1. Introduction

This paper develops some of the implications of the feminist literature on care and caring labor and demonstrates links to Post Keynesian economics. The care literature develops its analyses around ties of responsibility and commitment to specific others that people shape and reinforce, resist or betray. Such relationality fleshes out the way material life is lived in historical time and gives content to decision-making under uncertainty, themes common to both literatures.

To develop this link I elaborate the relational social ontology implicit in the care literature, distinguishing it from individualist and structuralist ontologies. Corresponding insights into relationality can be found in the Post Keynesian literature. I consider what a relational social ontology implies for the epistemology of social subjects, that is to say what people in society know, and how. Both literatures have given critical attention to the status and objects of such knowledge.

The care literature has deepened the relational analysis of gender, which is to say that part of gender which exists neither in the properties of atomistic individuals nor in pan-social structural rules and roles, but in relations between specific people. Post Keynesianism, similarly, has investigated the properties of relations, networks, and chains of commitment.
It is this formal similarity that can give Post Keynesianism a unique perspective on the economics of gender. In turn, parts of the feminist literature that lie outside what is usually construed as economics may help develop Post Keynesian analyses of material processes that lie outside formal firms, financial institutions, and government, and may help integrate that work into a better economics uniting the formal and informal, the monetary and the non-monetary.

These links raise the question of what gender is, as an object of study. One part of the feminist literature has taken gender difference as a more or less given and obvious cultural mapping of biological sex. It has examined how that difference shows up in economic phenomena like the division of labor. If you follow that approach, caring comes into view as a property of women or women’s work. The alternative feminist approach drawn on in this paper starts in the thick of social relations, in a world of practice and performance, and studies gender as consequence, rather than cause, of these phenomena. The working hypothesis is that caring and other social relations produce gender, rather than the other way around. The two approaches are not necessarily at odds, and in the last section of this paper I discuss Kathy Ferguson’s argument that they are complementary elements of feminist theory. But it is the purpose of this paper to show that a relational, practice-first approach opens directly onto an important part of the Post Keynesian literature.

2. Care

Gilligan’s (1982) *In a Different Voice* starts from a critique of psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg’s assumption that abstract ethical reasoning represents a higher stage of moral development than contextual reasoning. In the most-cited example of the kind of study he
did, children were presented the story of a fictional Heinz, who must get his sick wife a particular drug or she will die. He cannot afford it and the druggist refuses to lower his price. If Heinz has the opportunity to steal the drug, should he? In Kohlberg’s framework a high-scoring answer would reduce this story to two or more competing universal principles such as life and property, rank the principles, and work out Heinz’s course of action on that basis. Kohlberg found that boys were more likely to speak in these terms than girls.

Gilligan argued that the problem was not that girls were incapable of abstraction, but that they were trying to do something else in their answers. They tried to puzzle out Heinz’s situation: how could the druggist have refused a life-saving drug? How could Heinz have no other resources to call on in such a serious crisis? They also worried about the long-term social consequences of different courses of action: would Heinz wind up in jail? Essentially, they approached an ethical dilemma from the point of view of (1) what it indicated about the social networks people found themselves in and (2) how one or the other course of action would build, change, or damage those social networks. Rather than treating the particulars of the story as pointers to universal absolutes, they interpreted them as evidence of a particular breakdown in sociality and interpersonal responsibility, and looked for more social detail, not less, to try and fix it. Their responses thus resisted seeing the dilemma as a stark either-or and looked for ways to respond that would do less social damage.

Analyzing the responses of Amy, one of the research subjects, Gilligan writes:

Seeing in the dilemma not a math problem with humans but a narrative of relationships that extends over time, Amy envisions the wife’s continuing need for her husband and the husband’s continuing concern for his wife and seeks to respond to the druggist’s need in a way that would sustain rather than sever connection. Just as she ties the wife’s survival to the preservation of relationships, so she considers the value of the wife’s life in the context of
relationships, saying that it would be wrong to let her die because, “if she died, it hurts a lot of people and it hurts her.” Since Amy’s moral judgment is grounded in the belief that, “if somebody has something that would keep somebody alive, then it’s not right not to give it to them,” she considers the problem in the dilemma to arise not from the druggist’s assertion of rights but from his failure of response. (Gilligan 1982, p. 28, emphasis added)

Her world is a world of relationships and psychological truths where an awareness of the connection between people gives rise to a recognition of responsibility for one another, a perception of the need for response. … [she sees] the actors in the dilemma arrayed not as opponents in a contest of rights but as members of a network of relationships on whose continuation they all depend. (Gilligan 1982, p. 30)

“Relationships,” as the term is used here, are particular and personalized. They are not mere manifestations of deeper structure. Amy’s response resists seeing Heinz and the druggist as mere exemplars of a structural customer-vendor relationship. Her reasoning has an irreducibly situation-specific element, because social webs are far from uniform, and specific people’s responses matter: there are moments at which one feels the pull of a certain responsibility to a specific other. “Grounded in interrelations rather than the ‘autonomous’ self of the Kantian tradition” (Dalmiya 2001A, 293), a caring subject is not an independent actor suspended between selfish desire and the categorical imperative.

Writers such as Noddings (1984), Held (1993), Tronto (1993), DeVault (1991), and Kittay (1999) have extended Gilligan’s work via the study and analysis of actual care-giving, with a core of common insight that care is a matter of doing, acting, accomplishing, and that the development and maintenance of a social relationship between carer and cared-for is inseparable from the accomplishment of care. The point is perhaps most evident in the case of the link between a parent and young child, but more generally, as Himmelweit (2007, p. 583) writes, “care is the development of a relationship, not the production of an output that is separable from the person delivering it.” We can reduce this to two propositions: one is that in many cases, as with parenting, the relationship itself is an output and not a means to
some other output, the other is that even if an output like a child’s robust health can be specified independently of a relationship, effective nursing and feeding requires engrossment, a kind of close attention that can only happen within a close relationship. I return to this point in the discussion of subjects’ epistemology below.

From a “care perspective,” especially in the writings of a theorist like Tronto, the relationships created and maintained via caring are the social world; care is thus a matter of world-making. The world is not simply given to us. This has implications for social ontology. Simply to acknowledge the “pull” of responsibility to specific others, simply to acknowledge the difficult reality of kinship, friendship, love, collegiality, loyalty, responsibility and the possibility of the betrayal of those things, is to admit the existence of something irreducible to individual or to structure.¹

The carer is not a fully autonomous individual because she recognizes the pull of ties to others, among them ties she did not choose, and reasons in terms of how her decisions will change the network of connections. Caring agents may rationally decide on courses of action that hurt themselves or give pain to those they love. An individualist ontology must deny that people give fundamental weight to their responsibilities toward specific others.²

But if the relationality of care is not capturable by an individualist ontology, neither is it a variety of structuralism. Structure as conceived in structuralism is an overarching system, like language or kinship, that precedes individual acts and is reproduced by them. It is available ready-made to each member of the society; members may draw on and reproduce structure without being conscious of doing so.³ Personalized relationality is uneven, and is
 Structural phenomena like kinship or race or codes of friendship or collegiality may give us idioms, frames, and cultural forms for constructing relations, and may influence which relations are constructed and which are not, but they are not the same thing as those relations. Moreover, care-providers make real decisions with real consequences, including consequences that shape or damage the sets of relationships in which they operate. At these moments, structure does not tell you what to do in the unproblematic way that a language lets you put a verb together with an object. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the care literature, one that is difficult to evoke in a few paragraphs of summary because it emerges from careful, context-specific accounts, is to emphasize the extent of choosing, planning, and even creativity that goes on at this social level. Relationship-making cannot be characterized as something pursued unconsciously, although it is possible to be a care-recipient while being more or less oblivious to the work of care.

So the care literature points us neither to (a) individualist theories built up from atomistic agents nor (b) structuralist theories built down from broad categories. Nor can we grasp this realm via some weighted average (call it c) of (a) and (b), because the failings of one are not made up by the other. For example Anthony Giddens’ (1977) “structuration,” an influential composite theory that emphasizes the importance of skilled individual action in recreating structure, still rests on the notion of the ultimate reproduction of structure as a complete whole, and still admits no ontic category between individual and structure – we have only the individual’s performance and the massive structural whole. In Giddensian structuration individuals get married and marriages reproduce marriage as a societal
institution, but there is still lacking the point that people marry specific partners and develop specific ties with in-laws.

In sum, there are consequential and fundamental social phenomena at the interpersonal level that are reducible neither (a) to individual desire nor (b) to overarching structural rules, and that are just as surely missed by composite (a + b) theories of type (c) that still touch social reality only at the theoretical extremes of total disaggregation and total aggregation. Thus the care literature points us toward a distinct category (d), a relational ontology that begins from social networks and intersubjectivity.

3. What does a carer know?

Any social ontology implies some doctrine about the epistemology of subjects: what do people in society know or try to know; what is the status of the social knowledge people believe they have? Pure structuralism and pure individualism offer relatively simple answers to these questions. For example in the individualist framework of Walrasian general equilibrium, people need know only their own desires plus the vector of prices that is announced to them, knowledges which the theory simply assumes. The subject in pure structuralism need only know the rules well enough to follow them, but without necessarily having any consciousness of the larger structure formed by those rules. Worse, the subjects of structuralism may be guided by ideology and “false consciousness,” a kind of opposite of knowledge. In both approaches people need know and understand rather little because they are enmeshed in a larger social mechanism – whether it is free markets or class struggle – that organizes their efforts and coordinates their plans. Workers are workers, consumers
are consumers, capitalists are capitalists, and playing these roles is not supposed to be epistemologically difficult.

The relational world that emerges in the care literature is not so simple or readily legible to its inhabitants. One way of putting the difference is to say that in this world, important facts can be missed – not seen, or seen and not understood. Seeing them and understanding them takes work. Focused inquiry and attention to the condition of specific others is a necessary component of effective care-provision. Such knowledge is not given innately or effortlessly skimmed off the surface of experience, but deliberately made and updated. The very attitude of care requires a certain interest and interpretive capacity, and providing care entails close attention to its effectiveness.⁷ Carers interpret, act, and reflect on their interpretations and the results of their actions. They develop insights into the cared-for that those people could not articulate themselves. And such knowledge is contingent and fragile: a child who lives in a series of foster homes may simply never have a guardian who develops that kind of knowledge about her. Care is world-making, and it is world-making precisely because structures, no matter how rigid or all-encompassing they may be, are not enough to provide the situated, specific knowledge of care.⁸ One of the insights animating the work of writers like Tronto, Noddings, and Kittay is the difficulty, the unevenness, the raggedness of care in the real world, the widespread failures of this world-making attention and responsibility.

And when we try to write down the object of caring knowledge, it turns out to be moderately complex. To begin, caring for infants or sick people requires an understanding of natural phenomena, like nutrition or fevers. One of the most vital contributions of writers
like Noddings and DeVault is their emphasis on a very real, embodied kind of care, in which other people are present to us physically as well as socially and culturally, and in which carers need skills at reading physical, non-linguistic signs – someone looks ill, someone is likely to be tired or hungry. In this facet there are analogies to the work of natural science, which are particularly clear in kinds of professionalized care like nursing.

But almost any care for a fellow human being (as opposed to a plant or a cat) requires cultural knowledge, plus social insight into the properties of the web of social relations in which carer and cared-for are enmeshed. Feeding a family effectively requires an understanding of what members consider culturally-appropriate meals, and not simply what is nutritious (DeVault 1991). Care for a child requires an understanding of what situations or events may hurt its feelings. Some kinds of care, as in “making conversation” to making someone comfortable, or conducting an appropriate ritual, are entirely social and cultural (e.g. DiLeonardo 1987). This cultural and social knowledge is what Gilligan’s respondents drew on when they were asked questions about Heinz’s predicament and sought resolutions that would do the least damage to his social ties over the longer term.

Care and caring knowledge is a necessary correlate of a certain opacity of the social world, so that knowledge gained of particular others is very little generalizable across large numbers of people. Thus it is no contradiction to say that the social world is both opaque and alive with inquiry. Certain kinds of opacity may also be furthered through certain kinds of caring practice. Take this passage from the most popular mid-century U.S. cookbook:

When you are entertaining, try not to feel that something unusual is expected of you as a hostess. It isn’t, just be yourself. Even eminent and distinguished persons are only human. Like the rest of us, they shrink from ostentation; and nothing is more disconcerting to a guest
than the impression that his coming is causing a household commotion. Confine all noticeable efforts for his comfort and refreshment to the period that precedes his arrival. Satisfy yourself that you have anticipated every possible emergency — the howling child, the last-minute search for cuff links, your husband's exuberance, your helper's ineptness, your own qualms. Then relax and enjoy your guests.


Part of the social knowledge and cultural craft of this ideal hostess is the art of concealing trouble. It is a frequent theme in the literature on care-work that it is not understood or coded as “work,” (Daniels 1987, DeVault 1991) and we have here an example in which the effective production of a social occasion requires hiding the trouble and anxiety it entails. Gender studies encounter with regularity cases in which men and women live in proximity but inhabit partly-distinct epistemological realities, both in the workaday and ceremonial aspects of their lives. In cases like this, the provision of care may entail the maintenance of epistemological boundaries!

Before turning to the Post Keynesian literature, two distinctions are worth marking. First, the literature on “care” is large and theoretically diverse. One part of it has tended in a gender-essentialist direction, seeing care as in some way essentially female. This approach is not the one taken here, and it is certainly not required in order to absorb the insights of this literature about knowledge, practice, and the ethical thinking of carers, as Dalmiya (2001B) shows. Second, important figures in this literature, among them Noddings, Held, and Tronto have assumed that caring as practice is ethically valuable – that there is a direct and necessary link between caring practices and the accomplishment of ethically-valuable ends. This has been criticized by feminist philosophers such as Card (1990) and Ruddick (1980), and I have argued elsewhere (Danby2004a) that it is a mistake to see care ipso facto as a virtue. To take the example of the previous paragraph, caring practices may be socially
conservative in their outcomes, in the literal sense that they conserve sharp differences in social power, practice, and knowledge. Moreover to say that caring entails ethical thinking, in the sense that carers mull different outcomes in ethical terms, is not to say that the results are necessarily ethically admirable. The contribution I draw from the care literature, therefore, is simply its insight into the extent and depth of relational thinking entailed in activities like feeding a family or interacting with co-workers at a job, and the ways this kind of thinking is embedded in repeated practices and performances. All these insights can be gained without pre-judging ethical valences. (To be clear, I do not mean to be understood as ruling out such judgment or putting aside larger ethical frameworks: I merely argue that the work of judgment and framework-building cannot be accomplished through simple mappings.)

Theorization of care in pre-moralized terms appears linked to an aprioristic social ontology in which the world is split into loving homes on the one side and the cold, uncaring world of business on the other: indeed in some of the literature business serves as the example of care’s antithesis. I suggest this is an error of both social and ethical analysis, an error which has served to keep apart literatures that might learn from each other. A central contribution of Post Keynesian theory is that it understands the relationality of business, and in a way that resists the sorts of prefabricated ethical mappings that see business as inherently vicious or inherently virtuous.

4. The relational social ontology of Post Keynesianism

Post Keynesian economics contains relational treatments of firms, yielding insights collapsible neither to individual nor structure. By virtue of its through-time emphasis, Post
Keynesian thought has a relational understanding of economic actors: agents enter into relations that oblige them to do certain things at certain times. For Paul Davidson (1994) a firm under conditions of capitalist production can be approached via its cash flows: it has at any moment a range of commitments to make future payments and a range of commitments from others to receive them. For Hyman Minsky (1986), the resulting fact of concatenated balance sheets is an essential aspect of economy. What is important is not so much the abstract structural fact that a firm is simultaneously creditor and debtor, but the particular obligations to particular others in which it is enmeshed, and the particular larger concatenations that form at particular times. In the analysis of financial systems, for example, Post Keynesians have taken an interest in the particular ways governments have interacted with financial markets and underpinned, often informally, the liquidity of certain assets. Government authorities, financial institutions, and other businesses form patterns of interaction and commitment, often tacit, that structure resource flows and have systemic properties that eventuate in financial booms and busts. The onset of financial collapse, in which abrupt, cascading reductions in cash flows force people and firms to default on obligations, has similarities to the way Gilligan’s subjects thought about ethical dilemmas in terms of the relationships that would be hurt or helped by a given course of action. Decisions about how to respond in periods of stringency are just as much irrevocable “crucial decisions,” in Shackle’s (1969) term, as decisions about which relationships to build during a boom, with the same kinds of uncertainty attached – because one is making one future and not another, “you’ll never know,” in the words of Gilligan’s subject Amy, how the other would have turned out. While the Post Keynesian concept of how economy changes across time is certainly not exhausted by the kinds of ties people have with each other – it also includes for example changes in the capital stock – it has a particular salience
when one thinks about responses to crisis. One of the reasons for central bank provision of liquidity in times of crisis is to prevent a further unraveling of payment commitments between actors, and in those cases one will “never know” what would have happened if the unraveling had proceeded further.

There are complementarities specific to firms that produce goods. There is a broad tradition, going back to Adam Smith and expounded by Allyn Young (1928), which emphasizes relations of complementarity between enterprises rather than theorizing units as exclusively competitive. This does not imply that businesses are solidaristic: the same kinds of tensions, imbalances of power, and betrayals that occur in families happen between firms. But we end up with a richer and more consequential range of business interconnection than either the neoclassical imagination of firms as arms-length market transactors, or structural imaginations in which firms form part of a single powerful capitalist bloc.

Keynes’ (1989) remarks that capital investment used to be, and in some circumstances ought to be, as indissoluble as marriage also admits of a relational interpretation. Financial markets can depersonalize the relationship between owner and capital: I can become a part-owner of IBM tomorrow, and cease to be the day after, with no alteration in my social network. Keynes can be seen at various points worrying about the dissolution of older institutions and ties; Post Keynesianism is in part a working-out of the insights about the ways that specific links of responsibility hold or snap under certain conditions. This is one of the reasons Keynes is difficult to interpret today: we read him having already absorbed a mainstream economics which assumes that sociality has completely broken down into
atomism, that any risk or relation can be securitized and priced and traded between interchangeable agents. Keynes – and this line of thought can be seen most strongly in Minsky among Post Keynesians – does not make that total-breakdown assumption, and does worry about the successes of financial markets in turning specific ties into anonymous securities.

Post Keynesian uncertainty, therefore, is even more than a denial of the ontic reality of the future as an object of knowledge. It is an understanding of the present as possessing fragilities that stem directly from its networked, relationship-dependent nature. Thus in a manner formally similar to the care literature, Post Keynesianism is aware of society as a network of specific future-oriented commitments, thinks of this network in terms of the knowledge and ignorance, confidence and doubt, and understands agents as thoughtfully working within and shaping that network. As in the care literature, the objects of knowledge of the Post Keynesian entrepreneur overlap the natural, social, and cultural worlds.

But the similarity is more than formal, because the two literatures are studying the same society. The familial linkages studied by the care literature also channel money and entail all kinds of contingent and implicit conditions to make payments and provide services. Further, non-monetized and informal commitments may nonetheless be tightly connected, as a matter of analysis, to monetized and formal ones: unpaid household services keep workers rested and fed; families socialize and educate new workers; consumption in the economic sense of buying finished goods is tightly linked to the kinds of household work that unpaid household workers are willing to do. This points to a social reality in which
there is only one (worldwide) network of many kinds of commitment, thick in some places and thin in others, where decision in one realm have implications for decisions and outcomes in the other. Studies by Benería and Roldan (1987), and Halperin (1990) are examples of this connectivity and the strains on it. Or, take this example from the contemporary UK:

The case of Barbara and Nick, who each had a business, included almost all the permutations of parental support. Barbara offered catering services and Nick had a land-based business. Barbara worked with the animals for his business on a daily basis and Nick contributed to the catering business with more occasional but substantial effort, for example by renovating a vehicle. The couple had a young baby. Barbara’s mother had a share in the catering business and worked for it on a flexible basis around Barbara’s busy schedule. She did not take out income but was repaid in kind by Nick, who looked after her animals. She also helped out occasionally in his business and minded the baby. Nick’s parents were not involved in the practicalities of the business on a day-to-day basis but they gave him a startup loan (which he has not repaid). Nick said his business was not really viable at present, mainly because of the high rent he had to pay for premises. In common with some of the other younger male business owners, he was seriously thinking of looking for an employed job to increase the household income. The land-based business could be viable in the longer term if Barbara’s parents retired and enabled the younger couple to take over their farm.

(Wheelock, Oughton, and Baines 2003, p. 35)

Households overlap, businesses overlap, households overlap through businesses, businesses overlap through households. Post Keynesian financial analysis asks not just who owes how much to whom, but who has lines of credit with whom. Imagine, then, Minsky’s “concatenated balance sheets” plus the network of lines of credit and tacit arrangements to accommodate different actors in moments of financial crisis spreading via both the ‘formal’ firm sector and the kin-based household one.¹⁴

If we take the relationality seriously enough, we might hesitate to regard an “economy” as a large machine or cybernetic apparatus for supplying goods and services, that is, as a technical solution to a technical problem. It may be illuminating at times to study it as
though it were a machine of this kind, but what is obscured in that heuristic move is almost precisely what the care literature, and allied Post Keynesian insights, recognize. As van Staveren (2005) shows, a range of individualist and structuralist efforts to model care tend still to approach it as a special and limited sort of service-production, with characteristics like limited scale economies or high substitution elasticities. None of them captures relationality as anything but a constraint of some kind; none of them accommodates Himmelweit’s (2007, p. 583) point that “care is the development of a relationship, not the production of an output that is separable from the person delivering it.” It is not difficult to see why: neither individualist ontologies like those of neoclassical theory nor structuralist ontologies have personalized relations to protect.

5. Relationality and economic ontology

Social ontology has been put on the agenda in large part thanks to the work of critical realists. Critical realist writings have also emerged as one of the most interesting avenues for exploring connections between Post Keynesian and Feminist economics, since it approaches heterodox economics as a shared, interactive project rather than as a variety of separate literatures, and insists on a rigorous formulation of social ontology.

As developed by Roy Bhaskar (1978, 1986, 1998), critical realism sees the essential task of science to be the search for deep rules or laws underlying observable events. The rules are the “real.” In the natural world rules are physical laws which underlie, albeit complexly and via layers of emergent properties, observable natural phenomena. In the social world rules produce regularities and linked social roles, but they have the ontological distinction that they exist not in nature but in the collective practices of large numbers of people. That
is, common, large-scale social practices are assumed to have a formal similarity to laws like those producing electromagnetism.\textsuperscript{15}

In both the natural and social realms, critical realism requires that rules/laws be “intransitive,” which is to say they exist regardless of our knowledge of them and are not influenced by our knowledge. On the other side of this dichotomy are “transitive” phenomena, those which can be influenced by our knowledge of them. Science in general, then, is according to critical realism the pursuit of knowledge of the intransitive.\textsuperscript{16} Even though such knowledge takes the form of transitive statements about the world, it is essential to critical realism that transitive statements can be about intransitive phenomena, that we can speak of their truth even if they can never be a final reading of the book of nature or equivalent revelation about society. For this to work, the unobservable level of rule/law, which critical realists also term “structure,” must have sufficient consistency, coherence, and simplicity that it can be divined from observations of events. The exhilarating success of natural science over the last three centuries in developing powerfully simple explanations of apparently complex and unordered natural phenomena remains the ideal toward which critical realism is oriented.\textsuperscript{17}

This gives Critical Realism a broadly structural orientation, which is to say that this approach adapts well to social phenomena like languages or kinship systems, which are explainable as overarching sets of rules or roles that are drawn on, applied, and in the process willy-nilly reproduced. Critical Realists have also been eloquent in their dismissals of ontological individualism. But this approach still faces gaps as it approaches gender at a more familial, densely-social level.\textsuperscript{18} This is where the care literature enters. While it would
not do to call Carol Gilligan a post-structuralist as the term is generally used, she does belong, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to a moment in feminist thought in which both the advantages and the problems of thinking about gender in structural terms had become widely recognized, and her work at this intermediate social level can be seen as part of a broad movement that is “post-structural” in the sense that it neither wholly rejects nor wholly embraces a structural understanding of gender.

This gap in current critical realism also be registers as a matter of epistemology. Because it understands the object of science as the intransitive, it is not entirely clear whether critical realism admits the possibility of scientific knowledge of transitive phenomena. And the limitations implied by this approach to social scientists’ epistemology are also reflected in Critical Realist accounts of what people in society know. Bhaskar (1998) implies the only transitive statements about intransitive reality really matter or have much meaning; a transitive statement about a transitive phenomenon seems to have no status at all.

By virtue of their commitments to relationality, both Post Keynesianism and the care literature must take an interest in transitive phenomena – relations that require people to take an active interest in the thoughts in the mind of the other party. And it is clear, even in very simple examples like Keynes’ discussion in the General Theory of investors’ knowledge of the state of opinion, that (a) it is possible to talk about the truth or falsity of such knowledge of transitive phenomena and (b) there is no simple reduction of transitive statements to intransitive ones: there are physical, natural facts that are highly relevant to material life, but the facts of a relationship-filled, money and credit economy cannot be derived from those physical and natural facts.
6. Approaching gender

Ferguson (1993) distinguishes two broad streams in feminist thinking. One, which she labels “interpretive,” sees its task as unmasking: peeling away layers of false representation in order to get to the truth of gender subordination. The task of interpretation, in this sense, is to distinguish true signs from false ones so as to gaze directly on the face of society. For example Nancy Hartsock (1983) positions her feminist standpoint theory as the successor to Georg Lukács’ theory of the proletarian standpoint: just as the proletarian standpoint illuminates the concealed working of class, the feminist standpoint exposes the truth of gender. In this interpretive approach gender, like class for a Marxist, must be a mechanism of subordination operating at the most fundamental social level (an intransitive phenomenon in the critical realist lexicon). It follows that ideas about gender, and people’s practices of gender, are manifestations of the underlying mechanism. It also follows that there is a sharp distinction between ideologies that conceal truth and spread false consciousness, and practices that strip away wrong ideas and reveal the truth of society.

The second stream, which Ferguson labels “genealogical,” replaces this layered ontology with an intense interest in what people actually do and say. Practice and performance, the daily doing, interacting, and exchanges of words and symbolic acts, become the primary material of social analysis, and large ideologically-potent abstract categories like gender, race, sexuality, or citizenship are treated as the consequences of this world of practice, not causes of it. Hence the interest of “genealogical” thinkers in the everyday practice of institutions like family courts, social work, or psychiatry. We ask, for example in the work of Jacques Donzelot (1979), not how do gender, race, class, and nation converge to determine the work of French family courts, but instead how did the emergence of a
complex of courts, social workers, and other institutions create and enforce certain kinds of urban French working-class femininity and masculinity.

Ferguson’s interpretive and genealogical approaches roughly map the distinction in economic theories between structural and a relational theories of gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretive</th>
<th>Genealogical</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Gender is a cultural mapping of biological sex.</td>
<td>• Gender emerges in ongoing, personalized social relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gender appears in economy as properties built into men and women (whether via nature or nurture).</td>
<td>• Gender appears in economy to the extent that economic processes are, or overlap, social processes that make it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Economy is approached structurally.</td>
<td>• Economy is approached relationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Structure works outside people’s knowledge of it.</td>
<td>• Subjects make knowledge of each other, unevenly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Structure is associated with false consciousness, or false knowledge</td>
<td>• Subjects’ knowledge of each other (knowledge of transitive facts) plays an essential role in society-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Thus social science strips away false knowledge to reveal the truth of structure.</td>
<td>• Social science has a more complex task of description and explanation.</td>
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In other words the interpretive approach tries to look past (possibly false) appearances to an underlying structural truth about gender, a truth powerful enough to generate both economic phenomena and false ideas about them. Hence a theory of subjects’ epistemology is part of a larger ontology. For the genealogical theorist, by contrast, gender is made and remade in contingent, difficult ways; the actual practice or performance of gender is often
incomplete and anxious, and the way we make knowledge of each other matters a great deal. Subjects’ epistemology is thus built into social ontology in a radically different way.

Ferguson (1999, p. 29) argues that the interpretive and genealogical streams are not mutually exclusive but mutually interdependent. Interpretive approaches depend on genealogy to understand structural mechanisms and possibilities for structural change; genealogy needs the interpretative literature to think about the larger schemas that subjects draw on and contribute to.

Post Keynesianism has a similarly-productive tension between a broadly structuralist stream, which sees its task as uncovering underlying dynamics and working out their operations, and a fundamental-uncertainty stream with less faith in the workings of underlying mechanisms and therefore greater interest in the ongoing practice and performance of business. In a complexly-relational business world people’s understandings of each other matter. I do not mean to ignore the differences in terminology and frames of reference between the fundamental-uncertainty Post Keynesianism and genealogical feminism, but simply to explore the potential correspondences that Levin (1995) was the first to delineate. The care literature provides a language and set of questions for extending the analysis of relational phenomena and relational thinking, and linking insights across institutional settings.
References


References

1. The realness of these things is an important theme in Nelson 2003a.

2. This is not to deny that extensions of rational-choice theory may provide useful insights. But the approach pursued here takes seriously people’s understandings of their responsibilities to specific others and vice versa, understandings sufficiently nuanced that they can hold thoughtful discussions with consociates about whether particular actions meet those responsibilities. In other words I treat shared concepts like duty, honor, desert, and responsibility as foundational, not as ex post justifications or ideological fictions.

3. It is logically essential for structuralism, ontologically, that the reproduction of structure does not depend on conscious decisions of agents. See Charusheela 2005; also Bhaskar 1979, 31-101.

4. For example Judith Stacey’s (1990) research on families in California’s Silicon Valley shows a range of kinship innovations, including women who retain kinship with in-laws across several divorces in a way that suggests an emerging matriliny, and small evangelical religious groups that create close ties among small groups of people. Certainly gender and class, of you want to regard those as structures, can be discerned in the lives of Stacey’s informants. But it would be very difficult to regard those as adequate explanations for the rich, complex changes that Stacey found, much less the ethical and religious categories that mattered to the people she studied.

5. It is not even required that they be conscious of their desires as such as long as they act in a way that is consistent with pursuing them.

6. At this level of abstraction individualism can be seen as a variety of structuralism, just with a particularly small set of rules – see Charusheela 2005.


8. See also Haraway (1988) on situated knowledge. This should be distinguished from the standpoints of standpoint theory (Hartsock 1993), which is essentially structuralist.

9. As Dymski and Pollin (1992) write, part of the difficulty in absorbing Minsky’s insights is that they are often read as representations of structural laws, whereas Minsky is doing a much more contextual analysis.

10. See discussion of this passage in Dalmiya 2001b. There is an essential difference between conceiving ethics in a world in which all results can be foreseen and conceiving ethical choices as both creating a future of one kind and foreclosing others. The foreclosed futures can never be known, the created future will come to be known, but is also unknowable ontologically at the point of decision.


12. This kind of connection is not the same as what Carabelli (1992) and Rotheim (1992) mean by “interdependence” in Keynes’ thought. But if macroeconomic aggregates are the kinds of “complex wholes” full of consequential decision-making under uncertainty that these articles point out, then what kind of society could underlie it but one in which people start from and reshape uneven social ties?

13. For example White’s (1994) work on Turkish garment ateliers shows the importance of kin ties in providing flexible labor.


15. There is an effort to avoid naïve naturalism on one side (whether contemporary sociobiology or a 19th-century Comtean positivism) and various kinds of idealism on the other.

16. See also Dow 2003.
17. This derives from Bhaskar’s (1978) foundational insight that for controlled experiments to tell us about the natural world outside the laboratory, the natural world must have certain properties.

18. Nelson 2003B, Barker 2003, and Peter 2003 provide a related ontological critique. The underlying ontological difficulty is a result of Bhaskar’s framing of the choice as individualism versus structuralism. See also Faulkner 2002. Also note that Bhaskar (1979) uses “relational” to mean structural, which is not this paper’s usage. The argument presented in this paper has broad overlaps with Nelson (see also 1996, 2003A). Her work follows a different route through the literature, and places greater emphasis on the qualities of individual perception and less on the properties of networks than I do above (as has much feminist philosophy – see discussion in Danby 2004a). But she insists on the central place of ethical thinking in social reality, and thus makes a similar argument to the one presented below about the ontic status of mental phenomena.