giddens states that reading (some of) his ontology into completed research will allow for 'various quite basic criticisms and emendations to be made to the research work analysed' (1995(a):326). However, apart from the fact that Giddens does not criticise or emend Willis's work, we can note that Giddens' ontology is not specific enough to be used in such a way. Taken at 'face value' we get the problem that the concepts are truistic, unfalsifiable and circular. Or as Baert puts it, 'Giddens on the whole abstains from providing bold conjectures - quite a few of the basic statements actually verge on the tautological. [...] Many aspects of Giddens's carefully worked-out theory are simply immune to refutation, being as self-evident as logical formulae' (1998:108-9). These points apply to the notion that for agents to act, agents must be knowledgeable (they know how to go on - i.e. they must have social skills), and that agents deal with limits and (potential) opportunities in a particular social

context. Arguing against this would commit one to either a determinism or an unconstrained voluntarism, so we have to accept these points, but they do not tell us much. Therefore rather than have a specific detailed ontology, we have a set of rather truistic and elastic concepts, which are general enough to be operationalised in numerous ways, which means that the ontology will just create synonyms for already established research findings. If the ontology were to allow for 'basic criticisms' and 'emendations' it would need to have a specific set of concepts which could be contrasted against those used in the research; unless that is, the general concepts of structuration theory were given meaning in an arbitrary way, with the concepts simply being defined in ways antithetical to the research being studied.

I say if we take Giddens' ontology at 'face value' then the above problems emerge. If though we analyse the ontology, as I sought to do in the previous sections of this chapter, then it is the case that Giddens' work unfolds into individualism and a subject-object dualism. In the former case, we have the individualistic sociological logic of immediacy, because the individualism results in a psychologistic reductionism. In the latter case, we have the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, with the object determining the subject, as social structures become emergent properties which, given Giddens' ontological dichotomy between practices and determining structures, means that structures are external constraints upon agent. What this means, *apropos* finished pieces of research, is that the ontology would be specific enough to criticise and emend the research in question. The problem though is that if ontology were predicated upon the sociological logic of immediacy then it would be definitive: there would be a relationship of epistemic immediacy between a concept and a really-existing essence in reality which determined behaviour. The ontology would be a filing cabinet of essences from which all forms of social behaviour could be explained. Therefore, if one did adopt such an ontology, the implications as regards finished pieces of research would be twofold. On the

one hand, one could dismiss the work as redundant, because behaviour could be read-off from the definitive ontology. On the other hand, one could read-into the research one's concepts to verify the ontology, for if one took the ontology to be definitive, then research would either be utterly erroneous or read as a verification of the ontology.

Giddens is certainly concerned about his ontology being essentialist, i.e. a definitive master-ontology. He is concerned that in developing a general definition, or meta-theory of social reality, it may be thought that his ontology is definitive, meaning that it is predicated upon the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, with each concept pertaining to a discrete empirical essence. To avoid this, Giddens stresses that his ontology is not meant to furnish a new research programme in its own right (1991(b):213 & 1995(a)326-7). So instead of trying to get methodology to mirror the ontology, with research setting out to simply verify the filing cabinet list of concepts, Giddens is keen to stress that empirical investigation would not be a verification of a definitive ontology. In fact, the link between the ontology and actual methodology (i.e. to the development of specific theories and empirical investigation), is so loose that Giddens holds that his concepts are to be used as 'sensitizing devices, nothing more' (1995(a):326).

Outhwaite (1990), and Bryant and Jary (1991), support this stance. They argue that a social ontology may be complex, but one must not mistake the complexity of concepts for an attempt to mirror reality. Thus Outhwaite argues that Giddens has a 'cautiously realist approach' whereby a plethora of concepts is developed, and designed to be used in a selective / flexible way (1990:71). This prevents the 'reification of hypothetical structures', which occurs when a less cautiously realist approach presumes that there is a relationship of identity, or immediacy, between a concept of a structure and a really-existing essence. Similarly, Bryant and Jary note that '[u]nlike Parsons, Giddens has never wanted empirical researchers to incorporate his whole conceptual vocabulary in their work' (1991:27). So, Giddens' ontology may be complex but only certain aspects will be drawn

upon, because to draw upon the entire ontology would be to assume that social reality mirrored the concepts. Further, in drawing upon selected concepts, it would not be the case that these concepts mirrored discrete referents, but that the concepts were heuristic, or sensitising devices, which could be interpreted in different ways, allowing the researcher to be sensitive to the context, rather than dogmatically applied a previously worked-out definition of a structure, etc.

Bhaskar, and Archer, who will be discussed in the following chapter, also develop an elaborate social ontology, and some see Bhaskar and Giddens as having very similar positions. Outhwaite takes such view, holding that Bhaskar not only has a similar ontology to Giddens, but that Bhaskar's realist ontology (of emergent properties) is also meant to function, in effect, as a sensitising device (1990:69-71).¹³ Bhaskar is held to be 'ontologically bold and epistemologically cautious' (1987:34), meaning that his ontological concepts, like Giddens's, do not mirror reality. Conversely, Bryant and Jary say that Giddens is a 'naive realist', in the sense that he accepts that there is a reality beyond ideas, discourse, etc., but that he does not want his ontology to be used like Bhaskar's 'scientific realist' ontology (1991:26-7). They contrast Bhaskar's scientific realism with Giddens' naive realism, to say that Bhaskar's ontology is not a sensitising device, but more of a claim to epistemic certainty. Bhaskar's ontology, unlike Giddens' ontology, is held to seek a definitive explanation of social reality, with concepts mirroring discrete essences.

The issue here is not the correct interpretation of Bhaskar; although it must be noted that Giddens explicit rejection of emergent properties does not sit well with Bhaskar's realist defence of emergent properties.¹⁴ Rather, the key point to note here is that Giddens,

¹³ See also New 1994, who regards Giddens and Bhaskar as holding very similar ontologies.

¹⁴ Baert 1998 holds that Bhaskar's ontology is very similar to Giddens'. but he says that they differ as regards the definition of structure 1998:196-7. This, as Archer 1995 argues though, is the key point: realists such as Archer and Bhaskar define structures as emergent properties, whilst Giddens eschews any notion of emergence.

Outhwaite, and Bryant and Jary, are confusing the issue of *how much ontology to apply* with the issue of *how to apply an ontology*. It is not the case that if one seeks to apply an entire ontology then one is drawing upon a form of essentialism in the form of the sociological logic of immediacy, whereby a definitive ontology of structures (or human being for that matter) is held to mirror reality *qua* discrete essences. Of course functionalists like Parsons may argue for a filing cabinet approach, with a complex set of concepts being used to map social reality, but the use of a whole ontology need not be based on the assumption that the ontology is definitive. *One may apply a whole ontology of emergent properties (as will be discussed in the next chapter) without saying that this ontology mirrors social reality: a theory of being does not imply a being-knowing identity, or immediacy.* As soon as one says that an ontology need not be definitive, with the concepts mirroring social reality, then one is able to apply the ontology to guide methodology. The issue about applying selected components of an ontology to avoid essentialism and reification is wholly specious, because if the ontology does not presume to mirror reality it may be applied *in toto*, and if its concepts are thought to mirror discrete referents / essences, then applying only selected concepts will not circumvent this problem.

(8) Conclusion

Giddens, like Rorty, was influenced by the works of the later Wittgenstein, in that there was an emphasis upon understanding the social world in terms of rule-following practices, or how agents go on within a form of life or language game. Unlike Rorty, or Wittgenstein for that matter, Giddens sought to develop a general definition of social reality. Rather than focus upon specific ways of going on, Giddens sought to develop a meta-theory. This would be an anathema to Rorty, and Wittgenstein, because it would mean stepping outside a language game to try and gain knowledge of some aperspectival

essence which defined all societies. For Rorty and Wittgenstein, the attempt to define a social ontology would be essentialist because one would be trying to reduce the complex fabric of social life into a fixed set of categories which mirrored 'really existing' fixed essences. In other words, any attempt to define a social ontology would be 'realist', in the sense that one would be trying to go beyond perspectives to see reality as it really was. In the case of natural reality this (putative) realism would be premised upon the necessity of a finished science whereby knowledge mirrored being; and as regards social reality, it would mean have a definitive ontology of social structures or human being.

This is not to say that such a conception of realism is correct. Nevertheless, Giddens is influenced by such views about social ontology. Hence his belief that any notion of structures being emergent properties which constrain (as well as enable) agency will necessarily result in a subject-object dualism, with a reified and deterministic conception of social structures. The consequence of this is an argument for an ontology of social reality which holds that structure and agency are mutually implicated as rule-following practices. The problem here is twofold. On the one hand such an ontology collapses into individualism and voluntarism, with the emphasis being upon individuals' dispositions which, consequently, entails a psychologistic reductionism that removes any reference to social contexts. This turns on the individualist sociological logic of immediacy because such psychologism would be predicated upon a theory of human being, in the form of a theory of mental states, from which behaviour could be read-off. On the other hand, a subject-object dualism is entailed, as soon as we begin to conceptualise rules, and social systems, as objective constraints upon agency. This is because for such entities to have an objective existence, and not to be reducible into individuals' practices (and, ultimately, beliefs / dispositions), one must say that such things are real - that they are emergent properties. Thus, given Giddens' dichotomy between practices and a subject-object dualism, we have a subject-object dualism. Such a dualism would entail the structuralist

sociological logic of immediacy, because the ontology of structures would be a definitive ontology, from which one could read-off behaviour.

When it came to using ontology to guide methodology, Giddens counselled us to use selected parts of the ontology, and to use the concepts as 'sensitisation devices - nothing more'. If we followed this advice the ontology would be verified because it would be so vague and elastic it could be read into any work and, moreover, it would be redundant, given that such elasticity could not do any guiding work, but only redescribe work already done. The advice to use the ontology in such a fashion stemmed from a concern that the ontology may be regarded as a filing cabinet list of concepts, with the concepts mirroring external essences, so that methodology would have to verify the ontology, by applying it *in toto*, reading it into all the observations made. If the ontology did entail a subject-object dualism this would not resolve the problem, but simply limit it in a small way, with some concepts directly mirroring some discrete essences. If though the notion of emergent properties does not entail a subject-object dualism, and if we can apply an ontology in whole without assuming that it mirrors fixed social referents (such as reified social structures), then we can avoid the problems that attend the post-Wittgensteinian emphasis on practices. The next chapter shows how we may have a realist ontology of emergent properties, whilst holding that sociological knowledge based upon this is conceptually mediated and fallible.

Chapter Five

Social Realism:

Overcoming The Sociological Logic Of Immediacy

(1) Introduction

Having described the philosophical logic of immediacy, and argued that realist anti-foundationalism presented a viable alternative account of knowledge formation, in chapter one, it was argued in chapter two that realist anti-foundationalism could also act as an underlabourer for the social sciences. Realist anti-foundationalism could *underlabour in a negative sense*, by *proscribing theories based on epistemic immediacy or being-knowing identity*, meaning positivism (in the form of an extreme individualism, and ‘abstracted empiricism’), and theories predicated upon the sociological logic of immediacy. The last two chapters dealt with the sociological logic of immediacy, in both its structuralist and individualist versions, showing how Rorty’s pragmatism and Giddens’ ‘structuration theory’ ended up as positions based upon a definitive ontology. Such forms of ontology were ‘master-builder’ models of ontology, because as the ontology was definitive, with the concepts mirroring all the relevant facts, or discrete essences, then methodology would be either redundant, or an exercise in arbitrary verificationism.

It was also argued in chapter two that realist anti-foundationalism could act as a positive underlabourer. This would mean that an ontology could supply some guiding precepts for methodology. In other words, a metaphysical realist ontology would have to be complemented by a meta-theoretical ontology, meaning an ontology which could

inform the construction of specific theories and empirical research, by furnishing guiding precepts based upon a general - but non-definitive - definition of social reality. The linkage of an anti-foundational epistemology with a metaphysical realist ontology (to overcome the philosophical logic of immediacy) now needs a further linkage, with a meta-theoretical ontology complementing the metaphysical ontology. The position referred to here as 'social realism' offers such a meta-theoretical ontological complement.

Social realism advocates an ontology of emergent properties, to explain social being in terms of social structures which are irreducible to individual acts (in the present tense), and which furnish enablements for agency, as well as objective constraints upon individuals' agency. Bhaskar develops this social realist ontology from his philosophy of the natural sciences, arguing for a (non-positivist) naturalism, or unity of method in the sciences. After sketching out Bhaskar's philosophy of natural science, noting its affinities with the realist anti-foundationalism argued for in chapter one, Bhaskar's social ontology will be described. The social ontology which Bhaskar initially develops is problematic because he qualifies his naturalism by putting too much emphasis on agency, thus downgrading the ontological status of social structures. This is rectified in later work and Archer goes on to make Bhaskar's social ontology more elaborate and nuanced.

Having discussed the development of the social realist meta-theoretical ontology of emergent properties, I will move on to describe and refute two sets of criticisms levelled at social realism. The first holds that realism is a form of foundationalism, premised upon the notion of an immediate access to a manifest truth, definable as discrete fixed essences, and the second holds that realism is an empty abstraction. These critiques will be rejected on theoretical and philosophical grounds; and in the following chapter, the practical usefulness of social realism will be illustrated with regard to social scientific discussions on the underclass issue.

(2) Bhaskar On The Philosophy Of Science: From Empirical Realism To

Transcendental Realism¹

Bhaskar argues for 'naturalism', meaning the unity of method between the natural and social sciences (which will be discussed later), and *he maintains that methodology (in both the natural and social sciences) ought to be guided by ontology (of 'emergent properties' existing in 'open systems') rather than (foundationalist) epistemology*. What this means is that instead of using empiricism as a epistemic master-builder, defining methodology and the objects of knowledge wholly in terms of a philosophy of mind, ontological issues concerning the object of study are to be addressed in their own terms and not transposed into epistemological questions. Instead of using empiricist epistemology as a master-builder, a meta-theoretical ontology could guide methodology (meaning the formation of specific theories and empirical research), by supplying some general precepts about the realm of natural being. In other words, ontology would act as a positive underlabourer for natural science methodology. The ontological precepts would be derived in the following fashion: having assumed that science 'works', the transcendental realist concern is with the condition of possibility for science, and the ontological precepts used to explain the condition of possibility for scientific knowledge formation are derived from an immanent critique of an alternative position, viz. 'empirical realism'. Empirical realism pertains to both positivism and neo-Kantian philosophies of natural science, and the discussion will start with Bhaskar's critique of the former.

Bhaskar's project in the philosophy of science is to avoid the reduction of ontological questions into epistemological questions. Bhaskar wants to avoid what he terms the 'epistemic fallacy' (which was defined and discussed in chapter one). This leads Bhaskar to reject positivism, on the grounds that it commits the epistemic fallacy of reducing being

¹ Given that my concern is primarily with social realism the following section, on Bhaskar's philosophy of natural science, will be rather schematic. My purpose is simply to note the contours of his realist philosophy

into knowing, i.e. for reducing, or transposing, ontological questions into epistemological questions (1986:6, 1993:13, 17-8, 1997:36). Ontological questions are transposed into epistemological questions with positivism, because the object of science, *viz.* causal mechanisms, are defined in Humean terms, as observed constant conjunctions. Thus *what* exists, and *what* is knowable, is defined wholly in terms of *how* we may have knowledge: an account of knowledge formation based on experience is used to define the objects of knowledge for natural science. Questions of natural being are transposed into questions of knowing, framed in empiricist terms of reference, and this results in what Bhaskar (1997:64) refers to as an ‘actualist’ ontology. *With actualism the real is necessarily definable in terms of the actual.* What this means is that any account of (natural) being must confine itself to propositions concerning actual observed, or observable, states of affairs, rather than causal mechanisms which are unobservable in their effects. A description of observed discrete ‘facts’ would be an accurate account of being, with laws being manifest in their effects *qua* observed constant conjunctions.

An actualist ontology is also an ontology of ‘closed systems’. Laws and their effects would be thought to correspond exactly, with laws being observed constant conjunctions, and so it would follow that natural reality was a closed system, because it would be made up of a fixed set of unchanging observable regularities. There would be no ‘openness’, in the sense that there would be no difference between laws and their observable effects, with observed effects being the result of different (unobserved) laws interacting. In place of unobserved causal laws having observed effects which were *contingent* upon a particular set of changing interactions between causal laws, an actualist closed systems ontology would hold that observed regularities were manifestations of *universal* causal laws. To observe a regularity would be to observe a relationship of natural *necessity*.

rather than get drawn into technical debates in the philosophy of science; which lack of space precludes anyway.

The problem with this is that closed systems do not (for the most part) obtain, unless one is creating artificial closure in an experimental situation (and even then unknown factors may intervene). Therefore the positivist could not explain how an identified putative law could be held to exist outside the experiment, or the use of closed system identification of putative laws, if open systems exist. As Bhaskar argues

The empiricist is now caught in a terrible dilemma: for the extent that the antecedents of law-like statements are instantiated in open systems, he must sacrifice either the universal character or the empirical status of laws. If, on the other hand, he attempts to avoid this dilemma by restructuring the application of laws to closed systems (e.g. by making the satisfaction of a *ceteris paribus* clause a condition of their applicability), he is faced with the embarrassing question of what governs phenomena in open systems (1997:65).²

So, if one used an empiricist epistemology to inform positivist scientific methodology, empiricism would act as a master-builder. By committing the epistemic fallacy, empiricism defines ontology in terms of an epistemology which is premised upon the notion that we have a direct access via experience to the manifest truth. Thus the ontology of natural reality produced by this is one which holds that causal laws are identical with their effects, with causal laws being defined via observed regularities. Given an empiricist epistemology then, the ontology produced is an actualist closed systems model of being.

Therefore, *scientific methodology would be simply a restatement of empiricist epistemology: empiricism would not guide scientific methodology, but make science a restatement of its epistemic tenets.* Science would be based upon seeking out actual regularities which were presumed to exist in closed systems. *Such a model of science may conform to the epistemic dictates of empiricist epistemology, but it would fail to explain*

how causal laws existed when regularities failed to obtain outside the conditions of artificial closure created in an experiment. In short, it could not account for the condition of possibility for science, because it could not explain how the object of scientific knowledge (causal laws) existed in a natural world that is, for the most part, an open system.

The empiricist-positivist philosophy of science described above is one version of what Bhaskar refers to as empirical realism. The other version of empirical realism is neo-Kantian (1997:26).³ It may seem strange to refer to neo-Kantianism as a form of empirical realism, as this may seem to imply that it has significant similarities with the empiricist doctrine that we have a direct access to a manifest truth, contrary to the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal realms. Indeed, Bhaskar does argue that neo-Kantian philosophies of science ‘reject the empiricist account of science, according to which its valid content is exhausted by atomistic facts and their constant conjunctions’ (1997:27). However there is an ontological similarity between the two, which is that neither can sustain the notion of causal structures being definable in terms other than that of how the knowing subject may have knowledge (1997:25-6). Both are predicated upon the epistemic fallacy, with both empiricist and neo-Kantian accounts of natural science turning upon an actualist closed systems ontology. As Bhaskar argues, It is in their shared ontology that the source of this common incapacity lies. For although transcendental idealism rejects the empiricist account of science, it tacitly takes over the empiricist account of being. This ontological legacy is expressed most succinctly in its commitment to empirical realism, and thus to the concept of the ‘*empirical world*’ (1997:28. Emphasis in original).

² See also 1986a:28-33, 1993:16 & 1998:9.

³ Note that positivism and neo-Kantianism are treated as ‘ideal-types’ by Bhaskar, who argues that elements of both exist in many philosophies 1997:26.

With neo-Kantianism the emphasis changes from a manifest truth, which is directly experienced, to our concepts, with experience being mediated via categories / conceptual structures. Nevertheless the view remains that causal laws are definable in terms of empirical regularities, even though these are constructed via our categories. So, instead of defining causal laws as observed constant conjunctions which are taken to be the manifest truth, causal laws are definable as perceived constant conjunctions, which are the products of our categories. Consequently neo-Kantianism is, like empiricism, predicated upon the epistemic fallacy, because questions of being are reduced into questions of knowing: causal laws are defined in terms of the regularities perceived by the knowing subject. Further, neo-Kantianism also adheres to an actualist closed systems ontology, because causal laws would be defined as fixed regularities, with no conception of causal laws being separate from their perceived effects.

The root of the problem with empirical realism is that it is predicated upon a relationship of epistemic immediacy, or being-knowing identity, because with both empiricist and neo-Kantian philosophies of natural science, there is no way to avoid defining causal laws as anything other than the regularities which are observed or perceived via categories. Which leads us straight into the difficulty of explaining how causal laws can exist when regularities fail to obtain. Or to put it another way, the object of natural science (causal laws) is dependent for its existence upon the subject perceiving universal regularities in a closed system, and as the natural world is not a closed system, *the object of science disappears with the subject's failure to perceive, continuously, universal regularities.*

Against this, Bhaskar argues for the anti-foundational non-identity of being and knowing. As Bhaskar puts it, his realism 'explicitly asserts the non-identity of the objects of the transitive and intransitive dimensions, of thought and being' (1993:23). In other

words, Bhaskar is complementing an argument for anti-foundationalism with an argument for a metaphysical realist ontology, by maintaining that our knowledge is conceptually mediated, and that this knowledge is of an external reality which cannot be known with epistemic immediacy.

As knowledge claims do not directly mirror a manifest truth there is no relationship of identity between the realms of being and knowing. Thus knowledge claims constitute a *transitive* realm, because given the lack of a direct epistemic access to an external reality (the intransitive realm), our knowledge claims will be *fallible*. Therefore what constitutes scientific knowledge will necessarily change over time, as theories with better approximations to the truth are developed. This leads Bhaskar (1997) to describe his position in terms of 'epistemic relativity', and to argue against the correspondence theory of truth. Bhaskar advocates epistemic relativity, simply because given the lack of a direct access to a manifest truth, our knowledge claims are relative to some fallible theory or perspective. This is different from truth-relativism because the anti-foundational emphasis on the conceptual mediation - or relativity - of truth claims, is complemented by a metaphysical realist ontology. That is, the truth content of a concept is not reducible to its origin within a conceptual scheme because if it has any truth content, this will arise from its relationship to an external reality. As Collier puts it, we are trapped inside the transitive realm, but

This is no real trap, since we can always *change* the transitive dimension, and that we do so in the ways that we do is (in the best case) explained by the fact that the transitive dimension is not an end in itself, but produced entirely in order to explain what occurs in the intransitive dimension (1994:82).

We may not be able to break outside our perspectives, but this does not mean that all perspectives are equal in usefulness or truth, because they will *correspond* to an external reality in different ways.

Bhaskar would, as noted above, object to the correspondence theory of truth, but I have just described the relationship between the transitive realm and the intransitive realm in terms of correspondence, because Bhaskar's rejection of the correspondence theory of truth is erroneous. It is possible, *pace* Bhaskar, to adhere to both the thesis of epistemic relativity and the correspondence theory of truth. Before saying why this is so we can survey Bhaskar's view to the contrary. Bhaskar notes that for the correspondence theory of truth, a proposition is truth iff it corresponds with a state of affairs. He continues,

But propositions cannot be compared with states of affairs; their relationship cannot be described as one of correspondence. Philosophers have wanted a theory of truth to provide a *criterion* or stamp of knowledge. But no such stamp is possible. For the judgement of the truth of a proposition is always intrinsic to the science concerned. *There is no way in which we can look at the world and then at a sentence and ask whether they fit.* There is just the expression (of the world) in speech (or thought) (1997:249. Emphasis added).

This argument against the correspondence theory of truth is erroneous. For as was argued in chapter one, the correspondence theory of truth need not entail the relationship of epistemic immediacy that Bhaskar maintains it does. Hence Popper adhered to the correspondence theory of truth, whilst advocating the notion that truth claims had varying degrees of verisimilitude: truth claims could approximate to the truth, and this would occur if they corresponded to the truth, in some fashion, but there was definitely no notion of a direct access to a manifest truth. The source of Bhaskar's error lies in his view that the correspondence theory of truth furnishes a *criterion* of truth when, as Collier argues, it

may furnish a *definition* of truth (1994:239). Truth may be described as occurring when a proposition corresponds to reality, but there is no abstract philosophical *a priori* algorithm to define how beliefs may correspond to an external reality, and given the lack of such an algorithm, correspondence does not necessarily imply that propositions directly mirror external reality. Propositions about gravity will be true if they correspond to the physical processes involved with gravity, but this does not necessarily imply a special philosophical ‘method’ to explain how sentences can directly express the world in its own (pre-linguistic) terms.

Turning from Bhaskar’s critique of empirical realism and anti-foundational conception of epistemology, to his ontology, we can note that Bhaskar (1997) argues for a stratified ontology of emergent properties existing in open systems. The ontology is ‘stratified’ because it maintains that there are different strata of being, with the higher strata being dependent upon other strata for their existence whilst being causally independent of the lower strata. To give what may well be the ‘classic example’, water is an emergent property of hydrogen and oxygen: water depends for its existence on the existence and admixture of hydrogen and oxygen, but it is causally independent of both properties. The properties of water cannot be understood in terms of the properties of hydrogen and oxygen alone. Thus natural reality is stratified because higher strata properties *emerge* from lower strata properties. Causal laws as emergent properties exist in open systems because causal laws can interact in a number of ways, with the result that the observed effects of causal laws are always contingent upon a particular configuration of causal laws having effects which, at one particular point in time, happen to interconnect with the effects of other causal laws. So instead of perceiving a causal law in an observed regularity, an observed event will be contingent upon the effects of several causal laws interacting.

Given this ontology of natural being it follows that one could not adopt a methodology suited to empirical realism. One could not maintain that scientific methodology ought to seek knowledge of causal laws via an inductivist methodology or a deductivist methodology. Inductivism would mean defining a relationship of natural necessity in terms of a finite number of observed regularities. This is not only logically fallacious, because it bases a proposition about a event recurring into infinity upon a finite number of observations; it is also erroneous, because it confuses the observed contingent effects of causal laws with the laws themselves. Similarly, deductivism is predicated upon an actualist closed systems ontology.⁴ A deductive approach to methodology would mean making a distinction between the *explanans* and the *explanandum*. The *explanans* pertains to the law (for example, all metals conduct electricity), and the ‘initial conditions’ (for example, that there is no insulation or other form of circuit-break). That is, the *explanans* pertains to the premises.⁵ The *explanandum* pertains to the conclusion, which is that copper conducts electricity. This deductive methodology is based upon an actualist closed systems ontology because causal laws are defined in terms of empirical regularities. It is assumed that if an observed event conforms to the premise (*explanans*) then a causal law has been observed. As the realm of natural being is an open system though, one cannot draw a conclusion about a causal law existing, from such observed events. In sum, methodologies based upon the empirical realist actualist ontology of closed systems cannot explain causal laws, because causal laws do not exist as empirical regularities in closed systems; contrary to the ontological presumptions of empirical realism, and the epistemic presumptions concerning the philosophies of mind (empiricism and neo-Kantianism) which underpin this.

⁴ This is an ideal-typical example of deductivism. Variations on this model go under the following rubrics: the covering-law model, the deductive-nominological model, and the hypothico-deductive model.

⁵ I take this example from Sayer 1994:170.

Instead of inductivism and deductivism, scientific methodology has to be based on the notion of seeking out knowledge of causal structures, or ‘generative mechanisms’, which ‘underlie’ their observed and contingent effects. This means that science ought to be based upon what Bhaskar calls the RRRE methodology; and this methodology has four stages. The first stage is the *resolution* of a complex event into its causal components. The second stage is the *redescription* of component causes into the perspective deployed. The third stage is to *retrodict* the possible antecedent causes. The final stage being the *elimination* of alternative possible causes of components, which will remove alternative explanations, by appealing to independent evidence about antecedent causes (Bhaskar 1997:125, 1998:129, and Collier 1994:122-3). Rather than seek a manifest truth, methodology has to be based upon constructing theoretical interpretations of complex empirical events, to define the underlying non-observable causal mechanisms at work, and to criticise alternative accounts of natural laws, which place too much emphasis on the realm of the actual, by pointing to failures in regularities to obtain.

So, whereas empiricist epistemology functioned as a master-builder, with the possible objects of scientific enquiry being delimited by a philosophy of mind, the transcendental realist ontology of emergent properties existing in open systems functions as a meta-theory, or underlabourer. This meta-theoretical ontology of emergent properties existing in open systems can be used to guide scientific methodology, meaning that it may guide the formation of specific theories and empirical research. Scientific investigation is to be premised upon the notion of searching out underlying causal structures which are ontologically separate from their contingent effects, hence the RRRE methodology in place of inductivism and deductivism. Further, knowledge of such causal structures will be conceptually mediated and fallible because there is no epistemic immediacy, or relationship of being-knowing identity.

Now it may be objected, especially by those of a more (post-Wittgensteinian) ‘pragmatic’ position, that this ontology is, like empiricist epistemology, very dogmatic. Whereas empiricist epistemology - and empirical realism generally - had an actualist closed systems model of being, to which science methodology had to adhere, by seeking out constant conjunctions, Bhaskar’s realism, it may be argued, presumes to mirror natural being. In the former case a philosophy of mind provides a master-builder for science and in the latter case an essentialism is used, whereby a definitive master-ontology is a master-builder because it lists all the discrete essences which constitute natural being. With such a charge of ‘essentialism’ it would be presumed that *any* form of ontology *necessarily presumed* some form of epistemic absolutism, by seeking what Putnam called a ‘God’s eye view’, and what Rorty called a ‘skyhook’, meaning a definitive master-ontology. This is because any definition of reality would be presumed to be a detailed ‘map’ of reality which was total (in actuality or potential) and based upon a relationship of epistemic immediacy. The general point to make here is to repeat the argument made by Searle in chapter one, which is that ontology, or at least realist ontology, in the form of metaphysical realism, is not an epistemological position, concerning how we may know reality. Of course our specific concern here is with an ontology which does seek to say something about reality, other than the metaphysical claim that reality exists beyond our representations of it. However, this realist meta-theoretical ontology (of emergent properties in open systems) does not presume to be an essentialist master-ontology, which mirrors (all the) discrete essences in the realm of natural being. For realism is part of the transitive realm, meaning that it is a fallible theory itself. It may seek to guide the formation of specific theories and empirical research, but this does not presume immediate access to all the ‘facts’ and, conversely, if it did, the research, and the formation of specific theories, would be pointless, as we would know all there was to know.

Transcendental realism seeks to provide a guiding meta-theory (i.e. to act as a positive underlabourer) rather than presuming to furnish a definitive master-builder ontology. It does this by developing its ontological concepts as general precepts to guide methodology, and these are derived from an immanent critique of empirical realism; and thus they are not justified in terms of epistemic immediacy, with the ontology mirroring fixed external essences. Thus transcendental realism acts as a positive underlabourer by explaining the condition of possibility of science, in terms of a non-empirical realist methodology, gaining knowledge of emergent properties existing in open systems.

Bhaskar is aware that the charge of circularity may be made with regard to his 'transcendental realism'. This is because often transcendental arguments about X being the condition of possibility of Y are tautological, with X being the condition of possibility of Y because X is the condition of possibility for Y. For example, it could be argued that the condition of possibility for a political party to be elected was the condition of being voted into office; meaning that a party would be voted into office if it was voted into office. Or, to think of an example with more bearing upon the above discussion, it could be argued that the condition of possibility of science was that science sought knowledge of emergent properties existing in open systems, and by seeking knowledge of emergent properties existing in open systems, science was possible. With both examples the condition of possibility (let us call this X) for a particular state of affairs to obtain (lets us call this Y) is identical with the state of affairs, because the latter is defined in terms of the former, making it self-referential: X is the condition of possibility for Y, because as Y is defined in terms of X, X is the condition of possibility for Y because X is the condition of possibility for Y. Further, should such a charge of circularity be valid, then realism would be dogmatic, because it would seek to explain the condition of possibility of science via its own (unjustified) terms of reference.

Against this charge of circularity, Bhaskar argues that his transcendental realism is developed via an immanent critique of empirical realism, and that immanent critique avoids circularity. He argues that

This snare [i.e. circularity] can be avoided only if philosophical enquiry assumes the form of immanent critique, so that transcendental arguments paradigmatically become, or at least are always supplemented by, transcendental refutations of pre-existing, and more generally alternative accounts (1986:14).⁶

This immanent critique takes as its starting point the assumption that ‘science works’, and then moves on to develop an alternative account of natural being (in terms of emergent properties existing in open systems), from the immanent critique of the empirical realist actualist ontology of closed systems. As Bhaskar puts it

one assumes at the outset the intelligibility of science (or rather of a few generally recognized scientific activities) and asks explicitly what the world must be like for those activities to be possible. This programme not only yields new insight into the structure of scientific knowledge (the form that it must take if it is to be knowledge of a world investigated by such activities), but enables us to see the tacit presupposition (of a closed world, completely described) on which the traditional problem of its rationality was hung is *inconsistent with its very possibility* (1998:8. Emphasis added).

So, transcendental realism avoids the charge of dogmatism because in addition to not being an essentialist ontology, the guiding precepts are developed via an immanent critique of the alternative empirical realist philosophy of science.

To sum up we can note the following points. Bhaskar's realism is referred to as 'transcendental realism' because it starts by assuming that science works, and then it seeks the condition of possibility for this. Circularity is avoided because the transcendental argument for realism is developed via an immanent critique of empirical realism. This immanent critique leads Bhaskar to argue that the condition of possibility for science is that science is based upon seeking knowledge of emergent properties existing in open systems, rather than seeking knowledge in terms of an actualist closed systems ontology, where laws are taken to be manifest in their effects, as observed constant conjunctions: scientific methodology cannot be based upon an empirical realist epistemology. Consequently, as transcendental realism explains the condition of possibility of science, it can also act as an underlabourer: the meta-theory of natural being can guide methodology (i.e. the formation of specific theories and empirical research), because it can supply some general precepts about the natural world. Moreover, transcendental realism *must* act as an underlabourer. This is because if transcendental realism is based upon explaining the condition of possibility for natural science, then it follows that if such an explanation is developed (in this case as an ontological meta-theory of emergent properties in open systems), then it must be presented as such. If a critique of empirical realism can yield an account of the condition of possibility of science, then such an account ought to be argued for as an underlabourer, so that the knowledge can be applied to methodology. In short, a transcendental realist account of natural science is also *necessarily* an argument for the underlabourer conception of philosophy, because the conditions of possibility established by the transcendental argument will serve to guide scientific methodology: a (non-dogmatic) meta-theoretical ontology can guide the formation of specific theories and empirical research, whereas positivism used empiricism as a master-builder, defining science in terms of a philosophy

⁶ See also 1998:6.

of mind, which resulted in an untenable actualist closed systems ontology (which was also adhered to by neo-Kantian accounts of natural being).

(3) Positivist Versions Of Naturalism (Or, The Use Of Positivism In Sociology)

It was mentioned above that Bhaskar advocates naturalism, or the unity of method in the sciences. Now obviously Bhaskar is opposed to positivism, but naturalism is usually taken to be a positivist doctrine, with empiricist epistemology acting as a master-builder for all areas of intellectual enquiry. In this section I will consider the implications of using an actualist and closed systems ontology in sociological explanation. Just as an actualist closed systems ontology failed to explain the condition of possibility for science, because science was not based upon discovering laws via observed constant conjunctions, so it will be shown that an actualist (and closed systems) ontology cannot be used for explaining the condition of possibility of social science. Following this, discussion of social ontology will continue by considering Bhaskar's response to the 'voluntarist', 'collectivist', and 'dialectical' positions in the 'structure-agency' argument; and the way that Bhaskar seeks to qualify his naturalist argument for the unity of method in the sciences.

Actualism in the social sciences could take one of two forms. It could, as mentioned in chapter two, either be an individualism which proscribed any reference to social factors, in which case it could not describe, let alone explain, individual acts; or it could take the form of abstracted empiricism. In the former case, with the observed realm of the actual being taken as definitive of the real, social scientific explanation would pertain to discrete 'facts', meaning observed individual acts. As there could be no reference to non-individual contextual factors though, this position could not even *describe*, let alone *explain*, the social world, because it would rule out the most basic social defining factors for an agent, such as their class, gender-identity, ethnicity, nationality, status, etc.; and

reference to motivations for action would be impossible, given the rejection of reference to contextual factors. So, whereas methodological individualism (which was influenced by a moderate form of empiricism) begged the question by referring to ‘situational logics’ and ‘situations’, positivist individualism could not begin to explain what an agent was *qua* social agent, let alone explain why or how they acted as they did.

The actualism involved with this positivist form of individualism would not hold that the social realm was a closed system, because it would deal with isolated individual acts *qua* discrete facts, rather than regularities; whereas in the latter case, concerning abstracted empiricism, the actualist ontology would also have a closed systems ontological aspect. This reason why abstracted empiricism has both an actualist and closed systems ontology can be illustrated by returning to C.W. Mills’ example of abstracted empiricism, as described in chapter two. Using the variables of religion and voting behaviour, a study noted that richer Protestants voted Republican, and poorer Catholics voted Democrat. Mills, it will be remembered, referred to this as ‘abstracted empiricism’, because the putative facts were abstracted from any social context, with the *described correlation* between the variables being taken to constitute a *causal explanation*. It was held that one’s religion ‘explained’ one’s voting behaviour, with religion ‘causing’ one to vote in a particular way; and the study failed to explain *why* or *how* affiliation to a religious group *qua* social group (situated within a particular socio-historical context) had the political ramifications noted. The ‘facts’ were taken to ‘speak for themselves’.

This study cited by Mills illustrates how abstracted empiricism is premised upon a positivism which adheres to an actualist ontology, *because in abstracting the variables from a social context, it is presumed that the variables constitute a manifest truth*. Instead of explaining people’s affiliation to religious groups, and the consequences (political or otherwise) of this in terms of social factors (such as tradition, upbringing, social class,

etc.), the variables of religious group and voting behaviour (i.e. outcome of voting, rather than the decisions that led up to the choice to vote for the party perceived to further one's (unanalysed) interests), are taken to be discrete facts in their own right. The real is conflated into the actual, with statistical variables being actual facts, which can be known directly, and which are exhaustive of social reality. Unless a social factor can be quantified as a discrete empirical variable, to be measured statistically, it cannot be real; and thus the realm of the real is synonymous with the real of the actual, i.e. quantified 'facts'.

Rather than list the existence of a set of abstracted variables, sociological explanation is taken to turn on describing causal relations between variables. A causal relation is presumed to obtain when a correlation is noted between two variables; such as religious group affiliation and voting behaviour. Given the actualism involved, the real is reducible to the realm of observed or statistically measured 'actual' / empirical events, in which case a causal relationship will be said to obtain when one event follows another; that is, when a constant conjunction is observed. As only quantified (or quantifiable) variables are real, a causal relation will exist if a constant conjunction, or correlation, occurs between two or more variables. There can be no reference to non-observed factors, so any notion of causality must define causality in terms of observed correlations (between variables). Therefore, *to measure one event following another is to measure a dependent variable being determined by an independent variable*. To retain Mills' example, voting behaviour would be the dependent variable and religious group affiliation would be the independent variable, with voting behaviour being dependent upon agents' religious group affiliation. One could 'read-off' voting behaviour (as the dependent factor) from the independent or causal factor of religious group affiliation.

With this model of causality there can be no conception of a contingent correlation obtaining over a period of time. A contingent correlation may occur, but for a correlation

to continue occurring, between two variables, then a causal relationship *must* be said to exist. As the real is synonymous with the actual, in the form of quantified variables, causal relations can only be conceptualised in terms of reference which pertain solely to the realm of the actual. In which case, correlations must be causal relations, and the notion of a continued contingent conjunction is, *a fortiori*, logically impossible. Or, to put it another way, a putatively *chronically occurring correlation* must really be taken to be a relation of *necessity*. The alternative is to vitiate the entire ontology by saying: (a) that the realm of the actual is not definitive of being (because there are unobservable factors at work); (b), that one must embrace scepticism and reject the existence of causal laws, because, with actualism, we cannot distinguish a causal relation of necessity from a relation of contingency; or (c) that one can only retain the notion of causal laws (and the actualist closed systems ontology more generally) by relying on ‘faith’ that causal laws must exist, even if they cannot be observed, or known, given that observation of correlations is not the sufficient condition to distinguish a chronically occurring correlation from a causal relation.

An actualist closed systems ontology may be retained if one ignores points (a), (b) and (c) above, and assumes that a chronically occurring contingency must, in reality - or ‘actuality’ - be a relation of necessity; and in doing this one may adhere to an inductivist methodology. Of course, in the social realm, unlike the natural realm, there are no relations of necessity, in that social relations are contingent upon their socio-historical location. Yet one may try and get around this, by arguing that with some social relations there is sufficient ‘fixity’, i.e. chronic recurrence, for those relations to be explained via an inductivist methodology. For example, to say that affluent Protestants vote Republican is not the same as establishing the existence of a law of nature, or natural necessity. Yet it could be argued that the relationship between religious group and voting behaviour was sufficiently chronic for it to be explained via an inductivist methodology, which identified

the independent and dependent variables, explaining a causal relationship between the fact of religious group identity and the fact of voting behaviour. In short, a causal relation between two sociological variables could be *analogous* to a relation of natural necessity.

What this means is that the use of an inductivist methodology in the social sciences (as utilised for instance with abstracted empiricism) would *not* entail the logical fallacy of deriving a conclusion about a causal relation occurring into infinity from a finite number of observations. Rather, a relationship between two variables would be held to occur for a finite period of time, and this conclusion would be derived from a finite number of observations or measurements. This raises the problem though about defining how exactly an on-going correlation between two variables may be taken to be a causal relationship which is analogous to a relationship of natural necessity. Unfortunately the notion of a relationship being ‘sufficiently chronic’ for it to be a causal relation is wholly untenable because it commits the logical fallacy of begging the question. To say that a correlation occurs between two (or more) variables on two, three, ten, twenty, etc., occasions is not sufficient to establish that the relation is non-contingent; and to maintain that X number of measured correlations establishes a non-contingent (causal) relationship, is to give a tautological argument whereby X number of occurrences establishes a causal relationship because X number of occurrences establishes a causal relationship. For example, one could say that having observed ten instances of people from religious group X voting for party A, one can infer a ‘causal’ relation, whereas if only nine had acted in this way it would remain a ‘mere’ contingency; as ten occurrences was deemed to be ‘sufficiently chronic’ to be analogous to a causal relation (about necessity).

So, there are no relations of necessity (strictly speaking) with regard to social being, in which case one may look for correlations which are sufficiently chronic to count as being causal relations that are analogous to relations of (natural) necessity. This argument though rests upon the logical fallacies of *petitio principii* and tautological reasoning. This

means that the actualist closed systems ontology is vitiated, because the *methodology* which would establish knowledge of casual relations, via *the ontological assumptions that being is definable in terms of observed - actual - events*, cannot do so without falling into fallacious reasoning. As such reasoning is fallacious there is no basis to exclude the possibility of chronically occurring correlations being wholly contingent rather than causal relationships.

An inductivist methodology may be based upon a less extreme form of positivism, which qualified the actualism, by holding that research can be theory-mediated, rather than based upon a direct access to the facts. Inductivism may allow for theory-construction, but in a *post-hoc* sense. May gives the example of how a study (by Butler and Stokes (1969)) found that manual workers tended to vote Labour rather than Conservative, and notes that from this empirical *description* one then will move on to develop a theoretical *explanation* (1998:31). After noting that class based explanation of voting behaviour have become increasing problematic, May notes that ‘this illustrates that we require a theory to interpret the findings of social research. As social researchers, our findings on the social world are devoid of meaning until situated within a theoretical framework’ (1998:31).⁷

May continues by arguing that such inductivism is flawed because it presumes that we can move from data to theory, when all our observations and investigations are influenced by some form of theory (or implicit ‘prejudice’). As May argues,

Whether the research is pure or applied in this sense, interests have guided our decisions *before* the research is conducted. It cannot be maintained that research is a neutral

⁷ The reason for the increased difficulty of linking class to voting behaviour, may be due to the phenomenon of ‘class de-alignment’, meaning the fragmentation of political identity. Whether class de-alignment is an accurate theory or not is beyond the scope of this chapter, although it is worth noting that to assume a neat fit between social class (however defined) and voting behaviour, may be essentialist, as it assumes members

recording instrument, whatever form it may take. As a result, researchers should make their theories, hypotheses or guiding influences explicit and not hide behind the notion that facts can speak for themselves (1998:31). Emphasis in original).

Moving from fact to theory is impossible given that what constitutes facts is influenced by some form of perspective, whether this is explicitly formulated or not; and so it is wrong to begin by measuring correlations *qua* facts about causal relations.

One may of course adopt a deductive approach to the use of quantitative data. In this case one may sub-divide a premise into (a) the 'law' or causal relation, and (b) the initial conditions. For example, one may say that (a) people vote for political parties which will further their perceived interests (causal law), and (b) that Protestants perceive the Republican party to serve their interests (initial conditions); and then one may conclude the Protestants vote Republican. Although this is more elaborate than the inductivism associated with abstracted empiricism, it still rests upon an actualist closed systems ontology. This is because the conclusion about a causal relationship is still derived from observing empirical regularities. The conclusion is derived from measuring a dependent variable (voting behaviour) react to an independent variable (perceived interests), and thus one is measuring a correlation, and assuming that this is sufficient to identify a causal relation. There may be a statement about initial conditions, but this simply serves to indicate *which* observable factors are to be focused upon in order to measure a 'causal' relation, in terms of observed constant conjunctions.

Given the above arguments, we can say that positivism cannot account for the condition of possibility of social science. For positivism social scientific knowledge is to be created by gaining knowledge of discrete empirical facts. That is, it is premised upon the epistemic fallacy, whereby questions of being are transposed into questions of

of a socio-economic class act in the same way for the same reasons: i.e. it may be premised upon a false

knowing, with the object of knowledge being defined in actualistic terms that comply to the *fiat* of empiricist epistemology. The consequence of using such foundationalist epistemology to define methodology is that either one has an atomistic individualism which can say nothing about the social realm (meaning, in this case, individuals as social agents); or that one has an inductivist or deductivist method, premised upon an actualist closed systems ontology,

which erroneously has to presume that observed, or measured, correlations are causal relations. This means that positivism misconstrues the object of knowledge (as atomistic asocial individuals; or causal processes that are empirically observable); and it misconstrues the method for gaining knowledge, by presuming that knowledge is based upon direct access to a manifest truth (via observing individuals or measuring variables *qua* discrete facts).

So, in the previous section transcendental realism was argued for, via an immanent critique of empirical realism. Empirical realism could not explain the condition of possibility of science because its actualist closed systems ontology could not explain how causal laws were not observable constant conjunctions. That is, empirical realism could not explain how science gained knowledge of causal laws which were not observable in their effects, existing in open systems. Similarly, positivist versions of sociology could not explain social reality, because either the social context would be evacuated, or statistical facts were abstracted from any social context, with correlation being mistaken for causality. What is needed therefore is an approach which will explain how individuals are situated within a social context, that enables as well as constrains agency (to avoid voluntaristic individualism, and reification, respectively), and which will explain this in a way that is not premised upon knowledge having an immediate access to a manifest truth, or discrete empirical facts which speak for themselves. Social realism can achieve such a

position, and to see how this is so, we can begin with Bhaskar's immanent critique of three positions concerning the object of social scientific knowledge, which concerns individuals and structures (the 'structure-agency' problematic).

(4) Transcendental Realist Naturalism: Bhaskar's Social Ontology

Bhaskar argues that 'for transcendental realism, it is the nature of objects that determines their cognitive possibilities for us' (1998:25). This means that the object of study for social science, *viz.* social reality, is to be conceptualised in a way that avoids the epistemic fallacy. Instead of transposing ontological questions into epistemological questions, we are to deal with ontology in its own right, which means avoiding positivist naturalism, and the actualist closed systems ontology. When it comes to considering ontology, the features of this ontology can be developed via an immanent critique of alternative social ontologies, which means that the ontology is to be developed from an immanent critique of the various positions concerning the structure-agency issue. What this means is that social realism can explain the condition of possibility of social science by explaining what the object of study is, via an immanent critique. Further, it can use a definition of this object, in the form of guiding general precepts, as a meta-theory, or underlabourer, to guide methodology, with this giving a theoretically mediated and fallible access to the social object. In developing his social ontology in such a way, Bhaskar argues for naturalism, holding that the ontology of emergent properties existing in open systems applies to both the natural and social sciences. Naturalism is argued for on the basis of the defining features of reality rather than in terms of an epistemology which acts as a master-builder. Bhaskar does qualify his naturalism, but before we can discuss this, we need to deal with his argument on the structure-agency debate.

Bhaskar sets out three approaches to the structure-agency problem, and provides an immanent critique of each approach (1998:25-34), which is similar to the critical points

raised in chapter two. The first approach he discusses is 'voluntarism', which is rejected because it fails to account for social reality, for reasons which were discussed in chapter two. That is, it is argued that voluntarist, or individualist, versions of sociology, which focus on agents' acts and meanings fail to explain how the social context influences and constrains individuals' freedom. Whether one is dealing with an interpretative individualism or a more empiricist individualism (such as 'methodological individualism'), any notion of a real social context is lost, as the explanation *reduces* the level of analysis down to individual agents.

The second approach is 'collectivism', which is illustrated by Durkheim's ontology of social facts, and this is criticised for reifying social reality. This cannot account for the condition of possibility of social science, because agents are passively determined by reified social forces, which prevents any understanding of individuals, because the ontology is based on the logical fallacy of reification. Bhaskar does though agree with Durkheim that social structures are emergent properties, in that they arise from individuals, but are irreducible to individuals. Unlike Durkheim though, Bhaskar wants to avoid reification by not conceptualising structures as something which are only an external constraint upon agency. Whereas Durkheim argued that sociological methodology should explain one social fact by another, with no reference to individuals and agency (which was the object of study for psychology), as social facts were *sui generis*, Bhaskar's project is to have a social science which can link individuals to a social stratum of reality beyond them.

The third position criticised is the 'dialectical' position of Berger and Luckmann. This view is rejected because it begins with free agents creating, *ex nihilo*, social structures, and then presents social structures as external and constraining. In other words, it

replicates both the problems of voluntarism / individualism and collectivism.⁸ As Bhaskar puts it, such a model 'encourages, on the one hand, a voluntaristic idealism with respect to our understanding of social structure and, on the other, a mechanistic determination with respect to our understanding of people' (1998:33).⁹

Bhaskar addresses these problems, which we can refer to as the 'traditional critiques', given their ubiquitous existence within the literature on the structure-agency issue, with his 'Transformational Model of Social Action' (henceforth TMSA). He argues that unlike the model of social reality argued for by Berger and Luckmann, with the TMSA model it is not the case that individuals *create (ex nihilo)* social structures (which then act upon them), but that individuals *recreate* social structures, which provide the social context for action. Here social structure, like the natural environment, is *always already made* (1998:33). According to Bhaskar

It is true to say that society would not exist without human activity, so that reification remains an error. And it is still true to say that such activity would not occur unless the agents engaging in it had a conception of what they were doing [...]. But it is no longer true to say that agents *create* it. Rather one must say: they *reproduce* or *transform* it. That is, if society is always already made, then any concrete human praxis, or, if you like, act of objectivation can only modify it; and the totality of such acts sustain or change it (1998:33-4. Emphasis in original).

Hence the task of sociology is to understand how agency refashions the social context in which it is situated, in a way analogous to a sculptor fashioning a piece from the material available (1998:34). This conception of social reality leads Bhaskar to make a distinction

⁸ This 'dialectical position' is similar to some aspects of Giddens' social ontology, which manages to both overemphasise individuals' agency, and the social object against the agent / subject.

⁹ For a similar critique of Berger and Luckmann, see Layder 1994:88-9.

between the *duality of structure* and the *duality of praxis*. The duality of structure refers to the dual character of society as the ever-present condition (material cause) and continually reproduced outcome of agency. The duality of praxis refers to the dual character of agency, as both conscious production and often unconscious reproduction of society (1998:34-5).

So, unlike the voluntarist position which fails to deal adequately with constraint upon the individual, and the Durkheimian-collectivist position which under-emphasises agency, by reifying structures as external constraints, Bhaskar is arguing that *individuals' actions always recreate a pre-existing social context, whether such reproduction is intended or not*. He gives the examples of marriage reproducing the institution of the nuclear family, and work reproducing capitalism, noting that people getting married or going to work do not (usually) consciously intend to reproduce those institutions (1998:35). This is not to focus exclusively on reproduction / continuity though. For Bhaskar also wants to explain change as well, although he states that change is not a direct consequence of a consciously intended plan. That is, one may act to change society in some way, but the changes created (if any) will create unintended consequences, and may only be partially realised. For example, if divorce was made more difficult to obtain, then less people may get married and more people may live in unhappy marriages, or live apart, all of which may possibly create emotional turbulence for their children. So an attempt to strengthen the family would weaken it, by creating dysfunctional family units. An act based on right-wing religious political ideology would result in practices which undermined the original aim (when reality failed to comply with the dogma). Thus '[s]ociety does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But it is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism)' (1998:36). That is to say, society is reproduced by agents working within a pre-existing context, rather than produced *ex nihilo* by unconstrained practices.

This TMSA model of social ontology turns on an ontology of emergent properties existing in open systems. Social structures are objectively real and irreducible down to the level of individuals because structures are emergent properties: social structures exist as an objectively real context which agents reproduce, or change, via their agency. These emergent properties exist in an open system because as individuals have free will, and as actions have unintended consequences, structures do not produce fixed regularities whereby agents' behaviour continuously conforms to a structural determinant.¹⁰ So, from an immanent critique of alternative accounts of social being, Bhaskar is able to advocate the use of a meta-theoretical ontology of emergent properties in open systems, which means that Bhaskar is able to advocate the doctrine of naturalism. *The natural and the social sciences ought to share a unity of method, because they have a similar form of object and, as Bhaskar argues, it is the nature of the object that defines its cognitive possibilities for us. Thus transcendental realism can explain the condition of possibility of the natural and social sciences in terms of science gaining (conceptually mediated and fallible) knowledge of objects of study which are emergent properties in open systems.*

Obviously there are differences between laws of nature, or relations of natural necessity, and social factors; and Bhaskar responds to this issue by qualifying his naturalism, noting some ontological, epistemological, and relational limits to the possibility of naturalism. The ontological limits on the possibility of naturalism are as follows. (1) Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the activities they govern. (2) Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist

¹⁰ As Sayer 1994:122-3 notes, we can distinguish intrinsic and extrinsic conditions of closure. The former pertains to the internal coherence of, say, a group or institution (with all the people involved pursuing the same goal, or working consistently towards a single end). The latter pertains to relations between a group and other groups together with the prevailing structural context. Although regularity may occur, the existence of free will, together with unintended consequences, we may note, means that closure will be, at best, ephemeral. That is, there will be no closed social systems even if regularity does obtain in some areas for a short while. Social continuity may, by definition involve regular patterns of action, but we are to understand this in terms of a contingent correlation, caused by a particular combination of decisions, actions and structural constraints and enablements. Causality is understandable in terms of unobserved structural

independently of the agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity. (3) Social structures, unlike natural structures, may be only relatively enduring (so that the tendencies they ground may not be universal in the sense of time-space invariant) (1986(a):130-1, 1986(b):17-8, 1993:79, 1998:38).

The epistemological limit on the possibility of naturalism is that there can never be any equivalent to experimental closure in the natural sciences (1986(a):133-4, 1993:82-4, 1998:45-6). Lacking any decisive test-situations for theories, the criteria for rational replacement and development of theories 'must be *explanatory and non-predictive* (1998:45-6. Emphasis in original). This is held to be of no ontological import though, as 'social laws', like natural laws, are not to be confused with their empirical effects. In other words, only an actualist would deny the existence of social laws or social structures on the epistemological ground that we cannot observe the social structure either in itself, or via Durkheimian 'objective indicators' (such as the legal system being an indicator of the type of social solidarity in a society).

The relational limit on the possibility of naturalism is that the social sciences are part of their own field of inquiry, so 'they are *internal* with respect to their subject-matter in a way in which the natural sciences are not' (1998:47. Emphasis in original). What this means is that (a), social objects of study may be affected by social science and conversely (b), social reality will affect the formation of sociological knowledge (1986(a):134, 1993:84, 1998:47). This could mean that the very distinction between the intransitive and transitive realms broke down, in which case social reality would cease to consist of emergent properties and it would be dependent for its existence of agents' perspectives, or meanings. Bhaskar argues though that this does not happen, and he does this by making a distinction between causal interdependency and existential intransitivity. His argument is that social structures may be effected by social science knowledge, and actors'

conceptions, but that social reality remains an emergent property. Thus 'the concept of existence is univocal: "being" means the same in the human as in the natural world, even though the modes of being may radically differ. The human sciences, then, take intransitive objects like any other' (Bhaskar 1998:47). As social structures are not conceptualised as reified determining forces upon agency, it is possible for agents to alter structures, by acting upon certain forms of knowledge: change would occur as a result of conscious agency (which is not to deny the possibility of unintended consequences too). Yet even though such agency may potentially change structures, it would be a logical error to infer from this that structures are reducible to agents' acts or meanings. Agents may mobilise for a minimum wage, accepting arguments about social justice over supply-side arguments about economic decline resulting as a result of the supply cost of labour increasing, and realise their objectives; but capitalist structures would continue to exist as objectively real factors.

(5) Developing The Ontology

(5.1) Problems With The Limits To Naturalism

In this section I will discuss the sympathetic critiques concerning Bhaskar's 'ontological' qualifications to his naturalism, made by Benton (1981), and Archer (1995), before moving on to discuss the subsequent emendations made to social realist ontology. Turning to the first ontological limit to naturalism, Benton argues this notion is rather vague, and if we focus on the verb 'govern', then the argument does not work, because in the natural world there are powers which are real and yet may remain unexercised. An example, given by Benton, is the power of an organism to reproduce, which may remain unexercised although it still exists (1981:17). The analogy in the social world that Benton gives is that of the state having extensive military power which still exists when

unexercised. Having indicated that this first ontological disanalogy between social and natural reality is not necessarily a disanalogy after all, Benton presses on to argue that for social structures to be a stratum of reality that is not reducible to individuals, social structures must, to some extent, be independent of individuals' activities. Yet given the argument that structures are not independent of individuals' activity, the notion of structures as emergent properties is lost. Thus Benton states that 'Roy Bhaskar is, it seems, committed to a variant form of individualism in social science' (1981:17).

Archer (1995) reads this qualification in a slightly different way, following up the point about the natural-social disanalogy *vis-à-vis* structuration theory. Her point is that we can retain the notion of activity-dependence, provided that we say that social structures are activity-dependent in the *past tense*; because to make structures activity-dependent in the *present tense*, is to reduce structures down to individuals' practices (i.e. the instantiation of rules). In developing her point, Archer begins by noting that Benton left a loophole for activity-dependence, through allowing for those activities necessary to sustain the *potential* for governance. Thus in the case of a State, its full coercive power may remain unexercised but actions such as the (current) raising of taxes and armies may well be necessary for it to retain its potential power of coercion (1995:143. Emphasis in original).

The state then may have powers which remain unexercised (military power) but which are still activity-dependent (upon the raising of taxes for instance).

Archer goes on to show how, in his reply to Benton, Bhaskar uses the loophole to retain his argument about activity-dependence, although he still fails to avoid an individualistic position. Bhaskar's reply is that

a structure of power may be reproduced without being exercised and exercised in the absence of any observable conflict [...] so long as it is sustained by human practices - the practices which reproduce or potentially transform it. In this sense the thesis of the activity-dependence of social structures must be affirmed. *Social structures exist materially and are carried or transported from one time-space location to another only in virtue of human praxis.* This does not, *contra* Benton, entail commitment to methodological individualism: it is merely a condition for avoiding reification (1998:174. Emphasis added).

For Archer this rejoinder is reminiscent of Giddens' argument about instantiation, where structures have a 'virtual' existence until instantiated. In which case, structures cannot be emergent properties, because they would exist outside time-space until instantiated in individuals' practices. Conversely, for Archer, social structures are activity-dependent, but the activities are the *activities of the long dead*. What this means is that social structures exist as emergent properties, created by past agency, which condition present agency, and which cannot be significantly transformed, except over time. This is why for Archer social structures are activity-dependent *in the past tense*. More will be said about Archer's ontology presently, and for now we need to move on to the next problem, as regards the ontological limits to naturalism.

The second ontological limit to naturalism was the argument that social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity. As Benton and Archer argue, this can be read in three different ways. The first reading, is that structures depend upon agents having some conception of what they are doing, which is nothing more than a truism (Benton 1981:17, Archer 1995:145). If structures requires agents, and agency requires a notion of agents being conscious beings, then the point is sustained, but simply noting this is not epistemically

important (Benton 1981:17). It is simply acknowledging that agents are not cultural or structural dopes. The second reading is that *some* social relationships, such as friendship, require the agents involved having *particular* conceptions of what they are doing (Benton 1981:17, Archer 1995:145-6). In this case, if the parties involved change their conceptions, then the relationship is finished. However, most social relationships are not like this. 'Where society surrounds and sustains a relationship with sanctions, including coercive powers, social relationships can be, and are, sustained through immense changes in participating actors' conceptions of what they are doing' (Benton 1981:17). Benton gives the examples of employer-employee relationships, imperial domination and marriage, whereby social sanctions sustain a relationship or institution, despite conflicting values, or changed beliefs. Thus unlike friendship or commitment, which require a consensus of conceptions, many social relations and institutions can - and do - survive, and function, with a conflict, change or divergence as regards beliefs / conceptions. Archer extends this point, noting that unless we sustain the notion of social reality as an emergent property, which constrains (as well as enables) agency, then Bhaskar's position is the same as Giddens' and thus, for her, results in central conflationism (1995:145-6). This is because the notion of social structures as emergent properties would be lost, giving us just individuals, their beliefs, and their practices; which brings us to the third reading.

The third reading concerns the relationship of agents' beliefs to social change. According to Benton, we may read the second ontological limitation as telling us that if agents change their minds, then this would be a cause for structural change, although the consequences may be unintended. As Benton argues though, whilst this is not obviously wrong 'it hardly counts as an *a priori* demonstrable truth about society as such' (1981:17). Rather, such questions, about the relationship between changed conceptions and changed structures, is an open question, which requires empirical research for each specific issue, as there are always unintended consequences (1981:17-8). Archer argues that the notion

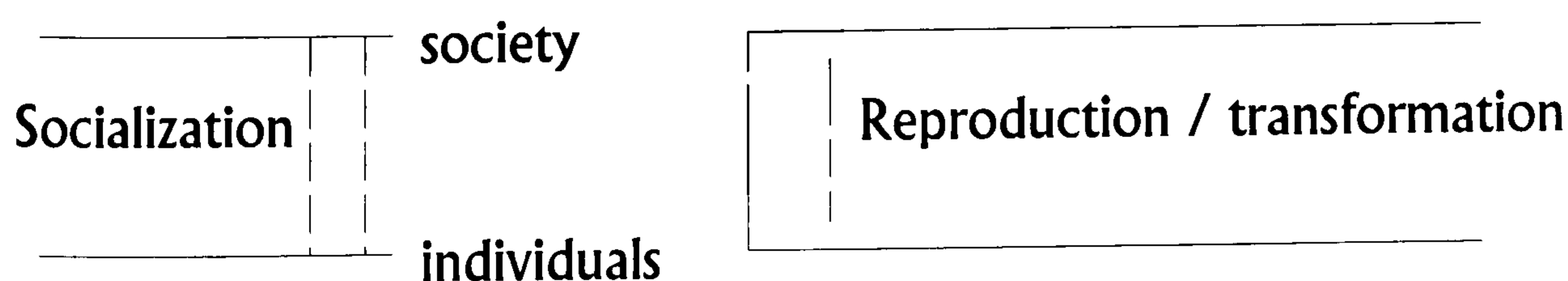
of concept-dependency may mean that certain structures have to be misconceived in order to continue (1995:146). Her conclusion is the same as Benton's though, viz. that if such a claim is a universal *a priori* claim, then it cannot be sustained. Thus, 'there are no grounds for demonstrating this as an *a priori* truth; the matter seems to be one for empirical investigation, particularly since we can find evidence of large conceptual shifts (feminism) which existing structures have withstood largely unchanged' (1995:146).¹¹

(5.2) Bhaskar's Elaborated Social Ontology

To avoid the charge of reification Bhaskar was over-cautious, which meant he over-qualified his realist ontology, compromising the principle of structures being emergent properties, by putting an erroneous emphasis on the activity-dependency and concept-dependency of social structures. Another problem with Bhaskar's initial social ontology was that it was too schematic. In this section I will discuss how, in relation to these two problems, Bhaskar's social ontology was developed, to link structure and agency in a more adequate way.

Bhaskar's original TMSA model (see figure one), as set out in '*The Possibility Of Naturalism*' (1998),¹² was, as Archer notes, 'too fundamentalist' (1995:155).

Figure 1. Bhaskar's original TMSA model



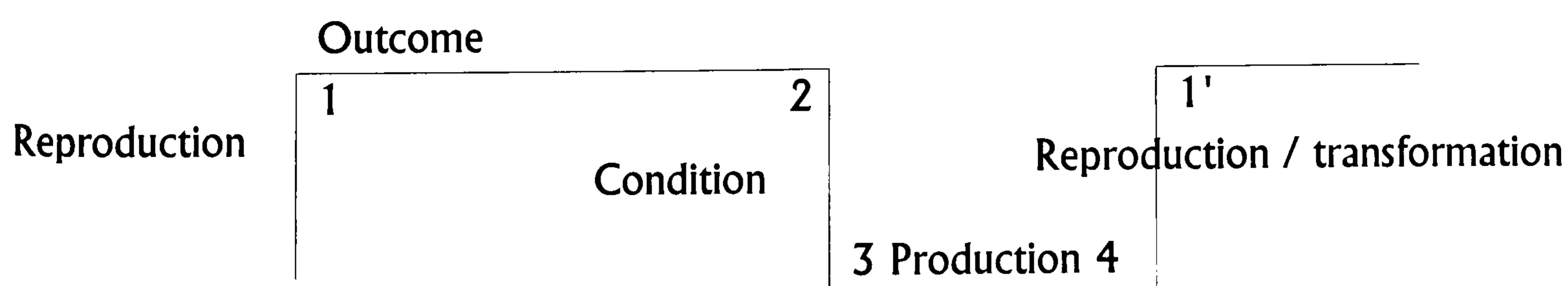
¹¹ As regards the third ontological limitation, concerning the point that social structures are only relatively enduring, Benton 1981:18 argues that the same is true for natural structures. Bhaskar's reply accepts this in a qualified way. He argues that '[t]he relevant difference is that [historicity, i.e. change] is far faster and (e.g. in cities) denser than is normally the case in nature' 1998:175.

¹² First edition originally published in 1979 by Harvester Wheatsheaf (Brighton).

This model is too fundamentalist because as it is a rather schematic model it fails to explain the actual link between structure and agency. Archer gives three reasons for such a failure (1995:155). The first is that it lacks any sense of historicity, despite containing a ‘before’ and ‘after’ moment, because it could be used as an heuristic device, to represent any moment, rather than a phase in an ongoing historical process, where structure and agency are intertwined. The second reason is that it seems 'overpersonalized', as 'structural influences appear to work *exclusively via socialization* and seem to exert their influence directly upon (all) individuals' (1995:155. Emphasis in original). The third reason is that the before and after are unconnected by interaction. Thus, the notions of emergence, history and the social mediation of agency, are downplayed (1995:155). What we have then is a rather abstract model, which lacks a sense of how individuals are embedded into social contexts which condition individuals’ agency, with structures preceding all present actions.

Bhaskar moves on though, in '*Reclaiming Reality*' (1993),¹³ to give us a more nuanced model, as set out below (figure two).

Figure 2. The improved model



This model overcomes the three problems noted with the original. Firstly, it introduces prior emergence and the current influence of structural properties at points one and two,

as the unintended consequences of past actions, and as the unacknowledged conditions of present actions (Archer 1995:155). Secondly, the influence of social structures limits agents' understanding, and this is compounded at points three and four, by limitations on self-understanding, which means that the 'production process' (of agency) is a mediated product of agents (Archer 1995:155-6). In other words, agency is mediated by structures, and the outcome is not a direct expression of an original conscious intention. Thirdly, the model now includes temporal phasing, with time point 1 being the outcome of an antecedent cycle, point 1' (Archer 1995:156); meaning that agents reproduce a context that always already pre-dates their actions, with the reproduced (or changed) context being the new *milieu* for the next stage of action.

Thus Bhaskar improves his original ontology by replacing a model of structure and agency as rather separate entities, with a model which emphasises how agency is always already embedded within a context furnished by pre-existing structures (created by past actions), which are modified by agents, and which furnish the new material for later agency. Hence emergence is important, because it allows us to sustain the notion of past activity creating the context for, and limitations upon, present activity. Without such an emphasis upon emergence (meaning the activity-dependency of structures in the past tense), we would be left in the position of saying that putative structures are activity-dependent in the present tense only, which would reduce structure into individuals' actions or instantiations. Hence, by putting a stronger emphasis upon structures as emergent properties, Bhaskar can distance himself from Giddens (and individualism), by saying that 'I am inclined to give structures (conceived as transfactually efficacious) a stronger ontological grounding [than Giddens] and to place more emphasis on the *pre-existence of social forms*' (1983:85). So, by emphasising emergence we emphasise how social structures are formed prior to present interaction, and how present interaction may

¹³ Originally published in 1989.

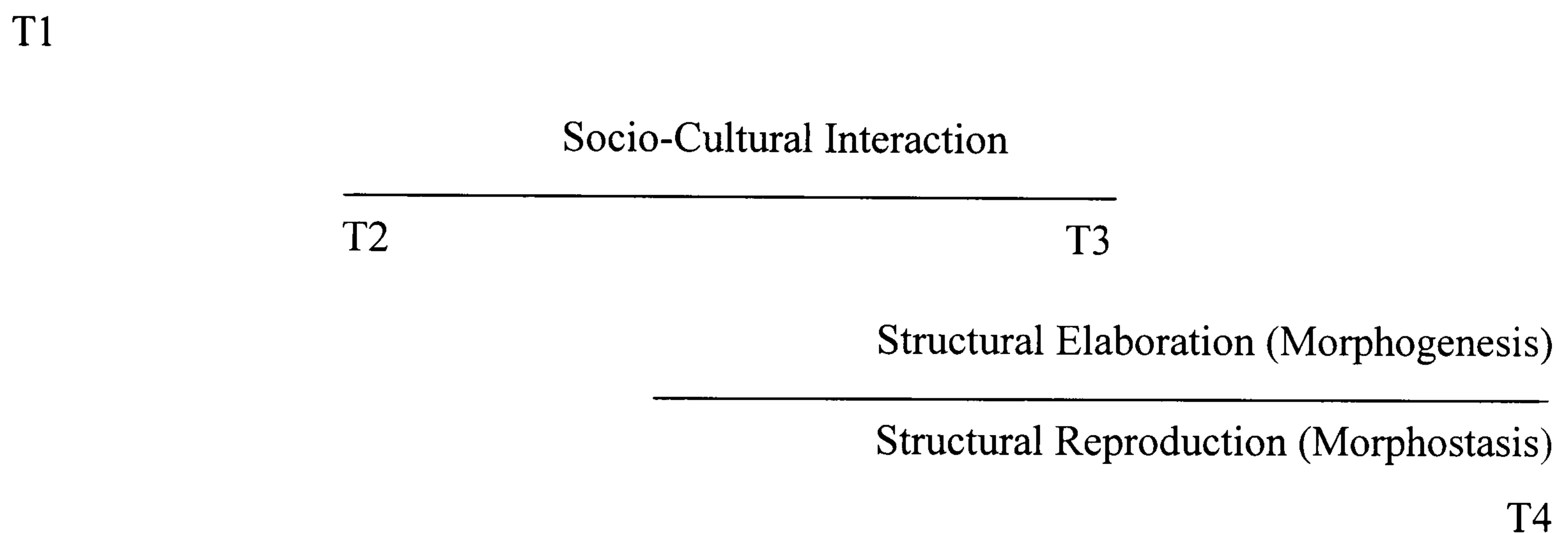
change those structures, which then becomes the starting point for the next cycle of structure-agency interaction. Emergence, that is to say, has to be grasped via ‘analytic histories of emergence’; which is to move onto the realist position developed by Archer.

(5.3) Archer’s Social Ontology

Archer (1995) argues that the refined TMSA model set out above (figure two) maps onto her model of morphogenesis and morphostasis (or the MM model), and that the MM model is more elaborate. Archer’s MM model is set out below (figure 3).

Figure 3. Archer's morphogenetic / static cycle and its 3 phases¹⁴

Structural Conditioning



Archer notes that she prefers her model to the refined TMSA model,

for the simple but important reason that my T2 and T3 period (where prior structures are gradually transformed and new ones slowly elaborated) shows diagrammatically that there is no period when society is *un-structured*. In a purely visual sense, Bhaskar's T2-T1' (contrary to his intention) *could* convey that structural properties are suspended for this interval, whilst they undergo 'production' (1995:157-8. Emphasis in original).

¹⁴ 1997:157.

Archer's MM therefore allows the *dramatis personae* to retain the stage setting which contextualises and gives sense to their actions. Bhaskar's refined TMSA model may allow this too, but Archer's model has removed the potential figurative ambiguity concerning the location of structures.

Archer's ontology is also more elaborate than Bhaskar's, because it has a more complex conception of social reality. For Archer, there are three types of emergent properties: Structural Emergent Properties (SEPs), Cultural Emergent Properties (CEPs), and People's Emergent Properties (PEPs). SEPs are material-structures, and CEPs are belief-systems which are not reducible to individuals' beliefs. CEPs as emergent properties constitute a Cultural-System (or CS), and the use of beliefs within a CS, is referred to as Socio-Cultural Interaction (or S-C) (Archer 1995:172-94). Finally, as regards PEPs, Archer makes a distinction between the Person (as biological and psychological entity), the Agent (a plural concept referring to a group), and the Actor (meaning a role-incumbent within a group) (Archer 1995:247-57). Agents are sub-divided into corporate agents and primary agents, with the former pertaining to organised groups pursuing a goal, and the latter pertaining to groups which do not express interests or organise to pursue a goal; and an individual may well be a member of both (1995:258-9).

There are two key points to note with regard to Archer's social realism. The first is that, to recap, in order to retain the notion of social structures being irreducible to individuals' activities in the present tense, we need to argue that social structures are emergent properties, which means they are activity-dependent in the past tense. Structures were the product of past interactions, and serve as the context for present interaction, providing both enablements and constraints for individuals' interactions; with such interactions resulting in either change or continuity.

In order to understand how individuals' activity results in either change or continuity, we need to begin by noting the construction of an analytic dualism between structure and

agency, which brings us to the second point. The dualism here is *analytic* rather than *philosophical*, because the distinction between structure and agency is one of theoretical artifice. Thus the above diagram is not meant to say that at T1 there are just structures, whilst at T2-T3 there are just agents (i.e. groups), with T4 ushering out agents. So whilst in reality structure and agency are always already embedded, with agents always acting in some form of social context, we have to separate - or abstract - the structural factors from a preceding series of events, in order to explain how agency was enabled and constrained by those structures, and how such agency either led to change or continuity. Thus we have a 'dualism' rather than a 'duality', because instead of conflating structures into practices (as with Giddens' duality), structures are separate from practices (as different forms of emergent property). This does not result in a 'philosophical dualism', or a subject-object dualism, whereby structure is an external and determining constraint upon agency, because structure and agency are interconnected in reality, and their separation is in the form of a theoretical / artificial dualism.

By using analytic dualism we can operationalise the 'morphogenetic cycle' methodology, to explain how the outcome of agency is either morphogenesis (change) or morphostasis (continuity). Using the morphogenetic cycle, an artificial distinction is made between structures (the context) and (corporate) agents, with the cycle having the following moments: structural conditioning, socio-cultural interaction, and structural elaboration or reproduction. In the first part of the phase (T1) we have the context, which is an emergent property created by the past-actions of agents, and which will enable as well as constrain agents' activity in the present tense, which occurs with socio-cultural interaction (T2-3). This activity either reworks the pre-existing context producing change, or it results in continuity (T4).

Time is used to make the analytic dualism between structure and agency, and time is used to link structure and agency. The interplay of structure and agency is analysed by

separating structure and agency into discrete analytic units, pertaining to different time phases within a cycle, and then contrasting the initial phase (the original social context) with the last phase (the social context which is either the same or changed, following agents' activity). This does not of course imply that the time phases are discrete entities, any more than it implies that structure and agency are discrete essences which are in reality separated from each other. Rather, the time phases in the morphogenetic cycle are premised upon analytic dualism, meaning that they are used as analytic abstractions, from an on-going flow of continuous structure-agency interaction.

The picture can be made more complex by introducing CEPs, and discussing how S-C agency may draw upon, contest and change a CS. That is, in addition to discussion how agency responds to the structure context within which it is located, we may also talk of belief systems as emergent properties, with different agents interpreting one CS in different ways, or different agents mobilising different CS in support of their claims. In pursuing such an analysis one would still be using the morphogenetic cycle, because one would explain that belief systems (CS) were irreducible to activities in the present tense, and explain how belief systems may change, or may not change, over time, depending upon how agents were able to mobilise. This is not to imply that CEPs are epiphenomena of SEPs, as a crude materialism would maintain, but it is to say that there can be an 'elective affinity' between ideas and (material) vested interests; although Archer notes that individuals may go against their vested interests, because of a prior ideational / normative (CS) commitment, and in so doing, such individuals incur 'opportunity costs' (Archer 1997:195-246).

Using this ontology of emergent properties, social scientific methodology will be based upon developing 'analytic histories of emergence'. What this means is that: (1) the formation of specific theories and empirical research ought to be based upon the *precepts* (SEPs, CEPs, and PEPs) supplied by Archer's ontological meta-theory; and (2), the way

in which social research will *use these precepts* to explain social phenomena will be *historical*. In order to understand social phenomena, social scientists will have to reconstruct the interplay of three ontologically independent factors (SEPs, CEPs and PEPs) which, despite the fact that each factor exists in its own right (i.e. it is not epiphenomenal upon another emergent property), are always already interconnected. This means that social scientists will have to base social scientific explanation upon a conceptually mediated and fallible reconstruction of how, over time, the social context and individuals (acting as Actors with Agents) interacted, with agency resulting in change or continuity. Such a reconstruction will use analytic dualism to operationalise the morphogenetic cycle, and having explained the interplay of structure and agency over time, using this cycle, one will produce an analytic history of emergence, i.e. a history of the interaction between different emergent properties.

(6) Philosophy And Social Science: Notes From A Realist Perspective

Having discussed how social realism developed in response to the sympathetic critiques levelled at Bhaskar's initial social ontology, I will presently move on to discuss the hostile critiques made against social realism. Before doing this though, I will summarise the above points and augment this summary by linking it to broader themes underpinning the previous chapters.

Realist anti-foundationalism held that knowledge formation was to be understood in terms of a conceptually mediated and fallible access to an external reality. This avoided the relativist and foundational philosophical logics of immediacy. Realist anti-foundationalism could act as a negative underlabourer, rejecting any theory based upon being-knowing identity. This means rejecting positivism, which used empiricist epistemology as a master-builder, assuming that the objects of knowledge were definable in terms of an empiricist philosophy of mind. The upshot of such positivism would be

either an extreme individualism which failed to describe, let alone explain, individuals' activities (by having no notion of a social context); or failure to explain how causal relations were separate from contingent relations. In neither case was it possible to have social scientific explanation, as we could explain neither individual acts, nor relationships between quantitative variables.

Realist anti-foundationalism would also proscribe another form of being-knowing identity which underpinned the sociological logic of immediacy. In this case explanation was premised upon the assumption that ontology could be a master-science of being. Here a definitive ontology of human being or social structures would be used as a master-builder. Ontology would be a form of essentialism, whereby the ontology listed all the discrete essences which were the determinants of human behaviour. Therefore methodology (the formation of specific theories and empirical research) would be either pointless, as one could read-off behaviour forms from the ontology, or an exercise in arbitrary verificationism, as one would read-into any observed behaviour the concepts of the ontology. In other words, there would be a relationship of epistemic immediacy between the ontology and the putative essences, which meant that empirical investigation could not yield new or surprising information.

Realist anti-foundationalism can act as a positive underlabourer if the arguments about complementing an anti-foundational epistemology with a metaphysical realist ontology are complemented by a argument for a meta-theoretical ontology. Such a meta-theoretical ontology could guide methodology by supplying some general precepts about being.

Bhaskar developed such a meta-theoretical ontology for natural science, from an immanent critique of empirical realism. This critique showed that empirical realism could not explain the condition of possibility of science, whereas the realist ontology could.

Thus realism was 'transcendental realism' because it could explain the condition of possibility of science, and do so in a way which avoided circularity, by developing its

principles via immanent critique. As realism was transcendental it ought to serve as an underlabourer, because having defined the conditions of possibility for science, these conditions ought to guide methodology. *Here ontology would act as an underlabourer rather than a master-builder because the concepts would be guiding precepts, rather than concepts which mirrored a fixed number of discrete essences.*

As regards social science, Bhaskar began with an immanent critique of three positions on the structure-agency debate, showing that each one failed to account for the condition of possibility of social science, by failing to conceptualise adequately the object of study. Instead of explaining how individuals were enabled and constrained by a social context, the object controlled the subject (holist / collectivist determinism), the subject had no objective social constraints (voluntarism), or both. This immanent critique then allowed Bhaskar to extend his ontology of emergent properties from the realm of natural science, to explain how individuals interacted with social structures *qua* emergent properties. This meant arguing for naturalism, and Bhaskar over-qualified this and produced a schematic ontology which was also individualistic. Subsequently the ontology was revised in the light of criticism; although we may still argue that the position is naturalist, because it still holds that methodology is to be based upon seeking knowledge of emergent properties in open systems in both natural and social science.

We can also argue for the use of a social realist meta-theoretical ontology from my discussion concerning theories based upon epistemic immediacy or being-knowing identity, meaning positivism and the sociological logic of immediacy. This means arguing that theories based upon being-knowing identity cannot account for the possibility of social science, for two reasons. The first reason is simply that, as with Bhaskar's discussion of the structure-agency issue, theories based upon the sociological logic of immediacy prioritise the object (structures) or the subject (human being), and cannot account for their interaction.

The second reason, which I wish to focus upon here, also concerns the object of study, but not in terms of whether it prioritises structure or agency. Theories based upon being-knowing identity cannot account for the condition of possibility of social science because they cannot account for the formation of social scientific *knowledge*. The positivist version discussed above either fails to allow for social description of individuals, or results in empty statistical description of contingencies. There is no form of explanation, and so there is no social scientific knowledge generated. With the sociological logic of immediacy empty description is replaced with essentialist certainty, in the form of master-science of being. In this case, an ontology is presumed to furnish definitive knowledge, and this precludes, or renders arbitrary, social scientific investigation. So in place of science, meaning an investigation into the (social) world, we would have metaphysics in the worst sense, meaning a dogma which was empirically ungrounded and untestable, being used to legislate upon all forms of knowledge about the (social) world. Instead of *science*, meaning knowledge formed through investigation of the (natural or social) world, there is a form of metaphysical ontology which, unlike the argument for metaphysical realism, presumes a position of epistemic certainty and absolutism, replacing *knowledge* with *dogma*. So, theories based upon epistemic immediacy, or being-knowing identity, presume that there is a direct access to a manifest truth, in the form of facts about individuals, statistical correlations, or models of social structures and human being to which real behaviour necessarily conforms. The consequence of this presumption is *description* replacing *explanation* (or even a failure to describe), and *dogma* replacing *scientific knowledge*, respectively.

From this consideration of the problems entailed by positions adhering to a thesis of being-knowing identity we can note that for social science to be possible, the object of study must: (1) be conceptualised in a way which allows the social context to enable and constrain individuals' activities (thus avoiding reified structural determinism or a failure

to explain the social context); and (2), knowledge claims about this object of study must be based on the principle that knowledge formation is conceptually mediated and fallible, so as to avoid a relationship of being-knowing identity (positivism and the sociological logic of immediacy), and its attendant problems.

Realism can explain the condition of possibility of social science by conceptualising the *object of study* in a way which does explain how the social context enables and constrains individuals' activities, using the notion of emergent properties existing in open systems. This *conceptualisation* of the object of study avoids the problems that stem from a relationship of being-knowing identity, because the ontological principles are furnished by a *fallible meta-theory* which is *derived from an immanent critique* of alternative positions, rather than an *essentialist theory* which seeks to be a *definitive categorisation of specific actual essences*. This means that social realism is a form of transcendental realism, because it explains the condition of possibility of social science. In providing such an explanation, it must also act as an underlabourer to methodology, because the precepts developed to explain the object of social scientific knowledge claims, will be needed to inform research. The formation of specific theories will have to be premised upon the notion of emergent properties existing in open systems, and research will have to be developed by creating analytic histories of emergence, via the morphogenetic cycle, which will yield fallibilist conceptual interpretations of social reality.

(7) Challenges To Social Realism

(7.1) Realism And Epistemic Immediacy

Bhaskar approves of Outhwaite's description of his work as 'ontologically bold and epistemologically cautious' (Outhwaite 1987:34; mentioned by Bhaskar 1998:176). What this means is that in order to avoid the epistemic fallacy, of transposing ontological questions into epistemological questions, we have to recognise that it is the nature of the

object that influences our knowledge of it (rather than defining what is known in terms of how we have knowledge), although such knowledge will always be mediated by some fallible theory - there is no epistemic immediacy. However, for some, the very notion of developing an ontology implies a commitment to epistemic immediacy. Thus Fay argues that realism is a form of essentialism, and Layder argues that realism is a form of empiricism.

Fay (1990) argues that realism should be linked to a correspondence theory of truth, rather than the notion of epistemic relativity, and that such a correspondence theory would seek a God's eye view.¹⁵ As Fay puts it

Realism asserts that Ultimate Reality is structured and formed 'in itself', in much the same way the coloured pegs in Mastermind are. In doing so, it encourages the belief that there is only One True Picture which corresponds with this pre-existing, pre-formed reality.

(This in turn encourages the notion that there is an Ultimate Codebreaker who has created this already-ordered Reality - realism is, I think, a continuation of the Christian view of the world) (1990:38).

So, the 'bold' claims about social ontology must, *ex hypothesi*, entail essentialism, which contradicts the thesis of epistemic relativity, because the ontology would purport to mirror all the fixed discrete essences. Realism is based upon locating a finite number of fixed essences: a bold ontology leads to a bold epistemology. 'For realism asserts that there is an underlying causal structure at work behind surface phenomena, and such an assertion certainly suggests an essentialism to the effect that this underlying causal structure is unitary and invariant' (Fay 1990:39). This essentialism would mean that, as regards the use of social ontology, realism was predicated upon the structuralist sociological logic of

immediacy. The reason for this being that the social ontology would have to list all the causal mechanisms *qua* fixed discrete essences. In short, ontology seeks to be a master-science of being, which implies epistemic immediacy and absolutism.

Similarly, Layder (1985) argues that realism results in empiricism. Layder's point is that realism places such a strong emphasis on ontology (in the form of generative mechanisms), that knowledge has to be construed as mirroring reality. Layder affirms that he is a (metaphysical) realist, because he denies 'radical idealism', and affirms that there is a real world. He goes on to insist that 'knowledge of this world is impossible without conceptual instruments, which, more often than not, derive from, or are connected with, wider theoretical parameters of discourses' (1985:255). Thus Layder makes a distinction between dogmatic claims about 'ontology' (read: reality itself), and 'ontological schemes' (read: theories about reality) which are constructed within a particular discourse; whilst stressing that discourses are about the world, *contra* 'radical idealism'. Social realism is held to be a dogmatic realism, which results in a 'sophisticated empiricism', because by privileging ontology (in the sense of reality-in-itself), 'Bhaskar is implicitly claiming there is an extra-theoretical givenness to the structures of reality which, as a result, determines our knowledge of them' (Layder 1985:268). Knowledge is 'determined' because knowledge has to mirror these fixed atheoretical features. For realism, we must remove the veil of theory / perspectives to see atheoretical / aperspectival reality as-it-really-is. Against this, Layder argues that we cannot seek direct knowledge of reality, or ontological features, without realising that ontologies are always constructed within a particular discourse. In short, we should recognise the discursive relativity of ontology (as ontological schemes), in order to avoid the empiricism that stems from the belief that beliefs ought to mirror reality directly (1985:273).

¹⁵ Fay is responding to an article by Isaac 1990, but the points made are of general relevance.

(7.2) Realism As An Empty Abstraction

If realism is based on seeking epistemic immediacy and such immediacy is impossible, then the result must be that the ontological underlabourer is, literally, useless. This brings us to the arguments of Shotter (1992), Magil (1994), and Gunn (1988), who reject realism, on the grounds that the attempt to construct a general ontology can only result in an artificial abstraction, which corresponds to nothing. Shotter (1992) criticises Bhaskar from a Wittgensteinian perspective, arguing that we can understand practices within forms of life, but we cannot explain such practices by abstract ontologies. Thus Bhaskar's realism is only a 'theoretical realism' which is 'monologically articulated' (1992:171), because it is an abstract fiat about reality. Shotter argues that

In the 'bustle' of everyday life, there is no order, no one single, complete order. Hence the meanings of events in the living of our lives cannot be properly understood within the confines of an order; they are only to be found in the not wholly orderly, practical living of our lives (1992:167-8).

Shotter goes on to agree with the view (as put forward by Fay, for instance) that realism seeks a God's eye view, because to define a general ontology, which is abstracted from practices, is to seek a view from everywhere and nowhere, which no-one could actually have (1992:168). As no-one can attain this view, then realist ontology remains an empty abstraction.¹⁶

A similar point is made from a Marxist perspective by Magil (1994). For Magil '[n]o universal ontology can resolve specific ontological problems within particular sciences or social sciences' (1994:121). He makes this point by drawing an analogy between social

¹⁶ A similar critique which deals with the ontology of human being, specifically, the notion of agency being essentialist, is made by Pleasants 1997. For a detailed account and defence of agency and human being, see Archer's forthcoming book: 'Human Being: Persons, Agents, And Actors' (Cambridge University Press).

realism and dialectical materialism. Dialectical materialism served well as the orthodox philosophy of Stalinism, because it was general enough to be interpreted in virtually any way one chose: it was elastic and general enough for Stalin to interpret it in any way which suited him. One could make the realist philosophy more specific, but then it could not function as a general guide, so its purpose would be undermined (1994:124). Instead we should accept that '[t]here are no universal ontological truths or principles that can supplant, alleviate or guide the work of concrete investigation' (1994:125). We can have detailed and specific knowledge from detailed and specific empirical studies, and ontology is of no use for this, because it achieves generality by being abstract and vague.

Gunn (1988) makes a slightly different point, arguing that the use of an ontological underlabourer simply results in tautology. He begins his critique of realism by making a distinction between philosophy *qua* meta-theory, concerned with second order-questions, and theories of a first-order or empirical kind (1988:89). The problem, according to Gunn, is that if first-order categories were taken to explain themselves, then circularity would result, whereas if we pursue second-order justifications, then we invite an infinite regression, by asking for the justification of the justification *ad infinitum* (1988:89). Gunn argues that Marx escapes this problem by fusing meta-theory and theory. Marx achieves this because his work was based on immanent critique. So, rather than turn to a philosophy / meta-theory to provide the guiding principles for social investigation, Marx set out to examine capitalism in its own terms, and to see what problems emerged. Gunn argues that such immanent critique is 'dialogical' in form. What this means is that '[i]mmanent critique converses with its critical targets, in contrast to external critique which holds no brief for answerability in any conversational (or 'dialogical') sense' (1988:98). External critique would require one to talk *at* one's opponent using prior meta-theoretical convictions, whereas immanent critique would require one to talk *with* one's opponent, to unravel their position from within. Thus, for immanent critique, '[t]he

categories which meta-theoretically "control" discourse are also the categories which at a first-order level discourse "finds" (1988:107).

Gunn takes Bhaskar to task, arguing that his ontological underlabourer gives us a model of external relations, which results in tautology (rather than infinite regression). Tautology occurs because to identify a generative mechanism one must say that it explains observed phenomena, but these phenomena can only be explained by appealing to a generative mechanism (1988:109). Gunn argues that

Tautology arose because two allegedly separate things were supposed to make sense of one another within a causal-explanatory frame. [...] Nothing is explained by anything else or, put differently, there are no 'generative mechanisms'. Instead there is a determinate abstraction: the existence of unity in difference and of the abstract in the concrete (1988:112-3).

So, for realism we identify a generative mechanism by turning to empirical data, but the criterion for saying what data identify a generative mechanism can only be made by reference to a generative mechanism. As Gunn puts it 'appearances become the criterion of generative mechanisms (of reality) while generative mechanisms (reality again) become the criterion of phenomena or appearances' (1988:110). Against this meta-theoretical ontology of 'external relations', Gunn argues for an ontology of 'internal relations'. Instead of looking for a causal relation between A and B, the notion of internal relations holds that A and B (and C, etc.) are part of an interlinked totality, and concepts refer to real features, but not by locating causal relations between objects that are external to one another. Concepts locate different aspects of the same interconnected phenomena, and they do so by locating the practical presuppositions of existing practices.

(8) Rejoinder To The Challenges

The critiques levelled at realism by Fay and Layder are reminiscent of the critique of realism made by post-Wittgensteinian pragmatists such as Putman and Rorty, who argue that ontology (and metaphysics) *necessarily* presumes to be a master-science of being, and that a correspondence theory of truth implies a relationship of epistemic immediacy. My response to the critiques of Fay and Layder is similar to my response to Putnam's 'internal realism', and Rorty's argument about knowledge claims, *viz.* that such positions entail the relativist philosophical logic of immediacy.

Such a conclusion may seem extreme. Indeed, Layder does say: 'I share with realism a commitment to the idea of an independent and objective material world' (1985:255). In other words, Layder supports the metaphysical realist denial of metaphysical idealism. In which case, it should follow that Layder holds that perspectives give us a mediated and fallible access to an external reality. Instead of self-referential discourses, discourses would provide some form of access to an external non-discursive reality. Layder cannot sustain such an argument though. The reason for this is that Layder draws a dichotomy between 'ontology' meaning reality-in-itself, and 'ontological schemes' meaning theories of reality which are internal to a discourse. The corollary of this is that we either have direct access to reality-in-itself, or that our beliefs about reality are self-referential components within a discourse: we either have empiricism or truth-relativism. We cannot say that ontological schemes provide a conceptually mediated and fallible access to an external reality, because any reference to a reality other than that construed by a discourse, as an 'ontological scheme', is a reference to reality-in-itself (or 'ontology'). Given this, all we have left are self-referential ontological schemes, which means that a concept becomes true simply by virtue of its origin within a discourse. There is no way to sustain the notion of fallibilism, and thus avoid truth-relativism, because there can be no reference to reality other than that construed by the discourse.

Layder argues that

the ontological features and structures that are the objects of (realist) knowledge, do not exist entirely independently of [theoretical-perspectival] knowledge [...]. I want to show that such objects are always embedded in, and in a significant sense *constructed* by, discursive parameters, i.e., that knowledge of these objects largely depends upon *prior* theoretical commitments' (1985:260. Emphasis in original).

The problem of course is that the objects of knowledge, and therefore truth claims about such objects, are *wholly* constructed by discourse with Layder's argument. The objects of knowledge, and truth claims about such objects, are self-referential aspects within a discourse, because to hold otherwise (i.e. to invoke notions of an extra-discursive referent) would, for Layder, be to try and step outside discourse to see reality-in-itself.

The same sort of dichotomy underpins Fay's argument that the rubric 'critical realism' is oxymoronic. Fay notes that the epistemically *critical* aspect of realism pertains to epistemic relativity and fallibilism, with beliefs being always open to critical review (given the lack of foundationalist certainty), and this, he argues, is in stark contrast with the *realist* emphasis on ontology, which presumes an uncritical epistemic certainty.¹⁷ As Fay puts it

The difficulty with critical realism, then, is that its critical aspects (by calling into question the notion of a preordered world) is at odds with its realist aspect (which asserts the existence of such a pre-ordered world). Because of this difficulty it is not at all clear that critical realism is a coherent philosophical position (1990:38).

¹⁷ The adjective 'critical' in 'critical realism' is used by Bhaskar to mean political-normative critique, and Fay discusses this too. Nevertheless this use of 'critical' is in accord with realist anti-foundationalism, whereby

So, the 'critical' aspect of 'critical realism' pertains to knowledge being anti-foundational, whereas the 'realist' / ontological aspect of 'critical realism' pertains to an essentialist doctrine, whereby concepts directly mirror fixed discrete essences. On the one hand we have perspectives, or discourses, and on the other hand, we have reality-in-itself. The upshot of Fay's position is truth relativism too, because Fay draws a mutually exclusive distinction between anti-foundationalism and essentialism, meaning that there are either different discourses, or theories which purport to mirror being-in-itself. As with Layder there is no way to sustain the notion of a reality beyond discourses, which means that discourses become self-referential, resulting in truth-relativism and the genetic fallacy.

Against the arguments of Fay and Layder we may note that one may complement anti-foundationalism, or the thesis for conceptual relativity, with the argument for external or metaphysical realism, without the latter implying direct or absolute knowledge. As Searle argued, realism is an ontological thesis and not an epistemic thesis (1995:154-5). In other words, ontology, as used in the arguments for metaphysical realism, simply pertains to a metaphysical conjecture about reality existing outside our representations of it. It does not say anything specific about the world, let alone presume to be a master-science of being. Fay and Layder may not be idealists, but they fail to argue for metaphysical realism, because they presume that 'realism' and 'ontology' are essentialist doctrines predicated upon epistemic immediacy. Consequently they argue for the thesis of conceptual relativity without complementing this with the thesis of external / metaphysical realism; and the result is truth-relativism, because the object of knowledge and truth claims about it are wholly reducible to a discourse, perspective, language game, etc. Furthermore, it is erroneous to assume as Fay (and Bhaskar) do that a correspondence theory of truth

beliefs can always be criticised, as there is no relationship of epistemic certainty or immediacy. The issue of political critique, and the relationship of realism to Marxism, is beyond the scope of this chapter.

implies a relationship of epistemic immediacy. So we may agree that realism does have a correspondence theory of truth, without this supporting Fay's conclusions about realism.

Hence, given this generic suspicion of ontology, Fay and Layder are even less disposed to accept ontology in the form of the social realist meta-theoretical ontology of emergent properties, which is *presumed to mirror specific aspects of reality-in-itself*. This, obviously, misunderstands realism. The ontology of emergent properties is a *theory* of reality, and so it is a fallible conjecture, which is in the transitive realm. Ontology does not, *contra* Layder, mean 'reality-in-itself', and theories are not taken to mirror the intransitive realm. This realist ontology is developed via an immanent critique of alternative positions, rather than via an argument about it having some form of privileged epistemic access; so it is not construed as some form of algorithm for epistemic immediacy. From the process of immanent critique the concepts developed are taken to be *general precepts* and cannot be taken to refer to specific empirical features of reality: the theory is of emergent properties and not specific emergent properties. In which case, one may use realism as a guide for empirical research without realism negating such research by acting as a master-science of being or presuming a direct access to reality-in-itself.

For a critic such as Gunn though, realism is to be rejected not on the grounds that ontology is presumed to mirror reality-in-itself, but because in constructing a meta-theoretical ontology, realism turns on a circular argument. Thus a theory about capitalist market relations would be translated into the terms of reference supplied by the meta-theoretical ontology, which would add nothing to the initial theory; and this meta-theory would be justified in a circular way, with the meta-theory being needed to 'inform' theories and empirical research, because those theories lacked the meta-theoretical principles supplied by the meta-theory. Some general precepts (rather than specific concepts pertaining to specific essences) would be justified by holding that methodology ought to be understood using the terms of reference supplied by the meta-theory.

Note here that the argument against the use of a meta-theory, or an underlabourer conception of philosophy, is the same as that levelled at transcendental arguments. The conditions of possibility are defined by a theory and therefore they have to be used to guide research, but a critic may always hold that the structure of such arguments has to take the form: X is the condition of possibility for Y because X is defined in terms of Y. As we have seen though, circularity is avoided because realism develops its principles via an immanent critique of alternative positions. It is not the case that X is the condition of possibility for Y because Y has been (arbitrarily) defined in terms of X. Instead, the condition of possibility for social science has been arrived at via an immanent critique of alternative conceptions of the social object, which fail because they cannot say how individuals interact with a social context; or which fail because the knowledge claims made preclude social scientific knowledge, by precluding *explanation* (with positivism), or by precluding science (replacing it with an essentialism, as with the sociological logic of immediacy). Hence there is no circularity, because the realism is justified in a non-arbitrary way, with the terms of reference not being justified in a self-referential fashion.

Realism can therefore explain how social scientific knowledge is possible: such knowledge arises because we can have a theoretically mediated and fallible access to a social object, which is to be understood in terms of individuals' activities and objective contextual factors. In explaining the condition of possibility for social science it also follows that such transcendental argument will be used to underlabour for the social sciences. This is because the formation of specific theories and research ought to be based upon such principles, in order to avoid problems such as begging the question, with regard to the social context, over-emphasising structures, or producing a theory predicted upon a being-knowing identity relationship. Thus it follows that realism is anything but an empty abstraction, divorced from substantive social research, *contra* Shotter and Magil.

The problem with Gunn's critique is that he fails to realise that realism develops its principles from immanent critique. For Gunn, realism simply presumes that its meta-theory is correct and then tries to justify it in a circular fashion. As realism is based upon immanent critique though it ought to be more favourable to Gunn, although there is the problem that he begins with imminent critique but arrives at a very different conclusions. This calls for a consideration of the differences between the two types of immanent critique. *The immanent critique used by realism operated at a meta-theoretical level*, meaning that it moved from a consideration of the problems with existing theories to a new meta-theory based upon over-coming those problems. In the natural sciences realism developed an immanent critique of a meta-theoretical position, *viz.* empirical realism, and in the social sciences, realism developed an immanent critique of specific theories, but in both cases, the immanent critique was itself meta-theoretical because it transcended the specifics of particular theories to arrive at general conclusions.

Now with Gunn, immanent critique is levelled not at *theoretical consideration of the object of study* (meaning issues concerning the structure-agency debate, and how social science knowledge represents the object), *but at the object of study itself*. For Gunn, one begins with an immanent critique of capitalism (the object of study), rather than, say, methodological individualist or positivist conceptions of social reality. So, to understand capitalism we do not need to explain putatively discrete relationships in terms of generative mechanisms, with the meta-theory of generative mechanisms being needed to explain specific relationships in its own meta terms of reference. Instead we need to begin with an immanent critique of capitalism (the object of study) as a totality. From this, a meta-theory and specific theories will be developed in tandem. The concepts developed in such a fashion are developed as 'determinate abstractions'. What this means is that concepts are abstractions, or theoretically artificial ways of dividing up an interconnected totality; although such abstractions are determinate, in that they reflect substantive aspects

of the whole. Whereas realism would allegedly use a meta-theory of specific general essences to explain (tautologically) discrete causal mechanisms, Gunn's method would allow theory to capture the complexity and interconnectedness of the object of study, in its own right.

Apart from the fact that realism does not result in tautology (given its use of immanent critique), or seek to present the social world as a fixed set of discrete essences as Gunn tacitly implies, we can note that it is disingenuous of Gunn to argue that he approaches the object of study with no prior theoretical convictions, in order to develop his concepts via an immanent critique - or 'dialogue' - with the object of study. Gunn approaches the object of study from a position influenced by an Hegelian form of Marxism, which uses an ontology of 'internal relations' as its meta-theory. This disingenuousness ought not to be surprising, given that it is impossible to approach the object of study with no prior notions about it; and such a view would only be argued for by an ardent positivist, who thought that social science theories (or statistical methods) ought to mirror a manifest truth. Indeed, the very notion of dealing with 'capitalism' presumes that one has a particular conception of what the object of study is and, correspondingly, how one ought to study it. That is, prior to any research, Gunn holds that there is an object called 'capitalism' as an internally coherent totality, which is to be understood as an interconnected totality, and given this *ontological assumption about the object of study*, it follows that the *methodology* has to be based upon concepts - or 'determinant abstractions' - reflecting components which are 'organically' connected to the 'totality', rather than being discrete essences in their own right.

Thus with Gunn, a meta-theoretical ontology is used as an underlabourer to inform methodology, with an ontology of internal relations being used to hold that concept formation ought to be based upon concepts being 'determinate abstractions'. Such an underlabourer is of no practical use though, because it fails to explain how concepts ought

to pertain to social relations: the ontology is too vague to say how it could be operationalised in empirical research. One may try and avoid this conclusion by arguing that either capitalism (the object of study) is such that the same features will be understood in the same way by different social scientists; or that it does not matter if the ontology of internal relations produces a multiplicity of interpretations of capitalism. In the former case the argument rests upon the essentialist view that knowledge directly corresponds to fixed discrete essences, and in the latter case, the redundancy of the ontology, with regard to practical usefulness, is recognised. Against this, it would be more useful to use realism as an underlabourer, to explain how individuals are enabled and constrained by an objective social context, instead of presuming the object of study could determine knowledge (in the form of ‘determinate abstractions’), or defining the object in a way that was too vague to be of use for substantive empirical research.

(9) Conclusion

In the preceding chapters realist anti-foundationalism was used as a negative underlabourer to criticise positions which were premised upon the sociological logic of immediacy. This critique also took the form of an immanent critique, because the positions dealt with were untenable in their own terms of reference. For example, Rorty’s pragmatism resulted in truth-relativism and a concept of human being which negated his defence of liberalism; and Giddens’ social ontology failed to resolve the structure-agency problem. In this chapter, realist anti-foundationalism was used as a positive underlabourer for the social sciences by complementing it with a social realist meta-theoretical ontology of emergent properties. This positive underlabourer function stems from the fact that social realism is a transcendental position. From an immanent critique of theories based upon being-knowing identity (i.e. positivism and the sociological logic of immediacy), realism is able to explain the conditions of possibility for social science and, in doing this,

it *must* function as an positive underlabourer to supply guiding precepts to methodology. Two forms of critique were dealt with. Sympathetic critiques which called for Bhaskar's initial ontology to be elaborated were accepted. Hostile critiques which held that realism was a form of essentialism, empiricism, empty abstraction or empty tautology, were refuted.

Chapter Six

Closing Remarks:

On The Usefulness Of Realism

(1) Remarks On Realist Anti-Foundationalism

The foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy prevented foundationalist philosophy acting as an underlabourer. What this means is that the *basis of philosophy's claim to understand knowledge*, and *philosophy's job in applying that understanding*, were at odds. For one could not maintain on the one hand that knowledge formation was a matter of epistemic certainty, based upon having an immediate access to a manifest truth, whilst saying that philosophy was but a mere underlabourer, on the other hand. If *knowledge was based on certainty afforded by epistemic immediacy*, then philosophy could only be a *master-builder*, as knowledge acquisition would be solely in terms that conformed with a philosophy of mind. Scientific methodology would be identical to epistemology, because epistemology had a direct access to the manifest truth.

This may not necessarily be a problem if one holds that epistemology ought to be based upon epistemic certainty, with beliefs being epistemic isomorphs of fixed external essences. However, the view that epistemology can allow us a direct access to a manifest truth is predicated upon a logical fallacy. To argue for epistemic immediacy is to hold a philosophical position based on the epistemic fallacy, where questions of reality are defined and answered in terms of knowledge: *what* there is to know becomes defined in terms of *how* we can have knowledge. This is a logical fallacy because it entails an

unjustified *reduction*, whereby the terms of reference pertaining to the (metaphysical) mind are presumed to be the same terms of reference to explain the objects external to the knowing subject. The search for certainty is also, in its empiricist guise, erroneous (rather than fallacious, strictly speaking), because it results in idealism. Idealism occurs because instead of experiencing the object, one would experience the idea of the object, and as what exists is defined in terms of how it is known, then it follows that what exists are ideas rather than material objects.

Against foundationalism, and the argument that we have an immediate access to a manifest truth, it may be argued that our knowledge is mediated through conceptual schemes. In which case *certainty would be replaced by contingency*, with the conceptual scheme or perspective being contingent upon its location within a particular socio-historical setting. Such *contingency turns therefore on conceptual relativity*, and the problem is *how to have conceptual relativity without truth-relativism*. For if all beliefs are components within conceptual schemes, and there is no relationship of epistemic immediacy between a belief and a discrete fixed external essence (or non-belief *qua* object), then it may be that truth is reducible to the origin of a concept within a conceptual scheme. That is to say, conceptual relativity may result in the genetic fallacy. In such a case, we would have the relativist philosophical logic of immediacy, whereby the (putative) truth would be immediately identical with conceptual scheme. To know a conceptual scheme would be to know the truth. As with empiricism, the upshot would again be idealism, because in this case the conceptual schemes would be entirely self-referential. Every conceptual scheme, or perspective, would be equally true, because there would be no external referent, against which one could compare concepts.

If anti-foundationalism falls into truth-relativism then it is an anti-epistemology, because such relativism is antithetical to the notions of truth or knowledge. In a situation where every conceptual scheme were equally 'true', the distinction between truth and

falsity would be meaningless. One could not even say, ethnocentrically, that others' perspectives were wrong on the basis that they were different, because as a (self-conscious) relativist, one would be saying that, from a God's eye point of view, there was no God's eye view, and that all beliefs were equally valid. In order to have an anti-foundational epistemology one needs to complement the argument for conceptual relativity with an argument for metaphysical, or external, realism. One needs an ontological complement for epistemology. This has been resisted by philosophers such as Putnam and Rorty, because they take metaphysical realism to be a search for a God's eye view. For thinkers such as Putnam and Rorty, 'ontology' and 'metaphysics' are pariah subjects, because they assume that these subjects necessarily presume a God's eye view. As was argued though, metaphysics need not entail absolutism and, as Searle pointed out, *realism is an ontological thesis about reality existing beyond perspectives (and discourses, language games, propositions, etc.), rather than an epistemic thesis concerning how we may have knowledge of this reality.* In which case, one can argue for the metaphysical realist view that there is an external reality beyond our contingent conceptual schemes, and argue that our conceptual schemes may have some knowledge of this external reality, avoiding the presumption of realised or potential epistemic absolutism.

The way that conceptual schemes connect to the external world should, *contra* Bhaskar, be understood in terms of a correspondence theory of truth. This does not mean that a proposition is held to be an epistemic isomorph of a referent. As Collier and Popper argued, one may have correspondence without presuming direct access with language speaking the world in its own terms. Consequently, truth claims will have what Popper referred to as varying degrees of 'verisimilitude', meaning that our truth claims may contain varying degrees of truth. Although we can never attain the Finished or Definitive Truth, our propositions and perspectives may have varying degrees of truth. Therefore we

can, *contra* truth-relativism, have knowledge; and this knowledge will be fallible, because although our beliefs may correspond to an external reality, there is no immediate access to a manifest truth in the external world.

From what has just been argued, we can say that *the defining feature of the philosophical logic of immediacy is the lack of ontology*. The foundationalist search for certainty committed the epistemic fallacy of defining ontology in terms of epistemology. This is the starting point for truth-relativism, because having made ontology dependent upon the beliefs of the mind, relativism accepts such a reduction of ontology to our knowledge (or beliefs) of reality, but argues that beliefs should be regarded as socially contingent. That is, it accepts the reduction of what is known to our knowledge claims, but replaces the mind of the lone individual subject by a collective belief system. So, the genetic fallacy of relativism is predicated upon the epistemic fallacy, which is the defining feature of foundationalism, and neither can explain how we have a conceptually mediated and fallible access to an external reality. Of course foundationalists would not wish to talk of such mediation and fallibilism, but the search for certainty paves the way for truth-relativism. The way to avoid such truth-relativism, and to move beyond the philosophical logic of immediacy (in both forms), is to introduce ontology in the form of metaphysical realism, to complement the argument for conceptual relativity. That is to say, anti-foundationalism can only be an epistemology (rather than a relativist anti-epistemology) if it is complemented by a metaphysical realist ontology. Linking a metaphysical realist ontology to a anti-foundational argument for conceptual relativity gives us realist anti-foundationalism, and avoids the philosophical logic of immediacy.

(2) Remarks On Social Realism

A philosophy of knowledge ought to be able to guide social scientific (and natural scientific) methodology, rather than just remain an abstract doctrine with no practical

import. Whereas foundationalism sought to be an untenable master-builder and relativism would leave everything as it was, because every perspective would be equally true, realist anti-foundationalism could act as an underlabourer for the social sciences (and natural sciences). Adopting such a realist position would debar one from taking up any view which closed the gap between knowledge claims and the object of knowledge. It would be opposed to any form of being-knowing identity. In which case, realist anti-foundationalism would proscribe one adopting positivism. If one did try to apply such positivism then one would end up with an untenable actualist individualism, or an actualist closed systems ontology which held that methodology ought to seek out causal relations via observed - i.e. measured - correlations between variables.

Building on Rorty's arguments, we may extend this rejection of being-knowing identity to include much of what goes under the (currently) fashionable appellation of 'postmodernism'. Rorty argued, it will be remembered, that a postmodern reference to Language, Discourse, Otherness, etc., turns out to be a meta-narrative itself. In such a situation, postmodernists' talk of a new 'thing', or essence, replacing an old thing / essence, such as the Universal Class or History, but reference is still to a definitive thing-in-itself. Further, those postmodernists who try to deconstruct discourses are rehashing ideology-critique. This unmasking is not just formulaic but epistemologically problematic, for it maintains that we can have a relationship of epistemic immediacy to a thing-in-itself, once we remove the distorting factors. In other words, postmodernism can turn out to be a form of essentialism, predicated upon the doctrine of epistemic immediacy between a concept and an external referent. Conversely, we could of course simply accept that postmodernism was concerned only with free-floating signs, or discourses, but this would entail the relativist philosophical logic of immediacy, with signs / discourses being self-referential.

So, there would be a relationship of being-knowing identity with positivism and postmodernism, because the former would hold that concepts could mirror the observable facts directly, and the latter would either end up with the same view, or fall into truth-relativism. In both cases, the positions turn on the philosophical logic of immediacy. There is though another form of being-knowing identity, which I have described under the heading of 'the sociological logic of immediacy'. The sociological logic of immediacy is predicated upon a version of the foundationalist philosophical logic of immediacy. This is because the sociological logic of immediacy is a form of essentialism, whereby the concepts of the ontology are taken to mirror social reality, which is to be understood in terms of fixed discrete essences. These essences would be either the essences which defined human nature, or the psychological properties of the mind, for the individualist sociological logic of immediacy; or structures *qua* external constraints upon agents, for the structuralist sociological logical logic of immediacy.

Both versions of the sociological logic of immediacy would take their ontology to be definitive. This is because: (1) individuals' behaviour would be taken to be a direct reflection of an essential property (concerning human nature, or social structures); (2) concepts would be a direct reflection of (i.e. have an immediate access to) the discrete fixed essences; (3) and the ontology concerned would furnish a definitive 'filing cabinet', listing all the pertinent factors / essences. Consequently, instead of ontology being a *meta-theoretical underlabourer*, supplying some general precepts to guide methodology, ontology would be a *master-builder*, whereby a theory of reality (in terms of human essences or structures) sought to be a detailed and specific picture of reality. This means that either methodology is redundant, because one could read-off behaviour from the ontology; or else one could verify the ontology (which one 'knew' to be correct) by reading it into observed behaviour, which would be arbitrary because any instance could prove the ontology correct.

Methodological individualism, in effect, recognised both forms of the sociological logic of immediacy, by arguing against psychologism and holism. However, methodological individualism (and methodological collectivism), were influenced by a weak form of empiricism which meant that although there were references to a form of social reality (such as 'situations'), there was no definition of social ontology.

Consequently the question was begged as to what it was precisely that constituted a social situation. After discussing methodological individualism and methodological collectivism I discussed two different forms of post-Wittgensteinianism, in the form of Rorty's pragmatism and Giddens' structuration theory. The problem here was not that these positions begged the question, with regard to social reality, but that they ended up being based on the logic of immediacy.

Rorty commented that his pragmatism was like an underlabourer who cleared the way. In other words, his underlabourer was to serve a negative role, removing obstacles. It could not take up a positive role, because the pragmatist emphasis on practices is antithetical to the 'realist' 'representational problematic', meaning that it could not supply some meta-theoretical precepts to guide methodology, in the search for truth, as such general theories would be taken as seeking an epistemically absolutist position. A positive use of the underlabourer conception of philosophy would mean that one presumed that philosophy could provide some algorithm to obtain The Truth. Moreover, there could be no social science because there could be no way to maintain that social scientific theories gave us 'truth' about a social reality beyond such theories / perspectives. In debunking such 'realism', that is, by underlabouring in the negative sense, Rorty's pragmatism put the emphasis on ways for going on - i.e. practices.

So if post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism were a tenable position then we would have to reject both realism and the possibility of attaining social scientific knowledge. In place of social science there would be a concern with 'practices'. This means a defence of

liberalism for allowing individuals the freedom to engage in self-enriching practices; and a conception of policy formation in terms of reactive piece-meal problem solving, in place of 'theoretical' attempts to gain a 'skyhook' on the social realm, seeking some form of definitive master-view of how people go on.

Against this we can note the mistaken understanding of realism and the way that Rorty's argument turns on different forms of the logic of immediacy. At a philosophical level, this pragmatism was criticised for entailing the philosophical logic of immediacy in both its relativist and foundationalist forms. When Rorty switched his attention to politics his putatively non-'realist' defence of liberalism as a political philosophy was criticised for entailing the individualist version of the sociological logic of immediacy. His arguments about policy-formation were also based on the logic of immediacy, in its foundationalist form, whereby political discussion was about discrete facts, and where theory *per se* along with normative issues were declared illegitimate for the public sphere. That is to say, the emphasis on 'knowledge' being relative to language games resulted in truth-relativism; the use of physicalism to help deny the existence of a metaphysical centred-subject resulted in positivism; as did the argument about policy-making; and the argument about liberalism and poetry turned on an essentialist conception of the self (which actually negated the justification for liberalism).

Post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism ought not to be embraced in place of realism therefore, because it breaks down according to its own terms of reference, and is to be rejected because it violates the principles set out by realist anti-foundationalism which, we may note, give us a tenable anti-foundational way to explain how our beliefs relate to an external reality. There is another form of post-Wittgensteinianism though, which is sociological, and this refers to more interpretative sociologies and Giddens' structuration theory. The former, as Giddens argues, cannot really explain the social context. This does not mean we ought to accept Giddens' general ontology of rule-following practices. The

argument about rule-following unfolded into an individualistic sociology on the one hand, and a subject-object dualism on the other hand. The former ultimately entailed the individualist sociological logic of immediacy, and the latter entailed the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy because agency would be an epiphenomena of structures, which were external constraints, i.e. determinants of agency.

The argument about the use of the ontology was also problematic. Taken at face-value the concepts are too elastic to be used to interpret research or guide future research. If though we accept that his work entails the sociological logic of immediacy, then ontology will be definitive, in which case methodology becomes redundant, unless it relies on a crude verificationism to observe the categories of the ontology in any observed agency. Giddens, along with some supporters of structuration theory, seems concerned that the use of an ontology of social reality may end up being a definitive ontology, and so it is argued that the ontology should be a 'sensitizing device', to be used in an *ad hoc* or *post hoc* way. This however resolves nothing, for if the ontology does rest on the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, i.e. if it is definitive, then it will still entail a specious essentialism, and the application of it will entail verificationism, albeit on a smaller-scale. Given the sociological logic of immediacy then, methodology ought to be redundant, as one could read-off behaviour from the concepts, but if one does apply them, then one simply reads them into observed behaviour.

So, Rorty's negative underlabour sought to clear away realist attempts at certainty, counselling us to deal with practical matters as practical matters (not as abstract philosophical problems with philosophical resolutions), and Giddens' structuration theory sought to provide a positive underlabourer, providing a meta-theory about social ontology, which linked structure and agency. In both cases the attempts ended up being based on some form of being-knowing identity, with Rorty's arguments being based on positivism and the individualist sociological logic of immediacy, and Giddens' arguments being

based on both versions of the sociological logic of immediacy. In short, the notion of having a conceptually mediated fallible access to an external reality was untenable because of the relationship of being-knowing identity.

It may be objected that realist anti-foundationalism is just negative, and that if it does have any positive role, then it must also entail the sociological logic of immediacy. This is because, any attempt to define social reality could seek to be a definitive ontology. However, this dichotomy between a purely negative role and the necessity of immediacy, is too simplistic. On the former issue, realist anti-foundationalism does have a positive role as a general theory of knowledge. It may also have a positive role, as regards the social (and natural) sciences, by being complemented by social realism. *The ontological argument for metaphysical realism may be complemented by another ontological argument for a meta-theory.* This meta-theory will, by definition, guide the construction of more specific theories, and empirical research, by supplying some general precepts about social reality. Specifically, it will hold that social reality is to be understood in terms of emergent properties (existing in open systems). This ontology will not be definitive as it says nothing about the specific empirical contents of research. It does not purport to mirror social reality (or human nature) 'in itself', but rather, it suggests some general defining features, developed via immanent critique, which can be used for substantive investigation of concrete issues. So, we can have a conceptually mediated and fallible access to an objective social reality, with a realist meta-theory being used to guide methodology.

Realism therefore operates as an underlabourer in two senses. Firstly, realism as realist anti-foundationalism, acts as a negative underlabourer, arguing against the philosophical logic of immediacy. Secondly, realist anti-foundationalism acts as a positive underlabourer by presenting an alternative theory of knowledge, and it can act as a positive underlabourer supplying some general precepts for methodology, by being

complemented by social realism. Without this approach, social research will either beg the question as to the definition of the subject matter (*viz.* social reality), seek explanation via reference to contingent correlations, or end up being premised upon the sociological logic of immediacy (which includes postmodernism, unless one divorces discourse from (social) reality, to embrace an idealistic truth-relativism in the form of self-referential 'signs').

(3) Remarks On The Underclass Debate:

Using Realism As An Underlabourer

(3.1) The Origins Of The Underclass Concept And The Sociological Logic Of Immediacy

Having summed up the theoretical points involved in advocating realism, I will now illustrate its practical use, by turning to a substantive research topic concerning debates about the existence and definition of a underclass. The literature on the underclass issue can basically be divided into two camps. One camp holds that there is an underclass, and defines it in an essentialist way, with the members of the putative class all sharing certain fixed essential properties. The other camp rejects the concept of an 'underclass', on the basis that empirically, one cannot locate such an homogenous socio-cultural group. After noting the main points of the two different frames of reference, I shall argue that one may argue for the existence of an underclass, in a way that avoids essentialism.

The concept of an underclass arose from nineteenth century debates which were concerned with separating members of the working class who may suffer some form of economic distress, from a qualitatively different 'underclass', which brought poverty upon itself, and which relied on crime and / or (nascent) welfare to support itself. These debates defined an underclass in right-wing essentialist terms, as a group whose members mirrored all the deviant characteristics that were used to define the underclass. The

political purpose of introducing the concept of an underclass was to link poverty and deviant behaviour, showing that chronic poverty and crime were caused by biological factors, with the underclass being a form of sub-normal 'race'. Whilst difficulties with market economies were recognised, ultimately 'free markets' and *laissez faire* economic policy were justified, and those in chronic poverty were held to be inadequate individuals. In short, the underclass concept was based on an individualist ontology, which explained different forms of individual behaviour in terms of fixed biological properties, with a biologically distinct 'racial' group constituting an underclass of impoverished individuals unable to conform to accepted codes of behaviour; such as gainful employment in place of crime and welfare.

In the mid-nineteenth century, debate turned on the issue of a 'substratum', and how this was different from the working class. As Morris notes, one mid-nineteenth century commentator, Mayhew, noted how casual and sweated work in London created conditions of economic distress, whereby work was insecure and gruelling (1994:16). However, Morris notes, Mayhew went on to draw a distinction between casual labourers and vagrants, which was difficult to sustain given the nature of casual labour, and which Mayhew tried to support by turning to biology. Mayhew divided 'humanity broadly into two races: the wanderers and the settlers; the vagabond and the citizen; the nomadic and the civilised tribes' (Morris 1994:17). This is because having recognised that economic - structural - conditions were causing insecurity and poverty, he wanted to identify a group who were responsible for inflicting poverty upon themselves. In trying to identify such a group Mayhew listed their defining physical and social traits, such as 'high cheek bones and protruding jaws', 'slang language', 'repugnance to continuous labour' and 'love of cruelty' (Mayhew in Himmelfarb, cited in Morris 1994:17).

Similarly, discussion in the late nineteenth century talked of a 'residuum'. Here poverty arose from 'demoralisation', meaning that charity and public relief had led to people

choosing not to work. People who were previously industrious workers had become corrupted. Further, those who remained industrious workers - the respectable poor - were in danger of being corrupted by the residuum. Consequently one proposed solution was to remove the residuum from working class areas, setting them to compulsory work in industrial regiments (Morris 1994:20 discussing Steadman-Jones 1984). Such attitudes towards the residuum existed alongside the attempt to understand poverty in 'structural' terms, although as with Mayhew's views on the substratum, such views used a distinction between the material conditions of the respectable poor, and the biological causes of poverty with the demoralised residuum, who chose crime and welfare over work. So, for example, Booth carried out a survey of London in the late 1880s, finding that one third of the population lived in poverty, including members of the labouring poor (Morris 1994:21).

Potentially, says Himmelfarb (1984), this finding 're-moralized' the poor, and challenged any clearcut division between the respectable poor and the residuum. The corrupting influence and moral failure of Booth's lowest class, however, remain: 'Occasional labourers, street-sellers, loafers, criminals and semi-criminals [...] They degrade whatever they touch and as individuals are *incapable of improvement*' (Keating 1976:114. Cited in Morris 1994:21-2. Emphasis added).

Despite recognising that material - or structural - conditions may lead to a situation of economic distress for the working class, the belief in a group of deviants, whose behaviour was biologically caused, led to a division between workers and the residuum.

In inter-war years of the twentieth century, the concept of an underclass persisted in the form of the 'social problem group' (Macnicol 1987:297). Here an hereditary cause was sought for 'a variety of conditions, ranging from mental deficiency through alcoholism,

criminality and unemployment, to "mild social inefficiency" (Macnicol 1987:297).

Subsequently, the underclass was identified as the 'problem family', following problems concerning anti-social behaviour amongst some urban school children who were evacuated to rural areas in the USA during World War Two (Macnicol 1987:297). Unlike the social problem group, for whom sterilisation and segregation was mooted, members of problem families were deemed to be amenable to reform so that they could conform to the prevailing norms (Macnicol 1987:297).

In the 1960s and 1970s, debate turned upon the notions of a 'culture of poverty' (in the USA), and a 'cycle of deprivation' (in the UK). The argument in both cases being that deprived groups were self-perpetuating because the individuals in such groups shared particular sets of values and forms of behaviour that were antithetical to employment and family stability. Thus Keith Joseph ordered the then 'Social Science Research Council' (later to become the Economic And Social Research Council) to investigate his claim that there was a 'cycle of deprivation'.

Joseph's central idea was that of the inter-generational transmission of poverty through a 'cycle of deprivation', where inadequate child rearing leads to failure at school, which leads to unemployment and unstable families, which continued the inadequate rearing of children (Bagguley and Mann 1992:121).

The SSRC council found - much to the chagrin of Joseph - that the empirical grounds for such a claim were lacking (which provoked Joseph to attack the intellectual legitimacy of social science and, coincidentally, after this the Social Science Research Council was renamed the Economic and Social Research Council). Against such a notion of a cycle of deprivation Rutter and Madge argue that

At least half the children born into a disadvantaged home do not repeat the pattern of disadvantage in the next generation. Over half of all forms of disadvantage arise anew in the next generation. On the one hand, even where continuity is strongest many individuals break out of the cycle and on the other many people become disadvantaged without having been reared by disadvantaged parents (1976:304).

In place of a self-reproducing group there are individuals whose situations change.

Further, we can note that the existence of some (putatively) defining traits may co-exist with other forms of behaviour which are antithetical to the definition of an underclass, and that the interpretation of such behaviour may be open to normative question. For instance, a family which would appear to fit the 'cultural deprivation' stereotype did practice 'deferred gratification', by putting money aside for a life insurance policy, instead of being utterly profligate (Macnicol 1987:295 discussing Coffield *et al* 1981). In identifying families which fit the underclass image though, it is necessary to remember that the interpretation of behaviour is a normative issue, and that putatively anti-social behaviour may be more accurately understood as functional or adaptive. For example, a father's playfulness was quite aggressive, and this could be interpreted either as causing anti-social behaviour in the children, or equipping them to survive in a 'hard world' (Macnicol 1987:295 discussing Coffield *et al* 1981). So, it should be noted that empirically, it is erroneous to assume that the underclass is constituted by a group of people who conform to an homogenous deviant culture, which is manifestly deviant and pathological.

It should also be noted that even those who ideologically adhered to a prior conviction that a biologically distinct underclass existed, admitted severe difficulty in empirically identifying such a group. In 1929 the Wood Report advocated sterilisation for the social problem group, providing that there were adequate ways to identify such a group. This

report held that although a social problem group definitely existed, there had been little reliable data concerning its identification, and that although the cause for 'social inefficiency' was biological, its identification was to be via social behaviour which was deemed 'inefficient', i.e. 'dysfunctional' (Macnicol 1987:302). All the attempts by the Eugenics Society (of Britain) though failed to establish family histories sufficient to prove the case (Macnicol 1987:306). So, unlike the nineteenth century studies which did invoke biological explanations despite a lack of empirical evidence, here a biological cause was believed in, although it was not recognised as being 'proved', because no lineage studies were sufficient to identify such a group.

From what has been said, we can conclude that the underclass concept, as discussed above, is premised upon the sociological logic of immediacy. The biological arguments about a sub-race, or individuals who have a poor family lineage, uses an ontology of human being, which posits certain behavioural (and possibly physical) traits, to define some individuals as members of an underclass. If one were a political ideologue one might simply read-off behaviour from the ontology without bothering to do research, but those who did engage in research, in the nineteenth century, read the ontology into observed behaviour, to verify the ontology of human being. Certain *social* actions were observed and these were taken to verify the belief that some individuals (those in the underclass) were *biologically* distinct from members of the working class. That is, the biological ontology was verified by being read into social action. Despite recognition that economic factors may cause distress to the 'respectable poor', a group of poor people were identified as 'different' from the respectable working class, because of a prior (ideological) conviction about the existence of such a group.

Of course not everyone did verify the ontology, with the Eugenics Society failing to compile sufficient evidence, but still an ontology of human nature determining social failure was retained. This may not be exactly the same as simply using an ideological

argument about human nature to 'explain' why certain people act in certain ways, without any empirical research, but it is quite similar, for the argument is that (perceived) social failure can be explained (eventually) by some reference to biological factors. The ontology is 'known' to be true, even if it has not (yet) been verified.

Moving from the individualist sociological logic of immediacy, we can note that the culturalist arguments about the underclass turn on the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy. Of course the culturalist arguments sought to be normatively individualist, in the sense that the emphasis was upon how individuals were socialised, rather than on wider structural-economic factors. However, the emphasis on an underclass does turn on the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, because there is a clear subject-object dualism, with culture being defined in this sense as an external constraint upon passive agents. *An underclass is said to reproduce itself because the underclass culture determines behaviour.* If underclass culture merely conditioned action, then one could introduce other factors into the explanation. Instead, the explanation is mono-causal: the culture reproduces itself, because the culture determines behaviour.

Again, one may simply read-off behaviour from the ontology, to say how underclass individuals behave, without doing any research. When research was carried out however, the ontology could not be read-into the finding. Despite Joseph's ideological conviction that such a culture must exist, research found that individuals move in and out of poverty. Which suggests that the analysis ought to be upon how individuals respond to changing economic situations, rather than using a prior definition of an homogenous group with fixed cultural-behavioural traits, as an explanation. Further, there is the issue that behaviour which some may use to verify the existence of an underclass may be functional rather than pathological. Instead of simply labelling some behaviour as deviant and pathological, it may be that such behaviour constitutes a functional and adaptive way of coping with changing circumstances. To study the behaviour of the putative underclass

would be to study why certain types of behaviour obtained, and one could not do this with a prior political conviction about a necessarily anti-social culture, which was fixed and not adaptive.

(3.2) Murray And Wilson: Is The Underclass A Result Of Rational Choice Or Economic Decline?

Murray (1984 and 1990) develops a New Right definition of the underclass, which emphasises the importance of social bonds and free market incentives to work. This does not mean that, like Joseph, he defines an underclass in terms of a cycle of deprivation; or a culture of poverty. Instead of talking of an homogenous self-reproducing culture, Murray's approach is a form of rational choice behaviourism. His basic argument is that individuals are rational, which means in this context that they respond to positive and negative reinforcement stimuli. Murray does not use such behaviourist terminology, and nor does he espouse rational choice theory as such, but he does talk of individuals responding to the world in which they find themselves, making decisions in the light of the existing 'rewards and penalties'. Specifically, Murray's argument is that individuals respond to the 'rules of the game' as set by government. Murray argues that the features of a black underclass in the USA

could have been predicted (indeed, in some instances were predicted) from the changes that social policy made in the rewards and penalties, carrots and sticks, that govern human behaviour. All were *rational responses to changes in the rules of the game* of surviving and getting ahead (1984:154-5. Emphasis added).

In short, individuals may chose forms of action which produce an underclass, but in doing this, the underclass individuals are not pathological in the sense that they are innately less intelligent, devoid of the ability to work, or innately criminal. They are not misfits or deviants. Rather, they have responded rationally, at least in the short-term, given the options put before them.

This leads us to the issue of Murray's definition of the underclass and the Government policies which created it. Murray argues that the liberal response to racism was actually counter-productive in the long-term. An unintended consequence of well-meaning intervention since the mid-1960s was a nefarious outcome, which helped create an underclass for poor blacks. Murray holds that the USA underclass is constituted by black single mothers who have never been married, and young black men who are chronically unemployed and who may indulge in criminal activities. The policy changes which helped bring about such an underclass are as follows. As regards single mothers, and unemployed young men, Murray argues that social welfare has now made it more rational for young people to avoid (low paid) work and live on welfare payments. Murray argues that changes to a benefit called AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) made in the 1960s meant that single mothers received higher benefits than before, single mothers and their partners were now allowed to co-habit (provided that the man was not legally responsible for the child), and that some income from paid employment was permitted without loss of benefit.

To help make his point, Murray discusses a fictional couple - Harold and Phyllis - who are described as being of average intelligence, from poor backgrounds with no skills or qualifications, and who are not stereotypical irresponsible poor people (1984:156-62). Before welfare reforms, Harold could not live with Phyllis, if she received AFDC, and a low paid job would provide more than welfare. However, it would make sense for Phyllis

to marry Harold, rather than receive AFDC, because the benefit is low, and by being married Phyllis could supplement Harold's income with a part-time job, and live with her partner. After the welfare reforms though, Harold and Phyllis could live together, with one partner having a job, and receive benefits which were higher than those initially given.

Another factor to consider is that any sense of social stigma was removed from receiving welfare, which would influence potential welfare-recipients to go on welfare rather than seek low-paid work. Murray describes this as the 'homogenization of the poor' (1984:179-84). Instead of a distinction being drawn between the deserving and undeserving poor, all poor people were perceived as 'victims' with welfare being a 'right' rather than charity. The belief in self-reliance was replaced therefore with the belief that one had a right to state support. Consequently welfare became a popular option, especially as some work was permitted without loss of benefits. Turning from the issue of welfare and work to the issue of crime, Murray's argument is that sentences have become more lenient and special help programmes are set up for those who do engage in criminal activity, whereas those who struggle without turning to crime get no special attention. The consequence of this is to make it rational for those who are poor to turn to crime. The chances of getting caught have fallen and the penalties faced if caught have been weakened. In short, the underclass came into existence because the rules of the game - the positive and negative reinforcement stimuli - were changed, and it was a rational decision to choose not to work, and to engage in criminal activity.

Murray (1990) also discusses the existence of an underclass in Britain. As he puts it 'Britain does have an underclass, still largely out of sight and still smaller than the one in the United States. But it is growing rapidly' (1990:3). To make this claim, Murray focuses on three 'early warning signals' which are: illegitimacy, violent crime and drop-out from

the labour-force (1990:4). Using data collected by the British Government's Statistical Service, Murray argues that all three underclass phenomena are increasing. Illegitimacy is described as 'sky-rocketing' (1990:5), and this is a problem not simply because of welfare payments, but because 'communities need families [so c]ommunities need fathers' (1990:7). Illegitimacy is high - and increasing - amongst women in the lowest social class (and class is undefined here), with the result that there are increasing numbers of children who are inadequately socialised. Such children behave like the adults they see around them, and children living in communities full of single mothers will have no fathers to act as role-models, setting the norm as going to work and supporting the family. Instead, they will regard welfare-dependency as normal. In addition to this, such children are undisciplined. '[I]n communities without fathers, the kids tend to run wild. The fewer the fathers, the greater the tendency' (Murray 1990:12).

The reason for the increase in illegitimacy is the attractiveness of benefits, coupled to the decrease in social stigma attached to receiving welfare and having an illegitimate child. Murray points out that he is not saying that women chose to have babies to receive welfare. Rather, his point is that as sex is fun and babies are endearing then the provision of welfare for single mothers allows poor women to do what comes naturally (1990:30). Similarly, Murray argues that as in the USA, benefits are regarded as a right, and are perceived to have more status than low-paying jobs, and crime has increased due to failing conviction rates. The net result is thus: young people (from underclass families) leave school with no qualifications and barely literate (having had no discipline to work); the young men choose welfare and / or crime over a low-paid job (if they could acquire this being barely literate), and chose not to support a family (having had no role-model of a responsible father); whilst young women have babies, supported by the state. Murray

also goes on to say that with no jobs or family to give life meaning, such young men will turn to drugs which means turning to crime to support this (1990:31).

Against Murray, Wilson (1987) takes up a 'structuralist' position. He argues that if we accepted Murray's views then the underclass in the USA should be diminishing, as the real-value of welfare has decreased since the 1970s. Nevertheless Wilson accepts that there is an underclass, and the reason for this is structural change concerning urban de-industrialisation. Wilson argues that whilst a black middle class and older black working class have managed to leave the run-down inner-city ghettos, the young blacks have suffered from urban de-industrialisation in the 1970s, meaning that they suffer high levels of chronic unemployment, with no prospects for leaving the ghetto. There is also a high level of never married single mothers, because the levels of unemployment mean that there is a very small pool of marriageable (employed) young men.

Wilson argues that this economic situation undermines the fabric of the local community. He argues that the exodus of middle class blacks and working class blacks from the ghetto

removes an important 'social buffer' that could deflect the full impact of the kind of prolonged and increasing joblessness that plagued inner-city neighborhoods in the 1970s and early 1980s, joblessness created by uneven economic growth and periodic recessions. This argument is based on the assumption that even if the truly disadvantaged segments of an inner-city area experience a significant increase in long-term spells of joblessness, the basic institutions in that area (churches, schools, stores, recreational facilities, etc.) would remain viable if much of the base of their support comes from more economically stable and secure families. Moreover, the very presence of such families during such periods

provides mainstream role models that help keep alive the perception that education is meaningful, that steady employment is a viable alternative to welfare, and that family stability is the norm, not the exception (1987:56).

With economic decline comes a decline in the local institutions of civil society. This decay of institutions which help preserve mainstream values augments a normative alienation of young ghetto blacks from mainstream values. In place of mainstream values new 'pathological' values emerge, which hold that welfare dependency and single-parenthood are the norm.

In underclass areas, characterised by very high levels of single-parent households, there is also a high level of crime, especially violent crime. For example, the Robert Taylor Homes housing project in Chicago houses half a percent of the city's population, but was host to eleven percent of the city's murders, nine percent of its rapes, and ten percent of its aggravated assaults; ninety-three percent of the households in the project were headed by a single parent, and unemployment was estimated at forty-seven percent in 1980 (Wilson 1987:25). With the decay of mainstream values and institutions, including the family, comes social problems, including high levels of crime.

So, as civil society began to degrade, and without role-model families, mainstream values were undermined. The result was an alienation from the values of education, family life, and supporting oneself and one's family by work, and in some cases, turning to crime, especially violent crime. Wilson denies that he supports the idea of a culture of poverty though, arguing that the right-wing notion of a self-sustaining culture is tautological because it holds that we infer values from behaviour and then use these values to explain behaviour (1987: 15). In place of a 'culture of poverty', Wilson talks of

'social buffers', 'social isolation', and 'concentration effects', which link 'ghetto-specific behaviour' to wider 'problems of societal organization' (1987:137). His point is that instead of talking of a self-sustaining culture, as an independent entity, we have to realise that economic decay, followed by the decline in mainstream institutions and values, leads to cultural changes. As he puts it

As the basic institutions declined, the social organization of inner-city neighbourhoods (sense of community, positive neighbourhood identification, and explicit norms and sanctions against aberrant behaviour) likewise declined. This process magnified the effects of living in highly concentrated urban poverty areas - effects that are manifested in ghetto-specific culture and behaviour (1987:138).

Consequently, social policy ought not to try to effect a cultural change, but rather, it needs to change the material circumstances in which poor unemployed urban blacks find themselves. *If the material situation improves, civil society will be strengthened and mainstream values will challenge and overcome the 'ghetto-culture'.*

Although Wilson thinks it would be dogmatic to say *a priori* that culture could not develop any autonomy (from structures), he is confident in stressing the point that a change in material circumstances leads to a change in outlook and behaviour (1987:138). Such a view though may still be dogmatic, for it treats cultural factors as epiphenomena of structural factors. As Morris argues, the structure - culture divide is not bridged, because the explanatory force lies with structure (1994:87. See also 1995:58). That is, we would have a mono-causal account whereby structure determined culture. Wilson may not be a Marxist, but his argument is similar to (vulgar) Marxist materialist reductionism, because

culture is a direct reflection of material circumstances. The 'superstructure' is changed by the economic 'base', or in this case, culture and behaviour are epiphenomena, which will change when the material situation changes. Further, behaviour would be determined by economic structural factors too. This is because behaviour is taken to be identical with culture, in which case the causal chain would run thus: structural change in the economy \Rightarrow cultural change read mechanical change in behaviour. Behaviour is identical with culture in Wilson's account simply because there is no discussion of how different individuals respond to similar situations in different ways. It is just accepted that a cultural change is identical with behaviour change: as the mainstream mores decline people act in a new underclass fashion.

In a later work, Wilson (1991) takes a slightly different approach. He replaces the term 'underclass' with the term 'ghetto poor', in order to avoid some of the ideological connotations of the former term. Wilson also reconceptualises the structure - culture relationship. This relationship is analysed using the concepts of 'weak labor force attachment' and 'social context / neighborhood'. Weak labour force attachment refers to structural constraints, meaning limited opportunities for access to employment (1991:9). There are two sources of weak labour force attachment. The first concerns 'macro-structural' changes in 'broader society', especially in the economy. The second concerns the social milieu (1991:10).

Focusing on the latter, Wilson argues that social environments with a low opportunity for stable and legitimate employment, and high opportunity for alternative income-generating activities, will create a weak labour force attachment. Specifically, in such neighbourhoods, many people will turn to crime and 'deviant' activities, further alienating them from the labour market. In addition to this, children will be socialised into patterns of behaviour and attitudes which are antithetical to work. Wilson argues that

the social context has significant implications for the socialization of youth with respect to their future attachment to the labor force. For example, a youngster who grows up in a family with a steady breadwinner and in a neighborhood in which most of the adults are employed will tend to develop some of the disciplined habits associated with stable or steady employment - habits that are reflected in the behaviour of his or her parents and of other neighbourhood adults (1991:10).

This does not mean that all poor communities are understandable in the same terms.

Wilson does not think that all poor neighbourhoods will be characterised by the same levels of poverty, because he believes that some poor communities will have a social context which promotes a higher labour force attachment, with better formal and informal networks for job-seeking. Poverty and the ghetto poor are not necessarily the same.

This argument of Wilson's is rather confusing. Weak labour force attachment is a structural concept, concerning structural constraint, such as lack of job-access networks. Some people are more vulnerable to unemployment than others because they face more constraints: their structural situation limits their options. By itself this is tautological: people have poorer job prospects if they have worse access to jobs and if that have worse access to jobs they have poorer job prospects. So, an explanation of this state of affairs is required. Furthermore, as structures are presented as constraints rather than enablements and constraints, determinism may enter into the explanation via a subject-object dualism, unless we can say how agents respond to, and alter, their situations. Wilson's response to the need for an explanation of weak labour force attachment is to turn to another structural factor, *viz.* economic restructuring. Here a structural cause (economic restructuring) has a

structural effect (lack of access to jobs). This may still be tautological though: economic decline depletes the number of jobs, and the former access networks may therefore become redundant, and these jobs are depleted because the economy declines. Apart from this, structural factors remain as external constraints, setting up a subject-object dualism, and this structural explanation by itself does not allow us to distinguish an underclass from other groups of unemployed people. It merely tells us that some people are pushed by structures into unemployment, with poor job prospects stemming from a lack of jobs.

To distinguish an underclass Wilson introduces the second cause of weak labour force attachment, which concerns the neighbourhood. Now this cannot be a causal factor in its own right, because if it was then Wilson would be advocating a culture of poverty theory, whereby the sole cause of long-term unemployment was a deviant anti-work culture. If though the character of the neighbourhood is caused by structures, then culture and behaviour are epiphenomena of structures, which gives us a deterministic account. In which case, cultural factors concerning the character of the neighbourhood would not be a cause of weak labour force attachment: joblessness and an anti-work culture would be caused by economic structures. Structures would determine culture which was identical with behaviour, so structures would determine behaviour.

However, Wilson does not want culture to be merely epiphenomenal. Indeed, he relies culture to distinguish an underclass - or 'ghetto poor' - from other forms of unemployed people. Unlike those poor people who may eventually find work, the ghetto poor have a deviant culture which normalises crime and which socialises children into habits that are antithetical to regular paid employment. Children are socialised into a culture which, lacking in regular employment, leads to an 'incoherent' world, where meaning is derived from the present, and no long-term perspective can be sustained (1991:10). Here we have a clear cut culture of poverty argument, which maintains that those in chronic

unemployment find themselves in such a position because of their socialisation. As Bagguley and Mann (1992:115-6) argue, Wilson's argument is based on the 'ecological fallacy', whereby generalisations are made about the character of individual people, on the basis of aggregate census data, concerning crime and unemployment. The result is supposition rather than empirical investigation, as evidenced in the argument about dysfunctional socialisation in communities containing the putative ghetto poor. The upshot is circularity, because as Wilson himself noted, cultural explanations infer values from behaviour and then use these values to explain behaviour.

Wilson may protest that culture is to be linked to structure, but there is a signal failure to do this. He says that weak labour force attachment has two causes: economic factors and cultural factors. These cannot be independent variables because that would result in a culture of poverty argument being co-joined with his earlier structuralist account. So culture must be epiphenomenal, to avoid a culturalist argument which is right-wing and in contradiction with the structural argument. Yet in order to distinguish the ghetto poor, the argument turns to a culture which is actively hostile to opportunities should they exist. It is not just that there may be low opportunity for stable employment, but that a high opportunity for crime occurs, and this is because the individuals concerned decide to turn to crime and avoid work, creating a culture of poverty into which children are socialised, to repeat the cycle.

With Wilson's argument therefore we have the sociological logic of immediacy in its structuralist version, with both his structuralist and culturalist arguments. With the structuralist arguments about economic restructuring we can read-off behaviour from an materialist ontology. Structures create cultures and behaviour is identical with the culture, so structures determine ghetto-specific behaviour. Similarly, with the culturalist argument, the ontology of the culture can be used to read-off behaviour. A theory of an

homogenous ghetto-poor culture is posited and individual behaviour is supposed to conform to this external constraint. Ontology is taken to be definitive because there is no way to explain how agency may act in relation to economic and cultural factors. We are simply presented with the view that there is an homogenous group, whose behaviour can be read-off from a materialist ontology or from an ontology of culture.

Hence Wilson's work commits the ecological fallacy, taking aggregate data on crime levels etc., and inferring individual cultural-behaviour traits from this. He reads his ontology of culture into the research to verify it, by taking statistical findings as evidence that everyone behaves in a way that conforms to the homogenous underclass culture posited. In this case statistical data are not merely the empty description of abstracted empiricism. There is still a relationship of being-knowing identity though, but instead of empiricism, this relationship of identity resides in the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy, with methodology being used to verify a prior ontological conviction. The 'facts' prove the ontology: one can 'see' that a deviant culture exists.

As regards Murray, we can say that his argument is predicated upon the structuralist sociological logic of immediacy too, because Murray's argument rests upon a culture of poverty thesis. Murray may talk of rational choices but ultimately his argument turns on individuals being socialised into a deviant culture. Children grow up in families where there is no father, so they 'run riot', and having seen their single mother claim benefits, they assume that benefits are a 'right'. The money from benefits is theirs for the taking. Moreover, having been able to 'run riot', the young people concerned are unwilling and unable to hold down a job, finding crime an easier option, and avoiding the stigma of working for 'chump change' when they could get benefits and money from crime. Indeed, Murray goes so far as to say that the destitute would not stay in a well-paid job with good promotion prospects, should someone offer this as a social experiment. In this case, any

notion of rational choice has been replaced by a very strong argument about socialisation creating a pathological mentality.¹ Individuals make decisions based on the context in which they are located, but the decisions that they make are determined - rather than merely influenced - by their socialisation.

The underclass may have been started by, *ex hypothesi*, policy which made welfare more 'attractive', but the socialisation of children led to a self-reproducing culture of dependency. If this were not so, then there simply would be no-one doing any low paid jobs: if we simply read Murray as a form of rational choice theorist there would be an underclass and a relatively affluent working class, with no one doing poorly paid working class jobs, living on the minimum wage rather than living off crime and / or welfare.

(3.3) Suggestions For Linking Structure, Culture And Agency

From what has been argued above it would seem that the concept of an underclass was simply untenable, because it was based on untenable biological, structural, or cultural arguments about a non-existent homogenous group. Even if one had 'liberal' (meaning liberal in the north American sense of centre / centre-left) rather than right-wing political views (such as Wilson), the outcome was still to posit the existence of an homogenous group with a deviant culture. The spurious belief that there is an homogenous underclass culture led neo-Weberians to argue that although there may be a specific *class situation* for those long-term unemployed people who lack the requisite labour-market resources

¹ Murray does say that one would have to separate those with mental health problems from the rest for this experiment. However, this overlooks the fact that those who have been living on the streets may well have emotional and mental health problems from this experience. At the very least, the responsibility would be a challenge, difficult to face after living on the streets. Implicit in Murray's claim is the view that homeless people have been socialised into behaviour which is anti-social. This raises the question as to why those individuals ended up on the streets, if welfare was easy to obtain and crime an attractive option.

for employment, such a group does not constitute a distinctive *social class*.² There may be people different from the mainstream working class but they are not a distinct cultural group, and therefore they are not a social class.

Morris and Irwin (1992) take up a stance which is opposed to such a neo-Weberian view, as well as the argument that the underclass is a distinct social class. They define class in occupational terms, and argue that instead of talking of a underclass 'class situation', it is better to talk of working class people who move in and out of working class occupations.³ This means studying the life-courses of individuals, rather than trying to define a collective category which will furnish a definitive explanation of a group who are separate from the working class. Drawing on their study of individuals' employment history in Hartlepool, Morris and Irwin focus their attention on three groups: group A (unemployed), group B (stable employment), and group C (recent recruits). They argue that group A are not a qualitatively distinct class from the working class. Rather, group A is constituted by people who are unskilled workers, or people who belong to the Registrar General's class V. The source of their unemployment is to be located in their class position, in which case, it is argued, to call group A an underclass would be to overlook the source of their vulnerability which resides in their class location.

Group C is mainly constituted by young workers (under thirty) who belong to the Registrar General's class 3m (skilled manual). This group experience fragmented work histories, not because the individuals concerned choose constantly to change employer, but because economic restructuring (i.e. industrial decline) has prevented secure

² See for example Gallie 1989. This argument is made in relation to Giddens' 1973 argument about an underclass, which argues that status factors concerning ethnicity constitute a labour market disadvantage creating an underclass, with its own specific form of consciousness. For another 'labour market' approach broadly similar to Giddens, see Dahrendorf 1987.

³ As Crompton 1993:50-3 argues though, identifying class in terms of occupations can be problematic. Crompton argues that occupational class schemes fail to grasp inequality, and fail to comprehend the nature of class relations. A list of occupations tells one very little about capitalism and the way it results in social

employment. This means that instead of slowly moving up the 'job ladder', individuals may well experience 'downward mobility', as well as (limited) 'upward mobility'. It also means that the individuals within this group experience bouts of unemployment. In studying how individuals in group C move out of unemployment, Morris and Irwin study the informal networks for job access. This leads them to take issue with Murray, arguing that those who are insecurely employed do have a will to work, despite frequent unemployment, and this will to work, as manifest in the use of job seeking networks, forms a collective experience contrary to a culture of poverty.

MacDonald (1994) also deals with social networks in relation to employment. Unlike Morris and Irwin though, MacDonald's study on industrial decline in Cleveland deals with 'fiddly jobs'; which is local argot for jobs which are undertaken whilst claiming welfare benefits. MacDonald describes how those experiencing long-term unemployment fall into one of two groups. One group, which is the majority, suffers social isolation and struggles to survive on welfare payments. The other minority group have, by being members of the appropriate social networks, access to fiddly jobs. By knowing the 'right' people, and the 'right' pubs, it is possible to get short-term employment with 'no questions asked' and payment in cash.

Fiddly jobs could be jobs such as taxi driving or household repairs. Although in Cleveland the changing economic situation meant that there were jobs in industry, because in an attempt to try and stay competitive, the remaining industry sought labour market 'flexibility' in terms of both numerical and functional flexibility, meaning that it wanted a periphery of workers who could be employed on a casual 'as-and-when-needed' basis, and a core of workers that could be reskilled, respectively. This meant that there were sub-contractors who could undercut legitimate competition by providing peripheral

stratification, and thus one is told virtually nothing about the formation of class and the relationship between

workers who were paid less because they were on the 'dole' (meaning 'Jobseekers' Allowance'). The type of work procured was poorly paid, short-term, and involved working long shifts; which often meant double shifts and sometimes triple shifts.

MacDonald gives the example of 'Stephen', a twenty-five year old man with a wife and two children, who worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week, doing cleaning and maintenance jobs in a steel works, for sixty pounds a week (1994:514-5). The sub-contractors were paid 'tax' by the workers, who were uninsured against industrial accidents. Fewer women were employed in fiddly jobs, and those who were worked in the service sector, earning even lower wages. For instance, one interviewee ('Muriel') earned thirty-five pounds a week for a full-week's work in a private nursing home (which brought her total weekly income to just under seventy pounds).

MacDonald argues that those who engage in such activities regard themselves as adhering to mainstream values about employment and self-reliance, rather than self-consciously adhering to a criminal culture which valued fraud. The attitudes expressed by the men he studied, were that fiddly jobs were an acceptable supplement to meagre welfare payments, and were a necessary method of supporting their families. The women expressed similar views, saying that fiddly jobs were justified to support a family or, if single, to supplement a meagre income in the short-term ('Muriel' only worked for six weeks). In order for the men to continue receiving fiddly jobs, they had to have a reputation as a reliable hard-worker, who would not let the sub-contractor down. They had to be 'good workers' not 'shirkers', or 'trouble makers' who complained about pay and conditions. Claiming benefits whilst having a normal wage, or engaging in large-scale organised benefit fraud were regarded as wrong by those engaged in fiddly jobs. Those who were unemployed and not engaged in fiddly jobs usually shared such views, saying that fear of being caught, or lack of opportunity, prevented them doing fiddly jobs. It was

also stated that the cumbersome bureaucracy, and wait for money, involved in re-starting a claim if one 'signed-off' benefits, to work legitimately for a short while, led to people claiming benefits whilst working on short-term jobs.

So, although the act of claiming was fraudulent, the attitudes expressed conformed to mainstream values about self-reliance through work, instead of welfare-dependency which would be antithetical to any work ethic. Indeed, MacDonald argues that

fiddly work could, ironically, be understood better as representing a culture of enterprise, rather than as one of dependency. If the political Right is worried that the work ethic is under threat, this study should help allay their fears. Because 'proper jobs' were not available some showed high degrees of personal motivation, initiative, local knowledge and risk-taking (1994: 528).⁴

In place of a culture of dependency some people are able to work, and although this is illegal, the values expressed about such activity conform to mainstream values, concerning self-reliance and hostility to fraud for the sake of profit alone. Further, such activity shows a high attachment to the work ethic associated with the New Right's economic and normative individualism.

MacDonald does not discuss the concept of an underclass *per se*, but he does reject the cultural explanations, advocated by such New Right ideologues as Peter Lilley, arguing

⁴ See also MacDonald 1996, where he argues that those who are self-employed in economically depressed areas are not the entrepreneurial stereotype described by the New Right, who create jobs and wealth by 'working harder' than others. They are people who use state assistance to become self-employed to escape long-term unemployment, and most of these new businesses will fold in the short-term. There was no long-term boost to the local economy. Rather, some people took an alternative to fiddly jobs, using some form of state assistance to try and survive on the economic margins.

that there is no culture of dependency, or 'something for nothing society', to use Lilley's polemical locution. As with Morris and Irwin, the focus is more on the strategies adopted by people when confronted by chronic unemployment caused by de-industrialisation. Although unlike Morris and Irwin, the focus is on fiddly jobs rather than legitimate employment. Those employed in such jobs may be *deviant in a legal sense* but they are *not deviant in a social sense, because their action may be regarded as functional and adaptive*, and their values conform to mainstream norms.

With both these studies, the emphasis is on how individuals cope, when confronted by difficult situations. Both these studies are plausible discussions of what individuals in particular circumstances do. Apart from anything else, they break away from the sociological logic of immediacy. In place of reference to structures causing an homogenous ghetto-specific culture, or a self-sustaining culture of poverty, the use of a definitive ontology is replaced by detailed research into different forms of action. Instead of behaviour conforming to some posited cultural essence, from which behaviour may be read-off, different forms of action are studied in a particular social context.

Implicitly these studies conceptualise structures as enabling as well as constraining. Economic change is not just an external constraint upon individuals, pushing them into types of behaviour: structural change does not just simply produce passively unemployed people (although this is one specific effect, for those without the appropriate social networks). Rather, as circumstances change, so individuals adapt, seeking new legitimate jobs (Morris and Irwin), or fiddly jobs if these are not available (MacDonald). Further, such structures may be regarded as emergent properties because they are objectively real. Structures are not reducible to individuals or 'virtual rules' which are 'instantiated' in the present-tense, and instead, structures change the context in which individuals operate. Culture may also be conceptualised as an emergent property, with different *cultural*

agents using the *cultural system* in different ways (Archer 1995). The individuals doing fiddly jobs thus adhered to norms about the work ethic even though fiddly jobs were illegal, and claiming benefits whilst working became a subject of much political and media attention, with 'dole scroungers' becoming a new pariah group. That is, whilst all concerned accepted the cultural-system, which advocated work and self-reliance, this cultural system was irreducible to the beliefs of one particular group, and it was used by the unemployed in MacDonald's study to legitimise action which was legally deviant but functional and adaptive as regards their situation.

The problem with the studies by Morris and Irwin, and MacDonald, is that they do not explicitly discuss ontology. Consequently, they may appear to endorse methodological individualism. With no discussion of social reality *per se*, it may seem as though all the emphasis is on what individuals do. This individualism would be erroneous because it would simply be at loggerheads with the initial purpose of such studies. One could not set out to explain how 'something' changed which affected individuals, presenting them with new constraints and opportunities if that 'something' were only individuals. One could talk perhaps of unintended consequences. This however would simply not suffice as an explanation of large-scale material changes. For one would need to talk of billions of discrete decisions, whereby each decision contributed to the decline of the manufacturing base, like the apocryphal tale of the butterfly flapping its wings and helping to occasion an hurricane on the other side of the world. Even if one did carry out this task (somehow), one would still be left with the problem of begging the question, and reading the context into the individual (Gellner 1969, Lukes 1968). Rather, one needs to talk of capitalist structures as emergent properties that are independent influences upon agency. One also needs to theorise culture in a way that avoids individualist-reduction, so that it is possible to say how a set of beliefs (or knowledge without a knowing subject) is contested by

different groups dealing with different material circumstances. Ideas from one belief system may have an 'elective affinity' (to use Weber's phrase), with a plurality of groups, and social classes.

By conceptualising material structures and cultural systems as emergent properties one would base methodology on an explicit ontology. This would avoid the problems associated with an implied methodological individualism which ultimately begs the question about how the social context affects agency; or which results in a psychologistic reductionism that would, in this case, mean reverting to explanations of an underclass in terms of fixed psychological or biological features. With such an ontological meta-theory, or underlabourer (Archer 1995, Bhaskar 1998), specific theories could be constructed and empirical research could be undertaken, with the explicit purpose of saying exactly how the social context provides enablements and constraints. Using such a realist ontology would not entail essentialism, as some of a more Wittgensteinian persuasion fear, because one would not be reading-off behaviour from a definitive ontology, or reading such an ontology into observed events to simply verify its set of behavioural categories. One would not be holding that an ontology of structures or culture (or even a type of human nature) provided a definition of the underclass in terms of a fixed set of behavioural traits.

Rather, one would use the general notion of structural and cultural emergent properties, to inform empirical research. One would conceptualise the structures and the cultural system that furnished the social context as emergent properties, which enabled as well as constrained agency. One could then study agency using 'analytic dualism' and the 'morphogenetic cycle' (Archer 1995), to say how specific individuals responded to the opportunities and limitations afforded by the changing material context. In this case, one would certainly carry out studies of individuals' life-courses, as Morris and Irwin advocate. Unlike Morris and Irwin (and MacDonald) though, this would not be

juxtaposing the experiences and actions of individuals against general references to a broader social context. Instead, it would mean integrating the experiences and actions of the individual to the social context, to explain how the result of their agency was morphostasis or morphogenesis. That is, one would explain how individuals without social networks faced limitations and did virtually nothing to change the situation, whereas those with social networks were able to rework the social context to some extent, by finding alternative courses of action which created a new form of economic agency (job change via informal networks or access to fiddly jobs via informal networks).

Contrary to Morris and Irwin, and MacDonald, I will venture the (possibly) controversial view that the concept of an underclass ought to be retained. It may have an overtly ideological origin, but this is not to say that the term is useless for unbiased social scientific analysis. Using the type of analysis suggested above one could certainly discuss the underclass without drawing upon any form of right wing essentialist argument. Moreover, the need for a term to distinguish a group which is separate from the working class is implied in MacDonald's study. To talk of individuals facing virtually no chance of employment in full-time legitimate jobs is to talk of individuals who are, by definition, not in the working class. Such individuals will face different structural constraints and enablements from those who are in full-time legitimate jobs. Further, as regards culture, it is possible to identify a separate culture or, to be more accurate, *a different use of the same cultural system, by different cultural agents*. Critics of the right-wing essentialist notion of an homogenous deviant culture correctly point out that this is a myth, and also note that what is putatively deviant may be more accurately interpreted as functional or adaptive (Macnicol 1987:295 discussing Coffield). From this we ought to infer that the notion of an underclass is appropriate for social scientific use, because it implies that formally unemployed people (i.e. people who claim welfare and who may work in fiddly

jobs) are in a materially different position from the working class, and will be cultural agents who rework the cultural-system in a way that is function to their particular circumstances.

As regards the views of Morris and Irwin, it can be argued that they side-step the issue. Instead of focusing on the long-term unemployed they focus on those facing insecure employment, and argue that the differences can be understood in relations to individuals' class position (with class V (unskilled) individuals facing long-term unemployment, and class III_m individuals (skilled manual) facing insecure employment) in relation to de-industrialisation. The problem here is that individuals who are long-term unemployed are not, by definition, in the working class, whereas those who move between working class jobs are. Morris and Irwin are wrong to conclude that talk of an underclass is erroneous, when their study is dealing with how people within the working class respond to occupational insecurity. Those in long-term unemployment face a different situation, and if the long-term unemployed use social networks for jobs, then these will be fiddly jobs.

Morris and Irwin say that long-term unemployment is a feature of a class position - the position of working class group V. In which case it serves no purpose to define such a group as different from working class group V. However, it is not the occupational grouping which causes the problem (and to say it is results in tautology). Unemployment is caused by structural factors that lead to the loss of unskilled manual jobs in the industrial sector. Those affected by this move from a working class job to unemployment, meaning that in terms of semantics they are not working class, and in terms of social situation, their horizon of opportunities and constraints will necessarily be different from those in employment. Morris and Irwin obviously recognise that structural factors lead to unemployment but conceptualise structures, in this context, as just external constraints, saying that individuals in class V will be pushed into unemployment by structural decline,

and that as members of class V who have been acted upon by structures in this fashion, they as best regarded as members of class V. The upshot of this argument is to treat such individuals as 'workers-in-waiting', or 'workers-who-do-not-work', which fails to understand the qualitatively different position of such individuals. To retain the concept of an underclass using the realist approach set out above is to understand the unique position of such individuals, and pursuing such an analysis will help refute the right wing essentialist arguments, which continue in contemporaneous political rhetoric.

(4) Last Remark

To do justice to the lived world of social reality we need to explain how individuals interact with a social context which pre-dates their agency and which provides enablements as well as constraints for their agency. Realism can allow us develop such an explanation, by discussing how agents interact with Structural Emergent Properties and Cultural Emergent Properties. In constructing social scientific knowledge claims using analytic histories of emergence, based upon the morphogenetic cycle and analytic dualism, we can base methodology on a social realist meta-theory, and explain how and why individuals have acted as they have done. In doing this we will avoid question-begging references to a social context / structures, and deterministic essentialism, which stereotypes individuals and denies them any free will.

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