

## Anthony Giddens

As author or editor of 30 books, and as Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science, Tony Giddens' interests and influence have been broad. Two features of his work are most pertinent here. First, there is his effort to rethink the theory of social sciences, what he terms "structuration" theory, and second, his efforts as the prominent theorist of the so-called "Third Way."

Structuration theory is an extended gloss on the famous remark of Marx that we make history but not with materials of our own choosing. It attempts to overcome all the troublesome dualisms in social theory, but prominently agency/structure, micro/macro and subjective/objective. Giddens argues that social structure presupposes action and conversely. Social structure is both "enabling and constraining," and has but "virtual reality" as both medium and concrete product of action." When we speak we use language and reproduce it, and it "exists" only insofar as it spoken or written. One can buy a hot dog with a five dollar bill only because people have beliefs about what it is and what it can do. These are "objective" facts even if unlike (say) salt's solubility, they are facts only because of what we believe and do. And this is true of all our actions. Versus Durkheimian accounts of structure as causal, persons working with materials at hand are the causal agents of society and history. Other consequences follow: ethnography will be an essential first step, followed by an effort to understand why members believe what they do, and indeed, whether what they believe about their "world" is true. As with Marx, a good deal of social life is sustained only because members have false beliefs, uncritically taken for granted.

Consider poverty. One side holds that it is explained by the "culture of poverty," beliefs held by poor people which cause their poverty. On this view, we need to change their beliefs. The other side argues that it is explained by "objective circumstances of the social position the poor find themselves in," their lack of resources given the "objective" conditions of the labor market. But this bifurcates structure and culture. Of course, the poor act on their beliefs, but the alternatives available to them depend upon features of the world which require human institutions for their reality. Of course, those lacking skills encounter "external constraints on action:" There is inequality of opportunity and there are no jobs. But these facts are not "external" to the activities of persons; they are a consequence of the actions of capitalists, government actors, consumers, etc., each of whom are acting with materials at hand.

An essay in *The New Yorker*, "The Two Tonys," identified Giddens' close association with Tony Blair's "Third Way" politics. But this "third way" is not certainly the traditional Social Democratic way between Communism and Liberal Capitalism. Indeed, it is not easy to characterize it, except perhaps to say that it seeks to join the values of Social Democracy with market liberalism. This can be illustrated by considering poverty.

Giddens offers that the key element in third way welfare reform is a focus on “social exclusion.” The term “directs our attention to the social mechanisms that produce or sustain deprivation.” This would seem promising, but Giddens also argues that since “it refers to circumstances that affect more or less the entire life of an individual,” “exclusion contrasts with being ‘poor’, ‘deprived’ or ‘on a low income.’” Exclusion would seem to refer to a small subset of the poor and, accordingly, would take us a long way from concerns about jobs, or income inequality. Similarly “countering mechanisms of social exclusion... meshes closely with other themes in third way politics, including that of personal responsibility.” But, presumably, the well-worn catch-phrase that “welfare should offer a hand-up not a hand out...takes on flesh in the emphasis placed upon labour-market reform and job creation.” Again, this seems encouraging except that, writing in 2000, Giddens strongly endorsed Clinton’s 1996 effort to “end welfare as we know it.” Of course, the proportion of people receiving benefits went down, but the evidence also suggests that in the absence of any effort to create decent jobs, like so many of world’s poor who lack benefits, the poor in the U S are also adept at survivalist strategies, including their unidentified efforts in the informal economy.

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