MORPHOGENETIC APPROACHES TO RELIGION

UNDERSTANDING RELIGION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MARGARET ARCHER

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This Master's Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.

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Abstract

The general theory and methodology offered by Margaret Archer under the name of "the morphogenetic approach" represents the major developments within critical realist social theory. Archer combines the critical realist ontology of stratified reality and complex causality with emergence- and interest theory in an innovative framework for social-scientific analysis. By taking this framework to the sociology of religion this thesis sheds light on familiar topics from a novel angle. The morphogenetic approach has as its key feature an analytically dualistic view of structure and agency. A stratified model of social agency highlights how the causal potential of humans must be understood in relation to in what respect they are acting: As individual, organised collectivity or within a role structure. Social structures are granted objective influence on interaction by shaping action contexts. By differentiating these levels in sociological explanation Archer maintains that the interplay of causal influences between structure and agency can be apprehended. Morphogenetic analyses trace historical trajectories of such interplays.

Religion becomes subject to different mechanisms and has different causal potentials depending on the aspect of analysis. In the morphogenetic perspective religion can be viewed as a system of meaning, as a repository of rational reasons to guide one's action, as an ultimate concern which shapes our identity and perception of the world, as a powerful resource in collective struggles for upward mobility and as a force to be reckoned with in public social life and decision making. Religious interaction is guided by interests vested in the group's position in the cultural and material domain. Religious change (morphogenesis) or stability (morphostasis) occurs as the result of the relative influence of religious agents within their cultural and structural action contexts.

This thesis finds that there may be significant advantages for the sociology of religion by taking a morphogenetic approach in practical study. The advantages are primary related to instances of change, and particularly at the levels of group interaction. Archer also offers an exciting, if controversial, view on the importance of religious belief and experience in identity formation that could be an interesting point of departure for future research.

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Preface

Last spring I was writing a term paper which gave me nothing but trouble. No matter how I turned it around I found more problems than solutions in the framework I was using. The due date of my paper rapidly went from a dot on the calendar horizon to a mounting menace, without any progress. My advisor, then as now the eminent Ole Riis, met my last-minute complaints with a devastating challenge: “Just write what you think is best”. Bewildered but in dire straits I fumbled together a crude model of culture, structure and “existentiality” as interrelated yet non-deterministic systems, distinguishable from one another by means of what I haplessly named the “unity” of their internal relations. Although I trembled at the ambition of it I could not make my paper work unless I found some way of formulating my concerns. Yet my lofty propositions left me just as miserable. Dizzy with deliberation I ploughed the library shelves for anything that resembled my unworkable sketch, to no avail. Even worse, profound problems related to causality, the nature of structure and ethics began to pester me. “Who do we think we are, speaking of people like this?” I thought, deeply submerged in a subjective crisis of sociological faith. Surely this was going nowhere good.

My desperate confusion suddenly turned to perplexed astonishment when Terje Mesel in one of his popular lectural digressions briefly touched upon the morphogenetic model. “Well Ω×%💣✞#☠!”, I thought, “someone’s dunnit!”. Being a knowledge-craving person I capered back to the library and finally found what I was looking for. Eventually casual reading led to a commitment to thorough research, the product of which you are holding in your hands.

Without the tutorship of Ole Riis I surely would be unable to ask questions which do not have an answer. For your invaluable advice, support and confidence throughout this process I am most grateful; and for the strands of thought which you so subtly have woven into my mental fabric I forever will be. Please forgive my blunders! Thanks also to Terje Mesel for inspiration and feedback; Michal Prince for friendly advice and artistic escapades; and the University for allowing me to pursue my dream a little early. A special thank you goes to fellow master students Ingrid Halvorsen, Gro Anita Homme and Ragnhild Sørbotten. Your brilliant minds have made our conversations an awarding and joyful experience of campus life. And to my friends and loved ones, thank you so much for putting up with all my “can’t”s and “later”s these past two years. I love you!

1: Introduction

The topic of this thesis is the methodological framework and general theory offered by Margaret S. Archer under the name of "the morphogenetic approach". The explicit aim of the research process was to investigate the conceptual spaces which might open up when the morphogenetic approach were taken to the sociology of religion. The morphogenetic approach is designed to enable the social analyst to explain why change or stability ensues in a given context. It is therefore potentially valuable for a wide range of readers of the sociology of religion, from fellow sociologists to Church officials.

The themes of religion in society visited in this thesis are common to sociologists of religion, and countless others have given far more perceptive analyses of them than what the present brief can endeavour. This thesis aims not at conducting analyses but at exploring which routes of explanation Archer offers to the sociology of religion. In order to demonstrate this I have found it useful to juxtapose Archer to theoreticians and analyses readers of the discipline are likely to be acquainted with.

The morphogenetic approach is named for its focus on social change name. The term is a composite of the Greek *morphe*, meaning form, shape, outward appearance; and *genesis*, meaning origin, creation, generation or *genein*, to produce. In the present context it refers to the (trans)formation of social structures and their causal powers.

Archer borrowed what she affectionately calls "the unlovely term 'morphogenesis' " (Archer 1995: 75) from American sociologist Walter Buckley. Both Buckley and Archer use the term in conjunction with its opposite, morphostasis. The Greek suffix *stasis* means "a standing still" and denotes a situation of inactivity due to a fixed balance between two opposing forces. Buckley writes that morphostasis refers to "those processes in complex system-environment exchanges that tend to preserve or maintain a system's given form, organization or state" while morphogenesis denotes "those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, structure or state" (Walter Buckley, *Sociology and Modern Systems Theory* (1967), quoted in Archer 1996: 339-340). Archer retains this meaning, but adds that the "genetic" part is an acknowledgement that social structures take their shape from and are formed by agents and as such are products of human relations. In this light the "morpho" element acknowledges that society has no pre-set form or preferred state (Archer 1995: 5, 166).

1.1 PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research conducted for this thesis has aimed at adapting the general theory and methodological framework of Margaret Archer for the sociology of religion. As the material is a highly abstract framework developed to model the most general aspects of social reality the aim has been to investigate how religion as a complex social phenomenon can fit into this frame, and to concretize the general claims of Archer to specific problems and phenomena associated with religion. The work has been guided by the following research questions:

- What types of explanations is the morphogenetic approach most suited for?
- What causal potentials are granted to religion?
- How does this perspective relate religion to other aspects of society?
- How does the framework relate the individual to religion?
- What consequences can these relations have for our understanding of the changing dynamics of the religious landscape today?

Answering these primary questions necessitates reference to the disciplinary field. My research has therefore been conducted in light of a secondary research question, namely How does the morphogenetic approach compare to the concepts I am acquainted with? The present thesis focuses on disciplinary areas where the theory of Archer may offer new perspectives or potentially more fruitful modes of inquiry in relation to the research questions.

1.2 RELATION OF THE THESIS TO THE FIELD OF RESEARCH

Compared to the scope and innovativeness of the morphogenetic approach its scant application in practical research is striking. Equally puzzling are the sparse references made to it in theoretical literature. George Ritzer gives Archer some space in his *Sociological Theory* (2008), but the treatment is superficial and casual compared to what other contemporary theoreticians are granted. Most books on the same subject leave Archer out entirely. An exception is a forthcoming publication by Pål Repstad and Inger Furseth on modern theoreticians on religion, which has planned a whole chapter on

Archer. Personally, I am even more mystified by the unwillingness of Anthony Giddens to enter into scholarly debate with Archer in response to her substantial critique of his popular structuration theory (1982; 1985; 1995; 1996).

Cross-references and citation frequency in online databases are becoming popular means of evaluating the importance of scholars (Rekdal 2009). Although such comparisons obviously are not representative of factual impact, a simple JSTOR search of *reviews* may still be illustrative of amount of collegial *attention* received by an author. By searching for items authored by Archer and narrowing to reviews, JSTOR gave 63 matches. By comparison an identical search produced 153 reviews of both Jürgen Habermas and Anthony Giddens, and 165 items for Pierre Bourdieu (searches conducted 10.04.2010). As far as such an inquiry is suggestive of anything, Archer has received scant attention compared to her peer general theoreticians.

Lilli Zeuner has provided several critiques and discussions in the theory of culture (Zeuner 2000; Zeuner 2001). Sue Clegg has suggested that Archer's model of agency can prove fertile grounds for furthering feminist research beyond the reach of the disciplinary pioneers (Clegg 2006). Theoretical work has also been conducted on the linkage between internal conversations and interaction (Chalari 2007). Archer's own work (2003) with the model probably represents the most substantial developments in practical qualitative realist research (Carter and New 2004: 17). To the best of my knowledge there have been no comprehensive attempts at utilizing the morphogenetic approach in the sociology of religion, empirically or theoretically. Consequentially, this thesis must be considered an attempt to break new conceptual ground.

1.3 HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As this is a theoretical thesis, I have deployed a strategy of analysis and systematic and comparative inference based on said analysis. Because my material is a general theory neither analysis nor inference can be a matter of deduction. As the morphogenetic model is based on highly abstract propositions, my work has mostly consisted in breaking up and concretizing these propositions onto phenomena and events which may be recognisable to researchers on religion. Throughout, my aim has been to build conceptual bridges between Archer's abstracts and practical research concerns which hopefully may give explanatory advantage.

The present thesis is doubly situated in relation to critical realism as a philosophy of science. First, as I intend to explore the advantage of a realist social theory for my discipline (rather than deliver a critique of social realism) the philosophical pillars upon which the morphogenetic approach is founded are left unchallenged. I accept critique from the postmodernist perspective that I "remain in the discourse", my sole defence being that so is my intention. Second, I consider myself far more akin to the critical realist stance than to its postmodernist and positivist counterparts. This necessarily implies some methodological consequences for my adaptation of Archer.

I have never met or communicated with Archer, and have no insight into her intentions beyond the cited texts. Every presentation and adaptation of her work is first and foremost my personal interpretation of said work. The practical work with this thesis has above anything else been a hermeneutical exercise. I have striven to understand the text from what I know of Archer, and to reflect on my interpretations as I increasingly became aware of my own preconceptions. The resulting understanding is a provisional and fallible one. This is in line with the principle of epistemological relativity shared by postmodernists and realists. However, being realist, I cannot assent to the claim so abundant in postmodernist scholarship that it follows from this that my interpretation as text has validity in itself apart from Archer's intentions in writing. Contrary, from my point of view, the validity of a theoretical discussion depends on whether my interpretation *sufficiently reflects* the works I interpret. I might not know what she *meant*, but I can get a decent impression from what she *wrote*. This is predicated on having sufficient background knowledge, which must be judged by the reader.

Archer is an exceptionally articulate and coherent writer. I need not resort to "artistic hermeneutics" in order to grasp her point – reflection and reason will do. As a realist I am aware of the contingency of my interpretations and their third-order relation to the object of interpretation. My conclusions are unavoidably shaped by my interpretations and the resulting selections. Nevertheless I insist on my capacity as a cognitive being to strive for accuracy in my representation of the physical products of another mind. To the best of my abilities I have strived to weigh my conclusions on the grand scales of "fair representation" and "overall correspondence". Often times, I found my considerations to be just that and corrected them to be more representative of Archer. Other times I may have been less perceptive. Any inconsistencies stemming from faulty interpretations are of course my sole responsibility. This is never a matter of achieving

simple correspondence, but a matter of the relative success of my intellectual endeavours. This is in line with the realist principle of judgmental rationality.

Throughout my work on this thesis I have striven to follow realist principles for scientific conduct as well as common criteria for academic writing. I have substantiated my interpretations with comprehensive references so that the reader easily can go back to the original phrasing of Archer and evaluate for him/herself whether my interpretation is sufficiently founded. Quotes and references are to the best of my ability used in line with their original intention, and texts are not cited as primary sources unless I am myself familiar with them (this declaration is inspired by Rekdal 2009).

There is no such thing as objective knowledge, but sometimes we as researchers (by will or by accident) convey to the reader a false pretence of value-free lab-coat authority by the mere colour of our lingo. One such literary trick is just this invocation of a "we" when in fact it was I who just made that claim. Also note that I asserted an authority as a researcher and flattered my reader with the same status, although I do not know you. Another common trick is the use of passive sentence case when it is in fact my active judgment and writing which conveys these sentences to you. I have made a conscious effort to avoid these tricks in contexts where such wording would indeed be "tricky". When "we" does occur, it is either intended as an inviting gesture to the reader "as we move through the text" or it refers to experiences common to reader and writer alike – be they existential or scientific in nature.

The work in section three was conducted with special attention to the principles for evaluation of research as formulated in Hammersley's *subtle realist* account. This mode of evaluation lies in between empirical realist and anti-realist approaches, and hence is a suitable middle ground for the present task. Because the researcher is attempting to grasp a reality which is not subject to direct access, and hence engage in creating and interpreting representations of reality, Hammersley argues we must evaluate research on the basis of the *credibility* and *plausibility* of its truth claims. If the evidence of the conclusions are adequate, and the representation accurately represents those features of the phenomenon which are the focus of the research, the account can be held to be valid. Hammersley also suggests that relevance be an important criterion, as a work of research which does not contribute in some way to the literature of its discipline is likely to be insignificant and therefore poorly conducted (Bryman 2004: 276-278). The validity of this thesis hinges on how recognizable my presentation of the morphogenetic approach is to readers already familiar with Archer, how aptly it is adapted for religion

and how suitable the research data I employ is to shed light on the resulting concepts. This is somewhat similar to the criteria of internal validity as developed by LeCompte and Goetz, which would depend on whether my contributions in section three are a "good match" (logically compatible) to Archer's writing (Bryman 2004: 273).

Other criteria common for evaluating empirical research may also be partially relevant, and have been considered. One challenge is to demonstrate what Lincoln and Guba termed *confirmability* (Bryman 2004: 276). Willingly or inadvertently, I may have allowed my personal interests to sway the conclusion without sufficient founding. One grip I implemented to avoid this was to give detailed and not overtly simplified accounts and discussions of Archer's concepts. Half-hearted treatment might lead the reader (and myself) to think that problematic issues were unimportant because they had not been given adequate attention. Only by going into detail can I make a case which is sufficient for the reader to make a judgment of confirmation or dissent. This study is highly replicable as the material is available to anyone with a library card. Still, any second observer will filter the material through his or her preconceptions in order to derive a meaningful conclusion. Thus the overall reliability is still questionable (Bryman 2004: 273). I could have strengthened the external reliability of the thesis by including in my repertoire other uses of the morphogenetic approach in the sociology of religion. However, I have found no such appropriation through my searches.

1.4 INTRODUCING MARGARET S. ARCHER

The material of the present thesis is the authorship of Margaret S. Archer, limited to a few select publications. These will be introduced shortly. But books are shaped and shaded by the mind from which they arise, and hence a proper introduction to the principal person is first in line.

Margaret Scotford Archer has become one of the major proponents of the philosophy of science known as critical realism in sociology. She is herself a Catholic and politically positioned at the left (Archer, Collier and Porpora 2004: 6). Archer is a remarkably coherent and articulate writer, demonstrated by the compatibility of her early works with her later ones, the propositional form of her theoretical expositions and the clarity of her arguments. Archer served as a lecturer at the University of Reading from 1966 to 1973, when she attained a professorship at Warwick which she still holds.

Initially Archer worked within the discipline of the sociology of knowledge and education. In 1964, she graduated B.Sc. in sociology from London University and completed her Ph.D. in 1967 with the thesis *The Educational Aspirations of English Working Class Parents: Their formation and influence on children's school achievement*. After graduating, Archer left London and travelled to Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes at Sorbonne where she conducted her post-doctoral studies in the late 1960s.

As Archer witnessed the French May of ’68, it occurred to her that the structure of the French educational system was integral to the magnitude of the political outbursts which threatened to topple the government of Charles de Gaulle. The decentralized nature of the English educational system spawned straggled and local outburst which dissipated relatively quickly, whereas the centralized system of France led to an accumulation of political protest in the heart of Paris itself (Archer 2007b). After seven years of research, Archer publicized her findings in *Social Origins of Educational Systems* (1979). Within its eight-hundred-plus pages is the original development of the morphogenetic model and its first application to complex social systems, the further developments of which recurs in every subsequent work of Archer. However, it raised a major philosophical problem. As Archer remembers it herself,

> “It was being claimed that educational systems possessed properties emergent from the relations between their parts – summarized as centralization and decentralization – that exercised causal powers. However, these two properties could not be attributes of people, who cannot be centralized or decentralized, just as no system can possess the reflexivity, intentionality and commitment of the agents whose actions first produced and then continuously sustained these forms of state education.” (Archer 2007c: 38)

The inaptness of the prevailing philosophies of science of that day obstructed a fully satisfactory account of social structures. The breaking point came with Roy Bhaskar's *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1979), one of the founding works of critical realism. Soon after Bhaskar's seminal publication, Archer became involved with the nascent group of thinkers which we now call critical realists. Eventually she was able to develop the full ontology of the morphogenetic approach in realist terms (Archer 2007b). The morphogenetic framework is both compatible to and different from Bhaskar's philosophical and sociological work.

On the topic of intellectual pedigrees, Archer credits her teachers at LSE Karl Popper, Ernest Gellner and Tom Bottomore as strong influences in her work. But interestingly, a mere fourteen-page article by British sociologist David Lockwood is the most influential work Archer has ever read (Archer 2007b). The piece, titled "Social Integration and System Integration" (Lockwood 1964), spurred the first development of the morphogenetic approach in *Social Origins* and formed the basis of *Culture and Agency* (1988). The central influence from Lockwood is the analytical separation of structure and agency, which Archer terms *analytical dualism*. It is the most characteristic premise of the morphogenetic approach.

1.5 SELECTED MATERIAL

The development of the morphogenetic approach has so far spanned four decades. Archer's earlier books concentrated on social and cultural structures and how they interfaced with the actions of people (Archer 1979; Archer 1995; Archer 1996). Later works have been more concerned with the individual, reflexivity and social mobility (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Archer 2007a). This should not be understood as a shift in her theoretical standing, but as a differentiation of her theorising as it pertains to different strata of social reality. As Archer expresses it herself, "each book sets the problems to be tackled in its successor and thus defines the next section of the pathway, without one having any clear idea about how many more sections will be required before reaching that rather indefinite goal, the 'finished project' " (Archer 2007c: 37). Thus, whereas later works focus on agency that should not be taken to imply that Archer has forgotten about structure but rather that she has moved on to cover new topical ground that previous works could not encompass.

Ideally I should cover all of Archer's theorizing in order to fully appreciate its potential for the sociology of religion. However, given the comprehensiveness of her total production and the limited time available to me I have made the decision to focus on the earlier works as they are the basis of the later ones. *Social Origins* is omitted due to its size of over 800 pages. This leaves me with a core material consisting of *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory* (originally published 1988. I use the revised edition from 1996) and *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (1995). As Archer deals with problems pertaining to popular approaches in the sociology of religion in these works they are the most fitting with regard to the aim of this thesis. The primary material is supplemented by *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Archer 2000) and *Models of Man* (Archer 2004).

The basic argument of *Culture and Agency* is that the logical relationships among ideas place agents in distinctive situations which condition their strategic decision making. Agential efforts to deal with these situations may over time manifest permanent changes to the system. This analytical separation of structure and agency is termed analytical dualism and is a unique mark of Archer's methodology. Their separation allows the social analyst to trace how these two levels influence each other over time. This is expressed in the morphogenetic model as analytical cycles of structural conditioning – interaction – change or maintenance of structural conditioning.

Only in *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (1995) did Archer integrate her theoretical development with realist ontology into the morphogenetic approach as it appears in this thesis. Here Archer argues that both structure and agency can fit into the same ontological and analytical framework without risk of reductionism or reification. Both structure and agency are conceptualized as *emergent* entities in a complex social environment. The following chapter explains the basic elements of critical realist thought, such as emergence, so that the reader is provided with a conceptual toolkit with which to grasp the theory of Archer.

The selection of material limits the scope of this thesis. The collective aspect of society is treated more carefully than the individual and personal. In some instances, such as in the discussion of how belief conditions action in chapter 6, this limitation is severe. I ask the reader to bear in mind that this lack is due to my selection of material, and not to the writings of Archer. Archer's conceptualization of agency is given less attention than what it deserves, and I believe that further research in that direction may yield fruitful understandings of religion's role in personal life.

2: Critical Realism and Social Science

All forms of scientific conduct are laden with philosophical presuppositions. Put simply, how one presupposes the world to be put together affects how one proceeds to examine worldly phenomena. In order to make optimal use of our models and collected material it is vital that we are aware of the fundamental assumptions upon which our systems of knowledge are constructed. If we do not pay attention to issues of the philosophy of science, we cannot stay alert to and active towards the conditions of our conduct as scientists (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 11). By the same token, it is necessary to understand the philosophical foundations of the sociology of Archer in order to see the difference it makes to the sociology of religion. Hence the present chapter prepares the ground for the subsequent sections as it clarifies the nuts and bolts of critical realism as it pertains to sociology.

2.1 ORIGINS AND RELATION TO OTHER PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONS

Critical realism was gradually crystallized as philosophical movement in the 1970s. Great thoughts do not arise in a vacuum, but nevertheless the nascent of critical realism is increasingly being associated with British philosopher Roy Bhaskar (1944-). Bhaskar developed parts of the philosophical tradition and chiselled the common tenets into a coherent philosophical language (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen and Karlsson 2002: 4-5). Bhaskar's two main works aimed to integrate the natural and social sciences in a common ontological and epistemological framework. In *A Realist Theory of Science* (1978), Bhaskar introduced his *transcendental realist* philosophy of science to the intellectual scene. *Transcendental* refers to the preconditions for human activity which lie beyond the immediately accessible, experiential domain. The term *realism* denotes the independence of these preconditions from our knowledge of them (Danermark *et al.* 2002: 206). We do not have immediate access to the objects of which we seek knowledge because they are existentially independent from us. Still, Bhaskar argues we can ascertain the existence of such objects by *transcendental reasoning*. A transcendental argument attempts to disclose the necessary and prior conditions of the existence of a phenomenon and our ability to experience it as such. One pertinent example is Max Weber's

transcendental condition for social science. In order for social and cultural analyses to make sense, the social scientist has to be equipped with the ability and intention to assign meaning to a particular aspect of social reality. Which aspects of reality are considered meaningful or worthy of scientific analysis may vary, but the ability to do so is according to Weber a transcendental precondition for there to be a social science at all (Gilje and Grimen 1993: 227-229).

Bhaskar's follow-up, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1979), introduced *critical naturalism* as a philosophy for the social sciences. Ironically, it came out the same year as Archer's *Social Origins*. Archer already had plans for her two next books, which were to provide a stratified social ontology along the lines of transcendental realism in a practical research tool (Archer 2007c: 38-39). Subsequent chapters of this thesis should be understood as her own philosophical work within the tradition of critical realism, not as a direct adaptation of Bhaskar. The core differences among them are discussed under heading 5.2. It was the terms "transcendental realism" and "critical naturalism" which merged together to form the notation *critical realism*. Bhaskar eventually accepted critical realism as the uniting name because it suggested both proximity to and distance from Kantian thought (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson and Norrie 1998: ix; Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 7). As it is used in the following, critical realism denotes the movement and its most common philosophical features. As such, it does not indicate the works of Bhaskar in particular but rather the multitude of writings which has emanated from the initial ignition offered by Bhaskar and his likeminded.

Both critical realism and postmodernism arose in the turmoil of settling the accounts with positivism and empirical realism in the 1970s. These nascent schools of thought demolished positivism as a viable philosophy of science, but on different terms. Some critical realists even consider postmodernists more akin to positivism than what the former would be comfortable with. The initial critical realist concern with the critique of positivism has largely been superseded by responses to postmodernism. As the latter have a solid foothold in contemporary Norwegian scholarship, the key realist critiques against it are included.

Critical realism impacted the social sciences from the mid-eighties and onwards. Particularly Archer's works and Andrew Sayer's *Method in Social Science – A Realist Approach* (1992) spread the thoughts of Bhaskar to this field. Critical realism has also gained a considerable audience in economics through he works of Tony Lawson (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 7). Critical realism offers concrete alternatives to both

positivist and postmodernist thought, with solid methodological consequences. This will be explored thematically in the following subsections. First a qualification of the term "realist" is in order.

A crude line of demarcation among ontological stances is drawn between idealists and realists. Put simply, realists hold that reality exist independently of our conception of it while idealists hold that it is our ideas about reality which give it shape. For instance, the transcendental idealism of Immanuel Kant asks what *human perception* must necessarily be like to apprehend the world, whereas the transcendental realism of Bhaskar asks what *reality* must necessarily be like in order for us to perceive it (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 12-13; Danermark *et al.* 2002: 96-97; Gilje and Grimen 1993: 228). Today, most sociological theories are founded on some form of realism. Mainly the differences concern what can be said to have existence independent of our knowledge of it (ontological issues) and to what extent we can have knowledge of it (matters of epistemology). Thus to Bhaskar, the only question which remains is *what type of realist* you are (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 13).

Failure to differentiate among realist positions leaves critical realists in the unwelcome company of positivists and other empirical foundationalists. Empirical foundationalists claim that only that which can be verified by empirical observation can be true or have existence, quite contrary to the critical realist view of reality. The critique of "realism" delivered by Brian Fay (Fay 1996: 202-203) is an example of this common misconception. He claims that since realist ontology implies there is an ordering of reality independent from our conception of it, then "there must be One True Picture of this order... Scientific progress occurs in so far as scientists get closer and closer to painting this One True Picture". According to Fay, "realists" employ correspondence criteria of truth and thus searches for "a Theory of Everything which exactly duplicated all the elements of this Picture" (Fay 1996: 203). This failure to differentiate among realist positions misses the crucial point that empirical realism is in fact antithetical to the critical realist stance: "for if the defining feature of realism is the belief that there is a world existing independently from our knowledge of it, then that independence ... immediately undermines any complacent assumptions about the relation between them and renders it problematic" (Sayer 2000: 2).

The foundationalist stances (positivism and empirical realism in particular) which Fay's critique *should* be aimed at contended that ontological *existence* can only be granted to those phenomena which can be empirically validated by scientific, publicly

conductible methods. In early scientific thinking those theories which *corresponded* to the results of such empirical testing were considered true (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 14-17; Danermark *et al.* 2002: 7; Gilje and Grimen 1993: 47-55). Such notions of correspondence between reality and concepts have been rejected on epistemological grounds and on ontological grounds, by postmodernists and critical realists alike. First, our experiences are mediated by our language, knowledge and previous experiences. And second, any concept-formation entails a process of selection whereby some aspects of the object are chosen to represent that object in our theories about it. Only the object can contain all its features, and hence even the best of concepts is a *representation* of its object, and therefore is fallible and non-exhaustive.

Few if any present day scientists would openly name themselves positivists. Still, the related empiricist ontology (with its consequences for methodology) is lingering in contemporary sociological research (Archer *et al.* 2004: 7; Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 18-19). Bhaskar finds structuralism and functionalism to be closely linked to positivism in particular and rational choice theory has been subjected to considerable critique for resting on empiricist premises (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005). From the 1980s to present day, rational choice theory is enjoying considerable popularity in American sociology of religion through the works of Rodney Starke, William S. Bainbridge and Roger Finke (see for instance Finke and Stark 2005; Stark and Bainbridge 1996; Stark and Bainbridge 2006). Hence the critique of empiricism and clarification of the differences between critical realism and empirical realism is still an important task for contemporary critical realists. Archer is perhaps the most articulate critic of implicit empiricism in the modern developments within sociology. As Bhaskar says it, positivism is *discredited* but not *dispersed* (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 18).

Contemporary critical realism remains an unconsolidated school of thought. Despite this fluidity and openness to new thoughts, the three pillars of critical realism remains: a stratified ontology of reality, epistemological relativity and judgemental rationality (Archer 2007c; Archer *et al.* 1998; Archer *et al.* 2004). The remainder of this chapter is devoted to their exploration.

2.2 STRATIFIED REALITY AND CONTINGENT CAUSALITY

The unique ontological mark distinguishing critical realism from other forms of realism is its stratified model of reality. Bhaskar postulated that reality holds three dimensions: the *empirical*, the *actual* and the *real* domain (see Figure 1: Stratified reality and contingent causality, page 131). Each level is nested in the one below. Our concrete experiences and observations belong in the empirical domain. But while our experience of an event is true in the empirical sense, our experiences are not exhaustive of the event in question. Neither can our experiences be said to exhaust all events taking place. Thus, the actual dimension of reality holds all events that do manifest, whether or not they are also observed empirically speaking. Still, the causes leading to the events in the actual are often unavailable to observation. This was even recognised by early empiricist David Hume, whom sought causality in patterns of regularly occurring events. But although he could empirically observe that when event A occurred, event B followed, he could not actually observe *why* this pattern manifested (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 13; Gilje and Grimen 1993).

The real domain holds mechanisms, structures and causal potentials which are not readily observable but nevertheless may cause events and phenomena in the actual domain. Put simply, structures have properties which have generative powers. Thus structures "give rise to" mechanisms, which again may give rise to actual events. However, different structures may infringe on each other's operation to the effect that they do not always manifest themselves as events in the actual. Nevertheless, their potential for causation still lies in the real awaiting activation. These three domains of reality are neither reducible to nor symmetrical to one another. According to Bhaskar, structures and mechanisms are as real as the events they generate, but the manifested events of the actual domain are not the same as the generative mechanisms of the real. Likewise, our experiences and observations of the manifested events do not necessarily reflect what is actually going on (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 23-25).

The three domains relate to our ability to perceive reality, but reality itself is far more complex. Critical realists see reality as comprised of an indefinite number of hierarchically ordered strata, or levels. Although the precise nature of their ordering may be difficult to discern, critical realists believe an understanding of this ordering is necessary to understand causality. This is because higher strata acquire their causal

potentials from lower ones. For instance, a very crude division sets the social reality above the biological level upon which it is contingent. This is because without the biological features which make us human, social reality as we know it could not exist. The biological is in turn dependent on the chemical level, and the nuclear is again a prerequisite of the chemical. Each of these underlying strata provides necessary features for our human existence by virtue of their precise combination. The creation of potentials at a higher stratum by the combination of features at its underlying strata is in critical realist terms called *emergence* (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005; Danermark *et al.* 2002; Sayer 2000).

An object emerges from, or is nested in, its underlying strata, and derives its *causal potentials* from them. These causal potentials make the object *capable* and *liable* to behave a certain way or be *susceptible* to certain influences. The combined effects of the causal potentialities of one level create new causal potentialities at the next higher level, and so on. Without any one of these underlying structures, the object would have other properties and potentials, and hence it would be something else. In other words, the underlying causes of an emergent entity are related in a manner necessary for the entity's existence.

The dependence of higher strata on underlying strata or mechanisms may at first glance seem to lead to an infinite regression or reduction of objects to its underlying causes. However, higher strata are *irreducible to* and *qualitatively different from* their underlying causes. It is the precise combination of the underlying structures of an object which make the object what it is. But the object is irreducible to its causes because it has acquired new potentials by their combination. These new potentials *differentiate* the emergent object from its causes as something qualitatively different from them. The fire-distinguishing potential of water is a property of water which is irreducible to the properties of its causes, because both hydrogen and oxygen are highly flammable and hence qualitatively different from water. In this instance, the property of distinguishing fire emerges at a higher stratum than the properties of flammability. This relationship between higher and lower strata is asymmetrical in that the object cannot be equalled to the sum of its causes. Neurochemistry is necessary for movement and memory, but our physical and mental capacities are not reducible to neurochemistry (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 29-30).

The effectuation of causal potentials is contingent upon other mechanisms, or rather the functional properties of other structured objects (see Figure 1: Stratified reality

and contingent causality, page 131). In the real domain there will always be a large number of mechanisms which may block, modify or release the causal potentialities of each other. The potential of any mechanism to cause a certain event to happen is not a pre-determined causal relation, but a potential which may be effectuated should the conditions (the influence of other mechanisms) prove favourable for it to do so. The actual events are therefore always the result of a highly complex interplay of several mechanisms (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 25-28). In research with a successionist (also called Humean) view of causation the aim is to identify the independent variables responsible for causing change in a dependent variable (Carter and New 2004: 24). Critical realism entails the view that causality is best understood as *potential* for causation. This can be called a *complex* and *contingent* notion of causality.

The social world is profoundly complex. It can be imagined as comprising sets of nested structures with many interpenetrating levels which loop back and around each other (Carter and New 2004: 8). The contingency of causal mechanisms, their infringement upon each other, and the massive complexities of social life entails that society is envisaged as an *open system*. Bhaskar specifies two criteria for closure, one internal and one external (given in Danermark *et al.* 2002: 66-67). First, there must be no qualitative change or variation in the objects having the causal powers we wish to study. In other words, the relations between properties internal to the object must be stable in order for it to operate in a constant manner. If there is change, we are dealing with a different object and hence different powers and mechanisms. Second, the relation between the causal powers of the object and the causal powers of its environment must be stable. External generative mechanisms influence the generative mechanism we study both by mode of operation and its generated effects. We must be assured that such influences from external mechanisms are constant in order to achieve closure and secure a regular outcome. The emergence of new mechanisms is prevented if both the internal and external condition for closure is met because no new properties are added to the object of study.

Experiment as research design has its value in the isolation of variables from potentially interfering factors so that the relationship among the variables in question can be examined. By carefully introducing stimulus and recording the reaction the scientist can determine something about the relationship between the independent variable (the stimulus) and the variable assumed to be dependent (the reaction). A linear causal relation in the empiricist sense have been uncovered if a high degree of consistency

between results is achieved. Such a laboratory setting constitutes a closed system where the researcher is in control of what can possibly produce an outcome. But, says Bhaskar, the need to exclude uncontrollable variables in order to achieve empirical regularities would not be present were the real world anything like a laboratory. Bhaskar's transcendental critique asks *What must reality be like in order for scientific experiments to make sense*? and finds that reality cannot be characterized by empirical regularities, for if it were there would be no need for a laboratory setting to unveil them. Hence methodologies based on observation of empirical regularities, such as experimentation, falls on its own premises (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 14-15).

Nature does not produce closed systems. Although certain natural phenomena such as the solar system approximate the criteria posed by Bhaskar, reality is so complex that a naturally occurring closed system is highly unlikely to develop. This is important to remember in realists discussions of social theory, for Archer and many others consistently speak of "social systems". This refers to the complex array of generative mechanisms in society, and should not be taken to imply a closed "cybernetic" model of society. Social life can *never* amount to a closed system (Danermark *et al.* 2002: 67). Likewise, realists "can say categorically that mechanisms in social life *never* work mechanically" (Carter and New 2004: 13-14).This has profound methodological importance. Critical realist social science requires methods and models which can make sense of open systems. The morphogenetic approach is one response to this challenge.

2.3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL RELATIVITY AND JUDGEMENTAL RATIONALITY

One prime premise of realism is that the objects of knowledge are existentially independent of our knowledge of them. This position is called ontological realism or ontological intransitivity. In accordance, Bhaskar differentiated between the *transitive* and *intransitive* dimension of science. The intransitive dimension holds the objects of which we seek knowledge whereas the transitive dimension is constituted by our accumulated knowledge of these objects (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005). We are familiar with the terms from basic grammar. A transitive verb requires reference to an object to complete its meaning whereas an intransitive verb does not need an object in order to make grammatical sense. In parallel, the transitive dimension of science has no meaning without reference to objects, which are intransitive and hence meaningful in

their own right. For example, volcanoes exist independently of our knowledge of them whereas theoretical assumptions about volcanic activity would be meaningless could we not relate them to actual volcanoes. Furthermore, in critical realism the intransitive dimension is given priority over the transitive dimension. This means that if we discover inconsistencies between objective reality and our transitive representations of it, then the latter must be changed. Volcanoes erupt regardless of our ability to predict such events, and hence it is our knowledge which must be adjusted should a "dead" volcano unexpectedly come back to life.

Ontological realism grants *objective existence* to the intransitive things which our transitive tools of science try to engage. The term "objective" may mean several things and it is therefore necessary to disambiguate the term in order to clarify the critical realist stance. For instance, the term "objective knowledge" suggests that the mental state of knowing is directly related to (corresponds to) events in the external world. Objective is also seen as the counterpart of subjective, in this context meaning someone value-free, neutral and better able to judge compared to the value-laden and emotional subject (Sayer 2000: 58). Both of these usages are repudiated in contemporary thinking. Use of "objective" occurs within critical realism as variations over "objective existence", which is used to denote a thing or class of things external to or independent of the mind (Oxford University Press 2010). The distinction between objective and subjective is most often used as "pertaining to object" and "pertaining to subject", although with the awareness that this is not an exhaustive nor uncomplicated distinction. Thus, if an object is said to have objective existence this implies that there is an entity or thing which exists independently of anyone thinking about it. Such *ontological realism* is widely agreed to today. However, there is great dispute over the possibility to gain any sort of knowledge of these external objects.

As implied, critical realists concur to the widely accepted notion that there is no such thing as objective knowledge: "all knowledge is value-laden and theory-laden" (Archer *et al.* 2004: 1). This is what postmodernists and critical realists alike refer to as epistemic relativity or epistemic relationality. This principle constitutes the second pillar of critical realism. However, realists criticize postmodernists for stretching epistemological relativity too far as both objective existence and our judgemental powers are relativized. One note of caution before we proceed: Critical realists tend to aim their critique at postmodernism in general when in fact diverse and partially divergent thinkers fly the banner of postmodernism. For the sake of conciseness I commit the same cruelty

here. I follow Sayer (2000: 67) in that the intended targets of the present critique are those anti-realists whom in a response to foundationalism and naive objectivism flip and revert the problems of these positions into an equally naive anti-foundationalist idealism and self-repudiating relativism.

Postmodernist discursive theorists hold that valid explanations are determined by the predominant regime of truth, which is determined by power relations. Because all knowledge is mediated by the social conditions of the current discourse, postmodernists argue that any explanation which attempts to describe an event by light of the available knowledge must be considered the correct and objective description for that time. According to this position, there is no knowledge liberated from the dominant discourse and paramount power relations, and hence our notion of truthful explanation is contingent upon factors which do not pertain to the objects we are seeking to know (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 79-80).

First, from the realist perspective such a relativist notion of truth is self-repudiating: “For it to be at all intelligible, the denial of anything outside the text must be understood as the very kind of abstract truth claim that the declaration itself disallows” (Archer et. al. 2004: 10). The existential independence of objects is not mirrored in an object-independence of the mind. Although all observation is conceptually mediated through language, nether language nor theory can determine what we observe. To state otherwise would be to imply that our concepts can anticipate all empirical material (Sayer 2000: 41). “Indeed, if the world were a figment of our imagination we would people it with friends” (Mario Bunge, "Realism and anti-realism in social science" (1993), p. 209. Quoted in Danermark *et al.* 2002: 35).

Second, because postmodernists confine truth to discourse, the transitive dimension of science is given priority over the intransitive (whereas realists have it the other way around). From this relativist point of view we inhabit different worlds because of our difference in world-view. Hence, no account of reality can be said to be more truthful than those of other cultures. Realists object that this attempt to amend foundationalism’s blind faith in objective *knowledge* ends up throwing objective *reality* out with the bath water. Furthermore, it falls into idealism because our knowledge is taken to be constitutive of the world (as we know it). In other words, this move goes from epistemological relativity to ontological relativity! But as Sayer famously pointed out, “there is no reason to believe that the shift from a flat earth theory to a round earth theory was accompanied by a change in the shape of the earth itself” (Sayer 2000: 11).

Critical realism concurs that science is conducted in a social context, and hence is subject to influences from a wide range of cultural, political and economic interest groups, the constraints of language and popular theory, and the general power relations of society (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 22-23). However, this need not lead to postmodernist conclusion that no truth outside the discourse is possible. Power relations or discursive trends cannot alter what is objectively true, no more than our concept of the planet alters the way it objectively is. In other words, the social mediation of our experiences and observations in the empirical domain cannot determine what is objectively happening in the actual, yet alone existing in the real. This leap of reason is referred to as *the epistemic fallacy*. We commit this fallacy when we reduce what can ontologically exist to what can epistemologically be known: "The epistemic fallacy involves the fallacious inference that because there is no epistemologically objective view of the world, there is also no objective world ontologically" (Archer *et al.* 2004: 2). A pertinent example of such fallacious reasoning is to draw the conclusion that society is not being secularized because theoreticians and analysts disagree over the causes and results of secularization.

Although power play and discursive trends may trammel the search for adequate knowledge, that does not necessarily imply that knowledge of objective reality is unattainable. It does not even suggest that unattainability is a property of the intransitive dimension. The discourse of the Church in Medieval Europe certainly did not *allow* for heretic statements about the order of the Universe, but nevertheless some of those heretics had got it *right*. Indian astronomer and mathematician Aryabhata calculated the circumference of the planetary sphere with impressive accuracy as early as 499 CE. Later, Islamic scholars developed spherical trigonometry to help devout Muslims anywhere on the globe face in the direction of Mecca during prayer. Erudite persons across time, space and discursive strategies have come to the same conclusion both in spite of discursive power relations (such as in Europe), and to some extent *because of* the interests of the current order (as in the Islamic case). Critical realists maintain that that it is feasible to attain adequate knowledge of objective reality, despite the social contingency of our knowledge. The third pillar of critical realism is the notion of *judgmental rationality* whereby we are able to grasp reality beyond current discourses (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 80-81).

> "Judgemental rationality means that we can publicly discuss our claims about reality, as we think it is, and marshal better or worse arguments on behalf of those

> claims. By comparatively evaluating the existing arguments, we can arrive at reasoned, though provisional, judgements about what reality is objectively like" (Archer *et al.* 2004: 2).

The fallibility of our knowledge does not mean we cannot gain *better* knowledge than what we currently have.

Where postmodernists have a conventionalist notion of truth, critical realists have a more pragmatic approach. To the best of our contemporary knowledge the earth is distinctively spherical. We have settled for this account of our planet's shape due to the consensus among experts, visual confirmation and the technical innovations which presupposes theories about gravity, curvature and planetary orbit for them to be possible at all. Arguments for other shapes have ceased to engage debate and do not even provide intellectually challenging. When the arguments for a particular case at some point become this solid and convincing, critical realists settle the discussion and await no further debate on their sufficiency. They are welcome – but unexpected. Bhaskar termed this state *alethia* or *alethic truth* (Archer *et al.* 2004: 2-3). In general philosophy *alethia* refers to modalities of truth, or the possibility or impossibility of something being true (Oxford University Press 2010). In critical realism the term takes on a deeper meaning. The Greek *aleétheia* is a composite of the negation *a* and *letheia*, meaning veiled or hidden. Alethic truth can thus be understood as the unveiled truth about an object, the objective nature of things: The shrouds of epistemological interpretations and representations are removed so that only the object in its ontological nudity remains. In this respect, alethic truth is what the thing objectively is regardless of our thoughts about it (Sayer 2000: 58, 65n25).

But in order to bridge the epistemological gap between knowledge and objects of knowledge the term must be further qualified. No objects of knowledge are directly apprehensible. Quite the opposite – most objects are empirically unavailable. This is the point of the three dimensions of reality. The structures and mechanisms which cause social events to unfold are for the most part only observable trough their operative effects in the actual. To uncover the alethic truth about reality is to unveil the causal structures of the real[1]. The social scientific quest is to understand the genesis of social phenomena, which can only be done through retroduction and conceptualizations which allow for complex and contingent causality. The truthfulness of our concepts must be judged

[1] I am indebted to Ole Riis for pointing this out for me.

according to how aptly our concepts can and must capture this intransitive reality. Critical realists insist that as rational beings we are able to make such rational judgements and eventually come up with a concept that is truthful *enough*. When we evaluate the truth of a statement we must judge the adequacy of the concept *qua* concept. Critical realists consider that alethic truth has been reached when all debates on its aptness has abated.

2.4 CONSEQUENCES FOR PRACTICAL SOCIAL SCIENCE

As indicated by the three-dimensional model of reality, critical realists see empirical regularities as the proverbial tip of the iceberg when it comes to theorizing about social events. The first pillar of critical realism, stratified reality, implies that the unobservable structures of social reality may cause a wide variety of events, prevent other structures from manifesting and impeding on each other's operation. The empiricist objective of measuring recurring events is in the critical realist perspective replaced with the search for those mechanisms which *generates* empirical regularities. This entails a lesser emphasis on deductive research and an increased awareness of the potential of other forms of reasoning (abduction and retroduction) in generating adequate knowledge about the world.

Furthermore, deploying a stratified model of reality requires the development of methodological standards fit to explore complex chains of causation beyond patterns of empirical regularities. Prevalent modes of analysis today are incapable of capturing this. Quantitative modelling frequently resorts to additive analysis, which can only amount to "linear determinations of the individual case" (Byrne 2004: 63). Different methodologies must be employed to divest knowledge of structures and mechanisms operating beyond the level of observable events.

A stratified social ontology opens up for an understanding of interdisciplinary exchange which may indeed prove fruitful. Comedian Harald Eia is currently causing tremendous debate with his TV show *Hjernevask* ("Brainwash"), in which he interviews scholars from different disciplines on delicate topics such as gendered behaviour, race and homosexuality. The strategy of Eia consists in juxtaposing the explanations offered by American natural scientists to those offered by Norwegian humanists. The latter group is then ridiculed for emphasising cultural factors as explanation for what the former group attributed to biological factors. Whether the Norwegians were fairly portrayed is hotly

debated, but nevertheless a few of them did go as far as saying that biological factors could not have *any* bearing on social behaviour (see for instance http://www.dagbladet.no/tag/hjernevask). It is my distinct impression that these scholars denied biological factors first and foremost to prevent quasi scientific justification of inequity from spreading in the populace. Additionally it did appear as if consent to naturalistic explanations would undermine their own standpoint. The critical realist view of reality *presupposes* the *potential* influence of underlying strata on our social behaviour. Critical realist sociology is aware of the rooting of its subject matter in lower strata, the scientific exploration of which is conducted by other disciplines. To me, a discrepancy between disciplines signifies a focus point for further research which may permanently alter our collected sociological *and* naturalistic knowledge on the subject.

This brings us to a matter of epistemological difference between postmodernists and critical realists which is significant for practical social research. If ontological reality is rendered coterminous with any discursive knowledge of it then the parameters for evaluating research are worthless. This was addressed by physicist Alan Sokal in his famous hoax on the postmodernist journal *Social Text.* In a thoroughly referenced but utterly nonsensical paper entitled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" (1996b), Sokal argued that quantum gravity is a social and linguistic construct. He was astounded that the journal took him to be serious and published the parody. Shortly after, Sokal exposed the hoax and stated that his aim had been to show the absurdity of the postmodernist tendency to render objective reality redundant, which ironically only seems to occur within the discourse of discourse theory. Because of this "anything goes" attitude the editorial board of *Social Text* "apparently felt no need to analyze the quality of the evidence, the cogency of the arguments, or even the relevance of the arguments to the purported conclusion" that "the content and methodology of postmodern... [quantum physics] provide powerful intellectual support for the progressive political project" (Sokal 1996a: 5). Conversely, critical realists claim that the intransitive dimension of science must be given priority over the transitive in order to enable evaluation of research and uphold a fruitful concept-reality relationship. As indicated above, this also obtains to knowledge gathered in other disciplines. However, such accumulation of knowledge requires plausible explanations of the relations between strata. This was of course missing in the bogus argument of Sokal.

Postmodernists mounted a massive defence after the Sokal incident, and "many who identify with postmodernism now claim that they have never denied an ontologically

objective world. What they tend to persist in denying is that we can know anything about this world" (Archer *et al.* 2004: 2). Exercise of judgemental rationality requires critical relists to reject the epistemic relativist notion that all propositions about reality are equally valid. The fact that different discourses portray reality in different hues and shapes should not be taken to imply that there is not an objective reality to be known. Critical realist social science aims to develop concepts which despite their social contingency are more reflexive towards objective reality than to current power distributions. The fact that people may hold false belief or prevent each other from learning truth cannot deflect the quest for adequate, extensive and coherent knowledge about the world.

It is indeed the capability of science to distance itself from the prevalent truth regime which allows us to study these power relations and develop theories of inequality, oppression and manipulation. Relativism leaves the evaluation of truth in the hands of the powerful. Consider this quote from a well-known head of state: "There is no such thing as truth. Science is a social phenomenon and like every other social phenomenon is limited by the benefit or injury it confers on the community". This statesman's utility rationale implies that the interests of the community *as given by discourse* have the authority to evaluate science, not objective reality.

While critical realists agree to science being socially conducted, the objects of knowledge nevertheless have existence apart from our scientific investigation of them – even social ones. Because truth is limited to discourse, postmodernists allow epistemological *absolutism* to reign *within* discourses, while at the same time letting epistemological *relativism* roam unchecked *among* discourses (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005). The latter is mistakenly taken as a gesture of respect by its practitioners, whom fail to see that "[r]elativism is no friend of feminism, anti-racism or any other kind of critical social theory" (Sayer 2000: 77). Relativism leaves science open to potentially grave abuse as a servant of ideology. The statement above amply demonstrates this as the statesman in question was Adolf Hitler (qouted in G. Daniel, *The Idea of Pre-History* (1962), p. 118. Cited in Sayer 2000: 47). Quite contrary to relativism, Bhaskar claims that social science can have an emancipatory potential in that identification of misconceptions and avoidable suffering "simultaneously amount to criticisms implying the removal of the misconceptions or suffering and whatever causes them" (Sayer 2000: 156). This is what associates the realist position of Bhaskar with the project of *critical social science* (CSS), a social-scientific practice which is critical of its objects of study.

This is a highly controversial position, first because it implies we can deduce *ought* from *is* (Sayer 2000: 156), and second because of the conceived barriers between science and ethics (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 65-67). Science cannot predict that solution A *ought to* replace current state B. What it *can* do is to identify that current state B is detrimental to a fulfilling human existence, and hence that public decision-makers *ought* to do something about its assumed causes C. Bhaskar envisions that if we allow explanatory social science to inform our values and beliefs about the world, we can create an emancipator spiral where oppressive structures gradually are replaced to create a better society (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 65-67).

Critical realism considers itself the answer to the ontological deficiencies of positivism and the epistemological difficulties of postmodernism. “Critical realism claims to be able to combine and reconcile ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality” (Archer *et al.* 1998: xi).The possibility of naturalism entails that social science at least in some respect can be conducted as the natural sciences. This necessitates a concern for the structures and generative mechanisms of the real domain and how they appear in social life as trends, events and phenomena. Critical realists tend to be more concerned with causal explanations than with hermeneutical understanding. Archer combines these two approaches to society, albeit on different terms according to the level of analysis. The morphogenetic approach operates between the real and the actual, grasping at the mechanisms which condition interaction and our responses to these conditions.

Introduction to Section Two

The morphogenetic approach to social science aims to gather structure, culture and agency under the same conceptual umbrella and equip the social scientist with an analytical tool fit to wrestle with them all. Such theoretical bravery is characteristic of the body of thoughts known as *general systems theory*, within which the morphogenetic model was developed (Archer 1996: 274). For the systems theoretician the quest is ever to find an optimal level of generality which allows for a coherent overview of disparate and complex areas of knowledge yet retains such a proximity to the matter at hand so that its distinctive qualities remain apprehensible. Kenneth Boulding, one of the first to view social organization as open systems, wrote that "General Systems Theory is the skeleton of science in the sense that it aims to provide a framework or structure of systems on which to hang the flesh and blood of particular disciplines and particular subject matters in an orderly and coherent corpus of knowledge" (Boulding 1956: 208). Likewise, the morphogenetic approach is an analytical skeleton which provides guidelines for choosing and developing theoretical concepts and investigative methods. While an analytical framework does not in itself explain anything, it serves a regulatory role by deterring or encouraging the direction of research. Thus, the morphogenetic approach is first and foremost intended as a practical tool for ordering and developing our knowledge of society (Archer 1995: 5-6).

If the morphogenetic approach can be likened to a skeleton, then *analytical dualism* forms its backbone. Analytical dualism is the name given by Archer for the methodological grip of separating the causal powers of structure form those of agency in practical sociological analysis. Analytical dualism is the core premise of Archer's entire authorship, yet it may be her most controversial contribution. It is introduced in *Culture and Agency* as a separation of cultural items, such as religious beliefs, and the people holding them. This is dynamite to the sociology of religion, which more often insist on the necessity of understanding beliefs in context. Chapter 3 is devoted to an examination of Archer's reasons for separating structure from agency in analysis in the terms of traditional sociological debate.

In chapter 4 the lingo is changed into that of critical realism as I turn to Archer's own conceptualizations of structure and agency. Archer's stratified model of people

encourages explorations of power relations, opportunities and motivation, conditioned by but detached from structure, in reflexive relation to beliefs about the world, and subject to potentially transforming experiences of transcendent or extra-social reality. This I believe can prove a treasure trove to the sociology of religion. Some very cursory explorations of its potential are made in Section Three. The last chapter of this section is devoted to explicating the methodological implications of the stratified concepts of structure and agency. In its most basic outline the morphogenetic model is a three-phase temporal cycle of conditioning – interaction – conditioning, in which the last phase constitutes the starting point of the next cycle. By tracing these cycles through historical trajectories of action it becomes possible to extrapolate the interplay among the causal potentials of emergent structures, and between structures and the causal powers intrinsic to people.

3: Analytical Dualism

Sociological conceptualizations of structure and agency have been at the root of intense, endemic and perennial scholarly debates. Indeed, that is why they are so often referred to as "the problem" of structure and agency. Various solutions have been offered, mainly from developments of the broadly defined positions of Individualism and Collectivism. Archer has dedicated substantial segments of her main publications in address to the deficiencies associated with these positions (particularly Archer 1995: Chapter 1, 2 and 4; Archer 1996: Chapter 2, 3 and 4). She asserts that the conduct of social science demands acute attention to the intimate connections between our philosophical presuppositions, methodological considerations and theoretical developments. According to Archer, failure to heed the implications for methodology and theory after the demise of positivism has led sociological theorizing into ever new traps of the same old problems: How to conceptualize the causal power of the Collective while conserving the capabilities of the Individual, how to defend the existence of a structure which is evidently "not there" and how possibly to investigate such a relationship in practical social research. Although contemporary social theorists generally agree on the importance of postulating interplay between structure and agency, Archer finds the resulting conceptualizations are divergent, methodologically inadequate and philosophically unsatisfactory (Archer 1995). As a response to these concerns the morphogenetic approach is both a methodology and a general theory founded on realist ontology.

Although this is not a thesis on the range of popular sociological perspectives, it is my opinion that a fair demonstration of the uniqueness of Archer's thoughts necessitates some attention to her critique of the rest of the field. As her critique is Archer's own answer to the question *Why is the morphogenetic approach a better alternative?* it is also of direct value to the stated aim of this thesis, namely to investigate its potential advantage for the sociology of religion – advantage being a relational term.

3.1 DAVID LOCKWOOD AND THE SYSTEM/SOCIAL DISTINCTION

The analytical dualism proffered by Archer is credited to British sociologist David Lockwood (1929-). Lockwood is known for his appropriation and subtle development of the classical and neo-classical theories of the discipline, particularly those of Weber, Marx, Parsons and Durkheim (Rose 1996). Lockwood's fourteen-page article "Social Integration and System Integration" (1964) makes a fitting starting point for the present analysis as it was the "the single most germinal source for the development of the morphogenetic approach" (Archer 1995: 69). The article was a comment to the then ongoing debate between normative functionalists and their self-appointed opponents Ralf Dahrendorf and John Rex, whom Lockwood gave the lingering name "conflict theorists" (Lockwood 1964: 246; Strandbakken 2007). Their debate adequately exemplifies the "problems" of structure and agency from a theoretical perspective.

When it came to theorizing social change, conflict theory was exclusively concerned with group antagonism and agency relations, while normative functionalism had its sole focus on structural relations and systemic interdependencies. According to normative functionalism, the "common value elements" of society serves to integrate social action. Hence social change could only stem from systemic incompatibilities (Andersen 2007; Lockwood 1964: 245-247). Conflict theorists criticised the former's commitment to social stability and neglect of social relationships. According to Rex and Dahrendorf, power and conflicts of interest must be recognised as a cause of change endemic in any society (Lockwood 1964: 246-247; Strandbakken 2007). Whilst it grew as a response to *normative* functionalism, conflict theory entirely abandoned *general* functionalisms focus on the role played by structure in constraining changes in its own makeup. If social change is explained solely in terms of shifting power balances among groups then we cannot explain why conflict among groups may be intense without effectively causing any structural change. This is the "analytical limits" of conflict theory (Lockwood 1964: 249).

Lockwood suggested that the problems of theorizing about social change would be better resolved by *balancing* system integration with social integration rather than replacing one for the other. He draws an interesting example from Marx to illustrate how these seemingly conflicting perspectives may actually prove complementary. Marx similarly differentiates between the propensity to class antagonism (social integration)

and institutional contradictions in the economic system (system integration). While class antagonism is a function of production relationships, the *interactional* conflicts over power stemming from these relations are not the chief conductor of social change in Marx. Instead Lockwood reads Marx to say that the factor decisive for change is a *system* conflict which arises from contradictions between the forces of production and the institutions of property. In the case of capitalism, the conflict arises from the inability of the institutions of private ownership to accommodate the (over)productive capacity of the industrial system (Lockwood 1964: 249-251). The point is that the material conditions associated with the mode of production "may facilitate the development of "deviant" social relationships which run counter to the dominant institutional patterns of the system" (Lockwood 1964: 251). Thus a working structure cannot be held to cause social cohesion *a priori*, as normative functionalism would have it. Instead we must look towards general functionalism and its articulations of how structural conditions *may* predispose agents to act and organise in certain ways.

That would balance only one side of the equation, however. Those with vested interests in the existing order, the elite, must prevent such potential counter-relationships from actualizing and attempt to resolve the incompatibility between the material conditions and the institutional order (which gives rise to the strain) in order to prevent systemic change. In the words of Merton, "When social mechanisms for controlling them are operating effectively, these strains are kept within such bounds as to limit change of social structure" (Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1957), quoted in Lockwood 1964: 250). In order to extrapolate how systems may prevail despite their functional deficiencies, we must look at how agents work to manipulate each other to preserve their own interests.

This leads Lockwood to maintain that the theoretical cavity which yawned between the two diametrically opposed perspectives of conflict theory and functionalism could be traversed by a relatively simple methodological grip. He writes: "Whereas the problem of social integration focuses attention upon the orderly or conflictful relationships between the *actors*, the problem of system integration focuses on the orderly or conflictful relationships between the *parts*, of a social system" (Lockwood 1964: 245). Thus, the two perspectives could be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. The point is that by distilling two levels of analysis one is able to focus on how different degrees of integration on one level *interfaces* with different degrees of integration at the other. This could solve the problem of the conflict theorists, because if

social malintegration faced a highly integrated system Lockwood would expect little change to ensue due to the dominant relations among *institutions*, not between groups. Likewise, the structural stability of such a society would not be due to its unitary *function* because evidently social cohesion is low. Rather, its sustenance depends on the systemic relations and whether they manage to embank social conflict. Thus, both the general functionalist commitment to social structures and the conflictualist propensity for shifting power relations are combined in a novel analytical tool.

Lockwood refrains from any claim to have solved the structure-agency puzzle and humbly states that there is little more "than a 'polemical advantage' to be gained by focusing on system integration *as opposed* to social integration" (Lockwood 1964: 256). Nevertheless, the remainder of the article testify to his intuition that an acknowledgement of system-agent interrelation does not *preclude* their analytical distinction, but in fact *warrants* it. Although "the dynamics of class antagonisms are clearly related to the progressively growing 'contradictions' of the economic system", writes Lockwood, "these two aspects of integration are not only analytically separable, but also, because of the time element involved, factually distinguishable" (1964: 249-250). This last sentence contains the seed of the unification of analytical dualism and the historicity of emergence. It is quoted several times by Archer as the foundation of her synthesis of Lockwood and critical realist ontology, for in Archer's own opinion, Lockwood "simply lacked the concepts of emergent generative mechanisms, operating in an open system" (Archer 1995: 68) to unify and support his insights.

To Archer, the problems of functionalism and conflict theory are specific instances of more general problems pertaining to the broad positions of Collectivism and Individualism, respectively. Archer substantiates Lockwood's theoretical system/social balancing act with methodological and ontological arguments which effectively sink the ship of one-sided approaches. The following subchapter briefly recounts the main points of Archer's critique in terms of traditional sociological debate. It also visits another important trace of Lockwood's article in Archer's writing, namely his suggestion that the degree of integration among the "parts" could vary independently from the integration of the "people" at any given time. Archer argues that failing to uphold this analytical distinction led anthropology and parts of sociology into erroneous conceptions of culture and society as an over-integrated whole, regardless of their methodological starting-point. This chapter is closed by an account of Archer's own analytical dualism as a distinction

between the degree of integration among the ideas, and the degree of integration among the people, of a cultural system.

3.2 THEORETICAL CONFLATION AND MYTHS OF INTEGRATION

The debate between functionalists and conflictualists over how to conceptualize social events is anything but unique. Parallel disagreements abound in the history of the discipline, the common element being that structure is privileged at the expense of agency, or *vice versa*. Here I use the collective terms Collectivism and Individualism rather than names of particular schools of thought as Archer claims they all basically make the same mistakes. Whereas Lockwood provided a critique in theoretical terms, attention is now turned to Archer's methodological and ontological critique of Individualist and Collectivist sociology.

The Individualist tradition started by asserting that individuals comprise the basic unit of society and hence should be the focus of social scientific investigation. Society as a whole could not be anything other than the sum of individual action (Gilje and Grimen 1993). In the words of Mills, "Men in a state of society are still men. ... Men are not, when brought together, converted into another kind of substance with different properties" (J.S. Mills, *A System of Logic Ratiocintive and Inductive* (1884), p. 573. Quoted in Archer 1995: 3-4). Individualist methodology thus becomes one of *reduction*, whereby societal phenomena must be disaggregated into the factors making up individual action. The problem with reductionism is that it cannot explain those phenomena which are not the direct results of the present individuals and cannot grasp *relations between* individual instances. And because individuals are seen as the only efficient cause, structure is rendered inert without any capability of acting back upon the trajectories of individual lives (Archer 1995; Archer 1996).

The Collectivist tradition, on the other hand, started with the notion that "Society is no more decomposable into individuals than a geometrical surface is into lines, or a line into points" (Auguste Comte, *Système de politique positive* (1951), p. 181. Quoted in Archer 1995: 3). Collectivists rebuked the Individualist approach due to their methodological conviction that social context must be accounted for in sociological explanation, and attempted to explain the *status quo* with reference to structural reproduction through regulation and socialization (Gilje and Grimen 1993). But because

the structure or system of society is seen as the only efficient cause from this perspective, individuals are rendered passive and incapable of social transformation (Archer 1995; Archer 1996).

But Collectivists could not come up with an ontological account of why their methodological innovation proved fruitful. The patterns of collectivities could not be grasped in the empiricist sense except as aggregates, and these patterns could not be granted ontological existence except in Individualist terms. Individualists had the ontological upper hand as their research was based on observable people. They demanded that Collectivists admit to *reification* – the granting of material existence to conceptual abstractions (Archer 1995; Archer 1996; Gilje and Grimen 1993). A self-conscious comment by Gellner vividly exemplifies the Collectivist conundrum: "The pattern isolated … is not "merely abstracted" but is as I am somewhat sheepishly tempted to say, "really there"" (Ernst Gellner, "Holism versus individualism" (1968), p. 264. Quoted in Archer 1995: 47, italics removed).

According to Archer, the failure of both approaches to develop a workable methodology is the sole responsibility of the lingering Geist of empiricism:

> "For it fortified Individualists in the belief that since they were ontologically secure, then their methods must work 'in principle', despite all evidence to the contrary. Simultaneously, it undermined Collectivist confidence in their methodological 'success' by querying the reality of their explanatory variables, which never could be validated in empiricist terms." (Archer 1995: 57)

Archer deems both approaches equally guilty of the general fallacy of *displacement of scope*. Displacement of scope is committed whenever models or conceptualizations created for micro-sociological considerations are taken to fit interpretations of macro-level phenomena, or *vice versa*. Archer criticizes Collectivists of committing this mistake by asserting a homology between the societal system and the small group. Individualists employ the opposite homology to the same effect, so that that which is characteristic of the small group also is characteristic of the whole of society. Such inferences are based on the erroneous premise of translatability, "namely that the same properties (no more, no less, and no different) are indeed found throughout society" (Archer 1995: 6-7).

Archer coined the term *conflation* to describe the mistakes exemplified in the above. In both Collectivism and Individualism structure and agency are "conflated" because they are rendered the by-product of each other and hence effectively are deprived

of autonomy. In other words, both versions are guilty of epiphenomenalism, although they differ about which level is held to be epiphenomenal. Collectivism is guilty of *downwards conflation* because structure is allowed to engulf interaction through processes of regulation and socialization, leading to determinism. Individualism is guilty of *upwards conflation* because it allows the interactional aspect of society to swallow up social structure, leading to socially volatile voluntarism. Hence, both conflationist approaches automatically preclude any two-way interplay between the forces of structure and the forces of agency because one level is deemed dependent on the other (for a summary, see Archer 1996: 97-100). To Archer as to Lockwood, an adequate theoretical stance must be predicated on some autonomy being granted to both levels so that an interplay of influences can be preserved.

Of course Archer is not alone in recognizing the shortcomings of these early sociological traditions. Her critique is also based on the state of affairs in the 1950s, making it dated already at its first publication twenty years ago. However, Archer defends this choice by arguing that the problem of reconciling ontology, methodology and social theory in these early theories still is evident in their modern developments (Archer 1995: 59):

> "my apologia is that unless individualism and collectivism are uprooted, reinspected and rejected once and for all, because of their radical ontological and methodological deficiencies, then social theory will remain bogged down in the fallacy of conflation and practical social analysis will remain shackled to the unworkable explanatory programmes represented by upward and downward conflationism." (Archer 1995: 12)

Needless to say, Archer holds social realism and the complementary methodology of the morphogenetic approach to resolve these issues by re-linking and balancing structure and agency by analytical dualism.

However, there is another and more recent form of theorizing "which enjoys considerable sociological vitality at the moment" (Archer 1996: 97). This is realism's contemporary structuration theory, of which Anthony Giddens is the most widely read in the sociology of religion. By introducing a new *ontology of praxis*, which grants real existence to structures through their *instantiation* by individual actors, Giddens claims to have found an ontological *via media* between Collectivism's reification and Individualism's reductionism. Because structure is deemed inseparable from agency, and *vice versa*, this position may be called *areductionistic* (Archer 1995: 61). Yet Archer

claims structuration is just another form of conflationist theory, namely *elisionism* or *central conflation*, and that it is doubly guilty of the mistakes of the past. Still, as structuration theory proposes a different solution to the deficiencies of the traditional debates it has attracted considerable attention, or as Archer says it: "Forewarned that the signposts reading "reductionism" and "reification" are roads to hell paved with bad conceptualizations, no doubt central conflation promises ontological security to more and more theorists" (Archer 1995: 136).

According to Archer, structuration theory fails by attempting to describe structure and agency all at once as the two are held to be "mutually constitutive" aspects of social reality. In this attempt to salvage the causal powers of both structure and agency through their instantaneous operation, *both* sides are in effect deprived of autonomy – and hence of causal powers. In other words, it does not pose a solution of the perennial problems of epiphenomenalism but commits the mistakes of *both* approaches in that neither structure nor agency have autonomy (Archer 1982; Archer 1995; Archer 1996). Here I cannot go into whether or not the critique of Giddens is justified, but note that Giddens has yet to come up with a response to Archer.

Archer not only deems structuration theory erroneous as solution, she claims it is an old problem in a new shroud. This brings us back full circle to Lockwood's theoretical critique of eliding "social integration" with "system integration", but this time in the voice of Archer and on the topic of culture.

Archer opens *Culture and Agency* by stating that "[t]he conceptualization of culture is extraordinary in two respects. It has displayed the weakest analytical development of any key concept in sociology and has played the most wildly vacillating role within sociological theory" (Archer 1996: 1). One prime culprit for this is what she mercilessly baptizes the *Myth of Cultural Integration* (Archer 1985; Archer 1996: Chapter 1). Archer takes the fathers of anthropology to task for positing an *a priori* concept of culture as an integrated whole. In early anthropological studies of so-called primitive societies the fascination with the interpenetration of cultural ideas into every aspect of social life led to a notion of "an archetype of culture(s) as the perfectly woven and all-enmeshing web… the perfectly integrated system, in which every element was interdependent with every other" (Archer 1996: 2). By "perfectly integrated" is meant a system devoid of cultural contradictions and social conflict. Methodologically, this led to an aesthetic (rather than analytical) turn in anthropology in which the quest was to grasp

the “inner sense of cultural wholes” by means of “artistic hermeneutics”. Crucially, this method presumed that there was indeed a coherence to be found.

The key notion of the Myth was that uniform action stems from strong and coherent cultural patterning, so that an integrated socio-cultural system produced a society of integrated social relationships. Its prime error in Archer’s view is the failure to distinguish analytically between the structural integration of a society and the social integration of the people. For one thing, the structural availability of ideas cannot be elided with people’s capacity of reflection, as some studies of primitive societies suggested. Furthermore, the preoccupation with culture as an integrated whole led to the neglect of systemic inconsistencies as potential causes of change. But crucially, by presuming coherence *a priori* both the “parts” and the “people” were deprived of the capacity for independent variation (Archer 1985; Archer 1996).

The Myth eventually entered sociology and was “enshrined in the Parsonian central-value system – that *a prioristic* guarantor of further social integration” (Archer 1996: 3). Linguistic structuralism went the other way and grasped intuitively after a “hidden code” which would reveal the underlying structures of “seemingly unconnected” cultural symbols. Even the Neo-Marxist notions of “hegemonic culture” and “dominant-ideology” embodied the same assumptions of cultural coherence (Archer 1996: 3-4). Thus, the Myth of cultural integration gave rise to an equally mythic notion of structural integration, and both have impeded the development of workable agent-culture and agent-structure conceptualizations (Archer 1995: 214).

All three forms of theoretical conflationism have served to buttress the Myth, claims Archer, because as the inert level cannot be the source of incoherence, the property of coherence has to be attributed to the dominant side. Epiphenomenalism in itself only points to the co-variance between the degrees of integration at the different levels. But once some dominant element (such as a dominant ideology or hidden code) is postulated as being free from contradiction, then societal coherence *must* ensue because the dependent level is deprived of autonomous power (Archer 1996: 98-99). In line with the original critique delivered by Lockwood, Archer states that such a commitment to social stability is a poor friend if the task is to explore potentials for social change. Structuration theory is doubly guilty of maintaining the Myth because its concept of the “duality of culture” precludes any understanding of social or cultural variation, and hence of change. If the longevity of a religion is credited to the continuous instantiation of its rituals by believers, neither structure nor agency have the capacity for independent

variation because the pair are tied to the same conceptual chair. Because their mutual co-existence and coherence is given *a priori*, neither the people nor the structure can be the cause of religious change. Put another way, central conflation offers no freedom to subjectivity from objective conditions and hence offers us no freedom at all: "this blurring of subject and object necessarily challenges the very possibility of reflexivity itself" (Archer 2007c: 41). Because of its inadequacy in this regard, structuration theory "is taken here to constitute the final condemnation of the whole conflationary procedure" (Archer 1996: 20-21).

3.3 ARCHER'S ANALYTICAL DUALISM AND THE THEORY OF CULTURE

In *Culture and Agency* (1996, original publication 1988) Archer introduces analytical dualism as a distinction between what she terms *Cultural System integration* (henceforth CS) and *Socio-Cultural integration* (henceforth S-C). This deliberately parallels Lockwood's structural distinction as Archer aims to prove "the explanatory pay-off … by using a parallel distinction in the cultural field" (Archer 1996: xvii). In Archer's new theory of culture, which attempted to confront and amend the mistakes of the past, the degree of *consistency among ideas* (CS) is given autonomy from their *socio-cultural usage* (S-C). Here, I am concerned with spelling out the systemic side of the distinction. As the ontology of emergence only comes in the later *Realist Social Theory* (1995), Archer draws on her tutor Karl Popper to defend analytical dualism. Popper distinguished between the world of mental processes and the world of the products of the human mind, or rather culture with a knowing subject (World Two) and culture without a knowing subject (World Three). This means, one, that Popper grants ideas ontological existence independently from the minds of people; two, that the objects of World Three stand in logical relationships which are relatively autonomous from their World Two appropriation; and three, that an interplay of influence can be postulated among ideas and their holders.

The first point grants objective existence to the Cultural System as the collective registry where products of thought-processes are kept. Its components are theories, beliefs, values and other ideational items, including ideas that are not currently endorsed but may move people to action in the future. Archer differentiates the Cultural System as a specific aspect of culture as a whole. Whereas the latter refers to all intelligibilia, that is

items with the dispositional capacity of being understood, the former is reserved for intelligibilia to which the *law of contradiction* can be applied. The law or principle of contradiction asserts that nothing can be both *p* and *not-p*. For instance, nothing can be both Created by God and *not* created by God. It can only be applied to *propositions*, that is statements which assert truth or falsity about something, such as "the world *is* Created by God" (Archer 1995: 179-180; Archer 1996: 109, 136; for a discussion of the invariance and universal applicability of the law of contradiction, see 1996: 113-120). Hence the Cultural System is limited to the pool of propositions in a society at any given time.

This brings us to the second point of Popper, namely that all propositions necessarily stand in logical relationships to each other. This relationship can be one of compatibility, incompatibility or of course independence. It pertains solely to the logical possibility of the propositions in question being true at the same time. Archer uses the term CS integration to denote the degree of *logical consistency* between ideas of a cultural system.

Thirdly, as analytical dualism is inserted as a wedge between people and their ideas it becomes possible to say something about how they may differ in terms of integration and how one side comes to influence the other (and *vice versa*). On the Socio-Cultural level people have the potential to influence each other in terms of ideas. In critical realist terms this is a *causal capacity* of people. Popper expressed it thus: "So we have actually these two different worlds, the world of *thought-processes*, and the world of the *products* of thought-processes. While the former may stand in *causal* relationships, the latter stand in *logical* relationships" (Karl Popper, *Objective knowledge* (1972), p 298-9. Quoted in Archer 1996: 105). The distinction between belief and believer is discussed thoroughly in chapter 5.

Archer draws an everyday example which is helpful (Archer 1995: 179; Archer 1996: xvii-xviii): When a theory is held to contradict another theory, or when we assert that the thoughts of one philosopher are consistent with the thoughts of another, we are talking about *logical consistency* stemming from relations among components of the CS. When we speak of the influence of one person upon another, such as a teacher on her pupil, of early thinkers on later ones or a preacher on his congregation, we are talking about *causal effects* which are the properties of people. Causal consensus is "the degree of cultural uniformity produced by the imposition of ideas by one set of people on another" by means of "the whole gamut of familiar techniques – manipulation,

mystification, legitimation, naturalization, persuasion and argument" (Archer 1996: xviii). Whereas causal consensus is intimately linked to the use of power, logical consistency is entirely independent of it since logical relationships exist regardless of them being socially exploited, concealed or even recognized. Archer holds that the *de facto* relationships among ideas "in no way rests on claims made about it on the part of any group" (Archer 1996: 109). Furthermore, social relationships are contingent but logical relationships are not: Causal relationships *may* pertain whereas logical relationships *do* obtain (Archer 1995: 179; Archer 1996: 105).

Analytical dualism gives that culture as a system of ideas can be highly or poorly integrated, and that any of these possibilities can co-exist with a population that is either conflict-ridden or highly integrated. What this leads us to understand, argues Archer, is how the different degrees of integration at one level interfaces with the degree of integration at the other. Both sides have autonomous causal power. By separating them Archer claims we can examine the *interplay* among them. Archer does *not* suggest that people act the way they do because of the ideas they hold as if they were determined or compelled by the CS to produce patterns of interaction. Rather, the logical relations among cultural ideas create certain *situational logics* which shape the action context of agents. Situational logics are explored later. For now I ask the reader to be content with a simple example.

The logical incompatibility of the theory of evolution and the Genesis story of Creation (they cannot both be true) confronts contemporary adherents of the latter with certain challenges. The problem lies in the intimate relation of Creationism to its scientific adversary. Because it is constructed as a Christian response to Darwin, promoting Creationism to the unconvinced necessitates invocation of the theory of evolution. In order to maintain or advance their position, Creationists are pressed to re-interpret one or each of the competing theories in order to modify the incompatibility. Genesis can be re-interpreted ("it took six God-days, which can be six million human years") and scientific theory can be re-construed ("evolution is in fact the unfolding of the continuous Act of Creation") so that the logical relationship can be shown to be an *apparent* contradiction. This is in effect syncretism, or changes in the original belief.

Of course, in this case both perspectives originate from immensely complex systems of thought which are fundamentally incompatible, and any resolve is therefore likely to last only as long as no further CS relations are dragged into the dispute. The point is that relations among ideas "only exert a *conditional influence* upon the course of

events and only then by *shaping the action contexts* in which people find themselves" (Archer 1996: 154, my emphasis). In other words, the causal effect of cultural structures is limited to delineating which situational conditions cultural agents must face. The incompatibility of Creationism and evolutionary biology is a matter of logical relations among ideas; the success of the Creationist mission is a matter of causal relations among people. By inserting analytical dualism between ideas and their holders a new analytic space is distilled within which we can examine how people relate to different aspects of their culture, and how properties of their cultural system condition interaction. Neither social nor system integration is presumed to occur. Both culture and agency have causal efficiency, without one side being epiphenomenal of the other. Developments and change in the cultural system occurs as a result of the interplay of causal powers. This is the purchase of analytical dualism in cultural theory.

Analytical dualism stands as the basic premise of both Lockwood and Archer: That the socio-cultural system influences social interaction and *vice versa*, and that the constitutive features of this interplay effects social change or stability. But this is hardly controversial – most contemporary theorists would agree! Indeed, the theoretical tradition of social dialectics is in various ways dedicated to this interplay. What, then, is so special about Archer's conceptualization of structure and agency? The confrontation with Collectivism and Individualism may be dated, but nevertheless Archer highlights some very important consequences of taking these routes to sociological practice. By reconciling them through analytical dualism Archer has posed one solution to the perennial problem of structure and agency. While Lockwood showed the explanatory profitability of the system/social distinction, general functionalism did not provide him with an (ontological) answer as to what constituted the "parts" of a social system (Lockwood 1964: 250). Archer finds an answer in critical realism and emergence theory. Most importantly she takes on the task to which Lockwood merely hints, namely to identify the various combinations of system/social integration, their effects upon one another and what types of social outcomes which may result. While removed from the hermeneutical horizon of Lockwood, when analytical dualism is embellished with the conceptual battery offered by critical realism Archer is able to articulate an approach to social change that has a solid ontological anchoring and, allegedly, an "improved explanatory purchase". As a reader you now depart from the two-dimensional domain of traditional sociological debates and enter the stratified realm of realist social theory.

4: The Morphogenetic Approach

As human beings we are born into a society and a context not of our making, and even as our awareness of our conditions grow we fag away at the foundations of our misery or saviour the benefits of our birthplace without being readily capable of transforming what makes it so. This is not because we are deprived of power, but because we are situated in an enduring and complex system created by our predecessors. While we are capable of transforming our situation, strategically or inadvertently, and hence are the makers of our world to some extent, the structural constraints and enablements we face are frequently the results of past interaction, not our present endeavours: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx 1852: 1).

The human feeling of being bound by one's position in society informs the entire authorship of Archer: "we do not make our personal identities under the circumstances of our choosing" (Archer 2000: 10). In *Realist Social Theory* (1995) Archer presents her resolution to the problem of reconciling individual freedom and structural efficaciousness on a "solid ontological footing" and with a "workable methodology" to boot. In the following I recount the basic principles of the general theory of Archer. These form the foundation of the discussions of religion in section 3.

4.1 THE MORPHOGENETIC MODEL

The morphogenetic approach rests on the key premises of analytical dualism, the historicity of interaction and the ontology of emergence. Analytical dualism has been shown to entail the separation of the causal powers of structure from those of agency so that none can engulf the other in either an "upwards" or a "downwards" fashion. Archer states that the price of Individualism's autonomous man was loss of structural influence, and Collectivism paid the same but reversed price for their causally efficacious structures. In both cases one side was rendered inert as the other was given all autonomy. Structuration sought to amend this by positing structure as rules and resources

instantiated by the individual in social action. Through this ontology of praxis reification of structure is avoided, albeit at the cost of stability: Because any agential instantiation bears the potential for structural transformation structure is rendered volatile. From this perspective there is no explanation as to *when* change or stability occurs because both factual and temporal independence is withheld. The morphogenetic approach seeks to understand this by separating and balancing the causal powers of structure and of agency. To accomplish this *time* is inserted as an unbending spoke between them. As autonomous emergent aspects of social reality they occupy their own distinctive historical trajectories. Structurationism's notion of mutual constitution leads to conceptions of structure and agency as *interpenetrating* aspects of social reality; the morphogenetic model maps the *interplay* between them (Archer 1995: 15). *Contra* structuration theory, Archer argues that people do not re-create (instantiate) structure in every instance of interaction; they either reproduce or transform what is already there. That is, agents maintain or change something which is temporally prior to these activities and hence cannot be said to be coterminous with it (Archer 1995: 71, 168). This is why the historicity of social interaction ought to be accounted for when exploring social change.

The historicity of social interaction and analytical dualism gives the two propositions upon which the morphogenetic model rests: "that structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) which transform it; and that structural elaboration necessarily post-dates those actions" (Archer 1995: 76). The practical-minded reader can rest assured that we are now honing in on the implications of taking the morphogenetic approach. The interplay of structure and agency is given in the three-phase diagram of the morphogenetic model. Archer advances four propositions for its acceptance (adapted from Archer 1995: 168-169):

1) **That there are internal and necessary relations within and between emergent structures;**
2) **That structure exerts causal influences on social interaction;**
3) **That there are causal relationships between groups and individuals;**
4) **That social interaction elaborates upon the composition of structure.**

The causal powers of structure and agency can be diverted, suspended, modified and enhanced by agents as well as other structures. Their influence is equally relative. The difference between them is in their mode of operation: Structure is always mediated by

agency whilst agents always are mediators (Archer 1995: 196). The explication of these propositions is the topic of the consecutive subchapters.

Propositions 2, 3 and 4 are mirrored in the progressive phases of analysis, each marked by a temporal measure point T (see Figure 2: The morphogenesis of structure, page 132). The morphogenetic analysis of the structure-agency interplay starts at T1 by identifying the structural conditions which are present *before* the interaction we are interested in takes place, that is, the pre-existent constellation of structures and how they may condition social interaction. The middle phase, spanning from T2 to T3, examines how agents respond to this conditioning. Through T2 to T3 strategies of action are developed and deployed. Some of these may willingly or inadvertently change the structures which initially conditioned their actions. The last phase of the morphogenetic sequence is therefore about how agential interaction has preserved or transformed the initial structural conditions, the point of measure being T4.

The next analytical cycle begins with the structural end-products of the previous cycle as its preconditions, but otherwise has the same opportunity for transformation through interaction. Human interaction may have served to preserve and reproduce the structure in question, in which case the cycle is a morphostatic one. If human interaction has altered the structure in any way, either by adding, re-arranging or abolishing component features, the cycle is a morphogenetic one. The next analytical cycle will start with entirely new structural conditions, which are the results of previous cycles of human interaction. Each morphogenetic/static cycle thus links up with anterior and posterior cycles (see for instance Archer 1982; Archer 1995; Archer 1996).

The sequences of the model are in reality continuous and overlapping. In causal analysis, however, the quest is to unravel *what* action made by *whom* produces *which* effects, and of course *why* this is so. Hence, the analytical move must consist of breaking up the flows into intervals determined by the problem in hand. Depending on the subject of study, each cycle can span centuries or days as long as it remains true to the basic formula of initial conditioning – interaction – subsequent conditioning. The lines of the model are projected forwards and backwards in time to connect with posterior and anterior morphogenetic cycles (Archer 1995: 76). In this way the morphogenetic model portrays periods of structural change or stability with respect to a given case. This is above all what makes the morphogenetic model a historical model of social reality because it makes room for the fact that social outcomes are influenced by the actions of

those whom have gone before. Thus “time is incorporated as sequential tracts and phases rather than simply as a medium through which events take place” (Archer 1995: 89).

The causal powers of agency and the causal powers of parts are linked through the process of mediation, which is described in chapter 4.4. As the critical realist notion of stratified reality implies, this is not a unidimensional affair. In *Being Human* (Archer 2000) and *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation* (Archer 2003) Archer develops the individual, psychological level of confluence between the “parts” and the “people”. This she terms *the internal conversation*. In *Realist Social Theory* (Archer 1995) Archer sketches four levels of confluence between the “parts” and the “people”. First, there is the *positional* level where structure delineates everyone into different position relative to a distribution of resources. Second, there is the level of *roles* in which people occupy a position in a pre-set hierarchy of norms and expectations yet bring their personal qualities to the table, thus making for creative reinvention of the role itself. Third, there is the *institutional* level where the relationship between an institution as a whole and the people associated with may show independent variance. And finally, the fourth level is the *systemic* or society-wide level in which several institutions, several role hierarchies and a manifold of socio-economically diverse groups stand in shifting and queasy, or stable and comfortable relationships to each other (Archer 1995: 185-189). The complexity of a stratified social reality entails that diverse forms of generative mechanisms, and hence causal powers, are to be found on all of these levels of analysis.

4.2 A STRATIFIED MODEL OF PEOPLE

According to Archer’s realist social science, people are identifiably stratified just as any other aspect of reality. Human existence is dependent on a vast number of strata, from cellular biology to the orbit of our planet. Most of these have scientific disciplines dedicated to their exploration and interdisciplinary dialogues devoted to map their interplay. Archer identifies three strata as necessary (although not exhaustive) for sociology. These are *Persons*, *Agents* and *Actors*. Archer capitalizes each in order to distinguish them from everyday usage, and utilizes the generic (non-capitalized) “agency” to cover for the “people” part as opposed to “structure”. That demarcation is replicated here. The term Person refers to real human beings, our bodies and our human capacities of action, reflection and reflexivity. Thus, Persons may be considered the “base

unit" of Archer's stratified model of people. This is where the internal conversation takes place. The term Agent refers to our position in relation to material and ideational resources. This corresponds to the first level of confluence between structure and agency. Finally, Actor refers to people's positions in a network of roles, which is the second level of confluence. The distinctions are analytical and temporal (they do not refer to different people), but by virtue of being emergent strata they are also irreducible to one another and cannot be used interchangeably (Archer 1995: 249, 280). The human Person gives birth to the Agent, who in turn fathers the Actor. The first is the end-product of the *double morphogenesis of Agents* whereas the latter emerges from the *triple morphogenesis of Actors*. First, we turn to Agency.

The emergent properties of Agency are distinguished as the internal and necessary relations between a collectivity and its shared life chances. *Life chances* refer to a distribution of resources which stand in internal and necessary relations with structured and relatively stable social groups. An Agent is always a collectivity in Archer's work. At birth we involuntaristically enter into a system of social stratification, our position in which deems us "privileged" or "underprivileged" by means of the collectivity we belong to. As will be seen in section 4.4, this position in the social "hierarchy" allocates premiums and penalties for the pursuit of different lines of action. As an emergent stratum, Agency has powers proper to itself. Typical generative power is the ability to articulate shared interests and bring it to impact on decision-making, frequently through generating, organizing, and participating in social movements (Archer 1995: 257, 277). However, "[c]ollectivities *per se are* only tangential instigators of structural change" (Archer 1995: 186). Without activation of their capacity of articulation of interests vested in their position, any antagonism will be localized and disorganized.

Therefore Agents are further divided into *Corporate* and *Primary* Agents. Everyone is an Agent in the Primary sense as we are all part of a collectivity which relates to a structural distribution of resources. The difference between Corporate and Primary Agency is that the former in addition share the characteristic of articulation and organization. This gives Corporate Agents a capacity for strategic action which differentiates them as active social subjects. A Person may be a Primary agent in one domain and a Corporate agent in another. For instance, a member of a religious group lobbying for change in healthcare policy is a Corporate agent in both the religious and the political domain, but remains a Primary agent with respect to the capitalist economy. Corporate Agents pursue their goals with reasoned motivation and may exert a significant

influence on the societal state of affairs. By contrast, lack of articulation and organization leaves responses of Primary Agents un-coordinated and unrelated. Still, similarity of response towards similar contextual challenges may generate powerful albeit unintended *aggregate effects* (Archer 1995: 257-261).

Because of their organization, the consequences of Corporate action may become *emergent properties* through the *double morphogenesis of Agency* (see Figure 3 The double morphogenesis of Agency, page 132). As people participate in the process of reproducing or transforming structural and cultural conditions, they also change or maintain their own position in the socially structured context. The emergent effect of Corporate interaction is that the context is shaped for everyone. Primary Agents inhabit the context of which Corporate Agents seek control, and by merely living in it generate aggregated problems and pressures which Corporate Agents must give consideration. Thus Corporate Agency struggles towards the attainment of a goal set in a prior social context in the continuously changing context of the aggregate effects of Primary Agency.

These efforts may result in structural morphogenesis or morphostasis, entirely dependent on the outcome of interaction. However, as Agents attempts to maintain or transform their structural conditions they are inexorably pulled into a process of sustaining or transforming the categories of Corporate and Primary agency themselves. This is the double morphogenesis of Agency. The emergent consequence of Corporate interaction is the increase of the category of Corporate Agency as increasing numbers of people are pulled into the struggle of position-improvement. Through the morphogenesis of Agency mobilization of groups and hence collective social identity is changed (on Agency, see Archer 1995: 254-274).

Social Actors emerge from Agents and are defined as role encumbents. The double morphogenesis of Agency has as one unintended consequence to generate new roles and rules of conduct, and delineates who is eligible to occupy which roles: “different agential life chances give differential access to different parts of the array of roles available in society at any given time” (Archer 1995: 256). Roles are themselves emergent *structural* properties which cannot be reduced to the characteristics of the people occupying them. Social roles operate in sets which entail internal and necessary relations between roles (such as those between parish and priest, priest and Bishop, Bishop and Secretary of State) and internal and necessary relations between the role and resources, rule requirements and normative expectations (expert knowledge, Churchly hierarchy, Christian Constitution). This gives the emergent property of role-structures

autonomous powers of constraint and enablement which are pre-existent to Actors and enduring despite being successively held by a diverse range of Persons.

According to Archer, Actors are not only role-reproducers but reflexive role encumbents with the reflexive capacity of role redefinition. By acquiring a role we also acquire an identity linked to that role; but by the same token, we bring our Personal characteristics to the roles we occupy. Rules and normative expectations cannot exhaust the concept of Actor because personal qualities will shape any role conduct. Empathy and sense of humour are Personal traits which may significantly impact how a role is conducted (consider those traits in a priest, a police officer and a professor). Additionally, Personal identities are unique, reflexive and innovative. When taken to a pre-defined role set, these qualities may effectively change the role itself. This re-definition of structured roles is the *triple morphogenesis* of Agent, Actor and Person. In the triple morphogenesis the particular social identities of individual Actors emerge from individual relation to the array of collectively available organizational roles (Archer 1995: 275-280).

While Agency gives rise to Actors, both are anchored in Personhood. In order to recognise that a collective interest is one's own or reflect on the adequacy of role restrictions there must be "more primitive properties of persons" (Archer 1995: 281) which enables us to do so at all. Our abilities to self-monitor, emote and be motivated are Personal characteristics which can and should be given ontological existence apart from their particular social expressions, argues Archer. In other words, the notion of a *continuous sense of self* must be kept sociologically distinct from social expectations, challenges and achievements which the self encounters (Archer 1995: 281-282).

Archer distinguishes personal from social identity. The former emerges from our relations with the three orders of reality Archer determines as the natural, social and practical world. The latter emerges exclusively from the social world. The emergence of our prime emergent powers, self-consciousness and reflexivity, is rooted in our material embodiment and our practical embodiment in the material world. Our reflexive capacities are activity-dependent, yet these activities are shaped by the structured environment of society and the natural world (Archer 2000). As we are faced with the different challenges reality has in store for us, the natural, practical and social world "confronts us with three inescapable concerns: with our physical well-being, our performative competence and our self worth" (Archer 2000: 318).

In other words, our identities have an internal and an external component in that we reflect on our external conditions and our internal preference. What Archer terms "the

'inner conversation' is a matter of referential reflexivity in which we ponder upon the world and about what our place is, and should be, within it" (Archer 2000: 315). Our singular solutions to these challenges, or our personal prioritization of our concerns, give the strictly particularistic and unique personal identity of each and every one of us. Emotionality enters as our *ultimate concerns*, the things we are committed to that do not lead to further ends. Our desires to be loved, regarded and respected and our commitment to personal relations are both expressions and extensions of ourselves, and also irreducibly social because they express who we are and where we belong (Archer 2000: 79-80). The structural conditions of reality present us with unavoidable concerns, but "the world cannot dictate to us what to care about the most: at best it can set the costs for failing to accommodate a given concern" (Archer 2000: 318). This reflection and reflection upon our reflections ultimately how structure links with agency (see for instance Archer 2000; Archer 2003).

The stratified model of people distinguishes between collective, personal and social identity. This opens a conceptual space where our Personal identity can reflect upon our social identity as Actors. This relates the individual to the social as it makes room for the reflexive action of deciding "which social commitments to endorse for the very reason that they publicly express the person one wants to be, versus those that cannot be embraced because they would threaten one's personal integrity" (Archer 1995: 292). The distinctions are sociologically necessary because individual properties take on different meaning depending on in what respect the individual is engaged to the part of society in question. They are equally important to the people investigated, "for the things they can do *qua* human beings, *qua* agents and *qua* actors will be different things in different settings, involving different powers, different interests and different reasons" (Archer 1995: 255). The traits of being a low-income parent of foreign descent restrain the conceivable household allowance economically speaking. But the same traits may serve as an empowering uniting ground for similarly situated people. Combined with a religious message and a common goal such people may go from receptors to moulders of social structure. And then these individual traits can no longer be treated as the sums of individual people, but must be considered in relation to the implications that people's emergent properties entail.

4.3 THE PROPERTIES OF STRUCTURE

Qualifying the generic term "social structure" is a perennial sociological challenge. It lies at the heart of the sociological undertaking; yet sociological conceptualizations of structure vary tremendously. Porpora points out that differences in such a key concept has important consequences "because differences in the ways sociologists conceptualize social structure lead to very different approaches to sociology" (Porpora 1998: 339). The stratified model of reality gives that as emergent entities social structures derive their causal powers from their underlying strata yet are irreducible to them. " 'Structure' suggests a set of internally related elements whose causal powers, when combined, are emergent from those of their constituents" (Sayer 2000: 14). The relations between the constituents of a social structure are *internal* to it and *necessary* for its operation. This refers to Archer's first proposition about the morphogenetic model. As Elder-Vass (2007a: 40) puts it,

> "Social structures have causal powers in their own right, which arise from the combination of individuals and relations that constitute them, but which are different from the causal powers that would be possessed by these same individuals if they were not organised into these social structures. They are therefore causal powers of the structures and not of the individuals."

Not all factors influencing an event are emergent properties, that is, structures of internal and necessary relations. External and contingent factors may influence any social event or phenomenon. While such external factors may have causal efficiency, the phenomenon in question is existentially independent from these factors. By contrast, the components of an emergent property are necessary for the entity's existence. This makes emergent properties homogenous and distinguishable from other variables which may influence the situation (Archer 1995: 173-174). Furthermore, emergent entities have causal powers of its own which are irreducible to and qualitatively different from those of its constituents. These *sui generis* causal powers give an emergent entity the capacity to modify its constituents. In short, emergent properties exert causal powers of its own whereas contingently related entities only produce aggregate effects. This *sui generis* capacity "is the litmus test which differentiates between emergence on the one hand and aggregation and combination on the other" (Archer 1995: 174).

Structures vary tremendously in terms of extension and magnitude. Not all structures are supra-individual. Cognitive structures are examples of intra-individual and internalized structures (Sayer 2000: 27n4). In *Realist Social Theory* (1995) Archer differentiates between three major kinds of emergent properties: Structural emergent properties (SEPs), cultural emergent properties (CEPs) and people's emergent properties (PEPs). People's emergent properties have already been dealt with. In the present account the term *social* structure is by the denotation "social" reserved for entities which are fundamentally inter-personal. Both structural and cultural emergent properties are covered by the generic term "structure", and they operate in parallel ways. Yet they are distinguishable from one another by the nature of their internal relations.

Cultural emergent properties are characterised by internal and necessary relations of a *logical* nature (Archer 1995: 179). A cultural emergent property is thus distinguishable from other propositions in the Cultural System as a cluster of two or more interdependent and mutually invoking ideas. Put simply, Christian reference to Acts invokes reference to the Gospels for without the story of Jesus the actions of the apostles make little sense. Likewise, the narratives of the Gospels are by necessity related to notions of an apostolic tradition which has conveyed the story of Jesus through history. Because items of faith more often than not are propositional, the relations between them are by nature logical. Despite variations in interpretation and tradition, Christian theology is constituted by relations between the *items* of faith which are internal and necessary for its constitution.

Structural emergent properties are differentiated by their primary dependence upon material resources, or rather the *material nature* of their internal and necessary relations. Material resources are here understood as both physical and human in nature (Archer 1995: 175). Demographic structures are illustrative of the conceptualization of structural emergent properties. This example has been criticised for ascribing emergent powers to aggregate phenomena. Emergentist Elder-Vass writes that the proportional influence of the number of couples at T1 on the number of babies at T2 "is merely a statistical artefact, not a material causal relation" (Elder-Vass 2007a: 36). Nevertheless I find it illustrative of Archer's thoughts on the matter, and have chosen to replicate it here. In Archer's original usage it is used to demonstrate the difference between *treating data* as aggregates or as emergent properties, something Elder-Vass fails to acknowledge.

A demographic structure derives its nature and causal powers from the internal relations between the proportional distributions of the relevant population. This gives the

structure *sui generis* powers which are autonomous from that of the people in question. For instance, the structural distribution in age cohorts delineates which segments have the power to change the structure. Child-bearing couples have the potential to change the structure over time, but the structure itself limits the effect of their reproductive behaviour. However fecund or non-proliferating the couples may be, their collective influence upon the demographic structure is dependent on the structural distribution of fertile couples – that is, the demographic structure itself. The effects of a generation of baby-boomers cannot change the proportional relations between the parent cohort and that of the elderly. By the same token, a couple with many children does not change the demographic makeup of the region if the average reproduction rate remains low. These restrictions come from the structure itself and hence should not be explained by means of aggregation (Archer 1995: 174).

Because emergent cultural and structural properties share the qualifications of emergent properties in general, they are granted ontological existence apart from the people curtrently engaging in them. The role hierarchies of institutionalised religion are one example of an SEP whose durability despite successive occupants, such as changing popes, requires that they "are defined and identified independently of their occupants or encumbents and of the social interaction taking place between the latter" (Archer 1995: 176). The resilience to change of systems of belief also implies relative autonomy from the whims of the people: "Equally it is the pre-existence, autonomy and durability of the constituents of the Cultural System which enables their identification as entities distinct from the meanings held by agents at any given time" (Archer 1995: 179). While in reality these distinction may be unclear and outright woolly, it is precisely this analytical separation which enables the study of their interplay. This was the point of Lockwood: Balancing the properties of the "people" with the properties of the "parts" makes room for causal explanations in the conceptual space between them.

If we recall Lockwood's key Marxian example for a moment, we see that Marx too was concerned with the material relations of the economic system and how these relations might cause social change. With the new means of production acquired in the industrializing process came drastically increased productivity. Marx thought that the institution of private ownership was incapable of containing this capacity for over-production. In other words, the system itself contained a contradiction which could potentially be exploited in class struggles (Lockwood 1964: 247-251). To Archer, what Marx identified as contradictions between the forces and relations of production are

specific instances of a more general phenomenon (Archer 1995: 222). The following applies to the systemic and the institutional levels.

Archer uses the term *incongruence* "to cover what neo-functionalists term "tensions" and neo-marxists prefer to call "contradictions" (Archer 1995: 215). An incongruence is a "systemic fault line" which runs throughout the social structure. It may or may not be split open, but will by its very existence condition strategies for its containment or actualization among various parts of the population. Systemic congruence will conversely confront agents with no conflicting elements; rather, agents find a well of reasons to preserve it (Archer 1995: 214-215). A highly integrated social system is one where there is a significant degree of congruence between its institutions. Conversely, if the operation of its major structures threatens to destabilize one another they are incongruent and system integration is low. A social system typically contains several kinds of relationships between its various institutions (Archer 1995: 189). These relationships are not necessarily implicit in the structure itself, but refers to the "state of affairs resulting from the historical elaboration of socio-cultural structures whose various operations then have to co-exist" (Archer 1995: 214-215). *Contra* functionalism and the over-integrated view of culture, Archer holds that there is no *a priori* reason that equilibrium and emergence should coincide rather than conflict and contradiction being the persistent result of these relations (Archer 1995: 214). Whether societal stability (morphostasis) or change (morphogenesis) occurs depends on how the relationships among structures (structural preconditioning) relate to the relationships among people (group interaction). Then again, what happens in group interaction is influenced by the structural preconditioning and how it interfaces with the ambitions and opportunities of the people.

4.4 THE MEDIATION OF STRUCTURE BY AGENCY

The mediation of structure by agency is where the second proposition of Archer comes into play: That structure exerts causal powers on interaction. Structure cannot determine what people end up doing, but can restrict or enable people to behave in certain ways. *Structure influences people by shaping the situations in which people find themselves.* The structural pre-conditioning delineates some things as possible and others as difficult for different parts of the population. For instance, the simple facts that I was born a

Norwegian female in 1984 have a significant influence on my educational opportunities. Had I been born in another country or at another time I might not have had such aspirations, yet alone opportunities. Then again, none of that need have made a difference had I been male. My fortunate situation is ultimately a benefit of the structural relations which developed in post-war Norway. This may again be considered a result of the cultural relationships between second-wave feminism and socialism which fostered gender equity in the educational sector. Yet these structures did not "hit me over the head with a University stick". They merely shaped the circumstances under which I grew up. This shaping of situations is referred to as the *mediation* of structure.

Mediation can be defined "as an objective influence which conditions action patterns and supplies agents with strategic directional guidance" (Archer 1995: 196). Chalari writes that "internal conversation and external social structural factors are connected and separated from each other through mediation" (Chalari 2007: 124), which on the individual level is a generative mechanism consisting of the reflexive deliberation of agents. Archer prefers "mediation" over "generative mechanism" as "there is nothing mechanical about the processes involved" (Archer 1995: 153). She associates the latter with the conception of successionist causality which critical realists have spent so much time on demolishing. In this thesis the two terms are used somewhat interchangeably. It is my opinion that (the verb) mediation is better reserved for an operative causal process, whereas (the noun) mechanism implies an object which exists independently of its potential being actualized.

All structural influences, or the generative powers of SEPs and CEPs, are mediated by people. People remain the only efficient cause in social life, yet structural preconditions influence their interaction. At any given time, structures are the results of past interaction. As consequences go, they can be unintended, unwanted and unacknowledged. Nevertheless structures are activity-dependent in the past tense yet irreducible to current actions in the present tense (Archer 1995: 195-196). Cultural emergent properties delineate at the start of each analytical cycle which theories, dogma and beliefs *can* be re-interpreted, reproduced or forgotten. "There may be the most sophisticated conversations in so-called primitive societies, but they will not be about atomic physics" (Archer 1995: 197). Likewise, structural emergent properties ultimately delineate which material relationships between people and institutions can be transformed through morphogenesis or preserved in morphostasis. These are *objective limitations* of the possible situations and settings agents can encounter. People are involuntaristically

embedded in these conditions because they are not the result of the "people here present". *Contra* structuralisms voluntaristic concept of instantiation, Archer argues that "[t]he prior emergence of relational properties impinge willy nilly on current actors and their situations, implying no compliance, complicity or consent from the latter" (Archer 1995: 151). Determinism is avoided on two accounts. First, any form of structural conditioning (be it social or cultural) is only efficacious through the mediation of people. Second, people are themselves emergent properties of social reality and thus have their own causal capacities which are autonomous from those of structure (Archer 1995: 184). Hence, structure is neither deterministic nor volatile in Archer's conceptualization.

Structures are not constraining or enabling in abstract or by nature. These are relational terms which can only be meaningful by reference to a specific goal or project countenanced by people. Thus, there can be congruence or incongruence among structures as well as between structures and people. This is how a given structure may be enabling for some people while disabling for others (Archer 1995: 198). Indeed, the apartheid state was congenial to the white minority of South Africa precisely because it placed severe restrictions on the powers and aspirations of the multi-coloured majority. Structure forces no one to act in any given way, but may provide strong incentives for choosing some courses of action above others. Thus the relationships between social structures generate causal effects on people, whom in turn still have the freedom and creative capacity to come up with alternative routes of action. Although never determining, the shaping of the situations provides strategic guidance "by supplying good reasons for particular courses of action, in the form of the premiums and penalties associated with following them or ignoring them" (Archer 1995: 216). These are *vested interests* and *opportunity costs*.

The major effect of the situational mediation of structure is the distribution of the population into positions. Agents are involuntaristically placed in positions relative to each other and relative to the socially available pool of material and ideational resources. With these positions come *vested interests*, such as the interest in maintenance of one's place in the hierarchy or the desire to improve it. Porpora explains: "In other words, actors are motivated to act in their interests, which are a function of their social position" (Porpora 1998: 353). Vested interests are embedded in all socially constructed positions. Archer explains the term "vested" thus: "To characterize an interest as a "vested" one is to associate it with a particular position; the implication being that if positions change, then so do interests" (Archer 1995: 203). Vested interests are relational properties which

exert an objective (factual) influence on people's interpretation of their situation. Through the bestowal of vested interests, structural and cultural properties exert a conditional influence of action because one will be predisposed – albeit not determined – to act in accordance to one's interests (Archer 1995: 203-205).

The advancement or defence of vested interests is associated with opportunity costs. Whereas the structural distribution of people into positions gives them vested interests, the pursuit of these interests may be costly. Opportunity costs thus represent the next link between the structural conditioning of people and their reaction to it. Opportunity costs exert their operative effects in two ways. First, they work by applying different costs to differently situated people for the same course of action. This concerns the structural conditioning of decision-making as "different groups have different degrees of freedom and face differentially stringent constraints when they contemplate the same project from their different positions" (Archer 1995: 207). They are a product of the overall structured situations in which people find themselves because the costs derive from the gap between positions which the pursuit of vested interests must span. For instance, leaving an isolated religious sect is a course of action which allocates different costs to people depending on their position. For a frustrated youngster eager to explore the temptations of secular society the price of leaving is the severing of all known social bonds, including family. This price is indeed high, but it is remedied somewhat because young people are adaptable, at the start of their reproductive career and generally employable. An elderly person might risk a comfortable position of honour and face less appealing circumstances outside in addition to paying the cost of severed relationships.

Second, opportunity costs work by influencing which projects *can* be entertained. The distribution into positions, with their vested interests and varying access to resources, faces different parts of the population with different challenges and opportunities. For instance, the redistribution of life chances attending the industrial division of labour resulted in the allocation of reverse opportunity costs for different family forms to different social groups. The growing middle class could hire labour to take up the task traditionally carried out by the third generation so that the nuclear family form could be sustained. The situation was reversed for the working class, which in addition to the costs obtained by means of their position lacked public provisions for care of the elderly and thus had no means of supporting a nuclear family. Indeed, the projects entertained by two groups may be diametrically opposed and this may according to Archer account for divergent social trends (Archer 1995: 208).

We need not deprive agents of their interpretative freedom to maintain that "real structural influences mean that objective opportunity costs are associated with different responses to frustrating or rewarding situations, which condition (without determining) the interpretations placed upon them" (Archer 1995: 205). Such constraints and enablements are the situational expressions of structures, stemming from their relational capacity to bridge or obstruct transition to other positions which also carries premiums and penalties. Reification is avoided because although incentives and costs are objective, they are conditional and hence "their efficacy is dependent upon how agent weigh them and decide to act in view of their own weightings" (Archer 1995: 208). Agents have their full interpretative freedom as to how they perceive their own situation and how they choose to act, but objective opportunity costs will apply should people misinterpret their position or ignore to act in accordance to the interests vested in it. In fact agents can be very perceptive of their position and still choose a path of action which disregards the constraints and enablements associated with it (Archer 1995: 197, 205-206). As *conditional* influences, opportunity costs and vested interests cannot prevent an actor deterministically from pursuing a different path, but the different path comes with a price tag (a price which some, of course, will be willing to pay. The marriage of Norwegian Crown Prince Haakon Magnus to working class party-girl Mette-Marit Tjessem Høiby is one well-known example).

The "structured messes" of social reality are of such a complexity that their causal powers need further disentanglement in order to become available for analysis. Divergent degrees of congruence between the level of "people" and the level of "parts" create distinctive *situations* for the people involved. These situations are the *loci* of the interplay of structure and agency. "In general, situations are shaped very differently for agents according to whether such emergent properties are characterized by tensions between their component elements or by coherence between them" (Archer 1995: 214).

Archer introduces a terminology of numbered relations to differentiate among strata of emergence pertaining to any given phenomenon. The relations internal to an emergent entity are relations of the *first order*. These are the direct results of past interaction. Relations among emergent entities of the same kind are relations of the *second order*, or *second-order emergent properties*. These are "relations between the results of the results of past actions" (Archer 1995: 213). Relationships among the figuration of cultural and structural emergent properties are termed *third-order emergent properties* (Archer 1995: 218). Higher-order emergent properties have potentially

systemic-wide causal powers, the exercise of which depends upon their congruence or incongruence with conditioning at lower levels, implying actualization and non-actualization respectively. Thus, higher-order relationships do not override or determine first-order relationships but are in fact significantly influenced by them (Archer 1995: 213-214).

The second-order relations create "distinctive *situational logics*, which predispose agents towards *specific courses of action* for the promotion of their interests" (Archer 1995: 216). Second-order relationships are particularly interesting, because it is the incidents of complementarity which may identify loci of social morphostasis whereas cases of contradictions may serve as loci for social morphogenesis (Archer 1995: 215). Archer construes four-type schemas to establish the different ways second order relations may provide strategic guidance given their shaping of the situations agents find themselves in (see Table 1: Four institutional configurations and their situational logics, page 133). When it comes to four-type schemas one can always question whether two variables can exhaust the possibly relevant factors or whether the two most relevant variables have been selected. Nevertheless four-type schemas are popular as they provide research with a basic typology with which to compare very complex situations. The present schemas model the interface of agency and social and cultural emergent properties with respect to the variables of first, whether the second-order relationship among structures is one of compatibility or incompatibility; and second, whether the second-order relationship is one of necessity or contingency. It is in these variables we can find some structural causes – the generative mechanisms – of social stability (morphostasis) or change (morphogenesis).

Because second-order relations obtain between CEPs as well as SEPs, and parallel forms of situational logics are generated from them, both culture and structure can be described using the same terms and framework (see Table 2: Cultural and structural morphogenesis / morphostasis at the systemic and social levels, page 133). However, there are two reasons to treat them separately. First, given the substantive differences (structural emergent properties having material relations, cultural emergent properties having logical ones) "their formal similarities have to be illustrated and demonstrated rather than merely asserted or presumed" (Archer 1995: 217). Second, the relative autonomy of emergent properties means that they are not necessarily in synchrony (Archer 1995: 218). It is the separate treatment of structure and culture which allows for analysis of the third-order relations between them. For the sake of the reader I limit the

present account to the institutional relations, or second-order structural emergent properties.

The two variables give four institutional configurations, each of which generates its own situational logics. When institutions stand in a *necessary and complementary* relationship they are mutually reinforcing and mutually invoke one another in their operations. The interdependence creates a situation where *protection* of the existing institutional relations is imperative to the people involved. Structural stability results because everyone would lose should their ordering be disrupted. The complementarity of the existing network of interlocking positions, roles and operations is protective because disruption of their relations incurs penalties while reproduction is rewarding (Archer 1995: 219-221). This is an inherently morphostatic configuration as change is discouraged and disadvantageous.

The second-order relationship of *necessary incompatibility* describes a situation "when two or more institutions are necessarily and internally related to one another yet the effects of their operations are to threaten the endurance of the relationship itself" (Archer 1995: 222). This is an inherently unstable situation which contains within itself a potential for disruption and change. Because of the systemic interdependence, agents are forced to co-operate; but because of the conflicting operation they cannot pursue their own vested interests without incurring opportunity costs pertaining to the contradicting institutions. Thus, the second order emergent property of incompatible but necessary relations among institutions creates a situational logic of containment and *compromise*. Promotion of vested interests becomes a careful balancing act of weighting gains against losses, because to accrue bonuses also incurs penalties. Compromise contains the contradiction as long as this balancing act can be maintained, and hence is in itself a morphostatic configuration (Archer 1995: 222-225).

Because society is an open system, the various degrees of institutional stability witnessed in the preceding two forms of second order relations are differently susceptible to disruptions by external influences. These external and contingent factors may be beneficiary or detrimental to the institutions in question. Examples include war and invasion, the discovery of new resources (such as oil), new alliances and other power relations, and religious reinvention.

Contingent incompatibilities can arise within or without a given system, the generic effect of which is to foster a situational logic of *elimination*. Both the morphostatic configurations of necessary compatibilities and necessary incompatibilities

are dependants of the distributions of a finite amount of resources. Should these distributions shift, the symmetry upon which a compromise rests falls as the groups positioned so as to exploit new resources plunge towards the counter-actualization of the initial agreement. For institutions in a mutually reinforcing relationship, the internal preoccupation with protection of the *status quo* is re-directed towards elimination of the contradiction which threatens to topple or disrupt the existing institutional relations. The greatest gains are tied to inflicting maximum damage on the contradicting side. In the case of necessary contradictions, change in available resources lead to a systemic cracking as pursuit of vested interests realize the systemic fault line which previously was contained.

Likewise, the protection of a stable system depends on containing the ambitions and limiting the resources of the less fortunate parts of the population because these are the ones with the greatest gain potential for a system disruption. If the marginal can make new gains through external and *complementary* relationships, a situational logic of pure *opportunism* ensues. For the groups affiliated with the contingent complementarity, only gain can accrue from their exploitation. New interests, new material means for their realization and hence new institutional patterns emerge from this situation. This situation is antithetic to the protective reproduction and repressive containment of the state of affairs because it was the distributions of resources which originally bound the parties to the compromise: The intrusion of external contingencies is both destructive to the institutional order and re-constructive. Hence, this is a “loose” situation highly conductive to morphogenesis (Archer 1995: 226-227).

In both cases, strategic mobilization generates new forms of social cleavage, and in both cases the introduction of an external incompatibility is antithetical to their previous operation (Archer 1995: 225-226). Contingent incompatibilities thus have a morphogenetic impact on the state of affairs.

Given that society is an open and extremely complex system, any and all of these institutional configurations may be operative at any given time. One single institution may have secondary relations of all four kinds at the same time. The nature of the relations and which institutions they pertain to is a matter of historical contingency and variability, and is a matter of empirical investigation (Archer 1995: 222) But, claims Archer, what happens under these circumstances is not (Archer 1995: 227-228). In situations where the relations among institutions are of several kinds, two features are

significant with regard to agents. First, the involvement of agents in these structural relationships differs and hence their experience of the same varies. It delineates who can partake in the strategic battle for promotion of the interests vested in a given position, or who can be an ally in the defence or change of a given institutional operation. Second, "the alliances which do develop will have variable degrees of access to material resources … which will affect the impact of their strategic action in relation to that of their opponents" (Archer 1995: 229). These factors strongly condition who will be involved and what strategies will be more successful to them given the resources at their disposal. This, in turn, will be decisive for institutional morphogenesis or –stasis.

Introduction to Section Three

The viability of the morphogenetic approach for the sociology of religion hinges equally on the premises of analytical dualism, the ontology of emergence and the temporality of interaction. In a manner typical of Archer's authorship, their joint appropriation is characterized by interdependence and mutual necessity although they were developed for the morphogenetic approach at different times. This, of course, justifies naming the morphogenetic approach a cultural emergent property. All three premises find support in the ideational environment of critical realism. However, not all critical realists are equally convinced of the advantage of an analytical dualism. Particularly vexing to Archer is the resentment of Bhaskar himself. Chapter 5 re-visits analytical dualism from the perspective of the sociology of religion. A conversation with Jürgen Habermas in 5.1 on his distinction between the life world and the system shows how the distinction of Archer retains room for religion in the public sphere. In 5.2 attention is turned towards the activity-dependence of structure, which Bhaskar and Giddens perceive as an obstacle to analytical dualism. Chapter 5.3 discusses whether it is practically possible to utilize analytical dualism with attention to the topic of religious belief.

Archer is predominantly concerned with extracting causal explanations of complex social interplays. Religion obtains several causal potentials within her theory. Three dimensions of the religion of the individual are highlighted in chapter 6: Religion as provider of meaning, the causal force of religious belief and the importance of religious belief and experience in identity formation. The institutional relations described in chapter 4.4 are contextualized to religion as a meaning system in chapter 7. Early anthropology's characterization of religion as a highly integrated system is shown to be one out of four possibilities in 7.1. Use of cultural power to conceal problematic aspects of the belief system and the consequences for religious interaction and grouping when these strategies fail is explored in 7.2 and 7.3, respectively.

Archer sees group interaction as the driving force in religious change, which is explored in chapter 8. In chapter 9 I take an overview on religion from Archer's perspective with attention to practical research.

5: Analytical Dualism and Religion

In this chapter analytical dualism is examined from the vantage point of the sociology of religion. The enterprise of Archer strikes familiar tones with Habermas' differentiation between the *life world* and the s*ystem*. Habermas seeks to establish a complementarity between functional analysis and interpretative phenomenology (Kaspersen 2004). Archer, following Lockwood, combines functionalism and interactionism with critical realist ontology. Chapter 5.1 should be read as a comparison of Archer's analytical dualism to the key dualism offered by one of her peer general theorists. The aim is to contextualize Archer into the field of general theory, and demarcate her stance from the one that in my opinion most closely resembles her on this particular issue. One consequence of the difference in distinction is that religion is apprehended differently, and has different prospects in modern society.

5.1 JÜRGEN HABERMAS AND THE LIFE WORLD / SYSTEM DISTINCTION

To Habermas, the repertoire of knowledge which makes mutual orientation of understanding between actors possible constitutes the life world. The shared knowledge of the life world is expressed in culture and personality. In the life world action is *communicative* in that it is founded on shared or negotiated meaning. Communicative action reproduces cultural knowledge, develops personal identity through socialization and maintains solidarity between actors. The system, on the other hand, is guided by strategic action and means-end rationality. Society is viewed as a self-regulative system comprised of partial systems, such as the economy and politics. The system is dominated by *generalized symbolic steering media*, such as money and power. The system reproduces material conditions, whereas the life world reproduces symbolic conditions. In other words, communicative action produces social integration whereas the steering media produces system integration (Kaspersen 2004: 77-79).

To Habermas, religion, values and traditions are part of the "finite province of meaning" of the life world (Furseth 2009: 99). The life world is a public sphere where common meaning and consent can be built by communicative rationality. Modernity has resulted in an independent sphere of secular knowledge in which formal modes of

communicative action, discourses, have been institutionalized (Furseth 2009: 99). To Habermas, religion is bound to lose its relevance as modernization progresses as "the authority of the holy is gradually replaced by the authority of achieved consensus" (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), p. 77. Quoted in Furseth 2009: 99). The influence of religion is limited to questions of meaning and purpose in the communicative action of the life world. In the ideal democracy envisioned by Habermas, the idea of God can be linguistically transformed into an immanent symbol of ideal communicative structure. Only by adopting secular rationality can religion inform the emancipation of communication and society (Furseth 2009).

From Habermas' perspective the distinction between social integration and system integration is a historical question (Archer 1996: 308; Kaspersen 2004: 78-80). To Archer this is an analytical, ontological and theoretical distinction. Analytical dualism gives the differential distribution of religious ideas and their internal logical relations autonomous causal power from what agents make of them. Historically the degrees of integration *at* the different levels may vary, as well as the intersection *between* the levels. By differentiating CEPs and SEPs in historical analysis Archer seeks to track how shifting relations among and between them influence social interaction.

Habermas' distinction applies *between* culture and structure whereas Archer's analytical dualism applies *within* the respective domains of culture and structure (Archer 1996: 289-290). Thus, where Habermas sees the two spheres as constituted by two modes of rational action, analytical dualism entails no such inference about action. From the perspective of Archer one cannot deduce the powers of agency from those of structure.

To Habermas, modernity has altered the balance between the symbolic reproduction of the life world and the material production of the system. Means-end rationality and generalized steering media (money) increasingly surpass communicative rationality and values in the life world: The life world is colonized by the system. Religion is gradually being replaced by secular rationality. This may lead to loss of identity and meaning for the individual and anomie for society (Kaspersen 2004: 80). Archer distinguishes between structure and culture, but places a heavy emphasis on how groups associated with these two domains may form alliances across these boundaries. To Archer it is important to note that religion can motivate materially oriented strategies *without this implying anomie* or loss of religious plausibility. From this perspective "colonization" of one domain on the other is to be expected, without there being a preset

outcome of such entanglements. The outcome depends entirely on how the "parts" gel with the "people".

This is the key difference between the life world / system distinction of Habermas and the analytical dualism of Archer. In the morphogenetic perspective both communicative and goal oriented interaction are placed together on the "agent" side, without any clear distinction among them. Both system and life world, or social structure and culture, are placed together on the other side of the distinction, albeit with a clear demarcation among them. Where Habermas sees religion as belonging in one sphere of his dual structure of society, Archer maintains a space for religion in all spheres of social life. In other words, although their theoretical distinctions appear similar, different things are placed on the respective sides of the distinction and hence different inferences are drawn from them.

The distinction of social reality into spheres governed by different rationalities is in many ways less controversial than Archer's differentiation of social structure from agency. Readers unfamiliar with critical realism may perceive the morphogenetic frame as a reified and deterministic account of the structure/agency interplay. Yet familiarity with critical realism is not a guarantor of acceptance of analytical dualism. In the following I visit the philosophy of sociology by Bhaskar, who disagree with Archer on the topic.

5.2 ANALYTICAL DUALISM AND ACTIVITY DEPENDENCE

Archer recognizes that methodologically, "Bhaskar displays some qualms about adopting the analytical dualism … upon which [in Archer's opinion] the workability of his TMSA depends" (Archer 1995: 141). Bhaskar's main reason for denying analytical dualism is according to Archer the "siren call of inseparability" which tempts the conceptual sailor to collapse structure and agency due to the recognition that society is not a self-subsistent reality. This brings Bhaskar close to central conflation and the perspective advanced by Anthony Giddens. Where Archer separates structure and agency to examine their interplay over time, Giddens sees the two as mutually constitutive aspects of social reality and argues we must examine them simultaneously (Bo Kaspersen 2007; Kaspersen 2004). Both Giddens and Bhaskar maintain that social structure, and hence religion, is activity-dependent. In their view this renders separate treatment of them misleading.

Archer wishes to maintain that social realism *necessitates* analytical dualism. The following may therefore be read both as Archer's critique of Giddens, her critique of Bhaskar and her argument as to why analytical dualism is necessary for realist social science. Emphasis is on those aspects with particular relevance for the sociology of religion.

In the chapter "Realism and morphogenesis" in *Realist Social Theory* (Archer 1995), which also appears in *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (Archer *et al.* 1998), Bhaskar's *Transformational Model of Social Action* (henceforth TMSA) is compassionately juxtaposed to the morphogenetic model. While at times found dubious and wanting in practical value, the TMSA is depicted as "the generous under-labouring of a philosopher who has actually dug beyond disciplinary bounds" (Archer 1995: 161). Archer deliberates on the key theses put forward by Bhaskar and with prowess manages to synthesise them with her own approach. One central move in doing so is, unsurprisingly, to incorporate analytical dualism into Bhaskar's more holistic frame.

Bhaskar states that social structures, like religion, "unlike natural mechanisms ... only exist in virtue of the activities they govern, and cannot be identified independently of them" (Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality* (1989), p. 78. Quoted in Archer 1995: 143). Other critics have noted that if the pivotal word is "govern", the proposition must allow action which upholds the *potential* for governance. Archer pulls forth Bhaskar's own argument that power, among other things, may exist unexercised and thus govern nothing at all *at the present moment* (Archer 1995: 143). The key is "present", because if we are to take into consideration that social events emerges through time then we cannot limit analysis to the present moment. Taken to the religious context, any activity which upholds religions normative authority *in general* also extends the potential of any *particular* aspect of religion to govern *future* action. Its potential for governance is sustained as long as the normative authority of the tradition is upheld.

Bhaskar accepted the critique of his use of "governance", but maintains that social structures "are carried or transported from one time-space location to another only or in virtue of [sic] human praxis" (Bhaskar, *Naturalism*, p. 174. Quoted in Archer 1995: 143) and hence cannot be identified apart from them. Archer criticises this "loophole" for retaining a present-tense concept of structure which is incompatible to Bhaskar's own understanding of stratified reality. With respect to religion this is problematic because the structural aspects of religion are resilient to efforts of present believers to alter their operation. The institutionalized role hierarchies of Christianity are not dependent on their

role encumbents; rather, people who might wish to change the structure are often not admitted into (or quickly removed from) positions of power where change may be effected. Archer writes that present-tense theorizing (Archer 1995: 71)

> "omits, *inter alia*, the powers of many role structures to pre-determine *who* was eligible to be an occupant and the powers of incumbents to reflectively re-monitor their activities. The former introduces the past tense and the latter the future tense, but neither are observable in the present tense, if they are observable at all"

Archer contends that if structure is held to be activity-dependent, such as Giddens proposes, the scientist is confined to the level of empirically observable events. Limiting the causal properties of structure to present action conflates the real and the actual, and deprives us of an understanding of how the actions of "the long dead" continue to influence interaction. As relatively enduring emergent properties, the structures aspects of religion have the power to condition present agents regardless of their efforts to transform them. Thus, whether religion is activity-dependent in the past or the present tense is to Archer an empirical question (Archer 1995: 143-145).

The second proposition of Bhaskar states that social structures, such as religion, "do not exist independently of the conceptions that agents have of what they are doing in their activities" (Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality* (1989), p. 78. Quoted in Archer 1995: 145). This is particularly relevant to the sociology of religion because religion is largely about conceptions agents have. A rephrasing of Bhaskar to our topic may be that religion does not exist apart from the religious beliefs, interpretations and explanations agents employ in their religious lives. Theoretically, Archer finds this to have three possible, yet equally problematic, interpretations. It may mean that if agents have no conception whatsoever of what they are doing, then the maintenance of society is impossible: If there are no believers, there will be no religion. This she rightly identifies as a "no people, no society truism" and moves on to a second possibility, namely that structures may depend on agents having the *particular* conception they have of what they are doing. Some religious relationships are of this kind, such as the one between a priest and a confessor and partners in a marriage. However, many other structures rely on coercion, manipulation and sanctioning processes which maintain the relationship by overriding or mystifying the conceptions agents have of what they are doing (Archer 1995: 145).

A potent example is the capacity of religion to legitimate order and authority in society. By reference to an ultimate source of authority, such as the "divine kingship", the social order is represented as something *more than* human convention. Marx and Engels

are of course prime critics of religion in this regard (see for instance Marx 2006; and Marx and Engels on Religion, in Woodhead and Heelas 2000: 192-194), but one need not attack religion *per se* in order to appreciate Archer's point. Berger accurately pointed out that the effectiveness of religious legitimation often involves mystification of how the order came to be, de-emphasising deviant forms of organization anterior to the present one and the treatment of such practices as "genuinely traditional" (McGuire 2002: 28-29).

In the contemporary West religion still serves as a support for distributions of power and resources. The combination of utilitarian capitalism and puritan morals in the Republican Right Wing served as a powerful resource to the political ideology of George W. Bush. The implementation of Christian values was integral to the mobilization of republican voters, despite the fact that many of the measures that were taken by the Bush governments was detrimental to the same people (see for instance McGuire 2002; Riis 2001: 116). The point is that religious structures may well exist and have causal influence apart from "the conceptions agents have of what they are doing". Habermas emphasises the power of money and markets in shaping our action context behind the backs of agents. In extension, Archer emphasises the objective limitations and enablements placed on action contexts by religion. This implies that the causal powers of religion cannot be reduced to the people currently engaging in it, but must be understood as contextual limitations which are not necessarily activity-dependent. At least we must ask whose activities they depend upon, and when they did so.

Archer finds that the dismissal of these options leaves the interpreter of Bhaskar with one final possibility, the postulation of "a causal relationship between agent's misconceptions and the endurance of social structures, implying ... that changes in the former would contribute to changes in the latter" (Archer 1995: 146). In our present context, that would be saying that if the partakers in a religious group change their minds about religion that would reflect in the structure of the group. Again, while some egalitarian communities such as Wiccan covens may well change swiftly should the witches in question find reason to do so, that change would not be a direct consequence of the participants' change of heart. First, they need to convince the other members. In large-scale institutions change is decisively slow. In the Catholic Church processes of change are slowed to a near halt by the structure itself. To Archer, this third possibility implies a functional necessity of concepts which is founded upon an *a prioristic* notion of coherence between concepts and reality (Archer 1995: 146-147).

I interpret Archer to the meaning that any structure is only operative insofar as it is mediated by human agency; but that the *causal potentials* of a structure to condition interaction are not. In a later passage Archer writes that the power of pastoralism to sustain larger tribes than food-gathering can be suspended by the actions of people: “In this case, it could of course be said that the tribe had simply stopped being pastoralists, which is true, but they have not destroyed the powers of pastoralism as would be demonstrated were they to resume the nomadic life” (Archer 1995: 188). Similarly, religious structures such as monastic organization have properties and powers which are suspended, but not destroyed, by failing recruitment. The operation of structure cannot be equated to an activity-dependence in the present tense without falling back into central conflation. Again, whether religious change occurs as a direct result of changes agents have of their religious conceptions must remain an empirical question.

Archer does not dispute that structure is a dependant of human agency. What she resists is to equate activity-dependence with simultaneity. “To stress temporal separability is never to challenge the activity-dependence of structures: it is only, but very usefully, to specify whose activities they depend upon and when” (Archer 1995: 66). Structure is only efficacious through the meditational shaping of action context. But this dependence on agential action must according to Archer not be taken as an impetus to lump them together in analysis. Offered as a solution to the problems of structure and agency, analytical dualism is deemed necessary for an understanding of the interplay of structure and agency through mediation. This is not a new idea:

> “Despite these difficulties inherent in using the notion of a ‘system of belief’ instead of the individual or group credited with holding it – difficulties for which there may be no formal solution – I nevertheless think it essential that the great Dividing Line be drawn in some such terms” (Gellner, "The Savage and the Modern Mind" (1973), p. 169. Quoted in Archer 1996: 133)

But the comprehensive account of how and why this should be done is innovative. How does analytical dualism apply to the practical conduct of the sociology of religion?

5.3 ANALYTICAL DUALISM IN PRACTICAL ANALYSIS

From the perspective of the sociology of religion it may be argued that analytical dualism is conductible in theory, but that it is impossible in practice. Exploring religion from a

social-scientific point of view entails understanding the particular conceptions agents have of their experiences. Quantitative surveys of religion map the spread of diverse ideas, values and practices in a populace. This spread is necessarily activity-dependent, because it is the activity of believing or doing which is reported. Qualitative research often focuses on the particular interpretations and justifications offered by agents for a given course of action. This is also activity-dependent, because it is the particular instance of believing and doing that is sought understood. Analytical dualism can seem an obstacle rather than a help from this perspective. In the following I recount Archer's own argument for why analytical dualism is possible in practice. From my point of view, her argument presupposes a given mode of explanation (see chapter 9.1) and hence is not universally applicable.

As have been seen, Bhaskar emphasises the context of interpretation in identifying social structures. Similarly, Habermas recommends that hermeneutical methods and an insider perspective be deployed for understanding the life world because communicative action is founded on shared meaning. This necessitates that structure and agency be treated simultaneously, for as Archer herself says it, " 'meanings' invoke both levels (CS + S-C) and therefore the context of interpretation also invokes both levels" (Archer 1996: 133).

Still, Archer argues that the context of interaction and interpretation is not the correct one for identifying social structures due to the fallibility of human knowledge. Archer holds that the context of social interaction "only yields the fallible partial appreciation which agents have of their structural context" (Archer 1995: 177) and thus that any method restricted to their interpretations cannot exhaust the matter of structure nor provide anything but subjective accounts of their operations: "To reduce culture to our knowledge of it is to commit the epistemic fallacy" (Archer 1996: 299). If we limit the analysis of structure to the comprehension of agents, we confine ourselves to their disparate interpretations and preclude an understanding of structural conditions of which agents are unaware (Archer 1995: 176-177).

Objections to asserting analytical dualism in relations to beliefs are to Archer caused by trying to do too much at once. The identification of the generative mechanisms inherent in structures of religion (both ideational and material) must rely on an analytical separation of the people they influence. If we try to deal with them both at once because they are in fact intertwined, Archer fears we end up going nowhere (Archer 1996: 133).

The problem lies in distinguishing how much of the context to include. Archer introduces a rule (Archer 1996: 134):

> "if the Cultural System (CS) is held to be constituted of nothing but objective items, 'texts' and the *logical relations* between them, then the only part of the context which is relevant to them, because of their dependence on it, are the '*other ideas*' to which they are related. In sum, if we clearly distinguish between the two cultural levels, the Systemic and the Socio-Cultural, then we can also differentiate between the aspects of context – 'other ideas' and 'other people' – on which the former and latter depend respectively. "

Archer argues we should strive to have fullest possible knowledge of the CS environment of ideas, and work to divest intelligibility from ambiguity and attain the highest possible degree of propositions as compared to "utterances" (Archer 1996: 138). In my view this renders the "rule" of context-differentiation problematic because the reformulation of utterances into propositions (by the researcher or the informant) undeniably is an act of interpretation. The researcher is situated in another context than her research object, with other objective conditions and subjective concerns. Hermeneutically speaking, there is no "tunnel of translation" securing that the meanings of the informant are apprehended correctly by the researcher. Epistemologically speaking, both the researcher and the informant are restricted in their knowledge of the context, and both of their interpretations are fallible. We are thrown back upon the slippery grounds of our own interpretations because in reformulation our categories may be projected upon the ideational framework of the informant. Do we know enough about the ideational context to be sure that there are no additional ideas which would affect its interpretation? Do we let our own preconceptions shape our interpretation beyond what the informant gives us reason to do? This very much becomes an exercise of Giddens' double hermeneutics – which is not to say it is impossible: only more complicated than what Archer openly admits.

Sociological reluctance to produce "textual" analyses of meaning without social reference is reasonable, because it is not the system of belief *per se* we are interested in, but the social consequences they have. To Archer, analytical dualism is a method which enhances the understanding of social consequences by separating them from the system of belief. Analytically, at the starting point of the temporal tract which we study, the CS items in questions have "escaped their makers" and condition the cultural context for the

unravelling morphogenetic/static cycle. This is an analytical separation of the ideas created *before* the interaction takes place from those which *result* of interaction. This is not to say that religious ideas, meanings and imagery are existentially differentiated from the minds of the believers *during* interaction. “I am not claiming that the two levels are independent of one another; the whole point of analytical dualism is to be able to investigate the relations between them. Obviously the S-C level crucially effects the CS level” (Archer 1996: 141). The context-independence of CEPs at the start of the analytical period merely asserts that as ideational resources available before interaction takes place that the causal powers of CEPs are differentiated from those of the people.

To Archer, the interdependence of the CS and the S-C is precisely what makes dualistic disentanglement “a matter of methodological ingenuity not of theoretical intractability” (Archer 1996: 139-140). Both researcher and the people researched have restricted knowledge, but this is of no concern in establishing logical contradictions and complementarities: “For all propositions are based on restricted material and all restrictions were caused by something, but the logical relations which ensue between them are emergent properties and thus irreducible to the ... Socio-Cultural causation involved” (Archer 1996: 138). Methodologically, informants may be asked to supply contextual clarification by elaborating on statements made by preachers, texts and theological items of faith. Although the context of interpretation is not the correct one for identifying *structures*, “subjects *own* sayings about their Socio-Cultural environment ... are as admissible as contextual referents as any ‘other ideas’ about anything else” (Archer 1996: 138).

In the process of determining the nature of the relation between two items, many will be discovered which are not of propositional status. Archer contends that *epistemological differentiation* is necessary in analysis because “people hold their factual beliefs (which are true or false) quite differently from their representational beliefs (which do not pretend to propositional status)” (Archer 1996: 139). For instance, when people “say” something but obviously “mean” otherwise the researcher should take the saying seriously because it indicates Socio-Cultural attitudes towards the Cultural System. The researchers in *Hjernevask* said that we can only understand gender as cultural patterns, but as I said, I believe that what some of them *meant* by denying biological factors was a preventative measure for not spreading quasi-scientific “evidence” for gender inequity on national television. If this interpretation is true, it tells me quite a lot about how the researchers perceived their own position as scientific

authorities in relation to the knowledge of the audience, and how they were constrained by these conditions.

According to Archer, trying to understand the meanings of items of faith for different groups of believers or trying to explain how people live with contradictive beliefs are different enterprises from that of identifying contradictions and complementarities. Such questions are about how people live with the makeup of their Cultural System, she argues, and "this is precisely what we want to explore; to make it part of our tools of identification is to rob us of our topic" (Archer 1996: 142). Furthermore, "analysis does not begin with a complete description of the Cultural System: a full itemization of its contradictions and complementarities being both impossible and irrelevant" (Archer 1996: xxi). The point of analytical dualism is to understand how people relate to and are conditioned by the available ideas. Thus this concerns a different inquiry than that of qualitative understanding of justification and interpretation of one's situation, or reports of personal religious belief and practice in surveys. Analytical dualism is a tool for *identification of generative mechanisms* and the *construction of causal explanations* based on them within the morphogenetic model.

5.4 DUALISMS NECESSITY FOR REALIST CAUSAL EXPLANATIONS

The original distinction between system and social integration by Lockwood was intended as "a wholly artificial one" (Lockwood 1964: 245) with which to further structural analysis. Archer takes this far beyond the intentions of her inspiration by taking it to encompass both structure and agency as a workable methodology (Zeuner 2000). Archer clearly states that her own analytical dualism is "an artifice of convenience" (Archer 1996: 143), and that it is an analytical, not a philosophical, line of demarcation. Archer does not deny that structure and agency in reality are intertwined and overlapping in very complex ways. Quite the contrary: "I am *not* asserting dualism but rather the utility of an *analytically* dualistic approach" (Archer 1996: xix). Even if analytically speaking agents and structures are confined to their respective sides of the dualism this should not be taken to imply that structures are unpeopled or *vice versa* that people are entirely unstructured, nor that the two are conceptualised as opposite and complementary entities.

Archer allows the analytical dualism *some* ontological correspondence although she is quite resourceful in avoiding its explication. Her realist conceptualizations of structure and of agency as emergent properties in a stratified reality grant both ontological existence, so that they may be "factually distinguished" as temporally asynchronous entities with their own causal potentials. Thus the distinction is not an entirely analytical one. Yet structure is only operative through agential mediation, and hence cannot be entirely distinct from its counterpart. Archer explains that "social realists have never maintained that these are fully *distinct objects*, as opposed to ones possessing *distinctive powers*." (Archer 2000: 310).

From her critique of Bhaskar and her own arguments Archer draws the conclusion that analytical dualism is not only compatible with the TMSA and critical realism, but in fact necessary if the aim is to be of practical value. The critical realist ontology of stratified reality implies that the emergent properties of structure and of agency are irreducible to and relatively autonomous from one another. "Irreducibility means that the different strata are *separable* by definition precisely because of the properties and powers which only belong to each of them and whose emergence from one another justifies their differentiation as strata" (Archer 1995: 14). Emergent entities, by virtue of their autonomy, have the property of occupying their own tracts in the historical trajectory: "emergence takes time since it derives from interaction and its consequences which necessarily occur in time" (Archer 1995: 14). Because strata and entities *emerge from* other strata and entities, the latter necessarily pre-dates the former. And having emerged, then *qua* product, it is relatively independent from its origins. Analytical dualism is necessary because structure and agency "are neither co-extensive nor co-variant through time, because each possesses autonomous emergent properties which are thus capable of independent variation and therefore of being out of phase with one another in time" (Archer 1995: 66).

Recognizing that structure and agency constitute emergent properties entails attention towards the *interplay between* their causal powers. Theorizing about society as an open system necessitates a differentiation between generative mechanisms and intervening factors. Social generative mechanisms operate in a highly complex environment where other mechanisms may prevent or prove conductive to their actual manifestation. People themselves are a prominent factor which trammels the workings of these mechanisms. As any social outcome always entails an interplay between the generative mechanisms of people and of structure, Archer argues that a distinction

between them is required in order to be able to explain anything at all (Archer 1995: 69-70). To the extent that the aim is to divest the causes of social change I concur to this argument. The basic delineation of analytical dualism makes firm handholds on the gargantuan complexities of social change. Change is caused by something, either by active effort or the failing of old relationships, and therefore a distinction among causal potentials may prove helpful in investigating events.

In the framework of Archer religion can take on a manifold of causal powers by virtue of the diverse emergent properties which can be said to constitute religion and religious phenomena. Religious beliefs can cause patterns of interaction at all levels of analysis, either as reasons for evaluating Personal decisions or as guidelines for role conduct. Religious beliefs can also serve as the uniting ground which moves people from a passive position of Primary Agency to an actively challenging or defensive position as Corporate Agents. Religious institutions exert causal powers over the people associated with them by shaping the action context for everyone involved; the relationship between religious institutions and other institutions of society can also have profound effect on people's lives. On a societal and global scale the third-order relations between religions and these religions and other institutionalised powers generates distinctive situations which impact how the religious adherents evaluate and interpret their situation, and what strategies they consider to further their ambitions. The following account of religion in the morphogenetic perspective starts at the small scale: The individual's religion and religious experience.

6: The Individual's Religion

Sociological understandings of religion have to a significant extent focused upon religion's capacity to provide meaning for our human experience of the world. In its generic form, "*meaning* refers to the interpretation of situations and events in terms of some broader frame of reference" (McGuire 2002: 26). It first and foremost the imagery and creeds of religious traditions which has been considered to possess this capacity as religious belief serves as a pool of imagery to which our personal experiences can be related. It was early emphasised by Weber, who suggested that religious action is the individual's way of relating towards mundane concerns in a meaningful way. From this perspective religion has a capacity to provide meaning to the actions of the individual beyond the institutional boundaries of religion itself (Furseth and Repstad 2003: 47-50).

This chapter focuses on how religion can have causal influence in the life of the individual from the morphogenetic perspective. First, the position of Archer on the topic of meaning is delineated from the most influential modern scholar on the subject within our discipline, Peter L. Berger. Second, we turn to how religious beliefs and meanings have causal powers through individual action. This chapter is closed by what I consider Archer's most controversial – but also most exiting – contribution to the sociology of religion, namely the causal potential of religious belief and experience in identity formation and interaction.

6.1 RELIGION AS PROVIDER OF MEANING

In modern theories of religion the Weberian influence is strong in the works of symbolic anthropologist Clifford Geertz and social constructivist Peter L. Berger. To Geertz, events and experiences are interpreted as meaningful when they are linked to a perceived order of reality. This symbolic order is to Geertz "world-making" in that it ultimately delineates how we perceive the world (Geertz 2002). Drawing on Geertz, Berger too emphasises religion's capacity to allocate all experience into the same explanatory framework. Such a comprehensive meanings system is called a *worldview*. A worldview is a perspective on the world, so to speak, which according to Berger links the individual to the group by bestowing meaning on shared experience. Sharing a meaning system

means both cognitive and social support for one's worldview and interpretation of everyday events. Religion as a meaning-system is an encompassing frame of interpretation which makes sense of the world, orders it, and relates our experiences to the community (Furseth and Repstad 2003; McGuire 2002).

From the perspective of the morphogenetic approach, the concept of "meaning" spans the gap between the Cultural System and Socio-Cultural interaction. The act of interpretation occurs in the social context by reference to items of the Cultural System (Archer 1996: 133). Interpreting good news in terms of divine providence relates the concrete news and the religious belief to the experience of being blessed. The religious meaning system is understood as cultural emergent properties, or clusters of ideas about the world and transcendence which stand in particular logical relationships to one another. This is the ideational aspect of religion, including the doctrinal and aesthetic dimensions. In this perspective the concept of worldview can be sustained as the cultural and religious resources utilized by the individual in assessing her or his situation.

Due to their rooting in lower strata the mental processes contributing to this aspect of religion are not dealt with in my core material and hence fall outside the scope of this thesis. Emotional factors are dealt with to some extent in chapter 6.3. The issue I wish to discuss here is the tight relations posed by Berger and Geertz between holding religious belief and religion as structure. This is from the morphogenetic perspective a question of system integration versus psychological and collective integration.

Common to Berger and Geertz is an understanding of the human mind as vulnerable to cognitive challenge. To Geertz, the symbol system of religion is world-making and thus the loss of plausibility becomes world-wrecking:

> "Man depends upon symbols and symbol systems with a dependence so great as to be decisive for his creatural viability and, as a result, his sensitivity to even the remotest indication that they may prove unable to cope with one another aspect of experience raises within him the gravest sort of anxiety" (Geertz 2002: 68)

From the morphogenetic perspective this is an over-integrated view of religion as a meaning system that simultaneously compacts belief, reality and individual coping into one integrated whole. Anxiety may be the result if one has founded one's identity and existence on a set of beliefs which suddenly appear undeniably unjustified. This, however, is a contingent property of people and not of the belief system.

To the young Berger, people are fundamentally preoccupied with divesting order from chaos. The provision of meaning is closely linked to what he considers an in-built

human longing for order and harmony in the world around us: “order is the primary imperative in social life” (Berger, *Facing up to Modernity* (1977), p. xv. Quoted in Furseth and Repstad 2003: 78, my trans.). This longing for order is expressed in our interaction, creations and symbolic action. When expressed to the external world, such as in songs, architecture and mythic narratives, these desires have been *objectivated*. These meanings are again internalised during socialization and interpretation. To Berger the total meaning system becomes an externalization of the internal search for wholeness and intelligibility. The people and the parts are dialectically related in that they constitute a continuous process of externalization – objectivation – internalization. Religion is thus a human construct, whereas people are products of the society that have been constructed (Furseth and Repstad 2003: 75).

To Berger, the meaning system rests on plausibility structures, social processes or interactions which allow the meaning system to be taken for granted. As long as these structures are intact the worldview can remain a plausible explanation of experience. When other worldviews are encountered this undermines the plausibility structure and weakens religion because it can no longer be viewed as the One Truth (Furseth and Repstad 2003; McGuire 2002). To Berger, the loss of plausibility is ultimately the loss of religion’s capacity to provide meaning. This may result in *crisis* of meaning, and to the young Berger, eventually to the regretful loss of religion as a provider of meaningful experience. Since the meaning system is so highly integrated the plausibility and credibility of the system as a whole is undermined: The meaningful totality ceases to be total when pluralism ensues, and due to the human longing for order, therefore ceases to be meaningful.

Plausibility in face of pluralism concerns the *content* of belief and whether it can stand the test of relativization and loss of unquestioned justification. From Geertz’ perspective, the content of religious beliefs are empirically irrelevant beyond their function as a representation of the transcendent order (McGuire 2002: 11). Establishing content is a prerequisite of assessing the logical relations among propositions and what can be counted as propositions. Religious belief may well be about a symbolic order of things as Geertz proposes, but this is not given *a priori* by Archer. Contrary to Berger, Archer retains that logical relations among beliefs do not pertain to how individual believers end up living with beliefs.

Despite her emphasis on the logical relations among cultural items, Archer does not suggest that people cannot live with contradictions or that a worldview must be

coherent in order to be meaningful and sustainable. The generative mechanisms stemming from logical compatibility and contradiction pertain to the second-order relationship among CEPs. These relations are operational on the *institutional level* as they shape the action context of religious collectivities dedicated to defend a given conspectus of belief. They do not pertain to the cognitive mechanisms operative on the individual level. Therefore it is not given beforehand that pluralism undermines religious belief. Such a hypothesis would to Archer commit the fallacy of displacement of scope. The relative influence of available ideas on people is an empirical matter, not a part of the morphogenetic tools of identification. Archer suggests that we ought to identify these relationships precisely in order to examine how people live with them.

Archer claims that social constructivism makes religious people overtly reproductive and passive receptors of faith, a poor foundation for explorations of religious change. Because belief ultimately becomes "internalized structure", the meaning system and the believers are both deprived of autonomy as they are conceptually tied together. The concept of agency proposed by social constructivism can according to Archer

> "only be moved by reasons appropriated from society, and thus is basically a conventionalist, in religion as in everything else... Constructionism is unable to explain why some people seek to replace societies' rules and unwilling to allow that this originates in people themselves, from their own concerns, forged in the space between the self and reality as a whole" (Archer 2004: 66).

From the realist perspective, what Berger refers to as internalization counts among the many mental processes which may lead up to certain action patterns. These mental processes can be structured, complex, conflict-ridden and to varying degrees available for reflection (Carter and New 2004: 12-13). Because religious meaning systems are emergent properties, and the meaning system itself is one but several emergent properties pertaining to religion, they are treated apart from the people who at any given time partake in institutions committed to maintain a given belief system.

The religion of Berger is a highly integrated system of meaning which stems from the human craving for order and coherence, and once created as products of those desires serve to alleviate them. Bhaskar have criticised Berger, claiming that people and social structures are not related dialectically – they do not constitute two moments of the same process (Archer 1995: 67). Archer sees Berger and Luckmanns social construction of reality as an early and idealist version of central conflation (Archer 1995: 13). The

stratified society modelled by Archer entails first, that once religious meanings have been given objective expression, been objectified, they are "lodged" in the collective cultural registry of beliefs. As emergent properties religious beliefs have relative autonomy from the people who expressed them. Whether or not they "return" to meet anyone's specific needs is contingent and an empirical matter.

Second, there is no *a priori* reason why religious unification, rather than malintegration, should ensue from the relations among religious ideas. Whether anyone finds solace in the available faiths is an empirical matter contingent on the interface between the causal powers of believers, the causal powers of belief system and the conditions of their material embedment. Neither is there an *a priori* reason to assume that the intention is to create order and coherence. Third, believers do not internalize meaning in the sense of social constructivism. From the morphogenetic perspective interpretation is an instance of mediation of structure by agency. This entails reflexive evaluation of one's situation in relation to both material and ideational resources.

Explanation of religious commitment as a search for meaning has been subject to criticism for being founded on an overtly cognitive and intellectual understanding of religion (Furseth and Repstad 2003: 149). Archer too has been criticised for positing an over-rational and calculating individual (Zeuner 2000). My readings lead me to the opposite conclusion: That Archer, as Weber, finds the need for religious meaning both cognitive and emotional. While both intellectual and emotional reasons enter into religious rationality in the morphogenetic perspective I have chosen to treat them separately in relation to two different themes. The following deals with the cognitive aspect as I account for the causal potential of religious beliefs in justification of action. The next subsection turns to the emotional and experiential aspects of religious life and how that influences our commitments and identities.

6.2 THE JUSTIFICATORY FORCE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Religious belief is granted causal potential in the morphogenetic perspective. Archer advances that first, values and religious beliefs must be granted causal efficiency in evaluation, and second, that evaluation of beliefs and values must be treated in exactly the same manner as other types of knowledge. Archer remarks that there is a persistent tendency in the literature to promote "a crude polarity",

> "according to which instrumental rationality governs the pursuit of material interests, whereas an irrational leap of some kind of faith prompts the promotion of values. The presumption is made that material and ideal interests are taken up in entirely different ways; the former by a process of shrewd and undiluted calculation of payoffs, and the latter by an emotive leap in the dark" (Archer 1995: 210).

Archer argues we ought to start from the assumption that being committed is predicated on having "good reasons" for it. Good reasons can be anything. The interpretation the individual makes of the situation is ultimately what determines which reasons to act upon (Archer 1995: 210-211). Considering one's reasons for conducting one action or another is shaped by ones external conditions as well as internal preferences. Religious beliefs, values and political ideals are all equally admissible as "good reasons" in Archer's perspective.

Questioning whether reasons can be causes does not have a self-evident answer; it has been a philosophical conundrum for a very long time. The conundrum lies in what can be considered reasons. Do we refer to our scientific assessment of the objective situation in which an action is conducted, or the actor's own understanding of the situation? In the case of the latter, do we mean the rationalisations offered in justification of the act after the fact? The conscious deliberations of decision making? Or to the unconscious mental states of the actor? In the case of the former we may judge the course of action taken as unreasonable because it disregards what we as scientists weigh as important concerns. And then, the reasons provided by our scientific appreciation of the situation apparently have no causal effect on the actor (Carter and New 2004: 12-13; Elder-Vass 2007b: 338). To Archer, this is a problem of differentiating subjectivity and objectivity. In sociology subjectivism-objectivism is a parallel dualism to that of structure and agency. In gross terms, are our subjective interpretations or our objective preconditions what ultimately shape our actions?

Bhaskar claims that reasons must be causes. Otherwise they are condemned to an epiphenomenal limbo where they float in parallel to "real" causes:

> "unless a reason could function as a cause there would be no sense in a person evaluating (or appraising) different beliefs in order to decide how to act. For either a reason will make a difference to his/her behaviour or it will not. In the former case, it counts as a cause. In the latter case, it is logically redundant, and deliberation, ratiocination (and indeed thought generally) becomes practically

> otiose." (*The possibility of Naturalism* (1989), p. 92. Quoted in Carter and New 2004: 12)

If reasons can be causes, then religious beliefs can be one category of such causes. For instance, believing that loving-kindness is the primary imperative of one's life carries some obvious guidelines for behaviour (conscious reason). This particular belief may also colour our perception of ourselves (post event reason) and predispose towards compassionate interaction with others (unconscious reason).

Archer spends much of *Being Human* (2000) on arguing that the subjective-objective dichotomy preventing culture for taking on a causal quality due must be rejected form the realist perspective: "just as water remains constituted by the hydrogen and oxygen atoms from which it emerges, and has properties different from its constitutive elements, so are objectivity and subjectivity part and parcel of one another, where the emergence of our social identities is concerned" (Archer 2000: 314). Agency is lodged in objective reality, and our causal powers emerge from our relations with this world of which structures are part. Structural emergent properties influence people by shaping the situations in which they find themselves. Different *objective* reasons are supplied to differently situated people for different courses of action (Archer 1995: 201). Objective reasons are relative to one's position because of the interests vested in it and the opportunity costs associated with pursuing them. Subjective interpretation of these conditions does not alter the structures in question; they alter the experience one has of them. These too are reasons. Thus, from the morphogenetic perspective both objective and subjective reasons can have causal power. The question of objectivity versus subjectivity is thus one of the relationships between the powers of structure relative to the powers of agency, and *vice versa*.

Religious belief is an important aspect of the evaluations of environment, situation and strategy. Reflexivity is conducted both in reference to subjective belief and material conditions:

> "In other words, just as material reasons derive from the structural context and objectively both encourage and discourage certain judgements about courses of action, so too, normative reasons emanate from the cultural context and have the same effects upon situational evaluations" (Archer 1995: 212)

Thus from the morphogenetic perspective, subjectivity and objectivity are two sides of the same story when founded on realist ontology (Archer 2000). Both aspects have causal

potential, and hence both must be accounted for in sociological explanation of religious behaviour.

Weber is frequently taken to solely advocate contextual understanding at the expense of his concept of causality (see for instance Carter and New 2004: 12). Mats Ekström (1992) has shown that Weber's conception of causality to a significant extent is consistent with the critical realist stance (for a tabled juxtaposition, see Ekström 1992: 119). According to him, "Weber did not regard understanding and causal explanation as distinct or opposed activities" (Ekström 1992: 109). On the contrary, Weber perceived interpretive understanding and causal analysis as mutually *necessities* and *prerequisites* for constructing sociological explanations. His integrative methodology builds upon the idea that meanings can be causes (Ekström 1992: 109-110): "Since interpretive understanding makes it possible to identify the motives behind actions and the specific context of meaning in which the actions are embedded, the social scientist can identify the processes that link cause and effect" (Ekström 1992: 113). This leads Ekström to conclude that to Weber as to realists, conceptualization based on *abstraction of relations* and contextualization based on *understanding of meaning* both are indispensable in the search for causal explanations.

From Weber's perspective, intentionality is one of several and various causal processes which contribute to an action and its effect (Ekström 1992: 110). This is in line with the realist understanding that "the mental states that mediate between the situational precursors of action and the action itself are among the causes of the action" (Carter and New 2004: 12). From the morphogenetic perspective understanding reasons becomes part of causal explanation of interaction:

> "Causal powers are held to be generative mechanisms which are at work in ... open systems, and human reasons are one category of causes. Hence, the possibility of naturalism and the end of a self-standing hermeneutics, for in realism 'understanding' becomes a matter of grasping the causal efficacy of 'people'" (Archer 2000: 310)

We need to understand the social and cultural context of religion in order to appreciate why agents act the way they do. Whether their action is a result of routinized habit, clever tactic, regretful resignation or spiritual conviction can only be ascertained by reference to context. Contextual understanding is thus the first step towards causal explanation of religious change.

When it comes to religious reasons, these have a special place in the morphogenetic framework. Religion possesses a capacity for bestowing motivation, conviction and ultimate importance on certain goals and actions. In other words, religious belief is afforded full causal potential in the morphogenetic framework. The collapse of belief system into reproduction Archer associates with social constructivism is avoided on two accounts. First, the mediatory nature of structural conditioning means that a wide and non-deterministic conceptual space is opened between religion and religious. Second, the reflexive powers of agency are ultimately the only efficient cause in social life. "Reasons not only have to be weighed and found good but if and when they are, discretionary judgements have to be made about what to do in view of them" (Archer 1995: 208-209). Archer suggests that the answer to why people find some commitments worthwhile, and some courses of action preferable to others, "may well lie in the *relationship between the material and ideal*, which of course means that such matters can never be purely individualistic if they are at least partially relational" (Archer 1995: 211). Identifying these relationships would of course require concrete research. On the individual level, which is the present topic, the rational evaluation proposed by Archer is complemented by an emotional and experiential aspect which she deems equally important to religious commitment and identity.

6.3 RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND COMMITMENT

Social constructivism is to Archer too concerned with the cognitive aspects of religion, and places too much emphasis on the importance of reproduction for religious prosperity and human well-being. In order to avoid an establishment of society as a prerequisite to human thinking and being, Archer argues *extra-social* spaces must be admitted into the shaping of our selfhood (Archer 1995: 290-292). The young Berger cannot explain why people stick with a worldview which has lost its taken-for-granted saliency. In order to appraise Archer's stance on the issue I now turn towards other theoreticians which has made religious commitment a chief focus.

The theory of rational choice proposes that people seek to maximize the outcome of any situation by avoiding what is perceived as costs and obtaining what is regarded as rewards at the most favourable exchange ratio: "When faced with several courses of action, people usually do what they believe is to have the best overall outcome. This

deceptively simple sentence summarizes the theory of rational choice" (Elster, *The Cement of Society* (1989), p. 22. Quoted in Andersen and Bo Kaspersen 2007: 219).

The rational choice approach to religion of Stark and Bainbridge posits that religious commitment ought to be understood as an evaluation of the explanations offered by the religious community. Commitment to any religion anywhere can be understood by means of the same concepts because individual preferences used to assess such decisions do not change much between persons, in time nor space (Bruce 1999; Spickard 1998: 99-100; Stark and Bainbridge 2006). Archer does not purport to explain how people come to hold beliefs in the first place, only the consequences of doing so. Stark and Bainbridge are more confident. According to them, people come to hold religious beliefs because there is an in-built human drive to seek explanations. In the economic lingo of rational choice theory, explanations are evaluated by their known ability to facilitate the desired reward. When evaluating, we tend to go for the explanation which offers the most profitable cost-benefit ratio. However, not all things can be easily explained and not all explanations can be easily evaluated. Some explanations are so general that we cannot unambiguously know whether it does eventually lead us to our desired goal. These are termed very general explanations. Some desires are not readily met with any explanation, even general ones. Stark and Bainbridge propose that religion poses *compensators* for human desires which cannot reasonably be met by natural means. For instance, the desire for immortality is compensated by religious explanations of what occurs after physical death, the desire to inflict terrible vengeance is compensated by explanations of divine reciprocation etc. Religious explanations are very general compensators which can only be supported by reference to some supernatural entity. Compensators work *as if* they were rewards, and hence people will be willing to expend costs to obtain them, according to rational choice theory (Stark and Bainbridge 2006). This is the basis of religious commitment in the theory of Stark and Bainbridge.

As several critics have pointed out, rational choice is founded on a means-end type of rationality which at most can be said to typify some modes of human evaluation. Other ideal types of evaluation (such as Weber's value rationality) are equally rational (Bruce 1999; Furseth and Repstad 2003; Spickard 1998). The morphogenetic approach is heavily influenced by interest theory, and as such Archer places a heavy emphasis on strategic action and rationality. However, as quoted in the introduction to 6.2, Archer argues for an admittance of belief and values as rational reasons on the same terms as

other reasons. This defies naming some reasons compensators and others explanations, as a brief discussion of the dichotomy may illustrate.

It is my opinion that Stark and Bainbridge operate with an unstated double understanding of evaluation which is a problem in explaining religious commitment. Stark and Bainbridge gives that evaluation of any explanation is defined as determining its value, which is "the maximum cost a person would pay to obtain the reward" (Stark and Bainbridge 2006: 385). Only if we are able to compare the cost, benefit and probable fulfilment of a given explanation can we make a rational evaluation of it. Religion is characterized by supernaturally founded promises and hence cannot be subject to such evaluation, but must be taken on faith alone (Stark and Bainbridge 2006: 387). Whereas evaluation of explanation is understood in terms of transactional value, evaluation of compensators (promises that the reward will be obtained) is understood in terms of truth. This is the difference between very general rewards and very general compensators in the rational choice theory of religion. But given that we cannot know for certain that a promised reward does not exist, we are suspended between the meaning of the concepts of rewards and compensators when it comes to religious experience.

Explanations of religious experience must be ascribed high transactional value if we evaluate the explanation with regard to its "known ability to facilitate the desired reward" (Stark and Bainbridge 2006: 385). But then this cannot be religion, because religion provides compensators which are "empirically unsubstantiated faith that the rewards *will* be obtained" (Stark and Bainbridge 2006: 387). The ambiguity of evaluation make the terms reward, compensator and explanation so interchangeable that only atheism remains to determine what is what, for only the claims of religion is evaluated with respect to truth. This is not evaluation of different explanations in terms of rational choice theory's own concept, but validation. And then Stark and Bainbridge's proposition 20 that religion is based on supernatural compensators becomes circular. The implication is that religious values and beliefs are less rational, or less justifiable, than other values and beliefs. In the rational choice perspective religion becomes nothing more than a subjective search for security, and social bonds, personal experience and reflexivity becomes entirely irrelevant to religious commitment and identity.

As Bruce points out, both naturalistic and metaphysical explanations may be considered true until they are proven wrong, but only the latter are considered compensators by Stark and Bainbridge (Bruce 1999: 32-35). Archer criticises such "double standards" for subjecting religion to a set of demands which is required by no

other aspect of social reality. This is a category mistake where the scientific ideals of empiricism are allowed to "imperialize" religion and religious practice, argues Archer (Archer 2004: 71-72). Her full argument falls beyond the present thesis, but I refer the reader to the collaboration *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God* (Archer *et al.* 2004) for – it must be safe to say – a refreshing argument on epistemological evaluations of religion.

In relevance to my argument above, Archer argues that religious experience is as justifiable in belief-formation as any other experience is justifiable for beliefs about other things (Archer 2004: 69) . Whether or not any experience is sufficient for the individual to weigh it an important reasons is an "insider test" which can only be conducted by the person in question. A person may have to defend his or her choices and interpretations, which is an "outsider test", but the falsity or truth of an interpretation makes no difference with regard to its causal potential as reason. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, our purpose is to explain what leads up to social events and actions, not whether the reasons given by agents are true or false. Investigating the challenges of sticking to a belief which has been proven wrong ("the UFO did not come and take us away yesterday as foretold") or is controversial in the surrounding environment ("God put the dinosaur skeletons there on purpose") does not necessitate that everything religious is categorized as untrue *a priori*. As Archer frequently reminds her reader, these consequences are what we want to explore. To decide beforehand what they can and cannot be is to run ahead of ourselves.

Rational choice theory is frequently subjected to critique for being "founded on an atomistic model of society that disregards human sociality" (Riis 2006b: 89, my trans.). Archer finds rational choice theory's *homo economicus* to be an "impoverished model of man" without true ability for solidarity, altruism and self-sacrifice. To Archer, solidarity to oneself and others is necessary for commitment (Archer 2000: 79-80). By neglecting the sociality of man, rational choice theory fails to capture what I consider the most important explanation of religious commitment from the morphogenetic perspective, namely solidarity to one's self (salvation) and others (community).

The most grave deficiency of rational choice theory in Archer's view is its incapability to model "the human capacity to transcend instrumental rationality and to have 'ultimate concerns' " (Archer 2004: 65). Our personal identities derive from our concerns, among which ultimate concerns are the most important (Archer 2000: 63; Archer 2004: 74):

> "These are concerns that are not a means to anything beyond them, but are commitments that are constitutive of who we are – the expression of our identities. Who we are is a matter of what we care about most. This is what makes us moral beings. It is only in the light of our 'ultimate concerns' that our actions are ultimately intelligible" (Archer 2004: 65).

Religion counts among our ultimate concerns, and is not even usually subject to maximizing rationality. What is more, religion counts among our reasons for evaluation in terms of reasons as well as experience.

While the completion of our personal identity takes place in the world, the social is but one aspect of reality: "Society is indeed the natural milieu of humankind, but this is *no less true* of natural or *transcendental* reality" (Archer 1995: 290, my emphasis). From the morphogenetic perspective religious experience is at least as important in the formation of our personal identities as our experiences of our naturalistic conditions (Archer 2004: 69). Secular commitments allocate our concerns within the three realms of reality we encounter as the practical, natural and social worlds. Commitment to religion requires the *subordination* of the concerns deriving from the practical, natural and social world unto those which emerges from encounters with the transcendent. Hence Archer argues that the commitment to transcendence has consequences which have no secular counterpart (Archer 2004: 78-79).

Being-in-the-world is transformed by religious experience: "The main *inward* effect of endorsing *any* ultimate concern is that it transvalues our feelings" (Archer 2004: 77) as it functions as a "sounding board" against which other concerns and emotions are echoed: "any serious commitment acts as a prism on the world that refracts our first-order emotions, transmuting them into second-order feelings, for affectivity is always a commentary upon our concerns" (Archer 2004: 77). For example, holding loving-kindness as ones moral rule of thumb affects how one reflects upon one's anger or irritation, potentially transforming those emotions into feelings more appropriate to one's ethical standpoint. This affective transformation is what makes religious experience at least as important for the formation of personal identity as experience of the natural worlds and secular commitment.

While certainly controversial, this line of reasoning finds some support in the pragmatic and perceptually realist approach to the philosophy of religious experience advanced by Barrett and Wildman (2009). Similarly they argue that philosophical-interpretative investigations of the causal features of sense perceptions can pave the way

for an understanding of the difference experience of transcendence makes for being in the world. Neither philosophers nor sociologists can assert the existence of God. But, if such experiences and beliefs make a positive difference to coping and being in the world they can reasonably be perceived by the believer as reliable, which again can become a reliable reason to think that God exists. Thus dynamic engagement with a transcendent reality can have a justificatory force in personal experience and interaction (Barrett and Wildman 2009: 82-85). Similarly, Archer argues that while sceptics reasonably may deny the possibility of transcendence, the possibility of *rewarding inner experience* must be granted potential causal efficacy in the formation of selves because "it makes a difference to their chosen way of being in the social world" (Archer 1995: 292).

This chapter has been concerned with the individual's religion, how belief and meaning condition interaction and identity-formation and how Archer grants religion status as a rational reason to act upon. Analytical separation of agency from belief system has been seen to have theoretical consequences for religion in a modern, pluralistic context. The conceptual space opened between them retains the possibility that agents choose to make repairs to their belief system rather than abandon religion altogether when plausibility is weakened. The importance attached to solidarity, commitment and religious concerns may even imply that people would be more likely to live with problems they can't resolve than to abandon the ultimate concerns conserved by a living religious community. Clearly Archer opens some interesting avenues to the sociology of religion with respect to the causal influences of religion in personal life.

Next chapter goes into detail on the causal powers exerted by religion as a meaning system in the institutional context. On this level, contradictions among beliefs do pose problems to collectivities devoted to preserving them.

7: Religion as a System of Meaning

Religion as a system of belief is mediated to people by shaping the action contexts in which they find themselves. Archer differentiates clearly among the mechanisms that operate between cultural emergent properties at the institutional level and those which pertain to the religious life of the individual. Of course, to do otherwise would be to commit the fallacy of displacement of scope. The previous chapter explored how religious belief, meaning and experience can be granted causal efficiency through individual agency within the morphogenetic framework. This chapter is concerned with the systemic level of belief: the cultural emergent properties of religion and how the systemic relations among them generate situational logics at the institutional level. These situational logics parallel those of the second-order relations among social structures examined in chapter 4.4. Here we go one step further by examining how Archer sees the social consequences of these relations.

This chapter exemplifies the distinction between social integration and system integration with respect to religion as a meaning system. It can also be read as an explication of the four propositions Archer offers in support of the morphogenetic model in chapter 4.1. Many interesting and important topics could be covered, but I have chosen to stay close to Archer on this issue and focus on those aspects which set morphogenetic approaches to religion apart from the rest of the field. To simplify, the following presumes that there are groups committed to maintaining the belief systems in questions, and that each religion is constituted by only one or two CEPs. For the sake of interest the four cultural configurations are partially portrayed as successive stages which lead the mind to European religious history. However, they are four extreme types of the explanatory framework and hence are not actually related in succession.

7.1 RELIGION AS AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM

Most "world" religions are comprehensive systems of internally compatible beliefs which, in certain phases of history, legitimated and explained the social order on the societal scale. The Hindu myth of the four *varnas* of the Creation legitimated the division

of labour into the complicated hierarchy of castes, and the European notion of divine kingship legitimated the monarchy as a God-given right rather than a political convention (McGuire 2002: 28-29). As mentioned in chapter 3.2, the complex interdependencies of culture, material conditions and interpersonal relations found by early anthropologists in primitive societies led to the idea of culture as an integrated system. Thus to Émile Durkheim, "[a] religion is a *unified system* of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which *unite into one single moral community* called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim 2002: 46, my emphasis). To Durkheim religion is both an expression of a group's unity as a moral Collective, and the producer of social unity. In ritual the group worships itself, so to speak, as it adores the idols created to express its unity (McGuire 2002: 37).

The prime error of early functionalist definitions of religion as the above is that the results of its operation are also given as its reasons. In the case of Durkheim, the highly integrated belief system produces a highly integrated group of believers which again produces a highly integrated religion. This is a circular argument which in addition presupposes that coherence is a property of the belief system in its natural state. As with the neo-marxist dominant ideology thesis, once the element that has been granted causal efficiency is deemed free of contradiction, cohesion at the other level of analysis *must* ensue because the latter is deprived of autonomy. Berger goes the other way around to the same effect by ascribing the property of coherence to the people, that is, the creators of the meaning system: "Every human society is an edifice of externalized and objectivated meanings, always intending a meaningful totality" (Berger 2006: 318-319). Hence to Berger, religion is *supposed to be* a coherent whole. Contradictive beliefs become a problem for Berger's individual because they disturb the dialectical process in which the meaningful totality is expressed and internalized.

To Archer, both Berger and Durkheim describe one out of four different conjunctions and disjunctions between system integration and social integration. To Archer, the religion defined by Durkheim describes one instance where high system integration occurs simultaneously as high social integration: The religion is a unified system of belief standing in relation to a relatively unified and conflict-free populace. The ideal state of Berger describes the same thing, namely that there is a stable reproduction of this internally reinforcing constellation of religious people and religious beliefs. Durkheim and the fathers of anthropology confronted primitive cultural systems as

finished products and hence did not in retrospect reveal the process in which the cultural web has been knitted together. Archer claims that the conjunction between high system integration and high social integration must be understood as the end result of a lengthy period of CS development which fosters both systemic coherence and social stability.

From the morphogenetic perspective this process starts with the linking of cultural items in internal and necessary relationships (on this configuration of culture, see Archer 1995: 234-239; Archer 1996: 157-158, 171-183). Such CEPs are interdependent and mutually supportive. Archer terms this a *concomitant complementarity* because when belief A is asserted, belief B is also asserted. In this instance B provides A with "a congenial environment of ideas, the exploration of which ... yields a treasure trove of reinforcement, clarification, confirmation and vindication – because of the logical consistency of the items involved" (Archer 1996: 153). When religious beliefs stand in this relationship the belief system in question can be said to be a highly integrated one. The classical example is Weber's study of ancient India. Weber emphasised the importance of the compatibility between the beliefs about karma, the economic ethos and the mythic legitimation of the caste system in producing social stability in the highly stratified Indian society.

The long-term consequence of the concomitant complementarity is to produce higher system integration *and* higher social integration. First, the concomitant complementarity encourages *systematization* of belief (CS level) because ever new linkages between the two can be drawn without problems of logic. As further complementary relations are introduced the relations between the founding beliefs are strengthened, hence providing further support for the entire framework. Over time the belief system becomes rich in technical vocabulary and subtle distinctions among its concepts, signifying cultural density and a high degree of systematization. Christian theology exemplifies such a belief system. The second-order relationship between the CEPs fosters a situational logic of *protection* of consistency because, just as with necessary and complementary relations among institutions, every item of belief would suffer should the order be disrupted.

Second, at the level of social interaction the systemic relations generates a concern for *reproduction* of the conspectus, writes Archer. Reproduction is to Archer closely tied to the use of power, to which we turn shortly. The success of reproduction strategies depends on the interface between the belief system and the populace. High system integration provides fertile grounds for high social integration. Lack of alternatives is

conductive to reproduction, whereas religious alternatives that run along social cleavages would be counterproductive as those positioned to lose from passive reproduction would be likely to resist (Archer 1996: 178-179). The initial socio-cultural effect of a concomitant complementarity is to buttress adherence to the religious corpus.

The situational logic of protection fosters a "negative feedback loop" which progressively discourages explorations beyond the felicitous AB cluster. As theological density is increased there is no incentive to explore external, incompatible items. Internal preoccupation with systematization and reproduction has as its morphostatic corollary the formation of a natural boundary. *Over time* the concomitant complementarity is likely to result in both high social integration and high system integration. Eventually stability and hence lengthy periods of morphostasis result if no factors disrupt the process. Boundaries are not created as a response to external threats. Cultural closure appears here as the final phase of a temporal process of intellectual endeavour: "For only when a body of ideas has achieved such internal complexity that new items cannot be assimilated without major disruption, is innovation then met with aggression and opposition with counterattack" (Archer 1996: 182). This is the instance where Geertz' man becomes anxious, for only when the belief system is highly integrated can any indication of problems become a threat to the entire system.

The concomitant complementarity is the only instance where the powers of the "parts" and the powers of the "people" can be said to pull in the same direction. Hence the confusion over culture as an integrated whole and Durkheim's circular definition of religion: When the result of interaction and interaction itself serve towards the same goal of systematization and unification, one, both levels are highly integrated, and two, the result of interaction can at the same time appear as its cause because they are in fact mutually reinforcing. This stable relationship of causal exchange thus appeared to Durkheim as the natural state of religion. Whether there is in fact such a co-variance between integration of believers and belief system remains an empirical matter from the morphogenetic perspective.

7.2 CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS AND CONSENSUS BUILDING

Long periods of religious morphostasis do not necessarily follow from a highly integrated system. Usually this must be attributed to the exercise of what Archer terms socio-cultural power.

In Archer's writing power is a relational and emergent property. It is not exclusively tied to dominance, and even when it is it does not necessarily spell domination: "Power relations are the causal element in cultural consensus building and, far from unproblematically guaranteeing behavioural conformity, they can provoke anything from ritualistic acceptance to outright rejection of the culture imposed" (Archer 1996: 5). The basis of her discussions in *Culture and Agency* is Steven Lukes' three-dimensional concept of power. Lukes criticised conventional models of power for being limited to the causal power to *force* decision making and setting the agenda for *future* decision making. Lukes argued that power must also include the unseen taken-for granted aspects embedded in our values, language and religion (Steven Lukes (1974), *Power: A Radical View*, source Clegg 2001).

Lukes' first dimension is about power to determine the outcome of issues where conflicting interests attach to different groups (Clegg 2001). Archer terms this strategy *authoritarian containment*. Cultural repression through authoritarian containment is a strategic limitation of what part of a hostile cultural environment is available to the believers. This strategy is associated with "a fairly standard repertoire of tactics" familiar to historians of religion, such as selective censorship, burning and banning of books, labelling of deviations as "heresy", excommunication, forced public recantation of erroneous faith, etc (Archer 1996: 190-191). The second dimension consists in restricting which segments of the believers are allowed access to and knowledge about the antithetical beliefs. This is a strategy of *sectional containment* which insulates the faithful from the dangers of outside thinking. The advancement of interests of those who stand to gain for an alteration is impeded (Archer 1996: 192-193). The third dimension is what the wielders of first- and second-order power would like as its outcome, namely that culture and religion can be taken as a common truth. In other words it is the power to cause religious reproduction and cultural stability over long periods of time. Such power and power-play is explored in chapter 8.3.

A highly integrated religion is a congenial cultural environment for the exercise of power since there are few sources of opposition to its legitimation. When religious power attaches to the materially powerful their position of dominance allows for overriding of social cleavages and containment in social hierarchies. Likewise, religious power can be used to suppress inconsistencies in the system in order to make it appear unified, coherent and self-explanatory. In a Marxian manner Archer sees the "plausibility structures" of a religion partially as the result of active efforts to convey it to the less fortunate as plausible and credible (Archer 1996: 46-70). Their main effect is to delay and obstruct the causal forces of the Cultural System from manifesting problems of social integration.

Strategies of containment are frequently resorted to when the religious belief system is not as well integrated as its protectors would like. As indicated throughout this thesis, Archer maintains that whether or not a given belief system does in fact constitute a coherent and contradiction-free pattern is a contingent (and quite unusual) feature of religion. Logical contradiction among CEPs does not automatically spell social malintegration or religious defection. People may very well live with inconsistencies on the individual level. On a larger scale, religious institutions are committed to a given corpus of belief. It is the institution and its specialist role encumbents (priests, doctrinal authorities, etc) which must make repairs to the problems stemming from the cultural emergent properties of its conspectus. In addition they must keep abreast with cultural emergent properties that emerge outside its institutional boundaries, such as science, political ideology, and popular opinion. We return to these issues lastly in this chapter and in chapter 8.3. Here I deal with problems arising from within the belief system itself as presented by Archer.

Use of cultural power is pivotal in preventing social malintegration in cases of *necessarily incompatible* cultural emergent properties. This second-order relationship is termed a *constraining contradiction*. Just like in the preceding instance asserting one of them also invokes the other, but in this case the belief A is logically incompatible with the belief B. This causes a "strain" in the section of the belief system where they are located because A is necessarily dependent of the general preserve of B (Archer 1996: 148-149). Our Creationists in chapter 3.4 attempted to pose a biblical answer to the theory of evolution, but faced a problem of internal contradiction. Creationism as an alternative theory cannot be advanced without appeal to its adversary precisely because it is constructed as a critical alternative to it. The dependence "enforces the fraught relationship between A and B yet simultaneously prevents their divorce" (Archer 1995:

230, see also 1996: 154-155). In other words, they can't be together and they can't be apart. This is a different story from that of challenged plausibility from external pluralism, because the problem rises from within.

Constraining contradictions provoke a situational logic of *correction* which has consequences at both the CS and S-C levels. At the interactional level people may resort to containment strategies in order to prevent the voicing of the logical difficulty. Strategies may be as complex as mandatory education on acceptable belief or as simple as labelling the questioning mind a vassal of Satan. Socio-Cultural strategies, however, do not ultimately dispose of the tension among the components of the belief system. At the systemic level a redefinition of one or both contradictive elements is required to effect union between them, claims Archer. This means that if someone insists on A in the face of B, then the adherents of A must make syncretic amends to either A or B or both in order to attain logical cohesion. Their penchant for A of course means to them that B should do most of the adjusting so that A can be preserved. At the socio-cultural level this means that the protagonists of A will have to make their reinterpretation of A or B to "stick" socio-culturally so that union – agreement – results. This is a matter of causal cohesion among people, in which the deployment of power is a crucial factor (Archer 1995: 230-234; Archer 1996: 155-156, 158-171).

As with systematization, syncretism appears as the end product of a process in the morphogenetic perspective. Due to the autonomy granted to both the "parts" and the "people", there is no *a priori* assumption about the social outcome of systemic contradictions. *Contra* Berger, Archer does not see religion and believers as dialectically related and hence problems in the former do not automatically generate problems for the latter. Archer maintains that whether morphostasis (reproduction) or morphogenesis (change) occurs is always a result of the interplay of the generative mechanisms caused by systemic relations and the generative powers latent in social organization and personal reflexivity. As such the outcome is always a matter of empirical investigation.

Because those familiar with the contradiction often are the same people whom would preserve it a secret, systemic relations and their ensuing mechanisms are not always obvious. An example from contemporary Norway may illumine how they do appear in almost any culturally dense system of belief. Biblical scholar Tor Vegge (2009) has pointed out that the knowledge generated by his discipline is of little relevance to normative theology. Although both theologians and biblical scholars are concerned with understanding the same body of texts in light of the context of their authors, the

hermeneutical guidelines of these two approaches are divergent. The Lutheran Church of Norway is committed to the dogma of *Sola Scriptura*. The dogma of "Scripture" gives that the texts canonized in the Bible is the highest authority for churchly teachings, and that these texts convey a coherent understanding of the Christian message (Vegge 2009: 211-216). This fosters systematization and density as every text is linked with every other.

Biblical scholarship, on the other hand, has no commitment to establish coherence. In this line of thought "Scripture" is not a recognised concept. Its task is to utilize historical-critical methods from a wide range of disciplines to analyse language, social context, power relations, culture and other aspects which may have influenced the text in question. This implies a critical and distanced attitude towards established interpretations and doctrines (Vegge 2009: 201-204). The issue here is not which way of reading of the Bible is correct, but the consequences of logical contradiction for the relationship between the two schools of thought. As such it exemplifies the generative mechanisms stemming from a necessary contradiction.

The comment of Vegge was occasioned by a report (on how normative reading of the Bible should be conducted) that centred on two issues demanding attention by modern society, namely gender equity and homosexuality. From the vantage point of the morphogenetic perspective, The doctrinal commission is embroiled in a situational logic of correction stemming from its relation to Norwegian culture. Being challenged on its traditional stances the Church is pressed to resort to Scripture to find whether its position should be changed. But why are not biblical scholars like Vegge consulted on how to interpret these texts? My tentative look from the morphogenetic perspective finds that this is a strategic manoeuvre from a Church that is challenged on many sides and uses its power of authority to limit the manifestation of contradictions.

The normative authority of the Church is founded on correct interpretation of the Bible. Embroiled in the generative mechanisms stemming from the disjunctions between its normative stance and the opinion of its members, the Church stands only to lose by inviting scholars with a contradictive approach to the source of its authority. First, the Church would risk to plunge itself into the same difficult situational logics, yet with another opponent. And this opponent is on the one hand its bed-fellow because they both emerged out of the cultural system of Christianity, and on the other is perceived an enemy because it does not recognize the concept of Scripture. Second, the Church is already pressed towards syncretism by secular culture. The most powerful tool at the

Church's disposal for steering that syncretic process is its exclusive authority on normative readings of the Bible. If biblical scholarship is allowed to enter into the fray the Church stands to lose the basis of its authority, and hence the power over how the Church responds to the challenges of modern culture.

This is authoritarian containment of which segments of knowledge can be consulted so that contradiction is limited, a strategic measure taken to prevent systemic and socio-cultural disruption. The position of the Church in relation to secular culture and biblical scholarship comes with vested interests and opportunity costs for the different projects. The situation which is generated stems from the logical relations among ideas and the social saliency of those ideas. The situation is mediated to The doctrinal commission as a shaping of action context where strategic action entails syncretism and authoritarian containment strategies.

The purchase of taking a morphogenetic approach to religion as belief system lies in the understanding which can be gained of the mechanisms impacting strategic positioning of religious institutions in society. The second-order relations at the institutional level of analysis of CEPs in the above include an external and an internal body of CEPs relative to that of the Church. In addition the Church is pressed by its own structural relations to the state and the socio-cultural integration of people. When belief systems are distilled as a separate dimension of analysis we can investigate the consequences of logical relations among beliefs for the social interaction taken up by their proponents.

The situational logic of necessary contradiction renders authoritarian containment incapable of sustaining a cohesive Socio-Cultural environment indefinitely. First, "this strategy is necessarily limited by the very dependence of A upon B: not everything pertaining to B *can* be burned or banned" (Archer 1996: 191). Normative theology cannot discredit the importance of biblical scholarship, because to do so would undermine the foundations of Christianity. Isolation from decision-making is the only possible route. Secondly, should the Church consult biblical science on particular issues, larger segments of the latter becomes available to the authorities of the former and enmeshes them in the problems of weighing secular pressure, ancient culture, historical-critical reading and theological concerns in syncretic repairs and corrections. Once the availability of the resources of biblical scholarship has been increased, nothing but a commitment to Scripture prevents people from continuing the corrective enterprise in other sections of the doctrinal system. Thus, over time, although right-mindedness was originally intended

as a result of authoritarian containment strategies, it turns out to be its precondition (Archer 1996: 191).

Where people realize the inability of authoritarian containment to effect social union in the face of a contradictive system the strategy of sectional containment comes into play. The strategy consists in limiting which segment of believers is admitted into the discourse about the contradictive belief. By asserting their own principles of reading as authoritarian, The doctrinal commission becomes a sieve of which knowledge about the texts is acceptable: sifting knowledge accumulated outside its natural boundary, filtering acceptable items from incompatible ones and thus limiting what is conditionally present for normative evaluation further down in the hierarchy of clerics and congregations (Archer 1996: 192-193).

Both the strategies of authoritarian sectional and containment are deficient because their effectiveness is limited to the "lower orders". Archer argues that the religious elite needs full access to and knowledge about the problematic sections of the belief system in order to filter it for popular consumption. By consequence they encounter the full force of the constraining contradiction (Archer 1996: 193-194). This is to some extent indicated by the deviant opinions of commission members (Vegge 2009: 201). However, these persons have their interpretative power by means of the role of commission member. These roles are restricted by the overarching concerns of the Church, which in effect contains dissenting opinion.

Sectional containment is a strategy of non-decision-making which is ultimately dependent on human agency. Should structural shifts alter the foundations of socio-cultural relations, Archer argued the fault lines of the belief system lies bare to the charge of those liberated or seeking liberation from authoritarian containment strategies. Use of socio-cultural power to detain the populace from knowing ultimately is at the mercy of the quiescence of the people. When shifts occur and the contradiction becomes visible, "the defenders of A are compelled to address the CS problem and produce syncretic corrections" (Archer 1996: 194).

When deployment of power fails, syncretism ensues. In the lingo of Archer, the syncretic manoeuvre consists preferably in re-interpreting B to a B^1. Alternatively, A and B can meet halfway as A^1 and B^1. Correcting A to fit B is the last resort of protagonists of A, because that ultimately signifies that their belief is unfounded since A has to do all the adjusting. Thus the result of the constraining contradiction is ideational syncretism at the CS level in an effort to provoke unification at the S-C level. The (CS) syncretic

manoeuvre is a result of a failure to contain the logical difficulty by causal cohesion (S-C), and hence appears as the *end product* of a *process* in which the attempts at unification has failed. Syncretism generates new items which enters the Cultural System. Hence, the constraining contradiction pushes towards systemic morphogenesis *over time* (Archer 1995: 230-234; Archer 1996: 155-156, 158-171). From the morphogenetic perspective, *all* cultural systems are likely to undergo change at some point or another in history.

7.3 RELIGIOUS MALINTEGRATION

When social integration is higher than system integration this can be attributed to use of cultural power. But as has been shown, authoritarian and sectional containment are both unable to permanently resolve the logical issue and effect system integration without resort to syncretism. If a coherent syncretic formula is created, this produces a higher degree of system integration than what is possible through strategies of concealment and containment (Archer 1996: 194-195, 197). However, development of a syncretic resolution does not necessarily imply its social acceptance. Religious malintegration is here used as a collective term on both social and systemic conflict and incompatibility. Expressions of religious malintegration include schismatism, sectarianism, pluralism and individualism.

Archer portrays religious malintegration as the result of failed efforts to produce social unity. Again Archer takes a Marxist perspective on social affairs as the "protagonists of A" are invariably exemplified as a religious elite that stand in opposition to or try to dominate "the people". Clearly her theory in principle allows for variance in the relative position of the parties. Still, even this most favourable starting point in no way guarantees the success of the powerful party. Archer argues that the general unificatory thrust of their syncretic ambitions can be deflected in three main ways. Each of them spells progressive religious malintegration as they propel the elite to make further accommodative correction.

Individual response to the failure to generate unification is desertion. While the aggregate effects of desertion can be powerful, this is to Archer more than a negative index of the loss of saliency for a body of ideas. Archer also sees deserters in a positive role as ideational emigrants free to join other causes. Having gone through the intellectual efforts of weighing the belief system and the syncretic repairs made to it, and found them

wanting, deserters represents “the aggregative transfer of adept deductive reasoning power to external alternatives” (Archer 1996: 199). In this light deserters may be seen as people strongly committed to tradition that find modern corrections at odds with their worldview. If deserters join oppositional religions they fuel the struggle for legitimacy and further religious malintegration.

The defenders of tradition can be tempted towards bolder moves of syncretism or harsher tactic of containment in an effort to eradicate the problem once and for all. Yet what this eventually leads to is exactly the opposite, argues Archer, because the now apparent malintegration has already undermined their exclusive authority. This is the final fall of Durkheim’s highly integrated religion, because “when ever the manifest Systemic unity of ideas is disturbed, their unificatory role in society is reduced: a once-united source of cultural power gives way to a dispute over cultural authority” (Archer 1996: 201). Radical moves to embank the conflict may themselves become loci of strife and disagreement with internal schism and sectarianism as an unintended result. The classical example of schismatism is the Reformation. Contrary to the intentions of the original parties, the result of the original dispute was not a purified Church united in God, but a multitude of competing perspectives. In this process those who were labelled heretics are re-labelled as challengers of establishment and claimants to the throne of authority (Archer 1996: 199-201).

One result of challenged authority is increased individualism and pluralism. By removing the Church as a mediatory authority between God and man, the Reformation carried “a profound change in the relative importance of the community and the individual” which fuelled individualism, sectarianism and religious malintegration through the following centuries (Bruce 2006: 339). The social differentiation in Protestant countries after the Reformation took the form of a series of schisms from the dominant tradition: “Rising social classes were able to express their new aspirations and ambitions by reworking the familiar religion into shapes that accorded with their self-image” (Bruce 2006: 338). Desertion, schismatism and sectarianism indicate religious pluralism in the sense that the deviators represent religious alternatives.

Sectarianism can result as a deliberate strategy or as a manner of adaptation. For a cognitive minority the establishment of clear boundaries is protection from external threats as well as internal assurance. In the terms of Berger, when communication with unbelievers is limited the creeds and lifestyle of the group is plausible and can remain a taken-for-granted reality (McGuire 2002: 183-184). Sectarianism represents protection of

those creeds which is judged to be of ultimate importance at the systemic level and the establishment of boundaries at the socio-cultural level. This protects the core against outside threats so that an integrated system of compatible beliefs and practices can be maintained. Utter failure to retain social saliency can force even once-dominant religions over on sectarian-like tactics in order to preserve the religious belief system. For example, the struggles between the conservatives and the liberals within the Church of Norway in mid-twentieth century ended in the sudden demise of the influence of the Home Mission Society values for the public Church as the liberal side won the support of the population (Furseth 2006: 53-54; Oftestad, Schumacher and Rasmussen 2005: 300-307).

According to Archer, hegemonic religion has in effect lost the battle when schismatism and pluralism enters the scene. Syncretism has as an unintended consequence that larger aspects of systemic discrepancies are revealed to those positioned to suffer from continuation of tradition. At this point "only profound imbalances in social relations to the detriment of our oppositional group can prevent it from pressing forward" (Archer 1996: 202). In other words, social malintegration carries with it a propensity for stirring malintegration in the belief system. At this point, those who originally found themselves in a situation shaped by internal and necessary contradiction between the segments of their belief system discover that their opponents have been freed from its problems: While A and B are still in contradiction, there is nothing of B which is dependent on A. The systemic consequence is pluralism and new forms of situational logics.

Independent beliefs generate pluralism at the systemic level. Religious pluralism is an instance of low systemic integration *at the societal scale*. Integration may still be high within each religious subsystem. At the social level either integration or malintegration can ensue, depending on agents. Given the independence between them, their second-order relationship is a *contingent incompatibility*, also called *competitive contradiction*. The original incongruence only continues to exert a social influence if someone insists on counterpoising it and enforces a debate (Archer 1996: 204). This relationship does not only occur as an end-result as described in the above. The same relationship applies to religions that come into confrontation with other religions, of which the current state of the world is ripe with examples, and to religion and secular systems of thought whose logical compatibility can be characterized as incompatible.

Archer writes that when a contingent contradiction is actualized a situational logic of *elimination* arises. Protagonists of religion A are not limited by a constraining dependence on religion B and thus can launch charges and counter-charges on its protagonists. If religious boundaries happen to map onto ethnic, national or other material boundaries the situational logic of elimination is likely to effect "a pure unbridled competitiveness at the Systemic level which parallels their total Socio-Cultural hostility" (Archer 1996: 203).

The CS competitiveness can for instance appear as re-interpretation of sacred texts to justify holy war, religious justification of discrimination, and the less violent war of public debate. In the case of the latter the social effect is that people otherwise uninvolved in the conflict become confronted with a choice between the alternatives, for instance between feminist theology's insistence on a women's right to decide over her own body and Catholicism's insistence on the primacy of life in abortion debates (Archer 1995: 239-243; Archer 1996: 219-220). Thus pluralism entails the weakening or loss in traditions third-order power as the existence of alternatives undermines taken-for-grantedness. But contrary to Berger, from the morphogenetic perspective this does not necessarily entail loss of plausibility. Along with Geertz, Archer finds that religion "may well link men together, but it may also provide them … with a vocabulary by means of which to explore more exquisitely the differences among them" (Geertz, "Ideology as a cultural system" (1972), p. 56. Quoted in Archer 1996: 257). As noted by Woodhead and Heelas, difference is an important marker of identity for extremist and exclusivist groups (Woodhead and Heelas 2000).

Pluralism also carries with it situational conditions of *opportunity* as independent CEPS can come to stand in complementary relationships to one another. Second-order relations of *contingent complementarities* have a loose albeit objective influence on the action context as it provides fertile grounds for ideational synthesis: Plenty of choices are on offer, and no sacrifices are required (Archer 1995: 243-245; Archer 1996: 222-225). If we allow for lack of institutionalization the generative mechanisms stemming from contingent compatibilities may describe something about the modern tendencies of *detraditionalization* and *universalization* of belief. Woodhead and Heelas suggest that these trends represent responses to the experience of difference and incompatibility among religions in the modern context of religious pluralism. Rather than emphasising difference, many religions shift the focus to equality and sameness by positing that differences are cultural variations over universal and perennial religious truths.

Detraditionalization entails a shift from tradition to the group as authority on truth. Thus unity can be salvaged from potentially disruptive plurality (Woodhead and Heelas 2000: 343-346, 386-388).

From the morphogenetic perspective the situational logics of pluralism shift from stalemate competitiveness to potential compatibility when authority is shifted from tradition to the present context. Because new views on the sources of religious authority also amount to new CEPs, the second-order relationship between them and external CEPs changes simultaneously. Use of the morphogenetic model in such explanations of religious change follows the lines of the four propositions Archer offers in its support (see chapter 4.1).

While purely speculative, the examples of this chapter have aimed to show how religion as a belief system can have causal influence on the people involved. The interesting part of morphogenetic explanations is not the contradiction in itself. There is no sociological advantage to be had on positing "scandals" of internal contradiction. The purchase lies in what *follows* from contradictions, that is, the *social consequences* of logical relations between CEPs. At the institutional level Archer maintains that groups committed to maintain a given belief system are embroiled in particular situational logics stemming from the relations within the belief system, and external to the belief system. These general generative mechanisms are the skeleton of causal explanation within the morphogenetic framework. When religious change is analysed in temporal cycles of interplays between agential and structural powers it is easy to see why the fathers of anthropology concluded as they did: Because both levels were stable, their specific configuration was deemed a whole. Archer argues for the separation of system from interaction, and cultural systems from structural ones, in order to avoid over-integrative concepts. Religion is more than systems of belief, and religious groups frequently are committed to more than maintaining their own conspectus. Religious change and reproductions and the relative success of religious groups pertain to their positioning in relation to each other.

8: Religious Morphogenesis

To Archer, whether social morphogenesis (change) or morphostasis (stability) occurs is a matter of the outcome of group interaction in response to the social context of structural and cultural conditions. The generative mechanisms stemming from the second-order relations of SEPs and CEPs were dealt with in chapter 4.4 and 7, respectively. Structured distributions of resources at the primary level shape action contexts by delineating different resources differentially available to agents. This again pertains to their ability to generate social change or reproduction. This chapter deals with religious change primarily in terms of groups. It is in the action context of groups that all the generative mechanisms discussed so far in this thesis clash to shape strategic possibilities and ambitions, transactions of power and knowledge, and social identities. The third-order relations among the outcomes of these processes are decisive for religious change and stability.

8.1 DIFFERENTIATING RELIGIOUS COLLECTIVITIES

Group interaction is understood from the morphogenetic perspective as *transactions* in a hierarchy of positions related to different resources. "All transactions, as processes of exchange and power, involve the use of resources, namely political sanctions, liquid assets and expertise" (Archer 1995: 297). In *Realist Social Theory* (1995) Archer develops her three-dimensional concept of power entail the pre-grouping of agents in relation to resource distributions. These three dimensions are termed *bargaining power*, *negotiating strength* and *transformational and reproductive power*.

Collective distribution of agents in relation to resources gives their potential bargaining power. This is the power to influence decision-making, and pertains to who can partake, what demands can be voiced and the initial bargaining position of the parties. The general position of a group is made by its placement on the hierarchies of sanctions, wealth and expertise. According to Archer, the distribution of resources in contemporary society restricts access to transactions to Corporate Agents (Archer 1995: 297-299).

The second-order level of negotiation strength pertains between resource mobilizers. This is about how well a Corporate Agent, confronted with the situation of structural relations, is able to mobilize the resources available to the group in its strategic action towards the articulated goal. Having the command of a resource is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for successful transaction. Negotiation strength depends on the relationship of the vested interest group to other corporate agents, and is always tied to cultural resources such as religion and / or politics (Archer 1995: 299-302). The third dimension of transformational and reproductive power is ultimately how religious groups may cause religious morphogenesis or morphostasis, which is the topic of the chapter.

At the level of roles religious Actors are confronted with normative requirements, rules and resources which emanate from the role structure and its embedding in institutional or relational structures. The stratified model of people brings with it a differentiation of concerns. Agents confront challenges which are interest-related. Because "we become agents *before* we become Actors" (Archer 1995: 277) not all of these interests pertain to roles. From the perspective of the religious institution, the role structure serves to maintain its social functions and its conspectus of belief.

Role structures are intertwined with religious dogma, either as attempts to organize in a manner pleasing to the Divine or by religious legitimation of the existing organization. In the case of the latter the structural organization influences religious beliefs; in the case of the former religious belief can be understood as a causal influence on interaction through situational mediation. By emphasising the temporal trajectories in which such relations between belief and organization come to be, the morphogenetic model encourages disentanglement so that the cause can be assessed in each case. Rigid and unidimensional systems of social stratification may create role structures in parallel to the different strata of resource distribution, such as the Hindu caste system. But this is contingent to stratification and not an internal and necessary feature of it (Archer 1995: 277).

When assuming a role in an institution one moves from Person and Agent to becoming an Actor. Social identity as an Actor is acquired through the triple morphogenesis. Religious pluralism in a differentiated society poses challenges for role identities. Because we occupy different roles in different spheres, we also encounter different cultural environments. From the morphogenetic perspective this becomes a matter of compatibility or contradiction between the requirements and norms associated

with each position and the resources available, and transactions between the roles of a given structure: ”role sets may clash … because their associated normative expectations collide or the sum of their resource requirements exceeds total disposable assets” (Archer 1995: 276). Contradictions of structure have been sufficiently dealt with for this thesis' purpose. Here I wish to discuss how cultural clashes of different roles can impact the role encumbent, and how role encumbents themselves can change the structure.

The triple morphogenesis gives that our aspects as Person, Agent and Actor are weighed against one another. Our resulting social identities depend on how we resolve our conflicting concerns in our own singular way. But because people encounter different sets of normative requirement in different roles, the religious aspect of identity may come into conflict with the role one occupies. In much of academia there is an unwritten norm of suspiciousness against religion. For a religious academic in such an environment, vested interests in maintaining or improving one's academic position must be related to the interests vested in one's religion. Giving religion an impact on scholarly identity is associated with heightened opportunity costs due to the hostile environment. The decision is especially difficult if one also occupies a religious role of which confession and proselytizing is a normative requirement. Thus, routinization does not cover the reproduction or continued replication of role requirements because far from being an account of routine or habitual action, such action may entail “reluctant resignation … and a bitter failure to meet the costs of overcoming situational constraints” (Archer 1995: 208).

One resolution to the failure of championing one's faith in a hostile cognitive environment may be to increase one's dedication in the roles in which religion is a positive identity marker. Of course, one may also occupy roles which are congenial to the Person one wants to be with respect to religion. The problem of the academic above also turns the other way around. Concerns derived from secular society may alter the conduct of religious roles. Given that the role in question carries with it sufficient authority and power, the Actor may transform not only his own role performance but also the very structure in which his role is embedded.

For example, Bishop Kristian Schelderup changed the role hierarchy of the Church of Norway by ordaining Ingrid Bjerkås as the first female to priesthood in 1961. Schelderup could do so because of the power vested in his position, and the support his liberal profile received in the people. A by-product of the changes in the gendered restrictions was a growing “feminization” of spiritual care within the Church through the

1980s. The controversies around the ordination of Rosemarie Köhn as first female bishop in 1993 may be understood as the "breaking in" of a new female role with increased power. The resistance towards women in Church roles has abated ten years later when Laila Riksaasen Dahl was ordained to bishop. The ordination of Riksaasen Dahl was controversial due to her conservative profile, not her gender (Furseth 2006: 53-54, 57; Lundby 1985: 172, 185; Oftestad *et al.* 2005: 300-307).

The triple morphogenesis of Actors is the Archer's most direct linkage between individuals and social structure. The reflexive evaluations of the role encumbent as Person can, given his or her position in the role hierarchy, change the entire organization. Membership in many religious groups must be considered a role in itself. Through the concept of Actor, individual reflexivity enters into the organisation as an active partaker in organisational and ideational structure, like women clergy brought their own embodied experiences to the clerical role and redefined ("feminized") churchly practice. This prevents Archer's concept of role structures form reification and retains the importance of individual experience of structural and cultural conditioning: "a non-reified account … requires an active agent in order to mediate the process" (Archer 1995: 199).

The very interesting part of the story above is that religious debates over female clergy continued the next couple of decades, but that the change in the role structure quickly became permanent as women by 1996 accounted for 40 percent of all ordained clergy in the Church (Furseth 2006: 57). In other words, the cultural controversies had less influence on the structure once change had been effected. This is one instance where I find the analytical distinction among cultural structures and social structures fruitful. In this example gender attitudes (culture) and gender rules (role structure) within the Church are asynchronous and are elaborated upon over different temporal tracts. They generate different situations simultaneously for the people involved. Such entanglement is precisely what the morphogenetic approach offers to disentangle into causal explanations of social change.

To Archer the reproduction of role structures are the results of morphostatic processes, and hence it becomes a matter of the relative influence of the conservational powers of the role structure to the aspirations and power of the occupant. The emphasis placed on social change renders social reproduction a matter of dominance and power to quench conflict. Reproduction is seen as a failure to change more than a willing continuation of tradition. In my opinion Archer does not give sufficient importance to

habitual, conscientious and intentional acts of integrative and reproductive action on the level of the individual. This is discussed further in chapter 9.3.

On the level of Agency, religious collectivities may partially be defined as populations or segments of populations which share a religious belief system, or a particular aspect of the cultural system. With the relation to religion as a cultural resource come vested interests in the group's position. This may be to promote a certain set of values or practices, such as abstinence and temperance, or to defend the group against external threats. Primary and Corporate religious agents are differentiated as those who remain passive and those who organize to promote religiously motivated goals. Religious organizations are within the morphogenetic framework *ideal interest groups*, groups with a shared interest in maintaining or advancing their shared beliefs. Strategic action taken to advance or maintain a position in relation to religious resources may include isolation from the outside world, encouragement of everyday religiosity outside the formal community, active participation in public debate and discourse, recruitment, requiring visible identity markers such as dress, sanctions against deserters, delineation of proximate faiths as heresy, formalization of personal relationships etc.

Religious groups differ in the participation of their members. Some groups are characterized by members' active participation, such as much Pentecostal religiosity. Such collectivities have the powers associated with Corporate agency of articulation, organization and collective strategic action. Other religious collectivities are largely made up of Primary agents. The Church of Norway is in many respects a hybrid. While the majority of the population is passive members, a small group actively participates in services and activities. Yet others are passive within the state church, but lead active Christian lives in other congregations (Repstad 2000). In the morphogenetic perspective, this peculiar situation stems from the relation between the religious institution of the Church and the Norwegian State which automatically grants membership to most people with Norwegian heritage. Members are not only partakers of a shared cultural resource, but are also bound together by the shared material conditions of citizenship.

Collectivities can also group around shared material resources to form material interest groups. Here I am more concerned with how religious collectivities may ally with such groups, or develop hybrid forms where a shared material position is equally important in group formation as the shared religious beliefs. These distributions are important to interaction in the morphogenetic perspective because "social or socio-

cultural interaction is explained by the changing interrelationship between the structures of resource distributions and the structure of material and ideal vested interest groups" (Archer 1995: 297). Access to material resources is of course a prime indicator of social stratification. With these positions come vested interests. Archer emphasises how the materially deprived have vested interest in enhancing their opportunities due to their positioning, just as the wealthy have a vested interest in maintaining their positional advantage. But because these positions also allocate obverse opportunity costs to differentially situated people, maintenance of advantage is often far easier than overcoming social cleavages. As transference of belief is easier than transference of wealth religion may become a rich resource in struggles of upward mobility.

As primary agents, similarity of experience of one's material conditions may generate similar albeit unrelated aggregate responses. Material conditions which have been shown to link up with religion include bodily features such as gender, ethnicity and age, and also socio-economic features such as class and inhabitancy. Belief in destiny has been argued to be more prevalent among people living with unfavourable socio-economic conditions. Beliefs and practices associated with destiny (such as astrology, fortune telling and stories of ghost haunting) emphasise external forces in one's life, hence corresponding to the overall feeling of powerlessness (Ahlin 2001). The relationship between material resources and religious change is more pronounced when collectivities actively seek to improve their position.

If shared material conditions are combined with a shared religious repertoire, powerful emergent responses may be generated by Corporate agency. Shared material conditions may significantly affect how the ideational resources are interpreted because material conditions enter into the range of reasons present in evaluation. Peter Beyer (1994) demonstrated how the structural changes of Vatican II and the rise of new social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, in conjunction with increasing social inequality in the wake of globalization, gave rise to liberation theology in Latin America: "Here, those people who demonstrated in their poverty and powerlessness the disparity between modern, global values and modern, global effects would begin to rectify the situation through a renewed religious message of liberation" (Beyer 1994: 140). The patronage of powerful clergymen and their active exploitation of new organizational freedom after Vatican II provided structural conditions which promoted the new theology and its companion social movement (Beyer 1994: 148-152).

In the morphogenetic perspective the mobilization of the poor is seen as a shift from Primary to Corporate agency, spurred by the specific conjunction between material conditions and available cultural resources, and effectuated by shared articulation and organization. The structural changes of Vatican II provided enough institutional freedom for a Catholic version of the global movements of social equality to develop. The morphogenetic approach emphasises that material conditions provides a common viewpoint from which to interpret such two divergent systems of thought. The resulting liberation theology represents an active elaboration of the Cultural System. Efforts towards social improvement following the birth of this CEP were positively conditioned by this powerful cultural resource. In light of Archer, deprivation religiosity and liberation theology are emergent properties consisting of internal and necessary relations of people, resources, social structure and cultural system.

The delineation of agents in relation to material and ideational resources is also about which routes are open to different people. In rational choice theory religious commitment, involvement and the success of religious alternatives is related to the marketing strategies deployed by different denominations. From this perspective, different churches address different issues in different ways and hence attract different people (Bruce 1999; Spickard 2007). From the morphogenetic perspective one must take into account the structural distributions which differentiate people as fit or unfit to partake in the range of alternatives. A church concerned with black femininity not only caters specifically to the needs of black women, but delineates those who do not share the material characteristics of black and female as unsuited to partake.

8.3 TRANSFORMATIONAL AND REPRODUCTIVE POWER

Whether morphogenesis or morphostasis at the societal scale ensues as the outcome of interaction is to Archer a matter of the conjunctions between the morphogenetic/static processes of the cultural, structural and agential domains, and how agents manage to navigate these shifting landscapes. This depends on their third-order power of reproduction and transformation.

To Archer, “there is structural differentiation intrinsic to the emergence of SEPs; ideational diversification intrinsic to the emergence of CEPs; and social re-grouping intrinsic to the emergence of PEPs” (Archer 1995: 302-303). The morphogenetic

processes of structure, culture and agency has as their consequences the emergence of new third-order relations among their outcomes. Corporate groups with a vested interest in either one of the systemic figurations must deploy strategic action to secure its social reception. The morphogenetic or morphostatic processes of CEPs and SEPs thus intersect in the middle phase of group interaction, which is also subject to morphogenetic processes of agency. The social reception of strategic action, and hence the outcome of change or reproduction, is to Archer dependant on the intersection of the various constellations of CEPs and SEPs and the relative negotiation strength of PEPs. The relative success in effecting social morphogenesis or morphostasis is indicative of transformational and reproductive power, respectively (Archer 1995: 302-306).

Religion enters the structural domain in an "extremely simple" manner. Any material interest group that attaches itself to any religious doctrine for the advancement of their material interests by necessity become entangled in the situational logics of the religious doctrine (Archer 1995: 306). Structural benefits in terms of legitimation, naturalization and advancement on the hierarchy of cultural resources (increased power) come with a price of the problems pertaining in the cultural realm. In order to participate in public discourse in a proficient manner the group must attain some mastery over the cultural realm. To Archer, "the whole point of a material interest group adopting ideas is quintessentially public – to inform and unify supporters or to underscore opponents argumentatively" (Archer 1995: 306).

Structural factor enter the realm of religion by the same route. Any ideal interest group that lets its doctrines become associated with a particular material interest group "becomes embroiled in the fortunes of that group *vis-á-vis* others. For all such attachments immediately enmesh cultural discourse in power play" (Archer 1995: 307). Sponsorship by powerful social groups can greatly enhance the visibility and domination of a religion in society. If we recall chapter 7, the success of strategic action taken in the contexts of the situational logics associated with religion as a system of meaning depends upon their social reception. Morphogenetic processes of the belief system, such as syncretic amends or new syntheses, must achieve social salience in order to have any actual effect on action contexts. If religious groups ally themselves with powerful social groups, the latter can lend substantial weight to strategies directing at blocking the acceptance of alternatives or concealing contradictions (Archer 1995: 307). The costs of such alliances for the religious groups "is a form of guilt-by-association which socially restricts the appeal of ideas" (Archer 1995: 307). People in opposition to the material

interest group may be willing to subscribe to practically any other religion than the one advanced by their structural adversaries in response to the element of cultural discourse which the latter have dragged into the material dispute.

The interface of morphostatic and morphogenetic cycles in the structural and cultural domain logically has four possible combinations. Archer maintains that these are extreme types which in contrast to ideal types are found in reality. As such the "majority of cases are more likely to occupy slots between these two poles" (Archer 1995: 308). The domains of culture and structure intersect in the middle phase of the morphogenetic model, that of interaction.

The highly integrated society with a highly integrated religion described by Durkheim is an instance of morphostasis in both the religious and structural domain. The former indicates an integrated belief system without ideational opposition, and the latter "a monolithic form of social organization with a superimposition of elites and heavy concentration of resources which together prevent crystallization of opposition" (Archer 1995: 309). The third-order relation between the structural and cultural domain is one of complete reciprocity, which according to Archer explains the usual durability (morphostasis) of such systems and their reputation in early anthropology as one of typicality. As with second-order relationships of necessary compatibility, the cultural elite and the structurally powerful both have every interest in supporting each other. Archer succinctly summarizes its religio-political effects:

> "It is in these configurations that kings and emperors readily don the insignia of the high priest... Here, too, the priests ratify the divine rights of kings, the literati keep their books straight, the soothsayers arrange their entrails appropriately, and the intellectuals knuckle down to producing anything from conservative constitutions to confirmatory ceremonials." (Archer 1995: 311)

Subordination of potential opposition is a consequence of steep concentrations of resources that restrict the majority of agents to Primary status.

In case of a disjunction between cultural morphostasis and structural morphogenesis we have a hegemonic religious institution which finds itself in a context peopled by a number of structurally differentiated Corporate agents. In this conjuncture culture acts as a drag on group differentiation. Despite cultural hegemony, disadvantaged collectivities "can hardly fail to note that some of its competitors are beneficiaries of cultural support whereas their own promotive efforts attract cultural opprobrium" (Archer 1995: 313-314). Negative opportunity costs attach to going along with religious

legitimation of social stratification, and positive incentives are given for acquiring cultural resources with which to challenge legitimacy of the dominant order and establish their own. The most obvious lines of attachment to the ideational conspectus are those fault lines of the dominant system which has been concealed by socio-cultural containment strategies.

A single material interest group can according to Archer accomplish the full loss of hegemony for an institutional religion by enforcing syncretic reparations by the elite; pushing adherents of the dominant religion into schismatism; and eventually counter-actualizing the original problems of the conspectus in a manner suitable to their own ends. In such instances structural differentiation has a greater impact on the outcome than culture, but the situational logics of the newly created competitive contradiction enmeshes everyone in the situational logic of elimination (Archer 1995: 314-315). Religious change, in the form of loss of hegemony and the nascent of pluralism and schism, can in this way occur as consequences of changed material conditions. As an interest theory, the morphogenetic approach emphasises strategic action over cognitive dissatisfaction in explaining religious change. Thus loss of plausibility or challenged authority of dominant religious agents does not imply that defectors become secular individuals. What it implies is elaboration of the Cultural System, as ideational alternatives (which *can* be atheistic) emerges over time through morphogenetic processes.

Because Archer retains cultural autonomy, religious changes can also exert causal influence over structural affairs. The opposite constellation of the above occurs as a disjunction between cultural morphogenesis and structural morphostasis. Here cultural dynamics (as described in chapter 7) have differentiated cultural agents into a variety of Corporate groups that interact in a context dominated by one structural agent. Social control is directed at preventing re-differentiation of society, and hence will act as a drag on cultural differentiation. But because Archer sees the cultural and structural domains as relatively independent, social control cannot force these developments to a perennial halt. Cultural morphogenesis shifts the legitimating foundations for structural organization, and in addition presents socially stratified people with new ideational resources which represent competitive advantages or new opportunities to their material projects (Archer 1995: 315-317).

Cultural actors are also structural agents, implying that cultural morphogenesis leads to the reconstitution of structural subjects, writes Archer: “For what cultural morphogenesis does is to change people (or at any rate some people), from unthinking

traditionalists into evaluators of alternatives and from passive conformists into potential competitors" (Archer 1995: 317). Cultural changes can attach to the cultural elite as well as to the cultural underdogs, to the structurally dominant as well as the dominated. Structural influence in the intersection of interactional is identified as *who* opts to pursue the contingent complementarities emerging from religious morphostasis. This may well be the established religious elite, for the visibility of religious alternatives heightens the opportunity costs and lessens the benefits for maintenance of the old system. In some structural domains the elite will stick to tradition, while in others groups will form around alternatives because the CS cleavage "provides powerful impetus to the proper consolidation of what were previously latent interest groups of primary agents" (Archer 1995: 317-318).

In the case of female priests in the Church of Norway, Bishop Schelderup joined forces with the competitive feminist formula. He immediately faced a "rearguard conflict from 'old believers' defending the institutional practices around which they are *already* organized" (Archer 1995: 318). The liberal theology advocated by Schelderup confronted believers with a choice between alternatives and therefore stimulated social regrouping. The success of Schelderup in changing the structure of the Church marks the long-term success of cultural change in effecting changes in a morphostatic structural makeup.

Critical realism entails the view that society is an open system, and hence that different sectors of society can be characterised by any one of the preceding three configurations. The fourth configuration of cultural morphogenesis with structural morphogenesis thus is deviant from the other three. This configuration does not necessarily occur as the historical end-product of the previous three. Archer writes that change in the different domains are more likely to occur over different time tracts than in synchrony, and that future research would do well to examine the effects of temporal precedence of positions (Archer 1995: 318-319). Archer herself is currently conducting research on the effects of globalization on reflexivity (and perhaps *vice versa*) (Archer 2007c: 44-45). I presume her forthcoming *The Reflexive Imperative* goes into detail on how these doubly morphogenetic processes condition agency.

On a general level, a context of cultural and structural morphogenesis is characterized by a differentiation of material interest groups and a differentiation of ideal interest groups, each with interest vested in their position. Some material groups may have close relations to some religious groups, such as overlapping class, ethnicity or political affiliations, and hence some alliances are likely to develop without social or

religious drama. Archer sees religious mobilization as a gradient, where religious groups go to increasingly strenuous efforts to acquire social sponsorship of their ideas: “Since its acquisition is crucial because cultural survival and salience are at stake, then ironically the price of obtaining it is ideational adjustment” (Archer 1995: 320). The same applies to material groups seeking advantage over other material groups. If one group aligns itself with a religion, its adversaries are put at a disadvantage: “Let one material interest group present its claims as legitimate and those opposing them have to take up ideas which undermine this legitimatory source and buttress their own counter-claims” (Archer 1995: 321). Strengthened by religion in relation to their opponents but now also subject to the generative mechanisms of the cultural domain, religio-material vested interest groups find that social interaction and socio-cultural interaction reinforce one another, hence intensifying morphogenesis in both domains (Archer 1995: 321-322).

These four configurations of structural and cultural developments, elaborated over merely fourteen pages in *Realist Social Theory*, represent the culmination of Archer’s adaptation of the equally brief article of Lockwood. The second-order relations among structural and cultural emergent properties, the transactional alliances among people’s emergent properties and the third-order relations among results of their infringement are Archer’s realist conceptualization of the configurations Lockwood did not venture to explore. To Archer it is the causal interplay between them which generates social outcomes of change and stability.

Going back full circle to analytical dualism, we see that structural integration is a complex affair. On the “top” side of the distinction resides the third-order relations among the domains, the second-order relations among emergent structural and cultural properties, and the first-order relations within them. Social integration in the “bottom” half is no less complicated, with the social and personal identities of Personhood which emerges in reflexivity, the collective powers of organization and articulation of Agency, and the triple morphogenesis of normative requirements, personal characteristics and collective identity from which our social identities as Actors emerges. Everything is linked to interaction in the middle phase of the morphogenetic sequences, which means that the double morphogenesis of Agency continuously re-shapes the context for everyone in the midst of the shifting fluxes of the entire range of generative mechanisms.

9: Religion from Archer's Perspective

Can reciprocal and mutually reinforcing morphogenetic processes involving both the structural and cultural domain come to a halt? Can stability ensue from ever more rapid change, when change is seen intrinsically as an accelerator on the morphogenetic process itself? Archer says that the process is not endless: "The very fact that Structural and Cultural Elaboration takes place signals that some alliance has won out to a sufficient degree to entrench something of the change it sought" (Archer 1995: 322). However, that *some* change becomes permanent says little about the torrents of transactions that still is battling to effectuate *other* sorts of change. As long as groups are still promoting their divergent interests the changed conditions does not bring the conflicts to a halt, but sets a different set of rules for the continued game. Awaiting a theoretical answer by Archer the question must remain open. What is certain is that the "vexatious fact of society" rarely approximates what anyone wants (Archer 1998).

What seems equally certain is that "a purely theoretical taming of the vexing beast may give a warm inner glow of ontological rectitude but is cold comfort to practical social analysts" (Archer 1995: 135). This last chapter of the thesis looks at how one can seek to understand religion from the perspective of Archer.

9.1 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Morphogenetic approaches to religion must provide analytical accounts of the *historicity of emergence*, that is, an account of how a given constellation of emergent entities came to be (Archer 1995: 167). Historical-sociological analysis was more common in the early years of sociology than what it is today. Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* has generated vast amounts of criticisms and interpretations but has not fathered corresponding studies. Riis remarks that the scarcity of historical-sociological analyses is regrettable, because our greatest sociological theories deal with slow and highly complex developments which demand historical-sociological founding (Riis 2001: 115). Archer argues that such analyses would benefit from separating the causal powers of SEPs, CEPs and PEPs, because although they are intimately entangled, "[w]hat we confront in daily life are, in

fact, *particular* configurations and what we meet and treat as amalgams are, in fact, *specific forms of amalgamation*" (Archer 1995: 324). The morphogenetic model is designed to disentangle them so that causal analysis of their intertwined historical trajectories can be conducted.

One challenge of taking a morphogenetic route to religion is that it is difficult to discern the relative position of groups in relation to resources. Not all material resources can be quantified, and hardly any ideational resources can assessed in terms of value. Archer admits that at least by standards of today these are impossible to compare. She suggests instead that concentration of resources be assessed by means of, one, the general degree of access to resources, and two, how wide an array of resources they have access to (Archer 1995: 299-300). Morphogenetic approaches to religion need to understand the relative positions of the groups with respect to the phenomenon or events we wish to study. Clearly these are interesting relations which could be assessed on a case-to-case basis by suitable methods.

In open systems, mechanisms can only be identified as tendencies. Tendencies operate in the real domain, whether or not they are actualized or experienced by anyone (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen 2005: 26). Lawson referred to empirical regularities in social reality by the term *demi-regularities*. A demi-regularity is a "partial event regularity which *prima facie* indicates the occasional, but less than universal, actualisation of a mechanism or tendency, over a definite region of time-space" (Lawson, Economics and Reality (1997), p. 204. Quoted in Higgs, Jones and Scambler 2004: 93). Especially contrastive demi-regularities, like patterns of inequality, can be indicative of underlying mechanisms. The morphogenetic approach spans the conceptual space between the real and the actual domains of reality, and hence focuses on the properties of structures which generate tendencies and events.

This has consequence for analysis of quantitative data. The three strata of agency in Archer's work are three *sociologically important* modes of being in the world. They are not merely categories, but instances where the *relations* between human beings and particular aspects of their environment give premises for interaction which are significant for understanding social outcomes. We must differentiate among substantial relations, which are those of a real connection between objects, and formal relations. Objects which are related by means of a shared characteristic are formal ones, implying that there is no actual connection between the objects. Substantial relations obtain between objects which influence one another, reciprocally or asymmetrically (Danermark *et al.* 2002: 45).

The practical difference between them is one of emergence versus aggregation. Inclusion in taxonomic categories is often determined by material requirements, but the relations between those included are contingent rather than necessary. Archer argues that in additive analysis the effects of necessity and contingency are elided, so that social reality becomes both misconstrued and inexplicable. When emergent properties are mistakenly labelled aggregate effects the analyst is confined to the actual domain of reality, working on formal relations rather than investigating substantial connections between phenomena (Archer 1995: 177-178). If the analyst works exclusively in individualistic terms by means of atomistic attributes, people "are assigned to categories which refer not to real collectivities but to the investigator's constructs" (Archer 1995: 178). Within each category, different structural relationships will account for why different people find themselves there. These structural constellations spur agents towards collaboration with some groups and not others and predispose interaction. If we shift our focus from the aggregate to the emergent we shift our understanding from formal categories to generative effects and hence causal mechanisms, argues Archer (Archer 1995: 178).

Morphogenetic approaches to religion must look for methods which can identify latent causal mechanisms. This implies using mixed methods and retroductive analysis (Riis 2009: 230). Retroduction is the inference of generative mechanisms from patterns of outcomes. Byrne (2004) adds that retrodiction is a vital element of causal analysis. Through retrodiction one attempts to establish which mechanisms affected the agent's trajectory prior to the present state. Whereas prediction concerns the future trajectories from this time point, retrodiction traces backwards from known outcomes to detect possible antecedent conditions: "Retrodiction, then, is the obverse of prediction and can apply to events as well as to mechanisms" (Carter and New 2004: 25).

Retrodictive trajectories can be generated by collecting quantitative and qualitative data in comparative analysis of circumstances and outcomes. Byrne argues that in this manner different factors generating change can be identified while complex causality is preserved: "[e]xplanatory multi-time point classification allows us to examine the non-linear trajectories … of individual cases, *on all levels*" (Byrne 2004: 63). As the morphogenetic approach indicates historical trajectories on multiple levels it would be interesting to see how the suggestions of Byrne could be applied within this framework. The importance of socialization in reproduction of religious action and gender patterns is uncontested, but quantitative linear modelling cannot assess the importance of

socialization relative to other factors (see for instance Flere 2007). Archer offers a general framework into which multiple causal factors can be ordered, and hence can potentially be of value in investigating the relative importance of different factors in shaping the fluxes of a phenomenon.

Furseth has conducted a study on religious change in life stories which can shed light on how morphogenetic approaches to religion on the individual level can be conducted. Furseth conducted life story interviews and analysed them both as narratives of a life course and as informant's reflections over their actions and identity. The former relates the informant to society by socio-economic and cultural factors, and the latter relates the informant's narrative to their own self-image. This material was triangulated with historical analysis of the Norwegian social context through the informants' life course and data from quantitative surveys in which the informants had participated (Furseth 2006). Because this approach highlights the relation to the cultural and material resources available to the individual, their perception of contradictions and complementarities with their world view to those of others, in which respects they felt constrained or enabled by these conditions (transferrable to Actor, Agent or Person) and their meta-narratives over what their actions, circumstances and beliefs means to them, Furseth captures the most central elements indicated by the morphogenetic approach on this level of analysis. Of course, this is because both Furseth and Archer deal with the most central aspects of social and religious life. Taking the morphogenetic approach to religion is one way of ordering such knowledge into causal explanations.

9.2 GLANCES AT RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

As indicated in chapter 6.3, Archer treats religion on the same terms as other systems of thought and meaning. Every sort of reason is subjected to the same mechanisms, even those with a supernatural referent. One objection to such treatment is that we are blurring the theoretical dividing line between politics and religion: "If, for example, scientific rationalism, Roman Catholicism and Russian Communism are all declared to be religions we lose the conceptual tools to explore the constant and profound conflicts among them" (Stark and Bainbridge 2006: 390). To Archer, this is positing a double standard (see particularly Archer 2004). Religion, politics and scientific theory are consistently referred to as *parallel* examples throughout her discussions. Defining

communism and socialism as political ideologies do not preclude an investigation of their conflicts; the same is true about religion and other systems of belief. Maintaining that religion, politics and science are cultural emergent properties is unproblematic because what these CEPs refer to is not the causal factor when it comes to the generative mechanisms stemming from their congruence or incongruence.

That being said, Archer does not deny that there is a qualitative difference between different systems of thought (such as religion and science) and that these differences may influence the people engaging in them. Obviously we need finer distinctions, both between spheres of thought such as religion and science, and within them. Archer does not offer any suggestion of what distinguishes religious CEPs from political and scientific ones. I take that to suggest that existing theories and definitions can be fitted within this more general frame. But "the oft-heard demand that religion and politics should be kept separate carries an implicit acknowledgement that they rarely are" (Woodhead and Heelas 2000: 214). While contemporary public debates often seem bereft of religion's influence, from the morphogenetic perspective this is seen as the failure of religious groups to advance their cause. The compatibilities and incompatibilities between religious and political thoughts, and the hybrid CEPs which result from their entanglement, point to general generative mechanisms which shape the action contexts of their proponents as well as that of their opponents. One of the reasons why religion has so little influence in Habermas' public sphere is that he tends to polarize reason and religion (Furseth 2009: 100). Archer retains that the reception of religious arguments in public discourse is contingent on the context in question. It is not unfeasible that successful promotion of religious ideas change secular discourse.

Morphogenetic approaches to religion and politics in contemporary society point to investigation of trajectories of influences of religious language and argument onto secularised social structures and to transactions of legitimation and support between religious interest groups and the ideal/material hybrids of political parties. In USA religious lobbyist groups have a powerful influence on national politics. The New Christian Right which rose to prominence in American politics from the late 1970s "mobilized institutional religious resources in order to recover public influence for religion by directly conditioning the operation of major instrumental systems, especially the political, legal and educational" (Beyer 1994: 114). Rachel Kraus have found that only a minority of religious lobbyist groups take the political climate into account when setting their agenda. Most lobbyist groups gave their religious concerns priority on how

their political participation should be conducted, rather than the other way around (Kraus 2007). Kraus has also found that these groups' use of religious language in the promotion of their case had a significant impact on politicians and other decision-makers (Kraus 2009). Interesting research could be generated by taking a morphogenetic approach to such relationships between religion and politics. For instance, how does the alliance with religious lobbyist groups affect the influence of politicians in different segments of the population? Does the use of religious language in politics increase the electorate's involvement in public discourse? How do religious-political alliances affect the primary institutions, and from which positions can such an influence be exerted? The temporal priority of positions, the pre-existence of structures and the morphogenetic sequences of agency may help unravel the causal processes involved.

If there is going to be only one historical-sociological study of religion using the morphogenetic approach I cannot think of a grander candidate subject than secularization. Secularization is frequently tied to the functional differentiation of society and the following loss of influence of religion over social institutions, as well as a cognitive shift towards individualism and rationalism. Bruce sees what he calls "the secularization paradigm" as a series of causal processes initiated by the Protestant Reformation and culminating in religious diversity, relativism, compartmentalisation and privatization (Bruce 2006). Weber, whose analysis of the protestant ethic Bruce founds his secularization theory on, warned against inferences "which logically deduced everything characteristic of modern culture from Protestant rationalism" (Weber 2002: 60n2). Weber saw it as dilettantish and founded on the belief in the unity of the group mind.

From the morphogenetic perspective one would have to agree with Weber on not turning what is clearly a phenomenon caused by a complex array of factors over long tracts of time into the unforeseen consequences of the actions of one German theologian. More importantly, because Archer retains real autonomy to people, social structure and belief system the consequences of secularization cannot be given as epiphenomena of one of them. I have elsewhere asserted that anomie and atheism does not necessarily follow from systemic incongruence. As a theory concerned with transactions of power and legitimation a morphogenetic approach suggests that religion can continue to be influential in situation where additional legitimation is required.

Byrne has argued that understanding of generative mechanisms operative in relation to a given phenomenon carries with it an understanding of possible future trajectories of this phenomenon, and hence is of value to public decision makers in terms

of understanding which measures can generate the desired outcome (Byrne 2004). Obviously there are important ethical differences to the conduct of critical social science from the public health perspective of Byrne to our context. Nevertheless our discipline generates important knowledge for the self-understanding of religious institutions, as well as for governmental branches concerned with the challenges of religious militancy. Rational choice theory can offer advice to religious communities on how to enhance their appeal from a market perspective. The morphogenetic approach can shed light on the consequences of strategic action in the cultural and structural domain.

As several writers have noted, the future of traditional religions is increasingly seen to depend on how the challenges of secular culture are met. Modern perceptions of gender, body and sexuality are increasingly becoming a challenge to a Church which is intimately tied to more conservative ideals (Woodhead 2005; Woodhead 2007a; Woodhead 2007b). Pressure from contemporary culture changed the stance of the Church of Norway on interpretations of gender equity it the Bible. The issue of homosexuality is still problematic because there is less room in the biblical texts for a corresponding reinvention (Vegge 2009). Societal changes in organization and economy pose less obvious, but equally significant, challenges. The transition from an agrarian economy and state-governed religion to capitalism and religious pluralism have threatened to leave the Scandinavian state churches empty relics of times past rather than vibrant religious communities. Uncertainty about what functions the church ought to fill and lack of appreciation of the changing social context experienced by members threaten to leave the state churches irrelevant to modern concerns (Riis 2006a). Differentiating cultural, structural and people's emergent properties in analysis may lend valuable perspectives on where the tensions arise within CEPs and SEPs, where these systems are in incongruence with the Socio-Cultural integration of the people, and how changes in the different domains have affected the operation of the others. The emphasis on historical trajectories and the autonomy of emergent properties make the morphogenetic approach tailored to meet the demands of sociological explanations on the large scale.

9.3 CRITICISMS

The ontological account of structure and agency has been subject to both criticisms and repairs (Elder-Vass 2007a). One criticism claims that "temporal priority" is converted

into “autonomy of structure” due to the importance given to the historicity of interaction in accounting for the causal powers of structure. As I have argued here, the morphogenetic approach hinges equally on the premises of analytical dualism, the historicity of interaction and the ontology of emergence. Temporal priority is one aspect of the independence granted to emergent properties. Although Archer treats them interchangeably in some instances, she is clear on the difference between these two principles. Thus I disagree with the critique of Domingues that Archer “conflates two different issues, namely the historicity of the properties ... and their ontological nature” (Social Integration, System Integration and Collective Subjectivity (2000), p. 227. Quoted in Elder-Vass 2007a: 35). In my readings I do not find evidence of Archer claiming that prior existence necessarily entails emergence, and hence that the outcomes of historical interaction automatically are structural. Rather, I find her to say that this *may* be the case but that it is unlikely to be so on every occasion. Elder-Vass has nuanced and clarified Archer’s argument of structural emergence so that these problems are avoided (Elder-Vass 2007a).

Lilli Zeuner (2000) has criticised Archer for taking the systemic perspective too far. On the one hand, Archer preserves agential freedom by positing mediation as the “soft link” between structure and agency. Thus Archer avoids drawing a direct parallel between the systemic and the agential, which would spell determination and predictability. On the other hand, Archer proposes that the mode of agential mediation works by the same model as structural elaboration. To Zeuner, this means that the admittance of the morphogenetic model into the minds of agents mean that system theory is let in the back door, so to speak: “Interaction itself becomes a morphogenetic process. ... The system penetrates interaction and makes it a system. Interaction is no longer separated from the system. The analytical dualism is not sustained” (Zeuner 2000: 184, my trans.). I must object that the morphogenetic cycles are not systematically occurring processes, but analytical tools deployed in order to divest something about the shifting influences between structure and agency. The whole point of analytical dualism is precisely that the causal powers of structure and agency are re-integrated through the process of mediation, which as any other event in the historical trajectory occurs through time and hence according to Archer can be analysed with the three temporal sequences of the morphogenetic model. Zeuner confuses the theory with the model: “Theories tell us how things work; models reproduce the results of their working” (Spickard 2007: 150).

Perhaps Archer's usage of the term social system is misleading. In my view the critique of Zeuner would be more accurately pointed at Archer's schematics of the interface between social and system integration, not interaction itself. Archer has a penchant for listing second-order configurations and the resulting generative mechanisms in tables (cf. Table 1 and 2 page 133). While no doubt intended as a cognitive and practical tool, and not a map, Archer makes scant reservations throughout the discussions which the same table is meant to simplify. Archer writes that these relations "*can* be generated *if* the respective situational logics are *all* successfully followed (*and each* of the relevant contingencies materializes)" (Archer 1995: 303, my emphasis). Nevertheless she states:

> "it is a matter of contingency how any particular systemic configuration is patterned. Consequently it is an empirical matter *which* second-order properties characterize institutional relationships making up the system: what is not an empirical matter is what occurs when different second-order properties characterize different institutional clusters simultaneously." (Archer 1995: 227-228)

While leaving the door open on factual variance, the confidence in her chosen constellations leaves Archer's model of societal morphogenesis or morphostasis a figured-out schema. There is little room for variations beyond the sketched out constellations.

There is also little mention of other intervening mechanisms. This latter has two possible interpretations: One, that the different figurations of second-order relations have a pre-set outcome which then can be predicted. This interpretation is difficult to sustain given Archer's frequent reminders on the contingency of outcomes on interaction. The second possibility is that "what occurs" is a matter of the relative interplay of the variables identified. This is grave because it implies that our model approximates a closed system. Knowing Archer's critical realist background it seems obvious that she does not think of society as anything remotely near a closed system. On this particular issue I have settled on giving my overall knowledge of the writer precedence over my understanding of her written formulations. The confusion of Zeuner and myself is more likely due to rare instances of textual opacity than to novice blunders in Archer's thinking.

Zeuner has also criticised the emphasis on group transactions and logical relations for posing an overtly rational account of interaction (Zeuner 2000; Zeuner 2001). Zeuner interprets Archer to say that "the individual enters as a rational actor pursuing material

interests. The cultural actor seeks material gains from his cultural work and from his interaction with other cultural actors" (Zeuner 2001: 111). What Zeuner sees as "Archer's rational agent" approaches culture as a resource in the exchange relationships of material interests and is "in no way influenced by culture" (Zeuner 2001: 111).

In my view Zeuner bases her critique on a blatant misreading of Archer. Archer spends piles of pages on counterpoising her concept of agency to the rational actor found by Zeuner. Zeuner fails to acknowledge that the morphogenetic approach models society at multiple levels, with different mechanisms and relations among them. The exchange relationships of cultural and material resources occur at the level of groups and institutions. I will not rehearse the analysis of chapter 6 here, which should have made it clear that individuals are very much influenced by culture as it enters into evaluation, interpretation and ultimate concern. Furthermore, when a religious group acquires the sponsorship of a material interest group, the former does not automatically partake in the transactions of the latter. The religious group experiences a change of action context which, while shaping what would be strategic courses of action, does not change the commitment to a cultural conspectus into one of pursuit of material gains. Hence I find Zeuner's criticism of Archer's "uncultivated agent" based on a very different reading from my own. Then again, Zeuner does not list the works which deal with the individual level in her references (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Archer 2004; Archer 2007a).

I contend to the basic criticism that the concept of agency posed by Archer tilts too far into rationalism, but not for the reasons posed by Zeuner. The theory of Archer places a primary emphasis on agential reflexivity. Reflexivity is to Archer a conscious process. It is therefore through conscious processes that structure is transmitted to agency. As reflexivity is seen as the ultimate efficient force in social life, reproduction is seen as active propagation, reluctant resignation or lack of knowledge. As I concluded in chapter 8.1, this does not satisfy why the individual *would* reproduce roles and action patterns. People do not spring to change their roles and action patterns at every opportunity, even if they resent the action patterns they are reproducing. Gender roles are reproduced by urban couples with a stated ambition *not* to reproduce traditional gender roles (Kjeldstad and Lyngstad 2010). The concept of opportunity costs captures the external conditions which may lead to reproduction, but says nothing about internal processes.

Current research is being conducted on the relationship between reflexivity and predisposition with attention to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Adams 2006; Elder-Vass

2007b). Habitus links structure and praxis as the principles which reproduce the practices of a social class, such as systems of culturally informed norms, values, attitudes, practices, habits and physical bearing. Habitus is not necessarily or even usually conscious, but is embodied dispositions which are taken for granted and perceived as the proper way of being and acting (Furseth 2009: 107-108; Kaspersen 2004: 72-73). Because habitus is taken for granted by the individual, Bourdieu has been criticised for underestimating the importance of individual choice and rationality. The overall theory of Bourdieu is more oriented towards reproduction than towards change. Archer, on the other hand, has been criticised for posing too much emphasis on these aspects. A synthesis of their concepts of agency might yield a more balanced theory of action (Elder-Vass 2007b).

Adams notes that a synthesis ought to include reflexivity, habitus and what he terms *post-reflexive choice*, that is the structural limitation of what choices made by people can be effectuated (Adams 2006). Archer contains this to some extent in the two ways opportunity costs work. Elder-Vass has provided an emergentist synthesis of Archer and Bourdieu. He argues that we must take into account reflexivity in gradual terms relative to degree of unconscious predispositions. Embodied dispositions of the *habitus* can according to Elder-Vass be re-conceptualized into emergentist ontology as biological liabilities. Human action is to Elder-Vass co-determined by the causal powers of reflexivity and the neural and physiological foundation of embodied dispositions. Thus, habitus is seen as a lower stratum in which reflexivity is rooted (Elder-Vass 2007b). Clearly research into the theoretical and practical possibilities of reconciling Archer and Bourdieu would be interesting for the sociology of religion.

9.4 CONCLUSION

Sociological explanations of religion that take the morphogenetic approach become predominantly concerned with causality. It points to historical trajectories of a given phenomenon, and how external and internal factors have contributed to its changing manifestations. By separating structure, culture and agency in analysis Archer maintains that the social analyst becomes better able to discern how these aspects of reality impinge on one another and cause events and phenomena to manifest. Religion obtains several kinds of causal potential within the morphogenetic frame, potentials which it can

maintain in the context of modernity. Several lines of inquiry into these potentials have been suggested.

Archer does not offer a ready-made concept of religion. Rather, each religious group and phenomenon appears uniquely related to its environment and its believers. Operationalization and definition of religion from the morphogenetic perspective may take the form of linkages between a group and its available resources (belief system, class, and personal relations), commitment and ultimate concerns, degree of involvement in public discourse, the organization's second-order relation to secular SEPs and second-order relation between the group's belief system and the CEPs of dominant culture. The relative importance of these aspects must of course be ascertained in relation to the object of study.

As institutions committed to a body of belief religious organizations are enmeshed in the situational logics generated by the logical relations within its belief system; the relations between the belief system and the societal culture in general on any given topic of public discourse; and the structural relations between its organization and other institutions of society. Its relative success in maintaining or advancing its position with respect to the interests vested in these relations is a question of the bargaining power (access to resources) and negotiation strength (legitimation) of the religious institution in relation to other (material and ideal) vested interest groups, and the structured relations of surrounding society. The outcome of these third-order transactions is ultimately what determines religious morphogenesis or morphostasis at the institutional and systemic level. In real life things are seldom susceptible to simple categories and clear-cut relations, which is why abstraction is so useful. The abstractions of Archer concern how structures may run smoothly alongside or butt against one another. These are extremities on an axis running from detrimental to reinforcing operation. What Archer is spelling out is the general generative mechanisms inherent in things standing in these general relationships to one another. As such, these relations can be said to represent the simplest and perhaps most naturally occurring emergent properties of social reality.

The morphogenetic approach is an overarching and general frame that orders specific knowledge and guides the researcher towards causal explanations. On these most general generative mechanisms, or effects of the mediation of cultural structures, there is no need to validate the claims of informants in terms of truth. At the institutional level, mechanisms stemming from the compatibility or incompatibility of cultural symbols and ideas operate regardless of their referent. At the individual level this is a matter of

individual assessment of the reasons one has to follow a given course of action. Archer grants all human reasons causal potential. They might not always be good reasons, and not always pursued with the right means, but they weigh equally on the scale of justification *unless* the individual gives some kinds of reasons priority over others. Which reasons are ultimately given priority (and why) is an individual and hence an empirical matter, and therefore the general framework of Archer does not set religion apart from other systems of thought *a priori*.

Archer does not claim that people cannot live with contradictions or that any two logically incompatible beliefs embroil the believer in situational logics of correction or elimination. In fact she does not even claim that beliefs in general fit onto the propositional form. Archer allows far more than what people hold as propositions into the cultural realm. Unfortunately she does not remind us very often. Paintings, theories, aesthetics, music, language, dance, ritual, symbols, semiotic patterns – all these amount to cultural items. Indeed, the Cultural System is according to Archer constituted by "*all things* capable of being grasped, deciphered, understood or known by someone" (Archer 1996: 104, my emphasis). By definition these items form a system because a precondition of being intelligible is the shared characteristic of language (or translatability), and a shared feature is also the precondition of being systematically related (Archer 1996: 104). I understand the criterion of propositional status as a methodological grip, not a theoretical claim. This means that in the vast number of cases formulation of religious beliefs into propositional form must be an act of interpretation which is ultimately conducted by the researcher.

As I pointed out in chapter 5.3, this renders research within the morphogenetic perspective challenging but not impossible. This thesis offers no solution to its hermeneutical intricacies. In the sociology of religion the task is remedied by religious belief often taking the form of propositional statements. From the morphogenetic perspective, causal explanation and contextual understanding is two moves of the same process in sociological investigation. We must understand the connections between different beliefs in order to understand how they impact the believer, shapes her interpretations and guides her action. The conceptual division of beliefs from believers, tradition from traditionalists and values from everyday judgement does open up an interesting space where methodological disentanglement (and hence causal explanation) might become more tractable. I would be very interested in empirical research which

could shed light on whether analytical dualism actually provides the researcher with a better grip on religious events.

A forthcoming publication by Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead on religious emotion represents an entirely novel approach to the sociology of religion (Expected June 2010). Awaiting its publication, Archer stands out in the field with her emphasis on emotion, embodiment and healthy personal relations. Within the impersonal logics of the morphogenetic approach there is room for a religious agent who is emotionally attached to his church, community and personal salvation. If we follow Archer, his religion can be investigated respectfully and forcefully because his religious commitment, experience and identity are as valid sociologically speaking as those of non-religious people. Understanding him is not just about divesting meaning, but also about grasping the causal efficiency of his religion, all the way from the transvaluation of feelings through the reflexive evaluation of reasons, to his interpretations of context and action within it. Reification is avoided because the efficacy of structural and cultural conditioning "is dependent upon how agent weigh them and decide to act in view of their own weightings" (Archer 1995: 208). The stratified model of people suggests that we ought to understand his religion differently depending on in what respect he is a religious agent. Indeed, his powers and influences will differ according to whether he is acting in respect of Person, Agent or Actor. On different levels he will be differently susceptible to the generative mechanisms and structured relations of his social environment. Hence the validity of our knowledge of his religious life would depend on in which respect he is investigated and what aspects of his religious life our methods can grasp.

Can this be of value in explaining religious change? Only concrete research and analysis can tell. As shown in this thesis, I believe there are several aspects of the theory of Archer which is not only innovative in itself, but particularly interesting from the perspective of the sociology of religion. It is regrettable that no empirical researchers on religion have adopted the morphogenetic approach to date. Perhaps the scope and generality of Archer's writing conveys it as impervious and removed from concrete events to the practically-minded reader.

The basic model is tremendously complex even when laid out as simply as possible. Archer designed it to capture the central aspects of social change emanating from the deep structures of society and ourselves. Taken separately, her concepts promise ontological security and epistemological dignity to religion in its various causal forms.

Taken together, the researcher looking for linear explanations and clear answers finds a Pandora's Box of complex interrelationships and unintended consequences. But a general theory which purports to resolve the structure-agency puzzle and reconcile our methodological, ontological and theoretical conundrums deserves serious attention."The theoretical language of science works like other structures: it is limiting in some ways, but it is also the medium that makes possible deep and creative interpretations of social reality" (Danermark et. al. 2002: 136). The morphogenetic approach is Archer's answer to the ontological problems of Collectivism, the methodological qualms of Individualism and the inexplicable amalgams of central conflationism. Firm in her belief in the possibility of naturalism and an emancipatory social science, understanding religion from the perspective of Archer grants religion and religious agents a solid anchorage in our consciousness and society: "Realism revindicates real powers for real people who live in the real world" (Archer 2000: 10). If social reality is indeed to be modelled on emergence and contingent causality, which seems fruitful, then we need a general theory that stands up to the complexities this by definition entails. From what I gather in this thesis I find morphogenetic approaches to religion to open promising conceptual spaces that deserves further attention.

Appendix: Figures and Tables

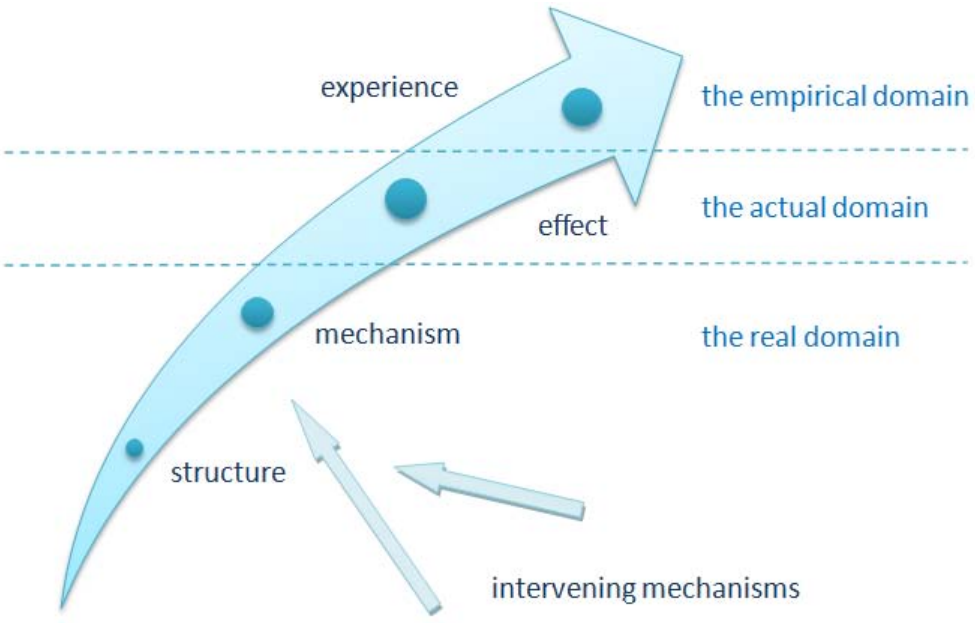

Figure 1: Stratified reality and contingent causality

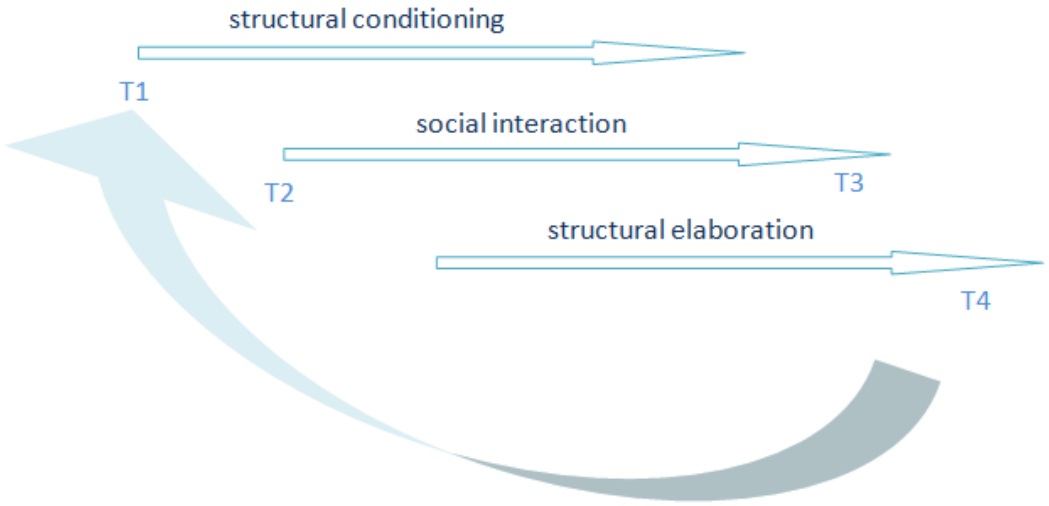

Figure 2: The morphogenesis of structure

Adapted from Archer (1995: 76) "The morphogenetic sequence"

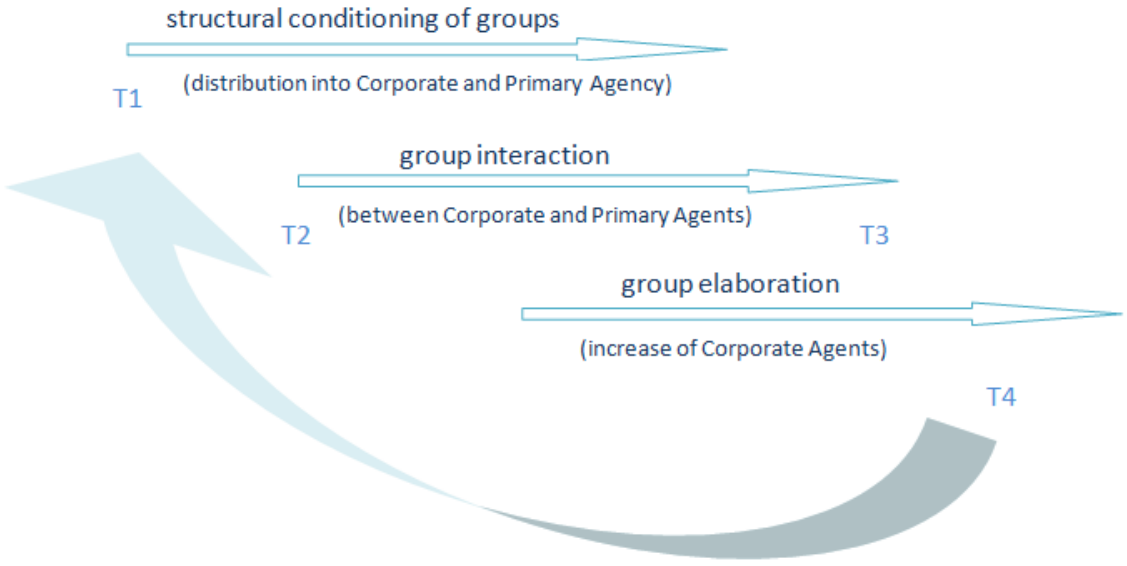

Figure 3 The double morphogenesis of Agency

Adapted from Archer (1995: 264) "Corporate and Primary agency in the morphogenetic sequence"

	COMPATIBLE	INCOMPATIBLE
NECESSARILY RELATED	Necessary complementarity (protection)	Necessary contradiction (compromise)
CONTINGENTLY RELATED	Contingent complementarity (opportunism)	Contingent contradiction (elimination)

Table 1: Four institutional configurations and their situational logics

		CONTRADICTIONS		COMPLEMENTARITIES	
		NECESSARY	CONTINGENT	NECESSARY	CONTINGENT
CEPs	Situational logic	(correction)	(elimination)	(protection)	(opportunism)
CEPs	CS LEVEL	Syncretism	Pluralism	Systematization	Specialization
CEPs	S-C LEVEL	Unification	Cleavage	Reproduction	Sectionalism
SEPs	SS LEVEL	Compromise	Competition	Integration	Differentiation
SEPs	S-I LEVEL	Containment	Polarisation	Solidarity	Diversification

Table 2: Cultural and structural morphogenesis / morphostasis at the systemic and social levels

Adapted from Archer (1995: 303)

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