

From Theory of Structuration to Sociology of Knowledge (4)

Yoshiki Kurata

This study reviewed the academic debates on the concept of social structure, beginning with the structuration theory developed by Anthony Giddens. As a consequence of these debates, we are confronted with three positions on how to conceptualize social structure: (1) the position that vindicates structuration theory, represented by Stones; (2) the position that reinterprets it from the perspective of a constructionist social theory, represented by Sewell; and (3) the position that criticizes it from the perspective of a realist social theory, represented by Porpora.

This study also examined another concept of social structure, developed by Elder-Vass, that is based on an emergentist social theory. In the paper titled, "Integrating Institutional, Relational and Embodied Structure: an Emergentist Perspective," Elder-Vass attempted to settle the academic debates on social structure using his new concept: structure as wholes (entities). Looking back on past debates, he organized the concept of social structure into three types: (1) social structure as relations, (2) social structure as an institution, and (3) social structure as an embodiment. These classifications correspond to my own, as mentioned above. Furthermore, Elder-Vass pointed out that all the three concepts are incomplete, because they refer only to one facet of social structure. Alternatively, he defines social structure as characteristics comprising of five structural elements: entity, parts, emergent properties, causal mechanisms, and relations. The concept of structure as relations refers to only one element of structure: relations. The conception of structure as an institution corresponds with only one other element of structure: emergent properties. The concept of structure as an embodiment also corresponds with only one other element of structure: causal mechanism. I believe that his critique on the existing three types of conceptions from this emergentist ontological perspective is valid. Elder-Vass has drawn a reliable logical geography for the sociological study of social structure. Furthermore, by examining his concepts of social structure, we can discover a reliable framework for the sociology of knowledge.

In the final section of this manuscript, I summarized the four chapters of previous papers I authored in serial, and made brief concluding remarks.