Wittgenstein en Giddens: Een institutionele handelingstheorie gefundeerd op de latere filosofie van Wittgenstein

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This study deals with the relation between the largely unrecognized content of a philosophy and social theory. Anthony Giddens appeals to the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein to overcome the issue concerning the relation between objectivistic and subjectivistic theoretical orientations in sociology. The dualism in this relation is characteristic of the development of the social sciences. In any proposed solution, one of the poles always dominates. According to Giddens the problem of a dualism is wrongly stated and he does not present a theory of meaning to solve it. His alternative consists of an institutional theory of action with respect to the constitution of meaning. In this, the generation of meaning is not ascribed to subjective reflection or an objective working of a social structure. He bases his ideas on the “Philosophical Investigations”. This best-known section of Wittgenstein’s later work was published posthumously. Giddens reproduces the purport of this book in general conclusions. He does not appeal to an extensive interpretation by others or develop one himself. Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is actually made up of a voluminous collection of manuscripts of which only a part has been published. In his later period, Wittgenstein investigated misconceptions of the constitution of the meanings of action and offered an alternative to these. The remaining manuscripts have recently been subjugated to exhaustive comparative analysis, in which Peter Hacker has been the most important researcher. The conclusion is that the contents of the “Philosophical Investigations” only become clear in the light of Wittgenstein’s entire philosophical legacy. This opinion is shared by other philosophers who have based their ideas also on the manuscripts. According to Wittgenstein, meaning is constituted within a “practice” of action. The dominant belief is that a scientific or similar type of explanation must be given for this constitution. This is also the point of departure for subjectivistic and objectivistic theoretical orientations in the social sciences. In Wittgenstein’s view, however, each scientific or epistemological approach to the constitution of meaning is incorrect. This criticism and its alternative have been given scant attention up until the present. The reason for this is that the commonly held opinions on meaning still rule, and their influence is so great that, despite Hacker’s analysis of every argumentative detail, people still continue to regard the contents of the later philosophy as an epistemology. Applications of the later philosophy in sociology have not taken into account the results of the research on the legacy. The main issue in the present study concerns whether or not the institutional theory of action that was developed by Giddens is confirmed in a comparative study of the manuscripts. The findings of Hacker’s analysis form the touchstone for the assessment of an overcoming of dualism in sociology. The hope of a possible synthesis of subjectivistic and objectivistic theoretical currents has increased again recently. Giddens regards the search for a synthesis a meaningless activity. A study of the philosophical background of his approach therefore becomes relevant. In particular because he has analysed and rejected other foundations of the social sciences starting with Talcott Parsons. The first part of this study is directed towards the philosophical background of an institutional theory of action in sociology and the theoretical dualism that still persists. The second part of the study is oriented
Summary
towards application. An inquiry has been made into the consequences for theory development in sociology of an adequate theory of action derived from the later philosophy. Illustrations of this are given in the field of the modernisation of society, the methodology of educational-sociological research, and the conceptualisation of citizenship in current society. In the assessment of Giddens’ institutional theory of action, as many other applications of the later philosophy as possible have been taken into account in order to determine the differences in dealing with the problems of dualism. The result of this exploration is that two authors who refer to this philosophy seem to agree with Giddens in his going beyond dualism. The others have developed, on the basis of the later philosophy, a solution to this problem. The content that is ascribed, in all these solutions, to the later philosophy is compared to the factual content that this philosophy possesses according to the manuscripts. Based on the results of this comparison, the criteria have been formulated by means of which the argumentation of Giddens and his kindred authors for a transcendence of dualism has been judged. The most important assessment criterion is the superfluity of every epistemological approach to the constitution of meaning. Criticism of Giddens’ social theory is, as yet, largely in an incipient stage. The general appraisal up until now has been mostly negative. One of the critics even regards his main work “The Constitution of Society” as being without content. He refers to this book, alluding to the year of publication, as “newspeak”. It appears, however, that “context” as the main concept in the structuration theory has a completely different meaning than the one taken as the point of departure in the criticism. None of the critics have followed up his references to the later philosophy. Neither has an assessment of his interpretation of the “Philosophical Investigations” been performed in the light of Hacker’s analysis. Giddens’ institutional theory of action completely satisfies the assessment criteria that were borrowed from the later philosophy, while the work of the kindred authors does so partially. The main issue dealt with in the study is thus answered affirmatively.

After the determination of the result of the main issue, three application-oriented questions are answered. The first question deals with the relevance of concept forming in the application of the structuration theory. It is further important to know whether or not differences occur in the sociological research approach according to Giddens in comparison to an approach in which a synthesis is aimed at. Finally, it is possible that an epistemological interpretation of the later philosophy will not lead to an approach which is different to that of Giddens. The illustration of the relevance of his concepts is oriented towards modernity. For this purpose, Giddens elaborated concepts that had been neglected up until now, such as time, tradition and reflexivity. In the analysis of the content of “reflexivity”, the focal point is the reflexive role that social science itself plays in the modernization of society. In the second application-oriented question concerning the changes in the sociological research method, an inquiry has been made into how a historical, educational-sociological study should be approached. The modern school class, which came into being in the middle of the nineteenth century, was chosen as the specific focal point. In order to establish whether or not two kinds of interpretation of the later philosophy lead to a different
theoretical result, the conceptualisations of citizenship by Giddens and by Van Gunsteren have been compared. They both attempt to provide a theoretically adequate picture of the actions of the citizen in current society. In the comparison, the emphasis was placed on the somewhat younger citizens. In conclusion, a first impulse has been given to an appropriate situation of Giddens in sociology. The tone of the criticism of his work has impeded the appraisal of that place up until now.

The reader can begin at various points in this book. Three applications of the structuration theory are presented. Section 3.3 deals with ultra-modernity, 3.4 concerns educational sociology, and Chapter 4 covers citizenship and education. For each of the parts, Chapter 2 provides the argumentation for the particular application. It describes the various interpretations of Wittgenstein's later philosophy in the social sciences and the criteria that an overcoming of the issue of dualism has to satisfy. If one is interested in solutions to dualism, Chapter 1 is relevant. This also contains a justification and a description of the main issues dealt with in the study. An overview of the criticism of Giddens' theory forming is presented in Section 3.1. The argumentation for the incorrectness of this criticism is given in Section 3.2. This section also contains the answer to the main issue of the study. The core of this answer is presented at the end of Chapter 2. Chapter 5 can be read on its own. It provides a general overview of the results achieved in the research on an institutional theory of action in social theory forming.