



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

- This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.
- A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.
- This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.
- The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.
- When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

*For a Social Ontology with a Self-Reflective  
Knowing Subject: Towards the Articulation  
of the Epistemic Criterion of Reflexivity*

*Christoforos Bouzanis*

*Ph.D in Sociology  
The University of Edinburgh  
2012*

Hereby, I would like to declare that:

- a) The thesis has been composed by me,
- b) The work is my own,
- c) The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Christoforos Bouzanis

To my Parents, Nikolaos and Trisevgeni

# Abstract

---

This thesis argues for the idea that there are deep interconnections between the notions of ontology and reflexivity. It starts from the idea that ontological claims are cognitively prior to epistemological and methodological accounts. It is argued that ontology is of particular importance to social science because the boundary between the substantive and the ontological is less clear than in natural science. Furthermore, because social science is located within its object, society, it is argued that self-referential questions about the epistemic status of every social ontology emerge. In the face of these self-referential questions concerning ontological coherence, the ‘epistemic criterion of reflexivity’ is proposed in this thesis. Meeting this criterion is required to deal successfully with the self-referential problem emerging from the fact that the knowing subject is part of her object. I argue that it is only by conceptualizing agents as self-reflective knowing subjects that an ontology has a chance of satisfying the criterion of epistemic reflexivity which is proposed by this thesis.

In Chapters 1 to 3, the works of Roy Bhaskar, Pierre Bourdieu, Jürgen Habermas, Alvin Gouldner and Andrew Sayer, as well as of several social constructionists and ethnomethodologists are examined, considering their contribution to the notions of ontology and epistemic reflexivity. It is argued that proponents of both relativistic and deterministic social theories cannot satisfy the criterion of epistemic reflexivity because they cannot coherently account for their knowledge-claims using their own ontologies. I thus argue that it is not enough for a social theory to provide an account of self-reflection – for the wider ontology in which it is situated may itself deny the possibility of such a self-reflective activity. It is in this sense that I argue for the need for an improved conceptualization of self-reflection in which agents are conceptualized as having the capacity of self-objectivation within context. It is through having such a presupposition that ontologies can fulfill the epistemic criterion of reflexivity proposed. The need for such a conceptualization of self-reflection leads me to explore two relevant approaches in Chapters 4 and 5, those of

Archer and Castoriadis. I begin by looking at Margaret Archer's account of the 'internal conversation'. However, Archer's internal dialogue will be shown problematic in the sense that it results in various contradictory claims. The thesis then considers Cornelius Castoriadis' notion of self-reflective imagination which *partially* meets the epistemic criterion of reflexivity proposed in this thesis.

# Acknowledgments

---

First and foremost, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the enthusiastic supervision of Dr. Stephen Kemp, whose continuous efforts for conceptual clarity and careful examination of theoretical arguments have made me understand the role of the researcher in a high-level academic environment. I would also like to thank Dr. Jonathan Hearn for his insightful comments during the different stages of my work. Last but not least, I would like to thank Olga Athanasiou, Katerina Mitka, Maria Stylogianni, Theodoros Trachanidis and Barbara Vrachnas for their linguistic comments and their help with the format of the thesis.

# Contents

---

<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	1
i) <i>The context of the thesis</i>	1
ii) <i>Outline of the main argument</i>	9
iii) <i>Order of the argument</i>	12
iv) <i>Conclusion</i>	17
<b><u>Chapter One</u></b>	
<b><i>Ontology Vs Epistemology: the Role of the Knowing Subject and the Requirement for a Reflexive Sociology</i></b>	20
i) <i>The cognitional priority of ontology to epistemological investigations</i>	21
ii) <i>The role of theory: from its relationality to its ontological premises</i>	29
iii) <i>Ontology and social stratification: Roy Bhaskar's realist philosophy of science</i>	37
iv) <i>Andrew Sayer's contribution to understanding subject-object relations in social scientific knowledge</i>	51
v) <i>Social ontology and the knowing subject</i>	61
vi) <i>Alvin Gouldner's consideration of the 'knowing subject' and reflexive sociology</i>	68
<b><u>Chapter Two</u></b>	
<b><i>Epistemic Reflexivity: from Self-Critical Examination to the Problematic of Epistemic Circularity</i></b>	76
i) <i>The sociology of knowledge and epistemic reflexivity</i>	79
ii) <i>Michael Lynch's critique of radical reflexivity</i>	100
iii) <i>Dick Pels' celebration of circularities</i>	105
iv) <i>Hilary Lawson and the 'post-modern predicament'</i>	108
v) <i>Epistemic reflexivity, self-reflection and theory-ladenness: a triadic relationship</i>	113
<b><u>Appendix of Chapter Two</u></b>	
<b><i>Epistemic circularity as engendered from critical (self-) reflection</i></b>	116



<b><u>Chapter Three</u></b>	
<b><i>Reflexive Social Ontologies: from Social Metaphysics to Pierre Bourdieu’s Social Determinism</i></b>	130
i) <i>Ethnomethodology and reflexivity: the work of Blum and McHugh</i>	132
ii) <i>Habermas and the impossibility of reflexivity as a self-referential possibility of science</i>	146
iii) <i>Participant objectivation: Pierre Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity</i>	156
iv) <i>Critical perspectives on Bourdieu’s ontology and notion of reflexivity</i>	168
<b><u>Chapter Four</u></b>	
<b><i>Agential Reflexivity as a Transformational Capacity: the Case of Margaret Archer’s ‘Internal Dialogue’</i></b>	176
i) <i>Margaret Archer’s ‘morphogenetic approach’ and the structure/agency debate</i>	178
ii) <i>Critical notes on Margaret Archer’s ontological dualism and conceptualization of emergence</i>	187
iii) <i>Margaret Archer’s solution for the mediating process between structure and agency: agential reflexivity</i>	199
iv) <i>Reflexive and non-reflexive action: is habitus consistent with the ‘internal conversation’?</i>	210
<b><u>Chapter Five</u></b>	
<b><i>Cornelius Castoriadis and the Self-Reflective Imagination: ‘Representing One’s Self as Representational Activity’</i></b>	226
i) <i>Society, psyche and politics: the imaginary institution of society</i>	228
ii) <i>From the concept of Ontology towards the self-reflective knowing subject</i>	234
iii) <i>Castoriadis’ conceptualization of self-reflective subjectivity: a critical appraisal</i>	244
iv) <i>Critical remarks on Castoriadis’ social theory and notion of self-reflection</i>	255
<b><u>Conclusion</u></b>	266
<b><u>Bibliography</u></b>	277

# *Introduction*

---

This thesis intends to show the interrelations between the concepts of ontology and reflexivity. The social character of knowledge, which is assumed by a great part of social theorists, while being an important contribution to the understanding of human action, has generated self-referential questions about the possibility of knowledge as well as of (social) philosophy. In order to positively respond in these questions, I have tried in this thesis to propose the *epistemic criterion of reflexivity* which intends to argue for a necessity of coherence in every effort to propose an ontology for the social realm. I start this introduction from the context of the thesis. Then, I have tried to provide an outline of the main arguments of this thesis. After this, I have summarized the order of the thesis, which will lead us to the conclusion of this introduction.

## *The context of the thesis*

It was at the outset of the appearance of philosophy in ancient Greece that its fusion with science placed philosophical intuition at the heart of public discussion about the natural world as well as about society, and thus about the value of different regimes that characterize its order. Different philosophers, having different perspectives about the world and its constitution, offered different explanations and accounts of it; and it was at that time that early efforts for reasoned justification of one's own knowledgeability took place. However, from the demise of the Athenian democracy to later rediscovery and reassessment of the texts of Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Heraclitus and others of western societies – and through the so called 'scientific revolution' – a radical rupture that characterized the efforts for knowledge had appeared: that between philosophy and scientific work. The division of labour together with the new technological developments and achievements – both facilitating mass production and scientific efforts to knowledge – that characterized the Industrial Revolution had various impacts on that reborn and revitalized academic community, which now had to organize itself in an environment which

facilitated the rapid accumulation of information and knowledge claims in various domains.

However, one should not conclude that this rupture between philosophy and science emerged only because of that unprecedented accumulation of knowledge claims and information in seemingly different domains of investigation. Among the other social influences that played a great role in the current division of labour that characterizes modern universities one should underline the way in which Philosophy and science understood themselves and their role in the new era of experimentation and proof. The retreat of philosophy to a supportive role coincided with the autonomization of the different scientific programmes which now need philosophers – if they indeed need them at all – only to contemplate about whether the distinct or common methodologies, which are followed by and are part of science, are consistent with productive logic that can infer worthwhile results. The supposed discovery of the laws of nature by science generated a philosophical debate on the status of these laws as well as on the credibility of the knowledge claims asserted by those who use the methodological programmes of the different sciences. And this debate, as parallel to but also distinct from scientific debates, is still taking place with unreduced interest and passion under the labels of ‘philosophy of science’ and ‘epistemology’.

The division between philosophy and science was enthusiastically enforced by the positivist programme in the philosophy of science, which was dominant in the early 20th century. And it is nowadays evident that the division between philosophy and science is partially premised on the idea that science engenders hypotheses and knowledge claims about the world while philosophy – when not abstractly contemplating on the nature and form of knowledge in general – is a modest facilitator of science. According to many positivists, the aim for philosophy is far from the investigation of being; its role is at best to investigate the possibility of methodological or logical inferences, or at worst, to elaborate and cast light on terminological ambiguities and differences. More specifically, for positivists, meaningful statements should be either empirical or analytical and empirical statements have sense-perception as their source of validation – and we should not

refer to objects of investigation which are ‘unobservable’. For example, the positivist A. J. Ayer (1971) alleges that ‘no statement which refers to a “reality” transcending the limits of all possible sense-experience can possibly have any literal significance’ (Ayer, 1971: 14). However, social theory and social philosophy frequently refer to entities that transcend sense-experience and are somehow ‘unobservable’. The same is true for many contemporary findings of natural sciences – and this is a main argument against logical positivism in the philosophy of science.

For positivists, the *logos* of being (*on*) – demarcating the domain of ontology – has nothing to do with the proper philosophical intuition but only with metaphysics; for ‘now philosophy too is an *a priori* discipline. Hence, if there are methods of verification in philosophy, we should not expect them to be of the empirical sort; and the same is true of metaphysical statements.’ (Hanfling, 1981: 131) Of course, not all positivists adopted the characterization of ‘metaphysics’ for ontology. But one could safely state that:

Most positivists believe that science and human thinking generally can be completely neutralized from a philosophical point of view, and that within the area of experience so neutralized, to which no ontological determinations are ascribed, “the scientific view” fulfills the same conditions as Husserl’s transcendental ego, i.e., makes the criteria of truth completely independent of the cultural, historical, psychological, and biological conditions under which this knowledge is achieved. Once ontology has been neutralized, our position as observers is absolute. (Kolakowski, 1972: 236)

In fact, this idea is so radically swallowed by modern epistemology that the terms of ‘ontology’ and ‘metaphysics’ are frequently used as identical – in the sense either that every ontological claim prior to scientific investigation is metaphysical and thus in a way irrational or, at best, that the metaphysics of science has to do with the (critical) self-critical contemplation on the scientific presuppositions or epistemic values and beliefs held from the part of the scientist.

Importantly, this last notion of the self-critical investigation of the epistemic beliefs and values (or ontological presuppositions) that might influence one’s own scientific work, instead of being conceptualized as an insignificant – though quite useful – self-

interrogation in order to avoid biases, in current sociological achievements, has rather been connected with a virtuous epistemic conduct, celebrated under the label of 'reflexivity'. And thus, the 'reflexive turn' in sociological theory constitutes a *critical* moment in the historical development of social theory, and the supposed virtuousness derived by this self-critical effort is reflected in various developments in the self-image of the social sciences and, more specifically sociology. This sociological self-image had to do with sociology's stance towards its formation as a scientific field within that very division of labour of academia. Hence the questions about this tendency of sociology for self-critique are related to whether the positivist rupture between philosophy and science is really adequate for sociology or not; though sociology and social theory have changed a lot from the times when their founding fathers like Weber, Durkheim and Marx were writing, one can still raise this kind of questions concerning the scientific status of sociological research and theorising.

As I will try to support in this thesis, which considers social life and sociological work, one can still challenge this positivist rupture between philosophy and science; and as a result, social ontology should have something to say about the social world independently of more empirical research programmes. And, consequently, this 'reflexive turn', which intends to cast light on the implicit or explicit theoretical, normative or the ontological assumptions of social research, will be shown to be theoretically connected to this discussion about the scientific status of social sciences, its relevance to philosophy and its contrast to the scientific status of natural sciences. The meta-level of theoretical interrogation that it generates aims at the heart of the possibility of the sociological gaze, through an effort to have a critical look at itself.

Not surprisingly, as a critical self-interrogative movement, this 'reflexive turn' in sociological theory did not appear without an accompanying crisis in the whole field of sociology. As Holmwood (1996) explains, sociology itself was a consequence of the crisis coming from the demise of the traditional regimes and the accompanying emergence of the new order of industrialism and western democracy (Holmwood,

1996: 2). But it was during the 1960s that a new period of crisis of sociology began when ‘dominant paradigms of social science ... were being challenged by “radical alternatives”’ (Holmwood, 1996: 3). And, here, Holmwood explains that this crisis is sociology’s crisis and involved the argument that sociology was irrelevant to the current problems and dilemmas of society (Holmwood, 1996: 3). For post-war sociology contented itself with being a value-neutral domain of production of objective and ‘scientific’ knowledge and, there was a belief that ‘like the natural sciences, it had progressed (or should have progressed) and left the “classics” and their “ideological” definition of issues behind.’ (Holmwood, 1996: 4) This kind of scientific self-image, I think, is connected with the influence that the structuralist and functionalist works of Robert Merton, Talcott Parsons and Claude Lèvi-Strauss had upon their contemporaries.

Among the socio-theoretical movements that challenged the positivistic echoes of the post-war period was, according to Holmwood (1996), Alvin Gouldner’s ‘reflexive sociology’:

According to Gouldner, a more adequate sociology – that is a “reflexive” sociology which applied its understandings to itself – must recognize that, “every social system is bent upon crippling the very sociology to which it gives birth”. Instead of hiding behind the mask of neutrality, sociologists had to ask whose side they were on and the answer, from the point of view of a properly radical and reflexive sociology, was the “oppressed” and “excluded”.’ (Holmwood, 1996: 8)

Indeed, Gouldner is one of the earliest to introduce the term ‘reflexivity’ and, this thesis intends to underline the predicament that sociological theory finds itself when realizing its own sociality – the fact that together with the social origins of social action and knowledgeability in general, sociology has to place itself within this framework of the sociality of knowledge. This means that sociology has to provide an account of the possibility of escaping relativistic echoes that come from the careless generalized application of the idea of the sociality of knowledge.

*The concern of this thesis is exactly to show the connection between the ‘reflexive turn’ in social theory and questions about the scientific status of sociology and, as a very important part of this, with the notion of ontology. For, the idea of reflexivity*

provided a challenge to conceptions of social inquiry as a detached scientific enterprise because it emphasized the way in which social science was part of society. Similarly, the connection with the notion of ontology is crucial, since socio-theoretical investigation about the role of the knowing subject, now placed reflexively as a constituent part of society, has an ontological character.

Of course, we need first to explain what sociologists mean by the term ‘reflexivity’ – something which is quite difficult since, as we shall show, different authors attach different meaning to this term. Generally speaking, reflexivity is a socio-theoretical concept of self-reference which expresses the capability or the possibility of one’s turning his critical attention back to his own thoughts, words, deeds, etc. In Webster’s dictionary (1998) the adjective ‘reflex’ is given as ‘**1** turned or thrown backward; reflected, as light ... **3** Turned back upon itself or in the direction where it came: reflex motion. **4** Bent back’ (1998: 1059). When one looks at the books and the articles which are devoted to sociological *reflexivity*, one immediately realizes the ambiguous and multifold content of this term. However, it will be fruitful for the purposes of this thesis to make a first step towards a brief effort of taxonomy. A useful sociological starting point is Michael Lynch’s statement:

Reflexivity is a central and yet confusing topic. In some social theories it is an essential human capacity, in others it is a system property and in still others it is a critical, or self-critical, act. Reflexivity, or *being* reflexive, is often claimed as a methodological virtue and source of superior insight, perspicacity or awareness, but it can be difficult to establish just what is being claimed. Some research programmes treat reflexivity as a methodological basis for enhancing objectivity, whereas others treat it as a critical weapon for undermining objectivism and exposing methodological “god tricks”. (Lynch, 2000: 26)<sup>1</sup>

It seems that Lynch (2000) at this point distinguishes among three frequently appearing formulations of this term: the first, a capacity of human agency; the second, a property or influence of the social system (one could also say of social structure, function or of culture); and the third, an ambiguous formulation of it as corresponding to epistemic status or theoretical virtuousness or as a genuine problem of theorizing.

---

<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, emphasis in the quotations is always in their original form.

I will examine the first mode of reflexivity (that of an essential human capacity) when, in chapters four and five, we turn our gaze to agential reflexivity – that is, the capacity of social agents to make themselves the object of investigation that is, to objectivate themselves. The key terms here are those of ‘self-reflection’, ‘self-objectivation’ and ‘agential reflexivity’. Here, the social individual reflects on her thoughts, values, beliefs and, generally, on herself and her stance towards society. Social theory here conceptualizes the social actor as capable of making oneself the object of investigation. In this thesis, the main question is how formulations of agential reflexivity, that have been proposed by contemporary social theory, can be helpful in accounting for the capability of the knowing subject to locate social-theorising within society – and thus to account for herself as a constituent part of society. In the literature of self-reflection, several formulations of it have been proposed like those of ‘introspection’, ‘internal conversation’ (Margaret Archer), ‘reflective imagination’ (Cornelius Castoriadis) etc. In this thesis, accounts which argue for individualistic modes of self-reflection as well as those which argue for reformulations of a cogito, or a transcendental consciousness will be criticised as inadequate explanations of the agential properties of social actors.

Now, as far as the second formulation of it is concerned, reflexivity as a system property – which is what we shall call ‘institutional reflexivity’ – has mostly been developed by authors who have systematically tried to investigate the impact of late or high modernity to the increase of the former notion – of self-reflection. And it is in this tradition that Anthony Giddens has offered us a distinction between ‘reflexivity, as a quality of human action as a whole, and *institutional reflexivity*, as an historical phenomenon.’ (Giddens, 1993: 6) Thus, in the case of institutional reflexivity certain thinkers, among them Scott Lash, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, have argued, in general terms that late or high modernity has undermined traditionalism and by an extensive differentiation and individualization, agents have become more reflexive in a new social reality, in ‘reflexive modernization’, where every agent chooses her own self-culture. As Giddens explains:



Institutional reflexivity refers to the institutionalization of an investigative and calculative attitude towards generalized conditions of system reproduction; it both stimulates and reflects a decline in traditional ways of doing things ... The expansion of institutional reflexivity stands behind the proliferation of organizations in circumstances of modernity, including organizations of global scope. (Giddens, 1993: 6)

As far as the third formulation of ‘reflexivity’ is concerned, Lynch (2000) is right to claim that this term has been used for various scientific aims, either for the support of a general objectivist programme, or for the disruption of our truth-values such as objectivity, reason and rationality. These efforts are connected with what we shall call ‘epistemic reflexivity’. Yet, the most prevalent formulation of epistemic reflexivity is the one which is used as a virtuous challenge or uncovering of epistemic values and scientific beliefs. But again, as will be explained later, in the case of this self-critical uncovering it is difficult to distinguish its content from other non-epistemological issues. As we shall see, this idea of self-critical examination and uncovering is neither new, nor always useful; for in this case it is difficult to say when and how one should finish the self-critique. Here, ‘the basic problem, put simply, is that we can never tell if we are being reflexive *enough*’ (McLennan, 2006: 164) However, epistemic reflexivity aspires to cast light on theory production at a meta-philosophical/scientific level and thus, on the more general problems of the social sciences. The sociology of knowledge and social constructivism, for example, provide us with characteristic conceptions of epistemic reflexivity, as well as Pierre Bourdieu’s formulation of it which will lead us to further elaboration of this kind of reflexivity.

At this point, it suffices to claim that, according to this thesis, epistemic reflexivity is connected with the role of the knowing subject as the putative and impersonal knower thus theorized by a social ontology and appreciated in relation both to her object, i.e. society, and to her theoretical framework, i.e. social ontology. *Social scientists are part of the object they intend to examine and as such*, they influence and are influenced by its constitution or its institution. On the one hand, scientific work can be influenced by scientist’s values, dispositions, interests, etc; and, on the other hand, social institutions, systems or structures can be transformed by the implementation of the practical dimensions of social theories. Indeed, it is

unavoidable that every theory about social reality has political consequences since even if it does not explicitly take sides about political choices, it is an explanation different from (and probably in contrast to) other theories which consciously and directly promote political ideas and choices.

In this thesis, I will mainly focus on the interrelations between agential and epistemic reflexivity and will only relate them to the concept of institutional reflexivity when its theoretical connections with the former two concepts are significant. Institutional reflexivity has been used as a title for a variety of descriptions about the distinctive features of late or high modernity, or, more broadly, about the ‘ethos of our post-industrial and global order’. However, this discussion cannot be useful for further elaboration on the definition, the content and the output of reflexivity but rather for the cases when thinkers relate reflexivity to its historical conditions. For just to say that in high modernity individuals are more reflexive does not explain what reflexivity is and how it is conducted; nor does it help in our distinction between epistemic reflexivity and agential reflexivity (self-reflection). After all, as Archer (2007) has shown, this tradition of ‘reflexive modernization’ frequently ends up with definitions of reflexivity which fail to capture agents’ ability to choose and act. Instead, *this thesis will focus on how the requirement for epistemic reflexivity supports and is supported by an analysis of how agents reflect on their conduct and take decisions by criticizing their values – that is how epistemic reflexivity implies a self-reflective epistemic subject.*

### Outline of the main argument

Having laid out three basic conceptions of reflexivity<sup>2</sup>, I now want to outline the contribution of the thesis. We will start our analysis with the discussion of epistemic reflexivity. Our purpose – and one main contribution of this thesis – is to insist that epistemic reflexivity can only be understood when placed within a framework of

---

<sup>2</sup> Sandywell claims that ‘three general strategies have recently taken centre-stage in this “sociological turn” ... these may be called the *Sociology of Reflexivity*, the *New Sociology of Scientific Knowledge*, and *Reflexive Sociology*.’ (Sandywell, 1996: 384). But this categorization is quite unclear because Sandywell does not adequately explain the difference between ‘the Sociology of Reflexivity’ and ‘Reflexive Sociology’.

social ontology. The thesis tries to show that the discussion about the role of a *meta-level* of examination, of that ‘reflexive turn’ on the part of the social scientist is deeply connected with the ontological status of social science; and further, with the role of the knowing subject as conceptualized in relation to her object. *Social theory has a strong ontological character* and discussions about social structure, social systems and agency are not only ontological investigations but also, in their generality, implicitly or explicitly refer to social scientists and their position in these social structures and systems.

For this reason, the analysis has as its starting point the classical philosophical debate about whether ontology or epistemology has the prior *epistemic* status or the last word. And it is this discussion of the philosophical *meta-level* issue of the ontological status of social science that leads us to devote the first chapter to the role of the knowing subject, as conceptualized in a social ontology. Questions about the capability of such a knowing subject and the possibility of the self-objectivation of the social scientist are posed, leading towards another contribution of this thesis. This is, to theorize the epistemic subject as another agent and thus pose the question about his capacity to place himself as such, as a knowing subject, in the theoretical framework (social ontology) he proposes for the explanation of social life. These questions will lead us to articulate and propose an ‘epistemic criterion of reflexivity’ which requires that every social ontology should account for such a capability of agential self-objectivation – that is, the theorists’ own capability to make knowledge claims about society and himself – which is another major contribution of this thesis.

And it is at this point that the discussion around epistemic reflexivity is related to the ontological discussion about the agential powers of reflection and self-reflection – what I have called ‘agential reflexivity’: the connection here is that any actor, including the social scientist, must necessarily have powers of self-reflection, or as will be later called, of ‘agential reflexivity’; and this ontological claim should be granted or otherwise the result is a paradox. Here, considering reflexivity as ‘a quality of human action’ we should refer to Harold Garfinkel – who, along with Gouldner, is a ‘father’ of reflexivity – and Ethnomethodology. Using the terms

‘indexicality’ and ‘indexical expression’ Garfinkel intends to show how agents utilize routine expressions through reflexivity, which is presupposed within social conduct and which is considered as a constant and inevitable condition of this conduct: ‘Members know, require, count on, and make use of this reflexivity to produce, accomplish, recognise, or demonstrate rational-adequacy-for-all-practical-purposes of their procedures and findings.’ (Garfinkel, 1967: 8)

However, I will argue that we need a more detailed account of the concrete conduct of agential reflexivity and, for this reason I will then focus on the efforts of Margaret Archer and Cornelius Castoriadis to give a robust and coherent ontological status to the self-reflecting actor. For the time being it suffices to say that the reader should keep in mind that this thesis is against any account of sociological or naturalistic determination of the self-reflective subjectivity and this position-taking is reflected in the critiques that I make of socio-theoretical frameworks which offer deterministic ontologies of any kind. Moreover this thesis does not aim at reproducing the classical epistemological debate between interpretivism and realism. In this thesis, I have criticized several realist positions; but as far as interpretivism is concerned, I have to claim that though several arguments of this thesis may initially seem close to the interpretivist tradition, one should keep in mind that ‘from the fact that interpretative processes are a significant part of what goes on in the social world, and that our access to the social world is necessarily via our understanding of those interpretative processes ... it does not follow that this is all that exists, or can be known to exist.’ (Outhwaite, 1987: 76)

In fact, according to this thesis, the need to acknowledge such a self-reflective activity should lead us to express and highlight the creative and undetermined work of human imagination. This will be shown to imply that self-critical examination<sup>3</sup> is possible only when we grant imagination an ontological status whereby such a radical self-critique is not peculiar only to social scientists, but to every actor whose socialization permits him to develop such a self-reflective activity – which *might*

---

<sup>3</sup> As we shall see later on in this thesis, self-critical examination as self-reflection should not be called ‘epistemic reflexivity’, a term which, as I will explain more fully later, is attributed to our epistemic criterion of internal congruity of a social ontology.

fulfil our epistemic criterion of reflexivity. And this final arrangement is another contribution of this thesis which aims at a new theoretical settlement which, while not denying the sociality of thought, argues against the deterministic surplus that is inherited by philosophical relativism. Such a relativistic perspective appears, as will be evident, in the works of the Strong Programme in the Sociology of Knowledge and of Ethnomethodology.

### Order of the argument

The chapters of the thesis will proceed as follows. The first chapter is devoted to the debate between ontology and epistemology. As noted above, this is because questions of reflexivity are linked to ontological ideas about the knowing subject and society. My initial claim will be that ontological frameworks are cognitively prior to epistemological claims of validity and methodological devices and procedures. I insist that ontologies are theoretical frameworks and, additionally, that social theory, whose authors talk about structures, systems, institutions, groups etc., has a definite *ontological character*. Having argued for the priority of ontology, I then go on to develop various ontological claims. The first ontological claim is that social science, as a field of theory production and as individuals who are practitioners of it, is part of the theoretical object that Roy Bhaskar (whose work is central for the notion of ontology and social science) talks about – in the sense that society is a theory and activity dependent object of investigation: the knowing subject, as a social theorist or as an every-day social actor, is an active agent among others.

Yet, it is not only that our object is theory/activity-dependent, but also that the knowing subject has to express it theoretically (with a social ontology) so that we can now state in a dual way that the epistemic subject is part of its *theoretical* object: a) as an active theoretician and agent and now, b) [the epistemic subject] as another ontological entity which is self-referentially characterized and described by that ontology. This idea of the self-referential aspect of a social ontology as provided by an epistemic subject who places himself within it, leads us to the questions concerning the *meta-levels* of theory production. Epistemic reflexivity is now situated in the meta-level of theory, as related to general theories which the knowing

subject provides as conceptual frameworks for the understanding of social life – including his own conduct. The next chapters intend to explicate the relation between this self-referential notion of epistemic reflexivity and social ontology as a generalized theory for the explanation of social life.

In the second chapter, I focus on the different notions of epistemic reflexivity given by the different voices coming from the field of the sociology of science. Here, the dominant view is that reflexivity has to do with the self-critical examination of one's own epistemic values and beliefs. However, I insist that this self-examination – which can indeed be very fruitful for scientific work – is closer to what I have called 'agential reflexivity' as a capacity for self-objectivation on the part of every actor (including the social scientist). Instead, I make the proposal of an epistemic criterion which is a property of theory when generalized, as a social ontology, to describe social life. This epistemic criterion requires, as I have already mentioned above, that a social ontology should account for its own possibility of formulation by the knowing subject. I start this 'literature review' of what is considered epistemic or social scientific reflexivity from the school of Edinburgh and I move on to Woolgar and Ashmore's meta-level of criticism. Here, (epistemic or social scientific) reflexivity as self-suspension leads to instability of theoretical description. But while self-criticism in general is a fruitful activity for any scientific work, Ashmore and Woolgar's relativism is imported in each meta-level of criticism and thus it works as a discussion-stopper.

Then, having outlined the dominant idea of epistemic reflexivity as self-questioning, I will turn to the work of Michael Lynch, an ethnomethodologist, who accuses Woolgar and generally 'radical reflexivists' – those who argue that epistemic reflexivity is concerned with self-criticism – of lacking originality. For Lynch, self-critical examination is nothing new because a) it is the classical post-modern critique of theory-ladenness and b) when it is so much underlined, it hinders scientific work. However, I argue that the idea of meta-critical levels should not be considered identical to theory-ladenness: for the former to be the case, I argue that an epistemic agency is required which transcends the conventionality and relativism of theory-

ladenness – not as a transcendental subjectivity but as one which is both social and capable of self-objectivation. Moreover, to examine one’s own presuppositions is not only fruitful, as I have already claimed, but it is very common and usual to all sciences. Yet, this idea of self-critical examination or suspension will lead us to the wider discussion about what, in fact, the role of reflexivity is.

However, I will suggest that Lynch is right to complain that the idea of self-critical examination is not something new. Indeed, this thesis, using the self-referential aspect of generalized theories and thus extending this idea to that of social ontology, aims at a new approach to the content of reflexivity – as a self-referential aspect of that move to the critical meta-level. And by showing the interconnections between the notion of social ontology and – through that self-referential aspect – the notion of reflexivity, the thesis aims to provide the wider theoretical context of this new approach. In the final part of the chapter I argue that, in order to avoid paradox, the knowing subject should be conceptualized as capable of knowing the very social world that his social ontology theoretically intends to conceive. The *epistemic circularity* that is engendered is not a vicious one but a virtuous one as entailing the internal congruity of the social theory proposed. I then propose a *necessary epistemic criterion for social theorizing* concerning any effort to propose a specific ontological scheme for the social world. Again, we should state that *it requires that each social ontology should include in its premises the conditions under which the theorizing of the specific ontology, by the knowing subject, is possible.*

Armed with this criterion, in the third chapter we examine ontologies which try to incorporate the ‘reflexive problem’ within their premises but fail because, as we show, they cannot formulate how the knowing subject is able to exercise scientific reason. In this chapter the work of Blum and McHugh is compared (and placed together) with Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology because both put forward a theory in which an entity (either language or the field) reflexively examines either its own existence or its impact on the objectifying subject. The point here is that these ‘reflexive ontologies’ cannot consistently account for how their authors (like Bourdieu, Blum and McHugh, etc.) are able at first to *authentically* theorize and thus

reach the specific description provided by the social ontology adopted<sup>4</sup>. Specifically, this self-referential aspect of epistemic reflexivity has been taken into account by several social theorists: Blum and McHugh recognize this need to account for the possibility of knowledge of the social world within which the individual knower acts. However, for them, it is only through language that this possibility is enacted and as a result, the social world is not acknowledged by the knowing subject but only by this very world, as life-world. This position, I think, is close to social metaphysics. Here, the difficulty of this effort to objectivate one's own social position while acting as a social actor is underlined by Habermas who, like Bhaskar, initially argues for a monistic naturalistic ontology. However, Habermas, by admitting that he is unable to combine this naturalistic ontology with a non-deterministic notion of self-objectivation, concludes to a vague epistemological dualism.

Instead, I propose the articulation of a social ontology as distinct from that of natural sciences where an existential distance between the knowing subject and her object does exist. In the social domain, the knowing subject is a constitutive part of its theoretical object and thus, we are now in need of an *epistemic agent* who, in his sociality, will be capable of self-objectivation. And it is at this point that the notion of the self-referential epistemic reflexivity which we have proposed is connected with the possibility of self (critical) examination and objectivation: the former requires the latter. For the self-referential aspect of social ontologies not to be paradoxical, the possibility of a self-reflective actor should now be included within the ontological framework. Thus, we are in need of an epistemic agent who, while being an active actor and theorist, influencing and being influenced by society, is also capable of self-objectivation – a self-reflective turn which would fulfill the requirement of our epistemic self-referential notion of reflexivity. Hence, instead of Habermas' (2007) self-objectivation that is external to the social world, we now need a participant objectivation – a possibility of self-objectivation of an actor which is not theorized as distinct from his sociality. Bourdieu's account may seem promising here. But unfortunately, it fails to provide us with such an account of participant

---

<sup>4</sup> And thus they fail to fulfill the epistemic criterion of reflexivity proposed by this thesis.



objectivation because his reflexive turn is still based on social determinism predicated in a sophisticated structuralist theory.

The fourth chapter focuses on the work of Margaret Archer, a critical realist like Bhaskar, who has provided us both with an account of 'agential reflexivity' and with a transformational model of society. This means that 'agential reflexivity' is now placed in the context of general ontological investigations around the agential role in social change. The chapter starts with a brief critique of the work of Anthony Giddens. Giddens borrows the term 'reflexivity' from Ethnomethodology and we can safely claim that he is one of those who have highlighted its use and value for social theory. However, he fails to explain more about its content. After a brief discussion of institutional reflexivity we move towards Margaret Archer's work (through her critique of Giddens' position) on the 'internal conversation' which intends to offer us a sophisticated account of that self-reflective agent whose conduct might provide the premise for a fulfillment of our epistemic criterion of reflexivity. Here, individuals reflexively modify their projects and thus, social structure. In this way, reflexivity becomes the mediator between structure and agency, that is, the content of the social conditioning of the individuals' conduct by society.

Thus Margaret Archer provides us with an account of agency, but the distance which she raises between people and society is unacceptable considering our presuppositions of the first chapter; it is also argued that her account leads to several contradictory claims and ambiguities. Moreover, though Archer makes clear that the 'internal conversation' does not face the problems of introspection, because now there is no need for a division of the self, Archer fails to explain how this process enables us to be critical towards our own words, our own thoughts. If understanding can be pre-linguistic, critical examination should follow it and thus, Archer's idea that one can answer to one's self cannot explain 1) how one can identify the meaning of her own words and thoughts and, 2) in which way self-critique can cognitively be formed. Furthermore, I argue that Archer's account underestimates the role of human imagination in self-reflective conduct as well as its relation to contemporary transformation of social structures and social institutions.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the notions of (self-reflective) imagination and the social imaginary. Here, it is argued that internal dialogue is only possible through the creative work of personal imagination as a human capacity. And, thus, this chapter focuses on the controversies that arose between the uses of the concept of the ‘social imaginary’ and that of the ‘imagination’ conceptualized as the potentiality of radical change, innovation and creativity. Here, Cornelius Castoriadis provides us with a definition of imagination, which is the *unending and autonomous flux of representations, affects and desires*. And it is this undetermined flux of representations that permits us to represent ourselves as an object, and to reflect critically, by creating other representations – a process which can lead the subject and society to self-creation. Castoriadis realizes that in order to ontologically empower the epistemic subject and thus render him capable of self-reflective objectivation, we need to place the creative power in the human psyche – as a representational activity, as human imagination. Yet, no distance between people and social forms is raised since it is only through human imagination that socialization can take place and thus, it is only through/within an autonomous society that an individual is capable of *reflectiveness*. I take advantage of Castoriadis’ dual meaning of ‘reflectiveness’ to develop further the distinctions of the second chapter: a) self-critical examination is omnipresent in various degrees and levels throughout human history (Archer) while, b) ‘to represent one self as a representational activity’ (Castoriadis’ second aspect of reflectiveness) is close to fulfilling our epistemic criterion of reflexivity since, the conceptualization of the epistemic subject as an autonomous personality can self-referentially account for the ontology of the imaginary that Castoriadis has proposed.

### Conclusion

It is true that Pierre Bourdieu, Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Cornelius Castoriadis, Jürgen Habermas and most of the other thinkers we refer to in this thesis, are crucially different as far as the origins of their thought are concerned. Of course, Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar and Andrew Sayer are fellow founders of Critical Realism while, I sometimes refer to schools of thought like the Edinburgh school, or

Ethnomethodology. But, again, heterogeneity rather than homogeneity is the main characteristic of this thesis as far as the selection of the thinkers discussed is concerned. Yet, I have tried to draw on the existing connections, similarities and differences in order to present the interconnections between the concept of social ontology and that of reflexivity. For this, the first chapter is devoted to the ontology/epistemology debate. The second and the third chapter try to elaborate the notion of epistemic reflexivity while moving towards the need for a self-reflective, self-objectivating agent. And finally, the last two chapters aim at offering two accounts, one realist and one anti-structuralist, of the social individual as a self-reflective agent.

Yet, while Castoriadis' work has its origins in the French anti-structuralist tradition, it is shown in this thesis that Roy Bhaskar's discussion of philosophy and ontology – which is the premise of Archer's realism – presents various similarities with Castoriadis' ontological notes – to such a degree that I shall try to explain and show why Castoriadis is nevertheless not a transcendental realist. And, while Pierre Bourdieu and Cornelius Castoriadis were teaching in the same school and in the same period but ignore each other's work, Critical Realists like Dave Elder-Vass and Andrew Sayer shall be shown to aim at a reconciliation between the reflexive agent of Archer and the habitual action as described by Bourdieu. Of course, Bourdieu's sophisticated structuralism cannot be reconciled with Castoriadis' anti-structuralism. However, both have contributed to the discussion of epistemic reflexivity and the contrast itself engenders a variety of useful considerations.

The importance of this thesis resides in the significance and the difficulty of what is at stake in the general issues that are discussed. The open-ended debates on the role of philosophy in scientific work, on the status of the sociality of science and of the possibility of its enactment and on the status of agency either in social life in general, or in the scientific community, are interconnected. But their relevance to the understanding of social life – as well as to the more specific phenomena that social sciences intend to investigate – has become more and more acute in a globalized world where natural sciences and the accompanying scientific ethos are prevalent

and deeply influential. Should social sciences break more completely from natural scientific methodology? If yes, can we premise such a radical rupture between methodological programmes on a distinct social ontology? Or should we rather state that methodological differences do not emerge from theories about being (ontologies) because this is in fact what science is supposed to do – to investigate being? Additionally, if social sciences presuppose an absence of agential powers in social life, can they avoid paradoxical or self-undermining methodological or theoretical programmes? These questions, I think, are not only important for theory/hypothesis production but also for the choice of the appropriate method of social research; for this thesis argues that underneath competing methodological programmes, antagonistic ontological presuppositions and frameworks lie unexamined; and that uncovering as well as elaborating them could help to improve the internal congruity of social theorizing, but also help us understand the limits of knowledge in the social domain.

Finally, we have to warn that there are terminological complexities because of the crucial differences in the ways in which different thinkers conceive ‘reflexivity’ and its role either in science or in social life in general. For example, Bourdieu uses the term ‘reflexivity’ both in agential and epistemic manner since he attributes reflexivity to a specific group of people that is, sociologists. However, at the outset of my analysis a distinction will start to appear that is developed throughout: self-referential properties of theoretical accounts or ontologies should initially be distinguished from theoretical accounts about the agential capacities of self-objectivation, self-examination, self-deconstruction or self-suspension. Self-referential properties will lead us to the articulation of what I shall later call the epistemic criterion of reflexivity which is one of the main contributions of this thesis. Again, the reader should be aware that different thinkers use the term ‘reflexivity’ in different ways and the organization and division of our material in this thesis is intended to help one to ignore the terminological differences and to realize what is common, identical, similar or different in each case.

# Chapter one

---

## ***Ontology vs Epistemology: The Role of the Knowing Subject and the Requirement for a Reflexive Sociology***

Social Theory might be conceived as the ambitious – if not the ironically impossible – task of identifying the basic characteristics of human societies expressed through the concepts of a particular epoch. In this sense, Social Theory has an *ontological* character since social theorists propose and use in their descriptions concepts – like structures, institutions, systems, groups, roles, functions etc. – which intend to present social being, how society is or how it is formed. From another point of view, Social Theory points to the identification of the generic characteristics as well as the limitations of social knowledge and thus, to the characterization of the possible knowledge concerning the social world. In this sense, Social Theory has an epistemological character that is, it can be conceived as a philosophy of/for the social sciences – thus identifying the role of theory in social scientific work, the possibility of investigation in specific fields, the cognitional status of social sciences, etc.

Yet unless one wants to confine oneself in adopting only one of these two positions and ignore the other, one would wonder about the proper placement of each of these approaches to Social Theory and the possible cognitional relationship between them. This chapter is dedicated to this question by taking sides and, thus, it argues that ontological accounts are cognitively prior to epistemological accounts. The discussion of the role of social ontology will trigger questions about the theoretical role of the knowing subject in relation to her general object, that is, society as conceptualized through social ontology. And it is on these premises that I will try to link the discussion about reflexive sociology to this debate between ontology and epistemology and, more specifically, to the role of the knowing subject as conceptualized by a social ontology and, as related to her object.

This chapter will proceed as follows: firstly, I provide arguments in favour of ontology. It is argued that theories about knowledge (epistemologies) and methods (methodologies) are cognitively premised on ontological presuppositions. Then, I focus on the post-positivist tradition of theory-ladenness which underlines the central role of theory in the process of selection, formation, translation and evaluation of the 'facts'. Now for perception and appreciation of the data to be possible pre-existing theoretical schemes are necessary and these theoretical schemes are premised on world-images and prior conceptions of what exists in the world. My next step will be to show the antinomies lying in the works of Roy Bhaskar (1975, 1998), the 'father' of 'critical realism' and Andrew Sayer to develop my first ontological argument. This is that social sciences, unlike natural sciences, are a constitutive part of the object they examine and that, because of this existential interdependence between social science and society, the social scientist should be conceptualized as one agent among others in the social domain. The work of Alvin Gouldner will be shown to be of great significance at this point. Society is theory-dependent and this means that social theorising should place itself within ontological frameworks thus provided for the understanding of social life. Thus, social ontology should account for the possibility of its own articulation by an epistemic agent who now realizes his own sociality and intends to provide us with such a social ontology. This epistemic agent, this knowing subject, as conceptualized by a social ontology, should be *reflexive* in the sense that while recognizing his own sociality, he intends to transcend it in his attempt to understand the social world.

### *The cognitive priority of ontology to epistemological investigations*

Our first task should be to define more explicitly, the content and the meaning of the terms 'epistemology' and 'ontology'. It is interesting that different authors of introductory books of social research give us quite similar definitions of what ontology and epistemology are. However, agreement on in-depth contents of these concepts or on the relations between these cognitive fields is missing. For example,

Mark Smith (1998) explains that ‘epistemology involves the study of theories of knowledge, the questions we ask about how we know, whereas ontology involves the study of theories of being, the questions we ask about what can really exist.’ (Smith, 1998: 279) Similarly, Norman Blaikie says that Ontological assumptions are concerned with the nature of social reality so that these assumptions make claims about what kinds of social phenomena do or can exist, the conditions of their existence, and how they are related, while, ‘epistemological assumptions are concerned with what kinds of knowledge are possible – how we can know these things – and with criteria for deciding when knowledge is both adequate and legitimate.’ (Blaikie, 2010: 92)

In the same mode, Crotty (1998) explains that ontology is the study of being while epistemology concerns with how we know what we know and, he claims – without further explanation – that ‘ontological issues and epistemological issues tend to emerge together.’ (Crotty, 1998: 10) However, one of the most rigorous philosophical debates is the question of the relation (and the priority) between ontological and epistemological arguments. Should the discussion about what does exist (*ōn*) predate arguments concerning the legitimacy of our knowledge-claims, or, on the contrary, are we only legitimated to describe the world after we have already settled the foundations of what can be said about the world? Yet, Crotty’s co-emergence seems to be a very popular solution. Martin Hollis, for example – as we shall see in chapter four – has criticized a lot of social thinkers for putting aside epistemological debates (i.e. subjective/objective distinction) in favour of ontological ones (i.e. structure/agency problem). In this thesis, as I will show, co-emergence of ontology and epistemology takes the form of incorporation of the later into the ontological frameworks.

Indeed, it is difficult to support the claim that epistemology pre-exists ontology since if this was the case, it would be difficult to support a clear distinction between ontology and science. Once we have adopted the term ‘ontology’, in its historical conceptualization, we cannot reduce it to the results of scientific or pre-scientific investigation following epistemology. Of course, one can de-value its usefulness as a

concept like logical positivists, as we have explained earlier. This problematic could be taken to depict the realist/positivist debate (coming from the natural sciences and thus being transferred to the philosophy of social science) about the role of sense perception – and the inapplicability of this idea to social theory which focuses most of the times on ‘unobservable’ entities. Instead of devoting a whole chapter (or even a whole thesis for this), we could simplistically claim that since new scientific discoveries are often supposed to be about non-perceivable objects, positivists’ premises were attacked by various philosophical stand-points. Additionally, as we shall examine latter, doubts have arisen about the nature of perception, considering the theory-dependence and concept dependence of what is perceived.

Now I would like to state that ontology is prior to epistemology and that even ‘if ontology as a subject is not consciously thematised, some or other ontology will be, willy-nilly, unconsciously imbibed.’ (Bhaskar, 2009: 47) As Dilworth (1996) explains, many philosophers have supported the view that science is based on principles, which ‘determine what is to be conceived as ontologically *necessary* or *possible* within the enterprise or certain of its sub-disciplines.’ (Dilworth, 1996: 66) And, Dilworth admits that these principles are ontological as well – that ‘the basic presuppositions or principles of modern science will here be taken to be ontological in nature’ (Dilworth, 1996: 51) – as having a categorical role in science: they ‘provide the fundamental *categories* of scientific thought.’ (Dilworth, 1996: 61) In a sub-chapter called ‘ontology vs. epistemology’, Dilworth takes with sides for ontology. For Dilworth, positivism considers changes in principles as more radical than they really are, because changes in epistemology have been translated as having ontological imports – as in the case of Einstein’s relativity<sup>5</sup>:

We see that some of the more revolutionary changes of twentieth-century science involve an alteration of epistemological principles rather than of ontological principles, and further that the suggestion that such changes themselves represent ontological insights is misguided, as has been argued by Einstein. (Dilworth, 1996: 190)

---

<sup>5</sup> At this point, it will be stated that Einstein was initially in his career influenced by positivism, but he later developed a realist thought of science.



This theoretical-conceptual formulation of ontology – even if obscure – helps us to provide an answer to Dave Elder-Vass (2007a), whose work we will examine later, who tries to distinguish between ontology and theory. For I think that ontology, like all knowledge claims, is historical and thus fallible. Moreover, ontology provides the conceptual framework through which facts are appreciated and, in this sense, we should treat ontological claims as hypotheses about the world, as theories or conceptual schemes which cannot be judged by their testability or refutability by facts. For conceptual schemes ‘are neither a priori demonstrable nor empirically refutable and so can only be assessed indirectly – in terms of their developmental potential, empirical fertility, heuristic plausibility, synoptic power, etc.’ (Bhaskar, 2009: 22) This means that this thesis intends to place ontology at the hypothetical level by treating it as a theory of being which is open to revision, critique and change. It also means that this thesis argues for a distinction between empirical perception and concept/theory. We will focus on post-positivist critiques of theory-ladenness below in order to support such a distinction.

Yet, this theoretical aspect of ontological claims is more acute in the case of social sciences whose object is ‘theoretical’ and thus, there cannot be a radical distinction *in kind* between meta-levels or transcendental levels (independent of scientific experience) and (pre) scientific (transient) knowledge; accounts for the explanation of social reality have a genuine ontological character which cannot be confined into minimal generalization concerning the possibility of scientific reason or principles or the legitimacy of specific methodological programmes. We will explain later that if Bhaskar (1998) is right to say that the object of social science is *theoretical* – that is, it is not perceivable and thus it cannot be identified and exist independently of its effects – the transcendental level, that meta-level concerning coherence, which is characterized by those presuppositions which make science possible, is meta-theoretical rather than meta-scientific.

Again, I do not mean to support that all these pre-scientific world-images, representations and theoretical-conceptual frameworks inserted as intuitive hypotheses in the natural scientific work, belong to the ontological level. It is rather

in the human sciences, where the object of analysis is *theoretical*, as Bhaskar (1998) says, that ontological accounts, which intend to define the conditions of the possibility of the social being, cannot be clearly separated from social research. Further reasons for this will be provided throughout this chapter and, at this point, I should define social ontology as such: social ontological concepts:

- (i) are an attempt to theoretically articulate and identify the properties of the most basic constitutive elements of social reality,
- (ii) are intended to capture trans-historical features of society and,
- (iii) are analytically related and interdependent. The element that emerges at this point is the relationality of the concepts of ontological frameworks.

This means that the content of those very concepts can be identified only through the identification of the co-production of meaning internal to a totality of interrelated and mutually inter-dependent conceptualizations.

And let me now propose that from now on we will presume that ontology is *cognitionally, but not necessarily temporally* prior to epistemology: detailed knowledge of those basic constituents of, for example, the social world presupposes – and only becomes intelligible through – the acknowledgement of the very basic characteristics of these constituents. After all, since society or its basic constituent elements are not always perceivable and thus we are in need of concepts, these concepts should express something substantial on which one can make further judgements. And these concepts cannot but be historical concepts provided in either academic or every-day language. If Bhaskar (1998) is right to believe that philosophy is a conceptual science, we can then admit that its finding is the conceptual framework of ontology. And if epistemology is the theory of (scientific) knowledge, then such a theorization should be cognitionally derived from ontological claims. For, knowledge (whether verified or not) presupposes a (knowable) object, as well as a knowing subject – and it is unintelligible how one could set the criteria and principles of verification of knowledge claims without having in mind a pre-supposition of what is to be known, in relation to the one who is supposed to have

formed knowledge of this object. That is, the question immediately arising when talking about a ‘theory of knowledge’ is ‘knowledge of what and in relation to whom?’.

The same is true about methodology: to claim to know which method is appropriate to use in order to derive/attain knowledge from data of a field or of a natural or social *something*, one should already have a (fallible) idea of what is like – and how is related to her as a putative knower. Simplistically, how can we know that a shovel is the best tool for grasping the ground and how can we construct such a thing (in relation to our capacities), if we do not have a prior idea of the malleability of ground and the properties of the metals used to construct the shovel? That simply means that science does not write on a *tabula rasa* and does not work in a vacuum. Of course, ontology, as I have already explained, should not be considered as something stable or eternally and once-and-for-all given. This is the reason why it is not temporally prior to epistemology and methodology – and of course to empirical investigation. But it should be granted a relative stability since what it aims at is a trans-historical abstraction of what is most constitutive of social life. And the criteria of change are internally given. The argument here is that behind the legalization and the authority of different epistemologies and methods, what informs the edifice of our beliefs are ontological beliefs. And their relationality does not imply a lack of inconsistency existing between these beliefs and representations. Indeed, one might unintentionally employ self-contradictory concepts and explanations.

I have already explained that in the case of the social domain, it is difficult to distinguish between social ontology and science. But I have just explained that ontologies are open-ended projects subject to change, but relatively immune to (counter-) factual statements. What I mean is that in every effort to have empirical results and investigations, social ontology orients our efforts to interpret and appreciate the data of analysis. And even if a social ontology is not clearly stated, an implicit ontology lies under the notions of ‘experience’, ‘data’, ‘explanation’, ‘causality’ etc. For after all, concepts like structure, systems agents etc., which have a clear ontological character, cannot but indirectly appear, disappear and finally form

and reform empirical research. Now social ontology, as a theoretical scheme, can survive criticism based on factual evidence since those ‘facts’ can be reassessed, recollected or simply vanished because the criteria of their appreciation are most of the times pre-decided by theory itself. And post-positivist tradition has clearly accounted for such a theory-ladenness of the ‘data’.

Now, theory-ladenness should not entail that, in the case of natural sciences, theories cannot be assessed in the face of factual statements. As we shall see in the next section, Paul Feyerabend, while he believes in theory-ladenness of the empirical ‘data’, does not imply the impossibility of scientific investigation. It is rather in the social domain, in which theory production is a constitutive part of the social world, that social ontologies cannot be assessed through more substantial empirical work. And this will lead us to the idea that for the adequacy of the social ontological schemes, epistemic criteria should be developed, like the one proposed in this thesis – the epistemic criterion of reflexivity. It is in this sense that in the discussion of Roy Bhaskar’s work, I explain the reasons why social ontology should be a more extended theory (as in fact it is) than the ontologies of natural sciences which are confined in the investigations about the possibility of specific scientific methods considering specific (prior) conceptualizations of the natural domain(s).

Of course, it is very difficult for one to deny that social theory, while focusing on things like structures, systems, fields etc. has an ontological character. But one could rather argue against the idea that social research is totally dependent and oriented by a pre-given general theory. One example of this is John Holmwood who claims that ‘any claim for an *a priori*, general scheme is a form of “foundationalism” that is at odds with the thrust of post-positivist philosophies of science’ (Holmwood, 1996: 48) according to which, ‘theoretical objects and categories are transformed in the process of substantive and located scientific activities of problem-solving.’ (Holmwood, 1996: 48) Now, I disagree that post-positivism, in general, has as its main contribution the idea that theoretical objects are transformed in the process of located and substantive scientific research. For as Holmwood himself provides us with the example of Quine, who in the tradition of post-positivism has argued for the

underdetermination of theory by contradicting facts, this idea of Holmwood's about post-positivism seems not to hold water. As Holmwood himself underlines, 'theories, Quine argues, are *under-determined* by any "facts" held to bear upon them and can always be maintained by some adjustments of terms ... the implication is that a number of theories may be consistent with the "same facts" which introduces an apparently irreducible indeterminacy into the evaluation of competing theories.' (Holmwood, 1996: 42) This seems more to lead us to the idea that theories are more or less immune to the findings of substantive scientific investigation rather than the idea that theories are locally transformed by those findings.

Quine is one prominent example in the tradition of post-positivism, and we should focus for a while on this tradition. Thus it now seems that we need to take a few notes on the role of theory in our efforts for knowledge. In which way is theory characterized by relationality and how is this consistent with the claim that social theory has a genuine ontological aspect? We will start from the work of W. V. O. Quine in order to examine the relational aspect of theoretical frameworks. Theory-ladenness will be an import of this relationality. Now, theory will lie under the translation of perceived facts and of the applicability of methods. Then, we will move to another philosopher of science, Feyerabend, who also supports such a theory-embeddedness of science, and implies that behind the need of a plurality of methods a plurality of (cosmo/) ontologies exists.

Thus, in the next section we should show in which way theory confronts the findings of more substantive investigation, in which way our theories are characterized by relationality and, in which way ontological/cosmological presuppositions lay beneath our theories. Then, in the following sections of this chapter I intend to show in which way social thought has this distinctive characteristic which, as we have already explained, entails that social ontology has extended and pervasive boundaries with social research – which will also lead us (with the antinomies of Roy Bhaskar's work) to the discussion about the need of a social ontology as distinct from the one of the natural sciences and also, to the investigation of the role of the knowing subject (with the help of Andrew Sayer and Alvin Gouldner). For our purpose is to

explain why ontological schemes, as conceptual schemes, are cognitively prior to methodological and epistemological claims and, relatively underdetermined by counterfactual scientific findings – while not immune to change and critique; why social ontology should then be conceptualized as distinct from ontological claims about the natural world; and, in which ways the knowing subject as the author of a social ontology, should self-referentially place himself in this social ontology.

### *The role of theory: from its relationality to its ontological premises*

We have already explained that ontologies cannot but be considered as conceptual schemes. This simply means that ontological schemes should be treated as different theories concerning the most basic characteristics of the social world. Again, one reply to this would be that there is no need to have a theory prior to more empirical social investigation. We could just focus on the more specific object of investigation (i.e. a social phenomenon) and thus apply or derive our concepts through this very examination. Yet, at this point, I would like to argue that Bhaskar's (1979) characterization of society as theoretical object, takes us further, as we shall explain later, than he himself would accept. For the mere statement of the existence of a distinct, dependent or independent social phenomenon is related to a pre-existing ontological scheme. The distinctiveness or, more radically, the very existence and possibility of (empirical) examination of a social phenomenon, implies that the debates on such decisions have already been resolved – in a field in which, as we will allege below, its very constitution is not neutral, immune or independent to its conceptualization and theorization.

In other words, the classical critique of empiricism, which claims that our theoretical frameworks influence our data, our principles and our methods, as well as our variables and criteria of assessment for our empirical analyses – critique which points to the theory ladenness of our perception, appreciation and evaluation – is more acute in the social sciences. A further reason for this, I would like to claim, is that since the constitution of our general object is theory-dependent, 'factual'

resistance that is, a *potential* existential distance between theory and the reality examined is missing here – with the result of a lack of the potential *stability* of the observations or measurements; and this means that we are in the danger to consider as fact a ‘phenomenon’ which is partially created or is interdependent by (social) scientific community – if not sociology itself. Of course, since our theory-creation and the existing re-presentations and world schemes are either socially embedded or created within a specific social and scientific context and community – and since our theoretical object is this very context – we can easily realize that we no longer are able to leave our selves exposed to outdated scientific reasoning.

Before we discuss more about these interrelationships between social science and its object, we should at first take an introductory walkabout around this very theory-ladenness of our perception and appreciation. Through the help of prominent epistemologists like Quine and Feyerabend, we will be able to orientate this discussion towards our purposes. However, we should keep in mind that it is very difficult to sociologize this discussion and a lot of questions concerning society and social thought will be open until we start our discussion in the rest of this chapter which intends to connect the idea of the concept of social ontology with that of epistemic reflexivity.

In his famous article ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’ (1953), Quine aims at undermining two dogmas, which are, on the one hand, the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths and, on the other, what he calls ‘reductionism’ – the verification of knowledge claims from experience. And he does so by pointing out the conventional and multi-referential character of our knowledge. But what is the cognitional premises on which we could base this conventional character of our epistemic schemes? As he explains, ‘total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field. Truth values have to be redistributed over some of our statements.’ (Quine, 1953: 42) In this field of force, each redistribution of truth can engender further changes, ‘because of their logical interconnections’ (Quine, 1953: 42) with logical laws. Logical laws are statements

too and can be modified or abandoned too, if it is required by the equilibrium of the whole field – but not by individual connections of the statements with each other. It is for this reason that Quine cannot accept that scientific individual terms or individual statements face sense experience one by one. Instead, due to the use of the concept of ‘field of beliefs’, experience is faced with science as a whole – and this is a kind of relationality of theory; cognitive elements are interrelated and, it is only through this interdependence that a specific statement can be meaningful or trivial, refuted or valid.

Hence Quine does not intend to propose a deterministic account of scientific change: the total field ‘is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to reevaluate in the light of any single contrary experience.’ (Quine, 1953: 42) However, statements which are central to the field, like those of our logical laws, are more difficult to be abandoned, because of the multiple impact of such a change in the field. After all, our natural tendency is to disturb the system as little as possible. But, in the final analysis, ‘no statement is immune to revision.’ (Quine, 1953: 43) It is now evident that Holmwood (1996) fails to take into account that the relationality in theory ladenness precludes the idea of a localized substantive scientific activity which has a crucial moment confronting theory formation. For here localized experience face ‘science’ as a whole.

As a result of all these, the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths can only be conventional. After all, ‘any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system. Even a statement very close to the periphery can be held true in the face of recalcitrant experience by pleading hallucination or by amending certain statements of the kind called logical laws’ (Quine, 1953: 43). The analytic/synthetic dichotomy proposes a differentiation in kind among statements, while Quine denies this and only permits differentiation in degree: ‘Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediates – not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the god of Homer.’ (Quine, 1953: 44)



At this point, we should make two remarks which can help us to proceed to a further elaboration of what is at stake. On the one hand, we might be very skeptical about whether the tribunal of experience has the last word (as Quine admits), even if we can choose among a variety of readjustments. As Martin Hollis asks:

Whose tribunal is it? It seems to me that it can only be ours. Nature has become a myth or cultural posit, like the gods of Homer or the everyday physical objects which we bump into. In a system where no statement is immune to revision, how could statements about nature be otherwise? ... No doubt it remains useful to think in terms of negotiation with nature but, epistemologically speaking, the tribunal of experience is another myth. (Hollis, 1994: 82)

Thus, we face here the problem of omnipresence and omnipotence of convention and of theory-ladenness. Moreover, we could allege that Quine's idea about this 'field of power', this 'network of belief', which is Quine's basis of his critique of Positivism, is ontological. And it is a challenging ontology which defies the limits of individual/collectivity distinction, since Quine does not attribute this field of beliefs either to individuals, or to collectivities. For, as Andrew Sayer would add, according to this view, 'it seems scarcely possible for experience to contradict theory for the only available criteria for judging the theory are those internal to it.' (Sayer, 1992: 56)

We will discuss the methodological work of Andrew Sayer later. For the time being we have to explain that Sayer is a critical realist and what his criticism of empiricism aims at is not total conventionalism. For after all, 'wishful thinking, thoroughgoing conventionalism or "anything goes", patently do not work: not every method works, not every convention can be upheld without absurdity.' (Sayer, 1992: 68) This very 'anything goes' to which Sayer (1992) objects, belongs to Paul Feyerabend, another proponent of the theory ladenness of scientific practice – but held from another point of view than that of Quine. At this point, I have to state again that the conventionality that Quine argues for cannot easily be placed in the sociological theorizing. For the discussion about the sociality of the knowledge claims as well as that about the whole/individuals relations is missing. And, again, I do not think that such a relativistic approach can adequately explain the character either of natural or of social scientific investigation. For, to claim that every fact is perceived through the lenses of a specific theory does not necessarily deny empirical investigation in general. And to

claim that social ontologies cannot be evaluated through empirical investigation neither leads to a kind of cognitive relativism which denies the existence of social being – such a form of relativism would be contradictory since an ontology is a theory about being – nor could it entail that there is no way in rejecting social ontologies as incoherent.

Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method* (1975) is a manifesto in favour of an anarchic account of the production of knowledge. He starts its introduction by announcing that '*science is an essentially anarchic enterprise*' (Feyerabend, 1975: 9) and this is because 'a complex medium containing surprising and unforeseen developments demands complex procedures and defies analysis on the basis of rules which have been set up in advance and without regard to the ever-changing conditions of history.' (Feyerabend, 1975: 10-11) Those scientists who assume that only one methodology is appropriate for the examination of every kind of historical event and fact fail to realize that the scientific process has not only to do with concrete facts and inductions from them, but also with (mis)interpretations of these facts. As he further explains, 'on closer analysis we even find that science knows no "bare facts" at all but that the "facts" that enter our knowledge are already viewed in a certain way and are, therefore, essentially ideational .' (Feyerabend, 1975: 11)

And it is because of this ideational character of what we perceive as 'fact', as he comments, that the history of science is full of mistakes which however fascinate those who participate in their (re) production. Through intensive training and education the scientist learns how to ignore parts of history while endorsing the creation of those stable facts invented to satisfy the uniformity and the 'objectiveness' which scientific reasons favours. Thus, 'his imagination is restrained, and even his language ceases to be his own. This is again reflected in the nature of scientific "facts" which are experienced as being independent of opinion, belief, and cultural background.' (Feyerabend, 1975: 11)

Yet, for Feyerabend, the motto 'against method' leads to the motto 'anything goes' rather than a systematic attack on the idea of method. For his aim is not to abandon

any effort which is conducted by a specific methodological programme. Instead, I could allege that methodological monism is what really irritates him. The idea that our facts are translated as such via existent ideological and conceptual schemes – which of course is a version of theory-ladenness – does not lead us to an exclusive denial of the role of methodology, but rather to a pluralistic conception of the scientific devices – which he calls anarchic. As he announces, ‘there is not a single rule, however plausible, and however firmly grounded in epistemology, that is not violated at some time or other.’ (Feyerabend, 1975: 14) Specifically, there are always circumstances when it is more fruitful:

... not only to ignore the rule, but to adopt its opposite. For example, there are circumstances when it is advisable to introduce, elaborate, and defend *ad hoc* hypotheses, or hypotheses which contradict well-established and generally accepted experimental results, or hypotheses whose content is smaller than the content of the existing and empirically adequate alternative, or self-inconsistent hypotheses, and so on. (Feyerabend, 1975: 14-15)

This simply means that Feyerabend’s advice is to proceed *counterinductively*, that is to ‘introduce and elaborate hypotheses which are inconsistent with well-established theories and/or well-established facts.’ (Feyerabend, 1975: 20) This game of imagination acknowledges the fact that it is by contrast and not by analysis that the properties of theories are identified (Feyerabend, 1975: 21). Moreover, this advice recognizes that ‘there is not a single interesting theory that agrees with all the known facts in its domain.’ (Feyerabend, 1975: 21) After all, as we have already explained earlier, for Feyerabend, ‘factual’ statements are laden with specific theoretical assumptions. And Feyerabend’s complaint is that we most of the times are not aware of the effect which these assumptions have in our worldviews and the only possibility for us to critically uncover it is to ‘encounter an entirely different cosmology.’ (Feyerabend, 1975: 22)

At this point I would like to claim that what Feyerabend really proposes is that because our facts are contaminated with unexamined presuppositions, to uncover them we need to think of – and through – a different cosmology. On the one hand, that self-reflective or, self-critical examination of our most valuable theoretical principles and our most carefully established observational reports can only be

conducted through counterinduction. As we shall see later, Cornelius Castoriadis would not disagree with such an imagination game. However, at this point, I would like to argue that different cosmologies constitute different ontologies since there is no real difference between the ‘logos’ about what our ‘cosmos’ is like and the ‘logos’ about what exists (‘on’). For even if Feyerabend does not use the term ‘ontology’, I think that he implies it. However, Feyerabend fails to connect this discussion about this counterinductive self-critical examination to the ontological presuppositions underlying methodological and epistemological programmes.

Thus Feyerabend’s proposal is that the comparison of different cosmologies will lead us to a critical examination of our presuppositions. However, what seems quite paradoxical is that his main aim is to propose a move towards pluralistic methodologies and not a movement towards a configuration of a plurality of cosmologies – towards which I think his argumentation would lead. For he fails to take a further step in his movement ‘against method’ and to realize that if our facts are contaminated with theoretical assumptions and if there is no theory-neutral methodology, then theory gains the upper hand in the scientific process and what we need is an ontological investigation rather than methodological pluralism. For even if a different methodology will uncover new facts, as Feyerabend would claim, the progress he aims at would be very ambivalent since, as he explains, we have to do with mutually inconsistent and exclusive cosmologies. And here I would like to claim that to compare different methodologies would be to fight with the shadows of those cosmologies – that is, after he has deprived facts from neutrality, and after he has shown the value-orientation of methodological programmes, his only one path to ‘progress’ would be to focus on the ‘logos’ of those preconceptions about our ‘cosmos’. After all, as he admits, a comprehensive theory, ‘is supposed to contain also an *ontology* that determines what exists and thus delimits the domain of possible facts and possible questions.’ (Feyerabend, 1975: 155)

Again, what is really missing here is a clear statement about the relationship between ontological claims and methodological ones. For it is totally unclear why what he calls ‘counterinduction’ can result in a plurality of methodologies and not to the

contrast among different cosmologies – as his position would otherwise indicate. Yet by connecting the ontology/methodology question with the problem of theory-ladenness and with that of self-critical examination, Feyerabend's critique offers us a good framework of questions to which we will start to correspond possible answers. But he does not focus on the problematic concerning the status of theory in social sciences. This critique of theory-ladenness comes from the epistemological circles of the sixties, and as a result, discussions about theory and knowledge scarcely distinguish between social and natural science; and in order to proceed to a further analysis of the role of theory and its connection with the concept of social ontology, we had better start our analysis from Roy Bhaskar who, as a naturalist philosopher, is trying to show the relevance of a naturalistic ontology with social scientific status. The critique of his position will help me formulate my own concept of social ontology as contra-distinct from that of the natural sciences.

Now I have tried to show that post-positivism has frequently led epistemology not only to the idea that theory has the first and the last word in its relation with more substantive scientific activities, but also to the idea that cosmological/ontological views lie under more concrete methodological programmes. Again, the relationality of theory, should not lead us to cognitive relativism. And, it is now the right point to claim that our stand-point against conventionalism and the accompanying epistemic relativism will be that it is *reflexively* self-contradicting. For:

... relativism, taken as an account of the nature of knowledge, is pointless – self-defeating in the sense that it declares impossible what it originally seemed intended to do: explain what knowledge really is. The relativist can give an account of the nature of knowledge, but not a cognitive justification of that account other than that it meets the conventional criteria of knowledge he happens to use. In the end, the relativist cannot say what knowledge really is; he has rejected the question itself. (Tollefsen, 1987: 213)

This kind of problematics of self-reference will arise in the next chapter, after we have connected the concept of social ontology with that of epistemic reflexivity. Indeed, after explaining in which ways a social ontology is entailed in every theory about the social world, questions concerning self-critique and self-reference related to every theoretical schema which has ontological character, will emerge. And, as we

will shall see, the dimensions of such an ontological-cosmological investigation will take us far from Feyerabend's self-critical 'counterinduction', whatever form this eventually takes.

*Ontology and social stratification: Roy Bhaskar's realist philosophy of science*

It is now time, as I have promised, to focus on the necessity of a distinctive social ontology. We will focus on Roy Bhaskar's work on the possibility of naturalism in the social sciences. Roy Bhaskar is the founder of 'critical realism', a school of thought which argues that the world is structured, is an open system and that science investigates the causes and their generative mechanisms which are not necessarily activated or effective. Here, in a tradition which intends to impose the notion of stratification in the social world, I argue that Bhaskar's ontological procedure is misguided, that he fails to make a case for a naturalistic ontology of the social world and, that we thus need to reject the ontological hiatus between society and people, which is frequently implied in the works of critical realists, and locate social scientists and knowledge-production within society.

We can begin to explore Bhaskar's ideas by considering his critique of Feyerabend's anarchistic philosophy of science. According to Bhaskar, Feyerabend is unable to think of criteria of rationality of scientific change, that is, he excludes the possibility 'of objective grounds for a rational choice between conflicting theories *within science*'. (Bhaskar, 1989: 32) For Bhaskar, this is tenable since 'we can allow that a theory  $T_a$  is preferable to a theory  $T_b$ , even if they are incommensurable, provided that  $T_a$  can explain *under its descriptions* almost all the phenomena  $P_1 \dots P_n$  that  $T_b$  can explain under *its* descriptions plus some significant phenomena that  $T_b$  cannot explain.' (Bhaskar, 1989: 32) But, as Bhaskar explains, this presupposes an ontology of what he calls the *intransitive dimension* that is, that scientific objects exist independently of our knowledge of them – 'for to say that two theories conflict, clash or are in competition presupposes that there is something – a domain of real objects

or relations existing and acting independently of their descriptions – *over* which they clash.’ (Bhaskar, 1989: 33)

So, this is the reason why Bhaskar argues that Feyerabend does not have a concept of the intransitive dimension of the philosophy of science (Bhaskar, 1989: 28) and as a result, his analysis succumbs to individualistic, i.e. voluntaristic auspices. For, as Bhaskar explains, ‘Feyerabend, at least on the face of it, certainly seems to be making the proposal that one should not be bound by explicit rules in science. In Feyerabend’s science the policies pursued by individual scientists become “free”, a matter of personal choice (or democratic vote)’ (Bhaskar, 1989: 34). Of course, one could ask what the problem with this kind of voluntaristic conceptualization of science really is. Bhaskar explains that Feyerabend’s aim is not only to attack method but – and this is more serious – science itself; since, in Feyerabend’s theory, science and its rational criteria become, in the name of freedom, only as important as – or with equal authority to – any other form of life (like religion).

Thus Bhaskar concludes that ‘against method’ becomes relativistic; but he also says – for the very same reasons – that Feyerabend’s method is empiricist<sup>6</sup> (Bhaskar, 1989: 38): ‘in denying the very possibility of a theory of the production of knowledge (the prescription “*anything goes*” is based on the idea (theory) that “*anything has gone*” in the history of science), Feyerabend produces not a philosophy of science which is empiricist but an empiricist philosophy of science.’ (Bhaskar, 1989: 38) And this is because just as Hume cannot guarantee whether an empirical regularity – a course of nature – will remain the same in the future and, thus, anything might happen, Feyerabend cannot guarantee that the same ‘rational criteria’ can account for scientific aims every time. In this sense, ‘... just as Hume’s rejection of theory (in science) led, formally, to the impossibility of knowledge, so Feyerabend’s rejection of any theory of science leads to the impossibility of any theory of knowledge, and hence of any criteria of rationality for its production.’ (Bhaskar, 1989: 39) In order for us to understand why his realist approach should differ from empiricism and, whether Bhaskar is not exaggerating by admitting that

---

<sup>6</sup> Allegedly a very weird claim by Bhaskar since, as we have seen, Feyerabend’s theory ladenness attacks empiricism.

‘much of the time Feyerabend is joking’ (Bhaskar, 1989: 40), we should explain the role of the intransitive – as opposed to transitive – dimension in his ontology.

Indeed, Bhaskar in his ‘Realist Theory of Science’ (1975), which is focused centrally on natural sciences, distinguishes between ‘two sides of knowledge’. The one, which he calls transitive, has to do with the ‘antecedently established facts and theories, paradigms and models, methods and techniques of inquiry available to a particular scientific school or worker’ (Bhaskar, 1975: 21) which, in other words, are the raw material to be transformed in present scientific works. Its malleable and contingent character is entailed by its being a product of human activity that is, a social product. In contradistinction, ‘the intransitive objects of knowledge are in general invariant to our knowledge of them: they are the real things and structures, mechanisms and processes, events and possibilities of the world; and for the most part are they quite independent of us.’ (Bhaskar, 1975: 22)

This does not mean that they cannot be objects of scientific inquiry but just that their being as such, that is, objects of observation, empirical examination and theoretical objectification, does not change their existential independence. This distinction, according to Bhaskar, answers his transcendental question: what must the world be like for science to be possible. And this answer to his transcendental question, ‘deserves the name of ontology. And in showing that the objects of science are intransitive (in this sense) and of a certain kind, viz. structures not events, it is my intention to furnish the new philosophy of science with an ontology.’ (Bhaskar, 1975: 23) Science as a transitive process (proceeding by usage of antecedent knowledge) depends upon the preexistence of – and as an intelligible effort, presupposes – intransitive objects, knowable but not knowledge-dependent.

Thus, reality is stratified and this stratification is explained through the pre-existence and independence of those structures and mechanisms which are independent of human activities and experiences. Resulting from this is the distinction between real objects of (scientific) experience and experiences<sup>7</sup> – contrary to empirical realism

---

<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that experiences are not real (Bhaskar, 1975: 58)



which identifies and, in this way, confuses them. But even the category of ‘real things’ should not be considered as homogenous. Events should not only be distinguished from experiences but also from the important objects of science that is, structures and mechanism – although events are real. For on the one hand it is not necessary that events are perceived or perceivable (Bhaskar, 1975: 32). And, on the other hand, in open systems – in which experimental closure cannot be attained – causal laws *as tendencies* operate without their being express themselves through constant conjunctions of events.

To be more specific, these generative mechanisms exist as the causal powers of things in the form of tendencies (Bhaskar, 1975: 50). And we call them tendencies since ‘such mechanisms endure even when not acting; and act in their normal way even when the consequents of the law-like statements they ground are, owing to the operation of intervening mechanisms or countervailing causes, unrealized.’ (Bhaskar, 1975: 46) – For, ‘tendencies are powers which may be exercised without being fulfilled or actualized.’ (Bhaskar, 1975: 50) As a result, in their efforts to identify a law, scientists have to exclude these interventions under conditions of experimental closure which will permit a one-to-one relationship between the causal law under examination and the events produced by its operation.

So, empirical patterns of events should not be identified with causal laws. For if this was not the case, the scientist who sets the conditions for the closure of the experiment and thus reproduces, as a causal agent, the conjunction of events, would be the generator of a causal law – which is absurd because causal laws are not predicated in our knowledge or our activity: ‘thus the intelligibility of experimental activity presupposes the categorical independence of the causal laws discovered from the patterns of events produced.’ (Bhaskar, 1975: 34) In this way, causal laws are distinguishable from patterns of events and, both are distinguishable from experiences. And this simply means that for Bhaskar, ‘the intelligibility of experimental activity presupposes not just the intransitivity but the structured character of the objects investigated under experimental conditions.’ (Bhaskar, 1975: 33)

One could now allege that since Bhaskar supports that ‘the sense in which every account of science presupposes an ontology is the sense in which it presupposes a schematic answer to the question of what the world must be like for science to be possible’ (Bhaskar, 1975: 28-29), he coincides with our statement of the priority of ontology to epistemology. However, Bhaskar, as we shall show, takes for granted a monistic notion of science (and its compatibility with a stratified world) that is, an account that applies to natural science – and, then seeks a deduction of the stratification of the world from the mere occurrence and success of this very science: ‘it is not necessary that science occurs. But given that it does, it is necessary that the world is a certain way. It is contingent that the world is such that science is possible.’ (Bhaskar, 1975: 29) Thus, Bhaskar, 1) takes for granted the compatibility of stratification as the intransitive aspect of knowledge with the (naturalistic) notion of science and, then, 2) asks whether this specific notion is the (successful) case so as to derive the structured world from this very fact.

Bhaskar (2009) is conscious about this problem. As he wonders, ‘how are the premises of our transcendental enquires to be selected without already implying an unvalidated commitment to the epistemic (moral, aesthetic, etc.) significance of the activities analyzed? How, that is to say, are we to avoid that bad circularity implicit in recourse to arbitrary and external criteria of knowledge with which Hegel so trenchantly charged traditional (Cartesian-Kantian) non-phenomenological epistemology?’ (Bhaskar, 2009: 14) For this problem, Bhaskar (2009) invokes what he calls ‘Immanent critique’. But since this very immanent critique is grounded in experience as well, ‘there is no alternative but to openly take one’s stand with science’ (Bhaskar, 2009: 18)

The argument here implies that Bhaskar’s notion of science is pre-decided as successful, while he avoids critically examining this successfulness. Instead of accusing Feyerabend of an ‘empiricist’ philosophy of science (and not of course of philosophy of empiricism), Bhaskar could at least consider Feyerabend’s arguments against methodological and epistemological monism and thus not talk about science

as a uniform mode of activity. And this is an unfortunate mistake because instead of supposing a monistic epistemology<sup>8</sup>, he could rather proceed in an ontological investigation of a different kind, which I would like to propose: what kind of knowledge is possible about the world  $\alpha$  if it is characterized by the specific set of properties  $T$  [ $t_1, t_2, \dots t_n$ ], where  $t_i$ 's are conceptualized as the most basic characteristics of this very world. Towards this question, this thesis, as we shall show later, has chosen its grounds by distinguishing between reflective and reflexive knowledge – by having based their very distinction on the existential differences between the natural and the social world. If Bhaskar intends only to speak about the natural world, his ‘transcendental’ argument would not bother a thesis on reflexivity like this. However, in *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1998), he intends to transfer the concept of stratification in society and its theorization by asking ‘what properties do societies possess that might make them possible objects of knowledge for us?’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 25)

What I want to do now is critically appraise Bhaskar’s approach to developing an ontology of the social world. Here Bhaskar seems to realize that there are ontological, methodological and relational differences in the subject-matter of the social sciences so that he admits that, even if his naturalism can account for both social and natural science, ‘it is the nature of the object that determines the form of its possible science.’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 3) Yet, it is not clear in these introductory statements whether, in *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1998), Bhaskar intends to show ‘what form of knowledge is possible for societies’, or he intends to offer reasons why his naturalistic epistemology (accompanied with a unity of method) can be applied to societies as well. We shall show that *again* the second is the case: ‘my first task is to establish the elements of an adequate account of natural science, in relation to which the possibility of social scientific knowledge can be reappraised.’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 3) – even if he later, paradoxically, admits that ‘the minor premises of philosophy’s arguments may have to be developed afresh in the case of each specific science.’

---

<sup>8</sup> As Bhaskar explains, ‘to posit an essential unity of scientific method is to posit an account which conceives the sciences as unified in the form that scientific knowledge takes, the reasoning by which it is produced and the concepts in terms of which its production can be most adequately theorized or reconstructed.’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 18)

(Bhaskar, 1998: 7) We shall show below that for the social sciences, this understanding ‘afresh’ assumes, according to Bhaskar’s work, a naturalistic nomology.

For, Bhaskar is looking for the ontological and epistemological conditions which make such compatibility between the two domains possible. For example, after explaining that philosophy has a transient character that is, a relative (social) and conditional status considering its synthetic truths and its conceptualizations, he admits that:

... philosophy can tell us that it is a condition of the possibility of scientific activities  $\Phi$  and  $\Psi$  that the world is stratified and differentiated,  $X$  and  $Y$ . But it cannot tell us *what* structures the world contains or *how* they differ. These are entirely matters for substantive scientific investigation. Scientific activities are contingent, historically transient affairs. And it is contingent that the world is as described in ‘ $X$ ’, ‘ $Y$ ’, ‘ $Z$ ’. But given  $\Phi$ ,  $X$  must be the case. (Bhaskar, 1998: 5-6)

Yet, again, Bhaskar does not start from a direct ontological argument of whether the world is stratified  $X$  or  $Y$  and then try to derive the kind of knowledge possible or compatible for such a world, while expressing the limits of knowledge about this very world; rather his only worry is whether a specific scientific activity is the case. However, I would like to comment that a scientific activity (and its assessment as successful) can wrongly, unjustifiably or dogmatically be the case – for after all, its existence, according to Bhaskar here, is a historical, transient affair. So, instead of deducing whether the world is stratified from the occurrence of a specific activity, which might present itself as successful, we should rather question and thus critically examine whether our form and means of knowing are possible or appropriate for the world, as conceived in its basic characteristics (from) within its historical context<sup>9</sup>.

Summing up, the argument here indicates that Bhaskar intends to ‘show what must be the case for the ensemble of scientific activities to be possible’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 6), by presupposing the intelligibility of specific activities of science: ‘both the (warranted) acceptability and the (actual) acceptance of some piece of philosophical

---

<sup>9</sup> My account of what are those basic characteristics of the social realm will soon be provided within the rest of the chapter.

reasoning will depend upon the minor premises ( $\Phi_i, \Psi_j, etc.$ ) concerned.’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 6); and then, after having supposed the occurrence of these *transient* specific scientific activities, for the natural sciences, he derives – by their being his starting point – the stratification of the world by this (successful) occurrence of these activities. However, we shall show that, for the social sciences, he prefers at first to examine ‘what kinds of things societies (and people) are before we can consider whether it is possible to study them scientifically. Indeed without some prior specification of an object of inquiry, any discourse on method is bound to be more or less arbitrary.’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 13) I think that this last quotation vindicates our previous objection concerning the way he derives the stratification of the natural world in the sense that now he intends to start directly from the basic characteristics of the object of investigation.

Thus, while again Bhaskar presupposes his naturalistic uniform notion of science (together with its naturalistic epistemology and, its compatibility with a stratified world), he starts from the basic characteristics of the very object and not from the occurrence (or not) of specific scientific activities. The difference here is that instead of starting from the occurrence of an (pre-decidedly) *intelligible* scientific activity in order to derive what the world is, we start from ontological remarks in order to answer whether science (in his sense) can be possible. Of course, as we have already explained, this would be closer to our account of ontological investigation if Bhaskar had asked ‘what kind of knowledge suits such a world’, instead of seeking an answer as to whether one is able to impose a pre-decided uniform notion of science to the social world. So, while in the case of natural science he has pre-decided that specific scientific practices are compatible with the independent natural world and then, we derive the independence of the natural world from the occurrence of these practices – in the case of the social sciences, Bhaskar’s argumentation makes a manoeuvre which helps us to criticize his premises of the transitive/intransitive distinction.

For this manoeuvre stops us from achieving adequate appreciation of the epistemic conclusions implied by the ontological differences between natural and social enquiry. Thus, despite the differences concerning the explanatory predicates and

procedures between them, for Bhaskar, ‘the *principles* that govern their production will remain substantially the same.’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 20) And the notion of structures, as again distinct from events, is essential for such an ‘identity of essence’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 21); and it is at this point that Bhaskar describes that:

... society would not exist without human activity, so that reification remains an error. And it is still true to say that such activity would not occur unless the agents engaging in it had a conception of what they were doing (which is of course the fundamental insight of the hermeneutical tradition). But it is no longer true to say that agents *create* it. Rather they must say: they *reproduce* or *transform* it. That is, if society is always already made, then any concrete human praxis, or, if you like, act of objectivation can only modify it; and the totality of such acts sustain or change it. (Bhaskar, 1998: 33-34)

So, it is this pre-existence of society which is necessary for the intelligibility of human action that is, a pre-existence of a material on which agents work by modifying it through their intentional actions.

However, Bhaskar does not explain why the necessity of the pre-existence of a social ‘something’, on which agents should work, does *necessarily* lead us to adopt the notion of ‘structure’. But was this not his main question – that is, to show society’s properties which permit the possibility of science? Indeed, there is no reason why this social material should be theoretically examined by the help of the concept of structure; and Bhaskar at this point (Bhaskar, 1998: 38), does not provide us with such an explanation though he had initially promised so. As Stephen Kemp (2005), on that point, explains, ‘even if we were to grant Bhaskar the legitimacy of his starting point, it is by no means clear that all, or indeed most, of the realist ontology is in some sense derived from or entailed by it.’ (Kemp, 2005: 179) Consequently, having presupposed the existence of structures in society, *instead of having shown it*, he describes the role of human activity in its relation to these structures:

... people do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so. Society does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But it is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism). (Bhaskar, 1998: 36)

Bhaskar wants to avoid voluntarism's reductionism that is, to state that structures and intentional action are a necessary condition for each other. But now, structures are not independent of human activity as they are initially supposed to be, according to Bhaskar, in the case of the natural world. So, after failing to provide us with reasons in favour of the stratification of the social world – while presupposing it – he also changes the content of the concept of stratification. It is now more than obvious that Bhaskar is confused in his effort to sustain the intransitivity and the transfactuality of structures as defined earlier. And it is not only that structures do not exist independently of agents' activity, but also, that they are modified by the totality of their actions: the whole concept of intransitivity collapses. So, one could reasonably wonder why Bhaskar believes that his realistic account can sustain 'the *transfactuality* of social structures, while insisting on their *conceptuality* (or concept-dependence).' (Bhaskar, 1998: 21-22)

Interestingly, Bhaskar (1998), in the section 'Some Emergent Properties of Social Systems', *indirectly* admits all these problems of his account. But just to admit them or to invoke the relative independence and the relative endurance of the structures he does not resolve these problems. And as far as the causal status of social structures is concerned, we have just to remind ourselves that 'people are the only moving forces in history' (Bhaskar, 1998: 39) since 'in every process of productive activity a material as well as an efficient cause is necessary.' (Bhaskar, 1998: 34) – And the efficient cause here, it is obvious, is agency. The only rescuing scenario would be (in vain) to retain the notion of the independence of structures from agents' knowledge (unlike their activity) of them. But now, structures 'do not exist independently of the conceptions that the agents possess of what they are doing in their activity, that is, of some theory of these activities.' (Bhaskar, 1998: 38)

The notion of stratification was based on the structures/events/experiences distinction. Now, structure is a social product, it is concept-dependent and, social activity 'cannot be explained by reference to non-social parameters' (Bhaskar, 1998: 38): the possibility of Bhaskar's naturalism is lost. For his epistemological limit of naturalism implies that what does distinguish social scientific enquiry from that of

the natural domain is that ‘not only can society not be identified independently of its effects, it does not *exist* independently of them either.’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 45) But at this point Bhaskar claims that this is not such a huge problem since societies constitute open systems where empirical regularities are not the case and, for this reason, there cannot be experimental closure for its examination – and one should not exaggerate its methodological implications. However, the idea of the open system, as we have previously seen, was applicable to the natural world as well, without the need to invoke the dependence of structures on their effects as here. And considering this dependence, it is unintelligible how Bhaskar, at this point, still believes that this limit of naturalism ‘does not affect the form of laws, which in natural science too must be analysed as tendencies.’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 46)

For, the notion of tendencies has been based on the clear independence between structures and events – of laws and effects. *Now transfactuality is completely lost.* Moreover, this is a nomological and not a methodological import – which, in fact, underlines that this very admission of the impossibility of transfactuality undermines Bhaskar’s belief in uniform scientific activities. And now Bhaskar cannot thus argue that ‘in citing a law one is referring to the transfactual activity of mechanisms, that is, to their activity as such, not making a claim about the actual outcome’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 9) except if he makes a distinction between the people and the social scientists: even if structures depend on actions and knowledge of agents, one could support intransitivity by claiming that scientific activity and knowledge should be distinguished from such an effect.

Yet, Bhaskar admits that the objects of knowledge of the social sciences ‘may be causally affected by social science, and in some cases not exist independently of it (as for example in the sociology of social science!)’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 47). *Now intransitivity is completely lost.* For the very notion of it had been based on the independence of these objects of knowledge from (transient) scientific activity and theorization. The interesting thing is that even now that Bhaskar is clear that ‘the process of knowledge-production may be causally, and internally, related to the process of the production of the objects concerned’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 47), he still



insists on seeing (intransitive) structures in the social world. For, according to Bhaskar, *causal interdependency* should be distinguished from *existential intransitivity* since ‘although the processes of production may be interdependent, once some object  $O_r$  exists, if it exists, however it has been produced, it constitutes a possible object of scientific investigation.’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 47) But this is an unfortunate announcement since Bhaskar, as we have explained before, had supported the idea that the objects of investigations are structures and not their results – and now he refers to the objects of knowledge as products! Needless to say that the level of his confusion at this point here becomes obvious since it is difficult to say whether this ‘products’ are either structures or events. And it is now more than obvious that he is helpless to save any possibility of his naturalism for the social sciences.

At this point, I would like to allege that all these drawbacks of Bhaskar’s account, come from his presupposition that ‘there is an ontological hiatus between society and people’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 37) – with the former having relative independence from the latter. For, I would like to state, even if there were structures with relative immunity to transformation, this would not mean that an ontological distinction from knowledgeable agents should be reasonable. However, for Bhaskar (1998), because of this ontological distinction, the interdependence between social forms and the processes of knowledge production is an external one – since a distance between the different modes of being has been invoked. Instead, I think, what is required is to conceptualize the inclusion of knowledge production within society. In that way, that interdependence would be internal to society. Of course, this would lead to an inclusion of the social scientist, as a possible knowing subject, within the totality of her objectivation.

Towards such an inclusion of the knowing subject, Bhaskar (1975) would be very negative. For it would necessarily, according to him, lead to an infinite regress as far as the possibility of knowledge is concerned. After all:

... to be aware of the fact that I am thinking of a particular topic  $x$ , it is not necessary for me to be thinking of that fact. Such awareness may be expressed in

thought, but when it is the topic is no longer x but my thought of x. It is possible for A to think e and to be aware of thinking e without thinking about thinking e; ... Moreover it is possible for A to think about thinking e without thinking about his (A's) thinking e. Thinking about thinking about a particular topic must be distinguished from thinking about the thinker of the topic. (Bhaskar, 1975: 48)

However, this would only hold water if we have already presupposed that the possibility of our knowing the world is not an essential property, 'and so cannot be a defining characteristic, of the world.' (Bhaskar, 1975: 38); and, that his intransitive objects are independent of men 'as thinkers, causal agents and perceivers.' (Bhaskar, 1975: 47) For, to distinguish 'thinking about the thinker of the topic', from 'thinking about the thinking about a particular topic', is predicated on the premise that the object which defines the topic of the thought is independent of (or distanced from) thinker's (thoughts about his/her) theorizing of it. Now, if knowledge production is interrelated with the (re)production of society (which is admitted by Bhaskar 1998), this sets the lines for the requirement of the inclusion of the possibility of the knowing subject within ontology.

The fact that Bhaskar does generalize in this above offered quotation is due to the fact that his 'syncategorematic use' (Bhaskar, 1975: 52) of the concept of 'structure' in social science ignores his remarks about what differentiates its role from that of the natural sciences – especially concerning its distinctive role in relation with the mutual interdependence between society and science he himself describes. In other words, Bhaskar fails to show and conceive the *real* consequences of the fact that the main relational difference between the natural and the social sciences:

... is that the social sciences are part of their own field of inquiry, in principle susceptible to explanation in terms of the concepts and laws of the explanatory theories they employ; so that they are *internal* with respect to their subject-matter in a way in which the natural sciences are not. (Bhaskar, 1998: 47)

likewise, Bhaskar fails to appreciate the full significance of the fact that:

The social sciences deal with a pre-interpreted reality, a reality already brought under concepts by social actors, that is, a reality *already brought under the same kind of material in terms of which it is to be grasped* (which is the only possible medium of its intelligibility). So that, to put it crudely, the human sciences stand,

at least in part, to their subject-matter in a subject-subject (or concept-concept) relationship, rather than simply a subject-object (or concept-thing) one. (Bhaskar, 1998: 21)

It is now clear that Bhaskar (1998) has two contradictory accounts about the relations between the knowing subject and theory production, on the one hand, and social forms on the other hand. He initially argues for a naturalism which raises an ontological distance between human knowledge and activity and, society, while he later admits their ontological interdependence and the consequent idea that social science is a part of its object of investigation. In this section, I have explained that, 1) Instead of starting from ontological remarks about the natural world and then, proceed to an analysis of the possible form of knowledge about this world, Bhaskar uncritically takes for granted the successfulness of a monistic science and thus he derives from this the main characteristics of this world, 2) this ontological procedure of Bhaskar, when applied to social world, changes; Bhaskar starts from the very characteristics of this world but also that, 3) while making some useful comments on the basic characteristics of this world, Bhaskar becomes ambiguous about the roles of the knowing subject and theory-dependence considering their impact to his realist notion of stratification. Now, I will use these critical comments in the following sections in order to show that social ontology, unlike the ontology of natural sciences, cannot be confined in investigations of the possible form of knowledge about this world (as well as about the proper method for the further examination of this world), but it must rather be an extended theory which considers the possible interrelations among holistic entities and social individuals.

We will use these critical remarks later to argue for a distinctive social ontology. For the time being, this inclusion of the knowing subject in society would require a more adequate focus on the subject-object relations concerning the social scientific inquiry. Such an analysis would permit us to develop the theoretical aspects of the role of the knowing subject and thus to explain how we can conceptualize epistemic reflexivity as related to it. And it is for this reason that we should now move to what a critical realist, Andrew Sayer, says about these relations between the knowing

subject and her object. Yet, at this point, we have to allege that Bhaskar (2009) is positive to epistemic reflexivity, as we shall show in chapter three. For after all:

... besides the intransitive and transitive dimensions, the philosophy of science needs a third dimension – which I shall call the “*metacritical dimension*” (MD) of discourse, in which the philosophical and sociological presuppositions of accounts of science are critically, and self-reflexively, scrutinized. (Bhaskar, 2009: 25)

Reflexivity is thus placed at the heart of ontological investigations and, after examining the role of the knowing subject we will be ready to assess in which way this ‘metacritical dimension’<sup>10</sup> lead us to an epistemic criterion of reflexivity.

*Andrew Sayer’s contribution to understanding subject-object relations in social scientific knowledge*

At this point, I would like to clearly state that this thesis will try to argue for the idea that the knowing subject should be conceived as a constitutive part of its theoretical object. The knowing subject here is neither a transcendental subjectivity, nor a specific scientist with ‘subjective’ views and beliefs. We are in the domain of social ontology and we intend to examine the possibility of epistemic agency without rejecting the sociality of social agents. And this claim will lead us to the need for a new conceptualization of epistemic reflexivity. For the moment we should stay in the realm of critical realism, the founder of which was Bhaskar, and try to investigate the repercussions of the claim that the social world is structured. We will see that in the case of another prominent critical realist, Andrew Sayer. Sayer’s work is worth considering because it moves beyond that of Bhaskar in some respects, but nevertheless remains problematic. Of course Sayer’s account is very interesting in

---

<sup>10</sup> Bhaskar (2009) is not clear on this and he only says that ‘in its most general sense, a “metacritique” typically aims to identify the presence of causally significant absences in thought, seeking to elicit, for instance, what cannot be said or done *in* a particular language or conceptual system about what is said, done, known, implied or presupposed *by means of* it; or, more broadly, what cannot be *said* in a scheme about what is *done* in the practice into which the scheme is connected.’ (Bhaskar, 2009: 26).

the relationship between the subject and the object of social scientific investigation the focus on which, depicts the cognitional primacy of ontology:

“Method” suggests a carefully considered way of approaching the world so that we may understand it better. To make judgements about method it helps considerably if we have some idea of the nature of the relationship between ourselves and that which we seek to understand. Yet it is at this fundamental level that many arguments about method go wrong, for they fail to consider knowledge in its context. (Sayer, 1992: 12)

And these first words of Andrew Sayer in his book ‘Method in Social Science’ (1992), can be a first answer to the theorists that we have already examined, who think they can start their journey to knowledge after having chosen one or more neutral and uniform methods. One such example would be Popper (1979) who intends to provide us with an ‘epistemology without a knowing subject’. I rather aim at proposing a social ontology which can account for the possibility of the knowing subject to theorise and thus provide us with that social ontology. And I have to make it clear here that I do identify knowledge production with the knowing subject’s reflection or self-reflection. It is not that an epistemic agent is only one specific scientist, but rather it means that social knowledge cannot but be situated and attributed to social actors. In the third chapter, I will explain these ideas more while underlining the idea that it is metaphysical to claim that the author of theory is not the epistemic subject but language or the life world.

Yet, Sayer here becomes vague and we have to examine further what this compact statement intends to imply. In order to talk about methodological problems in social sciences, Sayer starts by alleging that ‘individuals cannot develop knowledge independently of a society in which they can learn to think and act.’ (Sayer, 1992: 14) Of course, this is a very common supposition among social thinkers. Yet, as Sayer would agree with, it is a quite unexamined supposition as far as its methodological implications are concerned. So the main argument for Sayer is that individuals can stand as knowledgeable participants only as far as they have been socialized. We should therefore reject any conception of social science as proceeding through mere passive observation of the world. Moreover, according to Sayer, we should stop assuming that we attain knowledge only through linguistically

transmittable meanings. This erroneous supposition can only disorientate our gaze from so much everyday knowledge transmitted through practical competence.

It is in this sense, that Sayer (1992) aims at combating the misconception of knowledge as a thing or a product of a finite form assessed externally of our use of it and, independently of our participation in the production of it. To overlook this results in reification of the social world, ‘that is, to turn active, conscious social relationships and processes into things which exist independently of us so that we think of them in terms of “having” rather than “being”.’ (Sayer, 1992: 16). So, for Sayer, scientific knowledge is also socially produced. After all, misconceptions about the social production and the practical character of science are interrelated with its role attributed as the highest form of knowledge. He calls this last misconception scientism and his response to it is that ‘... *different types of knowledge are appropriate to different functions and contexts.*’ (Sayer, 1992: 17) I would like to agree with this position – it is close to my claim that we have at first to examine what kind of knowledge is possible, if any, for a scientific domain, rather than adopting a uniform methodology. But this response of his, I think, does not question that science is the ultimate form of knowledge but only requires that science should include more forms of practice and more types of knowledge than it usually does. Yet, it seems that what really does irritate him is the objectivist notion of scientific reasoning rather than the prevalence of science among other forms and processes of knowledge. However, we can still use his claim to remind us of our own thesis that different types of processes of knowledge are appropriate to different contents.

This account of *knowledge in context* ‘can be developed and further clarified by examining the relationship between “subject” and “object”.’ (Sayer, 1992: 22) And this argument is of particular interest for this thesis. At this point Sayer is clear that in contradiction to objectivists, what is called the ‘knowing subject’ should not only be identified with the scientist since there are similarities between scientific and other forms of knowledge<sup>11</sup>. Secondly, he wants to enhance our view of scientific work by including ‘the older meaning of “subject”, as a creative agent who brings

---

<sup>11</sup> We have to keep in mind this comment because in the next chapter I will argue that there is no clear identification of the knowing subject and the institutionalized scientist.

about change.’ (Sayer, 1992; 22) We shall see later that Sayer (1992) cannot fully support this notion of the creative agent and that he becomes vague on this.

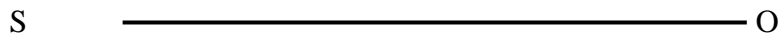
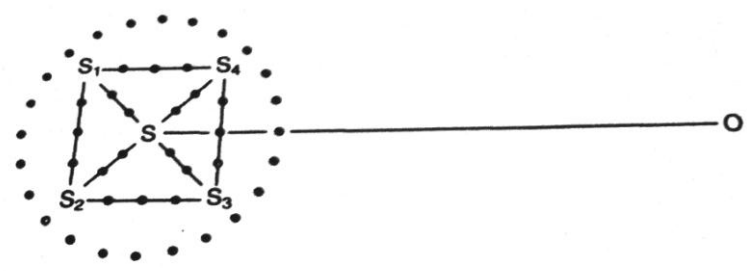


Figure 1 (from Sayer, 1992: 24)

To start with, let us schematically represent the simplest and the most commonly adopted conceptualization of subject and object. In figure 1, S (subject) externally and independently observes O (object). This is similar to what I will call ‘external objectivation’ in which the subject does not intervene in the constitution of the object. However, as we have already explained, there must be a language community in order for the knowing subject to be able to think. This, I think, just expresses the sociality of the scientific community and the theory-ladenness of observation and, more generally, of objectivation. Thus, figure 2 depicts this very *fact* that ‘subjects cannot gain propositional knowledge of their objects or acquire practical knowledge of how to manipulate them without using the cognitive and conceptual resources of particular communities.’ (Sayer, 1992: 24)



where

- • • • • is the boundary of the language community
- $S_1, S_2, \dots, S_n$  represent other knowing subjects within the language community
- represents social relations

Figure 2 (from Sayer, 1992: 25)

Note that Sayer (1992) in figure 1 does not clearly show the practical aspect of knowledge produced in the subject-object relationship described here. So for Sayer, ‘it is therefore not a question of knowledge developing autonomously first and then (perhaps) being applied in a practical context later: knowledge and practice are tied from the start.’ (Sayer, 1992: 25) Yet, Figure 2 is more suitable to describe the subject/object relations in the natural sciences. For here, even though knowledge is based in concepts and, meaning is socially provided, the object is non-social that is, its constitution is not influenced by concepts and meanings:

Non-social phenomena are impervious to the meanings we attach to them. Although one could say that such objects are “*socially defined*”, they are not socially produced ... “Subjects”, however interact on the basis of shared understandings which can be changed. Nature can be altered but through work and not merely by changing systems meaning: non-social objects such as atoms do not act on the basis of shared understandings and so are not susceptible to change in them. (Sayer, 1992: 26)

At this point Sayer asks what kind of relationship we would have if our object was society. Unfortunately in this question, while Sayer underlines that he does not intend to divide scientific knowledge from other forms of knowledge, he fails to present social science as a part of its theoretical object – and thus he places the scientific community as indirectly socially related with the various social objects of figure 3 – so that he concludes in an the symmetrical subject-object relationship of the figure 3.



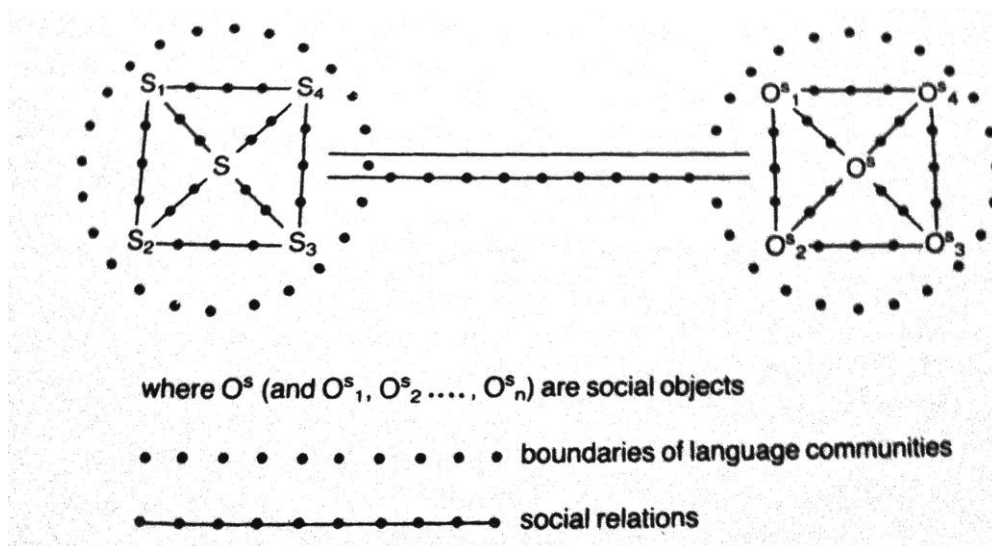


Figure 3 (from Sayer, 1992: 27)

Of course, he admits that figure 3 implies that the knowing subjects and people objectified represent two different language communities – which is a relationship more appropriate to describe some anthropological enquiry. However, since in anthropological enquiry too conceptual connections are the desired target, Sayer alleges that:

In practice, there is usually a partial identity of subject and object, so that we are often already familiar with the meaning of the social phenomena in our “object”. Nevertheless, even where the identity is full rather than partial, it is possible for the subject  $S$  to characterize  $O^s$ ’ knowledge as wrong or incomplete, and vice versa. (Sayer, 1992: 27)

Now, the limitations of Sayer’s approach start to become apparent. For Sayer (1992) bases the subject-object relationship on whether they present partial or full identity with each other. But if his new object is society as he initially wondered, then to say that they have full identity is to present society as a scientific community! So, in that case a mirror in the middle of figure 3 is missing. On the other hand, if they are in partial identity, in fact they become entities of the same kind which live in almost different linguistic communities. It is obvious that we need his figure 4 to avoid misunderstandings.

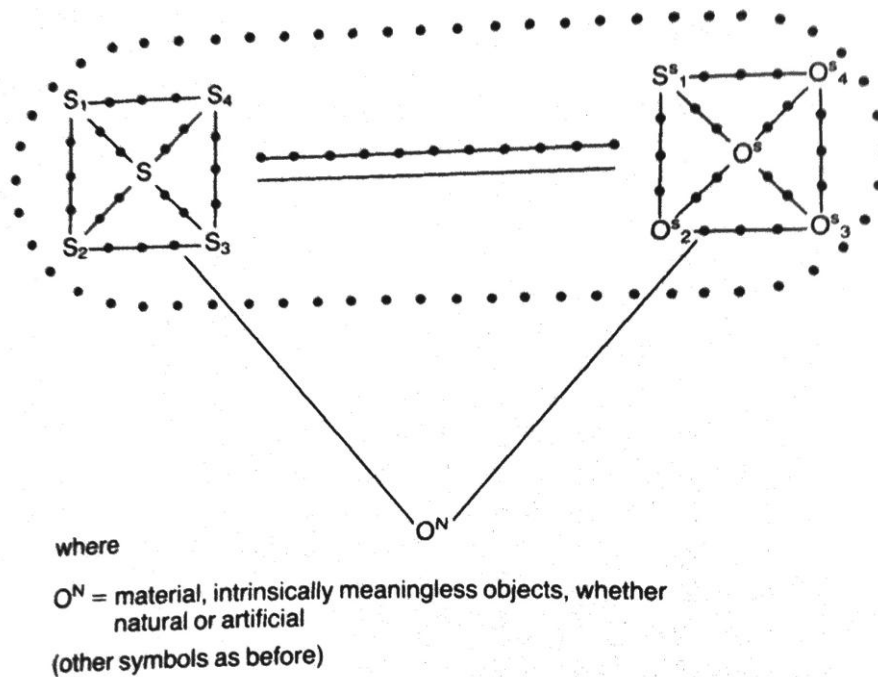


Figure 4 (from Sayer, 1992: 28)

With figure 4 he intends to show all those material and non-material interactions between those two communities. Obviously, Sayer does not believe that the object is society. For otherwise he should either claim that there are at least two objects, two societies within the same language community – one of the investigators and one of those examined – which is a quite absurd idea<sup>12</sup>; or in a similar fashion, Sayer should claim that language is not totally included in society, in the object, but only a part of language resides in society – which is more absurd since it assumes that there is either a pre-social or a non-social aspect of language. Both of these absurd scenarios come from the fact that it has been alleged that the object in figure 4 is society – and not just a part of society. However Sayer still surprises us when he admits that:

... investigators do not exist outside their object ... Indeed, to be consistent, any discussion of knowledge must avoid asserting a particular characteristic of people as subjects (or investigators or students) only to deny it to them in their perceived role as objects, and vice versa. (Sayer, 1992: 44)

<sup>12</sup> Because in social theory it is difficult to claim that two (semi) distinct societies share the same language. It does not mean that USA and UK do not have a common language. A linguistic community here implies much more than the mere conclusion that French people speak French. A linguistic community can frequently imply systems of knowledge, shared meanings or culture etc.

Thus, our question about what does constitute the ‘object’ of social scientific investigation for Sayer (1992) remains unanswered. And it is now more than obvious that if this last confession *is* right, his figure 4 is erroneously depicted. For if society is the object of investigation then, scientific community is a part of the greater linguistic community and should not be presented as only related to its object.

So here the mistake of figure 3 is retained and my only question at that point should be in which level Sayer does recognize the real interrelationships between the knowing subject and his theoretical object. Can Sayer really support his claim that ‘social phenomena can be changed *intrinsically* by learning and adjusting to the subject’s understanding’ (Sayer, 1992: 29)? It seems that there are two stories that Sayer (1992) is telling here about the object of investigation in these methodological notes. If the object is just a social phenomenon distant from the social scientific community – while in the same linguistic community – then the possibility that the knowing subject may not influence her object is still open. But if the second scenario which places the knowing subject within her object, that is society, is the case, as is argued by this thesis, Sayer’s picture 4 fails at showing the real import of such a relation – which is far different from that of the first scenario. The problem here is that Sayer (1992) is indecisive about what is in fact his object, a confusion which leads, I would like to argue, to a confusion of the real relationships between the knowing subject and his theoretical object. Of course, as he underlines:

In so far as people and their ideas are included among our objects of knowledge, the relationship of knowledge to practice may be interactive rather than passive and purely reflective. It is particularly clear with self-reflection that in thinking *about* ourselves, we can change our ‘object’. Under certain conditions, social science can have a similar effect on its object. (Sayer, 1992: 14)

And those intrinsically changeable phenomena are the ideas, beliefs, concepts and knowledge of the people included in the ‘object’: ‘as part of the object – as well as the subject – of knowledge, their meaning must be understood.’ (Sayer, 1992: 30) Here, ideas are both parts of the subject and of the object<sup>13</sup>. This is correct, but it is

---

<sup>13</sup> It is obvious that here there is a grammatical mistake and Sayer (1992) wants to say that ideas are parts of both subject and object.

also correct, I think, if the subject is part of her object. For the subject was born and thus socialized in that world of ideas, concepts and beliefs as Sayer confesses.

However, at this point of his analysis, Sayer (1992) is sure that social practices, institutions, rules, relationships etc. are – unlike in natural sciences – concept-dependent and meaning-dependent for those concepts and meanings are not only *in* society but also *about* it (Sayer, 1992: 30). After all, ‘when we reflect upon our beliefs and the concepts we use, we often change them in the process: we notice and try to resolve inconsistencies and so we come to understand ourselves and the world in a new way or discover new “levels” of meaning.’ (Sayer, 1992: 39) As a result, social science cannot avoid influencing its object critically when it is studying and engaging with common-sense illusions that remain unexamined<sup>14</sup> – as well as when practical contexts and material structures are mutually supported by such illusions. Social science can not only interact with its object, but it can also have a therapeutic critical or emancipatory stance towards it (Sayer, 1992: 14). So, the object is susceptible to change as a result of being influenced by changes in definitions and meanings in the subject’s internal process of cognitive and *normative* (Sayer, 1992: 81) elaboration.

Yet, occasionally – and permit me to say, following the first scenario – Sayer becomes less confident about this *similar* effect of *intrinsically* changeable object and about the interactive relationship between the subject and the object of social investigation. For as he admits, ‘because of the partial identity of subject and object in social knowledge, the former may have a direct effect on the latter, although in most cases it is small.’ (Sayer, 1992: 83) This is consistent with Sayer’s argument that, ‘...nature and its material process (including human activity) have particular structures and properties which exist independently of our understanding of them’ (Sayer, 1992: 21). However, I would like to state that, if human activity as our object depends on structures, which are independent of our understanding of them, our

---

<sup>14</sup> On this, William Outhwaite claims that ‘the other side of this coin, however, is that common-sense descriptions of social phenomena can and must be taken as a starting-point in social scientific theorising.’ (Outhwaite, 1987: 56) I agree with this idea, since, as I will argue again later, social scientists face the same problems for the understanding of social life as other agents.

object cannot be directly influenced by the subject and then, self-reflection, which *may* change our object, is not possible; it is rather reflection that we really need in this case – reflection upon properties of the self which are not *subject* to a process of self-creation. Now the realist element in Sayer does not permit him a coherent view. And this conclusion is supported by his claim that:

... the thought objects of those who are being studied are not, except in self-reflection, the same as those of the investigator, and it is misleading to imagine otherwise. *Although social phenomena cannot exist independently of actors or subjects, they usually do exist independently of the particular individual who is studying them.* Social scientists and historians produce interpretations of objects, but do not generally produce the objects themselves. (Sayer, 1992: 49)

Now investigators are not parts of their objects as before. It seems that Sayer (1992) has two versions of the self when referring to the knowing subject (and its potentialities). On the one hand, the investigator is creative and constitutive – and is part – of his object and, on the other hand, he keeps his distance with his object which is not influenced by him. Similarly, with self-reflection, on the one hand, we change our object – other people – but, on the other hand, with self-reflection we can only change ourselves – in the case where our object is social science<sup>15</sup>. For even if he seems to *partially* understand the differentiated character of social scientific enquiry, he is not willing to conceptualize ‘the object’ as changeable through intrinsic self-reflection – for the self-reflective knowing subject in the first scenario is not part of but be detached from her object.

If the second scenario was really what Sayer meant, it would imply that material constraints, in society too, are more flexible than his realist tradition would permit him to admit. When the critical role of theory comes to the fore, this interplay offers a good ground for social scientists to influence their object(s) in a positive way. But he admits (Sayer, 1992: 62) that this influence always occurs even when its effect is nothing more than the reproduction of common sense through scientific failure to recognize that ‘in the case of concept-dependent social objects empirical knowledge

---

<sup>15</sup> It might be this ambiguity that makes Sayer (2010) to argue (as I have examined later in chapter four) for a combination between the Bourdieu’s habitus and Archer’s ‘internal conversation’.

presupposes understanding the constitutive concepts' (Sayer, 1992: 58) Yet, again, after all these remarks, his following conclusive statement becomes unintelligible: change in social scientific knowledge, which is part of its own object, '... can prompt change in its object and vice versa. Given this relationship and the possibility of beliefs having self-fulfilling effects, the existence of "false" beliefs *in* the object of study becomes a problem for social science which is not rigorously critical.' (Sayer, 1992: 81) Unfortunately, Sayer, at this point, does not recognize that this interdependence between the subject and the object undermines his other conclusive statement that conceptual resources 'do not determine the structure of the world itself.' (Sayer, 1992: 83)

However, my critique here has not only focused on the way Sayer formulates two contradictory accounts considering the knowing subject in relation to its object – on the one hand, the subject is existentially distinct and cannot change the object of investigation and, on the other hand, the subject is internally related to the object of investigation and its change. We have also explained what this means for self-reflection. And it is now the time to allege that Sayer, by being indecisive about whether the knowing subject is part of his theoretical object, fails to account for the self-referential aspect of his own ontology. Figure 4 provides an ontological picture; but since he fails to present it in a coherent way, he fails to wonder about the cognitional possibility of this very description in a self-referential way that is, to ask about the intrinsic epistemic relation between this ontological description and the knowing subject theoretically incorporated *within* it. These early comments will help us in the formulation of the conceptualization of epistemic reflexivity. But, before that, we should explain more about what is being argued in saying that the knowing subject is a constitutive part of its theoretical object.

### *Social ontology and the knowing subject*

First of all I have to restate that by the concept of social ontology I do not mean that the concepts and the schemes used in order to re-present the basic characteristics of

the social world, are a-historical or neutral in any way. Within the socio-historical realm, we are contemplating the possibility of theorization and of social knowledge. It is in this manner, I think, that Cornelius Castoriadis (1987) alleges that it is only through a historical being that we can speak of history and historical knowledge since this kind of knowledge is, ‘in its essence, a historical phenomenon which demands to be apprehended and interpreted as such. The discourse on history is included within history.’ (Castoriadis, 1987: 33) Thus there is no transcendental consciousness to achieve such knowledge. Nor should we *translate* this remark as an inclination towards relativism or skepticism (Castoriadis, 1987: 33). Accordingly:

... only historical beings can raise the problem of knowledge of history, for only they can have history as an object of experience. And, just as experiencing nature is not to go outside the universe and contemplate it, in the same way, having an experience of history is not to consider it from the outside as a finished object placed in front of us ... to have an experience of history as an historical being is to be in and of history, as it is also to be in and of society. (Castoriadis, 1987: 33)

Yet, this raises two issues which need further clarifications. First, the question about the status of the historical being which will permit him/her to escape from the sociality of his/her knowledge and – consequently – second, the theoretical implications of the historicity and the sociality of this being concerning a second-level re-evaluation of the recognition that ‘the discourse of history is included within history’. Both will be shown to be answered by Castoriadis later, under a common denominator: the project of autonomy. For the moment we have to focus on what the concept of social ontology implies.

At first, I have claimed that a social ontology (concerning social reality) should intend to offer those very basic concepts in their relationality with each other. But this does not mean that every constitutive social factor is present at the same level of relevance in any context. In this sense, one should not expect that the subject-object relationships have exactly and always the same formulation in every existing community examined by every possible investigator. What characterizes human societies is not simply variation in degree and differentiation in kind, but also self-alteration. Thus we are not looking for a general pattern, the modification of which would account for a decline in existing social forms. Nor should we claim that the

concepts of any ontology can be meaningful in every human society. What is at stake here is not a formalized generalization of social inertia excluding the possibility of social (self) change. Unfortunately, as I will show, several authors provide ontological schemes of this kind.

So, similarity in existential pertinence and not in formulation, institutionalization and organization is assumed. Differentiation resides in the type and the form of each society and of course such a differentiation requires a careful application of those concepts (and the formation of their interrelationship) in each case. In this sense, though, in a past society, there might be no such thing as an authoritative social science and as a putative (self-) knowing activity in a society, every knowing subject, in all possible social worlds, remains a (fallible) wanna-be-social-theorist agent of his/her own society influencing and being influenced by it. Here, a similarity in the cognitional capacities and impacts is underlined: social actors should not necessarily be characterized as lacking a theory of their society or a more generalized theory, even if expressing the status quo or a reified version of it. If this was not the case, we should be talking of cultural dopes that mechanically or unconsciously make pre-defined or pre-expected moves throughout the historical field. Thus, a minimum of self-reflection should definitely be granted for the social realm since actors always had to combine, resolve and manage different – or even contradictory – aspects of different social roles. The possibility of critical examination of this fallible knowledge of society is another topic, which will concern us later on.

Now what does it really mean that the knowing subject is part of her ‘theoretical object’? For again, our object can be a community we do not live in. On the one hand, we have already alleged that ontological arguments are cognitionally prior to methodological ones; and this grand picture which describes the basic relationships between the most basic constitutive factors in human societies is our first target, our first theoretical *object* in any effort of social scientific work. On the other hand, if ‘society, as an object of inquiry, is necessarily “theoretical”, in the sense that, like a magnetic field, it is necessarily unperceivable’ and, ‘as such it cannot be empirically identified independently of its effects; so that it can only be known, not shown, to



exist.’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 45); and if social theory is meant to focus on the basic relationships between holistic entities and agents (actors, agents, groups, functions, structures, systems, roles, etc.), our first hypothesis, our first description before any effort of practical/empirical investigation, should be an account of the theory-dependence of society.

This thesis focuses on the theoretical work of prominent thinkers such as Margaret Archer, Cornelius Castoriadis, Roy Bhaskar, Pierre Bourdieu etc. whose theories are mainly ontological – pursuing an explication of the possible existing relations between a whole and parts. And it is now time to explain why I have invoked the term ‘theoretical object’ and what it can really imply. At first, as I have already explained, society as an object of investigation is theoretical in Bhaskar’s sense that is, it can only be known, not shown, to exist. And Bhaskar is more radical on that: what does distinguish society from other ‘theoretical’ objects of natural sciences is that, as I have shown, not only can society not be identified independently of its effects, it does not exist independently of them either (Bhaskar, 1979: 45). However, there is a second reason why I call society the ‘theoretical object’ of the social scientist who can only be conceived as a part of it. It is that society, as a theoretically/conceptually dependent domain, cannot be approached, as we have already explained above, without a conceptual framework aiming at offering a systematized explanation of social reality. And this conceptual framework should have an ontological character. So as our first object is to reflect on a social ontology considering a theory-dependent domain – in which the knowing subject is existentially interdependent with this domain – we therefore prefer to state that the knowing subject is part of its theoretical object.

This dual meaning of this *theoretical* aspect of the object of investigation, implies that since we have made our first ontological claim that social science influences and is influenced by the greater social context, it can only be conceived as another agent (whether it has a special authority or not) and additionally that this social context is theory dependent – while theory is socially premised. Now, this theory-dependence renders the problem of theory-ladenness more acute since the boundaries between

theory and data are now dependent on theory – and thus cannot resist in virtue of their autonomous constitution. To put it simplistically, there are no stable and theory-independent ‘facts’ here and the role of theory is more significant than in the natural sciences. So, a social ontology, in its turn, should offer something more than generalizations about the possibility of the application or differentiation of scientific method(s). A more extended social theory is needed now, a generalized social ontology, which can account for this enigmatic placement of the knowing subject as another agent.

Ontology here should not only account for theory formation and foundation considering an external reality but rather about its own role in the transformation or reproduction of social forms. It is more than obvious that to account for such a role cannot be pursued through empirical examination of any kind because such an analysis would imply a kind of ‘objectivist’ ontology already denied in the invocation of this role of theory – it is only through ontological investigation, that is, a theory of the role of agents, social forms and their mode of interdependence, that such problematic can be examined. Nor can we necessarily judge the resulting social ontology by its congruence with social ‘facts’ – because of its relationality – except if the conditions of its testability have been given by itself. And it is in this sense that now epistemology has been, in a way, incorporated within ontology. Finally, to admit that ontology is cognitively prior to epistemology has led us to this very inclusion. And this inclusion entails that no rupture between the epistemic subject and the people to whom she refers should be adopted.

Of course, for the above mentioned to be supported, ontology was assumed to be placed in the theoretical-hypothetical level – we could more adequately claim that *social theories as hypothetical frameworks have an explicit or implicit ontological character*. For, ‘since theories are propositions containing concepts and since all concepts have their referents (pick out features held to belong to social reality), then there can be no social theory without an accompanying social ontology (implicit or

explicit).’ (Archer, 1995: 12)<sup>16</sup> And the first ontological claim, it is here assumed, is that the objects of the natural scientist do not cognitively influence her, and their constitution is not influenced by her<sup>17</sup>. This is to say that molecules have no cognitive capacities and thus are not informed about what the natural scientist thinks of them. This means, at first, that the opposite should be the case in the social sciences that is, the distance among the social world and its enquiry is demolished. Here, science as theory producer, is another actor with the same potentiality in cognitive capacity as the agents examined in relation to a greater whole. And this similarity in cognitive potentialities, implies that whatever hypothesis is made about that ‘theoretical’ object of inquiry, about the whole and the parts, it is crucial to explicate the possibility of this inquiry: hence the knowing subject is a part of the *theoretical* object of the social realm. As Giddens claims:

*the sociological observer cannot make social life available as a “phenomenon” for observation independently of drawing upon her or his knowledge of it as a resource whereby it is constituted as a “topic for investigation”.* In this respect, the observer’s position is no different from that of any other member of society; “mutual knowledge” is not a series of corrigible items, but represents the interpretative schemes which both sociologists and lay actors use, and must use, to “make sense” of social activity – that is, to generate “recognizable” characterizations of it. (Giddens, 1993: 169)

Then, one of those subjects-parts, in this picture of the whole/part descriptions, is social science itself. By claiming this, we render the social scientist an active – and at least (fallibly) knowledgeable – agent among others, who, given historical circumstances, tries to collect the cognitive elements enabling a systematic (pre)understanding of what differentiates the social world from the natural one. For to suppose otherwise – that there is either a conceptual or existential consonance between these worlds – is misleading and has a naturalistic import which, judging from the characteristic examples we have already examined, is untenable. And this simply means that our relationship to the social world under examination as well as

---

<sup>16</sup> To those who would translate this quotation in terms of an one-to-one relation between concepts and reality, I would answer by pointing out again the theoretical-hypothetical character of ontology. The same concepts can be used to describe different entities and it is only through the co-existence of these concepts that their content attains a specific referent.

<sup>17</sup> This does not entail that the work of natural scientists is not influenced by the social world views or cultural re-presentations.

its differentiated character has to be ontologically appreciated – even if it is implicitly denied by many contemporary social scientific enterprises.

As a result, from now on, we will just claim that the knowing subject is part of her object. And, as we have already seen, considering Andrew Sayer's thoughts, it is very difficult to claim – even in anthropological research – that we can separate our object, a part of a community, and thus examine it without it coming into relations either with other parts of the society we examine, or with the process of the production of social scientific knowledge. Since the knowing subject constitutes an agent placed in its object, his ideas or descriptions can always be adopted by other members of society, for various reasons and usages. For, again, no cognitional rupture between the former and latter should be adopted uncritically.

One consequence of this lack of rupture is the so-called phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecy. A financial crisis can start from fake negative expectations because this may lead consumers and investors to decrease the amounts they intended to spend with the final result of a new circle of the income – which is lower than the previous one. But also – and in a reverse version – a heavy traffic in off-peak hours of a day can be a result of an announcement from authorities warning drivers for heavy traffic in peak hours; most of the drivers believe the authorities and thus they all together make all speed to avoid traffic – with the probable result of a worse traffic than the *normal* one of the peak hour.

Of course, this leads our conversation to the problematic of a possible exploitation of science (and specifically social science) since its authority and its influence (on material structures and settings, as Sayer recognizes) might be used for specific political or financial goals. This consideration of the possibility of institutional influence and impact on social science is obvious in the work of Alvin Gouldner (1970). It is not this analysis, however, that leads us to the next sub-chapter devoted on Gouldner's work. For him, as we shall see, social sciences may influence their object and he is more decisive on this than Bhaskar and Sayer. However, our analysis

should leave more special cases of this influence like self-fulfilling prophesy to future work<sup>18</sup>.

*Alvin Gouldner's consideration of the 'knowing subject' and reflexive sociology*

Up until now, the argumentation has led us from the primacy of ontology to the need for a more extensive social theory that has a crucial ontological character. Indeed, social theorists have frequently provided us with an inclusive general theory concerning the relationships between social structure, systems, groups, institutions etc. Now, it is time to connect the idea of social ontology with the notion of epistemic reflexivity – which is one of the most basic contributions of this thesis. I have argued for the idea that social science is a constitutive part of its theoretical object. This implies a radical difference between the natural and the social sciences – accompanied by different ontologies. For, even if social influences or pressures are exerted on the former – and alternatively it may influence the social world – this does not mean that its objects (natural laws, planets, atoms, etc.) are internally constituted through and by scientific theories. Nor does it mean that its objects coincide with those influences as happens in the case of the latter: the ‘distance’ evoked implies that interests, (epistemic) values and scientific norms which may distort scientific analysis in general are not the subject matter of natural science but of social science. Thus, to allege that the change of paradigm, to borrow a Kuhnian term, from Newton to Einstein, did itself change the law of gravity<sup>19</sup>, or for example the constitution of a

---

<sup>18</sup> Of course it is a good example of what I mean of ‘influence’ and, at this point, it should be stated that this influence is what Karl Popper calls ‘*oedipus effect*’ to ‘describe the influence of a theory or expectation or prediction upon the event which it predicts or describes’ (Popper, 2002: 50). Specifically, as Popper claims (1957: 13), this influence may be of precipitation of the event, of causation of the event, of undermining the event or, of prevention of the event predicted. This is due to the fact that ‘we are faced, in the social sciences, with a full and complicated interaction between observer and observed, between subject and object.’ (Popper, 1957: 12) Yet, as I have explained, what is at stake here is more than an interaction between subject and object.

<sup>19</sup> In the way it *really* exists, which of course is an open scientific issue.

star, is an absurd idea<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, to allege that Neo-classical Economics and the academic ethics accompanied have shaped the norms of what is called as professional ethics or the norms and expectations which are adopted by agents throughout industry or market is not absurd at all.

However, the collapse of the constituent distance between the knowing subject and her object implies not only that the social scientist is another agent influenced by as well as influencing society, but also that it should not be assumed that there is an existential difference in the cognitional capacities of different agents acting within society. For it would be a kind of extreme social elitism to allege that social scientists, as agents have, by definition, better knowledge of the social world or, to put it better, that lay actors are *necessarily* not able to have any theory of society (through the terms of which they make their way in the world) which is more adequate than those assumed by professional sociologists. This does not devalue sociologists' tools and practices. It just signifies that the human capacity to produce cognitively adequate theories about the world within which they live should not be attributed only to a specific caste – a mistake which Pierre Bourdieu's theorizing, as we shall see, does not avoid.

Thus, two elements pertinent to social scientific inquiry distinguish it from the work of natural science: one is the social agent and the other one is the knowing subject. As we will explain later, this distinction is analytical. But it has to do with our claim that the knowing subject is part of its own object. For this, I will try to explain, has two dimensions. First, that the scientific community and the knowing subjects are 1) conceptually dependent on the rest of society that is, they belong to a language and cultural community in which they share the same world-views and ideological schemes with other agents while, 2) they can influence and be influenced by the rest of society. In this first dimension, we just try to introduce ourselves to the fact that social scientists or social thinkers, as we explained in detail in the previous section, are another agent in the social world. And thus we can connect their conduct with what we will call self-reflective agency. However, there should be another dimension

---

<sup>20</sup> But one that some philosophers have defended.

of this very internalization of the knowing subject within her theoretical object: *since the knowing subject is another agent and since any rupture between the cognitional capacities of lay actors and those of the social scientist should be avoided, any social ontology which has an import about these cognitional capacities of agency, as well as about the agential capacities for social transformation, should include, in its description, the knowing subject and thus account for the possibility of the generation of such a social ontology by the knowing subject.* This second aspect of our initial claim about social ontology will be later connected with epistemic reflexivity.

And we are now going to explore these issues further by considering subject-object relations in the theorizing of Alvin Gouldner who is trying to formulate a reflexive sociology without invoking a distance between the knowing subject and society. By referring to Gouldner's work on reflexivity, we have an important opportunity to connect the idea of the conceptual and existential interdependence between social sciences and society with the idea of (epistemic) reflexivity as related to the theoretical role of the knowing subject. In his 'Enter Plato' (1965) Gouldner evokes the platonic definition of the term *epistēmē* which, according to Gouldner, is a type of knowledge:

... in which there is consciousness concerning the nature of the method used by the would-be knower and of the relation of what is uncovered to the self of the knower. *It is a knowing in which the object discovered is implicated deeply in the self of the knower, to whom it is no mere academic thing or a matter of idle curiosity ... to know in this sense is not simply to acquire a view of the world outside, but to see it in its relation to and personal meaning for oneself as the knowing subject. To know, in this sense, must mean to have insight into and understanding of the self – to know oneself.* (Gouldner, 1965: 267)

The division between this form of knowledge and empirical knowledge of information, is, according to Gouldner (1965) related to sociology since it is present in the distinction between the social and the natural sciences as having different objects and methods; and also it is present within sociological debates about whether sociology should adopt naturalistic methodologies or attain its own distinctive ones. Extrinsic value-free factual statements are thereby opposed to intrinsic/introspective

awareness of one's own values and meanings and attitude towards information (Gouldner, 1965: 270), and thus the information/awareness distinction should demarcate the classical one between explanation and understanding – between, on the one hand, efforts to collect data in order to externally examine their factual constitution and co-relation and, on the other hand, efforts from within one's context and thought to decode and comprehend the meaning and the valuation one attaches to an action.

Yet, it is this awareness which is the premise of what Gouldner later (1970) calls reflexive sociology. And at this point we should start from his idea about the epistemic subject (knowing subject) and its relation to the sociological object in order to explain what Gouldner meant by reflexivity. In his 'Coming Crisis of Western Sociology' (1970) Gouldner attacks what he calls methodological dualism which is predicated on differentiating the social scientists from those studied by them – while ignoring the homology between them: 'methodological dualism calls for the separation of subject and object, and it views their mutual contact with concern and fear. It enjoins the sociologist to be detached from the world he studies.' (Gouldner, 1970: 495-6) Gouldner argues instead that those being studied, 'too have their social theories and conduct their investigations.' (Gouldner, 1970: 496) and, consequently for Gouldner, there is a mutual constitution between social scientists and the world they examine; in these terms, a reflexive sociology believes that sociologists:

... inevitably change others and are changed by them, in planned and unanticipated ways, during their efforts to know them; and that knowing and changing are distinguishable but not separable processes. The aim of the Reflexive sociologist, then, is not to remove his influence on others but know it, which requires that he must become aware of himself as both knower and as agent of change. (Gouldner, 1970: 497)

This quotation, as characterized by extraordinary clarity and significance for the purposes of this thesis, helps me maintain my argument for the *analytical* distinction between the agent of change – of social transformation and reproduction – and the knower that is, the one who provides us with a social ontology which accounts for such a transformation and reproduction, the conceptualization of which I will use for the analysis of epistemic reflexivity. For, as we will also explain later, ontological



status will be attributed to the former and, epistemic status to the latter – while distinguishing between agential self-reflection and epistemic reflexivity. Again, this distinction is analytical since, as this thesis will require, epistemic reflexivity will be a criterion of ontological self-reference<sup>21</sup>. Whether confusing or not, we need to further examine Gouldner's argument about reflexivity since he does not provide a more adequate and clearer definition and theory of reflexivity considering his ideas about the subject-object relations. Of course, he is clear when stating that 'knowledge of the world cannot be advanced apart from the sociologist's knowledge of himself and his position in the social world, or apart from his efforts to change these.' (Gouldner, 1970: 489), but this can only be regarded as an unfinished effort to connect the discussion about the role of the epistemic subject with the very notion of reflexivity. Yet, his vagueness gets worse when we realize how many different contents are attributed to reflexivity. Thus, in brief, for Gouldner (1970: 482-512), reflexive sociology intends to:

- Transform the sociologist by enrichment of her awareness
- Transcend sociology in its contemporary form
- Produce a new generation of sociologists
- Avoid the presupposition of value-free sociology
- Avoid modeling of technical specialty
- Have an empirical dimension while avoiding naïve positivism
- Embody a critique of conventional academic roles

---

<sup>21</sup> I will show in chapter five the way in which Cornelius Castoriadis accounts for both these elements (agent and knower).

- Face the fact that hegemonic institutions and elites threaten its conduct since their support is not without a distorting reward
- Formulate criticism of the present but also a positive account of forthcoming societies
- Denounce imperialism and mass deprivation
- Encourage academic creativity and resistance to the old-style politics of scholars
- Distinguish between society (and its history) and individual biography - the one does not exhaust the other
- Construct a sociology of sociology

One can find more attributes to reflexive sociology in his last chapter 'Living as a Sociologist: Toward a Reflexive Sociology' (1970) than these provided here. And Gouldner alleges that reflexive sociology 'is a conception of how to live and a total praxis' (Gouldner, 1970: 504) but this does not make reflexivity and its content more concrete or specific. This ambiguity about the precise role and content of reflexive sociology, I think, rests on the fact that Gouldner is obscure about the kind of subjectivity he promotes. It is true that, 'in emphasizing the importance of the reflexive, critical subject in Gouldner's thought we must be careful not to reduce his position to a mere subjectivism. Gouldner's subject was hardly a subjectivism of consciousness.' (Lemert and Piccone, 1982: 740)

Yet, at the end of the day Gouldner's work can be used to identify a relevant question but he finally does not answer it; not only does he fail to explain the terms in which

that subjectivity enacts reflexivity, but he also fails to systematically reorganize his material in order to specify the epistemic aspect of reflexive sociology: in which way(s) does the knower, as an agent capable of cognitional conduct, epistemically relate herself to her object? He aims at generating a critical theory while forgetting about specifying the epistemic role of the knower – while emphasizing the agent – and thus, ‘in raising the question of a reflexive sociology Gouldner comes to the limits of his discipline as a form of theoretical life. Because he has neglected to consider the philosophical foundations of reflexive sociology he is obliged to make his choice of a sociology a political choice.’ (O’Neill, 1972: 219) Yet, he criticizes sociological dependence on institutional manipulation not to restore a ‘distance’ between sociologists and their object, but to introduce a critical self-awareness of such a mutual interdependence between them which would entail a responsible political praxis.

This thesis is trying to provide a more concrete and complete idea about the notion of epistemic reflexivity while connecting it with the discussion of the possibility of the self-reflective subjectivity – something which is missing from Goulder’s account of reflexive sociology. The main import of this discussion will be that social science does not work in a vacuum and, that, since the knowledgeability of scientists is tacitly presupposed for the natural scientific work as well, it is reasonable to admit that when turning our gaze at the world to which these knowledgeable creatures belong, we have to attain *knowledge about knowledgeable creatures*. Now, agency is added to this discussion and is coming to the fore since conceptual dependence in a social-historical context entails existential interdependence and since, contrary to Pierre Bourdieu (see chapter three), knowledgeability is not a property unique to sociologists (or to a specific group within society). For I will show that, due to the fact that social scientists are part of the greater theoretical object under examination (which is also clearly noticed by Bourdieu himself), such a contention of elitist discrimination of scientific reflection from lay people understood to be incapable of it, must be untenable.

In chapter three we will examine how critical theory incorporates self-awareness and self-reflection. We have started from the concept of social ontology and a critique of Roy Bhaskar concerning his idea of intransitivity and we have shown that there is a possibility for scientific theories to influence the social world. With the help of Andrew Sayer, also a realist like Bhaskar, I reformulated this idea in terms of subject-object relations. However, Sayer's hesitation in taking a decisive step concerning his idea about the object of sociological gaze (and the possibility of its being changed by the epistemic subject), has led us to Gouldner's notion of mutual interdependence between the knowing subject and the social object. The awareness of such an interdependence, characterized as reflexive, raised a question about the content of reflexivity – which is the contributing goal of this thesis. In the next chapter, we will start from the efforts to examine epistemic reflexivity – that is a focus on the part of the knower – a start which will then lead us to a more detailed examination of a distinction (and the theoretical interrelations) between epistemic reflexivity and agential reflexivity or self-reflection accordingly related to the knower and the agent. It will be shown that since social ontologies are inclusive and general conceptual schemes and since the knowing subject, as a constitutive part of his object, should thus be included in the ontological accounts, epistemic reflexivity requires an ontology which provides us with an explanation of its own formulation by the knowing subject.

**Summary: ontological claims are cognitively prior to epistemological and methodological accounts. Our first ontological assumption was that social sciences are part of their object. But this led us to the requirement of a more general theory, of an extended social ontology; for the lack of a unified notion of method becomes now, in the case of social sciences, more acute since the theory-dependence that characterizes the social world broadens the boundaries between theory and experience. Now, that epistemology has been incorporated into ontology, self-referential questions about the epistemic status of every social ontology emerge as related to the knowing subject, and her capability to *reflexively* conceptualize this possibility.**

## Chapter Two

---

### ***Epistemic Reflexivity: from Self-Critical Examination to the problematic of Epistemic Circularity***

We have already placed the knowing subject within her theoretical object, an ontological statement which generates questions about the self-referential character of this inclusion. After this investigation on the role of the knowing subject we are now ready to connect it with the notion of epistemic reflexivity. Social theory, as an inclusive and general theory which has a deep ontological character, has a self-referential aspect. As I have already stated, social ontology should account for the possibility of its own formulation by the knowing subject. I will argue for the idea that this requirement should define an *epistemic criterion of reflexivity*. Yet, in the literature on reflexivity, epistemic reflexivity has been frequently defined as a self-critical examination of one's own epistemic values, presuppositions and beliefs. Unlike these efforts, I will explain that this self-critical examination – while very important and indispensable to any scientific and philosophical investigation – should be attributed to self-reflection. Thus, according to this thesis, epistemic reflexivity is related to the self-referential properties of general theories, like social ontologies, while self-reflective critical examination is related to the agential properties of self-objectivation.

In the third chapter, I intend to show the theoretical interconnections between these two aspects of reflexivity – epistemic reflexivity and agential reflexivity. In this chapter I will rather stay focused only on the 'epistemic' aspect of reflexivity, while simultaneously preparing the ground for further analysis of the multiplex import of this term and thus, explaining the difference between self-examination as a property of agency and self-reference as a property of general social theory. We will start our analysis from sociology's turn towards self-examination in order to formulate an account of the role of the epistemic subject. More specifically, we will start from the

efforts of the sociology of scientific knowledge to account for this epistemic aspect. I will explain that self-examination cannot adequately account for the concept of epistemic reflexivity which should not be related to an epistemic criterion for the internal congruity of social ontologies. Thus, in the third chapter, after we have formulated an epistemic criterion of reflexivity, we will assess the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and the social philosophical work of Blum and McHugh, which intend to present themselves as ‘Reflexive Sociologies’ that is, approaches that have taken into account the cognitional-epistemic problem.

Epistemic reflexivity has frequently been related to the possibility of the self-consistency of relativistic sociological approaches. Many contemporary socio-theoretical approaches underline the possibility of the sociality of the origins of knowledge; knowledge-claims about scientific facts, methods and criteria of assessment, are valued and asserted as originated by and within certain paradigms (Kuhn, 1962). In this sense, there are no general, uniform or universal criteria of validity of knowledge and it is through social features that we can explain why some claims are accepted and others are rejected. Such a position could generate the counterargument of self-refutation. For if knowledge-claims are a social – and thus a contingent – product, then the self-same argument *should* be valid for the sociological theory itself. Social relativity faces the problem of reflexivity which turns the sociological gaze to its own cognitive status. As I will explain, several thinkers would argue that cognitive relativism, if applied back to itself, is condemned to face the instability it generates and thus is absorbed by the black hole it creates.

And as will be argued, this formulation of social theorizing has no other impact but relativism. This would entail that to attack any positivistic conception of validation does not entail the impossibility of any kind of knowledge, but just to characterize any effort for concrete and stable representation as socially ‘given’ is to destroy any possible foundation of one’s own argumentation. For one could reply that this last argumentation is socially originated, that is inter-subjectively produced, that is, culturally contingent, that is, relative. Of course, this generalization, that the sociality of knowledge entails epistemic relativity, is crude and it has to be shown in each case

in which way a sociological approach of this kind is relativistic. However, it suffices to say, at this point, that social positionism or social embeddedness lead to relativism. And of course, this is what certain modes of reflexivity intend to point out.

This chapter will proceed as follows: we should at first start our analysis with an effort to answer a first substantial question of the necessity and the role of reflexivity as a scientific theme. Gruenberg's early effort to define reflexivity in relation to the sociology of knowledge will offer us a good starting point for such a purpose. After that, we will be able to go further and examine Malcolm Ashmore's and Steve Woolgar's extended discussion on the complexities of reflexivity. Their constructivist origins provide us with possible manoeuvres taken by theorists who support the social construction of reality or of scientific knowledge. For despite the intention of Ashmore and Woolgar to show that relativist analyses can be applied reflexively in a productive way, the argument will be that their approach can produce a paralysis induced by the sense of deconstruction as generating an endless series of levels. Michael Lynch's critique of the accounts of Ashmore and Woolgar, will be shown to have misunderstood what is at stake in this discussion of epistemic reflexivity. And, by putting our finger on such an ambiguous subject-matter as knowledge, it is not surprising that the post-modern movements towards deconstruction would enter our analysis. Hilary Lawson's analysis of reflexivity as the paradoxical aspect of such a deconstruction should put a sudden stop to the above mentioned paralysis, without, of course, providing us with comfort.

On the contrary, paradox can lead us either to an early confession of that paralysis of representation or to an answer concerning the epistemic subject. And it is that idea of paradox that will lead the argumentation towards the need for a congruent solution of the self-referential aspect of social theorising. It is because of this need that I provide, in this chapter, the requirement of the epistemic criterion of reflexivity which accounts for this self-referential aspect as well as the theoretical inclusion of the knowing subject discussed above. The circularity shown to be generated is a virtuous one expressing the internal congruence of a social ontology which aims to

be *reflexive* in the sense that *the possibility of the knowing subject to articulate a social ontology is premised in this social ontology.*

### *The sociology of knowledge and epistemic reflexivity*

A first possible question would be why the sociology of knowledge should bother itself with questions about reflexivity. We have already explained that the relativism adopted by various circles of this school of thought faces problems with the apparently self-defeating character of this position. However, I think there is another complementary reason. Since social science is part of its theoretical object, we should expect that a generalized sociology of knowledge – which would not refuse to turn its gaze towards sociological knowledge-claims – would thus problematize itself: ‘The sociology of knowledge ... aims to see even the crisis in our thought as a situation which we then strive to view as a part of a larger whole’ (Mannheim, 1991: 95-6)

An early effort to place the discussion of reflexivity at the core of the sociological agenda was Barry Gruenberg’s article ‘The Problem of Reflexivity in the Sociology of Science’ (1978) which, as he admits, intends to extend the cognitional interest of the sociology of science to itself:

...the term “reflexivity” is intended to refer simply to that aspect of the sociology of science that is self-referential. Because the sociologist of science is a social scientist, he is in the peculiar position of having to define “science” both as the object of his research and, at the same time, as the methods and procedure he employs in carrying out this research ... this leads to serious problems for two reasons. First, it undermines the capacity of the sociologist of science to define his subject matter independently of his methodology, so that the specification of a methodology presupposes an understanding of the subject matter which the methodology itself is intended to provide. In addition, the reflexive relation between subject and object in the sociology of science systematically precludes its capacity to maintain a critical stance towards its subject matter because any critical position would inevitably be self-congratulatory if positive while a negative assessment of science would undermine its own credibility and would therefore be self-defeating. As I hope to show, one important implication of this reflexive situation is that the sociologist of science cannot avoid making normative judgments about his subject matter. (Gruenberg, 1978: 321-2)



These lines, I would like to argue, constitute one of the best definitions of epistemic reflexivity since it clearly depicts the interrelations of the discussion of reflexivity with the analysis of ontology, epistemology and methodology as well as with the debate on value-neutrality and theory-ladenness of the social sciences. For now the relation between the subject and the object of inquiry generates the problem that the inquirer has a prior concept of his own object (ontology/methodology); and one could wonder how this definition has not been accredited with the proper significance in the literature of reflexivity.

However, Gruenberg is clear that reflexivity is a *problem* of all social sciences for every statement referring to human action also refers to the social scientists themselves. But this 'turning back to the author' becomes more 'troublesome' if applied to the sociology of knowledge, which intends to define the social conditions generating particular beliefs; for since 'any such theory must itself be explicable in terms of specifiable social conditions, the question arises of how one is to evaluate the truth or adequacy of such a theory.' (Gruenberg, 1978: 323) And methodology cannot help us in this work of evaluation because, as we have already mentioned, its criteria are necessarily based on prior assumptions about the nature of science the constitution of which is problematic because they are '(1) still widely disagreed upon among philosophers of science; (2) disputed as to whether they hold for social as opposed to natural science; and (3) often stated in terms of a disparity between ideal science and the activity of scientists themselves.' (Gruenberg, 1978: 324)

Since Gruenberg refers to reflexivity as a *problem* of social science, it is not surprising that he is trying in his article to provide us with a solution. If we cannot start from a method with an objective status, we could instead recognise, as he explains:

...the social embeddedness of the criteria governing knowledge claims, for it is only in terms of the relationships between the norms, values and interests governing human societies, and the norms governing the knowledge-producing institutions within societies, that we may find an independent basis for the demarcation of the field of science and the methodologies governing social scientific activity. (Gruenberg, 1978: 337)

But what this could really mean? Gruenberg on the one hand argues for the sociality of knowledge and, on the other hand, is looking for an *independent* basis for specific and distinctive perspectives. Unfortunately, his Habermasian position takes him away from his initial questioning and as a result, his latter discussion in this article becomes self-defeating. Since this initial questioning is more significant to the problems of the sociology of knowledge than as a contribution to rationalistic approaches, we should not take his work as irrelevant to the work of the social relativists we will examine in this section since the questions he poses are more than similar to the questions these theorists pose.

After all, we will examine Habermas' position in the next chapter and we will have the chance at that point to examine if the notion of reflexivity he proposes survives the reflexive criterion we intend to propose. Yet, Gruenberg not only fails to combine the sociality of knowledge with an independent basis for asserting knowledge, but also fails to support them. He wishes for a social scientific model which, as an ideal type, would offer a 'rational' image towards which belief systems would be characterized either as rational or irrational. But if there is no external and objective criterion demarcating a specific rationality, what is the point of this distinction? And in the final analysis how is it possible to be 'rational' and 'coherent' in such social embeddedness? Gruenberg does not answer these questions.

Finally, Gruenberg's position seems problematic for another reason. He takes for granted the existence of the sociology of knowledge as an academic field and then moves towards the idea that our presuppositions about the object of investigation should come before its examination. Yet, this seems to me a confusing way of arguing since the sociality of knowledge, as an idea, theoretically and cognitively preexists the theoretical problems it engenders in a *meta-theoretical* level. This means that the sociology of knowledge assumes a constructionist ontology of sociality of every knowledge-claim and, to rediscover this ontology in a meta-level – such as the sociology of knowledge – through those problems this ontology engenders, should not lead us to the idea that we start from a meta-level and then we discover that an ontology has been presupposed. After all, the necessity of the

sociology of knowledge, one could allege, is based on the ‘reflexive turn’ in sociology that is, on the transition from the idea of the sociality of knowledge in general, towards the examination of its own process and its own possibility of production. Of course, Gruenberg has successfully discovered the inner connections between reflexivity and theory-ladenness; again, instead of starting from a scientific field and examining the reflexive problem it faces, it would be academically more fruitful and interesting to place the problem as examined by the sociology of knowledge – and not as emerged from its existence.

For the same problem can appear without starting from the supposition of the existence of the sociology of knowledge: by relativising the premises of knowledge-claims, the possibility of the acknowledgement of this very sociality has lost its strength. Gruenberg, by starting from the existence of the sociology of knowledge, has already *reflexively* made the full circle between ontology and the problem of reflexivity but in the opposite way; and, at this point, while a circle has been completed by him, instead of the problem of reflexivity – the epistemic problem of the cognitional status of any ontological scheme – he has concluded to that from which he should have started – that is the theoretical and ontological status of scientific reasoning. Instead I would like to propose that Gruenberg (1978) could have started from the idea of the sociality of knowledge-claims, and, after that, he could realize that there lies a possibility that this argument may *reflexively* be bent back to the possibility of its own cognitive premises – and thus a circularity be discovered.

Of course, this kind of argumentation is not unusual to the sociology of knowledge. As we shall see, Barry Barnes and David Bloor in their ‘Strong Programme’ for the sociology of knowledge take a similar step by assuming reflexivity as a value of the sociology of knowledge, but as will be shown their account fails to be coherent. However, we should at first draw on a few distinctions before proceeding to further examination of the ‘Strong Programme.’ Collins (1983) distinguishes between the American specialty of ‘the sociology of science’ (mostly associated with Robert Merton) and the British specialty of ‘the sociology of scientific knowledge’ as

opposed to each other. Specifically, Collins explains that for the sociology of science, a basic assumption is that ‘the ultimate answers to the questions are Nature’s, mankind being only a mediator.’ (Collins, 1983: 266) Focusing on the institutional prerequisites, this programme was not interested in the content of scientific answers. The sociology of scientific knowledge on the other hand, is mostly concerned ‘with what comes to count as scientific knowledge and how it comes so to count.’ (Collins, 1983: 267) Inquiry based on this programme aims at explaining how certain views about nature and logic ‘come to count’ as valid within society, rather than ‘how a society can be arranged so that truth will emerge.’ (Collins, 1983: 267)

Collins explains that the opposition between these two specialties is an opposition between a traditional faculty (sociology of science) and a more recent one (sociology of scientific knowledge). And the more recent result was relativism under the label of ‘the social construction of scientific knowledge’ to which Collins belongs. He places himself in an influential trio including Barnes and Bloor whose critique was more like a defence of relativism rather than a reaction to the traditional sociology of science (in contrast to the influential trio of Mulkay, Whitley and Dolby, whose work was more of a reaction to that traditional specialty). Therefore, ‘the program’s endorsement of relativism means that it must seek to explain the content of scientific knowledge as far as possible in social terms.’ (Collins, 1983: 272)

According to Bloor ‘all knowledge, whether it be in the empirical sciences or even in mathematics, should be treated, through and through, as material for investigation.’ (Bloor, 1991: 3) For scientific beliefs are still beliefs which scientists hold and live with and the sociologist should have as her object beliefs which are taken for granted ‘or institutionalized, or invested with authority by groups of people.’ (Bloor, 1991: 5) For Bloor, variation of knowledge is the subject-matter of the sociology of knowledge: ‘for example: how is knowledge transmitted, how stable is it, what processes go into its creation and maintenance, how is it organized and categorized into different disciplines or spheres?’ (Bloor, 1991: 5)

Bloor (1991) explains that this approach encompasses four values, four tenets which are also taken for granted in other disciplines: 1) causality: the sociology of scientific knowledge is concerned with the conditions generating certain states of knowledge. 2) impartiality: the sociology of scientific knowledge should be impartial 'with respect to truth and falsity, rationality or irrationality, success or failure. Both sides of these dichotomies will require explanation.' (Bloor, 1991: 7) 3) symmetry: the same kind of causality should be attributed to both true and false beliefs. 4) reflexivity: the modes of explanation of the sociology should be applied to itself: 'like the requirement of symmetry this is a response to the need to seek for general explanations. It is an obvious requirement of principle because otherwise sociology would be a standing refutation of its own theories.' (Bloor, 1991: 7)

Sociality and relativism of knowledge-claims are still basic tenets of this approach even if Bloor does not explicitly incorporate them within what he calls 'the strong programme in the sociology of knowledge.' However, this is because they are implied by these four tenets. For individual experience takes place within a framework of shared assumptions, standards, purposes and meanings: 'society furnishes the mind of the individual with these things and also provides the conditions whereby they can be sustained and reinforced.' (Bloor, 1991: 15) As far as relativism is concerned, Barnes and Bloor (1982) explain that it is commonly defined as:

(i) the observation that beliefs on a certain topic vary, and (ii) the conviction that which of these beliefs is found in a given context depends on, or is relative to, the circumstances of the users. But there is always a third feature of relativism. It requires what may be called a "symmetry" and an "equivalence" postulate ... our equivalence postulate is that all beliefs are on a par with one another with respect to the causes of their credibility. It is not that all beliefs are equally true or equally false, but that regardless of truth and falsity the fact of their credibility is to be seen as equally problematic. (Barnes and Bloor, 1982: 22-23)

In this sense, empirical investigation around the local causes of either true or false beliefs should be perpetuated. And the relativist himself recognizes that his own evaluations considering what he thinks as true, false, rational or irrational, are

context-bound and condemned to locality – and cannot be reduced to ‘rational reconstructions’ or ‘immanent laws.’ (Barnes and Bloor, 1982: 27)

Bloor (1991) explains that relativity to many thinkers seems to be self-contradictory because if applied to itself, it reflexively put itself in danger:

If someone’s beliefs are totally caused and if there is necessarily within them a component provided by society then it has seemed to many critics that these beliefs are bound to be false or unjustified. Any thorough-going sociological theory of belief then appears to be caught in a trap. For are not sociologists bound to admit that their own thoughts are determined, and in part even socially determined? Must they not therefore admit that their own claims are false in proportion to the strength of this determination? (Bloor, 1991: 17)

In this sense the sociology of knowledge, one might claim, should make exceptions in favour of objectivity and thus be rendered inconsistent. At this point, Bloor explains that this counterargument to the ‘strong programme’ is based either on rationalistic conceptions of knowledge, or on a form of individualistic empiricism. For both theories of knowledge take for granted that causation implies error, deviation or limitation (Bloor, 1991). Rationalists give everything to philosophical ex-post decision about true arguments and reduce sociology to the study of what is irrational or of limited importance while, on the other hand, individualistic empiricism usually favors psychology which deals with real knowledge (in contradiction to sociology which deals with error). In response to both these premises, Bloor reminds us that both false and true knowledge claims are socially caused and ‘if knowledge does depend on a vantage point outside society and if truth does depend on stepping above the causal nexus of social relations, then we may give them up as lost.’ (Bloor, 1991: 18) The only result, according to Bloor (1991), of this accusation of self-refutation is the reduction of the Sociology of Knowledge to a sociology of error. But again, relativism does not refer only to false beliefs but to true beliefs too and, in this way, if applied to itself should not take for granted that it refers only to the former.

Of course Bloor, having defined relativism in this way, is right to reject the idea that relativists’ ideas themselves can be reflexively accused of falsity. For by relativising

their object, they do not attach falsity to it. However, Bloor (1991) fails to recognize that the case for ‘false’ beliefs is not the same for ‘unjustified’ beliefs. For the ‘impartiality tenet’ of the ‘strong programme’, because it includes the distinction between ‘justified’ and ‘unjustified’ beliefs, cannot escape from this accusation: even if causality is neutral towards the true/false distinction, it cannot be neutral to the justified/unjustified one. Otherwise the meaning of the term should be transformed. And at this point, I would like to allege that there could be no other option for causality than to mean nothing at all! For if ‘causal explanations’ themselves are nothing more than socially determined beliefs without any notion of validity attached within its premises, what is the point of calling them causal?

In relation to their own accounts, Barnes and Bloor admit that ‘at any given time our overall understanding of the matter, and in particular our verbal accounts of it, will be provisional and liable to change. They are subject to the same fluctuations and redescriptions as are found in the study of any other empirical phenomenon.’ (Barnes and Bloor, 1982: 44) But this is a very surprising argument since the status of the knowledge-claims emerged from those ‘empirical phenomena’ usually take for granted a method which includes within its premises a notion of validity. And it is in contradiction of – and in relation to – this notion of validity that these ‘deviations’ and ‘fluctuations’ are respectively defined. In this way Barnes and Bloor can either reduce their notion of causality to a loose version of fallible correlation or they can identify it with the empirical individualism – with the constant conjunctions of events it assumes – they attack. And since the first option seems to be the case, this loose notion of causality *should* be treated as nothing more than another belief among others without any hint virtuous of self-privileging from those other non-privileged beliefs. The result is that the ‘Strong Program’ they propose is lost into the black hole of its own assumptions: no one can now persuade anyone whether the theoretical assumptions and the empirical results of Barnes, Bloor and their followers should be considered as true, false or justified.

In this sense, the fourth tenet of reflexivity and the possible extension of it within this context of relativism was thus a step to be taken by the Sociology of Scientific

Knowledge. This step was eventually taken by Malcolm Ashmore and Steve Woolgar. Woolgar and Ashmore agree with Gruenberg's definition while underlining that:

the growing confidence with which scholars have argued that *natural* scientific knowledge is a social construct, is now accompanied by growing interest in the consequences of applying this same argument to knowledge generated by the *social sciences*. Gruenberg's (1978: 322) statement of the self-referential quality of the social sciences is typical. (Woolgar and Ashmore, 1988: 1)

And as Woolgar comments, 'the general aim of the social studies of science is to produce knowledge about scientific activity, in other words, to make statements about human acts which involve the production of scientific knowledge. Since making statements is itself a human act, it follows that the social study of science is self-referring.' (Woolgar, 1988; 18) But they try to be more radical in their position than Gruenberg; for they realize the problem that relativism generates through its reflexive implementation to the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge and they try to give a proper explanation of it. They agree that:

The exploration of reflexivity is the next natural development of the relativist-constructivist perspective in the social study of science. It moves beyond the familiar general position that relativism can be "applied" to scientific knowledge, and thus supersedes such variants as the strong programme in the sociology of scientific knowledge (Bloor, 1976), the empirical programme of relativism (Collins, 1981c), and discourse analysis (Mulkay et al, 1983). (Woolgar and Ashmore, 1988: 7)

As will be made clear, their position is not to get rid of relativism in the work of the social study of science, but to extend and apply it to itself as well. At this point Woolgar and Ashmore (1988) criticize Barnes (1974), Bloor (1976), Collins (1981) and Pinch (1983) for not applying their relativizing analysis of science and its methods to their own methods and thus for constructing a new realist meta-level – while they reject realism for the constitution of their object (the objects of natural sciences), their methodological approach of causality remains realist. But one scarcely can find a clear definition of Woolgar and Ashmore's position since the instability they wish to endorse, frequently permits their sophisticated approach to 'the reflexive theme' a self-undermining but self-conscious obscurity about either the



level of importance of reflexivity in the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge, or about the pervasiveness of this ironic instability.

Specifically, Woolgar (1988) in a chapter characteristically called 'Reflexivity is the ethnographer of the text', wonders if Relativism does lead to Reflexivity:

The conclusion that relativism is self-defeating (in virtue of the reflexivity it entails) depends crucially on our interpretation of the various terms and clauses which constitute the argument. For example, Gruenberg's formulation: "Any statement refers as much to the social scientist as anyone else", draws heavily on a particular sense of what we understand by making statements, acting as a human, and being a social scientist ... Thus, we read reflexivity in this formulation by equating the class of actions of "human" with those of "social scientist", although in another setting we might recognise the need to emphasize a distinction between humans (subject) and social scientist (analyst). (Woolgar, 1988: 19)

I have already explained why such a distinction between humans and social scientist would be completely unreasonable. Woolgar intends to show that to allege that 'relativism leads to reflexivity' is to assume a specific relationship between observers and those observed. Instead, Woolgar explains that what he calls 'interpretive flexibility' can question this very assumption and thus undermine the significance of reflexivity for the domain of the social study. In fact, he intends to explain that the question of whether relativism leads to reflexivity depends on how one constructs the above mentioned relationship, by reference to either the level of distinction or of similarity between the object of the research and the representation of this object.

For this reason, method is 'a knowledge community's sanctioned procedure for accomplishing adequate connections between representation and object; a guide (or set of guidelines) for generating an image which is faithful to the represented reality. But it is readily apparent that prescriptions of method fail to resolve the central tension between the postulates of distinctiveness and similarity.' (Woolgar, 1988: 20) In this way, Woolgar argues for a social negotiation of this relationship. But this subject/object analysis becomes more interesting, as Woolgar explains, when we apply it back to the study of science itself. For if method is the mediator regulating the relationship between representation of an object and the object, then our

representation, in that case, partially constitutes the object itself: ‘In this way, our efforts to study science assume some of the very features of scientific enquiry we set out to reveal. The character of our object (science) shapes the character of our investigation (our method) and hence the nature of our representation (portrayal of science).’ (Woolgar, 1988: 21) The similarity with Gruenberg is more than obvious.

In this way, Woolgar (1988), by showing this binding constitution of theorising of the Sociology of Science and the practice of science, implies the poverty of methodology while not assuming *clear* priority of ontology. For this constitution is not mutual, but binding and thus this interrelationship is not dynamic in a twofold way because, following this argument of Woolgar’s, representations do not seem to change or influence the object. However, Woolgar at this point uses expressions like ‘double-bind accounts’ to characterize this binding constitution. We will see now that this proposition is not indicative of his position and he argues for a mutual constitution of the object and its representation.

With the help of these two parameters (distinctiveness and similarity), Woolgar is trying to place the existing different kinds of reflexivity. What he calls the ‘constitutive reflexivity’ of Ethnomethodology assumes an absolute similarity between subject and object and a denial of distinction because of their mutual constitution. This is the one pole of continuum of the possible combinations between absolute similarity and clear distinction. The other pole is what he calls *benign introspection* which seems to be a description of the positivistic-empirical conception of subject-object relation. Woolgar at this point says that social sciences fall ‘awkwardly’ between these two extremes (Woolgar, 1988: 22). We will show later that as far as Ethnomethodology (especially in the work of Blum and McHugh) is concerned, the subject-object distinction collapses in favour of the object. We will also try to show that the whole project of reflexivity is only reasonable and feasible if placed in the middle positions of that ideal continuum – that is, there is no possibility and need for epistemic reflexivity in the extremes cases.

For the time being, we should only state that, as Woolgar explains, the problem of distinctiveness and of similarity, which of course is constitutive to the problem of

reflexivity, is far more problematic in the field of the social sciences. And it becomes more problematic when considered in the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge because:

... the researcher is required to participate, *in the course of her research*, in activities which are also the object of that research. She produces knowledge claims about the production of knowledge claims; she aims to explain how explanation is done, to understand how understanding is produced, and so on. We would thus expect that self-reference in the sociology of scientific knowledge would be of an *immediate* kind, occurring in the course of the research itself. (Woolgar, 1988: 23)

The similarity with Gruenberg's argumentation again is characteristic. And as far as the peculiarity of social sciences is concerned, Woolgar (1988) says that Ashmore (1985: 198 – 201) explains that problems of reflexivity would occur in the natural sciences only if it was the case that electrons have belief systems, their own theories of interaction etc.

Up to this point we have explained the conditions and circumstances under which reflexivity is significant. But what does Woolgar think it really is to be reflexive? And what does it mean that 'reflexivity is the ethnographer of the text'? For Woolgar's complaint is that although Ethnography relativizes its object, it does not try to think of the uncertain character of its own presuppositions: the distinctiveness of the object in terms of the exoticism of the tribesmen as an axiom and of their strangeness as privileging ethnographers with special authority for representation compared to the primitives. In this way Woolgar asks the relativists to deconstruct their own assumptions:

The analyst must resist the temptation to accept at face value the conventions which structure the text and the illusion of a world beyond the text which these conventions suggest. These conventions impose order upon a fluid (pre-textual) realm of actants and entities; they produce an ordered structure of categories, objects and subjects; they define distances and relationships between these entities ... The ethnographer of the text must not simply make these conventions his (exotic) object; they are at once his own equipment and his topic. The key principle of ethnography as applied to the text is that of uncertainty rather than exoticism. (Woolgar, 1988: 29)

Hence Woolgar aims at a continuous criticizing of our taken-for-granted assumptions, especially those concerning the relationships between subject and object, between representation and reality, between caption and image.

But although Woolgar supports a kind of textual uncertainty and ambivalence of interpretation, he places himself closer to Ethnomethodology in the sense that if for Ethnomethodology the sense of the appearance is elaborated by drawing on ‘knowledge of’ the underlying reality and simultaneously the sense of that very reality is elaborated by what is known about the appearance (document) – that is an ideal denial of distinction between subject and object – then, he has taken his sides for similarity when he states that ‘we should recognize that there are no grounds for assuming the activities our subjects/objects to be essentially different from our own’ (Woolgar, 1988: 28) It now seems that Woolgar comes closer to the pole of absolute similarity – in his own terms – when he claims that ‘the caption is reflexively tied to the image such that the meaning of the latter draws upon the sense of the former, and the meaning of the caption draws upon what is “evident from” the image’ (Woolgar, 1988: 29).

However, this should not be considered a clear similarity but an obscure effort for denying any kind of clear distinctions and similarities. And this alone should warn us about its similarity to Ethnomethodology. After all, ‘similarity’ is a poor term to characterize both positions because in the case of Woolgar this concept of similarity of the image and its object, entails a mutual constitution with no certain privileges between subjects of representation and objects represented while, in the case of Blum and McHugh, as we shall see later, this mutual constitution entails the collapse of the subject/object distinction. Of course, one could complain that Woolgar could be easily accused in his own terms that his decision of resolving the distinction/similarity problematic is another product of social negotiation; and it might seem that Woolgar’s argumentation falls into the trap it creates. But Woolgar, I suggest, would reply that this is one possible interpretation of his text which may not realize the multivocal character of it and that our effort of turning specific textual elements back to their own interpretative stability and self-authorization is what

Woolgar himself aims at by his *ironic* effort to help us stop interpreting texts in a realist mode.

Thus, such an instability created by deconstructing, textual, relativistic and self-undermining echoes would be pleurably heard by Woolgar. Instead for Woolgar, our standardized 'reflexive device' of turning utterances back to themselves in a critical look for cohesion forgets that text is 'just one element in a reader-text community' and that 'the juxtaposition of textual elements works systematically throughout a text rather than just at odd "reflexive moments"' (Woolgar, 1988: 32) But again, this uncertainty cannot help him to make the distinctions on which he bases it. For example, the distinctions of natural/social science, of image/caption and of similarity/distinctiveness provide stable grounds which are *both possible and impossible*, that is, Woolgar's instability – and consequently, his lesson – is contextually interconnected with quite stable and uncritically examined assumptions.

Thus, to sum up, Woolgar appreciates Gruenberg's self-referential character of reflexivity and he also connects the discussion of reflexivity with the assumptions about the theoretical conceptualization of the relation between the subject and the object of social scientific work<sup>22</sup>. However, he extends relativism in such a way that the (self-) examination of these assumptions is condemned to be only one voice in a multi-vocal text of his. Yet, Ashmore (1994: 158) agrees with Woolgar (1992) that the really useful character of reflexivity is that it can enable a radical critique of representation. But for Ashmore, the 'problem of reflexivity' turns out to be 'the preserver of relativism *for* relativism and not its destroyer.' (Ashmore, 1989: 111) Hence he does not identify *reflexive practice* with the self-suspending power of what he calls 'tu quoque'<sup>23</sup> – which in Ashmore's texts means 'you as well' that is, if you have deconstructed this scientific account with your relativist argumentation, the

---

<sup>22</sup> And this is one of the main reasons why Ashmore and Woolgar are important for the discussion of epistemic reflexivity: while they appreciate the self-referential problem of reflexivity, they fail to resolve it. And they also fail to place it in relation to the discussion of social ontology. For, Ashmore and Woolgar cannot talk about social ontology since their theoretical investigations are closer to social epistemology in the sense that they examine the consequences of the sociality of knowledge without placing knowledge to *social reality*. Here, the discussion about knowledge claims is not related to the role of agents as knowledgeable *beings*.

<sup>23</sup> The 'tu quoque' move is a move initially associated with critics of constructionist/relativist accounts of science who are trying to dismiss such accounts.

same deconstruction holds also for your argumentation<sup>24</sup>. And it is *self-suspending* and not *self-disappearing* for if the latter was the case, the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge would never have been born. (Ashmore, 1989: 88) Nor is his purpose:

... to put forward counterarguments. Getting beyond the tu quoque is not and cannot be simply a matter of producing equal-and-opposite arguments that attempt to escape from the charge by alleging faulty reasoning in the tu quoque. Nor can this be done by using the same form of argument as a counteraccusation or meta tu quoque. Such self-protective strategies are, I feel, both pointless and counterproductive. Pointless, because arguments of the tu quoque type seem to be subject to a law of Eternal Recurrence; and counterproductive, because such reactions involve two fundamental complicit *agreements* with the tu quoque: that the upshot of this kind of argument (self-contradiction or whatever) is *unavoidable*; and that it must have a *negative evaluation*. (Ashmore, 1989; 88)

Contrary to these arguments, Ashmore aims at an approach which both respects and celebrates the problems emerging from reflexive self-reference and thus from the tu quoque, since the lack of stability which tu quoque arguments generate should not be considered as undermining but as demonstrations of a generalized relativism – as positive evidence for relativism. For this reason, in his chapter ‘Beyond the Tu Quoque’, Ashmore tries to argue that the supposed self-destructiveness of the tu quoque argument does not entail self-destruction (Ashmore, 1989: 100), because self-destruction is the extreme reaction of the abandonment of one’s speech under the threat of its ambiguity, its self-destructiveness. At this point, Ashmore aims at placing suspension at the core of theorising while denying that theory should be abandoned. How is he able to argue for such an unstable position?

At first, we have to focus on his stance towards the regress generated by the infinite series of metalevels of self-referential deconstruction. As he explains, the power of the tu quoque is based on the privileging of the metalevel – and then, the meta-metalevel and so on:

Let us represent this process using numerals for the levels (2 for science, 3 for historiography, 4 for historiology, and so on) and the terms “deconstructs” and “resurrects” for what occurs at each level. Thus we get 4 deconstructs 3 and resurrects 2. Similarly, when we move to the next higher starting point (level 5: metahistoriology), we get 5 deconstructs 4 and resurrects 3 and deconstructs 2.

---

<sup>24</sup> Does this mean that Ashmore intends to distinguish between self-referential epistemic reflexivity (tu quoque) with self-reflection (reflexive practice), as I have tried to support in this thesis? Ashmore (1989) does not answer such a question; nor does he imply anything to help us understand this distinction.

The result of this little game is that each move to a higher level produces a domino effect on all the levels below... (Ashmore, 1989: 102)

For Ashmore, here, number 1 symbolizes nature or the genuine object of investigation. Then science (2) theorizes 1. Number 3 characterizes what relativists like Barnes and Bloor aim at, that is, a social explanation of knowledge claims of 2. Now Ashmore claims that this process of social explanation can be applied to 3 as well at a level of 4 and so on. Of course if we apply this process to an infinite series of levels, we may conclude that meta-theoretical work is never-ending. However – and surprisingly – Ashmore (1989) explains that this disappointing result ‘has a practical end’ (Ashmore, 1989: 104) because ‘there is always a comparative paucity of paradigmatic environments (in the Kuhnian sense) within which to undertake such inquiry. This is because metainquiry is parasitic upon its objects: it requires, for its existence, the prior development of the lower level(s).’ (Ashmore, 1989: 105) Of course, this pragmatic limitation contradicts the conclusions emerging from the above stated analysis of the infinite regress. Ashmore is deeply aware of this seeming contradiction:

How does my discussion of the pragmatic limitations to the infinite regress, which relies on the idea that in practice there is always a level at which metainquiry stops, square with ... my general advocacy of nonprivileging discourse? ... to claim that the regress argument is irrelevant because of the real world pragmatic limitations is to kick the major support out from under the carefully constructed arguments for non-privileging discourse. (Ashmore, 1989: 105)

And as a result of the above mentioned comments, he does not abandon the effort of resolving this contradiction. For Ashmore, since the restriction he proposes is pragmatic and not philosophical or logical, he can retain the possibility of the infinite regress while reassuring us that possibility is low: ‘Therefore, the argument for the essential vulnerability of discourse stands. This is, we can retain the notion of the infinite regress for purposes of justifying the refusal of privilege by reading it as a reference to the infinite *availability* of regress’ (Ashmore, 1989: 105) and, at the same time, we can handle the pragmatic restriction as a realistic regression-stopper and thus, as a positive perspective of metatheory without the fear of the infinite loss in the abyss – which can easily lead one to abandon any kind of meta-analysis.

Hence Ashmore in this way intends to attack both the privileging speech of any meta-theory which deconstructs its object with the safety of supremacy of a higher-level analysis and, on the other hand, the discouraging effect of the idea of an infinity of meta-steps. We will see later that Dick Pels, under the same threat, argues in favour of ‘one step up’.

In this way, Ashmore’s Analysis can complete Woolgar’s argumentation on the textual dependence of reflexivity since in this form the instability remains while not undermining the whole enterprise of talking about it. Thus Ashmore’s analysis can cover the theoretical gap of Woolgar’s position. Of course, with this infinite regression Ashmore implicitly deprivileges any effort at observation external to its object of observation – and thus his position complies with Woolgar’s. In Ashmore’s work, the similarity/distinction categorization (of Woolgar) takes the form of insiderness/outsiderness relation. Insiderness being the object, the participant<sup>25</sup> and, outsidership being the external, the analyst. As Ashmore explains, if it was really the case that insiderness and outsidership were completely distinct realms, then reflexive argumentation, including the *tu quoque* itself, ‘could have no purchase. Accusations of self-referentially consistent absurdity would be utterly idle if it was not possible ... to understand a realm of practice in the terms that that practice uses to understand its realm of phenomena.’ (Ashmore, 1989: 107) And the similarity with Woolgar’s analysis becomes more evident since he claims that:

... in the study of science (and knowledge practices generally) the student *cannot avoid* being inside and outside at the same time. Another way of saying this is that the reflexivity of inquiry into inquiry is not a problem *for* that inquiry but a constituent problem *of* it (to paraphrase McHoul). All such work has to be written in as well as on its topic. (Ashmore, 1989: 109)

Thus, both thinkers intend to underline the interconnections between the observer and the observed while simultaneously pointing to the necessity of reporting the textual insecurity these interconnections produce. But Ashmore, compared to Woolgar, seems to be more decisive about the role of self-critique: he aims at a

---

<sup>25</sup> In chapter three, it will be shown that this idea of participant and the way she relates to the object will lead us to the idea of participant objectivation and thus, to Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of reflexivity.



practical reflexivity *beyond the tu quoque*; at first, beyond the self-refutation – after all, refutation implicitly privileges the position which deconstructs, but suspension does not.

But both Woolgar and Ashmore, while connecting the discussion of self-referential epistemic reflexivity – which, as I have shown earlier, was introduced in the literature of the sociology of knowledge, by Gruenberg – with the discussion about the subject and the object of social scientific investigation, in their relativist position, fail to give an adequate account of the knowing subject; and thus lack a key distinction that this thesis argues for, between self-referential epistemic reflexivity and agential reflexivity or self-reflection. Hence, while Woolgar and Ashmore state that they do not argue for a complete similarity between the subject and the object, their relativistic ontology presupposes such a similarity (or the absence of any distinction between distinctiveness and similarity). In the case of Woolgar, and for the distinction between insiderness and outsidership, in the case of Ashmore – which means in both cases that the subject of investigation is not completely assimilated in the object – their relativism fails to account for a notion of subject who can get beyond Ashmore's 'tu quoque', as Ashmore wishes. The final result is that we started from Gruenberg's discussion of self-referential epistemic reflexivity as a problem of social science and, in the same tradition of the sociology of knowledge, and now this self-referential aspect of social science has been identified or confused with self-critical examination or with self-reflective deconstruction. Instead, in this thesis, as I have already explained, I intend to distinguish between agential reflexivity (or self-reflection) and self-referential epistemic reflexivity, and thus provide a criterion for the latter.

Now, even if self-suspension does not lead to self-destruction, in what way could we avoid the 'fear of regress, paradox, and the loss of control.' (Ashmore, 1989: 111)? Not surprisingly, Ashmore claims that the tu quoque must itself be suspended, but he does not explain in what (practical?) terms his vague argument that 'it is only beyond the tu quoque that a reflexive practice can discover its own possibility.' (Ashmore, 1989: 111) has been resurrected (or initially de-constructed). For this *discovering* to take place, a notion of agency should be supposed, for to say only that

‘the tu quoque is a *constituent problem of reflexivity*’ cannot explain to us how one is or can *reflect* on this interconnection – one should be more than self-suspicious in this case. For the tools provided by Ashmore’s theorising could result only in an utterance like: ‘self-suspension is a constituent problem of the tu quoque’; and not something more. For *reflexive* self-suspension (applied to itself) should be applied simultaneously both inside and outside itself – and here, what stands ‘outside’ is this ambiguous thing called reflexivity.

In this way, Ashmore, by distinguishing between self-critique and reflexivity opens a door to an observation forbidden to any theory which aims at showing the lack of privilege of any observer constitutively situated within the object he/she is trying to observe. For the expression ‘a constituent problem of’ is used here in a slightly different way than in the discussion of insiderness/outsiderness because now reflexivity should identify itself *beyond* the tu quoque, despite its simultaneity and co-existentiality with the tu quoque. Is this transcendental step permitted by another practical restriction? Is the ‘tu quoque’ the self-referential reflexive problem and what we really need is a notion of agential reflexivity in order for us to be able to give an answer to this problem? Unfortunately, Ashmore does not pose these questions, let alone answer them.

After this discussion, even this logic of ‘deconstruction’ and ‘resurrection’ seems irrelevant and contradictory to the rest of Ashmore’s argumentation. For if level 4 deconstructs 3, there is no reason for 2 to be resurrected since it has already previously been deconstructed by 3. Instead, the story would probably be that 4 deconstructs 3, 2 and 1; or that 4 deconstructs 3 while 2 and 1 have been already deconstructed by 3. And this would be the case since Ashmore’s relativism does not include any kind of *privileging* for ‘resurrection’ to occur. This means that that self-suspension is his only tool and it cannot offer him any moment of ‘resurrection’ even if theoretical.

To sum up, in Woolgar’s case, self-critique cannot be justified and take any specific form. But in this way the whole discussion of epistemic reflexivity has no certain interest since the meaning of this term (‘epistemic reflexivity’) varies according to textual interpretation. Ashmore, on the other hand, places the necessity and the

possibility of self-critique at the core of meta-theorising but in doing so, he fails to preserve self-critique in congruence with the mainstream constructivist-relativistic rhetoric. Both authors fail to place the self-reference of social science in relation to the knowing subject – a subject whose relation with the object of investigation has initially been problematized by both these authors but only in a brief and obscure form. Passing through the crossroads where self-referential epistemic reflexivity and self-critical examination meet, one can find Woolgar and Ashmore<sup>26</sup> ambiguous concerning the role and the virtuousness of epistemic reflexivity – after all, they do not mean to negate this role to it but to be both sceptical and confident about it.

This confusion between self-reference and self-critique has made several authors erroneously identify epistemic reflexivity with self-critical examination of one's own presuppositions. One example is Melvin Pollner who claims (and in similarity with what several proponents of the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge think of reflexivity) that 'Radical reflexivity – the recursively (Platt 1989) comprehensive appreciation of the "accomplished" character of *all* social activity – enjoins the analyst to displace the discourse and practices that ground and constitute his/her endeavours in order to explore the very work of grounding and constituting.' (Pollner, 1991: 370) Its role is to unsettle basic assumptions used in the descriptions of reality. For Pollner aims at a revival of radical reflexivity which can only contribute to the enrichment of the sociological imagination.

---

<sup>26</sup> Yearley (2005) states that Woolgar and Ashmore's forms of reflexivity – an extension of symmetry and textual multi-vocal challenge (Yearley, 2005: 102) – have been 'overwhelmingly cognitive. In other words, the worry about reflexivity has been treated almost wholly as though it had to do only with logical consistency.' (Yearley, 2005: 104) Instead, Yearley (2005) proposes that science studies lack of self-reflection is more striking in other ways: they fail to account for the social role of science, they are not reflective about their own explanatory practices and methods (Yearley, 2005: 108) and, they 'have had little to say about the sociology of the internal organization of science.' (Yearley, 2005: 109) However, he does not explain why this aspect of reflexivity (or self-reflection) is (or should be) differentiated from (logical) self-referential consistency. It seems that the epistemological premises of the sociology of science do not leave an opportunity for its opponents to place such questions of consistency together with ontological questions about the role, the practices and the organizations of (sociology of) science.

Indeed, Pollner's article 'Left of Ethnomethodology: The Rise and Decline of Radical Reflexivity' (1991) takes the form of a manifesto of radical or referential reflexivity<sup>27</sup>. As it is announced:

What escapes the gaze of inquiry preoccupied with the world are the ontological practices that create the rim and thereby shape the arena within which such spectacles and their observers occur ... Radical reflexivity recursively encompasses every aspect of the discourse through which descriptions of reality are proffered by communities of knowers. Indeed, the very notions of "reality," "descriptions," and "knower" become problematic instead of taken-for-granted ontological resources. In encouraging ethnomethodology to reckon with parameters of its ontological space, radically reflexive inquiry resonates with challenging analyses of the contingency of fundamental premises and practices of Western epistemology. (Pollner, 1991: 376)

Ontology, and ontological assumptions which are taken for granted, here are suspended as well as the notion of the 'knower' and of 'epistemology'. This apotheosis of radical reflexivity as self-critical examination continues with the remark that reflexive ethnomethodology is "abnormal discourse" within sociology which revives a sluggish *imagination* at the metalevel. (Pollner, 1991: 376) The metalevel here means a level above the examination regarding the organization of the commonsense worlds, the practices and processes of everyday life which *reflection* (and not radical reflexivity) aims at examining. Again, the analysis started from Guenbergs's self-referential epistemic reflexivity as peculiar to social sciences but, as with Woolgar's and Ashmore's accounts, Pollner fails to distinguish between the self-reference of social science and self-critical examination, instead entirely conflating them. One should distinguish between them while identifying their theoretical interrelations. For example to criticize oneself for not taking into account one variable in more substantial social scientific investigation is different from an epistemically virtuous placement of the knowing subject within her object of investigation – in relation to the self-referential question that emerges from this idea. Later on I will try to show more adequately their differences as well as their theoretical interconnections. For the time being, it is fruitful for the discussion to

---

<sup>27</sup> Here I think the confusion between self-reference and self-critical examination is more than obvious.

examine the objection of Michael Lynch that this confused identification has triggered.

### Michael Lynch's critique of radical reflexivity

Michael Lynch criticizes Woolgar and Ashmore by arguing that 'reflexivity is not intrinsically radical.' (Lynch, 2000: 36) By the term 'radical reflexivity' Lynch describes a critical treatment of *representation*. Specifically, he refers to Woolgar (1992: 329) where he orientates this critical treatment towards a process of critical explication of those deep preconceptions concerning our notions of science, of reason and of knowledge. And at this point, Lynch comments that this kind of reflexivity is well exemplified by the field of Science and Technology Studies:

Simply understood, radical reflexivity extends a constructionist analysis of representations to include the representations produced in S&TS texts. A radically reflexive analysis problematizes or deconstructs positive claims about progress, knowledge and professional autonomy. Unlike Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, which seeks to objectify the work of objectification ... radical reflexivity questions the very practice of objectivation, without distinction or exemption. In short, it is sceptical of any representation that refers to, or presupposes, a world independent of the local means of its representation. (Lynch, 2000: 33)

Hence, Lynch attributes radical reflexivity to Woolgar and Ashmore who have tried to deconstruct and undermine any form of objective or privileged analysis by 'exposing uncertainties and "messy" contingencies.' (Lynch, 2000: 36) and, by applying the commitments of opposition to logical-empiricist philosophy and to scientism relentlessly back to the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge – while celebrating the paradoxes generated by this application.

Thus Lynch's article called 'Against Reflexivity as an Academic Virtue and Source of Privileged Knowledge' (2000), argues that 'the meaning and epistemic virtues ascribed to reflexivity are relative to particular conceptions of human nature and social reality.' (Lynch, 2000: 26) And he wants to suggest 'an alternative, ethnomethodological conception of reflexivity that does not privilege a theoretical or

methodological standpoint by contrasting it to an unreflexive counterpart' (Lynch, 2000: 26) In fact this accusation recommends that reflexivity favours specific ontological and methodological programmes – a position which in a way inverts my initial proposition that since ontology is prior to epistemology and to methodology, the problem of reflexivity emerges as a cognitional or epistemic question about the application of any ontological claim to the knower or to the theorist who utters it. But for Lynch:

The effects or implications of applying a form of analysis “to itself” will vary with the kind of analysis in question, and the examination of “self” (or self’s own writings, and the writings of colleagues in self’s field) is no less circumstantial, contingent, fallible or trustworthy than is any other investigative or critical activity. Like confession, reflexive analysis does not come naturally; it requires a tutorial under the guidance of a particular programme. (Lynch, 2000: 36)

Of course, this use of the term ‘radical reflexivity’ is still very broad and Lynch is aware of this risky generalization. However – and secondly – Lynch’s critique focuses on the optimism of constructivism to uncover and reveal the deletion of contingencies and mediations occurring throughout the discovery and elaboration of specific facts: ‘at an earlier stage of the research, such modalities were formulated by (some) members of the relevant community of scientists, but they were progressively removed when “the fact” became established.’ (Lynch, 2000: 37) Accordingly this stabilization process of that kind of deletion under conditions, presuppositions and assumptions is historically contingent, uncertain and arbitrary. As Lynch explains, constructivists’ intent is not to reject the evidential basis of factual statements but to support the temporality of stability since it is a matter of contingency whether in the future the experiment will be replicated with the same result or whether the statement will be retained under different conditions.

In this sense, radical reflexivity is the application of this deconstruction to constructivists’ arguments. As Lynch explains, the meaning of this deconstruction remains vague. His argument connects radical reflexivity with postmodern philosophy and to the theory-ladenness of observation and as a result, for Lynch, this kind of abstract criticism leads to confusion in specific scientific claims:

The *problem* of how descriptions correspond to their objects (the primary problem taken up in a programme of radical reflexivity) is a classic problem for philosophical analysis, but it has no direct bearing on the more localized referential questions and problems addressed in science and other situations of inquiry ... The move from particular interpretative troubles to a general, and ultimately insurmountable, “problem” of representation may seem profound, but it begs the question of why it should be imposed on practicing scientists, or anyone else. (Lynch, 2000: 41)

For this reason, scientists should ignore this general and abstract problematic and focus on the specific problems arising from their particular research programmes. For reflexivity cannot offer something more than what every effort of attacking objective truths offers, so there is no particular benefit of “being” reflexive unless something worthwhile emerge from it (Lynch, 2000: 42).

Consequently, it is pointless to require that every time a scientist makes a statement, she should confess all the presuppositions and contingent conditions which influenced her research – and thus reply to every possible imaginary critique regarding the uncertainty connected with these conditions:

Take, for example, the prototypical objective expression, “water boils at 100 degrees Centigrade.” Is it fair to say that this statement *deletes* all reference to the unstated circumstances of place, altitude, materials, equipment, competency, historical background, etc.? Any of these circumstances, and many more too, *can* be relevant, but when is it relevant to mention them? Consider a more qualified statement like “water boils at 100 degrees Centigrade *at sea level*.” The qualification may clarify the original statement by explicating an unstated condition that is relevant to mention under some circumstances. Further qualification about the composition of water, the meaning of “sea level”, and so forth may also be relevant to mention. At some point, if only through sheer exhaustion, the listing of conditions and contingencies will have to come to an end, but the task of listing them is potentially endless. (Lynch, 2000: 45)

Hence the limit of the number of these confessions, in order for one to be reflexive, is social and there is no single way of being reflexive. We have already shown that Woolgar does not argue for specific devices of being reflexive although he does not deny its *potential* relevance to the ambivalences of the text. But Ashmore’s response of the ‘tu quoque’ constitutes a more concrete presentation of the problematic. Not surprisingly, Lynch (2000) suggests that the infinite regress it generates leads relativism to obscurity and implies that reflexivity is self-destructive. But for this, a

relevant potency should be assumed, that is, we should accept that reflexivity undermines truth and reveals the arbitrariness of our factual compositions. But Lynch cannot see this potentiality in reflexivity: ‘the “effects” of any reflexive project are contingent, as they depend on its execution and communal reception.’ (Lynch, 2000: 47) After all, being critical and suspicious towards taken-for-granted truths (even if truths for/of one’s own self) does not necessarily lead to a helpful result or does not crucially differ from the old scepticism on representation and its validity.

Thus Lynch reaches a sociological (or ethnomethodological) approach to reflexivity whereby ethnomethodology can dissolve certain (communal) benefits which are attributed to radical reflexivity by Woolgar and Ashmore. This account argues for two key critiques to reflexivity we have already examined: 1) different kinds of reflexivity promote and are based on specific ontological and methodological programs and, 2) radical reflexivity does not *necessarily* contribute to science since as far as it adopts the rhetoric of the theory-ladenness discussion, it can only disorientate science from particular problems arising in its local activities – and it does not offer us anything new than the philosophical scepticism the significance of which, is a matter of chance depending on the instanciality of each case. So, the more apparently challenging aspect of Lynch’s approach to my argument is that I have already tried to base the need for epistemic reflexivity on the two philosophical problematics/presuppositions which Lynch uses to show the triviality of reflexivity: the primacy of ontology to epistemology and the theory-ladenness!

First of all, my response to Lynch (2000) is that theory-ladenness is not necessarily a post-modern idea. We have already seen that Andrew Sayer, who is a critical realist, adopts this critique of representation. Moreover, and as we shall explain later, to request a critical examination of one’s own presuppositions, either ontological or epistemological, is not necessarily equal to being a proponent of the theory-ladenness of perception and appreciation. For in the case of the latter, conventionality of observation is *frequently* the resulting import while, in the case of the former, a rupture in the conventional character of thought is implied since the self-critical examination which is at stake requires a radical turning back on those



very (epistemic or not) conventions – and in this sense, the knowing subject who now *reflects* on her own assumptions (even if fallibly) has not been lost in the relativity which Woolgar and Ashmore have adopted. This is a crucial mistake of Lynch's who fails to *reflect* on the fact that ontological accounts are prior to methodological and epistemological accounts. This will be more obvious later in the appendix of this chapter, when we will criticize him for his view on epistemic circularity.

Not surprisingly, Lynch (2000) criticizes Pollner (1991) for taking the side of constructivists like Woolgar and Ashmore. And I have to admit, at this point, that Lynch's critique of those whom Lynch calls 'radical reflexivists' – those, like Pollner, who are supposed to argue for the virtuousness of self-critical examination – is not unfair. For, self-critical examination of one's own presuppositions is neither something new, nor does it always have scientifically significant imports. To my view, self-critical examination is indispensable to and necessary for scientific and philosophical work. But it should not be identified with the idea of theory-ladenness, as explained above; nor should it be identified with epistemic reflexivity – and Lynch fails to avoid these two fallacies. Instead, I want to argue in this thesis that self-critical examination is a mode of self-reflection which presupposes a minimum of agency. For if otherwise, this kind of critical self-objectivation is either meaningless or *paradoxical* since the absence of an epistemic agent generates a vacuum of conventionality through which any presupposition thus examined is rendered unstable. Yet, Lynch (2000) is also right to claim that the infinite regress engendered by the never-ending meta-levels of deconstruction, diminishes the value of the notion of reflexivity proposed by Ashmore.

For this reason it is time to examine the way in which Dick Pels tries to avoid this trap of infinite regress as well as the question of the possibility of the appearance of such an infinite regress. Dick Pels' analysis is crucial for this point of argumentation because not only does he introduce the concept of circularity to the discussion of epistemic reflexivity, but also he thinks that all ontologies are entrapped in circularity, as far as their cognitional premises are concerned, but what we have to do is to acknowledge this. And it is in this way that Pels precludes the possibility of

an infinite regress: the ‘reflexive turn’ here stops at the first level of the identification of the constitutive circularity of our accounts. However, in contrast to Pels, I argue in this thesis that the virtuous epistemic circularity which emerges from the fulfilment of the criterion of epistemic reflexivity (which will be proposed later) does not entail a situation that what we argue for is value-laden. For, it will be shown that to claim that we *are able to know* that every *knowledge claim* is value-oriented or relative<sup>28</sup> is *paradoxical*.

### Dick Pels’ celebration of circularities

We have already shown that self-critical examination of one’s own (epistemic) values, beliefs and taken-for-granted presuppositions, while important for the notion of (agential) reflexivity may lead us to a situation of an infinite regress of meta-levels, when introduced to the philosophy of science as a form of skepticism. Ashmore was not so worried of this result. Yet others will claim that such a critical self-reflective analysis would not lead us to an infinite regress of meta-levels of self-suspension but rather to circularity. Of course, one could say that neither is a good scenario. However, one may prefer the one over the other for some reason, or because he thinks that we cannot do anything to escape from one or from both. This is the case of Dick Pels who, instead of celebrating a latent infinite regression (like Ashmore), rather prefers to celebrate epistemic circularities.

Pels (2000, 2003) pays more attention to what he calls ‘the natural proximity of facts and values’ since it is the last distinction which survives in the theories of constructivist and of actor-network thinkers who surpassed the knowledge/power distinction. After all, ‘all ontologies describe “normative facts” and hence function as performatives that partly create what they state; but few ontologies are prepared to

---

<sup>28</sup> It is difficult for one to show that value-ladenness does not necessarily lead to cognitive relativism. For, in such a case, one would need a kind of rationale in order to show which value is more consistent with epistemic virtuousness. However, I do not want to preclude the possibility of value-ladenness of scientific investigation in general, but only to claim the self-evident: every ontology intends to escape from the social conventionality and normativity and thus to present a theory of being rather than a theory of the impossibility of knowledge.

acknowledge this inherent normativity and performativity.’ (Pels, 2003: 83) In this circle, interests, values, positions, knowledge and facts intermingle and as a result:

... reflexivity presupposes that, while saying something about the “real” world, one is simultaneously disclosing something about oneself. In refusing to separate knowledge of things “out there” from knowledge of the self “in here”, the reflexive knower, while reading the book of nature, simultaneously writes a piece of her autobiography ... Reflexivity therefore arises as a radical concern, and as a radical threat to the traditional canon of impersonal, value-free, and dispassionate inquiry, as soon as the epistemological rift between subject and object is mended and the subject is conceived to be in some substantial or passionate way “present in”, “part of”, or “at stake in” the object itself (Pels, 2003: 158).

Thus, reflexivity recognizes this mutual constitution of accounts and reality. But Pels, at this point, seems also to partially accept the distance between accounts and reality – though he is not so clear about this. In fact, Pels wants to maintain a relative distance between the knowing subject and the object which, for him, are mutually created; and he also argues for a *monitoring* of this kind of interconnection in order for us not to escape from the circle, but to establish a weaker notion of representation which, without escaping from its value premises, intends to add only one level of self-reference. This is opposed to ‘flat’ objectivist discourse and to infinite regression of meta-discourse. Pels calls this reflexivity<sup>29</sup> ‘one step up’ (2000, 2003) which here takes only ‘one step up’ to only one meta-level because we now realize the circularity of our accounts and we just stop at this point with a circularity in our hands. We cannot do anything more but to celebrate this circularity that always exists among our factual statements and our value judgments.

There are a few points however which need further elaboration. First of all, Pels does not distinguish between the two sides of the fact/value distinction (Bhaskar, 1998) and, as a result, while he explains in various forms 1) how ‘factual’ statements have political consequences (what he calls the ‘performative’ function), he does not explain sufficiently 2) how values intervene in our theoretical accounts. For, to affirm the mutual constitution and mutual presupposition of the texts and of what they try to describe, does not by itself show how values affect our argumentation. He

---

<sup>29</sup> Reflexivity here is feasible by the spatio-temporal distinction of science from other fields, that is, an installation of weak boundaries and of decelerated scientific speed as distinct from the speed of ‘the quick decision’ pertaining in economic and political field (and in mass media too).

just refers to Hilary Putnam<sup>30</sup> (and others like MacIntyre and Doerer) who radically have shown ‘the deep impregnation of values with factually descriptive information’ (Pels, 2003: 85)

To show in any possible case – as Pels does – the value-ladenness of any ontological work can function as a critique of what Putnam (2002, 2003) calls as the fact/value distinction adopted by logical-positivist. Yet, Pels takes for granted, without further explanation, the ‘natural proximity of facts and values’ and then accuses whoever tries to give an explanatory position (between values or facts) in his/her social theory of not recognizing his/her own value-point – whether one reduces culture to concrete social facts, or one reduces material organizations to culture, s/he has a value-based starting point. In these lines, Habermas is criticized for giving lifeworld primacy. But, generally speaking, what value-ladenness theorists (like Pels) frequently ignore is that they do exactly the same thing: though they at first declare (As Pels does) the entanglement of facts and values as an intermixture without priorities, in fact, the priority is obviously given to values. For when Pels criticizes both kind of thinkers, who either give priority to factual reductions or to cultural or normative ones, he always ‘uncovered’ a hidden value. Value here has the first explanatory role and is the element which demolishes the factual status: after the entanglement, only values survive.

Thus, Pels’ account is another theory which gives priority to the value-element and can be compatible (or the epistemological consequence of) with social ontologies which place culture, norms and values in a prominent position. And Pels fails to acknowledge that if we can reflexively represent circularities in our argumentation this means that we are not lost within them and implies a cognitional capacity from the part of the knowing subject. For to recognize one’s blindness, which is what Pels aims at, can imply that you are not totally blind – since to ‘recognize’ here means ‘I

---

<sup>30</sup> Putnam (2002, 2003) explains that in our language as a whole, we can find concepts which have both the function of describing and of evaluating. For this Putnam uses Quine’s arguments to extend the idea of theory-ladenness to value-ladenness. In a similar mode, Martin Hollis by inserting values to that web of beliefs: ‘this normative element in the web of belief influences how we choose and define the relevant concepts, how we apply them, and how we fit the resulting interpretation together.’ (Hollis: 1994: 214)

am conscious of” rather than ‘lost in’ the circle. Pels wants reflexivity to accept and celebrate its own circularity and also to re-affirm its own value point. But he fails to explain how one is able to transcend this omnipresence of normativity while, self-referentially, acknowledging and celebrating it.

Pels, as I have already explained, is very negative about the infinite regress of meta-levels thus generated by the application of self-deconstruction. Here a second alternative possibility is offered: that is, instead of an infinite regress, a constituent circularity is the result of epistemic reflexivity. But I think that Pels does not explain why all ontologies describe “normative” facts and thus his self-referential attribution to reflexivity results in a mere realization of the natural proximity between facts and values. But he fails to account for the possibility of such a realization: if value-ladenness is the case, how can we escape (social) conventionality and thus *reflect* on it? The possibility of such a reflection is what is missing from Pels’ account of epistemic reflexivity. Instead, in this thesis I intend to show, as I have already explained, that every social ontology has self-referential properties which render reflexivity a problem for social theorizing. And for this reason I have proposed an epistemic criterion for theory’s own possibility, which will be further articulated in the rest of this chapter. The resulting circularity will succeed in not falling into the trap of infinite regress, but it will rather express the internal congruence of the social ontology which fulfills the epistemic criterion of reflexivity thus proposed.

### *Hilary Lawson and the ‘post-modern predicament’*

We have already seen that several authors refer to the self-referential aspect of reflexivity; but some of them (like Melvin Pollner) have completely misappropriated the content of the term. Hilary Lawson (1985) puts forward the self-referential aspect of reflexivity in respect of the role played by our language, theory and text. This will be, I think, a strong argument in response to Pels who thinks that an ontology (a theory of what exists) can accept its own conventionality – since here to claim that one can know that one is not able to know is paradoxical. For Lawson, ‘to recognise

the importance of language is to do so within language. To argue that the character of the world is in part due to the concepts employed, is to employ those concepts.’ (Lawson, 1985: 9) And, in this sense, this has further theoretical consequences. Lawson’s contribution, at this point, is significant that is, the suspension of our truths, of our facts and of our ‘common sense’ is self-undermining that is, post-modern critiques of representation result in a predicament. Not surprisingly, he connects the discussion with value-ladenness too (Lawson, 1985: 13). Values and facts, as Lawson explains, carefully separated since the Enlightenment, are now confused with the denial of clear facts – a critique which faces its reflexive application itself.

Of course, Woolgar and Ashmore’s analysis moves towards approximately the same point, as I have already shown, but Lawson’s definition of reflexivity casts light on the relationship between self-critique and epistemic reflexivity. We faced this problematic distinction when examining Ashmore’s thesis on the topic – but we found his position quite vague. Now this self-referential aspect is distinct from self-critical, self-reflective, examination of one’s own presuppositions. This could seem to be a plain trick. But for Lawson, theory-ladenness seems to directly affect *our truths* and not *reflexively*. Thus the reflexive element is to show the limitations emerging from the application of this critique of representation to itself – to undermine the omnipotence and omnipresence of the critique itself. And it is in this sense that Lawson’s position can be an answer to Lynch’s critique, since whereas Lynch (2000) identifies reflexivity with the idea of theory-ladenness, Lawson connects it to the application of one’s theories to one’s own approach.

Now, reflexivity attempts ‘to situate the narrator within the narrative itself, as if to demonstrate its narrative form while at the same time seeking to escape that very narrative. In a certain sense such moves must fail, for the narrative is always merely a narrative and identifying it as such is no means to escape its character.’ (Lawson, 1985: 10) The similarity to Woolgar is evident. Thus, how can Lawson’s thesis help us to reply to Lynch’s critique (2000)? As Lawson explains:

The denial of the possibility of knowledge may seem a wild and anarchistic claim, but it is at first sight intelligible and *logically* unremarkable. But matters cannot be left there. This denial involves a reflexive problem, which appears trivial but which cannot be eradicated with the ease that one might expect: if it is not possible to provide knowledge, then how are we to regard the text of the philosopher that asserts this very point? Since it is evidently paradoxical to claim to know that knowledge is not possible, philosophers who have wished to make this type of claim have usually engaged in the more wide-ranging attempt to alter the nature of their text in order to avoid a self-contradictory stance. (Lawson, 1985: 14)

This depiction of this conscious need to escape from the problem, to alter a self-contradictory position so as to account for one's own limitations is the distinctive step of Lawson's analysis. That Lawson is not clear about whether he believes in such an escape, does not devalue the significance of this last move. Indeed, this step will lead us to a different conception of reflexivity partly differentiated from the simple concept of self-critical deconstruction or self-reflective examination of one's own values and presuppositions.

In other words, Lawson allows for a possibility that a philosopher realizes the paradox of the self-reference of his/her position in cases where this generates inconsistency and modifies it so as to solve it or to escape from it. Why is this a crucial step? For here we have the concept of 'paradox'. Since the recognition of the role of language, theory and text in our thought, the reflexive step to apply this critique to itself creates a paradox which paralyzes the whole discussion. This reflexive step is due to the self-referential nature of some theories and statements<sup>31</sup>. Now there is no possibility of an infinite regress not because there is a practical regression stopper – like in Ashmore's (1989) case – but because of the nature of the concept of 'paradox' used here. Instead of the sequences of (Ashmore's) deconstruction and resurrection, here, we face the problematic status of our meta-

---

<sup>31</sup> It is in this sense that May (1999) alleges that 'the play of postmodernism is now the end and critiques a means of demonstrating the paradoxes apparent in any act of textual representation.' (May, 1999: 2.17) More precisely, May (1999, 2000) recognizes that 'reflexive concerns arise from an acknowledgement that the knower and known cannot be separated ... as the knower and known are implicated it is necessary to consider the mode and consequences of this relation for the status of social scientific knowledge.' (May, 1999: 2.1) and that the result of the linguistic and postmodern turns is that 'demonstrations of reflexive adequacy at the level of the knower became the ultimate forum of concern.' (May, 1999: 2.19)

statements immediately and as far as epistemic self-referential reflexivity is applied – without any infinite regression. Thus the paradox of self-reference is not something that afflicts all theories but only those which cannot be consistently applied to themselves.

Thus, for Lawson, this paradox emerging from reflexivity generates problems for many forms of social relativism which aim either to show that our position-takings are determined by our position in society, or to show that our understanding is a function of history: ‘Thus the sociology of knowledge and theories of science are immediately faced with this problem for they are attempts to provide a theory (knowledge) about how theories are possible (how knowledge is possible)’ (Lawson, 1985: 20) As he concludes, ‘The same form of paradox is generated by any overall claim about the world which incorporates within it the logical impossibility of its own verification ... such assertions are paradoxical because they claim that one knows that the world is such and such while at the same time denying that this is possible.’ (Lawson, 1985: 27), and the story ends here without any following sequences of paradoxes. Consequently, every theory which declares the significance of theory, language and context has to find a solution to the paradox of conventionality and relativism it creates – and this possibility implied in Lawson’s work is the new element in our discussion.

We can now transfer this notion of epistemic reflexivity to our own argument about the primacy of ontology over epistemology: if the knowing subject is part of her own theoretical object, then an ontology which entails relativism or generally the impossibility of the knowing subject to *know* that is, to be cognitively related to the ontology she reflects on as theorizing society, then a paradox arises. This thesis intends to argue for reflexivity *as an epistemic criterion of social theorizing*. This criterion will require that *every ontological scheme should account for the possibility of the knowing subject to reach, within the social-historical realm, the content of the specific ontology thus proposed*. At this point, we have to say that the ‘problem of reflexivity’ that Gruenberg and Lawson talk about emerges even when authors do not refer to notions like ‘the epistemic subject’, ‘theoretical object’, ‘part of her object’ etc. For mere generalized conventionality and social relativism are enough



for the emergence of the ‘reflexive predicament’. And we will show that it also emerges for other cases in which the possibility of knowledge, on the part of the social scientist as the knowing subject, vanishes.

Yet we will see that unless one supposes that a theorist who provides an ontology renders himself a prophet whose words pertain to other humans but not himself, or unless one, like Pierre Bourdieu, treats social scientists as a distinctive part of society with discrete acquired cognitional capacities, the ‘problem of reflexivity’ will arise as soon as a more or less generalized social theory, which consequently includes social scientific knowledge, is adopted. Thus, the same problem of reflexivity will be encountered when a theory claims that cognition is socially determined, as in Bourdieu’s work. For, ‘Just as the sceptic or relativist seems, in asserting his thesis, to be making the sort of knowledge claim his thesis excludes, so also the determinist is said to be doing something in asserting determinism which this very thesis excludes.’ (Boyle, 1987: 193) – and the question will arise of how the thinker as knower is able to provide us with knowledge about the generalized social unconscious as *determined* by external structures.

Yet, in this thesis, I will examine a special case where not social scientists, but all people are distinguished by the ontology of social forms – and Margaret Archer who articulates such a theory should be criticized accordingly. Finally, one could allege that even if we apply such a criterion of epistemic reflexivity to ontological claims, and if, eventually the criterion is satisfied, circularity is still the case. For, after all:

... the elaboration of the criteria of knowledge necessarily involves reflexive or circular insights which presuppose themselves in their very formation, since the principles of thought must be active in the thoughts by which we grasp the nature of thinking ... cognitional analysis always exhibits a self-referential character because it uses the very structures which are under investigation. (Moleski, S.J., 1987: 218)

I have shown, in the appendix of the chapter, the way in which epistemic circularity proposed in this thesis is different from the conceptualization of this term discussed by contemporary epistemological debates. For the moment, I will try to provide a final account of the relation between self-critical examination and epistemic

reflexivity. This will permit us to avoid misunderstandings about the role and the potential significance of epistemic reflexivity in this present reformulation.

*Epistemic reflexivity, self-reflection and theory-ladenness: a triadic relationship*

We have examined various positions, all of them talking about epistemic reflexivity. But we then distinguished between epistemic reflexivity, on the one hand, conceptualized as an internal criterion and, on the other hand, self-reflection through which one examines, deconstructs, objectivates and suspends his own values, beliefs, presuppositions – either ontological, or epistemic, or just personal. This shows how confusing the discussion of reflexivity can be. The lesson to be learned is that we should distinguish among the concepts of theory-ladenness, of radical-self-critical examination and of the self-referential and paradoxical aspect of relativism – the potential treatment of which we called epistemic reflexivity, as it intends to remedy the repercussions of the ‘problem of reflexivity’. As such, I define these three terms as follows: i) theory-ladenness, ii) self-critical reflection and, iii) epistemic reflexivity.

For, at first, to say that theory intervenes in every decision about the facts and methods that scientists take for granted is not the same as alleging that one is able to – or one should – turn one’s own gaze towards one’s own presuppositions and values. And this is because for one to examine one’s own presuppositions and cognitional premises simply means that one is not (theoretically and practically) lost within them: theory-ladenness is one of those epistemological movements the assumption of which *frequently* leads to epistemic relativism. As a result, its adoption *may* permit no stable premises for an examination of any kind. Now it is not our aim to completely reject the idea of theory-ladenness but, as I have shown in the previous chapter, to place it in the discussion about the knowing subject and about the need for social ontology as a generalized theory of social inquiry.

Yet, for this thesis epistemic relativity is self-refuting and self-undermining and the need to avoid this predicament becomes more and more compelling since Lawson's acknowledgment that not only theory but text and language in the post-modern story have relativized our certainty and truth-values. One kind of epistemic subjectivity is needed and that should be in congruence with a conceptualization of self-critical examination. And it should be in congruence with self-critical examination because the agency required for the theoretical possibility of self-reflection is the one which can be articulated as the epistemic, the knowing subject – placed *within* the social world and not apart from it.

For to examine your own values and beliefs, what is required is an agency ontologically articulated before any critical examination of one's own values and conventions. Thus, the self-reflective agent who critically examines his epistemic presuppositions, as we have explained above, should not be considered as distinguished from the knowing subject as related to the social world and thus theorized as a constitutive part of it. But the 'problem of reflexivity' (Ashmore, Gruenberg, Lawson and Pels) has to do with the self-referential character of generalized theories, like social ontologies, and not with the capabilities attributed to epistemic agents – by these ontologies. However, the one presupposes the other since, on the one hand, epistemic reflexivity requires a knowing subject in order for ontology to survive the undermining of self-reference while, there can be no transcendence of conventionality – and thus no self-referential problem can be identified and resolved – without the active engagement of a self-reflective *agent* who objectivates himself as a theory-producer.

Thus, it is in this sense that we call our epistemic criterion of social ontologies one of *internal congruity*. And thus we have ended up with a few distinctions among theory-ladenness, epistemic reflexivity and self-critical examination. We will claim later that self-reflection (self-critical examination), concerning either epistemic beliefs or just everyday beliefs should be placed closer to what in the existing literature is called, agential reflexivity which is characteristic to members who

critically explore their own values or internalized norms. This relevance to a hidden agency is what I have already described. As we shall see in chapter four, Margaret Archer explains that this is a life-long process and its outputs are always under further suspicion and critical examination.

Hence, Woolgar and Pollner talk about self-reflection despite the fact that they call it reflexivity. And it is this self-reflection that Lynch criticizes as not being something new. Indeed, it is not a new idea but it should nevertheless be distinguished from theory-ladenness. We have up until now shown that Lynch (2000) fails to distinguish between the problematic of theory-ladenness and what he calls radical reflexivity – self-reflection for our purposes. His second argument was that specific notions of reflexivity are in congruence with specific ontological programmes. I have tried to show by contrast that it is because I have already admitted that ontology is cognitively prior to epistemology that reflexivity becomes a necessary condition for theorising about the social world. This step can be taken to different ‘reflexive’ ontologies. Indeed, the need to give an answer to the paradoxes which our cognitive premises generate, has led us to the need of incorporating this answer *within* these premises. In the appendix of this chapter and in the third chapter, we should try both to explain why the circularity engendered is a virtuous one and why some ontologies in the bibliography of reflexivity do fail to be epistemically reflexive.

**Summary: epistemic reflexivity should not be identified with self-reflective, self-critical examination of one’s own values, beliefs and presuppositions. The former has now been transformed by a requirement of an epistemic criterion for coherence within social ontologies – as facing the self-referential question emerging from the fact that the knowing subject is part of her object. Instead, self-reflection as self-objectivation should be treated as an attribute of the knowing subject who now is responsible to satisfy this very criterion. The virtuous circularity thus generated entails this coherence as related to our ontological assumption that social science is a constitutive part of society.**

# Appendix

---

## ***Epistemic circularity as engendered from critical (self-) reflection***

I have started with the assumption that ontology is cognitively but not necessarily temporally prior to epistemology and methodology. I then made my first ontological assumption that the knowing subject is part of its theoretical object and that led the analysis to the ‘problem of reflexivity’. Following on from this I proposed reflexivity as an internal epistemic criterion of social theorizing – *that every ontology should account for the possibility of its own formulation by the knowing subject*. Thus epistemic reflexivity as an internal criterion should be distinguished from the (radical, critical, suspending) self-reflective examination of one’s own values, beliefs and presuppositions. Yet, as I shall now explain, these two accounts are interrelated. And, finally, in this appendix, I shall explain in which ways the problem of epistemic reflexivity is connected with that of epistemic circularity.

But considering the organization of the material of this appendix, I think it would be fruitful to start from the end of the previous analysis and thus move backwards – from epistemic circularity as conceptualized in the epistemological circles back towards the need to include the knowing subject in our efforts to justify our beliefs. This, of course, does not constitute a new method of justification which moves onwards and then backwards, but it just helps us to identify the interconnections between ontology, constituent circularity and epistemic reflexivity. And I call what emerges from my proposed criterion of epistemic reflexivity epistemic circularity, since this criterion points to the fact that the knowing subject is a *constitutive* part of its theoretical object – and thus the knower is necessarily intrinsically interrelated to that object, as theorized and conceptualized by the social ontology he proposes.

Paradoxically – but conveniently for our purposes – William Alston, who is the ‘father’ of the term epistemic circularity (1986), starts his analysis with the problem of the infinite regress discussed in this chapter while considering the deconstructionist approach (Ashmore, Pels, etc.). But are these two conceptualizations of the possibility of infinite regress identical, relevant or different from each other? For Alston (2005), first of all, for questions about the epistemic status of some belief to be settled, we have to take for granted ‘something of exactly the same sort, something that should require critical examination if the initial claim to epistemic status does. It is the endless repetition of just the same sort of claim to epistemic status at each stage of the regress that makes the procedure unsatisfactory because it is not “getting anywhere.”’ (Alston, 2005: 193)

Here Alston (2005) explains that claims of knowledge or well-grounded beliefs, if challenged, may be established by reference to other assumptions (beliefs, claims of knowledge) which, in their turn, may be established by reference to other assumptions, etc, ad infinitum. This, of course, is very similar to the regress generated by the infinite stages of self-reflective critical examination of cognitional status – asserted by the deconstructionists<sup>32</sup>. For, I think, cognitional status and epistemic status are inseparable if the discussion moves around beliefs and not around rules or methods of inference. Yet, opponents of this kind of scepticism are looking for a ‘final definitive establishment’ so as to put an end to this infinite regression.

However, Alston (2005) explains that this regress is inevitable and that ‘no matter how long we pursue the attempt to validate ever higher assumptions about the epistemic status of beliefs, there will always be other such assumptions that have not yet been established.’ (Alston, 2005: 194) If for example we challenge our *belief*

---

<sup>32</sup> If we put aside Ashmore’s idea of resurrection – and also the differences between the ‘deconstruction’ and ‘questioning’ – the great difference is that with Ashmore’s deconstruction what is at stake is the whole of scientific knowledge or, at least, of a specific programme of it, while here we have to do with the questioning of the reliability of a method. Now in the case of methodological monism, where we do have only one method proved or accepted to be reliable, the infinite regress produced is very similar to that of Ashmore’s account. However this is not the case here, since we have not a priori excluded all methods but one. If, on the contrary, we are talking about the reliability of one method among others, what is at stake is not our trust in science (or in one of its programmes) as such.

considering sense perception as a source for validated knowledge, our effort to justify its status will lead us to rely on other *beliefs* about other sources of knowledge. But:

In relying on them to give adequate support to the former belief, we are assuming that they themselves enjoy a suitable positive epistemic status. And to establish the credentials of that assumption we are forced into an exactly parallel situation at the next higher level. Thus there is no way in which we can end this process by reaching a stage at which no epistemic assumptions are left unestablished. (Alston, 2005: 194)

At this point Alston claims that in this analysis it is presupposed that as we take every new step up, in these infinite stages of regression, we do not make assumptions about beliefs which we have already adopted earlier in this regression: ‘that is what forces an infinite regress; at each stage we depend on one or more beliefs that have not yet been established. But if one or more previously established beliefs pop up at a later stage, we have a different story. Now the trouble is with circularity rather than with the inability to halt a regress.’ (Alston, 2005: 195) For, as Alston (2005: 210) says, the number of our sources of belief is quite limited, so circularity rather than regress will often be the case. And this is the very new element which Alston offers to this analysis. And it is a clear position showing that (self) reflective efforts for critical enquiry may follow circular paths rather than linear ad infinitum. The result of this circularity is that the establishment of the truth of a proposition is identified by the fact that it is true! And, as Alston explains, though in this last case our question does not remain infinitely unanswered, as in the case of the regress, now we are still not in a more comfortable position.

However, Alston also describes circularity in a parallel way to this just described. He focuses on the general argument for the reliability of the formation of normal perceptual beliefs (he calls this, conclusion ‘RP’ – ‘R’ for reliability, ‘P’ for Perception):

This is a track-record argument. Take a suitably constructed sample of perceptual belief formations and check the belief outputs for truth value. Then take the proportion of true beliefs in that sample as an estimate of the reliability of that mode of belief formation. Let’s assume that the sample is sufficiently large and

properly varied to satisfy standard sampling criteria and say that the result we get from the argument is RP, that normal perceptual belief formation is highly reliable ... but how do we determine the truth value of the beliefs in our sample, for example, B<sub>I</sub>? Since B<sub>I</sub> is a perceptual belief, the natural way is simply to take another look, listen, or whatever to determine whether B<sub>I</sub> is correct. B<sub>I</sub> is “That’s a Volvo”. To determine whether B<sub>I</sub> is true I (or someone else who is able to recognize a Volvo on sight) take a look to determine whether what the subject of B<sub>I</sub> was referring to really was a Volvo. But then, in taking that premise of the argument (“S formed B<sub>I</sub> and B<sub>I</sub> is true”) to be true, we are taking normal perceptual belief formation to be a reliable mode of belief formation. That is, we are presupposing the conclusion of the argument in taking that premise, and other like premises, to be true. And that is a kind of circularity. (Alston, 2005: 201-2)

What Alston says here is that in our effort to *see* if sense perception is reliable we rely implicitly on it. Yet Alston (2005) explains that this is not the most direct form of logical circularity for ‘we are not using RP as one of our premises. Nevertheless, we are assuming RP in using normal perceptual belief formation as a way of generating premises for the argument.’ (Alston, 2005: 202) This means that in order to foster the premises of our argument, prior reliance to our conclusion, that is RP, is needed.

Track-record argument is a good example to present the idea of epistemic circularity. But why is it that problematic? At first appearance, the problem is that we assume what we are looking for and thus there is no source *external* to our argumentation for it to be established: If our assumption of RP is warranted before we give the argument, how does the argument contribute to the positive epistemic status of RP? (Alston, 2005: 202). For, as Alston says, ‘this tells us that beliefs of a certain type ... are reliably formed if and only if they are reliably formed.’ (Alston, 2005: 210) Yet Alston (2005) explains that epistemic circularity does not prevent us from using a conclusion like that. As he claims, if we have a belief p which is *adequately grounded*<sup>33</sup>, we are entitled to use it as a premise even though we cannot find another higher-level adequately grounded belief grounding p other than p. For, as he admits, the force of the argument does not depend on its premise being grounded on that higher-level grounded belief but it rather depends only ‘on the arguer basing the premises on an adequate ground’ (Alston, 2005: 203). As Alston further explains:

---

<sup>33</sup> Of course, one could again ask how such a belief in this circular situation can be ‘adequately grounded’.



So long as RP is true, then S will have at least prima facie adequate grounds for those premises (and epistemic circularity itself cannot bring it about that this prima facie presumption is overridden), and that permits the argument to be cogent even if S does not have adequate grounds for the prior assumption of RP, and even if S does not realize that he is making that assumption. And so, despite appearances, the argument could be cogent even though it is epistemically circular. (Alston, 2005: 203)

First of all, and as Alston explains, epistemically circular argument cannot help us in the discrimination between reliable and unreliable processes (Alston, 2005: 204); for the consistency of the result produced in the track-record argument (in any case of any process/sources of beliefs) is due to the self-fulfilment of the very *reliability* of the source of belief which has already been chosen and thus believed to be reliable. But to orientate our conversation more and explicate what is at stake here, we have to say that this last quotation leads us to the idea that there is no problem if we believe in P, as a reliable source of grounding beliefs, while P can thus be used to ground any p, any belief, including the grounding of its own reliability. That is why Alston continues and says that ‘*so long as RP is true*, an argument for it that is epistemically circular by virtue of assuming RP in practice can still be used to show that RP is true.’ (Alston, 2005: 203). But what is happening if someone is not willing to assume that RP is really true that is, what situation we face if S (I take ‘S’ here to imply the epistemic subject and, it is very important that Alston needs an ‘S’ to carry a belief p) decides that she has good reasons to challenge the reliability of P? Alston (2005) is clear that in that case an epistemic circular answer would not reassure her at all.

At this point I should add that the crucial element is the knowing subject’s decision whether she considers a specific source of belief as reliable or not. For it seems that this very decision generates two potential distinct scenarios. 1) the subject is confident that her beliefs are the result of a reliable procedure, and this procedure can then be the grounds of its own reliability and, 2) the second has to do with scepticism: the subject is doubtful that her beliefs are the result of a reliable procedure, and thus that this procedure is reliable. Since, according to the second scenario, we challenge the reliability of a source of belief, and thus having no positive belief about any other source of beliefs – and since the number of those

sources is not unlimited – we find ourselves in the uncomfortable situation of having no stable basis for any belief; and more than that, our effort for grounding any belief of ours enters into an infinite circular path, that is a circularity. Of course, the kind of the constitution of the circularity is exactly the same in both cases though the difference is that in the first case we take for granted the reliability of some of our beliefs and in the second we don't. But this alone does not change the nature of the circularity as such.

In a similar way, Michael Bergman (2004) in his article 'Epistemic Reflexivity: Malignant and Benign', tries to defend epistemic circularity while intending to show why it seems to be a negative characteristic. As he explains, 'a context in which epistemic circularity is a bad thing is one in which the subject begins by doubting or being unsure of X's trustworthiness.' (Bergman, 2004: 717) – where 'X' is a source of belief. For since the doubter does not trust X, it is not reasonable for her to depend on X to learn things but to look for another testimony (Bergman, 2004: 718) But as Bergman explains:

... not all contexts are like that. Suppose that a person who has no doubts at all about the trustworthiness of her sense perception ... comes to believe that her sense perception is reliable ... even if she discovers that she formed the belief in a way that involved epistemic circularity, there is no reason for her to be troubled by this. For she wasn't looking for some *independent* verification of the reliability of her senses. She was merely curious about how it was that she came to hold, with justification, the obviously justified belief that her sense perception is reliable. (Bergman, 2004: 718)

Note here that the word 'obviously' in this last quotation could mean 'perceivably'. Bergman's proposal is that in the doubter's case epistemic circularity is malignant while, in the case of the non-doubter, epistemic circularity is benign. For in the doubter's context, the epistemically circular belief in a source X's reliability is generated by a source already questioned by the doubter, that is 'X': 'because she questions X's trustworthiness, the subject has an *undercutting defeater* for all her beliefs produced (even in part) by source X, including the belief that X is a trustworthy source.' (Bergman, 2004: 719) This self-defeating aspect makes epistemic circularity in this context (seem to) be a bad thing. And thus Bergman

complains that people tend to examine this context where the source is in question while ignoring the case where one trusts a source. Of course, Bergman has other good reasons to defend epistemic circular arguments but these are not relevant at this point<sup>34</sup>.

What is interesting in this analysis is that the first scenario<sup>35</sup> in which we start from a taken for granted trustworthiness of a specific source of belief and then we wonder about whether this source can verify the belief of its own verifiability is characterized by a benign circularity. Hence, Bergman (2004) implies here that every source of belief can assert itself as reliable, but I think that this is not always the case<sup>36</sup>. Alston makes the same erroneous supposition as well. But now – since we are talking about sources of inference – is the term ‘self-reflection’ correct for describing critical challenge to a source of knowledge if this source is other than the knowing subject? It seems that we have made the latent assumption that reflections on beliefs about sources of beliefs are similar to reflections on one’s own ontological presuppositions. But this should not be the case because critical reflections on sources of beliefs should not be identified with critical reflections on theories which intend to provide an account of being and thus have a clear ontological status. So, at this point I have to underline that in this literature of epistemic circularity, when we talk about sources of beliefs we refer to methods of inference. And now, I will try to examine with the help of specific authors and their works 1) the way in which methodological differences relate to the notion of epistemic circularity and, 2) the way in which the knowing subject is always present to decide either to believe or to challenge any source of beliefs. These two steps will help us connect the notion of epistemic circularity with that of ontology as well as that of the knowing subject.

Now, one could still claim that ‘if it is an open question whether sense perception is reliable, we can’t close it by relying on sense perception’ (Lammeranta, 1996: 115)

---

<sup>34</sup> A similar position is taken by Psillos (1999)

<sup>35</sup> Note that the first and the second scenario are the same for the two different ‘contexts’ in Bergman (2004)

<sup>36</sup> for example, if we take that, in general, abduction is the kind of reasoning where to infer *a* from *b* involves determining that *a* is sufficient but not necessary for *b*, abductive reasoning cannot help itself in justifying a belief that abduction is *necessarily* reliable, and this changes the situation in a crucial way.

and thus remain irritated by any kind of circularity. Yet, Michael Lynch (2010) would disagree with this kind of argumentation, for he thinks epistemic circularity could not be treated otherwise and he connects epistemic circularity with another epistemological issue, namely, epistemic incommensurability. Hence, epistemic incommensurability ‘is not a problem about whether we in fact have knowledge or are justified in our opinions. It is about rationally resolving explicit disagreements over the reliability of our most basic methods for forming beliefs.’ (Lynch, 2010: 263) And I think that this is not a surprising development at all. Since our sources of beliefs have been described as rules of inference, as methods, the problem of epistemic incommensurability is utterly connected with epistemic circularity.

To settle an epistemic disagreement is to provide an *epistemic reason* recognised as such by the interested parties so, a debate as that of epistemic incommensurability is ‘epistemically irresolvable just when no epistemic reason can be given for resolving it. Overt deep epistemic disagreements are marked by epistemic circularity.’ (Lynch, 2010: 270) because, as it is now obvious, there is nothing so powerful and external to the circularity to break it. And circular arguments cannot be recognised as epistemic reasons by the one who cannot be persuaded about the reliability of a method in the first place – as we have already explained earlier (Lynch, 2010: 270). And after an extensive analysis of rejecting reasons about why epistemic disagreements are rationally resolvable, Lynch concludes that it is in the nature of epistemic disagreement to be irresolvable because ‘epistemically circular arguments for the reliability of some *method* won’t be recognized as a reason to accept that method by those challenging its reliability in the first place.’ (Lynch, 2010: 273) But unfortunately for him, at this point he seems to argue that we cannot resolve epistemic circularity entailed in each part of the epistemic disagreement because its parts offer arguments which are epistemically circular!

Yet Lynch (2010) advises us that instead of looking for epistemic reasons in order to give an answer about which method to choose, we should look at practical reasoning. Thus, according to him, since these methods we ought to choose are about to give us

true beliefs the issue at hand is practical and he calls it ‘epistemic practicality.’ This means that our concern should be how to arrive at such practical reasons because:

One cannot foresee in advance what specific practical reasons might be relevant to cite in favour of a method for any disagreement over that method. What is needed is a general framework – a way of identifying the types of practical reasons relevant for settling on one method or another. (Lynch, 2010: 274-5)

This quotation taken alone casts light on a real need for a general framework assisting us in the identification of distinct *practical* – not in the sense meant by Lynch but rather in the sense that a method should correspond to the proper treatment of the object examined – reasons for choosing among different methods. Unfortunately, Lynch offers us disjointed ideas with poor academic content and thus leaves us helpless for further elaboration. He calls upon us to play a method game in which the players, under a Rawlsian ignorance, *rationaly* choose which methods should be used in a putative world *w*. Finally, our self-interests would favour methods which would be repeatable, adaptable, public and widespread – thus fostering democratic methods! It suffices to say that in order for him to choose the most (practically) reasonable methods he has to presuppose a specific world – and thus an ontological claim is needed in the first place. Paradoxically, Lynch (2010) needs a preconception of what (and how) the world (would) be like in order to choose among different methods – even if his concern would finally be of a political rather than *practical* adequacy.

The above discussion about epistemic circularity and methodological incommensurability does not crucially change our distinction between self-reference (in the case of epistemic reflexivity as our criterion of theorizing) and self-objectivation as the critical self-reflection. But at this point I have to claim that following this literature of epistemic circularity, we face the problem of the imposition of a distance between the knowing subject and the beliefs generated (including beliefs concerning the source of beliefs). Let us narrate again this story: the knowing subject (S) has beliefs, at the first place, about the credibility of a source (P) of beliefs (p) – which may or may not fail to engender positive beliefs about that very credibility of P. But who is the one that is going to judge whether this failure

occurs or not if not the one who, at the first place, holds beliefs about the credibility of P? This cannot be a source external to the knowing subject. And even if we suppose, like Alston and Bergman, that every source of beliefs can produce positive beliefs about its own credibility, how can we suppose – without finding ourselves in a paradoxical argument – that the one who eventually accepts the positive results (concerning the credibility of a source P) of P is the same as the one who, at the first place, adopted P as credible? It seems that the *only* source of beliefs can be the knowing subject and not a method *external* to her judgement (about it).

On this discussion, concerning the notion of epistemic subject in relation to the notion of epistemic circularity, a very interesting account is that offered by the philosopher Ernest Sosa. Sosa (2009) alleges that ‘virtue epistemology is distinguished by its emphasis on the *subject* as seat of justification.’ (Sosa, 2009: 187) This means that for Sosa, instead of providing epistemic reasons for a belief to count as knowledge, we have to focus on the cognitive process that yields the belief. For the positive epistemic status of a belief would involve not only its performance as a true belief:

... nor even just whether a rule somehow in effect demands that choice or that belief in those circumstances. Our virtue epistemology and virtue ethics focus rather on the agent and cognizer. When the agent’s actions are said to be *right* and the cognizer’s beliefs *knowledge*, we speak implicitly of the virtues, practical or intellectual, seated in that subject, which (a) give rise to that action or belief, adding to the subject’s worth as agent or cognizer, and which (b) make him reliable and trustworthy over an interesting spread of possible choices or beliefs, and circumstances. (Sosa, 2009: 189)

But this still leaves us with the question of what these epistemic virtues are and how one can attain them. First of all, as Sosa explains, ‘in order to qualify as knowledge a belief must be “competent,” epistemically so, in a strong sense that goes beyond its being just a belief that coheres well within the subject’s perspective.’ (Sosa, 2009: 187) So, coherence alone would not be the answer. For internal coherence might leave the thinker detached from the world environing him and as a result, it would leave him as having no reliable access to the truth (Sosa, 2009: 190). Of course, internal coherence is very important but we also need perception and memory. On

the other hand, however, ‘internal coherence goes beyond such faculties, and requires reason, which counts for a lot in its own right.’ (Sosa, 2009: 190)

What do these ambiguous words really mean? Sosa (2009) truly believes in a combination of both internal-coherence-seeking-reason and external faculties like perception because coherence, ‘when so combined it, like retentive memory, gives us a more comprehensive grasp of the truth than we would have in its absence.’ (Sosa, 2009: 191) And this broader conception of coherence includes both logical and explanation relations between first-order beliefs and also coherence between these first-order beliefs with sensory experience, ‘as well as comprehensive coherence between first-order experiences, beliefs, and other mental states, on one side, and on the other beliefs *about* first-order states.’ (Sosa, 2009: 192) Obviously, this last requirement gets closer to the requirements of this thesis for internal connection of the theoretical framework with subject’s cognitive capacity to reach in, as described in it.

Yet, this commitment to perception in this effort of Sosa to turn his gaze back to the knowing subject as the cognizer leads him to the notion of introspection<sup>37</sup>. However, the similarity to my position becomes more obvious when Sosa claims that ‘this reflective knowledge does require a good measure of broad coherence, including one’s ability to place one’s first-level knowledge in epistemic perspective.’ (Sosa, 2009: 193) In this way, Sosa distinguishes between *animal* knowledge, which requires only that one tracks nature, and reflective knowledge, which requires awareness of how one knows (Sosa, 2009: 199) – and thus providing a theory of knowledge which reassures us that our faculties are reliable.

Sosa admits that he can trust the faculties he intends to combine only through the employment of these very faculties – and this argument is circular. And he also admits that there is no other way to support the reliability of these faculties than by

---

<sup>37</sup> Introspection, has been argued, is based on the presupposition that perception is feasible something which is both criticized by Archer (as we will see later) and challenged by our initial introduction of the idea of theory-ladenness. All in all, introspection is outdated and far enough from our own concept of self-reflection.

using them. ‘But why should that be frustrating when it is the inevitable consequence of its generality.’ (Sosa, 2009: 200)? Sosa cannot see any reason why he has to accept that those who know that they have a reliable faculty (say X) have to restrict themselves in claiming that ‘if X is reliable, then beliefs produced by X are true’ and not also claim that ‘X is indeed reliable’. Why not, since they have a theory of knowledge for the reliability of X which has been vindicated by the successful use of this faculty! After all, ‘if you are really *certain* that p, then you cannot well consider whether you know it without thinking that you do. Moreover, second, isn’t it incoherent to be convinced that p *and yet* wonder whether p?’ (Sosa, 2009: 202)

However, Sosa’s *reflective knowledge* seems in the final analysis not to be *reflexive* at all. For finally, the theory of knowledge he requires for a faculty to be reliable is judged *through* the help of the faculty itself. So those who adopt perception as reliable faculty know it is reliable because after all a theory of knowledge for it has been supported by it – ‘for it all rests in large measure on their reliable perception.’ (Sosa, 2009: 202)! Circularity remains the case here in a new form through a formation of theory of knowledge vindicated by the faculty it is *epistemically* supposed to support. And the inclusion of the subject, as the cognizer, is rendered trivial. For again the subject plays no role in the attainment of knowledge but her epistemic theorization only constitutes a mediate stage in the epistemic circularity.

Sosa seems to favour methodology and not ontology but without ignoring epistemological questions. But this is not enough and epistemological adequacy cannot be attained only by invoking it. Of course, he may be attractive when concluding that:

Knowledge requires truth and coherence, true enough, but it often requires more: e.g., that one be adequately related, causally or counterfactually, to the objects of one’s knowledge, which is not necessarily ensured by the mere truth-cum-coherence of one’s beliefs, no matter how comprehensive the coherence. (Sosa, 2009: 204)

However, for such an adequacy to be achieved, we have to re-examine and reassess not only the question of the inclusion of the subject, of the cognizer, and its



relatedness to her theoretical object, but the reassessment should re-evaluate the relations between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge; of course this re-evaluation cannot be processed through the mediation of perception or of the other faculties which Sosa trusts: for in such a case, beliefs about the subject-object relations would only be reliable if the faculty generating them is reliable. And its reliability would *partially* be due to the fact that the *subjects*, as cognizers, have a theory of knowledge widely measured by that reliable faculty towards the enviroing world. But doesn't this last requirement presuppose what we initially set out to answer? Ontology is present even where thinkers believe they only try to be epistemologically *consistent*.

This discussion about the epistemological conceptualization of epistemic circularity should not lead us to suppose that every ontological account should depict the knowing subject as part of her object, but rather to the conclusion that any contemplation on methodology presupposes ontological conceptualization concerning the object of investigation in relation to the knowing subject. But the authors of epistemic circularity I have already examined not only ignore the fact that knowledge is possible only within the socio-historical realm, but also that the question of whether or not a method is appropriate cannot be examined independently of 1) its origin to the socio-historical realm and, 2) the question about the knowing subject and its ontological status as referring to its own historicity.

And it is now time to claim that since I have placed, considering social inquiry, the knowing subject within the theoretical object which he intends to conceptually understand through a social ontology, the virtuous circularity engendered is that between the ontological account and the knowing subject as conceptualized by it. The possibility of a knower of a specific social ontology *should* be premised by that social ontology. And now, this circularity is generated by this request: the one who attributes epistemic status to a social ontology should place the possibility of his being a knower as a potential knowing subject of the world which this ontology intends to describe. It remains to be shown the ways in which the circularity engendered is a virtuous, a benign and not a vicious one and, in what terms the

epistemic criterion of reflexivity is one of internal coherence of ontological accounts. It suffices to allege that virtuousness here, as expressing theoretical coherence, comes from the resolution of the paradoxical predicament that we may find ourselves in the case of a general theory that cannot account for its own possibility.

## Chapter Three

---

### ***Reflexive Social Ontologies: from Social Metaphysics to Pierre Bourdieu's Social Determinism***

I have distinguished between epistemic reflexivity – the issue of how one's social scientific theories about others apply to their putative authors – and self-reflection as critical self-objectivation of one's own epistemic values, ontological presuppositions etc. The criterion of epistemic reflexivity requires that every social ontology should encompass the possibility of a knowing subject capable of formulating this specific ontology. The circularity thus engendered entails that the author of a social ontology, not as a specific personality, but as a knowing subject does not exclude, in his ontological description, the possibility of a knower within what he has already proposed. The social ontology proposed by a putative knower should also explain how such a proposed acknowledgement is possible: a social ontology which makes general claims about the sociality of cognition of social actors should explain how a knowing subject, such as the one who proposes it, can reach to the very knowledge it entails without her thoughts being theorized as *determined* by her social positioning – that is, without an internal self-undermining of his theory.

It is in this sense that I explained that to understand how transcending the sociality and conventionality of thought is possible, a self-reflective activity should be granted to actors. Putting this another way, I have argued that the most productive way for social theorists to respond to the circularity involved in the self-application of theories is to theorise actors as having the capability for self-reflective activity. In the previous chapter we distinguished vicious circularity from this kind of circularity which is a result of the internal congruity of social ontologies which do not assume a distance between the knowing subject and their theoretical object. However, the specific content of such a self-reflective activity has not yet been supplied. As we shall see, it will involve not only the possibility of self-critical examination of

presuppositions, but will also take into account agential influence upon social transformation – implying the possibility of such an *internal* acknowledgement and avoidance of theoretical self-undermining. In chapter four, I will try to examine in which way this elementary formulation of self-reflection can be enhanced by Margaret Archer’s agential reflexivity. I will argue at that point that her account does not take us further than the kind of self-reflection we have already examined in the work of those who are criticized by Lynch (2000) as ‘radical reflexivists’.

In this chapter, social ontologies will be examined, which more or less acknowledge the self-referential ‘problem of reflexivity’ but it will also be argued that the solution they offer is still problematic. For as we shall see, in the case of Blum and McHugh (1984), who argue for a new conception of self-reflection, at the end of the day there is no possibility of self-reflection for they have deprived the knowing subject of any kind of substantial existence. Then, Jürgen Habermas’ analysis of self-reflection will be shown to be unhelpful since he does not really believe that one can reach a reconciliation, in a monistic naturalistic ontology, between the assumption of free will and the possibility of an external scientific observer, who intends to objectivate the natural world which includes society and social science. One could respond to this that a social ontology should be a distinct target from that of natural sciences and that what he thus needs is not an external-naturalistic self-objectivation but a ‘participant objectivation’. And this idea will lead us to Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualization of ‘participant objectivation’. This is the logic behind a chapter the structure of which is characterized by heterogeneity. All in all, the works of thinkers thus examined either fail to make space for the need and the possibility of a genuinely knowing subject or they seem to worry about that issue but fail to resolve it.

A terminological note: our criterion (of self-referential epistemic reflexivity) is theoretically distinguished from agential reflexivity or self-reflection (the content of which is actors’ self-objectivation). One should have in mind that our criterion as engendered by the problematic self-referential character of our general theories, should be distinguished from theorizations of the content and implications of self-

objectivation (either oriented to one's own scientific presuppositions or to personal values and beliefs). This distinction holds water even if our criterion requires for a *theoretical constitution* of a knowing subject who will eventually be capable of a self-objectivation adequate to acknowledge the very *truth* that the social ontology, which encompasses her through its generality, offers as peculiar to the social world.

### *Ethnomethodology and reflexivity: the work of Blum and McHugh*

Ethnomethodology has already been referred to in the discussion of the work of Woolgar. Ethnomethodology is one of those relativist schools of sociology to which we referred before which implicitly or explicitly face the problem of reflexivity, the founder of which is Harold Garfinkel. In his book, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, (1967) which founds a new school of thought concerning the enquiry about everyday practice, Garfinkel explains that the central recommendation of the studies proposed is that 'the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organised everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings "account-able"' (Garfinkel, 1967: 1) In this way the 'reflexive' character of accounts is their constitutive aspect. This means that members' accounts are reflexively tied to the social settings that organise the occasions of their use. As Garfinkel explains:

That tie establishes the central topic of our studies: the rational accountability of practical actions as an ongoing, practical accomplishment. I want to specify the topic by reviewing three of its constituent, problematic phenomena. Wherever studies of practical action and practical reasoning are concerned, these consist of the following: (1) the unsatisfied programmatic distinction between and substitutability of objective (context free) for indexical expressions; (2) the "uninteresting" essential reflexivity of accounts of practical actions; and (3) the analyzability of actions-in-context as a practical accomplishment. (Garfinkel, 1967: 4)

But what does this 'uninteresting essential reflexivity' mean? It means that members take for granted their knowledgeability of the setting to which their accounts are tied: reflexive phenomena can no longer be confined to substantially academic interests;

instead, ‘they directly enter as “seen but unnoticed”, but nevertheless constitutive, features of what the actions consist of and hence into the concerns and calculations of ordinary actors pursuing their daily affairs.’ (Heritage, 1984: 110) In this sense, members treat ‘as the most passing matter of fact that member’s accounts, of every sort, in all their logical modes, with all of their uses, and for every method for their assembly are constituent features of the settings they make observable.’ (Garfinkel, 1967: 8)

It is in this sense that Czyzewski (1994) explains that for ethnomethodology, reflexivity does not (only) refer to capabilities of actors but rather, ‘the accounting practices are “reflexive” because the accounts which members provide are displayed in member’s actions.’ (Czyzewski, 1994: 163) and he thus concludes that ‘the notion of “reflexivity” of actions is the original ethnomethodological contribution and it relates to the intelligible character of human actions on the one hand, and to the “incarnate” or “embodied” character of interpretative practices on the other hand.’ (Czyzewski, 1994: 166)

Yet, this idea of the ‘uninteresting reflexivity’ has become the reason for an extended discussion, within the circles of ethnomethodologists, about the meaning and the relevance of this proposal to the project of ethnomethodology. At least, we can claim, at this point, that this formulation, while taking for granted the knowledgeability of members, avoids putting its finger on it: it avoids reflecting on the implications of the relativism that it most of the time implies. Of course, this denial that ethnomethodology has such radical epistemic consequences has generated various reactions. For example Bonner, another ethnomethodologist, includes the self-referential character of reflexivity in his discussion of the term: ‘theorizing is no longer the privileged and secure phenomenon which enables the exposure of the contradictory commitments of others; rather, it is itself subject, it is itself a response to a need of sociality and simultaneously vulnerable to the very sociality to which it responds.’ (Bonner, 2001: 283)

But one of the most important ethnomethodological efforts to account for the role of epistemic reflexivity is the work of Blum and McHugh. Alan Blum and Peter

McHugh face the ‘problem of reflexivity’, though as I argue in this section, do not do so successfully. For, while they recognize a self-referential need to account for the possibility of knowledge and also connect it with the possibility of self-reflection, their account of self-reflection is not helpful. In fact, as I will argue, they fail to account for a self-reflective knowing subject because the self-referential ‘problem of reflexivity’ is not adequately identified.

In their book *Self-Reflection in the Arts and Sciences* (1984) not only do Blum and McHugh try to objectivate ‘taken for granted assumptions’ but also, they intend to found self-reflection, not objectively or empirically, but as expressed by and through ethnomethodological texts, on that assumptive stratum which is taken for granted: ‘For ethnomethodology, observation is the form of life, in Wittgenstein’s phrase, for inquiry into that selfsame form of life: convention.’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984, 75) Indeed, convention is all we have and there is no other way to speak except conventionally.

For this reason, the observer is equivalent to the member of society since both are limited by convention. As they characteristically explain:

Members are reflective, oriented to the enforceable intelligibility of their own and other actions. They produce social structure as sets of conventions that develop and change in terms of these actions ...The observer studies society from within (language), and language is, for ethnomethodology, identical with conventions that enable inquiry in the first place. Adequate sociological theorising must formulate adequate member’s theorising, because the agency of each is language as convention. In this sense, the actor for ethnomethodology is convention: convention, being the simultaneous source and object of orientation, makes behavior methodic and thus serves as the agent of society and the agent of societal accounts, descriptions, and inquiries, wherever these may take place. Enforceable intelligibility is the convention by which every conventional practice must proceed. The origin of society is convention, conceived as enforced intelligibility. (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 76-77)

Here, conventionality dissolves any kind of individuality and even observers are deprived of any individuality since this could imply a break of the limits of convention. Does this mean that self-reflection has its origins in convention? For if convention is the only source of speech, self-reflection as another mode of speaking

should reside on the self-same premises as every kind of speaking for and within convention. As they claim, the self-reflective inquirer is one who not only has formulated life-world as language but one who also has traced its enforceable intelligibility towards this common ground of every meaningful and valid account that is, the life-world: ‘such an actor has to be constructed to exhibit not only the competencies but also the founding commitment required in any solution to those decisions or problems that we ascribe to self-reflection as an intelligible course of action.’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 4) Yet, Blum and McHugh deeply understand the implications this position may generate:

One consequence of our formulation of the problem of self-reflection as an actor’s interest in recollecting the possibility of language is that the action of using language is essentially oriented and motivated in a way that includes the action of self-reflection itself. (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 61)

But before trying to explicate the dimensions of the conventionality of self-reflection within their argumentation I should at first explain what this ‘recollecting’ consists of. First of all, we should state that for Blum and McHugh any exposition is necessarily self-centered (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 3) that is, it advances the assumptions on which it is grounded. Certain values constitute the premises of one’s speech and the *reflexive* bending back is oriented towards these value-premises, ‘since all speech can be seen as a response to, and as a way of affirming, principles and methods of adequate speaking, whether or not the speaker is so aware.’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 3) Thus, self-reflection is considered as speech that identifies its self-centeredness. This does not mean that inquiry should enumerate its assumptions, but rather that it should be *conscious of itself as an oriented speech*.

For Blum and McHugh, such a consciousness and its relation to life is compatible only with an understanding of consciousness as a social product or accomplishment. As they comment, ‘to preserve the character of consciousness as such an achievement, it is necessary to formulate the roots of consciousness in the life-world as an instance of “subjective interest” or “oriented action.”’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 25) However, this orientation is not of a determinate character and actors do not mechanically follow rules and canons of the life-world but instead, they orient to



what is prescribed as a choice rather than a constraint. But this description is up until now very abstract and seems to imply a hidden agency. I have to provide a more satisfactory account of how Blum and McHugh understand the role of language as convention, as the life-world. Indeed, Blum and McHugh understand the above mentioned grounding as a way of referring to the pervasiveness of language:

...to the limits of language as the limits of life. It is not that consciousness *depends* upon the life-world as if that world could be an “antecedent variable”; rather, consciousness is inexplicable except as a demonstration of the pervasiveness of the life-world as an affirmation of the limits of language. That everything is settled within language – including the relationship between consciousness and the life-world, and including the problem of language itself – means that language is engaged in recollecting itself, that this is its reflection upon itself ... That which connects our language to the world is not discovered by our language “in” the world as if the world lay outside of our language; it is within language itself that such matters get decided. (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 31-32)

In this sense our consciousness, that is our thinking about the world, becomes an instance occurring under the auspices of language. Consciousness occurs as an exemplification of speech, as we have already mentioned, and speech, which has language as its only source, is contingent, individual and concrete while language as a necessary condition and limit is collective, essential and omnipresent. Therefore, speech becomes the accidental realization of convention. And though Blum and McHugh (1984) sometimes imply that this partial occurrence cannot affect convention, they sometimes attribute this role to self-reflection. For example, using Husserl’s conception of the life-world, they claim that now, ‘there is an opportunity to modify that life through “reflection.” Theorising as (self-) reflection – that is, speech’s reflection upon itself or upon language as that representation of itself that is both greater than it and yet internal and necessary to it – is possible *given certain purposes*.’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 34)<sup>38</sup> However, this modification, which Blum and McHugh identify, *should*, using their own theory, be treated as an effect of language, and as a result at this point, Blum and McHugh are not consistent with the rest of their *speech*.

---

<sup>38</sup> At this point, it is not clear whether they are using Husserl’s terms or they are making their own point.

Since convention is the only actor, theorising cannot generate something more than what language requires. Thus, any modification should occur as a change which language conditions for itself through its instant assimilation in speech. In other words, self-reflection *should not* be an independent instrument for change but only a possibility of language for itself:

...self-reflection reviews, reformulates, and recollects the relationship between consciousness and life not by being “conscious of this fact” (of this relationship) but by reconstructing or relaying the grounds of this relationship in the life-world. What this means ... is that language reflects upon itself, it recollects itself in the form of speech’s relaying of its own grounds in language. Thus, self-reflection is intelligible as the ideal discourse developed by consciousness about its relation to the life-world through its use of that very world. Self-reflection in this sense is language recollecting itself. (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 35)

Thus there is space neither for conscious change nor for intentional modification of convention since recollection and reformulation are too thin as concepts to be used in such projects. And this becomes clearer since it is added that ‘that very recollection occurs as an accomplishment of language.’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 41) Thus, it would not be an exaggeration if I claimed that this life-world (language as convention) constitutes a totality which transcends any (individual) particularity and it is not only omnipresent but is also the only actor. In support of this interpretation we can consider Blum and McHugh’s complaint that Wittgenstein attributes to convention a particularity which is unacceptable and conceals the generality of this totality. Hence, when they allege that self-reflection has its roots in convention, they do not intend to make self-reflection a result of a particular convention of a particular field. Consequently, ‘the self upon which consciousness reflects is its place (the place of speech) within language.’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 41) Of course, it would not be exaggerating too if we claimed that this totality is a powerful holistic transcendental consciousness since:

It is language that gives us (perhaps in particular circumstances) the power to produce (accomplish) consciousness as an intelligible distinction, which itself draws its own limits by constituting itself as what it is vis-à-vis what it is unlike. It is in this sense that the power of language is social, and it is in this way that consciousness is a social product; it is an accomplishment of language. (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 45)

Thus the self-reflective actor reflects upon his usage in order to recollect himself as an individual who is grounded in language. And he is oriented in doing this since he has, as Blum and McHugh explain, a ‘deep need’ for the essent. This deep need:

...appears to him not in the form of an essent but in the *demand* that language makes upon him to recollect its limits through his examination of usage, of speech. To the actor, this demand crystallizes as the history of possible and actual usages, which is a conversation, where the power of that conversation makes reference to the way in which language’s need for its own collectability persists throughout any particular circumstances of success or failure. (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 44)

In this way, this deep need for self-reflection has its grounds in language which orients its particular occurrences to reformulate it. And it is *only* through these occurrences that this reformulation of this totality is possible. And thus, the question of the possibility of self-reflection – which, as I have tried to allege, is posed by the ‘problem of reflexivity’ – leads them, I think, to the impossibility not only of self-reflection but of reflection in general; for neither is there any ‘self’ nor any *objectivation* independent of the ‘demands’ of language.

At this point, we have to claim that what they borrow from Wittgenstein as ‘the deep need for convention’ has its roots in convention, that is, convention orients members to correspond to its relevance. By theorising language as a normative totality Blum and McHugh (1984) have escaped from the accusation of random subjectivity, but their approach generates what they call ‘the problem of conventionality’, that is, self-reflection as a social product, as an accomplishment, becomes another convention, as we have just mentioned. This, as Blum and McHugh admit, could imply a collapse of the distinction between common sense and self-reflection, between knowledge and ignorance. As they characteristically allege:

It might be said that particularity assimilates self-reflection to the status of any need or convention within society. This is partially true and partially false. Self-reflection does occur as an interested and oriented need on the part of societal members, and in this sense its impulse reflects the need (shared by all) for a convention or agreement. On the other hand, the need that self-reflection expresses has its own character and shows its own interests. In this way, the need for self-reflection can be understood as both the same as, and different from, other human needs. (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 56)

However, this discrimination of needs and interests contradicts their previous statements such as the remark that ‘no principle is applied to distinguish types of knowledge’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 51). Of course, Blum and McHugh would answer that the interest of self-reflection is unique since self-reflection is the only occurrence that intends to recollect its ground in language – while not escaping from convention (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 89). Yet, I think that it is for these reasons that Ashmore (1989) claims that Blum and McHugh:

... have certainly given up the project of matching their discourse to the real but at the expense of not bringing news of any kind. But inasmuch as those engaged in Analysis/Theorising respond to the reflexivity of reflexivity with self-removal from the problematic side, they seek not so much to solve it as to avoid it. If, in ethnomethodology, Analysis/Theorising is situated as the opposite end of ... the idealist/realist and philosophic/scientific continuums from Sack’s conversation analysis, both practices share the quest for the unproblematic life. (What appears to be a continuum is really a circle.) (Ashmore, 1989: 98)

This self-removal can be considered further than this. As far as a potential reader of Blum and McHugh (1984) can find their own views (rather than their commentaries on the views of others), s/he will get this sense that the life-world extends to everything that can be uttered or acted on in an omnipotent and exclusive way. This image is not too far away from presenting a transcendental and omniscient totality for which individual actions and speaking constitute instances of its existence and these actualizations can be nothing more than the *natural* result and output of a greater consciousness or a primary actor.

In this thesis so far, we have moved from a discussion on the epistemological role of self-contemplation – either considering the value-ladenness of scientific accounts or considering the ontological presuppositions of every account about social reality – to an ethnomethodological theory which places this self-contemplation within the ontological status of society by giving it the role of acknowledging this status. And in this way self-reflection has been connected not with a project of resurrecting the knowing subject, but with a social ontology of language and *of* the self-reflection of language itself. Now the ‘self’ following these epistemic-philosophical activities

(contemplation, reflection, critique) is absent, and so the possibility of a knowing subject is also absent. Yet, this position, as formulated here, is a clear example of social metaphysics: it is one thing to discuss about and propose entities which are not observable – as social theory does – and it is another to propose a supra-natural entity, a holistic mysterious actor that *permits* individuals only to recollect its status.

And we shall now state that every position that supposes or proposes a holistic totalitarian consciousness which rules individuals from above is *metaphysical*. For, if this greater social actor has the only power to make us become conscious of its omni-relevance, it may also have the wish to deceive us. If this argument seems tricky and unfair to some supporters of Blum and McHugh, one may think that since individual *selves* have *deeply* assimilated the possibilities, or the possible modes of speaking which comply with this total convention, they cannot be *conscious* of the validity of what self-reflection reveals – since, in fact, they have been assimilated by and within language. For what is revealed is a ‘received’ knowledge and the self-reflective actors *have no ontological status* to escape from the omnipotence of the lifeworld; nor do they have any kind of epistemic status of their own in order to affirm or to deny by themselves – that is, to identify by themselves – what convention says about itself through their speech.

As a result, one could allege that this total power could wish to deceive them about its constitution and this idea, this critique, is at the end of the day not absurd at all since the theory has given such a power to a holistic supra-actor superior to individual actors. In other words, since the theory has dissolved the inquirer as a self-reflective actor conducting under the auspices of a totality that forms his consciousness, s/he becomes a spokesperson and his/her theory about social reality unfolded in books like the one on which we comment. As a result, the theory can be considered self-undermining; the authors (and their work and opinion) are not the original sources of their texts and both we and they become powerless not only to judge them adequately, but even also to speak for ourselves. This problem of ‘received’ but privileged knowledge is also present in the work of Pierre Bourdieu as we will present it latter. The crucial difference with the problematic formulation of

‘self-reflection’ in the work of Blum and McHugh (1984) is that, as we shall see later, Bourdieu confines self-reflection as pertaining to a specific caste of the social world – the sociologists.

Now, Blum and McHugh (1984) criticize Jurgen Habermas (1988) for his formulation of self-reflection. Blum and McHugh (1984) explain that Habermas’ (1988) formulation of self-reflection is concerned with the explication of the conditions under which it is possible, that is, it is concerned with the reproduction and the recreation of a self-reflecting actor: ‘we say “reproducing” and “recreating” because Habermas’s writing testifies to the possibility of self-reflection as personified in his own discourse, for his writing represents the actualization of the self-reflective program that he intends to implement in the member.’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 90) And they counter-pose Garfinkel who would never reproduce such an actor because ‘this actualization can only be achieved by denying its own terms.’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 90) since it can only base itself on the practical features Habermas wants to avoid – and thus, for them, self-reflection can only sink into conventionality.

One should assess Habermas’ contribution to our discussion through his placing self-reflection in relation to political praxis. By commending historical materialism, Habermas explains that critical theory specifies the conditions under which reflection on its own origins becomes *objectively* possible, together with anticipation of its own application and, in this way, ‘sees itself as a necessary catalytic moment within the social complex of life which it analyzes’ (Habermas, 1988: 2). In this way, ‘critical speech would introduce into its very discourse the question of discourse as itself a problem in order to revive the question of how we ought to speak.’ (Blum and McHugh, 1984: 90) As Habermas characteristically alleges:

The theory thus encompasses a dual relationship between theory and praxis. On the one hand, it investigates the constitutive historical complex of the constellation of self-interests, to which the theory still belongs across and beyond its acts of insight. On the other hand, it studies the historical interconnections of action, in which the theory, as action-oriented, can intervene. In the one case, we have a social praxis, which, as societal synthesis, makes insight possible; in the other

case, a political praxis which consciously aims at overthrowing the existing system of institutions. (Habermas, 1988: 2)

Thus, critical examination of the foundations of theorizing results in a necessary – but not obvious at all – movement towards a self-correction which, as we shall see, is directed to both theory and practice. Now, I have to say that Habermas (1988) connects his notion of self-reflection with the notions of psychoanalysis and what he calls as interests of knowledge in an analysis which is both obscure and can only raise more questions than the ones that it is supposed to answer. And, instead of focusing on this text we had rather try to examine how Habermas conceives reflexivity and self-reflection in his later work.

We have occupied ourselves with a first level of critical ‘turning back’ which refers to a process of a critical examination of inquirer’s ontological or value-oriented presuppositions. However, as I have already explained, this process should not be confused with theory/value-ladenness. For to examine these presuppositions implies that for the inquirer such an examination – that is, such a ‘turning back’ – is now possible. This means that the inquirer can have a conscious grasp of his/her own presuppositions; and consequently, this means that s/he is not lost in the conventionality which characterizes his/her own position: a possibility for epistemic agency should be explicated.

The terminology of this process, of this critical examination, varies but whether it is called deconstruction (Ashmore) or ‘radical reflexivity’ (Pollner) what is almost always forgotten (and Ashmore as we have shown is quite conscious about this) is that this possibility of ‘turning back’ to one’s own positioning has also to be accounted for. Yet, this explanation should not be a mere presupposition of a transcendental consciousness, or of an omnipotent supra-consciousness (like in Blum and McHugh’s case). We have already responded to these kinds of perspectives. Instead, since we have already explained that ontological claims are theoretical claims one should take into consideration Lawson’s lesson that a paradox arises when one turns the attributes of knowledge back to themselves instead of just examining them *externally*.

This thesis proposes that Lawson's notion of paradox concerning the possibility of acknowledging the limits of our knowledge should be rendered explicit and then resolved from within each ontological scheme. Thus, each ontological scheme should explicitly define the conditions under which its own acknowledgement is possible. This is the requirement of the epistemic criterion proposed by this thesis. This means that the social theorist/scientist who is conscious about his/her own ontological premises should ask about the possibility of this kind of *consciousness* in accordance with the whole ontological framework. In this way, the knower as such identifies the conditions which renders his knowledge possible; and since now the knower considers this procedure as a *self-objectivating* one, she should, in a second level, explain through his/her ontological framework his possibility not as a mere knower but as a self-reflective knower – for, now the knowing subject, in her effort to resolve the problem of self-reference, the 'problem of reflexivity', has followed the circular path engendered by the fact that she is part of theoretical object and, thus has to conceptualize herself not only as a putative knower of that specific ontology, but also as a self-reflective one, capable of such a self-objectivation that satisfies this very epistemic criterion of internal congruity.

And this is one of the main contributions of this thesis. The social scientist who is a constitutive part of her own object – who can (now also politically) influence and be influenced by society – should not only provide and thus make clear her ontological framework; she also has to account for her ability to grasp these interconnections between herself and her object. And this cannot and should not be a biographical statement. These interrelationships can only be grasped by a social ontology which not only accounts for these interrelationships, but also accounts for the possibility of a self-reflective knowing subject capable of reaching to such an ontological investigation.

This is the reason why the self-reflective agent is the prerequisite of every articulation of social ontology and, why for the epistemic criterion I have provided with to be satisfied, mere self-reflection is not enough. But its possible extension will be the subject-matter of the next chapters. These distinctions cannot but require a reestablishment and a re-direction of the terminology in the existing literature. I have



proposed that self-reflection should refer to that (critical) self-examination either corresponding to the individual who critically questions her own values and beliefs; or to the epistemic subject who critically examines her own epistemic values and presuppositions. However, this alone does not *necessarily* account for agency as entailing political praxis; that is, it does not *necessarily* account for a person who not only has personal identity and is able to elaborate it through critical self-examination, but also who attributes her social identity as a part of the greater whole to which her conduct is constitutive of. Here we are talking about agential reflexivity which should be understood as closely related to self-reflection though the former should extend the conduct of the latter, since now the agent is ontologically capable of situating this conduct as socially related to its performative role.

For the *self-reflective knowing subject* mere reflection on one's (epistemic) values and presuppositions is not enough to account for the kind of self-objectivation necessary for attaining the criterion of epistemic reflexivity as I have already defined it. Thus, what we need here is an extension of the self-reflective subject to the notion of the *reflexive agent* who is able to place himself in the social ontology proposed and thus to satisfy the epistemic criterion of reflexivity I have proposed. For after all, the connotations of self-reflection should have their origins in reflective examination which presupposes distance from society in a dual perspective: a) considering one's own values; in this sense, self-examination *refers* to a putative object inherent in the self and only has its origins in it – thus the sociality of individual is ignored; and, b) considering self-orientation towards society, the person is only condemned to reflect upon social objects which are not transformable by his conscious conduct. We will see that both these perspectives arise in Margaret Archer's work and thus her *reflexive agent* can only be a self-reflective one, in both the above mentioned ways.

One, of course, could argue for the sociality of agents without permitting them the possibility of social and personal change. But in such a case, the epistemic, the knowing subject would become a mysterious entity. All in all, if the cognition of actors is deeply embedded in social conventions, there is no space for autonomous social transformation – either collective or individual – because in such a case, actors

are rendered social puppets the moves and utterances of which are orchestrated by structures, functions, norms and roles – or by an abstract sociality in general. At this point, one could notice that on the one hand, this thesis aims at avoiding any kind of social determinism which deprives individual actors from a minimum relative autonomy – as conceptualized and realized within cultural context. On the other hand, and one could say that in apparently contradictory terms, this thesis is also criticizing any account which distinguishes the knowing subject from its theoretical object that is, which distinguishes the epistemic subject's cognitional capacities from the ones of the other social actors – and also which distinguishes the knowing subject from its constitutive aspect *within* the social realm. This does not mean that social science is identical to society. It rather means that there are different agents in society and the social scientist is one among them.

On this, we should remind ourselves that Woolgar and Ashmore, whose work I examined in the second chapter, were seeking a compromise position between the extremes of total distinction and total similarity between the knowing subject and her object. And it has been argued that point that an adequate account of self-reflection (reflexivity in their terms) should orient itself towards such a theoretical reconciliation. It has already been argued in the first chapter that Cornelius Castoriadis claims that 'only historical beings can raise the problem of knowledge of history, for only they can have history as an object of experience.' (Castoriadis, 1987: 33) And the possibility of such a theoretical reconciliation will be accounted for in the fifth chapter in which Castoriadis' work is explored. For the moment I shall continue to work with Habermas' ideas and thus showing that Habermas (2007) admits that he cannot but fail to account for such a theoretical reconciliation.

Of course, one could claim that even if we account for the sociality of individuals, epistemic reflexivity can be attained by attributing, to a scientist, distinct cognitive capacities, peculiar to a specific field, as letting them escape from what bounds the positions-takings in society. But this theoretical move, made by Pierre Bourdieu will be shown to be problematic since his ontological concepts of structure and habitus pertain to all relatively independent fields and so, epistemic reflexivity has the same

fate as self-reflection in his account. Finally, there is always the possibility that an author, such as Margaret Archer, intends to offer different ontologies for people and for social forms – and thus, in that case, the ‘problem of reflexivity’ is not a *problem* any more, since any subject is not a part of the greater social object. The drawbacks of this position will be shown in chapter four. For the moment, our main concern is the possibility of such a self-reflective agent which could permit epistemic reflexivity as a criterion to be satisfied that is, the possibility of social science developing a self-referential epistemic virtue within an ontological framework. It will be shown now that Habermas is pessimistic about this.

*Habermas and the impossibility of reflexivity as a self-referential possibility of science*

Jürgen Habermas, is the most influential critical theorist who has his theoretical origins in the ‘broad Marxist tradition which also inspired the original Frankfurt Institute for Social Research.’ (Outhwaite, 1994: 5) Although Habermas had disagreed with the works of the other influential thinkers of the Frankfurt School, namely, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, mainly because they had become more philosophical with the result of a skepticism about more substantial social research, ‘he shared their substantive preoccupation with the way in which enlightenment, in the form of instrumental rationality, turns from a means of liberation into a new source of enslavement’ (Outhwaite, 1994: 6). And, for Habermas, instrumental action should be distinguished from communicative action. In a thesis like this, we should not focus on the different ways in which Habermas has conceived self-reflection and its possibility (in connection with his stance towards epistemological issues) through the vast material of his work. Outhwaite (1987) explains that Habermas’ initial transcendentalist and anti-naturalist position was transformed into a theory of communicative action, a theory which is characterized by ‘rational reconstruction of universal human competences’ (Outhwaite, 1987: 85); and this marked a convergence with Bhaskar’s ‘emancipatory

critique' (Outhwaite, 1987: 90-91) Yet, I will examine only one piece of Habermas' work which is related closely to the concerns of this thesis, while leaving a more thorough examination of Habermas' work to future efforts of mine.

In his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1986), while talking about Ethnomethodology's critique of method as an interpretive movement, Habermas notices that self-reference might have self-destructive impacts:

The insight that interpretation of an action context presupposes participation in, and constructive influence upon, this context merely brings a dilemma to consciousness; it does not resolve it. Insight into the unavoidably self-referential character of research practice does not open a way to context-independent knowledge. Thus social research should count only as one particular form of life alongside of others. Theoretical work is, like religion or art, an activity distinguished by reflexivity; the fact that it makes an explicit theme of the interpretive processes on which the researcher draws does not dissolve its situational ties. (Habermas, 1986: 126)

Here, self-referential reflexivity implies that social science, constitutive of the context on which action draws its situational ties, is also dependent on that context. Yet, it is interesting that Habermas (2007) does not believe that epistemic self-objectivation is possible within the ontological monism that he recommends – the idea that one ontology incorporates both the social and the natural worlds. To understand this, we should at first start with his notions of reflection and self-reflection as outlined in Habermas (2007).

First of all, Habermas (2007) connects the self-reflective agent with what he calls the presupposition of responsible agency – the agency presupposed to have free will, as the ability and volition to weigh reasons in order to determine action while choosing among alternatives: 'the content of this presupposition reveals itself only to *participants* who, as speaker or hearer, take up a performative attitude *vis-à-vis* "second persons"; it remains inaccessible for the *observer*, that is, from the viewpoint of the uninvolved third person.' (Habermas, 2007: 15) Now, why does this inaccessibility occur and is this the main reason why Habermas (2007) denies the possibility of scientific self-objectivation? For Habermas (2007) the capacity of

reflection and self-reflection implies that the agent is aware that she could act otherwise and that:

the reflective agent must not only weigh considerations but also act for the reasons he has made his own ... *self-determination* means *having the strength of will to ensure that, in acting, one is determined by precisely those reasons that one has found convincing oneself*. (Habermas, 2007: 16)

Reflection here takes the form of providing epistemic reasons, for the rationality of our motives is related to the coherence and validity of our (epistemic) beliefs<sup>39</sup> (Habermas, 2007: 15). Yet, reflection occurs through weighing reasons which reside in intersubjective shared rules of intelligible action – the influence of which cannot be understood in a law-like attribution of causality, but rather as conditioning action (while not determining it). Of course, this presupposition of self-reflection is an ideal for comparative attribution of responsibility: ‘even if we ascribe free will to all persons as a matter of principle, the degree of reflexivity and willpower does vary in each case, according to endowment, character, and circumstances.’ (Habermas, 2007: 17)

When agential self-reflection is understood in this way, and is seen as a presumption in everyday communication, naturalistic self-objectivation of neuroscience – which intends to reduce consciousness to brain processes – is unintelligible. For if we permit such reduction, the presupposition of responsible agency collapses: we can no longer attribute freedom of will to self-reflective agents since all these degrees of freedom become an illusion determined itself by neurons. So, as Habermas (2007) explains:

The epistemic subject does not simply encounter the world but also knows itself to be one entity among others in the world. That is why knowledge of the world bites back at the knowing agent. The cumulative expansion of our knowledge of the world cannot leave untouched the position that *epistemic* subjects have to attribute to themselves as subjects who also *act* in the world. (Habermas, 2007: 23)

---

<sup>39</sup> a similar conceptualization of reflection was offered by Ernest Sosa (2009) examined in the appendix of chapter two. However, as one can see in Habermas’ early work, self-reflection is related to psychoanalytic work facing distorted communication. See, Habermas (1988, chapter one) and Outhwaite (1987, chapter five)

Here, Habermas (2007) points to what has already been described as the ‘problem of reflexivity’. Knowledge about the world should not contradict the idea of self-reflective knowledge of the epistemic subject. However, Habermas seems to identify rather than distinguish *self-objectivation*, which corresponds to self-reflection and can be used for an internal examination of a possible object without reifying it or supposing it to have an objective hypostasis, with *self-objectification* which means ‘to make ... objective’. The reason for this is that Habermas (2007) initially seeks to place the self-reflective agent within the natural world without the former being reduced to the latter – and thus looks for a mild non-compatibilist version of natural ontology. However, and this is very important for my criticism of his account, he takes for granted that ontology has only to do with the universality of the natural world and, consequently, he does not refer to the possibility of a distinct social ontology. Hence, Habermas’ “‘weak” naturalism that integrates free will into the whole of nature’ (Habermas, 2007: 17) cannot account for epistemic (self-referential) reflexivity; for if self-objectivation implies self-objectification then, using Habermas’ own words, ‘the agent cannot, at the same time, perceive his performance to be an event that is brought about causally.’ (Habermas, 2007: 17) Otherwise, through such an objectifying self-reflection, he would render his reflective consciousness pre-determined.

Habermas’ problem here is that he cannot reconcile the naturalistic view of determination with the idea of a self-reflective agent. However, if Habermas (2007) had opened a window to the possibility of a social ontology distinct from a monistic natural ontology, the possibility of an internal self-referential objectivation could have emerged without necessarily facing the limits that his ‘weak naturalism’ faces. Instead, Habermas (2007), by asserting a natural monism, in the first place, cannot permit *self-objectification* to be coherent with the presupposition of the free will of the epistemic subject; for now, the epistemic subject cannot *perceive* her position in terms of the *external* (objective/objectified) gaze of a *causally* determined non-participant – for he has already denied a distance between the knowing subject and her object. We will immediately understand the difference between this position and Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘participant objectivation’ (2003) in the next section. For the

moment, I should state that Habermas (2007) identifies this problem, that emerges from the reconciliation between the external/objectivist gaze (which is in congruence with the naturalistic monism) and the participation of the knowing subject in an intersubjective context within which free will is presupposed, in neuroscience and in naturalistic accounts. For in the case of neuroscience, the self-reference to a subject is destroyed unless:

... the subject of this most recent advance of knowledge were to possess the paradoxical ability to dissolve the conceptual link of identity between the two – the brain-researcher who definitely solves the “mind-body problem” and the same person, in the role of an agent, who now allows himself to be enlightened about his illusionary self-understanding as a person. (Habermas, 2007: 24-25)

Now, in order to place the subjective and intentional person within the objective natural world, within a monistic physicalist ontology, one, according to Habermas (2007) could invoke the concept of ‘emergent properties’ (analogous to that invoked by critical realists). However, as he claims, this would not be sufficient for the attribution of ‘causal efficacy’: ‘since the law-like physical regularities governing the interaction of the elemental building blocks reach right through all levels of emergence, there is no room in such a universe for mental causation.’ (Habermas, 2007: 32) We will see in chapter four that Margaret Archer argues that there is room for mental causation and that personal reflexivity is such an emergent property<sup>40</sup>.

Yet, Habermas (2007) insists that we cannot retain the two epistemic perspectives – the one of the participant and the one of the observer – in a unified ontology of the natural world. However, this, I think, merely depicts the difficulty of combining the notion of the intersubjectively shared lifeworld with the notion of the objective world examined objectively<sup>41</sup>. So, the tension between ‘explanation’ and ‘understanding’ is transferred into the discussion of scientific self-reflection. This tension is more obvious when Habermas seems undecided about which form of self-objectivation (or

---

<sup>40</sup> I think that Bhaskar (1997) would reply to this that according to the formulation of emergence he proposes, ‘the lower-order level provides only the framework conditions of possibility of the higher-order level’ (Bhaskar, 1997: 143) and thus ideas are irreducible modes of manifestation.

<sup>41</sup> See Habermas, 2007: 35

equally, self-objectification) is suitable for self-reflective persons: the dialogic (self-speech) or self-observation (introspection):

The pragmatic universals of ordinary language endow the speaker and the hearer – who use language to communicate *with* each other *about* something – with a double reference: in relating to each other *as first and second persons*, participants within the horizon of a shared lifeworld simultaneously refer, *in the objectivating attitude of a third person*, to objects in the world about which something can be said. Participants in such a practice of coming to an understanding view themselves as persons who owe one another reasons for their utterances. These properties, which are familiar from performative contexts, are also attributed to persons when they are described and observed, together with their practices, as “occurrences within the world”. (Habermas, 2007: 35)

So, from the double endowment of the speaker-hearer, the result is self-observation<sup>42</sup>. It is this tension that makes Habermas allege that with naturalism’s effort for self-objectification which intends to ‘*replace* the “manifest image of man” (proposed from a lifeworld perspective) with a scientific self-description of man, a conflict broke out between the epistemic perspectives, which are normally interconnected within a division of labor.’ (Habermas, 2007: 36)

It is at this point that Habermas makes a manoeuvre in which he claims that towards this conflict, he prefers to make an ‘epistemological turn’ and thus to avoid the ontological monism that was initially adopted. It is not that Habermas (2007) intends to avoid ontological monism for good, but rather he thinks that he cannot reconcile the two contradictory elements examined above (participation in the life-world and external objectivation) and as a result, he wishes that in the future we will be able to account for such a reconciliation. Again, I think that Habermas (2007) could have, instead, chosen a third way of a social ontology together with a possibility of internal self-objectivation, as I have done in this thesis. After all, a social ontology distinct from a naturalistic one would not be that contradictory to his account since he recognizes that ‘the linguistic socialization of consciousness and the intentional relation to the world are mutually constitutive in the circular sense that each

---

<sup>42</sup> We will see, in chapter four, that Margaret Archer criticizes introspection and proposes ‘internal dialogue’ as the mode of agential reflexivity.



presupposes the other conceptually.’ (Habermas, 2007: 35) – as we have already explained in the first chapter.

But Habermas prefers this epistemological, transcendental turn (as he calls it here) which intends to show that ‘naturalism confuses the nature discussed in the natural sciences with the universe that includes humankind as part of nature.’ (Habermas, 2007: 37) However, I believe that this is an ontological conclusion, rather than an epistemological one; for, it intends to explain how the world is rather than talking about the possibility of (scientific) knowledge of it. Habermas partially recognizes this by asking:

... can epistemology push aside the ontological question as to the constitution of a universe that includes humankind as part of nature? The epistemological turn should not have the strong transcendental point of immunizing the intersubjective conditions for a scientific objectivation of nature against further empirical research. That turn should rather open the door to a detranscendentalizing natural history, in which “nature” has been liberated from the corset of a physicalist ontology. (Habermas, 2007: 37)

However, Habermas maintains his manoeuvre by proposing an epistemological dualism while making ontological claims to support it. Habermas aims at intersubjective epistemology which would account for scientific non-reductionist empirical research, either by reflecting on the intersubjective categories preconditioning research (Habermas, 2007: 38) – and this is the reason why research practices ‘cannot, without remainder, be brought over to the object side and described completely as causally determined processes. The intersubjective preconditions for the objectivating mode of any scientific access to the world escape this objectivating outlook.’<sup>43</sup> (Habermas, 2007: 38) – or by permitting the possibility of the objective world to *constrain* and steer us ‘via the interplay of construction and experience.’ (Habermas, 2007: 39)

Now, Habermas becomes vague when talking about this interplay between empirical facts and interpretation. However, he finally seems negative about the very idea of

---

<sup>43</sup> On this I could add that, as we have explained, for the social sciences this objectivation is completely untenable since these preconditions can influence the very object and thus, only a social ontology could offer us a meta-level of self-objectivation.

ontology itself since, according to him, ‘it is distinctive of ontological propositions that they cannot reflect anything but the grammatical form of the language in which they (along with the speaker’s form of life) are expressed.’ (Habermas, 2007: 40) But Habermas (2007) fails to explain why this is not also the case for epistemological accounts. And this is, I think, partially the reason that for Maccarini and Prandini (2010) Habermas gives priority to epistemology over ontology since ‘what is there is fully language-dependent. We cannot escape the epistemic priority of the linguistically articulated horizon of the life-world. The ontological priority of language-independent reality can make itself heard only through the constraints it imposes on our practices.’ (Maccarini and Prandini, 2010: 101)

Again, in examining Habermas (2007), I do not intend to make general conclusions about Habermas’ work. This is a recent work of Habermas and it helps us to understand that a more extensive analysis of his work would not offer us an account of the connection of the concepts of ontology and reflexivity. Outhwaite (1987) explains that Habermas does not concede to the realist favouring of ontology (Outhwaite, 1987: 90). After all, ‘one of Habermas’s central preoccupations has always been the issue of “methodological dualism” in the social sciences and the fact that they are “pervaded by the opposition between different approaches and aims”’ (Outhwaite, 1987: 61)

On this, I would answer that ontological claims attempt to transcend their origins in intersubjective rules of reasoning and action while using concepts selected from that ‘grammatical form of language’. And it can now be safely argued that Habermas (2007), by succumbing to naturalistic auspices while retaining his concept of the lifeworld, has found himself in the unfortunate situation of recognizing the impossibility of a unitary ontological self-description of nature; and, as a result – which is mostly unfortunate – proposes a paradoxical epistemological turn which, while denying any kind of ontological claim, has an aim and final goal of the constitution of the unity of the universe by placing man within natural history (Habermas, 2007: 41). And it is now more obvious that the naturalist ontology he

presupposes – and provisionally avoids until future developments – leads Habermas (2007) to succeeding confessed inconsistencies and manoeuvres.

At this point, it is interesting to observe that the analysis of the role of monistic, naturalistic ontology in Habermas (2007) is very close to Bhaskar (1997) – in the sense that Bhaskar (1997) also avoids any distinction between social ontology and the ontology of natural sciences – who faces the problematic of the ‘ontological status of ideas’. Of course, at the first level, there is a great difference between these two positions since here Bhaskar (1997) takes sides in favour of ontology as far as the ontology/epistemology debate is concerned: ‘everything is contained (constellationally) within *ontology* (including epistemology and ethics) – or rather its referent, being (including knowledge and values).’ (Bhaskar, 1997: 142); and Bhaskar here intends to include ideas *within* – and he thus rejects any kind of theoretical separation or distancing between them and – being (Bhaskar, 1997: 140) and thus, to include them within ontology. But this is what I have called monistic-naturalistic ontology.

For Bhaskar (1997), not to acknowledge that ideas are a *constitutive* (Bhaskar, 1997: 141) *efficacious part of the world* (Bhaskar, 1997: 142) would only lead to a detotalization resulting in a split, dualistic, dilemmatic and inconsistent philosophy of alienation. And the interesting thing here is that a detotalization would lead to ‘the failure of the philosophical position to satisfy the all important reflexive criterion for philosophy.’ (Bhaskar, 1997: 142) Thus, it is very important for our discussion on epistemic reflexivity as a criterion for social theorizing – and also very surprising – that Bhaskar explains that ‘the *reflexive* turn, ... implies the need for every philosophy, if it is to be adequate, to be capable of reflectively situating itself – which entails its own production and context as well.’ (Bhaskar, 1997: 141) Obviously, this thesis can only agree with this position while, contrary to Bhaskar (1997), placing this need within a social ontology as distinguished more clearly from that of natural sciences, as I have already explained.

We have seen that Habermas (2007), while working only within the ontological monism of naturalism, admits that he fails to adequately account for such a ‘reflexive turn’ within this naturalistic framework. However, as explicated previously, Habermas (2007) explains why he faces such a predicament. Bhaskar (1997) does not explain why it is only through his naturalistic monism that the ‘reflexive turn’ can occur. He merely claims that a possible split would entail an inconsistent dualism. First of all, to argue for a distinctive social ontology does not mean that you deprive this very world of its materiality<sup>44</sup>. Nor does this mean that in this case one is condemned to defy the ‘reflexive turn’ that Bhaskar (1997) argues for. Instead, I have tried to show that it is only when one adequately places the knowing subject in relation to – and as a constitutive part of – the social realm that is, her theoretical object, that one can properly place the ‘problem of reflexivity’ and thus engage with what I have called epistemic criterion of reflexivity.

There are interesting parallels between the ideas of Bhaskar and Habermas, for, as we have seen, Habermas (2007) partially refers to the notions of *emergence* and *stratification* while, Bhaskar has always tried to incorporate a theoretically *critical* stance. For example, Bhaskar (1997) argues for an ‘explanatory critique’ which could justifiably characterize a theory or practice as ideological – which ‘requires the satisfaction of substantive as well as formal criteria, bearing on the role that the theory or practice plays in the discursive moralization of power.’ (Bhaskar, 1997: 145) Yet, I have explained in the first chapter that Bhaskar fails, in his own terms, to explain why his idea of stratification is adequate for the social realm. And I required a formulation of a social ontology clearly distinguished from one peculiar to the natural sciences. It has also been proposed that instead of Habermas’ account of an external observer’s self-objectivation, one should rather try to formulate an account of ‘participant objectivation’ – as expressing the idea, with which both Bhaskar and Habermas agree in general, that the knowing subject is a constitutive part of the social realm. However, we will see that, unlike Blum and McHugh (1984) who fail to retain the possibility of self-reflection within their idea of a supra-subjective lifeworld, Pierre Bourdieu fails to attribute self-reflection to a specific field – that is,

---

<sup>44</sup> On this, Castoriadis’ work in chapter five will help our argumentation.

the social scientific field – because of the inadequacy of the general concepts, of the structure and habitus, that he uses to account for the explanation of the social world.

*Participant objectivation: Pierre Bourdieu's epistemic reflexivity*

The work of Pierre Bourdieu should be our next topic of discussion. Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) was a French sociologist, anthropologist and social theorist, who highlighted in his works the role of practice considering the explanation of social life. The main concepts of his theoretical work are the *habitus* and the *field* (structures) as well as those of social, cultural and symbolic capital<sup>45</sup>. Since Bourdieu's work has become extremely influential in contemporary social theory and social and anthropological research and, his ideas on reflexive sociology are of great significance in the literature of epistemic reflexivity, an overall assessment of his view is important to this thesis. We should at first examine his ontology and then see whether his concepts are adequate to deal with the 'problem of reflexivity'. Therefore, in this thesis, I focus on the notions of the habitus and the field, for the question of their dialectical relationship is central to Bourdieu's conceptualization of reflexivity. Bourdieu uses the term of 'field of power' in a completely different way than Quine (1953). First of all, for Bourdieu, the social universe is constituted by various social worlds, identifying the structures of which is the task of sociology. These social worlds lead 'a double life':

... they exist twice: in the "objectivity of the first order" constituted by the *distribution of material* resources and means of appropriation of socially scarce goods and values ... and in the "objectivity of the second order," in the forms of systems of *classification*, the mental and bodily schemata that function as

---

<sup>45</sup> Here, 'a field is simultaneously a *space of conflict and competition*, the analogy here being a battlefield, in which participants vie to establish monopoly over the species of capital effective in it – cultural authority in the artistic field, scientific authority in the scientific field, sacerdotal authority in the religious field, and so forth – and the power to decree the hierarchy and "conversion rates" between all forms of authority in the field of power. In the course of these struggles, the very shape and divisions of the field become a central stake, because to alter the distribution and relative weight of forms of capital is tantamount to modifying the structure of the field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 17-18)

*symbolic* templates for the practical activities – conduct, thoughts, feelings, and judgments – of social agents. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 7)

For Bourdieu, subjectivism and objectivism, structure and agency are false dualities and in order to transcend them, he ‘turns what functions as the “world hypothesis” (Pepper 1942) of seemingly antagonistic paradigms into *moments* of a form of analysis designed to recapture the intrinsically double reality of the social world. The resulting *social praxeology* weaves together a “structuralist” and a “constructivist” approach.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 11) For this, we need at first to construct the objective structure and the distribution of resources within it and then, to take into account the *categories of perception and appreciation* which structure the actions of the agents.

But as Wacquant (1992: 11) explicates, ‘epistemological priority is granted to objectivist rupture over subjectivist understanding.’ This could not surprise us since the structures of perception and evaluation are recursively linked to social structures; and since both structures are homologous because they are genetically linked: ‘cumulative exposure to certain social conditions instills in individuals an ensemble of durable and transposable dispositions that internalize the necessities of the extant social environment, inscribing inside the organism the patterned inertia and constraints of external reality.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 13) Hence, the habitus is the embodied, internalized version of the corresponding structure of the field. And it is not a mere superstructure since it helps agents to constitute the social structures, through their struggles – in each delimited and relatively autonomous field, and depending upon the position they possess within it – for the preservation or the transformation of the field. The question arising is whether there is any space for conscious agential activity. On this, Bourdieu alleges that:

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being

all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (Bourdieu, 1977: 72)

This exclusion of agential conscious conduct<sup>46</sup> from social life, as we shall see<sup>47</sup>, will demarcate the premises of our critique since, additional to this, the habitus, which enables agents to face unforeseen and changing situations, is also *determined* by these structures, the past conditions. And it is important, at this point, to show that not only is the habitus, the orientating principle of perception, appreciation and thus of action, produced by objective conditions (Bourdieu, 1977: 78), but also that for Bourdieu, ‘each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning.’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 79) This cannot permit for any kind of dialectic between structure and habitus, since objective structures become the crucial ontological concept. Thus, Bourdieu cannot justify the claim he frequently makes, that practices can only be accounted for through a dialectic between the structures and the habitus but rather, ‘by relating the objective *structure* defining the social conditions of the production of the habitus which engendered them to the conditions in which this habitus is operating, that is, to the *conjuncture* which, short of a radical transformation, represents a particular state of this structure.’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 78) In this quotation, ‘them’ refers to practices and not to the conditions of production of the habitus.

And this is, I think, an admission of the impossibility of any kind of dialectic. For, as we shall see later on, when examining King’s (2000) critique of Bourdieu, Bourdieu seems to have replaced mechanistic structuralism/functionalist – which explain social action through the identification of the social position of each group of agents – with a mild social structuralism accompanied by the fuzzy logic of practice which relaxes social determinism but does not finally avoid it: to account for practice, in this way, a conjuncture between past and present structures is required and as a

---

<sup>46</sup> In case someone interprets this quotation as leaving space for a conscious conduct that ‘can be’ another option, we should provide the potential reader with what Bourdieu says on this: ‘it is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know. The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less “sensible” or reasonable”’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 79). This generalization is more than characteristic of Bourdieu’s exclusion of conscious agential conduct.

<sup>47</sup> See also King (2000)

result, the habitus becomes the mediator of this conjuncture: structuralism, in its most sophisticated formulation, only takes into account the need to incorporate agents' interventions in social reproduction and thus, avoids the naive determinism of social mechanics.

Yet, it is very interesting that when social transformation is at stake, it is clear, according to Bourdieu, that practices are constituted by a dialectical relationship between the habitus and the structure (Bourdieu, 1977: 82-3). The argument here, which is my contribution to this discussion, aims at showing that Bourdieu (1977) has two contradictory accounts of the role of the habitus in social history: social reproduction requires the habitus to be a mere mediatory cognitive structure, defined and embodied, while social transformation needs a dialectic between this embodied, incorporated structure and the objective structures, so as to be properly conceived. Ironically enough, when Bourdieu (1977) concludes his sub-chapter 'The Dialectic of Objectification and Embodiment', he claims that 'through the habitus, the structure which has produced it governs practice, not by the processes of a mechanical determinism, but through the mediation of the orientations and limits it assigns to the habitus's operations of invention.' (Bourdieu, 1977: 95) Here again, it is structures that govern practice and the orientations of their product, the habitus, are assigned to it by them. There is no space for a 'dialectic' according to this unfortunate quotation.

In *The Logic of Practice* (1990) Bourdieu, continues to present this dual aspect of the habitus. For, on the one hand, we should focus on the dialectic of structures and habitus (Bourdieu, 1990: 52) and, on the other hand, the habitus is 'a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices, an internal law through which the law of external necessities, irreducible to immediate constraints, is constantly exerted' (Bourdieu, 1990: 54). This 'through' excludes any dialectic. Through his work, these two accounts co-exist even sometimes in the same propositions and thus, Bourdieu cannot avoid, as I shall explain more adequately further on, contradictory claims about related themes such as, for example, that of the conscious/unconscious conduct.



Thus, the habitus is sometimes presented as an ‘effective demand’ (Bourdieu, 1990) and, sometimes as a ‘spiritual automaton’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 57), a ‘practical operator’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 95). In other words, the habitus is frequently conceived as a limited spontaneity but, on the other hand, differentiations of biological individuals are due to structural variants (Bourdieu, 1990: 60). Hence, while always attacking social mechanics (Bourdieu, 1977: 1990), Bourdieu claims that ‘the social mechanisms that ensure the production of compliant *habitus* are, here as elsewhere, an integral part of the conditions of reproduction of the social order and of the productive apparatus itself’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 129-130). But I think that social mechanics are now enhanced and thus transformed into social automatics through the invocation of the mediation of a hydraulic apparatus that is, habitus, which, in its vagueness of ‘conditioned spontaneity’, absorbs the pulsations of ever-changing social relations. And, as a result, this fuzzy determinism would not leave untouched agential reflexivity (or self-reflection if you like) which accordingly, is totally denied: ‘the *habitus* is a spontaneity without consciousness or will, opposed as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic theories as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects “without inertia” in rationalist theories.’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 56) Yet, Bourdieu here ignores the possibility of socio-theoretical articulation of the reflexive agent without its being ‘rationalist’.

It is now time to show the way in which Bourdieu’s ontological framework can be applied to the scientific field itself. This will not only allow us to see Bourdieu’s approach in action, but permit us to understand his analysis of social science and the role of reflexivity in it. More precisely, Bourdieu argues, ‘the scientific field, like other fields, is a structured field of forces, and also a field of struggles to conserve or transform this field of forces.’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 33) This structural aspect entails a relational aspect of the field since we can understand the position in a given point in this structure only through its relation to the whole logic and the series of interrelations within this structure. But it is through the relationship between the various agents:

... that the field and the relations of force that characterize it are generated (a specific, symbolic relation of force, given the “nature” of the force capable of being exerted in this field – scientific capital, a form of symbolic capital which acts in and through communication). More precisely, it is the agents, that is to say the isolated scientists, teams or laboratories, defined by the volume and structure of the scientific capital they possess, that determine the structure of the field that determines them, in other words the state of the forces that are exerted on scientific production, on the scientists’ practices. (Bourdieu, 2004: 33)

What one can infer from this paragraph is that the structure of the field of forces is predetermined – while actualized through agency – by the distribution of scientific capital (recognition through quotations, references etc.). Thus, ‘possession of a large quantity (and therefore a large share) of capital gives power over the field, and therefore over agents (relatively) less endowed with capital (and over the price of entry to the field) and governs the distribution of the chances of profit.’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 34) But what does determine that structure of the distribution of capital, which determines the structure of the field, which is simply the relations of forces among agents? Moreover, how does the transformation of the field become feasible under this determination? Finally, what is the factor which provides the scientific field with its specificity? For, the notion of the field provides us the framework of the questions about the specificity of each distinct field. In order to answer these questions, we should at first focus on the notion of the ‘habitus’ *in relation to* this field. For, the logic of the practice of science is derived from scientific practice itself:

To reintroduce the idea of the habitus is to set up as the principle of scientific practices, not a knowing consciousness acting in accordance with the explicit norms of logic and experimental method, but a “craft”, a practical sense of the problems to be dealt with, the appropriate ways of dealing with them, etc. (Bourdieu, 2004: 38)

In the case of science, this practical sense of these routines absorbed by personal engagement, of these ‘schemes and techniques’, differs from artistic practice because of its incorporation, as a theory, in its practice. This kind of consciousness is peculiar to the scientific field because ‘the scientific habitus is a realized, embodied theory.’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 40)

Bourdieu here explains that the rules and regularities of the scientific field determine the scientists' behaviour 'only because they are perceived by scientists endowed with the habitus that makes them capable of perceiving and appreciating them, and both disposed and able to implement them.' (Bourdieu, 2004: 41) This means that these rules and regularities determine the scientists because they are *disposed* in such a way that they can understand and intend to act in accordance to these rules. And the system of dispositions, that is habitus, takes a specific form depending on the speciality, but also on educational or social trajectories.

Thus, the above stated questions can be answered by showing the relation between the scientific field and the corresponding habitus. At first, we have to add that the scientific field is also relatively autonomous which means that 'the system of forces that are constitutive of the structure of the field (tension) is relatively independent of the forces exerted on the field (pressure). It has, as it were, the "freedom" it needs to develop its own necessity, its own logic, its own *nomos*.' (Bourdieu, 2004: 47) Unlike Castoriadis (whose work we will examine later), autonomy here is characterized by a closure of the powers of the field. And the relations of powers constitute, as we saw, the structure of the field, which is determined by the structure of the distribution of the specific capital accumulated in earlier struggles.

Bourdieu explains that the space of the positions in the field governs (in terms of probabilities) the space of position-takings, that is, strategies and interactions (Bourdieu, 2004: 58). More precisely, as Bourdieu says:

These position-takings are the product of the relationship between a position in the field and the dispositions (the habitus) of its occupant. Every scientific choice ... is also a social strategy of investment oriented towards maximization of the specific, inseparably social and scientific profit offered by the field and determined by the relationship between position and dispositions that I have just set out.' (Bourdieu, 2004: 59)

Bourdieu also explains that this is not a mechanical correspondence because the space created is multidimensional, but he does not provide us with further information about the formation of scientific choice within the choices permitted by habitus: 'the space of positions exerts an effect on position-takings only through the

habitus of the agents who apprehend that space, their position within it and the perception that the other agents involved in that space have of all or part of the space.’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 59) Of course, the construction of scientific facts and of knowledge is determined in the same way.

This means that Bourdieu’s habitus leads us to a semi-deterministic conception of scientific choice; for, the space of positions ‘when perceived by a habitus adapted to it ... functions as a *space of possibles*’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 59) in which some choices have been excluded and some other are promoted. And this happens because ‘habitus is creative, inventive, but within the limits of its structures, which are the embodied sedimentation of the social structures which produced it.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 19) So, we have a process of correspondence with the output of a multidimensional space which is not static but dynamic, since the field contains potentialities and tendencies which are anticipated through the habitus corresponding to the field. This is the reason why Wacquant (1992) says that the ‘practical sense’ pre-recognizes: ‘it reads in the present state the possible future states with which the field is pregnant.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 22) As a result, to describe the distribution of the game:

... the distribution of the winnings and assets, is also to describe the probable future of the game, the different players’ probable chances of gain, and their probable strategies, given the state of their resources (assuming, that is, a strategy adjusted in practice to the chances of gain, reasonable rather than rational – as is the strategy of the habitus). (Bourdieu, 2004: 62)

And in this way, the first two of the above stated questions have been answered, showing that the outcomes of previous battles shape the present battles, thus resulting in the transformation of the field, which occurs through these battles of the different agents struggling to maximize their benefits using the tools corresponding to their unequal positions. And as Wacquant adds, ‘this gives any field a historical dynamism and malleability that avoids the inflexible determinism of classical structuralism.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 18)

At this point, I should address my third question: it has already been claimed that the scientific habitus is a consciousness peculiar to the scientific field because it is a realized theory (Bourdieu, 2004: 40). And, I think that this is what defines the speciality of the scientific field despite the fact that Bourdieu provides us with several other characteristics peculiar to the scientific field. And it is this consciousness, this habitus, ‘the objectivation of which is the precondition for the access of science to self-awareness, in other words, to knowledge of its historical presuppositions.’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 86) What he calls *participant objectivation* is the objectivation of the subject of objectivation (the scientist herself, the knowing subject) which does not mean the objectivation of the *lived experience* of the knowing subject but the social conditions of possibility of that experience. (Bourdieu, 2003: 282) This requirement – which is close to, but not identical with, a notion of self-critical examination of scientific presuppositions taken in their sociality – is important because, as he explains:

...every word that can be uttered about scientific practice can be turned back on the person who utters it. This echo, this reflexivity, is not reducible to the reflexion on itself of an “I think” (*cogito*) thinking an object (*cogitatum*) that is nothing other than itself. It is the image sent back to a knowing subject by other knowing subjects equipped with analytical tools which may have been provided to them by this knowing subject ... Sociology, which invites the other sciences to address the question of their social foundations, cannot exempt itself from this calling into question. Casting an ironic gaze on the social world, a gaze which unveils, unmask, brings to light what is hidden, it cannot avoid casting this gaze on itself... (Bourdieu, 2004: 4)

So, Bourdieu, in our terms, recognizes the ‘problem of reflexivity’ and proposes a ‘turning back’ on these social influences exerted upon the knowing subject. This ‘turning back’ on the social influences is what he generally calls ‘reflexivity’. Let us now follow his terminology – as done with ‘radical reflexivists’ in the second chapter – and notice that here ‘reflexivity’ becomes a tool of sociology for sociology even if Bourdieu refers to the social sciences in general. And it is a tool for autonomy (but which is hardly enough for autonomy) since having identified its own determinations, social science can free itself from them and from their effects. When social sciences have this consciousness, they will be able to foresee possible distortions. Now, following Bourdieu’s general comments, social sciences are more

heteronomous than the natural sciences, which means that they are exposed to strong external pressures, and this is one reason why they need this self-knowledge: to realize the (external or internal) determinations to which they are exposed. At this point Bourdieu provides us with a challenging reason of why the social sciences need to reflect on themselves: *Social sciences are a part of the object they examine*, which means that ‘the analyst is part of the world that he is trying to objectivate and the science he produces is only one of the forces that confront one another within that world.’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 88)

Thus, sociology has to use its methods of objectivation on itself in order to *eliminate circularities* and social determinisms which affect its capacity for progress. More precisely, ‘sociologists have to convert reflexivity into a disposition constitutive of their scientific habitus, a *reflexivity reflex*, capable of acting not *ex post*, on the *opus operatum*, but *a priori*, on the *modus operandi*’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 89). In other words, reflexivity should be embodied in sociology in such a level that it will act as a reflex. To do so, sociologists should avoid *narcissistic* reflexivity which just verifies the already given results, and egological<sup>48</sup> reflexivity which turns the most objective tools of social science onto the private person (and not onto her social trajectory) and onto ‘the scholastic dispositions and biases it fosters and rewards in its members.’ (Bourdieu, 2003: 281) Instead, what he calls *reformist* reflexivity is the one which enables every scientist in a field to become conscious of the social conditions of the presuppositions with which s/he engages in the *construction* of the object of his/her science. For scientists themselves are social constructs. As Bourdieu explains, the reformist reflexivity can:

... on the scale of a collective such as a team or a laboratory, become the principle of a kind of *epistemological prudence* making it possible to anticipate the probable chances of error or, more broadly, the tendencies and temptations

---

<sup>48</sup> It is on this base that Bourdieu criticizes Alvin Gouldner, whose work on reflexivity we examined in the first chapter, for making the private person (the “I”) the pivot of reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 38). However, as I have explained earlier, Gouldner does not have a clear conception of what kind of subjectivity is required for epistemic reflexivity; and he also presents the need to account for the knowing subject not as biographical settlement, but as a need to account for a possible knower as subject to the social influences which s/he intends to examine – a need which is very close to Bourdieu’s notion of epistemic reflexivity.

inherent in a system of dispositions, in a position or in the relationship between the two. (Bourdieu, 2004: 91)

And, in this way, Bourdieu calls us to objectivate not only the habitus, but also the position within the field corresponding to it (and of course the field) and their relationship, since both concepts of habitus and field are relational not only in the sense of their constitution, but also in the sense that they function fully only in relation to each other (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 19). However, if we take into account that the habitus is the internalized conceptual version of the field, I could conclude, like Wacquant, that ‘the subject of reflexivity must ultimately be the social scientific field *in toto*.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 40)

Consequently, Bourdieu argues that one can be more objective when one examines an object as long as he makes his relationship to the object an object itself. One example of this is what Bourdieu calls the *theoreticist* or *intellectualist bias* which ‘consists in ignoring everything that the analyst injects into his perception of the object by virtue of the fact that he is placed outside the object, that he observes it from afar and from above.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 69-70) Of course, this again underlines the relational aspect of one’s position (and thus, of one’s position taking). For, one needs to objectivate her own point of view and since the habitus connects the space of positions with the space of points of view; and, since every position within the field is interconnected with the other positions, then, a point of view is a point in a space too: ‘to conceive the point of view in this way is to conceive it differentially, relationally, in terms of the possible alternative positions to which it is opposed in different respects’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 95). This relational aspect is not surprising at all, since he has already described the correspondence that the habitus permits between positions in the field and position-takings.

The surprising statement is that ‘one of the foundations of this dimension of scientific competence, commonly called “intuition” or “creative imagination”, is no doubt to be found in the scientific use of a social experience previously subjected to sociological critique.’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 113) Epistemic reflexivity here is *partially* founded on the ‘creative imagination’. But what is that property called ‘imagination’

and what could it create, if the scientist is a social construct and if position-takings are the product of a semi-deterministic correspondence? These questions are unanswered by Bourdieu. As we shall see later, Castoriadis explains that human imagination is the autonomous flux of representations and the parallel becomes more challenging, if we consider that Bourdieu has described the habitus as ‘a system of schemes of perception and appreciation’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 65) and truth as a ‘set of representations regarded as true’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 72). In this way, Bourdieu legitimates us asking about the relations between that ‘creative imagination’ and these representations, these schemes, but also about the co-existence of this creativity with the habitus and its role. For, how could we combine the routines of the habitus with such a source of innovation?

A persuasive answer to this last question becomes more difficult for Bourdieu to provide since we know that the habitus is the internalized version of objective structures. For, the structure of the field is determined by its distribution of capital. Additionally to these questions, we could wonder about the *feasibility* of reflexivity in these conditions. First of all, it is worth noting that while Bourdieu recognizes the ‘problem of reflexivity’, his conceptual framework is problematic in resolving this problem. Since every point of view is a relational and subjectified position within the scientific field, his belief in reason and its reflexive use become internal to the whole it intends to describe and thus, impossible to be justified by a point external or relatively independent from the relations of the field.

As a result, the consciousness that Bourdieu aims at becomes a received, internalized knowledge without any chance of escaping from the arbitrariness peculiar to his discipline or his position. In fact, any social ontology which explains every kind of knowledge by reference to its social conditions without giving any scope to agency in the epistemological field, cannot escape from the blindness it constructs. And, since self-reflection becomes unintelligible in Bourdieu’s ontological framework, his demand of reflexivity becomes impossible. After all, Bourdieu, by alleging that we can eliminate the circularities and the determinations pertaining to sociologists – without acknowledging it – permits for a mysterious, or hidden agency (and



intentionality) which is not permitted at all in his social ontology; for to eliminate the determinations which affect your positions, implies that you (even if theoretically) freed yourself from them – and this ‘you’ is not determined or constructed any more.

It seems that Bourdieu’s acknowledgement of the ‘problem of reflexivity’ has led him to empower a specific group of agents, sociologists, to be capable of applying their own tool to themselves, as a group. But this call for self-objectivation is undermined by Bourdieu’s own conceptual framework through which this self-objectivation can take place, since Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ renders agents’ knowledgeability as social product – an internalized cognitive structure. And thus nothing can guarantee us that social scientists’ views of themselves are not dictated by their social positionality; or by the external influences exerted to the social scientific field. A similar critique of Bourdieu’s notion of reflexivity – which points to the impossibility of self-objectivation within such social determination – has been made, as I will show below, by King (2000) and by Maton (2003). And it is now time to examine those critiques of Bourdieu’s work.

### *Critical perspectives on Bourdieu’s ontology and notion of reflexivity*

I have shown the way in which Bourdieu’s conceptual framework is 1) characterized by ambiguities and contradictions, 2) not compatible with the notion of reflexivity which Bourdieu proposes. It is now time to examine other possible critiques of Bourdieu’s ontology and of his notion of epistemic reflexivity. I have already alleged that Bourdieu’s work entails a more sophisticated structuralism. Making a similar argument, Anthony King (2000) claims that although Bourdieu intends to resolve the subject-object and subjective-objective problems of social theory by the invocation of the habitus, his theory of the habitus is objectivist and fails to fulfill the very function that Bourdieu has designed for it. Despite this, for King, Bourdieu’s ‘practical theory’ constitutes a possible resolution of the structure-agency division, and thus is incompatible with the definition of the habitus. In this way, King argues that there are two opposed theoretical strands, within Bourdieu’s work.

More precisely, for Bourdieu, according to King, social agents are ‘virtuosos’ who are ‘not dominated by some abstract social principles but who know the script so well that they can elaborate and improvise upon the themes which it provides and in the light of their relations with others.’ (King, 2000: 419) This is a summary of Bourdieu’s ‘practice theory’ which, King explains, depicts social actors as having a ‘sense of the game,’ as having a practical sense of what is tolerable and not by the others, attained by and through their mutual agreement of meaning. Here, social agents, while not following rational or predetermined rules, cannot do whatever they want and any action is inescapably social ‘because it is derived from their socially created sense of practice learnt from other individuals.’ (King, 2000: 420)

Thus, according to Bourdieu’s ‘practical theory,’ social actors are constrained by their embeddedness in social relations with other individuals. This inclination to intersubjectivity considers rules and structures as reifications of the real, complex, ongoing and negotiated exchanges among individuals. In this way, King claims that Bourdieu’s practical theory:

... has extremely important implications for contemporary structure and agency debates because it points toward a social ontology which obviates the dualism of structure and agency. In those opening pages of the *Outline*, Bourdieu undermines the notion of objective, determining social rules and social structure which are prior to individuals who are isolated from their social relations with other individuals and placed before these rules or structure. (King, 2000: 421)

On the other hand, the notion of the habitus entails a retreat to objectivism and to reductionism, for now ‘society no longer consists only of interactions between individuals, but rather Bourdieu sees society as a dialectic between practice and structure.’ (King, 2000: 422) In this way, Bourdieu does not keep his promise to give no authority to structure, but, on the contrary, renders it the most crucial factor. For now, the habitus is derived from the structural position in which individuals find themselves as long as they ‘internalize their objective social conditions, such as their economic class, so that they have the appropriate tastes and perform the appropriate practices for that social position’ (King, 2000: 423). This argument, as King (2000) explains, is similar to Alexander’s who says that ‘Bourdieu wishes not to free up

creative and interpretive action but to attach it to structures in a noninterpretive way ... far from an alternative to social structural explanation, habitus operationalizes it' (Alexander, 1995: 135).

Determinism, as I have also explained, is the outcome of this view and there is no place for intersubjective negotiation; and individuals' practice can only emerge from their structured positions since 'the habitus, which is determined by the social conditions in which an individual lives, imposes certain forms of practice and conduct on the bodies of individuals, who in the end unknowingly embody the "structuring structure" of the habitus.' (King, 2000: 424) In this case 'unknowingly' means without conscious mastery over practice and thus, individuals are presented as cultural dopes.

At this point, Anthony King criticizes Bourdieu for alleging that individuals can 'transform their habitus strategically' (King, 2000: 425). For, this description is not compatible with the definition of the habitus as the unconscious internalized set of dispositions:

His incorporation of the habitus into struggles around the field and its openness to change in these struggles is at odds with his formal definition of the habitus. Strictly, he cannot allow individuals the choices or strategies which he gives them when he discusses the field because any choice individuals can make are always already given by the habitus which is itself determined by their objective, prior and, therefore, unchangeable position in the field. (King, 2000: 425)

Finally, King explains that if the habitus was determined by the objective structure and if the habitus really was that set of dispositions, social change would not be feasible. Social actors would behave 'according to the objective structural conditions in which they found themselves, and they would consequently simply reproduce those objective conditions by repeating the same practices.' (King, 2000: 427) And it is in this sense, I think, that Bourdieu's theory accounts for social inertia rather than social change.

King's critique can become useful in a discussion about reflexivity in Bourdieu's terms too. For, the inappropriateness of the notion of the habitus as far as social

change and conscious deliberation upon individual's conduct, are concerned, entails an impossibility of conscious interrogation and transformation of distortions generated by one's own position; because one will always reproduce all the time the same view-points being helpless for an intentional change of what has already been determined by habitus and its relation to the field. In this sense, Paul Sweetman (2003) explains that 'the habitus itself is not amenable to reflexive intervention.' (Sweetman, 2003: 535) Instead, Sweetman (2003) claims that despite this difficulty, reflexivity would not be impossible because it can emerge in situations of crisis which result in temporary disruption of correspondence between the habitus and the field<sup>49</sup>.

To this, King would respond that even if such a crisis could occur, despite the fact that habitus does not allow for changes, 'any change to the habitus would require knowing active individuals who would creatively rethink the principles of their actions.' (King, 2000: 428) Hence, the main problem in Bourdieu's account of reflexivity is that there is no space for escaping from the existing cognitive structures and thus, there is no possibility for standing beyond what is determined from the field. And, as Karl Maton comments, 'to put it another way, Bourdieu's theory begs the (reflexive) question of the extent to which his analyses of the partial and positioned nature of knowledge produced by actors within intellectual fields are more than merely the reflection of his own partial and positioned viewpoint.' (Maton, 2003: 57)

Maton (2003) distinguishes among three kinds of relations of knowledge claims: a) the *social relation* between the knowing subject (the knower of the knowledge claim) and the knowledge claim, b) the *epistemic relation* between the knowledge claim and its object and, c) the *objectifying relation* between the knowing subject (the knower) and the object (the known). As Maton (2003) says, Bourdieu underlined the third relation of knowledge by making this relation the object of analysis. As it has already

---

<sup>49</sup> Yet this argument is not original to Bourdieu's thought. For example, Peter Winch in the year 1958 was claiming that 'questions of interpretation and consistency, that is, matters of *reflection*, are bound to arise for anyone who has to deal with a situation foreign to his previous experience.' (Winch, 2008: 60)

been explained, Bourdieu's intention is to *collectively* uncover the *collective* scientific unconscious and, in this way, to reveal the structured determinations relevant to the scientific field. In this sense, Maton (2003) criticizes Bourdieu's commentators who forget that reflexivity is a collective effort and thus end up to methodological individualism. This may lead to recursive regress and narcissism. For, after the examination of the relation between the subject and the object of investigation, a new relation has been generated, that is, between the subject and the objectified relation examined before. This ever-producing of relations and of the need of further objectifications can recur *ad infinitum*. And it becomes narcissistic since in this regression the subject has infinitely objectified relations whereas the object has only appeared in the first objectification. This is depicted as:  $S \leftrightarrow (S - \{S - [S - (S - O)]\})$ <sup>50</sup> (Maton, 2003: 60).

This problem, Maton (2003) suggests, emerges not only from misunderstanding Bourdieu but also from Bourdieu's failure to provide us with a persuasive tool for transcending positionality. For 'whatever the habituses of actors or organisation of the field, reflexivity is always conducted from a social position.' (Maton, 2003: 60) Indeed, Bourdieu (1977), considering the scholastic fallacy, explains that knowledge is not only dependent upon the position of the observer but we should also add that:

The "knowing subject", as the idealist tradition rightly calls him, inflicts on practice a much more fundamental and pernicious alteration which, being a constituent condition of the cognitive operation, is bound to pass unnoticed: in taking up a point of view on the action, withdrawing from it in order to observe it from above and from a distance, he constitutes practical activity as an *object of observation and analysis, a representation*. (Bourdieu, 1977: 2)

At this point, I think, it is legitimate for one, such as Maton (2003), to think that an objectification of this alteration that the observer gaze produces, would lead to a generation of a new pernicious alteration in need of further objectifications – with the result of an infinite regress, similar to the one presented by Ashmore (1989) of upper-level objectifications. Yet, for Bourdieu this *supposed* break with the objectivist view, while grasping the limits of the objectification, only aims at a

---

<sup>50</sup> 'S' for subject and 'O' for object. Maton (2003) instead of 'S' and 'O' uses the symbols 'A' and 'B'.

constitution of ‘a science of the *dialectical* relations between the objective structures to which the objectivist mode of knowledge gives access and the structured dispositions within which those structures are actualized and which tend to reproduce them.’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 3) However, as I have explained, dialectic is not the case here, despite Bourdieu’s efforts to persuade us of this, since the habitus is an internalized structure and thus there are not independent moments of a dialectical relationship. Moreover, even if this was the case, and if each level of objectification was one moment in such a dialectical relationship, this would also permit for infinite numbers of upper-level of objectifications – even if excluding the idea of a linear regression. Again, I think, this cannot be the case since the habitus should be considered ‘as a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and appreciation’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 86).

And since the habitus is a *precondition* of every objectification, it cannot also be the object – as we have seen above – in this objectification. Thus, I think, since every objectification cannot escape from social determination, from the ordering of the habitus, it is surprisingly that Bourdieu does believe that we can ‘correct’ the scholastic gaze by another objectification – for, the solution should, on his terms, be given by another intervention of the social unconscious. And the second objectification of the objectifying subject (in relationship to the subject-object relationship thus objectified) would be as fuzzy as the former. Objectivation in this context is again identified with objectification, that is, with a constitution of a relation of objective status between the subject and the object, a relation in which the subject is part of the object but also predisposed by the object.

Yet, Maton complains that Bourdieu, by focusing only on the third relation of knowledge, that is, the objectifying relation, ignores the questions about the validity of knowledge claims:

The epistemic relation between a knowledge claim and its (constructed) object of study is thus not part of the equation. Bourdieu’s reflexivity is thereby less

“epistemic” than “objective” in terms of focus and “social” in terms of basis. In short, Bourdieu’s methodological relationism misses the key epistemic relation of knowledge and so provides a sociological account of knowledge rather than an epistemology ... Without some form of (albeit provisional and transitive) anchor in the world, the epistemological question of how knowledge itself may be specialized by its objects, one is left with the results of sociological reductionism: narcissism and regress. (Maton, 2003: 61)

In response to these insightful comments on the problem of the reductionism of Bourdieu’s conceptualization of reflexivity, Maton (2003) provides us with an unfortunate answer. In order to transcend positionality, he proposes that we can add to economic and cultural capital the concept of epistemic capital – ‘the ability to better explain the (social) world.’ (Maton, 2003: 62) However, this notion of epistemic capital has more to do with the interest of scientists for ‘realist notions of a world’ and for disinterestedness (Maton, 2003: 62) than a new epistemological or methodological recipe for solidifying the second relation, that is, the epistemic one. The maximization of this capital has to do with ‘the role of *non-social* interests in producing knowledge’ (Maton, 2003: 61) rather than a substantive epistemology which guarantees that our knowledge claims capture the constitution of the object of examination – something which nonetheless is not provided by Maton (2003). And even if social actors *intend* to produce better knowledge and thus, to increase this kind of capital, nothing *again* guarantees them that the knowledge they produce is based on that ‘anchor in the world’ Maton is looking for.

Despite its difficulties, Bourdieu’s conceptualization of (epistemic) reflexivity is very important to my aims in this thesis, because Bourdieu, at first, intends to face what I have called the ‘problem of reflexivity’ – the (self-referential) question of the *possibility* of social scientific knowledge which is related to Bourdieu’s admission that the social scientist is part of her object. But even if Bourdieu is also right to place his ‘epistemic reflexivity’ within a scientific community and thus, not in individualistic terms, his ontological framework is disappointingly too deterministic to account for a participant objectivation which could really satisfy the *epistemic criterion of reflexivity* proposed by this thesis. Making this comment is a good chance for us to enhance the idea of self-reflection, or self-objectivation and thus move to the concept of agential reflexivity which more adequately expresses the

constitutive-transformational aspect of self-reflective activity. For, it is clear that mere self-reflection (which implies a distinction of the subject from her object) should be improved by the terminology of the agential reflexivity. The fulfillment of our epistemic criterion of reflexivity, of the internal congruity of social ontologies, has led us to the requirement of a *reflexive agent* capable of placing himself as a constitutive knower of the social realm. Margaret Archer provides us with a very influential conceptualization of agential reflexivity very problematic though, as we shall show in the next chapter.

**Summary: Not only relativistic but also deterministic social theories face the self-referential ‘question of reflexivity’ and thus, for a social theory, just to provide an account of self-reflection is not enough – for the ontology itself may deny the possibility of such a self-reflective activity. In fact, we have seen that both naturalistic (Bourdieu’s) and idealistic (Blum and McHugh’s) ontologies are problematic in this respect. To avoid this problem, what is needed is an ontology which gives self-reflection an appropriate place. This will involve a conceptualization of agential reflexivity which allows that agents can engage in self-objectivation, and thus fulfils our epistemic criterion of reflexivity. Further, what is required is a conceptualisation of agential reflexivity which neither implies (nor is premised on) a distance between the knowing subject and her object. Such a conceptualization must also not involve a kind of self-objectification – that is, a scientific approach which treats everything that is studied, including humans, as objects.**



## Chapter Four

---

### ***Agential Reflexivity as a Transformational Capacity: the Case of Margaret Archer's 'Internal Dialogue'***

As we saw in the previous chapter, one of the problematic dimensions of Bourdieu's theory of field is that by permitting science an intervention into its own determinations, he, in contradiction to his ontology, describes an agent who is independent of them. Bourdieu is clear that science is one of 'the forces that confront one another within that world' (Bourdieu, 2004: 88) and, in this sense, it is part of its object. But social scientists cannot be knowledgeable because the definition of the habitus, provided by Bourdieu, renders them cultural dopes. Thus, though Bourdieu underlines the need to confront the 'problem of reflexivity', his ontology does not enable any agent to escape from social determination. And what I tried to show in the previous chapter, in general, is the need for a notion of agency which would complete the notion of the knowing subject. It would do so by conceptualizing the self-reflective knowing subject as someone who can account for her existential interdependence with her theoretical object. In this chapter I will begin to develop such a notion by critically evaluating the work of Margaret Archer.

At this point, one may wonder why this chapter is addressing the work of Margaret Archer instead of the work of Anthony Giddens who is a well-known proponent of theories of agential reflexivity. Indeed, Giddens, who like Bourdieu intends to transcend the dualism of structure and agency, allows for knowledgeable agents who reflexively produce and reproduce the social systems. For Giddens, reflexivity is grounded in the 'continuous monitoring of action which human beings display and expect others to display' (Giddens, 1984: 3), and thus, he provides us with a potential solution for the riddle of epistemic reflexivity, since for him 'Human actors are not only able to monitor their activities and those of others in the regularity of day-to-day conduct; they are also able to "monitor that monitoring"' (Giddens, 1984: 29).

However, we should not show in detail the obscurities of Giddens notion of agency and its role in social transformation. It suffices to allege that by explaining human reflexivity with another vague term (monitoring), Giddens does not provide us with a plausible account of the paths of agency which are indicative of effective processes in social transformation. In fact, the actor here can always behave otherwise, but a theoretical connection between reflexive contemplation and social transformation is missing since it can ruin Giddens' negation of the structure/agency distinction. For, what is the point of conflating structures and agents while presenting the latter's distinctive capabilities for changing the former? The theoretical content constitutive of agential reflexivity is missing too. This may not be surprising since transcending the structure/agency distinction implies the weakening of the role of individual deliberation. As Archer explains:

Whether central conflation is endorsed theoretically or empirically, it remains incompatible with what is required by any workable notion of reflexivity. By definition, reflexive deliberation depends upon a clear subject-object relationship. It can neither work nor be examined if there is any tendency to conflate the two, that is, to elide the properties and powers pertaining respectively to "structure" and to "agents". (Archer, 2007: 34)

Archer places Giddens, Beck (1994) and Bourdieu in the same group of central conflationists. For Archer, Bourdieu's habitus as the mediating concept between structure and agency is problematic considering the concept of reflexivity since 'if we view our habitat through the lens of a habitus, their "mutual possession" deprives human subjectivity of the necessary degree of independence from its habitat to reflect upon it ... Moreover, since it is impossible to slough off this habitus, we are condemned to misrecognise the habitat to which it corresponds.' (Archer, 2007: 42). In the final analysis, 'given how "habitus" stressed the pre-adaptation of people to circumstances and the "semi-conscious", "quasi-automatic" nature of its operations ... it is hard to think of any concept less helpful for dealing with conscious deliberations and the determination of choices.' (Archer, 2007: 56) I agree with this consideration, but as I will try to show, these objections should not lead us to an ontological distinction between social structure and agents.

Considering these remarks, at this point, we should move back again to critical realism and its contribution to the structure/agency debate – and more specifically to Margaret Archer’s views about agential reflexivity and its social role. Her account of agential reflexivity is very interesting, as I have already explained, because, on the one hand, she separates people and society – and thus there is no ‘problem of reflexivity’ arising from her account since she places people and the social forms in two different ontologies – and, on the other hand (and consequently) this influential account of agential reflexivity shall be shown to be a crude version of self-reflective activity; since now, the distance raised between the subject (whether epistemic or not) and society permits this subject only to reflect either on external (and conceptually independent from her conceptualizations of) objective structures, or on personal beliefs and values – the origins of which *frequently* appear as pre-existing self-reflection. Archer’s conceptualization of agential reflexivity is based on the ontological distinction between people and society and thus, before I examine her notion of agential reflexivity, it would be fruitful to start with an examination of her broader account of the interconnections between structures and agents.

### Margaret Archer’s ‘morphogenetic approach’ and the structure/agency debate

Since Margaret Archer is a prominent critical realist, like Bhaskar and Sayer, the works of whom I examined in the first chapter, one could expect her to talk about causes that are not always activated and, if activated, not always be responsible for the social effects. That is right, but what we have here is also an elegant effort to rescue Bhaskar’s realism from his early admissions – that is, the concept/activity-dependence of the social forms. At this starting point, we have to underline that Archer defends the subjective/objective distinction while reminding us that structure is considered to be the objective part and agency the subjective part of social reality:

Arguments “against transcendence” protest that the *interplay* between the objective and the subjective can only be occluded by the attempt to transcend the difference between the two. Those who are “for transcendence” are denying that objectivity and subjectivity refer to two casual powers that are irreducibly

different in kind and make relatively autonomous contributions to social outcomes.’ (Archer, 2003: 1-2)

Structure and agency are presented as having a different ontological character, which simply entails that we have to deal with two distinct kinds of causes, and Archer does not aim at providing us with a reductionist solution. For her, the fact that we have to analyse two different powers should lead us to examine their interplay, that is, how they affect each other. In other words, we should have a plausible explanation of how objectivity influences subjectivity and vice versa. And, the problem that appears is how she can maintain subjectivity while talking about structures and generative mechanisms as causes in open systems. Again, her answer is that, under the presupposition of *emergent properties*, she adopts different ontologies. Mental states, as well as thoughts, belong to the ‘first-person ontology’ (Archer, 2003: 36), while ‘objective’ structures to the ‘third-person ontology’. This simply means that thoughts are subjective, private and experienced by a particular individual. In the social world we face different ontologies with different emergent properties, not divided, but mutually acting *in the same story of naturalism*. Both ontologies are placed in one story of how our human powers emerge from our relations with the world and how they react back upon it.

Later on, we will discuss the theoretical role of terms like ‘agents’ and ‘reflexivity’ in Archer’s work, as well as her conceptualization of social structures – together with examples of these structures. It suffices to say that Archer distinguishes between social and cultural structures and, that costs, benefits and interests are those objective properties of social structure. Yet, at this point, we have to note that her ‘Morphogenetic Approach’ intends to examine the reproduction (Morphostasis) and the transformation (Morphogenesis) of the social structures conducted by agents, who, in their turn, are reproduced and transformed accordingly. Structures pre-date action, which in its turn, transforms them, and structural elaboration post-dates those actions – procedures which are repeated, and thus society goes on. More specifically, this approach entails analytical (not philosophical) dualism to delineate different temporal phases – Structural Conditioning, Social Interaction and Structural elaboration – to give an account of structuring over time.

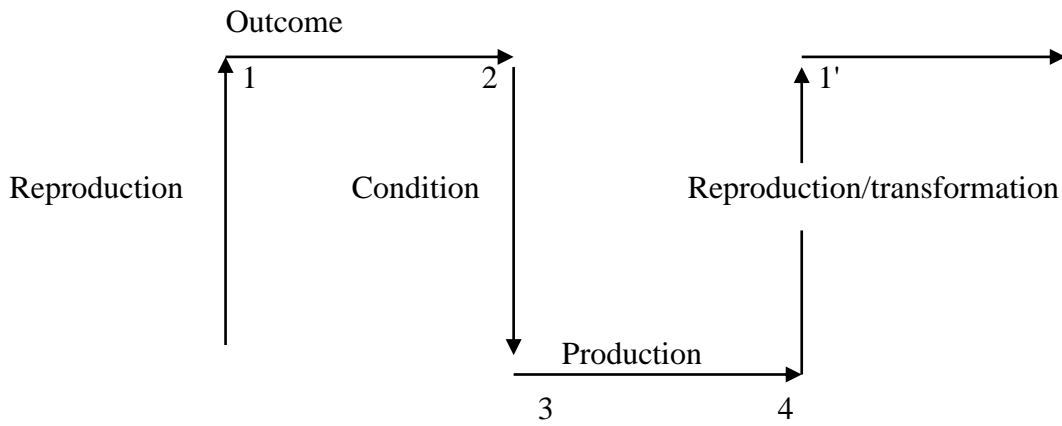


Figure 1. Bhaskar's transformational model (Bhaskar, 2009: 126)

On this, Archer (1995) compares Bhaskar's transformational model (Bhaskar, 1989) of the society/person connection with her Morphogenetic approach. As she explains, the basic theorems of the Morphogenetic approach are: '(i) that structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) which transform it ... (ii) and that structural elaboration necessarily post-dates those actions which have transformed it' (Archer, 1995: 157). What differentiates her figure from Bhaskar's is the placement of socio-cultural interaction as occurring before structural elaboration. This is Archer's reassuring manoeuvre which guarantees that present actions do not transform concomitantly the conditions which impinge on them. The result of present actions will condition others in the future but not those who make the present-day actions.

Structural conditioning

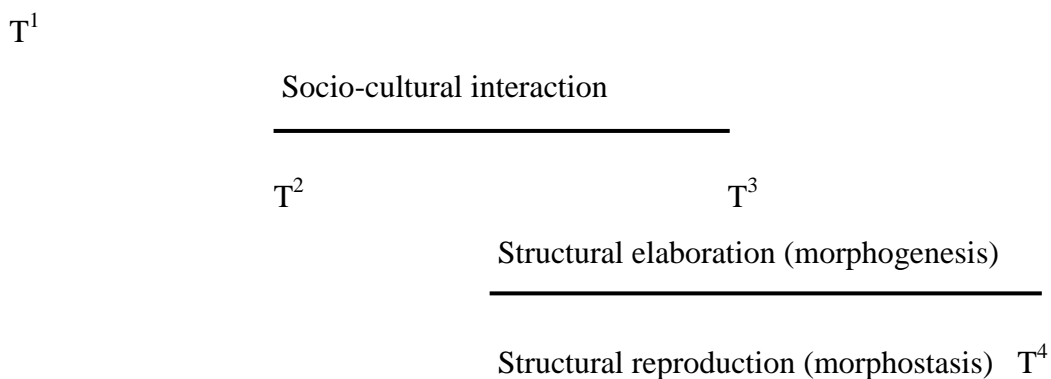


Figure 2. Margaret Archer's morphogenetic cycle, (Archer, 1995: 157)

And since these lines in figure 2 represent a continuous movement, the dualism (structure/agency) is analytical and not philosophical (Archer, 1995: 157). For, analytical dualism is 'a matter of theoretical necessity if we are to obtain purchase on those processes which are accountable for determinate social changes – that is if we are to advance usable social theories for working investigators' (Archer, 1995: 158). However, as I will explain later, this position of analytical dualism is not very safe from sliding to philosophical dualism – or at least, to ontological dualism, which is what this really implies.

Archer believes that the principle 'no people; no society' should not imply 'this society; because of these people here present'. This means that the fact that structures are activity-dependent does not entail that people can *intentionally* transform structures whenever they wish – as if they do not have their own distinct reality. For Archer, structures are most of the time the product of long-dead others, the actions of whom pre-condition and pre-date present actions – thus exerting distinct causal powers which present actors' actions cannot elide. And, 'at any given time, structure itself is the result of the result of prior social relations conditioned by an antecedent structural context. As such it is moulded and re-moulded but conforms to no mould' (Archer, 1995: 165); though society exists because of intentional action, it never

conforms to someone's intentionality, no matter powerful he is<sup>51</sup>. Consequently, Archer separates herself from interpretations of structure such as social hydraulics or social mechanism.

Of course, Archer does not argue here in favour of the complete contingency of the social world. In such a case there would be nothing for science to explore. That is, 'although it is contingent *that* any particular social structure exists (for they are historically specific and only relatively enduring), nevertheless whilst they do persist, as the unintended consequences of previous social interaction, they exert systematic causal effects on subsequent action.' (Archer, 1995: 167) And, structures, which thus have irreducible character, autonomous influence and relative endurance exert this influence through *emergent properties* – which emerge as such because of the relations between those structures – 'whose differentiating features are relative endurance, natural necessity and the possession of causal powers' (Archer, 1995: 167); they are relational properties the relationality of which is characterized by internal and necessary relations. And their necessity is natural.

However, Archer, at this point, becomes ambivalent by claiming that what is crucial to structures is that they have the generative capacity to modify the powers of its constituents in fundamental ways 'and to exercise causal influences *sui generis*. This is the litmus test which differentiates between emergence on the one hand and aggregation and combination on the other.' (Archer, 1995: 174) However, in such a case, while structures exert, through emergent properties, two kinds of causal powers, that is, towards the constituents of the emergent properties themselves and, towards other external entities, the former kind is related to what should be ontologically distinct – that is, agency. And our question becomes more acute, if we consider her ambiguity, in the case of structural emergent properties, of claiming that what 'differentiates a *structural* emergent property is its *primary dependence upon material resources*, both physical and human.' (Archer, 1995: 175) But what does these 'human' as material resources mean?

---

<sup>51</sup> The same analysis holds for cultural emergent properties analyzed in Archer's book 'Culture and Agency' (1996)

For, if structural emergent properties are characterized by ‘internal and necessary *relationships* between real collectivities and their further relations with entities like the prevailing mode of production’ (Archer, 1995: 178), ‘real collectivities’ become parts of the components of the relational properties which exert causal powers to themselves. And, thus, agents become *internal* to the generative mechanism’s powers, not external as Archer initially claims. And, as a result, the interplay between structure and agency enters in the level of structural conditioning – and thus, there arises a possibility for the motto ‘no people, no society’ to mean ‘these social forms; because of these people, these collectivities, here present’.

Yet, Archer would not allow for such an agency-dependence – which would be contradictory to her other views about the relative autonomy of structure – and, it is for this reason that Archer separates the conditioning of social structures (SS) from social interaction (SI) which is conditioned by structures at present time – which then will have conditioning outcomes in future time:

Transcendental arguments ask what else needs to be the case, what else must be present for X to be such as it is, and not what people think, notice, tell or believe is the case. Natural necessity makes appeal to other constituents at the SS level and not to beliefs about them, including mis-information and dis-information at the SI level. Failure to make this distinction runs together precisely the three things which we wish to explore and theorize, namely structures, their causal powers and their social reception. (Archer, 1995: 177)

At this point, we have to claim that this effort to deny the theory-dependence of the social forms, and thus to correct Bhaskar’s early admissions, has led Archer to hold inconsistent views; for, Archer’s fear that agents may influence contemporary social structures has made her place agents so far away from society that its impact is echoed less and less – something which leads her to two arguments which contradict other aspects of her work: 1) structural effects are eventually not so powerful as they were initially supposed to be and, 2) agency, instead of being an internal factor of emergence, becomes an external factor that, frequently in Archer’s work, is understood to be the one and the only powerful influence on events.



The first argument belongs to Kemp (2011) who explains that, on the one hand, ‘Archer is suggesting that structural costs and penalties have an intrinsic influence on all agents’ decision making by tipping the scales one way, no matter what their subjective priorities are.’ (Kemp, 2011: 11) and, on the other hand, she is frequently implying that agents can ignore and suspend this structural conditioning – and thus, ‘Archer tacitly consents to the undermining of her claims about the influence of structural interests in those moments where she emphasizes the subjective basis of agents’ values.’ (Kemp, 2011: 12) Indeed, Archer frequently claims that agents can ignore structural properties or that they can interpretively and ideationally evade their impact on them. Archer explains that people ‘... are capable of resisting, repudiating, suspending or circumventing structural and cultural tendencies, in ways which are unpredictable because of their creative powers as human beings’ (Archer, 1995: 195); and, as a result, structural and cultural conditioning echoed less and less since ‘under all but the most stringent constraints, agents have the capacity to suspend the exercise of constraints (and enablements) through their circumventory (or renunciatory) actions.’ (Archer, 2007: 9-10) After all, the projects which agents are capable of conceiving ‘can imaginatively outstrip the social possibilities of their times.’ (Archer, 1995: 200)

At this point, Archer explains that despite this mediation, the ‘exercise of agential powers (whether of individuals or of groups) can be suspended, modified, re-directed etc. by the social forms in which they are developed and deployed.’ (Archer, 1995: 196) Yet, this generates a contradictory argument which, in its turn, can be applied at a second level of conditioning since, her insistence on the possibility of circumvention really undermines structural conditioning as these ‘modifications’ and ‘re-directions’ are – at a second level – again activated as well only through agential causality. In this way, all social causes become a matter of agential discretion – since agents are ‘capable’ of suspension and circumvention. And to claim that the objective constraints and enablements of the situations ‘we confront are not the same as our powers of description or conceptualization.’ (Archer, 1995: 197) is not enough for her to explain how structures condition agents’ activity in the sense that ‘they *condition us involuntaristically*.’ (Archer, 1995: 197)

This inconsistency is, I think, engendered not only by Archer's wish to raise a distance between structures and agents – so that she can avoid either reductionism or theory dependence<sup>52</sup> – but by a creeping individualism (as implied above by her inclusion of agents within structural parts). The confusion that results from Archer's attempt to escape (in vain) these individualistic auspices is obvious when she claims that 'the generative powers of the "parts" and the "people" are both necessary conditions for the development in question, but only together do they supply the sufficient conditions' (Archer, 1995: 199) for the accomplishment of agential projects, while, simultaneously, she re-affirms the unique efficiency of the causality of agency. Here, we face the *oxymoronic schema* where we do have an *efficient* cause which, as a *necessary* condition, becomes *sufficient* condition for action *only* when it is combined with another necessary condition (socio-cultural conditioning)! And my question here is how and why an (unique and efficacious<sup>53</sup>) efficient cause is *at a second level*, viewed only as a *necessary* condition – and in which ways the former does not overlap and epistemically include the latter. Let us offer a few quotations showing this confusion:

The realist is committed to maintaining that the "causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency". This commitment protects against reification and endorses the view that agents are the only efficient causes in social life. (Archer, 1995: 195)

Thus, just as conditional mechanisms through which structural and cultural properties impinged upon agents had to be adduced because conditioning only works through agency (as the sole efficient cause in social life), so the same is true of elaboration in society. (Archer, 1995: 295)

Reification is not entailed by considering such incentives and costs as conditional, though not deterministic influences, since though objective, their efficacy is dependent upon how agents weigh them and decide to act in view of their own weightings (Archer, 1995: 208)

It is obvious that by saying that 'the causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency' which is now the **only** efficient cause in social life and,

---

<sup>52</sup> Both these elements, are unfortunately presented by Archer (1995) as identical.

<sup>53</sup> As Archer claims, 'any form of sociocultural conditioning only exerts its effects on people and is only efficacious through people' (Archer, 1995: 184) and, 'social structures are only efficacious through the activities of human beings' (Archer, 1995: 148)

through which socio-structural conditioning **only** attains efficacy, because such a conditioning only works through it, then, we are assuming that 1) agency is the primal causality and, 2) this *efficient* causality constitutes an efficacious one and not just a necessary one. So, Archer, once again, seems to contradict herself by saying that it is only through the combination of two necessary causalities that sufficiency in relation to the outcome is attained – since, now, agency is not only necessary but also has the final word on the efficacy of the socio-cultural conditioning – and thus, agential powers become the only efficient cause and not just a necessary one as she initially claims.

After this preliminary critique of Archer, it seems self-undermining, as Kemp (2012) explains, to claim that one cannot avoid structural conditioning (Archer, 1995: 202) – with its related vested interests and opportunity costs – and, that different opportunity costs not only influence the difficulty and the ease relevant to each course of action of different groups but also, ‘condition which projects are entertained by them’ (Archer, 1995: 208). Indeed, the concept of opportunity costs, for Archer, is the basic tool to theorize structural conditioning while retaining the indeterminacy of agents’ interpretations of the situation they involuntarily have found themselves in. For, ‘objective opportunity costs exert their influence upon the vested interests of agents which are equally objective.’ (Archer, 1995: 205); thus, they constitute a second guaranteeing pressure on subjective unpredictable reactions and aspirations.

Thus, it is again surprising that Archer concludes that ‘the objective distribution of costs and benefits conditions both interpretation and action.’ (Archer, 1995: 209) For this reason, the notion of ‘directional guidance’ would be more consistent with her idea that the only efficient cause in social life is agency. In such a case, structural conditioning offers just good reasons or *reasonably good guides* regarding an ‘objective’ loss or a gain. Unfortunately, in the sub-chapter devoted to ‘directional guidance’ (1995), in the case of incongruence at the level of systemic (dis) integration, strains are ‘experienced as practical exigencies by agents whose interests are vested in the impeded institutions and their associated roles.’ (Archer, 1995: 215)

This quotation is closer to social determinism than to an idea of ‘directional guidance’.

*Critical notes on Margaret Archer’s ontological dualism and conceptualization of emergence*

It is now time to examine critical assessments by other writers of Archer’s effort to articulate a dualistic ontology which aims at pointing out that agents cannot transform their contemporary social forms which conditioned them. This discussion is important since its ontological import depicts what is at stake about the status of social actors, their powers and their relations with social forms. Are social individuals constituent parts of social structures or, as Archer frequently argues, do structures and agency constitute two distinct causes in social life? Does the former idea imply that the actions of social actors as constituent parts are determined by social structure, or should we rather assume that social structures are the result of the interaction of contemporary social individuals? This latter idea would mean that even if social structures are external and pre-date every agent, this does not entail that social structures are external to the actions of all social actors and their relations. I will start from Dave Elder-Vass’ neo-functionalist approach and we then conclude with a few critical remarks made by Anthony King.

Dave Elder-Vass is a critical realist who is broadly sympathetic to the work of Archer while offering a different account of the agency/structure relationship. In his article ‘For Emergence’ (2007b) Elder-Vass differentiates his own views from Archer’s account of emergence in the sense that he criticizes Archer’s analysis of the temporality (causes unfolding in time series) that characterizes the emergence of social structures by proposing what he calls a *synchronic relational aspect*. A synchronic analysis of a structure would involve an identification of the components, the relations between those components, and how these relations give a structure its distinctive emergent properties. A synchronic analysis requires ‘the components of

an organization (people), the relations that constitute them into organization (roles), and how this gives the organisation emergent properties not possessed by its parts.’ (Elder-Vass, 2007b: 34) For this last requirement, Elder-Vass draws several similarities with natural scientific imageries. For example, hydrogen and oxygen atoms have their own properties, but their combination to water molecules gives the resulting substance distinct properties.

The new whole as constituted by components – and by the combinations and relations among them – has properties which cannot be reduced to the properties and powers which the parts would express if not related with each other. Synchronism here implies chronical simultaneity of causation – there is no time gap for causes to be exerted. Unlike Archer, Elder-Vass (2007b) is not willing to present structure as a historical residue and he implicitly accuses Archer of grounding the ontology of structure in its prior formulation. Instead, while focusing on a specific kind of structure, that is organizations<sup>54</sup>, to support his argument, he explains that the diachronic aspect of emergence expresses the ways in which ‘morphogenetic and morphostatic causes combine to develop and sustain the existence and characteristics of this set of parts and relations’ (Elder-Vass, 2007b: 34) which constitute specific organizations.

Elder-Vass here argues that although understanding stability and change (diachronic) is important what he wants to add to Archer’s work is an account of the synchronic relations that produce a power over and above that of the otherwise disorganised parts. However, he does not spend a lot of lines to show how these antithetical (morphogenetic and morphostatic) diachronic causes (can) influence the form of what he has in mind as social structures. He seems to prefer casting his theoretical gaze on his critique of individualists’ reductionism. In order for us to explain in which ways his account becomes controversial and show that it does not solve any problem present in Archer’s account of emergence, we have to follow him in his focus on organizations. For Elder-Vass, roles are related to specific positions in an

---

<sup>54</sup> Elder-Vass has a more general account but I focus here on his argumentation about organizations as a specific instance of his more general account.

organization. Yet, roles depict those relations among the ‘parts’, among people who thus expect and realize the rules specified by each role. Hence:

When a role incumbent adopts the behaviours defined by a role ... we have a case of “downward causation”, in the sense that the behaviour of the role incumbent is influenced by the rules for a holder of that role that are built into the structure of the organisation. Here the action of the role incumbent is co-determined by a variety of causal powers, including the causal power of the organisation, as well as the causal powers of the individual role incumbent herself (cf. Archer, 1995: 184). Thus, the organisation has a causal effect on the role incumbent, although this effect, like any causal influence, does not fully determine a necessary outcome.’ (Elder-Vass, 2007b: 32)

However, not only a well-articulated ‘upward causation’ from the part of agents is missing – with the potential but also unfortunate result of a neo-functional approach – in his account (2007b), but also this very ‘downward causation’ seems problematic. For all those like Elder-Vass who find direct resemblances between natural phenomena and the social world, various responses can be offered. Since Elder-Vass (2007a) adopts Archer’s idea of agential reflexivity as formulated by the ‘internal conversation’, one should not expect him to be referring to molecules and atoms when talking about humans. And this is because relations between reflexive agents cannot be assimilated to relations of necessity pertaining to the natural world. And, even if we intend to talk about relations of necessity of the social structure, as Archer and Elder-Vass do, the nomology of ‘necessity’ still will need discriminating between relations of ‘human atoms’ and of atoms as perceived in the microscope. For, atoms do not speak with themselves and do not reflect upon their social circumstances in order to enact their intentionality. After all, natural substances frequently lose their initial properties after their coalition with other substances and Elder-Vass does not explain to us in which way people remain humans while being part of wholes emergent from them and the relations between them.

Further, Elder-Vass (2007b) by attributing roles to the relations among individuals, has, in an unacknowledged way, announced the causal mediatory role of ‘relations’. But in this way, emergent powers are enacted through its generative strata – through the relations between the parts. And the idea that a structural cause is mediated through immaterial premises – relations and combinations – needs further

elaboration. Margaret Archer had decided to leave this role to agency as the only efficient cause in social life. Yet, talking about generative strata, the analysis here becomes more obscure since individuals are included in these strata while being the parts upon which emergent powers impinge. This is problematic since the ontology of structure cannot be distinguished from the ontology of agents – and thus the diachronic relationships identified by Archer become untenable on Elder-Vass’ account. More dramatically, we face a weird situation of a cause which *internally* – through the relations (roles) from which a new totality emerges – is exerted on the parts thus related as the premises of this cause! Thus, this cause is *internally* exerted on parts *internal* to its emergence. And, since Elder-Vass has made the same mistake as Archer in placing human components within the generative strata of emergence, the ontological distinction between structure and agency of Archer’s realism collapses. Again, Elder-Vass’ lack of adequate analysis of morphogenetic causes on the part of the people leaves us with a neo-functional model of action which deprives agency of the distinct causal powers which Archer has recursively made great efforts to resurrect.

Another critic of Archer’s Morphogenetic approach has his origins in the inter-subjectivist tradition. Anthony King (1999) criticizes Archer by accusing her morphogenetic approach of becoming metaphysical. For King, although Archer adopts the claim ‘no people: no society,’ which simply means that there cannot be any social entity beyond human intervention, ‘she argues that there is something more to all these individuals and their interactions, which constitutes society and of which sociologists have to be aware; namely, structure, which pre-exists and is autonomous to individuals.’ (King, 1999: 206) In this way, she becomes metaphysical by making reference to entities which exist independently of what is, according to her, the only constituent element of society, that is, people.

As King claims, Archer realizes the metaphysical dangers threatening her position and she induces the concept of ‘emergence’ which, she believes, enables her to ‘tread that fine line between recognizing that certain aspects of society are not reducible to the individual even though these aspects of society are still rooted in individual

practice.’ (King, 1999: 207); and those emergent properties are more than the sum of the individual practices. King (1999) criticizes Archer on the basis that, her critique of interpretivism takes for granted that meanings are generated only by present-day individuals and this means that it deprives this tradition of its emphasis on the historicity of the creation of ideas. In fact, King argues, Schutz is a nice example of interpretivism which takes into consideration the past and its relative influence on the interpretations of living individuals. Resulting from these assumptions is Archer’s argument that interpretivism is trying to reduce social structure to individual interpretations and to their interactions. And in this way, Archer aims at defending three assumptions hostile to interpretivism, these are, structure’s autonomy, its pre-existence and its causal power. However, at that point, King explains that the first two assumptions should not be considered as separable for ‘if something is temporally pre-existent it must necessarily also be autonomous for it cannot pre-exist something upon which it is dependent.’ (King, 1999: 206) After all, as he explains, Archer at numerous points derives structure’s autonomy from its temporal pre-existence.

Under these auspices, King (1999) is complaining that when Archer describes her morphogenetic approach, in the discussion of ‘social interaction,’ all that occurs here is that individuals interact with each other with the result of producing new social conditions. So, what the individual confronts as a reality independent of her is just a product of past interaction and, in this way, when individuals change the existing social properties, they just come into relations with other people in different places and times (King, 1999). This is the reason why King claims that Archer presupposes at this point an interpretivist ontology:

Archer ontologises time so that the actions of other people in the past, which she accepts and describes as individual action while they are happening, suddenly become structural once they have receded into history and irreducible to anybody even though they are plainly, on Archer’s own account, the interactions of other people in the past. Archer converts the temporal priority of other people’s actions into the ontological priority and autonomy of structure. (King, 1999: 211)

However, King accepts that the product of this interaction *cannot be reduced* to any particular individual and, of course, it confronts this sole individual as an



autonomous entity<sup>55</sup>. But it must *be necessarily reduced to* all those individuals interacting in the context examined: ‘that mutual situation is more than any one of them but it is not emergent from or irreducible to all of them.’ (King, 1999: 213) Again to say otherwise is to move towards social metaphysics ‘where social life is described by reference to an entity beyond everyone.’ (King, 1999: 213)

Now, King explains that Archer derives social structure from the fact that for the particular individual the product of the social collaboration is a pre-existent and autonomous factor. This perspective of a single individual is the basis for her ontology and, as King explains, Archer has made a solipsistic error where she ‘hypostatizes the experience of an individual to derive sociological conclusions ... Despite her claim that the interpretivist tradition is “Individualist”, it is, in fact, her position which is irretrievably individualist.’ (King, 1999: 217) After all, King claims, Archer believes that certain features of the self ‘are prior to and separate from society’ (King, 1999: 217) in the sense that personal autonomy is a prerequisite for an individual to become a social being; for the self:

... is at some level autonomous and prior to social interaction because the self has to be able to distinguish itself from its environment. That ability to distinguish cannot be derived externally because the ability to distinguish itself from the rest of the world is crucial to there being a world with which the self can interact in the first place. (King, 1999: 218)

As we have seen above and also will show below in this chapter, this tendency of Archer towards a pre-social monad entails further inconsistency within Archer’s own ontology. For the moment, we have to say that Archer, in her response article called ‘For Structure’ (2000b), maintained her claim that ‘interpretive sociology’ has individualism as its ontological base; and in this way, King (1999) is right to complain about this very claim since, I think, the interpretivist tradition includes various attempts, either holistic or individualistic, (or by compromising both of these poles) to explain social life.

---

<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Archer seems to frequently claim that the idea that ‘these structures, because these people here present’ slides into methodological individualism. But this is not always the case and King (1999) is right about this.

Yet, Archer responds to King's critique of her account that critical realism does not propose, in relation to the structure/agency problem, philosophical dualism but rather analytical dualism. According to the morphogenetic approach, Archer explains, 'there is never a moment at which *both* structure and agency are not jointly in play.' (Archer, 2000b: 465) For, as she explains in *Realist Social Theory* (1995: 76) all the three lines representing 'structural conditioning', 'social interaction' and 'structural elaboration' are continuous and the analytical element consists only in dividing up the flows into intervals; what makes analytical differentiation possible:

... are the two simple propositions: that structure necessarily pre-dates the actions which transform it and that structural elaboration necessarily post-dates these actions ... There is no philosophical dualism because (a) structures are only held to emerge from the activities of people, and because (b) structures only exert any effect when mediated through the activities of people. Structures are ever relational emergents and never reified entities existing without social interaction: the converse would be tenets of dualism. (Archer, 2000b: 465)

Thus, Archer turns the accusation of metaphysics back to King since his idea that the social world can change, if everyone or vast numbers of people interpret their social relationships differently, entails, according to Archer, that changes conform to the wishes and interests of one group while 'social structure is the resultant that nobody ever wants in exactly its current form, which is precisely what fosters continuing morphogenesis.' (Archer, 2000b: 469) Instead, Archer underlines the distribution of vested interests of different groups in the process of social transformation or reproduction, which lead different groups to different actions. However, I think that Archer is right to point out that the resulting transformation of society does not correspond to the wishes and actions of one only man or group. But it does not seem that King (1999) says something like that; he rather renders the totality of the social individuals, as related with each other, responsible for this transformation. One, of course, could reply to this that there are contradictory aims and actions of different groups and individuals. We will face this problem in the next chapter while discussing Cornelius Castoriadis' work.

Yet, Archer's second response is relevant to King's second accusation concerning the 'solipsistic error.' Here, Archer explains that she does not derive the notion of

structure from the experience common to all individuals, that is, the awareness of the simultaneity of the freedom of making one's own life and of the constraints faced in the former decision making. For, this individual awareness does not entail and does not found the ontological status of the structure:

Our epistemology is *about* something ontological, ie, real, and it is imperfect because all human knowledge is fallible. The existence of structural properties and powers is established by the *causal criterion*, that is in terms of their generative effects. Matters of ontology are not settled by interviewing people about them! (Archer, 2000b: 469)

Thus, for Archer, to identify how reality is with what agents know about it is to commit the 'epistemic fallacy', which is the case for King and not for her account<sup>56</sup>. For, what King addresses is 'networks of meanings, but not what they are about; definitions of the situation, but not whether the situation conforms to them ... this is true solipsism where people are epistemologically licensed to make what they will of the world' (Archer, 2000b: 470) but the world itself has no license to have any effect about its own theorization.

I think that Archer is right to have this last objection since, according to our previous interpretation, she does not derive the notion of structure from individual's knowledge or beliefs. And she is right to react to the accusation of metaphysics since she is clear that emergent properties arise only through human association and interaction. However, as we have already explained earlier, her account implies ontological dualism and there is no reason for this not to be called philosophical dualism since ontology is prior to epistemology according to her account. Structure and agency are of a different ontological status and the 'analytical element' only intends to show the continuous character of morphogenesis and morphostasis<sup>57</sup>.

---

<sup>56</sup> After all, Archer is clear in *Realist Social Theory* that 'if prior emergent properties really condition subsequent interaction, then their reality cannot be withdrawn by reducing them, as Giddens does, to "memory traces" which falls back onto the "personalization" strategy of Individualism.' (Archer, 1995: 139)

<sup>57</sup> Yet, even this continuous character is not clear since morphogenetical cycles unfold only through great gaps from generation to generation; for social transformation results from the results of the actions of one generation – and this result conditions the next generation.

On the other hand, King seems to be deeply confused about the real difference between emergence and reduction. Even if structural properties emerge from human interaction, it is not metaphysical for one to allege that these properties have gained ontological status to contemporary individuals – as Archer claims. For, a social phenomenon can *emerge from* another or from a vast number of individuals, without its theorization being metaphysical – which on one common interpretation means that the phenomenon is understood to have its own consciousness and will towards ‘the people’. And, King (1999) is wrong to allege that pre-existence entails autonomy because ‘A cannot pre-exist B upon which it is dependent’; and this is controversial within King’s account because if individuals’ interrelations are what really counts in the institution of society, then, there must be cases that pre-existing institutions are not autonomous at all towards meaning-production by contemporary individuals even if these institutions pre-exist them. Yet, his claim that Archer does the same, that is, to derive the autonomy of structure from its pre-existence is a quite reasonable conclusion since there are several quotations in Archer’s work to support this accusation:

Autonomy is also temporal (and temporary) in the joint senses that such structural properties were neither the creation of contemporary actors nor are ontologically reducible to “material existents” (raw resources) and dependent upon current acts of human instantiation (rule governed) for all their current effects. (Archer, 1995: 138)

Secondly, even if King likes the verb ‘reduce,’ this does entail that the only relevant ontological scheme we need is interacting individuals and their interrelations. For, even if a social phenomenon can *only* be reduced to another, that is, even if social structure should be theoretically reduced to interacting individuals, this does not mean that we do not have a new ontological element – though this would not entail an ontological dualism like that characterizing Archer’s realist theory. And this means that there is no need to omit from ontological investigation realities just because their existence depends only on other realities<sup>58</sup>. Nor should we assert that since social structure is theory-dependent or activity-dependent (as I have implied),

---

<sup>58</sup> After all, Archer (2000b: 470) is right to allege that King (1999: 222) faces problems with real properties such as the ‘distribution of wealth’.

we should deny its ontological status – not in the sense that is objective and autonomous, but that – of constraining and enabling agents’ actions as long as the totality of these actions do not throw away or transform this very structure. Again, Cornelius Castoriadis’ work will help us to account more adequately for these problematics.

For the moment, I should state that it is true that social structures which pre-date social actors – either individually or collectively – are dependent upon actors’ actions and conceptualizations of those structures. But this does not mean that social structures do not have an ontological status. Nor does it mean that social structures should be theoretically *reduced* to collectivities. As I have tried to argue, social structures can be transformed by acting self-reflecting agents<sup>59</sup>. But this does not mean that we should have two ontologies with two distinct kinds of causes respectively (as Archer has claimed): society is more than the actions and the relationships of social individuals and this means that human relationships and interactions do not exhaust the social domain which, of course, includes material settings (structures) as well as operational rules and codes (systems) which constitute the consecrated modes of enacting and manipulating those material settings. But both these elements (social systems and social structures) depend for their reproduction or transformation on human conceptualizations of them. In the next chapter, we will see the ways in which Cornelius Castoriadis has cast light on the notion of social imaginary as the exclusive social factor that coordinates and also differentiates those conceptualizations and actions. And I say ‘differentiates’ because I think that the notion of social imaginary that Castoriadis provides can account for the fact that different agents have different conceptualizations of the content of specific roles, interests, political ideologies, cultural norms etc. – even if they belong to the same social class or group. And the social scientist is another agent in the social domain.

---

<sup>59</sup> And this does not contradict the fact that ‘during the time it takes to change something, then that thing continues to exert a constraint which cannot be assumed to be insignificant in its social consequences, whilst it lasts.’ (Archer, 1982: 462) For, the mere existence of this ‘remnant’ conditioning does not entail that structure is not ontologically dependent upon agency.

I have already examined some of the problems and the questions that have emerged in the existing literature considering Archer's effort to get rid of Bhaskar's early admissions about the theory-dependence of society. However, the efforts of Elder-Vass (2007b) and King (1999) to reassess the structure/agency problem were characterized as inadequate. Elder-Vass's naturalistic approach fails to offer a convincing alternative to Archer's account. Likewise, King's intersubjective alternative runs into difficulties. I have shown earlier the ways in which Archer's account is problematic because of the contradictory claims in her work. But Archer's choice that agents are not capable of transforming their contemporary social forms is a choice that can be assessed indirectly by its implications. I have tried to show the contradictions and the obscurities that this 'choice' entails. And, this is the reason why I call this ontological position-taking 'choice'. One cannot respond to Archer, or to any other who supports this kind of temporality of structure, just that contemporary agents do influence the social forms that predate them and thus, that her view does not hold water. It is through the theoretical examination of possible contradictions or paradoxical claims that such theoretical decisions can be assessed.

Now, it is in this way that the ontological distinction of structure and agency, and the epistemological one between subjective and objective, comes again to the fore as the most important questions of social theory. On this, Martin Hollis and Steve Smith (1994) criticize Margaret Archer for encompassing both structure and agents in one single story. And their criticism is that morphogenesis favors ontological arguments while ignoring the epistemological ones. For them, 'there are *always* and *inevitably* two stories to be told' (Hollis and Smith, 1990: 211) about the social world, which cannot be combined. The difference between explanation (determinism) and understanding (interpretivism) is unbridgeable. And Hollis and Smith support this kind of dualism because they think epistemological differences are more crucial than ontological ones – and Archer not only casts primary light to ontology, but also ignores the crucial fact that subjectivism and objectivism cannot be bridged within one ontological scheme. In fact, for them, we cannot solve the structure/agency problem, as Archer contends, because they *imply* that there are always two possible pairs of structure and agency – those which can be attributed to these two distinctive

traditions. Of course, in each tradition (explanation and interpretation), they claim, we face different problems in any effort to connect holistic and individualistic perspectives. However, they warn us that they do not intend to allege that ‘the two stories are finally of equal and irreducible merit. One of them may have the last word ... But it could only be the *very* last word’ (Hollis and Smith, 1994: 251).

Archer does not actually try to bridge these two elements within one ontology, but she rather tries to distinguish these two as pertaining to different ontologies. However, Hollis and Smith have made an insightful comment. For them, ‘Morphogenesis’ might succeed in combining explanation and understanding, ‘if they were related like two map projections of a single, external world. But the problem would hardly have arisen, if we had a map-maker’s independent access to reality.’ (Hollis and Smith, 1994: 247) For, the problem with ‘Morphogenesis’ is that ‘it does not make sense of how we *integrate* structures and agents into a *single* story.’ (Hollis and Smith, 1994: 250) Of course, while Archer does not need the image of two projections for connecting objectivity and subjectivity, she accepts that there indeed was the need for a more explicit description of the conditioning of structures. In this sense, Archer (2003) admits that their critique was creative. Specifically, she sets out to give a plausible account of that ‘how’.

According to Archer, and as we shall examine later, to allege that structure conditions action – as most critical realists do – does not explain the content of the process of this conditioning. An adequate explanation should focus on that mutual affecting: ‘Firstly, this involves a specification of *how* structural and cultural powers impinge upon agents, and secondly of *how* agents use their own personal powers to act “so rather than otherwise”, in such situation.’ (Archer, 2003: 3) And Archer thinks that this second ‘how’ should be attributed to human reflexivity. We shall see that this improvement, through the concept of ‘agential reflexivity’, does not affect our initial criticism of her individualistic auspices. It rather makes this problematic aspect of her account more obvious. Nevertheless, Archer’s account is of interest because aspects of her work can be used to develop an account of a self-reflective agent, a key goal of this thesis. As I shall discuss further below, in the terminology

of this thesis, Archer isn't best described as developing an account of reflexivity (of the application of social scientific theories to themselves) but an account of self-reflection.

*Margaret Archer's solution for the mediating process between structure and agency: agential reflexivity*

In *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1998), Roy Bhaskar uses Durkheim's arguments to present the first of the two parts of the interplay between structures and agents. As Archer states, most critical realists have done so and as a result the second part has remained underestimated. Archer's solution is human reflexivity which is conducted through internal dialogues. In this section, I will show the ways in which Archer's account of human reflexivity cannot escape the problems that her ontology faces. Archer (2003) refers to *constraints* and *enablements* as causal powers of 'structural emergent properties' (Archer, 2003: 5), which however imply subjective reception. As a critical realist, she warns us that 'as with all potential causal powers, they can remain unexercised because it is a wholly contingent matter whether they are activated. In other words, constraints and enablements do not possess an intrinsic capacity for constraining or enabling in abstraction.' (Archer, 2003: 5) In fact, their effect can essentially be explained by reference to subjectivity, namely, the personal power to reflect upon the world and to decide which actions one should make through this world.

Thus, *agential reflexivity* as *the mediator between structures and agency*, takes the form of an 'Internal Conversation', which, as an idea, respects 'the interiority, subjectivity and causal efficacy of the life of the mind' (Archer, 2003: 93). In fact, reflexivity is:

...a matter with which all normal people are fully familiar. In fact, ironically, they are most likely to be more familiar with it and agreed upon its existence than about any other aspect of reality. This is the fact that they all enjoy a lively inner



life of the mind. The irony is that so much philosophical energy should have been spent on trying to convince us that we are all deluded. (Archer, 2003: 35)

Having argued that agents do have an inner life that needs to be accounted for, Archer develops her own approach by criticising a standard conceptualisation of this inner life – one that characterizes it as involving introspection. For Archer, the notion of introspection is based on the notion of perception, of visual observation: ‘in perception, there is a clear distinction between the object we see and our visual experiences of it, whereas with introspection there can be no such differentiation between the object and the spectator, since I am supposedly looking inward at myself.’ (Archer, 2003: 21) – and, for this, a split-consciousness is implied, in which case, we cannot turn our gaze fast enough to perceive ourselves in the mental process (Archer, 2003: 96). Moreover, instead of losing the self as a conscious activity in a behaviourist’s manoeuvre to save introspection as self-observation, rather Archer substitutes it with the ‘internal conversation’. This is a replacement of ‘internal observation’ with ‘internal conversation’ (Archer, 2003: 33) since ‘to the social realist, introspective *observation* could never be an acceptable model for obtaining self-knowledge, because this perceptual criterion limits one to the level of empirical events’ (Archer, 2003: 93).

In this thesis we cannot take into account every dimension of the ‘Internal Conversation’. It suffices to say that, for Archer, this is a preferable notion to self-perception because we can both talk and listen to ourselves – here we have two senses working simultaneously – while perception constitutes only one of our senses<sup>60</sup>. For her, we internally discuss with ourselves in order to reach to self-knowledge (not infallibly), to self-modification and to social transformation. ‘Like all conversations, it is one that takes place over time.’ (Archer, 2003: 97) and it is one which involves turn-taking. Archer describes this inner dialogue as an alternation between subject and object through which the *self* responds critically to the *objectified* echo of her previous voice: ‘The two will go on alternating until solidarity

---

<sup>60</sup> However, this implies that in the case of introspection, perception constitutes thought. Yet, this would be impermissible since according to Sayer (1992) observation is only the one of the three stages of perceiving facts and objects. Beyond this, we need the necessary categories of translation of what we *see*.

is reached or the issue is postponed or abandoned.’ (Archer, 2003: 100) Here, the self as the object, after having recorded the subject, takes its turn, becomes the subject and thus responds to what has been recorded through this objectification: ‘this alternation entails nothing more problematic than our ability to question internally (correct, evaluate or reject) what we have just said.’ (Archer, 2003: 100)

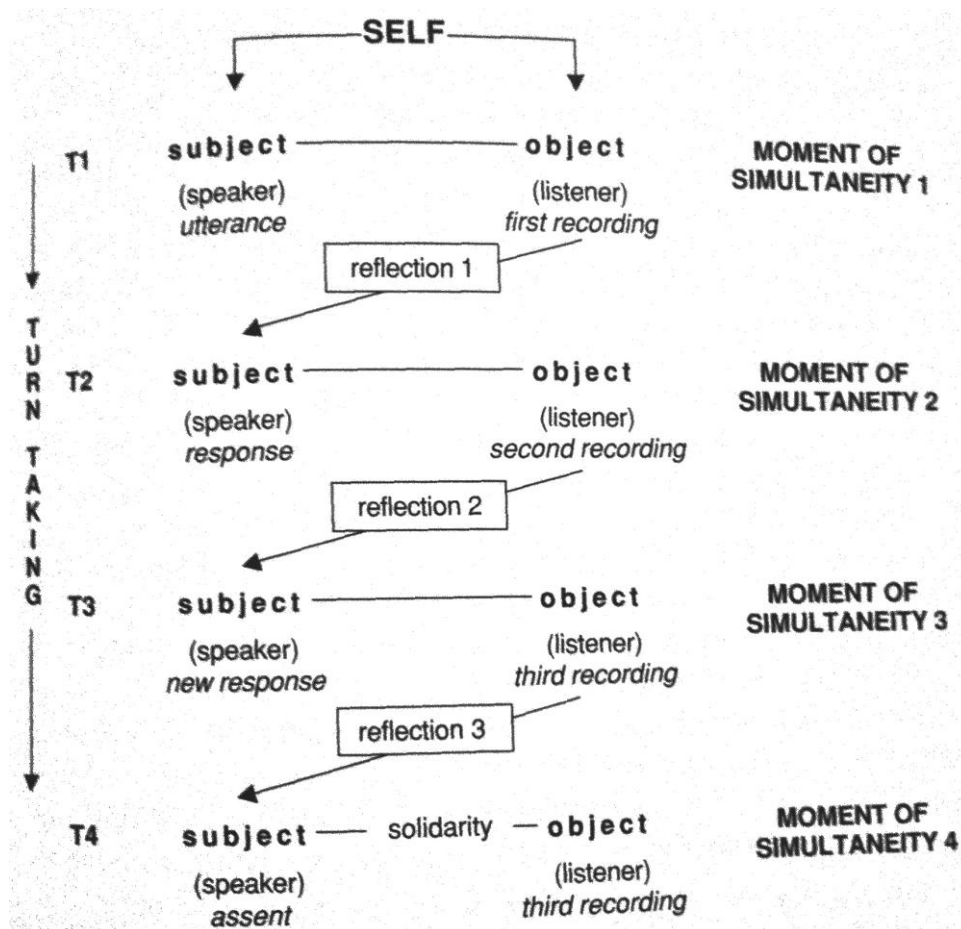


Figure 1: the internal conversation, Archer (2003:99)

The application of this process is as follows. Through internal dialogue, we endorse, review, choose or deny our commitments, and we also learn about them. It is also through this internal deliberation, considering our enablements and constraints, that we can formulate projects which are crystallizations of our concerns and from which we (fallibly) expect to achieve in society what we really want. In this sense:

... we cannot account for any outcome unless we understand the agent’s project in relation to her social context. And we cannot understand her project without

entering into her reflexive deliberations about her personal concerns in conjunction with the objective social context that she confronts. (Archer, 2003: 131)

Thus, the interplay between two causal powers is feasible through ‘Internal Conversation’, and the activation of structural powers is due to the formation of those projects. If the subject changes her ultimate concerns (which constitute her personal identity), that is, changes herself, personal Morphogenesis will be the case; and if she continues to endorse those concerns, we will have personal Morphostasis. Whether we have Morphogenesis or Morphostasis of Society depends on the interaction among the projects of the agents.

However, Archer’s account of ‘how’, i.e. how structure and agency integrate into one story is not a plausible one. According to Archer (2003), we formulate our projects in order to achieve what we ultimately want. And the Internal Conversation is the process which leads us to those projects, while our concerns are the inputs of this process. But when we apply the Internal Conversation to the decision about our ultimate concerns, Archer is not clear about its inputs. The only clue she gives is what she borrows from William James, namely, ‘thought tendencies’: ‘the subject, he insisted, has a “premonitory perspective” on what she is about to think. This means, I take it, that she has both a blurred notion of an uncrystallised thought, and some inchoate awareness of what its thrust should be.’ (Archer, 2003: 98) So, we already have this tendency before articulating it into words. And, at this point, I would like to ask what this personal property is which enables pre-linguistic understanding. As we shall see later, Castoriadis’ solution to this question is imagination.

Yet, after we have selected the appropriate words, Archer continues, this articulation is the first utterance which will become an object, which the subject can question or accept. She can then reformulate or abandon this effort; for ‘perhaps what she hears she immediately realises cannot be correct, because listening to the utterance also brings counterfactuals to mind.’ (Archer, 2003: 98) But what are these counterfactuals? Could they be other *premonitory perspectives*? In fact, the

answer could be yes since, as Archer explains, in this lengthy process of internal discussion, ‘we have to inspect, interrogate and evaluate the object in relation to a premonitory thought tendency towards it, and then formulate a new utterance in response to it.’ (Archer, 2003: 106) But, what is the relation between social norms and these perspectives? It is now more than obvious that we are here in the need of a further explanation of the generation of *intimations* which are prior to verbal articulation (Archer, 2003: 98). So, the question here is what lies before the first utterance? Or, to put it better, what makes the speaker a *subject* – that is, a thinking person who is capable of questioning?

Moreover, Archer (2003) does not connect these thought tendencies with the ‘Me’ (past self) which the ‘I’ (the present self who is the only responsible for the questioning of concerns and for the conversation) always take into account, that is, she is not clear whether these tendencies come from the past; the past, which, in its turn, conditions the present self. In such a case she *might* invoke memory; but, of course, not as an interlocutor, which would be impermissible for her. Indeed, this was her critique of supporters of retrospection and of William James; for ‘memories cannot be interlocutors’ (Archer, 2003: 95). It seems implausible for Archer to invoke memories in this context, then, but this means that the origins of premonitory statements remain somehow mysterious.

For sure, ‘premonitory statements’ *should* not be what she calls ‘first-order emotions’; for here ‘premonitory states’ are elements of thought and Archer in *Being Human* (2000a) distinguishes *logos* and *pathos* even if they move hand in hand. Even if one looks at her account of the ‘internal conversation’ as playing crucial role in the formation of personal identity, one will easily find elements which contradict the analysis up until now. First of all, the internal dialogue becomes a test of our commitments, of our concerns – related to the three orders of reality (natural, practical and social) – against our emotions commenting upon them. Since our emotional commentaries ‘will not be unanimous, the conversation also involves evaluating them, promoting some and subordinating others, such that the ultimate concerns which we affirm are also those with which we feel we can live.’ (Archer,

2000a: 228) Of course, we may change our mind and revise this in an ongoing process of *transvaluation*.

The interesting point is that here (Archer, 2000a) the discussion occurs between the 'I' (the present spontaneous self) and the 'You' (the future prospecting self) which both are constantly *informed* by a (non-meadian) 'Me' – which is 'all the former "I"s' who have moved down the time-line of future, present to past' (Archer, 2000a: 229) and thus constituting a memory storage of past emotional commentaries, providing data for the two interlocutors (the 'I' and the 'You'). Yet, it is now more than obvious that this account contradicts the one in Archer's *Structure, Agency and The Internal Conversation* (2003) where such a division of the self is unacceptable – for, while it is true that the past and the future exert influences and constraints to the 'I' while replying to himself, 'these processes should not be reified by endowing the past "Me" or the "You"-to-be with the power of speech or of hearing.' (Archer, 2003: 111). After all, as she explains, in reality, the 'I' only speaks to itself by alternating as subject and object. And, additionally, emotions are quite overlooked in Archer (2003) and, in a way, the interplay between human concerns and emotions is under-theorised. On the contrary, in Archer's *Being Human* (2000a):

The dialogue is a dialectic between our human concerns and our emotional commentaries upon them. Its outcome at any time is the designation of certain concerns as ultimate ones to us, but also ones with which we can live. The dialogical process is one which aligns our predominant concerns with our pre-eminent emotions, but in this process both elements will undergo modification because of the interplay between them. Yet although they are interrelated, both retain relative autonomy and therefore one does not become the dependent variable of the other. (Archer, 2000a: 230)

And, here (Archer, 2000a) the two interlocutors, the two selves, do not represent either emotions or concerns, but only try to negotiate, through conversation, in order to achieve alignment and solidarity: 'the "You" reflects upon the "I"s' experiences of itself, the "Me", and the "I" assesses the strength of the "You"s' inclinations. Together they re-prioritise their concerns, demoting and promoting, cutting the coat as the emotional cloth allows.' (Archer, 2000a: 237) It is now evident that mystery exists concerning the input of this process called 'internal dialogue'. And Archer

does not provide a unique and clear account of this reflexive exercise from the side of agents. The main argument here is that Internal Conversation seems to be an *analytically* useful process, however, Archer does not present a plausible account of the inputs inserted in it. In fact, Archer is unclear about the process of this internal dialogue, about the interlocutors and about the origins of the cognitive elements that appear as inputs in this process.

Moreover, Archer sometimes presents ‘internal conversation’ 1) as the *content* of reflexivity and, some other times 2) as a transformational procedure which is *based on* reflexivity as in the following quote: ‘it is reflexivity which gives us our ability to respond to ourselves by examining our own sayings’ (Archer, 2003: 106). But the confusion about it increases when she admits that ‘Reflexivity itself is held to depend upon conscious deliberations that take place through “internal conversation”. The ability to hold such inner dialogues is an emergent personal power of individuals that has been generally disregarded and is not entailed by routine or habitual action.’ (Archer, 2007: 3) Indeed, this last quotation does not help us since, on the one hand, reflexivity depends upon inner dialogue but, on the other hand, inner dialogue *seems* to depend upon reflexivity!

If the second interpretation is the case, the question that emerges is what is reflexivity? Is it something like an internal power for contradicting a single thought or creating second thoughts? This problem is *partially* related with another ambiguity: human reflexivity is supposed to be the mediator of socio-cultural constraints and enablements. But Archer sometimes talks about the interplay between socio-cultural properties and human reflexivity: ‘the interplay between socio-cultural properties and the exercise of agential reflexivity is essential to explanation.’ (Archer, 2003: 130) And the question here is, whether this interplay is internal to subjectivity, so that this interplay is the object of internal dialogue, or ‘internal dialogue’, as formulated by Archer, is a moment of that dialectic. This question is related to her problematic notion of constraining<sup>61</sup> I examined above.

---

<sup>61</sup> See, Kemp (2011)

I have shown before that Archer is confused about the status of causality of human subjectivity which now appears both to mediate, on the one hand, and to be a power in a mutual causal interplay, on the other. Why is this so problematic? The mediatory process is simultaneously a causal power in an interplay which is mediated by it! The potential problem here is that the interplay implies two distinct powers while, one of them necessarily mediates the other in their mutual interplay: questions arise about the nature of mediation – does this mean that the mediated power loses its efficacy? Indeed, as we have seen, if subjectivity is the only efficient causality for agential action, as we have previously seen, then, in a process of mediation, what is mediated can only have a necessary but not sufficient causal efficacy. And Archer is thus in an unfortunate situation where agents reflexively – through internal discussion – can suspend, avoid and ignore social conditioning.

And, thus, we cannot talk about the interplay between two distinct causal powers because, in the mediatory process, only one causal power has been privileged as efficacious – while its source has been attributed an ultimate (even if not unique) ontological status; here I insist that, for Archer, the *only efficient causal power* has its roots in *prior* (but not unique, for socio-cultural forms do exist) ontological status. And as Cornelius Castoriadis would probably have claimed, ‘when we take a closer look, we see not only that nothing is said concerning what it is that would remain irreducible but that, in fact, this irreducible something is in reality reduced: society repeatedly reappears as determined by the individual considered the efficient or the final cause’ (Castoriadis, 1987: 177)

As a result, ‘conditional influences may be agentially evaded, endorsed, repudiated or contravened. Which will be the case and what will be the outcome only become intelligible by reference to the agent’s own reflexive and therefore internal deliberations.’ (Archer, 2003: 131) Yet, Archer could make a final manoeuvre to say that ‘it is not agential properties that interact directly with social powers, rather, it is the projects formulated by agents, in exercising their subjective and reflexive mental powers that do so.’ (Archer, 2003: 132) – in order to avoid this problematic aspect of mediation. But wouldn’t this be contradictory with the idea that, as we have already

seen, ‘reflexive deliberations constitute the mediatory process between “structure and agency”, they represent the subjective element which is always in interplay with the causal powers of objective social forms.’ (Archer, 2003: 130)?

However, even if the first proposition is the case<sup>62</sup> (that Internal Conversation is the content of reflexive deliberation) we should notice that internal conversation alone as a turn-taking critical procedure of self-elaboration, cannot give us any kind of idea of how the ‘I’ has the capability of critical examination: the fact that we respond to ourselves does not answer the question of which way this response is critical and how we can criticize ourselves, unless we suppose that our response is (or can be in an ambiguous way) *reflexive*, which engenders the above mentioned problems at a second level. To sum up, Archer alleges that humans are able to engage in continuous alterations between an objectifying self and an objectified, and chronically subsequent, self but she does not explain: i) how one can – even if fallibly – stabilize and concretize the cognitive content of one’s own thought or utterance and, ii) in which way we are able to be critical – through which perspective and (considering academic work) under which criteria of objectification.

This also indirectly engenders questions about the relations between reflexivity and imagination. Archer frequently uses this term especially when she explains that agents imaginatively<sup>63</sup> try to find new ways to realize their projects – particularly in Archer (2007). Indeed, having second thoughts different from our initial thoughts or inventing new ways of acting through the constraints which social structure imposes on us, should have a relation with imagination, and one of the most important thinkers on imagination and its social role is Cornelius Castoriadis.

Up until this point, I have tried to show the deficiencies concerning the *content* of Archer’s notion of reflexivity – or to be more consistent with my critique – concerning the status and the inputs of inner dialogue as a *reflexive* process.

---

<sup>62</sup> In which case our critique of Archer’s confusion about the status of causality together with the problems it engenders considering the role of reflexivity as a mediator, still hold.

<sup>63</sup> See Archer (2003: 102, 103, 107) – association of imagination with Peircean ‘preparatory meditations’.



However, little attention has been given by Archer and by other authors on the *relational function* of Archer's account of reflexivity. In this thesis, I have already distinguished between self-reflection which implies self-objectification and, agential reflexivity which stresses the self as a constitutive part of a greater object in which the objectification includes the self. And Archer's internal conversation seems to be more self-reflective rather than truly reflexive – since she argues for a distance between the subject and her object, whether this is an utterance or, interests, roles and constraints:

Reflexivity involves a subject considering an object in relation to itself, bending that object back upon itself in a process which includes the self being able to consider itself as its own object. (Archer, 2007: 72)

Reflexive thought is synonymous with internal conversation because reflexivity is *not* a vague self-awareness but a *questioning* exploration of subject in relation to object, including the subject as object, one which need not have any practical outcome or intent. (Archer, 2007 73)

In both these similar definitions two functions are included and underlined: 1) one can make oneself (values, beliefs, thoughts) an object and thus be critically related to one's own self and, 2) one can relate one's self to an object. As far as the second function is concerned, it seems – judging from Archer's thoughts about the relations between subjects and their being related to society – that a 'vice versa' is not missing: 'We talk to ourselves *about* society in relation to ourselves and about ourselves in relation to society, under our own descriptions.' (Archer, 2007: 88)

But this alone cannot satisfy what I have proposed in this thesis as *the epistemic criterion of reflexivity*. What I aimed at was a concept of agential reflexivity through which the knowing subject could acknowledge the social premises of his knowledge while transcending them by ontologizing the possibility of this very acknowledgment. And a self-reflective agent who is distant from society – and in the final analysis from the origins and the context of her value-claims – was not conceptually adequate since I argued that the knowing subject is a constitutive part of her *theoretical* object. At first, this theoretical character of the object (society) was held to have a dual meaning – (1) that society as an object of investigation is theory-dependent (which is also implied by the word 'constitutive') and that, (2) for the

knowing subject, her first task is a general theoretical framework, an ontology, since ontological claims are prior to epistemological. And if we consider (1) the consequence is that this need for a general theoretical-conceptual framework is more acute in social sciences since, as I have explained in the first chapter, this theory-dependence implies that the boundaries between theory and facts which resist *objectification* and manipulation are wider than in natural sciences.

Yet, I have also explained that for the ‘question of reflexivity’ to emerge, there is no need for the theorist to be aware that the epistemic subject is a constitutive part of her object. Lawson (1985) explains, as we saw, that any general account making general claims about knowledge-claims is condemned to face a self-referential predicament. And I have shown that this, in social theory, is not pertaining only to conventionalist approaches. In the third chapter, I have explained that Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis which even acknowledges this ‘question of reflexivity’ fails to finally avoid its consequences since the social determinism that his structuralist position implies, denies an agential reflexivity (or self-reflection, if you like). Now, we face something completely different. Margaret Archer offers us an interesting account of agential reflexivity, which has also become influential in the literature. However, I have explained that her account is more focused on self-reflection than on agential reflexivity. For, the agent in Archer’s account is deprived of his agency, that is, his capability to exercise an immediate influence on the social world through which his socialization occurred.

But because of the fact that a true process of socialization is missing in Archer’s account, and also because of the distance that she raises between people and social forms, there is no ‘problem of reflexivity’ here. Of course, to avoid a problem is not something negative. But I have already shown that the very means by which Archer avoids ‘the problem of reflexivity’ – the invocation of a distance between people and social forms – produces other contradictions in Archer’s account. So, the ‘problem of reflexivity’ is avoided at a high price. And neither Elder-Vass (2007b) nor King (1999) offers an unproblematic alternative.

Now, according to Archer, we make our way *through* an objective world without being able to be constitutive of it – so as to make our way within and about the

world. Our actions and decisions will have multiple outcomes and impacts on social structure but not in the present structure which conditions these very actions and decisions. Thus, although her account of agential reflexivity is in accordance with her temporality of emergence, self-reflection about external or *objectified* objects – including the subject as object – is the case, rather than agential reflexivity which, for this thesis, is the mode of objectivating the self as one who (fallibly) conceives herself as being co-author of this world. Yet, her account is still useful for our theoretical purposes and it is now time to investigate the interrelationship between agential reflexivity and non-reflexive or habitual action. This is an important task because an examination of the limits of self-reflection can help us place its conduct within the social domain; and this investigation can be fruitful in the sense that these limits can define the limits of the knowing subject in placing herself in an ontology of the social domain. Unfortunately, as a result of the great influence of Pierre Bourdieu, ‘habitual action’ is immediately connected with Bourdieu’s habitus, a concept which, as we shall show again, is not helpful at all for such reconciliatory approaches since it denies subjectivity. And the lesson from Archer that I completely accept is that without a notion of the subject, there is no self for self-objectivation.

*Reflexive and non-reflexive action: is habitus consistent with the ‘internal conversation’?*

Either because of the academic prominence of Margaret Archer and of Pierre Bourdieu, or because of the fact that Margaret Archer has meticulously tried to formulate her notion of reflexivity in contrast to Bourdieu’s, several authors have tried to draw connection points between these positions. This discussion is very important for us not only because we have already examined Archer’s and Bourdieu’s positions, but mainly because it helps us formulate an idea of the boundaries of agential reflexivity as well as an idea concerning the possible inputs of ‘internal conversation’ – something which is missing from Archer’s account, as we have already seen. However, as Margaret Archer (2007) explains, the late Bourdieu’s

account of epistemic reflexivity ‘still left his theorising far short of recognising the *necessity of reflexivity* for social life and life in society’ (Archer, 2007: 46) and, as a result, any effort to represent the ‘habitus’ as a set of reflexive dispositions of the intellect is both paradoxical and contradictory in terms. Yet, her admission that some of our considerations through ‘internal conversation’ about our activities become ‘embodied knowledge or practical knowledge, which are quintessentially wordless’ (Archer, 2003: 104), opens a window to this kind of reconciliatory account.

First of all, there are commentators that, without really appreciating Bourdieu’s conceptualization of the habitus, still believe that the role of dispositions for and through reflexive deliberations are underestimated in Archer’s work; and, that there seems to be at least some evidence to suggest that such modes of thought – like her classification of reflexives – are ‘powerfully shaped by structural factors in a way which perhaps needs to be taken into consideration when we consider conversations and reflexivity.’ (Mutch, 2004: 440) A prominent example of this theoretical tendency to combine these two seemingly heterogeneous socio-theoretical approaches is Andrew Sayer (2010) who admits that it troubles him that Archer rejects Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus and, that Bourdieu himself is dismissive of the agential reflexivity which is the focus of Archer (Sayer, 2010: 108) For Sayer, both theoretical pathways are important. After all, as he says, Archer in her *Being Human* (2000) recognizes that ‘we could hardly be skilled actors if we needed to reflect and deliberate on everything before acting’ (Sayer, 2010: 108). Yet, a reasonable combination of these two elements would require modifications to both of them – especially to the habitus. On this, he proposes that ‘the processes by which we develop a habitus range from a kind of osmosis or unconscious adaptation through to a more conscious process of learning how to do things so that we can come to do them without thinking.’ (Sayer, 2010: 110) And at this point, Sayer recognizes the deterministic way in which Bourdieu defines the habitus (Sayer, 2010: 110). And he also recognizes that:

...if reflexivity – talking to ourselves about ourselves in relation to our situation – is possible, then that requires a distinction between subject and object. Archer categorizes Bourdieu as a “central conflationist”, that is, as a theorist who

conflates subject and object, and hence leaves no space for reflexivity. (Sayer, 2010: 110-111)

Yet, Sayer (2010) disagrees with Archer in two ways. At first, he argues that Bourdieu, in his *Pascalian Meditations*, attacks both subjectivism and objectivism by distinguishing and interrelating them; secondly, Bourdieu, as Sayer explains, indirectly does acknowledge reflexivity in his co-authored book *The Weight of the World* which ‘is a collection of interviews with people relating their internal conversations.’ (Sayer, 2010: 111) However, as we have seen, Wacquant explains that ‘epistemological priority is granted to objectivist rupture over subjectivist understanding.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 11) So, Sayer overestimates Bourdieu’s intention to treat subjectivism and objectivism as distinguished and interrelated in a way which the subject could objectify herself – for again, there is no conscious subject but rather a subject whose cognition is deeply fabricated by external objective structures (which form and are formed by our practice). Secondly, if Bourdieu refers to interviews which are manifestations of how people relate to their inner speech, this is the result, I think, of Bourdieu’s inconsistency between his ontological definitions and his application of concepts in various descriptive projects, the study of which Bourdieu has undertaken in his huge work.

Yet, Sayer intends to weaken Bourdieu’s claims about ontological complicity between habitus and habitat, which presupposes the perfectly malleable and unreflexive subject: ‘to appreciate this, we need to attend both to the process by which the dispositions of the habitus are acquired and the way in which they are activated once acquired.’ (Sayer, 2010: 111) On this, Sayer proposes that it is our nature that permits socialisation to occur and this includes aversions and inclinations, that is, capacities which, though multiplied by socialisation itself, can explain our resistance to certain forms of social pressure. This is the reason why we often find ourselves resisting before our personal reflexivity becomes activated by mediating the conditions upon us (Sayer, 2010: 112):

Such embodied responses may quickly prompt reflection so that we decide how to reduce the problems, but our dispositions already incline us to do this. Reflection may alternatively lead us to suppress such responses, but this reminds us that there

are initially unmotivated, embodied responses that need dealing with. We should acknowledge both our capacity for reflection on our circumstances, and the embodied dispositions of our habitus, remembering that the latter depend on prior needs and susceptibilities. (Sayer, 2010: 113)

However, this clarification which demands changes in both sides – the habitus and the internal conversation – does not offer us a well formed and adequately articulated version of a possible combination of these two elements. Sayer introduces the concept of ‘emotions’ in an attempt to connect these elements. For Sayer, emotions are not only embodied, but also cognitive and evaluative (Sayer, 2010: 113). In this sense, emotions are evaluative orientations towards our engagement with the physical world and, towards our practical and socio-psychological engagement with the world. Thus:

In virtue of these forms of intelligent response, we can speak of “emotional reason”. Emotions also *motivate* us to act in certain ways. The coupling of cognitive and motivating properties implies that “emotional reason” figures prominently in practical reason – in reasoning how to act.’ (Sayer, 2010: 114)

But Sayer is ambivalent in his effort to formulate a theory of emotions. To attribute both a motivational and a cognitive aspect to emotions does not by itself explain how these two different elements can be combined. I do not want to claim that these are heterogeneous elements and thus cannot be combined, but just to underline the lack of any kind of a theoretical connecting link between them in Sayer’s (2010) account. After all, only the motivational aspect is explained even in part. There is no reference to the *cognitive* aspect of the emotions in Sayer’s account here. Additionally – and consequently – this absence of a substantial definition of this cognitive aspect of the emotions only generates questions about how *cognitive elements* precede reflexivity and also about how reflexivity manipulates pre-existed cognitive elements. For, as Sayer claims, ‘such reflections can modify our emotions.’ (Sayer, 2010: 114)

In this way, Sayer offers us an incomplete theory of the connection between the habitus and the internal conversation for which, ‘the formation, reproduction and transformation of the habitus is mediated by emotional responses.’ (Sayer, 2010: 114) Unfortunately, Sayer does not clearly argue that reflexivity comes after

emotional responses, and thus modifies or controls their effect or meaning – their motivational or cognitive aspect. But it is reasonable to assume that emotions are those non-social ‘capacities for flourishing and suffering’ (Sayer, 2010: 112) although this is not clarified. Nor is there any clear interconnection specified between the habitus, emotions and the internal conversation. Also obscure is Sayer’s claim that the habitus and our personality can influence our emotions and that ‘it is possible for actors not only to deliberate on their situation, but to strive to change their own habitus.’ (Sayer, 2010: 114-115) It would be really interesting here to have a well-formed theory about how emotions can link the habitus and the internal conversation, but Sayer only briefly discusses this perspective in a few paragraphs which can constitute an outline and nothing more. Thus, Sayer (2010) does not clearly connect emotions, as the mediating impulses between the habitus and reflexivity, with those ‘prior needs and susceptibilities’ (Sayer, 2010: 113), those innate susceptibilities.

A quite similar effort to reconcile Archer and Bourdieu, has been made by Dave Elder-Vass (2007a) even though he admits that at first sight this would not seem to be attainable, for ‘while Archer stresses our reflexive deliberations, Bourdieu stresses the possibility of acting without such deliberations, and the ways in which the dispositions that mold such action may in turn be formed without deliberation.’ (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 325). The new element is that here what Elder-Vass is aiming at is a theory of human action which *equally* combines these two seemingly incompatible approaches – a strategic equality which, I think, is not clearly stated in Sayer (2010).

Since Elder-Vass recognises the crucial differences between those two thinkers, he proposes, like Sayer, that such a reconciliation requires a kind of modification of their arguments (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 326). First of all, these differences can be found in two dimensions of their approaches, the ontological and the theoretical. Unfortunately, Elder-Vass does not provide any clear distinction between the ‘ontological’ and the ‘theoretical’ except for a vague statement that ontology is ‘not entirely independent of theory’ (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 335); and I would like to argue that this is one of the major drawbacks of his combinatory approach. For, ontologies

are – and should be considered – theoretical schemes accompanied with all the characteristics and the problematic aspects which we attach to theory as such. But Elder-Vass seems to take for granted their differences and he only warns us that his approach will ‘advance a theoretical account of human action that rests upon an emergentist ontology.’ (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 326) So, as Elder-Vass claims, his account is similar to Archer’s as far as the ontological level is concerned while believing that:

Bourdieu’s *theoretical* position is only loosely articulated with his own ontology, and so can be recast into an emergentist framework without losing its inherent structure or strengths ... At the theoretical level, we need to fill out this framework with an explanation of how human dispositions and decisions are related to the determination of human action. It is at this level that the conflict between reflexivity and habitus appears. (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 326)

However, I would like to argue that Bourdieu’s habitus and Archer’s notion of reflexivity constitute ontological premises and, again, a clear distinction between ontology and theory is missing. Yet, Elder-Vass thinks that he offers us a quite clear structured account:

At the theoretical level, the conflict turns on the extent to which human beings influence their own destiny. While Archer rejects “contemporary social theory that seeks to diminish human properties and powers” (2000: back cover), Bourdieu sees human action as driven by a socially derived habitus that provides “a spontaneity without consciousness or will” (1990b: 56). At the ontological level, the question turns on whether social structure can be seen as distinct from human beings or whether the two are mutually constitutive. (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 332)

Again, what Elder-Vass fails to see is that human agents and their possibility for consciousness, as a property and power which enables them to form projects, belong to the ontological level. As Elder-Vass himself says before, ‘what is critical for Archer in these relationships is that we continue to recognize that human beings, social structures, and cultural entities each have their own distinct existences and influences on social outcomes. She sustains this view with an emergentist realist ontology of the social world.’ (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 332) What this quotation shows is that Elder-Vass himself places both agency and social structure in the ontological investigation. After all, there is no genuine reason why these two elements of social



life should be discussed under the different labels of ‘ontology’ and of ‘theory’<sup>64</sup>. Last but not least, how can we articulate a discussion about mutual influence of structure and agency apart from the discussion about their attributes, their properties? And do these properties not relate to the way in which they influence each other?

And at this point, it is interesting to follow Elder-Vass in this effort of reconciliation because by showing the inadequacy of such an effort, we can deduce several useful conclusions for our further analysis of the ontological prerequisites of agential reflexivity. At first, Elder-Vass (2007a), in his vain effort to discover a weak notion of agency in Bourdieu’s words – agency which could help him in his broader reconciling effort – comments on this piece from Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984): ‘To speak of habitus is to include in the object the knowledge which the agents, who are part of the object, have of the object, and the contribution this knowledge makes to the reality of the object.’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 467) At this point, Elder-Vass intends to show that Bourdieu, contrary to Archer, proposes a mutual constitution between agents and their knowledge and, structures. However, I would argue that the knowledge of the agents here is the habitus which, as we have seen before, deprives agents of their agential status of being agentially reflexive (or self-reflective, if you like).

For Elder-Vass to say that Bourdieu supports a mutual constitution between structure and agency is to imply that agents, after having internalized external structures, can in their turn constitute structure. The problem with this interpretation is that, within Bourdieu’s approach, the contribution of agency at the last point in the process is deeply questionable. For, in fact, as I have explained, the key concepts in Bourdieu’s work are the structure and the habitus. And in fact, objective structures, as we have seen, have the prior role. These results in a structuralist approach where the habitus guarantees the effectiveness of those external structures. To talk about agents who constitute structure, as well as being constituted by structure, opens a small window

---

<sup>64</sup> This separation is not new, Margaret Archer explains in *Realist Social Theory* (1995) that her concern ‘goes beyond producing an acceptable social ontology for it seeks to present a workable social theory.’ (Archer, 1995: 161)

of an intentionality which is absent in Bourdieu's work. This misunderstanding of Elder-Vass makes him claim that:

... we need not alter the claim that agents are constitutive of structure. Indeed, the emergence relationship is concerned precisely with the question of how parts interact to generate wholes with emergent properties. Thus it is perfectly compatible with an emergentist ontology to argue that structures ("the object") are made up of agents, thereby inherently including in the structure the knowledge that agents have of the structure by virtue of including the agents as its parts. (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 333)

Now, one could easily notice that Elder-Vass' notion of emergence (2007a, 2007b) intends to incorporate agents and the knowing subject within her object; but Elder-Vass' neo-functional approach, as we have explained above, in its naturalistic conceptualization of cause, does not permit a coherent account of this. Furthermore, the fact that the habitus is the knowledge through which agents conceptualize and evaluate the situations in which they find themselves and which (knowledge) is compatible with its outcomes, has nothing to do with the agents Elder-Vass describes here – and this is the mistake we have just described above, that is, to place agency where it cannot exist at all in Bourdieu's conceptual scheme.

Secondly, the internalization of structures, that is, the constitution of agents by structures, is treated by Elder-Vass in a double way: 'On a metaphorical reading of *internalization*, the second claim is entirely compatible with an emergentist ontology; on a literal reading, it is entirely incompatible.' (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 334) The content he gives to the metaphorical version of internalisation is beliefs and dispositions which 'are not to be equated with social structure, nor to substitute for the notion of a distinct social structure, but to be seen as features of the human beings who are parts of the structure' (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 334) Here, in this metaphorical sense, when we internalize something, our beliefs about the world are *influenced* by our experience in a passive but not determinate way (Elder-Vass, 2010: 106): 'these beliefs and dispositions are not to be equated with social structure, ... but to be seen as features of the human beings who are parts of the structure.' (Elder-Vass, 2010: 106)

And this is opposed to the ‘literal’ version of what Bourdieu means by that ‘internalization’ where ‘habitus literally *is* structure, internalized into our bodies .... Now, beliefs and dispositions are no longer properties of human beings who are distinct from social structures; rather, they represent an ontological penetration of the individual by the social structure’ (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 334) which, according to Elder-Vass, is also an ontological error ‘in that it fails to distinguish between a thing and its causal consequences.’ (Elder-Vass, 2010: 107). However, Elder-Vass forgets to explain how this ‘literal’ aspect of Bourdieu’s ontology suits Elder-Vass’s interpretation of Bourdieu, that ‘structures are made up of agents, thereby inherently including in the structure the knowledge that agents have of the structure by virtue of including the agents as its parts and thus their knowledge as properties of these parts.’ (Elder-Vass, 2010: 105) For Elder-Vass seems to have two interpretations of how Bourdieu considers agency: on the one hand, ‘agents are constitutive of structures’ (Elder-Vass, 2010: 105) and, on the other hand, ‘habitus literally is structure, internalised into our bodies’ (Elder-Vass, 2010: 106). Again, Bourdieu’s view, I think, is clear about agency: it does not exist – especially in its theoretical formulation as a conscious conduct.

Regardless of a wishful, *metaphoric* thinking of having another definition of the habitus – and unfortunately for Elder-Vass – I believe I have demonstrated that there are no stable grounds for any kind of reconciliation between Bourdieu’s habitus and Archer’s internal conversation. I have shown that Bourdieu, on the one hand – and in contrast to Elder-Vass’ misinterpretation of him – cannot support any kind of agency similar to that adopted by Archer; and on the other hand, Elder-Vass’ ‘literal’ interpretation is more than apocalyptic about the vanity of his whole project to combine two heterogeneous accounts – as he admits himself (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 334).

Yet, Elder-Vass, after having assumed that his metaphorical reading has shown the ontological compatibility of Archer and Bourdieu, moves on to resolve differences in the supposed *theoretical* level – effort which, I think, is meaningless since I have shown that there is no convergence between those two ontologies and, since I cannot

share with him the distinction between ontology and theory. We can just say that he proposes a complex combinatory account in which agents make conscious decisions which are only *indirect* and *partial* causes of their behaviour in that ‘(a) they occur a variable length of time before the action concerned; and (b) they are always incomplete regarding the details of the action to be taken ... thus any single human action may represent the (full or partial) realization of a series of nested decisions of various sizes or scope.’ (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 339)

In this way, previous decisions become inputs in the conscious deciding upon current ones, all of them different in size, scope and effect. Old conscious decisions are stored as dispositions and thus, in the end, action implementation takes place as determined by those dispositions – including dispositions stored as such by ‘last minute’ decisions. This is a formulation in which, ‘our conscious decision making and our nonconscious behavior determination appear as complementary and mutually necessary moments in the causation of our actions.’ (Elder-Vass, 2007a: 340) Again, I would like to stress that this sophisticated approach is, on the one hand, ontological and, on the other hand, cannot be considered as an outcome of a combination between the habitus and the internal conversation. Even if it tries to incorporate two different aspects of how agency exerts its powers, this does not mean that these two aspects are directly and *literally* connected with the habitus and the internal conversation – especially with the former, as the social unconscious.

In this sense, Sayer (2010) tries to combine these two approaches by placing reflexivity after the formation of the dispositions while Elder-Vass (2007a) places reflexivity before the formation of dispositions. Both thinkers treat, in a mysterious way, the habitus and its dispositions as something which we are able to know – though Bourdieu defined it as the social unconscious. Finally, Sayer is trying to invent a mediator to play this revealing role while Elder-Vass does not need such a mediator since in principle he does not seem to change Archer’s version of reflexivity together with the knowleageability it assumes on the part of the agents.

Margaret Archer, in her turn, in a chapter called ‘Can reflexivity and habitus work in tandem?’ (2010), explains that there are four reasons why critical realists are not proponents of routine action:

First, social life in an open system is always at the mercy of contingencies so, by definition, people’s responses cannot be entirely “routinized”. Second, the co-existence and interplay of plural generative mechanisms often shapes the empirical situations encountered by subjects in unpredictable ways, thus requiring creative responses from them. Third, Realism’s stratified social ontology includes a stratum of emergent personal properties and powers, which include the human capacity for innovative action ... Fourth, as a meta-philosophy of social science, there is nothing in Realism that accords axiomatic hegemony to structural and cultural properties over agential ones in determining particular outcomes. (Archer, 2010: 123)

It is thus ‘unexpected’ as she claims (Archer, 2010: 123) that Sayer (2010) and Elder-Vass (2007a) defend routine action and simultaneously try to combine it with reflexivity. Archer’s critique of Sayer (2010) is not well formed since both these chapters belong to the same book edited by Archer (2010) and they are contemporary.

By contrast, Archer’s response to Elder-Vass (2007a) is fully articulated. First of all, Margaret Archer claims that Elder-Vass is correct to allege that a mutual constitution would lead us to an elimination of a clear subject/object distinction and thus would be incompatible with reflexivity. However (as I have already explained) mutual constitution is not equal to what she calls ‘central conflation’. Moreover, Bourdieu cannot fall into either of these two theoretical categorizations, since he is more like a kind of a sophisticated structuralist than a ‘central conflationist’ or a supporter of mutual constitution between structure and agency. ‘Central conflation’ is the extreme – in the case of structure and agency as having no independent status of their own – of the more general scenario of mutual constitution in which the subject/object distinction can be retained.

Archer wonders at this point whether Bourdieu could accept such a modification of his ontological framework (Archer, 2010: 129): ‘Bourdieu’s ontological commitments are so strong in the *Logic of Practice* that they shut the door on

emergence because of their forceful elisionism – leaving the concept and practice of reflexivity outside.’ (Archer, 2010: 129) There is no kind of agency and as she says:

Thus, Elder-Vass appears to misinterpret Bourdieu’s statement that: “[if] one fails to recognise any form of action other than rational action or mechanical reaction, it is impossible to understand the logic of all actions that are reasonable without being the product of a reasoned design, still less of rational calculation” (1990a, p. 50). This is interpreted as “confirming ... that he [Bourdieu] accepts that *some* actions are indeed the product of reasoned design” (2007, p. 335). Not only does Bourdieu state the opposite above (the force of the word “without”), but what is “reasonable” is inscribed in *le sens pratique* and expressed in action, not in personal “reasons” that can be articulated. (Archer, 2010: 130)

Archer (2010) is certainly right at this point; and through a careful use of Bourdieu’s quotations she shows that Elder-Vass has quite misinterpreted Bourdieu about the ontological complicity between the habitus and reflexivity.

Secondly, Archer (2010) explains that when Elder-Vass sets out to reconcile the two accounts in which he is interested at the *theoretical* level, he tries to modify the morphogenetic approach. In fact, as Archer explains, ‘this is no more amenable to the proposed theoretical “adjustments” than Bourdieu would have been to ontological revision.’ (Archer, 2010: 130) And, Archer explains that Elder-Vass erroneously presupposes that ‘action’ and ‘social action’ is homogeneous (Archer, 2010: 131). This means that for Archer (2010), Elder-Vass, like Bourdieu, obliterates crucial ontological distinctions as underpinning the different kinds of knowledge that agents can attain regarding each of the three orders of natural reality – the natural, the practical and the social. For, Bourdieu renders ‘all action as social action and gives *habitus* epistemological hegemony in every order of reality.’ (Archer, 2010: 131) Moreover, at this point, Archer claims that the proportional effects of the habitus and of reflexivity change as long as the order of reality changes and ‘are least determinate for the social order. If correct, this renders the “reconciliation” formally feasible but empty in practice.’ (Archer, 2010: 131) This means that different kinds of reflexivity arise in each of these different relations regarding different orders of reality.

Finally, I hope to have shown that the idea of the habitus as articulated in Bourdieu's texts and reflexivity as formulated in Archer's works cannot be combined in any reasonable way. And this is not because I have really referred to all possible scenarios of this putative reconciliation, but simply because by trying to respond to those reconciliatory approaches, I have interpreted Bourdieu and Archer in such a way that it is more than obvious that they cannot be combined. It is not that all agents' actions are the result of a self-reflective conduct. Nor do these critiques of Andrew Sayer (2010) and Dave Elder-Vass (2007a) imply that we can never have a general theory that combines habitual action and agential reflexivity (or self-reflection). It is rather Bourdieu's conceptualization of the habitus as the internalized cognitive structure that is not helpful in this task. Instead, a social ontology should account for both these elements of social life.

But, at this point, I have to make a crucial distinction. Habitual action, which is omnipresent in social life, should not be identified with social inertia or social reproduction. For every actor can, for example, drive his/her car without reflecting all the time on his/her actions; but the fact that a vast majority of the actions of social actors are of this kind, that is, they are not the product of self-reflection, does not preclude self-reflective personal and social change. Nor can this alone constitute a crucial factor for the explanation of the theoretical differences between social transformation and social reproduction. Bourdieu, by providing a theory of social inertia, has placed habitual action at the heart of social explanation. But this is only one theoretical choice. For, social inertia can still be the case, for social theory, even if a level of self-reflection is attributed to agents or even if its focal point is not habitual action. And also, a theory of social change can account for habitual action. The examination of Castoriadis' work, in the next chapter, will help us account for these theoretical distinctions. In Castoriadis' work, as we shall see, these elements are theoretically related to psychoanalysis.

For the moment, one could ask whether these efforts of reconciling reflexive and habitual action by Elder-Vass (2007a, 2010) and Sayer (2010) would finally imply a new formulation of the relationship between the 'I' and 'me'. We have seen above

that there is an anacoluthic development of the conceptualization of this relationship between Archer (2000) and Archer (2003). The key common secret – which Archer (2010) does not hide – is that she intends a closer reconciliation between critical realism and American pragmatism – prominent representatives of which are philosophers like William James, Charles Sanders Peirce and George Herbert Mead. And thus one could wonder whether we could have an improved account of the ‘internal dialogue’ so that habitual action, emotions and dispositions could be related, somehow, with the ‘me’.

Yet, this is only a secondary aim of this thesis and the brief discussion that follows is only a promise for further research. At this point, one can compare and comment upon Norbert Wiley’s and Archer’s critical engagements with pragmatists like James, Mead and Peirce. For Colaprieto (2010), Archer and Wiley try to complete pragmatists’ notions of the self and of the inner dialogue<sup>65</sup>. Indeed, Wiley (2010) intends to combine the medean ‘I-me’ formulation of the ‘inner speech’ with Peirce’s ‘I-you’ formulation by proposing an ‘I-you-me’ triadic reflexivity in contrast to – and thus enhancing and complementing – the two dyads proposed by Mead and Peirce. And he claims that the components of this triadic schema – the ‘I’, the ‘you’ and the ‘me’ – should be considered as more like complex relations than substances. In this way:

You can envision both the past and the future, along with the present, simultaneously. This omni-scopic vision allows one to go back and forth from past to future and also to see them together. If you can simultaneously see your settled habit system (“me”) and your options for some new, i.e. non-habitual action (“you”), you can more easily integrate the two practical resources, structure and agency. (Wiley, 2010: 18)

---

<sup>65</sup> On this, Colaprieto explains that their great difference is that for Archer, Mead’s excessive sociality deprives the self of its capacity of being a reflexive agent while for Wiley, Mead’s contribution can complement Peirce’s one. Colaprieto (2010) also claims that both of them are against reductionism and their work aims at a crucial support of human interiority, however, somewhat in contrast to Archer’s view, Wiley’s work ‘serves in this way by bringing into sharp focus both relational and temporal considerations’ and it is for this reason that ‘he strives to bring together what she works to rend asunder – Peirce and Mead.’ (Colaprieto, 2010: 48)



Of course, the ‘me’ as habitual system has nothing to do with Archer’s ‘me’ which only rests its feasibility on memory. Unfortunately, Wiley attributes to the ‘me’ component five partially *heterogeneous* contents; these are the ‘generalized other’, ‘habits’, ‘memory’, ‘interface with body’ and the ‘self-concept’. Yet, the discussion here is all-encompassing and, ‘there is no reason why all three cannot take turns speaking, and for the dialogue to be between the “me” and “you”, as well as between the “me” and “I” (or the “you” and “I”)’ (Wiley, 2010: 20). For this triadic relationship to occur, the self should stand simultaneously both in the past (‘me’), present (‘I’) and future (‘you’). Of course, as we have seen this is not a new idea. In fact, Archer (2000) expresses a quite similar account with the difference of the ‘Me’ being just informative to the other two interlocutors.

Yet, according to Wiley, since *existentially* we can stand only in the present, we can achieve this multilevel interplay *imaginatively* (Wiley, 2010: 20). But what could really be the role and the significance of imagination in such a triadic conceptualization<sup>66</sup> of the self as a relational linguistic structure – as a multidimensional discursive device? As Wiley tries to further explain, ‘in the case of inner speech there are also a variety of peripheral forms. Imagery, i.e. sensory, kinaesthetic and emotional, is an important area of inner experience.’ (Wiley, 2010: 30) In the category of imagery, he inserts daydreams, night dreams, emotional imagery and, at this point Wiley just says that images can enter into the internal dialogue as peripheral to it<sup>67</sup>.

---

<sup>66</sup> There are various ways one can criticize Wiley’s combinational approach to reflexivity – the observational aspect he attaches to internal speech (!), the fragmentary nature of the triadic self and his incomplete explanation about the ways in which it can be schematized in relational terms, his identification of self-awareness with self-observation – however, what is really important for our purposes is to cast light on his idea of imagination.

<sup>67</sup> As Wiley explains, ‘another kind of peripheral is the uncontrolled fantasy, which, again, seems to be happening to someone else ... these peripheral forms of inner speech can all be in the consciousness, and several of them, especially imagery, can be in your self talk. You can insert imagery in the sentences you use in your inner dialogue. Any non-linguistic image, e.g. visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, kinaesthetic or emotional can be inserted into some syntactical slot in an internal sentence.’ (Wiley, 2010: 30)

However obscure and incomplete his position seems to be for an analytical eye, a relative identification of what initially seemed peripheral and complementary, that is, fantasy, with what is mostly central to his formulation of reflexivity, that is, self-talk, is obvious. Of course, ‘thinking’ and ‘self-regulation’ are the main functions of the inner dialogue, but the clear limits between them and the – initially supposed to be peripheral – ‘uncontrolled fantasy’ are nowhere specified. It may be this thematic – or this theoretical incompleteness – in Wiley’s words that made Colaprietro (2010), in his concluding notes on the comparison between Archer’s and Wiley’s formulations of conversation, to ask ‘is not the human imagination, understood as an innate or instinctive capacity as well as a cultural and personally modified set of abilities, an indispensable resource for self-transformation?’ (Colaprietro, 2010: 51) Of course, this question helps us to turn our gaze to imagination and try to explore its self-reflective potentialities. But it also raises question about the role of human imagination considering novelty, self-change as well as social transformation: what is the role of human imagination in the process of socialization considering social disposition, emotions – or habitual action in general? And even if imagination is responsible for personal creativity, under which circumstances can such a source of novelty *really* account for agential intervention to the social realm by disrupting social reproduction? These questions will be encountered in the next chapter by focusing on the work of Cornelius Castoriadis.

**Summary: the need for a proper notion of agential reflexivity which would allow the fulfillment of the epistemic criterion of reflexivity, led us to Margaret Archer’s account of the ‘internal conversation’. However, Archer seems to raise a distance between the subject (whether epistemic or not) and society (structures) as both belong to different ontologies – thus avoiding the ‘question of reflexivity’. This choice, however, has been shown to entail contradictory arguments about the role of agency and, in the final analysis, her account can be seen more as a characterization of processes of (self) reflection, rather than an account of agential reflexivity as a contributor to self-creation and change in the social realm within which social science is another agent.**

## Chapter Five

---

### ***Cornelius Castoriadis and the Self-Reflective Imagination: 'Representing One's Self as Representational Activity'***

The individual is able to think, feel, strive, and work by himself; but he depends so much upon society—in his physical, intellectual, and emotional existence—that it is impossible to think of him, or to understand him, outside the framework of society ... In addition, during his lifetime, he acquires a cultural constitution which he adopts from society through communication and through many other types of influences. It is this cultural constitution which, with the passage of time, is subject to change and which determines to a very large extent the relationship between the individual and society. (Einstein, 1949)

It is not by chance that I introduce this chapter with a quote from Albert Einstein. In his speeches, Einstein, one of the most prominent scientists in the history of science, was always underlining that imagination is more important than formal logic. However, in the domain of social sciences, only a few authors have properly placed imagination's role in the formation of the social individual and in the self-reflective work of individuals and groups, the interaction of whom transforms society. And if I choose 'transform' over 'reproduce', it is because for Cornelius Castoriadis – an author centrally concerned with creative imagination – the impact of the imagination on social life is transformation and change, even if some societies and the individuals in those societies cannot be aware of it. In order for us to understand Castoriadis' contribution to agential reflexivity (which he refers to as 'self-reflection'), we should, at first, make clear the importance of the terms 'autonomy' and 'heteronomy' in his thought.

These terms, which are omnipresent in his various discussions about society (*koinonia*), agency, psychology, *poiesis*, politics, economics and philosophy, emerge within them and simultaneously correct them. This correction has to do with what he calls 'the project of autonomy', mainly concerning its emancipatory impact. Joas and Knöbl (2009) categorize Castoriadis as anti-structuralist because he critically draws

on the works of his contemporary French structuralists. But Castoriadis also draws on Marxism and post-marxism as well as on the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. As we shall see, Castoriadis places psychoanalysis at the heart of social explanation and emancipation. Yet, his ideas of the human psyche and its socialization are placed in a social ontology which he calls *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987).

This chapter starts by considering Castoriadis' ontology of the social imaginary and, then, moves to examine his views about the primacy of ontology in relation to his conceptualization of self-reflection and its role in social transformation. As will become clear, Castoriadis' ideas on the ontology/epistemology debate are similar to Bhaskar's ideas on this debate – ideas which I examined in the first chapter. However, it will be crucial for our conclusion to understand the ways in which these accounts are different. For, after this discussion, we will be ready to reassess Castoriadis' contribution to the notion of the epistemic subject, a task which will prove fruitful regarding the conclusion of this thesis. Castoriadis argues (like Bhaskar) that a transcendental argument should proceed by asking what the world must be for a certain kind of science to be possible. I have already explained that I think that proper ontological argumentation should at first conceptualize the basic characteristics of the world and then proceed to inferences about the proper forms of methods and accounts of the proper forms of knowledge claims. Otherwise, one will fall into the trap of taking for granted the existing methodologies and infer from them the world instead of explaining why these methodologies are the proper ones to examine this very world.

So, my critique of Bhaskar will hold for Castoriadis' analysis as well. However, I think that Castoriadis is clearer about the sociality of existing methods and knowledge claims. And, it is partially for this reason that Castoriadis is struggling to resurrect the self-reflecting subjectivity through his work. For, while Castoriadis argues that the social individuals have adopted, through the process of socialization, the norms and meanings of the collectivity, he also underlines the possibility of the autonomous subject who can critically examine the social institutions that have

emerged from the interactions of this collectivity. His ideas about self-reflection will lead me to argue that Castoriadis has two accounts of this concept; and that these two accounts will help me distinguish between critical self-reflection and agential reflexivity which can fulfill the epistemic criterion of reflexivity proposed in this thesis. Finally, since Castoriadis' ideas about ontology are similar to Bhaskar's, I will try to show why Castoriadis is not a kind of critical realist.

### *Society, psyche and politics: the imaginary institution of society*

In this section, I will be analysing Castoriadis' account of creative imagination, which he places at the root of many aspects of social life including institutions. I will also be considering his distinction between autonomous societies – in which creative imagination is freed – and heteronomous societies – where this is not the case. Finally I will consider the psychoanalytic roots of some of these ideas.

First of all, for Castoriadis, every society, as a collectivity, institutes itself by creating its own laws, rules, values and shared meanings; and it does so by changing its 'instituted social imaginary', namely the 'existing' truths which it embraces and subscribes to: what is sensible, true or false, fair or unfair and of course, what is meaningful and what is meaningless. As Castoriadis characteristically says, 'institutions and social imaginary significations are creations of the radical social instituting imaginary. This imaginary is the creative capacity of the anonymous collectivity, which is clearly manifest, for example, in the creation and evolution of language, family forms, mores, ideas, and so forth.' (Castoriadis, 1997: 131)

For there is no natural, logical, nomological or biological basis to which institutions and their appearance can be reduced (Castoriadis, 2007: 72). Of course, society has a functional (technological) dimension too. But Castoriadis explains that the distinction and the relation between cultural and functional *creation* is not fixed; and Castoriadis implies that the evolution and the differentiation of each of these two elements, which are present in every society, is a matter of creation, that is, of the

social imaginary. If culture is ‘the domain of the imaginary’ (Castoriadis, 2007: 77), Castoriadis *implicitly* premises the evolution of functional creation on the cultural domain – which, in a way, also affects its own evolution.

To be more specific, institutions are the bearers of *the social imaginary significations* (Castoriadis, 2007: 73) of the collectivity which creates them through the self-instituting of its *radical social imaginary*; and once created, both imaginary significations and institutions crystallize, or solidify, and that is what Castoriadis calls the ‘*instituted social imaginary*’ which:

... provides continuity within society, the reproduction and repetition of the same forms, which henceforth regulate people’s lives and persist as long as no gradual historical change or massive new creation occurs, modifying them or radically replacing them by others. (Castoriadis, 2007: 73-74)

However, self-institution, self-creation and self-alteration are always present, even if veiled and concealed; but historically they occur in different forms and have different levels of intensity<sup>68</sup>. For historically, most of the known societies for which we have sufficient information, while always being in a process of latent creation, have uncritically accepted the institutions which they inherited from previous generations.

In fact, Castoriadis intends to point out that in these societies, there was a closure of meaning, which means that the individuals could not know that they created and altered their institutions, that they had the power to do so, that there was not an external power which validated and created their laws, and that they had the capacity as a collectivity and as individuals for such a self-instituting. This situation, very common in history, characterized by a closure of meaning, a cognitive closure, is called *heteronomy*. For Castoriadis, ‘the *heteros*, the other who gave the law is none other than the instituting society itself’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 132), but heteronomous societies cannot understand this due to their cognitive closure. A heteronomous society always institutes the external source of the justification and validation of its institution; for example: ‘God gave the laws’. As a result, in heteronomous societies,

---

<sup>68</sup> After all, for Castoriadis, time is creation. It is in general an unending creation of the individual (radical imagination) – that is, self-creation – and of society (instituting social imaginary which is the radical imagination of the collectivity).

individuals, although they create, cannot identify the alterations they create with their conscious conduct. For their thoughts, fabricated as they are by society, cannot meaningfully challenge their own mode of validation. Logic, inductive methods and purpose orientation are defined and given by society.

By contrast, autonomy, as opposed to heteronomy, characterizes a society which *consciously* institutes its world, its meaningful conduct and which questions all the time that institution and its foundation, that is, its social imaginary significations, while elaborating the possibilities of change. Thus, Castoriadis calls ‘autonomous’ a society which ‘not only knows explicitly that it has created its own laws but has instituted itself so as to free its radical imaginary and enable itself to alter its institutions through collective, self-reflective, and deliberate activity’ (Castoriadis, 1997:132). Of course, the autonomous society also questions the reasons for changing its institution. In other words, its self-alteration goes further by contemplation of the basic principles of foundational logic (rules of inference) through imaginative elaboration of the possibilities of change and creation. Additionally, as Castoriadis explains, this implies ‘that there is no extrasocial benchmark for laws.’ (Castoriadis, 2007: 95)

Castoriadis confines this second type of instituting to only two historical periods; ancient Greece and modern western societies. Within them, *the project of autonomy* is present in their social imaginary significations, and is also being altered and developed. More broadly, Castoriadis argues that this self-institution is the essence of democracy and, consequently, politics is the lucid activity which promotes the institution of the self-reflective deliberation of the collectivity, thus being ‘a moment and an expression of the project of autonomy.’ (Castoriadis, 2007: 106) This is what he calls ‘the politics of autonomy’. Of course, a condition for an autonomous collectivity is the autonomy of its members and vice versa<sup>69</sup>. To sum up, democracy, autonomy of society and of its members, and collective (self-) reflectiveness are identical terms.

---

<sup>69</sup> We will see the difficulties this ‘vice versa’ produces, below.

Hence, the autonomous individual is the one who does not accept uncritically what society has taught her; she realizes that she is a co-author of her society and while she cannot exist outside society, she is responsible for its institution and for the production of meaning within it. Thus, she gives herself her own laws (Castoriadis, 2007: 94) – with ‘law’ here meaning ‘nomos’ as a necessary (transhistorical requirement for the existence of society) convention/rule and as the opposite ‘of *phusis*, a “natural” (and unalterable) order of things.’ (Castoriadis, 2007: 95) Of course, autonomy, whenever and wherever it exists, belongs to the social imaginary significations and no individual alone can escape from the enclosure of a heteronomous society. For:

... it is not the singular human being that has educated herself in such a way as to refuse obedience to any supreme authority that would fail to account for and provide a reason for its acts and its existence; others *who have already been raised in this way* have educated her to adopt this attitude. (Castoriadis, 1997: 165)

It must be society and the project of autonomy within its ‘magma’, its social imaginary significations, which provide individuals with the possibility of autonomy. However, as previously mentioned, it is not only politics that is connected with that project; it is also Philosophy, pedagogy and psychoanalysis that are interrelated with our discussion.

First of all, Castoriadis argues that philosophy, as well as democracy, is a result (and a condition) of autonomous societies existing in history. For these societies and their individuals questioned the premises and the foundation as well as the justification of knowledge, a procedure to which philosophy owes its existence. Philosophy as well as democracy, has, in its turn, enforced and reconstituted the project of autonomy, for they evolved simultaneously through their interconnection and mutual support. In addition, psychoanalysis and pedagogy constitute important tools for the enforcement of that project. This has to do, as we shall see later, with the role of imagination as the ultimate property of the psyche and as the capability of self-reflection. In fact, as Castoriadis makes clear and as we will explain below, self-reflective deliberation and conduct is personal autonomy.



At this point, we have to cast light on the role of psychoanalysis in Castoriadis' work. Castoriadis' account of the psyche allows us to see both the role of imagination within it and the connection (that he makes) between the individual psyche and society through socialization. To begin with, he explains that 'the core of the psyche is a *monad*, it is a monadic psyche characterized by pure or radical imagination, initially in a state of complete nondifferentiation.' (Castoriadis, 2007: 98) This state of nondifferentiation is called 'the monad' which is a self-enclosed representation, that is, 'shut in within itself.' (Castoriadis, 2007: 212) The *monad*, that is, the psyche of the newborn, has only one schema: the omnipotence. In fact, this omnipotence is based on the process whereby the *monad* is enclosed in the world it provides with itself; that is, it provides itself with its own meaning: 'I am everything, I am being itself, being is me, and I am pleasure, pleasure is me.' (Castoriadis, 2007: 170) However socialization achieves a series of ruptures in this totality of meaning which will be compensated in a substitution, in various ways, of these gaps of meaning with the meanings of society – by incarnating social imaginary significations. It is through this process that the fabrication of the individual by society starts. Individuals adopt society's meanings and assent to this substitution:

From the social-historical point of view, the adult has internalized virtually the whole of the existing institution of society and, more specifically, the imaginary significations that in each particular society serve to organize the human and nonhuman worlds and give them meaning. (Castoriadis, 1997: 130)

Thus, the ego, as a social fabrication, is designed to 'preserve, continue, and reproduce' (Castoriadis, 1997: 131) these significations through their internalization by individuals.

Yet, through the transformation of the monad into the 'social individual', the capability of the individual to create its own world by representation is sustained. Human imagination is defunctionalized, unlimited and unmasterable, and that means that humans can receive pleasure independently from satisfaction of their drives. And it is this characteristic, which distinguishes humans from other animals, that permitted the appearance of language and of society – the attainment of pleasure

through thinking and communicating. So, the human psyche has as its main characteristic ‘the substitution of representational pleasure for organ pleasure’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 161) and this is the prerequisite for what he calls sublimation, which is ‘the cathecting of representations (or states of representation) whose referent is no longer a “private object” but rather a nonprivate, public, that is to say, *social* object.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 162) So ‘sublimation’ is the process of replacing private objects of cathexis with social objects of cathexis.

Therefore, Castoriadis connects psychoanalysis with social theory and practice, by extending the Freudian phantasmization to the more general idea of sublimation. Here imagination, disconnected from its drives, permits socialization to take place. For without this flux of representations there can be no cathected social object. It seems that, for Castoriadis, human imagination is the ontological prerequisite for both socialization and social transformation. However, socialization occurs as long as the radical imagination of the individual has become tamed, channeled, regulated and brought into line with life in society so that they ‘absorb the institution of society and its significations’ (Castoriadis, 2007: 75), this is the basis only for the heteronomous aspect of society – and Castoriadis is conscious of this. But what is the role of imagination within his project of autonomy, if it initially permits socialization and thus heteronomy? It is at this point that his ideas of self-reflection can cast light on these questions.

Now, it is important to note that Castoriadis frequently too easily connects the idea of self-reflection with the creation of society. For him, ‘putting things into question’, ‘implies that there is no extrahuman authority responsible, in the last instance, for what occurs in history, that there are no true causes or author of history.’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 4) I would like to agree with his account at this point, but one could still reply that even if individuals are indeed self-critical, this does not guarantee that they are equally co-authors of society, that is, that they can so easily change social structure. Moreover, it is difficult to conceive social collectivity as a homogeneous self-reflective activity since, as Margaret Archer would respond, different groups have different vested interests as related to different orientations

concerning social transformation or reproduction. Castoriadis introduces the concept of the radical social imaginary to account for social change. But again, what is missing is a more concrete analysis, of how the different interests and resources of agents – interpreted as such through the lenses of the social imaginary significations – orient (and correlate with each other through) the formation of such a collective creativity. We will discuss these problematics after we have shown in which ways self-reflection is autonomy for Castoriadis. But a more rigorous analysis of these issues should be the subject-matter of a future research.

### *From the concept of Ontology towards the self-reflective knowing subject*

In order to adequately explain Castoriadis' conceptualization of self-reflection, I should, at first, consider his broader view of ontology and epistemology. After all, this thesis argues for the deep interconnections among the concept of ontology and the concepts of epistemic and agential reflexivity. And Castoriadis' analysis of the concepts of ontology and the knowing subject is very close to what is argued for in this thesis. Castoriadis' remarks on self-reflection will help me reassess my initial distinction between critical self-reflection and the epistemic criterion of reflexivity proposed in this thesis.

We should start our discussion of these issues by claiming that 'Castoriadis develops his insights, initially gleaned mainly from his critique of Marxism, into an *ontology of the indeterminate*, a non-deterministic theory of being.' (Joas and Knöbl, 2009: 412) – in contrast to inherited tradition, which conceives being as determined/determinacy. And, for this reason, Suzi Adams argues that, for Castoriadis, the social-historical constitutes a realm which does not succumb to the onto-logics of traditional thought. Traditional approaches fail to grasp the distinction between *nomos* and *phusis* and, 'as such, inherited thought could not grasp a mode of being that was not only creative but also *self-creative* (such as the social-historical)' (Adams, 2011: 28). More precisely, as Adams explains, 'Castoriadis opts to begin with a regional ontology of the social-historical in explicit opposition to the

individualistic – as well as naturalistic – assumptions that have vitiated the philosophical anthropological approaches’ (Adams, 2011: 29). As she further comments:

Unlike a *univocal* interpretation of being, a *pluralistic* elucidation of being assumes different logic-ontologies for different regions, and for the identity of their objects. The discovery of new regions requires critical reflection on the logic-ontologies created for already known regions of what is and their respective interpretations of modes and meanings of being. This is especially the case for the modes of being of the social imaginary and the social-historical. Interwoven with the mode of being of the social-historical is the mode of being of the creative imagination. (Adams, 2011: 36)

Thus, Adams here helps us to *initially* argue that Castoriadis distinguishes ontologically the social realm from the natural realm, supporting one of the main claims made in this thesis. Hence, Castoriadis underlines the inadequacy of transferring methodologies from one domain, for which they are valid, to other or all the domains of being (Adams, 2011: 38). On this, Suzi Adams also helps us to allege that Castoriadis ‘points to the ultimate impossibility of separating ontology from epistemology’ (Adams, 2011: 38) while explaining that:

Castoriadis’s particular concerns focus on the philosophical consequences of the radical separation of “subject” and “object” and their determinations as presumed in the traditional onto-epistemology ... his specific argument is that every epistemology assumes an ontology, and this argument endures throughout his entire philosophical trajectory (Adams, 2011: 164)

It is now obvious that Castoriadis’ position is very close to my initial remarks about ontology and epistemology – and I can now support it through his words. Castoriadis poses questions which remind us of the transcendental questions of Bhaskar<sup>70</sup>: how does the world have to be for a certain kind of science to be possible, how does this very same world have to be for a history of science to be possible (Castoriadis, 1997: 372) and, ‘how, finally, does the “knowing subject” have to be for it to be able, first of all to create, then to overthrow/conservate, this science and its history?’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 372) At first, we have to say that, as with Bhaskar, Castoriadis thinks that our scientific knowledge is social – and thus, contingent upon social

---

<sup>70</sup> Indeed, as we shall see later, Suzy Adams (2011) draws on a potential connection with Bhaskar’s ‘transcendental naturalism

activity<sup>71</sup>. The great difference between them resides in Castoriadis referring to ‘a certain kind of science’. For Castoriadis does not accept the uniqueness and the uniformity of contemporary scientific process and strategies – instead, modern science and its practice are governed by the social imaginary significations of this society, together with the concepts of progress, of rationality and mastery. Moreover, and accordingly, Castoriadis introduces the historical aspect of science as interconnected with the ‘knowing subject’ – something about which Bhaskar (1998) does not draw definitive conclusions, as I have already explained.

Castoriadis, I think, is right to include in his ontological investigations the discussion about the possibility of the knowing subject. But even if this ‘certain kind of science’ is different from Bhaskar’s account of a monistic conception of science, I would like to state that Castoriadis’ way of inferring the world from this ‘certain kind of science’ is similar to Bhaskar’s transcendental inference of the stratified world from a *specific* notion of science. I have shown the drawbacks of this kind of argumentation in the first chapter and, I would like again to state that a genuine ontological argument should start from the basic characteristics of the (social) world in relation to the knowing subject and, then, show the *possible kind of knowledge* which pertains to this very world. After all, the historicity of science cannot be considered apart from the historicity of the world and thus, to derive the world from the existence of the history of science is absurd. In fact, Castoriadis does not derive his ontology from any kind of scientific practice and this is a contradictory element in his account of being.

Now, for Castoriadis, the fragmentation of the world is presented through its heterogeneous stratification: there are gaps among its different strata – ‘not to speak of the gaps of another nature that separate the physical from the biological and both of them from the psychical and from the social-historical.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 372) Does this mean that he accepts the stratification of the social world – accompanied with a concept of ‘emergence’ concerning properties of it? My negative answer will be elaborated on later, when we face the question about whether Castoriadis can be

---

<sup>71</sup> Bhaskar, as we have seen, uses the term ‘transitive’.

thought of as a social realist. For the moment, I have to say that he does not distinguish, like Archer, between a first-person ontology (subjective) and a third-person ontology (objective structures). For all knowledge is a co-production of the 'subject' and the 'object' (Castoriadis, 1997: 344) – in the sense that all knowledge is knowledge of a subject (Castoriadis, 1997: 344) or subjects while the malleable natural world resists.

Yet, this raises questions: does Castoriadis really and decisively distinguish the social world from the natural world – by placing each into different ontologies? We will discuss this question throughout this chapter. Secondly, what is Castoriadis stance towards the epistemology/ontology debate? And Castoriadis is indeed perfectly clear on that: 'Our subject is philosophical – not "epistemological", as contemporary prudery and pusillanimity would call it. No "epistemology" holds good if it does not involve an enquiry into both the object of knowledge and the subject of knowledge' (Castoriadis, 1997: 342) – and this admission of the priority of ontology towards epistemology, by Castoriadis, is completed by his claim that 'there is no theory of knowledge that does not presuppose and entail an ontology.' (Castoriadis, 1997: 368)<sup>72</sup> And, as a consequence of these remarks, 'the idea of a science of facts which would not imply an ontology has never amounted to more than an incoherent phantasy of certain scientists; an incoherent phantasy which, as such and in terms of its content, already expresses a particular and particularly incoherent metaphysics.' (Castoriadis, 1987: 335) However, at this point, we have to note that in 'The Ontological Import of the History of Science'<sup>73</sup>, where he provides most of his arguments in favour of this priority of ontological investigation, he does not offer us any detailed explanation based on careful argumentation for this priority of ontology. Nor does Castoriadis show the consequences of these remarks as far as theory-production is concerned.

---

<sup>72</sup> As Castoriadis would elsewhere claim, 'there is no thought of being that is not also a logos of being, an ordered and self-ordered, hence logical logos, just as there is no logic without a presumption of being' (Castoriadis, 1987: 182)

<sup>73</sup> In his 'World in Fragments: Writing on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination' (1997)

Yet, it is clear that Castoriadis does not fall into the trap of basing ontological claims on sense perception: ‘there is perception only because there is also representative flux. From this point of view as well, the imaginary – as the social imaginary and as the imagination of the psyche – is the logical and ontological condition of the “real”’ (Castoriadis, 1987: 336). However, Castoriadis does not mean to argue that there is no world except in presence of representation – he does not want to suppress the world in favour of imagination. He only intends to underline that ““Logically” there is no thought without figures, schemata, images, world-images ... the operative schemata of discretion, order, coexistence, and succession cannot be constructed logically: every logical construction presupposes them.’ (Castoriadis, 1987: 336-7) And, of course, according to Castoriadis, we are capable of thought only as long as it is embedded in social-historical institution<sup>74</sup>. Castoriadis here argues that these elements are indubitable since there would be no question about our common world if there were not an infinite number of private worlds; and that ‘it is *because* there is a common world *and* private worlds that there is a world and the question of the world can arise.’ (Castoriadis, 1987: 339)

Here, the individual is not merely a blueprint of society. Society, which transcends the sum total of individuals and their (common) actions, is *only* possible through the fragmentary incorporation of its significations and its institution by social individuals. And the relationship between the instituted society and the social individuals cannot be classified into any known category of relationship between whole and part – ‘this situation is unprecedented from an ontological point of view: *what* the social is, and the way in which it is, has no analogue anywhere else’ (Castoriadis, 1987: 182). So, we are now more encouraged to claim that the social realm here is ontologically distinctive from other modes of being. More specifically:

In and through its own creation, society creates the individual as such and the individuals in and through which alone it can actually exist. But society is not a property of composition; neither is it a whole containing something more than and different from its parts, if only because these “parts” are made to be, and to be thus and not otherwise, by this “whole” which, nevertheless, can only be in and

---

<sup>74</sup> As Castoriadis claims, ‘we are capable of thinking only by positing together these indubitable and undemonstrable statements: there is a world, there is a psyche, there is society, there is signification.’ (Castoriadis, 1987: 338)

through its “parts”. This type of relationship, which has no analogy elsewhere, has to be reflected upon for itself, as principle and model of itself. (Castoriadis, 1991: 145)

And this last sentence<sup>75</sup>, of this quotation, entails a need for a self-reflective grasping of this type of relationship within its own possibility of existence at the theoretical level. The secret here, I think, which helps avoid any kind of problematic dialectic which would conclude to ‘society produces individuals who then produce society’<sup>76</sup>, consists in the existence of the instituting imaginary which permits both the fabrication of the individual by society – of which she is a co-author – and social transformation. For ‘the two mutually irreducible poles are the radical instituting imaginary – the field of social-historical creation – on the one hand, the singular psyche, on the other.’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 145-6) Castoriadis seems to have introduced a concept that escapes the problematics of mutual constitution and permits this unique formation: ‘society and psyche are inseparable and irreducible one to the other’ (Castoriadis, 1987: 320) – in contrast to Archer’s view, according to which the world of the individual and society are irreducible one to the other even though – or consequently – they are separable, that is, they belong to different ontologies. This is intelligible: the carrier of social meanings, which adopts and recreates them, is imagination, which is also a radical creation of new forms of being and meaning.

Now that I have explained the ways in which Castoriadis thinks of ontology and the ontological status of the social individual, it is time to explain the way in which Castoriadis conceives the knowing subject in relation to ontology. Castoriadis criticizes classical ‘epistemology’ for distinguishing the knowing subject from ontological investigations – ‘as if one could exclude this knowing subject from being.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 344) Yet Castoriadis connects the existence of this knowing subject with the role of the intellectual. Thus, the discussion of Castoriadis’ notion of the role of the intellectual casts light on his notion of the role of the social

---

<sup>75</sup> I disagree here with Castoriadis’ ‘neither is a whole containing something more than and different from its parts’ because, as I have explained in chapter four, social structures and social systems should also be included in the explanation of this whole even though their transformation depends on social actors’ conceptualization of them.

<sup>76</sup> As in the case of Roy Bhaskar discussed in Chapters 1 and 4.



inquirer in wider society. For Castoriadis (1991) we may call intellectuals ‘all those who, irrespective of their profession, try to go beyond their sphere of specialization and actively interest themselves in what is going on in society. But this is, and ought to be, the very definition of the democratic citizen, irrespective of his occupation’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 5) – that is, the definition of those who use their speech and thought and thus are able to have an effect on society.

On this, Castoriadis distinguishes two different relationships between the thinker and the political community: on the one hand, like Socrates, the philosopher-citizen who is placed within the *polis* and, on the other hand, philosophers who, like Plato, who want to live at a distance from and above it. In the same mode, the second stance seems to detach thought from creation by rationalizing the past, and *objectifying* and naturalizing what has already existed. However, we have to say that Castoriadis admits that for criticism to take place, ‘distance’ is required by the intellectual concerning her relation to everyday life as well as to herself. Yet, for Castoriadis, this could lead to an undesired separation:

Such attitudes would certainly tend to separate the subject from the great mass of his/her contemporaries. But there is separation and there is separation. We will not leave behind us the perversion of the intellectual’s role that has characterized it since Plato’s time, and again for the past seventy years, unless the intellectual genuinely becomes a *citizen* again. A citizen is not (not necessarily) a “party activist”, but someone who actively claims participation in public life and in the common affairs of the city on the same footing as everyone else. (Castoriadis, 1991: 11)

Now, it is clear that there are seemingly two antithetical orientations towards the intellectual’s role. On the one hand, a distance is needed for critical elucidation to be possible and, on the other hand, recognition is also needed from the part of the intellectual that ‘history is the domain in which there unfolds the creativity of all people, both men and women, the learned and the illiterate, a humanity in which s/he is only one atom.’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 12) – that is, the intellectual should not assume that he is constitutively distant from the creation of society and should also be aware of limits of his/her own universality and supposed objectivity and neutrality (Castoriadis, 1991: 12). Thus, it is now not surprising that for Castoriadis, ‘the

intellectual's only role, ... , is to set forth ideas, make proposals, the core of that project as: the power belongs to the people, the *dèmos*, and it is up to it to show that it can – or can't – seize that power so as to yield it – or have it confiscated.' (Castoriadis, 2010: 78) Yet, Castoriadis work itself yields to more than this – his work not only proposes the project of autonomy, but also provides us (with a minimal notion of universality) with an ontology of the imaginary.

Castoriadis' remark that 'there is separation and there is separation' (Castoriadis, 1991: 11) reminds us of Ashmore (1989), who places himself in the middle of the continuum between the total similarity of knower and known and an absolute distinction between them. What I have already argued is that we should not assume a distance of (cognitional) constitution between the knowing subject and other people; but we must also assert that this knowing subject is not absorbed by her sociality – and I think that this is what Castoriadis means here. After all, Castoriadis criticizes 'the death of the subject' promoted by contemporary psychoanalysis and by Marx and Nietzsche for 'if everything you say is determined by your unconscious (or your social position), or is just an interpretation, then so too is this very conception of yours' (Castoriadis, 1991: 29). Castoriadis also criticizes modern science for concealing all those questions raised 'by what it says or does not say about *what is* and its mode of being as well as about *the one who knows* and about his/her mode of being.' (Castoriadis, 1991: 263) And he continues and thus asks:

... given that *it is true* that at the core of the "subject" (whatever that may mean) an unconscious psyche most of the time motivates its acts (therefore, also, its pronouncements); given that *it is true* that nobody can ever jump over his times or extract himself from the society to which he belongs; given that *it is true* that any statement contains an irredeemable element of interpretation corresponding to the interpreter's position, outlook, and interests – how can it be that we are capable of any self-reflective activity, including the one leading us to the above statements and all the others? (Castoriadis, 1991: 29)

This question, as we have been saying again and again, lies at the heart of our own investigations. And it is similar – but not identical – to the self-referential 'question of reflexivity' examined in chapter two.

Now, as far as this question is concerned, according to Castoriadis, there are two solutions: either we have to assume that the philosopher, like a prophet and for no reason, has been endowed with the capacity to have access to truth – or to meta/post truth – and thus can ‘make pronouncements valid for everybody, but about which no further enquiry is possible’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 29-30). Or we have to recognize that there is no prophet with religious charisma and thus resort to the possibility of a self-reflective subjectivity: ‘Can I say that I posit my own law when I am living, necessarily, under the law of society? Yes, if and only if I can say, reflectively and lucidly, that *this law is also mine.*’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 166) Of course, Castoriadis could not *imagine* that there is also a third solution, like that of Margaret Archer, that is, to separate all the citizens (politai) from their polis, their society. Yet for Castoriadis, the possibility of self-reflection presupposes the raw material of past history: ‘I am under the double imperative: to think freely, and to think under the constraint of history.’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 19) And, again, Castoriadis places the knowing subject within society and as a creation of the social historical:

... the human individual, be that individual scientific (or philosophic) – and what is called in philosophy its understanding – exists only as the product of a perpetual process of socialization; it is first and foremost a walking fragment of the institution of society in general and of *its* particular society (Castoriadis, 1997: 343)

These aspects cohere with my claim that the knowing subject, on the one hand, is ‘a walking fragment’ of her contemporary society – that is, she is influencing and being influenced by it – and, on the other hand, she has to be conceived *within* one’s ontological framework: our knowledge concerning our ontological premises ‘says something about *what is* – therefore, about *what is* – as well as about *the one who knows* – therefore about another aspect of being.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 344)

Thus, for Castoriadis, we also have to conceive of autonomy, that is, of such a self-reflective subjectivity, as a creation: we are led to recognize that human history is the creation of significations and institutions embodying them, of the social individual out of the “raw material” of the psyche, and of self-reflective subjectivity

(Castoriadis, 1991: 31). Now self-reflection, as well as democracy and philosophy, becomes a creation. And as Castoriadis explains:

On the one hand, this leads us again into the ontological issue: there is at least a type of being capable of altering its mode of being – and since this is a mode of being therefore it pertains to what we think of Being. On the other hand, this creation contains the creation of a social-historical space where, and of a type of individual – self-reflective subjectivity – for whom, the question of truth can arise and be elucidated in a nonvacuous fashion. (Castoriadis, 1991: 31)

This, I judge, implies that there is an ontological distinction between the object of the natural sciences and that of the social sciences, since ‘the social-historical is the ontological form that *can put itself into question* and, through self-reflective activity, *explicitly alter itself.*’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 36) Of course, this is an exceptional possibility and not an omnipresent characteristic of human societies as much as philosophy is exceptional. Now, I would like to argue, the knowing subject lies ontologically on the creativity of human imagination but appears only through a specific era.

Indeed, Castoriadis (1997), in a chapter called ‘The State of the Subject Today’, makes clear that the (self-reflective) subject has not been given once and for all, but it is to be made under certain circumstances:

It is an (abstract) possibility but not an inevitability for every human being: it is *historical* creation and a creation whose history can be followed. This subject, *human subjectivity*, is characterized by *reflectiveness* (which ought not to be confused with simple “thought”) and by the *will* or the capacity for deliberate action, in the strong sense of this term. (Castoriadis, 1997: 143)

Consequently, this is the content of autonomy as created in specific societies which have incorporated this possibility of (critical) self-reflection. Now, an autonomous society as such, and as an effective reality (Castoriadis, 1997: 159), permits the self-creation of human subjectivity as a reflective activity. Yet, I think, autonomy now becomes another representation: ‘the object of the capacity for deliberate action, or of the will, can simply be a state of representation, a way of orienting the representational flux.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 160). However, this creation of ‘the subject’, of the reflective subjectivity, as Castoriadis admits, is very important since

without it – without the project of autonomy which permits such a subjectivity – not only does ‘every attempt at truth and knowledge collapse but every ethical effort disappears, since all responsibility vanishes.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 169)

*Castoriadis’ conceptualization of self-reflective subjectivity: a critical appraisal*

At this point, I should start to explain the way in which Castoriadis conceives of self-reflection. I have shown the ways in which Castoriadis’ analysis connects the concept of the knowing subject with the possibility of autonomy and self-reflection. In this section, I will try to cast light on the ways in which Castoriadis connects his conceptualization of self-reflective subjectivity with the rest of his ontology which was briefly presented in the first section. This means that the discussion here will focus on the content of the concept of self-reflection as well as the implications of its relations with philosophy, democracy, pedagogy and psychoanalysis. This discussion will finally lead us to the conclusion that Castoriadis has two accounts of self-reflection. And it is at that point that I will take advantage of Castoriadis’ dual conception of this term in order to distinguish between self-reflection and agential reflexivity. I will argue that while the former is an omnipresent characteristic of social life, the concept of autonomy – now distinguished from self-reflection – is an exceptional one in human history; and also, one which can account, in Castoriadis’ terms, for the fulfillment of the epistemic criterion of reflexivity as proposed in this thesis.

At first, we have to avoid, according to Castoriadis, implying that self-reflection is related to formal logic or to psychoanalytic consciousness. For Castoriadis, mere consciousness and logic, do not lead to science; it is because man’s distinguishing trait is imagination, that he can have reflective thought and therefore, science. Calculating and reckoning cannot be considered peculiar to human subject, who has the distinguishing capacity for ‘*reflectiveness*’. For in nature we come across procedures within which one can see reckonings and computations endowed with self-finality, while working without representations of those procedures, or

incarnating representations (Castoriadis, 1997: 158). Indeed, as Castoriadis says, ‘what is most human is not rationality but the uncontrolled and uncontrollable continuous surge of creative radical imagination in and through the flux of representations, affects and desires.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 127) And this flux is not connected or assignable to any other basis, scheme or object. Moreover, its elements are not tied together in a rational or even a reasonable way (Castoriadis, 2007: 74).

It is this capability of uncontrollable creation of representations that provides the individual psyche with the power of differentiation and of creation of different schemes and, as a result, with the power of questioning our own thoughts, our own representations. For the autonomous individual does not only question the thoughts which society taught her to live with, but also her own personal identity together with the most well-founded rules of logic which are taken for granted. Thus, ‘reflection appears when thought turns back upon itself and interrogates itself not only about its particular contents but also about its presuppositions and its foundations.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 267)

Thus, self-reflection is *only* possible because of human imagination, that is, because the self can become an object to it which is not really an object, but a representation, an image:

In reflectiveness we have something different: the *possibility that the activity proper to the “subject” becomes an “object,” the self being explicitly posited as a nonobjective object or as an object that is an object simply by its being posited as such and not by nature. And it is to the extent that one can be for oneself an object by being posited as an object and not by nature that the other, in the true sense of the term, becomes possible.*’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 158)

The contrast with Archer’s definition of reflexivity is interesting, since for Archer, in the internal conversation, the critical ‘I’ can make its previous utterance an object which in that case is *objectified*. The difference concerning the ‘non-objective’ character of the object has to do with Castoriadis’ effort to denaturalize the self, presenting it as self-constituting. It seems that *self-objectivation rather than self-objectification* is the case here. Archer, on the other hand, in perceiving the previous

utterances as objectified, intends to maintain the stability of the meaning in the temporal simultaneity of an utterance and a hearing in one's 'internal dialogue'.

And their definitions become more comparable when Castoriadis claims that 'reflection implies the possibility of *scission* and *internal opposition*.' (Castoriadis, 1997: 158); and he attributes the origins of the 'internal dialogue' to Plato, by making clear that a dialogue requires two different points of view –and 'therefore also the possibility of *putting oneself into question*.' (Castoriadis, 1997: 158) Archer moves towards Castoriadis' account when she explains that the 'alternation' of the internal conversation:

...can also be introduced into what Peirce called "musement". Our musings can range far and wide to include daydreams or fantasies. Some person, situation or idea that has been encountered may prompt them, or they may be triggered by the task in hand. Musings are exploratory; ... these explorations are very much part of our private lives because they are unobservable (Archer, 2003: 100-101)

Again, here the clear origins of these musings are missing in Archer's account. This admission of Archer's would justify Castoriadis, I think, to argue that the basis of 'internal conversation' is in the creative work of imagination. This does not devalue the role of the internal dialogue as a process of self-reflection but rather underlines the fact that the possibility of the internal dialogue is due to the fact that the self-reflective human subjectivity, by using its undetermined imagination, can create schemes different from the ones initially adopted. Thus, internal dialogue is based on the capacity of the subject for creating different representations of itself, and thus its capability for self-reflection. As Castoriadis further explains:

The absolute condition for the possibility of reflectiveness is the imagination (or phantasmaticization). It is because the human being is imagination (nonfunctional imagination) that it can posit as an "entity" something that is not so: its own process of thought. It is because its imagination is unbridled that it can reflect; otherwise, it would be limited to calculating, to "reasoning." Reflectiveness presupposes that it is possible for the imagination to posit as existing that which is not, to see *Y* in *X* and, specifically, to see double, to see *oneself* double, to see *oneself* while seeing oneself as other. I represent myself, and I represent myself as representational activity, or *I act upon myself as active activity*. (Castoriadis, 1997: 159)

Of course, for Castoriadis (1997), in this procedure, which can be fallible (as Archer would argue), there is always the possibility of the objectification, or of the reification of the self. Yet, I should state that now, Gouldner's (1970) knower and agent – two elements of an ambivalent character in Gouldner's reflexive sociology – have been connected in an ontology of human imagination.

In this way, self-creation and self-alteration are *only* compatible with self-reflective deliberation – and 'vice-versa'. For the undetermined and non-functional creation of representations allows individuals to create new forms of thought, new *figures of the thinkable*, which are empirically conditioned but not empirically inferred, and constitute 'conditions for the organization of empirical knowledge or, more generally, of the object of thought.' (Castoriadis, 1997: 269) However, questioning oneself, representing oneself and creating new figures of the thinkable are sometimes presented as processes that do not occur simultaneously, but the latter are presented as being predated by the former. This happens, I think, because the 'calling into question' is *initially* triggered by the imaginary significations of the autonomous society which teaches its members to be autonomous.

Here, pedagogy and psychoanalysis have as their end to free this *capability* from that closure of meaning either within society's heteronomy or monad's initial autism. Castoriadis claims that one of the objects of psychoanalysis is to free that flux of representation 'from the repression to which it is usually subjected by an Ego that is a rigid and essentially social construct.' (Castoriadis, 1997: 128) And the analysis aims at altering the Ego into a self-reflecting subjectivity, capable of deliberation and will: 'The Ego is altered by taking in the contents of the Unconscious, by reflecting on them, and by becoming able to choose lucidly the impulses and ideas it will attempt to enact.' (Castoriadis, 1997: 128) And, at this point, Castoriadis' analysis (1997) has similarities with Habermas (1988) and the self-correcting conduct of self-reflections in psychoanalysis.

Of course, for Castoriadis, this process of self-reflective deliberation cannot eliminate conflicts in our inner life. Nor does it bring about a domination of the



conscious on the unconscious since for Castoriadis this is not possible. It rather aims at the recognition of the unconscious contents and of radical imagination ‘lying at the core of the psyche’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 128), that is, what Castoriadis aims at, the restoration of the relations between the conscious and the unconscious, which are *indissociable*. In fact, Castoriadis aims at reconstituting a dialectical relationship between the radical imagination (unconscious) and the conscious, which is fabricated by society – whereby the former, as a creative source, should have the last word; this would be a condition for the reviving of the radical social imaginary. For Castoriadis, ‘genuine reflection is therefore, ipso facto, a challenging of the given institution of society, the putting into question of socially instituted representations.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 267)

The same holds for pedagogy. At this point, Castoriadis admits that he is speaking normatively (something which can be said about the whole project of autonomy as we shall discuss below) and thus, the aim of pedagogy is to make ‘this bundle of drives and imagination’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 129) become a self-governed, self-reflective subjectivity. This is the aim of teaching not particular things, but of developing a child’s capacity for invention and discovery, by developing his/her radical imagination which simply means his/her reflectiveness. However, pedagogy must ‘bring the child up to internalize, and therefore to accept fully, the existing institutions, whatever these may be.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 130)

Of course, this seems paradoxical since the very nature of autonomy, which is so highly valued by Castoriadis, is to question existing institutions. And here, for Castoriadis, pedagogy entails the acceptance, in the first place, of the existing social institution. Before examining the way that Castoriadis understands this paradox, let me explain a few things about the project of autonomy. Castoriadis frequently refers to the project of autonomy with words like ‘instauration’ (i.e. restoration, re-establishment). The first question that emerges is ‘instauration of what?’ He means reestablishment of the free radical imagination from repression. For autonomy is not just an end in itself: ‘we want autonomy for its own sake, but also in order to be able and free to do things’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 134). This repression comes from the social

fabrication of the heteronomy of society. And, this repression is the one that occurs by ‘blocking the representational flux, by silencing radical imagination, as if society were applying, in reverse, the ways of the Unconscious’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 133), as if society condemns imagination to mutilation.

One example of alienation, for Castoriadis, is the silencing of the values of the May 1968 movement in France – a movement which was inspired by Castoriadis’ early writings. For ‘it is our free and historical recognition of the validity of this project, and the effectivity of its partial realization up to now, that binds us to these claims – the claim for truth, the claim for freedom, equality, and justice – and that motivates us to move forward in this direction.’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 32) Castoriadis here explains that we cannot conceive of the project of autonomy and its approval with the help of the inherited notion of determinacy, for, after all, ‘the idea of autonomy can be neither founded nor proved since it is presupposed by any foundation or proof. (Any attempt to “found” reflectiveness presupposes reflectiveness itself.)’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 172). This comment will later help us to support that an agential reflexivity, suitable to fulfill the *epistemic criterion of reflexivity* we have proposed, is not only an answer to the ‘problem of reflexivity’ but also a presupposition for its acknowledgement and identification. And it is this idea that will also lead us to support that the circularity engendered is a virtuous one.

But if now pedagogy and psychology are themselves influenced by the social imaginary of a heteronomous society, then how can these instituted processes promote autonomy? There appears a vicious circle of heteronomy. Castoriadis is deeply conscious of this problem:

The impossibility of psychoanalysis as well as of pedagogy lies in the fact that they both attempt to aid in the creation of autonomy for their subjects by using an autonomy that does not yet exist ... But the impossibility also appears, especially in the case of pedagogy, to lie in the attempt to produce autonomous human beings within a heteronomous society, and beyond that, in the paradoxical situation of educating human beings to accede to autonomy while – or in spite of – teaching them to absorb and internalize existing institutions. (Castoriadis, 1997: 131)

However, as Castoriadis says, the solution to this problem is ‘the “impossible” task of politics’. (Castoriadis, 1997: 131) And once the project of autonomy appears as an element of the social imaginary, which is a matter of chance, these activities can preserve or reinforce the project in the future to an unprecedented degree. After all, as he says, once this project appears as an element in the *magma*, it:

... starts feeding on what becomes our unquestionable thirst for knowledge per se. This is one of the manifestations of our freedom, or autonomy: we constantly put into question the inherited (be it “scientific” or “philosophical”) representation of what there is; we constantly shake the walls of our own closure. (Castoriadis, 2007: 228)

At this point, for Castoriadis, Philosophy is a self-reflective activity, and thus relevant to any form of thought, which entails (self-) critique of past philosophies and does rely on previous history of thought (Castoriadis, 1991: 19). Thus:

Philosophy is a reflective activity that deploys itself both freely and under the constraint of its own past. Philosophy is not cumulative – but it is deeply historical ... in this sense, a circular situation obviously obtains, one which does not manifest any “logical defect”, but expresses the very essence of self-reflection within the necessarily total horizon of philosophical thought – or the fact that its center *is* its periphery, and the vice versa. (Castoriadis, 1991: 18)

Here, Castoriadis’ words seem to be getting closer to what I have already called epistemic circularity; for, this ‘circular situation’ reminds me of the notion of epistemic circularity as engendered by my internal criterion of theorizing. Hence for Castoriadis (1991) philosophy – as related to democracy and, both referring to the project of autonomy – is to break a closure: society and the social individual exist in a closure, so philosophy, ‘creating self-reflective subjectivity, is the project of breaking the closure at the level of thought’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 21) – while positing another closure which, in its turn, will be put into question by the endless<sup>77</sup> critical self-reflective activity (Castoriadis, 1991: 21).

---

<sup>77</sup> Castoriadis allows for an unending effort to criticize one’s own taken-for-granted-truths – as well as the rationality of each epoch, which is the first rational task; a task which is ever incomplete ‘and is, in principle, incompletable (except in trivial domains which exclude the infinite and exclude self-reference, that is, exclude by definition the self-reflective activity of thought)’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 40).

Up to this point, I have tried to place Castoriadis' conceptualization of self-reflection in relation to his general theory of the social institutioning. And it is at this point that I should state that, while I have tried to provide a specific and concrete content of epistemic reflexivity (as a criterion of internal congruity), 'self-reflection' and 'agential reflexivity', which both express self-objectivation, are vaguer terms. Both refer to the ability to make one's own thoughts the object of inquiry but can take various forms in different social contexts. Moreover, to investigate and identify one's own thoughts, values, beliefs and presuppositions is not the same as critically reflecting upon them. Yet, even if self-critique is the prerequisite of all scientific investigation, as I have claimed above, one has to grasp the vagueness of the forms and the levels at which this critique takes place. And also one has to realize that 'all the contents and rules can never be put into question simultaneously, but all of them can be posited as, each in their turn, provisionally suspended' (Castoriadis, 1997: 269). At least, one can allege, as I have explained earlier, that self-critical investigation, as self-reflection, is not equal to self-deconstruction (Ashmore, 1989). And Ashmore (1989) is right to claim that self-deconstruction is not equal to self-destruction.

This vagueness does not imply that the possibility of self-reflection, as required by the epistemic criterion of reflexivity, has no meaning. The issue of whether agents can be understood as self-reflective is related to the question of how the knowing subject is conceptualized. Whether members of society can be consistently conceptualized as self-reflective depends on how the relation between the knowing subject and society is conceived. Both Ashmore (1989) and Woolgar (1988), I think, agree that we should not position ourselves at either of the two extremes, the one postulating a total similarity between the subject and the object and the other making a clear distinction between them. They seem to deeply realize that for sociology both these extremes are pernicious. For, on the one hand, I think, the latter leads us to reification and objectification, which deprive social actors of their sociality and consequently, any kind of self-objectivation leads to contradictions and insufficiencies like the ones that characterize Archer's work as examined in chapter four. Of course, these insufficiencies are to be identified in each case; but I can safely

claim that it is only through society that meanings and values can be attained, and it is through socialization that the individual becomes an actor and then an agent capable of self-objectivation, whatever form it takes. On the other hand, postulating a total identity between the subject and the object denies any formulation of the self and, in this way, it denies any kind of self-objectivation and – if I may say so – it also denies society and social life, since actors without a minimum capacity for self-critique or self-suspension are completely unintelligible; for actors, in any society, face new situations and new dilemmas concerning contradictory roles and social norms.

Archer (2007) is right to emphasize that society cannot function without a minimum of self-reflection, while Castoriadis seems to argue that in heteronomous societies not even minimal self-reflection can exist. And this, I think, is Castoriadis' greatest mistake. For even in a heteronomous society which, in his terms, is characterized by a closure of meaning, individuals make revolutions, change their religious identity, defy power and challenge the Monarchy as not fair. Human history abounds with examples illustrating this point and Castoriadis should have taken into account that even habitual action is informed by self-reflective moments in order for the actor to follow the 'cultural manual'; for even if such a manual could exist, different interpretations would raise different position takings and several movements onwards and backwards between the self and the text. Finally, as we have already mentioned in the fourth chapter, in every society – and Archer is right about this – different groups have different interests concerning social transformation. This, contrary to Castoriadis' claims, leads to the exhausting self-reflective investigation of most of the members of social groups about obligations and strategies – and this is true even in heteronomous societies.

Now this problematic aspect in Castoriadis' work is premised on his supposition that it is only within a state of autonomy that self-critique appears. But it is now more than clear that self-critique should not necessarily be coexistent with the content of autonomy. For Castoriadis, autonomy is a condition where *society and individuals know that social nomos is only given by them* and that there does not exist any

extra/supra social power providing and legalizing the social institutions and laws. In this condition individuals realize that institutions and laws are neither physical nor given by an authority external to them. And it is now time to separate these two, I think, distinctive elements in Castoriadis' formulation of self-reflection: 1) self-critical investigation and, 2) knowledge that social laws are the product of (social) self-creation. And this is important because we now intend to argue that the former is always present, in different forms and levels of density, in every human society while, the second is indeed the unique *state of mind* in particular societies or in particular social groups.

In this sense, I would like to propose a distinction between self-critical, self-reflective activity and the content of what I conceive of as autonomous (knowing) subject: to represent one's self as a representational activity and as an active activity (Castoriadis, 1997: 159). This does not mean that these two elements are antithetical or contradictory to each other. On the contrary, they are perfectly compatible. And this distinction should help us to retain our distinction between the epistemic criterion of reflexivity and agential reflexivity. For after having examined Castoriadis' work, we are now ready to place that balance between total identity and clear distinction between the knowing subject and her object, something with which Ashmore (1989) and Woolgar (1988) would, I think, agree. In order to do so, let us take Castoriadis' argument from its starting premises: human imagination as the undetermined flux of representations is the premise on which self-reflection is possible. Imagination is for him the necessary but not the sufficient condition for critical self-reflective activity; instead, the sufficient condition is the autonomous society – that is, the society which has institutioned within its magmatic imaginary significations the project of autonomy.

And this institutioning is a true creation, a social creation of the radical social imaginary. The self-reflective subjectivity emerges only through such an autonomous society which realizes that there is no other instituting power for itself than itself. But it is at this point that the two elements in Castoriadis' conceptualization of reflectiveness appear as necessarily co-emerging. Instead, I have argued that self-

critique, even if limited in the so-called traditional or primitive societies, is omnipresent in human societies, and I have placed the second element of his ‘reflectiveness’ in autonomous societies. On this basis, I would argue that Castoriadis’ ontology of the social imaginary and of human imagination partially helps us to place the epistemic subject within society – so that one does not deny its sociality – while rendering it (ontologically) capable of attaining an acknowledgment of the ontological premises which render this capability explicit – that is, attaining a state of theoretical accomplishment which *might satisfy* the epistemic criterion of reflexivity proposed in this thesis.

Now, the social individual’s psyche is a radical, undetermined, defunctionalized imagination. This ontological claim, as Castoriadis explains, is the prerequisite of self-reflective activity and I would like to agree with that. I think that in heteronomous societies, humans, through their imagination, should act in such a self-reflective way. But this does not necessarily mean that they are able to know that they are the co-authors of their social world. So, ‘to represent one’s self as representational and active activity’ is a trait of individuals in autonomous societies – and thus this state is a socio-historical creation. And the question that arises at this point is whether this idea of autonomy as distinguished from – though perfectly compatible with – self-reflection can be an adequate ontological premise for expressing a fulfillment of our epistemic criterion of reflexivity: the knowing subject appears as a social creation, but now, not as a mere self-reflective activity (present in every society), but as an active agential reflexivity through which actors, while acknowledging that they are co-authors of the social world, represent themselves as representational activities – that is, as (ontologically) capable of self-representation of the source of this capability, which is now human imagination. In other words, Castoriadis bases the ontological possibility of creation on human imagination – and thus offers a creative source on which the knowing subject can premise her relative distinctiveness in the sense that she can avoid being only a cultural dope. But it is only through its sociality – that implicitly negates the distance between the subject and the object – that this undetermined flux *is orientated* towards the epistemic premises of one’s own reflections on ontology.

### Critical remarks on Castoriadis' social theory and notion of self-reflection

Up until now, I have tried to show the ways in which Castoriadis argues for the primacy of ontology over epistemology as well as for the interconnections between his conceptualization of the knowing subject and his account of self-reflection. The state of autonomy is identical to reflectiveness, which is possible because of the way in which Castoriadis places human imagination in his ontological framework. In this section, I try to pose critical remarks about Castoriadis' ontology and his notion of self-reflection. We will examine 1) some contradictory claims made by Castoriadis in his epistemological notes, 2) Habermas' critique of his theory and, 3) the question of whether Castoriadis is a social realist considering his claims about the stratification of reality.

Our critique of Castoriadis' work should start with the following question: what does it mean to 'free' our imagination from repression, if creative imagination is always present – even if it is in latent form? It just means that the substantial difference between autonomy and heteronomy is their cognitional part – that is, the fact that a heteronomous individual does not realize her *capability* as such, and thus, she does not use it in her conduct, under this cognitional factor. Castoriadis argues that it is only possible to be self-reflective, that is, use one's own imagination in order to question everything that can be changed (the institution of society, and consequently one's thoughts) in autonomous societies. If this is true, the realization of this *capability* becomes the result of one representation (which produces a desire for itself) among others and the project of autonomy becomes another scheme in the unending flux of representations and desires.

Thus, autonomy becomes another 'cathecting of representation', that is to say, another scheme<sup>78</sup> given by society through socialization. And one could accuse Castoriadis of having a blurred conceptualization of self-reflection; for, now, this

---

<sup>78</sup> As I have previously shown, Castoriadis admits that 'the object of the capacity for deliberate action, or of the will, can simply be a state of representation, a way of orienting the representational flux.' (Castoriadis, 1997: 160)



cathected social object which orients the flux of representations towards self-critical representations is too general an idea to *necessarily* lead or to presuppose the existence of democracy and of philosophy. For example, let us imagine a religion which calls believers to criticize themselves for sins. This means that self-critique alone neither has specific philosophical or political implications nor can it necessarily fulfill the epistemic criterion of reflexivity proposed, as I have already explained. And, in this sense, self-critique, while always useful, does not necessarily lead one to ‘representing oneself as representational activity’.

This would be a criticism that Castoriadis, I think, would have difficulty answering; because the connection of psychoanalysis and of philosophy as well as of democracy with self-reflective subjectivity, one could claim, can now be seen as precarious since it can only be a connection within Castoriadis’ own imagination, that is, it can only be one of his own representations while he cannot do more than admit this blurriness. Might this problem with Castoriadis’ work – that autonomy becomes another representation – be resolved by attributing a superior epistemic status to ‘the project of autonomy’? Such a view could mean that self-reflection can potentially lead us to schemes or concepts which present an epistemic virtuousness as compared with other schemes. However, I have to say that it is difficult to find an answer to the problem of the validity of his own distinctions and reflections in Castoriadis’ epistemological or methodological notes. For, not only does ontology have a role prior to epistemology in his work, but Castoriadis’ epistemological ideas are not fully convincing. And this problem is connected with the status of theory in Castoriadis’ work, and its relations with the radical imagination.

To reflect on this, we have to say that for Castoriadis, not only does there not exist any one-to-one relationship between representations and drives, but also, representations are most of the times interconnected: ‘there is no image without a *bringing into relation* ... The most basic *Gestalt*, a bright point on a dark background, already contains an indefinite number of relations: it implies the unending network of relations that we call “an object in space.”’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 258) At this point, the similarity with Quine is characteristic:

... every representation refers to other representations (what in psychology is termed “association” is but one particular case of this). Refers to them: generates them or is capable of making them arise. How is this, on the basis of what, supported on what and tending towards what? Nothing universal can be said about this. In particular, it is impossible to determine the class of *bs* to which *a* refers, to establish the totality of terms which maintain a relation of referral with any other. (Castoriadis, 1987: 323-324)

And it becomes even more evident through his saying that every piece of information presupposes ‘a high degree of subjective structuration and depends on the latter for its being-information.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 258) However, Castoriadis does not present a philosophical scheme for conventionalism and he goes further from Quine. For, Quine’s analysis, as I have explained in the first chapter, is a philosophical account which cannot be sociologized – it does not refer to social individuals and it does not provide a discussion of whole/parts relations.

It is in this sense that, for Castoriadis, it is only through imagination that sense perception can be organized and thus, sensibility belongs to imagination, ‘as the power to make “images” be for a subject’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 259), and the formation of ‘images’ is ‘ipso facto the positing of “elements” and the bringing of these “elements” into relation, the two occurring straight off, “at the same moment,” the one being made by the other.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 259) At this point, Castoriadis proceeds with describing the formation of the images, of presentations, as a relational and co-existential interdependence of different elements. But the ‘image’ is not a matter of transformation – of changing the form – of existing elements. Here, we do not talk about a synthesis but rather a radical novelty.

Moreover, as I have explained, the interconnections of representations (as is also the case with Quine) do not allow for any positivistic methodology (including Popperian falsifiability). However, as has been implicitly suggested so far in our questioning, ‘truth and falsehood’ are distinguished (Castoriadis, 1997: 270) and, as he says, there are only a few theoretical constructions which can survive critical examination, while it is easy to prove that, indeed that infinity of inanities consists of inanities. As I have already argued, one can maintain the theory-ladenness of perception and evaluation

of the ‘data’ of analysis without concluding to cognitive relativism. And I also try to argue that we can develop criteria about the coherence of ontologies. Thus I do not think that for Castoriadis to argue for the relationality of representations – in a mode similar to Quine’s analysis – is a serious problem. Since Castoriadis intends to provide us with a social ontology and since he realizes that the world-views we pose to account for reality are cognitively related to each other, this problem has more to do with the lack of clarity which characterizes Castoriadis’ analysis (considering his account of the status of theory) than with a necessary correlation between theory-ladenness and relativism.

Castoriadis claims that ‘it is, *under constraint of the data* (this is what in fact empirical knowledge as well as “falsification” amounts to), the positing of a new imaginary figure/model of intelligibility.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 271) And these words are paradoxical since Castoriadis has been clear throughout his work that interpretation and evaluation are prior to any kind of ‘data’. For, on the one hand, Castoriadis’ analysis implies, in a post-positivist sense, the omnipotence of imagination in the formation of the empirical ‘facts’ and, on the other hand, these ‘facts’ constrain theory-production. Thus, the problem in Castoriadis’ work is not that he argues for the relationality of representations but that, for Castoriadis, empirical facts are still present in the assessment of theoretical schemes. At this point, I would like to be clear. If Castoriadis had offered us an account of the ways in which those ‘facts’ can be identified and then assessed, while assuming that their perception would occur through the lenses of theoretical schemes, then his account would not be problematic. So, it is the lack of clarity that characterizes the relation between two seemingly contradictory elements – theory-ladenness and the presence of ‘facts’ – that makes me call his analysis at this point problematic.

The problem for Castoriadis, then, is how working among ‘constraints’ or ‘our available experience’ (Castoriadis, 2007: 79) can lead us to truth or to what he believes is substantial, while our data can be imagined variably, that is, perceived *initially* through different schemes. After all, the relationality of representations and schemes implies that single data and constraints are perceived as such within and by

a totality of interrelations. Again, this also means that there is no one-to-one correspondence between single perceptions of the empirical world and single representations about its constitutive elements, because the ‘content’ of a single representation (including representation of data) becomes specific and concrete *only through* its mutual constitution with other representations. Of course, as Castoriadis says, science is ‘concerned with those elements of experience that are essentially regular and susceptible of explanation’ (Castoriadis, 2007: 80-81), giving an external validation of the schemes proper; however, his reflections as reflections on society and on psyche concern ‘irregular’, unbridled, non-functionalized experience, so the question remains the same. As a result, the process according to which his representations become fixed, even if the object they concern presents a temporary stability, is absent.

Now, among the most important thinkers who have criticized Castoriadis’ work is Jürgen Habermas. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987), Habermas intends to provide us with a brief account of Castoriadis’ work while focusing on what he considers as problematic in this work. Habermas underlines that heteronomy in Castoriadis is the self-alienation of a society which conceals its ability of self-institution. For Habermas, this conceptualization of the relation between the self and society has one unfortunate consequence:

By assimilating intramundane praxis to a linguistic world-disclosure hypostatized into a history of being, Castoriadis can no longer *localize* the political struggle for an autonomous way of life – the very emancipatory, creative-projective praxis with which Castoriadis is ultimately concerned. For he either has to call the agents back, as Heidegger does, from their intramundane, subject-crazed lostness into the sphere of the nonmanipulable, and thus into an auratic heteronomy vis-à-vis the primordial happening of a self-instituting society – and this would amount only to an ironic inversion of praxis philosophy into another variant of poststructuralism. Or he has to displace the autonomy of social praxis, which cannot be redeemed intramundanelly, into the primordial happening itself – but then he has to support the world-disclosing productivity of language on an absolute ego and return in fact to a speculative philosophy of consciousness. (Habermas, 1987: 332-3)

Here, Habermas (1987) argues that Castoriadis’ notion of heteronomy leads him to the paradoxical situation we discussed above – and of which Castoriadis was totally aware: in the closure of meaning that characterizes heteronomy, the appearance of

autonomy becomes impossible or controversial. However, I think that Habermas misunderstands the role of unconscious creativity within Castoriadis' work and, thus, the possibility of change in a heteronomous state of society. Of course, in a heteronomous society, according to Castoriadis, there is no evolutionary and emancipatory praxis, either personal or collective. Autonomous praxis emerges from the 'magma' of the society within which the project of autonomy does exist. And its appearance is *ex nihilo*, created by the imaginary dimension in a latent form, that is, unconscious creativity. And it is because Habermas does not correctly understand Castoriadis' role of the unconscious within heteronomy that he argues that the socialized individual 'remains divided into monad and member of society' (Habermas, 1987: 334), with both thus being in a metaphysical conflict with each other. But Habermas alleges that:

The psychic streams of the imaginary dimension have their source in the springs of each's own subjective nature. They compete with the collective stream of the imaginary dimension emanating from society in a manner similar to that in which private worlds compete with public ones. ... In the socially institutionalized world view, everyone is previously in mutual agreement with everyone else, a priori, as if there were a transcendental consciousness; as they grow up, individuals try to assert their respective private worlds, as monads, against this preestablished harmony. (Habermas, 1987: 333-4)

However, this is not the case with Castoriadis' thought. The monad, which initially is not in agreement with anybody but itself, suffers when it is obliged to go through continuous ruptures during the process of socialization while assimilating society's existing schemes. But where heteronomy is the case, having assimilated these schemes, individuals participate in a harmony of closure of meaning and do not compete with any imaginary dimension. In heteronomous societies, the unconscious is still the source of representations, but it does not challenge or compete with the social imaginary because it exists in a latent form. The harmony of meaning is interrupted when the project of autonomy appears and, consequently, urges individuals to turn against existing meanings – and thus creation becomes conscious activity. It is only with the creation of autonomy, as an element of the 'magma', by the radical social imaginary that autonomous subjectivities can appear. And this does

not entail a conflict between a pre-established harmony and individuals – as if individuals are independent of the social institution.

As regards this possibility of the appearance of the project of autonomy, Castoriadis clearly states that ‘the instituting society, however radical its creation may be, always works by starting from something already instituted and on the basis of what is already there’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 150) And Castoriadis explains that the contributions to social change by social individuals are present, even in traditional societies where repetition is the rule, though in a rare and locatable mode (Castoriadis, 1991: 152). After all, as Castoriadis characteristically claims, in principle ‘the instituted society is always subject to the subterranean pressure of instituting society. Beneath the established social imaginary, the flow of the radical imaginary continues steadily.’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 152-3) And as he further comments in his ‘Imaginary Institution of Society’:

... it is true that, as such, the institution that is posited in each case can exist only as a norm of self-identity, as inertia and as a mechanism of self-perpetuation; but, equally true, that of which there should be self-identity, the instituted signification, can exist only by altering itself ... society is, therefore, always the self-institution of the social-historical. But this self-institution generally is not known as such ... The alienation of heteronomy of society is self-alienation; the concealment of the being of society as self-institution in its own eyes, covering over its essential temporality. (Castoriadis, 1987: 372)

Yet Castoriadis frequently argues that in traditional and primitive societies, where heteronomy and closure of meaning is the case, rules and meanings are ‘posited as given once and for all’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 17); but again, he makes it clear that even in the case of heteronomy, ‘society continues to self-create itself, therefore to self-alter itself, even though it does not know that it is doing this’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 358).

So, Habermas (1987) fails to understand that Castoriadis’ analysis can lead us to a notion of self-reflection according to which its existence, either social or agential, appears by chance and by exception. Here, Archer (2007) can be usefully drawn on to remind us that, even within traditionalistic societies, agents had to manage

reflexively different roles and contradictory cultural dispositions. And, at this point, we have to say that Castoriadis<sup>79</sup>, in his turn, criticizes Habermas for his claim that ‘modernity is an unfinished project’: for if ‘modernity’ signifies the imaginary institution of capitalism – of the unlimited expansion of rational mastery – then modernity is more alive than ever; if by modernity we imply social and personal autonomy, modernity has come to an end (Castoriadis, 1997: 43) since Castoriadis thinks that there is a very slow development concerning the expansion and transmission of the project of autonomy in the western world.

I think that it is now time to conclude our discussion of Castoriadis’ work by drawing on the similarities of his position with the works of the critical realists that we have examined in this thesis and, more specifically, with the work of Roy Bhaskar, whose work was assessed mainly in the first chapter. Now, one might erroneously suppose that Castoriadis is a naturalist when he defines what he calls ‘for-itself’ – a category under which the living being, the human psychism, the socially fabricated individual and society can be placed all together. For, all of these four types of being are self-constituted as self-finalities: they are for themselves – they create a proper world, a cognitive closure, for themselves within which *they are* as such (Castoriadis, 1997: 339). Yet, we have to underline that Castoriadis thinks that it is only within heteronomous societies that this cognitive closure exists and that it characterizes a society which *is for itself*; autonomous societies break this closure through self-critique. And this is the reason why, while explaining that an autonomous society criticizes and creates itself, its own nomos, its own laws as *non-physical* institutions, Castoriadis argues that ‘*Nomos* becomes the explicit self-creation of form, which thus makes it appear both as, still, the opposite of *phusis* – and as one of the latter’s points of culmination.’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 340)

---

<sup>79</sup> It is a mystery why Castoriadis, who criticizes Aristotle, Kant, Heidegger and Freud for under-developing the role of imagination in their works, completely ignores and avoids discussing Sartre’s well-known ‘Imagination’ (2004) in which Sartre underlines that ‘imagination is not an empirical power added to consciousness, but is the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom’ (Sartre, 2004: 186). Indeed, Castoriadis admits that he is not very well familiarized with Sartre’s work. In fact – almost aggressively – says that he reads Sartre’s work only ‘for conscience’s sake and by sad duty’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 173).

But does this mean that Castoriadis conceives of the social world as the culmination of self-creation in a natural continuum? For this *weak* distinction between *Physis* (nature) and *Nomos* (instituted law) leaves room for such questions. Unquestionably, Castoriadis thinks that *physis* is self-creative (Castoriadis, 1997: 336) – that nature carries within itself the principle of creation of new forms. But it should be clear at this point that, for Castoriadis, the social-historical world is distinguished from the biological one since, in the latter, we face the emergence of autonomy (Castoriadis, 1997: 16). And this is not a form of transcendental naturalism, since autonomous societies, where a rupture from tradition occurs, have no analogy ‘to anything else we know of in nature or in life’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 344). For, history ‘is the domain in which human beings create ontological forms – history and society themselves being the first of these forms.’ (Castoriadis, 1991: 3) As emphasized by Castoriadis:

We posit history *in itself* as creation and destruction. We are speaking at an ontological level here, for we are concerned with the creation and destruction of *forms*, of *eide*. Creation is not “production”, the bringing forth of an exemplar of a preexisting *eidos*; ... Even less would it be the random emergence of a numerically singular combinatorial configuration. Destruction is, here, ontological destruction. (Castoriadis, 1991: 34-35)

It is now clear that Castoriadis is not a social realist. But I think that it is equally difficult for anyone to claim that Castoriadis is a kind of realist concerning the natural world. This is important to be examined in order to place self-reflective subjectivity in Castoriadis’ conceptualization of being. However, such a case is made by Suzy Adams (2011), who raises questions regarding the concepts of stratification and emergence in Castoriadis’ work by arguing that he gets close to Bhaskar’s argumentation. For Adams, ‘as Castoriadis moves into the *physis* register, the beginnings of a “realistic” schema of knowledge as a version of “transcendental realism” begins to emerge, in both stronger and weaker forms, as different layers of transcendental reality.’ (Adams, 2011: 166) And as Adams further explains:

... in terms of the subject of knowledge, the social-historical context of the institution needs to be incorporated. In terms of the object, Castoriadis paves the way for a transcendental realism and the early Romantic constellation of post-Kantian thought, in that the presuppositions of science inevitably incorporate a philosophy of nature and the problematic of the world (Adams, 2011: 172)



As regards this question, we should start explicating Castoriadis' view concerning the natural world. For Castoriadis, Chaos is the ultimate abyssal and bottomless depth of being. And chaos presents itself, through the unending creation of forms that characterizes being, as a cosmos:

... that is, as an organized world in the broadest sense of the term, as order. Simply, we are constantly discovering that the organization and the ultimate order of that cosmos escape us. They escape us precisely because the various strata of what presents itself as being cannot be reduced to other allegedly more fundamental or more elementary strata. I personally am convinced that the social-historical sphere cannot possibly be reduced to the psychic sphere, any more than the two can be reduced to something else, or the biological can be reduced to physics and chemistry ... (Castoriadis, 2007: 241)

Here, emergence is not merely the non-reducibility of new properties and causalities to the strata from which they emerge, but rather a creation of new forms of beings. Castoriadis seeks a new ontology 'in which chaos will be the fundamental "determination" of being' (Castoriadis, 2007: 240), so that emergence here assumes a completely different meaning than the one that *Critical Realists*, like Archer and Bhaskar, attach to this word. At this point, we have to say that for Castoriadis, the natural world is malleable: the idea of an absolute formless chaos is unthinkable since it could not permit any kind of organization and thus, every schema would be of equal importance and relevance – and hence useless.

But for Castoriadis, society's institution is neither passively adapted to a concrete and unbending *natural stratum* nor is it totally unrestricted by it (Castoriadis, 1987: 353). It rather *leans on* what he calls the *first natural stratum*. And the emergence of the new level of institution, in its turn, while leaning on the natural stratum, transforms what is leaned on; for natural reality can be manipulated and is subject to transformation to a relative degree – as long as its stability is relative. However, as Castoriadis admits – and this is a very important admission, which places Castoriadis far away from realism – the degree of relativity of both – as related – the resistance and the malleability of the 'natural stratum', in each case, is socially orientated:

society is always dealing with the "natural given" as at once resistant and malleable; but *what* is resistant and malleable, and the manner in which it is so, is

such only in correlation with the social world considered in each case ... we can no longer speak of “leaning on” when we consider the relation of social imaginary significations and the institution of society to the stratum of “reality” which is no longer natural but social, between the former and what can be termed the “abstract materiality” of society itself ... (Castoriadis, 1987: 355)

In this way, any kind of ‘constraining’ becomes present but vague and eventually of secondary importance. And it is now time to conclude by saying that Castoriadis is in neither way a realist for, after all, instead of an *emergence* of properties that exert causal laws, here we have here is a *creation* of new forms of being which constitute new fragmentations of the world. And Castoriadis makes it clear that the schema of causality<sup>80</sup> – which Bhaskar and Archer, as critical realists, propose – is premised on inherited thought and inherited ontology (Castoriadis, 1987: 183-184), which Castoriadis attacks in all of his works. And this inherited thought of determinism and stability denies history and change: ‘faced with the question of history, physicalism naturally becomes causalism, that is the elimination of the question ... and causality is always the negation of otherness’ (Castoriadis, 1987: 172).

**Summary: Self-creation and change in society is now expressed through the acting role of imagination as an undetermined flux of representations. Human psyche is radical imagination; and social self-creation, when acknowledged and exercised by society and individuals, entails autonomy – as distinguished from heteronomy, in which people assume that there is an external source of social laws. Yet, autonomy is identified with self-reflective activity through which a subject *represents herself as a representational activity*. Castoriadis’ ontology, while problematic, is a step forward towards presenting the socio-historical character of the (appearance of the) epistemic subject, while (ontologically) rendering her capable of a creative process of self-representation. His dual account of reflectiveness can help us formulate a theory that clearly distinguishes between self-reflective critical examination and agential reflexivity which can fulfill the epistemic criterion of reflexivity proposed in this thesis.**

---

<sup>80</sup> At this point, we have to underline the fact that causality here does not have the same meaning as the one that Bhaskar attributes to this term – that is ‘tendency’. However, we could conclude that Castoriadis is not that positive towards what ‘causality’ connotes with in the history of philosophy of science.

## Conclusion

---

In this conclusion I am going, at first, to make a synthetic summary of what I have discussed in this thesis and, secondly, to respond in advance to a possible critique of this thesis, a critique which at first sight might seem identical to the one that I have applied to other theories: in which sense can the requirement of epistemic criterion of reflexivity, proposed in the thesis, assess the *internal coherence* of social ontological schemes in terms that are not *internal* to those schemes? I will respond to this possible critique in relation to the concept of ‘ontology’. For the moment, I have to claim that I have started this thesis by arguing that ontology is cognitively – but not chronically – prior to epistemological and methodological investigations. For, every effort to discuss a theory of knowledge presupposes the question ‘knowledge of what?’ and thus theories of knowledge always cognitively presume some knowledge of the object of investigation.

My first ontological claim was that as far as the social world is concerned, the putative knower, the knowing subject, is a constitutive part of the *theoretical* object (social world) of which he intends to attain some kind of knowledge. And I call that object *theoretical* for two reasons. Firstly, social institutions and structures are theory-dependent; their formulation and crystallization are partially dependent on the knowledge and epistemic beliefs contemporary that scientists and thinkers have of the proper or existent incarnation of these institutions and structures. But we have to say that scientific theorization and knowledge are also influenced by society in the sense that theory-formation occurs within context and within existent social norms, values, beliefs, ideals and world-views. And this means that there is an intrinsic existential interdependence between scientific theorization and knowledge of the world and society. It might be pointed out that the theory-ladenness of perception – that is, the idea that our perception, identification and evaluation of our ‘data’ occur only through the lens of our theoretical (ontology) frameworks – now, in its sociality, also pertains to natural sciences. But in the case of social sciences this ‘problem’ of the sociality of our interpretations and assessments is more acute, since now the

object of investigation not only lacks existential stability, but is also dependent on our conceptualizations of it.

Secondly – and consequently – this idea implies that the boundaries between ontology (as theoretical-conceptual frameworks) and constraining ‘facts’ are less clear cut here. What we need before examining our society or any other society (through anthropological investigation) is an ontology offering the concepts not to deny this sociality of our knowledge but rather, express the possibility of knowledge and theorization within it. We need a generalized theory for this theory-dependent world. Thus, our object is characterized as theoretical not only because of its theory dependence, but also because we now need a general conceptual-theoretical framework, concerning the constitution of the social world that should be provided before any other investigation.

And this ontology is also cognitively prior to methodological investigations, since, in order to realize which method is proper for a specific domain or field, one has to attain a prior understanding of the basic characteristics of this domain. And my argument up to this point is that since there is an existential interdependence between theory production and the social world within which it occurs, there is an acute need for a distinct social ontology. This need for a distinct social ontology, I would like to argue, is implicit in social scientific reasoning despite the enormous efforts of naturalists, like Roy Bhaskar (1998), to persuade us of the possibility of a naturalistic ontology for the social sciences. Interviews, ethnology and focus groups, for example, have nothing in common with work in the laboratory; for it is implicit that here we have to do not with planets and particles, the constitution of which is independent of what we think of them. This does not mean that the theorization of the natural sciences does not face the sociality of its premises. However, claiming that the knowledge that natural science attains is produced within a specific socio-historical context or within a specific scientific community is different from claiming that we suppose that this knowledge affects the constitution of those planets and particles. Nor does the sociality of knowledge claims, as I have explained, lead

natural sciences to such a need for an extended ontology which intervenes in and shapes more substantial empirical investigation.

And it is this existential interdependence, in the case of social sciences, that made me argue that the knowing or epistemic subject is a constitutive part of her theoretical object. For it should not be ontologically assumed that this epistemic subject has a different cognitional status from the people, related to each other, that he analyzes. One reason for this is that social actors may develop a theoretical account of the social world so that they can be conceived of as putative social thinkers. But a more important reason is the absence of a principle which enables us to believe that, unlike other social actors, social scientists are able to avoid their claims being social and conventional in character. Thus, social science and its field is part of the *theoretical* object it examines and this is Pierre Bourdieu's most important contribution to debates about reflexivity and ontology. And, I think, this means that *every social ontology should be compatible with (and should include) an epistemic account of its own theoretical existence*. Gouldner (1970), Gruenberg (1978), Castoriadis and Bhaskar (1997) would probably agree, I think, with the epistemic requirement which is proposed in this thesis, as I have already shown.

And this is the one of the main contributions of this thesis: epistemic reflexivity should entail a meta-theoretical requirement for cohesion and internal congruity between ontology and epistemology – which is to be incorporated within ontology. One's ontological view about society should include the explanation of how one part of the whole, that is, the social theorist, is able to form the specific theory, that is, to reach to the 'truth' it proposes. This first contribution could be called the requirement of the epistemic criterion of reflexivity, that is, the requirement of the incarnation within a theory of the possibility of its own theorizing and the conditions of the possibility of its own cognitional foundation. Thus, the question to be posed is how can an author (as epistemic subject) of a social theory (using the tools of this theory) explain his ability to give a justified account of the reality which the specific theory describes rather than being a passive recipient of his theory? And the answer to this question is the resolution of what Gruenberg (1978) and Lawson (1985) have called

the ‘problem of reflexivity’ as the *self-referential* problem of general theory engendered either by the generality of theories about the relativity, instability and sociality of our knowledge production or by the very fact that social science is a constitutive part of society.

Within the frame of the view that I am defending, social science is one actor among others and our hypotheses about the social world pertain to the social scientist as well as all the other actors to the same extent. And this situation, unique as it is, requires a criterion, a requirement, the fulfilment of which is the answer to the theoretical paradoxes emerging from this ontological remark. We have shown that Bourdieu’s social ontology is not consistent with this requirement; for the scientist as a social construct becomes a spokesperson of his social position within an ‘objective structure’ and, as a result, the one who utters the theory is not its conscious generator. And she cannot be that, since her cognitive structure is an internalization of an external and objective structure. So, she cannot escape from social determination and, if she is not the one who originates knowledge about her object, who is? Hopefully, not the object itself – as in the theory of Blum and McHugh (1984).

Bourdieu places the knowing subject within her object and additionally realizes the consequences of such an inclusion. The social scientist now should avoid contradictions and circularities engendered by the fact that social science is socially-positioned within structures. But these social determinations are explained and also resolved by and through the ‘univocal’ concepts of ‘the field’ and of ‘the habitus’ and, thus, when Bourdieu advises scientists to use these concepts to neutralize these determinations in order for them to achieve more objectivity, we wonder how they are able to turn against what their cognitive structure (the habitus) dictates. If, however, we propose that reflexivity is entailed by a ‘reflexive habitus’, reflexivity becomes another determination dictated by a ‘universal’ process of social determination. And this is the reason why Blum and McHugh (1984) and Bourdieu were placed together in the third chapter: both these approaches, despite the difference of their origins, recognize and try to adequately face the ‘problem of

reflexivity'. But since their ontological frameworks imply the social determination of the knowing subject, their account of reflexivity was shown to be problematic.

In other words, these accounts cannot fulfil what I have proposed as the epistemic criterion of reflexivity, which proposes that *one should incorporate into her ontological descriptions about society the conditions under which her capability of theorization of the specific ontological framework is possible*. But this *criterion of epistemic reflexivity* should be distinguished from the concepts of 'agential reflexivity' and 'self-reflection'. The criterion of reflexivity is my proposed resolution of the 'problem of reflexivity', which is a self-referential property of ontologies, while self-reflection and agential reflexivity both imply the property or capacity of social actors for self-objectivation that is, their ability to make themselves an object of investigation. In this sense, authors like Pollner (1991) and Woolgar (1988) – whom Lynch (2000) calls 'radical reflexivists' – proposed a kind of self-reflection in scientific practice. As we saw in the second chapter, Lynch (2000) was partially right to complain that these 'radical reflexivists' do not make a novel theoretical contribution. Of course, the idea of self-reflection as objectivation of one's own presuppositions and values was not something new; however, to criticize yourself is still significant in every practice and Lynch (2000) makes the unfortunate mistake of confusing self-reflection with theory-ladenness<sup>81</sup>.

As I explained in the third chapter – in relation to Habermas (2007) – self-objectivation should not imply self-objectification which means 'to present one's self or one's thoughts as objective entities.' Habermas (2007), as we saw, does not discriminate between these two terms; I think that he does not need to, since within his naturalistic and monistic ontology, any effort to objectivate one's self is an effort to find the determinations pertaining to its explanation and, in this sense, he makes the same mistake as Bourdieu. But Habermas (2007), unlike Bourdieu, realizes the self-referential predicament of his ontological monism. In Chapter 3, I also suggested that Bhaskar (1997) thinks that his ontological monism respects the *reflexive criterion of philosophy* (Bhaskar, 1997) – although he does not provide us with a

---

<sup>81</sup> See chapter two

definition of this criterion in order for us to check by ourselves whether his naturalistic ontology fulfils this criterion.

Now, chapters two and three developed the idea that an adequate account of agential reflexivity is needed in order for the epistemic criterion of reflexivity to be fulfilled. Thus, self-reflection as self-objectivation is related to the discussion of the epistemic criterion of reflexivity. With this new concept of epistemic reflexivity as a criterion of internal congruity of social ontologies, we require social scientists to give a plausible conceptualization of the one who utters a theory and the source of originality. But for a social theory to explain the possibility of its own theorising an important further meta-theoretical step is also needed. Since theorising is not only about society, but also about a *self-reflective* knowing subject capable of objectivation (who now considers herself a self-reflective theorist and who does not only generate a theory but also turns it back to herself), this social theory should account not only for its own possibility but also for the possibility of self-reflection.

For, not only theorizing, but self-reflection (or agential reflexivity if you prefer) itself should be consistently included in a *reflexive social theory* – that is, a social ontology which satisfies the *epistemic criterion of reflexivity*. I have already discussed in which ways I think self-reflection is different from agential reflexivity. For the time being, I have to say that stating that *the criterion of epistemic reflexivity leads us to the requirement that a social ontology should account for the possibility of self-reflection* also means that for ontology and for any kind of objectivation to be possible<sup>82</sup>, self-reflection is a basic prerequisite. So we can now suggest that for a social ontology to be reflexively self-consistent, it must argue that agents can be self-reflective. Otherwise, actors will be theoretically explained as cultural dopes or instances of a social automaton, and the social scientist herself cannot be consistently conceptualized as being able to reflect about ontology, epistemology, science, facts etc.

---

<sup>82</sup> and this means to be possible without getting lost within the conventionality and the sociality of social norms or of social position.



I will explain later in which ways such a position is virtuously circular. Now I have to underline that the self-referential ‘problem of reflexivity’ does not only emerge from the (ontological) assumption that the knowing subject is a constitutive part of her *theoretical* object. Lawson (1985) shows that, for the ‘problem of reflexivity’ to appear, it suffices to make general statements about the relativity of knowledge-claims. I have explained in chapter three that the same holds for deterministic social ontologies. But in order for a relativistic or deterministic social ontology to avoid this problem, the knowing subject would have to be a mysterious actor to whom the ontological claims about agents’ cognitional status do not pertain. We have seen that none of the authors of ‘epistemic reflexivity’ (chapter two) and ‘self-reflection’ have made such a paradoxical claim. It was only Bourdieu who tried to say something quite close to – but not the same as – it with the unfortunate results we have shown earlier. He did not try to claim that there is a different kind of people, the social scientists, but to place them in a relatively differentiated field; but since his ontological concepts of structures and habitus remained more than relevant, the whole discussion remained paradoxical.

Instead of raising an existential distance between society and social science, another tactic to avoid the ‘problem of reflexivity’ would be to raise a distance between society and all the people. This choice has been made by Margaret Archer, who places agents in a first-person ontology while structures are conceptualized in a third-person ontology. I have already explained in which ways her account is problematic; and I now have to once again take advantage of this separation of hers and recall that I have proposed that self-reflection as a term should entail such a distance while the term ‘agential reflexivity’ is better for incorporating the agential aspect of the actor’s capacity for self-objectivation. For, this agential element implies that the subject is an active, a *constitutive* part of society and not an *observer* only capable of *external* reflection. Yet, Archer (2010) explains that ‘the distinguishing feature of reflexivity is that it has the self-referential characteristic of “bending-back” some thought upon the self, such that it takes the form of subject-object-subject.’ (Archer, 2010: 2) Instead, I would like to argue that her notion of ‘internal dialogue’ takes the form of subject-object $\equiv$ subject (the last of which equals a subject – objectified subject),

because in the process of *self-objectification*, the object is the subject itself – thoughts, feelings, premonitory notions, utterances and trajectories.

Even if we could assume that the ‘subject-object-subject’ is correct as a description of Archer’s notion of ‘internal conversation’, the word ‘object’ in the middle of this schematic description would still depict a thought, an utterance or a structural property which can be objectively identified and this has nothing to do with the existential interdependence pointing at the sociality of the self we discussed above. Yet, these ontological investigations have led us to terminological differences which might, at first sight, seem unreasonable. Terminological discussions, however, are not and should not be treated as neutral, especially in such debatable conversations as that of reflexivity. Let us take the example of Pierpaolo Donati who confuses the whole discussion on reflexivity by providing inadequate terminological distinctions:

In my vocabulary: *reflection* is a self-referential operation of an individual mind which bends back on itself within itself ... *Reflectivity* is the same operation when performed by a system. Conversely, *reflexivity* is a relational operation on the part of an individual mind in relation to an ‘Other’ who can be internal (the Ego as an Other) or external (Alter), but who also takes the social context into account. (Donati, 2010: 146)

As we have already discussed, reflection can represent linear subject/object relations which may have nothing to do with genuine circularities resulting in self-referential operations. This mistake of Donati (2010) leads him to confuse system operations with agential properties and, for this reason, his effort to articulate a ‘relational theory of reflexivity’ fails to attribute to reflexivity any kind of epistemic aspect and thus confuses it with both internal and external conversation – and since for him, ‘reflexivity is synonymous with internal conversation ... it can, however, be extended to social groups, in so far as they can express a collective mode of reflexivity.’ (Donati, 2010: 146)

Now, although Castoriadis’ argument about the primacy of ontology over epistemology, as well as his account of the role of the knowing subject, is quite similar to what has been argued for in the first chapter, Castoriadis does not provide adequate arguments for the former. And, Castoriadis also fails to distinguish between

agential reflexivity (self-reflection) and self-referential properties of ontologies – and consequently, Castoriadis does not provide an adequate account of the interconnections among the concepts of social ontology, agential reflexivity (self-reflection) and epistemic reflexivity, as I have tried to do in this thesis. As we have seen, Castoriadis' account of self-reflective subjectivity is related to what he calls 'the project of autonomy' as well as to its premise that is, human imagination. Now, I would like to repeat that Castoriadis has two accounts of self-reflection which are not contradictory, but are complementary to each other. However, Castoriadis does not distinguish between them. On the one hand, self-reflection means self-critical examination and self-questioning with the result of self-alteration. But, on the other hand, self-reflective activity leads the subject, as we have shown above, to represent oneself as representational activity (Castoriadis, 1997: 159). While the former account is identical to the notion of self-reflection that is widely held, the second one comes close to fulfilling the epistemic criterion of reflexivity proposed in this thesis.

It was at this point, that Castoriadis, by placing human psyche as radical imagination at the heart of a socio-theoretical framework of the self-institutioning of societies, has offered us fruitful ontological grounds for the locus of representation. This, I think, is the positive contribution of Castoriadis to this discussion, since the socialization of social individuals occurs only through the intervention of what is supposed to be the source of social and personal change. And I also think that Castoriadis' notion of the social imaginary is helpful to place the historical possibility of the state of autonomy. Yet, contrary to Castoriadis' analysis, autonomy should not be identified with self-reflection. The former constitutes an exceptional characteristic of specific human societies in which there is a possibility for one to 'represent oneself as a representational activity'. In this sense, self-reflection should be considered an omnipresent characteristic of human societies. Archer (2007) would agree with this. Social actors, even in traditional societies, can criticize themselves and probably some institutions of their society. But it is only in specific societies which have specific corresponding social (and scientific) imaginaries that what Castoriadis called 'the project of autonomy' can appear as an element of these social imaginaries.

And now it is time to explain in which ways the circularity engendered is not just a celebrated one in Pels' terms (Pels, 2003) – which renders us celebrators but also helpless within the conventionality of our argumentation – but a virtuous one. Our scientific ethos (or imaginary if you prefer) permits us to conceptualize contradictory causes or tendencies or even inconsistencies and antithetical urges as constituent of the object examined, whatever it is. But theoretical coherence, while attacked by post-modern critiques, is the last harbor that has remained unconquered. Lawson's (1985) critique, I think, intends to point this out. And this is the importance of the word 'paradox', for it does not imply self-contradiction or *contradiction in terms*, but the mere fact that theory should comply with its own predicates as produced within a specific social context.

Yet, the main limitation of this thesis, one could claim, is that, while it underlines the need for the *internal congruity* of every social ontology, this very congruity – as opposed here to the notion of 'paradox' – is assessed *externally* to this ontology: the idea of the paradox is premised on shared ideas about the contents of notions like 'determinacy', 'subjectivism', 'relativism' etc. But now the self-affirmation of a schema is what appears as circularity and its virtuousness emerges from the fact that in our scientific ethos – or in our scientific imaginary – the requirement of the internal congruity of theory while relatively external to each ontological framework, is internal to the social grounds on which every thesis like this draws its basic categories and their meaning.

The way one defines causality as well as other terms, like 'subjectivity', 'objectivity', 'determinism', 'relativism' or 'relationality', must be characterized as having an ontological character. For to define them is to explain the constitution of the domain to which they are attributed as well as the modes of the being that express them and then, one is able to claim that the knowledge of them is 'subjective', 'objective', or 'deterministic' etc. And this means that representations and schemata which try to express world-views and forms of being are necessary in order for such (supposed-to-be) epistemological terms to be intelligible. In this sense, ontology is

cognitively – but not temporally – prior to epistemology for, after all, any investigation of the possible mode of knowledge must have a conception of the object of our investigation, of the object of which we intend to attain some kind of knowledge.

These world-views are shared, *even in modified forms*, by all contemporary ontological efforts which intend to conceive of social reality and, I think, every important thinker we examined in this thesis has struggled with them in one way or another. Most of these authors have tried to offer an overall theoretical-ontological account for society, and several of them identified the need to locate the cognitional possibility of this account within its own premise. And finally, if one revisited the opening of the argumentation of this thesis and challenged the possibility of ontology itself, one would face the problem of rejecting social theory and sociological theory as a field. For most, if not all, of social theorists, implicitly or explicitly discuss and think of concepts like ‘structure’, ‘function’, ‘system’, ‘agents’, ‘roles’, ‘social relations’ etc; and then, it will be very difficult for anyone, within our tradition, to deny the relationality and the ontological character of these theories without in fact rejecting them all.

# *Bibliography*

---

Adams S. (2001) Castoriadis's Ontology: Being and Creation. Fordham University Press, New York.

Alexander, J. C. (1995) Fin de siècle Social Theory. Verso, London.

Alston W. P. (1986) 'Epistemic Circularity'. *Philosophy and phenomenological research*. 47: 1-30.

Alston W. P. (2005) Beyond 'Justification': Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London.

Archer M. (1982) 'Morphogenesis Versus Structuration: On Combining Structure and action'. *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 455-483.

Archer M. (1995) Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Archer M. (1996) Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Archer M. (2000a) Being Human: The problem of Agency. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Archer M. (2000b) 'For structure: its reality, properties and powers: A reply to Anthony King.' *The Sociological Review*, Vol.48, (3), pp.464-472.

Archer M. (2003) Structure, Agency and The Internal Conversation. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Archer M. (2007) Making our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Archer M. (ed.) (2010) Conversations About Reflexivity. Routledge, London and New York.

Ashmore Malcolm (1989) The Reflexive Thesis: Wrighting Sociology of Scientific Knowledge. The University of Chicago Press, London.

Ashmore Malcolm (1994) 'Social Epistemology and Reflexivity: Two Versions of How to be Really Useful'. *Argumentation* 8: 157-161.

Ayer A. J. (1971) Language, Truth and Logic. Penguin Books, London.

- Barnes B. and Bloor D. (1982) 'Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge' in Hollis M. and Lukes S. (1982) Rationality and Relativism. The MIT Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Bartlett Steven J. and Suber Peter (1987) Self-Reference: Reflections on Reflexivity. Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Library Volume 21, Dordrecht, Lancaster.
- Beck U., Giddens A., Lash S. (1994) Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bergman M. (2004) 'Epistemic Circularity: Malignant and Benign.'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 69, No 3 (Nov., 2004) pp. 709-727.
- Bhaskar R. (1975) A Realist Theory of Science. Verso, London.
- Bhaskar R. (1989) Reclaiming Reality: a Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy. Verso, London.
- Bhaskar R. (1997) 'On the Ontological Status of Ideas'. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*. Vol. 27:2/3, 1997, pp 139-147.
- Bhaskar R. (1998) The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences. Routledge, London and New York.
- Bhaskar R. (2009) Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation. Routledge, London and New York.
- Blaikie N. (2010) Designing Social Research. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bloor D. (1991) Knowledge and Social Imagery. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.
- Blum A. and McHugh P. (1984) Self-Reflection in the Arts and Sciences. Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands.
- Bonner Kieran M. (2001) 'Reflexivity and Interpretive Sociology: The Case of Analysis and the Problem of Nihilism.' *Human Studies*, 24: 267-292.
- Bourdieu P. (1977) Outline of A Theory of Practice. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu P. (1984) Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste. Routledge & Kegan, London.
- Bourdieu P. (1990) The Logic of Practice. Polity Press, Cambridge.

- Bourdieu P. and Wacquant J. D. (1992) An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Bourdieu P. (2003) 'Participant Objectivation' *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 9, No 2 (June), pp. 281-294.
- Bourdieu P. (2004) Science of Science and Reflexivity. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Boyle, Jr, Joseph M. (1987) 'Is Determinism Self-Refuting?', in Steven J. Bartlett and Peter Suber's Self-Reference: Reflections on Reflexivity. 1987. Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Library Volume 21, Dordrecht.
- Castoriadis C. (1987) The Imaginary Institution of Society. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Castoriadis C. (1991) Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy. Oxford University press, New York, Oxford.
- Castoriadis C. (1997) World in Fragments: Writing on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.
- Castoriadis C. (2007) Figures of the thinkable. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.
- Castoriadis C. (2010) A Society Adrift: Interviews and Debates 1974-1997. Fordham University Press, New York.
- Colaprieto V. (2010) 'Cartesian privacy and Peircean interiority' in Margaret Archer (2010) Conversations About Reflexivity. Routledge, London and New York.
- Collins H. M. (1983) 'The Sociology of Scientific Knowledge: Studies of Contemporary Science.' *Ann. Rev. Sociol.* 9:265-85.
- Crotty Michael (1998). The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process. Sage, London.
- Czyzewski Marek (1994) 'Reflexivity of Actors Versus Reflexivity of Accounts'. *Theory Culture and Society*, 11:161-168.
- Dilworth Craig (1996). The Metaphysics of Science: An Account of Modern Science in Terms of Principles, Laws and Theories. (Second Edition). Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Volume 173. Springer, The Netherlands.
- Donati P. (2010) 'Reflexivity after modernity: from the viewpoint of relational sociology' in Margaret Archer (2010) Conversations About Reflexivity. Routledge, London and New York.
- Einstein Albert (1949/2009) 'Why Socialism?'. *Monthly Review*, Volume 61, Issue 01 (May).



- Elder-Vass Dave (2007a) 'Reconciling Archer and Bourdieu in an Emergentist Theory of Action'. *Sociological Theory* 25: 4, December.
- Elder-Vass Dave (2007b) 'For Emergence: Refining Archer's Account of Social Structure'. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 37: 1, pp. 25-44.
- Elder-Vass Dave (2010) The Causal Power of Social Structures: Emergence, Structure and Agency. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Feyerabend P. (1975) Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge. Verso, London, New York.
- Garfinkel H. (1967) Studies in Ethnomethodology. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Giddens A. (1984) The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Giddens A. (1993) New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.
- Gouldner A. (1965) Enter Plato: Classical Greece and the Origins of Social Theory. Basic Books, New York, London.
- Gouldner A. (1970) The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology. Heinemann, London.
- Gruenberg B. (1978) 'The Problem of Reflexivity in the Sociology of Science'. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 8:4 (Dec.) pp.321-343.
- Habermas J. (1986) The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and The Rationalization of Society. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Habermas J. (1987) The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Habermas J. (1988) Theory and Practice. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Habermas J. (2007) 'The Language Game of Responsible Agency and the Problem of Free Will: How can epistemic dualism be reconciled with ontological monism?'. *Philosophical explorations*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March.
- Hanfling Oswald, (1981) Logical Positivism. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Heritage J. (1984) Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Hollis M. and Smith S. (1990) Explanation and Understanding International Relations. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

- Hollis M. and Smith S. (1994) 'Two Stories About Structure and Agency'. *Review of International Studies*, 20, 241-251.
- Hollis M. (1994) The Philosophy of Social Sciences. An Introduction. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Holmwood J. (1996) Founding Sociology? Talcott Parsons and the Idea of General Theory. Longman, London and New York.
- Joas H. and Knöbl W. (2009) Social Theory. Twenty Introductory Lectures. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Kemp Stephen. (2005) 'Critical Realism and the Limits of Philosophy'. *European Journal of Social Theory* 8(2): 171-191.
- Kemp Stephen (2011) 'Interests and Structure in Dualist Social Theory: A Critical Appraisal of Archer's Theoretical and Empirical Arguments'. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, December 15, 2011 as doi: 10.1177/0048393111428809
- King A. (1999) 'Against structure: a critique of morphogenetic social theory.' *The Sociological Review*, Vol.47, (2), pp.199-227.
- King A. (2000) 'Thinking with Bourdieu against Bourdieu: A "Practical" Critique of the Habitus.' *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Nov.), pp. 417-433.
- Kolakowski Leszek (1972) Positivist Philosophy: From Hume to the Vienna Circle. Penguin Books, London.
- Kuhn T.S. (1962) The Structure of Scientific Revolutions., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.
- Lammeranta M. (1996) 'Reliabilism and Circularity'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Mar.), pp. 111-124.
- Lawson H. (1985) Reflexivity: The post-modern predicament. Hutchinson and Co, London.
- Lemert C. and Piccone P. (1982) 'Gouldner's Theoretical Method and Reflexive Sociology'. *Theory and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 6, Special Issue in Memory of Alvin W. Gouldner (Nov.), pp. 733-757.
- Lynch M. (2000) 'Against Reflexivity as an Academic Virtue and Source of Privileged Knowledge'. *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol.17, (3), pp. 26-54.
- Lynch M. (2010) 'Epistemic Circularity and Epistemic Incommensurability.' In Haddock A., Millar A., & Pritchard D. (2010) Social Epistemology. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

- Maccarini A. and Prandini R. (2010) 'Human Reflexivity in social realism: beyond the modern debate' in Margaret Archer's (2010) Conversations About Reflexivity. Routledge, London and New York.
- Mannheim K. (1991) Ideology and Utopia. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Maton K. (2003) 'Reflexivity, Relationism and Research: Piere Bourdieu and the Epistemic Conditions of Social Scientific Knowledge.' *Space and Culture*. Vol. 6, no. 1, February, 52-65.
- May T. (1999) 'Reflexivity and Sociological Practice'. *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 4, no.3, <http://www.socresoline.org.uk/4/3/may.html>
- May T. (2000) 'Reflexivity in Social Life and Sociological Practice: A Rejoinder to Roger Slack' *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 5, no.1, <http://www.socresoline.org.uk/4/3/may.html>
- McLennan Gregor (2006) Sociological and Cultural Studies: Reflexivity and Positivity in the Human Sciences. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills.
- Moleski, S.J. Martin X. (1987) 'The Role of Retortion in the Cognitional Analyses of Lonergan and Polanyi', in Steven J. Bartlett and Peter Suber's Self-Reference: Reflections on Reflexivity (1987). Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Library Volume 21, Dordrecht, Lancaster.
- Mutch A. (2004) 'Constraints on the Internal Conversation: Margaret Archer and the Structural Shaping of Thought'. *Journal for the theory of Social Behaviour*, 34: 4, 429-445.
- O'Neill J. (1972) Sociology as a Skin Trade: Essays Towards A Reflexive Sociology. Heinemann, London.
- Outhwaite W. (1987) New Philosophies of Social Science: Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory. Macmillan Education LTD, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London.
- Outhwaite W. (1994) Habermas: A Critical Introduction. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Pels D. (2000) 'Reflexivity: One Step Up'. *Theory Culture and Society*. Vol. 17(3): 1-25.
- Pels D. (2003) Unhastening Science: Autonomy and Reflexivity in the Social Theory of Knowledge. Liverpool University Press, Liverpool.
- Pollner M. (1991) 'Left of Ethnomethodology: The Rise and Decline of Radical Reflexivity'. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 56, No. 3, pp. 370-380.

- Popper K. (1957) The Poverty of Historicism. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and New York.
- Popper K. (1979) Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Popper K. (2002) Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge. Routledge Classics, London and New York.
- Psillos Stathis (1999) Scientific Realism: how science tracks truth. Routledge, London and New York.
- Putnam H. (2002) The collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Putnam H. (2003) 'For Ethics and Economics without the Dichotomies'. *Review of Political Economy*, Volume 15, Number 3, July.
- Quine W. v. O. (1953) 'Two dogmas of Empiricism'. From a Logical Point of View, Oxford University Press, London.
- Sandywell Barry (1996) Reflexivity and the Crisis of Western Reason: Logological Investigations, Volume 1. Routledge, London and New York.
- Sartre Jean-Paul. (2004) The Imaginary: A phenomenological psychology of imagination. Routledge, London and New York.
- Sayer, A. (1992) Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach. Routledge, London and New York.
- Sayer A. (2010) 'Reflexivity and the habitus' in Margaret Archer (2010) Conversations About Reflexivity. Routledge, London and New York.
- Smith J. M. (1998) Social Science in question. The Open University, Sage, London.
- Sosa E. (2009) 'Reflective Knowledge in the Best Circles'. In Sosa E. (2009) Reflective Knowledge: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Volume II. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Sweetman P. (2003) 'Twenty-first century dis-ease? Habitual Reflexivity or the reflexive habitus' *The Sociological Review*, Vol.51, (4), 528-549.
- The new international Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (1998), Trident Press International, Naples, Florida
- Tollefsen Olaf (1978) 'The Equivocation Defence of Cognitive Relativism', in Steven J. Bartlett and Peter Suber's Self-Reference: Reflections on Reflexivity (1987). Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Library Volume 21, Dordrecht, Lancaster.

Wiley N. (2010) 'Inner speech and agency' in Margaret Archer (2010) Conversations About Reflexivity. Routledge, London and New York.

Winch P. (2008) The Idea of Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy. Routledge, London and New York.

Woolgar S. (1988) Knowledge and Reflexivity: New Frontiers in the Sociology of Knowledge. Sage, London.

Yearley S. (2005) Making Sense of Science: Understanding the Social Study of Science. Sage, London.