

Anthony Giddens and International Relations Theory.

The Self and the Mirror of Society’

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Policy-making in international politics is often dependent on the balance between states’ preferences and international society interests represented by the institutions with supranational or intergovernmental characteristics. Thus, we can claim that international policy-making confronts individuation with social incorporation. The sociological approaches to world politics study socialization and appropriateness mechanisms in international institutions. As such, sociological perspectives analyse the tensions between individuation and social incorporation. This fact drew my attention to Anthony Giddens social thought, namely in what his thesis on the duality of social structures.

Anthony Giddens’ sociological thinking is framed by a critical positioning towards ontological structuralism and ontological individualism. Regarding methodology, his perspective is essentially syncretic, since he admits the validity of both macro institutional analysis and the study of micro strategic conduct. Such methodological syncretism is empirically useful given Giddens’ distinction between social face to face integration and systemic wider integration. It can also be understood as a consequence of Giddens’ proximity to scientific realism.

Giddens’ structuration theory is meant to set a balance between structure and agency as ontological analytical priorities. It is rather interesting to discuss how this equilibrium is put in motion in Giddens’ work.

Regarding structure, his main objective is to distance his work from functionalism, structural-functionalism and structuralism. In this regard, Giddens points to the similarity between Parsons’ and Althusser’s thought concerning normative social internalization (Giddens, 2000, p. 9).

Concerning agency, Giddens’ perspective on a self-reflexive agent is essentially designed to explain his standpoint on historically located individual *praxis* and on the potentialities open to human action in the ‘lifeworld’, thereby denying all reductionist

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approaches (Giddens, 2000, p. 15). Giddens opposition to both Popper's and Sartre's different forms of ontological individualism is particularly significant. Facing Popper's refusal of collective entities as basis for social explanations and Sartre's defence of individual liberty against structure, Giddens sets forward a kind of a 'strong', but contextualised, agent model. Individual agency is empowered as a vehicle that guarantees the recursive character of societies, which gives considerable value to social norms, rules as well as to socialization mechanisms. Individuals are 'strong' in the sense that: 1) they are able to articulate between their practical and/or discursive conscience when they have, socially, to account for their actions and beliefs; 2) they keep society from becoming static, intervening in the 'world' understood as the object and as somehow 'plastic'. This dual belief in human empowerment and on the plasticity of the world upon which individual agency is focused, leads us to the importance that the temporal dimension of human *praxis* assumes in 'structuration theory'. Drawing from phenomenological resources, mainly from Heidegger's work, Giddens places the 'self' on 'time'. He thereby aligns his thought with critics of Kantian's transcendentalism, stating that time and space are much more than receptacles of experience, for "everything which exists is a temporal 'being' ['be-ing']" ((Giddens, 2000, p. 13).

However, Giddens also points to the need of introducing a paradigmatic axis in time-space relations, meaning that only the combination of structure *with* temporal and spatial dimensions gives content to the syntagmatic axis. Time, space and 'virtual time-space' (or structure), the 'triple intersection of difference', are necessary elements for reality construction. Concomitantly with the importance of structure for time-space relations, Giddens also stresses that the reflexive monitoring of the self, is achieved in a structured environment where reason and intentionality are intermeshed with doubt. Regarding the stratification of action, Giddens declares that the intentional character of the reflexive monitorisation of human action does not disavow the existence of unacknowledged conditions as well as unintended consequences of action that impinge on the flow of individual conduct.

It is at this point that agency meets its structural limits and that the equilibrium, in Giddens social thought, between subject and object starts to favour society over individuals. Such distortion of the balance is visible in Giddens's constant reference to the theme of ontological security in contemporary societies. The significance, in his work, of such theme reveals his not desired but almost natural filiations with parsonian

structural-functionalism. On the other hand, his concern with the radicality of modernity and its effects, with risk perception as well as with personal identity (Giddens, 1997, 1995b, 1999) shows Giddens' alignment with the diverse, but significant, post-modern literature. His constant reference to Zygmunt Bauman's work is, in that regard, most enlightening.

Post-modern literature is often interpreted as being foundationalist regarding the question of the 'death of the subject'. However, such argument can be understood as a refusal of the rational self metanarrative, rather than a refusal of the possibility that, through human volition, resistance to power and untemporal social structure reification can be envisaged.

Such resistance to power in post-modern thought is presently theorised by two strands of post-structuralism.

The first is associated with the notion of alterity and the 'being for' condition (Bauman, 1995), articulated in theories like the 'subject in community' (Faber, 1994).

The second focuses on the 'self' rather than on the 'other', reconstructing the empowerment of against the 'freedom of subjectivity' bias. Such strand can be found in Rorty's recuperation of the 'strong poet ideal' and in the later Foucault's 'aesthetics of existence'. Giddens' 'theory of agency' can also be understood as the retrieval of human agency. Although Giddens refuses the concept of 'subject less history', the decentring of the subject assumes in his work characteristics that set him apart from authors that have led Nietzschean resurgence in the second half of the 20th century (Giddens, 1995a). Contrary to Rorty or Foucault, Giddens' 'soft realism' takes him to dismiss epistemological questions in favour of ontological ones, a characteristic that was imported, along with structuration theory, to the midst of international relations theories by *via-media* social constructivism.

The literature review on the social construction of international relations reveals a macro perspective bias, identifiable through the abstraction of appropriateness logic. Such logic, although compelling, has not yet fully revealed its analytical virtues. The utility of micro-level studies lies precisely in their power to show how such logic works. Sociological institutionalism frames socialization mechanisms by using cognitive psychology approaches (Checkel, 2005). However, these approaches do not sufficiently account for factors such as organisational cultures or the normative competition at policy-making level. Neo-institutionalism (March and Olsen, 1989) is also an attempt to

specify appropriateness logic. It selects organisational fields as units of analysis. This choice has allowed for two theoretical perspectives: a combination of agency and structure as *explanans* of institutional political behaviour and a more comprehensive analysis of the emergence of policy fields as structures of meaning. In the neo-institutionalist literature, the focus is on the way through which institutions rationalise the flow of normative beliefs that converge into them (Meyer, Rowan, 1977). The political competition process between different kinds of actors who struggle to impose certain policy means to desire ends (Di Maggio/Powell, 1983) within international institutions assumes particular relevance.

Neo-institutionalist perspectives on international policy-making processes explore the forms through which international cooperation empowers certain actors and policies beyond the nation state. Therefore, it is necessary to study the actors that operate within the international field. Such study should contribute to map the sociological effects of internationalised political action. In this context, structuration theory, alongside Giddens’ theories on high modernity have proven to be viable theoretical resources, since conducting the ‘Jagrena car’ in international relations has showed the limits to the recursive character of international society.

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