

Transcending the *impasse* of individualism and universalism in sociological theory?

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This article develops the argument formulated by Strauss (2002:96-115) in two directions: (1) It explores – in a transcendental-empirical sense – the relevance of the notion of modal universality for an appreciation of the (ontic) status of the social aspect of reality; and (2) it proposes an understanding of the place of multiplicity and wholeness in sociological theorising intended to provide a first level argument transcending the impasse entailed in the opposition of ‘individual’ and ‘society’ and present in the antithesis between atomism and holism. Analogous to the way in which the history of mathematics (with its alternation between ‘arithmeticistic’ and ‘geometricistic’ views) did not explore a third option, namely conjecturing both the uniqueness and the coherence between multiplicity and wholeness, it is proposed that sociology should also not enter the dead ally of seeing a strict either-or in what lies at the base of the stances of sociological atomism (individualism) and sociological holism (universalism). The inevitability of employing analogical basic concepts in doing sociology serves as a guiding star for the distinctions that are introduced. In conclusion a brief indication is given about two further dimensions of sociological theorising that need to be introduced in a third article, namely the constitutive role of complex (compound) and typical basic concepts (with special reference to the sociology of Giddens).

Introduction

In Strauss 2002 a number of key problems related to the opposition of ‘individual’ and ‘society’ were introduced and discussed. Particular emphasis was laid upon the opposing extremes of an *individualistic* (atomistic) and a *universalistic* (holistic) stance within sociological theory. It was argued that the former approach denies anything beyond the concretely existing *individuals*, whereas the latter accepts the idea of societal wholes as *supra-individual totalities*, as *more-than-merely-individual* social realities.

Tönnies absorbed both these extremes in his *genetic* distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*; Spencer articulated an *individualistic organicism*; and Durkheim finally gave priority to his *holistic* understanding of the *conscience collective*. Without any hesitation Max Weber defended the *nominalistic* tradition in terms of which it is always possible to understand “communal human actions” as being reducible “to the actions of the individual human beings (Einzelmenschen) concerned” (Weber, 1973:439). In direct opposition to this *atomistic* (nominalistic-individualistic) orientation Alexander finds it perfectly meaningful to refer to “structures separate from the individuals who compose it”

(Alexander, 1987:10-11).

The same problem surfaces in the opposition between 'action' and 'order.' Yet an analysis of the (apparent) opposition between 'individual' and 'society' soon turned out to be more complex than it may seem to be at first sight. By critically assessing the classifications introduced by Johnson *et al* on the basis of the distinction between 'material' and 'ideal' and between 'nominal' and 'real' the 'double-headed' nature of nominalism emerged - as being *rationalistic* and *irrationalistic* at once.¹

But given the *atomistic* emphasis on the *one* and the *many* (individuals) and the *holistic* focus on an encompassing *whole* (*totality*), another dimension of sociological theorising manifested itself - the inevitability of employing terms which reveal an *interconnection* between different *facets* or *aspects* of reality. If the antithesis between atomism and holism hinges upon the respective emphases on *multiplicity* and *wholeness*, then the first basic question is the following one: is there a 'domain' in reality where the awareness of the *one* and the *many* (*unity* and *multiplicity* / *being distinct*) finds its seat? Similarly: is there an 'area' where the primary (original) meaning of *wholeness* (or *totality*) is located? We shall argue that there are identifiable modes within which these terms find their "seat" and in addition we shall attempt to show that these terms are derived from *mutually cohering* aspects that cannot be understood in isolation from each other even though it must be maintained that they are at the same time *irreducibly unique*.

At this point we have reached a stage where "the most general assumptions that every sociologist makes" (cf. Alexander, 1987:10) come into play. Exploring this level of theory formation will enable us to arrive at a better understanding of the nature and interconnections of the different aspects discernable within reality.

"General assumptions"

In its *strict* sense the word "general" refers to what is considered to be *universal*. However, within contemporary postmodern trends the positive employment of the term *universality* is questioned. The "incredulity" towards "grand metanarratives" (Lyotard) apparently also entails a threat to any defence of *universality*. This negative assessment of universality is closely connected with what became known - since the sixties of the previous century - as the "linguistic turn." *Autonomous* (universalising) *reason*, *progress* and *science* in its broadest sense are features of modernity challenged by the postmodern spirit. Appleby *et al* remark that the (communal) structure of language replaces the logical and emotional understanding of being human:

Human consciousness, either logical and reasoned or intuitive and emotional, is no longer the point of contention. Through a renewed focus upon linguistic structure, language, rather than the powers of the human being, is seen as the focal point of the human world (Appleby, 1996:388).

Unfortunately the implied "choice" between *the lingual* and *the logical* does not constitute

1. In order to keep this (intermediate) follow-up article self-contained it should be mentioned that the core feature of *rationalism* is given in its over-emphasis of *universality* (or: conceptual knowledge), while *irrationalism* is characterized by its over-accentuation of what is *unique* and *contingent* (i.e., of *concept-transcending knowledge* or *idea-knowledge*).

a strict *either-or*. Any utterance displays both a *logical-analytical* and a *lingual side* - and therefore may be assessed from both of these *modes of explanation*. Viewed from its *logical-analytical* side an utterance appears as a *statement* - and viewed from its *lingual* side it appears as a *sentence*.¹ What is distinctive about a *statement* is that it admits an assessment of its *truth* or *falsity*. Affirming the truth of a statement is equivalent to denying its negation (or *contradictory*)² – presupposing the correlated logical principles of *identity* and *non-contradiction*. The distinction between truth and falsity is meaningless if these (and other) logical principles do not hold *universally*. This remark does not intend to elevate any specific theoretical account of universality itself to be universally valid *per se*, but it also does not justify avoiding an account of universality altogether either.

Postmodernism finds itself in the self-contradictory position that its denial of universality is based upon the *assumption* of universality. Rejecting *all* “metanarratives” and every universal way of addressing issues simply use universality in order to *deny* it. The “enemy” is not universality as such, but the *rationalistic* prejudice that conceptual thinking furnishes us with abstract, a-historical insights not in need of or subject to *changing interpretations*. The suggested distinction between the logical-analytical and the lingual functions of an utterance ultimately makes an appeal to certain *conditions* determining and delimiting human existence, namely *logicality* and *linguisticity*. We have just now also mentioned *historicity* as another condition for human existence. As soon as an attempt is made to promote or elevate one such a condition to become the only and the all-encompassing one, the inevitable outcome will be a fundamental distortion (and even denial) of other equally important conditioning moments.

Remark about the “social construction” of reality

Since the 15th century modern nominalism inspired the idea that “reality” ought to be “constructed”. Initially, exemplified in the extreme position of Kant, this ideal of “construction” triumphed in elevating human understanding to the level of the (universal) formal law-giver of nature (cf. Kant, 1783, § 36). However, since the 19th century this extreme *rationalism* was - through the emergence of *historicism* and the “linguistic turn” - gradually replaced by the domination of the *irrationalistic side* of nominalism, thus manifesting an original nominalistic conviction: God created nature, but “man” constructed the “human world”. Owing to his thorough study of Kant during the first decade of the 20th century, Edmund Husserl launched his phenomenological program in the spirit of the original rationalistic side of nominalism by embarking on the idea of a “constituting intentionality” which converted the world into a mere *correlate* of the *intentional con-*

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1. While the logical contents of a concept or a statement remain the same, it may acquire a lingual expression that differs from language to language – demonstrating the foundational position of the logical-analytical mode with respect to the lingual aspect.
 2. When Quine explains that the “peculiarity of *statements* which sets them apart from other linguistic forms is that they admit of truth and falsity” (1950:1) his implicit assumption is still that statements are “linguistic forms.” Our contention is that an utterance functions at once in two different *modes* and that the logical-analytical mode cannot be subsumed under the lingual mode.

sciousness. Within the development of 20th century sociological theory this stance inspired the idea of the *social construction of reality* (see Schütz, & Luckmann, 1973, and Schütz, 1932 and 1967).¹

Multiple modes conditioning the kernel of theories

There is something peculiar about these (general/universal functional) conditions. Alexander affirmatively points out that “postpositivist philosophers and historians of science” (such as Kuhn and Lakatos), “have shown that falsification cannot - or, at least, in practice usually does not - disprove a general theory, even in the natural sciences” (Alexander, 1990b: 9-10). He refers to Lakatos’ account that the *general core notions* of a theory, essential to its identity, are sustained in spite of the failure of more peripheral notions. Alexander explains this idea as follows:

Faced with studies that throw some of their core commitments into doubt, general theories can sustain their vivacity by discarding peripherals and defending their core (Alexander, 1990b: 10).

Stegmüller says that it would be mistaken to believe that the differences between Kuhn and his critics are limited to their evaluation of the nature of normal scientific practice. According to Kuhn it after all never occurs that a *new theory* emerges because an old theory could not give account of *experiential data*. The old theory is rather replaced *immediately* by a new theory, *without* the mediation of any *experience* (it concerns a ‘Gestalt’-switch – cf. Stegmüller, 1980a: 28).

Prompted by these perspectives and primarily reacting to the *negative (relativistic and irrationalistic)* picture created by the critics of Kuhn, Stegmüller rather aims to determine what Kuhn has established as a competent theorist of science, and to come to a *logical processing* of the material concerned (Stegmüller, 1980a: 29). In order to achieve this end he explores crucial elements in Sneed’s analysis of the structure of mathematical physics (Sneed, 1971) by distinguishing between the *non-falsifiable kernel* of a theory and its hypothetical extensions (*intended applications*).²

Within the context of sociological theorising a reflection on the key concepts of a general theory brings Johnson *et al.* to the following suggestion:

while these concepts do represent universal, constant features of human action, the particular values or contents they have vary historically, and are problems of empirical research (Johnson *et al.*, 1984: 72).

1. In the discussion of the idea of “structuration” found in the thought of Giddens we shall return to this school of thought. Then attention will be given to the *subjectivistic* inclination underlying the idea of the “social construction” of society. By contrast, the transcendental-empirical method intends to accept an ontic point of departure for every human act of construction with a full awareness of the fact that within the humanities the “ontic” is partially constituted by what humans erected and therefore also has to deal with “interpretations of interpretations” (see Van Niekerk, 1993: 156 ff.).
2. In his description of *theories* he introduces a set theoretic method in his distinction between the *mathematical structure* of a theory and *examples of its application*. Within the *mathematical structure* he distinguishes three elements constructed as classes. The *kernel* of a theory is *non-falsifiable* - only the hypothetical extensions of a theory in its intended applications could be subjected to empirical testing (cf. Alt, 1995, Chapter 7).

A fundamental layer of reality is here unveiled - those conditions that *make possible* whatever we can experience in *variable historical contexts*. The Enlightenment philosopher, Immanuel Kant, used the term “transcendental” for this purpose - although he did that within the context of his “Copernican turn” in epistemology (by assuming that the formal transcendental conditions for human experience are found exclusively within the understanding of the human subject).¹ In rejecting this subjectivist epistemological assumption there should be no objection to designate the method of acknowledging *ontic conditions* lying at the basis of what we can experience as *transcendental-empirical*.²

An insight of extreme importance for our aim to *transcend* the impasse of individualism and universalism in sociological theory is at stake in these considerations. In order to capture what it amounts to, another expression ought to be introduced – one that was implicit throughout the argumentation found in Strauss 2002 and briefly alluded to in our preceding considerations, namely: *modal universality*. Although it is closely related to the distinction between *properties* and *entities*, the idea of *modal universality* adds the perceptive that the various aspects of reality provide a constant (transcendental) “framework” within which concrete (natural and social) entities *function*. The diverse functions of entities within these universal modes (modal aspects) are known to us as their (modal) *properties*.³ These properties are *made possible* by the underlying and conditioning role of the modal aspects of reality, by their *ontic universality*.⁴

Without using the phrase *modal universality*, Peter Berger indeed explores something of its crucial role when he accounts for the delineation of the field of study of the discipline of sociology:

The sociologist finds his subject matter present in all human activities, but not all aspects of those activities constitute this subject matter. Social interaction is not some specialized sector of what men do with each other. *It is rather a certain aspect of all these doings* (italics are mine - DFMS). Another way of putting this is by saying that the sociologist carries a special sort of

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1. We have already briefly mentioned that Kant actually elevated human understanding to the level of the *formal law-giver* of nature. Just compare his statement: “human understanding does not create its a priori laws out of nature, but prescribes them to nature” (cf. Kant, 1783:79; § 39).
 2. The transcendental-empirical method was applied with great rigor in the discipline of physics (see Stafleu, 1980) and the science of law (see Hommes, 1972).
 3. Simple everyday questions highlight such properties. The question: *how many?* brings to light quantitative properties; the question: *how large?* makes explicit particular spatial properties; and so on.
 4. In Strauss 2003 the ontic status of the quantitative mode is highlighted with specific reference to supporting ideas of figures like Cassirer, Bernays, Gödel and Wang (see Straus, 2003:69-74). Gödel introduces the idea of “semiperceptions” when it concerns “mathematical objects.” Next to a physical causal context within which something can be “given,” Gödel refers to data of a second kind which are open to “semiperceptions.” The data of this second kind “cannot be associated with actions of certain things upon our **sense organs**” (quoted by Wang, 1988:304). Therefore the data may represent “an aspect of objective reality” (my emphasis – DFMS). Yet, “as opposed to the sensations” the presence of such an aspect of reality “in us may be due to another kind of relationship between ourselves and reality” (quoted by Wang, 1988:304).

abstraction (Berger, 1982:39-40).¹

The *social aspect of reality* thus evinces its own *modal universality*. As a “certain aspect” of “human activities” it has a *universal scope* which is not limited to any *type* of social interaction in particular. That is to say, the modal (functional) meaning of the social facet of reality holds universally for whatever there is (in an entitary sense – including all different kinds of events). Although material things, plants and animals are not *accountable free agents* (like human beings), they may acquire an *object-function* within the social aspect, always correlated to the activities of *social subjects* (*individual human beings* or, as we still have to argue in the final follow-up article, *societal collectivities* according to their *social subject-function*).

In order to bring the remark made by Berger “down to social reality” we may elucidate the idea of the various modal aspects by considering the aspectual many-sidedness of a social sport event, such as an athletic championship. Imagine that while we are exploring the “multifacetedness” of such an event we invite different special scientists employing these various modal aspects as the point of entry of their respective academic disciplines. Surely, every *distinct discipline* will have its own angle of approach, for otherwise it would be impossible to investigate athletic participation in a differentiated and multidisciplinary way.

The *physicist*, for example, would only be interested in questions concerning the *tempo*, *acceleration* and *strength* of the athletes. The *biologist*, on the other hand, would focus her attention on the importance of different organs and muscles crucial to athletic performance (think about an appropriate diet or the exercise program destined to enhance the performance of particular muscles). The *psychologist* would be interested in the *motivation* and *emotional stability* of the athletes. What is the effect of *stress* on performance? High-level participation requires thorough planning and tactics; it ought to be thought through well (the logical analytical aspect as point of entry). By paying attention to the historical development of sport the *historian* may provide us with an insight in the historically significant changes in the sport and correlate them with the data of the book of records. The domain of athletics developed its own universe of discourse with a distinct terminology, syntax and semantics – all elements relevant to the interest of general *linguistics* (the relevance of the sign-mode). Of course, also the *sociologist* would have his/her own peculiar interest in athletics. For example, is there any correlation between social status/position/rank and athletics participation? What are the effects of competition and success upon other phenomena within society? Is there any intrinsic relation between athletics and the capitalistic spirit of competition permeating modern Western society? What form is given to social power and social control in different sporting bodies? Can it

1. One can argue that lifting out a certain aspect as point of entry delimiting the angle of approach of a particular discipline - while disregarding other aspects as modes of explanation - indeed constitutes the *distinctive feature* of scholarly activities, designated as *modal abstraction* (see Strauss, 2001:11-15).

happen that sport bodies may abuse their power in service of certain external political aims!¹ The *economist* will not only be interested in the ever-increasing prices of sport equipment but also in the career possibilities provided by professional sport. The style and beauty of athletic bodily positions did not escape the eye of many artists. In an era of professional sport proper care and attention have to be given to the *jural* side of sport activities. Applicable rules have to be observed (for example regarding the use of steroids) while the human rights of athletes ought not to be violated through contracts or the way in which sport events are organized. That subdivision of legal science investigating the jural side of sport has recently gained in importance. The science of ethics surely also has its own distinctive focus. Sport ethics highlight the moral obligations involved in participating in sport. Of course an athletic event also functions within the certitudinal mode of reality, the aspect of faith, which delimits the angle of approach from which *theology* investigates reality. Every athlete lives according to his/her *sport credo*. Such a *sport credo* embraces the ultimate convictions of an athlete regarding what could be expected from and achieved by sport. It therefore often gives direction to the career of an athlete. Surely, one does not have to identify convictions about the nature, purpose and meaning of sport with ultimate *religious commitments*, except when someone ends up by idolizing sport, by elevating it to the level of a pseudo-God.

A nuanced reflection on the nature of athletics thus automatically confronts us with a rich variety of facets/aspects allowing for a great diversity of specialized academic approaches. In a *distinct* manner, therefore, these disciplines could always be interested in one and the same phenomenon within reality. Consequently, it is of particular importance in this context to realise that the “social aspect” itself is *not* the field of investigation of sociology - it merely delimits the angle of approach of sociology which actually studies the concrete societal phenomena from the perspective of this aspect of reality. If one looks at reality through the “glasses” of any aspect, one is not looking *at* these glasses, but *with* them. The theoretical account given of these various aspects is guided by the acknowledgment of their ontic status: we are not merely dealing with a “social construct” but with a many-sided reality evincing a multiplicity of *ontic modes of existence*. Although human thinking does require the generation of theoretical “constructs” the latter ultimately are responses to a reality transcending *mere* “constructions”.

The idea of the *modal universality* of the different aspects of reality proceeds from the empirical demonstrable fact that every single (natural and social) entity and every event has a (subject or object) function within every one of the modal aspects discerned in the

1. Hart strikingly refers to the social qualification of sport events: “However, the actual sporting acts, such as swimming the one hundred yards, running the mile, broad jumping and so forth, are not what qualify the event. The event is not staged in order to engage in the exercising of certain skills. The skills are demonstrated, shown off, displayed. In the demonstration the sport is promoted, and in this way a social ritual is established. The whole event is qualified by the social meaning of the excitement, pride, and glory belonging to the competition. The event is staged and planned in a certain way in order to achieve this social ritual” (Hart, 1984:145).

above-mentioned analysis of the many-sidedness of a sport event. This perspective, on a more general level, coheres with the distinction between *modal laws* and *typical laws* (type-laws).

Before Newton it was believed that *different* laws hold on earth and in the celestial world outside the earth. But when Newton formulated his law of gravity it was realized that this law (as a *modal functional law*) universally holds for whatever there is in the physical universe.¹ This *physical law* evinces *modal universality*.² The same could be said with regard to Galileo's law of *inertia*, since it is yet another example of a *universal modal law*. Modal laws³ are articulated by means of *modal abstraction* - and *modal abstraction* instantiates the application of the *transcendental-empirical method*.⁴ In this case it points at a *unique dimension* of "empirical reality" - a dimension that cannot be unveiled through the standard *empiricistic* method of "empirical experimentation" since the modal aspects are not given as *entities* that could be 'tested' and 'investigated' in a 'purely empirical' way - they can only be articulated in a *transcendental-empirical* way through *modal analysis/abstraction*. It is important to remember what has been said about the distinctness of the dimension of entities and (modal/functional) aspects: the former relates to the question: *what?* and the latter concerns the question: *how?*

The *modal* dimension of reality unmasks at once the shortcomings present in an extreme *positivistic* emphasis on *sensory experience*. Once one has *observed* something through "sense experience", it has to be *described*. But every possible description employs certain *terms* - terms that inevitably reflect the *modal meaning* of some or other aspect of reality.⁵ What has been pointed out in note 16 in respect of the changing theoretical account of the concept of matter, prompts us to realize that the *description* of matter was decisively dependent upon a particular *theoretical* view of reality entailed in the preference that is assigned to specific (modal) *aspectual* terms.

Yet, the Achilles' heel of positivism is revealed in the question: is it possible to account for any one of these foundational choices in an *empirical* way (i.e., in terms of *sensory*

1. Stegmüller referred to Newton's theory of gravitation (his "classical particle mechanics") as an example of the non-falsifiable kernel of a theory. Clearly, modal universality lies at the heart of his conception of the kernel of a theory.
2. In Strauss 2000 it is argued that Kant's epistemological quest for the *synthetic a priori* in his *Critique of Pure Reason* actually manifests a search for *modal universality*. The appreciation given to quantum theory by Von Weizsäcker (as the *central theory* of contemporary physics) neatly captures the core meaning of modal universality: "Quantum theory, formulated in a sufficiently abstract manner, is a universal theory holding for all classes of entities" ("Die Quantentheorie, hinreichend abstrakt formuliert, ist eine universale Theorie für alle Gegenstandsklassen" - Von Weizsäcker, 1993:128).
3. We have explained that modal laws hold universally in an unspecified way, whereas typical (entitary) laws are only applicable to a *limited* class of entities.
4. In a very fundamental sense *analysis* and *abstraction* are synonymous: analysis is constituted by *identification* and *distinguishing* whereas abstraction rests of the "legs" of *lifting out* (= identification) and *disregarding* (= distinguishing). However, explaining why the approach developed in these articles does not opt for a "consensus" or a "conflict" theoretical approach will require a separate article.

experience)? In other words, is it possible to *touch* the numerical aspect? Can we *weigh* the spatial aspect? Can we determine the *volume* of the kinematical aspect of motion? What does the physical aspect *taste* like? Can we 'measure' the 'distance' between the spatial aspect and the physical aspect?

The obvious absurdity of these questions equally applies to the modal structure of the *social aspect*. They simply underscore the fact that the *dimension* of modal aspects ought to be distinguished from the dimension of entities, notwithstanding the fact that these two dimensions of reality are inextricably intertwined. Whereas the natural aspects of reality are governed by natural laws,¹ the other aspects of reality are *normed* in the sense that they are functioning under the guidance of *normative principles*. These principles provide the contours of (modally directed) actions of human beings with their distinctive accountable freedom.²

Most of the dominating and influential sociological theories exemplify particular choices in terms of particular *modes of explanation*. Already the birth of modern sociology as a discipline is marked by the one-sided emphasis on a *physicalistic* sociological approach. Mechanistic and physicalistic theories opt for an exploration of the *explanatory power* of the *kinematical* and *physical* modes. Inspired by the ideal of an encompassing (physical) natural science, Comte initially studied human society under the flag of *social physics* (*physique sociale*). The first time he used the term *sociology* was in a letter to Valat, dated December 25, 1824. It was only made public in 1838.³ In his extensive work on *Positive Philosophy* Comte accounts as follows for his new term:

I believe that at the present point I must risk this new term, which is precisely equivalent of the expression I have already introduced, *physique sociale*, in order to be able to designate by a single word this complemen-

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5. Initially, for example, the concept of matter was identified with the numerical aspect (the Pythagoreans claimed that "everything is number"). The discovery of irrational numbers caused a switch to the spatial point of entry (leading to the *geometrization* of Greek mathematics - see note 30 below for more detail). This legacy was dominant up to the modern era – both Descartes and Kant still believed that *extension* constitutes the 'essence' of material entities. The classical mechanistic trend in modern physics once again switched to a different mode of explanation: *motion* (inspired by Galileo and Hobbes). It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that modern physics explored the physical aspect of energy-operation as mode of explanation (compare Einstein's discovery: $E = mc^2$).
 1. Such as arithmetical laws, spatial laws, kinematical laws of motion, physical laws, biotical laws and sensitive-psychical laws.
 2. This explains the distinctively human awareness of normative contraries, such as logical-illogical, historical-unhistorical, economic-uneconomic, legal-illegal, and so on. Even when one may differ about what is logically sound and what not, one cannot deny the universal scope of the contrary logical-illogical.
 3. Cf. *Lettres d'Auguste Comte & Monsieur Valat*, Paris 1870:158, quoted by Horkheimer & Adorno (1973:111-12). Maus remarks that Comte's choice for the term *sociology* was influenced by the resentment to the application of statistical methods in the science of social physics. After the publication of a work on social physics by the Belgian statistician Quetelet (1835), Comte decided to make his new term publicly known (Maus, 1956:7).

tary part of natural philosophy which bears on the positive study of the totality of fundamental laws proper to social phenomena.¹

The sociologist Ward remarks that in all his earlier sociological works he consistently defended the conviction that sociology is a *true science*, that is to say that it engages in studying *natural forces* where all phenomena obey the laws of motion of Newton's physics (1906:331-332). Consistent with a *mechanistic approach* he gives preference to the expression: *social mechanics*. He also speaks about *social gravitation* (the mutual attraction of people), but explains the fact that human beings are not all pulled together at one point by using a gas model – representing human beings as *clashing gas molecules* (he speaks about 'human gas'):

Were it not for the expansive force of the human gas, representing the need of individuals for elbow-room, the centre seeking force of gravitation would eventually pile everyone up at one place²

If we complete the picture – by enumerating, in addition to these mechanistic and physicalistic trends also others, such as *organistic, psychologistic, historicistic, symbolic interactionistic, conflict* and *consensus* theories – then the obvious fact to recognise is that throughout its history sociology as a discipline did not escape from *alternative choices* of modal perspectives, i.e., of employing, on the basis of implicitly performing the theoretical act of *modal abstraction*, the modal universality of one-sidedly accentuated functions of reality.

In note 14 above we have noted that whereas modal laws hold universally for whatever there is, laws for typically different kinds of entities have a limited scope only. The laws for different kinds of entities are solely relevant for a particular *type* of entities and are therefore preferably designated as *type laws*. The law for being an atom or for being human only applies to atoms and human beings respectively – but they do not apply to any other *kind* of entity.³ In order to discover the nature of typical laws, *empirical investigation* is needed.⁴

Since *typical laws* can only be discovered by means of *empirical investigation* we have to grant the empiricist tradition the legitimacy of this insight. The weak point of the empiricist tradition, however, is that it denies the inevitability of employing *modal concepts* in order to articulate what *empirical investigation* could teach us about typical regularities and laws. It is exactly this *inevitability of employing modal concepts* that constitutes the "empirically non-falsifiable" structural core of a basic theory. The specific *articulation* and *configuration* in which *modal terms* are 'positioned' within the overall *framework* of a *foundational theoretical perspective* turn out to constitute the decisive "frame of reference" of that particular *theoretical position*.

1. *Cours de philosophie positive*, Vol.4, La partie dogmatique de la philosophie sociale, identical edition of the first impression, Paris 1908:132 note 1, quoted in Adorno & Horkheimer 1973:12.

2. See Stewart, 1948:23; also compare his 1950 article and see Sorokin, 1966:46-53. Catton (1966) is a more recent example of a physicalistic sociological approach.

3. A type-law evinces a *specified universality*. The law for the *type* of entity known as an atom holds *universally* - in the sense that it applies to *all* atoms. But at the same time it is *specified* (i.e., *restricted* to atoms only) - not *everything* is an atom.

4. Stegmüller referred to the hypothetical (and falsifiable) extensions of a theory.

Since *modal terms* - with their implied *modal universality* - obtain a crucial and *determining* position within this core-element of a theoretical paradigm, its centrality can be highlighted by designating it as the *modal skeleton* of any theoretical approach. An example of what is meant by this *modal skeleton* is actually explained in more detail in Strauss (2002:109-113), where it was shown in which way Parsons - within his four function paradigm - combined key terms and perspectives stemming from the spatial, the kinematical, the physical and the biotical modes. Subsequently this *modal skeleton* is then used by him as his overall *ontological design* in terms of which an account is given for *everything*.¹

Can the modal universality of the social aspect help us to obtain an alternative view on 'individual' and 'society'?

In order to characterize the opposition between an atomistic and a holistic approach an appeal was made to the intimate connection that exists between the *social aspect* and the *numerical* and *spatial* aspects of reality. By pointing out that *individualism* over-emphasizes the primitive meaning of the one and the many (or analogies of the arithmetical mode in other aspects), while *universalism* did the same with regard to the spatial whole-parts relationship (or analogies of it in other aspects) we actually already employed the idea that the *meaning* of the social aspect only *comes to expression* in its *coherence* with the other aspects of reality – none of them being *reducible* to any other one.

Acknowledging the irreducibility of every unique aspect of reality constitutes the basis of a non-reductionistic ontology. It entails that the *core meaning* of every aspect is at once also *indefinable*. At this fundamental *ontic* level every discipline is confronted with *primitive terms*. Yet the core meaning of an aspect qualifies the (analogical) references to all other aspects, exemplified in composite phrases highlighting the interconnections between various aspects. The difference between sociological theories is not that any one of them can side-step the use of such basic composite phrases, but is found in the *diverging emphases* within which such composite phrases are "situated".

This underlying idea here concerns the intermodal coherence between different aspects as it is expressed in *modal analogies*. But before we explore this road any further we first briefly have to return to the idea of the *modal universality* of the social aspect. The multi-aspectual nature of an athletics event actually demonstrates that human existence is *equally* determined by every modal aspect, including the *social function*. A person is not an "abstract individual"² which only in the *second place* has a "social function." Every modal function - in a *primary* and *fundamental* sense – *inherently* co-conditions the existence of

1. He distinguishes between the *behavioral system* (in reaction to the contributions made by Victor and Charles Lidz, Parsons finally decided to use the expression 'behavioral system' in stead of 'behavioral organism' - cf. Parsons, 1977:106), the *personality system*, the *cultural system* and the *social system*. He analyzes the social system in subsystems, namely those dealing with the functional problem of pattern-maintenance (latency), integration, goal-attainment (the polity) and adaptation (the economy - cf. Parsons, 1961:30, 34).
2. Particularly compare the abstract construction of a "state of nature" in modern theories of *natural law* and in *social contract theory* (Thomasius, Pufendorf, Wolff, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant - revived by Rawls).

human beings. During the last three centuries modern philosophy successively stressed the conditions of *logicality* (Enlightenment), *historicity* (the 19th century) and *linguisticality* (since the transition between the 19th and 20th centuries). The history of one-sided accentuations at least in one respect ought to be appreciated *positively*: every one of them indeed did see something within reality that is worthwhile and truly “out there” - something every other theoretical view has to account for, albeit without falling prey to the distortions present in specific one-sided accounts of those ontic “givens”.

If human beings inherently function in the social aspect (amongst others), i.e., if the social aspect *co-conditions* being human, then one should not hesitate to analyse the intermodal meaning-coherence in which the social aspect is fitted within reality. Within social theory this coherence first of all manifests itself in the inevitability of employing certain *elementary* (analogical) *concepts*.¹ In Strauss 2002 three of these analogical structural moments received special attention, namely the numerical, spatial and the biotic analogies. The first two were superficially explored merely in service of a characterization of atomism (individualism) and holism (universalism), while the analysis of the third (the biotical analogy) penetrated a bit deeper into the original meaning of biotical phenomena - such as biotical *growth*, *differentiation* and *integration* - in order to bring to light what we have designated above as the “four function” *modal skeleton* lying at the basis of Parsons’ entire sociological theorising.

Quantitative relations implicit in sociological theorising

No single “observable social fact” can be described without explicitly or implicitly alluding to the (elementary basic) concept of a *social order* (*social unity* and *multiplicity*). Social functioning “by definition” engages *more than one* (i.e., a *multiplicity* of) human being(s). Furthermore, being human in a societal context transcends the one-dimensional specialization found in animal life. Hart states it with concise clarity:

A worker ant is just that - and all its functions are geared to being a worker ant. A human being, on the other hand, has multiple roles to play and is not exhausted in any of them (1984:146).

As soon as the sociologist sets out to analyze and understand the ‘multiple roles’ human beings may play within society, they encounter the reality of *social unity* and *multiplicity* in a twofold way.

1. First of all, they see the different roles human beings fulfill within society.
2. Secondly, they realize that each one of these differentiated roles is integrated by a differently specified social unity - depending upon the unique and distinct nature of the societal collectivity in which it occurs.

The role of a citizen within a modern state is co-determined by the public legal order prevalent in that state - a legal order integrating the multiplicity of societal legal interests manifest in the different social roles of its citizens. Every societal institution requires for its durable identity such a “social unity within a multiplicity.”

1. Of course all the special sciences, including the natural sciences, in their elementary basic concepts bring to expression the intermodal coherence in which their respective limiting angles of approach is placed.

A further complication

The second way in which the sociologist has to recognize the meaning of social unity and multiplicity involves other (though) related expressions, such as *social differentiation* and *social integration*. Clearly, although we are involved in analysing the meaning of the *quantitative* (arithmetical) analogy within the structure of the social aspect, we at once have used the *biological* (analogical) terms *differentiation* and *integration*. Does this imply that the analysis of any particular analogical basic concept can only be performed when other analogical terms are brought into play as well? Let us look at an example in order to find an answer to this question.

Suppose we want to explicate in more detail what is entailed in the concept *social order* and then produce an explanation such as the following one:

The nature of a social order requires that there are competent organs (office bearers) that effectuate and continue the unity in the multiplicity of social relations within a specific social sphere by binding together the positive social norms regulating human action within that particular social collectivity.

This description uses terms not merely reflecting the coherence between the social aspect and the numerical aspect of reality. The terms *competency* and *office* concern *power over persons* and may therefore be related to the *cultural-historical aspect* in which *power formation* (encompassing both cultural objects and fellow human beings - cultural subjects) finds its original modal meaning. The term *effectuate* derives its modal meaning from the physical aspect of energy operation with its accompanying *causes* and *effects*. The term 'continue' brings to light the core meaning of the kinematical aspect, expressed in the awareness of a uniform (continuing) motion. Finally the phrases *social sphere* and *social collectivity* (totality) are used - echoing the original meaning of *spatial extension*.

If these phrases merely expressed *metaphors* they could have been replaced by other (different) ones - but as basic analogical concepts they are *irreplaceable*. At most one can provide *synonyms* for them, still expressing the meaning of the *same* modal analogy.

It therefore turns out to be the case that the analysis of a particular elementary basic concept is only possible in a *complex* manner - making use of other analogical basic concepts (in this case not yet analyzed). In addition these intermodal connections partake in the same general feature of all modal aspects - *modal universality* (lying at the basis of a theoretical description of empirical reality but not derivable from "sense experience").

Johan Mouton mentions the striking dilemma present in an emphasis on empirical data with reference to the thought of Emile Durkheim. On the one hand Durkheim accentuates the 'objective' and 'factual' nature of social phenomena studied by him, and on the other hand he uses specific "theoretical terms" which do not possess any direct empirical equivalent:

The contribution Emile Durkheim made to the development of the positivistic tradition is foremost of a twofold character: on the one hand his emphasis on the objective and factual nature of social phenomena, and, on the other hand, his attempts to explore the positivistic image of science in his research. The same tension between his holistic interpretation of social facts and the requirements of an empirical sociology clearly comes to the

fore, amongst other things, in his use of the concept of social integration - a term which does not refer to any directly observable entity or phenomenon (Mouton, 1987:11).¹

In terms of the problem regarding the relationship between 'individual' and 'society' particularly those sociologists inclined to pursue an atomistic (individualistic) stance find it unacceptable to acknowledge certain spatial analogies within the structure of the social aspect. We have seen that sociological atomism questions any reference to or an acknowledgement of *social wholes* or *social totalities*.

What is at stake in this context is the unbreakable connection between the social aspect and the spatial aspect.

The unavoidability of spatial analogies in sociological theorising

No sociologist engaged in '(empirical) social research' can avoid using terms originally coming from the domain of *spatial* relations. The original spatial meaning of *continuous extension* is frequently specified with reference to social relations of *next-to-each-other* ('co-ordination'), social relations of *super-* and *sub-ordination* (so-called authority structures: government and subjects, parents and children, teachers and pupils) and the general notion of *social stratification* (entailing the concept of *social distance*).

The social interaction taking place between citizens of a state surely differs from the interaction between neighbours. In the former case the relation of super- and sub-ordination between government and subjects is always implied, whereas in the latter case any form of super- and sub-ordination is absent.

Although sociological individualists cannot avoid employing spatial analogies, the meaning of the latter is distorted, thus eliminating a *balanced account* of the *full* meaning of this analogical domain, for they *reject* the idea of a *social totality* or *social wholeness*. Ludwig Von Wiese, for example, distinguishes between *unity* and *multiplicity* in two forms: *one - many* and: *uniqueness - plurality*.² However, in these opposing pairs of concepts he sees a *fundamental dualism* (Von Wiese, 1959:18-19). According to him, the social sciences frequently have to trace their problems back to the 'last abstraction' that it is given in the "relationship of the one to the many" (Von Wiese, 1959:19). At least the fusion / combination of unity and multiplicity, according to Von Wiese, should be seen as a presupposition of all civilization and culture. Nevertheless, whoever wants to assign *reality* to social forms of life in the sense of *supra-individual totalities* is accused of being a victim of *universalism* (holism) (Von Wiese, 1959:25; cf. 1966:114-117). He considers the social next-to-each-other as the *basic* social category to which all social relations of super- and subordination ought to be reduced. His basic conception is that the "next to each other with the accompanying connecting and dissociation essentially constitutes the social" (Von Wiese, 1959:76). As a consequence he holds that the super- and sub-ordination between people

1. In his research on the occurrence of suicide Durkheim found that it happens more frequently in Protestant areas than in Catholic parts of society – due to a lesser measure of 'social cohesiveness' in the former. The expression 'social cohesion' analogically reflects the meaning of the spatial aspect where the terms continuity and coherence/cohesion have their original (non-analogical) seat.

2. Einzahl - Mehrzahl; Einzigkeit - Mehrfachheit.

is reducible to this 'next-to-each-other' of inter-human relationships and therefore to the basic concept of *social distance* (Von Wiese, 1959:76-77).

Yet, since the core meaning of the spatial mode entails the spatial whole-parts relation it cannot be side-stepped within any *analogical* context. Due to the presence of this spatial analogy within the structure of the social aspect every sociologist is justified to use expressions like *social totalities* and *communal wholes*. It is therefore formally also appropriate that Phillips extensively treats the concept of a 'whole' in his discussion of *holism* in sociology (cf. his work of 1977).

The fact that the original quantitative meaning of the *one* and the *many* served as a point of connection for the distorting view of atomistic (individualistic) approaches within sociological theorising should not lead to a position where its abuse rules out a meaningful application of numerical terms and analogies. Similarly, the distorting appeal to the original spatial meaning of a totality (a whole with its parts) in holism (universalism) should not discourage the meaningful and constructive employment of terms and analogies exploring the meaning of social wholes or totalities. We have mentioned that even within the domain of the basic mathematical discipline known as *analysis* Bernays pointed out that it is the typical *totality character of continuity* that resists a perfect arithmetization of the continuum (see Strauss, 2002:104, note 2 and Bernays, 1976:74,187-188).¹

Atomism and holism treat the constitutive meaning of number and space as something *mutually exclusive*, in terms of a strict *either-or*. Captured by this distorting view they preclude the insight that the core meaning of both of these aspects is presupposed in the meaning of the social aspect - undeniably reflected in the inevitability of employing the above-mentioned elementary (analogical) basic concepts in sociological theorising. The meaning of number and of space represents the two most fundamental "building blocks" within the modal structure of the social aspect and they should be acknowledged in this role both in their respective uniqueness and mutual coherence.²

Once the *complementary* role of *discreteness* and *continuity* (*multiplicity* and *wholeness*) is recognized in their uniqueness and coherence, the decisive step is given in transcending the impasse of a radical atomism and an absorbing holism - against the background of our argument that the *ontic status* of the social aspect inherently co-conditions *being human*.

In addition a succinct look at some of the other inter-connections could easily be cor-

1. Atomism or individualism within the domain of mathematics is known as *arithmeticism*.

2. The remarkable fact about the history of mathematics in this regard is that it (as briefly mentioned in note 16 above) started with the Pythagorean arithmetistic claim that *everything is number*; then - owing to the discovery of irrational numbers by Hippasos of Metapont in 450 B.C. (see Von Fritz, 1945) - mathematics switched to a geometrization of mathematics which lasted up to the 19th century when Cauchy, Weierstrass, Dedekind and Cantor once again thoroughly pursued the path of *arithmeticism*. The antinomies in (naive) set theory, discovered by Cantor and Russell (respectively 1895 and 1900) on the one hand called forth the axiomatization of set theory and, in the case of Frege (who saw the fundamentals of his logicist construction of arithmetic crumbling), to a renewed appreciation of (mathematics as) geometry: "The more I have thought the matter over, the more convinced I have become that arithmetic and geometry have developed on the same basis - a geometrical one in fact - so that mathematics in its entirety is really geometry" (Frege, 1979: 277). We are proposing a third option not explored by mathematicians: accept both the *irreducible uniqueness* and the *mutual coherence* between the ontic aspects of number and space.

related with some of the crucial chapters in textbooks on sociology and even with particular reductionistic trends in the history of sociological theory.

The theme of *social constancy* (kinematical analogy) and *social dynamics* (physical analogy) is common place in sociological theory and it provides a first understanding of the difference between *consensus* and *conflict* approaches - the former is supposedly preoccupied with *social stability* and was sometimes accused of conservatism, whereas the latter is preoccupied with *social change* (even *social revolution*) at the cost of *social constancy*. By and large the 19th century was dominated by *biologistic* (or *organicistic*) theories (not only within sociology), but notwithstanding the explicit desire present within some 20th century approaches to do away with “biotic analogies” every single contemporary sociologist inevitably still speaks about “social life” (and employ even more specific biotic analogies in expressions such as *social differentiation*, *social integration* and *social adaptation*).¹ Similarly no sociologist can avoid the use of sensitive analogies (such as *social consciousness*, *social feeling* of solidarity, *social desires*, and so on); of logical-analytical analogies [evidenced in expressions such as *social identification* and *distinction* (“we” and “they”),² and *social accountability*]; of cultural-historical analogies (*social power*, *social control*, *social competence*) and of lingual analogies (*social significance*, *social expression*, *social interpretation* -recall in this context the Iowa and Chicago schools of symbolic interactionism).

A more detailed account of these perspectives exceeds the boundaries of this context.

Concluding remark

Thus far we have introduced the necessary primary “building blocks” required for moving beyond the opposition of ‘individual’ and ‘society’. If the original meaning of number and space (discreteness and wholeness) cannot be isolated from each other because they evince an intimate coherence on the basis of their uniqueness, then also the opposition between atomism and holism is misplaced.

Yet further basic concepts need to come into play in order to advance to a level of analysis where still more refined distinctions can be introduced. This will be done in a concluding article³ in which both the *complex* and *typical*⁴, basic concepts of sociology, will be explored in the pursuit of formulating a more encompassing alternative to the extremes of individualism and universalism – with particular reference to the theory of ‘structuration’ presented by Giddens.

1. Luhmann argues explicitly for the *inevitability* and *irreplaceability* of the term differentiation (1990:409).

2. Social conflict theories - in the footsteps of Hegel, Marx, Simmel and Dahrendorff – turns *logical contradiction* into something that is inherently present within *social reality*.

3. This article will be entitled: “Beyond the opposition of ‘individual’ and ‘society’.”

4. Complex or compound basic concepts are built upon (constituted by) the elementary (analogical) basic concepts of sociological theory. They involve more than one analogical basic concept at the same time but – in the case of sociological theory – they remain bound to the modal structure of the social aspect as such. The final step required to move beyond the limits of the social aspect is when the *type-laws* (structural principles) of different social collectivities are investigated while upholding the provision that the existence of a human being is never *exhausted* by any social role.

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