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Morphogenetic Theory and the Constructivist Institutional Challenge

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ABSTRACT

This article engages with two meta-theoretical approaches to social analysis, ‘morphogenetic theory’ and ‘constructivist institutionalism’, and specifically explores how the former fares under the critical scrutiny of the latter. The key proponent of constructivist institutionalism, Colin Hay, has offered two detailed critiques of morphogenesis that criticise its position on the foundational sociological issues of structure-agency and material-ideational. Although Hay’s critiques are largely rejected in an overall defence of the morphogenetic approach, the process of engagement is seen to be particularly useful for morphogenetic theory because it allows a number of important clarifications to be made and it also opens up space for theoretical development. In the course of this debate, accessible introductions are given to both theories, and the similarities and differences between them are outlined, providing clarity to both. Therefore, although this article ultimately operates as a defence of morphogenetic theory, especially in the form proposed by Margaret Archer and Douglas Porpora, it finds a great deal of fruitful discussion in the constructivist institutionalist challenge.

Key words: morphogenesis, constructivist institutionalism, structure, agency, culture, material, ideational, critical realism, social change, Margaret Archer, Colin Hay.

INTRODUCTION

Colin Hay has offered detailed critiques of the morphogenetic approach on two particular occasions. Firstly, in his 2002 work *Political Analysis*, Hay lays out a critique focussed on the analytical dualism between structure and agency, arguing that this ‘analytical dualism’ inevitably hardens into an ‘*ontological* dualism’. Secondly, in collaboration with Andreas Gofas (Hay & Gofas, 2010), Hay refocused his critique on the analytical dualism between structure and *culture*, this time putting forward a wide-ranging attack as a point of departure for his own meta-theoretical approach: constructivist institutionalism. Ultimately, this article is concerned with defending morphogenetic theory and with opening up discussion about the design of its explanatory framework. Through an engagement with Hay’s critiques and his constructivist institutionalist alternative, this article also acts as a relatively accessible introduction to these two theoretical approaches to social analysis.

An engagement with Hay’s critiques and with ‘constructivist institutionalism’ is beneficial to morphogenetic theory for a number of reasons. Firstly, Hay shares the morphogenetic concern with the structure-agency and material-ideational questions as the foundational issues of social theory (Archer & Tritter, 2000; Hay, 2002). In his detailed consideration of these issues (see particularly Hay, 2002, 2016), Hay offers theoretically sophisticated arguments in a clear, systematic and accessible format, an approach that partly accounts for

his significant influence in the study of politics in the UK. Furthermore, Hay begins his critique of morphogenesis from within a shared perspective of Bhaskarian critical realism (Hay 2002) before later moving away from this position (Hay 2005) and adopting a social constructivist ontology (Hay 2017; Hay & Gofas, 2010). This movement in Hay's position offers morphogenetic theory (and critical realism more broadly) the highly valuable opportunity of engaging with a former theoretical ally. Finally, a morphogenetic defence against Hay's critique is necessary because the current response is insufficient. Although McAnulla (2005) puts forward a morphogenetic defence and counterattack in response to Hay's 2002 critique, his article was published before Hay and Gofas's more substantial 2010 critique.

Therefore, beyond *introducing* the two theoretic approaches named in its title, this article has two main purposes: firstly, to respond to Hay's criticisms with a defence of the morphogenetic approach and a critique of the 'constructivist institutionalist' alternative; secondly, to use Hay's partially justified criticisms to show that the explanatory framework of morphogenetic theory requires further clarification.

SECTION 1: AN OVERVIEW OF THE MORPHOGENETIC APPROACH

Built from a critical realist perspective (Bhaskar, 1975, 1979; see also Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 1998; Collier, 1994; Sayer, 2000), the morphogenetic approach works from a number of basic beliefs about the nature of reality, which are derived logically but maintained with an appreciation of their fallibility. Sayer (2000) identifies "the defining feature" of a critical realist perspective to be "the belief that there is a world existing independently of our knowledge of it" (p. 2). And, it is on this basis that Archer (1995) argues that "we *are* simultaneously free and constrained and we *also* have some awareness of it" (p. 2). In this short sentence from the introduction of Archer's seminal work, *Realist Social Theory*, two foundational distinctions are captured: firstly, the distinction between the individual and the constraining/enabling/motivating social context, generally known as agency and structure respectively; secondly, the distinction between the reality of our social situation and *our awareness of* that reality, known as "the material and the ideational aspects of social life" respectively (Archer, 1996, p. xi).

The first of these distinctions is only tenable on the basis of another central critical realist concept: *emergence*. On this particular conceptualisation of 'emergence', higher strata, such as water, emerge from lower strata, such as hydrogen and oxygen, which in turn emerge from even lower strata, such as neutrons, protons and electrons. In short, an emergent entity is nothing more than (a) its parts, (b) the way in which they are arranged in relation to one another, and (c) the unique properties it holds as a result of (a) and (b). When we apply the notion of emergence to *social* phenomena, it can be argued that the social context *emerges from* individual thought and action, while avoiding the suggestion that it entails the introduction of some new substance; its unique properties derive only from its constituent parts and the way in which they are arranged. This allocates a causal role to the social context without reifying the context as some independent entity.

In morphogenetic theory, the emergent stratum of 'social context' is further delineated according to the material-ideational distinction. Archer (1996) insists that in order to avoid "doing violence to our subject matter by eliding the material and the ideational aspects of social life" (p. xi), morphogenetic theory has "both to respect and to capture the substantive

differences between structures and culture” (p. xi). Porpora (1993) outlines these differences, explaining that structural “material relations are an important mechanism beyond the cultural rules through which our behavior is constrained, enabled, and motivated” (p. 212). Thus, the individual-context distinction and the material-ideational distinction are combined by Archer (1996) and Porpora (1993) to form a three-way split between individual, structure and culture (Archer 2013; Porpora 2013). By returning to the basic belief that “we are simultaneously free and constrained” (Archer, 1995, p. 2), the crucially relevant characteristic of the individual is seen to be a relative freedom, conceptualised as an internal reflexivity that exerts a causal force on the external world in the form of *human agency* (Archer, 2012). In summary, morphogenetic theory is based on a belief that there are three primary causal powers in society: structure, culture and agency.

According to Archer (1995), the “first axiom” of morphogenetic theory’s explanatory programme is that “structure necessarily predates the action(s) which transform it” (p. 138) and the second is “that structural elaboration necessarily postdates those actions” (p. 168). For example, a politician will always operate in a pre-existing political system, even if it is their *raison d’être* to fundamentally reform that system; the *consequences* of the politician’s attempted reform necessarily postdate the attempt. This ‘before, during, and after’ schema lies at the heart of the explanatory programme of the morphogenetic approach as a simple three-stage model of social change: *conditioning* (T1), *interaction* (T2-T3), and *elaboration* (T4). Because a distinction is made between the structural and cultural dimensions of the social context, there are two fundamental morphogenetic cycles, one between structure and agency, and one between culture and agency. Archer (1995, p. 169; 1996, p. xxvii) insists that these two cycles parallel one another, so that their functioning can be laid out in very similar terms, which ultimately “avoids any prejudgement of their relative importance at any time and makes it much easier to examine their interplay over time” (Archer, 1996, p. 275). As Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate, structure/culture exerts a causal influence on agents (conditioning); agents interact (interaction); and this interaction changes or maintains the structure/culture (elaboration). This simplified outline of the morphogenetic model is enough to show how the three primary causal concepts of structure, culture and agency are mobilised in a temporal sequence to form the basis of the morphogenetic cycle.

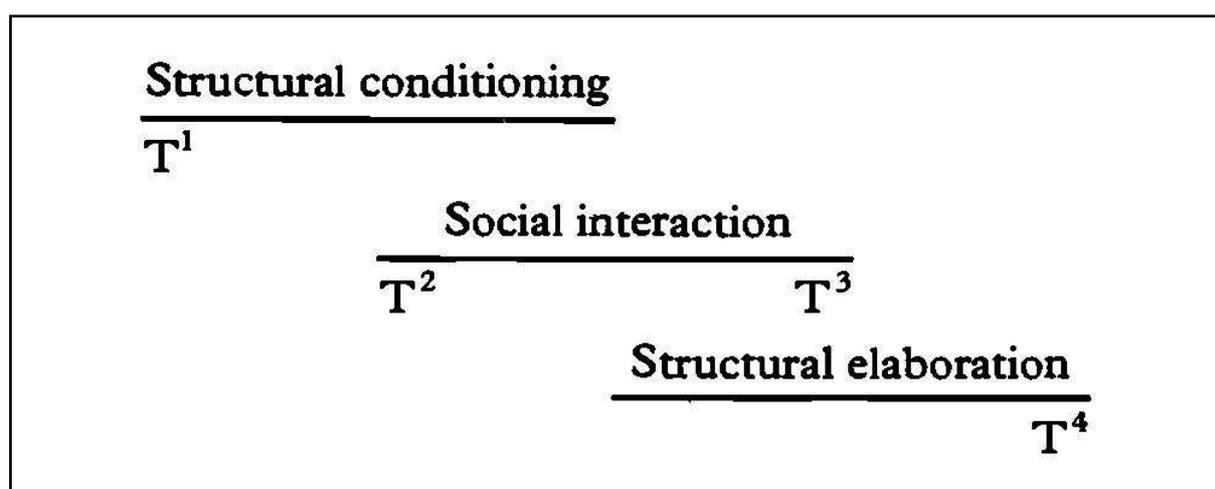


FIGURE 1 – Structural morphogenesis (Archer 1995)

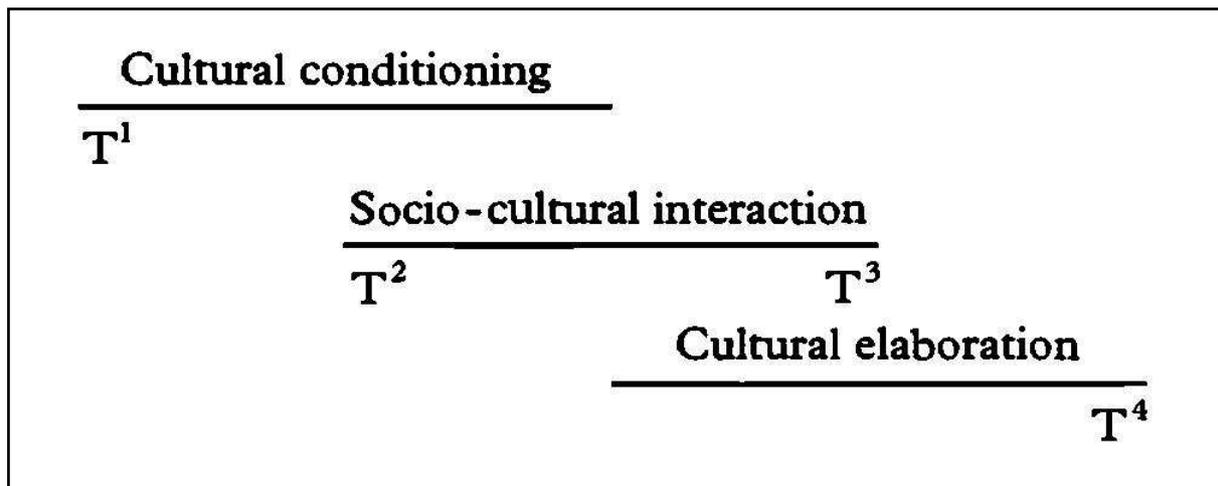


FIGURE 2 – Cultural morphogenesis (Archer 1995)

SECTION 2: HAY'S FIRST CRITIQUE AND THE STRATEGIC-RELATIONAL APPROACH

In *Political Analysis*, Hay (2002) offers a critical engagement both with morphogenetic theory and with structuration theory in order to “establish a point of departure for [his] preferred strategic-relational approach” (Hay, 2002, p. 117; see also Hay, 1995). While there is no space here to address structuration theory in any detail, it is enlightening to note how Hay and Archer both use Giddens’ structuration theory as a point of departure in their respective theorisations of structure and agency. But, they offer starkly contrasting critiques, and subsequently depart in different directions. Archer (1995) accuses Giddens of ‘conflation’, arguing that he elides structure and agency together, making it impossible for him to model their interaction over time. Hay (1995; 2002), on the other hand, accuses Giddens of ‘dualism’, arguing that, although Giddens sets out to intertwine structure and agency, he inadvertently ends up with an analytical dualism in which structure and agency can only be studied in isolation from one another.

As well drawing different conclusions from their respective critiques of Giddens, Archer (1995) and Hay (1995; 2002) also draw different conclusions from their critiques of the structuralist and intentionalist positions. Archer identifies structuralists as ‘downwards conflationists’ because in their approach agency is subsumed by, and therefore conflated with, structure. She then identifies intentionalists as ‘upwards conflationists’ because in their approach structure is reduced to, and therefore conflated with, agency. Hay actually offers a very similar critique of these one-sided approaches, commenting that “pure structuralism effectively dispenses with agency [and] pure intentionalism disavows notions of structure” (Hay, 2002, p. 110). However, he then goes on to argue that “this opposition or *dualism* ... has tended to resolve itself into fruitless exchanges between structuralists and intentionalists” (Hay, 2002, p. 115). Therefore, one key aspect of Hay’s disagreement with the morphogenetic approach relates to the justification for rejecting structuralism, intentionalism and structuration theory. From the morphogenetic perspective, this rejection is justified because such theories are built on a *conflation* of structure and agency. To Hay, these three positions, and indeed morphogenesis itself, are instead guilty of creating a *dualism between* structure and agency.

From this broader rejection of dualism, Hay (2002) offers a more specific critique of morphogenesis, arguing that in the morphogenetic cycle “structure and agency are not only analytically separable but ontologically separate”; “in this sense, an analytical dualism hardens into an ontological dualism” (p. 123). He goes on to specify the source of this ontological dualism by highlighting the role of *temporality* in morphogenetic theory: “Archer insists that structure and agency reside in different temporal domains, such that the pre-existence of structure is a condition of individual action” (Hay, 2002, p. 124); “to speak of the different temporal domains of structure and agency is, then, to reify and ontologise an analytical distinction” (p. 125). In other words, Hay is arguing that if structure is held to *predate* agency at an ontological level, then the two exist in *separate* temporal domains, meaning that they form an ontological dualism. The accusation that morphogenesis adheres to ‘ontological dualism’ allows Hay to place it on the discard pile of theories that have failed to overcome the structure-agency dualism, along with structuralism, intentionalism, and structuration theory.

In order to find a theory that not only avoids but also overcomes the structure-agency dualism, Hay (2002) turns to the strategic-relational approach (the SRA) of Bob Jessop (1996; 2001; 2005). The SRA is a meta-theoretical model that is primarily used by Jessop to explore the functioning and ontological status of the capitalist state (Jessop, 2007). To Hay, the appeal of the SRA, which he later incorporates as a foundational tenet of ‘constructivist institutionalism’ (Hay, 2016), seems to be twofold. Firstly, it “sets out to transcend the artificial dualism of structure and agency” (Hay, 2002, p. 127), which Hay clearly sees as a necessity in light of his critique of morphogenesis. And secondly, the SRA also “draws upon the critical realism of Bhaskar” (Hay, 2002, p. 127), which Hay continues to see as an important source of theoretical insight (Hay & Gofas, 2010), even if his more recent works on ‘constructivist institutionalism’ no longer strictly adhere to certain key critical realist assumptions (Hay, 2005; 2011b; 2016; McAnulla, 2005).

With the purpose of transcending the structure-agency dualism, Hay (2002) discusses ‘*structure*’ and ‘*agency*’ as concepts and not as ontological entities, and therefore denies their existence as anything other than the theoretical constructs of social analysis. Therefore, to Hay, “neither agents nor structures are real, since neither has an existence in isolation from the other” (Hay, 2002, p. 127); both concepts are “merely theoretical abstractions” (p. 127). On this basis, Hay advocates Jessop’s (1996) theoretical blending of structure and agency into two alternative concepts: strategic actor and strategically selective context. Although Hay offers an accurate representation of Jessop’s analytical manoeuvring (as outlined in Jessop, 1996; 2001), there is a problematic representation of Jessop’s ontological position. In contrast to Hay, Jessop (2005, p. 48) suggests that the SRA shares more in common with the morphogenetic approach than it does with Giddens’ attempted duality or even than it does with Bhaskar’s ‘transformational model of social activity’.

When Jessop (2005) comes to reflect directly on the relationship between the SRA and morphogenesis, he seems to contradict Hay (2002) by adhering to the critical realist premises that are the primary targets of Hay’s critique. Firstly, Hay criticises the founding morphogenetic claim that structures pre-exist agents in any given context, suggesting that it is *this* distinction that leads to ontological dualism. In contrast, Jessop accepts and supports morphogenesis on this point, because “ontologically, critical realism asserts that social forms pre-exist individuals and are a necessary condition of their activity” (Jessop, 2005, p. 44). Secondly, Hay criticises morphogenesis for the more general distinction between structure and agency at an ontological level, again suggesting that this leads to analytical dualism. In

contrast, Jessop explicitly warns that if one defines “structure and agency as mutually constitutive - and hence, in some sense, actually identical”, then one’s “argument lacks ontological depth” because “it treats structure and agency at the level of the actual rather than in terms of real mechanisms, emergent properties, tendencies, and material effects” (Jessop, 2005, p. 45). As we shall see in the following section, it is exactly this point that McAnulla (2005) uses in his morphogenetic response to Hay.

SECTION 3: A MORPHOGENETIC RESPONSE

In defence of ‘*analytical duality*’, Hay states that “while it may be useful analytically to differentiate between structural and agential factors, then, it is important that this analytical distinction is not reified and hardened into a rigid ontological dualism” (Hay, 2002, p. 127). It can therefore be inferred that a *duality* is defined by two main features: firstly, it pertains to a ‘*distinction*’ rather than a ‘*separation*’; secondly, it pertains to structural and agential *factors* or *properties* rather than structure and agency *as entities*. Because ‘a duality’ *distinguishes* but does not *separate*, we can infer that duality allows for structural properties and agential properties to be interrelated and interdependent (Hay 2002). This is an important contribution from Hay, as it allows for a comparison with morphogenesis over both the ontological and analytical levels using the terms ‘dualism’ and ‘duality’. Although the morphogenetic position advocates *dualism at the analytical level*, it actually advocates something closer to *duality at the ontological level*. In contrast, Hay advocates duality at the analytical level but at the ontological level he insists that neither dualism nor duality can be applied, a position that Archer (1995) labels ‘conflation’. By defining the terms in this way, we not only have a much clearer picture about the difference between the two positions but we now also have a clearer path to engage in the debate between them. To establish the tenability of the morphogenetic position, we can make three points of clarity to demonstrate that although it advocates a structure-agency dualism at the analytical level, its ontological position represents a ‘*duality*’ in which structure and agency, as *distinct properties* of social reality, are interrelated and interdependent.

Firstly, although the morphogenetic model places structure as temporally prior to agency, this is not to argue that structures existed before agents *historically*; “the issue is not about the chicken and the egg since even were ultimate regress possible, it would not prove very revealing ... after millennia of morphogenesis” (Archer, 1995, p. 75). The point is that structures “pre-date any particular cohort of occupants/incumbents” (Archer, 1995, p. 168) but do not pre-date occupants/incumbents generally. Therefore, structure and agency have always existed together and, ontologically, they are not treated as different entities occurring in different temporalities but as different causal forces, one of which logically precedes the other. Secondly, Archer (2000a) argues, in response to a similar accusation from Anthony King (1999), that *in any particular morphogenetic cycle* “there is never a moment at which both structure and agency are not jointly in play” (Archer, 2000a, p. 465). At the *analytical* level they are treated as separate entities so that we can model their interaction: (i) structures condition agents; (ii) agents interact in structured settings; (iii) agents’ action leads to structural elaboration. However, even when structure and agency are analytically treated as separate entities, they are both held to *exist* at each stage of the cycle; it is simply the case that one of the entities is causally active while the other is being acted upon.

Thirdly, Archer (2000a), McAnulla (2005) and Elder-Vass (2007) all point out that the concept of ‘*emergence*’ allows an ontological distinction (duality) to be theorised between

structure and agency as causal forces, without falling into ontological *dualism*. As Elder-Vass explains, emergence is the idea that “a whole [e.g. structure] can have properties (or powers) ... that would not be possessed by its parts [e.g. agents] if they were not organised as a group into the form of this particular kind of whole” (Elder-Vass, 2007, p. 29). Therefore, structure *emerges* from agency and can only have causal influence on and through agents (Archer, 2000a), meaning that the two can never exist in ontological dualism because they are *necessarily interrelated and ontologically intertwined*. Therefore, at an ontological level, critical realists such as Archer, Porpora, McAnulla and Elder-Vass, adhere to a belief in (a) the reality of structure and agency as distinct causal properties of reality, and (b) their interrelated and interdependent relationship; ‘interrelated’ because agents and agency are constituent parts of social structure; ‘interdependent’ because structure and agency each only exist in the presence of the other. It is therefore possible to demonstrate the tenability of the morphogenetic view that analytical dualism can be applied without falling into the trap of *ontological* dualism.

SECTION 4: HAY’S ONTOLOGICAL CONFLATION

We can now turn to Hay’s (2002) insistence on an analytical duality and ontological conflation of structure and agency, and how the logical relation between these two positions creates the following tension: *if we are to deny the distinction between structure and agency at the ontological level, and therefore deny their ontological existence, it is unclear how and why they are conceptually useful at the analytical level*. This problem is visible in Hay’s engagement with the fruitful, if theoretically constraining, coin analogy. In contrast to Giddens’s (1984) ‘bracketing’ approach of seeing structure and agency as flip sides of the same coin, Hay suggests that structure and agency could instead be understood as *alloys* in the same coin. However, for this argument to make any sense, the coin would have to be composed of two ‘alloys’ *in the first place*, a position that would commit Hay to an ontological distinction of some kind. This in turn would seem to contradict the idea that structure and agency are abstract concepts for understanding the real “mechanisms and processes” of social change, a theoretical viewpoint from which the coin is not an alloy of structure and agency but is instead solidly constituted by social process.

This gives us two possible interpretations of Hay’s position, each leading to a potential theoretical problem.

- *Position 1*. If social process is real but both structure and agency are merely abstract concepts for understanding that process, we are left with the following problem: why is the structure-agency issue important at the analytical level?
- *Position 2*. If structure and agency are held to be two constituent parts of social process, or two causal forces within it, or two features of it, we are left with the following problem: why does Hay deny the reality of structure and agency?

McAnulla (2005) interprets Hay according to *Position 1*, summarising Hay’s ontological stance as one in which “generative mechanisms or structures are treated as mere ‘theoretical entities’, not as real entities” (p. 36), which leads to the position that structure and agency are nothing more than “descriptive abstractions which may (or may not) be of use in accounting for events” (p. 36). McAnulla (2005) accuses Hay of ‘actualism’, the denial of unobservable social causes. When defending morphogenesis on similar grounds, Porpora (2015) critiques the position of ‘*nominalism*’ as one in which people “deny the reality of abstract objects” (p. 170) on the basis that they are merely ways of describing more tangible objects. For example,

do structure and agency really exist, or are they just ways of describing social processes? A nominalist would deny structure and agency their own ontological existence on the basis of one of the following justifications: (i) relational objects are nothing more than the entities between which the relation(s) exists, and perhaps the features of those entities, and (ii) there does not seem to be any physical space in which relational objects exist (Porpora, 2015, pp. 114-5). *Position 1* can therefore be labelled nominalist in its denial of structure and agency as anything more than ways of describing tangible social processes.

However, in response to McAnulla (2005), Hay (2005) offers a clarification of his position that would seem to defend *Position 2*: “I certainly do not deny the existence of underlying mechanisms (structure-agency complexes) which may be unobservable yet causally effective” (Hay, 2005, p. 43). In Hay’s view, these ‘mechanisms’ are “social processes (in which structure and agency are mutually implicated)”, while it is structure and agency themselves that are merely “analytical abstractions” (Hay, 2005, p. 40). Therefore, when pressed, Hay seems to advocate *Position 2*, accepting the reality of structure and agency as intertwined constituent properties of social processes in the form of “structure-agency complexes”. This leaves us with the question: why does Hay deny the reality of structure and agency? Callinicos (2004: xxx) offers one possible answer when he claims that Hay ultimately equates “being real with the capacity to exist independently of other entities”. Callinicos argues that if we erroneously assume that entities must be independent of other entities in order to be *real*, then we end up denying the reality of everything. On this interpretation, Hay accepts the existence of structure and agency but fails to define them as a ‘*real*’ because of his insistence on their ontological indistinguishability.

Therefore, it would seem that Hay’s ontology could be interpreted either as nominalist, in its denial of the existence of structure and agency because of their indistinguishability, *OR* he could be interpreted as advocating an ontological duality in which he fundamentally accepts the *existence* of structure and agency but insists that their close interdependence and intertwining prevents them from being labelled ‘real’. When we turn to Hay’s more recent work, in which he has adopted the label ‘constructivist institutionalism, and in which he has claimed that “there is no material bottom line” (Hay, 2016, p. 531), we find further indications that Hay’s ontological position is ultimately closer to nominalism than to ontological duality.

SECTION 5: CONSTRUCTIVIST INSTITUTIONALISM

In recent years, Hay has developed his sociological theory systematically under the label ‘constructivist institutionalism’ (see especially Hay, 2006; 2011a; 2016; 2017). Beyond his analytical duality between strategic actor and strategically selective context, Hay makes two further distinctions. Firstly, there is a distinction between the natural context and the social context, where the former is independent of our knowledge and understanding of it, while the latter is constituted by that knowledge and understanding (Hay, 2009; 2016). Secondly, building on the social ontology of John Searle (1995; 2005; 2010), Hay argues for a distinction between the institutional context and ideational context, where the former is dependent on knowledge but exists independently of conscious thought on a day-to-day basis, while the latter exists *as* conscious thought and only exists “as long as our thoughts are of a particular kind” (Hay, 2016, p. 522). These three distinctions seem to be the foundational tenets of constructivist institutionalism and can be summarised as follows: the strategic actor can be distinguished from the strategically selective context (Hay, 2002); within the

strategically selective context, a further distinction can be made between the natural context and the social context (Hay, 2009); within the social context, a final distinction can be made between the institutional and the ideational context (Hay, 2016). The elegance of these three layered distinctions is a strength of the constructivist institutionalist approach, but the ontological status of these distinctions remains a problematic ambiguity.

Because it holds institutions as nothing more than an analytical category, constructivist institutionalism is focussed “on the processes of institutionalisation, de-institutionalisation and re-institutionalisation rather than on institutions per se” (Hay, 2016, p. 526). These processes of institutional formation, institutional collapse and, most importantly to Hay (2016), institutional change, are held to be ‘*politically contingent*’. This means that because institutions and events can be *interpreted* in different ways, there is political competition over their interpretation and subsequently over what actions should be attempted. In other words, institutions change, but they do not change on their own, they change as a result of actors understanding them and specifically as a result of the particular understandings that come to dominate. Therefore, actors may be institutionally situated but they orientate “themselves towards their institutional environment *through* a series of subjective and inter-subjective understandings, cognitions and normative dispositions” (Hay, 2016, p. 526). As a consequence, actors’ behaviour is informed by *perceptions* rather than “the actual contours of the institutionally configured terrain” (Hay, 2016, p. 527). For example, where morphogenetic theorists might argue that a dictator is powerful because of peoples’ perceptions *and* because of the institutional context, a constructivist institutionalist would argue that the dictator is powerful because of peoples’ perceptions *of* the institutional context. These ‘perceptions’ not only constitute the subjective perspective of individuals, but are also part of *inter-subjective ideas*, which can act as ‘cognitive templates’ that “are frequently embedded institutionally” (Hay, 2016, p. 527).

As a result of the above claims about the ubiquity of perceptions and understandings, a central claim of constructivist institutionalism (laid out in detail by Hay, 2011a) is that *actors’ interests are never materially given*. They are *always* “socially constructed” and “deeply normative” so that “interests are perhaps best seen as idealised perceptions and projections” which ultimately “depend on those things one loves, respects, values and admires” (Hay, 2016, p. 529). Combined with the view that institutions only exist *as* people’s perceptions and understandings of them, this view of interests removes the possibility of any form of ‘objective’ or ‘material’ interest. Hay is quite clear on this point and offers a detailed critique of existing theories of material interests (Hay, 2011a), concluding that “any conception of material self-interest whether that of the analyst or that of the actor ... remains precisely that: a conception and a construction” (p. 77). Hay (2011a) argues that to conceive of material interests is “to imply that they are discernible from—since they are ultimately determined by—the context in which the actor is located” (p. 78), which in turn “is to deny the agency, autonomy, individuality, and identity of the agent” (pp. 78-79). This view of interests is a clear point of disagreement with morphogenetic theory, which sees objective ‘vested interests’ as a central mechanism of structural conditioning (Archer, 1995, p. 203-5); this is addressed in more detail in the next section.

Underlying its ideational understanding of institutions and its denial of material interests, constructivist institutionalism holds a radical position in the material-ideational debate. On the subject of political and economic crisis, Hay (2016) makes clear his position in the material-ideational debate, arguing that “*it is the very distinction between the ideational and the material itself that constructivists reject*” [emphasis added] (p. 531). Hay (2016) does

argue that we “can usefully differentiate – and we should – between the things we think go wrong (the referent) and our discursive construal of them” (p. 531), but he is clear that “there is no material bottom line” to a crisis because “the relevant facts here are social facts and social facts are social constructs” (p. 531). In simple terms, Hay is arguing that, although we can distinguish between institutions and perceptions, institutions are nothing more than people’s perceptions of them. Therefore, in contrast to morphogenetic theory’s realist ontology, constructivist institutionalism offers a fundamentally constructivist ontology in three key ways: firstly, as discussed in the previous section, it denies the reality of fundamental social concepts, such as ‘the material’ and ‘the ideational’, either because they only exist as ontologically intertwined constituents of ‘material-ideational complexes’ or because they do not exist at all and are merely ways of understanding social processes; secondly, it argues that socially constructed perceptions and understandings comprise institutions and therefore drive institutional change; finally, it denies a role for material interests, arguing that interests only have a meaning as subjective constructions.

SECTION 6: HAY AND GOFAS’S FIVE CRITICISMS OF MORPHOGENETIC THEORY

In their 2010 collaboration for the influential book *The Role of Ideas in Political Analysis*, Hay and Gofas lay five main criticisms against morphogenetic theory: (1) that there is a problematic conflation of the material and structural; (2) that there is a problematic dualism between structure and culture; (3) that there is no diachronic modelling of structural-cultural interaction; (4) that the conception of power is materialistic; and (5) that the conception of interests is materialistic.

The main criticism offered by Hay and Gofas (2010) against morphogenetic theory is levelled against Archer’s “unfortunate conflation of the material and the structure” (p. 45), a conflation which they argue to be the ultimate source of the other weaknesses. In order to understand what Hay and Gofas mean by the material-structure conflation, it is necessary to turn to another of Hay’s contributions, in which he emphasises the importance of clearly differentiating between “material/physical structures on the one hand, and social/political structures on the other” (Hay, 2009, p. 260). Hay (2009) very effectively uses the example of King Canute and the tide in order to emphasise the difference between ‘natural structures’ (such as the tide) and ‘socio-political structures’ (such as the king’s public image). Unlike social structures, natural structures neither yield to agency nor synchronically emerge from agency, but they can still provide agents with opportunities and constraints and, although the laws of physics cannot be changed, the physical and natural world certainly can. Therefore, Hay (2009) argues for a clear (presumably analytical) distinction to be made between the natural/physical context and the social/political context in which agents act. This in turn leads Hay and Gofas (2010) to criticise the morphogenetic approach for conflating the two together in the term ‘structure’.

The second criticism relates to the subsequent dualism between structure and culture (Hay & Gofas, 2010). Hay and Gofas (2010) offer a specific point of disagreement that seems to highlight their understanding of what differentiates analytical dualism from other approaches and what makes it an unsuitable approach for exploring structural-cultural interaction. They argue that the morphogenetic approach mistakenly assumes that *all emergent properties of structure and culture are internal to themselves separately*, rather than being emergent from the interrelation between them (Hay & Gofas, 2010). The unidentified implication of this is that any modelling of the material, ideational, structural or agential aspects of social life must

allow for the possibility that *emergent properties can arise from combinations between the concepts and not just from each one separately.*

Thirdly, Hay and Gofas criticise morphogenesis for lacking a diachronic modelling of structural-cultural interaction. They refer a number of times to McAnulla's (2002) defence of morphogenetic theory and particularly his concluding remarks that morphogenetic theory "is less than clear about what the relationship between the cultural and the structural is over time" (p. 290). Hay and Gofas (2010) suggest that "McAnulla can find no developed account of the relationship between culture and structure over time because, quite simply, there is none" (p. 46). They argue that this absence is confirmed by Archer when she "restrict[s] the interplay of culture and structure to something that occurs only in the second 'socio-cultural interaction' phase of the morphogenetic cycle" (Hay & Gofas, 2010, p. 46). This in turn prevents the modelling of structure and culture in a three-part morphogenetic cycle of the sort presented in Figure 1 for structural-agential and in Figure 2 for cultural-agential interaction. Therefore, what McAnulla sees as a theoretical gap waiting to be filled, Hay and Gofas see as an inevitable weakness of morphogenetic theory.

Finally, we come to the interrelated accusations that morphogenesis posits a materialist conception of power and a materialist conception of interests. With regards to power, Hay and Gofas (2010) argue that in morphogenetic theory, "actors are seen to be empowered by their position in the social hierarchy", which is "understood in purely material terms" (pp. 45-6). Therefore, they suggest that the morphogenetic cycle fails to acknowledge that actors may be powerful "by virtue of a widespread system of meanings that accords them status, legitimacy and/or authority" (Hay & Gofas, 2010, p. 46). With regards to interests, Hay and Gofas (2010) argue that morphogenetic theory conceives of "interests as materially determined" and "conceives of actors in the process of socio-cultural integration as animated ultimately by their material interests" (p. 45). The supposed source of these two strands of materialism is the dualism between structure and culture, because such a separation denies the complex interpenetration of structural and cultural effects (Hay & Gofas, 2010). It is for this reason that Hay and Gofas (2010) "prefer to talk of a social structure with interrelated, if nonetheless analytically separable, ideational and material elements" (p. 46).

SECTION 7: A MORPHOGENETIC RESPONSE

In this section, a response will be offered to each of Hay and Gofas's (2010) five criticisms in turn. These responses broadly offer a defence of morphogenesis, but also make a number of concessions to Hay and Gofas on their identification of weaknesses and ambiguities in morphogenetic theory. Indeed, this is one of the main reasons that their critique and their constructivist institutionalist alternative are a particularly important challenge to morphogenetic theory. Although this section seeks to resist the challenge by defending and clarifying morphogenetic theory, it is ultimately argued that further work is needed to strengthen the morphogenetic model of structural-cultural interaction.

Criticism 1: that there is a problematic conflation of the material and structural in morphogenetic theory.

Archer (1995) uses the term 'structure' in contrast to 'culture', so that the former has a "primary dependence upon material resources" (p. 175), while the latter is composed of '*intelligibilia*', a term that captures all those items that are "capable of being grasped,

deciphered, understood or known by someone” (Archer, 1996, p. 104). However, in a significant minority of instances, Archer (1995) uses the term ‘structure’ to capture “*all structural influences (i.e. the generative powers of [both] structural emergent properties and cultural emergent properties)*” (p. 196). Therefore, ‘structure’ is used specifically to mean material structures but also generally to refer to the social context (including both its material and ideational elements). Porpora (1989) narrows the meaning of structure, defining it “as systems of human relationships among social positions” (p. 198), which for the current debate is more usefully worded as “emergently material social relations” (Porpora, 1993, p. 212). “Although emergently material social relations are generated by cultural constitutive rules, those relations independently affect the ways in which situated actors think and act” (Porpora, 1993, p. 212). Crucially, for Porpora, *the ‘materialism’ of material relations does not refer to their direct dependence on physical resources or their manifestation in physical reality, but instead refers to their independence from human understanding* (Porpora, 2018). On this basis, structure *could* relate directly to physical reality, such as a relation between the strength of two boxers or between the food rations of two castaways, but structural relations do not *necessarily* relate directly to physical reality and could be based on cultural rules, such as the relative positioning of a manager and an assistant or of a professor and undergraduate (Porpora, 2016). Therefore, if ‘the material’ is taken to mean emergent social relations that are *ontologically distinct from human understanding*, then morphogenetic theorists would readily accept that they conflate the material and structural and would argue that this is a strength of the approach rather than a weakness. However, if as Hay (2009) seems to imply, ‘the material’ is taken to mean ‘physical reality’ and the ‘natural world’, then the situation is less clear.

With Archer (1995) stating that structural emergent properties have a “primary dependence upon material resources, both physical and human” (p. 175), it seems that morphogenesis has not traditionally offered a clear enough distinction between ‘*emergently material social relations*’ and ‘*natural reality*’. Despite its problems at the ontological level, constructivist institutionalism offers a clear analytical delineation between actor, natural context, ideational context, and institutional context. It is not that morphogenetic theory lacks a conceptualisation of each of these concepts, but rather that only three of them form the meta-theoretical core as structure, agency and culture (Archer, 2013). In *Being Human*, Archer (2000b) highlights the importance of our natural embodiment in the world and our practical relations with the world that occur “not through the manipulation of symbols but of artefacts” (p. 166). Archer therefore not only incorporates the natural world into morphogenetic theory through her theorisation of the ‘*natural and practical orders of reality*’, but she also explores the interaction over time between the natural world and human agency. However, in order to provide greater clarity on the place of the natural context alongside the structural and cultural contexts of an agent, it is necessary to draw it into the meta-theoretical core of morphogenetic theory, so that the agency-culture-structure trio that is currently maintained (Archer, 2013) becomes a *quartet* by establishing a theoretical place for the natural/physical/practical context.

Criticism 2: that there is a problematic ontological dualism between structure and culture in morphogenetic theory.

The accusation that there is an ontological dualism between structure and culture is based on the same premise as Hay’s (2002) earlier criticism of the structure-agency dualism. As with structure-agency, morphogenetic theory is clear that the ontological relationship between structure and culture is *overlapping and intertwining*, and can therefore be labelled an

‘ontological duality’. At the analytical level it is necessary to artificially separate structure and culture into an ‘analytical dualism’ for the purposes of understanding their interaction over time. At an ontological level, the fundamental dualities between structure, culture, agency and (now also) ‘nature’ are underpinned by necessary relations of *synchronic emergence*.

The notion of emergence put forward by Archer is almost entirely focussed on the way in which both structure and culture synchronically emerge from agency. However, Porpora (1993; 2015) offers a crucial elaboration, explaining how structures, conceptualised as “emergently material social relations”, *emerge from both culture and agency*. Structures emerge from culture because cultural elements such as ‘constitutive rules’, ideas, and language are almost always central to the very existence of structures (Porpora, 2015). Similarly, structures emerge from agency because they are themselves relations between agents and because it is only through agents that they exert any causal force (Archer, 1995; Porpora, 2015). In order to stand by the commitment of establishing a place for ‘nature’ in the theoretical core of morphogenetic theory, it is necessary to include it in the chain of synchronic emergence. Therefore, at an ontological level, we can postulate four social forces existing in overlapping and intertwining relations of emergence... *from nature emerges agency... from nature and agency emerges culture... from nature, agency and culture emerges structure*.

Criticism 3: that there is no diachronic modelling of structural-cultural interaction in morphogenetic theory.

It seems that in both Hay and Gofas’s (2010) critique and in Archer’s (1995; 1996) writing on morphogenetic theory, the central issue with regards to structural-cultural interaction is the claim that “when both structure and culture are conceptualised from the morphogenetic perspective then the two *intersect in the middle element of the basic cycle*” (Archer, 1995, p. 305). In direct response to Criticism 3, it can be flatly rejected that morphogenetic theory offers no diachronic modelling of structural-cultural interaction (see Archer, 1996, pp. 284-287; Archer, 1995, pp. 305-328; Porpora, 2015, pp. 175-187). But it is not satisfactory simply to point the reader towards existing morphogenetic writings, because there are problems with both of Archer’s main strands of argument on this issue: (a) the problem with Archer’s claim about the intersection in the ‘middle element’ is that her theoretical modelling of the middle element of the basic cycle is limited in scope and theoretically problematic; (b) where Archer does present a cohesive morphogenetic model of structural-cultural interaction, she does not conceptualise this interaction as occurring in the middle element of the basic cycle, which not only contradicts the earlier claim, but also limits the explanatory power of the model.

(a) Archer (1995; 1996) argues that, in morphogenetic theory, “the basic mechanism by which cultural factors find their way into the structural field” is as follows: “let any material interest group ... endorse any doctrine ... for the advancement of those interests ... and that group is immediately plunged into its situational logic” (Archer, 1995, p. 306; 1996, p. 284). Similarly, “structural factors find their way into the cultural field by following the same path”: “let the advocacy of any doctrine ... become associate with a particular material interest group and its fate becomes embroiled in the fortunes of that group” (Archer, 1995, pp. 306-7; 1996, p. 286). There is no indication that this discussion of interest groups is merely *an example* of structural-cultural interaction; rather, it is made clear that this is *the* mechanism through which structural-cultural interaction occurs in the middle element of the basic cycle. Aside from being a rather limited foray into the multitude of ways in which

structure and culture could be considered to interact, this ‘interest group explanation’ is undermined by the way in which Archer conceptualises interest groups.

The middle element of the morphogenetic cycle is explored by Archer (1995) on the basis of a distinction between two types of interest group: ‘primary agents’, which are held to be unorganised groups of individuals who share interests (though they may not be aware of themselves as a group or aware of their shared interests), and ‘corporate agents’, which, in contrast, are held to be organised around the articulation and pursuit of their shared interests (so that they are necessarily aware of themselves as a group and aware of their interests). The problem with these concepts arises when we consider the distinction between primary agents and corporate agents alongside attempts to model structural-cultural interaction in the middle element of the morphogenetic cycle. ‘Corporate agents’ are *organised interest groups*, to the extent that “they are social subjects with reasons for attempting to bring about certain outcomes” (Archer, 1995, p. 260); they therefore fit into Archer’s mechanism of structural-cultural interaction presented in the previous paragraph because, as organised interest groups, they are capable of ‘endorsing a doctrine’. However, ‘primary agents’ cannot be considered to be part of this mechanism because, as a group of people who “neither express interests nor organise for their pursuit” (Archer, 1995, p. 259), they are unable to ‘endorse a doctrine’. Although Archer could respond to this discrepancy by directing readers to her argument that corporate agents control morphogenesis while primary agents merely have unintentional collective effects, this is not the same as defending the problematic implication that structural-cultural interaction only occurs in relation to corporate interest groups.

Furthermore, the distinction between primary and corporate agents creates a further problem, because it undermines the clarity of the distinction between the middle element of the structural cycle (‘social interaction’) and the middle element of the cultural cycle (‘socio-cultural interaction’). Because “the primary social context delineates collectives in the same position” (Archer, 1995, p. 259), ‘primary agents’ are defined by the distributions of the structural and cultural context. In this case, the distinction between the structural and cultural domains can be maintained as existing between the material interest groups produced by social structure and the ideal interest groups produced by the cultural system. In contrast, ‘corporate agents’, as “self-conscious vested interest groups, promotive interest groups, social movements and defence associations” (Archer, 1995, p. 258), are defined as single organisational units. Clearly, in order to become ‘social subjects’ and be capable of ‘advocating a doctrine’, corporate agents must take the form of distinct *organisations*. This creates the following problem: how do we differentiate between a material corporate agent and an ideal corporate agent? All corporate agents are positioned within the cultural system, to the extent that they use language and ideas, and all corporate agents are positioned within the structural system to the extent that they are composed of relations between individuals. Thus, at the middle element of the cycle, the distinction between ‘social interaction’ (structural) and ‘socio-cultural interaction’ (cultural) can no longer be clearly maintained. Analytical dualism, central to morphogenetic models of interaction, is undermined by a blurring of the structural and cultural in the middle element of the basic cycle.

(b) In a more promising approach, Archer (1995, pp. 306-324) models structural-cultural interaction *between the outcomes* of the two cycles. Where both the structural and cultural cycles lead to *morphostasis* (no structural/cultural change), the stability of each reinforces the stability of the other (Figure 3). Where one leads to *morphogenesis* (structural/cultural change) and the other to *morphostasis*, the change in the former disrupts the stability of the latter. When both lead to *morphogenesis*, the change in each enhances the change of the other

(Figure 4). This model of interaction between structure and culture is a much clearer, more widely-applicable, and less problematic line of argument than the one Archer presents in relation to interest groups. However, two qualifying comments have to be made about this model. Firstly, Figures 3 and 4 clearly illustrate that this interaction does not occur in the middle element of the morphogenetic cycle; it instead occurs *between* cycles, so that a structural and a cultural cycle occur in parallel and the results of each intersect influencing future cycles. Secondly, and consequently, this approach, as depicted in Figures 3 and 4, only offers explanation of structural-cultural interaction at a *macro*-level, which Archer (1995) describes as ‘third-order’ emergence used to explain the “results of the results of the results of social interaction” (p. 218).

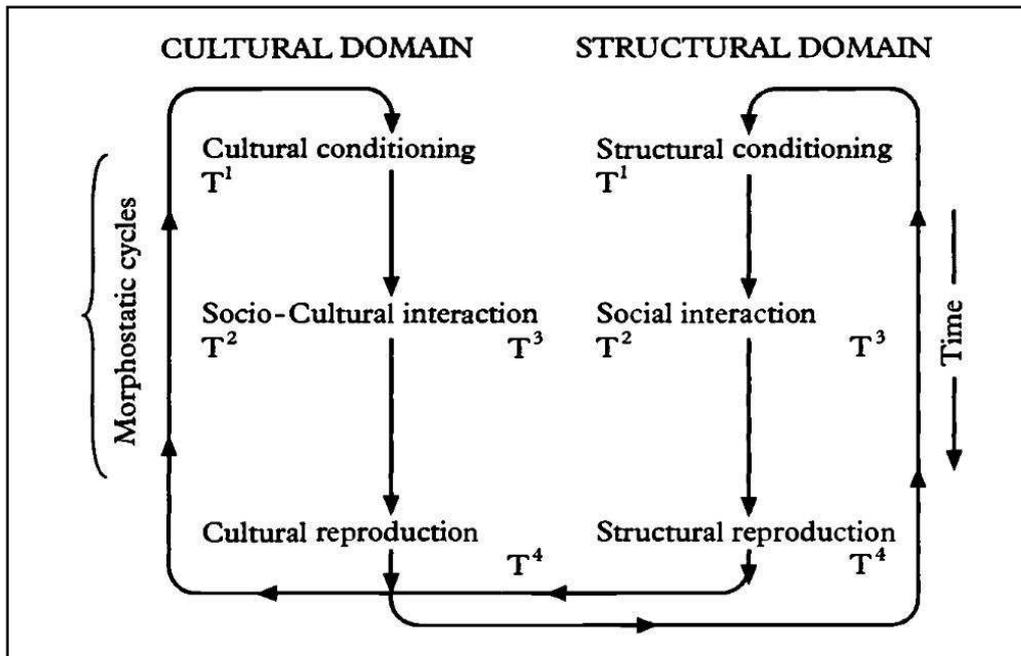


FIGURE 3 – cultural-structural morphostasis (Archer 1995)

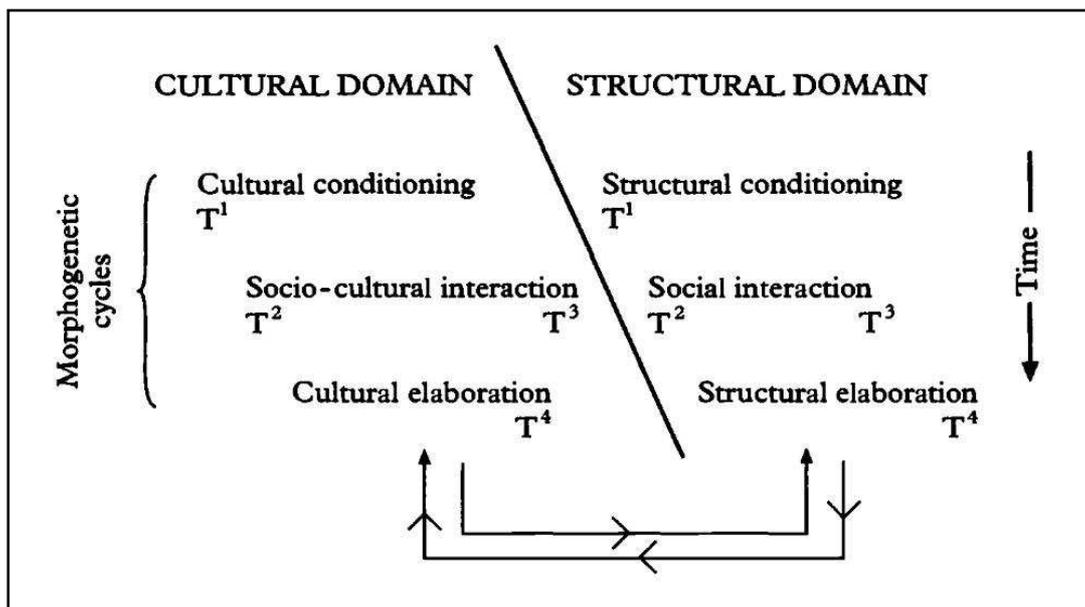


FIGURE 4 – cultural-structural morphogenesis (Archer 1995)

We can turn to Porpora's (2015) *Reconstructing Sociology* as a more recent attempt to provide a specific explanation of the elusive model of structural-cultural interaction. Porpora seems to conceive of a closer interaction between the structural and cultural by stating that "within their structured positions arising from an initial set of [cultural] rules, agents' struggles may change the [cultural] rules and hence the structures and their future actions" (Porpora, 2015, p. 182). Porpora is clear that although "particular social structures may vary, there will always be some structure" and although "reasons will vary historically with cultural backgrounds ... in all times and in all places, people will be motivated by reasons" (pp. 180-1). Therefore, although he seeks to explain structural-cultural interaction from the morphogenetic perspective, Porpora seems to have abandoned the distinction between 'social interaction' and 'socio-cultural interaction'. However, if the structural cycle and cultural cycle are considered to be *necessarily* operating simultaneously in parallel, and if the two intersect at the middle element of the two cycles, and if the distinction between the two middle elements has been abandoned, we are still left with the question: how do structure and culture interact in the middle element of the morphogenetic cycle? Although this paper does not have the space to offer a detailed model, it can be argued that the answer lies in drawing an analytical dualism not between cultural and structural *agents* but between the cultural and structural *powers of agents*.

Criticism 4: that the morphogenetic conception of power is materialistic.

Hay and Gofas (2010) argue that in morphogenesis there is no appreciation that individuals are powerful "by virtue of a widespread system of meanings that accords them status, legitimacy and/or authority" (p. 46). It is possible to offer a rather simple response to this charge: this type of power *is* acknowledged by morphogenesis *but not as a constituent of culture*. It is instead held to be a materially emergent social relation that belongs to the structural realm (Porpora, 2015). Therefore, although 'a widespread system of meanings' would be identified as belonging to culture, the resultant 'status, legitimacy and authority' are structural elements *because they are social relations*.

Although this very brief response directly addresses Hay and Gofas's criticism, we can move beyond notions of 'power over' to consider the causal powers of the cultural system and the causal powers agents have in their reaction to it. It is by delineating these types of power that we can lay the foundations for an explanation of cultural-structural interaction. As Archer (1996) explains in detail in *Culture and Agency*, the cultural system exerts a causal power upon agents, particularly as a result of the logical contradictions and complementarities that exist between ideas. As well as theorising the power of the systemic level, morphogenetic theory crucially insists on "the quintessential power of human agency to react with originality whatever its circumstances" (Archer, 1996, p. 187; for a discussion of agency and power in morphogenesis, see Vogler, 2016). It therefore makes sense to assume that agents have *powers* relevant to each, so that any individual has a degree of *cultural power* in their negotiation of the cultural system, including an ability to think creatively, imagine new possibilities and negotiate contradictions between ideas, but also has a degree of *material power* in their negotiation of the material structure. Agents who hold vast amounts of knowledge and/or adhere to a set of *complementary* beliefs have a cultural power by virtue of their positioning within the cultural system, while those who have been denied such knowledge and/or adhere to a set of *contradictory* beliefs will have relatively less cultural power. These cultural powers are not relational, as they do not entail power over other individuals. Instead they are powers that agents have to resist, adopt, change, or create ideas.

In the structural domain, agents do have powers over others, but they *also* have powers to resist, join, change, or create institutions.

In summary, morphogenetic theory does allow for the possibility that agents can hold *relational* power (e.g. “status, legitimacy and/or authority”) “by virtue of a widespread system of meanings”, but these powers are part of the *material structure*. That such powers are partly constituted by cultural meanings is accounted for in the morphogenetic assumption that *structure synchronically emerges from culture*. However, aside from relational power (i.e. power as ‘power over’), we must also consider the cultural causal power of the cultural system and the cultural causal power agents have in reaction to it.

Criticism 5: that the morphogenetic conception of interests is materialistic.

Finally, it is necessary to address the question of interests. A central feature of constructivist institutionalism is the explicit rejection of material interests because their acknowledgement is supposedly a denial of social construction and a denial of the reflexivity of the agent (Hay, 2011a). Therefore, rather than Hay and Gofas (2010) having identified a materialist bias in the morphogenetic conception of interests, they have instead offered a *wholesale rejection* of material interests. It would therefore make more sense to say that while morphogenesis includes both material and ideational conceptions of interests, constructivist institutionalism offers a purely ideational understanding of interests. Not only does morphogenesis claim to balance cultural and material interests, it also claims that it is possible, and indeed necessary, to *acknowledge the reflexivity of the agent* within any conception of interests. Furthermore, although the morphogenetic model strongly opposes Hay’s (2016) view that social forces are comprised entirely of social constructions, it is underpinned by a critical realist position that accepts that agents *always* perceive of themselves, their ideas, and their external environments *through* socially constructed understandings. Therefore, in order to respond to Hay and Gofas’s accusation of materialism in the theorising of interests, it is necessary to show how morphogenesis (a) allows for both material and ideational (cultural) interests, (b) maintains the reflexive power of agency, and (c) acknowledges the role of social construction.

(a) The main difference between the morphogenetic and the constructivist institutionalist position on interests is that morphogenesis applies analytical dualisms in order to distinguish different types of interest, whereas constructivist institutionalism conflates these various types together as the socially constructed perspectives of individuals. By applying an analytical dualism between the agent and the social context, Archer (1995) posits ‘vested interests’, which are interests loaded into positions within the social context. This includes interests that are inherent constituents of the *roles* that agents occupy in material structure and inherent constituents of the *beliefs* that they hold in the cultural system (Archer, 1995). Because both the structural and cultural contexts are held to provide agents with ‘vested interests’, it is possible to argue that morphogenesis *allows for both material and ideational interests*.

(b) These interests condition agents through the costs associated with flouting them and the benefits associated with adherence. However, this does not mean that they *determine* behaviour, because agents are always pursuing projects, be they “the satisfaction of biologically grounded needs [or] the utopian reconstruction of society” or anything in between (Archer, 1995, p. 198). The conditioning effects of the social context (cultural or structural) only ever operate *through* the projects that agents undertake, because constraints

and enablements only exist in relation to “the particular projects of particular agents in particular positions” (Archer, 1995, p. 198). This allows for a third type of interest beyond the vested interests of the structural and cultural context: the ‘real’ interests of agents (Archer 1995, p. 203). Agents may well define their own ‘real interests’ completely differently to the vested interests inherent in their structural role(s) and/or cultural belief(s). When they do act against their vested interests, a common cost that an agent pays is the loss of the associated structural role or cultural belief, though other additional/alternative costs are conceivable. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the morphogenetic model defends structural and cultural interests *while maintaining the reflexive power of the agent*.

(c) A key tenet of constructivist institutionalism is that all individual perspectives are social constructions. Therefore, when agents form their interests, they have social constructions about what they attach value to, social constructions about their strategically selective context and social constructions about their own abilities (Hay, 2016). There is no reason why a morphogenetic perspective cannot incorporate these different layers of social construction. Indeed, the critical realist position on which morphogenesis builds insists that all knowledge is socially constructed. However, while the inclusion of social construction leads Hay (2016) to argue that “there is no material bottom line to be found” (p. 531) and consequently no material interests (Hay, 2011a), it would instead lead morphogenetic theorists to reassert the importance of analytical dualism. The analytical dualisms of morphogenetic theory allow for the consideration of the inherently socially constructed perspective of the agent, while simultaneously accepting that an agent’s perspective is necessarily *of something*. This something exists independently of the individual’s knowledge and exerts a causal force through the consequences of action; these consequences “cannot simply be dissolved into subjective constructions” (Archer, 1995, p. 203). As Porpora (2015) argues, “while people may recognise themselves to be in crisis, the recognition follows rather than creates the crisis, which can obtain whether people recognise it or not” (p. 182).

In summary, morphogenesis allows for the identification of material interests, ideational (cultural) interests, and agential interests, while simultaneously accepting the social construction of each. In contrast, Hay excludes the possibility of material interests, a key mechanism through which the social context conditions the individual. It is not that the morphogenetic theory of interests is materialist, but that the constructivist institutionalist theory of interests is idealist, a reductionist position that weakens the worthy project of uniting social constructivism with institutional analysis.

CONCLUSION

By focussing on Hay’s (2002) and Hay and Gofas’s (2010) critiques of morphogenesis, this article has offered defences, clarifications and modifications that seek to contribute towards the development of the morphogenetic explanatory framework. In dealing with Hay’s (2002) first critique, a defence and clarification of the central morphogenetic concept of ‘analytical dualism’ was offered. Hay’s suggestion that analytical dualism inevitably hardens into ontological dualism was rejected on the basis that morphogenetic theory insists on the necessarily overlapping and intertwining relationship between key causal forces, particularly structure and agency, and particularly because their ontological relationship is one of *synchronic emergence*. Furthermore, a counter-critique was offered that questioned the compatibility between Hay’s own structure-agency model (a modified version of Jessop’s strategic-relational approach) and his nominalist assumption that structure and agency have

no existence in reality (an assumption that Jessop himself explicitly rejects). Therefore, Hay's first critique of morphogenesis has been rejected without any need to question existing morphogenetic concepts; though, the process of the defence gave clarity to both positions and to the disagreement between them.

With regards to Hay and Gofas's (2010) critique, they offered five criticisms against the morphogenetic modelling of structure-culture. Partly on the basis of this more troubling critique, Hay (2006; 2011a; 2016) has advocated the alternative position of 'constructivist institutionalism', in which he has entrenched his constructivist denial of ontological distinctions, such as the one between structure and agency and the one between the ideational and the material. Aside from this problematic ontological assertion, constructivist institutionalism effectively establishes a central role for socially constructed perspectives as drivers of institutional change (Hay, 2016). These social constructions are held by Hay (2016) to be ubiquitous, leading him to exclude the possibility of 'a material bottom line' and therefore to exclude the possibility of material interests. In response, this article has clarified the possibility, and indeed necessity, of theorising material interests in morphogenetic theory. This is again based on *analytical dualism*, allowing the separation of agential interests, cultural interests and material interests. Although constructivist institutionalism shares a great deal in common with morphogenetic theory and makes a number of important theoretical assertions, its denial of the *ontological distinctions* between agency, culture and structure are problematic because (a) they undermine the justification of using such concepts and distinctions at the analytical level, and (b) they undermine the possibility that social causes (e.g. institutions and material interests) exist as anything more than socially constructed perceptions.

In response to Hay and Gofas's (2010) five criticisms, this article has sought to offer clarity on Archer's definition of 'structure' by turning to Porpora's (1993) 'materially emergent social relations'. Additionally, and more importantly, it has argued that morphogenetic theory must be modified to allow for the place of the physical and natural world within the structure-culture-agency formulation, perhaps but not necessarily under the conceptual label of 'nature'. By again asserting the concepts of 'analytical dualism' and 'synchronic emergence', clarity was also offered on the ontological chain of emergence that is held to exist between agency, culture, structure, and now also 'nature'. This causal chain is as follows: from nature emerges agency, from nature and agency emerges culture, and from nature, agency and culture emerges structure. Finally, this article has identified problems with the morphogenetic theorisation of structural-cultural interaction, but has argued that the solutions to these problems already lie within the theory. Specifically, a distinction between the material causal powers of agents and the cultural causal powers of agents can open up the analytical dualism necessary to model structural-cultural interaction through the middle element of the morphogenetic cycle.

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