# Who Makes the Rules? Using Wittgenstein in Social Theory

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Anthony Giddens's structuration theory was a watershed in the history of thinking about social structure. As such, it received a spate of critical attention, especially after the publication of *The Constitution of Society* in 1984. After the early 1990s the amount of ink spilled on the subject slowed to a trickle. Structuration theory is still the most recent major theory of social structure, however, and it remains influential. It deserves further attention, particularly in comparison to its theoretical forebears.

As he states, Giddens drew heavily on Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology for the heart of structuration theory, the bringing together of action and structure. Garfinkel himself was strongly influenced by Alfred Schutz's phenomenological sociology, but also by the later Wittgenstein, in the latter's conceptualisation of understanding meaning as "knowing how to go on" in ordinary everyday life. Giddens also acknowledges Wittgenstein's influence directly; in his explanation of "rules" Giddens explicitly refers to Wittgenstein's "knowing how to go on."

While neither Garfinkel nor Giddens regard Wittgenstein as their central progenitor, it will become clear that both theories are strongly influenced by the insights of Wittgenstein's later thinking. It will also become clear that several problems shared by Garfinkel's ethnomethodology and Giddens's structuration theory stem from their interpretation of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. Contrary to what is normally thought, and contrary to what the two theorists intended, both ethnomethodology and structuration theory have difficulties with social uniformity ("cultural dopes") and individual choice. A different interpretation of Wittgenstein could lead to more nuanced and flexible social theory.

An outline of a Wittgensteinian theory of social structure follows the analysis of the three thinkers and the relationships amongst their theories.

Meaning, Understanding, Rule-following

The later Wittgenstein wanted to get away from the idea that words and language mirror or picture reality. For centuries, philosophers imagined that this was the nature and function of language. Wittgenstein[1] reconceptualised language and reality so as to be more intimately related to and bound up with one another. For him, language is not a completely logical system wherein each word refers to a thing in the world. There is no underlying concept we have "grasped" when we understand the meaning of a word. It is in that false conception that philosophers get themselves into tangles trying to work out what is the essence of what is meant by certain words, such as "justice" or "love" or "art". According to Wittgenstein, these efforts misconceive the nature of language and the relationship between language and reality, and thus will always be fruitless.

Wittgenstein urges us not to look at language in a metaphysical way. Meanings of words are not mental images or states of mind that people interpret and then act upon, according to Wittgenstein. Instead, the meanings of words, in most cases, consist only in how they are used. When we learn a language we learn what kinds of things to call "pain" or "red", what kinds of circumstances in which we might use the words and the kinds of things we say and do related to them.

Most classical problems of philosophy fall away when language is regarded in this way, explains Wittgenstein. There is no one *thing* that the word "justice" refers to, no *essence* of justice to discover. For another example, there is no point in asking "does this table exist?" as philosophers do. Of course it exists. We all can see it and feel it; it is simply bizarre to ask if it exists. But how can you prove it, skeptics might ask. You can't, Wittgenstein would say, "proving" doesn't belong in this context. In everyday life we don't question that the table exists. We don't need to go beyond everyday language and attitudes into some sort of scientific approach as to whether the table exists or not.

Wittgenstein thus reconceptualised meaning and understanding, rooting them both in active practical life. Gier (1981) describes Wittgenstein as trying to bring philosophy and logic back to the "rough ground" of life itself. It is easy to see what makes his ideas attractive to social theorists. Everyday life, in all its variations, inconsistencies, customs and habits is the focus, not anything beyond it.

Let us explore further how Wittgenstein describes the process of understanding the meaning of a word. In his active approach to meaning and understanding, understanding is more akin to an ability or a capacity than a mental state or mental process.[2] The Wittgensteinian phrase "knowing how to go on" describes this phenomenon. Knowing how to go on emphasises to the fact that grasping the meaning of a word is not done "in the head" but "in the world". Wittgensteinian understanding has also been described as the mastery of a technique or custom (McGinn 1984), where custom is an unreflective, habitual behaviour in which we

are trained. We understand the meaning of a word when we know how to use it in everyday life—understanding meaning is no more and no less than this.

Now, there are certain ways in which we use a specific word, certain ways "to go on" with it. We can use "pain" in the context of a physical or psychological unease, to refer to a person who is annoying us (slang), and so on. We do not use it to refer to butterfly catching, or to tables. Wittgenstein calls these learned ways of going on "rules". They are particular ways of using a word that are sanctioned by other language users and which render the word meaningful to those users.

Understanding meaning is thus directly associated with rule-following, in Wittgenstein's sense of the term. For Wittgenstein, following a rule is like following a signpost (PI[3] §85). How do we know to follow the arrow? Signposts don't *make* us go one way rather than another. They don't guide a person in a certain direction *unless* the person is trained as to what signposts are for and how to read them. We are trained in what is to count as following a particular rule, as described in the previous paragraph but one.

Even though rule-following is not a course of action that is forced upon one, it would not be correct to say that one has a choice in how to follow a rule. Wittgenstein himself makes the point starkly, "I follow the rule *blindly*" (PI §219) and "following a rule is analogous to obeying an order" (PI §206). Wittgenstein's emphasis on custom, habit and training reinforce the unreflective nature of rule-following. "I have been trained to react to this sign-post in a particular way, and now I do so react to it" (PI §198).

This emphasis on the lack of choice involved in rule-following, on its habitual nature, will become especially important in the analysis of structuration theory, below. The problem lies not so much in the idea that rule-following is automatic, but in the lack of consideration that people have choices as to *which* rules they follow at any given point. Further, different people might identify different meanings/rules in the same word/object/event/tone of voice. A discussion about the concept of "community" in Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations will lead us to these points.

The Role of the Community

As described above, in Wittgenstein's view, understanding the meaning of a word is being able to use it as others do. But which others? Who decides how to "go on"? Who makes the rules? To look at the question from another perspective, the process of learning these meanings has been described as "training". Are all language users trained in the same way? Or are all speakers of a single language trained in the same way? Maybe even this is not correct; are there not subgroups who use a single language differently?

Wittgenstein notoriously avoids being very specific about this issue. Several concepts in his writings have been seized upon as possible clues. "Language

games" looks like a potential candidate, but it seems that language games refer to groups of behaviours or ways of going on associated with certain activities, such as guessing riddles, asking, thanking, etc. (PI §23). These activities are not correlated with different people in society. Wittgenstein also refers occasionally to "forms of life," a concept he rarely mentions and leaves very vaguely defined. Forms of life are contexts for language games, they make them comprehensible. They are intimately bound up in language, "the speaking of language is part of an activity or form of life" (PI §23). Finch (1995) believes that Wittgenstein intended forms of life to be as flexible as possible, even including all of human being. "The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language" (PI §206).

Language games and forms of life do not seem to help in answering the question of who makes the rules.

## The "Community View" Debate

The problem of who sets the rules becomes especially acute when a Wittgensteinian approach is brought into social theory. Particularly problematic is the "community view" of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations, as we shall see in the case of Garfinkel. According to the community view, not only does a community set the rules regarding (what is to count as) understanding a word, it also has to determine whether or not someone is following a rule in every individual case. That is, what counts as "correctly" following a rule/understanding a meaning is determined by the community of rule-followers in both a general sense and in particular cases. As Wittgenstein says, "we judge whether [the expression "now I know how to go on"] was rightly employed by what he goes on to do" (PI §180). Community view adherents believe that their interpretation is the only one in which following a rule can be distinguished from wrongly thinking one is following a rule.

Those who reject the community view say that rule-following is an objective matter, with objective criteria. It is establishable by reference to the behaviour of the person in question, but has nothing to do with the behaviour of anyone else. It has only to do with whether or not someone's behaviour accords to the rule in question. Although the community sets the rules or "framework conditions" (what counts as following a rule/understanding the meaning of a word) it does not have to judge an individual action to be rule-following/understanding for it to be such. No one has to judge whether someone is actually following a rule as opposed to wrongly thinking they are following a rule; the person simply is or isn't correctly following it.

In an attempt to circumvent the problem, some theorists have suggested that the "community" could be a hypothetical community. That is, rather than an actual community having to verify a possible instance of rule-following, reference to what a hypothetical community *would* say is enough. While this gets

around the problem of people being able to follow rule/understand meanings alone (that is, to identify when someone wrongly thinks they are following a rule), it seems to open up a new can of worms in that who can say whether a hypothetical community would verify an act of rule following or not? We're back to the same problem of who gets to set the rules and determine whether or not people are following the rules/understanding meanings.

Community view supporters and their opponents cite different elements of Wittgenstein's texts to press their cases. The "community view" debate cannot be conclusively decided. We shall now see that using the community view in social theory can have some unfortunate consequences, especially when not accompanied by a consideration of what a "community" actually consists in.

Who is the Community?

Despite its central role, Wittgenstein himself does not seem too interested in the problem of who sets the rules. He does not pay much attention to significant differences in understanding within societies or language groups. At one point he says that we can differ in opinions, but on many things we don't "come to blows" because they are simply "how things are done" (PI §240–241). The problem is that the difference between the two is not as clear at Wittgenstein seems to think. Nor is it clear that there are many ways things are done within a society or language group.

Unfortunately, for social theory the issue of community becomes crucial. Unless the myriad different "communities" within society are factored in, of which each has its own meanings and therefore definitions of correct understanding, a Wittgensteinian social theory can appear to depict society as undifferentiated, as a mass of people all "knowing how to go on" in the same way, all having been trained in the same way. A social theory that uses Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations, and especially the "community view" of them, must consider what a "community" consists in.

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that within social theory, "meanings" and "rules" are usually expanded from the purely linguistic arena. The meanings of events, of objects, of many social phenomena become relevant. The conformity problem then extends to all situations in which people are trying to understand the meaning of just about anything. All situations, in other words.

It must be emphasised that this problem of conformity does not mean that the community view is incorrect, nor that it should not be used in social theory. The lesson is that the question of who the "community" is cannot be ignored. If the community view is taken on without consideration of the many different communities within a society, this overly conformist picture can result.

In the next section I shall argue that this occurs in Garfinkel's ethnomethodology. The following will show that Garfinkel's placement of "accountability" at

the centre of ethnomethodology is an example of the community view of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. Further, without considering the issue of what a community is, and whether there are subcommunities, Garfinkel undermines his own aim, which is to show how people continually create or "achieve" common understandings. Instead, his theory actually requires all community members to *already share* understandings. Further, we shall see that there is a tension regarding the nature and role of rules in Garfinkel's theory, which appears again in structuration theory.

## 3. GARFINKEL'S ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

### Sense-making Methods

Like Wittgenstein, Garfinkel focused upon the centrality of life context and activity in meaning and understanding meaning. He was interested in how actors make sense of their world, with the emphasis on "make".

As Wittgenstein rejected the "picture" or "mirror" theory of language, Garfinkel rejected the idea that people identify and deal with situations by applying or matching them to knowledge they already have. Instead, he believed that people draw on held-in-common sense-making methods to define situations together, while they are within a situation. Through the use of these sense-making methods people make vague norms and vague definitions of situations specific and concrete. It is through people trying to understand the situation they're in that they actually produce the situation. In retrospect, once the situation is determinate and the norms are specified, it *seems* as if each had always been so, and that people had "matched" the (pre-defined) norms to the (pre-defined) situation. The study of these methods actors use to make sense of the world became known as ethnomethodology.

As it is continually achieved, social order is contingent in ethnomethodology. It is not a foregone conclusion, as it is in the view of Garfinkel's teacher and principal target, Talcott Parsons. Parsons believed that social order is maintained through people's socialised normative commitments (Scott 1995), which Garfinkel felt meant that people were "cultural dopes". For Parsons, actors' own judgements, choices, and accounts were not important, whereas Garfinkel thought they were absolutely central. As we shall, see, however, the "cultural dopes" criticism can be levelled at Garfinkel too.

### "Accountability" and the Community View

As described above, ethnomethodology focuses on describing people's sense-making methods. Garfinkel focuses particularly on their "accounting practices".

He emphasises how agents both define situations and actions and establish their own rationality by making their actions reportable, accountable, demonstrable, etc. to one another. In doing this, they create mutually recognised situations and, on a larger scale, social order itself, on a continual basis.

Garfinkel's definition and use of accountability and accounting behaviours is a clear application of the community view of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. In the community view, it is necessary for others to judge that one is understanding a meaning/following a rule correctly. For Garfinkel, people continually act in order to demonstrate their rationality/understanding to others.

The key point in the analysis of ethnomethodology is that for participants in a situation to effectively demonstrate, make accountable, report their rationality to others, people must understand one another properly. They cannot be incorrect or interpret one another differently, or this process would not work. As Garfinkel puts it, people "recognise each other's actions, beliefs, aspirations, feelings, and the like as reasonable, normal, legitimate, understandable and realistic" (1967 p. 173).

We shall now see that accountability in ethnomethodology, as it is a manifestation of the community view of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations, is vulnerable to the same problem concerning social difference identified in the discussion of the community view, above. To avoid it Garfinkel would need to pay attention to the issue of different people or groups of people within a community understanding the meanings of things in a different way from others, but he did not.

Accountability and Conformity

That people make their actions seem accountable and that others interpret those actions as appropriate is the cornerstone of Garfinkel's ethnomethodology; it is a given. He wants to see *how* common understanding happens, but doesn't question *that* it happens. Now, while it may be that people make their actions accountable, whether others do or able to verify these actions as reasonable, normal, legitimate, etc. is actually contingent. It is *not* given. Further, the lack of consideration of subgroups in society, or meanings which are not shared amongst all members of a community, reinforces the characteristic "community view" impression of uniformity.

Garfinkel's famous "breaching" experiments, for example, *depended* on the participants sharing assumptions (Heritage (1984) makes this point explicitly) which the students would then deliberately ignore or break in order to see what happened. These experiments would not have worked so well amongst participants who did not share assumptions with one another.

Or take the case of Agnes, a case study Garfinkel discusses at length. Some might see her as someone whose meanings were very different to others', and

Garfinkel's interest in her situation was due to that difference. Actually, her meanings are *not* different to most people's, and the tricks and techniques she employed could only work if she could accurately know or predict the meanings others would see in them.

For example, she devised a plan to refuse to strip below the waist in a medical examination because it would reveal her secret that she was biologically male. Her plan, to claim modesty, *must* be normal for it to work. If the doctor did not have similar meanings surrounding female modesty he would not have agreed to the truncated examination. Agnes's whole lifelong project depended on her being able to know how other people were going to react to what she said and did. It would not have worked at all if she were unable to predict these reactions, if she and others did not share meanings and understandings.

Someone might interject at this point that that's the whole point; that Agnes was successful because she could predict others' interpretations. Indeed this was her aim and she was largely successful, but Agnes's experiences as related by Garfinkel are all examples where the people involved had similar meanings or interpretations; there are just as many potential examples of where her plans wouldn't have worked because the people involved didn't share particular meanings or understandings. Garfinkel could have looked at an occasion in which others did not interpret Agnes as she would have wished, but he did not. Or, more likely, she didn't tell him about such "failures" because she would have felt that they would undermine her claim to be a woman and might even jeopardise her forthcoming operation.

The impression of widespread common understanding is frequently explicit in Garfinkel's work. He refers to "cultural colleagues" (1967, p. 11), "competent co-member[s] of the same community" (p. 28), "language-community members" (p. 29), "collectivity member[s]" (p. 57), etc. There are references to "common understanding" (pp. 25, 49), "common practices" (p. 33), "mutually recognised texture of events" (p. 46), "common expectancies" (p. 50), "world understood in common" (p. 50), "common sense knowledge" (p. 53), "known-in-common environment" (p. 54), and many more, both in Garfinkel's own writings and those of his followers (Heritage 1984 ("a shared cognitive order"), Benson and Hughes 1983, Boden and Zimmerman 1991, Cicourel (1973).

This underlying assumption of uniform meanings across society appears in other forms, such as that Garfinkel believes sense-making methods are shared by all members of a society, "Agnes used a number of devices, all of them familiar enough . . ." (1967, p. 167) such as: euphemism, speaking in generalities or impersonal cases, denying knowledge of something or denying she'd said something, letting others take the lead, and many more. Other sense-making methods named by Garfinkel include: ironic speech, synonymous speech, metaphorical speech, narrative, questioning, double-talking, cryptic speech, lying, glossing, deliberate vagueness, occasionality of expressions, and waiting for meaning.

Now, these may or may not be techniques "we all" use. It is an empirical matter to determine which of these are shared by all members of a society or community, not a self evident fact. It is likely that some of the above techniques are shared by all members of a society and some are not. In some families, for example, "turn taking", a classic sense-making method, is not at all the norm. We cannot assume that the above sense-making methods are shared nor can we assume they are not, without investigation. We cannot even be certain that investigators will accurately recognise the sense-making methods people use.

Further, one might ask, couldn't people use the same sense-making methods come up with different "senses" or meanings? Garfinkel says that we don't recognise that someone is using a metaphor because we know what they are thinking, rather, we work out what they are thinking because we know they are using a metaphor. Maybe we do attribute/perceive a meaning based on the recognition of metaphorical speech, but we may not attribute or perceive the same meaning that the speaker intends. Also, perhaps it is significant whether the metaphor has the effect the speaker intends or not. For example, a speaker might think his metaphor clever, but his audience perceives it as pretentious. Are these not different meanings? This question leads us to ask what the relationship between sense-making methods and meaning (sense) actually is.

Sense-making Methods and Sense

What Garfinkel is saying in the point about understanding metaphors is that sense-making methods *are* sense, in the same way that knowing how to go on *is* the meaning of a word for Wittgenstein. Garfinkel (1967) says that "what is said" is not a "sign" for "what is implied" (the sense). He instructs us, c.f. Wittgenstein, to drop sign theory, and to look instead at *how* things are said. He states that how things are said *is* what is implied. Recognising the sense of an utterance *is the same as* recognising the methods used in the uttering process, "the recognised sense of what a person said consists only and entirely in recognising the method of his speaking" (Garfinkel, 1967). This is clearly Wittgensteinian.

However, as described in the previous section, it is not at all obvious that sense-making methods can be identified with sense or meaning. Our recognition that someone is using a metaphor does not exhaust the meaning of the metaphor, nor does it even indicate that we have understood the metaphor itself. More broadly, how can the meaning of a conversation consist entirely in the various methods the participants use in conversation (such as turn-taking, inference, etc.)?

The basic problem here is that "the recognised sense of what a person said consists only and entirely in recognising the method of his speaking" is not true. It is clearly Wittgensteinian in approach, but the method of someone's speaking

(Garfinkel) is not the same as the way to use a word (Wittgenstein). The former is much more general than the latter. Using a metaphor is a method of speaking, turn-taking is a method of speaking; but using the word "red" to refer to the colour of Braeburn apples or calling chess a "game" is not a method of speaking. The latter are specific to the word in question; Garfinkel's sense-making methods are not. The method of someone's speaking is not a rule for the use of a word.

Garfinkel sometimes seems to realise this rather large problem, and in certain places in the text he implies that sense/meanings are created in situations by agents *using* sense-making methods, e.g. "Agnes used a number of devices" (p. 167). This seems more intuitively correct. But if sense-making methods aren't sense itself, we are left asking where sense or meaning comes from. This is Garfinkel's central question, and he thinks he has solved it by showing how sense (in his interpretation: shared meanings) is created by people using shared sense-making methods, but we have just seen that that does not solve the problem. Instead it just begs the question. Due to the less specific nature of "method" the relationship between methods and using methods is less clear cut than between rules and following rules. A gap opens up between sense-making methods and sense, a gap that does not exist in Wittgenstein. As we have seen, it is in this gap that we can ask where the sense/meaning actually comes from, which is the question Garfinkel was trying to answer in the first place. So, whether sense-making methods are sense or not, ethnomethodology has run into a problem trying to bring a Wittgensteinian theory of meaning into social theory.

It is worth noting that neither Wittgenstein nor Garfinkel considers that sometimes, even frequently, there is a choice of which rules or methods to follow/use. This may be less of a problem for language, in that while words do have different meanings (take "cleave" for example) it is usually clear from the context which meaning is correct. For Garfinkel, and we shall see for Giddens too, it is a big problem. How do we decide which sense-making methods to use? Wittgenstein might say that this is also determined by a rule, and so on. A rather mechanistic picture of social life can result, which we shall see exemplified in Giddens's structuration theory, next. For Garfinkel the problem is further complicated by the fact that not only does one have to choose a sense-making method but, if we accept the argument in the last paragraph, we have to choose the sense too.

To conclude, Garfinkel's use of a Wittgensteinian approach to meaning (sense being identified with sense-making methods), especially the community view (in "accountability") without attention to subsets of society results in conformity in his picture of society which is reinforced by many references to "held in common meanings." His aim, to show how people are not Parsonian "cultural dopes" is thus undermined. Further, the confused relationship between sense and sense-making methods deepens the problem—either (1) since Garfinkel says we have the same sense-making methods, and, if sense-making methods are sense, we then have the same senses (meanings) or (2) sense-making methods aren't sense, in which case it isn't clear where sense (meanings) comes from.

We shall now see these problems recur in structuration theory, in slightly different forms.

### 4. GIDDENS—STRUCTURATION THEORY

The Duality of Structure

As Wittgenstein wanted to show that meaning is not a phenomenon that is abstracted from but related to everyday life, but instead is intimately bound up in it, Giddens does the same with social structure. Just as the meanings of words do not exist outside of their use in everyday life for Wittgenstein, for Giddens social structure only exists (is "instantiated") while action guided by it is performed. Structure has no existence independently of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day to day activity. Both theorists believed that there is no need to invoke an entity of dubious ontology above everyday life, behind it, or beneath it in order to explain it.

Structuration theory (Giddens 1984) is an attempt to describe how the structure of the social world is created by and through action at the same time as it orders that action. Giddens defines social structure as "rules and resources". Rules and resources are both the medium and the outcome of social practices (a "duality"); they are necessary to act in the first place, they only exist when instantiated in the action, and they are reproduced by doing an action. Giddens emphasises the routine nature of most social practices which tends to reproduce the structure of society and give it stability.

We shall see that structuration theory shares a number of features and characteristics with the Wittgenstein. One interesting similarity lies in the parallel concepts of Wittgenstein's language games and Giddens's "structural sets". "I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the 'language game'" (PI §7). Examples of language games include: giving orders and obeying them; guessing riddles, making a joke, translating, asking, thanking, cursing, and many more (PI §23). Structural sets, in structuration theory, are sets of "transformational relations", such as: private property : money : capital : labour contract : profit. Language games and structural sets help provide some ordering or grouping together of the plethora of rules/routines that social life consists of in these theories. Without them, social life would appear a multitude of independent routines, an image which does not accord with our experience of life, grouped as it is around activities or in themes.

However, it could be said that Wittgenstein does not succeed in distinguishing language games from rules. Some of Wittgenstein's examples of language games, above, could be used as examples of rules. "Asking" is a word, and thus its meaning has actions bound up within it which, when executed, constitute following the rules for the use of the word "asking". Why, then, isn't the activity of

"asking" a rule rather than a language game? This fuzziness surrounding the distinction between a rule and a language game is increased in PI §23 when Wittgenstein says, "Here the language game is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity." He has already shown that meanings/rules *themselves* are active.

For Giddens, the criticism is not so much that structural sets are indistinguishable from rules, rather, he does not make it clear how the two relate to one another in the first place. He constructs a system involving structural sets, structural principles, structural properties, and the three dimensions of structure (structure of signification, structure of legitimation, structure of domination) which all seem to hang together somewhat, but do not obviously fit with rules and resources. This separateness of rules and resources on the one hand and structural sets, principles and properties on the other will become important, below.


## Structuration Theory and Community

Many critics doubt that rules are a strong enough concept to constitute social structure. They also feel that Giddens does not clearly define rules, or rather that there are too many different kinds of rules, and that it can't be right to call them all part of social structure. Giddens characterises this question as missing the point. I would partially agree, and in explaining further a response to the criticism that rules are not a strong enough concept to constitute social structure will also emerge.

Social structure is extremely complex, and that many more things are part of it than is usually believed by social theorists (thus far agreeing with Giddens), but it is also the case that not every rule is part of social structure. The question of which rules constitute social structure must be determined empirically. A single person's habit does not constitute social structure, but a large number of people having the same habit would.

For example, if I choose to walk around the park on my way to work, rather than through it, that routine of mine is not necessarily part of the structure of the society I live in. However, if many people avoid the park because it is unlit, vandalised and dangerous, than that routine is a part of the structure of this society. Which rules/routines are social structure must be determined empirically.

Some might react to this with skepticism. How many people does it take to act a certain way before social structure can be said to be involved? They might add that it doesn't answer the question, that it is still not clear which rules are social structure. Actually, this is the point—each case must be investigated to see if it forms part of social structure, and there will inevitably be disagreement and debate as to its status as social structure. In fact, these kinds of studies go on all the time; they are just not put in this kind of framework, into the category of studies of social structure.

It may be quite right too, not to put them into an "is it social structure?" framework. Wittgenstein is constantly reminding us not to get metaphysical, and also not to imagine that everything can be decided for once and for all (certainty is a language game). We might translate this into a Wittgensteinian approach to social structure, and say that *social structure is what people treat as social structure.* Saying that people are wrong, that the way they are behaving is based on a false understanding of what is social structure does not make sense. Social structures can't be true or false. If a great many people may act in certain ways because of something they believe to be true, then it is part of their social structure, whether or not that belief is true (and whether or not that belief is of a kind that can be true or false). Social structure cannot be false, although it can be based on a false belief.

So, the criticism of structuration theory that not all rules can be social structure is partially accurate, and partially not. In the explanation just given it can also be inferred that there are different social structures within a single society. This point is absolutely critical. We must acknowledge the many different social structures/communities within societies. We can do this by defining structure as that which people treat as social structure; by identifying it with the activities of a number of people rather than just one or two; and by acknowledging that its identification as social structure will always have to be done empirically and will always be contentious.

This point is the same as that made about Garfinkel's and Wittgenstein's lack of consideration of what constitutes "the community". That is, Giddens, like these other "ordinary language theorists", does not consider the crucial issue of communities or subsections of society which have their own meanings and their own social structures, however fluid and changeable, and however cognisant of the fact that individuals are members of many subsets of society. It is often stated that the excerpts of empirical studies that Giddens discusses at length in *The Constitution of Society* do not relate in any clear way to structuration theory. They do focus on subsets in society, but structuration theory itself does not, and it should.

Structuration Theory and Choice

Not only does structuration theory share the social conformity problem that we have seen can afflict Wittgensteinian social theories, but it also shares the tendency towards a lack of adequate provision for individual choice. Not choice as to how to follow a rule, for this would be departing completely from Wittgenstein's approach, but choice in which rules to follow. Giddens does not consider the fact that there are many rules we could follow at every moment in time, and it is not clear that any one is obviously the right one to follow. Wittgenstein might say that even this choice is rule-governed, and

Giddens would probably agree, as he says that even crises are routinised (1984). This may be so, but in the large majority of cases, we still have choices as to which rule to follow.

For example, imagine I am being treated badly by my boss. I have any number of "ways to go on" or rules to follow in this situation. I could passively accept it as the way of the world; I could lose my temper and shout; I could decide to quit; I could calmly talk it over with my boss; I could complain to someone else in the company, etc. How do I decide what rule to follow? To some extent, it is true that this decision is itself rule-governed. I may have been trained that job security is all-important, in which case only certain of the above options are open to me. If I have been trained to protect my rights above all else, other options are excluded. Ultimately, however, it is my choice, no matter how I have been trained. Rarely does training determine exactly how one should act at any given moment; we still have choices to make.

Considered closely, this problem actually affects Wittgenstein too. It may be obvious which dictionary definition of a word is appropriate in a situation, but Wittgenstein's whole aim was to show than meaning consists of more than just language. Even within one of a word's definitions there are a number of non-verbal clues to meaning that can be interpreted in a number of ways by the hearer. Which one is the correct one? What does "correct" even mean in this circumstance—can it be identified with the intention of the speaker?

Say the government announces a tax hike. What does this mean to me? I could be disappointed, realising this means less money for me a the end of the month. On the other hand, I might be pleased, thinking that finally a government is trying to be socially responsible. Which "rule" do I follow? Which meaning do I choose? Unless I have been brought up or trained in an extreme school of thought, I have options as to the rules I follow.

Now, Giddens does not make much use of individual choice; his focus, as we have seen, is on tacit knowledge and routine action. In fact, he explicitly rejects the concept of intentionality, saying that it is difficult to define and to work with, difficult to link to action, and psychologistic. Consideration of motives, intentions and reasons extricates action from time and space, he says, making action seem like an aggregate of acts rather than a flow, he says. For Giddens, agency refers not to intentionality but to capability. He describes the "stratification model of the acting self" as comprising reflexive monitoring, rationalisation and motivation, but he defines motivation as underlying wants which are not usually invoked. Most day to day activities are unmotivated, he says.

This rejection of intention and the "inner life" of the individual is very Wittgensteinian. In bringing together meaning/social structure with everyday life, both theorists try to transcend the subject/object dichotomy. Both reject the idea that autonomous subjects confront a reality that is entirely external to them. The dissolving of the subject/object dichotomy manifests itself in both theorists' emphasis on habit/routine/custom/rules.

Giddens's lack of consideration of the fact that there are many rules open to us at any given time, combined with the emphasis on routine "unmotivated" action, results in a mechanistic picture of social life that does not seem to accord with our experience. If we incorporate certain elements into Giddens's approach, such as the complexity of society, through subsets of meaning within society, and choice, through the recognition that we have to choose which rules to follow (NB: not how to follow a rule), then a more nuanced picture could emerge, which can still be described as Wittgensteinian.

Structuration Theory and Change

What about structural change? Giddens considers the issue of social structural change, identifying it primarily with "structural contradictions", which are inherent paradoxes within structures of societies whose tension leads to change.[4] Some critics find this too limited a locus of structural change. Others focus more on the rules and routines aspect of structuration theory, and feel that it is far too *easy* to change social structure in structuration theory; one just changes one's habits. That critics can find the opposite problem in structuration theory results from the lack of clarity regarding the link between rules on the one hand and structural sets, structural principles, structural properties, the dimensions of structure, etc. on the other.

The response to both of these criticisms regarding change in structuration theory follows from the above argument regarding which rules are social structure. Social structures can and do change, but it's not as easy as one person changing a habit. As we saw above, one person changing their habit does *not* change social structure, but if a number of people shift from one habit to another this aspect of social structure does change. People can decide they want to change parts of their social structure and they do it. Social structures also change as people are doing other things. The new structure isn't any more "right" or "real" than the old one; they are both social structures because people act as if they are. Structure is deep and organisational but it is also variable and changeable.

Societies will have extremely complex social structures, of course, and all of social structure won't change at once. Some aspects of social structure change relatively frequently and some are more long lasting, just as some aspects of structures are more widely spread within society (and across societies) than others. Also, changes in certain aspects of structure won't affect everyone in the society. Some will, although they may affect different people to different extents and in different ways. For example, a change of political regime affects all in a country, but some it will greatly affect—perhaps people working for or with the former regime—and others it may not affect that much.

Answering criticisms of structuration theory by emphasising the complexity of society, of meanings, of social structures, lends structuration theory some much

needed flexibility. Without it, Giddens's emphasis on routine social practices and lack of consideration of subsets of society results in a mechanistic and uniform picture of society. Recognising that people are members of a number of subsets of society, all of which are fluid and capable of change and variation, and that they come into contact with many others makes the theory more amenable to our experience and renders it easier to work with.

Paradoxically, this emphasis on complexity would not only lend structuration theory flexibility, but would also emphasise the facticity of structures, the feeling that we cannot simply change them at will. A single person, as explained above, cannot change social structure, and confronts various aspects of social structure as external fact, because, to an individual, it is.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The two themes of complexity within society and individual choice, ran through the preceding analysis. None of these theorists seem to realise that we have many rules/sense-making methods to choose from, a point that, if noted, may have led them to consider the role of communities or tendencies within a society which differ amongst themselves and shape our choices.

Garfinkel wanted to show how shared meaning is created within situations through agency, but this aim is undermined by his use of the community view of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations without attending to the issue of what a community actually is. In another Wittgensteinian echo, Garfinkel struggles with whether sense-making methods are sense or not. A Wittgensteinian interpretation of the latter (that sense-making methods *are* sense) does not seem possible, but the alternative does not explain the issue satisfactorily (in that where sense/meaning comes from is left unexplored).

Giddens wanted to create a theory of social structure that was flexible and ended the false dichotomy of individual action and society, but he was almost too successful in this; his inheritance of aspects of Wittgensteinian theory obscure his aims and result in a mechanistic picture of society similarly lacking in choice and variety within society.

I believe that these social theorists, although inspired by Wittgensteinian insights into everyday life, have gone awry by focusing on one part of Wittgenstein's theory—rules—lifting it out of everyday life and placing it centre stage. They may be following the letter of the Wittgensteinian law, but not its spirit. Wittgenstein would not have wanted any abstraction or focus on rules or methods as such; it was *everyday life itself* which he believed to be the important thing.

I don't think Wittgenstein would have considered ethnomethodology's search for the methods of sense-making and their application to have the right focus. Similarly, trying to identify "sets of rules and resources" and their "transformations" as suggested by Giddens also seems to miss the Wittgensteinian point by

focusing too much on rules themselves. A truly Wittgensteinian social theory would strenuously avoid abstracting any notion from everyday life, even rules, and making it the centre of attention.

Wittgenstein's whole point was to urge us to avoid metaphysicalising concepts, in order to save us from being led up the philosophical garden path. To create a truly Wittgensteinian approach to social structure we should say that social structure is exactly what people take it to be. It is nothing more or less than this. It has no existence beyond everyday life—not as a socioeconomic framework, not as norms or beliefs, not even as "rules." It could be said that people's understandings of social structure *are* social structure, as long as "understandings" is taken in an active Wittgensteinian sense. They are social structure because people act as if they were.

For example, I use the banking system much as most people with my level of income in my society do. I have my wages paid into the bank, bills are paid out of that money, I have credit and debit cards, and I withdraw cash from my account. Perhaps I put some of my money into a savings account or into shares. This use of the banking system is part of social structure for me. However, the homeless man sitting outside the bank, hoping people will give him a few coins while their wallets are open, clearly does not have the same meaning/use of the banking system. It does not form part of his social structure in the same way. For him and others like him banks may be irrelevant, or good locations for begging, or loathsome examples of capitalist society, or a dream to hope for.

There are innumerable examples one could choose, many to do with neither economics nor politics, two classic pillars of theories of social structure. Perhaps I am elderly and too frightened to go out of my house, even during the day. Danger, or at least the perception of danger, is common to myself and others like me. It plays a very large part of my life and is certainly a part of social structure that is relevant to me. For my son, however, it hardly crosses his mind, as he is young and strong, and he lives in a pleasant suburb.

Any behaviour that is common in society and the meanings that are associated with them can form part of social structure, in this reckoning. In Wittgenstein's avoidance of metaphysicalising meanings and concepts he replaced the notion of "essence" with that of "family resemblances". All games, for example, or all tools, do not share a single set of characteristics, or even one characteristic, he notes. Instead we recognise something as a game or as a tool because of how it is used. All games thus share a family resemblance, as do all tools, rather than any particular attributes. There may well be mileage in the idea that social structure is like this. Social structures do not have to share characteristics—they do not have to relate to economics, or politics, or any one thing. They can consist of any number of things, themes, causes, reasons, beliefs, etc.

This view does mean that social structure is infinitely complex and constantly changing as people interact and events occur, but why does it have to be simple?

We often seem to think that a simple explanation is best, but there is no reason why social structure has to be a simple concept. Chances are that there will be different groupings of people will "have" different social structures. It may be that a large grouping of people might have certain elements of structure in common, while smaller groups within it have different elements from one another. It may be that a subgroup holds many different elements from the larger group. It may be that members of larger groups do not all share a single element of structure, but loosely hold some of a number of elements. These differences and commonalities have to be determined empirically.

The attempt to weave Wittgensteinian insights into social theory is certainly not misguided. Nor is it wrong to adapt or change aspects of a theory when incorporating aspects of it into a new one. But if the consequences of the original theory—and the adaptations—are not identified, the resulting theory may well be hamstrung by its origins. And further, we may miss out on the opportunity to really see how one theory might influence another field.

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## NOTES

[1] Although I shall not specify "the later" from now on, all that follows refers to Wittgenstein's later work.

[2] There are fairly comprehensive descriptions in the Wittgensteinian literature of how understanding differs from mental states and processes, and they will not be covered here. Commentators seem unanimous on Wittgenstein's views about this subject; they differ only as to whether they agree with him or not. Some feel understanding might be partly a mental state.

[3] PI = Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*

[4] It is interesting to note than in this discussion of structural contradiction Giddens discusses examples of social structure which are very traditional indeed—tribal societies, feudal society, etc.—and which do not relate easily to structuration theory, to rules and resources.

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