From Theory of Structuration to Sociology of Knowledge (3)

Yoshiki Kurata

In the theory of structuration, the concept of structure is defined in the following ways:

① Ostensively, structures can be defined as sets of rules and resources.

② Ontologically, structures can be defined as virtual existence which exists in the time-space only as moments involved in the production and reproduction of social systems.

③ In terms of causal explanation, structures can be defined as media and outcomes of the practice performed by agents in the social interaction.

In this paper, I reviewed the work of Douglas Porpora and William Sewell, both of whom have made great contributions to the debate over the Giddensian ostensive (①) definition of structures as rules and resources. In "Four Concepts of Social Structures," Porpora stated that the concept was full of fatal contradictions, and that it could not escape from the trap of idealistic determinism. On the other hand, in "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency and Transformation," Sewell attempted to revive the explanatory power of the structuration theory by redefining both the concept of rules and resources. He presented a new conceptual framework which could reintegrate the concept of rules and resources in a manner different from the one put forward by Giddens. In Sewell's framework, rules (or schema) can be grasped as both media and outcomes of resources. Sewell thought that by employing his framework, he could establish a robust sociological theory which would not lapse into either idealistic, or materialistic determinism. However, Sewell's concept has been criticised by critical realists like Margaret Archer. In the next paper, I would like to move on to the subject of ontological and causal conception of structures (② and ③ as mentioned above). In other words, how can we define ontological status of structures; what is the cause of structures in society; what is the effect of structures in society? I think these are the most fundamental questions for sociological theory.