Rational and moral action: a critical survey of rational choice theory

de Jonge, J.P.R.

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1. Introduction

In this chapter I investigate how the relation between social structure and human agency is approached: as inseparable or as separable.

We saw, in the previous chapter, that two arguments are offered why social structure and agency should be separated. Namely, because a) social structures pre-exist present living individuals; and b) social structures are causally efficacious. The first argument, is not really an issue in this context since, as we already noticed, both Bhaskar and Giddens endorse it. But it is connected with the second argument, and therefore I shall pay attention to it. To argue for the relative independence of social structures one can argue, first, that it is a level of reality with emergent properties. And second, social structures demonstrate their independence from human agency by the causal powers they possess. I will
consider this argument in section 4. But I begin with an overview of the most used concepts of social structures. For it is important to know whether the claim that social structure should be viewed as a relatively independent entity is connected to a specific conception of social structure. Thereafter, I will delve somewhat deeper into the relations between structure and system, because in transcendental realism and in structuration theory this relation is conceptualized in different ways. After I have dealt with both subjects I will compare both theories.

2. Concepts of structures

Social structure is one of the most central concepts in sociology. Yet, there is wide disagreement about its meaning. This disagreement is consequential because differences in the way theorists conceptualize social structure lead to very different approaches to sociology and to social sciences in general. Porpora believes that social structure refers to one of the following views (Porpora, 1989, 195):

1. Patterns of behavior that are stable over time.
2. Lawlike regularities that govern the behavior of social facts.
4. Collective rules and resources that structure behavior.

It is noteworthy that Porpora does not explicitly mention the concept that was widely used at times that structural functionalism dominated sociology, namely, that a social structure refers to a social whole that is a combination of connected parts. Most researchers into social structure at that time agreed that the study of social structure is essentially the study of the relation-ship between the parts of a whole.  

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218 A ‘structure’ is “[A] patterned relationship between differentiated parts constituent of a complex whole.” (Munch, 1976, 196) We could define a system in functional terms and distinguish subsystems, as the economic, political, cultural and social subsystems that are functionally integrated to form a whole.
In the first concept, "structure refers to those aspects of social behavior that the investigator considers relatively enduring or persistent" (Ib., 196). Structure is conceived as a form of stable or repeated behavior. This is a very general view that is accepted by most schools of thought as an aspect of social structures.

The idea of structures as law like regularities among social facts is traditionally associated with Durkheim. "According to this view, social facts or group properties are related to each other by a pattern of law-like regularities that together constitute social structure". (Ib., 197) The job of the sociologist is to uncover these regularities through empirical observation and thereby to describe social structure. Quantitative variations in one social fact are related to quantitative variations in other social facts. "This conception of social structure rigidly divorces sociology from psychology, and represents social structure as something entirely devoid of human agency. Social structures operate mechanically over the heads of individual actors". (Ib., 198) In contrast to the first definition, this definition sees social structures as external to human agents. These two definitions exemplify the two polar positions between which Bhaskar and Giddens try to find a middle course.

The conception of social structure as systems of human relationships among social positions is traditionally associated with the Marxian tradition. Porpora suggest that there is a strong affinity between this concept of structure and the realist approach of Bhaskar. But I think that this is only part of the truth. It seems to me that Bhaskar applies two conceptualizations of social structure. The first is that Bhaskar

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Only some use it as the real definition. Swedberg, for instance, defines social structures as “some kind of recurrent and patterned interactions between agents that are maintained through sanctions.” (Swedberg, 1994, 255).
conceives of social structure as:
a) configurations of rules,
b) that are rooted in positions-practices
c) and generate the habitual behavior of human agents.
This is the concept that Bhaskar needs to explain the ubiquitous presence of routine and how social structure is both the condition and the outcome of social action. This is the concept of duality of structure.
In addition to this concept of social rules Bhaskar seems to use a second concept of social structure as:
i) configurations of social relations
ii) that are manifested in position-practices
iii) and as having causal powers of their own.
In this conception social structure reflects the actual organization of society as manifested in networks of positions/practices.
The fourth conception of social structure is associated with Giddens. Giddens conceives of social structures as:
a) sets of rules and resources,
b) that are rooted in situated practices
c) and generate the collective routine in social life.
Next to this Giddens has a concept of social systems as:
i) configurations of social relations across time and space,
ii) that are rooted in connected and institutionalized social practices
iii) and having structural properties.
Giddens provides, in Porpora’s view, a cultural definition of structure and social structure manifests itself in structuration theory as an intersubjective reality. In transcendental realism, in contrast, a materialist definition of structure is offered and structure refers, therefore, to an objective reality. Transcendental realists believe that Giddens, as a consequence, debilitates the concept of social structure.²²⁰ Whereas Giddens

²²⁰ “(...) by structure Giddens is essentially referring to rules, which belong as much to the subjective realm as agency.” (Porpora, 1989, 202) Hodgson, commenting on structuration theory, says that ‘critical’ realism (in contrast to structuration theory) does not collapse the world into the mind of the
can describe poverty, in their view, only as a cultural phenomenon (the culture of poverty), Porpora’s definition of social structures enables him to describe it as above all a social (material) phenomenon.\(^\text{221}\) Giddens, however, is aware of the fact that actors, whose activities constitute social practices, are ‘positioned’. That is, that they have an unequal access to the rules and resources which enable actors to exercise these practices and which simultaneously constrain them. Therefore, he borrows Bhaskar’s notion of position-practices to underline this inequality. (Giddens, 1984, 83) Social systems are organized as regularized social practices and the positions that are associated with these practices are the material basis of the social relations within social systems.\(^\text{222}\)

Giddens for his part thinks that there is some functionalist flavor attached to transcendental realism because it mistakenly assimilates the notions of structure and system. Moreover, it employs the notion of structure in an explanatory way, in the sense that ‘underlying’ or ‘deep’ structures are held to explain surface phenomena and because of its functionalist proclivity it takes consequences of actor. Hodgson deduces this distinction solely from the fact that Giddens views structure as inseparable from action, which is quite something else. Hodgson continues to say that both the social and the natural world retain in critical realism an existence independently of our perception. (Hodgson, 2002, 163) Apparently this is, in his view, not the case in structuration theory. But in view of Mäki’s discussion of different concepts of realism, transcendental realism is a kind of indirect epistemic realism (the ontological claim is not conceptually independent from the epistemic claim), whereas structuration theory is a kind of indirect ontological realism. (Mäki, 1998) Being both realist theories, there is no reason to maintain that the one is subjectivist and the other is not.

\(^{221}\) It is in this respect remarkable that Popora seldom mentions resources as part of Giddens’ definition of social structures.

\(^{222}\) Giddens defines a social system as “reproduced relations between actors (...) organized as regular social practices” (Giddens, 1984, 25) Compare this with Lawson’s definition of it as “a structured process of interaction”. (Lawson, 1997a, 165) (as structured by positions/practices). The conclusion is that they have much in common.
actions or of social arrangements to be elements of the causes of those actions or arrangements.

In structuration theory structure refers to the organizing principles (the rules and resources) behind the actual organization of society. Actual society is made up of networks of socially regulated practices. Social practices are also the bedrock of institutions for the latter are held to be nothing more than such social regularized practices as structured by rules and resources.

The first definition of Bhaskar does not differ substantially from the definition that Giddens provides. Neither would he deny that in this conception social structure is inseparable from human action. In the second definition social structure is defined independent of human action.223 Bhaskar does not deny that all things social are activity dependent. Without human activity nothing in society could have its genesis, continuation or undergo change. But there are structures that are the products of past actions. We could say that Bhaskar uses two accounts, one that emphasizes the duality of structure (structures as both conditions and consequence of human action) and one that emphasizes social structure as the determinant of social relations (as in the Marxian theory in which social structure refers to the relations of production).

In the first account the inseparability thesis is confirmed, the second account emphasizes the pre-existence of social relations. Since social structures possess causal powers, social practices cannot be linked to social structures because they belong to different layers of social reality. Therefore, he disconnects praxis and structure. Archer underlines the importance of this dual account: "This need for separate accounts of 'structure' and 'praxis' firmly separates the TMSA

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223 Lawson sometimes supports the inseparability thesis, for he writes: "because social structure is human dependent it is only ever manifest in human activity." (Lawson, 1995, 18), but at another occasion he supports the idea that social structure refers to a level of social reality "which, though dependent upon, is irreducible to human thought and action" (Lawson, 1997a, 317, note 2)
3. Dualism and dualities

The separability/inseparability issue represents, according to Archer, the ontological parting of the ways between structurationists and realists. (Archer, 1995, 63) Authors, like Archer, who decline the idea of the duality of structure, fall back on Bhaskar's second (Marxian) definition of social structure. For some this means that social structures take historical forms and correspond to relations of production as they are defined by the prevalent mode of production. These authors emphasize the pre-existence of social structures. Others, like Archer, think that the denial of the separability thesis prevents the possibility of discussing macro-social change in theoretical terms. They stress the autonomy of social structures. Both groups of authors think that social structures causally influence human actions. Thus, in their view, the denial that structure is separable from agency rules out the view that social structure is 1) autonomous or independent, 2) pre-existent, and 3) causally efficacious.

If autonomy is denied and the dualism of agency and structure is ignored, then social reality can be treated as nothing more than an aggregate of people. (Archer, ib., 43) Archer criticizes Giddens's definition of social structure because it "shifts the referents of structure away from identifiable forms of social organization (the division of labor, educational systems, and political parties) (..)". (Archer, ib., 107) This is important for her for two reasons: she is interested in the way social structures work as it were 'behind

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224 The fundamental argument between structuration theory and transcendental realism is about the stratified nature of social reality. While structuration theory acknowledges only three strata (the natural, the biological and the social), transcendental realism acknowledges two additional strata, personal psychology (mind as emergent from body) and socio-cultural structure (structure as emergent from social relations). The social is not one and indivisible, but made up of heterogeneous constituents. (Archer, 1995, 102)
the back' of people and because she is interested in the relation between social integration and system integration (see her frequent references to the seminal article of Lockwood, 1964). In brief, what Archer wants to preserve in social theory is the ability to analyze the social determinants of human action as well as the tensions (conflicts, contradictions) on the macro-social level in order to be able to explain whether or not they generate system change or, as Bhaskar once said, to discuss 'historical possibilities'. (Bhaskar, 1983, 85) She thinks that both the inseparability thesis as well as the definition of social structures in terms of rules and resources makes it unsuitable for both purposes.

In Porpora's view, the discussion of pre-existence turns on the question what has analytical priority: rules or relationships? Porpora believes that social relationships are historically and analytically prior to subsequent rule following behavior. (Porpora, 1989, 206) As a consequence he treats social practices as derivative from social relations. Social relationships have determined the distribution of resources and the assignment of rules over position-practices. From this it follows that social structure, as a system of relationships among social positions is separable from human actions. Since social structures precede the positions-practices, they determine the capabilities that are attached to these positions-practices. These capabilities are in a sense the causal properties of the social structures and that is why they form the social (material) causes of social phenomena. Whether structures are causes will be subjected to discussion; the notion of pre-existence does not require more than the argument that "social structures, the deposit or residue of actions undertaken in the past, provide the context in which

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225 Lockwood proposed a view of system disintegration that arises from a 'lack of fit' between the core institutional configuration of a social system and its material substructure. (Lockwood, 1964, 252) Social change will occur when the material substructure facilitates the development of social relationships, which, if actualized, would directly threaten the existing institutional order. This is, in fact, the Marxists' analysis of the collapse of Capitalism.
current action is placed. (..) These historically given structures
condition (..) people's behaviour in the present by laying
down an initial distribution of resources and vested
interests." (Lewis, 2000, 260).

The most controversial issue is whether social structures are
causally efficacious. This proposition is often defended by
referring to emergent properties, but this is not correct. It is
not disputed that as systems acquire increasingly higher
degrees of organization they begin to exhibit novel properties
that in some sense transcend the properties of their
constituting parts and behave in ways that cannot be
predicted on the basis of the 'laws' governing simpler
systems. These new properties are called *emergent properties*.
These emergent properties are qualities of social structures
and thus prove their existence separate from human action.
Moreover, these emergent properties show, it is claimed, that
social structures are causally efficacious. But this claim only
makes sense within the transcendental ontology. For the
transcendental realist ontology presents a social world that is
made up of structures and individuals that belong to
different strata of social reality. There is no question of
reducing one to the other or eliding the two. On the contrary,
there is every reason to explore the interplay between the
two. It is only through analyzing the processes by which
structure and agency shape and re-shape one another over
time that we can account for variable outcomes at different
times.\textsuperscript{226}

\textsuperscript{226} As an example of an emergent property, Archer refers to the increased
productivity of Adam Smith's pin-makers which was a consequence of
their division of labor (relations of production) and not reducible to
personal qualities. (Ib., 51) This is a very special example of an emergent
property. Later on, she defines an emergent property as a "relational
property that has the generative capacity to modify the powers of its
constituents in fundamental ways and exercise causal influences *sui
generis*." (Ib., 174)

\textsuperscript{227} It is the notion of 'emergent properties' that supplies the adherents of
this position with a base for realist ontology. Archer takes as her premise
that the emergent properties of structures are irreducible to agents,
But Giddens adheres to another ontology. In the ‘ontology of praxis’ as put forward in structuration theory, structure and agency are *inseparable*. Structure becomes real only when instantiated by agency. This ontological assumption has direct implications for theorizing, for their corollary is that neither structure nor agency has independent or autonomous features, but only those properties, which are manifested in and reproduced or transformed through ‘social practices’. Because ‘structure’ is inseparable from ‘agency’, there is no sense in which it can be either emergent or autonomous or causally influential. Giddens’ position on the issue that social structures possess causal powers of their own is clear: “Structural constraints always operate via agents, motives and reasons, (...)”. (Giddens, 1984, 310) For, though it is true that practices are independent of particular individuals filling it, they are neither independent of the network in which they are embedded nor of all individuals that constitute society. Therefore, it is wrong to say that practices are autonomous. Society can exist only through individuals, either in the past, present or future and positions-practices can never be autonomous of all these individuals. This does not exclude the existence of emergent properties, what it does exclude is that these emergent properties are causally efficacious. Of the two approaches only structural realism supports the claim that emergent properties are qualities of social structure and that the effects of these emergent properties can be traced back on the events on a lower level. I shall investigate this claim in the next section.

meaning that in principle they are analytically separable. We cannot reduce social phenomena to psychological phenomena. Social reality must be viewed as distinct, indeed *sui generis*, of individuals. When Archer talks of structures, as distinct levels, she is primarily interested in their ‘generative causal powers’. It is these powers or properties that provide a level with a real, as opposed to an actual, existence. When it is argued that the notion of causally efficacious social structures cannot be sustained, then this would be an argument against the view that social structures are external to human agency.
4. Emergent properties and reconstitutive downward causation

The concept of ‘emergence’ plays a crucial role in transcendental realism. Lawson defines emergence as follows: “An entity or aspect found at some level of organization can be said to be emergent if there is a sense in which it has arisen out of some ‘lower’ level, being conditioned by and dependent upon, but not predictable from, the properties found at the lower level.” (Lawson, 1997b, 112)

It is its virtue of being emergent (irreducible to individuals and their practices) and causally efficacious that, Bhaskar maintains, social structure may be regarded not as a merely theoretical construct, but as real. The causal efficacy of social structure legitimates the possibility of a distinctive science of society by underwriting the existence of a distinct, knowable subject matter for the social sciences.

I have presented a short introduction of the notion of emergent properties in chapter VIII that I shall not repeat here. I want to remind the reader that we can distinguish a weaker and a stronger notion of emergent properties. The weaker notion only involves the claim that some configuration at a lower level of organization gives rise to surprising properties at a higher level of organization. The stronger notion of emergent properties involves the reconstitutive downward causation claim that, once arisen, emergent properties have causal power of their own that change causal powers at the lower level of organization, the levels from which they emerged. The idea of weak emergence or ‘upward causation’ is widely accepted in the social and natural sciences: elements at a lower ontological level somehow affect

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Another formulation is “P is an emergent property of a thing b iff either b is a complex thing (system) no component of which possesses P, or b is an individual that possesses P by virtue of being a component of a system (i.e., b would not possess P if it were independent or isolated” (Nash, 1999, 458)
those at a higher level. Also the notion of downward causation is well known: emergent properties influence the course of affairs at a lower level. What is contested is the stronger notion of reconstitutive downward causation.  

For Hodgson, the crucial point in the argument is to recognize the significance of reconstitutive downward causation on *habits*, rather than merely on behavior, intentions or preferences. (see Hodgson, 2002, 170) Reconstitutive downward causation works by creating and moulding habits. Habit is, in his view, the crucial and hidden link in the causal chain. Accordingly, as long as we can explain how social structures give rise to new or changed habits, then we have an acceptable mechanism of reconstitutive downward causation.(..) By acting not directly on individual decisions, but on habitual dispositions, social structures exert downward causation without reducing individual agency to their effects". (Hodgson, 2002,171; see also Hodgson, 2004)  

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229 Reconstitutive downward causation is a strong claim. It says something like the following: supervenient properties can, on the long run, change the base properties.  

230 "The term "habit" generally denominates a more or less self-actuating disposition or tendency to engage in a previously adopted or acquired form of action." (Camic, 1986, 1044) Actions that are frequently practiced tend over time to become habitual. There does not seem to be much of a distinction between habitual behavior and routine.  

231 In the discussion between transcendental (critical) realism and structuration theory Hodgson takes a special position. His definition of social structure looks very like the first one given by Bhaskar to explain the duality of structure, though most authors who defend the claim of reconstitutive downward causation refer to Bhaskar's second definition of social structure. Hodgson writes: "Those particular social structures that have the capacity for substantial, enduring and widespread reconstitutive downward causation upon individuals are termed *institutions.*" (Hodgson, 2002, 174) Apparently he has more definitions of social structure, but he needs this one because he discusses habit formation. Hodgson described the process of habit formation as reconstitutive downward causation. But when that is the case, reconstitutive downward causation is no longer evidence that (all) social structures are activity-independent.
The idea of reconstitutive downward causation has struck some thinkers as incoherent. And Kim agrees that it is difficult to deny that there is an air of paradox about it. "After all, higher-level properties arise out of lower-level conditions and without the presence of the latter in suitable configurations; the former could not even be there. So how could these higher-level properties causally influence and alter the conditions from which they arise?" (Kim, 1999, 25) The obvious case is that, diachronically, the interactions of individuals - in some given context and situation - can give rise to new aggregate phenomena and properties that, in turn, can feed back on how individuals act and react subsequently. And this 'cycle' can go on and on. The tough issue is how, synchronically, emergent properties relate, ontologically, to the relevant entities and their properties at the base level. There is something circular and incoherent about this variety of downward causation. How can the cause of the consequence be simultaneously the consequence of the 'consequence'?

But also the diachronic case is beset with difficulties. As Kim explains, the difficulties boil down to this: "if an emergent property M emerges from some basal condition P, why can’t P displace M as a cause of any putative effect of M? Why can’t P do all the work in explaining why any alleged effect of M occurred?" (Ib., 32) When M causes a base property M*, and given that M has an emergent base P that it supervenes on it is hard to avoid the conclusion that in the real causal story P rather than M causes M*. In other words, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that M plays no causal role over and above the role played by P. M is just epiphenomenal. 232

232 When people develop habits and the habituation of certain aspects of behavior leads to institutionalization and this leads to the end to constitutive rules, how can these constitutive rules initiate a change in habits that, in the end, would lead to a change of these same constitutive rules? Or to formulate it differently, how can an emergent property change a base property without becoming a base property itself?
The conclusion, therefore, is not encouraging for the 'stronger' notion of emergent properties: if emergent properties exist, they are causally, and hence, explanatory inert and therefore largely useless for the purpose of causal/explanatory theories. “(..)higher-level properties can serve as causes in downward causal relations only if they are reducible to lower-level properties. The paradox is that if they are so reducible, they are not really “higher-level” any longer.” (Kim, 1999, 33)

It is true that newly formed social structures affect the social practices of individuals. But they do not do so as causal agents. They rather provide new social relations or new social environments within which individual agents interact. Varela and Harré formulate a similar objection. They argue that efficient causation always involves a particular that produces or generates something.235 Because social structure lacks the capacity to initiate activity and to make things happen of its own accord it is not an efficient but a material cause of social activity. As a consequence it does not qualify as a powerful particular. The conclusion to which Varela and Harré’s rejection of the causal efficacy of social structure leads them to is that social structure is in actual fact immanent in (and so ontologically reducible to) people and their practices. (Varela and Harré, 1996, 313)

Critical realists who acknowledge that people are the only powerful particulars in society, still claim that pre-existing social structure does make a difference to the course of events by influencing the actions that people choose to make, and in virtue of this pre-existing social structure satisfies the causal criterion for existence, if ‘causality’ is understood as the ability to make a difference to the course of social events. (Lewis, 2000, 258) This gives rise to the question how the

235 Efficient causation is used here with reference to human agency as the sole agent who generates something. Earlier I have spoken about sufficient reasons in relation to human agency. A sufficient reason as an effective reason is a reason (a belief-desire combination) that actually led to the action (see chapter II).
causal efficacy of social structure is to be understood. Pattomäki has suggested we conceptualize the causal efficacy of social structures in terms of Mackie’s INUS condition. This condition states that a cause is an insufficient but necessary part of a set of conditions that are collectively unnecessary but sufficient for the occurrence of some outcome. Social structure is a necessary but insufficient part of a causal complex (combinations of structures and agencies) that is sufficient but unnecessary for the occurrence of a particular social event. For different combinations would lead to the same outcome and the same combination can lead to different outcomes.  

(see Mackie, 1976) Since a causal complex contains combinations of structures and agency we can characterize the causal influence of social structures as the material cause of action. And we need to do so if we want to hold on to the idea of purposeful action.

We have found that social structures, whatever the definition, cannot initiate activities, but they can be a material cause of habitual behavior in combination with human agency. It is part of a causal complex rather than an independent causal factor. This conclusion supports the view of structuration theory that structure and agency are inseparable. The properties of social structure only manifest themselves when they are activated in and reproduced or transformed through ‘social practices’.

5. Conclusion

In this conclusion, I first turn to the particulars of the agency-structure relations. Archer was one of the critics who started

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234 Pattomäki counts five elements in any causal complex (K) capable of producing events, tendencies and the like: namely actors (AR), rules (RU), resources (RE), practices (PRA) and meaningful action (AN). Together these form the sufficient but unnecessary condition for the production of a result. Hence, there is never a single cause but instead always a causal complex K =[AR, RU, RE, PRA, AN]. A result X may be produced by K(ij), i.e., there may be many different sufficient conditions capable of producing the same result. (Pattomäki, 1991, 239)
a discussion about the issue that structures pre-exist human agents, which raises the question how structures could be the product of human doings. Maybe we can narrow the problem to two issues. The first is the relationship between present day social structure and present day agents. This is best understood as a supervenience relation, where structures are the properties of relations that supervene on individuals. The second is the relation between agents and social structures of the present and those in the past. These stand in some relation of causal dependence to one another. Healy argues that when we look, for instance, to the demographic structure "then both the way individuals are distributed in the present population and the properties of the supervening demographic structures are causally dependent on the actions of past individuals, who were probably, in their turn, constrained by the demographic structure that supervened on them". (Healy, 1998, 517) Attempts to explain the actual demographic pattern will most likely involve referring to the actions of the now dead, or to the structures of the past. "However, such causal explanations form no part of the conceptual relationship between agents and structures. As it exists today, properties and all, the demographic structure supervenes on those individuals here present." (Ib., 518)

Archer holds to the view that the assertion of pre-existence, far from nullifying activity-dependence, actually specifies upon whose activities the development of a particular structure depends, in contrast to those later agents who cannot be held responsible for its genesis, but only for its maintenance, change or perhaps ultimate abolition. (Archer, 1995, 72) But the only thing that matters is that present agents confront a pre-existing social structure and reproduce or transform it while they act.

Social structures cannot be directly sensed like the powers and forces of nature, so perception is no direct guide to their existence and powers. A transcendental ontology can be based on two arguments. Firstly, there is an argument about society’s necessary existence prior to and independent of individual and collective understanding at any particular
moment. Second, causal power rather than physical being or sensory apprehension is the vital index of existence. Causal power is real if it results in observable human actions and institutionally organized patterns of behavior. Rules, roles and relations are amongst the causes of behavior and so must be real.

Since the deep issue is the different conception of causal powers, that is, the different views as to which entities are the sources of activities, the case is clear: only persons can fulfill that role. Only individuals as bearers of roles are potential ‘causes’ of actions. Social structures influence the state of affairs only by the way they condition people’s choice of action, not by acting autonomously (behind people’s back). Agency implies the capacity to produce a difference.

If social structures, to be real, must be distinct from their effects, what does it mean to say that they are ‘present’ only in their effects? We can say that the concept of ‘emergence’ apparently was needed to resolve this problem. One needs to make a sharp distinction between the idea of cause as an antecedent event, which triggers a mechanism, and the idea of social structures as relatively enduring mechanisms that determine real possibilities and where agents are often the ‘triggers’. (Manicas, 1980) The second formulation, the combination of structures and agents, is what the INUS conditions are about and is consistent with structuration theory. Giddens does not use the concept of emergent properties himself; he refers to the self-regulating properties of social systems. Social structures are ‘real’ in the sense that they have ‘real’ effects, for example, they constitute, limit and enable actions. His approach is founded on a conception of the individual agent where routine is foundational for action and reason. The key concept of routine provides a mechanism through which institutions can act upon individuals and help constitute their natures and preferences. However, the reliance on routine has a drawback: it makes it difficult to theorize about social change, for when we rely on routine, we focus on social
reproduction. Giddens argues that the concept of reproduction no more has a special connection to the structure of social stability than it has to that of social change, “Every act which contributes to the reproduction of structure is also an act of production, a novel enterprise, and as such may initiate change by altering that structure at the same time as it reproduces it.” (Giddens, 1993, 134)