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Handbook of the Sociology of Morality, Volume 2

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Foreword: Toward an Expansive and Inclusive Sociology of Morality

At a time when questions of dignity, respect, and recognition are at the center of political debates, when groups are obsessed with pecking orders, whose sufferings matter most, and who owes what to whom, and when the topic of social cohesion, inclusion, and moral obligations is a concern to so many, the stars are ideally aligned for a new edition of *The Handbook of the Sociology of Morality* (the last one came out more than a decade ago, in 2010).

So much has happened in American sociology and in our societies over the past thirteen years. Our discipline is slowly but surely becoming less exclusively US-centered, more global, and aware of intellectual developments elsewhere. It is also addressing and correcting how its gatekeepers have marginalized the contributions of many women sociologists, as well as people of color (Hoang, 2022; Morris, 2017; Ray, 2019; Wright, 2020; Quinn and Schneiderhan's paper referencing Jane Addams's work in this volume). In this writing, it is also engaging more intensely with neighboring disciplines, such as cognitive and political psychology as well as political economy. These interdisciplinary conversations are breathing new life into particular research areas, such as political sociology and the sociology of work.

To state the obvious, at the level of our societies, the recent years have been a period of extraordinary social change due to exceptional circumstances such as the pandemic, growing political polarization, and multiplying threats to democracies in a number of countries, as well as the global Black Lives Matter movement and the recent backlash against the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people. This unique combination of events has brought new grist to the sociologist's mill, with an explosion of research in political and cultural sociology, the sociology of punishment and policing, emotions and social movements, mental health and well-being, and much more. These developments also contribute to making the release of a second *Handbook of the Sociology of Morality* exceptionally timely: they have made the questions of shared cultural norms, collective representations of the worthy and the good, and what we owe one another more pressing than ever.

Against this background, what is the offer on the table? As one would expect from a handbook, the menu is exhaustive and varied, and everyone will find what they believe is essential to satisfy their hunger.

Unsurprisingly, the coeditors are active contributors to the subfield (in network and substantive terms), with different profiles, areas of expertise, and approaches. Steven Hitlin is a prolific social psychologist who coedited

Volume 1 of *The Handbook of the Sociology of Morality* and who has contributed several significant articles that are shaping the field. He has a fascinating new 2023 book, titled *The Science of Dignity: Measuring Personhood and Well-Being in the United States* (with Matthew Andersson; the title does not do justice to the breadth of the argument and the range of authors this book engages with). Shai M. Dromi is a historical comparative sociologist whose second morality-related book *Moral Minefields: How Sociologists Debate Good Science* (coauthored with Samuel D. Stabler) is also published in 2023, by the University of Chicago Press. His first book, *Above the Fray: The Red Cross and the Making of the Humanitarian NGO Sector* (2020), won the *Peter Dobkin Hall History of Philanthropy Prize* from the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) and the *Outstanding Published Book Award* from the Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity Section of the American Sociological Association. Aliza Luft is a political sociologist who studies social perception and moral judgment while people make decisions about violence (e.g., in the context of genocides). She has published multiple award-winning articles and is completing a book in progress, *Sacred Treason: Race, Religion and The Holocaust in France*.

Unsurprisingly given the complementary diversity of their interests, these editors open their introduction by celebrating the proliferation of sociological research around morality-related topics, at the very same time as they note the dispersion of substantive foci and the lack of agreement around topics central to this subfield. Twenty years ago, this subfield seemed (to me at least) more cemented around a shared (largely late-Durkheimian) focus on how people made sense of their world through representations, and the place of morality in those. Today's divisions emerge due in large part to a return to concepts such as motivation, interests, values, and socialization which had largely moved to the background since the 1980s. These concepts are more amenable to a focus on the individual or the micro-level, than to a more meso or macro focus attached to concepts such as collective representations, cultural repertoires, cultural structures, boundaries, discourse, and groupness.

Revisiting such questions goes hand in hand with sociologists tackling psychology-influenced debates as they have penetrated into our field, which inspired a concern with privileging explicit culture. Some argue that the latter are little more than post-hoc justifications, as opposed to basic categories structuring what people are able to "think with." For some, like Zerubavel (1999), cognitive sociology involves drawing attention to the ways socially constructed categories shape mental representations, whereas for others like Karen Cerulo (2010) it means uncovering the neurological underpinnings of social phenomena. For yet others, such as Steven Vaisey (2009), the challenge is to make cultural sociologists more familiar with dual process models developed by Daniel Kahneman (2011) and others.

Differences in perspectives along these lines are now shaping the field. Many of the authors included here remain wedded to a more pragmatic, interactional approach to cultural sociology, while others take more seriously key themes from cognitive science and behavioral economics. Differences are sometimes due to the depth of understanding that each group has of other

disciplines, often traceable to their own intellectual biography (with for instance a key contributor, Omar Lizardo, having studied psychology as an undergraduate, and whose deep intellectual proclivities have been deeply shaped by this field). Whatever their sources, a plurality of positions and an expansive and inclusive view of the field are necessary as we sort out what we want and need from our neighboring disciplines. Fortunately, the editors themselves embrace the type of healthy intellectual pluralism that has led to the rapid growth of important fields such as cultural sociology and economic sociology in recent decades.

As a starting point, the editors made the wise decision to invite experts on morality involved in a large subset of sections of the American Sociological Association. This ambitious approach brings to the table researchers who are deeply attuned to how morality "goes macro" (even when instantiated in individual interactions), as is the case when one considers for instance moral codes in organizations, which structures the context in which individuals live their lives, as in the wonderful papers by Michel Anteby and Micah Rajunov (on "The Darker Side of Strong Organizational Cultures") and by Carol Heimer ("Where Law and Morality Meet," which discusses the rapid spread of formal organizations).

Another strength of the volume is to shed light on the place of morality in fields such as the sociology of migration, which are not known for their concern for morality. This is exemplified by the chapter by Hajar Yazdiha "Bridging the Sociologies of Morality and Migration: The Moral Underpinnings of Borders, Policies and Migration," where moral questions that shape who gets the status of refugee are finally coming under close scrutiny. This contribution reveals how the sociology of morality plays an important role in broadening areas of inquiries, by pushing them to explore new questions of intellectual and social significance.

Moving conversations even beyond the confines of sociology, others engage for instance the work of philosophers (see Bin Xu's chapter on "Morality and Civil Society"). This move is also crucial to the development of the sociology of morality, as illustrated by Steven Hitlin and Matthew Andersson's new book mentioned above, *The Science of Dignity.*

Still other chapters call explicitly for expanding social psychological research beyond the individual to explore group dynamics in (for instance) pro-social behavior, as in an interesting chapter by Ashley Harrell ("Pro-Social Decision-Making among Groups and Individuals: A Social-Psychological Approach"). Against this broad diversity, unsurprisingly, some of the authors also urge for more rigor in our use of the concept of morality in order to foster a stronger intellectual field (see John Levi Martin, Alessandra Lembo, and Xiangyu Ma, "New Directions in the Sociology of Morality").

Given its expansive breadth, I certainly expect this new edition of *The Handbook of the Sociology of Morality* to stimulate many conversations within our discipline and beyond, as we aim to develop this crucial subfield in new important directions in order to better shape our collective future. If diverse calls for better definitions, more careful methods, or more attention to neglected topics such as emotions (as in James Jasper's essay, "Missing

Emotions in the Sociology of Morality," which takes my own scholarship to task) continue to proliferate, it is certainly because awareness of the centrality of such questions to the sociological agenda can only increase as we face more social and cultural challenges. May this handbook contribute to cultivating more awareness of these challenges and bring in more talent to address them, given the essential calling of the social sciences to give citizens and experts tools to better understand and act upon their world.

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The Sociology of Morality: Looking Around, Looking Back, and Looking Forward

The study of morality in sociology is undergoing a renaissance, and perhaps even accelerating, from our point of view. While some of the earliest sociologists identified morality as a core topic for sociological study (Comte, 1875; Durkheim, 2008; see Hitlin, 2021 for an overview), the movement away from Talcott Parson's grand theory in the late-twentieth-century relegated morality to a small disciplinary niche. Thus, when the first volume of the *Handbook of the Sociology of Morality* (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010) came out in 2010, while many sociologists were engaging with topics relevant to morality, few were calling their research explicitly "a sociology of morality" or had a sense that similar phenomena were being studied in different substantive areas. But the publication of the first *Handbook* volume crystalized a turning point. With a subsequent *Annual Review of Sociology* article by Steven Hitlin and Stephen Vaisey (2013), the concerted efforts of a group of sociologists at the American Sociological Association to formulate the sociology of morality as a field of study (e.g., Jeffries, 2014a), the establishment of the *Section on Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity*, and the publication of an additional handbook (Jeffries, 2014b), the nineteenth-century fascination with morality has resurged. We might argue, however, that the topic never went away: morality is embedded in the very fabric of social relations that holds our disparate discipline together. Still, its explicit focus is regaining prominence within and across subfields.

Indeed, this renewed interest in morality is remarkable in that it crosses disciplinary *and* sub-disciplinary boundaries and touches a wide variety of research programs. For social psychologists, morality informs in situ decision-making processes about whether and how to respond to stimuli (Hitlin, 2008; Stets et al., 2018); for cultural sociologists, morality underpins broad categories defining collective notions of belonging, groupness, and identity (Alexander, 2003, 2006; Lamont 1992); for economic sociologists, morality concerns the meanings institutions and individuals assign to economic behaviors (Gastón, 2022; Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Wherry, 2016); for urban sociologists, morality is understood as codes and norms that govern communities (Anderson, 1999; Duck & Rawls, 2012); and for organizational sociologists, morality is foundational to organizational policies, dynamics, and structures (Anteby, 2008; Shiff, 2021). Add to this the growing literature on generosity and philanthropy (C. Smith et al., 2008; Herzog, 2020); the burgeoning work in cognitive sociology relating to morality (Cerulo, 2010;

Ignatow, 2009); calls to infuse sociology with philosophical ideas of personhood and of the good life (C. Smith, 2011; Gorski, 2013; Porpora, 2015); and contributions from additional areas in sociology such as gender, religion, the study of race and racism, class dynamics, and so on (e.g., Almeling, 2020; Guhin, 2016; Saguy & Riley, 2005; Sayer 2005; Silver et al., 2022; Srivastava, 2005; Perry, 2012). Morality has certainly influenced our discipline.

Yet with numerous areas of sociology bringing their conceptual toolkits to bear on the study of morality, the entropy found in so many sociological concepts reveals that, rather than achieving a sort of agreement, conversations on the topic have become increasingly fractured. Significant areas of disagreement have come to the fore over the past few decades, with scholars clashing over competing definitions and explanations of morality. With such a plurality of views on the topic, surveying the field now and providing opportunities for dialogue between subfields seems all the more important. Of course, this is an issue beyond morality (see work by Vaisey & Valentino, 2018), about how much sociological science should strive for clarity (Healy, 2017) or derive its meaning from the quotidian details (e.g., Besbris & Khan, 2017). But given morality's centrality in the history of the discipline, it is a prominent place where we view this overarching trend and where we therefore feel a broad conversation is timely and useful, hence the motivation for this handbook, slightly over a decade after the original.

The *Handbook of the Sociology of Morality, Volume 2*, brings together contributions from scholars working in different subfields represented by the different sections of the American Sociological Association, each of which provides a window into how the subfield conceives of and operationalizes "morality." In so doing, the handbook provides clarity on the diverse meanings of "morality" in the discipline and at the same time identifies the common denominators that unite the discipline in thinking about morality. Better understanding how each field thinks about morality not only improves precision but also provides an opportunity to envision collaboration between different parts of the discipline, or conversely to bring subfields in the discipline into productive tension with one another. As David Stark argues, sites of tension and ambiguity are where creativity and innovation often emerge (Stark, 2009). The contributions in this handbook allow us to highlight some of the most pertinent dilemmas facing sociologists studying morality and topics related to morality, and begin to envision a path forward.

For example, a current conversation in the sociology of morality focuses on whether values—often understood as a core part of (or even synonymous with) morality—are consequential for motivating action, or whether motivation is always reducible to interests. On the one hand, many scholars argue that values serve as guiding principles for human action (Longest et al., 2013; Patterson 2014). On the other hand, Martin and Lembo (2020) recently critiqued the concept of value for its unstable grounding, much of which was lost in the disciplinary withdrawal from Talcott Parsons' theories, and called for a return to the notion of interest in explaining motivations for action. This debate has serious methodological implications. A wide array of studies (e.g., Miles, 2015) predict behaviors and attitudes using social psychologist

Shalom Schwartz's methodologies, which identify the degree to which individuals assign importance to different values (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2001), assuming actions can be explained henceforth. Conversely, Lembo and Martin offer a theoretical criticism of Schwartz's tools (though not of individual-level factors themselves) as important for understanding action. Many sociological subfields elide individual-level explanations as distracting from the collective, coercive aspects of social life. However, debates over the micro details of action, whether seen as fully shaped by cultural forces or as generative of behavior in their own right, point to core issues of social behavior. Sociological social psychologists are typically more comfortable positing these processes, alongside rational choice theorists, cognitive sociologists, and some cultural sociologists. But Lembo and Martin raise important disciplinary critiques of whether a notion of morality as a social phenomenon needs to be—or is properly conceptualized as—a measurable individual orientation. Values' attraction stems in part from their seeming applicability to both macro and micro situations (e.g., cultural values), but there is little agreement about how this works in theory and in practice.

A second conversation revolves around whether morality should be conceived primarily as habituated, quasi-instinctive responses to stimuli, or as conscious and deliberate reasoning, often referred to as "fast" and "slow" morality or as "Type I" and "Type II" cognitions (Lizardo et al., 2016). While the late-twentieth-century social sciences largely adhered to psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg's (1984) formulation of the stages of moral development, which held that moral reasoning develops through individuals' gradual engagement with moral dilemmas, many critiques emerged in reaction to Kohlberg's focus on reason. These critiques highlighted the centrality of emotions in moral development and decision-making (Gilligan, 2016 [1982]; Haidt, 2001; Rozin, 1999; Rozin et al., 1999; see discussion of both approaches in Hitlin, 2008, 75–92). In sociology, the dilemma between "fast" and "slow" morality came to the fore with Stephen Vaisey's 2009 *American Journal of Sociology* article arguing that most interview responses provide little information about individuals' sense of right and wrong, compared to their intuitive gut reactions to moral questions (Vaisey, 2009). This stance was met with some pushback from those cultural sociologists who argued that the discursive organization of moral categories undergirds individuals' learned intuitive responses to morally loaded questions (Alexander & Smith, 2003; Swidler, 1986, 2008; Vaisey, 2008, 2009), and that information gleaned about individuals' moral worlds through interviews cannot be captured otherwise (Pugh, 2013). Nevertheless, a rapidly growing literature on cognition and action has relegated "declarative" moral culture primarily to the role of post-hoc justification of action, and attributed little causal significance to individuals' conscious moral reasoning (e.g., Martin, 2010), with stated moral justifications perceived as a post-hoc justification to already decided courses of action.

A related rift exists between scholars who study the extent to which morality affects action directly and scholars who study morality as undergirding meaning frameworks that shape individuals' perceptions and worldviews. Scholars in the first camp place morality in a causal relationship

with attitude change, responses to forced-choice questions, and concrete action (e.g., in dictator-game experimental settings) (e.g., Stets & Carter, 2011, 2012; Franzen & Pointner, 2012).[1] Conversely, other sociologists see morality as providing individuals with broad frameworks by which to make sense of situations and relationships, without attributing to morality direct causal relations (see Abend, 2014). One example of this approach is the study of symbolic boundaries, which has shown how groups maintain a sense of self-worth and dignity by forming hierarchies depicting themselves as morally superior to other groups (Lamont, 1992, 2000). Another example is the sociology of critique (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) which investigates the multiple (and often conflicting) repertoires individuals employ to define justice and identify the common good (e.g., Cohen & Dromi, 2018; Levi & Sendroiu, 2019). While the phenomena identified by this literature may certainly influence social, political, and institutional arrangements downstream, research in this vein does not confine itself to directly observable cause-and-effect relations.

A question intertwined with these previous debates has been whether morality should be studied as a phenomenon contained within individual psychologies (and thus observable on the micro-level through surveys, experiments, and even fMRI scans) or as a phenomenon organized on the cultural level (and thus observable on the macro-level through public displays, rituals, and rhetoric). On the one hand, studies of personal culture have looked at the large-scale accumulation of individual psychological processes, and have argued that psychological and neurological nuts and bolts provide compelling explanations of collective behavior (Kiley & Vaisey, 2020; Lizardo, 2017).[2] In this, such studies have extended the Bourdieusian view of individuals' views of right and wrong as rooted in habituated and cognitive patterns ingrained through early childhood socialization (Guhin et al., 2021). On the other hand, numerous cultural sociologists and comparative-historical sociologists have followed anthropologist Clifford Geertz (2005) in seeing public culture as reflecting and organizing the meanings that shape individual perceptions of morality (Alexander & Smith, 2011).[3] Accordingly, cultural sociologists often examine legal systems, media representations, and political discourse in order to uncover commonly held notions of morality (harking back to Emile Durkheim's notion of collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1995)) (e.g., Goodman, 2009; Jacobs, 2000; P. Smith, 2008).

An additional, meta-theoretical conversation has revolved around whether sociologists should investigate moral claims from a neutral vantage point, or whether—given the real-life implications of these research topics—sociologists are obliged to take their own moral stances on their studied phenomena (Dromi & Stabler, 2019). In this, Pugh (this volume) helpfully distinguishes between the Weberian view and the later Du Boisian view on neutrality in the social sciences. Where Weber maintained that it is not the task

[1] See Vaisey (2014) for further discussion of this stance.

[2] See Abend (2017) for a critique of neuroscientific approaches to social phenomena.

[3] See Lizardo (2017) for a broad overview of the differences between public and personal culture, and their interrelationships.

of sociologists to express moral judgments about the phenomena they study (Weber, 2009 [1919]), Du Bois argued beginning in his second era of scholarship that sociologists are obliged to express moral judgment about the past in ways that will inform policy makers about the potential consequences of their actions (Du Bois, 1998 [1935], 106, 156–157; Itzigsohn & Brown, 2020). Elsewhere, Gorski (2022) proposed a critical social ethics approach to comparative-historical sociology where, drawing on Dewey's pragmatist philosophy, scholars would incorporate concerns with the common good with attention to inequality and alienation. Prasad (2021), too, argues from a pragmatist standpoint for a "problem-solving sociology" that begins by first transforming normative questions into analytic ones, followed by the development of theories of human action through empirical analysis of causation using comparative methods as particularly useful, but not the only, tools. Conversely, with the development of increasingly sophisticated strategies for studying morality (e.g., Stolz & Wood, this volume) and, relatedly, measuring culture (Mohr, 2020), the counter-demand for scientific neutrality in the sociology of morality has also increased.

Many of the discipline-wide discussions of the all-white, all-male, all-Western canon of US sociology (e.g., Morris, 2015; Wright, 2017) are also relevant to the sociology of morality. Quinn and Schneiderhan (this volume), for example, return to Jane Addams' writings on social problem-solving and reform in order to develop new ways of thinking about the moral aims of the discipline. Robinson and Rosino (this volume) properly take the original handbook to task for its omissions, offering suggestions for bridging the study of race and morality, topics they suggest are already intertwined. Other neglected sources which could be fruitfully explored elsewhere are Harriett Martineau's work on the study of morals and manners (Martineau, 1838), Ida B. Wells's research on the narratives populations construe in order to legitimate morally unacceptable behaviors, namely lynching (Wells-Barnett, 1895), and Anna Julia Cooper's intersectional analyses of modernity and morality from Black women's distinct perspectives (Cooper, 1998).[4]

Lastly, one of the emerging issues that will likely become increasingly relevant for the sociology of morality is the role of innate human capacities and genetic makeup in moral phenomena. There has been an influx of genetic markers into social science datasets over the past two decades (Freese & Shostak, 2009; Herd et al., 2019), which has reignited long-standing debates about the benefits and risks of employing biological data in social research (Dromi & Stabler, Forthcoming). On the one hand, some scholars have cautioned against the uncritical use of genetic data, and have argued that genetic markers have the potential to obscure and distort nuanced social dynamics (Roberts & Rollins, 2020). On the other hand, sociobiologists have argued that their field is directly oriented toward creating environments where our genes can flourish (Hopcroft, 2016), and that understanding hereditary influences on social phenomena can help promote equality. Indeed, Mellor and Shilling (this volume) revisit Durkheim's *homo duplex* model to

[4] Luft and Rosenberg (Forthcoming) make this argument, and argue more broadly for the incorporation of past neglected research on morality by Cooper as well as Marianne Weber, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and others.

rethink the interrelationships between innate bodily capacities and a host of social phenomena, many of them directly relevant to the sociology of morality. With this debate still in its infancy, we anticipate it will gain steam and continue to inform conversations on morality in the years to come.

Idealistically, handbooks like this are simply steps toward sparking conversations, building bridges, and advancing subfields. For a topic as hard to define, but as fundamental, as morality, we cannot reach definitive answers. Our authors do not all agree with each other or the editors. But we suggest that disagreement and even difficult-to-consistently-define nature of this book's subject accurately reflect where the field is today. A decade into the resurgence of the explicit focus in sociology on morality, we see the term more explicitly grappled with, and its social influences, instantiations, and consequences far closer to the accepted "mainstream" of our discipline than, say, 50 years ago. As the culture outside of academia seems to be arguing even more fervently about moral issues and even fundamental principles, we hope this handbook helps our field engage these issues in wider society.

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Part I

Defining and Conceptualizing Morality

New Directions in the Sociology of Morality

Alessandra Lembo, Xiangyu Ma, and John Levi Martin

Abstract

Morality has proved a difficult concept for sociologists to define. We begin by reviewing two great families of approaches to the problem: one based on the content of morality and the other on its form. We then consider Durkheim's and Parson's respective synthesis of the two approaches. While the Parsonian formulation of morality as values may be more influential among current scholars, we argue that the better conceptualization may lie instead with Durkheim. Like Durkheim, we think that morality involves a sense of *should* as well as a sense of renunciation of self-gratification in the interest of the social. But more than that, there is an aspect of the moral that lies beyond subsumptive judgement—the moral is felt as a kind of reflective judgment.

Keywords

Morality · Reflective judgment · Kant · Values · Gouldner · Durkheim

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1 From Janet to Durkheim

In his *Theory of Morals*, Durkheim's teacher, Paul Janet, attempted to demonstrate that all peoples everywhere tended toward the same morality, and that while Europeans were admittedly further along in their development than others, it was quite untrue that the uncivilized, whether African or Australian, lacked moral feeling, a doctrine that, he said, had been invented both to justify slavery and "to glorify the theory which makes man only a transformed monkey" (1883 [1874], p. 327). The reports about Africans that demonstrated their total lack of moral feeling, Janet proposed, were, first of all, disproportionately taken from those whose way of life had already been disrupted by colonialization and slavery; second, possibly unreliable; and third, a selective and biased sample. One could, via such anecdotes, paint any people as virtuous or vicious.

But given the strong claims about the non-moral nature of Africans and Australians, Janet believed it was important to demonstrate their possession of refined moral sensibilities, which he did via a collection of anecdotes and their implications. For example, the Australians are sensitive to "points of honor" and have formalized duels, as indicated by the following story: "Two Irish refugees got into a quarrel with the natives, with whom they had taken refuge. The Europeans were unarmed. Before attacking them, the Australians furnished them with

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weapons with which to defend themselves, after which they fought with and killed them," which "proves the chivalric spirit of those savages" (1883 [1874], p. 328), and, more important, demonstrated that they possessed a code of honor that would bend their wills. The equally demanding moral code of the scholar required that a somewhat distressed Janet add in a footnote, "As a shadow to this picture, it must be added that the Irishmen were then eaten, which," Janet admitted, "is not very chivalric." But he worked to dismiss this (indeed, cannibalism in general) as "an exceptional case."

This example might bring a smile, though it is structurally pregnant with meaning. A second example may be even more illuminating. While it was widely reported that Australian men are indifferent as to the sexual conduct of their wives, these reports, Janet emphasized, came from the urbanized areas. "It is not the same in other parts of the country; and Dawson paints a truly patriarchal picture of the Australian family" (1883 [1874], p. 327). Among the Indians of Guyana, though they practiced polygyny, at least "The law of the division of function [between the sexes] is never violated. The husband hunts, fishes, and builds: the wife does the rest. She is submissive without constraint: she pays her husband for his protection by her obedience" (331).

Janet, then, assumes that his reader will accept that the standards of nineteenth century French educated society simply *are* morality. To the extent that Australians or Indians or Africans do something that the French think worthy (have duels, have a patriarchal family), they are moral, and to the regrettable extent that they do things differently (eat people, have multiple wives) they are not. If we can ascribe their lapses to their state of development—and Janet (1883 [1874], p. 402) indeed proposed that the reason some practiced cannibalism was simply that they were ignorant "of the evil inherent in this abominable custom"—then the fact that they do objectively bad things does not require that we ascribe objective wickedness to them.

Durkheim (1961 [1902–3]) understood that this was an impossible—and arbitrary—place to begin a moral science. Rather than simply assume that we all know what morality is, and that it is *our* morality, we must begin by being clear as to the referent of the term, and its range of application. In this chapter, we argue that Durkheim's basic orientation here was correct, and that his particular definition of morality is a good starting place for a revised understanding of morality. But even more, we insist that scholars in this field will profit from an explicit consideration of what they mean by morality, whether or not they agree with us and accept a somewhat revised version of the Durkheimian solution. For by not critically considering what is at the base of their work, they have shown a distressing inclination to float off into abstractions that, we argue, may well prove ideological.

Here we do five things. First, we point to the problems for sociologists when it comes to defining morality, and to the problems of treating *moral* as if it were a universally valid conception. Second, we review the great divide between two different approaches to morality, one based on the *content* of morality, and the other on its *form.* Third, we review Durkheim's attempted resolution that brought these together, and we propose that the Durkheimian solution is in fact a good one, producing a definition of morality that is probably broad enough to encompass most Western societies. However, we acknowledge that it is missing something—a sense of our commitment to transcendent principles beyond concrete duties to the group. Fourth, we consider the great alternative synthesis to the Durkheimian, that of Talcott Parsons, which, we argue, guides many current approaches. These approaches, which turn on the notion of *values*, might seem to offer what the Durkheimian lacks. However, we will argue that actors' relation to transcendent principles is not that proposed by values researchers. Such researchers propose that such values are inherently *abstract* in the conceptual sense of having a large extension and being linkable to concrete acts by chains of derivation and subsumption (e.g., "everyone benefits from a clean environment, so anti-environmental policies are a violation of universalism"). In contrast, we (fifth) draw on both current neurology and classic

enlightenment philosophy to propose that these principles are inherently *vague* ("that's just wrong, I know it") but not arbitrary. Given that, as we argue, there are good reasons to be suspicious that the post-Parsonian formulation of morality via the concept of *values* produces inherently biased and misleading results, we suggest it safer to stay with a vaguer but empirically tractable and unbiased conceptualization of morality.

2 The Problem of Definition

2.1 Nominalism and Realism

Sociologists, as Bargheer and Wilson (2018, p. 3) have argued, "now lack a consensus definition of what we are supposed to study when we study morality," leading to a proliferation of incompatible findings. One difficulty in addressing this issue comes from the tendency of sociologists to operate according to a logic of "nominalism," but to interpret results in line with the opposite philosophical orientation, "realism." Nominalism is the philosophical standpoint that, while particularities exist independent of the mind, collectivities, like the concept "tree," are literally artificial impositions of the mind. We need to *define* a tree, explicitly or implicitly, as a large, single trunked, plant, in order for us to use the concept. The doctrine of realism, on the contrary, claims that at least some generalities are mind-independent: perhaps not *tree* (which includes technical grasses like the palm), but certainly *mammal*. A realist is more interested in using concepts to *delimit* the contours of the actual phenomenon, and recognizes that a scientific approach may fail to do justice to the real generality.

When we do not squarely face this problem, we may conduct research with definitions that guide our research practice but do not express our actual understanding of the world. For example, a major strand of the concern with morality in sociology has turned on the issue of "morals versus markets"—a debate about whether there is something about market life, or contemporary market societies, that is destructive to morality. Or perhaps it is *conducive* to morality (the "*doux commerce*" thesis)? Or perhaps there is a form of morality particular to market interactions (for recent contributions to this question, see Polillo, 2011; Barnard, 2016)? All of these are reasonable positions, and all have been well supported in particular cases. However, the one response that leads to catastrophic failure is to make an overhasty definition of morality (e.g., "morality is action that is driven by values"), aggravate the situation with a similarly wide definition of values ("values are what we use to rank things among which we may choose"), and find ourselves seeming to solve the problem without actually doing any research ("markets therefore are moral, since market action is all about choosing things"), if there are phenomena (say, people selling their children into slavery) that none of our readers will see as other than a conflict between morals and markets.[1]

We in no way think that it is necessary for all research in the sociology of morality to define morality. In particular, in many cases, when it is *respondents'* or *subjects'* ideas that are being explored, such definition could be counterproductive, if the researcher's definition does not align with that of the subjects. For example, Edgell et al. (2016) examine the "perceived immorality" of atheists by using a Likert response to "Do you agree that atheists lack a moral center?" Here, the focus is on respondents' understanding of morality, and whether atheists are—according to whatever standard this implies—deficient. For another case, it might well be possible to track changes in moral relativism without knowing precisely what the informants mean by morality (for an important recent example, see Brońć & Miles, 2021, who disprove the idea that higher education is still associated with moral relativism).

[1] This is not an unlikely scenario: Martin and Lembo (2020) point out that some values inventories include items tapping agreement with statements like "I seek every chance I can to have fun. It is important to me to do things that give me pleasure." A chain of logic (orientation~values, values~morality) can then be used to treat hedonism as evidence of moral orientation.

However, such an indifference to definition can become a problem where the goal is to build a set of general statements about the social nature of morality (Hitlin, 2021). It becomes necessary to at least delimit the range of phenomena of interest. Some sociologists attempt to use a descriptive approach that hopes to (as in the above study) refer the problem of definition to the subjects of the study. The problem, however, is that where there is no explicit investigation of subjects' beliefs, there is likewise no delimitation. This may be all that we can do for now—to leave this as an open empirical question. Thus, Fourcade and Healy (2007) write that "Morality does not refer here to some universal ethical standard; rather, it means what a society, or a group, defines as good or bad, legitimate or inappropriate" (301). Yet with this very attempt to resolve the problem of definition by treating it as an empirical question, a theoretical ambiguity remains. The terms "good" and "bad" can refer to non-moral aspects of utility or hedonism; likewise, there are standards of appropriateness (e.g., manners or coordinating conventions) that are understood as separable from morality (violation is generally expected to arise from ignorance, not willful transgression). Somehow, sociologists of morality must choose between two ways of proceeding: On the one hand, we can treat such definitions as a simple tautology (i.e., this should more accurately be written that morality "means what a society, or a group, defines as *morally* good or *morally* bad, *morally* legitimate or *morally* inappropriate"). If so, no harm is done, but no ground gained. On the other hand, we might use such an empirical definition to challenge folk theories, including the distinction between morality and utility, hypothetical, and categorical imperatives. We believe that the second path, seemingly objective and behavioristic as it might seem, is destined to fail, because there *is* something specific about the realm of moral experience. We must then attempt to use theory as best we can to carve out a realm of goodness that is specifically moral, as opposed to practical or hedonic. Here, there have been two great families of approaches, which we go on to review.

3 The Two Traditions

3.1 Form and Content

There has been a great division in the theoretical orientations regarding ethics that fed into later American sociological theory (we limit our attention to this line), more or less between the French and the German (with the English largely refracted through the French and via anthropology). The former—stamped by the work of Rousseau—was fundamentally oriented to the template of social/individual as the master key to thinking about morality. This fit the emerging functionalist view that dominated much of the sociology and anthropology that was to emerge from France (and closely related to that in England as well). What is moral is what is *general*, but not simply because this allows the individual to transcend her animal-like instinctual determinations (as Rousseau had argued), but because what is general is what is good for the higher quasi-organism of society.

The latter tradition—stamped by the work of Kant, and his critique of Rousseau—was fundamentally oriented to the template of necessity/freedom as the master key to thinking about morality. This fit the emerging idealist view that dominated much of the philosophy that was to emerge from Germany. What is moral is that which transcends the realm of necessity and allows the individual, or the people, to pursue its inner nature in freedom. The puzzle of morality is that there is a form of compulsion not only in the realm of necessity but in the realm of freedom. But it is an inner compulsion that comes from the nature of reason (we do not feel unfree if we answer that the square root of 81 is ∓9, although really, there are no other good options here). Thus, the core of morality is a sense of *should* that comes from the highest part of the reasoning personality.

These two conceptions correspond roughly to a distinction between the *content* and the *form* of morality respectively. In the first, we are more concerned with precisely what the moral voice, or feeling, or law, utters, and less whether it is a

voice, feeling, or law. True morality is that which serves the group. In the second, we are more concerned with the form—that there is a sense that "I *should* do *X*." We go on to briefly review both of these traditions in sociology, starting with altruism.

3.2 Problems of Content

There is an obvious problem with trying to define morality in terms of content. On the one hand, we may try to define morality narrowly, and then look for its social historical sources, its carriers, its processes of change in transmission. This, however, can lead us to compose a laundry list of those things that we happen to like and that we treat as moral, and claim that they are universal, because almost any society will have *some* of these. It is as if we claim that there was a culturally universal sense of good taste, and we were to scour other cuisines, other art forms, and so on, approvingly pointing to those things that we happened to like, and regretfully shaking our heads at the expectable contamination of good taste by bad taste. And in fact, the first modern comparative historical cultural analyses in Europe, beginning in the seventeenth century, were indeed oriented around this question of the universality—potentially—of good taste. We saw the problems with such an approach in our opening analysis of Paul Janet.

We run into similar problems when we try to simply define morality around *emotions* and *feelings*, as opposed to *actions* or *maxims*. This is the approach that Adam Smith (1997 [1759]) had favored, and which continues to dominate psychological studies of morality (e.g., Hofmann et al., 2014; Brady et al., 2017). Such approaches have a tendency to provide a *list* of "moral sentiments," not the principles for the construction of the list, and hence leave us in no better position analytically than we had been before. As Tavory writes (2011, p. 277), "After all, we have emotional reactions all the time. What kind of emotions are we talking about? In what kinds of situations are emotions deemed moral?"

On the other hand, we can try to define morality more broadly, but thereby understand that we may need to include in our definition much that strikes us on our day to day, lay level of experience, as not morality. For example, if our definition (like Durkheim's at least provisional first definition) includes *all* prohibitions, we may find much of our morality to turn out to consist of forms of political oppression ("do not question a superior," for example).

A reasonable compromise between definition via form and definition via content might seem to define the *class* of moral contents, not the specific contents themselves, and to define this class in a way that its elements would vary predictably with the type of society. The ready example of such elements would be *functions*—there is a similarity of function (e.g., respiration) even when the organs used vary in some ways (e.g., gills vs. lungs). If the function of morality is to preserve group life, then we have a promising solution: we know something about the class of moral contents (they are those which are functional for group solidarity) and we expect that the particularities will vary predictably with empirically ascertainable aspects of the society (some stressing military service and bravery, others pacific forms of devotion to the group).

3.3 Altruism in France

And this was exactly the innovation of Auguste Comte. His functionalist idea of altruism (he really did coin the term) was an appealing solution, because it was more flexible than fixing in advance what sorts of actions are "pro-social." In certain circumstances, the altruist may start a war; in other circumstances, work to end one. However, this flexibility can be problematic. Let us, without endorsement, use Merton's (1968) language to make a distinction between *manifest* as opposed to *latent* functions. If we define morality as altruistic action, we may need to struggle with whether we want to include only manifestly altruistic actions—those that are subjectively understood by the actor as a self-sacrifice—or

include the latent as well. Those who claim that, e.g., engaging in technically useless rituals count as a form of morality, are making the argument that latent functionality must be recognized. The problem that arises is, however, that the identification of morality then becomes an exercise in uncovering potential benefits to the whole of any action. It ceases to have any capacity for stable adjudication in comparison, as it is up to the analyst's creativity whether one finds or does not find, and whether one accepts or does not accept, an explanation for some action in terms of altruism. The problem with restricting to *manifest* altruism is that we are beholden then to our subjects to give us their reports, and in societies that, like ours, believe altruism to be a form of morality (as opposed to a form of cowardice, for example), we may imagine that reports will tend to emphasize in altruistic interpretation, at least in distinction to other societies.[2]

Still, this approach to morality has been very convincing, and it dovetailed with popular conceptions. In the nineteenth century, especially after the writing classes absorbed the implications of Darwinism, such altruism was often seized upon by educated elites as the functional equivalent of religion. Bettering the nation, bettering the race, bettering the species—all could be touted as ideals worthy of individual sacrifice. That the actions carried out in the name of such ideals might, to a more removed observer, seem quite compatible with self-interest in no way demonstrates that the talk was not sincere (that is the wonderful thing about talk; it *can* be sincere without affecting action). Those marked by such thoughts had often embraced Spencer, and although Spencer himself was more or less a quietist—he believed the tangle of causal pathways in an industrial society too complex to allow for planned intervention to have much of a chance of success—many of his American followers were able to fold his evolutionary thinking into their understanding of their moral obligations to serve the group.

Such an equation of morality and altruism is still attractive to those oriented to Darwinian explanations.[3] Casting morality as altruism has the advantage of making possible comparisons not only across societies but also across species. However, there is a problem—in the dominant evolutionary interpretation, there is really no way to make an opposition between altruism and egoism. In the animal world, the most commonly identified form of "altruism" (favoring of the other) is called "kin selection," namely undertaking costly activities that increase the wellness of one's kin. According to the most common understanding of this—and it is not one that we ourselves are putting forward here—the individual is not only a genotype first and foremost, but a "bag" of genes, and those actions are favored that ensure not so much direct descendants, but an increase in the proportion of one's genotype that is found in later population distributions (for a discussion of theories of individuality in biology, see Pradeu, 2012). Thus, a risk to oneself to increase the chance of a relative surviving *after* one has completed one's reproductive actions is favored, but even one that increases one's own chance of dying when one still has a chance of reproducing may be selected for if this chance, multiplied by the number of offspring and their likelihood of survival (and divided by 2 for sexual reproduction), is less than the degree of relatedness of those kin one saves (times their likelihood of survival to reproductive age). For this reason (though without the genetic logic), Simmel (1904 [1892–3], pp. 112–5) did not think that biology could be used to stabilize the difference between egoism and altruism; accepting a vision of nested levels of life (cell/organism/family/society/species), he argued that what was altruism to one

[2] At the same time, the converse is also possible; among materialists who take for granted that only egoistic explanations are unproblematic, argued Simmel in his early work (1904 [1892–3]), altruistic actions may be presented as if they stemmed from egoistic premises.

[3] For a recent example, Thomas Smith and Gregory Stevens (2002) propose to examine morality in the form of reciprocity.

level could simply appear as the egoism on the next higher level.[4]

Of course, it is then possible to say that altruism is the configuration of the emotional/reasoning systems of the animals that makes possible this sort of objectively egoistic behavior. These behavior patterns might then be extended to cases in which there is no kin relation, even though this loses the advantages that originally led to the selection of this behavior. (It is not only humans who adopt unrelated infants and engage in costly activities to protect them and rear them.) Thus, this perspective can be stabilized for an attempt to derive the nature of morality. But it can become obscure when applied to concrete cases. If, as Simmel noted, there are multiple levels beyond the individual, then is someone being altruistic when she sacrifices for her children? Her nuclear family? Her town? Her nation? If she sacrifices to have her family displace another? Her nation displaces another? Once egoism and altruism become the same, argued Simmel, the terms mean nothing. Especially if we recognize that there are some sort of gains, however obscure, to identifying with a winning side (Kemper, 1990), we may in some cases find that simply making costly acts that favor the whole does not seem to separate morality from other types of action orientations.

But this is not the greatest limitation to the equation of morality and altruism. Instead, its problem has been one common to functionalist analyses—a circular tendency to assume what was in question, that what some society treated with solemnity and enforced via sanction must, even if only indirectly, be "good" for that society (e.g., Malinowski, 1939). For example, few sociologists would claim that it cross-culturally valid and inherent in the nature of morality that one refrain from eating meat on Fridays. Yet they might still insist that there is a more general aspect of the content of all true morality, putting the welfare of others, or of the group, ahead of one's own, even if this is indirect (e.g., respecting symbols of the group). The difficulty here is that the links in the chain of association by which some act (refraining from eating meat on Fridays) actually does serve the interest of the group are hardly obvious upon the face of things. For groups, like individuals, appear to do extremely stupid things, including setting up rituals that undermine their capacity to achieve collective goals or even maintain cohesion, and so frequently analysts lamely (and tautologically) concluded that the senseless ritual served to unite the group, and the *divisive* ritual still helped the group by demonstrating the importance of ritual.

If we assume (like Comte) that the proper recipient of our sacrifices is "society," and that while *ultimately* we want this society to be coterminous with humanity, we currently exist in worlds in which *nations* are more plausible representations of such a "society," and nations are increasingly understood correlatively to *states*, then we may seem to be saying that the apex of morality is obeying authorities. Indeed, it is easy for social scientists to end up as apologists for domination: observing the rule that, for example, young initiate boys perform oral sex on their elders (the Etoro are one of a number of Papuan tribes in which such a practice was traditional [Kelly, 1981, p. 16]), which some might imagine as flagrant sexual abuse, may also be understood as contributing to community solidarity by demonstrating a concern with trans-individual norms. Naked exploitation of underlings by overlings could be rationalized as "good for all." This is of course not what those accepting ideas of altruism want to say, but it is difficult to determine how they can avoid saying it. Something more seems needed, and here (as we will see) Durkheim, despite his grounding in Comtean notions of altruism, turned to a competing Kantian tradition.

3.4 Problems of Form

Many reasonable treatments on morality from sociologists rely on the notion that the core to defining morality is the *should*. For example, in

[4] "Just as one sometimes says that love is an egoism of two, so perhaps one may say of morality [*Sittlichkeit*] as a whole that it is an egoism of the all" (116).

the previous handbook of morality, Sayer (2010, p. 164) wrote, "Broadly, they [*morality* and *ethics*] refer to ideas and feelings regarding how people should behave, particularly with respect to others, in relation to their well-being." We will suggest below that this is indeed a good start to a definition of morality, but the problem here is that this definition obscures the great difference between three possible interpretations of a *should*. One, associated with the Aristotelian tradition, finishes the phrase "regarding how people should behave. . ." with ". . .if they want to be excellent examples of the sorts of things they are." This notion (usually termed a "virtue" ethics) necessarily involves some sort of distinction between *essence* and *accident* (the central—and marvelous—treatment is Macintyre, 1981). A racehorse should be an excellent racehorse, and an excellent racehorse's excellence comes first in being an excellent horse (you cannot be an excellent racehorse but a wretched horse) and then also in being very fast, but not just that. An ungainly racehorse that compensates for its terrible stride by simply being twice as big as others is not necessarily what we mean when we say an "excellent racehorse." This idea is difficult for sociologists to deal with, as we are quite reasonably wary of making attributions of excellence (now finish this thought: "a girl's virtue comes in being excellent in all the ways that are essential to being a girl. . ."). But it is also not obvious that the other ways we have of answering this are free from their own problems.

The other two interpretations of a *should* are associated with the great alternate tradition to the Aristotelian, the Kantian. Here, the central distinction is between what Kant (1964 [1785]) called "hypothetical" and "categorical" imperatives. The first completes the sentence ". . .if they are pursuing goal *X*." The notion that pursuing the organization of all types of goals *X* would generate a coherent approach to a modern ethics was developed by many of the more institutionally oriented thinkers associated with the Southwest school of neo-Kantianism, such as Max Weber (and Hugo Münsterberg and Heinrich Rickert), as well as Georg Simmel.

In contrast, the categorical imperative ends the sentence with a period. You *should* treat others as ends-in-themselves (say). Period. This seems to be more common as a vision of morality, especially when the content of the moral maxim is (as it is for Kant) about the treatment of others (e.g., Sayer above). The problem is that this definition fails at being cross-culturally valid, in that what is caught in this net when we turn to societies very different from our own does not necessarily strike us as indicative of "morality." For example, there are taboos about how to treat one persons of a certain status that seem devoid of any feeling of caring for that other. One might, for this reason, claim that they are basically actually hypothetical maxims, despite their seemingly categorical nature; we must append ". . .if you want to stay alive." One must not, e.g., speak to a menstruating woman, or touch the body of the head chief, and so on. Such ad-hoc fixes, however, fall back into the problem of us picking and choosing among others' rules those that we happen to approve of, and anointing only these as "moral." (One could, of course, append ". . .if you want to get to heaven" to many versions of Western morality, and thereby transmute the categorical imperative into a hypothetical.)

There are even some difficulties in restricting our attention to the irreducibly categorical imperatives. It would seem that it is straightforward to say that such imperatives provide the *form* of morality. However, the problem is there are few cases that are *concrete* that work thusly. "Thou shalt not kill." Period. Yet killing in war (or in self-defense, or to punish those convicted of crimes) is often accepted—so the imperative might no longer be quite as categorical as it seemed. Of course, one can hope to solve the problem by rephrasing it (as it is in the ten commandments) "Thou shall not *murder*." But what is murder? Is it extrajudicial killing? Then there cannot be judicial murder? Does it mean *wrongful* killing? If so, we have come full circle—we need morality to define the category of our categorical imperatives.

Perhaps we cannot make as clear a distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives as we would like. If so, things might simplify—

there is a fundamental morality of the form of the *should*, one which includes some aspects of life that might not have initially been understood as moral (e.g., those imperatives that continue "...if you want to be rich as a troll"). The notion that the core of moral or ethical action was this feeling of *should* was worked out by the Kantians at length, especially in Germany. We turn to see how they pursued its puzzling implications for our understanding of morality.

3.5 Duty in Germany

The German thinkers who were to most influence later Americans (not, it should be noted, a representative cross-section of the first German sociologists, but actually a more philosophically, less reform-oriented, and less Spencer-influenced subset) were strongly marked by Kant's critique of Rousseau's position. Kant understood the paradox in Rousseau's attempt to ground this higher morality in the *true* general interests of the collectivity—interests of which individuals might well be unaware. Kant saw the only possible resolution in being a transcendental one: the actor must act not for the substantive good of a concrete community, but according to the formal principles of action that take all rational beings as ends-in-themselves. The actor should be able to recognize the compelling power of reason in the form of the feeling of *should*. The essence of morality, for those following in this tradition, was this *shouldness*.

This led to some difficulties for sociological theorists grappling (like Spencer and Durkheim) with the agreed-upon fact of increasing social differentiation. With the emergence of distinct cultural spheres, of which religion was assumed to be only one (for a critique, see Joas, 2021), we had a proliferation of *shoulds* (as the artist, for example, supposedly feels a *should* that is wholly separable from that of morality). Even Georg Simmel—whose early work on moral science, often read as a "negative," skeptical, materialist intervention, had attacked this theory, arguing that most *shoulds* really arose from what we now call learned helplessness, an internalization of previously external constraint—ended up joining the Kantians and focusing on the particular form of lawfulness that comes from the recognition of *shoulds* or *oughts*. In all cases, what transformed the ethical notion into a potentially sociological one was the idea that there were a limited number of classes of potential goals (*X*s) ("...if you want to achieve *X*"), each class having an institutionalized sphere structured around its realization (e.g., "...if they want to reach the truth," or "...if they want to create something of real artistic worth," or "...if they want to become rich as a troll," implying the spheres of science, art, and economics respectively).

This view, then, built upon a grand division between the realms of *is* and *ought*, which were generally assimilated to the differences in the subjects of the natural and cultural (or "human") sciences respectively, which also paralleled a division between realms of nature and of value. Thus, in this tradition, quite the opposite of the egoistic/altruistic tradition, the economy is a paradigmatically on the side of the moral sciences, as it is based upon values (e.g., Simmel, 1978 [1907]).

This approach, however, was no more free from the tendency to collapse morality and self-interestedness than was the theory of altruism. As Simmel (1904 [1892–3]) noted, even the most immoral egoist might ask himself which of two options he "should" do.[5] And this remains true even if we remove the "hypothetical" imperatives from consideration. Simmel himself, in his *last* work ([1918] 2010), proposed that it was not merely differentiated cultural spheres that could have their own ethical imperatives (a good painter follows the *shoulds* of the aesthetic sphere), but it was possible for each individual—at least, each individual like Simmel—to have his or her own

[5] "One can basically say that our way of speaking recognizes a twofold ought: one in the narrower sense of the ethical demand, another in the broader [sense], in which it denotes the preferable side of any practical alternative" [*Man darf geradezu sagen, dass der Sprachgebrauch ein doppeltes Gesolltes anerkennt: eines in dem engeren Sinn der sittlichen Forderung, ein anderes in dem weiteren, in dem es die vorzuziehende Seite einer beliebigen praktischen Alternative bedeute*] (53).

shoulds, and that one *should* be what one individually *is* to the fullest. Thus, the specter of as many moralities as there are individuals seemed at least a logical possibility.

But the greatest weakness was elsewhere. This approach had been adopted by German social scientists as a way of understanding processes of social (especially cultural) differentiation. They all considered it necessary that their treatment establish a formal parallel between different spheres (though many treated religion or metaphysics as a uniquely integrating sphere). The problem, then, is that if ethics is *one* form of a *should*, then how can *should* be understood as lying at the core of morality? Let us accept this idea that every cultural sphere, for example, aesthetics, has its own *shoulds*. This either implies that the realm of "morality" is larger than we thought, and includes aesthetics and morality conventionally understood as two comparable subparts, or that there is something else distinctive about morality in addition to the *shouldness* (usually, as Sayer suggested, that its realm is that of the interpersonal). And if aesthetics, say, *is* part of morality,[6] then we need a new meta-morality to explain why the process of differentiation does not lead to most people simply being *bad* people (since, outside of a set of cultural specialists, most of us do not do the aesthetic things that we *should*). The alternatives were either to claim that the meta-ethics was that one had to choose a sphere and pursue its value "to thy last, cobbler" (Weber's position) or that one should seek a harmonious reconciliation of the various values (the position taken by Weber's opponent Eduard Spranger [1914/1928]). In this case, one must posit a host of "minor ethics" (think of the likely derivation of the word *etiquette* [Arditi, 1998]). Neo-Kantians then divided according to whether they saw religious morality becomes one competitor among many for the provision of an ethic, or as the master integrator of all minor ethics.

[6] Note that this is the solution implied by Hitlin and Vaisey's (2010, p. 3) argument that "value-rational" action in Weber's sense is *moral* action.

Second, in comparison to the theory of morality-as-altruism, the problem with the theory of morality-as-duty was its limited capacity to help with the comparative project. For such an orientation is universally understood as a relatively recent, fundamentally Western, understanding of goodness (Macintyre, 1981). It is not even clear that it is a concept that can be applied across social classes without introducing forms of bias (we return to this below). Even more, the focus on the felt experience of obligation (*I should*) as opposed to the social establishment of prohibitions (*thou shalt not*) supported by sanction led to a problem of observability. An execution, a trial, an arrest, even ostracism are observable; an internal sense of obligation is not. This opened the door to a sort of complicity in which we attribute ethicality to those persons we like, and deny it from those we dislike.

4 Durkheim's Answer

4.1 Limitations of Others

We saw that the simplest version of a functionalist account of morality—that it consists in solidarity with the group—had little trouble dealing with cross-cultural and cross-temporal differences; it was, at heart, fundamentally relativistic, and it was not surprising that those committed to the moral regeneration of their time (such as Durkheim) would be somewhat uncomfortable with this, and attempt to find a larger developmental framework in which there could be a *better* good. Yet Durkheim was also uncomfortable with the other extreme—one that grounds the universality of morality in the Kantian vision that (in Durkheim's [1961/1902–3, p. 112] words) "There is only one reason."

Durkheim's solution was that, despite the diversity of moral codes across time and place, in all cases, morality "consists in the sum of definite and special rules that imperatively determine conduct" (1961 [1902–3], p. 33). Durkheim usually considered these rules fundamentally sets of *prohibitions*, because he understood them as experienced by individuals as *constraints* that

checked their individual desires (yet these constraints were not simply *imposed* commands from a hostile and foreign source). "Morality," he said, in a striking vitalist metaphor, "is like so many moulds with limiting boundaries, into which we pour our behavior" (26).

For this reason, morality involves what Durkheim called a "spirit of discipline." This involved the combination of a "preference for regularity" (to do the same thing in the same circumstances), and a feeling that one did this not because of habit, convenience, or unthinking tradition, but because of a "feeling of authority"—that something with higher moral status than oneself *wanted* it this way. Even more, Durkheim followed Kant in accepting that "An act is not moral, even if it in substantial agreement with moral rules, . . .[if we do so] in order to avoid disagreeable results or some moral or material punishment." Instead, "One must obey a moral precept out of respect for it and for this reason alone" (30).

This discipline—a sense of duty—is clearly following the *formal* understanding of the more Kantian approaches to morality. But this alone did not, for Durkheim, serve to define morality—if discipline demands an individual renounce certain gratifications, this would be merely senseless, and not moral, unless this renunciation served something else, indeed, a sentient being that could be aware of the sacrifice. And that being cannot be ourselves—"behavior prescribed by the rules of morality is always behavior in pursuit of *impersonal* ends" (58; italics added). But if our own welfare could not be the fitting recipient of our self-restraint, nor could that of a different person satisfy the definition, nor even a set of persons, but only the society itself. Thus, just as important as the spirit of discipline in the foundation of morality is the sense of "attachment to groups." Durkheim thus hereby added the *content*-rich view of morality more common to the French and British positivists to the Kantian focus on duty as form.[7]

It is worth noting that this fusion served Durkheim well in his empirical work, especially his (1951 [1897]) masterpiece, *Suicide*. Here he showed that these two aspects of morality, there understood as *regulation* and *integration* respectively, though interconnected, are analytically separable and have distinct contributions to the preservation of our moral integrity. The persons insufficiently attached to groups, suffering from *egoism*, and the persons insufficiently regulated, suffering from *anomie*, are more likely to end their own lives.

Durkheim's synthesis might indeed be a good resolution, and it is one that might recognize that what we mean by morality is not entirely cross-culturally valid. In some other cultures, one might see a virtue ethic (one should be generous and strong and jolly, because those are the best sorts of people to be) as well as prohibitions that are more utilitarian (breaking a taboo is a grave matter, only because it leads to danger), without sharing our understanding of certain forms of social conduct as having a categorical imperative.

4.2 What Is Missing

Thus, Durkheim. But, of course, anyone can define anything they want however they want (the Humpty-Dumpty principle). Despite his interest in surveying the results of anthropology, Durkheim did not really conduct the cross-cultural investigation he gestured toward, and even had he, it would have been useless, as it would have assumed what was in question—the essential elements of morality.

There is, however, a different possible approach, one often used by philosophers. Rather than being wholly nominalist or wholly realist, it orients to intersubjectivity, and posits that we, as speakers of a language, share implicit understandings of what a term like *morality* means that may be more informative than the

[7] This addition helps this neo-altruistic approach grapple with the issue of moral duties to *oneself*, a notion that was perhaps more central in nineteenth century thought than currently. The Durkheimian answer is that we only have duties to benefit ourselves when a violation would bring shame not merely to ourselves, but to our families, communities, nations, or to humanity itself.

first definitions one might come up with. We uncover this by experiments in which we try attaching a term to a case and see if we feel satisfied with the result. We believe that Durkheim's definition does well in assigning cases to examples of morality. Of course, this is hardly foolproof—it could be that we and our readers agree, but there are others who disagree. Indeed, given that we will be arguing that there is in fact an appropriateness gradient to the application of current sociological conceptions of morality, this is a problem we take seriously. However, if Durkheim's definition seems to us to *fail* at a certain point, this suggests a limitation to the argument.

Consider two cases. In the first, our central actor (Neil) has a high-ranking position in the military, and (for some reason) he knows that the United States is about to make a catastrophic mistake and begin a nuclear war with every other country, at the end of which the United States will survive unscathed but all other humans will be dead. The only way to prevent this is to cause the missiles to explode prematurely, killing most Americans (though not all), but saving the rest of the globe. Although Neil's job duties do not cover such a decision, he has the capacity to make this happen. Many (but not all) of us will imagine that if Neil did so, his act would be moral (though we might *also* consider his act moral if he did *not*, which is not necessarily a contradiction). In the second, the situation is similar but there actually *is* a secret plan among most other countries to conduct a first strike against the United States, and the United States, becoming aware of this, has decided that it has no choice but to go first. Neil's decision—the weights involved—might seem exactly the same. Certainly, only a tiny fraction of those whose lives are being weighed had any knowledge of these goings on, and whether the world was or was not plotting to attack the United States might seem totally irrelevant as to whether Neil should cause ignorant US civilians, or ignorant civilians of other countries, to be fried like onions.

And yet many of us will think that it *does* matter, and here is the sticking point—in addition to the Durkheimian definition, which seems a strong sociological one, there is "something else": a way in which feelings of right and wrong touch upon something besides the spirit of discipline and the attachment to groups. Such a "something else" is foundational to the emotivist-intuitionist approaches to morality that view emotional reactions as the defining quality of the moral (e.g., Vaisey, 2009; Tavory, 2011). Curiously, this "something else" can either seem extremely concrete and individualistic (a personal feeling that cannot be argued down, a sense of unease, a conviction that one cannot do otherwise and still be oneself) or abstract and evanescent (devotion to abstract principles like "justice," "fairness," "truth," or "humanity"). Grappling with the nature of this aspect of morality has proven most difficult, and the most likely entry point for conceptual errors.

In other words, a sociological approach to morality cannot simply rest with Durkheim's definition. Even if we restrict the application of the term *morality* to modern Western (and Western-influenced global) cultures, it misses something. The question, then, is whether we have a way to incorporate actors' sensitivity to principles of conduct that might seem abstract. It might be thought that this is the strength of mainstream sociology of morality, as it focuses on such abstract principles. We go on to argue that most current approaches are not yet strong enough to serve as foundations for the empirical study of morality.

5 Values and Justifications

5.1 The Alternative from Parsons

We have seen how Durkheim attempted to bring together two streams of thinking about morality; although he believed his definition to have universal validity, this does not appear to be the case. However, if the limited *extension* of this definition (the cases it covers) matches the limits to the *intension* of the concept (what we *mean* by *morality*), there is no problem, and we believe this to be the case. Hence, Durkheim offers an encouraging place to begin a sociology of

morality. However, this is not the tradition that seems most influential for current studies, which are marked by the intervention made by Talcott Parsons (especially 1968 [1949]). Parsons had quite deliberately attempted to fuse these same two traditions (altruism and duty) in his early work by appealing to (and transforming) the notion of *values*. Values were supposedly shared and integrative abstract commitments that oriented individuals away from egoistic self-interest (and hence automatically toward altruism), came in the form of internal senses of rightness (and hence operated via duty), but (so his followers and students believed) could be measured via verbal reports. Such values, however, were far more abstract than the sense of duty that Kant had spoken of. One might be able to explain why one's duty was to do such and such—and certainly, a philosopher would be able to generate the *maxim* that guided the action in question—but for Kant, such explanation was not integral to the experience of obligation (the so-called "fact of reason"): the voice of conscience and the voice of values do not speak in the same register.

Given that we have proposed that what is missing in Durkheim's own approach to morality was something that seemed hard to pin down, something that might appear in the form of principles such as justice, fairness, humanity, or decency, one might propose that *values* is the missing element in a study of morality. And indeed, since Parsons, perhaps the most central work in the sociology of morality has accepted the importance of such factors. However, we want to go on to suggest three reasons why the concept *values* may be a poor way of studying morality: first, it may be narrower in extension than the Durkheimian conception of morality; second, it may be related to the ideology of the educated classes even within Western society and hence lead to biased comparisons; and third, at least as it is used in sociological studies, the concept appears *not* to include the sorts of important principles to which we pointed above.

5.2 More or Less Weird

We have argued that it is by no means inherently problematic if sociology adopts an understanding of morality that is not cross-culturally valid. Sociology was long distinguished from anthropology as being the science of western—soon to be world—culture, that which was undergoing "modernization," and there is no reason to require that its statements be valid outside this realm. However, the reference to modernization should immediately raise a caution: modernization theory was both a descriptive one (these are the changes Western societies are undergoing) and a prescriptive one (and those who are dragging their heels in accepting this change are problems to be dealt with by kind instruction if possible, but compulsion if not). Political anthropologists, for one, recognized that the abstract moral concerns that western political philosophers had declared to be the only acceptable basis for justifying politics were not necessarily accepted by all. Educated, middle-class, Northern-European, especially Protestant, urbanites seemed nicely in conformity with the theory, but those who differed (e.g., uneducated working class or even worse, peasant, Catholics from the Mediterranean) might frustratingly remain attached to "particularistic" conceptions that did not strike the modernizers as "moral" at all (e.g., the famous Mediterranean saying, mostly attributed to North African nomadic patrilineal tribesmen but heard elsewhere as well: "me against my brother, me and my brother against my cousin, me, my brother and my cousin against my neighbor, all of us against the outsider").

Now there has, in recent years, been a recognition of the dangers of the tendency of researchers to overgeneralize to all human beings findings from studies conducted on subjects who are "WEIRD"—that is, from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic nations. But it has not been appreciated that similar divides may still exist *within* such societies. If the educated class monopolizes sociological research—and it is hard to see how it could be otherwise—they literally write the questions to

the morality test according to their own conceptions. Further, the almost complete separation between the writing and the fighting classes (always related to urban/rural splits, and, increasingly, in the United States to north/south) may have led to fundamentally different understandings about the meaningfulness of life and death that is poorly understood by the somewhat introverted and isolated academic researchers.

Of course, since the rise of the Christian right, some (left-leaning) academics comprehended that there was something about the morality of many of their compatriots that they did not quite comprehend, and some gamely set out to try to understand it. Perhaps misled by popular discourse, but even more, by their own inherited vocabulary, some theorists came back from their explorations to the new world with the remarkable spice of "values"—conservatives, we were told, were not doing what the educated elites wanted them to do not because they were too stupid to calculate their advantage, but because they were moved by "values."

5.3 Values and the Culture of Critical Discourse

But here, we argue, the theorists were wrong, attributing to their subjects a structure that did not quite fit. Of course, in the conservative Christian world, "values" are widely praised (as is "character"), but there is no commitment to the particular idea of values that characterizes the academic world. To make this point, we would like to resuscitate once influential arguments made by the now nearly forgotten Alvin Gouldner (especially 1979). Gouldner—incidentally, couching this in a critique of the tendency of the Parsonian explanations of professions to paint over the actual contours of bourgeois life better explicated by scions of the Chicago school—argued that technical and industrial changes had led to a transformation in the class structure of capitalism, with a "new class" of technical experts displacing the capitalist bourgeoisie as the dominant class. This, of course, was news to nobody, and other sociologists (e.g., Wright, 1985) had also been attempting to understand how the transition of the (seemingly) bourgeois class from owners to skilled employees rippled through both the politics of the globe and the theories of sociologists.

Gouldner pointed to something that had been treated as obvious, but in retrospect, is not, namely that all sorts of technical experts, especially in the United States (with its liberal arts curriculum), but not only there,[8] begin their advanced training in the same institutions. It is not a priori obvious that future dentists, tax accountants, jet propulsion engineers, writers for Disney cartoons, and sociologists should all struggle together through calculus, modern Japanese history, and *Jane Eyre*. The result, says Gouldner, is that they share a common culture, which he called the "Culture of Critical Discourse." This was both a set of skills and a way of looking at the world, one that stressed the importance of "modes of justification."

Our argument is not simply that this common gradient gives members of the educated classes a leg-up when it comes to justifying their lives, although certainly a fair amount of research on child-rearing practices has demonstrated just this. It is that the sense of legitimacy of the rule of the contemporary bourgeoisie is integrally bound up with the practice of "giving just reasons." (Most important, the growth of the administrative state has led to an eclipsing of the "will of the people" as a legitimate justification for the enactment of statute law, as judicial review necessarily engaged with the large amount of administrative law in terms of whether "good reasons" could be given.) In other words, the self-understanding of this class is likely to be uniquely bound up with

[8] While in many European countries, training splits at around the time of entrance to college, the preceding years have more in common with our college training: the earlier split is not *first* by domain (e.g., technical/cultural, working-with-things vs. working-with-people), and only *later* by level (repairman/engineer), but *first* by class (worker / bourgeois), as some enter vocational schools and others continue with the middle-class track. Further, the US model has increasingly become attractive to other nations.

the idea that abstract justifications can be given for righteous positions.

To then develop a theory of morality that privileges this practice is quite worrisome, but this is just what we have seen with the notion of "values." There is nothing intrinsically abstract about the idea of values—the term when first introduced into sociology was used to refer to concrete objects (here see Martin & Lembo, 2021), and in non-elite discourse it may be used interchangeably with "character" to mean "the buck stops here"—it is (we propose) a way to verbalize the conviction that one cannot do *X*. The sociological notion of "values," in contrast, is one in which the more abstract value is "higher," and therefore superior, thereby meaning that the buck stops no sooner than does a helium balloon released by a child. Indeed, we may say that "values" became virtual entities that were used to justify particular decisions as if they had been reached by subsumptive deduction ("Equality is good, this program favors equality, therefore I am for it"). Yet political scientists often find those on either side of a debate being equally convinced that the same values favor their own side—it is a way of thinking that is convincing only if we do not cross into the territory of those who think differently. And because so many academics basically *do* stay within their side, many of the data gathering instruments used to assess morality display a sort of credulous relation to the nature of verbal productions that goes beyond the normal faith required by indirect methods.

There has, of course, been a long running debate over the relation between expressed standards and situational behavior. Experimental work (Milgram, 1974) has shown the power of the situation, which most of the laity tend to underestimate (also see Lapiere, 1934). Certainly, the degree of correlation between predicted responses to situations and actual behavior in such situations is less than one, but this in no way implies that the predicted responses are meaningless or deceptive. Indeed, the very divergence of people's *predicted* responses from their *actual* acts may mean that the former are *more* useful at getting at certain facets of moral life than is observed behavior. The audience members who were *sure* that they would never go along with the Milgram experiments and shock an innocent man against his will were presumably not very different from the experimental subjects who *did*, but this explains why so many of those subjects betrayed signs of great distress and inner torment. The fact that situations can lead people to violate some of their moral standards in no way demonstrates that they lack such standards or a moral orientation—indeed, Milgram's conclusion was that situations have their own moral imperatives.

5.4 Tooting Horns and Raising Flags

The problem to which we point here is not, then, that some of the questions used to measure moral orientation are abstracted from concrete interactions and instead measure commitments that may not guide action, but that these questions do *not* actually measure these commitments. Instead, an examination of the actual text of many of the items makes it difficult to interpret them as anything outside of self-promotion or self-labeling. But a credulous reading has, in social psychology, often been differentially extended to the sorts of persons that the researchers like, and researchers are often—unbeknownst to them—good at signaling to respondents what sorts of responses someone who *liked* them would give.

For a justly famous example, Theodor Adorno et al. (1950) interviewed various Americans to understand their political ideology, and when good liberals responded to a question on the desires they found hard to control with answers like "to lash out at those people who voice an attitude of racial discrimination or an attitude of a dishonest intellect" or "telling people about fallacies in our economic system," these were taken as evidence not only that liberals lacked more troublesome desires possessed by conservatives (for an actual example, to knock someone down for bragging too much), but that

the motivational structure of these respondents was oriented (and, seemingly, so oriented all the time!) toward political liberation. In hindsight, we probably see these responses as attempts at affiliation, to convey to the researchers that the respondents in fact agreed with the researchers' ideology.

Similarly, research that asks decontextualized questions about making costless commitments may be best understood as creating "toot your horn" and "raise the flag" (to see who salutes) scales. Such responses may have great predictive validity (for the issue is *which* horn does the respondent choose to toot, and their choice made here may correspond to choices elsewhere). However, the resulting data distract us from the nature of the sociology of morality in a number of ways. First, there is a serious problem in that work in this tradition continues the weak practice of post-war social psychology in giving disproportionate interpretive weight to what researchers *label* scales (Martin, 2018). It is preposterous to assume that, simply because a set of survey items possesses certain psychometric properties, the researcher's theoretically constructed trait must actually exist, but little else underlies the widespread practice of allowing researchers' scale names to guide interpretation.

For example (here also see Martin & Lembo, 2022), the Schwartz instrument has a scale that seems to tap liberal academic values—it is called *universalism*, and (liberal) academics can then rush about exploring the predictors of universalism. But how is this commitment assessed? One of the items here is "I strongly believe that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to me." Why? Because *Schwartz* decided that environmentalism implies *universalism*; in other words, Schwartz was less measuring *values* than agreement with his own ideology—*he* would espouse environmental ideology, so it must be "universal." Someone who was an anti-environmentalist, pro-economic growth or laissez-fair liberal, would presumably also be convinced that *her* position was universalist. But as she does not write the scales, people like her are judged to have non-universalist values.

Perhaps our argument about horn-tooting seems strong. But consider: in the Schwartz Portrait Values Survey, respondents are asked to indicate how similar they are to the following person: "It is important to him to be humble and modest. He tries not to draw attention to himself." Shout it out loud—I'm humble and I'm proud! Only a credulous reading allows this to be transmuted into a measurement of "values." In another case, Miles and Upenieks (2018), making deductions from what we see as a reasonable theory, derived scales of different moral characteristics. Yet their first scale ("care/justice") could also be labeled "academics' (self-congratulatory) self-understanding." Wonderfully, one of the items here is the self-label "I am *truthful*." Should we really score up as 6 out of 7 those who said they were *honest, caring, kind, fair, helpful, compassionate* but not *truthful*?[9]

However, the difficulty goes even further than allowing people to write their own letters of recommendation. Creating scales based on our own conception of what we think is so excellent about us (such as that "looking after the environment" and "caring for nature" is important to us—that is, we recycle with zeal, and perhaps even drive a hybrid car) may indeed produce variables that have predictive power, but they may not be good at partitioning the population into those who have a greater as opposed to a lesser commitment to abstractions like "universalism," as opposed to tapping into different class cultures of ideological justifications. Indeed, it may be that the very conception that morality is about linking abstractions with our actions, choices, and ways of life, is itself a form of class bias. The practice of "giving just reasons…" is not necessarily

[9] Classic Art Linkletter joke: Interviewer asks little girl, "Do you have any faults Cindy? Do you ever steal? Or just take something for a while that isn't yours?" "Oh no!" "Well, are you ever mean?" "No, I'm not." "What about just being a little lazy?" "Never!" "Hmmmm… Don't you have *any* faults?" "Well, I lie." Psychological scales often have additions to weed out those who are simply saying what they think the researcher—or user of the scale, whether employer, psychiatrist, or judge—wants to hear. Perhaps sociologists will need to do something similar…

related to morality in conduct, even if there are other verbal forms of evidence that *could* be so related. Instead, if Gouldner is correct, it taps aspects of class culture. Thus, it makes sense that "morality" is explaining (as found by Miles & Vaisey, 2015) more variance in political orientation than demographics or even religious variables—the supposedly moral constructs are actually more proximate, as they are actually in large part ideological self-placements in a more general sociopolitical space (and not merely liberal-conservative).

6 Moral Sensation and Reflective Judgment

6.1 The Mundanity of Morality

We are in a bad place. We have found reason to believe that Durkheim's approach is missing something—something that comes out when we sense that there are cases in which the combination of altruism and duty does not quite capture all of what we mean by morality. We first wondered if abstract commitments in the form of "values" might supply this missing portion, but found that extremely unpersuasive. While we confess ourselves unable to solve this problem here, we wish to (first) suggest two useful clarifications, and then point to a tradition that we think is the most promising for further empirical exploration. This tradition formalizes the notion we relied upon above, that as actors we may have informative moral reactions to persons and acts that help indicate the nature of our moral reasoning even when we are unable to explain the nature of this reasoning via defensible propositions.

Taking this tradition seriously might lead to impossible paradoxes, were we not to, first, accept that there can be an *asymmetry* between our recognition of something as moral and our recognition of something as immoral. Few readers will disagree with us that slicing the faces of kindergarteners is a very bad thing to do, and when someone of sound mind does it, that person can be judged to be a bad person. Yet when we try to think of an archetypical *good* person, we do not think "someone who does not slice young children's faces." Indeed, we suggest that this is more generally true: that it is easier for us to determine the immorality of acts than their morality. It makes sense that social psychologists find evidence of such asymmetry (see Skowronski & Carlston, 1989 for a review); great badness comes from flagrant disregard of legitimate expectations, while there is a fracturing of its opposite. On the one hand, there is great conformity to legitimate expectations, which therefore does not provoke notice (it is what is expected). It is for this reason that experimental work suggests that subjects cannot distinguish "being good" from "not being bad." On the other hand, there are of course unusual acts of great moral worth—acts of self-sacrifice, unusual courage or altruism (e.g., non-directed organ donation to non-kin; see Brethel-Haurwitz & Marsh, 2014). These also may violate expectations (who expects you to run into a burning building to save a stranger?), but not *legitimate* expectations that provoke outrage or concern when violated.

This brings us to our second distinction—we propose that there is no reason to think that the processes whereby we (perhaps implicitly) assess the morality or immorality of *actions* is the same as that by which we assess the morality or immorality of *persons*. It may indeed be that there is a similarity in the judgment of immorality—it is easier to judge an immoral person on the basis of information about relatively few immoral acts. Persons may be good until proven bad, but the threshold at which immorality is established may be low. (As Mullaney, 1999 has pointed out, McGreggor need only have a single dalliance with a goat to be known forever after as McGreggor the goat-fucker.) However, it may well be that, in contrast to actions, persons are judged moral when their acts are predictably neutral. Thus, it might be that we find that moral people are not those who commit (disproportionately) many moral acts. When we ask ourselves if Joe is a good person, we probably are less interested in what sorts of exceedingly moral acts he has done, but whether, overall, we feel that he has integrity, honesty, we can rely on him, he does

what he promises, and he is the same to your face and behind your back. And yet he may never have sacrificed anything other than the opportunity costs (which might not even be there, if Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard is to be believed) of not stabbing one's friends in the back; "Duties," wrote Emile Durkheim (1961 [1902–3], p. 34), "are not fulfilled intermittently in a blaze of glory." Given these distinctions between judgments of acts and judgments of persons, between immorality and morality, we propose that the most promising direction for a theory of morality (both in terms of theoretical cogency and empirical adequacy) is one that builds upon the old theories of moral sensibilism, but follows Kant in theorizing a distinctive form of reflective judgment.

6.2 Moral Sensibilism

In an important essay in *Sociological Theory*, Iddo Tavory has tried to establish a "formalist position" on moral actions. Tavory defines the *moral action* as an action with two defining characteristics. First, the moral actions "define the self intersituationally and saliently." Second, moral actions arouse "predictable emotional reactions" from the self and others around them. This seems reasonable, but overly broad in that it would seem to include forms of action that would not evoke a specifically *moral* judgment (although it could be that Tavory would consider, say, admiration of technical proficiency—something that can define the self intersituationally and saliently and evoke predictable emotional reactions—as indeed moral). But Tavory goes further and argues that these moral reactions "may not necessarily be the actor's gut reactions, but may entail reflexive deliberation, where the actor attempts to ascertain what emotional reaction is appropriate in evaluating a specific self-definitional situation" (284). This is appealing, but we think that this distinction between "gut reactions" and reflexive *deliberation* is problematic, for, as the history of discussions of moral sensibilism and aesthetics showed (or so we believe), there is a form of *felt* (and not deliberated) reflexivity that is necessary for certain types of judgments. We go on briefly review this tradition of thought.

A wave of neo-Platonism swept through Europe in the early eighteenth century, starting with the Earl of Shaftesbury, but being codified by Frances Hutcheson in particular and accepted by other Scots like the common sensibilist Thomas Reid (for a remarkable discussion of this progression as it led to the notion of the beautiful soul, see Norton, 1995). Coming from a new enthusiasm for establishing parallels between the True, the Good and the Beautiful (here see Martin, 2017), thinkers argued that mentally healthy individuals had a capacity to recognize, via the informed senses, truth, and beauty in the world of objects, and goodness in the world of actions. What is crucial is that faith was placed on our capacity to use our own response—our feeling—as at least a provisional criterion for the goodness of an action. Where law and heart came into conflict—paradigmatically, in the case of a woman with a "beautiful soul" but a checkered past—one should listen to the heart.

This might seem to support the pseudo-evolutionary arguments that attempt to ground our moral sensibility in feelings of revulsion. However, the two are clearly not the same, as there are acts that would be judged revolting yet moral (e.g., giving CPR to a greasy old man who has recently vomited all over himself). Further, while the terms are often used interchangeably, scholars caution against conflating *emotions* with *gut reactions* (let alone pitting both against reason and rationality; e.g., Roeser, 2010, 2018; Cameron et al., 2015). For example, according to Haidt (2001), moral judgments are primarily formed by intuitive, gut reactions (a term generally used synonymously with "emotions"); rationality only enters in after the fact, as we rationalize and account for those judgments. The Moral Foundations Theory he supports posits one-to-one correspondences between specific moral content and discrete emotions (e.g., harm→ anger; purity→ disgust).

But Cameron et al. (2015) find little evidence that such correspondences actually exist. Instead, they suggest that any seeming links between

moral content and discrete emotions are most likely due to the fact that morality and emotion share general global features, and develop out of more basic, domain-general psychological processes (rather than from specific, dedicated biological mechanisms). These general processes involve core affect (generally unpleasantness, for the case of moral emotions) and conceptual knowledge (who or what is being harmed? How are they being harmed? For Cameron et al., a moral judgment thus consists of *both* core affect and conceptual knowledge, and not solely core affect (e.g., the spontaneous gut reaction).

Thus, any facile derivation of morals from core emotions appears to us at best incomplete. We suggest that insights can be drawn from the moral sensibilist tradition which, in a way, had a reverse movement from the evolutionary ones. Both saw a parallel between the nature of our capacity for moral judgment and the structures of the world, but while the evolutionary ones assumed that morality is a sublimated and refined version of reactions evolved to cope with the world, the moral sensibilist ones, based on the beneficence of the Creator, assumed that the world was deliberately made to comport itself to the sort of reason that we have.

For this reason, although both the nineteenth century Darwinian and eighteenth century sensibilist theories assumed a harmony between our faculties and the world, only the latter also made a claim to a sort of trans-natural validity. For this reason, the difference between revulsion and moral censure is, we propose, formally parallel to that established by Immanuel Kant (1987 [1790]) between the feeling of the *agreeable* and *aesthetic judgment*. Although both may begin with feeling, the former does not involve our believing that our judgment (e.g., "I like oatmeal") supports a claim of validity ("oatmeal truly is delicious, and I cannot but think someone deficient who does not agree with me"). Yet the statement of beauty is different from other intersubjectively valid statements ("a rose is a flower") in not being provable using subsumptive logic via concepts (given the definition of a flower, this particular object is a flower, QED). Instead, such judgments are made using what Kant (1974 [1800], p. 135) termed *reflective* judgment, which allows us to attach a particularity to a generality without determinate rules, in contrast to *determinate* judgment which used rules to go from the general to the particular. This sort of reflection is co-occurrent with the feeling, and not a backwards glance or conscious deliberation.

Further, Kant argued that while we recognize that it is not necessarily empirically the case that all will agree with us regarding our aesthetic judgments, we (or, at least, persons of sufficient cultivation) cannot be satisfied with disagreement in judgment—we seek a resolution, we seek intersubjective concordance. In so doing (here we turn to other work on aesthetics), we may attempt to persuade others by drawing their attention to aspects of the object under discussion, and we may make reference to abstract principles (such as "harmony"). However—and this is a central point—to the extent that we are defending specifically reflective aesthetic judgments of quality (and not, say, judgments of authorship, genre, or method), we use such terms in ways that generally lack a determinate meaning (the "harmony" of sculpture is not defined in the way harmony of tone is) (see, for one, Scruton, 1998 [1974]).

This reasoning helps us understand the error of the "values" approach; it is, in a word, that it substitutes an account involving *subsumptive* (or *determinate*) judgment where there can only be *reflective* judgment. It implies that there is a well-defined abstraction *universalism* from which one can *deduce* that this or that action or preference is in line with universalist values. Indeed, this is the very logic of the scales used. This is then to confuse the way in which at least some sorts of persons might attempt to *justify* their moral judgment with the processes by which they might *generate* it. Although we believe that this is an open question, we propose that current work in neuroethics suggests that moral response is indeed akin to the sort of parallel processing that allows for gestalt judgments such as that involved in the assessment of beauty. For instance, research has found that regions of the brain involved in moral judgements are also involved in facial aesthetic judgments (Wang et al., 2015), and that the experience of

mathematical beauty correlates with activity in regions of the brain—specifically, field A1 of the medial orbitofrontal cortex (mOFC)—that are active during the experience of moral beauty (Zeki et al., 2014).[10] mOFC activation patterns for positive aesthetic judgments and positive moral judgements, and insular activation patterns for negative aesthetic and negative moral judgments, have also been found to overlap within the same subjects (Takashi & Cabeza, 2011). While there is significant overlap in brain region activation for facial beauty judgements and moral judgments, moral beauty judgments involve a larger cortical network, which Wang et al. (2015) take as evidence that moral beauty is a more complex experience, with judgments involving areas of the brain associated with both perceptual processing *and* higher order functions (821).

There is also some intriguing current work in the intuitionist tradition that supports the notion that our intuitions may themselves be inherently cognitive and reflective. Roeser's "affectual intuitionism" (e.g., 2010, 2018) presents an alternative account of intuitions that fuses aspects of ethical intuitionism with a cognitive theory of emotions (e.g., Lazarus, 1991). Rather than treat *intuitions*, *emotions*, and *gut reaction* interchangeably, Roeser argues that moral emotions and intuitions are qualitatively distinct from the kinds of gut reactions that scholars like Haidt (e.g., 2001), and others following in the Moral Foundations Theory tradition (e.g., Feinberg et al., 2012), examine. Moral intuitions many indeed require emotional response,[11] and not be derivable from deductive argument, but that does not mean that they are bereft of a cognitive component. However, because they distill complexity into a felt experience of a quality of the world (an "intentional object" in philosophical terms), the objective, cognitive, and affective knowledge involved may resist being well explicated via the "additive" logic of propositional statements (84, 91, 94). Such an approach, we believe, is compatible with Cameron et al.'s (2015) critical examination of Moral Foundations Theory, with work in neuroethics (e.g., Wang et al., 2015, p. 822), and with the Kantian critique of judgment. Although such an account is currently sketchy and incomplete, it seems to us the most promising avenue for further explorations.

7 Conclusion

The sociology of morality must walk a thin line between having a vague definition of morality and an overly narrow one. The vague one has a large *extension* (many phenomena covered) and hence facilitates comparative analysis, but will not correspond to the *intention* of our concept (it may include forms of egoism or cruelty to the weak that are prized as expressions of strength in some societies). The problem with the narrow one is not that it restricts the range of comparison (precision is never to be feared in science), but that it leads to bias, as we academics increasingly define as the essence of morality our own self-conceptions. This is true both regarding the *content* of morality (e.g., it involves recycling and vague platitudes about tolerance) but also its *form* (it involves the commitment to justifying conduct in terms of abstractions).

We think that a good balance was struck by Durkheim: morality does involve a sense of *should*, and since such a sense is not universally moralized, we must accept the implication that while social regulation and social evaluation have been present everywhere, what we mean by morality is more restricted. However, the sense of *should* is not enough—it must be tied with a sense of the renunciation of self-gratification in the interest of the social. Finally, we admit that this conception still misses something, a sense of vague principles such as justice, decency, or humanity which are shared but

[10] mOFC damage has been linked to difficulties in making judgments of moral behavior (e.g., Ciaramelli et al., 2007), and reduced OFC gray matter volume is associated with increased psychopathy scores (e.g., De Oliveira-Souza et al., 2008).

[11] Damasio (1994) found that people with brain defects in parts of the amygdala fail to feel emotions and although they know *in general* what it is morally good and morally bad behavior, they fail to act in such ways in *concrete* situations (also see Nichols, 2004).

contested; sincerely held but creatively linked to situations by interested actors. Until the role such principles play is understood, we will not quite know what we mean by *morality*.

We believe that we can begin making progress in understanding the relation of such principles to moral judgments (and we do not rule out the possibility that we may not exhaust the missing aspects of morality by only focusing on moral *judgments*) by understanding them as *reflective* judgments—persons can argue with others about what is right in the same way they can argue about what is beautiful, but they recognize that they cannot *prove* this to others using concepts. Such was Arendt's (2003 [1971], p. 188f) conception, and we think it might be how sociologists must understand what the Durkheimian approach misses, the way in which self-concept and principle seem fused. Theorizing how such aspects of self-concept become matters of public concern, then, is a central, and unexplored, question for the sociology of morality.

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Is There Such a Thing as Moral Phenomenon, or Should We Be Looking at the Moral Dimension of Phenomena?

Alexandre Werneck

Abstract

This chapter aims to demonstrate that morality is neither a specific type of phenomenon—save in its metalinguistic dimension—nor corresponds to a particular kind of object. Instead, it constitutes a dimension of every social phenomenon. This is the dimension relating to the interpellation of actions/situations by social actors in terms of values. It is an unavoidable part of the effectuation (the observation of the effects) of actions and/or situations and thus of social life. Values here are the different forms assumed by the idea of good, which becomes the central variable in the effectuation of phenomena. This chapter then proposes a pragmatic and interpretive model for the sociology of morality. This approach emphasizes the forms through which actors define and operate morality, based on mapping the elements integral to this dimension, located in the intermediate space between valuative metaphysics (intersubjective abstraction) and situated pragmatics (concrete situations). Thus, there is as much morality to be analyzed in any social phenomenon—the forming of a couple, the adoption of a profession, or the decisions taken in a game—as there is in supposedly "traditional" objects of studies of moralities, such as genocide or, conversely, humanitarian actions.

Keywords

Morality · Moral dimension · Pragmatism · Effectuation · Moral situation · Social semiotics

1 Prolegomena

Allow me to begin with a beginning. In what is probably the most famous mythological image of the founding of morality, the Biblical scene of the Original Sin (Genesis 3),[1] we find Adam, the "first man," and Eve, the "first woman," being admonished by God for disobeying his order and tasting from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The outcome of this episode is well-known: Yahweh will expel the couple from Eden and impose various punishments with diverse symbolic impacts significant for the entire human species. On the serpent, who tempted both, "the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made," he imposes, among other punishments, the fact that the reptile will henceforth crawl on its own belly (before, it is told, the snake had legs). The myth's pedagogical

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[1] All biblical citations taken from *The Revised New Jerusalem Bible: Study Edition* (2019).

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content is clear: the originary morality consists of *obedience* to God. In other works (Werneck, 2012, 2014), I have explored the (strategic) contradiction fundamental to this narrative, highlighting the fact that it is only by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil that Adam and Eve become capable of knowing it is wrong to eat from it. But while at a simplistic level this contradiction might suggest nothing more than the tyranny of the Creator, who demands blind compliance, forbidding the only knowledge relevant to moral judgment, I explore how this mythological scene allows us to make explicit a fundamental point concerning morality, namely its *anthropological* dimension: it is a *cognitive capacity*[2]—a faculty integral to the perceptive/reflexive machinery of the human.[3] Adam and Eve *acquire* this faculty by eating from the tree and become capable of perceiving "that they were naked"—that is, that they did something wrong. This *moral capacity* (Boltanski & Thévenot, [1991] 2006), like any other capacity, consists of an available resource, able to be deployed if necessary, depending on the situations and the agencies of the actors.

This assertion, taken from a biblical text probably written in the fourth century BC and reflected in various other myths of various distinct traditions, including, for example, those of Babylonia and Greece (Ligier, 1960; Fokkelman, 1987; Minois, 2002), seems curiously in tune with more recent developments in biological anthropology and evolutionary psychology concerning the moral sense of *Homo sapiens* in its process of domestication (Wrangham & Peterson, 1996; De Waal, 2006, 2020; Turner, 2010; McCaffree, 2015; Wrangham, 2019; Hare & Woods, 2020). These works demonstrate precisely how the historical process of biological-social construction of the human also occurred through the *acquisition*, over the generations—in congruence with the idea of evolution grounded in natural selection—of a distinct and *self-constructed* moral sense, founded on containing aggressions and on managing empathy and the idea of good itself, which produced an imperative of mutual accountability and cross-valorizations and evaluations.

At the same time, however, the myth's symbolic narrative also allows us to discern a rather subtle point: although *apparently* showing a lack of moral capacity, the first couple is nonetheless capable of taking valuational decisions since they possess a fundamental element of agency, made explicit in the mythological text itself: free will. Make no mistake, here there are two terms with the same weight: it not only involves a manifestation of freedom but also an *imperative* to choose: Adam and Eve decide as they wish but *they have* to decide. Again the various millenary mythologies expressed here form part of the state of the art of twenty-first-century thought, this time in moral psychology: even without formal knowledge of good and evil, that is, without a clear understanding of a *grammar* of morality, the couple *intuit* what to do (as good, that is, as appropriate action)—because it is mandatory to do so to live with other people (in this specific case, Yahweh). Furthermore, this *intuitionist* model (Haidt, 2007, 2012), according to which the moral decision is taken a priori and is founded

[2] Digging into Weberian tradition and looking at the rationalization issue, Boudon (2010) also describes moral decisions as cognitive phenomena. My point, however, is less the content of this cognitive dimension and more that morality is, among others, a cognitive dimension, focusing on the "decisionist" mode of morally approaching the world by social actors.

[3] Here I am not claiming that this is an exclusively human characteristic, but rather a capacity integral to the defining matrix of humanity as a representation for humans themselves. This point is fundamental, in fact, since many approaches tend to characterize moral action simply as pro-social (in contrast to selfish action) and as various authors show—see De Waal (2020) for a summary—this is a characteristic widespread among mammals at the very least. What seems to be properly human (and a theme of a human science of morality) is that something that is patent among chimpanzees, bonobos, and mice *becomes a topic* among us humans (Berwick & Chomsky, 2017). The question is less whether we as a species possess a cognitive capacity called empathy but that this capacity, for us, is a question—which implies a series of social imperatives, among them accountability, as we shall see. Moreover, its questioning in occupying the same gray zone of doubt occupied in other species—save the similar/different or take the bit of food not being a question with an automatic response—precisely deactivates any simplistic determinism of behaviors, whether in mice, in 12-year-old boys, or in old women with walking sticks.

with the a posteriori valuative principle, is entirely consistent with an interpretation contained in the rudiments of classical and neoclassical sociology. I refer to the model proposed by Max Weber, for whom social actions can occur if they are imbued with meaning by humans, and its development in a sociology of social accountability (Mills, 1940; Scott & Lyman, 1968). However, this cognitivist claim—which frequently leads Weber to be erroneously depicted as a "methodological individualist"—is also requalified to be applicable to a social science: it does not consist of an individuated Cartesian operation of observation/interpretation. Instead, it involves a movement of *sociation*, placing this operation at a social scale. After all, an action "is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (Weber, [1922] 1978, p. 4). The question here is that this step will precede the other cognitively—in the sense that it will be conceived analytically *as if* (in typical-ideal terms) it had been a decision "thought out" prior to the "decision" to act: the actor may not have thought of it exactly before acting but, if the action occurred, it is as if it were imbued with that thought.

Before continuing this line of reasoning, however, a digression is required. When I speak of a *grammar* of morality, I am not making a mere metaphorical use of the term—as though a metaphorical use could, indeed, be called mere. Rather, I am adopting a generative taking (Chomsky, 1965) of the concept, consistent with a pragmatist/pragmatic approach that has guided my work: grammar here is understood as a coherent framework of behavioral modeling based on *competence*: that is, the resourceful use of patterns of actuation that are established ideally but are not completely obligatory. In this kind of grammatical model, the question is not whether those involved strictly obey closed norms, but whether they show themselves to be *resourceful* in manipulating them creatively, obtaining the effectivity of behavior. Boltanski and Thévenot ([1991] 2006, p. 144) define *competence* within a framework fully consistent with a sociology of morality, as a capacity "to recognize the nature of a situation and adapt to it." In another text (Werneck, 2015, p. 163), I proposed an alternative definition (though coordinated with the definition of the authors), treating it as "a feature demonstrated in situated actions, highlighting its allocation within a determined moral (. . .) grammar, as a measure of resourcefulness in rules that verify the criteria through which the action or situation becomes concretized; that is, the criteria sought in actions/situations when one verifies whether they can or cannot be effectuated." In other words, competence is the value involved in the evaluation that actors make when scrutinizing a social phenomenon to make it happen. In this kind of grammar, people are impelled to act creatively based on established patterns so as to conform to the terms set by these patterns, as close as possible to their ideal version, but in a more efficient way for the ultimate purpose of any grammar, which is to adjust the various behaviors among themselves, enabling them to be positioned in common.

Another fundamental topic to deal in these prolegomena concerns the role of the pragmatism/pragmatic approaches in the treatment presented here. As several authors show (Mills, 1964; Joas, 1993; Céfaï & Joseph, 2002), pragmatism has played a relevant role as background of various sociological approaches. That influence is present whether in the clear heirs, such as that of the vast set of visions known as Chicago School—cf. Becker (1999)[4]—or in those where the influence is more perceptible in the order of elective affinities, as in the so-called French *sociologie pragmatique*—cf. Boltanski and Thévenot (1987, [1991] 2006).[5] Several more

[4] In general, I have preferred to avoid the consecrated expression "symbolic interactionism," proposed by Herbert Blumer (1969). It is externally quite functional to point to a "school." However, agreeing with Howard S. Becker (1999), I consider it insufficient to account for all the pragmatist influence stemming from the sociological deployment of Peirce, Dewey, and Mead's treatment. Thus, I will speak of pragmatist sociologies to refer to the various approaches taken from them.

[5] The relation between philosophical pragmatism and American pragmatist sociologies, on the one hand, and French "sociologie pragmatique (de la critique)," on the other, is controversial. It is not difficult to see pragmatist

recent treatments focus on Dewey (1938) and his pair problematic situation/inquiry—cf. Bargheer (2018, 2022); Dromi and Stabler (2019); Gorski (2022). Here, I emphasize three essential features of the pragmatism closer to Charles S. Peirce: (1) his epistemological consequentialism, (2) his methodological situationism, and (3) his analytical bidimensionality. I will describe the core elements of this arrangement later. For now, it is worth exploring some elements of these three topics.

Regarding the first topic, the emphasis is on adopting the idea of *effectuation* (the perception of effects) as defining variable of social phenomena. Regarding the second, it is about adopting the *situation* as a privileged analytical unit and, following the interpretation of William Thomas ([1923] 1969), adopting the "definition of the situation" as central element. Finally, on the third, it is about, following the mirroring between a semiotic treatment and a behavioral treatment, reading social situations as moments of adjustment between signs in the pragmatic dimension and abstract contents in the metaphysical dimension. Thus, the point is understanding the *interpretants* of these situations as sociological variables. This triadic perspective offers an understanding of morality as a dimension of all social phenomena. That perspective allows to observe morality without falling back into a micro/macro dichotomy (Knorr-Cetina, 1981): since these elements spread out multidimensionally, one can think about the moral game within people, between people, between people and macro-actors (such as the State), between macro-actors, and so on. Finally, this treatment is not intended to exclude others—such as several proposed in the two volumes of this handbook and other works (cf. Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). It instead intends to compose with them a complex analytical system in which agential elements, actantial/behavioral elements, and structural elements come together like, let us say, characters and objects of scenes of the great play called morals.

Returning to our multi-mythological scene, this is obviously not a theological text, nor do I intend to show how the foundations of the sociology of morality are contained in Judeo-Christian mythology, or in Babylonian, Greek, or any other. But from our brief tour of the elective affinities between ancestry and contemporary analytic conclusions, we can comprehend morality as a three-dimensional phenomenology in anthropological and sociological terms: (1) it is a cognitive faculty focused on action (which indicates whether an action is good or not); (2) it is a pragmatics of action (which allows an intuitive decision on whether an action is good or not); and (3) it is a grammar (i.e., a metaphysics) of action (which maps "knowledge of good and evil" for actors as a guide to action). Firstly, this implies recognizing that human beings find themselves immersed in an unavoidably moralized common existence, permeating this entire three-dimensional matrix. Secondly, it implies comprehending that this matrix reveals a dense pact between *cognition*, *pragmatics* of interactions, and *metaphysics* of intersubjectivities, which once again testifies to an ample participation of morality in social life. We can see, therefore, that although phenomena that can be called "moral" are observable in each of these dimensions, they are so in basal mechanistic terms: it is in what each one shows as

features such as *situationism* and *consequentialism* in the "economies of worth" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1991]) approach—and in authors such as Bruno Latour (1988) even before that. However, the original French approach's vision of pragmatics seems to have more to do with linguistic pragmatism than with the philosophy of Peirce, James, Dewey, or Mead—which Boltanski and Thévenot even declare. Only a new generation, formed within the former Groupe de Sociologie Politique et Morale (GSPM) of École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, would propose a more robust dialogue with that philosophy, especially with John Dewey—cf. Chateauraynaud (2011). For a dense (and critical) description of this issue, see Breviglieri and Stavo-Debauge (1999), and Stavo-Debauge (2012). For an analysis on how pragmatist pragmatic sociology can be, cf. Bogusz (2014), and Corôa (2021, pp. 55–90); for a blueprint of the elements of pragmatist sociology and its inflection in the French current, cf. Corrêa (2014). For a properly pragmatist sociology within the French scenario, see Céfaï and Joseph (2002). Me, I am less interested in the historical-bibliographical connection between these different lineages and more in the tools capable of operationalizing effective pragmatist sociology.

valuational that they define themselves as such. Thus, it involves something similar to thinking about (to take a simple biological metaphor) cytology, defined as a foundation for explaining how cells function, but situated behind the scenes of another area, histology, in which tissues—complex compositions of cells—appear as protagonists at another level. The aim here, therefore, is to relate the effective dimension of a moral phenomenology to that matrix, the composition of these axes. In sum, the objective of this chapter is to characterize the sociology of morality as *one of the areas of the social sciences dedicated to a dimension of all social phenomena not to a specific type of phenomenon*.

Our mythological scene also enables us to think about a dichotomy widely associated with the moral in sociology, a dichotomy relating to the question of agency cited earlier. On the one hand, morality is frequently presented as an apparatus of agential intervention, as a framework of norms whose objective is to limit (whether through restriction or prescription) the behaviors of social actors. Moreover, this can be approached either as a productive version of that modulation—like in Durkheim ([1893] 2014, [1887] 1993) or in various political sociologies, likes those of Bendix ([1964] 2017), Giddens (1976), or Tilly (1989)—or critically—as for example, in Elias ([1939] 2000), Bourdieu ([1972] 1977), or Foucault ([1975] 1995). On the other hand, morality can be conceived as nature itself in which actions take place, comprising an operative foundation for social interactions/relations, a motor or element intrinsic to them. This is fairly clearly apparent in interpretive approaches—in Mills (1940) for instance, or Goffman (1966), Boltanski and Thévenot ([1991] 2006), and (curiously perhaps) in various tendencies of critical theory, especially in the works of theorists of recognition like Honneth ([1992] 1996) and Taylor (1992).

This chapter, then, takes a side: just as one cannot breathe without air (and one cannot call air fascist because of this fact), so one cannot act without morality. It is thus an intrinsic component of what defines the social itself—or an action as social (the "tak[ing] account of the behavior of others" in Weber's classic definition, aforementioned). Metaphorically taking advantage of the myth with which I began the discussion, morality spreads through our life together like the air blown into the nostrils of the original dust being, like the atmosphere without which almost nothing lives, whether to establish it as a being or to serve as an environment. It is in everything that happens undertaken by humans "in the plural" (Thévenot, 2006), whether consciously or unconsciously, since everything that happens *among humans*—that is, in the social—necessarily passes through a combination of inquiry/questioning and valuative effectuation, implicitly or explicitly.[6]

The basic claim here, therefore, is that it is not a matter of asking whether a social phenomenon is moral or not, but of inquiring into how the moral dimension of each discrete social phenomenon functions. We must begin, then, by rejecting the idea that the sociology of morality is dedicated exclusively to objects like, on the one hand, glaring "immoralities"—such as genocide, cannibalism in modern societies, crime, "heterodox" sexual behaviors, or injustices—or, on the other, "kind" or "generous" actions—such as humanitarian movements, care, organ donations, or the essence of the altruism. All these objects are good to think about morality and appear recurrently in this line of inquiry. Far be it for me to reject them as possible objects—which is open for various determinants (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013; Abend,

[6] That is not to say that I advocate an acritical naivety that closes its eyes either to how moral phenomenology includes intervention in the agency of others or to the uses of morality by processes of domination. This happens, cannot be ignored, and must indeed be integrated into this sociology. What I reject here is what I have called elsewhere (Werneck, 2021) "the problem of the "really"," the idea that the moral is reducible to other phenomena "really" in course. In other words that it is merely a rhetorical mask to euphemize the real state of relations—whatever this state may be, for example, in the view of so-called critical approaches to domination, conflict, or order. Instead, morality needs to be recognized as a dimension inseparable from the effectuation of social phenomena. This position regards the moral in all its amplitude, including all phenomena contained in its agenda, without adopting any moral principle beyond understanding (*Verstehen*) as a basis for the analysis.

2014). What I wish to emphasize here is the complexification of the sociology of morality as something irreducible to a moralist reading of morality—that is, a reading in conformity with established moralities. These objects are indeed important because they more readily make explicit moral problematics engaged in by actors themselves. As themes, they are good because they reveal limit situations in which actors make a special effort to reflect on the good. But they are not exclusively so. When it comes to thinking about morality, stock exchange transactions or a presidential election, the choices of art objects, stand-up comedy jokes, or decisions in a videogame are all just as good as these objects.

2 What, After All, Is Morality? Or the Object of This Sociology, the Good

One of the most fundamental questions—perhaps the most fundamental?—in undertaking a sociology of morality is to define what, ultimately, morality and the moral are. As a task, it will be the starting point of almost any text in this handbook, even if just implicitly. Furthermore, even if it is deliberately and openly rejected (adopting indefiniteness as a deconstructive stance), this question haunts the discussion and a definition is made still in some form, contained in the choice of objects and so on. Moreover, these movements are just as evident in the works of pioneering authors[7] as they are in those of contemporaries, as Abend (2010) has demonstrated. Rather than seek to produce a literature review of these diverse movements,[8] I intend to concentrate on a pragmatic definition: actors define morality with their actions, following varying frameworks, in accordance with different regimes (Boltanski & Thévenot, [1991] 2006).

The relevant point here is the common element between these various possible regimes, the idea that the moral is a *dimension* in which a key portion of the *effectuation* of social phenomena takes place—that is, their passage to fact. As I demonstrated in Werneck (2023), where I argue for a pragmatist approach, this passage is defined by its production of effects, consequences, congruent with the "Peirce maxim" (as called by his partner in crime William James): "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (Peirce, [1878] 1992, p. 132). The moral dimension of effectuation concerns the fact that this operation, by being inserted in and/or referring to the social, must include the *evaluation* of the actors concerning the basis for something to be effectuated, which signifies that they ponder this something evaluatively, "allowing" its effectuation or "giving it their approval." This corresponds to treating such effectuation as the good. In my first book (Werneck, 2012), I described the moral as the dimension of social phenomenology in which *management of the good* takes place, that is, the dimension in which actors define *the direction toward which the good moves* (*for whom* it is destined) and by means of which the effectuation of social phenomena in general unfolds.[9] Since this approach is fundamentally pragmatist, then, the "good" will also be related here to effects and, as I demonstrated in the same work, to effectivity, the passage to fact,

[7] Like Harriet Martineau ([1838] 2018), Émile Durkheim ([1887] 1993), or Georg Simmel ([1893] 2022).

[8] For such a review, see the text by Abend just cited.

[9] In this model, I call attention to the fact that social actors ask less about what is done and more about in whose benefit something is done. Hence, I proposed a framework of regimes of effectuation of the good, determined as follows: own good, other's good, common good, everyone's good, and "all good"—the latter referring to a state of belief (Peirce, [1878] 1992) in which the actors do not problematize the direction. These regimes are articulated within a matrix along another axis, the degree of particularity, with points on a scale from greatest equalization (the universal) to greatest particularization (the absolute singular), enabling actors to evaluate the most effective as an adequate composition between a direction of the good (or a composition between two or more) and a point on the scale of particularity. A deeper discussion of this model is beyond the scope of the present chapter. See Werneck (2012, pp. 267–316, especially the schema on page 308).

of an action *in favor of a beneficiary recognizable as such*.

In this way, the problematic shifts to the actors and to *how they treat well what they consider to be the/a good*. This approach offers the advantage of allowing analytic relativization without falling into simplistic relativisms: the social scientist needs to be attentive to the fact that—let us deploy the "standard" example—Nazism cannot be treated scientifically as an abomination *in itself* and at the same time be aware that scientifically we cannot close our eyes to the fact that "almost everyone" considers Nazism abominable—analyzing precisely the grounds for attributing this adjective.[10,11]

The good, therefore, is constituted as an anchor of the analysis of the moral. It is the true theme of this sociology. Nonetheless, it comprises a sociological object that is simultaneously solid and slippery: social actors always insist on giving it another name, making use of it in a delegated form: from the grand abstract idea of the good, the idea of a discrete good is metonymized by the idea of *value*, of something *valuing* (being valuable) *in terms* of something (a value). A reflection of this kind, involving the "study of values and evaluations" (Céfaï et al., 2015), obviously implies a reflection on the concept of value itself, an enterprise undertaken from the classics like Simmel ([1908] 2011) or Marx (Ash, 1964) to more contemporary approaches (Kluckhohn, 1951; Baier, 1973; Heilbroner, 1983; Graeber, 2001; Rezsohazy, 2006; Pedersen, 2008; De Lastic, 2014; Brosch & Sander, 2016). Here I focus on the idea of an *axiological sociology* (Heinich, 2017): value is an *attribute* associable with "things, persons, actions and states of the world" (Heinich, 2017, p. 140). But to adopt this idea, I first borrow from the aforementioned classic treatment of Weber ([1922] 1978), where value is a layer of *meaning*, a key to his sociology of action. In this key, the term *value* expresses a particular type of meaning, that which, constructed as *worth* (Boltanski & Thévenot, [1991] 2006; Heinich, 2017), subjectable to mediation and comparison, expresses the *importance attributed to something*, in the form of a quantity of this worth—and this importance becomes the privileged form of the effectuating meaning of something. It thus comprises *a name of the good*, with each distinct value comprising one of its forms, imbuing things with quantities of this good and allowing them to be compared. In an interpretive model, therefore, actors are called upon to legitimize, *effectuate* (Werneck, 2012, 2023) an action/situation—and, by extension of meaning, everything that serves it as a sign, through the demonstration of its imbuing with one of these forms of good, with values. This might be honor or beauty, justice, US$ 10 or US$ 40,000, or it may be its significative character—any sign that allows something to be said to have more or less of it than something else, attributing it comparative importance and allowing it to be said that a particular path of agency in a social phenomenon is adequate, the good to be followed.

Allow me, then, to quickly summarize the fundamentals of Weber's thought: the starting point resides in his reflection on the relationship between value (*Wert*) and meaning (*Sinn*). For the author ([1922] 1978), the foundation of *understanding* (*Verstehen*) begins with a considerably nihilistic affirmation: nothing makes sense a priori. In other words, nothing has automatic permission to be included in the world (the portion of existence intermediated by thought) and to be considered appropriate—in his view, humans seem to be motivated by a *will to meaning*, a *semiophilia*, we might say, by an imperative to

[10] Once again, I turn to my colleague Gabriel Abend (2010) and his invaluable allegory of the sociologist called Jones (pp. 574–575). Obviously, I am not saying here that I do not consider Nazism to be abominable (I do); I am simply using it as an extreme example of a behavior to be scientifically observed irrespective of the moral judgment attributed to it by people.

[11] In this key, while good can be objectified—as the effectiveness resulting from the judgment of actors—bad or evil becomes an attribute posed by people in situation (what is good for someone who disagrees with the principle of moral effectuation adopted by someone else). This does not mean that, as a social construction, it is not habitually deployed and is not a prodigious object of study. In this case, the question becomes: what makes something bad/evil for the actors involved in the evaluation, whatever the amplitude of this judgment?

assuage this nihilism, which inserts the thinker not only in the neo-Kantian tradition of Rickert (Ringer, 1998) and in a certain Nietzschean horizon, but also in a field of influence of the pragmatism of Peirce ([1878] 1992) and James (1907). This delegates to humans the process of imbuing objective things with a spirit (*Geist*), an abstract material that, by occupying bodies divested of meaning, allows them the effective existence. It is as though Weber were proposing a social semiotics: things, to share the world with humans, need to make sense, which they cannot do a priori, and thus they need to become as though meaningful and filled with meaning, the substance of which is abstract. This phenomenon, for the author, is imminently social. Although the operation involves defining a "subjective meaning," this can only be operated from an objective perspective, that of intersubjectivity: no meaning is appropriate if it is not the result of a common interpellation. From this it follows that forms, on being interpellated, need to be so vis-à-vis humans, which is why this amounts to a sociology of action: things make sense for us insofar as *they do something*[12] and this *doing* occupies the core of social life. Hence, the actors in their discussions on meaning are basically concerned with the actions of one another.

At the same time, however, this operation cannot be conceived as merely a subjectivist semiotics nor be reduced to a fundamentalist adequation between signs (forms) and objects (contents) (Peirce, [1903] 1998): the link between a meaning and a thing stems from a selection, since what something or someone does may not possess the same importance for everyone. This makes meaning not only a content, but also a *valuative* content; that is, a designation that states that something is congruent with respect to a determined worth (that which matters can be done, which is good in these terms). It follows that interpretive sociology is anchored in *values*, in those worths deployed by agents to lend meaning to the actions before them, resulting in an interplay of interpellations and offers of meaning, which will see Weberian sociology develop into a sociology of accounts (Mills, 1940; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Werneck, 2012).

The emphasis on this operation of signification/valuation suggests that one especially productive form of thinking about the moral is the adoption of a *methodologically situationist* approach (Cicourel, 1964; Collins, 1981; Joseph, 1984). The starting point of much of the discussion on the moral is a circumscription in space and time—a *situation*—in which the good is decided/managed. From this arises a specific situation in which it is decided which value is good for the situation and whether what happens within it agrees or disagrees with this value (or these values).

The analysis thus begins with the idea, proposed by William I. Thomas ([1923] 1969, p. 42), of "definition of the situation" as "a stage of examination and deliberation (...) [p]reliminary to any self-determined act of behavior" and that states *what is happening there* (Werneck, 2012, 2023). *Consequentialism*, the emphasis on effects proposed by Peirce, would allow the couple William and Dorothy Thomas to make their classic (and sometimes misunderstood)[13] affirmation: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, [1928] 1938, p. 572); in other words, what allows humans to define situations in some form (and to effectively experience them as "real" in practice) is the observation of some objective consequence of this definition. Furthermore, as I have put it elsewhere (Werneck, 2023, p. 4), emphasizing the anti-Cartesian nature of the argument, this does not correspond to "a psychological and/or idealist mechanics—according to which we can pre-define the situation as whatever we want it to be and that is what it will be like." Instead, it comprises an imperative of *action* and *sociability* simultaneously. A definition is not simply a verbal nomination: it is linked to practice, objective reality, manifested by conforming

[12] Obviously, definitions are included in this framework since their fundamental element, being, is a verb and presumes an action.

[13] Here I refer to the nickname of the "Thomas Theorem" and its erroneous interpretation as a description of "self-fulfilling prophecies" (Merton, 1948).

to action. At the same time, though, as we have seen, it is not the work of an individual rationality but rather of a process of *communitarian* scrutiny and testing (Dewey, 1938): a situation socially defined as being of a particular type is so because it *works* as such when tested as such by those who thereby question its definition. At the same time, it has to function objectively (independently of those involved) but this fact has to be perceptible to those involved on a shared basis. Along the lines of what John Dewey (1938) called an "inquiry," therefore, the actors undertake movements to define situations practically and make reality happen. In the same text just cited (Werneck, 2023), I showed how this situationist movement suggests a fundamental inversion to explain social phenomena: since "[the] degree [*of effectivity*] of a situation is measured by its capacity to produce effects (. . .), if we observe an effect, it is an index [Peirce, [1903] 1998] of the definition of the situation in which it is inserted (and can only be determined *a posteriori*)": every situated phenomenon is now conceived as a consequence of something and the objective of the research becomes precisely to understand its process of production from this something. From the viewpoint of an analysis of morality, moreover, a fundamental portion of the "causes" of the observed consequence resides in the valuation dimension.

The equation between consequentialism, situationism, and the social-empiricist nature of understanding the world inherent to pragmatism thus focuses on the mechanics through which actors, by jointly defining situations in which they find themselves together, we could say, *allow*—as in interpretive sociology (Helle, 2005)—actions to occur within these situations, perceived by the axiologism constructed here as a fundamentally *moral* question. Evaluating whether an action is appropriate, whether it makes sense, does not correspond to a simple semiotics (an association between forms and meanings) but to a moral semiotics (an association between forms and meanings-values). Actions are approved by actors based on whether they conform or not to frameworks of value, whether they are good vis-à-vis some criterion (value). This implies a sociology that sets out to understand the role performed by morality in the most basic phenomenology of social life, its mechanics of action—and, ultimately, of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), since this gives rise to the question of what becomes *decisive* for this development (Werneck, 2014). As a result, as I said earlier and as I have attempted to demonstrate, morality is interpreted as "a set of forms of making possible actions and situations of/in social life" rather than as an "apparatus limiting undesired actions" (Werneck, 2014), as some traditional approaches to morality advocate. The obstacle to this undertaking is that the habitual focus of various approaches on the determinant valuative *contents* in this process eclipses the phenomenon as *form*, able to be operated whatever this content may be. Furthermore, an emphasis on this form (without neglecting the mapping of contents, treated as "values of the variables" in a study interested in the "equations") would allow the construction of a broader gallery of moral phenomena, with an emphasis on mechanics, on the form in which *grammars* of morality are adapted to concrete situations through moralized *elements* that *appear* in them (Werneck, 2021). Hence the need to work with its most basic and neutral question, the verification and/or measurement of its production of effects, its *effectivity*. Even approaches such as Weber's exploration of meanings (which emphasizes legitimacy), Mills' proposal (1940) to study the vocabularies of motives in light of the German thinker, or the *economies of worth* (EW) approach proposed by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (1987, [1991] 2006) (focused on justification), among the most fertile for analyzing the mobilizations of frameworks of values by social actors, are marked by an emphasis on contents in terms of specific remarkable values: they concentrate on forms oriented by certain values.[14] For this definition, therefore, the action of a "modest sociologist" is necessary

[14] In the case of EW, for example, the emphasis is on justice through the choice of justification as a key variable, justice as a central value and the common good as a privileged directing of the good.

to potentialize a sociology "ambitious" in its scope (Werneck, 2023): by presuming a plurality of grammars in the sociology of morality strictly linked to the production of consequences of/in the definitions of a situation, the sociologist, by not setting out from a single morality, shifts to taking into consideration various orientations of the good equally and variably appropriate for the actors in these *evaluations*—that is, comparative ponderations in terms of evaluating the chosen value—and, with this, various principles of the good. Moreover, this demands a disposition to treat as moral any valuative principle capable of making the social situation a producer of consequences, a producer of effects, *effective*, with every socially experienced effectuation being permeated by a moral dimension.

This movement, therefore, not only diverts the analysis away from moralist biases produced by the overlaps between sociological projects and political philosophies or from potential naturalizations of premises of universality, but also it allows us to take seriously the project of a praxeology/axiology in which the question becomes: how do social actors themselves construct, all the time and conjointly, the conditions under which their contacts become possible, whether in momentary encounters (interactions) or in more long-term relationships (relations), mobilizing the valuative/moral dimension for this purpose? This does not mean naively adopting the representations of social actors as analyzes in themselves nor denying the impacts of certain structural determinants on this process. Rather, it means adopting a privileged object and an epistemological project, taking what one sees happening, every social phenomenon before one's eyes, every objective fact, as a *consequence* of a moral process. In other words, it signifies considering that if something effectively occurred, it is because this something is a consequence of a *situation* defined (and prior to this, constructed) mutually by actors—however problematic this may be among them—and, on this basis, retracing its constitutive elements, with special emphasis on the dimension in which the interpellation of this process occurs in terms of the good/values: its characters, its devices, the actions involved, its mechanics (evaluations, disputes, conflicts, agreements, etc.), and—especially for the project of a sociology of morality—arriving at the valuative/evaluative processes mobilized and the forms of adjustment between them and other elements, making explicit their impact, their role in effectuation.[15]

As I previously stated, therefore, the analysis can be initially referred to a discrete situation, one that makes explicit the element of ponderation, by persons, in terms of value(s) (of a form of good), of the possibility of effecting a definition of the situation. This situation, as I shall outline, can be divided into three, each containing a form of the question of values:

1. *Valuation*: the interpretive qualification of things according to valuative frameworks: this involves the choice of the criterion of interpellation of the *effectiveness* of something (that is, pointing out under what terms something represents the good). As far as an approach to morality as a generative grammar is concerned, this involves defining the *competence* in which actors are invited to show themselves resourceful. *Obedience* to Yahweh or human *freedom*? *Efficacy* or *beauty*? *Cost* or *creativity*, *honor* or *fidelity*, *justice* or *piety*? As can be seen, this portion of the issue already implies an effectuation and thus an evaluative interpellation among the actors: defining what value matters in the situation, what good is in question, entails deciding what value among diverse values is worth more (is a better good, we might say).
2. *Evaluation*: the ponderation of the magnitude of the worth of something according to a value and/or a pondered comparison between different things based on this same criterion: this involves measuring how much something A is worth in terms of value B, and, in the latter case, the definition that either thing C or D presents more of value B, making it more valuable than the other according to this

[15] This is consistent with the entire cited sociological tradition that evinces an imperative of accountability as a constitutive feature of social life (Mills, 1940; Scott & Lyman, 1968).

parameter.[16] Nevertheless, we are talking about the very essence of the valuative interpellations: among the different possible paths of action in a situation, which one is worth most—or is simply worth something—in terms of the value considered adequate there and thus makes this agency effective? Does filling out a report express the efficiency defined as a criterion of valuation in the office in question better than presenting the results orally? Does the choice of candidate A rather than candidate B better express civic representativity? Does giving a hand-out, "giving the man a fish," rather than working toward a long-term solution, "teaching the man to fish," better express the desired good in the form of the "good of everyone" of "social justice?" Does killing someone who killed, taking an "eye for an eye," express justice better than the pair prison/resocialization? The list is endless and comprises the most prolific empirical substrate of the interpretive sociology of morality, posing the question: *how*—which expresses many sociological variables—do social actors evaluate the forms of agency on their horizon?

3. *Valorization*: the recognition and/or amplification of the evaluation value of something according to the criterion chosen in the valuation: this involves measuring how much A may become more valuable, whether this has been noted or not, after the addition of value B. This is a matter of thinking about how actors engage in the operation of altering the evaluation of something. Of course, the inverse and intuitive operation of *devalorization* (when the value is reduced) is also included here: after some time and some "moral entrepreneurship" (Becker, [1963] 2018), a behavior treated as bad according to one criterion may be treated as good and vice-versa, or something may come to have more or less value according to another criterion. For example, a cultural product (a film, let us say) that critics consider to be merely "commercial" may acquire the status of a "major work" over time; or smoking marijuana may move from a "deviant behavior" and a "gateway to heavier drugs" to an inoffensive practice of "cannabis culture" and even a valuable medical treatment for incapacitating illnesses. In the opposite direction, smoking cigarettes shifts from being a sign of elegant hedonism and freedom to a health-damaging behavior and an index of environmental anachronism.

Continuing the argument, then, studying morality means studying the mechanics through which this process of imbuing any action/situation with meaning in accordance with these three operations takes place, either separately or combined, considering the valuative dimension of this meaning—that is, its translation as a good for some beneficiary and its possible effectiveness in an environment whose starting point is the recognition of a morally complex social life, permeated by a variable—and analytically mappable—framework of moral grammars.

3 Conclusion: Toward a Permanent Outlining, or What Will the Sociology of Morality Talk About?

Empirically and analytically conscious of the moral pluralism of the world, and yet simultaneously conscious that social actors may reject this plurality in their actions and discourses, whether because they do not discern it or because they "simply" reject it (in quote marks since there is nothing simple about this action, making it an especially privileged object of this sociology), the sociology of morality is also faced with the fact that it is faced with two pluralisms. The first is metaphysical in kind: social life has been capable of producing and maintaining a gigantic number of moral grammars, although some of them, like

[16] The traditional, almost mandatory, comparison between moral values and financial values finds an explicit space here since the market grammar (Smith, [1776] 1991; Boltanski & Thévenot, [1991] 2006, pp. 43–61) is expressed as a ground plan of the process itself—even implying a moral tension between the two poles of the comparison (Zelizer, 2007; Abercrombie, 2020).

the grammars of justice and piety (Arendt, [1963] 2006; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1987, [1991] 2006), occupy a certain hegemonic place in modern life. The other is pragmatic in kind: social life is prodigious in multiplying the types of situations, contexts, circumstances, devices, and so on that we face (Austin, 1956–1957; Werneck, 2012).[17] As a result, the sociologist is faced both with him/herself and the actors facing the distance and difference between the ideal (and idealism) of the grammar and the demands of experience.

This constant disparity between utopia and concrete experience, between metaphysics and pragmatics, may result in two paths: on the one hand, it implies an irreconcilable *Weltschmerz* in the actors (which, of course, also becomes an object for the sociologist) and/or in the researcher (which may result in a simplistic and somewhat unproductive nihilistic posture); on the other, it instills a specific curiosity concerning *metapragmatics* (Werneck, 2012, 2015)—the grammatical management precisely of this distance between metaphysics and pragmatics—and with the operations of *adjustment* from which, ultimately, social life is made: "in the plural" (Thévenot, 2006), we are simultaneously the progenitors and progeny of this game of trial and error that consists of concretizing in the concrete world worldviews conceived in the abstract and of projecting and modeling in this abstract world valued/evaluated/valorized concrete experiences. Like the Weberian sociology of action (and the various comprehensive and situationist sociologies explored here: see Helle, 2005), the sociology of morality proposed in this chapter is not a mere observation of so-called moral actions, but an operation of *connection* between actions—practical life—and an abstract mental/emotional substrate (a *Geist*) and of *the work demanded* to establish this connection.[18]

Consequently, we are talking about a more general framework of analysis whose main elements would be as follows:

1. Apprehension, annotation, characterization, mapping, and historiography/genealogy of the *moral grammars* available in a determined universe.
2. Apprehension, annotation, characterization, mapping, and historiography/genealogy of the *typical relations between available moral grammars* and *actions*, *situations*, *coordinated sets of actions*, *actors*, and so on—in a micro or macro sense (institutional structures, cultures, entire societies, and so on).[19]
3. Apprehension, annotation, characterization, mapping, and historiography/genealogy of a *set of specific situations*, namely, those relating to the valuative dynamic, representing its metalanguage: valuation, evaluation, valorizations, and their specific manifestations and in their role as bridge between grammars and situations (metaphysics and pragmatics).
4. Apprehension, annotation, characterization, mapping, and historiography/genealogy of a *set of metalinguistic operations of these actions* (accountability, verification, judgment, and so on).
5. Apprehension, annotation, characterization, mapping, and historiography/genealogy of a set of metonymic elements of the moral dimension, especially the relation between emotions/cognition and valuation/action and the relation between moralities and identities (Mead, 1934).

[17] I explored this discussion at length in my book *A desculpa* (Werneck, 2012), in which I analyze how circumstances perform a fundamental role in social life by making explicit the tension between the metaphysical/moral dimension and the pragmatic/experiential dimension.

[18] Whether short-term or long-term. The first case concerns analyses of the variable character experienced on the basis of pluralism, the switching (*basculement*: Boltanski [1990] 2012) between moral grammars/competences that enables an understanding of how the disputes between and in the context of moral frameworks take place. The second case corresponds to what we could call solidification, the naturalization of certain moral/contextual/situational/actantial associations in memory/culture, "structuring" certain forms as endemic.

[19] This set of questions also benefits from an advantage provided by thinking through the valuative dimension: a greater complexity in terms of the micro versus macro dichotomy, which becomes merely a question of scale within the same phenomenology rather than an analytic determinant (Knorr-Cetina, 1981).

6. Obviously, apprehension, annotation, characterization, mapping, and historiography/genealogy of *those phenomena considered by the actors themselves as "typically moral"*—as I cited, "obviously bad" phenomena, like certain crimes, certain "perverse" behaviors, or disrespect of human rights, on the one hand, and, on the other, "obviously good" phenomena like humanitarian action, altruism, and the mobilization for human rights—taking advantage of their metalinguistic capacity to make explicit/serve as a metonymy for the other dimensions of this framework. As I stated earlier, although the sociology of morality cannot be in any way reduced to them, it cannot ignore them either, including to privilege a fundamental question as an object: what moral dynamic is implied in the construction of this evident character?

Consequently, that modest sociologist of morality builds a specific "toolbox" for thinking about the actors in their joint actions (Freire, 2013) and is set to thinking in a state of perennial outlining, since actors, although attaching themselves to abstract frameworks in an extremely intensive form, exercising various kinds of moralism, also vary hugely in their own native sociological exercise: they produce multiple competing social theories on which they base their behaviors. In this state, the modest sociologist can undertake his or her more ambitious analyses: once he or she becomes aware of analyzing a dimension of any social phenomenon—which is social insofar as it is moral, since the mutual behavioral valuation/evaluation is precisely constitutive of the nature of the social—the sociologist can fix his or her analytic place (outside their own values, without pretending not to have any) and set about studying how this dimension operates as a world in itself.

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Part II

Organizations, Organizational Culture, and Morality

Where Law and Morality Meet: Moral Agency and Moral Deskilling in Organizations

Carol A. Heimer

Abstract

Law and morality are two distinct ways that we think about normative obligations and the appropriateness of alternative courses of action. This chapter looks at how the relationship between law and morality has been modified by embedding in organizations and by the intensification of infrastructural, managerial, technologically mediated, and algorithmic modes of structuring and controlling activity in organizations. Examples from healthcare (with more rigid guidelines and organizational rules), policing (with use of "big data" in intelligence-led policing), and the military (with laws of war and rules of engagement built into artificial intelligence software) show how modifications in how work is done have tended to decrease the space reserved for the moral agency of human participants.

Keywords

Morality · Law · Moral agency · Healthcare · Policing · Laws of war

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1 Introduction

In an influential study of moral development, Carol Gilligan (1982) asked 11-year-old children to consider what course of action would be most appropriate for a husband unable to procure drugs needed to save his wife's life. In the scenario presented to the children, the druggist had refused to lower the drug's price. Gilligan's focus was on the contrast between how boys and girls thought through this dilemma. Boys, she argued, were guided by an "ethic of justice," while girls' thinking was organized by an "ethic of care." Yet as the children considered the dilemma and reasoned about what was morally appropriate, little if any mention was made of pharmacy as a profession or of the pharmacy as the site where this drama was playing out. Forty years later, Gilligan's question about what the husband should do is nearly illegible because the moral agency of both the pharmacist and the husband has been reduced by new ways of organizing work. Tight inventory control and rigid guidelines for drug dispensing, both tethered to sophisticated computerized control systems, would make it difficult for a pharmacist to circumvent the rules and supply the life-saving drugs gratis to the financially strapped couple. Likewise, in contemporary pharmacies with elaborate security systems and drugs kept behind counters, often under lock and key, even a

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desperate husband would find it hard to steal the needed medicine.

Reflecting on the changing nature of pharmacy as a profession and pharmacies as workplaces, this chapter argues that contemporary life has brought two important modifications that have unsettled the relationship between law and morality. More than in the past, details of our lives are shaped by our encounters with formal organizations, as places where we work, learn, receive and give care, worship, play, and buy goods and services. But these organizations too are different from the organizations of the past in that they are more tightly governed by formal policies, guidelines, regulations, and laws. To be sure, there was no golden age; moral agency has always been shaped by social forces. Some of those influences diminish moral autonomy, while others undoubtedly amplify it. This chapter argues that living more of our lives in contexts strongly shaped by formal organizations has, for the most part, reduced the moral agency of organizational participants by pressuring people to set aside their own values and beliefs and accept the direction of the organization. Moreover, because organizations may be intensely aware of legal constraints, they often either conflate law and morality or allow law to trump morality. In this changed world, would Gilligan's 11-year-old research subjects still worry about care and justice or would they now be more inclined to accept the moral authority of the organizations that regulate and dispense pharmaceutical products?

2 What Is the Relationship Between Law and Morality?

Law and morality are, arguably, two distinct ways to think about normative obligations and the appropriateness of alternative courses of action. Prescriptions derived from law and morality often coincide, but interesting questions about the relationship between the two arise when they do not.

Considered abstractly, law and morality might be related in one of three ways. Heimer (2010) outlines these three possibilities, drawing on socio-legal studies and the sociology of morality and offering extensive illustrations.[1] First, law and morality might be conceived simply as two different approaches to normative matters. In such a pluralistic system, norms might be offered up by many entities, including a variety of (sometimes nested) legal and quasi-legal bodies and a host of groups claiming moral authority. Which normative prescriptions were regarded as decisive might depend on subject matter or geographical location, but also might vary over time, including with stages in the human lifecycle. In principle and in some empirical instances, the existence of multiple sources of normative prescriptions may be seen as a simple fact of life, with little pressure for one prescription to trump others. But, secondly, morality might instead be conceived as providing a set of standards for assessing the appropriateness and rectitude of laws. The laws of a rogue state thus might be judged immoral. Similarly, although some segments of a society might deem laws just, others might disagree even at the time and subsequent generations might be baffled that anyone could have seen such laws as anything but immoral. Legal systems that permitted enslavement have never seemed moral to those who were enslaved, although slaveholders would have argued that chattel slavery and the laws supporting it were morally acceptable (Smith, 2021).[2] Finally, law and morality might be seen as competing systems of prescriptions that require people to choose one over the other, a competition whose intensity can be particularly intense when, for instance, religious bodies claim moral authority and oppose some of the rulings of secular states, attempting to induce adherence to

[1] Although many social and legal theorists including Weber ([1921] 1968), Durkheim ([1833] 1984), Habermas (1986), Fuller (1958), and Hart (1958) have examined the relationship between law and morality, a full treatment of this extensive literature lies beyond the scope of this more focused essay. Heimer (2010) considers the work of some of these authors.

[2] See Smith's (2021) discussion of the elaborate edifice of laws protecting the "property" rights of slaveholders and new laws introduced to preserve white supremacy (e.g., non-unanimous juries for criminal cases) and access to cheap labor (e.g., "pig laws") after slavery was formally abolished.

religious rather than legal dictates on grounds of moral superiority.

Although scholars may carefully distinguish these three possible relations between law and morality, in many everyday situations and without giving it much thought, other people may toggle between these three approaches. They may, for instance, accept the (sometimes conflicting) dictates of law, professional ethics, and religious bodies; express distress at the immorality of legal systems during periods of political turmoil; or insist on the primacy of the moral dictates of faith or of state law. Conceiving the relationship between law and morality as toggling between approaches surely oversimplifies the social world, though, by suggesting a rather naive radical individualism. People do not in fact confront moral questions as social isolates. Rather, both morality and law are shaped by social groups, institutions, long-standing customs and practices, cultural understandings, and so forth. Societies have carefully crafted processes by which law is created and modified. And although it may be less clear how moral understandings are created and modified, the more institutionalized elements of morality—such as the moral teachings of religious bodies or the codes of ethical conduct of professions—are tethered to long-established traditions and formal processes much as law is.

3 Organizations as Sites for Moral Action

When people consider the effect of law on morality, they seem to be thinking about how law might shape the kinds of moral judgments that Gilligan (1982) discusses. But undoubtedly law also influences the other "stuff" of morality. Moral phenomena include considerably more elements than those most commonly considered by social scientists, psychologists, neuroscientists, and philosophers. In particular, social scientists surely should be investigating not just the "thin" judgments of right and wrong that neuroscientists study, but also the "thicker" ethical concepts, such as integrity, piety, cruelty, rudeness, exploitation, and fanaticism, that fuse descriptive elements and evaluations (Abend, 2010) and the "moral background" that undergirds and supports what we commonly understand as morality (Abend, 2014). And because our understanding and evaluation of actions varies with existing "descriptions" (Hacking, 1995) and what is available in the "moral background" (Abend, 2014), we should expect morality and ethics to vary from one social or cultural context to the next. But, in any case, we are interested both in the moral judgments people make and in how people act on those moral judgments. Those actions are likely to be strongly shaped by the organizational and institutional contexts in which moral judgments are formulated, encoded in norms and rules, acted upon, assessed, justified, reconsidered, and recorded and disseminated.

Although sociologists, starting with Durkheim ([1833] 1984), have often argued that morality is rooted in collective life, that does not mean that the features of our collective life that shape morality have remained constant. In particular, if our collective lives are increasingly shaped by and lived in organizations (Coleman, 1974, 1990), we might wonder whether the relationship between law and morality is different in organizations than in other parts of the social landscape.

Organizations might indeed draw heavily on the law or legal reasoning in resolving moral dilemmas, two lines of scholarship suggest. First, organizations may turn to rules to help resolve uncertainties that make it difficult for them to make and implement plans. And, even though legal systems may not move swiftly, they do seem adept at resolving uncertainties definitively (Stinchcombe, 2001), perhaps partly because their decisions apply to entire societies and so span boundaries between disparate entities including religious groups, families, occupational and professional groups, organizations and industries, and even municipalities and states. Moreover, despite the lack of supporting evidence, people apparently believe that litigiousness has increased and are willing to spend time and money to avoid costly legal battles (Haltom & McCann, 2004; Baker, 2005). In such a

climate, being morally right may seem less important than being legally right, leading organizations to focus on ensuring that routines are legally defensible.

A second line of research suggests that organizations have become more "legalized" (Meyer, 1983; chapters in Sitkin & Bies, 1994; Sutton et al., 1994; Heimer et al., 2005). Although regulation by states is an important element of this increasing legalism, legalization also changes how organizations define themselves and others (Scott, 1994) and shapes the procedures they adopt for getting things done. Most fundamentally, law plays a part in the social construction of actors. Law gives legal recognition to corporations, cooperatives, and partnerships, and categorizes natural persons by citizenship, age, marital status, or membership in professional or occupational groups. In so doing, the law endows various actors with rights and helps shape how they interact, an argument supported by Knight's (2022) analysis of the emergence of organizational actorhood. This legalization of organizational life reaches deep into the interior of organizations when organizations adopt legalistic reasoning, procedures, forms, and structures. Although adopting legal forms and structures may bring some instrumental benefits, institutionalists would argue that this "legal turn" in organizations is also importantly a political project. Acting in consonance with others' expectations—in this case, introducing legalized ways of doing things—increases an organization's legitimacy.

Taken together these two strands of work suggest that the legalization of organizations has muted the voices of other normative orders—because they offer less certainty or confer less legitimacy. If, as Meyer (1983: 218–219) suggests, legalization is not much about integrating or harmonizing rule systems, then law may speak with a louder voice simply because it has silenced or displaced other voices, not because people are persuaded that it gives answers that are superior to those offered by other moral authorities.

But not everyone is equally subject to rules even in heavily legalized organizations. In particular, rules tend to bind those lower in the organization more stringently than those at the top. Not only are those at the top able to bend the rules some of the time, but also they are more likely to participate in discussions about abstract principles and to be invited to debate the wisdom of various courses of action. People lower in the organizational hierarchy usually must follow the rules even when they believe them misguided, carefully concealing any workarounds devised to mitigate the effects of especially burdensome or counterproductive rules. Although all members of organizations encounter moral conundrums, only a few participants—those less bound by organizational rules and less subject to the authority of bosses—have sufficient autonomy to make meaningful choices. "Powerful people," Chambliss observes, "have ethical dilemmas; the rest of us have ethical problems" (1996: 118).

In organizations, moral questions that might be matters of (alleged) individual conscience are transformed into ethical questions on which professions, formal organizations, and other collectivities are expected to reflect and take a position. But as we know, although codes of ethics may codify the moral principles, they also serve to burnish the group's image, protect its reputation, and even offer some legal protection (Edelman, 2016). Once codifications are produced, people are expected to abide by the codes of ethics and organizational policies of their employers, as well as those of their professions, unions, schools, and other entities with which they are affiliated. To be sure, people continue to have their own moral reactions, though individual morality is not expected to play much of a role in organizational policy. People may continue to be troubled by moral and ethical questions and they may disagree with organizational policy, but their moral responses often are made essentially irrelevant by the obligation to follow the lead of their bosses and the rules of the organization (Jackall, 1988, 2010), though the exact content of corporate morals may be hard to pin down (Anteby & Anderson, 2017). Responsibility for moral action is shifted from individuals to groups ("the staff") and abstract rules ("organizational policy" or a

professional code of ethics). The organization becomes the effective moral actor, as Chambliss (1996) notes, albeit an odd kind of moral actor. Irresponsibility is "organized into" the complex divisions of labor of "seemingly remote organizations" (Mills, 1951: 111) because those who are able to see the moral consequences of organizational policy are usually not the ones empowered to make or revise the rules. Organizational ethics displaces individual morality and organizational ethics tends to be highly legalized and defensively oriented to avoiding litigation.

4 Moral Agency in a Changing World

Clearly, these are not new observations. But if sociologists have been thinking about the collective nature of morality essentially from the moment sociology was born, they nevertheless need to ask how the nature and strength of those collective pressures might have changed over time. This essay argues that such changes are indeed taking place, because of the increased importance of formal organizations and because of moves to formalize normative prescriptions. Formalization makes normative prescriptions more lawlike, "hardening" morality in a process that resembles the changes from "soft" to "hard" law (Abbott & Snidal, 2000) or from norms to standards to directives (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2000). Formalization also obscures the line between morality and law and focuses attention on potential consequences (often unlikely but quite costly or unpleasant) of failures to comply with law.

To see what these changes look like, how they have arisen, and what consequences they have, the remainder of this essay examines three fields where such transformations have been particularly visible and consequential and where moral questions cannot be avoided, namely healthcare, policing, and the military. The key points of this argument are summarized in Table 1 and elaborated in the sections that follow.

5 Medical Work: Legal (and Commercial) Pressures on Professional Work

Medical work raises a host of thorny moral and ethical issues about rights to receive and refuse treatment and rights to provide and refuse to provide care. Many of these complicated moral issues—about abortion and reproductive care, "death with dignity" and the right to die, palliative care and the appropriate use of addictive drugs, experimental medical treatments, and rationing of medical care, for example—are addressed simultaneously as medical, moral, and legal issues and have been the subject of heated discussion, professional and organizational policy, legislation, and court cases for decades or even longer. To some degree, though, healthcare is a moving target because innovations in treatment may move control from one group of practitioners to another or nearly obviate the need for professional assistance. Such changes have rarely decreased contention, though, and how much medical intervention is required depends on political/legal considerations as well as on strictly medical requirements. Yet changes in the social arrangements of medical work do seem to have altered the character of discussions about what is medically, morally, and legally appropriate (Chiarello, 2019).

Writing about work arrangements in medical settings, Chambliss (1996: 1) argued that although nursing is a "noble profession," it is "too often a terrible job." Trained to be caring professionals, nurses often are so constrained by the rules of healthcare organizations and their subordination to doctors' authority that they cannot exercise much independent moral judgment. This lack of discretion transforms ethical dilemmas—situations in which workers need to make tough decisions—into ethical problems—situations that are otherwise similar but where workers are not permitted to make any consequential decisions. With sharp limits on their discretion, nurses often find it difficult to do the "caring" part of their work. At the extreme, as they follow the rules and implement doctors'

Table 1 Legal and organizational pressures and decreased moral agency in three fields

Field	Pressures	Innovations	Whose agency is affected	Overall result
Healthcare	– Legal pressures: e.g., concerns regarding appropriateness of drug prescriptions, changes in abortion law – Organizational pressures to streamline work and reduce practice variations – Commercialization of medical work	– Managerial (e.g., policies and procedures) – Computer-mediated oversight (e.g., of inventories)	– Medical staff, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, researchers	– Pressure to adhere to rules rather than to use judgment – Decisions based on medical or fiscal gatekeeping, with more emphasis on fiscal over time – Organization becomes the effective moral actor ⇒**Moral agency reduced, with some variability among workers and work settings. Workers often are aware of constraints of "following the rules"; some medical workers resist, subverting rules and orders with which they disagree**
Police	– Popular, social movement, and political concerns regarding crime rates, terrorism, and inequalities in intensity of policing – Pressure to make police work more efficient	– Data-driven and intelligence-led policing and importation of military software	– Front-line police workers	– Feeder mechanism and function creep mean that moral judgments are elided (new economy of moral judgment) – Feedback loops shape data in subtle ways and eliminate points where police officers might otherwise have exercised judgment – Rules, classifications mandate action, seemingly leaving no space for moral agency ⇒**Moral agency reduced, but not transparently, so police officers may not be fully aware of changes**
Military	– Post-9/11 concerns regarding terrorism – Efficient operations to "hunt down" and "take out" enemies without much risk to American forces	– Drones – Incorporating international laws of war and rules of engagement into artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms	– Military personnel, including those who "run" drones	– Algorithms incorporate sometimes inappropriate category systems (e.g., about identification of objects as persons, identification of persons as appropriate targets) – Feedback loop to design process: Normalization of automation of decisions regarding lethal engagement ⇒**Military staff, accustomed to following orders, accept further reduction in moral accountability**

orders, nurses may not even realize that they are facing any decisions at all (Chambliss, 1996: 59). In addition to having choices removed from their purview, nurses are also sometimes required to be involved (complicit, even) in morally objectionable situations, such as continuing to treat patients who are not progressing and may even be begging to be allowed to die or providing treatment for hopeless but well-insured patients when indigent patients with better prognoses may not even be admitted (Chambliss, 1996). This obligation to suppress their ethical discomfort with their own actions (or non-actions) is, as Hochschild (1985) might suggest, also part of moral deskilling because it requires that people turn down the volume on their own consciences.

Located higher in the pecking order and less constrained by organizational rules, physicians more often encounter moral dilemmas, Chambliss suggested. But such distinctions among medical workers may no longer hold. Changes in the organization of medical work have surely reduced the autonomy of physicians as well. More than in the past, physicians are likely to be employees rather than independent professionals.[3] As employees of hospitals or other healthcare organizations, physicians are more constrained by organizational policies. They also are increasingly bound by clinical guidelines, in part because reimbursements depend on adherence to guidelines. If, as many observers argue, American healthcare has become "big business" (Rosenthal, 2017) or even the "medical industrial complex" (Relman, 1980, 1991, 2007), then these extensive rules may be designed especially to protect income streams even if that means curtailing healthcare providers' moral autonomy.[4] Such commercial pressures are not independent of organizational policies, but instead intensify the effect of these organizational policies by working with and through them.

A second change has altered medical work through modifications of the legal environment in which it is conducted. To be sure, legal regulation of medicine is not new, but legislatures and courts now seem somewhat less respectful of medical authority than in the past. Rather than restricting themselves to licensure and similarly broad matters, legal actors now seem more willing to intervene more deeply into the practice of medicine, rather than leaving these details to the professional workers themselves. For instance, legislatures now sometimes specify who can do which tasks, add requirements about information flows, and second guess practitioners' judgments about what medical interventions are necessary and appropriate.

Abortion is an instructive example here. Most early abortions are neither difficult to perform nor dangerous for the mother, and changes in abortion methods have decreased both complexity and risk. In addition to the dilation and curettage procedure of the past, medical caregivers now employ a variety of other techniques to perform abortions. Early in pregnancy, "medication" (or "medical") abortions can be accomplished safely and reliably at home using two drugs, mifepristone and misoprostol, given in sequence. Medication abortion is one of those innovations in treatment that makes medical assistance less necessary. By 2020, 54% of all abortions in the United States were medication abortions (Jones et al., 2022; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2022). Surgical abortions can be done via vacuum aspiration (first trimester), dilation and evacuation (second trimester), or dilation and extraction (later in pregnancy).

But of course it is not just abortion techniques that have changed. Although the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* brought American women legal protection for abortion, the right to abortion has been threatened and steadily eroded by state-level legislation, state courts, and federal courts (Tomlinson, 2021; Ziegler, 2020).[5] Closer regulation of abortion has increased the pressure for caregivers to

[3] See Rosenthal (2014) on the increasing proportion of physicians who work in salaried positions and Rosenthal (2017) on commercial interests in American healthcare.

[4] Indeed, Rosenthal (2019) points out that financial practices that would be considered fraudulent in other settings are legal in American healthcare.

[5] Ballot measures tell a different story, though. Voters strongly supported abortion rights in all six of the

orient to numerous legal requirements, often displacing caregivers' own assessments of what is morally and medically required with legislators' prescriptions. For instance, although the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved mifepristone as a method for abortion in 2000, only in 2021 did the agency issue a permanent ruling allowing the mailing of abortion pills and expanded access through pharmacies (Jones et al., 2022). Despite these rulings, 32 states insist that only physicians can prescribe abortion pills even though other categories of providers are permitted to prescribe other medications. In addition, 19 states require that the caregiver be physically present when the patient takes the medication. Very recent changes in American abortion law, including the Texas legislation[6] that allows third parties to bring suits against anyone who helps a woman secure an abortion and the 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling[7] of the U.S. Supreme Court rolling back the protections afforded by *Roe v. Wade* for a half century, have led many clinicians to cease providing abortions and to think twice about providing care that falls into legal gray areas or risks being (mis)classified as abortion (Reingold & Gostin, 2022). Previous legislation and court cases added medically unnecessary requirements for counseling, ultrasounds, waiting periods, and hospital admitting privileges, making abortion less accessible and more expensive. Newer provisions intrude more deeply into obstetric and gynecological care, sometimes making physicians reluctant or unwilling to provide medically necessary care even when the mother's life is in jeopardy (Goodman & Ghorayshi, 2022).[8]

These legal provisions have made the contest between law and morality especially intense in abortion practice. The recent spate of legal activity has created considerable uncertainty, with abortion law seeming to change from one day to the next—or even hour by hour, in the words of one doctor—as new legislation or trigger laws go into effect, judges issue restraining orders or lift injunctions, and provisions of new and older legislation need to be reconciled (Jaffe, 2022; McCann, 2022). The possibility of criminal prosecution seems, at least in some states such as Arizona, to have led providers to stop performing abortions (McCann, 2022). In these instances, caregivers' views on what is moral are no longer on the table, having been made irrelevant by legal strictures (or perhaps the moral reasoning of legislatures).

Admittedly, physicians and other healthcare workers have continued to insist on the right of conscientious objection. Interestingly, in discussions of abortion, it has been the right not to perform abortions, asserted both by individual physicians and by some healthcare organizations, that has received the most legal attention (Harris, 2012). In theory, women's rights to receive abortions and caregivers' rights not to perform them could co-exist because women could seek providers whose views aligned with their own. But such a search is often impossible because of the compressed timeline for abortion, lack of information, shortages of resources, and difficulties arranging travel.[9]

With the recent shift in American abortion law, some writers have begun to address a positive moral right to provide abortion. Noting the

abortion-related measures on state ballots in 2022 (Ballotpedia, 2022; Jacobson, 2022).

[6] The 2021 Texas Heartbeat Act makes abortion illegal after embryonic cardiac activity can be detected (around five to six weeks after the last menstrual period), with the only exception being medical emergency (Tanne, 2021). However, Texas's trigger law means that since *Dobbs v. Jackson*, even early abortion has been illegal except to save the life of the mother.

[7] The case was about the constitutionality of the 2018 Mississippi law banning most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

[8] Recent research on El Salvador, which has an absolute abortion ban, shows just how much harm such policies do to the health of pregnant women (Viterna et al., 2022).

[9] Women who are confined in prison or immigration detention centers for instance have no capacity to seek out alternative caregivers as illustrated by both the 2017 case of a young would-be immigrant (Rosenberg, 2019) and a decades old instance of prisoners whose medical care was provided by a Catholic healthcare service (Meyers & Woods, 1996).

peculiar arrangements for abortion, some commentators have suggested that abortion should be folded back into primary care,[10] that medication abortions fall comfortably within the skill set of internal medicine, and that abortion should not be separated out from the other reproductive and sexual healthcare provided by gynecologists and obstetricians (Bardhi & Rizk, 2022). Although these dissents occur, the responses of caregivers in blue states and the early evidence on the flow of patients to blue-state clinics, together with the extensive legally mandated scripting of abortion care from start to finish, suggest a decreasing role for conscience—morality—as compared to law (Bazelon, 2022).

Doctors' offices and abortion clinics are not the only sites where legal requirements, translated into organizational policies, restrict the role of individual moral sensibilities in healthcare. The pressures on medical staff are not all "legal" in nature and they vary both from one medical occupation to another (physician vs. nurse, as discussed above, but also other occupations) and with practice setting. Among other things, these variations in occupations and practice settings bring differences in exposure to commercial pressures (fiscal and competitive), involvement in policymaking, ties with adjacent occupations, and direct contact with patients (with corresponding variations in awareness of patients' difficulties accessing treatment and medication).

Pharmacists, like other high-ranking medical professionals, have sometimes insisted on their right to make moral assessments separate from law, though they too have taken inconsistent positions on key moral issues. Some pharmacists and some pharmacies have declined to provide birth control pills, emergency contraceptive ("morning after") pills, and drugs for medication abortions. Others have been reluctant to provide syringes or addictive pain medications, although some pharmacies have been accused of being part of the "pill mills" that have fed the American opioid crisis. But for pharmacists as for physicians, levels of autonomy vary. Some pharmacists work in pharmacy chains, others in hospital pharmacies, and still others in independent drug stores. Pharmacy work is governed by a host of regulations issued by federal and state bodies.[11] Although they are expected to keep current on legal requirements, meeting this obligation can be easier for pharmacists working in chains or in hospitals that have legal departments that monitor the law and craft organizational policies to correctly implement regulations (Chiarello, 2014: 523). But this advantage also brings closer monitoring of pharmacists themselves and persistent pressures to adhere to organizational—and legal—directives. All this translates into diminished space for individual conscience and a change in the balance between morality and law, particularly in pharmacy chains.[12]

Abortion garners a great deal of attention in political and legal circles and pharmacists are cited episodically in the popular press when they refuse to provide medications to which patients are legally entitled. Although abortion providers and pharmacists face unusual and episodically intense pressures, in many respects their work lives are not so different from those of other healthcare professionals. In other kinds of medical work, as in reproductive care and pharmacy, the space for individual moral deliberation has contracted as healthcare organizations have carefully crafted organizational policies and

[10] Joffe (1995) provides evidence on mainstream physicians who provided abortions—as a matter of conscience and despite considerable personal risk—in the period before *Roe v. Wade*. Her work speaks both to the skill sets of primary care physicians and to the balance between morality and law.

[11] Pharmacy is regulated at the state level, but pharmacies are also subject to the rulings of federal agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration and the Drug Enforcement Administration and federal legislation such as the Controlled Substances Act.

[12] Additional constraints on moral autonomy come from the nature of pharmacy work. Pharmacists are considerably less able than physicians to help needy patients pro-bono because they provide a product—owned by their employers—rather than a service (Chiarello, 2014: 529), a point that speaks specifically to the Gilligan hypothetical cited above.

monitoring programs to track profitability and compliance with law.

6 Police Work: Big Data and Function Creep

Almost inevitably, police work raises moral questions. Police are tasked with protecting the public, intervening to quell disturbances, detaining people who have harmed or seem likely to harm others, and collecting evidence that will settle questions about who committed crimes and allow society to hold perpetrators accountable. In order to carry out these functions, police are given extraordinary rights to intervene in people's lives and allowed to use tools, including lethal weapons, that may also cause grave harm. Even this simple list of what police are supposed to do makes it obvious that moral questions arise at every stage of police work. But additional moral questions arise as we consider how police have failed to deal with citizens in an even-handed way, abused their power, and injured or even killed the citizens they are sworn to protect.

The morality or immorality of police action has long been a topic of debate, though discussion often did not cross the boundaries between subgroups whose experiences of both crime and policing were often quite distinctive. In recent years, though, the character of public debate about policing has shifted, with police brutality and concerns about crime simultaneously on the agenda. Here we focus on only one small part of the conversation about police work, namely the changing role of moral judgment in policing.

Recent changes in police practices have unsettled the balance between morality and law in policing, though not in the ways reformers might have hoped. As they purchase proprietary predictive algorithms, police forces have been too uncritical of suppliers' claims that these new secret methods are neutral and objective and that the information fed into them is unbiased (Francois, 2015; Gangadharan, 2015; Papachristos, 2015; Patel, 2015). Both citizens and scholars have remarked on the increased militarization of American police forces as surplus military hardware has been purchased by police departments for domestic use. Police forces also have begun to use military software, a change less visible to outsiders. Although police departments had been seeking out new sources of information and adjusting their practices to make use of particularly helpful information, the move to "intelligence-led policing" accelerated after 9/11 (Ratcliffe, 2016). Intended to increase the efficiency of police work, these innovations have also been sold as opportunities to redress inequalities in police treatment of citizens by decreasing police discretion. Yet that has not been their effect. Brayne's (2017, 2021) meticulous examination shows that the surveillance work of the Los Angeles Police Department has indeed been transformed by its use of "big data." But the intensity of policing of residents of poorer neighborhoods has actually increased with the use of new technologies, exacerbating rather than ameliorating inequities.

As police draw on a wider variety of information sources, some explicitly created for policing, others not, they in effect create more robust and far reaching feeder mechanisms that draw people into the criminal justice dragnet (Brayne, 2017: 999). The "function creep" (Brayne, 2018; Innes, 2001) that occurs when data or records created for one purpose are deployed for other purposes often means that information about guiding assumptions, coding instructions, and so forth is lost in transition, increasing the likelihood that data will be misinterpreted and misused. As more people are swept into the system, an "economy of moral judgment" (Fourcade & Healy, 2017) reminiscent of the assessments made in employment (Pager, 2007) and insurance (Heimer, 1982, 1985; Kiviat, 2019) displaces the more careful sifting and sorting that occur when people are deeply familiar with the data their organization uses. Instead, with little conscious thought, police (in this case, but the argument applies equally well to other organizations using large bodies of redeployed data) judge people to be morally suspect simply because they appear in police databases. Police forget that these people were first swept into the police database as it expanded to incorporate data gathered

for other purposes and then only later accumulated extensive records as police used the initial data to guide their work. An initial innocuous data point becomes an occasion for further investigation and this in turn creates a trail of contacts with police whose numerical weight soon comes to have moral meaning. Rather than making policing fairer and more efficient—the intended goals—the use of big data seems instead to have swept more people into the system and made corrective checks more cumbersome and therefore less likely. And indeed this absence of conscious thought is a key part of the problem. Making use of new sources of information, new informational tools, and novel surveillance technologies and concerning themselves with efficiency, police, like other actors, fail to notice that moral assessments get smuggled in alongside the data. Adopting these existing moral assessments rather than making their own judgments is another example of the moral deskilling that occurs when organizations encourage or require workers to go where the new data and new rules lead them rather than continuing to make their own moral judgments.

7 Military Work: Algorithmic Implementation of the Laws of War and Rules of Engagement

In the estimation of some philosophers, ethicists, and political theorists, war, horrifying and devastating though it is, can sometimes be justifiable. The theory of just war lays out the conditions under which warfare can be morally acceptable or even necessary (Walzer, 2000; Elshtain, 2003), specifying criteria for both the right to go to war (*jus ad bellum*) and right conduct in war (*jus in bello*). Although they do not overlap fully with the tenets of just war theory, the international laws of war and rules of engagement (ROE) similarly depend on being able to justify otherwise unacceptable acts of violence committed against particular people. Those who fail to adhere to these rules can be charged with war crimes and forums have been created to judge parties charged with war crimes, though not all nations have agreed to participate in these courts or to allow their citizens to be tried in them.

But just as policing has changed, so has the conduct of war. A key tenet of just war theory is that innocent life must be protected. Walzer, for instance, argued that "Disengaged civilians are innocent without regard to their personal morality or politics" (Institute for Advanced Study, 2007). But the consensus on protecting innocent life quickly erodes in practice. How disengaged must civilians be to be categorized as innocent and to merit protection? And how can the rules be applied when it is unclear who is a civilian and who is a combatant? In the heat of battle, fatally consequential judgments are made quickly. It is sometimes possible to review such decisions later, but review does not mean being able to undo the damage of erroneous judgments.

If warfare is extreme, it is in some ways also absolutely mundane. In warfare, as in other situations, people make consequential moral judgments and act on them and do so as members of organizations. In these respects, warfare is not so very different from medical work or police work—all entail judgments and actions by actors embedded in organizations, with understandings and actions shaped by those organizations and their rules. But of course war is in fact unique because it is part and parcel about killing other people, an activity that, in most other contexts, is considered immoral and punished accordingly. Moreover, military operations are uniquely hierarchical, with unusually strict requirements that subordinates follow the orders of those above them in the chain of command.

As we consider how law and morality meet in military work, then, we need to ask two key questions. First, if the laws of war and rules of engagement are intended to put limits on warfare—to confine and control warfare so that it is more morally acceptable—what do military organizations actually do with these rules? Do they function like organizational policies in non-military organizations? How does the existence of such rules affect the space available for moral agency of organizational participants? Secondly,

is there reason to believe that changes in military work have altered how the laws of war and the rules of engagement are used by military organizations? Here we should be looking for intensification of infrastructural, managerial, technologically mediated, and algorithmic modes of structuring and controlling activity and making decisions in military organizations—changes that may modify the relationship between law and morality.

The laws of war and the rules of engagement put limits on warfare, thereby making some killing legally acceptable—and perhaps in the minds of some observers, also morally acceptable. Categorizing people as innocent civilians is only one element of these rules, which also specify such matters as when combatants can be killed and when their lives must instead be spared, which kinds of weapons are legal and when and how they can be used. How these rules are used varies from one country to another, but training documents from the U.S. Marines (United States Marine Corps, n.d.) provide one illustration.

The Marine Corps handout, a 28-page document, introduces its topic this way: "The Law of War is defined as that part of international law that governs the conduct of armed hostilities. Included in this lesson are the principles underlying the Law of War, as well as classification of persons that may be found on the battlefield. The Law of War is often referred to as the law of armed conflict (LOAC). The two terms are interchangeable. The Rules of Engagement (ROE) are those directives that delineate the circumstances and limitations under which United States (US) forces will initiate and/or continue combat engagement" (United States Marine Corps, n.d.: 2). The document goes on to offer a brief history of each body of rules with some examples (Law of armed conflict [LOAC] includes the Hague Convention of 1907 and the 1949 Geneva Conventions, for instance; the Joint Chiefs of Staff are noted to have made a series of attempts to standardize ROE starting in 1954, for example). About the ROE, the document notes: "ROE provide a framework that encompasses national policy goals, mission requirements, and the rule of law. Simply put, ROE define the way in which we can engage the enemy" (United States Marine Corps n.d.:13). It then goes on to describe the purposes of ROE, categorizing them as political, military, and legal. At the outset, the document also carefully specifies "terminal" and "enabling" learning objectives (p. 3), making clear that readers should be able to retrieve the content of these documents from memory. The bulk of the document offers details of what these two types of rules have to say about various categories of people, types of weapons, and military situations. But, interestingly, the document contains not a single mention of morality. That extremely hierarchical military operations are not urging soldiers to make independent moral judgments—to ask, in effect, not just whether their actions are legal but whether they are also moral—is perhaps not surprising.

Innovations in the practices of contemporary warfare do suggest a modified use of LOAC and ROE, however. These changes very substantially reduce or entirely eliminate human decision-making from some crucial acts of warfare. In autonomous intelligent weapons systems, including unmanned aerial vehicles ("drones"), for instance, decision rules are designed into the software. In effect, these decision rules automate the use of LOAC and ROE. LOAC and ROE become engineering problems, operationalized as a series of decision rules that allow an autonomous weapon to "decide" that engagement is permissible because the conditions of LOAC and ROE have been satisfied. In such a system, all the messiness, uncertainty, and complexity of ethics and morality—the weighing of complex questions about whether people have been miscategorized (maybe they are children rather than adults, noncombatants rather than combatants) or situations misunderstood (maybe they are not in fact armed, maybe the material that is being transported has civilian rather than military purposes)—have been eliminated; morality has been reduced to the codes, rules, and laws (Schwarz, 2018b, 2021; Wolfendale, 2021). This is troubling because artificial intelligence (AI) systems do in fact make mistakes, because

military staff become morally deskilled, unduly deferential to technological authority (Schwarz, 2018a) when they are not required to engage with moral questions, and because automating the most fundamental decisions about life and death violates underlying moral principles. It is for these reasons that some analysts (Santoni de Sio & van der Hoven, 2018) propose modifications that put humans back into the decision chain. But this, of course, is a reversal of a long process of intensifying and automating control systems that privilege rules, laws, and codes over morality.

8 Conclusion

To bring home the argument of this chapter, we can reformulate it as being about two kinds of distinctions. On the one hand, it is about changes in the social world. Among these changes in the social world, the chapter commented on modifications in social arrangements, such as the increased importance of organizations in our social environment and organizations' adoption and intensification of new administrative and control technologies, some infrastructural. The chapter also noted the introduction of computer-mediated technologies, that more rigidly structure actions and decisions, and algorithmic decision tools, that rely on engineered rather than human decisions. On the other hand, a second pair of distinctions concerns how these changes in the social world intervene in human action and therefore reshape the relationship between law and morality. Attempts to shape human action can either "nudge" people by making some alternatives more attractive and others less so, or they can more coercively close off some possibilities while opening others. In the medical world, the "softer" administrative technologies of guidelines and organizational policies initially nudged medical staff, but over time, these nudges have sometimes hardened as guidelines and policies were firmed up and embedded in computerized control systems. In the world of policing, complex big-data systems and intelligence-led policing reduced police officers' awareness of how their decision-making was structured by information whose provenance had been obscured. Such nudges move in the direction of more fully closing off alternative avenues of thought and action. Finally in modern warfare, AI has in some instances almost completely eliminated the need for, or indeed the possibility of, moral reflection by engineering in decisions about when to fire weapons. Military personnel have ceased to be moral actors in such systems, but are simply elements of fully engineered systems.

Paradoxically, some organizational and legal initiatives seem to have aimed to increase rather than decrease moral skill. Under somewhat unusual circumstances, inserting more rules does lead people to engage with moral questions, perhaps especially when they have face-to-face encounters with those whom the rules are intended to protect (Heimer, 2013; Hoffman, 2021). More commonly, though, organizational imperatives interact with institutional forms to perpetuate the emphasis on organizational preservation—secured by adhering to the letter of the law—rather than organizational virtue.

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The Darker Side of Strong Organizational Cultures: Looking Forward by Looking Back

Michel Anteby and Micah Rajunov

Abstract

Organizational cultures encompass the norms, values, and beliefs that guide the thinking and actions of organizational members. In this chapter, we highlight the moral power and ambiguity of such cultures. We review early research on organizational culture, and showcase its historical roots in moral questions around ideological control. We then trace how an emphasis on strong culture and firm performance slowly eroded these moral underpinnings. We also highlight specific studies that have surfaced the oft-forgotten moral consequences of these strong cultures. Next, we illustrate our argument with two research streams (i.e., research on person–organization "fit" and research on culture of higher education) that reveal a darker, more insidious, side of strong organizational culture. The *darker* moral side occurs when the moral repercussions of organizational culture are masked by good intentions from management, internalized by employees as beneficial, and lead to harmful consequences for workers, firms, and/or society. Finally, we discuss how increased public awareness of the moral dimensions of work necessitates a deeper understanding of the moral implications of organizational culture.

Keywords

Organizational culture · Corporations · Morality · Ethics · Immoral behavior

Several decades ago, America's economic and industrial future was under threat by upcoming foreign frontrunners, particularly from Japan. To counteract this period of intense doubt stemming from this growing international competition, strong organizational culture became the shiny new trend for American businesses. In their influential book *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* (1982), Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman surveyed US companies and remarked that many of them "had cultures as strong as any Japanese organization" (p. xxii) and that the word culture itself seemed "to pop up more and more frequently in business journalism" (p. 105). Critically, they concluded, "Without exception, the dominance and coherence of culture proved to be an essential quality of the excellent companies" that they examined (p. 75). Their implicit hope was that deliberately designing "strong" corporate cultures—namely, ones with "a set of norms and values that are widely shared and strongly held throughout the organization" (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996, p. 166)—might save America from its industrial demise. Business executives, managers, and

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consultants soon rallied around this call; numerous books sprang up, titled, for instance, *Corporate Culture and Organizational Effectiveness* (Denison, 1990) and *Corporate Culture and Performance* (Kotter, 2008). Each version promised to fulfill the dream of organizational success fueled by a strong culture.

The (strong) organizational culture wildfire had caught on in corporate America and beyond. Some observers cautioned that organizational "culture was not always a positive force" (O'Reilly, 1989, p. 10), or that its benefits could backfire given the increasingly turbulent and unpredictable environment companies were facing (Sørensen, 2002). Despite these warnings, business pundits embraced it as promoting innovation and other corporate wish-list advantages (such as productivity, employee turnover, and more). Quickly, being an organization *without* a strong culture implied a recipe for failure. Several companies even employed corporate ethnographers to better understand and presumably shape their own cultures (Fayard & Van Maanen, 2015). Trouble seemed on the horizon for corporate executives when they could not articulate their culture.

Yet the moral implications of these corporate cultures were rarely problematized. By moral, we mean what a society deems right. Whether these strong cultures would lead to a more equitable society or prove less exploitative for employees were not pressing concerns. Instead, the increased market share, rising profits, and growth benefits that strong cultures promised almost unequivocally justified their embrace. At the time, the moral consequences of strong cultures for organizations, their members, and, more broadly, society hardly registered as key concerns. Only observant bystanders to the business community, like Robert Jackall (1988) and Calvin Morrill (1995), warned about the less desirable moral outcomes of promoting such strong cultures.

Fast forward to more contemporary workplaces: people began to increasingly take note that the exact same strong cultures that supposedly allowed so many companies to thrive were also behind more harmful outcomes. Whether it be the suicides of Foxconn factory workers in China (Chan & Pun, 2010), the prevalence of pedophilia in the US Catholic Church (Alexander, 2018), the fraudulent deception committed by Enron leaders and some of its employees (Sims & Brinkmann, 2003), the fall of the former accounting giant Arthur Anderson (Hallett, 2003), or the police brutality against racial minorities across US precincts (Holmes & Smith, 2008), the damages that unexamined organizational cultures could cause suddenly entered the spotlight. Perhaps nowhere faster and more fiercely than with the 2017 #MeToo movement have these damages been surfaced and condemned. Working at the "creative" and "independent" Weinstein Company film studio abruptly took on a completely new meaning as sexual harassment accusations mounted against its founder, Harvey Weinstein. The studio's culture, heavily shaped by its leader, likely facilitated these abuses of power. But now, victims were publicly coming forward, eventually spurring an international movement against sexual violence at work. Employees and clients began speaking up about their experiences, shining a new light on the potential harmful effects of a strong organizational culture.

Under what conditions can strong cultures—where workers internalize these values as their own—lead to immoral behavior? Might the absence of a strong organizational culture suddenly prove more appealing? Is it possible to create an organizational culture that benefits organizations, their members, and society all at once? These questions suggest that organizational culture is likely to become a renewed concern for scholars of morality and organizations. We argue in this chapter that research on organizational culture can re-invigorate its agenda by returning to its historical roots. We start with a review of early research on organizational culture, and trace how the emphasis on performance slowly eroded culture's moral underpinnings. We also discuss specific streams of research that surfaced the oft-forgotten moral consequences of promoting strong cultures. Finally, we highlight how increasing awareness of moral dimensions of work, by both scholars and the general public,

begs for resurfacing the inquiry into the morality of organizational culture.

1 The Early Hopes for (and Limited Warnings About) Organizational Culture

It has only been 40 years since scholars started writing specifically and in depth about organizational culture (Pettigrew, 1979). Yet, its role in shaping, constraining, and enriching people's experiences at work has already spurred a vibrant and diverse research community. Early on, organizational culture was described as "an ideology that helps edit a member's everyday experience, [a] shared standard of relevance as to the critical aspects of the work that is being accomplished" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 210). Later, synthesizing research across the social sciences, Edgar Schein (1985, 1990) wrote about organizational culture as a pattern of shared assumptions, beliefs, values, norms, and artifacts—a definition that has since widely been embraced. The fastest to jump on the research bandwagon were organizational ethnographers who approached the study of culture by describing variations across settings—ranging from funeral homes (Barley, 1983) to banks (Weeks, 2004) and software firms (Perlow, 1999)—to help explain the social mechanisms and configurations sustaining given cultures. A key assumption in these studies is that organizations as well as employees benefit in one way or another from harboring such unique and individualized cultures.

In parallel, scholars drawing from social psychology began studying the relationship between an organization's culture and its performance. These researchers examined the congruence between organizational and individual cultural values to understand how culture shapes employees' socialization, satisfaction, and tenure—also key ingredients of an organization's ultimate success (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). The interplay between organizational contexts and select outcomes proved quite valuable in better explaining workplace behavior (Mowday & Sutton, 1993). As an example, a study of the Body Shop describes how its (mainly female) members were encouraged to express contained emotions at work. This culture of "bounded emotionality" promoted community building and personal wellbeing; at the same time, it offered a way for the firm to potentially grow and prosper in a crowded and competitive market (Martin et al., 1998). In short, the Body Shop's unique culture was what made it so successful.

In addition, cultures can sometimes transcend organizations and infuse entire regions or sectors. A prime example of these dynamics can be found by tracing the careers of the "Baxter Boys," namely those who started their careers in one pharmaceutical firm (Baxter) and went on to lead many other firms in the same industry (Higgins, 2005). At the time, headhunters specifically sought out people socialized at Baxter because of their "entrepreneurial spirit" and placed them in more bureaucratic contexts (such as Merck, Johnson & Johnson, and Abbott) with the hope of seeding these settings with the prior culture. Many such transplants succeeded and allowed the culture to diffuse throughout the pharmaceutical industry. Likewise, in her study on the evolution of the high-tech industry, Annalee Saxenian (1994) documented how Silicon Valley companies thrived as they fostered a free flow of ideas between like-minded organizations. On the other side of the country, companies in Boston's Route 128 shriveled as they clung to old notions of bureaucracy and hierarchy. Implicit in these approaches is that organizational cultures can provide a competitive advantage to certain firms and deliver on the many rewards that Peters and Waterman promised in the early 1980s.

None of the above scholars seemed entirely smitten—in the way business pundits were—by the positive transformative power of strong culture. Prominent researchers likened culture to a form of control (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Yet, researchers still focused more on specifying the contents of these cultures and tying them to firms' superior performance rather than interrogating them. Gradually, however, more skeptical voices emerged pointing to other, perhaps less righteous, moral implications of such cultures. In *Moral*

Mazes, Robert Jackall (1988) described how some managers neglected the maintenance of manufacturing plants when their timeline on the job would not be not long enough to reap personal career benefits from such investments. Such decisions seemed "culturally" fitting yet morally suspicious; these managers' decisions endangered not only the firm's longer-term survival but also the safety of their employees. Similarly, Calvin Morrill (1995) explained how many US corporate executives prefer silent disagreements and sending indirect signals to detractors—even to the detriment of a firm's success—rather than publicly discussing competing views. More critically, Diane Vaughan (1996, 1999) analyzed how mistakes and misconduct can become normalized within an organization. A strong culture provides employees with a template to interpret events and act accordingly. In her study, events that signaled danger were continually interpreted as acceptable; managers consequently downplayed or ignored employees when they raised concerns about life-threatening hazards. Such conformity to an organizational culture led to the explosion of National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA's) Challenger shuttle—a damning moral outcome, to say the least.

The strongest critic of the idealized view of organizational culture came from within the industry that had perhaps most embraced it: the software industry. New technology was supposed to save America from its manufacturing demise. In his book *Engineering Culture*, Gideon Kunda (1992) unflatteringly portrayed the organizational culture of a software firm that exerted normative control on its engineers. Kunda flagged one of the central tensions of strong cultures: "Though many members maintain a sense of freedom, they also experience a pull that is not easy to combat, an escalating commitment to the corporation and its definitions of reality, coupled with a systematic and persistent attack on the boundaries of their privacy" (p. 224). These and other critics (e.g., Fleming & Sturdy, 2011; C. A. Ray, 1986; Sallaz, 2009) tempered the expected enthusiasm following any new "culture" initiative put forth by organizational leaders. A corporate culture "survival guide" for employees suddenly seemed necessary (Schein, 2008).

2 The Forgotten Moral Roots of Organizational Culture Research

It is worth noting that Edgar Schein, the author of the above mentioned survival guide, is also one of the early central disseminators of the term "culture" in management and organizational research. His initial work on returning US prisoners during the Korean War directly influenced research and thinking on corporate cultures. As he explains, "Since I was very interested in social influence I decided to pull repatriates randomly off the line and interview them about their prison camp experiences. I asked each repatriate just to tell me his story from the moment of his capture. These stories fell into clear patterns that resulted in my being able to define in general terms what the Chinese indoctrination program consisted of, why it worked on a few people. . ." (Schein, 2006, p. 291). After that, Schein "decided to study how corporations indoctrinate their employees" by launching a panel study involving detailed career analysis of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) masters alumni (p. 293).

The term "indoctrination" itself contains moral undertones since it points to a process of teaching people to accept a certain set of beliefs rather uncritically. Indoctrination that goes unchecked and unquestioned sows the seeds for immoral acts. People who believe they are acting for a "greater good"—be it for their country or their company—are vulnerable to excusing the immoral consequences of their actions. This research echoed earlier attempts at understanding how people are socialized into a broader group (e.g., Elias, 2006) and subsequently commit themselves to collective ideals (e.g., Kanter, 1968), even when such ideals are prone to contestation.

Thus Schein's fascination with culture was rooted in the power of organizations to shape people's beliefs and guide their behavior as well as the potential dangers of such a phenomenon.

To him, questions of culture and morality seemed inherently intertwined. However, decades of popular buzz slowly buried these roots. Beyond infatuation with a management fad, obsessive discussions and attempts to "strengthen" culture allowed organizations to ignore other related topics—particularly the morally dubious outcome of such pursuits. Historically, much of the research on organizational culture emerged out of business schools, which often spoke of managers' business concerns. This alignment between researchers and managers reinforced organizational culture's promise to meet business goals, and any pitfalls of organizational culture were quickly forgotten.

The evolution of this scholarship at the Harvard Business School (HBS) serves as an illustrative example. Starting in the 1920s, Elton Mayo at HBS spearheaded a stream of research on workplace relations. He promoted the idea of fostering a collaborative culture at work, accompanied by the claim that paying more attention to workers' needs would revolutionize managerial practice. The notion that such a "collaborative" culture might strategically serve to tame any discord linked to "structural and power inequalities" barely registered at the time on Mayo's mind (Van Maanen, 2013). Instead, the movement that later became known as the Human Relations' school planted the seeds for conceptualizing culture as a fruitful and generative opportunity for all involved. Rapidly, the rosier view of culture sidetracked the moral questions that spurred early research on organizational culture. Though scholars have not shied away from pointing out the contradictions and paradoxes in these fragmented approaches to culture (e.g., Giorgi et al., 2015; Smircich, 1983; Weber & Dacin, 2011), the popular view of strong corporate culture remained fairly upbeat.

3 The Growing Evidence of Organizational Cultures' Darker Moral Side

Increasingly, researchers have spotlighted the darker side of organizational cultures (Greve et al., 2010). The dark moral side of organizational culture occurs when organizations condone or even encourage immoral behaviors. In the case of Wells Fargo, for instance, the bank openly took advantage of its clients. Their culture around sales rewarded employees with financial incentives for meeting their metrics, regardless of how they achieved that metric (Tayan, 2019). This led the bank's salesforce to create millions of fraudulent savings and checking accounts on behalf of clients without their consent. This surge benefited mainly salespeople and the bank's bottom line, even though their actions put customers at financial risk. Despite criticism from the media, leadership refuted any wrongdoing and permitted these practices to continue.

The *darker* moral side occurs when the moral repercussions of organizational culture are masked by good intentions from management, internalized by employees as beneficial, and lead to harmful consequences for workers, firms, and/or society. When Enron employees started manipulating its accounting practices, management masked the move as exemplary of the firm's "innovative" thinking—a key tenet of its culture (Benke, 2018, p. 115). Eventually the spread of this unintended corruption led to the company's sudden implosion and deafening downfall.

Next, we detail two research streams that reveal this darker, more insidious, side of organizational culture. First, studies aiming to understand how and when employees are most likely to "fit" with an organizational culture illustrate the often-overlooked moral implications of strong cultures. The notion of cultural fit greatly influences who gets hired and who gets fired, and composition of people within organizations subsequently shapes its moral stand. Second, we look at business schools since they are the training ground for managers who make critical decisions within organizations. The culture of business schools is one of the main funnels shaping managers' values; these same managers move on to influence the origins and contents of corporate cultures.

Early research argued that person–organization fit predicted job satisfaction, commitment to

the organization, and other behaviors (O'Reilly et al., 1991). Subsequent scholarship continually developed surveys and scales to measure an employee's alignment with organizational norms and values (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). The implied recommendation was to screen for fit early on to prevent turnover and other undesired outcomes. Recent studies have moved away from conceptualizing fit as a static alignment between the employee and the organization's values by examining employee's *enculturation trajectories*—that is, dynamic fit over time (Srivastava et al., 2018). They contend that employees can learn to fit in with the culture rather than being a fit from the onset (Mobasseri et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this research continues to show that failure to attain cultural fit increases the likelihood of an involuntary exit. The implication for organizations and employees is that conformity is key. Yet as early critics like Vaughan and Morrill warned, too much conformity can cause more harm than good.

This fanatical focus on cultural fit persists today among employees, managers, and some researchers. More critical scholars, however, have interrogated the consequences for employees when they believe that "fit" with an organization is more important than skills. Ofer Sharone (2014) found that white-collar job seekers in the United States mostly worry about improving their personal shortcomings to increase their "chemistry" with an organization. Candidates then attribute rejections to personal failure rather than a lack of skills; they see their whole self as flawed. Such existential crises justify the need for people to construct new selves, ones that mirror the market logics of independence and entrepreneurialism. This notion of developing a "personal brand" emerged out of the original organizational culture discourse of the 1980s (Vallas & Cummins, 2015). In the decades since, employee tenure in organizations has shortened, and the hold of organizational culture has purportedly decreased. Yet, now the individual is encouraged to self-impose a strong culture, normatively enforcing a profit-generating inclination on themselves (Vallas & Christin, 2018).

This perspective is further problematic when considering that organizational "fit" is often assessed in relation to dominant and existing cultures. Since organizational norms and values are typically constructed around notions of masculinity (Acker, 1990), straightness (Anteby & Anderson, 2014), and whiteness (V. E. Ray, 2019), promoting cultural fit results in continued exclusion of minorities and other disadvantaged groups within organizations. Indeed, Lauren Rivera (2012) detailed how "cultural matching" between employers and job candidates resulted in hiring culturally similar others. In her study she found that, ironically, surface diversity masked cultural homogeneity; despite hiring gender and ethnic minorities, selected candidates were still ones with access to elite educations and upper-class hobbies.

Self-conscious initiatives to counter inequality by changing the organizational culture often backfire. For example, some organizations try to reconcile their aim of fairness with the fuzziness inherent in finding a cultural fit through meritocratic myths (Amis et al., 2019). But organizational cultures that center rationality and objectivity as the basis for equality are perhaps even more dangerous, since they obscure the reproduction of often-hidden social and cultural capital available to those already privileged. This "paradox of meritocracy" was evidenced in an experimental study where managers were asked to allocate a performance bonus to employees (Castilla & Benard, 2010). Participants who were primed with "core company values" of meritocracy rewarded men with a higher bonus than equally qualified women. Importantly, this study highlights how organizational culture can perpetuate inequality beyond entry into an organization or occupation. Culture shapes organizational processes such as job selection, promotion, compensation, or task assignment. And organizational culture differentially impacts members' experiences outside of work as well. For instance, a culture that expects employees' total devotion and commitment to work amplifies discrimination already experienced by women in the workplace (Reid, 2015). Organizational culture therefore binds people together but also excludes others.

But where do managers learn about these purported advantages of organizational culture? And, more generally, where do many of them directly experience such cultures? A second stream of research showcases the pitfalls of strong cultures found in some business schools and their potential effects on the workplaces that school alumni go on to lead (Abend, 2016; Anteby, 2013; Orta, 2019). For decades, researchers focused their attention on describing the cultures of different industries where business school graduates tend to land (e.g., Jackall, 1988; Morrill, 1995). Scholars noted, for instance, how investment bankers embrace a "liquid" culture of job insecurity and short-term incentives that "help [s] contribute to the creation of both unstable, unsustainable markets *and* jobs" (Ho, 2009, p. 235). Many of these bankers are taught to value profits over people without fully realizing the consequences that this strategy has on the labor market itself. Most bankers also devote a significant number of hours to their organizations, a working load that eventually takes a toll on their own physical wellbeing (Michel, 2012).

Yet the training grounds of these business elites—and the organizational cultures that possibly gave rise to such behaviors—remained mostly off-limits to inquiry. Encouraged by calls to study-up (Nader, 1972) and to refocus scholarly efforts on the study of elites (Cousin et al., 2018), recent scholarship has examined these training grounds or "identity workspaces" in more depth (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). Andrew Orta's (2019) recent work on the "globalization" of business education is indicative of such efforts. His study looks at new initiatives in schools that, in the wake of recent corporate scandals, aim to "increase ethics education and infuse ethics training across all functional areas of the [MBA] curriculum" (p. 24). While some "ethical business" initiatives might seem new, business schools' history of trying to deliberately shape the morality of future managers is not.

The case of the Harvard Business School's culture epitomizes these intentions. The school holds a special place in the making of corporate morals since it has always viewed itself as encouraging its students to aim for "higher goals" (Khurana, 2010). Like many other elite business schools (Schleef, 2005), Harvard's aspiration is not only to teach students useable skills but also for students to develop a certain idealized view of themselves and, more broadly, managerial elites. Up until a few years ago, new faculty members joining the school were given a book titled *Education for Judgment* (Christensen et al., 1991). It was meant to underscore the school's educational hopes of engaging its students in a process of self-discovery. To realize this goal, the school developed an organizational culture that promotes a "perception of self-determination" (Anteby, 2013, p. 9). In short, students are taught to think of their actions as highly agentic and consequential. They are taught to believe their judgments and actions matter in this moral quest.

Yet, while the school's socialization model heavily scripts faculty members' teaching tasks (e.g., how to lead a case discussion, what prompt to ask students in class, and more), the model remains surprisingly silent on the moral compass that might guide students' (agentic) decision-making. In fact, an "ideology of non-ideology" is strongly enforced so its faculty members refrain from collectively taking an explicitly moral stand, in part for fear of antagonizing any part of the school's membership (Anteby, 2016). This imposed silence implicitly primes future business leaders not to vilify any moral stand; in doing so, this "neutral" ideology ends up justifying almost all stands. Under the guise of promoting higher goals, the school's culture de-facto socializes its members into *not* imposing any strong moral viewpoint on others. Such an organizational culture proves far-reaching since almost anything can be labeled "morally acceptable"—and thus nothing can be really deemed "immoral." This position mirrors the moral relativism that Gabriel Abend (2016) documented in many business settings in the United States. Such relativism typically benefits those in power over those who aim to reform any given system.

As the darker sides of organizational cultures are better understood, Edgar Schein's early interest in indoctrination and the potential pitfalls of strong cultures suddenly gains new saliency. A finer and more complex understanding of the

functioning of organizational cultures—to promote or prevent social change—foregrounds the need to continue exploring the moral implications of strong cultures. These and many other studies call for even more scrutiny of how strong organizational culture reflects and shapes society.

4 Conclusion

From the perspective of organizational leaders, the ultimate goal of a strong or effective organizational culture is a system of norms, values, and beliefs that are accepted and adopted unquestioningly by its members, so that members behave predictably as prescribed. The beauty of such an idealized view of culture rests in the hope that all members act as one for the benefit of the organization. Yet, reality is never quite as neat. Increasingly, people are pointing to how the interests of those who engineer specific organizational cultures might not be aligned with employees or society. As Vincent Meek reminds us, "An adequate theory of culture needs to be divorced from the direct interests of management and the naive assumption that a 'successful corporate culture' is either 'naturally good and stabilizing' or can be 'consciously manipulated'" (1988, p. 462).

What matters more than simply building a "strong" culture is to better understand who drives it and the moral assumptions embedded in it, regardless of avowed goals. Robert Jackall (2010) notes in the previous edition of this *Handbook* that morality in organizations depends on "the extent to which men and women, driven by personal ambitions, subject themselves to the exigence of their particular organizations… In the process, they recreate a world where morality is inseparable from the pursuit of one's own advantage" (p. 209). The key question is therefore identifying whose advantage is being served by developing strong organizational cultures, and at whose expense. Put otherwise, what is the price to pay for achieving performance outcomes? And, who might be paying the highest price?

Whereas early research was mostly concerned with the building, maintenance, and reproduction of organizational culture, new streams spotlight how members can resist and change culture (Weber & Dacin, 2011). Culture is a process of continual enactment, where individuals compare their perception of what the organization is to their beliefs of what the organization "ought to be" (Hatch, 1993). In a study illustrating this dynamic, a modern technology company advocated a culture of openness and transparency, yet leaders were still upholding strong structures of control (Turco, 2016). Employees manifested against this very culture by speaking up about the contradictions and noting how their experiences did not match the stated corporate intentions. On the other hand, even well-intentioned organizational cultures can backfire. Entrenched professional norms can lead members to resist changes that would be beneficial to them (Kellogg, 2011). Questions of pushback and resistance are inherently moral ones since they point to divergent viewpoints between organizations, members, and society.

Now that a vast number of white-collar professionals—the typical seekers and advocates of strong organizational cultures—have experienced working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have seen first-hand the pros and cons of a sudden "absence" of a strong culture. Organizational members might feel a renewed energy to more strongly shape the culture they aspire to live in. Alternatively, the future of organizational culture might look different from its more upbeat past as workers embrace authenticity in the workplace, promoting a plurality of individualized values. A dwindling tolerance to put up with strong workplace cultures that reflect the biases and prejudices of dominant groups might give way for a new appreciation of "weaker" organizational cultures.

The increasing consciousness of the darker side of organizational culture points to the necessity to deepen our understanding of culture. Specifically, we need to systematically investigate the conditions under which organizational cultures lead to immoral behavior and harmful consequences. Research on organizational culture has progressed from two ontological perspectives that could inform further inquiry. The first view (rooted in the fit tradition) assumes leaders can

actively shape an organization's culture. Though embedded in a broader external environment (Zucker, 1988), leaders are still seen as principal engineers of culture. But instead of considering *how* leaders can shape culture, this literature might want to pivot and ask whether they *should*. In addition, those looking at culture from its roots in anthropology eschew the notion that culture can be "managed" to make an organization more "effective" (Meek, 1988). Instead of being something that an organization *has*—an independent variable to be engineered and manipulated from above—culture is something an organization *is*—the end result of an emergent collective process (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Smircich, 1983; Weick, 1979). Again, a revisiting of the morality of cultural constructions is warranted. It is not because something *is* that it *should* be, or that it cannot be consciously changed. Regardless of researchers' starting point, the moral finality of organizational culture cannot remain unquestioned.

These studies and recent developments in the field highlight the moral power and ambiguity of organizational culture: it can stifle as much as enrich employees' experiences at work. Employees can succumb to its controlling force, oppose and challenge it, or use it as a catalyst for change. The outcomes of any one strategy can be beneficial or detrimental to the organization, its members, and society more broadly. Above all, the consequences of strong organizational culture warrant caution and skepticism by managers, workers, and outside observers alike. The coming decades will likely prove a fertile testing ground for such ideas and for a continued examination of the moral implications of existing and emerging assumptions about organizational cultures.

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Part III

Embodiment, Emotions, and Morality

The Structure, Culture, and Biology Driving Moralization of the Human Universe

Jonathan H. Turner

Abstract

The most important evolutionary event in human evolutionary history was the dramatic enhancement of emotions along the hominin line leading to the first humans. Emotions enabled the very-late hominin brain to grow, eventually leading to spoken language and symbolic culture in humans that could be used eventually to "moralize" the social universe. In both small pre-literate societies and larger, higher technology societies of the more recent past and present, the *process of moralization* made humans and their societies unique, because they were organized by *humans' dramatically enhanced emotional capacities*. Thus, in order to understand morality and moralization of social structures and their cultures at all levels of social organization, it is necessary to conceptualize (1) the fundamental nature of social structures, (2) the fundamental properties of culture attached to these structures, and (3) how the biology of emotions allowed humans' hominin ancestors to survive and, over time, alter the hominin and then human brain, thereby making language and culture possible. Thus, the study of emotions, social structure, culture, and morality provides a means for understanding of humans and societies from their very beginnings to the present day, and into the future.

Keywords

Levels of Social Structure and Culture · Moralization of Socio-cultural Formations

1 Toward a More Integrative Social Psychology

For many years, I have felt that social psychology in American sociology has under-emphasized the scale and scope of the "social" part of its name. Sociological social psychologists tend to emphasize the *most proximate dimensions* of the social—for example, status, roles, norms, small groups (or simulated groups), and social categories like gender, ethnicity, and age. The same is true of culture, which is always attached to these proximate elements of social structures. Culture is almost always studied in a delimited manner as local expectations-states, status beliefs, role conceptions, and individual beliefs rather than as a property of more meso- and macro-structures as high generalized values, beliefs, ideologies, institutional norms, symbolic media, technologies, texts, traditions, etc. And so, coupled with a delimited view of social structure, the socio-cultural universe studied by much of social psychology is decidedly micro and limited,

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virtually ignoring the macro-level of human societies, and even underemphasizing the meso-level of socio-cultural reality in which all face-to-face interaction is imbedded. What is true in social psychology is also true in almost every subfield within sociology.

In her Cooley-Mead Award address in 2021, Jan E. Stets suggested that social psychology begins to conceptualize its subject matter in a more grandiose way, as layered socio-cultural formations that constitute distinctive emergent phenomena operating at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of societal organization. This was a bold and welcome statement from an experimental social psychologist who is now willing to think about the far reaches of humans socio-cultural universe in trying to explain more micro level behaviors, motive states, and interactions. Another prominent example of hopefully incipient trend was provided by David Heise (2019) in a book on social institutions, an unlikely interest for social psychologists today. Furthermore, other experimental social psychologists like Edward Lawler and his frequent co-authors, Shane Thye and Jeongkoo Yoon (2009, 2016), have developed a more general view of how emotions and commitments travel up layers of social structure and culture. So, there have been rumblings but not an avalanche of interest in conceptualizing the social in it more robust manifestations. True, there were even earlier rumblings trying to introduce a more macro-view of structure and culture on personality in the 1960s (e.g., Parsons, 1964; Sorokin, 1969; and Shibutani, 1962 [1988]), but these came to virtually a dead end and, today, are hardly seen. Today, it is a narrower aspect of a person—say, identity—or behaviors of persons in response to group- or encounter-level norms or expectations that is likely to be the focus in much social psychology and even micro-sociology more generally.

My goal in this paper is to offer a way of conceptualizing micro-to-macro and, conversely, macro-to-micro-layering of the social universe with an eye to encouraging social psychologists and all other sociologists to develop *a more robust view of the socio-cultural universe*, as it constrains micro-level behavioral and interpersonal processes. Moreover, it is important to theorize and to conduct research on how micro-dynamics work their way up to meso- and, then, to macro-structural and cultural formations, vice versa. Indeed, macro-level cultures are created and sustained by human actions and interaction in micro-contexts reverberating up layers of social structure to sustain human societies. The converse is also true: the macro- and meso-structures and their cultures exert powerful influences, and even powerful constraints, on the more proximate elements of structure and culture in most social psychological research and theorizing. And, once greater attention is paid to this layering of the social universe, social psychology can study phenomena that help explain the dynamics operating at not only the micro-level of socio-cultural organization but also at the meso- and macro-levels. I will emphasize one property of human social organization that can serve a useful segue for studying the social more generally: the processes by which all levels of culture as they constrain actions and behaviors of individuals and corporate units within different layers of the social become *moralized* in ways that have large effects on human behavior and interaction that, in turn, have large effects on the meso- and macro-levels of human socio-cultural organization.

2 Conceptualizing *Structural* Properties of the Social Universe

Every behavior, thought, feeling, act, and interaction in encounters are *embedded in, and constrained by, meso-level social units that, in turn, are embedded in larger macro-level social units*. And in larger are societies, *the process of successive embedding* must be explained to understand fully *any* aspect of human behavior, interaction, and organization. Figure 1 Diagrams of the basic *social structures* at the most fundamental level of social organization (Turner, 2010a, 2010b, 2008).

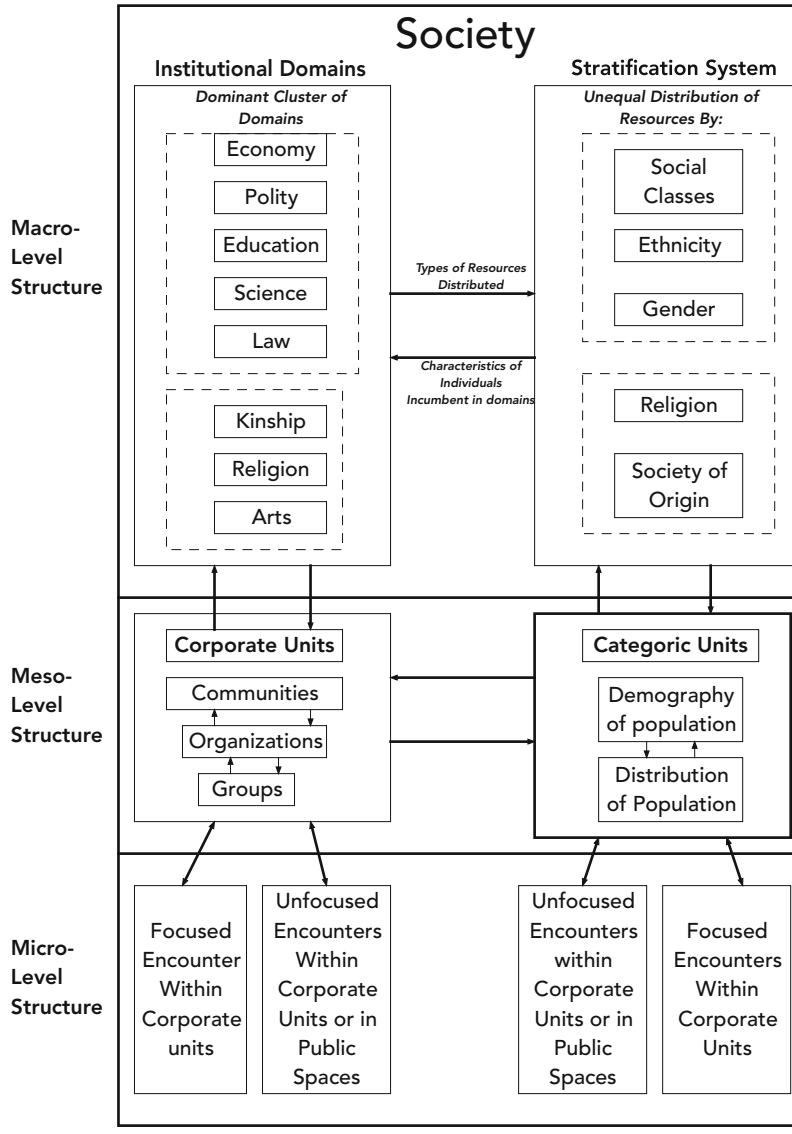


Fig. 1 The levels of organization of human

Social reality unfolds at three basic levels: macro-, meso-, and micro-; and while this is an analytical set of distinctions, it is also the way in which human societies unfolded during 400,000 years of societal evolution. The first societies, which dominated for most of this 400,000 years, were not organized at the macro-level, except in the sense that small populations of hunter-gatherers sharing a common language could perhaps been seen as a macro-level cultural formation (see Turner & Roberts, 2023). It was not until societies began to settle down into permanent communities that more macro-formations of societies began to emerge; and key among these were the beginnings of stratification systems and the differentiation of distinctive institutional domains, beyond the kinship, which had been the organizing template for human societies for well over 300,000 years (Turner, 2021a; Turner & Roberts, 2023).

2.1 The Macro-Level of Human Societies

The two pillars of macro-level social organization—that is, *institutional* domains and *stratification systems*—began to evolve as human societies grew larger over the last 12,000 years. The first human institutions evolved in their order of their differentiation from kinship (Abrutyn & Turner, 2022): polity, religion, economy, law. Later came science, education, arts, sports. Figure 1, however, divides the dominant from less dominant institutions for a contemporary society (by the two dotted-line boxes). Thus, both kinship and religion in most post-industrial societies are less critical than economy, polity, education, science, and law in distributing valued resources to members of a population—a dramatic reversal of the dominance kinship and religion in the first human societies, although in some societies today, such as most Islamic societies, religion remains a dominant force. Whatever the exact make-up of institutional domains in a society, they distribute valued resources to members of the population; and increasingly, these resources were and are today unequally distributed, thereby creating the second pillar of macro-level social organization, stratification systems.

Stratification systems thus evolved as institutional domains proliferated and differentiated as societies grew, especially during the Holocene, beginning around 10,000 years ago. There are both highly generalized resources that are distributed unequally, such as *prestige*, *honor*, and *positive emotions*, but these are linked to the resources distributed by each institutional domain (Turner, 2015). And, the building blocks of stratification systems revolved around classes, ethnic subpopulations, gender, and other is that the resources distributed by institutional domains unequally to individuals and families create marked differences in the type and amount of resources that members of subpopulations receive. Thus, to understand the second structural pillar of human societies requires knowledge of what institutional domains have differentiated and what resources are distributed unequally to members of a population on the basis of what criteria. As will become evident shortly, *morality* is very much channeled through these two sets of macrostructures—that is, institutional domains and subpopulations receiving varying amounts of resources from their incumbency in institutional domains. To fully understand how these dynamics operate and affect morality, it is necessary to complete this inventory of the three levels of human society.

2.2 The Meso-Level of Human Societies

Institutional domains and stratification systems are built from two key meso-level structures (Turner, 2002): (1) *corporate units* and (2) *categoric units*. *Corporate units* evidence a division of labor coordinating individual activities, generally in reference to goals defined with greater or less specificity. There are only three basic types of corporate units: *groups*, *organizations*, and *communities*. Often groups are embedded in organizations, and groups and organizations are embedded in communities. *Categoric* are units created by the fact that humans always place self and others into categories, such as social class, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, or any category that *defines subpopulations as distinctive*. Institutional domains are clusters of groups and organizations in communities that address particular problems of adaptation among members of a population. Categoric units, as their name implies, are created by definitions of subpopulations of individuals and often families that reveal distinctive characteristics that set them off from other categories of persons; and they are almost always accompanied by evaluations of their characteristics *vis-à-vis* other categories of persons.

Corporate units are the building blocks of institutional domains, whereas categ*oric units* are the building blocks of stratification systems. For most of human history, there was only one form of corporate unit—groups—and a small number of categoric units: sex/gender and age.

In nomadic hunting and gathering societies, which were dominant for most of human history, there was only one type of corporate unit—the group—with societies composed of just two types of groups, *nuclear families* organized into small *bands* of nuclear families; and there were only two types of categoric units: gender/sex and age. Thus, societies revealed only one institutional domain—kinship—and no stratification of categoric units. Thus, for most of human history, stratification was not evident, although it would begin to emerge when hunter-gatherers would settle down in geographical space, thus creating an additional corporate unit—community—and the very beginnings of stratification between leaders of the community and all other members of the society (Abrutyn & Turner, 2022; Turner, 2021a). But, once populations settled down permanently, and societies began to grow in size, thereby causing the differentiation of new institutional domains composed of groups inside organizations located in communities and, moreover, the differentiation of categories of individuals receiving different levels of valued resources, thus creating the first stratification systems.

2.3 The Micro-Level of Human Societies

The micro-level of human societies is that, using Erving Goffman's (1961) terms, we can identify two types of encounters among individuals in co-presence: (1) *focused encounters* where individuals interact face-to-face and (2) *unfocused encounters* where individuals are co-present but do not engage in face-to-face interaction. In the contemporary world, we can identify a third form of encounter: mediated encounters via communications' technologies that create "a sense of" focus of attention (visual and auditory) among individuals interacting in cyber space. For most of human history, encounters were face-to-face and occurred in groups (later in communities and organizations). Unfocused encounters increased with population growth, but for most of human history, micro-level processes revolved around focused encounters, revealing the properties outlined by Goffman (1961).[1] These properties in cyber face create the sense of face-to-face interaction but their effects are not quite the same as real human contact in space; and indeed, many of the problems with mediated interactions revolve around this now ubiquitous form of interaction that focuses interaction without the same immediacy as real co-presence in physical space where individuals are simultaneously focuses on each other. Just what the longer term consequences of this new form of interaction are hard to predict, but it is clear that people themselves do not seem them as the same as real physical co-presence and face-to-face engagement, even as they become often addicted to, and often dependent upon, emotional slaved to such forms of mediated interaction.[2]

2.4 Embedding and the Structures of Human Societies

As Fig. 1 emphasizes, micro-level encounters are embedded in corporate and categoric units, with corporate units embedded within an institutional domain, and categoric units within a stratification system distributing resources unequally. Thus, the building blocks of a society are encounters occurring individuals in corporate units that make up institutional domains, and encounters among individuals in diverse categoric units that make up the units of the stratification system receiving valued resources generated in the corporate units

[1] A single visual and cognitive focus, a mutual and preferential openness to verbal communication, a heightened mutual relevance of acts, an eye-to-eye ecological huddle, an emergent "we" feeling of solidarity and flow of feelings and emotions, a ritual and ceremonial punctuations of openings, closings, entrances, and exits, and a set of procedures for corrective compensation for deviant acts.

[2] One of the reasons that mediated encounters often fail to arouse positive emotions is the fact that they are indeed mediated. Humans are genetically programmed to read gestures in real face-to-face encounters, within a broader socio-cultural context. Such mediated interactions reduce the fidelity of reading gestures but, equally important, they often occur in an empty socio-cultural context and, hence, cannot be moralized in the ways that I will discuss shortly.

of institutional domains. Mediated interactions can have large effects on all levels of a society and certainly on individuals' thoughts and feelings, but it is not clear at this point how critical they are actual building blocks of societies because they can be ephemeral and transitory. Again, the next decades will tell just how critical they are in building up social structures and, more significantly, cultures.

In much social psychology and in virtually all of psychology, focus is best the encounter or even just the characteristics of individual, often using mediated technologies such as communication with computers where one partner is a computer program masquerading as a human being. And, if more of the social is to be brought into analysis, it is limited interactions among real humans and/or interaction in some narrow property of groups, such as status or roles, and the culture of these. Sometimes the group as a whole is included, with such analysis of the structure and culture of the group. But as is illustrated by Fig. 1, *society is more than these elements*; and more importantly, morality is not just a property of individuals but it is enshrined in every aspect of the culture attached to each and every level of social structure at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of human social organization.[3] And as the arrows in Fig. 1 moving up and down the figure as well as across the two columns marking of institutional domains and stratification systems, the structure and culture of *each* institutional domain, *each* level of stratification in salient in virtually all encounters. Moreover, the structure of *institutional system of the whole society* and the *entire culture of the whole stratification system* affect every aspect of focused and unfocused encounters as well as mediated encounters across cyber space. Thus, as the figure connotes, there is *a great deal many more forces* driving encounters than is currently explored in most research and theory in social psychology. And, when focus is on morality, it becomes even more imperative to look at the *entire structure of societies and their cultures,* at every level of social organization. Moral cultural codes flow down from the culture of the society as a whole through all institutional domains and through all strata and categories of the stratification system and, then, through all categoric and corporate units at the meso-level of social organization, and finally down to all focused and unfocused encounters. And, if we wanted to include the evolved biology of humans as yet another level of society, it immediately becomes evident that morality is very much affected by biologically driven propensities of humans to be moral and evaluative (see Turner, 2021a). So, there is another level below the encounter that would emphasize the evolved features of humans as a species, with much morality driven by the emotions, cognitive, and behavioral capacities and propensities of humans as an evolved species. I will seek to mention some of these as the analysis of morality continues. Indeed, morality in humans and their sociocultural creations involves vastly more than most social psychologists feel comfortable in conceptualizing. What is true of morality is true of almost every other subfield in social psychology. There is more of the social and more of the biological required for a full understanding of why and how humans think, emote, behave, and organize than most of not only social psychology but also sociology as mode of inquiry normally consider much less embrace. The same is true in all the social sciences and biological sciences as well.

3 Conceptualizing the *Cultural* Properties of the Social Universe

Attached to every element of social structures is culture. Again, social psychology in sociology does not address these successive layers cultural systems in great detail.[4] These successive layers

[3] See Gabriel Abend's award-winning book, *The Moral Background* (2014), for an analysis of morality as it applies to systems of business ethics as a useful empirical illustration of these more general dynamics.

[4] There are exceptions. See, for example, the *many* publications by M. C. Kohn and C. Schooler providing rich empirical detail on the relations elements of social

of the cultural systems are often ignored, especially at the macro-level of social structure, while not being as comprehensive as they could be at the meso-level. For example, if a social psychologist studies why beliefs of a certain type, the fact that beliefs are embedded in layers of more inclusive systems of culture—at a minimum in the (a) cultures of *corporate units* like groups, organizations, and communities, (b) the cultures of *categoric units* like ethnicity, religion, social class, gender, and age, (c) the cultures of macrostructures of diverse *institutional domains*, (d) the cultures of the macro-level *stratification systems*, (e) the cultures entire societies, and potentially, even (f) the culture of inter-societal systems. Of course, at times this embedding can be ignored because it is not practical to study every level of socio-cultural reality or because some layers of this reality are not relevant to a particular research problems or theoretical statements. But, I would argue that it is almost always useful to consider meso- and macro-levels of embedding of most micro-level social processes and psychological dynamics.

Humans have incredible brains that can create culture and build up social structures organizing now billions of individuals. And, little of this massive construction project is biologically programmed by the human genome, as it is among social insects that also build up very populous societies. Rather, the majesty of human socio-cultural formations is driven by human emotions and intelligence as these have allowed for the use of technologies to build up of social structures and their cultures. By staying to close "to the action of interaction" at the micro-level of social organization, much social psychology limits its explanatory potential. And, indeed, one of the reasons that sociologists often emphasize that the micro-macro "gap" or the "failure" of sociological theory to explain the dynamics linking levels of social organization is sometimes used to covert social psychologists in micro-chauvinists, seeing only what occurs in action and interaction among people as all that is "real." Thus, the realms that constrain almost every thought, action, or behavior in human interaction are ignored or downgraded to some specific variable, detached from its meso- and macro-anchor. Conversely, those working at the macro-level of social organization become macro-chauvinists, seeing interpersonal behavior as irrelevant for understanding the "emergent properties" of the social world. Both types of chauvinism are wrong and work against a unified theory of human social organization.

I have at times argued that sociology is quite far along in solving its micro-and macro-gap problem, even if most sociologists do not realize it. I have even gone so far as to argue that sociology has *actually solved its micro-macro-gap problem beyond that evident in any other social science and even natural science*, including biology and physics. This sounds outrageous, which why I like to repeat as often as anyone will listen, but more fundamentally, *I think that it is true*. Physics does not have a clean, or even messy, integration of astrophysics with subatomic branches of physics. Certainly, the most "scientific" of the social sciences, economics, does not have an integration of micro- and macro-economics. Most hard sciences believe that an integration is possible, and even eventually likely, but sociologists who have actually done the most on this problem for the social universe often believe what they have already done is not possible! This blindness to what theorists have already done is the outcome of overspecialization in sociology, and particularly social psychology.

The virtue of high degrees of specialization is that theory and research can have focus. The negative side of overspecialization is that it creates narrow silos of knowledge, disconnected from other silos of knowledge. Such is the problem with sociology in general, and social psychology in particular. What sociology needs is for more than the relatively small numbers of scholars to start looking over the intellectual fences that separate sociologists from each other. Of course, not all sociologists have allowed themselves to be so blinded, as will become evident. So, my goal in this chapter is to examine morality as a fundamental dynamic in human societies that

structure and culture over a decades-long research program (such as, Kohn & Schooler, 1969).

illustrates just how far along sociology has come in closing the micro-macro gap. In fact, there is no real gap, but a serious gap in many, if not most, sociologists perception of their own field.

This is a long introduction to the topic of this paper: *the moral basis of human action, interaction, and organization*. Humans are not only highly emotional animal, but probably we the most emotional animal on earth, and moreover, we also exhibit wide range of emotions that can have widely different valences (Turner, 2000, 2001, 2007, 2021). And a good many of these emotions are tied to morality, with morality being defined as *conceptions lodged in every level of social structure and culture of the right, appropriate, wrong, inappropriate, correct way to think, emote, behave, interact, and organize*. For morality to have "teeth" and power over individuals, emotions must be aroused when moral codes or expectations are affirmed and, even more so when they are violated by self and others.

Figure 2 outlines, at the most abstract level, the nature of culture in human societies, from the culture of the entire society to the culture flowing down the two pillars of societies of differentiated institutional domains and layers of the stratification through, respectively, the meso-level corporate unit and categoric unit that are the building blocs of macro-structures and, finally, to focused and unfocused (and mediated) encounters of interaction. Conversely, each form of culture attached to the micro-, meso-, and macro-social organization flows upward and across the structures of the institutional and stratification systems, potentially altering culture at the societal level. It is also possible that there is an intermediate level between the culture of the whole society and the two pillars of institutional domains and stratification systems operating at all levels of social structure. This intermediate structure can be typified by *regional cultures* that vary across the geography of a society, particularly if a society in large in terms of not only the size of a population but also the size of territory in a society. Over time, in the contemporary world, regional cultures tend to decline with population mobility and expanded technologies of communication (allowing for mediated encounters). But still, they may be regional differences in the culture of particular institution domains and the corporate units of these domains as well as in the culture attached to incumbents in various categoric units receiving differential levels of perhaps somewhat different recourses.

3.1 Macro-Level Culture

Societal Culture It may seem rather incomplete to conceptualize societal-level culture, particularly for large societies in the contemporary world, in terms of only their *technologies*, *traditions*, *texts*, *values* and gener*alized ideologies*. But I would argue that these are the most generic and important societal-level elements of culture necessary for understanding the process of *moralization* that occurs at all levels of socio-cultural reality. *Technologies* are knowledge about how to manipulate the environment—socio-cultural, biotic, and physical. Technology is thus cultural, even though the products of this knowledge—phones, airplanes, computers, and other physical manifestations of the application of knowledge—are often seen as "technology." The level and type of knowledge in a society have large effects on how a society is organized, but for my purposes here, it also has large effects on culture at every level of social organization. Thus, technology has large effects on the other elements in the box labeled "societal-level culture," as denoted by the arrows connecting the boxes. Values, traditions, texts, values, and generalized ideologies, and every other element of culture down to the micro-level interaction of individuals in focused and unfocused as well as mediated interactions are influenced by the level of knowledge about how to manipulate the environment, or *technology*.

Traditions are simply ways of thinking, acting, and organizing that individuals share and draw upon as they organize and interact in encounters. *Texts* are oral or written cultural systems that have accumulated among members of a population and these too, like technology, affect all other elements of culture operating at macro-, meso-,

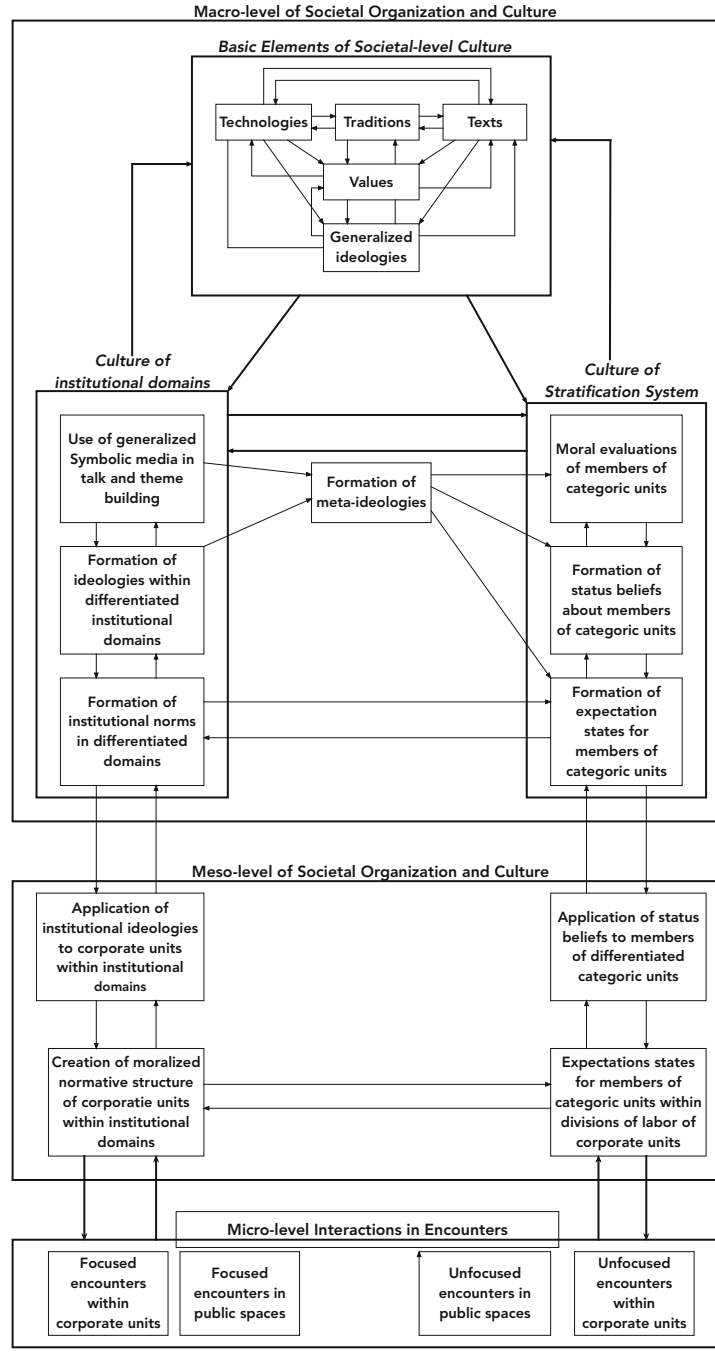


Fig. 2 Moralization across levels of cultural organization

and micro-levels of social organization. *Values* are highly generalized conceptions of what is right-wrong, appropriate-inappropriate, fair-unfair, and other evaluative conceptions and perceptions. Values are the highest level of moralization of culture in a society; and they constrain and infuse all other cultural systems at all levels of social organization. Values are, of course, affected by technologies, traditions, texts, generalized ideologies, and all other culture

elements operating at each level of social organization. Still, I would emphasize that values are one of one of the driving engines of morality and moralization of social life. Interestingly, sociologists do not do large amounts of empirical research or theorizing on values in societies any more, even though cultural sociology is a large subfield in the discipline of sociology [for exceptions, see: Miles, 2016; Hitlin, 2003, 2008; Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004). *Generalized ideologies* arise, especially as societies get larger, from values as they are made relevant for key spheres of social organization delineated in the model in Fig. 2, but the reverse is also true, values and generalized ideologies change with alterations of technology, traditions, and texts but, equally important, with changes in the cultures of institutional domains and stratification and the corporate and categoric units from which these pillars of society are constructed. This change is also often initiated with what is occurring in encounters; and as significant shifts occur at this micro-level of social organization, these can move up through the meso- to macro-levels, changing the culture at each level of social organization and, in so doing, change the generalized ideology of a whole society that, reciprocally, moves back two the two pillars of social organization. *Generalized ideologies* are, in essence, a composite of the distinctive institutional ideologies in dominant institutions and the meta-ideology that emerges when the ideologies of institutional domains are blended together; and they have the largest effect on legitimating stratification systems.

It would be easy to blame social psychology for doing so little analysis at more macro-level, especially compared to the past in sociology where these macro-elements of culture were studied intensively. At the same time, cultural analysis in sociology has flowered in recent decades; and I would propose that the more global, macro-approach to culture also be included in cultural analysis. For, from my perspective, if morality is to be understood, it is necessary to recognize that the elements of culture labeled in the top box in Fig. 2 exist and operate; they are *not* reifications but real systems of culture that are shared by most members of a society, and they affect and constrain all other levels of culture that emerge in differentiated institutional domains and their respective corporate units and stratification systems and their constituent categoric units.

The Culture of Institutional Domains Institutional domains evolved as a response to section pressures on populations and are all built up from creating corporate units and relations among corporate units to reduce these selection pressures. As noted, the first institution was kinship, with other institutional activities occurring within the division of labor within kin units operating in small bands of composed of nuclear families. All institutional domains evidence several key forms of culture: (1) a *generalized symbolic medium of discourse and exchange* for organizing relations within and between corporate units within a domain and for exchanges with corporate units in other institutional domains; (2) an *ideology* legitimating the activities of individuals and corporate units within an institutional domain; and (3) a high *generalized set of institutional norms* specifying appropriate dispositions, behaviors, and activities within the corporate units of an institutional domains. Each of these cultural systems is discussed below (Abrutyn & Turner, 2022).

1. Generalized Symbolic Media of Exchange. In Fig. 3, I outline in rough terms how and why generalized symbolic media of exchange evolve within institutional domains. Table 1 defines the media of exchange for prominent institutional domains. Generalized symbolic media evolve in discourse and talk as institutional domains are evolving, and they change in much the same way (Luhmann, 1976; Parsons, 1963a, 1963b; Turner, 2003; Abrutyn & Turner, 2022). As talk and discourse occur, and as leaders of corporate units engage in exchanges of resources with other corporate units within a domain, they develop a common repertoire of symbols that, over time, develop special properties. One is that these media are moralized by what s*hould* be occurring within corporate units within different institutional

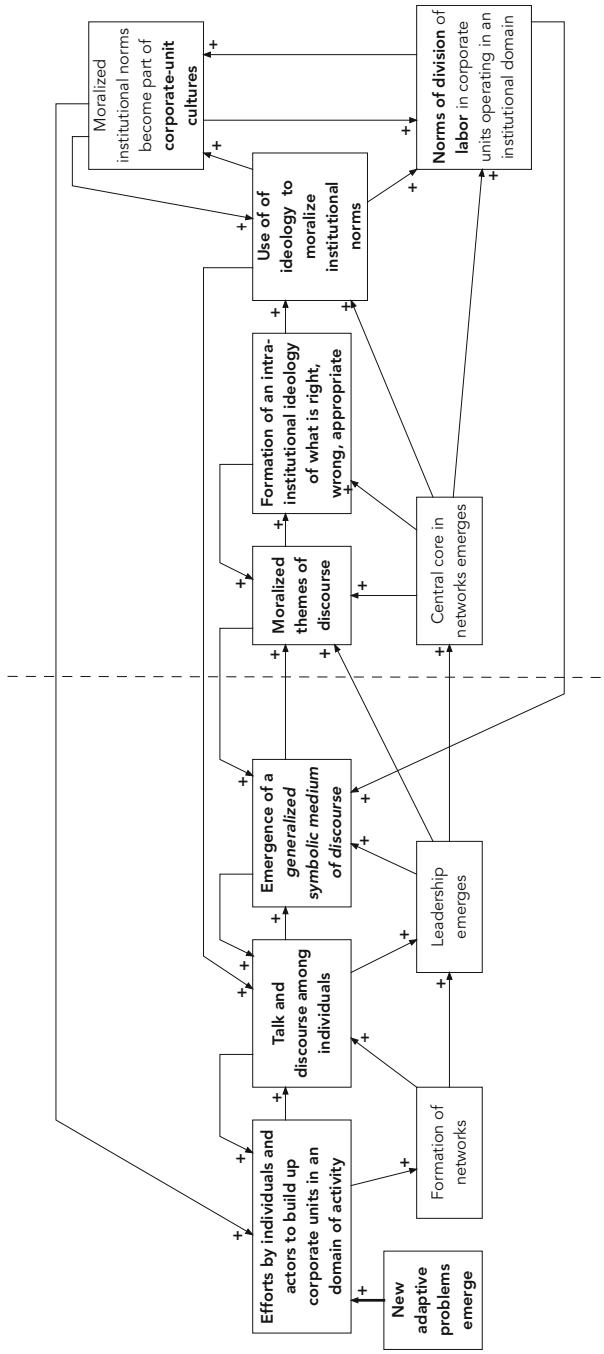


Fig. 3 The process of developing generalized symbolic media of discourse and its moralization and use in institutional ideologies

Table 1 Generalized symbolic media of institutional domains

Kinship	*Love/loyalty/commitment*, or the use of intense positive affective states to forge and mark commitments to others and groups of others
Economy	*Money*, or marking and denoting exchange value of objects, actions, and services by the metrics inhering in money
Polity	*Power/authority/control*, or the capacity to control the actions of other actors
Law	*Regulation/coordination/justice*, or the capacity to adjudicate social relations and render judgments about justice, fairness, and appropriateness of actions
Religion	*Sacredness of/piety toward supernatural*, or the commitment to beliefs about forces and entities inhabiting a non-observable supernatural realm and the propensity to explain events and conditions by references to these sacred forces and beings
Education	*Learning; knowledge*, or the commitment to acquiring and passing on knowledge
Science	*Creating verified knowledge*, or the invocation of standards for gaining verified knowledge about all dimensions of the social, biotic, and physico-chemical universes
Medicine	*Health/well-being*, or the concern about and commitment to sustaining the normal functioning of the human body
Sport	*Competitiveness*, or the definition of games that produce winners and losers by virtue of the respective efforts of players
Arts	*Aesthetics*, or the commitment to make and evaluate objects and performances by standards of beauty and pleasure that they give observers

Note: These and other generalized symbolic media are employed in discourse among actors, in articulating themes, and in developing ideologies about what should and ought to transpire in an institutional domain. They tend to circulate within a domain, but all of the symbolic media can circulate in other domains, although some media are more likely to do so than others

domains. This moralizing is, to some extent, taken from value premises at the societal level, tailed to the special realities of an emerging institutional domains.

Another property is that these media guide and channel the discourse and talk among actors within a domain. Still another is that, because of their moralized properties, generalized symbolic media become inherently valuable to actors in the sense that they are rewarding. In fact, generalized symbolic media increasingly take on another property as the valued resource of exchanges within an institutional domain and, similarly, as something to exchange for the valued symbolic media of other institutional domain. Thus, when actors from different institutional domains interact, they often exchange generalized symbolic media.

Moreover, generalized symbolic media become the scarce resources given to actors within the division of labor of corporate units within a domain, with this resource being differentially allocated by locations in the divisions of labor of corporate units, thereby creating inequalities among different categories of actors. The result is that those who have more of any symbolic medium are valorized for their capacity to accumulate symbolic media; and the more of these media that can be obtained by an individual, the higher the rank and the greater the prestige of those obtaining large shares of a generalized symbolic medium. Thus, the stratification system in a society is *based upon the unequal distribution of generalized symbolic media by corporate units* within diverse and differentiated institutional domains. Those who gain the most are seen as morally superior and those who have few generalized symbolic media are devalued and stigmatized, thus denying them other valued symbolic resources like a sense of well-being, prestige, and positive emotions about self.

For the generalized symbolic media of *money* (economy), it is obvious that it holds value since it can be used to purchase other generalized symbolic media in virtually all institutional domains. Similarly, the generalized symbolic medium of *power* is also valuable because power can be used to

gain other media and resources. Moreover, much like money, power is distributed to corporate units in other institutional domains in the form of franchising by polity of power as *authority* in corporate units within specific domains—for example, in the form of parental authority over family, authority in corporate units in all other institutional domains as well (education, science, law, religion, economy, sport, and arts). Indeed, polity can take this authority away to actors in particular institutional domains, or it can expand the giving of this limited authority to actors in corporate units. And the more money and power are used to secure all other generalized symbolic media, the more actors can enjoy more generalized rewards and resources, like positive emotions about self, prestige, and sense of worth. Conversely, those who cannot secure generalized symbolic media by money or power will be less able to experience the value of many other media plus the generalized media like prestige, positive emotions, and sense of worth. Indeed, when individuals and families cannot secure much money from the economy, franchised authority from polity, education, knowledge of science, or protections from law, they are often forced to secure what they can from family (*love/loyalty*) and religion (*piety/sacredness*). Yet, given the lack of other symbolic media, these fall back media may not be available as well, with the result that individuals and families may become dysfunctional.

Thus, stratification can be seen as much more robust than the conceptualizations of most theorist and research in stratification. *Money* (from economy and all other domains using money in conjunction with their own symbolic medium) and *power* (as authority franchised by polity to corporate units in all institutional domains) circulate in all institutional domains, but if individuals cannot secure these anywhere, save except for perhaps family, then they are much more deprived than just not having money or power (see Fourcade & Healy, 2013 [2017] for more general analyses). They are, in fact, denied most other generalized symbolic media, plus generalized positive feelings associated with positive emotions about self and life, prestige, worth, satisfaction, and many other positive emotions. Thus, with a more robust conception of the culture of institutional domains, it is clear that a great deal more than the normal inventory of resources is being unequally distributed to individuals and families. The generalized symbolic medium of family and religion are easy to get by just joining a church or marriage and offspring, but without all of the other valued resources flowing from the unequal distribution of generalized symbolic media and generalized reinforces like prestige, positive emotions, and worth, it is often difficult to even secure the few symbolic media offered by kinship and family as well as religion (both of which involve money which the poor do not have!).

The result, of course, is that individuals without these resources cannot occupy high positions in the division of labor of corporate units potentially across all institutional domains, thereby denying individuals and offspring of individuals access to resources. Moreover, as I will examine next, the ideologies legitimating what occurs within institutional domains will work to further stigmatized those who cannot gain access to generalized symbolic media. Thus, not only do individuals and families suffer from a lack of valued resources, they are further stigmatized by negative evaluations from institutional ideologies and, as Fig. 2 indicates, must suffer additional demoralizing of their worth by the meta-ideology legitimating dominant institutional domains and by the generalized ideology at the societal level of socio-cultural organization. Thus, without a more complete picture of the macro-level and the culture and structure of institutional domains, sociologies cannot get an adequate picture of stratification and, hence, even the meso-level dynamics that extract selectively features—say, status, roles—as drivers of social psychological

dynamics of individuals who are conceived of, at best, as members of groups but not the rest of the socio-cultural universe.

2. Ideologies and meta-ideologies. An ideology is a moralizing belief system that asserts what is proper, moral, right, correct, useful, and other positive evaluation in the organization of corporate units, the divisions of labor within corporate units, and the individuals occupying status positions, playing roles, and abiding by the norms of each institutional domain and the normative structure directing behaviors in the divisions of labor of corporate units. Ideologies will generally incorporate many of the value premises moralizing the entire society, converting them to more specific evaluative states for the structure and culture of each institutional domain. For example, a generalized value of the societal level, such as "work hard," "be honest," and "achieve" will be generalized and moralized and within a particular institutional domain, such as economy, kinship, religion, and education. And this focusing of a generalized ideology will be very much influenced by the generalized symbolic media of each domain. For example, to "achieve" in family with a generalized symbolic medium of *love/loyalty* will be very different that what it means to achieve in a market economy by the medium of *money*, or what it means to achieve in education with the medium of *learning*, in religion with a generalized symbolic medium of *piety/sacredness*, and in science, arts, law, and sport with their respective generalized symbolic media (i.e., *verified knowledge*, *aesthetic*, *justice*, and *competitiveness*). Thus, because each institutional domain reveals its own generalized symbolic medium and develops its own legitimating and moralizing ideology, morals and moralizing become much more complex as they channel highly generalized value premises within differentiated institutional domains.

   Some degree of simplification occurs when in highly differentiated market societies with state-based polity, because money from economy is a circulating in all corporate units as is franchised authority within corporate units from polity. The universal use of these media coupled with the unique medium of other institutional domains is given push for moralizing in the same direction. Even institutional domains with "hot" generalized media such as kinship with *love/loyalty* or religion with *piety/sacredness* are made less hot by a "cool medium" like money circulating or authority being franchised out by polity. Coupled with the fact that in contemporary societies, many locations in the divisions of labor rely upon educated labor and must abide by rules of the legal system further pushes corporate units in institutional domains to have somewhat converging ideologies, codified into meta-ideologies that legitimate the stratification systems and that create a generalized ideology at the societal level (that will also have elements of technology, traditions, texts, and societal values).

   Yet, even with this push for common tenets in the meta-ideology legitimating the stratification system, it remains highly stigmatizing to those who cannot occupy positions in the corporate units of key institutional domains. The ideology will inevitably damage a person's sense of self-worth, while giving others ideological ammunition to target individuals having self-worth problem with severe stigmatization. Morality can thus be a cruel force in the social universe, especially for humans who are the most emotional animal on earth (more on this later).

3. Institutional Norms. A moralizing force that has been often ignored in the era of the "New Institutionalism" is the notion of institutional norms. The "New Institutionalism" tended to see institutions as "networks" and "fields" of organizations rather than as an emergent level of social structure, per se. Perhaps somewhat unintentionally, the new institutionalism through out the original definitions of institutions articulated by the first sociologists. All social structures reveal networks and fields but these, alone, cannot create institution. It is

better to see these as properties of inter-organizational dynamics but not as a replacement for the older notion of institutions. Moreover, in abandoning the view of institutions advocated here (see Abrutyn & Turner, 2011, 2022; Turner, 1974, 1997, 2002, 2010a), so was the notion of *institutional norms*. In so doing, the power of institutions to moralize the universe was ignored if not dismantled. Networks and fields are ideas that are not useless—far from that—but they are not forms of structure that generate and carry morality. Institutional norms are, I believe, quite powerful; and they are yet another source of moralization arising the macro-level of social organization. They embody generalized symbolic media and ideologies made more specific by the normative expectations for how, in general, corporate units and individuals in these units should orient themselves to their activities and why it is morally important to do. In so doing, they have the power to constrain the normative system within sectors of an institutional domains, pushing them to have some convergence in the structures and organizational norms that are both structurally and culturally equivalent, thereby making transactions in corporate units within, and even between, institutional domains viable and, moreover, moral. This equivalence is pushed further by the wide circulation of money and authority in all corporate units, and by the fact that their relations with each other are mediated by markets. Moreover, with education as a criterion for placement of workers in corporate units, the medium of learning converges with money and authority in creating additional equivalences. Institutional norms always reflect these converges, while at the same time bringing morality down to the level of each corporate unit within a domain as a generalized, but still highly moralized, view of how actors should act and behave if they are to receive the valued resources offered by any corporate unit within a domain and by corporate units also bestowing the generalized symbolic media from other domains.

The Culture of Stratification Values and generalized ideologies moralize societal-level culture which, in turn, constrain the direction of moralizing within the culture of institutional domains, as examined above, and the culture of stratification. Much of the moralization of stratification, however, comes from the symbolic media, ideologies, and institutional norms, often channeled by the meta-ideology built around the dominant institutional domains in a society. The valued resources distributed unequally to categories to persons making up the stratification system are the generalized symbolic media, although sociology generally only focuses on money (income and wealth) and power (usually in the form of franchised authority from polity). Prestige is often the third resource (honor) in sociological analyses since Max Weber proposed this trilogy of the resources of a stratification system. As emphasized above, I see many more resources, starting with *all* of the generalized symbolic media of exchange, and the wide range of positive emotions associated with receiving high levels of valued resources (Turner, 2010, 2015). Indeed, there is always a stratification of emotions unequally distributed along a positive to negative continuum accompanying the unequal distribution of generalized symbolic media. And since emotions are the driving force of morality (see discussion below), they are among the most valued resources in any stratification because individuals can experience positive emotions. The power of emotions is even greater, in some respects, than the symbolic media because emotions can be punitive and painful. Not having very much money, power, and prestige is one thing, but the negative emotions of this situation account for much of the pain, sense of deprivation, and despair that those at the bottom rungs of the stratification system must experience. Moreover, these emotions often carry the power to stigmatized individuals as not morally worthy of anything more than emotional misery and deprivation of valued resources of any kind. While

some valued resources might be available, such as *love/loyalty* in a stable family or *piety/sacredness* from religion, these may not be available when, for example, poor families become dysfunctional or lack of any other valued resources and, moreover, experience of negative and stigmatizing emotions that cancel out any positive feelings about self.

Thus, the culture of stratification at the macro-level of social organization is much more brutal than commonly recognized because scarce resources are moralized by values, ideologies, generalized ideologies, and meta-ideologies and because the emotions aroused by have high or low levels of resources will immediately target self and self-worth. Moral codes are moral because they invoke powerful emotions on both the negative and positive side, and in so doing, they enhance the sense of worth or lack of worth for those receiving, respectively, positive and negative emotions. Much sociology, especially social psychology, studies these dynamics at only the meso-level, failing to recognize that positive self-emotions, stigma, and expectations states (Berger & Zelditch, 1985; Ridgeway, 2001, 2006, 2019) are not just attached to "status" and "roles" but are an outcome of macro not just the macro-level forces in play, as outlined in Fig. 3, but also the biological forces activated by the negative or positive emotions attached to resource shares of individuals. Still, research programs like that of expectation states theory and research have captured much of what I am emphasizing, as is indicated in the box in Fig. 3 highlighting "the formation of expectation states" for members of social categories typified by status beliefs that are, in essence, beliefs about the valued resources individuals receive as institutional domains distribute resources that have been moralized and, hence, also involve the distribution of positive and negative emotions. Still, I would argue that the dynamics of expectation states theorizing under-emphasize the intensity of the emotions involved in the formation of highly moralized status beliefs that legitimate the stratification system, institutional domains distributing resources, and the culture of a society. Thus, when more of the social is included in the analysis, the dynamics involved are much more powerful because they are the driving forces of stratification, institutional differentiation, and society-wide culture and, moreover, their legitimation through moralization. These forces operate at all levels of socio-cultural organization to sustain status beliefs and, thereby force people to accept, at an emotional level and at the level of self-appraisal and evaluation. Just as culture—ideologies, symbolic media, and norms—sustains the viability of corporate units and the institutional domains in which these units are embedded; they do much the same for the evaluation of members in categoric units, with these highly moralized evaluations determining not only a person's "place" in society but also their level of well-being or, alternatively, pain. It is thus culture and its effects on human biology, as much as structural location in corporate units, that sustain institutional domains and stratification systems.

3.2 Meso-Level Culture

The Culture of Corporate-Units As Fig. 3 outlines under the meso-level culture, institutional ideologies frame and moralize the normative structure of the division of labor within corporate units within sectors of each institutional domain. The moral element is somewhat diluted because divisions of labor are oriented to instrumental tasks and goals of organizations; and unless the corporate unit itself is highly moralized, as is the case for family and churches, the cultural norms organizing the corporate unit and its division of labor are created for instrumental purposes, although some of these norms can remain moralized and often include "codes of ethics" which vary in how much they are imposed upon incumbents in status positions within a corporate unit. Still, since the stratification systems is almost always highly moralized, if only to legitimate inequalities among valued and stigmatized members of categoric units, there will be some degree of moralization in norms occupied by members of categoric units in the division of

labor in a corporate unit. And so, the more valorized are categoric-unit incumbents, the more moralized will be the normative structure, although those who are valorized can often get away with less than moral conduct, at least until they are exposed. Still, because corporate units—communities, organizations, and especially groups—are the most immediate structure bearing culture to actual interaction in encounters, there will almost always be some degree of moralization of the normative structure in terms of expectations for proper demeanor to facilitate instrumental activities at the level of the encounter. Nonetheless, since interactions in encounters the place where emotions are generated, moralization cannot be far away. Indeed, whether positive or negative, the emotions aroused in encounters generate moral evaluations, thus giving the norms of corporate units some degree of bottom up "morality" which, when violated, will arouse negative emotions and which, when followed, will generate mild positive emotions. These dynamics are most likely to be activated when there are established "expectation states" for individuals in particular locations of the division of labor of a corporate unit, since expectations states almost always carry some degree of moralization derived from institutional ideologies (Berger & Zelditch, 1985).

Meso-Level Categoric Units Status beliefs that are connected to evaluations of members of categoric units forming locations in the stratification system will be more moralized than categoric units that are not the basis for the unequal distribution of resources. When status beliefs are highly moralized, they are involved in legitimating inequalities in the distribution of valued resources to varying categoric units. As the salience of categoric-unit membership declines, so does the level of moralization and particularly so if expectation states for differences in the expected demeanor and behavior of individuals also decline. For example, gender stereotypes codified into moralized status beliefs can be expected to decline as women occupy an increasing proportion of status positions at all levels of all corporate units. They will remain some differential expectations between men and women but I would predict in the long run that stigmatizing status beliefs will decline. And indeed, if current trends for females to credential themselves with college educations to a greater degree males, status beliefs about women in general and at specific locations in divisions of labor incorporate units within institutional domains will change and, moreover, will be more valorizing. In contrast, we can see the difficulty that many have with men who become caretakers in families where women have become the "breadwinner" are altering the moral evaluations, as well as expectation states—perhaps slowly but, nonetheless, inevitably—for both males and females.

3.3 Micro-Level Culture

Interaction is a process of individuals mutually engaging in taking cognizance each other and situations along a number of dimensions, while at the same time presenting self and the dimensions that they see as relevant and important to the viability of an encounter. I have been extending George Herbert Mead's (1934) notion of *role-taking* and Ralph H. Turner's (1962) complementary notion of *role-making* to include many more aspects of encounters. Individuals "make" for themselves via talk and body language a role and a self; and others "take" into account these presentations of self and roles by reading the gestures of those making such self-presentations. These are the mechanisms that drive interaction but they are many *more dimensions of person and situation* that individuals present to other and that these others take into consideration. The dimensions that are presented by persons are outlined in the top portions of Fig. 4; and at the same time, individuals are prone to "take" into consideration the same dimensions listed in the bottom half of Fig. 4. Individuals are thus constantly engaged in a mutual process of *making* known to others what they see as relevant to a situation, while simultaneously reading gestures of others, or *taking*

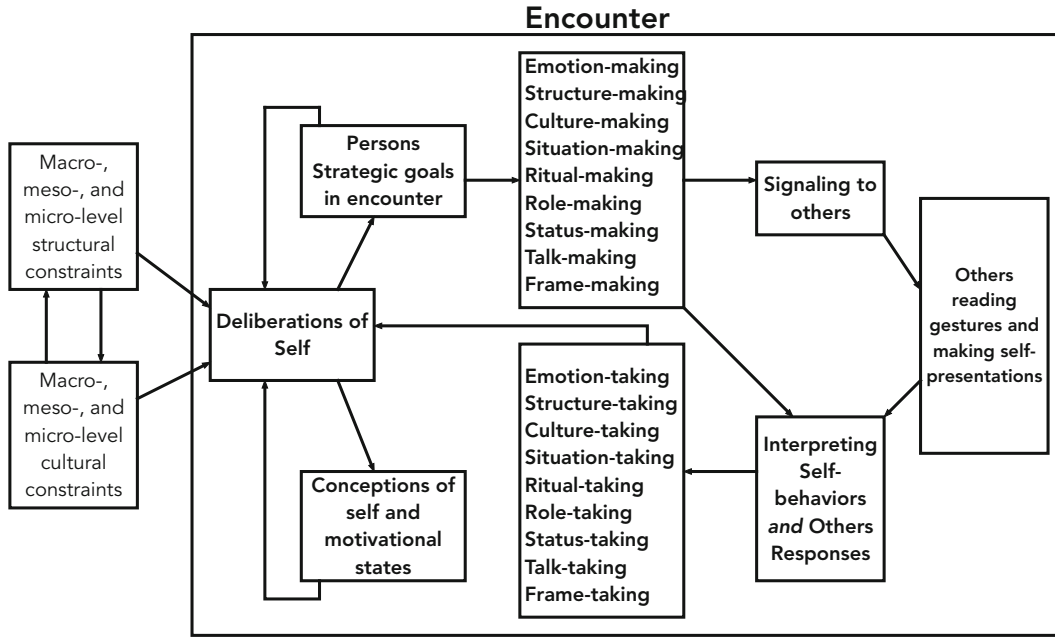


Fig. 4 Dimensions of interpersonal interaction in encounters and their moralization

(on the perspective), the relevant roles and all of the other dimensions of an interaction outlined in Fig. 4 of these others. Each of these mutually *making* and *taking* processes among self and others is defined in Table 2. As is evident, I see as most relevant to understanding the dynamics of morality are the mutual *making* and *taking* with respect to emotions, structure, culture, situation, rituals, roles, status, talk, and framing.

Humans have large brains that can engage simultaneously in many cognitive and emotional assessments of self, others, and situations in a process of presenting gestures of self and the dimensions outlined in Table 2, while simultaneously reading the gestures of others along these same dimensions. The complexity if this process is reduced somewhat by the fact that there is successive embedding of both structural and cultural properties of human societies and, moreover, overlap in most of the dimensions briefly defined in Table 2. The key point of this table is to emphasize how interwove are the key dimensions of structure and culture that have been "moralized" and that drive "the give and take" among individuals at the level of the encounter. Morality impregnates each of these dimensions; and in so doing, every encounter is moralized in the sense that individuals seek to negotiate by their talk and body language the appropriate behaviors and orientations of the dimensions outlined in Table 2. What G. H. Mead viewed as a process of mutual role-taking with others and generalized others (i.e., culture) is broken down into more specific dimensions here, and I have added to Mead's notion of role-taking, R. H. Turner's (1962) complementary notion of role-making. This process of role-taking and role-making occurs, as is evident, along many more dimensions than just "roles," as is outlined in Fig. 4 and Table 2. If participants can reach consensus, even if it is only perceived consensus, an interaction can move along easily. Since emotions are always involved in this process—in fact, *making* and *taking* are initially about emotions or than any other dimensions operating in an interactions—moralization is inevitably involved with respect to individuals respective self-presentations and expectations in the making and taking process that I have modeled and defined (Turner, 2019). What is remarkable, I think, is that most of the time, people "read" each other's presentations of self and all of the

Table 2 Dimensions in of interpersonal making and taking in encounters

Emotion-making and taking: The processes of signaling to others the appropriate emotional dispositions and demeanors, while at the same time reading others' signaling of their emotional dispositions. Since emotions generate moralization, they are also the means by which individuals signal to others breaches in all dimensions of interaction, and particularly emotional demeanors.
Structure-making and taking: The process of signaling to others the appropriate structural unit and level of structure to be used in ordering behaviors and interactions, while at the same time reading others' of their perceptions of the relevant structural unit (whether an institutional domain or location in stratification system, or type of corporate (community, organization, group) or categoric unit, or combination of corporate or categoric units. Establishing the unit of reference will affect all aspects of an interaction, while signaling which aspects of culture are moralized and relevant to the interaction.
Culture-making and taking: The process of signaling to others the appropriate cultural elements that are relevant, while reading the signals of others about their perceptions of appropriate elements. Since cultural elements are attached to structures as different levels of social organization within and across from the two pillars of societies—institutional domains and stratification systems—individuals must reach a perceived consensus of the level of culture that is salient—macro-level societal, institutional, or stratification—and meso level relevant corporate-unit and/or categoric-unit cultures that are also relevant. Without this perceived consensus, interactions are less viable and are likely to be breached, thereby arousing negative emotions over the lack of moral consensus.
Situation-making and taking: The process of signaling to others what aspects of the local situation within a social structure and its culture are salient and relevant to an interaction. This process involves determining which aspects of social structure, roles, status, culture, are situational ecology and demography are relevant and what expectations are salient in situations.
Ritual-making and taking: The emission of stereotyped talk and behavioral demeanors to open, structure the flow, and close an interaction in an encounter, while assessing the rituals presented by others. Rituals denote which elements of other dimensions of interaction are relevant as well as signal violations of any other dimensions of an interaction. Rituals emotional charge interactions and are always part of the moralization of an interaction.
Role-making and taking: Emitting signals about the roles that a person seeks to establishing in an interaction, while taking cognizance of the signals of others to establish a role. Such signals can be combined with emotion, structure, situation, culture, status, and frame making and taking to establish the emotional demeanor associated with a role, status location (whether in corporate or categoric units), a particular type of situation, and level of structural and culture elements defining appropriate role behaviors of self and others.
Situation-making and taking: The process of signaling to others what aspects of the local situation within a social structure and its culture are salient and relevant to an interaction, while at the same reading the gestures of others as to their interpretation. This process involves determining which aspects of social structure, roles, status, culture, are situational ecology and demography are relevant and what expectations inhere in this aspects of situations.
Status-making and taking: The process of signaling to others the relevant status within a corporate unit and with respect to membership in categoric units are salient and relevant, while at the same time interpreting the status markers and presentations of others. Such mutual assessments involve determining the relevance of corporate-unit status and status beliefs relative to categoric-unit status and status beliefs. Talk-making and taking: The process of signaling to others the appropriate form of talk appropriate for a situation, status, and role within corporate and categoric units within an institutional domain or set of positions within the stratification system, while assessing the presentations of others as to appropriate form of talk. At time, both parties to interaction must determine if differences in status in either or both corporate and categoric units require different forms of talk by higher and lower status individuals.
Frame making and taking: The process of signaling to others the relevant and appropriate boundaries for an interactions to others with respect to body framing (access to, distancing of, and portions of), demographic framing (number of persons, density, and movement of persons), ecological framing (relevant props, stages, and borders), structural framing (relevant macro- and meso-units), cultural framing (relevant symbolic media, ideologies, and norms), and personal frames (with respect to personal biographies, appropriate level of intimacy, self-involvement and investment) while, at the same time, reading the gestures of others to assess their assessment of appropriate frames.

dimensions outlined in Table 2 with rather amazing acuity. Humans have this capacity because great apes can read each other's gestures with much the same acuity. Again, like many features of human biology to be analyzed below (see right side of Fig. 5), humans inherited these amazing capacities to read each other because low-sociality animals, like the great apes, cannot rely on genetically controlled bio-programmers for social organization and interaction as do most other mammals. The must remember past encounters, and at the same time, create a new

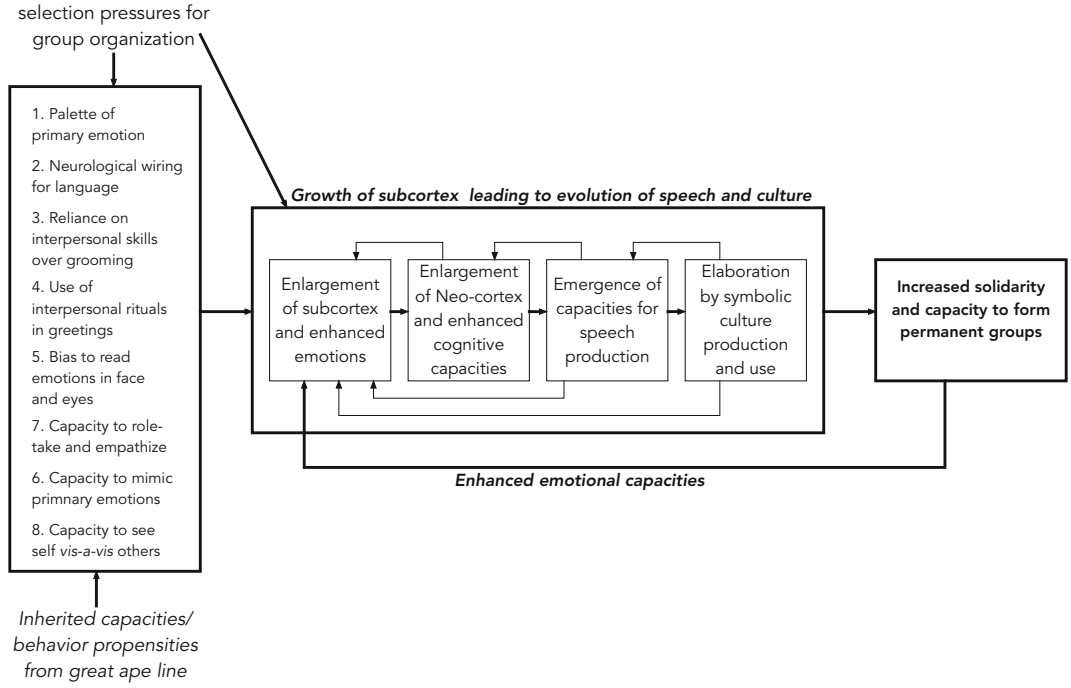


Fig. 5 Selection pressures and the evolution of subcortex and neocortex leading to capacities for speech and symbolic culture

moment of solidarity by mutually reading each other's gestures respect to the dimensions outline in Fig. 4, and probably even more dimensions that I have not mentioned.

The process of interpersonal attunement involved in "making" and "taking" of the dimensions listed in Table 2 is ultimately inherited by humans from their common ancestors with present-day great apes (chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans), but they have been dramatically enhanced by what enhanced emotions ultimately allowed to occur: growth of the neocortex of the human brain. This growth not only made humans the most emotional animals on earth but also, in all likelihood, the most intelligent as well as the most moral animals on earth. Thus, social psychology also needs to have a wing of bio-psychology but one much different than that developed by psychologist because sociologies have to not only understand the biology of human psychology but also the biological basis of what humans can create: societies that have grown from small bands of hunter-gatherers to societies organizing billions of humans. Insects do so with bio-programmers in very tiny life forms; by contrast, humans are a very large life form that is able to organize on the scale of social insects because of *their capacity to moralize their universe.*

4 The Biology of Morality

It is not incorrect to see morality as inhering cultural prescriptions and proscriptions that a large-brained animal like a human can conceptualize and monitor. But we need to ask: What gives these moral codes the power to push individuals to follow these cultural directives? And indeed, why would humans think such directives up? The answer to these and similar questions resides in human biology, as it evolved along the hominin like for several million years. The short answer to all questions about morality is that *their power resides in emotions*, not just obvious moral emotions where people feel *guilt* at violating a

moral codes, or *shame* toward self at doing so. In fact, almost *any* emotion can become moralized if tied to violations of a moralized cultural codes. *Anger*, *disgust*, *shock*, *outrage*, or just about any other emotion can take on a new intensity when moralized. In my and Jan E. Stets' edited book, *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions* (2006; 125–145), our chapter on "The Moral Emotions" emphasizes this point. In this volume some 15 years later, I want to emphasize more of the biology of emotions in explaining how "moralization" occurs; and why it has such power to constrain individuals and why it is so essential to the viability of patterns of human social organization. I will have to be brief and reference citations where more can be read, but the essential point is that morality is part of human nature as it evolved over a very long period in the ancestors of humans.[5]

4.1 The Elaboration of Hominin and Then Human Emotions

It is often assumed that humans are unique (and special creatures) because of their capacity for language, culture, self-reflection, and intelligence. All of this is true, but we need to ask: why is this so? Note I did not mention emotions in this list, but it should the very first unique property of humans since the ancestors of human had many of the other capacities that we often think are unique to humans. But, once we recognize that humans are descendants of hominins, all of which shared a common ancestor of present-day great apes, we can see immediately much of what we think is unique to humans is not really the case. Humans share 99% of their genes with common chimpanzees, 98% with highland and lowland gorillas, and 96–97% with orangutans, albeit on one less chromosome pair than great apes. Humans inherited their neurological capacity for language from these ancient ancestors of great apes (Geschwind, 1965a, 1965b; Damasio & Geschwind, 1984). Language is also evident with other animals such as some species of birds, elephants, and larger ocean mammals like whales and dolphins. All of these animals also have a sense of self and can see themselves as an object *vis-à-vis* others, which is G. H. Mead's definition of self at the basic level.[6] They all have culture but certainly not in the measure of human culture. And, all of these animals are highly intelligent, although not as intelligent as humans, human intelligence was possible *only because of the intelligence of great-ape ancestors*.

Thus, human biology is, in essence, great ape biology that has been subject to selection and, thus, has been enhanced and elaborated. As I should emphasize, humans' propensity to be moral also was inherited from the common ancestors of great apes, and indeed, from higher mammals more generally. For example, monkeys who are not nearly as intelligent as great apes can behave in moral ways, as is the case when they refuse to do tasks for trainer when their reward is not as high compared to that of another (Brosnan, 2006; Brosnan & de Waal, 2003). When exchanging requested behaviors for resources from trainers, they will exhibit anger and "moral" outrage if they see another money getting more resources for these same behaviors; and they will cease exchanging until the trainer equalizes the exchange. The same is true with great apes, but they will also stop exchanging with much high degrees of outrage, especially if a sibling or relative is not receiving the same amount as they are. Thus, most higher mammals have a higher sense of what "justice" is and get emotional when they perceive injustice. And so, again, humans inherited in their neurology something that we might think unique to humans.

It is hard to know if other animals are moral in the human sense, but it is certainly possible because they have all of the necessary preconditions. But clearly, humans are more

[5] Turner (Turner, 1996, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010d, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2021; and Turner and Stets (2005, 2006)

[6] Mead argued that humans were unique in this capacity to see self, but too much data has clearly proved him wrong on this score.

moral than other intelligent animal, and our morality is related to one key force: *emotions*. Everything that distinguishes humans from other intelligent animals, all of which are highly emotional, is that humans are super-emotional. And in fact, the push to enhance hominin emotions was driving human evolution over the last 5 million years. Emotions were evolving long before hominins could talk with words, before hominins had large brains and great intelligence, and before hominins could have a culture built on common symbols ordered by a complex grammar. None of the cultural forces that are outlined in Figs. 1, 2, and 3, for example, were possible without hominins becoming, first of all, highly emotional.

4.2 Emotions as the Driving Force of Human Evolution

From the split from the ancient ancestors of today's common chimpanzees some 5 million years ago, the size of the hominin brain did not change dramatically, as is assumed. The brain over a 3.5 to 4.0 million period only grew about 100 cc, from the 375–400 cc range of present-day chimpanzees until growth began among *Homo erectus* and *ergaster* around 1.0 million years ago. So, sudden growth of intelligence was *not* very obvious for three quarters of hominin evolution with the split off the chimpanzee line, but growth was clearly evident in the last 700,000 years of hominin evolution as the brain of *Homo erectus* went from 500 cc to 1050 cc, which is the lower ranger of the human brain. Nor were *Homo sapiens* the largest brained human; *Neanderthals*, *Denisovan,* and other species of humans had much larger brain, some at 1500 to 1600 ccs compared to the mean of *Homo sapiens* at around 1350 ccs. So, why did the brain suddenly grow so rapidly? The answer, I have argued (Turner, 2000, 2007, 2021), is that without a prior increase in emotions, there would no advantage to having a larger neocortex. As Antonio Damasio (1994) et al have documented, intelligence is a function of emotionality, because to remember anything, emotions *must be attached* to cognitions. And so, the more the range of emotions as well as their nuance and their complexity, the more intelligent an animal can become, with growth in the neocortex. Thus, I think the rather small increase in brain size for the first 4-million year of hominin evolution after the split from the ancestors of chimpanzees was the result of selection *working on subcortical portions of the mammalian* brain where emotions are generated (Turner, 2000, 2021). The 100 cc increase in size was probably the subcortical areas pushing up on the neocortex of chimp-like ancestors, but at some point, the emotional enhancements of the late hominin brain reached a point where it would be fitness enhancing to increase the size of the neocortex, *if* intelligence would increase fitness. Without emotions, there would be little to put into a big neocortex; it would an empty warehouse consuming calories and protein. But, with a larger repertoire of emotions, more complex cognitions could be created and attached to more nuanced and complex cognitions, thereby enhancing memory and general decision-making intelligence.

Why, then, did emotions evolve first and, thereby, allow for everything that is somewhat unique to humans: larger brains and intelligence, spoken language, and symbolic culture? The answer is that hominins had to adapt to evermore open-country habitats and thus had to get better organized than great apes that enjoy the protection of the forests. The forests were receding in African as it grew in episodic cycles cooler over the last 5 million years, forcing hominins out into the open-country savanna. To survive in this ecology with many predators and without the protection of the trees, and selection began enhancing emotions in order to *increase solidarity and emotional attachments among evolving great apes* that, like all great apes, did *not form permanent groups*, *did not have nuclear families*, *did not have high sociality,* and indeed, were and still are highly *individualistic*. Such an animal is not capable of living on the savanna[7] filled with

[7] In west Senegal, there are chimpanzees now living in open-country savanna but there are also large trees dotted across this savanna and there they can sleep at night. And moreover, they do have more "groupness" than other great

predators because a slow-moving animal like a great ape (compared to a four-legged predator) that does not form permanent groups is easy prey for packs of predators. Over time, as the subcortical portion of the human brain grew and, today, the emotion cortices of humans are on average twice as large as they are among great apes, controlling for body size, which correlates with brain size (see Turner, 2000, 2007, and 2021 for relevant citations). Thus, natural selection was making humans more social and more group-oriented indirectly, via enhanced positive emotions. For most mammals, sociality is attained bio-programmers in their neurology, but the great ape ancestors of humans did not have such bio-programmers, and so, natural selection had to find an alternative route to enhance sociality if hominins were to survive in more open-country habitats. By chance, a route became the enhancement of the areas of the brain generating emotions; and as these areas grew, more powerful emotions led hominins increasingly to form stronger and more enduring emotional attachments to con-specifics, thereby allowing for evolution of nuclear families (which are non-existent in great apes because of male promiscuity and female transfer at puberty from their natal communities at puberty). Thus, humans became big-brained, language using, and cultural animals because they first became the most emotional animal on earth. It is emotions that allowed for greater intelligence that, then, worked to push for spoken language that then allow for the evolution of symbolic culture. Thus, morality in the human measure was only possible because of the prior enhancement of emotions, and thus morality in the human measure with all of its many facets, especially cultural, w*as only possible by the prior evolution of human emotionality*.[8] And so, emotions like *guilt* and *shame*, which are essential to social control by morality, evolved *only in* humans (even great apes do not experience either shame or guilt). Great apes and most other (maybe all other) mammals do not possess capacities to experience these very unique emotions. Thus, morality and emotionally are connected by selection pressures working on low-sociality, non-group, and non-family great apes, forced to become more social and more group-oriented because they were forced to live in open-country bushlands, secondary forests, and most importantly, savannas. Figure 5 outlines the dynamics involved.

At the left side of the figure are the traits inherited from the ancestors of today's great apes; and as is evident in reading down the list, these are many of what are often thought of as unique traits of humans. Such is not the case, but these were enhanced by virtue of natural selection working to increase hominins' emotional capacities. And with these, then intelligence is fitness enhancing, eventually leading to spoken language and symbolic culture. Thus, the flow of events from the left to right side of the Fig. 5 traces the evolution of what is unique to humans, all of which is built on the foundation provided by the ancestors of great apes.

Thus, the capacities that we tend to see as unique to humans—intelligence, spoken language, and symbolic culture—were only possible by the early wiring of great apes with the neurology of language and other traits listed on the left side of the figure. Then, with the subsequent rewiring of the subcortical areas of the hominin brain for emotions (Turner, 2000, 2007, 2021), the stage was set for greater intelligence, spoken language, and symbolic culture. Still, if natural selection had not by random chance hit upon enhancing emotions to generate more sociality in a low-sociality species like relatives of great apes, humans would not exist and, moreover, everything that we associate with humans would not have evolved, including human morality. Yet, along the mammalian line there are, as noted earlier, hard-wired propensity for calculating "justice" and "fairness" in distributing resources among many higher mammals, but these *alone would not be enough* to make an animal moral in the human measure. Morality is enshrined in the

apes, but probably in other parts of African, without enhance of solidarity by increased emotionality, all other hominins did not survive in open-country, although a few very large primates at 8 feet tall and a thousand pounds did survive in more open country until about 1.5 million years ago. See Baldwin (1982).

[8] See Turner (2000a, 2007, and 2021) for more details.

society-wide cultural traits at the top of Fig. 2, such as texts, traditions, values, and generalized ideologies; and these can only be formulated with by a very intelligent animal that also possesses a complex spoken language. Other mammals may have some elements of this capacity—for example, whales, dolphins, elephants—but probably not in the human measure because there are more genetically programmed for sociality than are humans. But humans needed to become social, *without* strong bio-programmers in their ancestral line for being so, and by random chance, selection worked to push for enhanced emotionality that, eventually, led to more intelligence that, in turn, allowed for spoken language (the neurologically for which was already in the great-ape genome but not possible in great apes without the dramatic changes in the structure of vocal tracks, lips, tongue, and muscles regulating these in humans). It is unlikely that hominins would have developed spoken (and later written) language if the neurology for language was not *already pre-wired* but not used very much in early hominins, and without rewiring the brain for Broca's are and the complex changes in the genetics of the vocal tract, lips, long, larynx, and muscles allowing for articulated speech, language would never have evolved in the human measure.[9] But, in order to unlock this capacity for language and culture, it was first necessary to get the brain growing to a higher level of intelligence, and again, that was only possible by the prior rewiring of the subcortical areas of the hominin brain over a 4.0 million year period to the point where growing the neocortex, sitting on top of and around the more ancient subcortex would allow for language and culture. And, then the complex changes needed for articulated speech could evolve, if and only if other areas of the brain underwent dramatic genetic transformation.

And so, once an animal is highly emotional, highly intelligence, and capable of creating symbolic systems of thought, morality can prosper and indeed be used to *moralize almost any social context*. And once moralized, cultural symbols and the structures to which they are attached can promote fitness enhancing socio-cultural structures that allowed early humans to survive and that have allowed societies to grow incredibly large and complex. We are huge animals compared to insects, and yet with moralized culture legitimating social structures and constraining human action and interaction, humans have been able to create, for better or worse, mega societies of billions of people (Turchin, 2016). Human societies are not genetically programmed like insect societies, but they demonstrate what moralized structures, cultures, and interpersonal behaviors can do. But, had selection not hit upon expanding and enhancing emotions, the first small societies of human would *not* have evolved and, hence, the same would be true for the mega societies of today. Of course, the emotions that allow for these societies to emerge and even prosper also have the power to destroy societies. Thus, the capacity to moralize does not assure the persistence of the human social universe; it could indeed lead to the converse, given the power of human emotion to destroy social relations and, and through advanced technologies, to destroy people and their social structures and their culture.

5 Conclusion: Overcoming Intellectual Parochialism

What is true about morality and moralization is also relevant for any topic in sociology. Not just American social psychology, but most other

[9] This pre-wiring occurred during the early evolution of primates, probably 50 to 60 million years ago as outcome of the conversion of primates from olfactory (as are most mammals) to visual dominance led to a rewiring of the brain in and around the occipital lobe. The rewiring produced a "pre-adaptation" for the neurology of language, if a primate had enough intelligence. Great apes had this requisite intelligence, other species of apes and all monkeys did not. This neurological capacity was not sued extensively by great apes, unless placed in a human environment where they can learn human language and even have "conversations" with humans through sign language of the death or through use of computers with pictograms that great apes can assemble by placing them in an order revealing common meanings. See: Geschwind (1965a, 1965b)

specialties in sociology have become over-specialized and too compartmentalized. The result is that research and theory fail to recognize some simple facts. First, as societies have evolved, they have become layered across a micro-, meso-, and macro-spectrum. Second, the properties and dynamics at and within these three layers of socio-cultural reality have effects on each other. Macro-level forces constrain those at lower levels at both the macro- and micro-levels of reality. Third, studying any one level to the exclusion of another will generally produce research and theories that miss a good many of the operative forces in play. Macro-structures are built from meso- and micro-structures and dynamics, and conversely, macro structures have large effects on the meso-level of reality, and the meso-level has equally strong effects on the micro. And, what occurs at the micro level can, under specifiable conditions exert strong effects on meso- and macro-structures. Whether the concern is with culture, social structure, interaction, or behavior, research and theory need to pay attention to all three levels of reality.

These levels are not conceptual reifications; they are *the actual way that societies have evolved* and are, therefore, the key to understanding how they operate, now and into the future. Thus, social reality on earth among humans breaks out in this way; and hence, sociology as the science of society and the socio-cultural more generally cannot ignore the fundamental nature of this fundamental property of the social universe. And, yet the vast majority of research and theorizing in sociology does just that. I am not arguing that everything must be studied in all research and theoretical projects, but I am arguing that too much has been excluded; and in many was the situations is getting worse.

Whether one is doing research on the nature of self, interpersonal interaction, organizations, inequalities, families, economies, etc., these phenomena are *embedded in each other and are connected* via *structures and their cultures at all levels of human social organization*. I make a similar argument, but less stridently, about the biology of humans. Evolutionary analysis has had a unsavory history at times in sociology, especially when rather well-known sociologists seem to make extreme arguments about eugenics and, in so doing, made sociologists aversive to studying the evolution of humans as a species and, instead, retreating to the old and inaccurate bromide that once a species has "culture" their biology is not so important. Just opposite is the case, *culture is created by a biology with a long history of 40 million years in the evolution of great apes*. And when we take up topics of why and how do humans become moral, and why and how do they imbue almost every aspect of their world with morality, including their conceptions of themselves (Stets, 2015; Turner, 2010b). The complete answer to these dynamics resides in humans' evolved biology (Turner, 2021a). *Any* explanation that ignores the biology of morality is incomplete, as will be many other topics studied by sociologists. To the extent that sociology ignores both biology and the robust and layered nature of socio-cultural formations in human societies, it reduces the power of explanation of human behavior, interaction, and socio-cultural organization. And in so doing, it makes sociology less scientific and less useful in a world desperately needing insight into the pathologies that inhere in human social organization. Indeed, a great many of these pathologies are the result of human emotionality and moralization of the social universe.

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Missing Emotions in the Sociology of Morality

James M. Jasper

Abstract

If morality influences human action, it does so through emotions. Some emotions are long-run commitments and orientations, not short-run displays, and these come in two types: affective loyalties such as hate and love, liking, and contempt; and moral commitments such as shame and pride, compassion, and indignation over injustice. We can find emotions throughout classic, defining works in the sociology of morality, but they are rarely addressed and labeled directly, much less incorporated into models of action. Sociologists of morality can fall into a kind of idealism when they search instead for well-articulated values, principles, and frames. Although some emotions arise and subside quickly, as a part of what is called fast thinking, most moral emotions are fairly permanent and so are a component of slow thinking as well. I examine how Michele Lamont and Robert Wuthnow use emotions in their foundational work in the sociology of emotion and look at moral heroes who are widely admired.

Keywords

Moral emotions · Feeling-thinking processes · Public characters · Moral boundaries · Compassion

Twenty-five years ago, I published *The Art of Moral Protest* (Jasper, 1997), a long book intended to challenge and rethink the field of social movements from a cultural perspective. Like other scholars of the period (e.g., Lamont, 1992), in the early days of the cultural turn in sociology I saw culture and morality as closed entwined. I had coauthored a book on the animal rights movement (Jasper & Nelkin, 1992), which viewed it as a "moral crusade," and I began developing concepts such as "moral shocks."

But I had noticed something else in my fieldwork on animal rights: the management and display of emotions. Although I had been a student at U.C. Berkeley when Arlie Hochschild (1983) published *The Managed Heart*, emotions had not been on my intellectual radar; I was instead trying to find a place for culture and morality inside comparative and structural paradigms of politics (Jasper, 1990), not to burrow down in the direction of psychology. But upon pondering my experiences, I decided to describe culture as composed of equal parts of cognition, morality, and emotions, which I further argued could all be analyzed with the same tools. I was contented enough to have included emotions as part of culture, drawing especially on the constructionist

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approach to emotions (Harré, 1986; Jasper, 1998).

Today, I would formulate things differently, with emotions as continuously driving and assessing action, and morality as more like a subset of emotional processes. Moral principles and values can be isolated and articulated, sort of like an organization's mission statement crafted by an outside consultant, but they have little impact on what people actually do. They come out when people talk, for instance to sociologists interviewing them. Moral tastes, intuitions, and feelings, in contrast, permeate our actions at all times.

Emotions too can be reified, as though they were things that suddenly grabbed us, as if from the outside—an older view of emotions as necessary sequences or combinations of expressions, muscle contractions, and biochemistry (Ekman, 2003). Even to speak of the "management" or "display" of emotions is to suggest an odd distance from the feelings themselves.

We can better understand emotions if we further break them down, into "feeling-thinking processes" that are the building blocks of cognition, emotion, and morality (Jasper, 2014b, 2018). These FTPs are the hundreds of biochemical, muscular, sensory, linguistic, and other means we have for processing information, monitoring our actions and place in the world, and making constant adjustments through complex and mostly unconscious feedback loops. Only occasionally do we become aware of a bundle of these processes and label it as a feeling or emotion, and that label in turn feeds back and affects other feeling-thinking processes. Just as brain and body get combined in this view into a complex model of a nervous system, so culture—as publicly shared feelings and formulations—gets mixed in with a variety of additional sources of information and appraisal. Any theory of human action, it seems to me, must start with feeling-thinking processes and emotions. Sociologists should at least acknowledge their influence, even if it is not our jobs to identify and catalog all of them. (Neurotransmitters alone number over 100.)

What does this mean for morality? If we try to explain morality or the effects of morality without including feeling-thinking processes or at least emotions (which we can identify more easily than other feeling-thinking processes, due to the former's familiar linguistic labels), we fall into idealism, with moral principles or ideas floating on their own without a clear connection to action. In the field of social movements, we see this in the idea of frames: they are easy for researchers to pull out of speeches or brochures, to formulate in pithy slogans, and to apply to movements and groups (Benford, 1997). But it is harder to say exactly what material form they take (ink on a page? an image? a chanted slogan? an idea in someone's head?), and it is even harder to see exactly how they affect action, leading people to make one choice rather than another, to engage one issue rather than another, to identify with this group rather than that, to admire this person or that. Sociologists point to cultural "resonance," but have no good explanation for its causes or effects (cf. Luft, 2015a; McDonnell et al., 2017).

An emotional starting point implies that we should pay more attention to implicit moral intuitions and feelings than to explicit moral formulae and principles. If approval and disapproval lie at the heart of morality, then we are making those judgments all the time by feeling admiration or disgust, by liking or disliking, loving or hating, through gut-level compassion or a yearning for revenge. Cooley (1902) expressed this in his looking-glass self, in which we imagine how others view us and then feel pride, happiness, guilt, or shame as a result. In particular, pride and shame are master emotions guiding human action: most of the time we try to act in ways that will make us proud of ourselves, and avoid actions that will make us ashamed. Cooley's four are a small if influential subset of the many feelings that push us toward or away from certain actions and utterances long before we are aware of the feelings. Pride and shame are the more obviously moral of the four.

Imagine that someone asks you to volunteer for a task, perhaps small but perhaps not. How do you decide whether to say yes? You might consider the costs and any potential benefits, as

economists would predict (including future reciprocity). Or you might think about relevant norms and roles, as sociologists have traditionally claimed: is this something that someone in your situation *should* do? But you also feel additional emotions: you are pleased and proud that they asked *you* instead of your annoying, self-righteous neighbor; you are excited and curious because this is not something you have done before; you may also anticipate some pride in doing a good job and impressing others; but you are also anxious because you have recently said yes to several other time-consuming tasks; your spouse has complained that you are too busy; you also experience a cluster of feelings, good and bad, toward the person who has just asked you. You are probably not fully conscious of all these emotions, but together they guide you intuitively to yes, no, or maybe. Dozens of these feelings are the mechanisms by which morality affects action.

The sociology of morality has been a small but insightful subfield for as long as sociology has been around. Since Durkheim, the sources of a society's moral cohesion have been one of the basic building blocks of the discipline. Structural functionalism gave morality a central logical position, in the form of values, but in fact devoted little empirical attention to it because it operated more as a core assumption than a testable proposition. Conflict-oriented critics such as Alvin Gouldner, Pierre Bourdieu, and various Marxists tended to associate human motivation with material interests, downplaying moral dynamics as part of their rejection of the consensus vision of structural functionalism (cf. Lukes, 1985).

Bourdieu did not explicitly incorporate emotions into his many strategic and cultural concepts, but it is not hard to see habitus as largely guided by various feelings. If nothing else, we admire certain social performances and disapprove of others. Even more, the concept of taste is patently saturated by a variety of feelings—disgust, envy, awe, desire, familiarity, and many more—that help a person negotiate activities, objects, and other people. We position ourselves as morally worthy through our feelings and expressions of feelings. Ignatow (2013) suggests pushing habitus in the direction of greater mind-body holism, itself an oxymoron that covers up the actual feeling-thinking processes at work.

Morality resurfaced explicitly in the cultural turn of the 1980s and 1990s (Bellah et al., 1985; Etzioni, 1988; Wuthnow, 1987). Moral positions and tastes were seen as constructed in much the same way as symbols, frames, and narratives. Moral boundaries, for instance, fuse cognitive symbols and moral principles or tastes (Lamont, 1992; Wuthnow, 1987). As a result of this tight connection, the sociology of morality came to share the idealism of cultural sociology: a preference for well formulated categories, symbols, binaries, and boundaries instead of the human processes (both interactive and psychological) that create those products. Moral and cognitive lampposts often take the same forms: frames, principles, boundaries, identities, narratives, and so on. As Lizardo et al. (2016:303) complain, "contemporary analysis of culture in action is, more accurately, analysis of culture in thinking."

Part of this preference is methodological: it is easier (and sometimes more fun) to read a book or observe an image and interpret its meaning than it is to watch others read or look, than to watch a writer write or a designer design. Scholars believe they can fathom "the meaning" of a text, song, or picture directly, whether that meaning is a moral guideline or a cognitive boundary. The influence of French structural linguistics on the early stages of the cultural turn in social science reinforced this formal, idealistic method, easily represented in trees of binary oppositions (Lévi-Strauss, 1964; Alexander, 2006), and reliant on language as a root metaphor for meaning. So we have designed methods to look for these.

In addition, it is easier to interview people about the worlds they inhabit than to become part of one of those worlds ourselves, to visit as tourists than to immerse ourselves (cf. Desmond, 2007; Goffman, 2014; Wacquant, 2003). When we conduct personal interviews, what we usually get are respondents' articulations—often their ideals, and at any rate artificial formulations—instead of what actually moves them in the course of normal action. The contemptuous rejection of introspection as a research tool has not helped

matters. The derivation of moral principles from texts (e.g., Boltanksi & Thevenot, 1991) only heightens the idealism.

The idealism of structured codes is occasionally tempered by acknowledgment of the emotions that accompany them. Sacred symbols, Alexander (1988: 217) remarks, "are the focus of heightened affect, reflecting the emotional desirability of achieving the good." The binary oppositions "are highly charged both emotionally and morally" (Alexander, 1990: 18). At the time, it was sufficient to point out emotions without further analyzing their impact. But what does it mean to be emotionally charged? What emotions do we feel in that "heightened affect"? We have not moved very far beyond Durkheim's "collective effervescence."

Emotions, morality, and cognition are all constructed out of the same bundles of thinking processes, and any distinction between the three mostly lies in the imagination of the researcher, not in real human processes (Jasper, 2018). I begin with my lay understanding of how psychologists and neurologists view emotions today and then turn to how sociologists of morality have understood their subject. Emotions are present in their work, but rarely commented upon, much less explicitly theorized. Given the vast and sophisticated research on emotions available, we are missing a chance to specify moral processes in clearer detail. I hope to show that we can only comprehend morality's influence on social life if we grasp the role that emotions play.

1 Feeling-Thinking Processes and Emotions

Recent research on emotions can help us understand the role of morality in human action. In most views since Plato, emotions were feared as an interference with rationality and thoughts, coming from deep inside us in ways that disrupt our functioning in current situations (or as being imposed on us just as arbitrarily from the outside, when demagogues rile us up). Eventually, emotions were seen as nonrational, orthogonal to rationality, and in this they were grouped with morality. For Weber, both affectual and value-rational action are carried out for their own sake, meaning that they cannot be evaluated for their consequences; he often grouped emotions with irrationality and error. Today, psychologists are more likely to view emotions as a part of thinking, even a wise part, instead of its opposite (Barrett & Salovey, 2002; Gigerenzer, 2007; Goleman, 1995).

Another, evolutionary, view pictured emotions as programs that, once launched, follow a familiar pattern that has evolved and is universal. Each emotion was linked to a particular part of the brain or a circuit, and each was thought to have an immediately recognizable set of muscle contractions, facial expression, and biochemistry. They were seen as part of the human genome and thus shared by all humans around the globe (Darwin, 1872; Ekman, 2003). Famously, researchers claimed that remote groups in places like New Guinea could recognize the same facial expressions as Americans and Europeans. Recently, psychologists have shown the many ways that these researchers taught their subjects to perceive these expressions, casting doubt on the strict versions of the universality and biology hypotheses, and opening the door more widely to culture (Barrett, 2017: Chap. 3).

Initial efforts to bring emotions into cultural sociology relied on a "dual process" model of mind and cognition, in which "fast" thinking—unconscious, automatic, preverbal, and oriented toward action—operates alongside slow, deliberative, calculated thinking (Kahneman, 2011; Lizardo et al., 2016; Vaisey, 2009).[1] Positing two systems, often thought to inhabit different brain pathways, exaggerated the differences between them rather than examining their constant interaction and cooperation, as well as ignoring cases of cognition that partake of both kinds of thinking (Cerulo, 2018; Leschziner &

[1] Durkheimian sociology has included emotions, of course, ranging from Durkheim's own collective effervescence to Alexander's neofunctionalist inclusion of feelings alongside thoughts in his formulations (discussed below). For Durkheim, emotions, in my view, were potentially creative, but also irrational and overly reducible to social structure.

Brett, 2019; Stolz & Lizardo, 2018), which may actually include most or all thinking. Because dual process theory emerged from behavioral game theory, it tended to view slow thinking as superior to fast thinking, which was forever a source of biases, prejudices, and mistakes. Soon another brain was added, in tripartite models (Firat, 2019; Leschziner & Brett, 2019). It is unsurprising that a theory-dubbed "dual process theory" might prove unsuitably dualistic; the misleading (and originally religious) contrast between "mind" (or "soul") and "body" persisted.

But the direction of research was obvious: to incorporate more bodily sources of information acquisition and processing than the highly symbolic and linguistic cognition that was thought to be confined to small areas of the frontal lobe. It was easy to show such operations in the case of smell (Cerulo, 2018), but harder in other neurological activities. Because this research typically occurred as part of the flourishing of cognitive sociology (Leschziner, 2019; Strandell, 2019), it largely failed to incorporate emotions as sources of information and assessment, despite the availability elsewhere of extensive research on emotions. Social psychologists had surprisingly little influence on the sociology of culture and morality (cf. Hegtvedt & Scheuerman, 2013; Harkness & Hitlin, 2014; Turner & Stets, 2006).

Terms such as carnal sociology (Wacquant, 2003, 2015) or embodied cognition (Cerulo, 2019) occasionally cite emotions as a mechanism, but their focus on "the body" may actually perpetuate a body-brain contrast. In his ethnography of amateur boxing, Wacquant talks about bodies, naturally, but tells us surprisingly little about what actually happens in them. Nor is it obvious whether boxing is different from any other actions, all of which take place via our bodies. He could be describing any fast thinking, which uses various FTPs, when he says (2003: 97), "Pugilistic excellence can thus be defined by the fact that the body of the fighter computes and judges for him, instantaneously, without the mediation—and the costly delay that it would cause—of abstract thinking, prior representation, and strategic calculation." So does picking up a pencil. Further, he says (96), "In the accomplished boxer, the mental becomes part of the physical and vice versa." This is true of all human action, and it is surprising only in the background of an artificial distinction between mind and body. Since this is the sum of his theorizing about action, one wonders if Wacquant's three years of being pummeled in the gym was worth it.

Today most neurologists and psychologists view emotions as arising from hundreds of physiological and cognitive processes, ranging from the perceptions of peripheral vision or a flood of neurotransmitters all the way up through the words that we apply to familiar packages of these processes (Barrett, 2017; Damasio, 1994; Prinz, 2004). These occur in the brain, but also in the central and peripheral nervous systems that interact constantly with the brain—in other words throughout our bodies. The culturally informed concepts matter; if we identify a bundle of feelings as "anger" or some other emotion, this in turn affects those feelings: favoring, moderating, reducing, and redirecting different ones (Barrett et al., 2007).

I have used the term "feeling-thinking processes" (FTPs) for this diverse collection of signals, perceptions, and chemical processes (Jasper, 2014b, 2018). They all communicate information to, from, and within the brain about the state of our body and about its location and wellbeing in the physical and social worlds. Moods are a kind of summary statement of these FTPs: we are in a good mood if the signals are on the whole pleasant, a bad mood if they are unpleasant. (We can also be in anxious or calm moods depending on the intensity or urgency of those FTPs.) Even our gut flora emits chemicals that affect our moods, to take a recently discovered set of FTPs. Any sense of "meaning" begins with FTPs.

People recognize certain assemblages of FTPs as instances of emotions. Each episode is a slightly different collection of FTPs, depending on circumstances and on the state of our body at the time. There is no "ideal type" of an emotion, despite years of research attempting to identify a "fingerprint" for each one, or a place in the brain where it occurs, whether a location or a circuit

(Barrett, 2006, 2017; Pessoa, 2013). Once we abandon this search for a fingerprint for each emotion, we can also drop distracting debates (reflecting evolutionary theories of emotions) over which emotions are "primary" and which "secondary."

Psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett insists that people have a concept of an emotion, usually but not always associated with a word, a label, for it. In contrast to the Darwinian view, these concepts *are* the emotions, because each concept organizes and acknowledges the FTPs that combine into the emotion. Without the concept of indignation, we would not feel indignant, or not precisely; our FTPs would not coagulate into an emotion; they would remain incoherent and possibly puzzling feelings. *All* our cognitive activities consist of FTPs: our brains search for memories of similar concepts or situations in the past, cast about for associated words and images, follow through mathematical or logical series, identify faces, and so on. These activities happen in the same way that our gut signals hunger or our hearing suggests an approaching automobile. We use some of the same FTPs to recognize emotions displayed by others.

Whether we are feeling an emotion, remembering, perceiving, or categorizing something, says Barrett (2017: 126), these "can all be accounted for with the same brain ingredients for making meaning." To make sense out of a meaningless flow of information to our brains, we are constantly categorizing our FTPs: "categorization constructs *every* perception, thought, memory, and other mental event that you experience, so *of course* you construct instances of emotion in the same manner" (86).

Because cognitive processes are a key part of emotions, emotions differ across historically and geographically bounded groups. People from different cultures feel, acknowledge, and express slightly different emotions; they package the underlying processes in different ways. For instance, the ancient Greeks and Romans distinguished many types of anger that today's anglophones lump together, but they did not consider smiling a part of happiness (or of any other emotion: they apparently had no words for smiling). Germans have several emotion words that we lack in English, the most familiar being *schadenfreude*, as do more distant tribal cultures (Lutz, 1988).[2] This cultural constructionism is old hat for sociologists; less familiar is the biological version of constructionism through which we assemble FTPs into identifiable emotions, perceptions, and thoughts.

Just as individuals differ in their vocabularies or in their knowledge of antique sports cars, they differ in their conceptual repertories for emotions. Some people are barely able to articulate how they are feeling (or to recognize feelings in others), beyond being "upset" or "all right." At the opposite extreme poets and psychologists of emotion can distinguish hundreds of nuanced feelings, including a dozen forms of anger. The gender differences in this kind of emotional intelligence are notorious. This is not simply a matter of vocabulary; however, people differ in their ability to express emotions through the muscles of the face (Hatfield et al., 1994: 130).

Sociologists often turn to the "body" as a way to bash other theories of action, but they rarely specify why and how the body matters, how all those feeling-thinking processes work. When Wacquant (2015) calls for a sociology of "flesh and blood," what does he really mean by flesh or by blood, beneath a series of enticing slogans such as enactive ethnography and observant participation? What does he think is happening in our muscles or our bloodstream? A rapid heartbeat, the clenching of certain muscles, perhaps. These can help produce action, but they seem less important than many other things that occur in our nervous systems. Our bodies contain those nervous systems and our brains, so we need to move beyond simple acknowledgment of embodiment and break down more of what is happening in there.

[2] Non-Germans certainly experience schadenfreude, although the mix of FTPs may vary more without the concept to discipline them.

2 Short-Run and Long-Run Emotions

Sociologists can hardly be expected to busy themselves with distinguishing neurotransmitters and other FTPs at work inside us, beyond a recognition that emotions are just the occasional result of this work. But we can be expected to become more adept with the language of emotions, which are by now a standard set of tools in some subfields of sociology as well as having familiar lay meanings. FTPs can be defined and measured more precisely than emotions, but the latter surely suffice for most cultural analysis. And the apparatus needed to measure things like cortisol levels or fleeting facial expressions is not feasible in most sociological research settings. I would be happy enough if we began to get the emotions right. They are the most salient FTPs.

We can make some sense of all these emotions with a common-sense typology (Jasper, 2018) starting with two sets of short-run feelings: *urges* such as lust, hunger, fatigue, the need to defecate or urinate, and strong desires for substances (also known as strong feelings: Elster, 1999), and *reflex emotions* that we feel in reaction to events, such as joy at good news, disappointment at bad news, surprise, and some forms of anger and fear (Griffiths, 1997). Our moral intuitions shape our urges and reflex emotions.

Then come middle-range *moods*, which we tend to take with us from one situation to the next, carrying neurotransmitters such as dopamine in our brains. As Collins (2004) observes, what happens in one interaction ritual gives us emotions—primarily moods—that we carry to the next one in the chain.

Then there are two sets of long-term emotions that are especially important to culture and morality because they provide basic orientations and goals for our lives; they are background for short-run reactions. First, we have *affective loyalties*, such as love, liking, respect, trust, admiration, and comfort, that we feel for people, places, things, even ideas, along with all their negative counterparts. Collective identities rely on these emotions for their force, for example (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Our affective loyalties direct our moral commitments toward particular objects; for instance, we may feel compassion for certain groups but not others. Although they tend to be stable, sometimes throughout our lives, affective commitments can change suddenly, as when we feel betrayed or disappointed.

Moral emotions are a second category of long-term emotional orientation: commitments to more abstract ideas of approval and disapproval of human actions and statuses (our own as well as others' actions), such as shame and pride, indignation over injustice, contempt for stigmatized others, or compassion for suffering. These moral orientations develop gradually during our early years (with different ones emerging at different times), but after our twenties they tend to remain stable. Thomas Scheff (1990, 1997) follows Cooley in seeing pride and shame as overarching emotions that connect us to (or distance us from) others and exert considerable social control over us. But all the moral emotions, we will see, influence our actions—more through our felt intuitions than through explicit moral principles.

Some societies, especially caste systems, link moral honor explicitly to bloodlines, effectively fusing affective commitments and moral emotions, at least in principle (there are always exceptions and ways around the rules). Moral dis/approval applies to status over and above a person's actions. But actions usually matter too: one can do something that dishonors one's family or group, a moral infraction that pollutes one's group identity. Even in societies that are not legally based on caste, groups often try to claim superior moral status for themselves. Classic racism is an essentialist effort to establish fixed status groups on the basis of race, one reason that miscegenation is anathema. In status systems, moral approval or disapproval applies to someone's very being as opposed to any of their specific actions.

Let me point to two emotions that often guide our action: deontological pride and the anxiety of shame. We feel deontological pride when we have done something we consider the "right" thing to do, regardless of consequences, something that we would be proud to have others

observe (although we may be even more proud of doing such things anonymously). Part of deontological pride is a relief at having avoided a mistake or violation, of which we would have been ashamed later. This is the other feeling: a nervous fear about whether we will do the right thing, which like pride is partly independent of whether other people find out about what we have done. We feel these emotions both before an action, in anticipation, and afterward, as reward or punishment. Although they can be short-run reflexes, they typically reflect our long-run moral commitments.

3 Cultural and Moral Concepts

As individuals mature, they learn to apply concepts and labels to clusters of FTPs. These concepts may be more obviously cognitive, such as "friend," or more patently emotional such as "anger." (Although the apparently cognitive concept of "friend" has both emotional and moral elements.) The combination of FTPs is never quite the same: each instance of anger differs from others just as our friends differ from one another. Most psychologists and neurologists no longer believe that there is some defining brain pattern and location associated with each emotion.

Conceptualizing and labeling are FTPs among others but also a bit different, and in some ways more decisive, than the others. To some extent the labeling of emotions is familiar from the sociology of emotion. It is what helps us to do both surface and deep acting, it is what allows us to manage our emotions and display them to others (Hochschild, 1983). Words themselves matter: the term "anger" leads us down a different path than the word "fear," even if most of our bodily FTPs are the same in the two cases (Schachter & Singer, 1962). This is a standard cultural or social constructionism.

But it is easy to misunderstand these labels in an idealist fashion. The conscious label "anger" is not some kind of magic wand that instantly transforms dozens of FTPs into a coherent package. The concept of anger is already at work, almost entirely unconsciously, in numerous ways, helping us understand a snarling lip, a furrowed brow, or a grunt. We may or may not cap off these FTPs with a conscious thought, "she is (or I am) angry." We recognize anger in ourselves and others before we consciously label it.

The popular field of affect theory, which emerged from cultural studies and the humanities more than from social science, highlights the malleability of feeling-thinking processes beneath the explicitly labeled emotions. Affect theorists see potential for social change in structures of feeling that have not yet been labeled, following Raymond Williams (1977), but instead of trying to identify the relevant FTPs they lump them together as an inchoate mess of "affect," a realm of potential. Brian Massumi (2002: 30) adds ancient Greek paradoxes of stasis and change, and a "pressing crowd of incipiencies and tendencies." Like many affect theorists, Massumi associates that pressing crowd with the body, in contrast to the cognitive labels of the brain—retaining a form of the mind-body dualism that he otherwise criticizes.

Just as cognitive forms of culture can be sorted roughly into polished, articulated ideas on the one hand and all the processes that put those ideas to work on the other, we can begin by distinguishing moral principles (the golden rule, 10 commandments, categorical imperative) from moral intuitions. It may take a long time and hard work for people and groups to move from intuitions to principles: this is the painstaking task that artists, philosophers, and social movements usually do (Jasper, 1997). But attention to those processes is our only hope for avoiding idealism.

Social theorists have tried to develop theories of social action that incorporate morality but do not fall back on values. John Levi Martin, for example, develops a field theory by rejecting "values" in favor of "valences," Kurt Lewin's "intrinsically affective" concept of "something that pulls one toward or pushes one away" (Martin, 2011: 246, 247). This sounds like feelings, and Martin uses the example of hunger, which I would call an urge. Martin tries to link what we value to social fields, but emotions would provide

a more direct, well elaborated theory of valences. Hass (2021) extends valences to posit "anchors," which are things we especially care about (akin to Taylor's [1989] "hypergoods"). He includes emotions, but also positions and relations and meanings and identities. But it is only the emotional part of these that make us care about them. Without a clear theory of emotions, Hass's discussion of anchors is arbitrary and perhaps tautological.

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2001, 2012; Haidt et al., 1993) performed a number of experiments that showed—convincingly in my view—that people make a lot of their moral judgments by turning to their gut feelings, their moral intuitions, to which they cling even in the face of rational arguments against them. These are culturally inculcated commitments, beneath the level of explicit rules and concepts. "Intuition," he says (Haidt, 2012: 45), "is the best word to describe the dozens or hundreds of rapid, effortless moral judgments and decisions that we all make every day. Only a few of these intuitions come to us embedded in full-blown emotions." "Intuition" is a bit of a cop-out, in the style of "fast thinking," and we eventually need to unpack both ideas. Inspired by Hume, philosopher Jesse Prinz elaborates on the emotional approach to morality in *Gut Reactions* (2004) and *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (2007).

Critics of this intuitionist approach to morality point out that fast thinking-feeling processes work better for familiar, routine situations, but they frequently fail in novel settings and in crises, especially perhaps in moral choices (Luft, 2020). There are any number of efforts to describe when and why preconscious habits of thinking and feeling become objects of conscious consideration: unsettled times (Swidler, 1986), anxiety (Huddy et al., 2007), moral shocks (Jasper, 1997), failures and crisis (Greene, 2013). Following Kahneman (2011), there is a tendency to associate fast thinking with emotions and slow thinking with "rational" deliberation, but deliberation also relies on emotions, especially moral emotions such as shame or pride and affective orientations such as group-based hate or love (Jasper, 2018; Citrin & Sears, 2014; Sears & Citrin, 1982). Slow thinking may lean toward long-run rather than reflex emotions, but it entails emotional loyalties nonetheless.

Let us turn now to several research programs that revived and continue to guide the sociology of morality.

4 Moral Boundaries

In a long series of important works, Michèle Lamont has analyzed how a variety of groups make moral judgments and distinctions. She has moved gradually, and only partially, from viewing them as cognitive classifications to recognizing the emotional mechanisms in the actions that apply them. Her work has helped define cultural and moral sociology, and her trajectory reflects a broader acceptance of emotions. Yet it also shows that cultural sociology has yet to incorporate an adequate toolkit for understanding emotions.

Lamont's first book, *Money, Morals, and Manners*, launched the Morality and Society series at the University of Chicago Press. It addressed how professional men in France and the United States "assess themselves and others – the boundaries they draw between desirable and undesirable traits, inferior and superior human beings" (xxix). Instead of subjective feelings, their moral approval and disapproval are described as a system of classification that is the "supra-individual byproduct of basic social processes" (2). The theory is cognitive, almost formal. The rejection of the subjective in favor of externalism was a defining feature of the new cultural sociology, even though it harked back to Durkheim.

Emotions appear, untheorized, whenever we see the classifications in action. "Exclusive behaviors are experienced as repugnance, discomfort, embarrassment for the excluder, and as snobbery, distance, and coldness by the excluded" (10). The "experiences" are almost entirely emotional, although I suspect that those subject to this behavior have more emotions than those listed here, such as indignation, resentment, perhaps shame. Elsewhere, we see the men trying

to make others feel comfortable, or admiring teamwork—based on affective orientations such as trust and loyalty. Again and again we see motivating concerns for pride, dignity, and security, and avoidance of shame and embarrassment. Even "taste" is largely a way of avoiding embarrassment (102). Interview questions may elicit a formal classification, but emotions are crucial to understand how it all works in action.

Another cost of not explicitly addressing emotions is that this book on friendship missed something important (although variable) about friendships: we become committed to friends, much as we are to family, feeling that we must remain loyal to them through thick and thin. By asking respondents to articulate what they admire in friends, Lamont ended up with an idealist vision of friendship as an issue of choice. Lamont is interested in an external culture of moral distinctions, not how people experience them or what they try to do with them. Without a conceptual vocabulary that includes emotions, this book merely uses friendship as a setting and so does quite tell us what friendship is. (In fact it is a book about how people talk about friendship, much as Swidler (2001) is a book about how people talk about love.)

The Dignity of Working Men was Lamont's next book (2000), placing a complicated cluster of emotions front and center. Although they talk about hard work, responsibility, sincerity, and integrity, we see her respondents striving to maintain pride and avoid the kind of shame that is forever forced on them by societies that value economic success. (In their book on the working class, Sennett and Cobb (1973) highlight these psychological dynamics.) A basic affective commitment, solidarity, also turns out to be what primarily distinguishes Black from white workers. As in the earlier book, we read the explicit content of what and whom these men like, admire, fear, hate, and are disgusted by, without hearing about these emotional processes themselves, or variations in those emotions. Lamont makes clear that these feelings motivate the men's boundary work, but we do not hear about how that motivation works.

We do not quite learn what dignity is, since it is a set of emotions. In my view (Jasper, 2018), a person's dignity includes both their own emotions (especially pride) and those of others, both immediate others and distant others (especially respect). I lack dignity if I believe that another caste holds me in contempt, or that experts at universities think I am stupid. Respect includes some admiration, or at least tolerance, and it requires a lack of contempt or shame. Respect, dignity, and pride are fundamental human needs, motivating a great deal of personal and political action. Such emotions are the mechanisms inside concepts like dignity.[3]

Lamont (2009: 116) then turned to how academics like and admire grant proposals, acknowledging "the importance of considering evaluation as an emotional process, as opposed to the more typical approach of focusing on cognition and final outcomes." The panels she studied operated more effectively if members trusted and respected each other; they were also more enjoyable. Good chairs were able to do emotional repair work when that was needed. Panelists' own pride as well as their affective commitments to science and fairness influenced their positions and decisions. As with friendship and dignity, emotions are the center of the project—in this case emotions about proposals—but they are presented primarily as a cognitive set of boundaries and distinctions. (Emotions and cognition do get equal billing in Lamont et al., 2015.)

By 2009 sociologists of culture and morality were frequently recognizing emotion, but they still lacked a thick vocabulary for describing specific emotions or even locating them properly. Panelists in Lamont's research had emotions about themselves—their pride in their work for instance—but also about the other panelists, the proposals, and about science as a broader endeavor.

[3] In this volume Hitlin and Andersson, using the nice phrase "a locally recognized humanity," elaborate on this dual nature of dignity, combining one's own sense of self and one's position in a broader community, or the interweaving of the personal and social, but they do not address what dignity feels like. Also see Hodson (2001).

In *Getting Respect* Lamont and an international team of researchers (2016) examined responses to stigma in the U.S., Brazil, and Israel. The authors promise a phenomenological account of the lived experience of those stigmatized, and the vignettes that open the book contain words like aggravation, fear, and especially anger. What can lived experience be if not a series of emotions or FTPs? But the responses to incidents skip over the initial feelings to get at subsequent actions, categorized as: confrontation, the management of self, no response, an assertion of competence at work, and a focus on autonomy and isolation.

"Management of the self" might have been a kind of Foucaultian care of the self, including considerable emotion work, but it turns out to be "substantial time considering pragmatic constraints, including the material, professional, and emotional costs (and benefits) of various types of responses." Its five subcategories are "acting against stereotypes, preservation of self or energy, humor, managing anger (picking one's battles), and strategic silence" (Lamont et al., 2016: 92). Even the emotion of anger, which is central to protest (Jasper, 2014a; Miller & Jasper, 2023), becomes the more cognitive choosing of one's battles. Explicit attention to emotions would have allowed the authors (94) to pick apart a telling quote—"I try to be cool and collected"—to get at the struggles between reflex anger and indignation, between a gut-level shock and the development of outrage from it. Such processes are crucial to collective responses to stigma and discrimination: when do they occur and how do they occur? Scholars of protest have described processes like these, but this work has not yet been absorbed into the sociology of morality (Gould, 2009; Jasper, 2018; Summers Effler, 2010).

Emotions do not appear very often in this research for an obvious reason: the interviewers do not ask about them. For *Getting Respect*, African Americans were asked about some basic affective commitments: whom they admired or disliked, who they felt superior or inferior to, and some basic questions about their collective identities. The answers are presented in cognitive and strategic terms, in the moral-classification tradition. Reflex emotions and moods are absent. Perhaps for methodological reasons (more formal interviews versus wider-ranging participation), *Getting Respect* is in this way a step backward from *How Professors Think*, suggesting that emotions are still not entirely acknowledged as central to moral processes. Even when they try to get at lived experience, cultural and moral sociologists lack a vocabulary for the emotional texture of life.

5 Compassion

Like Lamont, Robert Wuthnow is one of the most influential and productive figures in the revival of moral sociology. In *Meaning and Moral Order* (1987), he firmly linked culture and morality, taking an externalist approach that combined a structuralist image of meanings with an account of broader social, economic, and political contexts. He is concerned with "ideological forms" like individualism, folk piety, and religious fundamentalism, but by starting from ideology he almost necessarily retains an idealism. Morality takes the form of "moral codes"; Wuthnow is firmly interested in moral order not moral action.

More than Lamont, Wuthnow's target is the "subjective approach" to culture, which focuses on attitudes, opinions, values, and goals, and which he claims dominates cultural sociology. Because he includes moods and motivations, this would seem to encompass emotions, although these are never explicitly addressed. They are often misrepresented (as in Freudian traditions) in the same way that he misdescribes attitudes and so on: they "represent, grow out of, express, or point to the individual's subjective states, such as outlooks or anxieties" (11). Charles Tilly used to call this "phenomenological individualism," just as dismissively. This view denies that emotions are social and interactive, an aspect of our engagement with the world rather than a starting point for it.

Several years later Wuthnow (1991) published *Acts of Compassion*, which -- in line with his externalist approach -- is more about the acts

than about the emotion of compassion. Or rather, how people talk about acts of compassion. He understands the feeling of compassion perfectly well, expressing it as "to suffer with" or "to feel with" (44). But he sets it aside in order to focus on acts of compassion, which combine two things: certain behaviors, and the labels we attach to those behaviors when we call them compassion. In other words, he is interested in discourse, in language, because these transform behaviors "from physical motions into human action" (45). We can apparently have the gut feeling of empathy or compassion, and act upon it, but if we do not label the action as compassionate it is not a compassionate act. (It is not clear if it can be a compassionate act in the absence of the emotion, as long as we use that language for understanding it.) "Caring," the word in his subtitle, turns out to be a better description of these actions.

Here the externalism of his theory kicks in: "To ask about language inevitably moves us from the level of the individual to the level of society" (45). To me this is an exaggerated contrast, designed to keep emotions down at another "level," safely away from sociology, rather than being an inherent part of social life and interaction. Even if someone is talking about their inner feelings, trying to link concepts with feeling-thinking processes, they have made the leap to society. The word compassion (or any other emotion label) may well ripple through social life, but it also ripples back inside us and reshapes or reinforces our feeling-thinking processes. There is no reason to conclude that words have more or less priority than other feeling-thinking processes.

We see another aspect of externalism, in that motivation for action seems to come from a desire to construct narratives rather than to balance or orchestrate a variety of inner feelings. Motivation, Wuthnow (1991: 285) argues, "is a matter of having stories to tell ourselves that make sense of our behavior." He is sensibly arguing against an image of religious morality as a set of lessons and precepts that we learn, then apply in our lives. But if he is moving in the direction of more implicit kinds of morality, he should go further than stories, all the way down to emotions.

6 Moral Heroes

We can draw some lessons from literatures that have looked at rare individuals who take huge risks and bear considerable costs to follow their moral instincts, such as corporate and government whistleblowers. These are people who violate a number of local moral (and legal) rules in favor of some alternative moral feelings that they have. Pre-existing sociological and demographic factors are insufficient explanations: race, class, gender, religiosity, control of resources, political affiliations and ideologies, occupations and other social roles, social networks.[4]

During the Holocaust, tens of thousands of moral heroes hid, helped, and fed Jews whom the Nazis were hunting down. Because standard demographic variables explain little, some scholars try to use "character" as an explanation, others the setting of the moment. Neither is very convincing, because it was hard to see how these people learned compassion. Another way to approach this question might be to view learning as a set of emotions: we learn to be compassionate when we see others suffering, we get a surge of oxytocin when we encounter some groups, cortisol when we encounter others. We are not always aware of our own emotional habitus, so it is unlikely to come up in interviews.

Others learn to hate and to kill in the immediate settings. Luft's (2015b: 164) valuable research on Rwanda "shows how dehumanization of victimized civilians is actually an *outcome* of ongoing participation in violence." Affective loyalties tend to be long-term emotions, but that

[4] Zygmunt Bauman (1989: 5) makes a similar claim about Holocaust rescuers, who "come from all corners and sectors of 'social structure,' thereby calling the bluff of there being 'social determinants' of moral behavior," and suggesting that pre-existing empathy and compassion are key (Monroe, 2004). But Luft (2015a, 2015b) casts doubt on the weight of pre-existing moral and emotional commitments by showing that many participants in Rwanda's killings changed their actions during the course of the massacres, depending on immediate situational factors. Of course, these include emotions of many kinds as well as social networks, opportunities, resources, and other structural factors. My thanks to Aliza for helping me work this through.

does not mean they cannot change, especially during traumatic events and under pressure. Many Rwandans killed in order to protect family members, a case of one affective commitment in direct conflict with another. Short term emotions such as fear possibly also reordered long-term emotional orientations. Rather than distinguishing and comparing emotions with networks and social interactions, we need to see how they are intertwined. Immediate contexts shape action, but they do so by shaping emotions as well as through structural factors such as political opportunities, social networks, and resources (Fox & Nyseth-Brehm, 2018; Luft, 2015a): the latter are themselves imbued with rarely examined emotions (Jasper, 1998).

Whistleblowers are less likely than rescuers to fully grasp the costs ahead of them, especially retaliation from employers. As with rescuers, it is hard to predict who will become a whistleblower based on standard variables. C. Fred Alford (2001: 16) suggests that we cannot distinguish them from bystanders using our usual external variables, but we must grasp how they "experienced their world." He does not frame this experience in terms of emotions, much less feeling-thinking processes (in fact he tries to reduce it to formal narratives), but the driving feelings are clear.

People become whistleblowers when they learn that "nothing he or she believed was true" (p. 20). This shakes their complacency and habits not through a neutral cognitive shift, but through a "shock," a word with various visceral connotations as well as cognitive ones. The shocks are not just from learning that one's employer is breaking the rules, but from the retaliation and rejection that follow from the employee's complaint. Punishment seems to reinforce whistleblowers' indignation and shock, confirming their stubborn path, in a way that would be hard to understand except through emotional processes such as deontological pride in doing the right thing. Moral shocks can paralyze people, but when they develop into indignation they seem more likely to lead to some form of explicit protest (Miller & Jasper, 2023).

In the end, Alford (2001: 136-7) describes would-be whistleblowers as facing a choice between two dreads: fear of punishment and expulsion on the one hand, and "the fear that one's self is about to lose all value because it is about to lose its already tenuous connection to its ego ideal." He describes this as a "wounded narcissism," but we hardly need psychoanalytic jargon to understand emotional motivations like fear and deontological pride.

Surprisingly often, whistleblowers start off as true believers in a system: those who are loyal to their employer, those who believe in the military force to which they belong, who have faith in their nation (Press, 2012: 35). They are perhaps more likely to be shocked by malfeasance in the ranks above them, and certainly by the negative response when they point out violations of the rules and laws. Their shock and indignation are difficult to explain in terms of a coherent moral order or system. They are easier to explain on the basis of multiple moral emotions that can contradict one another: long-run versus short-run; fear versus indignation; pride in our self, our family, or our group; compassion versus a sense of fairness. it is often hard to predict which emotions will dominate others.

7 Conclusion

Externalist views of morality create a straw target of emotions: that they can only be recorded through verbal reports, which are unreliable; that they reflect internal states rather than social interactions and expectations. Externalism rejects the possibility that there are both subjective and objective indicators, and that we could triangulate between them to get at emotions (and other cultural meanings). In the 1980s, externalism was a useful battle against older views of culture as attitudes and values, often packaged as a kind of national character in modernization theory. Today, research on emotions has led to greater understanding of what goes on inside our bodies, allowing us to overcome fast-thinking versus slow-thinking contrasts. (Both kinds of thinking tend to be left as black boxes in sociology.)

Cultural (and thus moral) sociology focus on meaning, but they have never quite explained what meaning is. In the structural, externalist, and idealist tradition, derived from French structuralism, meanings are treated as though they were definitions in a dictionary, based on distinctions from other meanings. This is meaning as intelligibility. But in a different definition we describe something as meaningful because it matters to us, we care about it. This affective approach is more promising for understanding how we use meanings in action, directing and accompanying us. With morality, this emotional kind of meaning is much, much more important than intelligibility, because we are not dealing with morality if we don't care about it.

I will immodestly offer one example of how cultural sociologists can fuse cognitive, moral, and emotional dimensions of meaning. "Public characters" are figures who suggest and include emotional responses in their definitions: heroes are those we need and admire, villains we fear and detest, victims we pity and hope to protect, minions are those we ridicule (Jasper et al., 2020). Appropriate emotions are as salient as the cognitive distinctions and moral dis/approval. Interactions among these characters drive or reflect moral lessons, political conflicts, and the construction of social problems, among others. In studying moral outrage and victim compensations, experiments have shown that empathy for the victim and outrage at the perpetrator both need to be present to stimulate punishment (Thulin & Bicchieri, 2016).

Even philosophers whose training and professional life involves debating moral positions and principles still turn to our intuitions (either their own or what they take to be widespread intuitions) to resolve debates. If intuition and philosophical principles clash, then "philosophy will have to go" (Posner, 2004: 65). Echoing Haidt and Prinz, Judge—and rational choice theorist—Richard Posner (2004: 66–67) argues "that ethical argument is and should be powerless against tenacious moral instincts." In the case of animal protection, he adds (72), "Neither philosophical reflection nor a vocabulary of rights is likely to add anything to the sympathetic emotions that narratives of the mistreatment of animals can engender in most of us." Peter Singer (1975), like many other philosophers, has been central to animal-rights debates, but his influence has been to stoke indignation through evidence about cruelty, not to convert participants to his Utilitarian system.

Even more than philosophers, sociologists are supposed to explain social life. If we are to come to grips with action, we must understand morality. The morality of books, sermons, and interviews is not irrelevant, but the morality that operates through our emotions is more direct in its influence on what we do.

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Sociology, Embodiment and Morality: A Durkheimian Perspective

Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling

Abstract

Durkheim is often associated with the 'old' sociology of morality but a fresh engagement with the embodied dimensions of his work can bring theoretical clarity to the contemporary field. In undertaking this task, our argument proceeds through three stages. Firstly, we demonstrate how Durkheim's explanatory *homo duplex* model insists that biological and social factors *combine* to constitute morality. Secondly, we analyse how this model provides the basis for a broader explanatory account that *resists* reductionist 'substantive' assessments of diverse moral systems to focus on them as cultural systems. Finally, we explore how his approach facilitates the analysis of competing moral solidarities *within* as well as *across* contemporary societies. Having reappraised Durkheim's account, we suggest that the sociology of morality should be *inclusive* of insights from other disciplines but also *synthetic*, resisting various forms of reductionism in favour of a distinctively sociological model reflective of the fact that human beings are, simultaneously, natural and cultural creatures.

Keywords

Sociology · The body · Morality · Durkheim · Nature · Culture

1 Introduction

It is commonly noted that while morality was a key concern in the classical writings of Durkheim and Weber, maintaining its status in the mid-twentieth century normative sociology of Parsons, this prominence gradually dissipated until the recent emergence of the 'new' sociology of morality (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010, 2013; Abend, 2010). This term 'new' does not signal merely the 'rediscovery' of morality (Bykov, 2019), however, but also an epistemological break with the past. Bargheer and Wilson (2018: 1–2), for example, suggest it entails a departure from the 'old' sociology of morality associated with Parsons's argument that the discipline had converged around a concern with values (see also Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013: 53).

The suggestion that we should leave behind classical accounts, however, overlooks the partiality of those visions of the discipline that have been shaped by the legacy of normative sociology (Levine, 1995; Bargheer & Wilson, 2018: 2). In what follows, we propose that a fresh engagement

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with Durkheim's work, free of Parsonian assumptions, can usefully inform debates about the future direction of the sociology of morality. This engagement aims to address Bykov's (2019: 192–3) recent call for further theoretical clarity in the sociology of morality; a call reflective of his view that it remains unclear whether the renewed prominence of the subject signals a common topic of interest, or an emergent, comprehensive sociological perspective akin to that of the behavioural science of morality. Our starting point in this regard is Hitlin and Vaisey's (2010: 9–11) suggestion that the key issue facing the sociology of morality is to make sense of the relations between 'innate' moral capacities and the social and cultural complexities of morality. These relations remain undertheorised, but a creative reinterpretation of Durkheim offers a basis for developing our understanding.

Our account of Durkheim's utility for this project is rooted in two fundamental observations. First, for him, morality is not simply a central and explicit concern but is also an *elementary* feature of social life. As such, any study of the social is necessarily aligned to an interrogation of the 'moral' frameworks, feelings and conditions that nurture a sense of responsibility towards others, or shape action in the light of effervescently grounded ideals or values (Shilling & Mellor, 2001: 1–2, 203; see Levine, 1995: 100; Nisbet, 1993 [1966]: 3–20). Second, despite frequent suggestions that Durkheim evidences a sociological hostility to biology, his *homo duplex* model of humans offers a productive basis upon which to theorise the relations between inherent bodily capacities *and* a range of social and cultural dynamics (Durkheim, 1973 [1914]: 151; 1995 [1912]: 223, 438).

This interpretation is at odds with the dominant reading of Durkheim as an analyst of 'social facts' that exist in *opposition* to natural, biological processes. Bykov (2019: 174, 195) exemplifies this conventional view in the contemporary sociology of morality by suggesting that Durkheim's understanding of the moral stands in opposition to the natural, despite acknowledging that his work holds significant 'potential for thorough reconsideration'. In this reading of Durkheim, morality is a social achievement with no basis in biology. It emerges from the submission of the individual to society, mitigates what is a Hobbesian view of human nature as 'animalistic, anti-social and immoral', and 'rules out the capacity of emotions to be morally generative' (Hookway, 2015: 7, 12; Junge, 2001: 106–7). If Durkheim really proposed such a view it would, amongst other things, be antithetical to much evolutionary psychology and anthropology (e.g. Tomasello, 2014), though a fresh reading of his work suggests potential convergence rather than opposition. Indeed, alongside certain longstanding attempts to develop creative syntheses of evolutionary science and Durkheimian sociology (see Turner, 1996; Turner & Machalek, 2018), the sociology of the body offers a particularly valuable correction to conventional assumptions of Durkheim's antipathy to biology.

The sociology of the body shares certain features with the sociology of morality. They were interrelated concerns of classical writings that were downplayed in significance and became increasingly 'ghostly' absent-presences in much subsequent disciplinary writing (Horowitz, 1993: 227; Shilling, 2012 [1993]). Parsons can be seen as a key figure in this transition, especially in the selective interpretation of Durkheim evident in his own normative functionalist model of social action and morality (Shilling & Mellor, 2001: 94). While acknowledging Durkheim's discussions of the social significance of emotions and somatic experience, he subordinated these considerations to 'information high' cognitive values in his own system (Parsons, 1978: 54–9, 171, 221–5, 241, 320; Shilling, 2012: 212).

Subsequent generations of sociologists have often read Durkheim through the influence of Parsons's writing, obscuring the importance of embodiment to his work (see Shilling, 2005), yet this is not true of anthropologists. As Hausner (2017: 3) expresses it, Durkheim remains central to contemporary anthropology because of the rigour with which he explored the relationship between embodiment, the collective bond and the genesis of solidarity. Humanity's bodily,

biological being is inextricably entwined with culture, as well as constituting a foundation for it.

In what follows, we develop this embodied perspective further and highlight its contemporary utility. Our focus is on how Durkheim's account intersects with current concerns in the sociology of morality, and our argument develops as follows. First, we examine Durkheim's account of humans as *homo duplex*, which signals how the *combination* of biological and social factors constitutes morality. Exploring this both in relation to Bauman's attempt to explain moral phenomena with reference to 'pre-social' impulses, and to biologically reductionist accounts of morality, we emphasise its merits as a distinctively *sociological* way of conceptualising human moral capacities. Second, we use this account as a basis for arguing against attempts to offer 'substantive' assessments of moral orders and in favour of them as cultural systems predicated upon the embodied foundations of society. In the light of this, we reflect on the nature and merits of the moral 'relativism' Durkheim's model implies. Third, we emphasise that this approach has utility not only across single societies, but also with reference to competing moral solidarities *within* societies, exploring its relevance in relation to contemporary phenomena such as neo-tribalism, fanaticism and insider/outsider dynamics.

2 Innate Moral Capacities and the *Homo Duplex*

Hookway's (2015: 2) belief that Durkheim's *homo duplex* offers a negative depiction of biology reflects a broader view in the secondary literature (see Mayes, 1980: 82; Smart, 2001: 513). Junge (2001: 107), for example, associates *homo duplex* with the social and moral constraint of a bodily impulse that would otherwise lead, in Durkheim's (1995 [1912]: 215) words, to 'bloody barbarism'. Clearly, if true, that would be the unhelpful for sociologists of morality interested in building interdisciplinary bridges to biology (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010: 7). Junge, however, is unfair to Durkheim: the 'bloody barbarism' referred to relates to the French Revolution and arises from an *excess* of social and moral force, not its *absence*. This 'excess' certainly has an embodied dimension, but this has nothing whatsoever to do with 'unleashing' bodily impulses from social constraints. Rather than proposing a theory of morality *against* biology, in fact, Durkheim *integrates* it into his account.

For Durkheim, it is not that biology is absent from the constitution of morality, but that morality is *irreducible* to biology: what is distinctive about human life is that humans alone are affected by organic *and* social causes (Lefebvre & White, 2010: 468). On their own, biological explanations account for one dimension of what it is to be human, rendering a reduction of morality to biology not only partial, but also fundamentally false, since they fail to account for the dualism of human nature wherein moral feeling and thought is born (Lefebvre & White, 2010: 468). It is this *socio-natural* conception of *homo duplex* in Durkheim's theorisation of being human that offers a basis for exploring the relations between innate bodily capacities and the social and cultural forces that interact with them to generate the 'moral'.

Specifically, there are three elements to these bodily capacities: first, individual bodies do indeed contain the asocial, egoistic impulses that preclude moral life; second, however, they also possess an inherent bodily capacity for 'reaching beyond' these to the realm of moral activity held in common by a collectivity; third, the activation of this capacity is a bodily phenomenon provoked by the social stimulation of collective emotions (Durkheim, 1973 [1914]: 151; 1995 [1912]: 223, 438). Thus, while Durkheim followed Kant (1964 [1785]) in recognising the need for individuals to reach beyond their natural selves if they were to become moral, morality nonetheless has its basis in a social engagement with the 'natural properties' of humans rejected by Kant: moral rules are *emotionally grounded* products of society that build on some, and override other, innate human capacities through processes of 'collective effervescence' (Shilling & Mellor, 1998: 195; see Turner & Machalek, 2018).

For Durkheim, there is an effervescent 'propulsion' towards moral action (Collins, 1988). It is the collective effervescence stimulated by social groups that harnesses people's passions to the symbolic order of society, enabling individuals to interact on the basis of concepts shared and 'shielded' from the 'perpetual flux' of individual sensory impressions (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 434). Collective effervescence substitutes the world immediately available to our perceptions for another world; a world that is moral because it is social but is no less grounded in the body (Durkheim, 1984 [1893]: 319). In this way, Durkheim's account captures the idea of social 'force' at its birth, when embodied humans feel themselves and are transformed through an emotional structuring of their sensory and sensual being (Gane, 1988: 5). This force is experienced mentally and physically, and binds people to the ideals valued by their social group; a process examined in most detail in Durkheim's (1995 [1912]) study of religion, but also central to his writings more broadly (e.g. Durkheim, 1982 [1895]: 50–2).

In Hitlin and Vaisey's (2010: 4–7) terms, then, innate human capacities constitute a basis for morality, though an ambiguous one, since they also include asocial, egoistic impulses hostile to moral feeling. It is social life that facilitates their transformation into something 'moral'. For some, however, this attribution of such a key role to the social effectively devalues innate potentialities as a source of the moral. Hookway (2015, 2017), indeed, rejects it on the basis that social forces can *corrupt* rather than *facilitate* natural moral impulses, and instead looks to Bauman (1989: 172) as the antidote to Durkheim for the contemporary sociology of morality. Bauman's account of innate moral impulses provides a useful comparison to Durkheim's, even though it ultimately places severe restrictions on what sociology can say about the subject.

Bauman (1993) has his own *homo duplex* model of humanity but identifies the individual pole with a pre-social, embodied moral impulse, and the collective pole with opportunities for and threats to it (though he concentrates very heavily on the latter). Either way, whether a society expresses or represses the moral impulses of individuals it does not create and transform them, since moral life is not sociological in its origins (Shilling & Mellor, 1998: 211; see also Junge, 2001). Indeed, Bauman's (1993: 51) assertion that 'ethics' (in the sense of society's moral rules and codes) is *irrelevant* to 'morality' reflects Lévinas' (1991) quasi-theological belief in an unconditional, pre-social *being for the other* rather than anything sociological. But what do 'pre-social' capacities mean here, and how can they be 'corrupted'? For Durkheim, the natural or innate human capacities within the *homo duplex* are not 'pre-social' but, potentially, anti- or pro-social, depending on context: the concept of 'pre-social' human beings is here a contradiction in terms, as well as being impossible to study empirically. Bauman (1990: 5) appears to take a different view, but nonetheless concedes that the notion of a 'pre-social' impulse is a fiction, or *hermeneutical device*, for thinking about morality rather than anything real (see Dawson, 2017). The key question here is why should sociology align itself with worries about 'corrupting' something that exists only as a hermeneutical device, not least when it renders the discipline epiphenomenal to the explanation of morality, even though morality outside social life is neither conceivable nor verifiable?

This problem is repeated in part within many accounts of morality offered by evolutionary biology and biologically oriented forms of psychology. As Bykov (2019: 196) outlines, such approaches, along with recent developments in the neuroscience of morality, offer accounts of morality reduced to universal foundations in the body, and thereby little scope for the *sociology* of morality (see Alexander, 1985; Kurzban et al., 2015; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2008). In such cases, these 'universal foundations' are clearly *conceivable* and, to some extent, *verifiable* (e.g. through MRI scans), but, like sociological notions of 'pre-social' capacities, they render society and culture epiphenomenal to the analysis of morality. In Durkheim's terms, therefore, they are partial, reductionist and misleading.

Firat and Hitlin's (2012: 168, 171) assessment of the potential for sociology and neuroscience to

explore morality in a genuinely interdisciplinary manner is instructive in this regard, as it attempts to move beyond such reductionism. Emphasising that humans are biological *and* social beings, they suggest that developments in neuroscience, particularly around the illumination of certain emotional and somatic stimuli and responses, not only challenge the rationalism of much cognitive psychology but also offer considerable potential to align creatively with a sociological interest in the role of emotions in moral judgements. Certainly, such conclusions sit comfortably with the Durkheimian model we have outlined, in that neuroscientific methods hold the potential for observing and measuring the bodily effects of the sort of 'propulsion' towards moral action Durkheim theorises, e.g. with regard to 'somatic markers' emergent from specific social interactions (Firat & Hitlin, 2012: 172; see Damasio, 1994). As they also note, however, neuroscience tends to be limited to 'individual-level moral judgements isolated from the social environment', and has no handle on 'thick' moral issues such as righteousness, fanaticism, in-group loyalty and authority (Firat & Hitlin, 2012: 173).

Abend (2012: 158) has explored these issues in detail, noting that while 'converging lines of evidence from evolutionary biology, neuroscience and experimental psychology have shown that morality is grounded in the brain', this work has not focused on morality per se, but 'a particular kind of individual moral judgment… about the rightness, appropriateness, or permissibility of an action made in response to a stimulus at a particular point in time'. As he suggests, not only is there far more to morality than 'individual moral judgments', but also the place or prominence of such 'thin' moral judgments in day-to-day life is hard to specify, while such research cannot account for those 'thick' moral judgments that are absolutely central to contemporary life. These include issues such as dignity, tolerance, barbarism or fanaticism; thick issues that are, furthermore, potentially untranslatable between different cultures (Abend, 2012: 180–1).

In terms of how we manage such problems in the sociology of morality, however, Abend (2012: 187) equivocates. On the one hand, he asserts there is 'no single best method to study morality' or make claims about it, and endorses the 'plurality' of approaches that has led to him being accused of promoting an 'unstructured eclecticism in regards to social scientific method' (Lizardo, 2016: 129). On the other hand, he acknowledges that

> some of the phenomena and processes of interest to a science of morality can't be broken into separate parts—for example, the social and the neural—because these parts mutually influence or even constitute one another. Hence, studying them separately may lead to misleading results.

Abend's latter point suggests the potential value of Durkheim's model, albeit in a way that is inclusive of biological/psychological data. The latter in and of themselves are, as we have emphasised, inevitably limited. MRI data are, for example, of only partial use in making sense of morality as a 'web of interlocked organic and dynamic systems encompassing (sometimes competing) thoughts, feelings and actions' (Firat & Hitlin, 2012: 169). Neither can such data explain *how* certain thoughts and feelings come to be provoked in the first place, and can only infer rather than observe, analyse and predict how they might shape social actions and structures. If what is distinctive about human life is that humans are affected by organic *and* social causes, and social life is 'moral life' only when the individual and collective, emotional and cognitive, dimensions of the *homo duplex* achieve a kind of communion (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 227, 434), then sociological explanation cannot be an adjunct to biology but is foundational to the understanding of the role innate human capacities play in moral life.

In this regard, while it is entirely possible that sociological terms can be 'translated' into the languages of other sciences in order to facilitate, rather than restrict, 'uniquely sociological' contributions to the cross-disciplinary analysis of morality (Vaisey & Valentino, 2018), the key issue is not the terminology used but the theoretical framework within which it is situated. Bykov (2019), in fact, offers what can be taken as a warning about the dangers of adopting elements of Durkheim's approach without his broader

vision of the need for a distinctively sociological analysis of morality. He draws attention to the value of various psychological approaches to morality that counter purely biological interpretations by advocating a comparative neo-Durkheimian focus on the collective shaping of morality, such as Haidt's (2012) 'Moral Foundations Theory'. Hitlin and Vaisey (2013: 60) also note that Haidt's (2012) most recent book refers to Durkheim 24 times, signalling the potential value of the latter's work for building bridges with psychology. Bykov (2019: 199, 201–2) notes, however, there are limitations in merely contributing greater sophistication in the elucidation and analysis of cultural variations while the core theories and methods underpinning such work remain grounded in evolutionary biology or cognitive psychology. Moscovici's (2001) social psychology is of note in this regard, in that he explicitly develops his account of 'social representations' via Durkheim, but strips out the emotional and somatic elements of his work in favour of a cognitive focus on discursive communication.

In contrast to one-sided elaborations of Durkheim, it is therefore necessary to maintain his systematic account of the *relations between* innate bodily capacities and the social and cultural forces that constitute moral phenomena (see Shilling & Mellor, 2001). This is particularly important for developing an account of morality that avoids the limitations of substantive evaluations of contrasting moral viewpoints, and is also able to provide adequate recognition and analysis of them as embodied cultural systems. It is to these issues that we now turn.

3 Moral Orders as Embodied Cultural Systems

It is common to challenge accounts that embed morality in the universal biological properties of humans by noting that they cannot account for the widespread cultural variations in moral viewpoints (e.g. Bykov, 2019; Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). Approaching these variations sociologically, however, raises the question of whether we define morality *substantively* or *relationally*. Hookway (2015: 10–11), for example, critiques Durkheim's analysis on the grounds that it rules out the possibility of evaluating the substantive content of particular moral systems, allowing us to see dangerous, fascistic social orders as 'moral' just as much as more benign social phenomena.

Substantive approaches enable scholars to avoid the potential discomfort of attaching the label 'moral' to phenomena they find unappealing or repugnant, but, drawing on Durkheim, Alexander (2014: 307) makes it clear that, since morality is a cultural system as well as a normative order, it is *always* the case that 'moral principles are defined relationally'. It is on a similar basis that Bykov (2019: 195) emphasises the merits of Durkheim's relativistic view that each collectivity has its own 'moral reality' for dealing with cultural variation. Others, however, while also advocating a relationally defined account of morality, have questioned whether Durkheim's views are internally consistent.

Abend (2008: 100–101), for example, identifies a tension or countertrend in Durkheim's writings in their espousal of both 'normative' relativism *and* what he sees as a 'metaethical' commitment to truth. The former is evident in Durkheim's claim that one form of morality cannot be 'truer' than another since each reflects the societies from which they emerge. The latter is said to emerge in Durkheim's commitment to 'improving' society and morality expressive of a belief that science can determine the truth of moral judgements and seek to shape society in the light of them.

Abend ultimately rejects Durkheim's approach, in favour of a Weberian conception of morality, but his analysis can be seen as underestimating the significance of *homo duplex* in Durkheim's work. In defence of Abend, Durkheim does express worries about modernity which might appear to support the suggestion of a countertrend in his analysis. Durkheim's evaluation of the division of labour suggests a weakening of collective sentiments leading to a proliferation of anomie and suicide, alongside the spread of the contractual relationships that he saw as having only a contingent connection

with morality (Durkheim, 1984 [1893]: 294, 302). Yet Durkheim's warning that if the beliefs, traditions and aspirations of the group were no longer felt and shared by the individuals, then 'society would die' and people would no longer be forced to pay morally binding attention to others (Durkheim, 1973 [1914]: 149; 1995 [1912]; 1984 [1893]: 331), does not arise from a metaethical commitment to moral truth, but from the *embodied basis* of his moral theory.

Durkheim's concern is with the potential 'devitalisation' of society arising from a neglect of its effervescent basis (Nisbet, 1993 [1966]: 300), and subsequent worries about what happens to innate human capacities without the effervescent 'propulsion' towards moral action. This is to do with the waxing and waning of moral force in everyday life, processes implicated in whether people experience a certain 'rush of energy' evident in acts 'that express the understanding, esteem and affection' characteristic of positive human relations (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 215). The incidence, intensity and scope of this moral force varies according to the relationships and activities characteristic of social groups (Collins, 1988), while its effects are, since they are rooted in emotion, characterised by ephemerality and must be 'recharged' if they are to have enduring social significance (Shilling & Mellor, 2011) . This can imply 'decline', of course, but it also highlights the potential for 'renewal' in terms of the particular balance of *homo duplex* energies upon which a cultural system is predicated at any point in time.

From this perspective, the presumed association of Durkheim's sociology with *evaluative* narratives of modern 'moral decline' makes little sense. Hookway (2015), for example, identifies as 'Durkheimian' two traditions expressive of such narratives. The first, a 'cultural pessimist' tradition, points to a hollowing out of cultural and moral life that can be redressed via 'a Durkheimian repressive inhibition' (Hookway, 2015: 4–6). The second, a 'communitarian' tradition, advocates that a modern culture prioritising the personal authenticity of individuals, rather than community-based moral orders, 'will inevitably mean diminished care, respect and responsibility for others' (Hookway, 2015: 6–8). The delineation of these traditions may be internally coherent, but do *not* cohere with the logic of Durkheim's embodied cultural sociology. Moral decline and revitalisation are instead based upon the *homo duplex*, the embodied basis of a society's cultural system, and bear no relation to substantive judgments of the standards of conduct within a social system.

In concluding the argument of this section, it is worth noting that the Durkheimian rejection of substantive approaches to morality has been maintained even in the face of what can be considered it biggest test, the rise of German Nazism. Mauss (1992 [1936]: 214) was clearly highly uncomfortable, and knew Durkheim would have been so too, in recognising the explanatory power of the Durkheimian model of moral order for analysing the nature and evolution of Nazi Germany, but he nonetheless did so. Here, Mauss followed Durkheim in emphasising that sociology's purpose is to elucidate and analyse 'social facts', in all their cultural *and* biological complexity, a task to be undertaken regardless of how pleasant or unpleasant those facts might appear to the researcher. In a context where we cannot fail to be aware of the vast diversity of moral views across the globe today, this is a strength. We should surely be able to explore the underlying processes which have given rise to this diversity rather than filtering it through our own culturally specific 'substantive' assumptions about what can and cannot count as moral. In this regard, it is important to note that such processes can occur, often simultaneously, 'within' as well as 'across' societies.

4 Competing Moral Orders within Societies

Durkheim has often been interpreted as conceptualising morality as a property of entire societies that bind its members together into a singular collective force. It is on the basis of this reading that Hitlin and Vaisey (2013: 53) argue that while Durkheim provides the paradigm for 'the old sociology of morality', 'new'

perspectives are better served taking their bearings from Weber's view that morality 'belongs more to cross-cutting groups and less to society as a whole'. Yet this binary distinction does a disservice to Durkheim. Contrary to a simple functionalist reading of his work, the embodied generation of social and moral force he focuses on has diverse, and ambiguous, consequences for individuals and groups within particular social orders (see Shilling & Mellor, 2001; Mellor & Shilling, 2014).

Despite suggestions to the contrary (Coser, 1977: 223, Hookway, 2015: 9), Durkheim is keenly attentive to the potentially violent, destructive consequences of moral force for some groups rather than others. Such force can be mundane or dramatic, harmonious or revolutionary (Durkheim, 1982 [1895]: 53). In periods of extreme effervescence, people can be 'stirred by passions so intense that they can be satisfied only by violent and extreme acts: by acts of superhuman heroism or bloody barbarism' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 215). The impact of such outcomes can be similarly diverse, with Durkheim citing the French Revolution as an example of collective emotions and moral force resulting in vastly different consequences for opposing groups (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 215).

This concern with competing moral orders within societies has been developed by a number of writers working within the Durkheimian tradition. Caillois (1950: 171, 227), for example, offers a theory of morality based on a distinction between the forces of cohesion and dissolution that can arise from these processes. He highlights how they can stimulate an emotional and cognitive renewal of existing moral orders, but also an upsurge of potentially violent social movements that slice brutally through everyday life. While Caillois develops his arguments with reference to non-modern groups, however, others have offered engagements with these aspects of Durkheim's thought that are highly relevant to assessments of the moral diversity in contemporary societies.

Maffesoli (1996) and Meštrović (1993, 1994) are two of the more prominent writers to have developed Durkheimian perspectives on competing moral orders within modernity.

Maffesoli (1996: 42) focuses on the return of an emotionally grounded category of the moral in contemporary life, identifying various modern 'tribes' as 'specific groupings for the exchange of passion and feelings' that threaten rational orders. Maffesoli spends little time on the *dangers* of neo-tribal groups, however, despite the conflicts around religion, xenophobia and racism in France at the time he was writing (Shields, 1991: 183). In contrast, Meštrović (1993, 1994) has focused on the opportunities modernity has provided for the spread of effervescent manifestations of fear and hatred amongst particular groups. Like Maffesoli, his analysis is rooted in an explicitly Durkheimian framework, but he argues that the sensual and cognitive experience of effervescence in modern societies is bound up with ethnic and racial conflict, analysing race riots in the United States, for example, as evidence of a broader 'Balkanisation' of modern life (Meštrović, 1994: 2).

These analyses highlight how a Durkheimian model of the moral can help account for contemporary neo-tribal social movements, but both also depart from Durkheim's writings in certain respects. Meštrović's pessimism and Maffesoli's enthusiasm about neo-tribalism contain more than a suggestion of a 'metaethical' tendency to reject value-freedom (Abend, 2008). They also neglect Durkheim's (1995 [1912]: 227, 434) assertion that social life is 'moral life' only when the individual and collective, emotional and cognitive, dimensions of the *homo duplex* achieve a kind of communion in the vitalism of collective effervescence. Regardless of whether they are excited or horrified by it, Meštrović and Maffesoli see only a wild effervescent emotionalism that, for Durkheim, was *involved* in the constitution of moral life but cannot be *equated* with it. Creative though these analyses are a brief engagement with certain recent social movements suggests that Durkheim's model is possessed of even greater value.

Discussions of the emergence and development of the radical Islamist movement ISIS suggest a combination of virulent emotional

contagion on the one hand, and collective representations of community and self that draw on a range of scriptural, symbolic and historical sources on the other; together, these embody the sort of potent moral order that Durkheim envisaged (Shilling & Mellor, 2018: 135). Similarly, Strenski's (2003) analysis of Palestinian suicide bombing as a Durkheimian sacrificial ritual also foregrounds the moral order that frames these activities; an analysis consistent with Atran et al.'s (2007) argument that the sacred values underpinning such extreme sacrificial acts render them immune to the utilitarian, rational assumptions that tend to characterise processes of conflict resolution. Of course, the violence and insider/outsider dynamic displayed by such phenomena can reinforce concerns about the moral relativism of Durkheim's model and its neglect of 'substantive' moral issues, but this is to underestimate the ambiguity of *all* emergent moral phenomena. Alexander (2014: 308–9), for example, in a discussion of the inherent ambiguities of morality as a cultural system, notes that the temporary upsurge of solidarity and civility evident early on in the Arab Spring was nonetheless accompanied by a notable upsurge in anti-Israeli and anti-American feeling, well before the subsequent descent into militarism, repression and religious fanaticism.

These analyses have their roots in Durkheim's (1984 [1893]) insistence that 'insiders' and 'outsiders' are always marked by symbolic distinctions; an insight that resonates with Firat and Hitlin's (2012: 174) discussion of the importance of boundary research to cultural sociology. The suggestion that symbolic boundaries simultaneously signal patterns of inclusion *and* exclusion has, indeed, been used to explore the problem of moral solidarity in the diverse, culturally fragmented context of the contemporary US, where groups increasingly define themselves against each other. It is also prominent within Alexander's (1992) exploration of how models of 'citizenship' symbolically exclude those deemed unworthy of solidarity (Edgell et al., 2006: 232).

In this regard, Durkheim's theory of morality is not only useful for examining how, for example, Islamist religious fanaticism offers a particular challenge for highly differentiated modern societies because of the commitment to a 'total' socio-religious society that excludes or subjugates those beyond the solidarity of the *umma* (Mellor & Shilling, 2014: 27), but can also help account for more subtle yet pervasive patterns of inclusion and exclusion. It has been noted, for example, that neo-tribal patterns of social solidarity can be associated with increasing manifestations of *resentment* across societies, manifest not only in widespread inter-racial tension and prejudice but also in the zealous policing of views and persons deemed to infringe 'progressive' values of inclusivity, empathy and tolerance; an on-going exercise In moral boundary making highly relevant to contemporary university life, amongst other things (Shilling & Mellor, 2021: 10). Yet in each of these cases, the establishment of general or particular, consistent or opposed, moralities occurs only when there are balances formed between the individual and collective, emotional and cognitive, dimensions of the *homo duplex*.

5 Conclusion

Our argument has developed in three stages. First, building on an examination of Durkheim's account of *homo duplex*, we have suggested that he offers a sociological model of moral phenomena that does not counter the biological effacement of culture with the cultural effacement of the body, but stresses that both are inextricably implicated in the constitution and evolution of the moral. Second, in using this as a basis for reflecting on moral diversity across societies, we have examined the nature of the moral 'relativism' Durkheim's model implies, and argued for its value in analysing diversity in a non-reductionist manner. Third, we have argued for its particular value in accounting for competing moral solidarities *within* societies, such as in relation to contemporary phenomena such as neo-tribalism, fanaticism and insider/outsider social dynamics.

In short, if the key challenge facing the sociology of morality today is to develop a compelling theoretical account of the relations between innate moral capacities and the social and cultural complexities of morality (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010: 9–11), then Durkheim offers the basis for one. What we have also emphasised, however, is that this challenge should be met via a sociology of morality that is also a sociology of the body (Mellor & Shilling, 1997; Shilling, 2012 [1993]). The historical trajectories of the two subjects have followed a similar path, from classical significance to decline to more recent renewal, but a reengagement with Durkheim's relevance for moral issues today can reunite them at the centre of sociological analysis. If, as he indicates, human beings are, simultaneously, natural and cultural creatures, and morality emerges and operates at the nexus of these two poles of the *homo duplex*, then parcelling out the study of morality to various disciplines in a theoretical and empirical 'division of labour' will not do (Abend, 2012: 187). Rather, in the light of Durkheim's model, the sociology of morality should be *inclusive* of insights from other disciplines but also *synthetic*, resisting various forms of reductionism in favour of a distinctively sociological model reflective of the duality of human nature.

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Physiological Rhythms and Entrainment Niches: Morality as Interpersonal Music

Kevin McCaffree

Abstract

The sociology of morality today is overly philosophical and inadequately linked to physiology, biology, and the larger animal kingdom. In this chapter, I attempt to more firmly ground the sociological study of morality in the study of our bodies and of the natural world. To do so, I argue that empathy, altruism, and morality more generally are all outcomes of varying degrees of physiological co-calibration between people. I then suggest six sociological barriers to physiological co-calibration, which are causally responsible for what we would call "immorality." Along the way, I introduce a few new concepts, including "entrainment niches," which refers to pockets of differentiated physiological co-calibration, and which better captures the basic nature of what sociologists often call "sub-cultures." This chapter concludes with a description of three different research programs sociologists might pursue if they are interested in connecting the study of human morality with the study of biology and the natural world.

Keywords

Entrainment · Empathy · Morality · Physiology · Social Psychology

1 A Ride Around the Neighborhood

Let us suppose you are out for a jog, or maybe walking your dog, and you see a father and a young daughter on a bike ride. She trails him slightly and he looks back regularly.

Cute, you think. But there is so much more going on here, a veritable orchestra of coordination.

The dad is the conductor of this orchestra, looking back at his daughter and subtly, subconsciously, monitoring his peddling pace, rhythm, and timing so that she stays close. You watch as they push their legs down on the pedal together in unison or maybe dad's left leg pushes down on the peddle as his daughter's left leg lets up.

This is some of what you see, but what you don't see are the mechanistic, always imperfect, coordinations of heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate, various attentional focuses, and neuroendocrine releases. All of these flows and beats and releases and pumps mimicking or synchronizing, and all of this below the level of conscious awareness. This father and daughter are becoming closer, becoming merged physiologically, but, consciously, the daughter is just out for

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a ride with her dad, and the dad is hoping to show his daughter around the new neighborhood they moved into.

To sharpen our terminology, we can say that when the father and his daughter behave in unison, with one matching the other, it is *physiological mimicry/merging*; when they act in compatible (but not identically matching) ways, it is *physiological synchronization/coordination*. And, to reiterate, most of this mimicry and/or synchrony is occurring absent consciousness awareness and control. Evolutionary processes would not leave the operation of these physiological mechanisms driving empathy to mere subjective awareness. The benefits of physiologically connecting with others are too vast to be purely a matter of conscious impulse control.

Though the brief example above is of a father and his daughter, don't assume that physiological merging is therefore only something family members do. It isn't.

Consider that humans are more genetically similar to one another than any other ape species (see Maryanski, 2018), and that relatedly, worldwide, people are far more alike in their attitudes and dispositions and values than they are different (Hanel et al., 2019). This deep similarity (amidst, no doubt, countless superficial differences) is an important reason why people the world over are capable of physiologically entraining, if not always in worldview, then in conversation or in body language or in heart rate.

But what does all of this kinetic-physiological merging and/or coordination have to do with morality? Well, it *is* morality; it is the most fundamental way morality is generated and expressed. Subjective cognitive appraisals of liking or trusting others are built, bottom-up, from lower-level physiological merging and/or coordination. You can have a very positive view of another person before meeting them and this may well motivate you to physiologically entrain with them, but it is the fact of entrainment (or its absence, or its inconsistency) that will most influence your ultimate feelings toward them.

2 Entrainment and Experience

When we have (always to an extent, never completely) physiologically merged with someone, we begin to lose our desire and ability to make strong self-other distinctions (Quintard et al., 2021). Caring about myself comes to feel as though I am caring about you, because you are becoming (to some extent) myself.

If, for example, the cadence, pitch, or emotionality of my speech is flowing comfortably along with yours during a conversation, what's really going on is that my nervous system is becoming (to an extent) dependent on input from yours in order to respond in ways deemed informative, interpretable, or socially appropriate. And, of course, where you find people maintaining consistent conversations over a long enough period, you typically find morally bonded communities.

This experience of self-other merging and/or self-other coordination even underlies our experience of transcendence (see Yaden et al., 2017). A peak human experience is that of feeling fused with others (or with all of humanity), whether this happens at a music concert, a community event, a wedding or somewhere else where bodies in space begin mimicking or synchronizing with one another.

There are many ways to mimic or synchronize with others. Riding bikes is an obvious way. So is speech, as in a conversation. Yes, virtual, computer-mediated, interactions also allow for it. I've given some other examples above. From my perspective, social events are interesting primarily because they are contexts that enable or constrain physiological co-calibration.

Simply sitting on a park bench next to someone can begin calibrating your internal physiological state—imagine the person next to you is highly anxious or very relaxed; it will be difficult not to "pick this up" and adjust accordingly. Copresence, then, is sufficient for some preliminary mimicry or synchrony of physiology, that is, some baseline physiological co-calibration. But if this person turns to talk to you and you are both able to establish a cadence, comfortable pitch, and a pattern of turn-taking regarding who gets to

speak, lower-order mimicry or synchronization of blood pressure, heart rate, respiration rate, and so on will begin to produce a higher-order subjective awareness that "this person isn't so bad" (i.e., trust, rapport and liking are bubbling up subtly and minimally). Should you both discover a shared interest or goal (say, water coloring, or jogging in a little-known local park), the probability of a future physiological rhythm being established between you two grows significantly.

Of course, it is possible that the person next to you on the park bench will be too anxious or too sleepy to entrain with—that is, their internal rhythm might be consistently faster or slower than yours—and conversation is thus stilted or awkward. You feel a little uncomfortable and get up to leave; in this case, trust, rapport, and liking were never established, even at a low level. This lack of reciprocated physiological mimicry or synchrony is a subtle sign of social rejection (Kouzakova et al., 2010), one we may not even be subjectively aware of in the moment.

So, when people are co-present, and especially when they are interacting and especially when they are working together toward a common goal, any emergent trust, rapport, and liking are a reflection of the more hidden, and to varying degrees shared, rhythm of electrical impulses beating their heart, filling their lungs with air, and secreting hormones and neurotransmitters. And, sometimes, this physiological co-calibration happens rapidly. When someone suddenly slams a hammer down on *their* thumb, *you* recoil, because you are—at a lower level of intensity— physiologically mimicking what you've just witnessed, a feat accomplished by "mirror neurons," (Fabbri-Destro & Rizzolatti, 2008; Hickok, 2014), endogenous hormones like oxytocin and dopamine (Tarr et al., 2014) and numerous other mechanisms.

Examples of physiological entrainment can get very subtle and complex very quickly. I will spare you much of this complexity because my goal in this chapter is merely an introductory overview.

But here's a quick and illustrative example to think about when contemplating how complex this phenomenon can become: consider an apartment full of people, where a popular TV show is being watched by numerous separate tenants at a regularly scheduled time on a regularly scheduled day. As these tenants watch the show separately in their respective apartments, they are passively and unidirectionally mimicking and/or synchronizing with the vocal pitch, tone, and tempos of the characters on the screen, as well as with the characters' emotional expressions and behaviors. This is what it means to "watch" a show and to "relate" to characters and a narrative. Additionally, though each tenant is in a separate apartment room, they are physiologically merging with *one another* in parallel fashion via their respective degrees of entrainment with the characters on the TV show. In other words, the TV characters are serving as a *common target of entrainment* among individuals living in separate locations. And, by sharing common targets of entrainment, people are, unbeknownst to one another, calibrating their physiologies in similar ways. This shared calibration could theoretically, in turn, facilitate interaction or conversation should two or more tenants eventually happen to run into each other and begin talking about the show, or about topics discussed on the show.

In short, theoretically, we can physiologically entrain with others directly, or indirectly, depending on the context and depending on the available communication and media technology in a society. I will grant that empirical research on the effectiveness of virtual, computer mediated, mechanisms for entrainment is still in its infancy (more on this below). Yet, keep in mind that, even if physiological entrainment via technologies like Zoom or Skype is today more difficult to achieve, this would hardly constitute an argument against the potential for computer-mediated entrainment; these technologies are only becoming more sophisticated and capable of sensory integration—a future of hyper-realistic virtual reality is all but an inevitability.

3 Entrainment Rhythm Niches

Let us summarize: *settings and encounters have social-moral significance because they serve as sites where people's physiologies can mimic*

(physiologically state-match) or synchronize (physiologically coordinate) with one another directly, or passively, to varying degrees, via various activities. On this view, "altruism" (e.g., effortful, costly activities like volunteering or helping) and "empathy" (e.g., pro-social regard like trust, rapport, liking) are lagged, epiphenomenal, outcomes of (varying degrees of) physiological state-matching or coordination.

An important implication of this is that physiological entrainment involves *particular metabolic-biological rhythms shared by people and groups, such that rhythms of different paces and tempos may become, over time, localized in niches*.

People, for example, move, talk (and probably think) faster in urban as opposed to rural ecologies (see Bettencourt et al., 2007; West, 2018), suggesting that urban ecologies might calibrate our internal states at a higher tempo. It seems population density and concentrated market competition "speed up" the pace of work, dating, and life in general. But urban ecologies themselves will vary, niche to niche, in their entrainment tempos (consider going to a raucous festival in a city vs. going to a meditative yoga class in the same city). Entrainment niches are likely to be demographically bound as well; for example, socioeconomic status influences how frenetic and time-pressured daily life is for people (see Lareau, 2000). Yet, how exactly ecological niches and demographic characteristics combine to influence physiological entrainment rhythms (and vice versa) is still barely understood.

We often talk of sub-cultures in sociology, but such talk almost always hovers at the abstract level of language, dress, comportment, and identity (with the partial exception of Bourdieu's [1977] classic work and more recently Collins', 2004). Indeed, I'd suspect many sociologists wouldn't consider the measurement of varying rhythms of physiological calibration to be "proper sociology." It unfortunately remains a particular heresy in this field to reduce the world of symbols and attitudes to the viscera of cells, tissues, and fibers.

On my account, then, sub-cultural differences in dress, comportment, language, and identity are outcomes emerging from similarities in lower-level biologic-metabolic entrainment rhythms among the people comprising the sub-culture. To feel "out of place" in a new sub-culture is to quite literally feel out of rhythm; just the same, to feel like one has "found their new home" in a sub-culture is to easily slip into a pattern of physiological rhythm with co-present others (perhaps because one has encountered such a rhythm consistently in the past either directly or passively).

4 Barriers to Entrainment, and Thus, to Empathy and Altruism

I must be clear about this: nothing about copresence or awareness of others *necessitates* entrainment. Some dyads or groups might be co-present and interacting for some time, but never quite feel bonded, merged, or interdependent.

There are, then, *barriers* to entrainment. And these barriers are what drive dehumanization, othering, distrust, and dislike. From the standpoint of understanding empathy and altruism, these barriers to (or moderators of) entrainment are as important as the entrainment process itself.

As it is now in sociology, we'll often presume that immorality/cruelty/bigotry/oppression are the default conditions of modern life or that immorality/cruelty/bigotry are essentially concentrated in our folk devils (political conservatives, white people, men, "the rich," and so on). But this is not really what is going on; these sorts of takes are incredibly popular but often intellectually thin, just the "cynical genius illusion" (Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2019) masquerading as substantive analysis.

In contrast to these approaches, I've come to think that there are basically six general "barriers" to physiological entrainment and, thus, to empathy and altruism: (1) proximity, (2) morphology, (3) exchange contexts, (4) insufficient communication or transportation technologies, (5) empirical ignorance, and (6) empathic over-identification. Each of these is a barrier to entrainment in that they reduce or prevent sustained

copresence (virtual or physical, passive or active). I'll discuss each of these barriers briefly so that you have a sense of what I mean, but I go into more detail elsewhere (e.g., McCaffree, 2015, 2020, 2022).

First, *proximity barriers* come in two broad forms, physical and demographic. Physical proximity is an obvious barrier to entrainment (unless one has access to communication/media technology, but more on that in a moment) because two people who are not in one another's presence cannot calibrate to one another's physiological rhythms.

Demographic proximity is more complex. In past work, I've tried to leverage McPherson's adaptation of Blau's theory of "intersecting parameters" (see McPherson, 2004; Blau, 1977) to argue that demographic differences between people will be correlated with differences in taste, interest or purchasing power that may reduce copresence even in a shared environment. This just means that, for example, we might expect upper-middle class people to tend to shop at different grocery stores than working-class people, even if they both lived in the same city. Or, for an even starker example, were an upper-middle class person and a working-class person to be in the *same* store, the prediction would be that they would not necessarily buy the same products, that is, not spend the same amount of relative time in each section of the grocery store. Now, consider all the locations, and pockets within locations, that might be traversed across a lifetime, and how time spent in such pockets might both confer a particular set of consistent rhythmic-calibration opportunities *and* begin to cleave off the probabilities of interaction with various people over time.

Second, there are *morphological barriers* to entrainment. We can think about these as relative differences in the concentration or dispersion of people in space. City centers are very densely populated, so the probability of a focused interaction forming between any two unfamiliar people is relatively higher than it would be in a less dense, more rural area. These interactions between unfamiliar people in big cities are not always superficial and superfluous: so-called "serendipitous encounters" occur all the time (McCaffree & Shults, 2022; Olshannikova et al., 2020); some people really do manage to merge in a surprisingly smooth manner and, thus, meet their spouse, or next business partner, standing in line for coffee or on the train to work. Even more often, previously unfamiliar people have conversations and share key insights about culture or society.

In the case of cities, given that their commerce and economic opportunities attract many people from around the globe, this higher probability of entrainment with culturally diverse and unfamiliar others is also often an inter-group or inter-demographic entrainment. This is significant for the study of morality because *people often categorize individuals as representative of groups (to reduce the complexity of the world), such that positive bouts of entrainment with individuals from stigmatized or unfamiliar groups may be sufficient to begin dissolving any stigma associated with that out-group* (see Moffett, 2013, 2019 for a review of these dynamics). In this sense, experiences of interpersonal physiological calibration (and, thus, varying degrees of empathy) are generalizable: if I was able to hold a conversation with you and feel comfortable, I can probably do the same with others in your social or identity group.

Notably, if people, for example, work remotely and make coffee at home (a less socially dense ecology) instead of going into work and stopping by the local coffeeshop (more socially dense ecologies), or say, commute in their own car (less socially dense) instead of on a public train or bus (more socially dense), these temporary reductions in the density of the surrounding social ecology constitutes a barrier to the probability of entrainment with diverse, unfamiliar others, or, indeed, with others regardless of their unfamiliarity.

Third, *exchange contexts* involve roughly four potentially overlapping forms: productive, negotiated, reciprocal, and generalized (Molm, 2003; Lawler et al., 2009). Briefly, *productive exchanges* typically involve two or more people contributing roughly equally in pursuit of a shared superordinate goal, *negotiated exchanges*

typically involve two or more individuals negotiating over (and attempting to satisfy) terms/obligations, *reciprocal exchanges* typically involve a cyclical, back-and-forth, voluntary provisioning of resources or favors between two or more people, and, finally, *generalized exchanges* typically involve a provisioning of resources or favors to unfamiliar others with no expectation of reciprocation. Paradigmatic examples of each form of exchange are collaborative work or social groups (productive exchange), contractual commitments between individuals or companies (negotiated exchange), offering to help a neighbor mow their lawn with an expectation that this neighbor might help look after the family dog (or some other form of help) during the next vacation (reciprocal exchange), and stopping to help an unknown motorist with a flat tire on the side of the road (generalized exchange).

Each form of exchange differs on the dimensions of: (1) task jointness and equality of contributions (with productive and negotiated exchanges generally involving more joint interaction and contributions than other forms), (2) superordinate goal pursuits (only productive exchanges presume shared goals between parties) and with regard to the (3) rate and (4) duration of interaction (with productive and negotiated exchanges tending to reveal more direct and frequent interaction). While, generally, a higher rate and duration of interaction might be conducive to entrainment between people, the competitive, possibly zero-sum, nature of contractual obligations means that negotiated exchanges are often more tense and involve a greater potential for competition, which might reduce people's motivation to entrain (Molm et al., 2009).

Exchange contexts with (relatively) greater task jointness, equality of contributions, a focus on superordinate goals that no one party to the exchange can achieve easily on their own, and a higher rate and duration of interaction, should facilitate a greater degree of entrainment. This would imply that productive exchanges facilitate entrainment the best, followed by reciprocal and generalized exchanges (Molm et al., 2007); the capacity for negotiated exchanges to facilitate entrainment will depend on how competitive, hostile, or zero-sum the negotiation is perceived to be (consider two individuals negotiating over the price of a tutoring service vs. negotiating over child custody). Even more interesting, high task jointness can stimulate a sense of shared fate or shared responsibility, and this sense of shared fate/responsibility can motivate people to attribute their positive pro-social emotions to the group (as a group) (Thye et al., 2019). Physiological entrainment thus underlies not only people's subjective awareness of a sense of cohesion and solidarity, but also their willingness to attribute this sense of empathy to the groups they belong to.

A fourth barrier to entrainment involves the *absence or poor diffusion of various communication/media and transportation technologies*. Because communication and transportation technologies reduce the salience of time and space—for example, cars and airplanes enable rapid traversal; computers and phones enable immediate contact—they increase the capacity for otherwise distant individuals to entrain. Critically, some communication technologies, like literacy or videorecording, even allow a form of "time travel," as when, for example, we read the dialogue of (or watch) people living a hundred years before we were born and imagine life through their eyes.

And, yes, exposure to fiction and media containing people culturally or geographically distant from oneself can spur empathic regard, though the parasocial (i.e., unidirectional, as when watching or reading about others) physiological entrainment driving this regard is relatively less well understood (Chung & Slater, 2013; Wong et al., 2022). The historian Lynn Hunt (2007), for example, has documented the powerful impact of literacy on peoples' ability to feel empathy for socially and/or geographically distant others in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hunt describes how simply reading a work of fiction about the plight of women in Victorian society was enough to bring some men to tears, and today, young people learn about the horrors of things like slavery and genocide via a complex assortment of multimedia technologies.

These travel and communication/media technologies have been developing in human societies over thousands of years, and each incremental improvement has opened new avenues for copresence and entrainment. A future of hyperloop bullet trains and sensory-integrated virtual reality promises to push humans into a new world of possibilities for copresence with others culturally or geographically distant from themselves, and thus into new vistas of perspective taking and empathic regard.

Fifth, *empirical ignorance* constitutes a barrier to entrainment. In past work (McCaffree, 2015), I regarded lack of formal education as a barrier to entrainment, but I think this was naïve, because institutions of formal education (I am now ready to admit) can be riddled with empirical inaccuracies, bogus assumptions and inane but fashionable ideologies. Nothing about a college degree (or a Ph.D.) necessarily confers wisdom, understanding, or even basic accuracy about the world (check out Rosling, 2018 who demonstrates that social science academics are chronically inaccurate and distorted in their thinking on a lot of topics, plausibly due to their incessant negativity and cynicism). Today, I would even grant that a degree in some fields renders students more ignorant than they'd be with no degree at all. So, this barrier to entrainment is not so much about formal educational attainment as it is about empirical ignorance per se, with greater empirical ignorance conferring a social anxiety, hostility and avoidance that can make copresence and entrainment difficult to obtain and maintain.

There are countless examples of how empirical ignorance can serve to negatively frame a bout of copresence and, thus, mitigate physiological calibration and entrainment. For example, believing that witches are supernatural evil beings, instead of women with unpopular political or social opinions or struggling from mental illness, led (and still today outside of the West, leads) to the senseless dehumanization and torture of people accused of witchcraft. Believing slaves to be sub-human has led to inconceivable suffering throughout human history (and again, still around the world today). Believing gay and lesbian parents to be intrinsically dysfunctional has prevented the adoption of countless children into loving homes. I could go on, but suffice it to say, witches are not real, slaves are human beings, and gay or lesbian parents can love their kids as much as anyone else. The point is that empirically false beliefs about out-groups ratchets up anxiety, hostility and avoidance, making copresence and entrainment less probable. Also, what counts as a "false belief" changes over time as data accumulates; no doubt many people's firm assumptions today are predicated on empirical inaccuracies, leading them to avoid certain situations or certain people out of a confused anxiety or hostility.

Finally, a sixth barrier to entrainment is, paradoxically, *hyper-entrainment*. As aptly described by Paul Bloom (2017, 2018)—physiological over-identification wrought by extreme forms of self-other merging, can overwhelm people emotionally and potentially lead to irrational and harmful responses. Self-other merging and self-other coordination underlie altruism and empathy, but for optimal moral/social coordinative responses, we still must be capable of subjectively distinguishing ourselves from others (Decety, 2007; Knoblich & Sebanz, 2008). This ability to distinguish self from other, even amidst varying degrees of self-other overlap, prevents us from becoming physiologically overwhelmed and impulsive with regard to our perception of others' emotion or circumstance.

In other words, when you become aware of the suffering of another individual or group, the process of physiological merging (even when it is a parasocial calibration involving imagining what you think person X might be going through) might mean *you* become overwhelmed by the anger or fear that you imagine *they* are feeling. And if you become overwhelmed emotionally, it may be more difficult to calmly and rationally decide how to help them, meaning you might over-react and lash out at others whom you believe (perhaps wrongly) to be causing the suffering. Over-identification with others can lead to an extreme emotionality which can motivate impulsive protective behaviors that do more harm than good (or that motivate aggression

against misrecognized or misunderstood "evil doers").

So, physiological entrainment underlies altruism and empathy, but over-identification with groups deemed to be suffering victims also has the potential to short-circuit our rational, reflective faculties. Physiological mimicry and a resultant degree of self-other merging *is* an important means by which to reduce, for example, racial prejudice (e.g., Inzlicht et al., 2012), but if this self-other merging is totalizing (that is, one no longer or only minimally distinguishes between themselves and the other individual) and tied to a perception of a stereotyped and essentialized evil-doing out-group, more harm than good is likely to result.

This is the catch-22 of physiological entrainment and morality: in order to feel the pain of others, we physiologically simulate their actions and behaviors. But, if our cognitive load gets too high—weighed down by strong, metabolically expensive, emotional states—it becomes more difficult to maintain a basic self-other distinction which allows for a reasoned, rational, and ultimately, helpful altruistic or empathic response (Bloom, 2017, 2018; see also Fredman et al., 2015). A classic example is the emotion we feel when our children are being hurt or bullied by others. The intense emotion we feel could cause us to defend our child in ways that actively harm or worsen their relationships with their peers; yet, in the moment, all we can feel is a powerful drive to protect, whatever the cost.

5 Computer-Mediated Entrainment

I can hear some readers protesting that (among other things) I am not dealing with the fact that much communication today occurs via computer-mediation (e.g., email, text message), and that, moreover, computer-mediated entrainment is intrinsically less effective than physical co-present body-to-body entrainment. Though this is a common view among sociologists, it is speculative and, I think, wrong.

The claim that computer-mediated interaction is inadequate for stimulating the entrainment of peoples' physiologies is almost always premised solely on critiques of current generation computer-mediated technologies (like Zoom or Skype). Rarely are these assessments future-oriented—it is easy and low-hanging fruit to critique current technologies, but why wouldn't the eventual development of hyper-realistic and sensory-integrated virtual reality be adequate for the stimulation of physiological entrainment between people? That is the real question. Criticizing Zoom and other current generation videochat technologies for inadequately enabling physiological co-calibration is no different than someone in the 1850s concluding instantaneous mass communication was unlikely to develop because of the expensiveness of telegraph machines.

Those skeptical about the possibility of computer-mediated entrainment also tend to discount the benefits that come from current generation computer-mediated interactions. In fact, computer-mediated communication has advantages that face-to-face communication does not: for example, in the case of email or text interactions, people are not generally expected to respond immediately and this allows a greater lag time to reflect on and consider how to respond (Rettie, 2009).

Here's an example that will both make this point and further elaborate how we might think about entrainment rhythm niches:

> Suppose Anondah and Royce are friends, Anondah works in tech and Royce owns a local community center.
>
> Royce's job requires him to be up at 7:00 am so that he can get his kids to school and open his center's doors by 8:15 am. On a typical day, Royce must address various peoples' concerns, needs and requests and he is sometimes lucky to get an hour lunch break. His day usually winds down around 5:30 pm.
>
> Anondah, on the other hand, works from home and tends to sleep in until about 10:00 am. Her typical workday lasts until around 6:00 pm. Anondah spends her workdays developing user profiles for a social media company, and mostly works at her own pace, though sometimes hard deadlines require her to work around the clock for a short period.

Now, two things are worth noting in the above description. One is that Royce and Anondah exist in two different *entrainment niches*, with Royce interacting with (i.e., to varying degrees mimicking and synchronizing with) various people throughout the day. This is busying and tiring, but also enjoyable for him because he likes learning about and helping people. Anondah, however, is in an environment more conducive to self-entrainment, parasocial entrainment, or selective entrainment, because she has more control over her workday, and in what environment she works. So perhaps she spends more time self-entraining (e.g., humming a melody to herself to slow her heart rate after getting a stressful email) or selectively entraining (e.g., meeting a friend at a coffee shop to do work together).

Critically, however, note what would happen if Royce decided to send Anondah an email or a text message when he gets up in the morning. Since Royce gets up so much earlier than Anondah, Royce's text message or email is likely to go unread for at least a few hours. If Anondah and Royce are not very close friends or if she is particularly busy, she also might prioritize other things in lieu of responding to Royce when she wakes up. And, when Anondah finally does respond, there might be a lag on Royce's end because of how often he is momentarily distracted with others in his community center. Anondah may also be freer to control her time and environment in a way that allows a synchronous exchange of text messages; Royce will be more restricted in his ability to do this. And, in either case, the relative time delay in responding to texts compared to in-person exchanges allows both parties to consider and reflect upon their responses to a greater degree than they'd be able to in an improvised, real-time, face-to-face exchange.

And, yes, those who exchange computer-mediated messages with one another in a mimicked (e.g., using the same emojis or words) and/or synchronous way (e.g., responding to texts at regular or rhythmic intervals) find such interactions more bonding, meaningful and supportive (Doré & Morris, 2018; Litt et al., 2020). As emotional bonds grow, linguistic mimicry in texts becomes more prominent (Brinberg & Ram, 2021). Actively seeking synchronous (if relatively delayed) exchanges in text messages may even be a means by which people attempt to cope with or curb negative mental states, such as depression (see Weinstein, 2021). People merge, over time, to the degree that they interact rhythmically, whether it is face to face or in person. The relative lag in response time in text or email exchanges may simply allow for greater consideration or reflection in responses.

6 Coda: Evolution and Physiology in Sociology

Manifestly, this brief chapter is about how our capacity to physiologically entrain with one another underlies our capacity for empathy and altruism. But, latently, all my talk of physiological merging and entrainment rhythms serves (I hope) to conceptually connect human pro-sociality to the pro-sociality exhibited by non-human animals. It serves to *naturalize* our concept of empathy and of morality; non-human animals appear to have relatively limited capacities for symbolic abstraction and social identity formation, sure, but they certainly have heart rates, blood pressure rates, breathing rates and neurotransmitter and hormonal cascades governed by a rhythm of electrical impulses. Perhaps most sociologists would doubt that non-human animals have empathy, altruism or morality, but the actual evidence at this juncture is overwhelming (see, for example, Monsó et al., 2018). Despite this, there isn't even a basic level of biological or evolutionary literacy in modern sociology—Ph.D.'s in sociology, for example, are not required to take courses in the life sciences (I have lost track of the number of students and colleagues who treat "genetics" and "eugenics" as synonyms).

If we sociologists want take evolution, physiology or morality seriously, we'd carefully delineate three distinct, but related, research programs:

1. What mechanisms allow for the formation and maintenance of social cohesion in "societal species" of animals?
   Societal species are extremely rare in the animal kingdom; societal species are those species that live in anonymous societies, or societies where individuals unfamiliar with one another cooperate regularly in pursuit of instrumental goals. Dogs, cats, elephants, dolphins, chimpanzees and other mammals, for example, are all *social* but they are not *societal.* That is, they tend to coordinate comfortably only with other animals known or familiar to them, the few members of their "pack," "troop," "herd" or "pod." They tend not to coordinate with unknown, unfamiliar others. This tendency to associate comfortably only with familiar others means that group sizes tend to remain small.
   What makes an animal *societal* is its tendency to interact cooperatively with unknown and unfamiliar others (Moffett, 2019). Humans act *societally* each time they elect to stop at traffic lights in order to coordinate the flow of traffic among unfamiliar others or when opening a business and selling goods to any individual with the means to purchase them. In fact, among mammals, only humans (and, perhaps naked mole rats) live in such anonymously cooperative societies.
   Yet, such anonymous societies are common outside of Mammalia. Various species of ants, termites and bees, for example, live in anonymous societies. The ant species *Pseudomyrmex,* as just one example, is a full-blown horticultural society actively involved in the farming of sugars and proteins from Acacia trees with a complex division of labor, various institutions (i.e., separate chambers and specialists), norms (for example, norms regarding how to manage a large flow of traffic to and from sources of food or building materials), a market economy (with individual foragers cooperating to hawk their materials to unfamiliar others who share colony membership) and population sizes ranging from about two million to four million. That sociologists would balk at the notion of insects being *societal* merely reveals how ignorant we are to the prevalence of societies in the animal kingdom. We are committed to our uniqueness instead of to understanding what societies, in themselves, really are across the animal kingdom. As I've argued elsewhere, chimpanzees are our closest genetic relative in the animal kingdom, yes, but chimps do not live in colonies comprised of institutions, divisions of labor, colony-level identities and millions of other individuals. But various ant species (for example) do. So, chimps are our closest genetic relative, but societal insects are our closest *social-structural* relative in the animal kingdom (McCaffree, 2022).
   Even if we presume that empathy and altruism are more elaborately and symbolically expressed in human beings, we ought not assume that social cohesion and societal cooperation are unique to humans. Thus, a plethora of research questions remain largely unconsidered: how are mechanisms of social cohesion similar across societal species? How are they different? To what extent does physiological entrainment help maintain social cohesion across *societal* (not merely *social*) species? One of the founders of sociology, Auguste Comte, insisted that cross-species comparisons would shed light on which mechanisms of social cohesion are fundamental to all animals and which are more species-specific (Comte, [1830–1842] 1975, p. 264). Sociologists since Comte have largely lost this plot, preferring instead to indulge the fantasy of human uniqueness. It is time our research—and theories—of social cohesion return to a more genuine and honest engagement with the animal kingdom.
2. Outside of cross-species comparative work on social cohesion, we can also specify a suite of questions squarely focused on human beings. Namely, how do physiological mechanisms produce and mediate pro-social (trust, rapport, liking) behavior in people?

Inquiries here might involve using technologies that track brain blood flow (e.g., fMRI), brain electrical activity (e.g., EEG), heart rate (e.g., wearable heart rate monitor), electrodermal activity (e.g., galvanic skin response monitors) or gut microbiome diversity (e.g., biopsy devices) in addition to gene indices (e.g., silica bead microarray devices). Put simply, how exactly does the viscera of the body synchronize and mimic with other bodies to produce higher-order subject feelings of trust, rapport and liking? Under what conditions does this synchronization or mimicry additionally motivate helping behaviors?

3. We should also consider a more longitudinal question: How and why do large-scale human societies become more empathetic and pro-social over time?

   This requires some knowledge of archeology and history: it is an assessment of how the human animal has undergone a change in outlook and motivation as we've been able to live longer, accumulate food easier, access higher density sources of energy and construct more sophisticated infrastructures. Peoples' worldviews, values and forms of expression really do, non-linearly and often very slowly, appear to be changing in a more empathetic and pro-social direction (see Pinker, 2012; Inglehart, 2018; Buchanan & Powell, 2018), but the particular institutional mechanisms driving this change are only modestly understood. Yes, I know the modal sociologist will probably balk at the very possibility of societal "moral progress," but yet again, this is just another example of our field's ignorance (again, the cynical genius illusion rears its head, see Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2019). In reality, poverty is going down and protections for civil rights are increasing (and have been increasing for hundreds of years, predating all mainstream social movements) all around the world; it is imperative that we make more of an effort to understand why.

To conclude, I'll restate my thesis in the simplest possible terms: where my body is able to discern accurate information about your internal state, and where my cognitive judgments are not clouded by inaccurate biases or prejudices, our bodies and, eventually our goals, more easily merge and become better coordinated. The synchronous movements of our bodies during interactions enables the very flow of information about you and your circumstances that will ultimately motivate my empathic or altruistic actions toward you (see Tsuchiya et al., 2020). And, again, we need to be creative and open-minded in how we think about synchronous (or mimicked) actions—these may be passive or active, bidirectional or unidirectional, virtual or physical.

Our over-arching task as sociologists of morality is to uncover how our mainstream—but still essentially philosophical—concepts like rituals, roles, norms, self-presentations, identities and so on are epiphenomenal representations of varying degrees and patterns of physiological merging.

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Grounding Oughtness: Morality of Coordination, Immorality of Disruption

Dustin S. Stoltz and Michael Lee Wood

Abstract

How is morality related to cooperation? One common model posits that morality facilitates cooperation, insofar as the adherence to explicit rules or guidelines for collective practices enables or abets these practices. In this chapter, we draw on work from phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and the cognitive sciences to discuss an alternative model that flips this perspective on its head. While acknowledging that cooperation is facilitated by explicit rules and deliberative rule-making in some cases, we argue that frequently, morality emerges as people participate and gain skill in embodied, situated, coordinated activity. Morality here is grounded in the phenomenological experience of "oughtness," or the immediate feeling that things "ought" to be a certain way, cultivated via repeated practical experience. Accordingly, immorality is grounded in the feeling that one's sense of "oughtness" associated with a practice has been impeded, which often results in conscious moral deliberation. By grounding morality in the sense of "oughtness" cultivated via local, practical experience, this model has promising implications for research on moral variation and the socio-historical antecedents of moral deliberation and resultant moral frameworks.

Keywords

Embodiment · Coordination · Disruption · Immorality · Practice

Morality is about what *ought to be,* either descriptively or prescriptively: what a people *feel is* good to do or what *is* good to do, both for themselves and others.[1] In social theory, morality is commonly placed at the center of establishing and maintaining collective practices and goods, in opposition to individual self-interest (Durkheim,

[1] Following Heimer (2010, pp. 180–1): "Morality is about what people feel they ought to do; it is about distinguishing what people feel is right from what seems to them wrong" and Durkheim [1895] (1982, pp. 80–81): "To decide whether a precept is a moral one or not we must investigate whether it presents the external mark of morality. This mark consists of a widespread, repressive sanction, that is to say a condemnation by public opinion... Whenever we are confronted with a fact that presents this characteristic we have no right to deny its moral character, for this is proof that it is of the same nature as other moral facts." This also aligns with Whiteley (2020, pp. 22–23) who offers two possible definitions of morality: "no rule is part of a community's morality if people can openly break that rule without incurring the hostility and disapproval of their neighbours..." and "morality comprises those actions which I think I ought to do regardless of inclination and regardless of personal advantage."

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[1925] 2012, p. 59; Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010). In other words, the moral order enables or abets *cooperation* (but see Lamont (1992) and Luft (2020)):

> Protagoras, Hobbes, Hume, and Warnock are all at least broadly in agreement about the problem that morality is needed to solve: limited resources and limited sympathies together generate both competition leading to conflict and an absence of what would be mutually beneficial cooperation (Mackie, 1990, p. 111).

This "decisionist" and "prosocial" perspective (Baron, 1993; Curry, 2016; Kohlberg, 1973; Wikström, 2010) conceptualizes morality in terms of explicit rules or guidelines, developed via deliberation and negotiation in which justifications are discussed and debated, and, eventually, solutions emerge. These explicit rules address the problem of cooperation insofar as complying with the rules facilitates cooperation and staves off shirking. Thus, from this perspective, the moral person is defined objectively as those deciding to comply with these explicit rules (Abend, 2013, 2018). The potential gap between explicit rules and compliance is an acute problem (Bourdieu, 1977; Strauss, 1992; Swidler, 1986), which is sometimes addressed by appealing to processes of deliberate socialization of children (Parsons, 2013, pp. 140–142; see also Wikström, 2010; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977) or corrective processes (Scott, 2013).

We argue that cooperation, in the sense discussed above, is a special case of coordination: the performance of an activity involving multiple people in proximate times and places, knowingly or unknowingly, simultaneously or sequentially. Coordination is facilitated by explicit rules in at least some cases, but this is only one possible way of understanding the relationship between morality and coordination. In this chapter, we discuss an alternative model that flips the common perspective on its head. Here, instead of explaining how morality facilitates coordination and deliberate cooperation, we describe how participation in coordinated activity provides a foundation for morality and the moral discourse emblematic of deliberate cooperation (Collins, 2014; Tomasello, 2016).

This theoretical move is not entirely without precedent. Like Marx and Engels, for instance, we intend not to "descend from heaven" bearing the universal set of human values, but rather "ascend from earth to heaven." Not from what people "say, imagine, conceive" but from people "in the flesh" (Marx & Engels, [1845] 1998, p. 42). Similarity, in *Division of Labor*, Durkheim argued that a form of solidarity could emerge "spontaneously" via coordinated labor in complex societies (Durkheim, [1893] 2014). In *Elementary Forms,* Durkheim expanded this argument with a focus on the social origins of collective representations. According to Durkheim, participation in coordinated ritual affords the phenomenon of "collective effervescence" which inspires the "sacred" and "profane" categorization of the world that undergirds all moral and religious life (Durkheim, [1912] 1995). Similar to Durkheim's interest in religious "feeling" in *Elementary Forms*, we focus our discussion on implicit moral sentiment—a subjective sense of "oughtness" that may or may not give rise to conscious moral deliberation and explicit rules. Although we believe that conscious moral deliberation and rational rule-making may follow this implicit moral feeling, we bracket it as a separate activity. However, we differ significantly from Durkheim insofar as our discussion is grounded in perspectives from contemporary cognitive science, including "multiple memory systems" research (Amodio, 2019; Evans, 2008; Leschziner, 2019; Lizardo et al., 2016) and so-called "E" approaches to cognition—ecological, enactivist, embedded, embodied, extended (Cerulo, 2015; Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Haugeland, 1998; Ignatow, 2010; Lizardo et al., 2020; Pitts-Taylor, 2016; Varela et al., 2017). One major difference here is the relative importance attributed to everyday embodied experience and skill-building (often called "enskilment"), in contrast with Durkheim's focus on special rituals and his relative inattention to embodiment.

Guided by these contemporary perspectives from the cognitive sciences, and building on ethnomethodological insights and practice theory, we articulate a model of morality based on *implicit* cognitive processing *grounded in*

enskilment and *situated coordination*. Conceptualizing morality in terms of implicit cognitive processing is not new, but unlike other approaches which posit a universal set of (unconscious) values constraining moral possibilities (Haidt, 2012; cf. Martin & Lembo, 2020), our model grounds implicit morality in *local skill development and use*. Specifically, we argue that a phenomenological experience of "oughtness" emerges as skilled people participate in embodied, situated, coordinated activity (Ignatow, 2009a; Pagis, 2010; Winchester, 2008, 2016; Winchester & Pagis, 2021).

Reconsidering the relation between coordination and morality has promising implications for the sociology of morality. First, the model of implicit morality discussed below provides a plausible explanation for how morality arises as a deliberative, discursive enterprise. Although explicit moral deliberation is widely recognized as a social necessity, it is unclear what motivates a person's engagement in moral deliberation in the first place. Second, because the proposed model is grounded in local experience, it is well-suited for studying moral variation and the "social antecedents of particular moral frameworks" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010, p. 6), issues that can be obscured by centering universal moral frameworks. Third, coordination, as we describe it, makes no commitments regarding the social standing of those involved or the extent an outcome of such practices benefits those involved in some objective sense. In short, this model of morality leaves room for considerations of power. Finally, although morality does take the form of rule-based, explicit coordination, this is unlikely to be the *modal way* we experience morality. Commensurate with various sociological approaches to morality (Abend, 2018; Firat & McPherson, 2010; Luft, 2020; Wherry, 2010), morality is conceived here not as a single decision (or string of decisions) set apart from mundane, continuous, collective experience, but as something we experience *within* coordinated activity. The model presented below sharpens our ability to understand "everyday" moral experience.

1 Morality in Implicit Coordination

We begin with the observation that social action is situated in time and space. As such, coordination requires participants to "move together," both simultaneously and sequentially. For example, people coordinate their actions when waiting in queues (Gibson, 2008; Schwartz, 1975), giving gifts (Caplow, 1984; Healy, 2010; Mauss, 2002), taking turns in conversations (Sacks, 2014), and engaging in religious rituals or protest movements (Effler, 2010; McNeill, 1997). Ethnographic and phenomenological work on social practices reveals that such coordination is dependent on developing nondeclarative abilities, what is sometimes called "enskilment" (Pálsson, 1994). Social practices requiring the coordination of bodies in time and space are not sustainable by explicit rules alone (Dreyfus, 1992). Rule-following not only encounters the problem of ambiguity and infinite regress (Bourdieu, 1977; Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 2013, p. 126; Kripke, 1982; Wittgenstein, 1953 § 201), but, more importantly, is simply too slow. Consider, for example, the fractions-of-second overlap between turn-takers in typical conversation (Jefferson, 1973). Instead, such practices are sustained by participants' embodied "know-how" enabling them to respond to the continuously unfolding temporal and spatial dynamics (Lande, 2007), which in turn makes their actions reliable information for other participants in the situation (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 173; Goffman, 1972, p. 13; Rawls, 2010; Simmel, 1950, p. 379; Stoltz & Lizardo, 2018).[2]

As people observe others and participate in a social activity, they develop three types of nondeclarative associations: (1) procedural skill, (2) affective associations, and (3) conceptual associations (Amodio, 2019). Procedural skill is

[2] As Weber (1978, pp. 21–22) writes, "in the great majority of cases actual action goes on in a state of inarticulate half-consciousness or actual unconsciousness. . .the ideal type of meaningful action where the meaning is fully conscious and explicit is a marginal case" (see also Bargh & Morsella, 2008; Davidson, 2004).

the "know-how" facilitating participation (discussed above). Importantly, this "know-how" does not develop in the abstract, but in an embodied participant in concrete situations (Barsalou, 2016; Giddens, 1979, p. 24; Ignatow, 2009b). In other words, as one practices, they experience emotions and observe patterns in their environment. As a result, procedural skill becomes associated with affective and conceptual associations. For example, in terms of affect, drivers might develop associations between certain emotions and traffic patterns, and athletes between certain emotions and competitive outcomes. In terms of conceptual associations, drivers might develop implicit models of different types of driving situations, such as "city driving" (including perhaps, stoplights, and pedestrians) and "freeway driving" (including perhaps, on/off-ramps and large, green signs).

Over time, the situated, tripartite nature of enskilment imparts skilled participants with a sense of "oughtness," which emerges in different ways. In some cases, "oughtness" is grounded in associations between emotions and skill-use. For example, when skilled people are engaged in a practice with other skilled people who all know how to synchronize their movements, participants can carry out the practice smoothly, even "without thinking" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1980). This "smoothness" may engender a sense of "oughtness" insofar as participants come to affectively value this experience above others. A "moral" person, then, from this perspective, is not necessarily someone who knows and follows all the explicit rules or can express justifications for their actions or beliefs, but one who is able to participate in a coordinated social practice without disrupting an affectively valued state, such as "flow" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). In other cases, "oughtness" may be grounded in emotional attachments to conceptual associations. For example, a veteran participant (or even observer) who has many positive experiences concurrent with the activation of an implicit conceptual model of a practice may develop a strong sense that the practice "ought" to be done in a *particular* way, even if other ways might yield the same outcome. Below, we discuss these two senses of "oughtness" using the examples of automobile driving and boxing. The main implication is that in all these cases, coordinated practices are implicitly *moral,* by virtue of these situated associations.

This model of implicit morality has several distinct features which set it apart from other models of morality. First and foremost, it is grounded in embodied skill, that is, *enskilment*. As people participate in social practices, they develop procedural memory (a form of nondeclarative memory) that enables them to meet the demands of the practice (Squire, 1992). New participants "literally become something different," altering their sensorimotor structures in a way that "respond appropriately to events in the world through acquired skills" (Lande, 2007, p. 105). During this process of "becoming," skilled participants develop a sense of "oughtness" about behaviors and environments that facilitates the practice (Gibson, 1963; Gibson & Pick, 2000).

Second, this model of morality makes no assumptions about what counts as "moral" (Haidt, 2012). Instead, it focuses on the cultivated sense of "oughtness," the affective allure of the smoothness of practice, and the phenomenological experience of having one's practical and conceptual expectations frustrated (Damasio, 1999; Goffman, 1983; Rawls, 1987, 1989, 2010). As we discuss below, people can and do respond in different ways to these disruptions, ranging from tolerant understanding to explicit moral condemnation. Although one could limit the analysis of morality to cases that are explicitly identified by participants or observers as "moral issues," we argue that by studying the phenomenological experience of "oughtness" grounded in practical coordination, we can develop a better understanding of how and why explicit moral deliberation emerges and make progress toward a more general theory of moralization.

Third, this model of implicit morality is radically local. Enskilment is always enskilment in a particular setting, with a particular ecological structure that varies over time and space, and which anticipates certain kinds of bodies over others (Engman & Cranford, 2016; Pitts-Taylor,

2015). In terms of morality, it means that the sense of "oughtness" described above is also locally grounded. Perception of a situation is direct. In most cases, there is no need "interpret" the situation by applying a "lens" or some other declarative moral device. Participants sense the virtue of a moment immanently. Although a participant may potentially "carry over" a feeling of "oughtness" or even a conceptual understanding of an activity from one situation to the next, these moral feelings emerge from grounded, local experience (Barsalou et al., 2003; Barsalou & Medin, 1986).

This last point is especially important to distinguish the proposed model from another cognitively motivated model of morality. This other model is built on a similar dual-process approach but is founded on the notion that there is a universal set of moral values (Haidt, 2012; Rozin et al., 1999; Shweder & Haidt, 1993). This "universal moral values" model proposes that each moral value may be *weighted* differently for each individual or each group—for example, one group may place a high weight on "fairness" while another group weights "loyalty" high. Ultimately, though, humans have a limited range of options.

In contrast, the model of morality as "situated oughtness" has no need for a set of universal values (which is not to say it is incompatible). Moral feelings emerge in grounded, local situations, and are therefore particular. To the extent we observe widely shared *regularities* in moral feeling, it is a reflection of the (1) regularities in the perceptual structures upon which our vision, hearing, and general proprioception rely (Gibson, 2014; Merleau-Ponty, 1962), (2) regularities in the structured environment (Engman & Cranford, 2016), and regularities in the biographies of participants (Bourdieu, 1977; Strauss & Quinn, 1997; Lamont, 1992; Bloch, 2015). That is, observed regularities are not attributed to universal inherent human qualities, nor cultural forces constraining individuals from above, but rather to the overlapping pieces of peoples' biographies, "below" the individual. "When going 'below' the individual, [sociologists] will not find atomized elements, but rather the repository of shared cognitive processes constitutive of 'socially embodied' collective knowledge" (Lizardo et al., 2020, p. 20).

This framework builds upon ethnomethodology and interactionist insight into the co-constituted (and local) nature of social situations (Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1972, p. 13), but extends it with an increased focus on the implications of embodiment. Ethnomethodologists observed, via compelling experiments such as the "conversation clarification" task, in which experimenters would ask dumb questions about "what everybody knows," that people had a sense of "oughtness" associated with conversation, manifest when research subjects "rapidly and powerfully sanctioned" experimenters for their breaching questions. The subject "treated the intelligible character of his own talk as something to which he was morally entitled" (Heritage, 2013, pp. 80–81). These findings are consistent with the framework developed here. However, ethnomethodologists concluded that these disruptions could be easily remedied with deliberative negotiation: the disrupted would simply "provide an account."

Repairing disrupted practices is not always so easy. Many disruptions result from a mismatch between a person's current skill and the demands of the current situation. In other words, our capacity to meet the local requirements of skillful coordination is a matter of relatively durable products of our biographies (Kiley & Vaisey, 2020), and cannot always be altered without investing time and effort in enskilment. This is not to say that regularity outside of discourse is impossible, however. Although individual biographies are unique, there will always be overlapping experiences between any two people—even if only in the most mundane human experiences of, say, verticality (Schwartz, 1981). These mundane, overlapping experiences provide a bedrock for "collective representations" below the level of the individual, yet manifesting as routine social interactions (Lizardo et al., 2020).

2 Immorality in the Disruption of Implicit Coordination

We proposed grounding the concept of "morality" in the embodied sense of "oughtness" emerging with the skill development within situated, coordinated practice. Accordingly, we propose grounding "immorality" in the feeling that one's sense of "oughtness" associated with practice has been impeded (Garfinkel, 1967; Tavory & Fine, 2020). In the remainder of this chapter, we provide empirical support for this model of morality by reviewing ethnographic research on coordinated social practices that make observations about participants' phenomenological experiences. In the course of situated practice, events sometimes occur which *evoke in skilled participants automatic, negative responses of varying degrees of intensity*. In other words, skilled participants have a clear sense of what "ought to be" that often goes unnoticed *until* it is disrupted. Emotion—as "thoughts somehow felt in flushes, pulses, 'movements' of our livers, minds, hearts, stomachs, skin" (Rosaldo, 1984, p. 143)—plays a central role in both fueling the pleasures of smoothness and directing one's attention toward the sources of disruption (Damasio, 1999; Easterbrook, 1959).

Before reviewing the ethnographic data, we wish to respond to potential criticism. The reader may reasonably ask whether this embodied sense of "oughtness" should be interpreted as a form of "morality" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010, pp. 5–6). After all, people respond to disruptions in different ways, for example, by attributing malintent to another party or charitably dismissing their actions as a "novice mistake" or even "meditating" on the discomfort (Pagis, 2010; Winchester, 2008). However, this higher-order processing (*conscious* and *deliberative*) presupposes the existence of *implicit* expectations about how things "ought to be," such that a skilled participant *immediately* feels when something has gone wrong, and often feels it quite deeply. In this way, our description of an implicit sense of "oughtness" as a form of morality aligns with Abend's concept of the "moral background" (Abend, 2014).

We organize our discussion of the relevant research around two distinct ideal-typical ways the practice-based, implicit, and affective sense of "oughtness" can be disrupted. The first involves *procedural memory*, that is, the "know-how" people develop enabling them to participate as skilled practitioners. Here, disruption entails an undesirable interference with or coercion of procedural ability. The second involves nondeclarative conceptual associations. As people become skilled and gain experience in a practice, they develop a multi-modal conceptual understanding of the practice, or a schema (Firat & McPherson, 2010; Leschziner & Brett, 2021; McDonnell et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2018). Here, disruption entails witnessing something that violates one's conceptual understanding of how the practice "ought to be." We refer to these as *procedural disruption* and *conceptual disruption*, respectively.

2.1 Procedural Disruption

Procedural disruption occurs when a skilled participant's sense of "oughtness" associated with their skillful ability is violated during a situated practice. Procedural disruptions take two forms: In the extreme case, disruption renders a participant's skill nonfunctional. These disruptions are experienced as "immoral" insofar as they prevent a skilled participant from achieving their affectively valued end. In other cases, procedural disruption consists in disrupting a skilled participant's "ideal" skillful experience. In these cases, the participant may still be able to carry on the practice, but they may be coerced to do things that they have come to dislike. Instead of "smooth," the practice is experienced as "choppy" or "rough." In this section, we review research on driving and boxing to illustrate the phenomenon of procedural disruption.

Driving is a coordinated practice, and relatively successful given that most driving experiences are quite mundane and uneventful, and most accidents are small and unremarkable

(Lupton, 2002; Michael, 2020).[3] Successful coordination among drivers is dependent on embodied, procedural skill (Charlton & Starkey, 2011). Although driving does have explicit rules, these rules are taken as loose guidelines (Goffman, 1972; Rothe, 1992), and are thus incapable of explaining the successful coordination of driving. Were this not so, programming self-driving vehicles would be a relatively easy problem of teaching a computer all the explicit rules (Dreyfus, 1992).

The morality of driving is most commonly grounded in expectations and tastes associated with skillful implicit coordination, rather than adherence to explicit rules. As Katz (1999, p. 25) observes, "anger at other drivers is very systematically limited to only certain patterns of spatial interrelationship" (e.g., specific driving situations), and not explicit rules. Explicit rules do not encompass all the ways drivers' intentions are made "accountable" to other drivers' (Laurier, 2004; Livingston, 1987, pp. 28–30; Nuhrat, 2020). In fact, breaking explicit traffic laws is often considered justified, even by police and judges (Goffman, 1972). For example, although explicit speed minimums and maximums exist, drivers commonly drive above or below posted speed limits, in most cases driving much faster or slower than they are comfortable to respond appropriately to current road and traffic conditions (Charlton et al., 2010; Charlton & Starkey, 2017).

The implicit morality of driving is manifested in the fact that driving routinely sparks *automatic, negative responses*, including "road rage" and aggressive driving, provoked by violations of implicit expectations and tastes (Nuhrat, 2020). Invectives and curses are common among drivers and arise spontaneously when driving is disrupted (Katz, 1999).

In the case of procedural disruption, the relevant implicit "oughtness" of driving consists in (1) the implicit expectation that one should be able to arrive at one's destination, given one's skill, and (2) implicit tastes and distastes for certain driving situations. In the first case, a procedural disruption comprises anything that renders a participant's ability to drive nonfunctional, such as getting hit by another driver. In the case of implicit tastes, a procedural disruption comprises anything that coerces the driver into an undesirable state of practice.

Consider, for example, maintaining an "appropriate" distance from other vehicles as a central, yet implicit, part of driving. The distance between the grill of one's own car and the rear bumper of a car in front is a constantly changing dynamic, and skilled drivers effectively gauge distance while all the "pieces" of the system are constantly altering speeds and distances (Charlton & Starkey, 2013; Yanko & Spalek, 2013). Drivers perceive a "field of safe travel" that "shifts and changes continually, bending and twisting with the road, and also elongating or contracting, widening or narrowing, according as obstacles encroach upon it and limit its boundaries" (Gibson & Crooks, 1938, p. 455). Although drivers can and do skillfully cope with other drivers making this task more difficult (e.g., by passing too closely in front of them or following too closely behind), these disruptions immediately evoke a negative affective response. Drivers who "cut off" or "tailgate" another become the targets of vicious moral opprobrium and even physical violence from their victims who insist on "getting even" or "teaching them a lesson" (Katz, 1999).

Importantly, the situations eliciting procedural disruptions are grounded in the expectations and tastes of local coordinated practice, grounded in embodied, action-specific skill (Witt & Proffitt, 2008). In the case of coordinated distance, local patterns will determine what distance is "appropriate." What counts as "inappropriately close" in Philadelphia may not necessarily be the same in Salt Lake City. Similarly, the implicit moral sense of citizen drivers is likely different from NASCAR drivers who in their specialized vehicles routinely "bump" or "trade paint" (Shackleford, 1999). Similarly, the right to space, such as what vehicles are allowed in which lanes and who "deserves" parking spots are both codified yet grounded in local "folk"

[3] This in no way minimizes the fact that driving is the most dangerous common mode of transportation (Savage, 2013).

understandings of propriety (Taylor, 2014; Nuhrat, 2020).

Institutions invested in facilitating a certain state of practice may develop local techniques to promote this state and mitigate disruptions. For example, boxing gyms facilitate sparring, which are playful simulations that "allow practitioners to experiment with technical skills and social rank more freely than if their performance was of high consequence" (Hoffman, 2006, p. 175). To facilitate effective sparring and avoid disrupting its playful instructiveness, boxers are required to move through "phases," in which newcomers are "socially quarantined" and must display competence in one phase before moving on to the next (Hoffman, 2006, pp. 183–5). Additionally, more skilled boxers must learn to "hold back." According to one boxing coach: "You gotta remember that your sparring partner is your friend. You're a little bit better than he is. Let him hit you in the body sometimes . . .and don't hit him back too hard" (Hoffman, 2006, p. 185). Furthermore, as in other martial arts gyms, "real fighting" is antithetical to learning how to fight. Heated emotional exchanges associated with a real fight are procedurally disruptive to the practice of a boxing gym, so, coaches may "[stop] sessions where the fighters were getting too frustrated, angry, or competitive" (Hoffman, 2006, p. 184). In sum, as a social practice in which participants create a collective good, boxing requires local enskilment that is more than knowing how to throw punches—avoiding procedural disruption requires the know-how to be a good partner.

2.2 Conceptual Disruption

Conceptual disruption occurs when something violates an observer's affectively laden implicit conceptual understanding of the practice. Unlike procedural disruption, which occurs during participation in a coordinated practice, conceptual disruption occurs during observation or recollection of a coordinated practice. Importantly, however, conceptual disruption is, like procedural disruption, grounded in skillful practice. As people develop skill in a coordinated practice, they also develop implicit conceptual associations, including an understanding of what things are relevant to the practice and how relevant things move. The situatedness of skill development means that people also develop affective associations with these conceptual associations, providing the groundwork for conceptual disruption by pairing an understanding of "what is" with feelings of attraction or repulsion. Conceptual disruptions are experienced as "immoral" insofar as they violate an observer's implicit sense of how the observed practice "ought to be."

One of the authors (Wood) elicited such a conceptual disruption by riding his bicycle on the road in a small Utah city, which provoked a driver in a passing pickup going in the opposite direction to stick their head out the window and shout, "get the fuck off the road!" The response suggests that the driver had an affectively laden implicit conceptual model of city transportation which rendered bikes "out of place," such that witnessing a cyclist on the road constituted a negative conceptual disruption. Similarly, Goffman describes "pedestrians [seeing] a motorist drive into a parked car, ruin a fender, and drive off," in that moment they feel an "action so improper... even though they themselves are not directly involved... [they sense] a desire to take some action against the offender" (Goffman, 1972, p. 265). The bystanders are not directly impacted by the crash, nor is their car damaged. In both this case and the case of the impolite pickup driver, mere observation was sufficient to evoke affective responses, despite not being directly affected by the "immoral" practice.

The affective impact of conceptual disruption may be partially explained by the subjective realism of *embodied simulation* (Cerulo, 2018; Gallese, 2011). First, sensorimotor patterns involved in a practice are also (partially) activated when *observing* others engaging in that practice (Bloch, 2015; Cerulo et al., 2021, pp. 65–66; Heyes & Catmur, 2022; Molenberghs et al., 2012). This fusion of perception and action is a special case of a more general cognitive mechanism called *neural reuse*. This describes the ways "different parts of the [central nervous system] are

used and reused to accomplish different functions at multiple spatial scales" (Raja & Anderson, 2019, p. 171). During embodied simulation, participants "create mental experiences of perception and action in the absence of their external manifestation. . ." (Bergen, 2012, p. 14). Furthermore, this process "makes use of the same parts of the brain that are dedicated to directly interacting with the world. . .simulation creates echoes in our brains of previous experiences" (Bergen, 2012, pp. 14–15; see also Gallese & Lakoff, 2005). Even abstract conceptual knowledge is, therefore, grounded in the body and environment (Barsalou et al., 2003; Barsalou & Medin, 1986).

Consider, for example, an instance of reprimand when the disruptor and disruptee are not co-present. One of the authors (Stoltz) parked his car on a street for over a week and returned to find a handwritten note in the windshield wiper: "Dickheads double park. You. You're dickheads." Being street parking, with no designated parking lines, this was puzzling. To understand the moral transgression, he engaged in embodied simulation—recreating a scenario in which one might interpret his car as taking up "two" spaces, while the vehicles in front and behind rotated throughout the week, parking at various distances. He also considered the scenario of moving his car each night to accommodate the turnover of vehicles: perhaps he was unaware of this local norm? Simulating the practice, and being quite familiar with the routines of this particular street, this scenario seemed unlikely. It was likely, however, that the note writer *simulated* the author parking his car *only after the vehicles immediately in front and behind were parked*. This simulation led to indignation profound enough to justify condemnation.

In pedagogical settings (i.e., parenting, teaching, and coaching), instructors commonly have a sense of how something "ought" to be, and conceptual disruptions commonly elicit admonition. Consider Wacquant's "carnal ethnography" of boxing. Pugilism, according to Wacquant's participants, involves an "all-embracing ascetic life plan":

> It is believed that an ordinary boxer who conscientiously abides by the commandments of the pugilistic catechism, as they apply in particular to nutrition, social life, and sexual activity, stands every chance of toppling a more talented but dissipated foe (Wacquant, 1995, p. 513).

Even seemingly disconnected activities can clash with this conceptualization of the activity of boxing. Wacquant, for example, offers an account of the "scandal of the smoking boxer." While training at the gym, one boxer, Ashante, is telling another, Luke, about an otherwise successful boxer who "wasn't serious about it." The key evidence in the story was witnessing the boxer smoking, "I saw him sittin' in the audience after the fight, puffing away with one of his buddies. Right away, I knew it was over for him." Luke responds "He was smokin' after a fight?!! [As if this were an inconceivable monstrosity]?" (Wacquant, 2004, p. 148 Wacquant's parentheticals). This retelling of a story carries a sense of moral weight precisely because it disrupts the boxers' conceptual understanding of how the practice ought to be.

3 Discussion

In the preceding, we outlined a theory of morality grounded in implicit coordination, in contrast to morality as explicit cooperation. As coordinated practice in time and space is dynamic and ever-changing, memorizing explicit rules and following them may not only be unnecessary but also insufficient to guarantee "moral" behavior. An unskilled novice who knows and follows explicit rules may nonetheless disrupt other practitioners for lack of skill. Instead, a moral person is someone who responds "appropriately" to the continuously evolving situational dynamics (i.e., in a way that continues the practice without disrupting others). This grounds the sense of oughtness in the smoothness of dynamic, situated practices and thus is the result of skill development and use.

We further argue that the morality of mundane and taken-for-granted acts of ongoing coordination is typically revealed when practices are disrupted. We describe two generic kinds of

disruption, (1) procedural and (2) conceptual. The first entails an undesirable interference with or coercion of procedural ability. The second entails witnessing an action that violates one's conceptual understanding of how the practice "ought to be." As a result of the constant ebb and flow of people with varying degrees of enskilment and with varying experiences in slightly different local ecologies, disruptions are bound to occur. People may attempt to cope with disruptions by making personal changes, but these efforts are constrained by the irreversible investment of time involved in enskilment.

3.1 Responses to Disruption

While the model is well-formed to account for both moral regularity and variation, it remains an open question why some instances of disruption result in mild irritation or even self-reflection (Winchester, 2016) while others result in deliberate chastisement and even overt violence (Garfinkel, 1967). Indeed, like Andy Kaufman's audiences, people may even vacillate between eager elation and raucous rage. This experience of being disrupted by others may become the site of *deliberate moral reasoning* in at least two senses. We refer to these as (1) performance failure and (2) false performance. In both cases, an activity that participants experienced as predominantly automatic now demands their deliberation.

First, enskilled participants may judge an instance of disruption as a performance failure on the part of some other participants. In some cases, these disruptors will be salvageable. They are, perhaps, a novice who has not received the necessary training. They may also be deemed a "foreigner" in the sense that they have familiarity with the practice, but their experience is derived from a different locale, where activities were coordinated in a slightly different way. The solution there is that the foreigner could either be retrained or should "go back" to wherever it is they learned how to engage in the practice. In other cases, the disruptors will be judged unsalvageable. They are morally deficient in essential and immutable ways. Here, the solution would likely entail barring them from the activity entirely and may be accompanied by the "figurative uses of dumbness as a common line of insult" (Katz, 1999, p. 25).

Second, enskilled participants may judge an instance of disruption as a false performance. In such a scenario, an interloper is attempting to appear as if they have acquired the requisite know-how—or in other words, they have lived a particular kind of life—but, in fact, did not. In some cases, it may be that the disruptor lacks commitment to the practice. The disruptor may also be attempting to pander to the participants, with no investment in continuing to participate in the activity. In the most nefarious instance, the disruptor may be attempting to deliberately sabotage the activities or swindle the other participants. In this latter case, the potential repercussions may be so severe as to entice the disruptors to "cool out" the disruptees so the latter interprets the activities as relatively inevitable (Goffman, 1952).

3.2 Why, When, and How

In the preceding, we argued that automatic, negative responses to disruptions may lead to deliberate responses for both disruptors and disruptees. Importantly, however, the question remains as to under what conditions a procedural or conceptual disruption will result in an automatic, *negative* response. In many ways, this question stands at the heart of broader debates about cultural change (Patterson, 2018; Kiley & Vaisey, 2020; McDonnell et al., 2021). Certainly, in some cases, changing the status quo may be experienced positively, as a pleasant surprise or an act of creativity or liberty (Martin, 2001, p. 203). That is, when is interruption novel versus immoral? And, for whom? Furthermore, acts of disruption are a common tool of protests, and observers' reactions may be mediated by the qualities of the participants and settings (Miller, 1997; Murphy, 1998; Stoltz & Taylor, 2017) and the observer's own relation to those participants and settings. A plausible starting point to this question is in the same sources of variation: the

constant ebb and flow of people with varying degrees of enskilment or experiences with slightly different ecologies.

Closely related is the question of perspective. Participants' enskilment is situated and therefore occupies particular standpoints (Pels, 1996; Sweet, 2020). Participants' embodied skill both engenders a sense of what they ought to do, but also anticipations of what others ought to be doing, and these need not—and often will not—align. The degree to which all participants' sense of "oughtness" are indeed in *alignment* is potentially related to the degree functionaries explicitly discipline others' disruptive actions (Lande, 2007) or "socially quarantine" novices (Hoffman, 2006). This touches on the earlier observation that the proposed model of morality makes no commitments regarding the social standing of those involved. To a higher-status person, for example, what a lower-status person "ought to be doing" is likely not the same as what the higher-status person feels impelled to do. Indeed, should the lower-status person attempt imitation, this could be experienced as disruption.

3.3 The Role of Moral Discourse

Finally, can "oughtness" be passed down without practical grounding? As we argue, disruption may often lead to moral deliberation. Is such deliberation entirely epiphenomenal? We do not think so. We articulate a framework for understanding how oughtness is predominantly grounded, implicit, and embodied, but this does not require the position that every sense of oughtness necessarily emerges and is sustained only in this way. Conceptual understandings of oughtness could be "passed on" without someone engaging in the practice. In other words, in situations of deliberate socialization, oughtness may be instilled in others through primarily linguistic means (Mills, 1940; Vaisey, 2009; Winchester & Green, 2019). This may, however, be marginal and instill an ersatz grasp of what one ought-to-do, without a visceral sense of necessity. Nevertheless, we cannot dismiss that situations of moral education exist, perhaps most obviously in parenting when one would hope their child avoids wrongdoing rather than learn by experience or coaching where one hopes to avoid mistakes during a competition.

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Part IV

Morality and the Life Cycle

The Sociology of Children and Youth Morality

Seth Abrutyn and Julia Goldman-Hasbun

Abstract

In this chapter, we make the case that cooperation is at the center of moral behavior by presenting insights on youth morality from neuroscience, psychology, and evolutionary science. First, we discuss the gaps in the sociological literature concerning youth morality. Instead of studying youth morality explicitly, sociologists often use proxies for morality such as norms, values, and socialization that underplay both youth's agency in shaping their moral worlds and their innate cooperative abilities. As such, we argue that sociologists' neglect of youth morality obscures our understanding of the interaction between the socialized and the innate aspects of moral development and behavior. Next, we review existing bio-psychological research that points to the innate aspects of cooperation and why cooperation may have been evolutionarily adaptive. In looking at the moral behaviors of infants, we see that moral judgment, a preference for pro-social versus anti-social others, and the ability to coordinate action, precede norm following and norm enforcing behaviors. We conclude this chapter by discussing the exciting opportunities that could result from interdisciplinary work on the morality of youth, and present some ideas for future directions in the areas of socialization, property and politics, and moral judgment and decision-making.

Keywords

Youth morality · Children · Adolescence · Moral ontogeny · Cooperation · Norms

1 Morality in Children and Youth

The study of morality within children and youth is virtually absent in sociology. This is both surprising and, perhaps, not. It is surprising because sociologists have cared (off and on) about child and adolescent socialization (Lareau, 2003; Parsons, 1951), with a growing resurgence capped by a recent review article pushing for a revival (Guhin et al., 2021). Going back further, the notion of education as inextricably entwined with morality or moral socialization has a long-standing tradition in sociological theory (Cooley, 1902 [1964]; Dewey, 2007; Durkheim, 1925 [1973]; Elias, 1978; Martineau, 1938). Thus, it would seem that the cultivation of morality would be as important as the cultivation of, say, class interests, intrinsic motivation, or schema. And yet, the mention of morality among children or adolescents, in theory or empirical research, is mostly invisible or implied (Corsaro & Eder, 1990), conflated with conceptual short-hand that

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presumably acts as a proxy of morality, like norms (Horne & Mollborn, 2020) or values (Guhin et al., 2021), or biased toward the sorts of "liberal" categories found in Haidt & Joseph (2004) model like care or justice versus authority or what Shweder (2003) refers to as "ethics of community." Equally vexing is the tendency to examine youth morality from adult perspectives, seeing their behavior and deviance—or, what is sometimes amplified as a/immorality—refracted through adult values rather than asking them, especially children, what they think and why they do or did what they do or did. In this sense, youth morality has been ceded to psychologists and neuroscientists (Decety & Wheatley, 2015; Eisenberg, 2000; Tomasello & Vaish, 2013).

On the other hand, this lack of engagement with youth morality is not as surprising as it may seem. Despite the theoretical and methodological stakes for studying youth (Pugh, 2014), some barriers include trepidation predicated on methodological and ethical dilemmas with studying youth, especially children (Eder & Corsaro, 1999); the explicit or tacit belief that youth, particularly children, lack moral accountability and agency (Frankel, 2012); the fear that studying socialization will paint a picture of passive creatures (Guhin et al., 2021); and, finally, a disagreement about what constitutes "moral" or "morality," with various sociological answers settling on the sort of sociological psychologizing that Wrong (1992) deemed oversocializing, such as belongingness (Pugh, 2009), conformity to norms (Horne & Mollborn, 2020) or adjacent proxies of morality like politeness, manners, and caring for others (Britton, 2015). This is not to say what these scattered studies examine is not morality; rather, we argue that most sociologists have yet to import the general insights of the sociology of morality (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013; Abend, 2008) into the unique developmental and sociocultural elements of children and youth.

Nonetheless—and despite the ambiguity and disagreement surrounding the definition of morality that surely runs like a thread throughout this volume—there seems to be much at stake in studying youth morality. That is, it is not territory worth ceding, as the fundamental basis of social interaction and organization require consideration of both the phylogenetic and ontogenetic roots of morality that consume bio-psycho research on youth *and* an understanding of the processes by which culturally specific morality is added on to what is inherently human. Moreover, much is lost when sociology's full methodological tool box goes unused.

The core theoretical insight we import from the bio-psycho sciences is that cooperation and the ability to coordinate our actions with significant others *and* strangers rest at the heart of youth morality. There is a phylogenetic, or evolved, component to this assertion in so far as domination and not cooperation characterizes our closest relative's social organization (Abrutyn & Turner, 2022; Boehm, 2018), with naked aggression being 100 times more frequent in chimp communities vis-à-vis human communities (Wrangham, 2019). Thus, while humans are animals capable of great conflict and violence, research on child development points toward the phylogenetic and ontogenetic roots of morality in the innate cooperative behavior of infants and toddlers that is carried on, with social modification, in children and youth more generally. As such, while the current trend in sociology, for understandable reasons, leans toward highlighting difference, inequality, and injustice, we miss the part where humans are wired for morality and the sociological study of how this morality is encouraged or discouraged over the most formative years of human development. And, without this part, it is difficult to make methodological decisions, let alone interpret our data, with regard to how early and later socialization affects the innate moral actions of children.

Before we can dig into this perspective and its implications for sociology, we begin by reviewing the classical literature on morality and, where possible, youth. This review is brief to avoid redundancy with other chapters in this volume and because classical sociology was only tangentially interested in children or youth more generally. From there, we explore the best candidates for a contemporary sociological study of youth morality, identifying some really important studies along the way, but also finding

a general lack of systematic research that begs to be filled. This chapter then shifts to the bio-psycho literature and concludes by pointing sociologists to future directions that may benefit from a happy interdisciplinary marriage.

2 The Classics Revisited

Any essay on morality must begin with the classics (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013; Abend, 2008), particularly Durkheim's (1925 [1973]) *Moral Education*, where Durkheim sees education as inextricably linked to building a civic, moral society without religion in highly differentiated societies (Guhin, 2021); a point made much earlier by Martineau (1938). Across the Atlantic, however, a similar argument was being made by the nascent pragmatist movement in American sociology (Dewey, 2007), which translated into an intense interest in transforming theories of psychological development into theories of a social self and its socialization. Most famously, this interest emerged first with Cooley's (1902 [1964]) assertion that human nature itself was a product of primary group socialization, which required not simply internalizing cognitive appraisals, but also core moral emotions like pride and shame. Mead (1934) also adopted this view, adding that the self is not completely developed without internalizing a *generalized other*, or an imagined other that reflects the community's moral authority. In classic sociological fashion, morality was found *outside* of the individual, in the community's beliefs and practices internalized through informal and formal socialization.

For better or worse, the assumption that morality is external to individuals presents a paradox. On the one hand, it echoes the problems Parsonian functionalism (Wrong, 1962) produces in which youth are passive vessels waiting for society to pour its latent cultural patterns. Youth then reproduce their parent's class-based, gendered, and/or racialized interests and beliefs, and thus sociology's version of youth morality appears far more fixed and socially constructed (Calarco, 2018; Lareau, 2003; Bourdieu, 1984). On the other hand, this sort of fixedness runs counter to many sociologists' commitment to some sort of *praxis*, which would prefer to emphasize the malleability and relative nature of morality, such that youth could actively resist, negotiate, or modify morality. Ironically, neither position contradicted the other because the externality of morality invites any given sociologist to impose their own version of morality onto youth attitudes and behavior. Class interests, if they create inequity in opportunity or resources, are inherently immoral, from many sociological vantage points (Willis, 1977), whether reproduced unwittingly or actively. Lost in this is the Durkheimian side of sociology in which we interrogate what is actually moral about youth culture, interactions, attitudes, and behavior from their perspective and from direct observations that do not immediately put the cart before the horse.

This problem is especially pressing as the movement toward a subjective, critical account of youth obscures two very different aspects of youth morality. First, it makes it difficult to imagine youth as having moral agency or accountability or, worse; adults strip them of it in oversocializing them. Instead, what might be deemed moral, cooperative behavior may simply be interpreted through the typical suspicious sociological lens that it is, in fact, power and conflict (Lignier, 2021); interpretations, incidentally, that pits sociology against the substantial and mounting evidence to support the idea of a social ontogeny predicated on cooperation (e.g., Curry et al., 2019; Tomasello & Vaish, 2013). Second, social science that has taken seriously children (Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Pugh, 2009) and adolescent (Britton, 2015) culture reveals a significant amount of coordinating behavior and attitudes for the collective good, cooperation, and cohesion that echoes what we believe is core to youth morality, but which often is obscured by the conventional sociological conflict prism. Indeed, these studies unsurprisingly support the notion that youth display agency, autonomy, and creativity that, admittedly, is not totally free of adult interference but is far more distinct than we often give credit. In short, then, we are not arguing that research on youth that emphasizes

distinctions borne of internal status hierarchies and competition (Coleman, 1961) or class-based differences that reproduce or intensify inequities (Lareau, 2003) is wrong or unnecessary, but that it is time to revisit the moral side of children and youth from a fresh perspective. But, before we present the current science of moral development, let us consider contemporary work in sociology that has close ties to the cooperative tradition in sociology.

3 Contemporary Trends in the Sociology of Youth Morality

As noted above, the bulk of the sociological literature on youth morality is indirectly observed through the focus on norms, or "social rules about how to behave that result in negative sanctions when violated" (Mollborn, 2017, p. 1). While norms are not synonymous with moral behavior—for instance, etiquette can be *ought to* moral directives or *should* conventions (Abrutyn & Carter, 2015), they are connected to morality in at least two ways. First, norms involve both judgments about what is "right" and "wrong" and perceptions of what others think is right and wrong (Horne & Mollborn, 2020); both important aspects of moral development and decision-making (Morris et al., 2011). Second, normative behaviors, like moral behaviors, are inherently cooperative. Fundamentally, norms work to meet the collective need for social order and often serve as the basis for laws alongside moral values (Hechter & Horne, 2009; Axelrod, 1986). Though this assumption undergirds a significant portion of microsociology, Goffman (1967: 19ff., 1983) most eloquently described this in his discussion of the interaction or expressive order in which the "rules of conduct" arising from the obligations one has toward others and the expectations they have toward her and one's commitment to obeying these rules are a "tacit agreement. . .to abide by the ground rules of social interaction." That is, cooperation is predicated on the socialization of norms.

From the earliest stages of life, children learn to coordinate their behaviors with those of their families, peers, teachers, and religious communities to ensure effective and efficient completion of day-to-day activities (e.g., Horne & Mollborn, 2020; Brint et al., 2001). As we discuss throughout this chapter, these types of coordinated efforts are central to moral behavior into adulthood. It is important to emphasize that norms are still cooperative even if, paradoxically, they can also reinforce social inequality, for example, by implying that some behaviors and groups of people are more socially desirable than others and thus worthy of social and material rewards. In such situations, a gap between what we might call "global" or third person morality (judging such inequality as immoral) and "local" or first person morality can exist without much dissonance (Lukes, 2008), as local culture tends to feel more direct, embodied, and experienced and is more easily monitored and sanctioned, and, consequently, effective at generating greater conformity (Fine, 2010).

Youth norms are particularly tricky to study because multiple, often conflicting, forces shape them. On the one hand, youth are subjected to tremendous pressure to conform to adult-imposed norms (which can be different from adults' own behavior) and pay a high price for any violation. For instance, Mollborn's (2017) work found that teens can face long-term consequences to their interpersonal relationships and career opportunities when they violate adult-imposed sexual norms around virginity and pregnancy. Moreover, parents, teachers, and other adults can enforce norms through physical and material control, for example, by imposing restrictions on youth's movements and activities, and by limiting the resources spent on their personal interests and desires.

On the other hand, youth create and enforce their own norms (e.g., Allison, 2009; Bauermeister et al., 2009; Best, 2006; Ilan, 2015; Corsaro, 1992; Coleman, 1961). For instance, Corsaro's (1992) research has highlighted how preschool children take part in a creative process of interpreting externally imposed norms and values, referred to as

"interpretive reproduction," a process ignored by earlier work on socialization (e.g., Parsons). And other research among California youth has shown how teens, and male teens in particular, attempt to gain a sense of freedom and visibility from their parents and communities through risky driving behaviors (Best, 2006). But unlike the material and physical consequences of adult-to-child norm enforcement, peer-to-peer norm enforcement can take the form of social sanctions and exclusion not unlike how adults enforce norms on each other (Coleman, 1961). Ultimately, youth actively attempt to present themselves in ways that promote social approval from their peers *and* adults in their community (Juvonen & Cadigan, 2002). This tension is exacerbated by the fact that youth are constantly on social media and must simultaneously juggle multiple conflicting identities; they can no longer isolate these identities from each other as previous generations could, conforming to context-dependent norms (Smith-Lovin, 2007). Instead, their online behaviors are turned into public, permanent "exhibitions" (Davis, 2016, p. 14) of their moral beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and political affiliations (Ekström & Shehata, 2018).

One might be wondering: what shapes these norms in the first place? While we are not equipped to answer this question fully, we argue that cooperation is key to *moral* norms. Our perspective is in line with what has been referred to as the "consequentialist" approach to studying norms, which posits that norms are shaped by the benefits a person's behavior confers onto other group members (Coleman, 1990; Heckathorn, 1988, 1989; Horne & Mollborn, 2020). Although other competing theories on norms exist—such as the relational approach—the consequentialist approach is considered the most well-tested theory on norms (Horne & Mollborn, 2020). In Coleman's (1961) ethnographic work on high schools in the greater Chicago area, for instance, he found that students preferred to be remembered as an "athletic star" rather than a "brilliant" student. Coleman argued that this was due to the collective "glory" that athletes offer their peers, in contrast to the individual-level status gains that result from academic achievement. The consequentialist approach to moral norms also fits with the extensive body of work on the evolutionary roots of morality, which we discuss below.

Despite this body of work on youth norms, we argue that a clear research program focused on youth morality is still needed to gain a deeper understanding of morality's role in shaping social action and its roots, development, and socialization. The broad conceptual research of "norms" used in contemporary sociological research makes it difficult to distinguish what is moral from what is simply normative. Examining youth norms without making such distinctions leaves room for scholars to impose their own perspectives on what is moral, which they likely derive from adult culture—in essence, acting as "moral philosophers in disguise" (Abend, 2008, p. 87). To address some of these conceptual issues, sociological research on youth morality would benefit from integrating insights from other disciplines, such as psychology, neuroscience, and evolutionary anthropology. In the following sections, we provide an overview of these literatures and how they can inform future research on youth morality.

4 The Evolutionary Roots of Youth Morality

Sociology has a long history of casting itself as supremely distinct from biology and psychology, but at what cost? We see several advantages to reviewing and integrating insights from these other fields, particularly on the subject of morality in children and youth. First, there are fundamental behaviors that are universal to neuro-typical humans. These behaviors provide further evidence that morality is universal to humans *and*—as infants begin to discern between pro-social and anti-social adults quite early—that there is something to the idea that children are moral beings. Second, it highlights some of the roots of sociological processes, like Mead's classic *taking the role of the other*, placing it firmly on biological grounds, and shedding more light on how it works. Third, it offers potentially

fruitful avenues for advancing the sociology of children and youth and for bringing the discipline into greater dialogue with other disciplines.

As previously noted, cooperation is a key aspect of moral behavior. Motivations for cooperative behavior span well beyond social conformity and norm following. We know that giving feels good. Aknin et al. (2015), for instance, have shown that the emotional rewards for generous and cooperative behaviors are universal, even if what counts as generous or cooperative varies across time and space. What is important here is that we can leverage this insight about cooperation as a fundamental moral act to better understand (a) what constitutes cooperative behavior across and between cultures, (b) how this motivation manifests itself, and (c) what happens when the motivation to cooperate comes into conflict with other motivations. In doing so, we start from a stronger empirical and epistemic perch as sociology moves forward in developing a more comprehensive theory of moral behavior.

4.1 The Phylogenetic Roots of Cooperation and Morality

Before reviewing evidence that children are moral creatures, we begin by asking: where does morality come from? Do our closest relatives, the great apes, demonstrate moral behaviors that could provide the foundations for human morality? To paraphrase famous primatologist Frans de Waal: the two pillars of morality are a sense of fairness and the capacity to empathize. To that end, humans share many qualities with their fellow apes. For instance, Brosnan et al. (2010) have demonstrated through experiments that chimps often do not tolerate inequity. In one study, some chimps occasionally rejected a grape (the preferred treat) when their buddy received a carrot instead. Chimps can discern buddies because they also reciprocate with those who have previously shared food with them. While they will share food with certain others, chimps do not live in cooperative communities, and these reciprocal relationships are tenuous at best, as chimps, like gorillas, live in communities forged from (moderate) dominance behaviors (Boehm, 2018). Nonetheless, they appear to have the capacity to calculate what is fair and unfair.

The other piece of morality is empathy. All mammals have mirror neurons, which are believed to be one of the key brain structures responsible for feeling and understanding the pain and suffering of those who belong to our group (Lents, 2016: 69ff.). Gorillas and, especially, chimps are both highly attuned to the faces and emotions of others, allowing them to determine who belongs to their community and who does not (de Waal, 2019). Moreover, research has shown that chimps act "to benefit the other without any direct anticipation or planning for any kind of payback" (Tomasello & Vaish, 2013, p. 236). In short, great apes are biologically wired to be reciprocal (with some members of their group) and to pay close attention to the affect of others and, consequently, have the foundations of a moral nature.

That said, apes differ from humans across a spectrum of ways that have implications for human morality (Tomasello, 2019: 5ff.). For one thing, experimental and naturalistic research confirms that humans act collectively with intention. The externalization of practices and beliefs in language and ritual is an intentional act of cooperatively remaking and representing the group. In contrast, chimps and gorillas do not seem to (a) intentionally form and pursue shared goals, (b) engage in a Meadian "conversation of gestures" in which both actors take each other's roles and mutually constitute a situation, and (c) willingly divide rewards equitably.

From an evolutionary perspective, cooperation makes a lot of sense. The human capacity for social and moral evaluation is rooted in systems that help us distinguish between friend and foe, which is required for the long-term functioning of cooperative systems (Hamlin, 2014). Moreover, helping kin, helping your group, reciprocity, sharing resources, and respecting some semblance of property all are adaptive cooperative traits that would have enhanced the survival of the groups whose members were more likely to display them (Curry et al., 2019). As humans evolved physiologically and neurologically, their societies grew

distinct, shedding organizational dominance in favor of a cooperative, mutually reinforcing set of adaptations: language, tool making and use, big game hunting, and kinship (Abrutyn & Turner, 2022).

Tomasello and Vaish (2013) identify six ubiquitous cooperative behavioral traits that appear to make up humans' moral nature, which might serve as a basis for thinking about children and adolescent attitudes and behavior. First, unlike other apes, food has long been procured collectively and cooperatively: from the big game hunting that simultaneously provided the necessary caloric bang that expanded our brains—which allowed us to communicate more complexly, control our emotions during a hunt, and coordinate more efficient hunting—to the first human settlements that owned property in common (Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Whether communal, private, or public, property is the second feature of morality. Regardless of the rules, their acknowledgement is universal and their respect is cooperative. In communal situations, the land is cooperatively farmed, while in private propertied societies, rules are designed to respect who can access property and requires coordinating behavior to respect these rules. Third, in ape societies, mothers provide 100% of the childcare, whereas in human societies, mothers rarely provide more than 50–60% (Hrdy, 2009). Rather, fathers participate in various child-rearing activities, as do grandparents and other extended family members, and, in modernity, daycares and schools are also involved intimately in childcare. Fourth, apes communicate to tell each other what to do, while humans communicate for a panoply of reasons, including disseminating information, transmitting knowledge, and pure sociality. Fifth, politics tend to shape power and authority instead of strength and intimidation. Whether one likes politics or not, it is a form of cooperative, relational domination that involves internalizing the rules of a game and maintaining ceremonial rituals. Sixth, habits become conventions, customs, norms, and laws, embedded in structural and cultural spheres that endure beyond the life of any given incumbent. Our capacity to simultaneously externalize society in external representations and internalize it in schema or scripts (or whatever cultural mechanisms one favors) is morality. The universal behaviors surrounding cooperation and more relative norms and rules become a collective, enduring endeavor.

Indeed, if there is a big takeaway point, it is that these six axes of cooperation are a good starting place for sociologists, especially those who take Tavory's (2011) suggestion for studying moral action seriously. Each one provides an opportunity to ask what actions define actors as a kind of socially recognized person, that this recognized self is trans-situational or more aligned with a person-identity, and that either doing the action or breaking the rule elicits predictable emotions for the actor and others. In particular, we see property and politics as excellent starting points for a marriage between disciplines, but we will save a more detailed discussion for the implications section below. For now, in combining the phylogenetic origins of morality with these uniquely human cooperative capacities, we can think about the social ontogeny of morality.

4.2 Moral Ontogeny

A significant body of research has focused on understanding infant and child moral behavior, suggesting that even pre-verbal infants prefer cooperative and pro-social behavior. For instance, research by Hamlin and Wynn (2011) found that five-month-old infants uniformly prefer individuals who display pro-social behaviors, even when that behavior is directed toward anti-social others. However, older children develop more sophisticated moral judgments, preferring those who display pro-social behaviors toward other pro-social others instead of those who display pro-social behaviors toward anti-social others. Put simply, older children learned to prefer those who were nice to other nice people and did not like those who were nice to mean people. These children already displayed a predisposition toward punishment and retribution.

Similarly, other research finds that infants as young as nine months old are able to distinguish between pro- and anti-social behaviors (Decety et al., 2021). And while they pay more attention to anti-social actors, they are more interested in interacting again with those that acted pro-socially with them (Jensen et al., 2014). Again, older children display more sophisticated judgments: their preferences for pro-social others have become contingent, to some degree, on the situation. By the time children are 9 to 14 months old, they will pick up objects that adults have dropped or ask to help when they perceive the adult as needing help (Decety et al., 2021). It is not surprising that, around this age, children begin to also purposefully engage in collaborative actions to form and realize joint goals (Warneken & Tomasello, 2009). By 13 months, they gain the ability to discern who belongs to their group and who does not. Hamlin (2013), for example, found that 9-to-14-month old infants display an in-group bias when judging others' behavior: not only did they prefer those who treated similar others well, but they also preferred those who treated dissimilar others poorly. Despite this preference for anti-social others when directed toward out-group members, these children's behaviors are cooperative without being prompted.

Children also prefer goal-directed behaviors. For example, other research by Hamlin et al. (2008) found that when behaviors appear to be goal-directed, infants are more likely to imitate them. These findings highlight children's agency in shaping their own socialization: they learn which behaviors are important (i.e., goal-directed ones) and focus on reproducing those. Indeed, infants will even attempt to engage partners when others are not necessary to achieve the goal, although they seem driven to cooperate with people they feel reciprocal relations with (Tomasello, 2019).

Moreover, children are oriented toward fairness. In terms of fairness, by 12–15 months, kids display a sense about what is fair regarding the distribution of resources, with a particular sensitivity toward norms that appears around the latter end of that time scale (McAuliffe et al., 2017). However, as infants become toddlers, the social world begins to shape the expression of their moral ontogeny. Most importantly, as Mead's developmental model predicts, as they shift from "playing" to games, the rules and norms external to their own ego become core to shaping the directionality and expression of their moral ontogeny. By three years old, for example, kids begin to enforce social norms (Rakoczy et al., 2008). It is clear that they are aware that these norms extend beyond themselves, as play with friends shifts from parallel to cooperative or competitive forms of interaction. Norms are usually standards that are believed to be shared by others, enforced through group opinion, and applied to everyone. Relevant to our discussion of contemporary sociological research on youth morality, It is important to note that an understanding of norms is *preceded* by the ability to express moral judgments about others (Engelmann & Tomasello, 2017) as well as discern between good and bad reasons for decisions, rules, and so forth (Köymen & Tomasello, 2020).

In short, the research above illustrates how children naturally display pro-social preferences and behaviors. Children also develop a sense of in-group/out-group even before they learn to speak; thus, from a very young age, they have a notion of whom to direct cooperative behavior. Finally, infants and young children already have a strong sense of fairness, empathy, and reciprocity (Decety et al., 2021). By the time that child is eligible for more formal educational socialization in preschool, they are wired to cooperate and be moral creatures without prompting or explicit cues.

5 Concluding Thoughts

As we conclude, we identify three major axes along which sociology can and should develop. The first is a set of concerns related to the socialization of morality. The second returns to Tomasello and Vainish's review of the literature on moral ontogeny in children and the emphasis on certain concepts, like property and politics, that are unique to human societies and, though often refracted through a lens of inequality and

conflict, also reflect a cooperative species. Finally, the question of moral judgment and decision-making, rooted both in ontogeny and social phenomena like politics, remains surprisingly beyond the interest of sociologists when, in fact, it is a cornerstone to understanding youth culture. We briefly examine each of these to point toward potential future research directions in sociology.

5.1 Socialization

Setting aside the problems with Parsons and structural-functionalism, socialization was and should be a central focus of sociology. As Corsaro's and Eder's respective works on child and adolescent culture underscore, socialization is not unidirectional. In fact, socialization *reflects cooperative efforts between adults and children*, on the one hand, and between peers on the other (Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Eder & Corsaro, 1999; Eder et al., 1995). Mead's theory of development forcefully supports this assertion, positing that society does not exist "out there," but rather exists only in the symbolic reality that makes cooperation at a level unseen in other species possible. Conflict, competition, status hierarchies, dominance, and even power are as relational as social solidarity built from shared joint-task responsibility or interaction rituals. Thereby, these behaviors rely just as much on language and cooperative efforts, even if we can take off our social scientific hat and argue, through a critical lens, about whether or not relationships are fair, equitable, and just. Thus, we agree with Guhin et al. (2021): socialization should return to the sociological lexicon because, without it, sociology has no real satisfying explanation for how and why human morality is amplified, extended, and transformed.

What we are suggesting, however, is building on classic research on adult–child socialization processes and youth peer cultures to ask more pointed questions about youth morality. We also think that taking informal processes seriously is just as important as focusing on schools. For instance, Wolf and Tomasello's (2020) work shows that humans are the only primate who bonds not just from reciprocal activities, like sharing meat, but through sharing *experiences* (see also, Woolley & Fishbach, 2017; Marsh et al., 2009). What is more cooperative (and therefore moral) than *play*? Even Mead recognized that the first steps into the larger world of self and mind required playing roles and, eventually, participating in games that signified one's commitment to the situation itself as much as to one's own success and pleasure. In addition to this suggestive path, we also see Pugh's (2009) and Britton's (2015) work as exemplars. They both start by asking and observing youth, rather than adults; they take the agentic capacities of children and teens seriously; and, implicitly or explicitly, recognize youth as morally accountable creatures. While we believe training our lens on cooperative efforts is central to the sociology of youth morality, efforts to understand the larger worlds of youth through proxies of or adjacent concepts to cooperation remain important as well. Finally, we see two areas related to socialization as key: (moral) education and moral emotions.

As to the former, many have made the case regarding the inextricable connection between morality and education in classical sociology (Abend, 2008; Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). And yet, as Baker's (2020) recent paper examining morality in the sociology of education, sociologists have largely ignored the cultivation of morality, its expression by youth, and how to study it. This is largely because "stratification remains central" to contemporary education scholarship, which reflects less the moral agency and accountability of its subjects and, instead, the deep moral "commitment to justice [and] sense that these inequalities are morally and politically wrong and it is academics' duty to understand these wrongs and address them" (Guhin, 2021, p. 912). And, when scholars do focus on schools and morality, it is often focused on either the norms around teen behavior (i.e., where these norms come from, the rates and consequences of deviation from them) or the cultivation of the types of values that square with sociologists' moral commitments (e.g., the fundamental value

of caring) (Horne & Mollborn, 2020; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Shweder, 2003). As such, we would push sociologists to expand their rather limited research questions to examine how schools facilitate and constrain the ontogenetic aspects of children's morality, the processes by which being moral agents are encouraged or constrained, and, especially, how peer culture comes to mobilize morality in relation to adult culture and vis-à-vis social differentiation within a school; especially in terms of adolescent schooling.

Much of this topic is related to the second area of socialization that sociology might move into: the socialization of moral emotions. We know humans are hardwired to feel empathy and pride, guilt, and shame (Tracy et al., 2007), but sociologists have largely ceded the study of how we learn to identify, label, and express *or suppress* these emotions (Eisenberg, 2000). For instance, we know guilt is a core moral emotion surrounding transgressing (socially constructed) norms and that it motivates actors to engage in the sorts of reparative rituals Goffman (1967: 19ff.) discussed. However, sociologists have largely ignored how we are socialized to feel guilt instead of shame (Scheff, 1997), whether guilt varies according to sex, race, class, or any number of key axes of stratification, and how much of this variation is due to adult versus peer socialization. Like Ridgeway's (2006) status beliefs theory, some traditions have begun to do some of the necessary work on this front, but it is nearly always focused on either adults or college-aged populations. Consequently, sociologists have very little understanding of how parents, schools, peers, and media shape the feeling and framing rules children and adolescents internalize surrounding moral emotions.

The very moral and political commitments sociologists make to fighting inequality might benefit from understanding what makes youth cooperative and affectually bond with youth who do not look the same, come from the same background, have the same tastes, interests, or preferences, and so forth. Affect is at the core of interpersonal bonding and broader collective cohesion, hence the stakes for studying moral emotions cannot be overstated.

5.2 Property and Politics

As is the case with socialization and education, the study of youth in relation to other areas of uniquely human cooperation, like property and politics, remains centered on stratification and power. In terms of property, this is understandable as private property and the rules, sanctions, and enforcement agents surrounding property rest at the core of a Marxian view of inequality both in theory and empirically, even among children (Stockstill, 2021). Can we imagine both a sociology of morality that can study preschoolers' capacity to follow rules surrounding property *and* a sociology of morality that stays true to its moral and political commitments to reveal injustice and inequities wherever they may lie? We see these projects as not mutually opposed. In fact, these projects can explain how and why different rules shape different patterns of cooperation and, also, the limits to either pole of property relations (communal/libertarian). In pursuing these projects, sociologists could offer schools and communities empirically grounded policy suggestions for doing the work necessary to reduce the physiological, psychological, and social effects of inequality among youth.

When we turn to politics, we see two obstacles. The first is the tendency to focus on either the asymmetrical power-differential between adults and youth (Guhin et al., 2021) or the effort of children to cultivate their own power over adults (Lignier, 2021). That is, the dark side of politics, power, and control, overshadow the fact that politics involves cooperative maneuvering rooted in relationships. The second tendency emerges from the first: forgetting that adult–youth culture and peer culture are political. Status hierarchies are not immutable. Whether adults like it or not, socialization is not mutually constitutive, and all collectives and situations within them are characterized by micropolitics and place-making (Clark, 1990). We know very little about how this works even though sociologists

are perhaps the best equipped to study this! Generally speaking, the study of child development in psychology relies on either parent reports (Eisenberg, 2000) or experiments (Tomasello & Vaish, 2013), whereas some of these processes demand ethnographic observation and interviews with youth; methods squarely in the wheelhouse of sociologists!

5.3 Moral Judgment and Decision-Making

Finally, we suggest sociologists take moral judgment, reasoning, and decision-making seriously; a pursuit which may feel increasingly out of reach given the popularity of dual-process models in cultural sociology—the more vibrant subfield currently studying social action—that have come to emphasize the deeply engrained aspects of cognitive schema as opposed to their elasticity, flexibility, and/or acquisition and modification (Vaisey, 2009; cf. Brett, 2022). Not only do these areas present essential questions about the relationship between beliefs and practices, but examining these areas is perhaps the most useful way to bring adolescents into the larger constellation of youth morality. That is, by age 13, moral reasoning is characterized by concerns about others' social expectations and, over the course of adolescence, concerns shift toward the generalized other, so to speak, as rules, laws, and authority come into focus (Kohlberg, 1969). The promise of studying adolescents derives from two interrelated points (Morris et al., 2011). First, the vast majority of developmental research focuses on negative behaviors, like aggression or, as delineated above, norms regarding sex. Second, a relative dearth of research on adolescent pro-social behavior (e.g., see Mortimer, 2012)—including eminently sociological interests like the moral emotions and moral identity of teens' inclinations toward cooperation—offers a major set of opportunities.

Here, once again, the return of socialization is welcomed. Past developmental research has demonstrated that parental morality predicts teen morality, particularly in families high in cohesion, adaptability, and communication (White & Matawie, 2004). Differences in volunteering behavior, for example, are shaped by parents' behavior and their attitudes toward the civic sphere, but importantly, best friends matter as much, if not more so (Van Goethem et al., 2014). Because of the ethical challenges presented by neuroscientific research that would expose youth to simulated trauma (Pfeifer & Blakemore, 2012), sociologists seem well situated to ask questions and observe how attitudes and behaviors associated with volunteering—among other pro-social behavior—are in fact shaped by parents and other adults, as well as how peer groups and networks facilitate and constrain cooperative behavior in ways similar to more risky behavior like smoking or risky driving. This is particularly important as pro-social behavior has been associated with academic, socioemotional, and sociocognitive outcomes (Morris et al., 2011).

Ultimately, sociology seems well-positioned to tease out the ontogenetic aspects of adolescent moral development from the environmental forces, as research has revealed that there are few gender differences in reasoning (both male and female equally reason based on care *and* justice), but there is some evidence girls are more pro-social in adolescence. As is the case with children, we believe the neglect of pro-sociality among all youth in the scant research of youth morality is a blind spot with real consequences. For instance, a much larger and more complex debate surrounding the use of social media, which does echo previous debates about traditional media, extends into morality, with some research finding a decline in adolescent morality correlated with television and internet usage (Fitzpatrick & Boers, 2021). Perhaps youth morality is weakened by the barriers to "normal" neural processing digitally mediated forms of interaction produce (Dickerson et al., 2017), and/or the feeling expressed by many people that these interactions are hollow and difficult to embrace (Tufekci & Brashears, 2014). After all, Collins (2004) argued two decades ago that the fundamental basis of moral solidarity—mutual arousal via co-presence and rhythmic bodily synchronization—is virtually impossible in virtual space. And yet, the ubiquity of social

media use among youth remains an untapped frontier in sociological research. Just like research on the development of youth moral identity or the study of how youth moral emotions are encouraged or not based on various demographic and environmental factors, research on young people's use of social media appears to be a high reward, low risk territory to develop.

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Aging and Morality

Deborah Carr and Elinore Avni

Abstract

The sociological examination of morality has been reinvigorated in recent years, yet surprisingly little sociological attention has focused on the moral questions raised by population aging. Population aging, or the growth in the number of persons aged 65 and older in the United States and worldwide, has intensified scholarly and policy debates that are moral at their core—including questions regarding suffering, care ethics, distributive justice, and self-determination at the end of life. We describe key trends in population aging in the United States and worldwide, and show how these demographic shifts have created ethical challenges for social institutions including families, governments, and health care systems. We then focus on four contemporary challenges in rapidly aging societies, highlighting the moral questions they pose: the long-term care crisis; public income supports for older adults; decisions regarding the provision of ethical and effective medical care; and physician-assisted suicide. We identify the moral frameworks that can be used to understand these challenges, and highlight the implications of ethical debates for policy and practice. We conclude by underscoring vast and persistent socioeconomic and race disparities in the quality of life and death experienced by older adults, and the moral implications of these disparities.

Keywords

Aging · End of life · Long-term care · Medical aid-in-dying · Social policy

1 Introduction

The sociological examination of morality has been reinvigorated in recent years, addressing questions about the "shoulds" and "should nots" of human activity (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010). The scope of sociological theory and research that explicitly or implicitly addresses concerns of morality is broad, encompassing questions about crime and punishment, the distribution of public goods, political behavior, the sociocultural and structural forces that shape conceptions of morality, and more. Surprisingly little sociological attention has focused on the moral questions raised by population aging, however. Population aging, or the growth in the number of persons aged 65 and older in the United States and worldwide, has intensified scholarly and policy debates that are moral at their core. Who should provide

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care for the large and growing population of older adults? What role can and should public policies play in upholding a reasonable standard of living for older adults who are no longer working for pay? Who should make decisions regarding costly end-of-life medical care for the rising numbers of older adults who lack decision-making capacities? Under what conditions should dying older adults have the legal right to end their own life through physician-assisted suicide?

In this chapter, we provide an overview of key trends in population aging in the United States and worldwide, and show how these demographic shifts have created new moral and ethical challenges for social institutions including families, governments, and health care systems. We then focus on four contemporary challenges in rapidly aging societies, highlighting the moral questions they pose: the long-term care crisis; public income supports for older adults; decisions regarding the provision of ethical and effective medical care; and physician-assisted suicide. We suggest moral frameworks that can be used to understand these challenges, and highlight the implications of ethical debates for policy and practice.

2 Population Aging and Its Consequences in Contemporary Society

The U.S. population is older than ever before; in 2020, adults aged 65 and older accounted for 17% of the total population. One in five Americans will be aged 65+ by 2030, and one in four will have reached old age by 2060. These trends are not limited to the United States. By 2050, a projected 16% of the global population and 25% of persons in North America and Europe will be over the age of 65. In 2018, for the first time in history, persons aged 65 and older outnumbered children under five years of age globally. The oldest-old population will increase at an especially steep rate. The number of U.S. adults aged 85+ is projected to triple from 6.7 million in 2020 to 20 million by 2060, while the number of centenarians is projected to quadruple from 72,000 to over 300,000 (Mather & Kilduff, 2020). Similar patterns are anticipated on a global scale; the number of persons aged 80+ worldwide is expected to triple, from 143 million in 2019 to 426 million in 2050 (United Nations, 2019).[1]

Population aging and extreme longevity have been driven by historical changes in the age at which and causes from which people die. These changes have created unprecedented ethical questions regarding suffering, care ethics, distributive justice, and self-determination at the end of life. Prior to the early twentieth century, most U.S. deaths struck quickly after one became ill, typically from infectious diseases like diphtheria and pneumonia (Omran, 1971). Infant and child mortality rates were high, with 20% of infants dying before the age of 5 years in the early 1900s (Preston & Haines, 1985). Technological and medical advances throughout the twentieth century led to major improvements in infant and child survival, such that people started to survive until midlife and old age in vastly larger numbers (Olshansky & Ault, 1986). Infectious diseases diminished as a share of all deaths, and were replaced by chronic illnesses that struck at older ages. Chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease typically have a long duration between illness diagnosis and death. These epidemiologic changes transformed death from an unexpected and swift event that could occur at any age, to an expected and protracted process in later life.

Three-quarters of U.S. deaths today strike adults aged 65 and older, with two-thirds of these deaths attributed to chronic illnesses. Heart disease, cancer, stroke, liver disease, and dementia consistently rank among the leading causes of death among older adults, with COVID-19 breaking into the top three in 2020 (Woolf et al., 2020).

[1] The impact of COVID-19 on future population aging trends is unclear. Although older adults accounted for roughly 80% of the more than one million COVID-19 deaths in the United States as of October 2022, reducing the size of the aged 65+ population, concomitant declines in birth rates reduced the share of infants in the overall population. Projections regarding population growth via net migration are uncertain, typically among working-age and young people, yet these trends also would bear on the total share of the population ages 65+ (CBO, 2022).

The former five conditions are chronic or long-term illnesses, so the period between disease onset and death may last for weeks, months, or even years, raising difficult questions about the competing values of sustaining life versus curtailing human suffering. The end-of-life period typically is marked by spells of pain, breathing difficulties, emotional distress, fear of being a burden, diminishing cognitive capacities, and a high need for personal care (Warraich, 2017). Persons with long-term chronic illness also face complex decisions regarding the medical treatments that they wish to receive or reject. These decisions can be fraught when the dying patient engages family members or caregivers in the process, especially when they disagree about an appropriate course of treatment (Carr & Luth, 2019).

End-of-life medical care is costly, with a large share of these expenditures borne by publicly funded programs like Medicare and Medicaid in the United States, raising ethical debates regarding the allocation of public funds (French et al., 2021; Livne, 2019). An extreme consequence of protracted disease and suffering is that some dying patients may take steps to end their life, with the assistance of a physician. As such, legislators, voters, and care providers are embroiled in intense debates regarding the morality of physician-assisted suicide or "medical aid in dying" (Emanuel & Emanuel, 1998).

Population aging does not refer solely to absolute numbers of older adults, but also their relative share of the total population. Policy makers may rely on an indicator called the old-age dependency ratio, which is the number of persons aged 65+ relative to the working-age population aged 15–64. These ratios provide an indirect (albeit imperfect) indicator of the potential support available for older adults. Among the most pressing policy challenges for the twenty-first century is ensuring adequate financial support for older adults' publicly funded pensions and health care (i.e., Social Security and Medicare in the United States), and addressing the dire shortage of both family and paid caregivers. Older adults with significant physical and cognitive limitations that undermine their daily functioning are dependent on unpaid family or paid professional caregivers. Solutions are predicated, in part, on the availability of working-age persons, whether as direct caregivers or as taxpayers contributing to the public safety net (Osterman, 2017). In 2020, the old-age dependency ratio reached an all-time high of 25.6 in the United States and a remarkable 48 in Japan in 2020, suggesting a considerable burden for care and financial support (Carr, 2023). Imbalanced old-age dependency ratios raise important questions regarding distributive justice and the ethics of care for the rapidly aging population.

3 Contemporary Moral Debates in Aging Societies

We summarize four societal challenges that emerge from population aging, describe the sources of and potential solutions to these challenges, and show how each such challenge is moral at its core. We also highlight moral frameworks that can be used to help understand competing views of each such challenge.

3.1 The Long-Term Care Crisis

The United States has an insufficient number of working-age adults to provide informal care to their aging kin, and the shortage of family caregivers is projected to escalate in the coming decades. AARP projects that the ratio of potential family caregivers to care recipients in the United States will plummet from 7 to 1 today, to just 3 to 1 by 2030. An estimated one in four members of the large Baby Boom cohort born between 1946 and 1964 is projected to become an "elder orphan" or "solo ager" without a spouse, child, or other family member to be their primary caregiver in old age (Carney et al., 2016). Although some older adults have the means to pay a home health aide or visiting nurse, this option may be out of reach for those with limited financial resources, especially given Medicare's limited coverage of home-based services (Carr, 2019).

Paid caregivers also are in short supply, a crisis that was exacerbated by COVID-19. The pandemic left many care workers exhausted, demoralized, and anxious to find other jobs. In 2020, about 4.6 million Americans were employed as direct care workers, including home health aides, nursing assistants, and personal care workers both in private homes and at long-term care facilities. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), home health aides and personal care workers top the list of occupations expected to grow over the next decade, with more than one million new job openings projected by 2029. Yet this statistic is a dramatic underestimate as it counts only those caregivers hired by companies; if the estimate also includes caregivers hired directly by families and patients, more than seven million workers are needed by 2026 (Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, 2021). Despite this desperate need for care workers in the United States, the pay is dismal—just $27,000 per year or about $13.50 per hour. Immigrant, Black, and Latinx women make up the majority of care workers, and about 15% live in poverty (Osterman, 2017). Given widespread racism, sexism, and xenophobia, these workers have little bargaining power to better their working conditions (Banerjee et al., 2021). Immigrant women providing paid care in the United States often leave behind family members in their home country, in need of care themselves (Kittay, 2009; Örtenblad, 2020).

The long-term care crisis raises important questions about who bears responsibility for older adults' care. The direct provision of and financial support for older adults' long-term care varies throughout the world, with most analyses contrasting welfare state regimes, such as those reliant on private markets versus regulated institutions. In the United States, long-term care is partly funded by public dollars, with the largest share (62%) covered by Medicaid, the federal and state health program for low-income individuals. Older adults with limited income and those who have "spent down" their savings are typically eligible for Medicaid. Elder care also is financed privately, with about 25% of costs covered through out-of-pocket payments by older adults and their families, some of whom have purchased pricy long-term care insurance. In stark contrast, the costs of long-term care in Denmark are almost wholly paid for by the government. Denmark is classified as a Social Democratic regime, with a high degree of decommodification and defamilization, meaning that public programs emphasize reliance on the government and public supports rather than on family and private supports (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

However, a nation's history as part of a "cultural zone" also may influence care systems, independent of economic or political factors (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Sociologists of morality could identify the cultural and ethical contexts that shape elder care provision, especially in rapidly aging societies. For example, cross-cultural examinations of public attitudes regarding "who should provide care to older adults" can shed light on the particular care ethic to which a society abides and can provide a roadmap for gauging the political and popular feasibility of social policy alternatives. Such inquiries could also shed light on cross-national differences in the concept of "moral background," in which decisions are based on a weighing of economic costs versus ethical concerns (Abend, 2014).

Fig. 1 shows the proportion of adults in China, Denmark, and the United States who believe that older adults' care should be supported primarily by the government, private for-profit organizations, non-profit/religious organizations, or family/friends (Avni, 2023). These three nations differ markedly in their views, with each prioritizing a different source of care. The overwhelming majority in Denmark (88%) believe the government should support older adults' care, whereas most Chinese adults (67%) believe this responsibility should be met by families. Just 2% of Danes believe it is the family's responsibility to provide elder care, whereas less than one-third of Chinese adults say the government should support such care. U.S. adults show less agreement, with just over half endorsing the government, a quarter believing that families should bear primary responsibility and equal minorities (8% each), assigning responsibility to private corporations and non-profit/religious

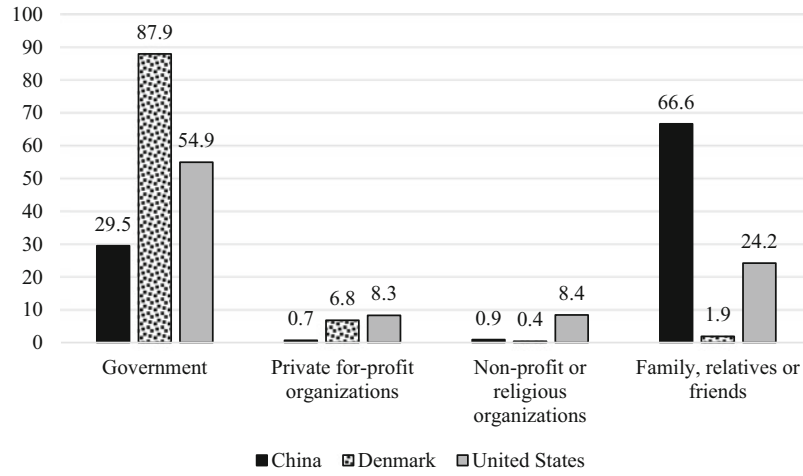


Fig. 1 Frequency Distribution of Responses to Question "Who Should Provide Care for Older People?" by Nation (The International Social Survey Programme, 2012). Source: Avni (2023)

organizations. These patterns reflect the political economies of each nation, and they also reveal prevailing ethos guiding care.

In China, where Confucianist beliefs prevail, the ethical principle of filial piety "commands lifelong parental reverence." The cultural dictate to "honor one's parents" underlies a range of behaviors including the provision of their care (Selig et al., 1991). By contrast, the bifurcated preferences revealed in the United States—favoring both the government and families as the primary supports for older adults—may reflect the ethic of reciprocity, such that adult children should provide for the aged parents who cared for them when they were young (Brodie et al., 2015). The ethic of reciprocity also applies to the government; U.S. adults strongly endorse attitudinal statements like "Social Security and Medicare are an earned right," recognizing that most tax-paying older adults have contributed to the public safety net throughout their working lives and thus are entitled to publicly supported care (Silverstein & Parrott, 1997). In Denmark, the Nordic model emphasizes that the public sector should provide its citizens with welfare services and a social safety net. This model has been linked to cultural support for a Christian-humanist moral repertoire, which emphasizes altruism (i.e., being "a good Samaritan") and a social responsibility repertoire, which elevates the values of equality, solidarity, and responsibility for one's fellow citizens (Skarpenes, 2021). Explorations of the complex interplay between moral values and social policies regarding elder care will becoming increasingly important in the coming decades, as the financial demands posed by large aging populations increase, potentially threatening family members' and citizens' capacity to uphold idealized values like filial piety and altruism.

3.2 Public Income Supports for Older Adults

Population aging means that rising numbers of older adults, most of whom are retired and not working for pay, will rely partly or wholly on public pension programs like Social Security for their economic security (Carr, 2019). Social Security is a social insurance program established in 1935 that provides monthly payments for nearly all U.S. older adults. Women, ethnic and racial minorities, and lower-income persons rely almost exclusively on Social Security for their income, whereas more economically advantaged populations supplement their monthly Social Security payments with private pensions, interest income, and other sources. Thanks to the expansion of the Social Security program in the 1970s, old-age poverty rates have dropped dramatically in the United States. While one in three older adults lived beneath the federal poverty line in the mid-twentieth century, this rate plummeted

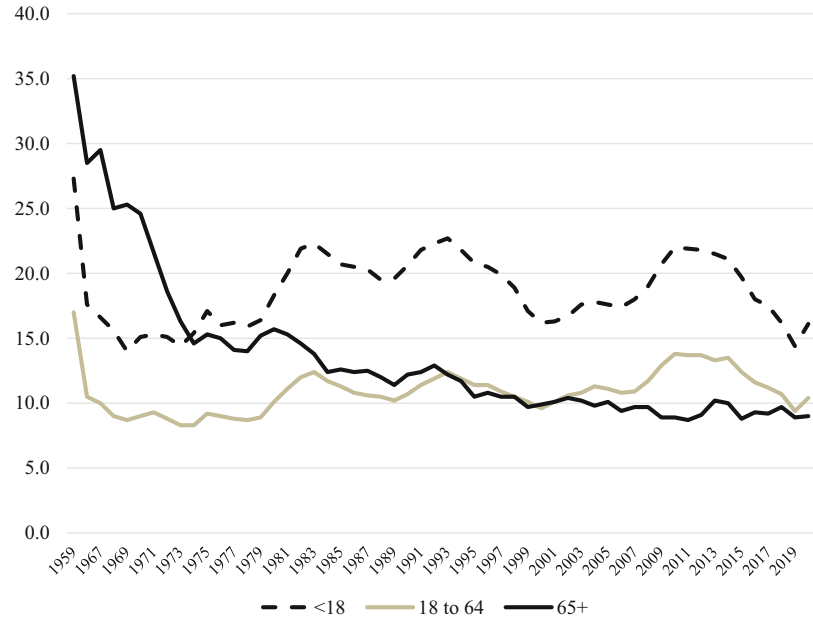


Fig. 2 Poverty Rates in the United States by Age, 1959–2020. Source: Creamer et al., (2022) and U.S. Census Bureau (2019)

and has wavered around 10% since 1990, as shown in Fig. 2.[2] In stark contrast, the proportion of children under the age of 18 in poverty increased during since the 1970s, wavering around 20% for much of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

This turn-around, whereby childhood poverty rates are substantially higher than old-age poverty rates, has sparked debates about public investments in social programs that benefit older adults relative to youth (Preston, 1984). Advocates for "generational equity" argue that per-capita spending on older adults is roughly twice that of comparable spending on youth in the United States (Isaacs, 2009) and that public supports for older adults necessarily transfer funds away from children and youth (Preston, 1984). These concerns are further exacerbated by compositional differences between older and younger populations in the United States today, such that younger populations include significantly higher shares of racial and ethnic minorities who are vulnerable to systemic racism and economic disadvantage (Pew Research Center, 2018). Public discourse regarding generational equity often is counter-productive; however, maligning retirees as "greedy geezers" who are hoarding financial resources that could otherwise be directed to struggling children and youth (McConatha et al., 2003).

Debates regarding generational equity raise important and pressing questions. Should all older adults—even financially well-off persons—receive Social Security benefits, or should the program be means-tested such that only economically insecure persons receive benefits? What share of public funds should be dedicated to programs supporting younger versus older persons, given that both are considered economically dependent on working-age persons? These debates are more than just fiscal matters, they are informed by ethical concerns and reveal underlying disagreements regarding the core principles of distributive justice. Distributive justice models are concerned with the fair and ethical allocation of resources among members of a society or community (Irwin, 1996). Fair allocation typically takes into account the total amount of resources to be distributed, the logics behind that allocation, and the resource distribution that results. Because

[2] The average monthly Social Security benefit in 2022 was about $1650.

resources are limited in most societies, establishing what is a "fair" distribution of benefits is a complex charge (Armstrong, 2012).

Theories of distributive justice emphasize five guiding principles which may be at odds with one another and may lead to different policy recommendations as rapidly aging nations face the dual challenges of providing income security to rising numbers of older adults, while also ensuring a sufficient material quality of life for younger persons. These principles are: *equality,* where all members of a society should receive an equal share of costs and rewards; *equity,* where one's inputs would be proportional to their benefits; *power,* such that those with more authority, status, or control should receive more than those with less power; *need,* where resources are allocated most generously to those with greatest needs; and *responsibility*, where those who have the most resources are responsible for providing for those who have less (Forsyth, 2006). Recognizing the high costs of Social Security benefits, especially as the large cohort of Baby Boomers approaches their retirement years, potential policy solutions include increasing the minimum benefit received by low-income older adults yet limiting increases in benefits for retirees with richer resources (e.g., Herd et al., 2018). Prioritizing need among older adults could potentially free up funds to invest more heavily in young people with high levels of economic need. Sociologists of morality have the capacity to offer creative insights into policy agenda setting worldwide, underscoring the role of ethical principles in guiding fair and just distribution of public resources.

3.3 End-of-Life Medical Decision-Making

Decisions regarding end-of-life medical care, especially in the case of older adults with chronic illness, focus on what sociologist Roi Livne (2019) refers to as the "three quandaries of death." Dying patients, their families, and health care providers must decide: (1) how far to go in prolonging life, (2) how much to spend to achieve this goal, and (3) who precisely should make these decisions. For instance, dying patients and their families often must choose between hospice care versus curative care. Hospice is designed to provide comfort and relief to people with a life-limiting illness who have decided to stop curative treatments. Curative treatments, by contrast, focus on curing one's underlying condition, with the goal of extending one's life span. Yet many treatments that may extend one's life span, most notably the use of feeding tubes, are considered "futile" because they provide no reasonable hope of a cure or benefit (Carr & Luth, 2019).[3] Decisions regarding palliative versus curative care are guided largely by values regarding life extension versus the reduction of suffering, yet they also are guided by concerns regarding cost. Medical expenditures for care in the last year of life are exorbitant, accounting for an estimated 25% of all annual Medicare expenditures and 8.5% of total annual U.S. health expenditures (French et al., 2021). Hospitalizations, including intensive care unit (ICU) services, account for the bulk of these expenditures. Foregoing curative care for hospice care can save between 25 and 40% of health care costs during the last month of life (Emanuel, 1996).

In the United States and most wealthy nations, end-of-life decision-making is considered the domain of patients, often with the consultation of their family members and health care providers. The Patient Self-Determination Act (PSDA), enacted by Congress in 1990, requires that all federally funded health-care facilities provide patients the opportunity to execute an advance directive. An advance directive is designed to ensure that a patient's treatment preferences are met at the end of life; it comprises a living will and a durable power of attorney for health care (DPAHC) designation. A living will articulates the specific treatments an individual would want or reject at the end of life, such as

[3] Some scholars have argued that the use of feeding tubes is driven by "moral" rather than health-related concerns. Providing artificial nutrition and hydration, while not necessarily helpful, is viewed by families as a way to provide care and love through feeding (Gillick & Volandes, 2008).

ventilators or feeding tubes. A DPAHC legally designates an individual (also referred to as a surrogate) to make decisions on behalf of the patient should they become incapacitated (Carr & Luth, 2017). Additionally, as part of the Affordable Care Act in 2016, Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (MCS) began reimbursing physicians for discussing end-of-life treatment preferences with Medicare patients at their wellness visits, in an effort to promote patient autonomy. Despite these policy interventions, slightly less than half of older adults in 2020 had an advance directive and only a small fraction of all Medicare patients discussed end-of-life planning with health care providers at their annual wellness visit (Palmer et al., 2021).

The end-of-life context is fraught with moral questions including the value of providing life-prolonging care that is neither cost-effective nor health-enhancing; and the ethics of entrusting a patient with a major health decision when they lack decision-making capacity or delegating this decision to a surrogate whose preferences may diverge from what the patient and other family members desire. Research on end-of-life decision-making often foregrounds legal, economic, or family-level influences, yet this literature would be enhanced with explicit attention to moral concerns (Moorman, 2020). Both social policies and popular understanding of end-of-life decision-making engage the moral concept of "death with dignity," or the belief that a dying person should have a say in where, when, and how death occurs (Allmark, 2002). The ethical principles of autonomy or self-determination, as well as the principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence are especially useful in understanding end-of-life care (Akdeniz et al., 2021).

Autonomy refers to a patient's right to self-determination; the use of advance directives, in theory, is a mechanism for promoting patient autonomy (or delegated decision-making) at the end-of-life. However, the limits of advance directives are well-documented, and even patients who articulate their preferences may not be fully informed about treatment options, the likely course of symptoms, and their prognosis for survival (Carr & Luth, 2019). Beneficence requires physicians to defend and use the most effective intervention for each patient, whereas nonmaleficence emphasizes refraining from causing unnecessary harm. However, health care providers do not necessarily agree on the "best" care option, especially in the case of terminal illness. For example, doctors' attitudes vary widely as to whether they are willing to provide care that is considered "futile," and there often is not consensus as to what constitutes the least harmful or most effective course of treatment (Carr & Luth, 2019). Identifying the contextual and institutional factors that pose obstacles to the ethical delivery of end-of-life care is a critical goal. Sociological studies of morality in health care settings may be instructive for enhancing patient autonomy and health care provider beneficence at the end of life.[4]

3.4 Physician-Assisted Suicide

Physician-assisted suicide (PAS), also referred to as medical aid-in dying and passive euthanasia, occurs when "a physician facilitates a patient's death by providing the necessary means and/or information to enable the patient to perform the life-ending act" (AMA, 2012, p. 8). Debates about the morality of PAS have persisted for more than a century in the United States. In the early 1900s, advocates argued for legalizing euthanasia, invoking practical rather than religious or moral arguments. Debates were reignited in the 1980s when Michigan pathologist Jack Kevorkian provided dying patients the means to self-administer lethal medications. In 1997, Oregon became the first U.S. state to enact the Death with Dignity Act. This Act allows terminally ill individuals to end their lives through the voluntary self-administration of lethal medications, prescribed by a physician for that purpose. To be deemed eligible for PAS, patients

[4] Such approaches should target domain-specific autonomy pertaining to health and medical care, rather than general trait-like autonomy. Prior studies of trait-like "personal mastery" find that it is not a significant predictor of advance care planning (Inoue, 2016).

must have an irreversible terminal illness, be of sound mind, voluntarily and repeatedly express their desire to end their life, and must take the specified legal dose by their own hand. As of October 2022, nine U.S. states (California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington) and the District of Columbia legalized PAS through legislation, and Montana legalized PAS via court ruling (Picón-Jaimes et al., 2022).

Debates will intensify in the coming years, especially as rising numbers of older adults suffer for protracted periods of time from chronic illness. This prolongation of life, despite its diminished quality, is particularly the case for Alzheimer's and related dementias (ADRD). Persons with Alzheimer's disease live between three and 11 years after diagnosis, on average, but some survive 20 years or more (Alzheimer's Association, 2020). These years, especially the later stages of disease progression, are marked by extreme memory loss, inability to communicate coherently, a complete dependence on caregivers for personal care, and steep declines in physical abilities. Persons with advanced dementia may become unable to walk, sit, or hold up their head without assistance. Muscles become rigid, and patients lose their capacity to swallow and control bladder and bowel functions. Most older adults do not want to live with this level of debilitation; surveys of U.S. adults' preferences for accepting or rejecting life-extending treatments show a stronger desire for rejecting life-extending treatments in the case of severe cognitive impairment compared to severe physical pain (Carr & Moorman, 2009). Dying patients also do not want to be a burden on their caregivers, recognizing that caregivers are at an elevated risk of depression, anxiety, physical health problems, and even hastened mortality (Richardson et al., 2013). Feelings of burdensomeness are associated with depression, anxiety, and a reduced sense of meaning in life among terminally ill older adults (Van Orden et al., 2012).

National opinion polls find strong support for PAS, with 72% of U.S. adults agreeing that doctors should be legally allowed, at the patient's and family's request, to end a terminally ill patient's life using painless means (Brenan, 2018). However, medical, religious, and political opponents invoke "slippery slope" arguments, cautioning that increased availability of PAS could lead practitioners and health insurance providers to exert subtle pressure on vulnerable individuals to use this option, especially for oldest-old persons who are believed to have few remaining years of life, even in the absence of serious illness (Meier, 2010).

Debates regarding the morality of PAS are informed by suffering-focused ethics, a framework that gives moral priority to the reduction of pain, distress, and hardship. Suffering-focused perspectives encompass diverse positions, some of which can be used to support PAS on ethical grounds, and others used to oppose it (Mayerfeld, 2002). Negative consequentialism, which asserts that reducing suffering improves the human condition, is a moral claim underlying support for PAS (Sulmasy et al., 2016). Ponderate views counter that the reduction of suffering is more important than other values, yet other aggregated values are more important than the reduction of a certain amount of suffering. These other values might include the preservation of life at any costs, on the grounds that taking a life or hastening death is inherently immoral; thus, PAS would weaken the sanctity of life (Brock, 1985). Ideological and political battles regarding PAS will persist in the coming decades, as other states consider legislation to legalize PAS. Sociologists of morality can play a critical role in identifying political, cultural, and economic factors that influence public knowledge and perceptions, media framing, and both popular and institutional support of PAS.

4 Conclusion

The unprecedented increase in the number of older adults in the United States and worldwide has created new challenges for health care systems, governments, families, and the individuals who may live longer than ever anticipated. Population aging is linked with a

range of social challenges, most notably the long-term care crisis, the availability of adequate public income supports for older adults' decisions regarding the provision of ethical and effective medical care at the end-of-life, and debates regarding physician-assisted suicide. We have described these challenges, and underscored how each challenge—while typically studied as a policy or practice issue—is deeply moral at its core. Moral concerns regarding the fair and equitable distribution of public resources, suffering, the value of human life, the appropriateness of particular care ethics, and the practical limits of self-determination are particularly important against a backdrop of population aging, increased longevity, and the widespread availability of high-tech treatments that extend the length although not the quality of human life.

The sociological study of morality has high potential for shedding new insights into the ethical challenges associated with population aging, and can provide deep understanding into the complex ways that values intersect with policy agendas to affect the well-being of older adults and their families. We encourage such a research agenda to directly address the moral concerns raised by vastly disparate experiences among older adults. Older adults whose lives have been marked by economic disadvantage and racial oppression have higher rates of late-life poverty, food insecurity, residence in substandard housing, disease and disability, premature mortality, lower rates of hospice and palliative care use, less autonomy in end-of-life decision-making, lower rates of advance directive use, and a greater reliance on unpaid family caregivers who themselves are vulnerable to physical and emotional distress (Carr, 2019). Understanding these disparities, which will continue to grow alongside population aging and rising economic inequality, will require scholarly attention to the moral principles of justice, and how policies can be designed so that the least advantaged members of society enjoy a suitable standard of living in old age.

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Part V

Moral Decision-Making, Mobilization, and Helping Behavior

The Moral Identity in Sociology

Jan E. Stets

Abstract

I examine theory and research on the moral identity in sociology as we understand it today. I briefly review what we knew about the moral identity a dozen years ago but then discuss how we have made inroads in better interrogating this concept theoretically and empirically. For example, we have learned more about the conditions under which the moral identity is activated, the meanings that are contained in the moral identity standard, how we can better understand the moral identity as a perceptual control process that internally goes on within the individual, and the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional responses to nonverification of the moral identity. Avenues for future research on the moral identity are discussed.

Keywords

Moral identity · Moral identity activation · Moral meanings · Identity theory · Perceptual control · Verification

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1 Introduction

The study of morality at the micro-level often has focused on moral judgments, particularly in psychology. Since moral judgments are linked to moral action, by the 2000s, a debate emerged in psychology as to whether moral judgments were rooted in moral reasoning or moral intuition (Stets, 2015a). Were people making moral decisions based on a deliberative, rule-based cognitive process in which information was gathered and analyzed, and an evaluation was made following certain moral principles? Or were moral decisions being made rather automatically, without conscious awareness, and accompanied by an emotional response of a "gut feeling"? While the former, rationalist view predominated moral psychology for years, the latter, and more recent, intuitionist view has become popular.

Irrespective of the debate, morality at the micro-level is not simply about moral evaluations, but it also is about the moral self, or how individuals see themselves in moral terms, that is, their moral identity. Indeed, over time, psychologists were recognizing that there was only a modest relationship between, for example, moral reasoning and moral behavior and that what was being left out of the relationship was the moral individual: the moral identity (Blasi, 1980, 1984). When I wrote about the moral identity a dozen years ago in Hitlin and Vaisey's 2010 *Handbook of the Sociology of Morality* (Stets, 2010), I was introducing a concept in sociology

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that already was being examined in psychology. Thus, sociologists were a bit behind psychologists in their conceptualization and empirical study.

My 2010 article dealt mostly with conceptualizing how we might frame the moral identity using identity theory. I argued that identity theory could advance our understanding of the moral identity. For example, in identity theory, it is assumed that the self is complex yet organized, reflecting the dictum that the self reflects society (Stryker, [1980] 2002). This is rooted in James' (1890) notion that there are as many different "selves" as there are different social positions persons hold, and thus different groups who respond to them. Given this, individuals have multiple "selves," or as we now understand multiple identities, with the moral identity as one among many that individuals might claim.

The many identities that people have are rooted in different bases of identities including *person*, *role*, *group*, and *categorical* identities. Person identities are meanings that distinguish the individual as different from others in society. The moral identity is a person identity, separating individuals from others based on the meanings that comprise their moral self (Stets, 2010, 2015b; Stets & Carter, 2011). Role identities are the meanings tied to playing out roles that are tied to social positions, such as friend and spouse; group identities are the meanings associated with interacting with a specific set of others, participating in the group's activities, and contributing to the group's goals, such as a softball team; and categorical identities are the meanings related to membership in social categories, such as one's gender or class (Burke & Stets, 2022). Thus, a person might see herself as a caring person (moral person identity), a supportive parent (parent role identity), a loyal parishioner (parishioner group identity), and a prideful black (racial categorical identity).

When a person is viewed as having multiple identities, it can lead to the mistaken assumption that the person is fractured or split into different "parts" with no coherence. On the contrary, as I discussed in my earlier writing on the moral identity (Stets, 2010), multiple identities are organized within individuals in a hierarchical system of perceptual control with the meanings of person identities such as the moral identity higher in the hierarchy of control influencing the meanings of role, group, and categorical identities lower in the hierarchy (Burke, 2004).

Person identities are conceptualized as "master" identities that are more likely to stay with individuals in and across situations, thus impacting other identities individuals claim. For example, if a person has moral identity meanings of being "caring" and "kind," we would expect these self-meanings to influence the role identities the person claims, such as being "caring" and "kind" in the parent identity, and in one's group identity in the local Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Thus, the meanings of the moral identity can be (but need not be) central in the meanings of multiple identities that individuals claim, guiding who they are in the other domains of their life. Other person identities might be more or equally influential as the moral identity in guiding one's life.

I went on in my 2010 writing to indicate that a complex, differentiated view of the self as having multiple identities was in contrast with the phenomenological approach in psychology that influenced early work on the moral identity, which conceptualized the self in unitary terms, as having a "center" or "essence" that ordered and gave purpose to a person's life. Known as the "self-model," if the principle that organized people's lives was being moral, then one had a moral identity, and this identity represented the core of the self, the deepest principle guiding the self and inspiring moral action (Blasi, 1993). Work continues in this manner today (Strohminger et al., 2017; Strohminger & Nichols, 2014).

The "social-cognitive model" that later followed moral identity research in psychology was more consistent with identity theory. In this approach, the self was composed of multiple schemas (organized knowledge structures about a stimulus that are stored in memory and available in situations), and when the moral identity was central (as opposed to peripheral) to the self, it

could be more chronically accessible across situations than other self-schemas (Aquino et al., 2009). Situational cues could activate or deactivate the moral identity since other identities could be "cued" in the situation. However, once the moral identity was activated, the social-cognitive model was silent on the internal processes by which the moral identity guided behavior and even people's feelings in the situation. This is what identity theory offered.

I showed how identity theory went beyond the self-model and the social-cognitive model in more ways than how the self was conceptualized in complex, multiple ways. I discussed how the operations of a single identity like the moral identity worked in the form of a continuous, feedback loop within individuals. I discussed the links that could be made among the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects of the self in a situation. A perceptual control system described the operations of one identity, but to account for multiple identities and how they were interrelated, the perceptual control system also was hierarchical, composed of an interlocking set of control systems at multiple levels where multiple identities were found. I applied the perceptual control system and its hierarchical nature to the moral identity to illustrate the internal dynamics of the moral identity that was not being discussed in the research.

In this chapter, I discuss the advances that have been made in the moral identity over the past dozen years, since my earlier writing. To do this, I place the theoretical and empirical developments on the moral identity within the context of what we currently know about the moral identity in identity theory. The current profile of the moral identity gives us more insight into the moral self, but there is still more work that needs to be done, which I will discuss.

To study any identity in a situation, it first needs to be activated. Thus, I begin with an analysis of the conditions for moral identity activation. I then review the meanings associated with the moral identity so that we know what is being activated. To be clear, once an identity is activated, it sets in motion the identity process, which involves comparing meanings of who one is in a situation with one's identity standard meanings. The degree to which self-in-situation meanings are consistent with identity standard meanings is identity verification, which is the goal in maintaining an identity, including the moral identity, in and across situations. Identity nonverification prompts behavioral, cognitive, and emotional responses, and I discuss how these responses have been revealed in an analysis of the moral identity.

2 Advancing the Moral Identity

2.1 The Situation and Moral Identity Activation

An identity such as the moral identity is activated in a situation when a person makes an interpretation of a situation and determines the identity most appropriate for the situation. In research on the moral identity, Stets and Carter (2012) note that the interpretation of a situation is the "cognitive" aspect of situation meanings. People draw on culture to determine situational meanings. For example, people will be more likely to interpret a situation of whether to take an item from a store as having a stronger moral imperative compared to deciding which of two cars to purchase.

Stets and Carter also point out that situation meanings have an "affective" aspect to them that indicate the emotions that individuals ought to experience. Once again, individuals draw upon culture to identify what feelings ought to be experienced in a situation. For example, the culture expects individuals to experience feelings of guilt or shame when moral imperatives are violated. Knowing these expectations may redirect persons away from immoral behavior (should they be inclined to such action) to avoid these negative feelings. By focusing on the moral identity, Stets and Carter's theorizing about the cognitive and affective aspects of a situation, or what they alternatively label the "framing rules" and "feeling rules" of a situation (Hochschild, 1979), helps advance our understanding of just what exists in any situation, including a moral situation that we need to consider.

In any situation, a person selects the identity whose meanings in their identity standard are relevant to the situation or "potent" for a particular identity (Stets & Carter, 2012). Potency, for Stets and Carter, means that a situation strongly signals a pertinent identity to guide behavior compared to an alternative identity. Stets and Carter found that when a situation was defined as having strong moral meanings, those who acted immorally had a large increase in the moral emotions of guilt and shame, while those who acted morally had a large decrease in guilt and shame. For example, if individuals reported copying another student's answer during an exam, driving home drunk, or taking merchandise that didn't belong to them as having strong moral meanings, and they admitted acting immoral in these situations (copying, driving drunk, stealing), they were more likely to report feelings of guilt and shame, while those who acted morally had a significant reduction in guilt and shame. Similarly, in a series of laboratory studies on the moral identity, when individuals' moral identity was not verified in a situation, that is, the meanings of how they were perceived in a situation did not match their identity standard meanings, there was a stronger negative emotional reaction from them when the situation had stronger moral meanings than weaker moral meanings (Stets & Burke, 2014a).

MacKinnon (2023) discusses how characteristics of any event including the identities of the actors, their behaviors, the setting, and the traits of the actors may have stronger moral overtones than others. Since morality is about what is good/bad or right/wrong, MacKinnon identifies when these characteristics are evaluated extremely positively and negatively using a sample of Canadian students. When these characteristics, in their extreme (either positively or negatively), appear in situations, they might activate meanings in one's moral identity.

For example, an event that we may experience may contain identities of a mother, baby, or grandparent (positive moral overtones) or a liar, bigot, or stalker (negative moral overtones). Behaviors may involve rescuing, encouraging, or educating (positive moral acts) or discriminating against, assaulting, or molesting another (negative moral acts). Settings that are evaluated as "good" may be a vacation, wedding, or party, while those evaluated as "bad" may be a fight, slum, or prison. Finally, "good" traits of actors may be being nice, honest, and helpful, while "bad" traits of actors may be being stupid, mean, and prejudicial. Thus, we see how different characteristics of events can carry moral/immoral meanings.

Similar to MacKinnon, Luft (2020) discusses how characteristics of situations influence our evaluations of morality, such as how familiar or novel is the situation, with familiar situations producing a more automatic, routine moral judgment, while more novel situations warrant a more deliberate, moral response because quick, moral intuitions are insufficient to make sense of the situation. Luft also points out that we need to be attentive to the social characteristics of the people in a situation such as their gender, race, or class. How a society classifies people is important, with some people valued more than others, and thus given more moral worth and better treatment over others in situations. Thus, how we perceive others in a situation based on culture, including their rank order in society, also will influence our moral responses to them in those situations. In this way, we have additional ways of thinking about how the moral identity is activated in a situation.

The activation of the moral identity may be prompted by priming or introducing specific meaning in a situation that is relevant to an identity. Some of this priming may be characteristic of the situation as when the moral identity may be prompted when one finds a homeless person seeking help in front of a church or synagogue. Individuals may prime their moral identity by periodically wearing a cross or occasionally speaking about their religious faith.

In a study that examined moral behavior across different social contexts, Carter (2013) primed the moral identity by having individuals write a short story about themselves either using moral characteristics or characteristics not associated with the moral identity. Individuals then

participated in an experiment where they completed a task alone, in a group, or in a group where they were pressured to behave immorally. In all three situations, participants were overscored for their work, thus earning more points that might later benefit them. At issue was whether participants reported the overscoring (moral behavior) or did not (immoral behavior).

Carter found that when the moral identity was primed or activated, those with a higher moral identity were more likely to behave morally, that is, report being overscored for their performance. This effect occurred when individuals completed the task alone, in a group, or in a group in which they were pressured to not report being overscored. When the moral identity was not primed or activated, individuals in the group condition were more likely to behave in an immoral manner and not report being overscored, perhaps out of group loyalty. And, when individuals were in the group that pressured them to not report the overscoring on the task so that the group might benefit from the extra points earned, participants were even more likely to comply, thus behaving immorally. Thus, we see how the meanings of the moral identity served as a guide for the meanings of individuals' behavior (to behave morally), but only when the moral identity was primed or activated.

Finally, the moral identity might be prompted by a salient moral identity. We can think of salience as the proportion of time spent carrying out the behaviors associated with an identity over some span of time, such as a week (Burke & Stets, 2022). For example, a person in the worker identity has, on average, a 40-hour work week. Given the number of hours per week (168 hours), and the number of hours spent in the worker identity (40 hours), the salience of the identity would be 0.24 (40/168). Thus, about a quarter of the time each week, we would expect the worker identity to be salient/activated. If an identity is more salient, individuals may be more likely to interpret a situation as an opportunity to activate that identity. Thus, to capture the salience of the moral identity, we should investigate how much time people perceive themselves as spending in that identity on a daily or weekly basis.

Once a relevant identity such as the moral identity is activated in a situation, the internal dynamics of an identity operate as a feedback loop that has several components. These components include the *identity standard* or the meanings defining one's identity, *perceptual input* or the perceptions of identity relevant meanings in a situation, such as how a person is coming across in a situation, the *comparator* that relates the perceptual input with the identity standard, and the *error* that results from the comparator (Burke & Stets, 2022). In short, activation of the moral identity reminds people of the meanings in their moral identity standard, and the fact that how they are coming across in a situation, including how they are behaving, should be consistent, in meaning, with their moral identity standard meanings. If the meanings of who they are in a situation and their moral standard meanings are inconsistent, individuals will feel bad, signaling that they need to better regulate how they are coming across in the situation to create a better fit with the moral identity standard meanings.

2.2 The Moral Identity Standard and Moral Meanings

The identity standard may be understood as the character of the identity. It is the set of meanings that are held in memory and that are specific to the person holding the identity. For the moral identity, I earlier discussed two underlying meaning dimensions: a "care" and a "justice" dimension (Stets, 2010). I noted how it was consistent with earlier discussions in the literature regarding the basis of morality (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1981). Since then, there have been studies operationalizing these two dimensions (Carter, 2013; Stets, 2011; Stets & Burke, 2014a, 2014b; Stets & Carter, 2011, 2012; Stets & Trettevik, 2016). While the care dimension focuses on kindness, helpfulness, and compassion toward others, the justice dimension addresses issues of fairness, honesty, and integrity. In these studies and other writings (Stets, 2015b; Stets & McCaffree, 2019), I often note that while these two dimensions do

not characterize all the meanings of morality, they are consistent with Western conceptions of morality that tend to value protecting individuals' welfare and autonomy, thus representing important meanings of morality (Haidt & Graham, 2009). Indeed, issues of care and justice are widespread and may be universal foundations of morality (Graham et al., 2011).

I have acknowledged that others have argued that other meanings should be included in the meanings of morality, such as a group orientation, adherence to hierarchical relations as expressed in respecting authority, and an orientation to purity or the divine (Graham et al., 2011). Thus, there appear to be at least three dimensions of the moral identity including an individual emphasis (care and justice), a community dimension (group loyalty, honoring authority), and a purity and sacred dimension. There may be even more meanings and dimensions beyond these.

Different moral dimensions may influence different attitudes and behaviors. For example, those endorsing justice and care may have a tendency toward liberal values and a distaste for authority and sanctity (Haidt, 2012). Those who endorse meanings of care may support those who promote this ethic such as nurses or environmentalists (Graham et al., 2011). What is important is that whatever the meanings held in one's moral identity standard, when the identity is activated in a situation, the internal dynamics of an identity are set in motion as I discuss below. Since, in identity theory, people attempt to control the meanings in their identity standard, different meanings may result in different behaviors to control those meanings. However, it does not matter that people are enacting different behaviors based on different moral meanings. The goal for everyone is to verify their identity, that is, ensure that who they are in a situation (or self-in-situation meanings) and as reflected in the meanings that their behavior "gives off" are consistent with their identity standard meanings. This is the power of identity theory in understanding the moral self as I outline below. One can substitute any set of meanings, and the identity process that follows is the same.

In measuring the individual moral dimension of justice and care meanings, we can think of the meanings as a set of contrasting characteristics. On one end of the continuum is one characteristic, such as kind or fair, and on the other end of the continuum is its opposite, such as unkind or unfair. Respondents are to think about where they would place themselves along each continuum of opposites. A value of 1 might reflect being unkind or unfair, 5 might reflect being kind or fair, and 3 might place one in the middle of the two poles. This procedure to measure moral identity meanings follows the technique of using the semantic differential to measure meaning (Osgood et al., 1957). What emerges is a score on the moral identity ranging from low to high, such as being unjust and uncaring to just and caring.

Research reveals that most people report a moral identity that is above the midpoint on the moral identity scale of justice and care (Stets & Carter, 2011, 2012). Thus, most see themselves as good or moral people. Those who report a "low" moral identity are at least at the midpoint on the moral identity scale, making it clear that these individuals are by no means immoral, but simply lower on the scale compared to others in the sample. Wherever people place themselves on the moral identity scale, they are motivated to act consistent with their identity meanings and have these meanings verified in and across situations.

As I mentioned earlier, the moral identity is a person identity that likely influences the meanings of persons' role, group, and categorical identities with which they identify. Theoretically, the moral person identity is conceptualized as higher in the hierarchical system of perceptual control, acting as a "master" identity that impacts the meanings of the other identities individuals claim lower in the hierarchy of perceptual control. While moral meanings may be shared among the multiple identities that individuals claim, moral meanings also may be shared between individuals. When individuals share moral identity meanings, mutual identity verification is more likely to occur because the responses of each are not only in the service of verifying their own

moral meanings, but also in the service of verifying the other's moral meanings. In turn, this may create a social tie between individuals. This serves as fertile ground for the development of homophily or being connected to others based on similarity (Stets et al., 2021). When similarity is based on moral meanings, we have value homophily or the sharing of morals, such as "honesty" or "social justice" as opposed to, for example, status homophily, where ties are based on sharing a status characteristic, such as gender or race (Vaisey & Lizardo, 2010).

Stets and her colleagues (2021) discuss how shared moral meanings among individuals create homophily in groups by looking at partisan politics in America today. Consistent with others who maintain that people's morals rather than their political ideology may be a more fundamental force that drives the political divide (Haidt, 2012; Miles & Vaisey, 2015), Stets and her associates suggest that rather than political identity being an important basis of homophily in political polarization, it may be one's moral identity. Since the moral identity is a person identity that has a "master" status, its meanings impact other identity meanings that individuals claim, such as the political (categorical) identity. Thus, moral meanings within the moral identity may become an important guide for the development and participation in homophilous political groups.

For example, if the moral identity for some involves the meaning of the sacred, they may find others who similarly identify with this moral meaning, and they may verify each other, which should reinforce this moral meaning. Individuals may then explore other identity meanings that they might share with homophilous others, such as political meanings, and discover an affinity with them on conservatism. For instance, when social issues emerge that are high in moral content such as issues of sexuality, persons may find that those who embrace the moral meaning of the sacred also may be strongly opposed to a gay lifestyle and thus will support Republican policies such as opposition to same-sex marriage. Thus, the political meaning of conservatism is infused with moral meanings. Stets and her associates point out that the risk in homophily is the creation of echo chambers. By interacting with like-minded individuals and distancing from dissimilar others, it can consolidate the meanings of in-group members and produce further polarization between in-group and out-group members. Thus, sharing meanings at the micro-level can foster homophily at the meso-level, but it may encourage intergroup conflict and unrest at the macro-level.

Whenever and however moral meanings emerge and develop within and between people, when the moral identity is activated in a situation, the internal dynamics of an identity operate as a feedback loop. I begin with perceptual input to explain the dynamics of how the moral identity operates in any situation.

2.3 Perceptual Input, the Comparator, and Error in the Identity Process

Perceptual input is the point in the identity process where individuals are attentive to the meanings as to who they are in a situation. In terms of the moral identity, attention is to one's moral meanings. There may be three sources to self-in-situation meanings or perceptual input: *reflected appraisals* or how individuals think others see them (Stets & Burke, 2014a; Stets & Carter, 2011, 2012; Stets & Trettevik, 2016), *actual appraisals* or how others actually see individuals (Savage et al., 2017, 2019; Stets et al., 2018), and *self-appraisals* or how people see themselves (Burke, 2006). These three sources of perceptions, reflected appraisals, actual appraisals, and self-appraisals, are all happening at once in varying degrees.

For example, Savage and his colleagues (2017) measured both actual appraisals and reflected appraisals in a study on the fairness identity (an aspect of the moral identity) in negotiated exchanges in a laboratory study. They found that when high fairness identity participants or low fairness identity participants received feedback that was inconsistent with the fairness level that they set for themselves (the feedback was nonverifying), and the feedback

was based on actual appraisals and reflected appraisals, both appraisals prompted participants to counteract the nonverifying feedback to restore a verifying state for participants. Thus, nonverifying feedback had the same effect on participants of counteracting it, irrespective of the appraisal.

In general, self-in-situation meanings are compared with the meanings in people's identity standard with the goal of matching perceptions to the standard, that is, for individuals to experience identity verification. In discussing the moral identity, I have pointed out that people compare in a rapid and quick manner how they think others see them in a situation with their identity standard to determine the degree to which there is a match between the two (Stets, 2015a). People learn over time what perceptions, behaviors, and situations carry the same meanings as contained in their identity standard. Once this learning takes place, the identity process is invoked rapidly, automatically, and without much thought. People are monitoring perceptions of who they are in situations all the time with the goal of identity verification, yet they often are not aware of this monitoring until a disturbance occurs.

A disturbance in perceptual input (how individuals are seen in a situation) halts the automatic process of the identity control system and a deliberative process takes over. Individuals see that others do not see them in a way that is consistent with the meanings in their identity standard. Persons are not being verified, as when one sets their moral identity at a high level, others do not see their moral identity at a high level. Thus, the perceptual input has been disrupted. In identity theory, it is the *comparator* that relates the perceived self-in-situation meanings with the identity standard meanings. That comparison produces an *error* or difference between the self-meanings in the situation and identity standard meanings. This difference indicates the magnitude and direction of the error, which then is fed into the output function (behavior) and input function (perception), as well as prompts an emotional response in the identity perceptual control system. The error signal essential indicates that a response is needed to correct any discrepancy between self-in-situation meanings and identity standard meanings.

In terms of the error's magnitude, the smaller the error or discrepancy, the more the self-in-situation meanings match identity standard meanings, the larger the error, the greater the mismatch. The direction of the error, which is either positive in terms of exceeding one's identity standard in the situation, or negative in terms of falling short of one's identity standard in the situation, guides people in how to adjust to the situation, resolve the discrepancy, and keep the identity system in a verifying state for them.

In general, when a disturbance occurs, individuals consciously adjust their perceptions and behavior (the input and output functions of the identity control system), and they do so simultaneously as recent research shows (Stets et al., 2020). The goal is for individuals to experience identity verification, such as the verification of one's moral identity, and the process remains deliberative until that is achieved. A trial-and-error period is likely to ensue until the best "match" between self-in-situation meanings with identity standard meanings is found. Once there is stability in this match, the identity process once again becomes automatic and will remain so until another disturbance in the perceptual input emerges.

2.4 Behavioral, Perceptual/Cognitive, and Emotional Responses to Identity Nonverification

Behavioral Responses If the perceived meaning is less than the identity standard meaning (a negative discrepancy), for example, people learn that they are falling short of exhibiting a high moral identity, individuals work harder, behaviorally, to exhibit a high moral identity. Alternatively, if the perceived meaning is greater than the identity standard meaning (a positive discrepancy) as when individuals learn that they have exceeded a high moral identity that they set for themselves, people work less hard, or they may "back off" from what they are doing to

"weaken" meaning in the situation so that it is consistent with their moral identity standard meaning.

While people retain meanings in their minds as to perceptions of who they are in situations and what meanings comprise their identity standard, how they behave also carries meaning, and behavior meanings should correspond with identity standard meanings (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). If people receive feedback that how they are coming off in a situation is discrepant with who they are, then their behavior may be signaling meanings that are different from their actual selves. Thus, people may behave *differently* following nonverification, such that the meaning that the (new) behavior "gives off" can help to realign self-in-situation meanings with their identity standard meanings.

An example of people's behavioral response to nonverification is Savage and his colleagues' studies on the fairness identity (Savage et al., 2017; Savage et al., 2019). The fairness identity involves meanings of being just and equitable. Savage and his collaborators studied how the fairness identity influenced inequality in negotiations depending upon whether participants received feedback that was consistent/verifying or inconsistent/nonverifying with their fairness identity standard.

Students were placed in the laboratory and told they would participate in exchanges with other students that involved bargaining to receive points that, at the end of the study, would be converted into class credit or money. In each exchange (from 30 to 45 exchanges), participants had the opportunity to negotiate a deal with one of two partners to obtain points. At three times during the exchanges, participants were interrupted with a brief survey, and they also received feedback as to how fair their exchange partners saw them.

However, this feedback was fixed based on participants' random assignment into a condition. A preset low score on fairness signaled that the participants' exchange partners, on average, thought the participants were not being fair, while a preset high score indicated that the exchange partners thought participants were being very fair. Thus, if participants had a high fairness identity and received a high fairness rating, the feedback verified their fairness identity, while those with a low fairness identity and who received a high fairness rating were not verified for their fairness identity. Likewise, if those with a low fairness identity received a low fairness rating, the feedback verified their fairness identity, while this feedback did not verify it for those with a high fairness identity. The design of the study was such that in instances of nonverification, those with a high fairness identity always were under-verified, and those of a low fairness identity always were over-verified.

What Savage and his colleagues found was that when high fairness identity participants received feedback that they were not being fair, they acted to increase their fairness from one phase to the next by seeking fewer points and thus reducing the inequality in their exchanges. When low fairness identity participants received feedback that they were being very fair, they acted to decrease their fairness by seeking more points and increasing the level of inequality in their exchanges. This study clearly showed how individuals behaviorally counteracted nonverifying feedback to maintain their identity meanings in situations.

Perceptual/Cognitive Responses Individuals also can respond cognitively to nonverifying information. Here, individuals use perceptual devices to reduce the identity discrepancy, convincing themselves that any discrepancy is small or nonexistent. Related to this, Stets and McCaffree (2019) have discussed how people may use perceptual devices in situations where they claim to have a relatively high moral identity but then behave badly. Here, the meanings of their behavior are inconsistent with their identity standard meanings. Stets and McCaffree use Bandura's (2016) understanding of the mechanisms of moral disengagement to illustrate how people can try to verify their moral identity in the face of nonverifying evidence.

Bandura identifies ten psychosocial mechanisms by which people selectively morally disengage. These mechanisms may, at times, be conscious strategies, but often occur without conscious control. The ten mechanisms operate in four separate places in a situation: *behavior locus* (the place of harmful, immoral conduct); *agency locus* (where individuals reflect on the degree to which they are responsible for the behavior they enacted); *effects locus* (where injurious effects emerge from harmful behavior); and *victim locus* (the target of one's injurious behavior). These areas can be conceptualized as sites where people might bypass the discrepancy between the meaning of who they are in a situation and a relatively high moral identity standard.

In *behavior locus*, people cognitively change the meaning of behavior to make it more consistent with identity standard meanings. This may mean persons changing "bad/immoral" behavior to "good/moral" behavior if they want to make behavioral meanings consistent with a relatively high moral identity. This can occur through *justifications*, *euphemistic language*, and *advantageous comparisons* of harmful acts with worse harmful acts. For example, in justifications, people suggest that their behavior, though it carries meanings of being harmful, was necessitated by a commitment to a higher virtue, thereby fostering consistency with a high moral identity. In euphemistic labeling, people rephrase behavior that carries bad meanings to sound better than it is; bad behavior is softened by how it is described to others.

In a*gency locus*, there may be *displacement of responsibility* or *diffusion of responsibility* such that individuals, themselves, are not seen as the source (responsible) for an identity discrepancy. In displacement, people attempt to shift responsibility for their behavior onto others or a group, thereby not holding themselves accountable for the meaning of their behavior. Similarly, diffusion of responsibility occurs when the harm done by a group cannot be attributed to a specific individual, thereby absolving each group member of responsibility. Each of these techniques places the responsibility onto the collective. When everyone places responsibility onto a group, no one is held accountable for bad actions.

In *effects*, people may *ignore, minimize*, or *deny* that the meaning of the consequences of their action is inconsistent with their identity standard meanings. Again, because behavior has meaning, the effect of these meanings may be inconsistent with identity standard meanings. For example, people may ignore the harmful effects of their bad behavior when they are claiming a relatively high moral identity, for example, that they are hurting another. Minimization or tempering the negative consequences of meaningful behavior also may occur when people convince themselves that, for example, the harmful effects that follow from bad behavior is not that severe. The more removed people are from the destructive effects of their behavior when they are attempting to maintain a relatively high moral identity, the easier it is to persuade themselves that their conduct caused little or no harm.

Finally, in *victim locus*, offenders may *dehumanize* the injured party or *blame* the target of their behavior. The meaning of the target is changed from good to bad, and thus a bad act toward a bad object is interpreted as good. Dehumanization involves reframing others as subhuman or nonhuman (in the case of being possessed by spirits or demons). In an analysis of Hutu Rwandans' acts of genocide against their Tutsi neighbors, Luft (2022) found that Hutu came to dehumanize Tutsi victims not initially, as a way of justifying their violence, but after the violence was routinized, and they had grown accustomed to killing them. Thus, dehumanization developed only over time. Blaming victims for their own injury, or that they brought the suffering on themselves, also can occur, which once again absolves individuals from being held responsible for any identity discrepancy.

Stets and McCaffree (2019) maintain that when thinking about the moral identity, the cognitive mechanisms related to moral disengagement that occur on the input side of the identity model can serve, if not to verify one's moral identity standard, at least to prevent nonverification in the face of disconfirming

evidence. People can claim to be good persons but continue to do bad things because the disengagement mechanisms act to reinterpret the meaning of identity-inconsistent behavior and its consequences as consistent with the meanings of a relatively high moral identity standard.

Emotional Responses A third path, following from the error signal, is to how people are feeling. As the error magnitude from the comparator approaches zero and persons are being verified, people will feel more positive emotions, but as the error becomes larger and moves away from zero because of disturbances and persons are not verified, individuals will feel more negative emotions (Burke & Stets, 2022). When positive feelings result from identity verification, individuals will continue to do what they are doing, leaving their behavior relatively unchanged in the situation. This is because individuals expect that future situations will generate similar verifying outcomes and positive feelings. It is negative emotions that are stressful for individuals to tolerate.

Thus, people will try to find ways to reduce or eliminate their negative feelings by altering their behavior to produce new meanings in the situation, altering their cognitions to produce new meanings, or both (Stets et al., 2020). As these new meanings enter the output and input functions, respectively, individuals may perceive that the meanings that define who they are better to match their identity standard meanings. If the error continues to register a discrepancy between perceived meanings as to who individuals are in a situation and identity standard meanings, resulting in persistent negative feelings, further attempts will be made to modify behavior, cognition, or both.

In an analysis of the moral identity, research reveals that moral identity verification is associated with positive feelings and nonverification is associated with negative feelings (Stets & Burke, 2014a; Stets & Carter, 2011, 2012; Stets & Trettevik, 2016). In a study where individuals with high and low fairness identities were negotiating over the distribution of resources in a four-person exchange network, research showed that not only verification of participants' fairness identities was associated with positive emotions, but verification of their fairness identities also increased social bonds or social cohesion with their exchange partner directly and indirectly, through positive emotions (Stets et al., 2018).

Earlier work argued that identity verification facilitates smooth interaction between individuals, which, in turn, can build trust, greater commitment, and a sense of social unity or feeling of "we-ness" between individuals (Burke & Stets, 1999). As Stets and McCaffree (2014) have pointed out, verification of the moral identity can sow the seeds of solidarity, and when each person verifies the moral identity of the other, a mutual verification context develops, and along with that, a stable pattern of interaction and social solidarity. Each is supporting how the other is seen and understood. Thus, verification of the moral identity at the individual level can foster social solidarity at the dyadic level.

Nonverification of one's moral identity is associated not only with negative emotions, but also with moral emotions such as shame and guilt (Stets & Carter, 2012). Shame signals to individuals that they have not lived up to the expectations of others by how they are behaving, and when it is felt, it can redirect behavior toward more morally appropriate actions. For example, Hitlin and Kramer (2014) found that when adolescents felt shame following arrests for minor offenses, they were more likely to shift future intentions away from deviant behavior when they saw the criminal justice system as legitimate and believed they could refrain from future criminality.

Verification of the moral identity also has been associated with increased self-esteem, specifically authenticity-based and worth-based esteem (Stets & Burke, 2014b). Stets and Burke argue that as a person identity, the moral identity carries meanings that reflect who one is, such that when this identity is verified, people should feel that they are living out their true, authentic selves. The moral identity also carries meanings of being

respected and valued in society given that one attempts to be "good." Thus, when the moral identity is verified, it also increases feelings of being accepted and feeling worthwhile.

People's emotional responses to moral identity verification/nonverification primarily have been studied for acts of commission, that is, when individuals have engaged in some action, such as cheating on a task (Stets & Burke, 2014a; Stets & Carter, 2011; Stets & Trettevik, 2016). Less research has been conducted on acts of omission, that is, when individuals have postponed or bypassed the decision to act. Not acting may be immoral if individuals withhold doing a good act such as giving to a homeless person when they meet them. In choosing not to act, people may be seen as less responsible for the outcomes that emerge because their behavior is seen as less intentional. If they are not acting, it is easier to assign the cause of an outcome to an alternative source. With acts of commission, however, inferences can be made about individuals from their actions. While acts of commission may not always tell us everything about individuals because situational factors may be influencing how they behave, when they act, observers tend to attribute actors' behavior to some characteristic of the individuals rather than to situational factors.

I investigated a moral act of commission, specifically, giving people an opportunity to cheat on a test, and the results were compared with a moral act of omission, that is, overscoring people on a test and then giving them the opportunity to report it (Stets, 2011). The results revealed that one's moral identity was associated with committed behavior. A higher moral identity served as a guide for engaging in moral behavior or not cheating. However, the moral identity was unrelated to omitted behavior or the failure to report being overscored. Further, nonverification of the moral identity was associated with negative emotions following committed behavior but not omitted behavior. When individuals were not verified for their moral identity following the opportunity to cheat, this was more likely to produce negative emotions than if they were verified. However, nonverification of the moral identity following being overscored was not related to reports of negative feelings. Thus, the identity process significantly influenced moral situations of commission, but not moral situations of omission.

I argued that identities like the moral identity may be less likely to be activated in situations of omission for a few reasons (Stets, 2011). Individuals are less likely to be attentive to the absence of something than its presence. Even if they do address that which is omitted, it does not provide much information on the actors involved in the situation because they have not done anything. Thus, insight into others in a moral situation may be limited, hampering the invocation of the moral identity. Further, the outcomes in a situation may be attributed to other factors than to individuals, and the reduced intentionality, responsibility, or blameworthiness of individuals in the situation may influence everyone to not even interpret the situation as a moral one. Thus, the morality identity may not be activated, and if it is not activated, then it cannot have effects in a situation.

When the moral identity is activated in a situation, it reminds people of the meanings of their moral identity standard, which then guides their behavior in a situation. When the moral identity is not activated, as in the case of failing to perform a good act, such as reporting the receipt of more of a "good" than what is owed, people may become emotionally unaffected by appraisals from others that do not match how they see themselves. Since negative emotion serves as a signal that individuals need to better regulate how they are perceived in a situation, and they may work to change these perceptions, for example, by changing what they are doing in the situation, any such change may not be forthcoming. Thus, people can fail to perform (omit) good acts and either fail to experience negative feelings for their nonaction or choose to ignore or suppress their negative feelings (if their behavior was intentional) to hide their bad behavior. Ironically, either the absence or denial of negative feelings may serve

to perpetuate using the omission strategy in situations.

3 Future Research

There is work that is still needed on the moral identity. Let me mention a few areas of research that are needed. As I have mentioned before (Stets, 2015b), an analysis of moral behavior typically has focused on behavior that benefits individuals, themselves, whether it be an act of commission, such as cheating on their taxes to pay less to the IRS, or an act of omission, such as failing to report being not being charged for something at a restaurant or grocery. We need to expand the analysis of moral behaviors to other immoral acts to see how the moral identity operates. For example, we need to examine immoral behavior that might be a detriment to oneself, for example, self-injurious acts of cutting oneself or binge eating, or a detriment to others, such as psychological or physical assaults on others. Additionally, is the moral identity less likely to be activated for the omission of a bad act, for example, deciding to stop consuming alcohol as it is for the omission of a good act?

We also need to examine the cognitive responses people use when nonverification of moral identity occurs. Currently, empirical work in this area is underdeveloped. If moral meanings infiltrate the other identities that individuals claim, what happens when one behaves in an immoral manner when a role or group identity is activated and has moral meanings of care or justice within them, for example? Stets and McCaffree (2019) suggest that people may use certain cognitive mechanisms to respond to discrepancies of certain identities. When there are moral meanings in a role identity such as the worker identity and individuals behave in ways inconsistent with being a good, moral person, the mechanism of displacement of responsibility may occur to reduce the negative effects of nonverification. Role holders may minimize their part in causing harm, and they may shift the responsibility onto others, particularly those who have authority and power over them.

In a group identity, Stets and McCaffree posit that individuals may engage in diffusion of responsibility in which they look to other group members and expect these others to initiate moral action. When everyone shifts the responsibility to do the right thing onto another, the group can end up doing harm with no one feeling that they were personally responsible for the outcome. Individuals also may engage in dehumanization and attribute blame to the victim. These mechanisms may be more likely to emerge when in-group/out-group conflict is high. Group members may positively evaluate their in-group and negatively evaluate their out-group. The negative views toward out-group members may become so strong that it motivates in-group members to harm them, and dehumanizing the out-group makes it easier to carry out that harm. Alternatively, they can blame out-group members for causing their own harm by portraying them as initiating the provocation that led to harming them, thus they deserve what they get. It is important to assess whether these relationships exist when different bases of identities are infused with moral meanings.

4 Conclusions

In situating morality at the micro-level, I have emphasized not moral judgments, as has been the focus among psychologists, but one's moral identity within the self. However, once we examine the moral meanings of individuals, we could then examine their relationship to individuals' moral judgments. For the time being, however, the perceptual control process in identity theory allows for a focus on how individuals see themselves along different moral meaning dimensions. The advantage of using identity theory is that it considers multiple aspects of the self, including people's perceptions and cognitions, behavior, and emotions in situations that carry moral meanings. It also considers the moral identity as one among a host of identities that individuals may claim, but given that multiple identities

exist for individuals, moral meanings may be present to a greater (or lesser) degree across multiple identities depending upon whether the moral identity is set at a high or low level. If set at a high level, it may permeate more identities than when set at a low level.

The goal of individuals is obtaining verification for one's moral identity, whatever level at which it is set. When verification is not achieved, individuals will respond cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally, to respond to the nonverification and achieve verification somehow. While the moral identity is one of the most extensively researched identities in identity theory, there is still much more that is needed to understand it.

Are the different meanings that are associated with the moral identity across individuals tied to different socialization experiences? For example, are the moral meanings that develop different when the parenting style is authoritative, supportive, and less directive, such as a focus on care and the welfare of others, compared to a parenting style that is authoritarian, punishing, and directive where they focus may be on loyalty and adherence to authority? Is the authoritative/flexible parental style more conducive to the development of a moral identity that is set at a high level compared to a permissive/laisse faire style? Does the moral identity change over time in terms of its meanings? If so, why or how does this happen? Are acts of omission as informative as acts of commission in teaching us about one's moral identity?

Finally, how does the moral identity at the micro-level influence the moral fabric of groups, communities, and organizations at the meso-level and, in turn, institutions and culture at the macro-level? I discussed one example of this with respect to how the sharing of moral meanings among individuals may foster partisan politics. It would be worthwhile to investigate other sites in which the moral identity at the micro-level impacts the meso- and macro-levels of social reality.

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Morality and Relationships, Real and Imagined

Francesca Polletta

Abstract

Scholars increasingly have recognized that moral decision making takes place within relationships. I argue that those relationships are sometimes imagined. People draw on the expectations of culturally familiar relationships to know what they owe each other in situations that are morally uncertain. This sociological perspective treats relationship schemas both as a resource that people use creatively and as constraining their self-interested action. It helps shed light on at least two puzzles: why people participate in high-risk activism rather than free-ride on the efforts of others, and why people sometimes understand their loyalty to the nation as including support for inclusive policies.

Keywords

Moral judgment · Relationships · Culture · Collective action · Free-riding · Nationalism

Surveys show that white Americans who consider themselves "close" to African Americans tend to favor affirmative action to combat racial inequality. This effect is independent of respondents' perceived self-interest and their moral values regarding equality. It is also independent of how much actual contact they have with African Americans (Wong, 2010). The relationship is imagined.

In this chapter, I explore the role of real relationships and of imagined ones in moral judgment and action. I argue that we know what is right and wrong, what is morally required of us, by reference to the relationship we are in. We craft our relationships with people jointly and idiosyncratically but also in ways that are governed by cultural norms. Friendship, for example, levies different moral obligations than colleagueship. The fact that those norms are cultural also means that we have some knowledge of the obligations of relationships that we may never have had; relationships of diplomacy, for example, or contractual bargaining. We can detach relationship schemas from their instantiation in actual relationships. This means that we can use such schemas creatively, acting on the moral obligations of a relationship we do not actually have.

We tend to draw on imagined relationships to act morally, I argue, in two sets of circumstances: when our identities as moral, that is, as good people, are put sharply at stake, and when we are called to act on moral principles that are abstract, conflicting, or ambiguous. In the first set of circumstances, imagined relationships serve as a circle of recognition for the moral person we want to be. In the second set of circumstances, relationships serve as something like metaphors, helping us to imagine our way from feeling to moral principle. In both

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conditions, just as moral heuristics generally both justify and guide moral action, so, too, do relationship schemas sometimes lead people to decisions that are inconsistent with their interests narrowly defined. Imagined relationships may also lead them to decisions that are not easily predictable on the basis of their explicit values or on the basis of the relationships they actually have. In that sense, paying attention to relationship schemas allows us to see how moral heuristics are *both* "a useable resource" *and* have "motivating power" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013: 63). They both enable and compel.

To make these arguments, I move from studies of morality that do not take relationships into account to those that do, and then from studies that treat the relationships that govern moral action as objective to those that treat such relationships as imagined. Then I turn to two questions that have been the object of considerable research and theorizing, and to which the operation of imagined relationships provides a novel answer. The first question is why people participate in high-risk activism rather than free ride on the efforts of others (Olson, 1965; Passy & Monsch, 2014; Simpson & Willer, 2015). Movement scholars have drawn attention to the obligations of preexisting relationships to answer that question. In circumstances where preexisting relationships counsel against participation, however, I suggest that imagined relationships may override that counsel. The second question is why citizens only sometimes favor inclusive versions of national citizenship (Banting & Kymlicka, 2017). While scholars of politics have answered that question by way of people's variable moral commitments to the nation, I show that people who are equally patriotic favor different policies depending on how they imagine the relationships joining co-nationals. I conclude this chapter by raising questions that this perspective invites us to pursue further.

1 Relationships and Moral Judgment

Begin with an out-of-control trolley car. In the famous experiment, subjects are asked to imagine seeing the trolley car hurtling along the tracks, with no driver, directly into the path of five unsuspecting workmen standing on the track. Then the subject sees a switch that will divert the trolley car onto another track and save the five people—but at the cost of the life of a workman who is standing on the other track. Will the subject pull the switch? What will she do if she is, instead, standing on an overpass and can only stop the trolley car by pushing something very heavy onto it, like the large man standing next to her? What if she does not have to push the man but can just pull a switch that will activate a trapdoor under him? What if she cannot redirect the trolley car but can push the five workmen on the tracks out of the way, where they will tumble down a hill and kill an unsuspecting bystander? (Edmonds, 2013).

The aim of scenarios like these has been to understand how people reason their way through moral dilemmas. Most people, researchers have found, will pull the switch to save five people over one person. They are utilitarian in that regard, choosing the option that maximizes the greater good. But they tend not to imagine themselves pushing the man off the overpass. Here, they seem to distinguish between killing someone as an unintended by-product of bringing about a greater good (pulling the train switch) and killing someone in order to bring *about* a greater good (pushing the man off the overpass). Or perhaps, the moral principle comes only after the emotional intuition: pushing the man off the bridge *feels* wrong (Greene et al., 2001; Haidt, 2001).

In most variations of the trolley car scenario, the characters are simply described as "workmen," a "large man," and so on. They are anonymous strangers. Not surprisingly, when the person on the alternate track is described as a family member, subjects are unwilling to sacrifice the person's life for that of the five strangers (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2010). Yet, it is only in recent years that moral psychologists and scholars in allied fields have recognized that people typically are in relationships and that they feel, reason, and act in terms of those relationships (Bloom, 2011; Clark et al., 2015). Researchers have shown that people make very different moral judgments when the parties are romantic partners, friends, or kin rather than strangers

(Clark et al., 2015; Stewart-Williams, 2007; Wolfe & Clark, 2010). Sociologists, similarly, have shown that people's generosity varies according to the closeness of the emotional relationship (Simpson & Willer, 2015).

Between the poles of intimacy and no relationship at all, however, are a wealth of relationships with distinctive behavioral norms and expectations. Those relationships come with identifiable moral obligations, as well. Surely, we would not expect a supermarket clerk to have the same moral responsibility to care for a depressed customer as we would a minister to care for his depressed congregant or a therapist for her depressed client. To be sure, the moral obligations of each relationship are worked out jointly by the parties to it, often in ways that are unique to the parties. Still, psychologists of relationships have shown that there are shared cultural expectations about how one *does* relationships, such as friendship, romance, or colleagueship (Baldwin, 1992; Fuhse, 2013; Ginsburg, 1988; Lindenberg, 2006). Especially at the start of relationships and in other conditions of uncertainty, *relationship schemas* produce the confidence that comes from shared expectations (Ginsburg, 1988; Planalp & Honeycutt, 1988). Supporting the idea both that we distinguish among relationship schemas and that we act on those schemas, studies have shown that people characterize typical relations between close friends, salesperson and customer, interviewer and job applicant, and teammates in similar ways (Wish et al., 1976); that people often confuse those with whom they interact in a similar relationship (Fiske et al., 1991); that when people's behavior departs from the script, they are less likely to remember it (Planalp, 1985); and that people strive to behave in line with the behavior acceptable to the relationship that is salient (Baldwin & Holmes, 1987).

I emphasize that relationship schemas are cultural; that is, they are shared in a given time and place. For instance, friendship today means something very different than it meant in Ancient Greece or eighteenth-century Europe. I also emphasize that the moral obligations attached to relationship schemas are different in kind rather than only degree. That is, while often the more intimate a relationship, the stronger the moral claim of its parties to some values--perhaps, honesty and care--that is not necessarily true of other values, such as equality and respect. Fiske (1991) makes this point by arguing that standards of moral action differ across *classes* of relationships. In a *communal sharing* schema, which is typical of families, communes, and, in attenuated form, ethnic and national identities, Fiske argues, goods are shared on the basis of need, decision-making is collective and consensus oriented, and values of caring, kindness, and altruism are privileged. In an *authority ranking* relationship, of which the military is the archetype, higher ranking individuals enjoy more in the way of power, prestige, and privilege and they provide protection and care for subordinates. Respect and obedience motivate moral judgment. In an *equality-matching* relationship, the emphasis is on reciprocity between equals. Characteristic of acquaintances and colleagues, equality-matching relationships emphasize balancing and turn taking, tit-for-tat reciprocation, and egalitarian distributive justice. Finally, in a *market pricing* relationship, relevant features of the interaction are reduced to a single metric, which is often, but not always, money. Decisions are made on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation of expected efficiency or utility.

Fiske points out that many actual relationships involve shifting among these models. Still, he and others have found extraordinary consistency in people's expectations of the values, obligations, and actual behaviors associated with each relationship scheme (Fiske, 1991; Fiske et al., 1991; Fiske & Tetlock, 1997; McGraw et al., 2003). They have also found that people's moral judgment of an action differs depending on the relationship in which it takes place. Drawing on Haidt's (2012) moral foundations theory, Simpson et al. (2016) found that violations of care were judged more harshly in a communal sharing relationship such as a family than in other kinds of relationships, but violations of equality were judged less harshly, presumably because goods are shared according to need rather than tit-for-tat reciprocation. In other words, it is not

the case that all moral values are more demanding in relationships marked by greater intimacy.

2 Imagined Relationships

Fiske and colleagues treat relationships as objective and given. One is either an equal (in an equality-matching relationship) or a subordinate (in an authority ranking relationship), and that affects how one behaves morally. The relationship, and its behavioral entailments, are straightforward. But that is not always true. Indeed, people may treat the other party in one kind of relationship in the terms reserved for a different kind of relationship. This is where the fact that schemas for relationships are *cultural* is key. For instance, in his study of the letters that Renaissance Florentines wrote seeking favors from powerful patrons, McLean (1998) shows that letter-writers sometimes sought to write relationships into existence. A petitioner might invoke friendship in a way that highlighted the would-be patron's self-interest in such a relationship, or combine appeals to honor (among equals) and magnificence (toward a better) so as to subtly shift the obligations of the relationship. Today, the buyer and the seller in economic transactions often "feign some kind of intimacy in order to begin the transaction," Wherry (2010: 159) points out.

In both cases, people invoked relationships they did not have strategically, guessing that the other party would behave in ways consistent with the requirements of the relationship. But people also invoke relationship schemas with less straightforwardly instrumental purposes. Consider Viviana Zelizer's (2012) example of a woman who borrowed money from her great-aunt. Although she would eventually inherit her aunt's money, the woman insisted on drawing up a contract. It was important to her to mark the relationship as one of borrower and lender rather than benefactor and welfare recipient. Why? Presumably, it made her feel more like a responsible adult. She drew on what Fiske might call a market pricing relationship schema in what was objectively a communal sharing relationship in order to act morally.

One might argue that the niece acting on a market pricing schema was self-interested, in the sense that it allowed her to preserve her reputation and it did not cost her anything (see Simpson & Willer, 2015 on the role of reputation in prosocial behavior). In my and Zaibu Tufail's study of debt settlement (Polletta & Tufail, 2014), however, we found that people's creative use of relationship schemas *did* cost them something. Debt settlement firms offer people in debt a service: for a fee, the firm will negotiate with clients' creditors to lower the principal of their debts. But there is a catch. In order to give the firm leverage in its negotiations, clients are advised to stop payment altogether on the debts they want the firm to try to renegotiate. This, however, renders the client vulnerable to financial and legal penalties.

Most debt settlement clients have multiple debts: to credit card companies, debt collection agencies, doctors' offices, utilities, and/or the IRS. So, one might expect that clients would ask the firm to negotiate the debts on which it was most likely to be successful. Firm agents knew that medical debt was much easier to negotiate without penalty than tax debt or even credit card debt. And yet, agents told us that consistently, people in debt refused to try to negotiate medical debt. They felt morally obligated to repay these debts in full. "It's just weird to me that some people call up trying to settle with the government but not a hospital," one agent told us. "It's like they are the government—you would rather try to settle back taxes with the *government*? Is that really the smartest thing to do?" Rather than a market pricing relationship (in which repayment of the debt in full was calculated to avoid penalty), debt settlement clients imagined an equality-matching relationship (in which repayment of the debt in full was understood as reciprocation to an equal) or even an authority ranking relationship (in which repayment of the debt in full was a token of gratitude to a superior). And more generally, clients often talked about debts as being to people who deserved or did not deserve repayment in full. The result, however, was that clients often chose to renegotiate debts that

rendered them vulnerable to financial penalty. The relationships they imagined came at a cost to their economic self-interest, even if such relationships allowed them to retain a view of themselves as autonomous and moral actors (Polletta, 2020).

In the case of the grandniece in Zelizer's account and the debt settlement clients in mine and Tufail's, people invented relationships they did not have and acted on the obligations of those relationships. They used relationship schemas creatively (Swidler, 2001) as a way to be the moral people they wanted to be. We can call this self-interest, but in the case of the debt settlement clients, at least, it led them to act against their financial self-interest. Why might people imagine relationships they do not have to act morally? Because they are capable of doing so. To use William Sewell's (1992) terms, they can *transpose* familiar relationship schemas from one set of interactions to another; that is, treat an employee like a friend or a member of a sports team. Indeed, insofar as schemas are "*cultural* blueprints" (McCall, 1988) for relationships, people often know the expectations of relationships they personally have not had. An experimental study of a prisoner's dilemma game showed that when people were told they were participating in a "Wall Street game," they were much less likely to cooperate than when they were told they were participating in a "community game" (Montgomery, 1998). Presumably, most participants had not worked on Wall Street.

But why might we turn to such relationship schemas in settings where they do not obviously apply? I suggest two reasons, both reflecting the fact that in real life, outside trolley car scenarios, moral judgment involves balancing moral concerns with concerns of self-interest and appropriateness and doing so when none of those things—what is moral, what is in our self-interest, what is appropriate—is transparent. We turn to imagined relationships, I suggest, first, in order to be the people we believe we should be. And we are likely to do so when circumstances put our self-image as moral in jeopardy. Pizzorno (1996) argued that our sense of who we are depends on a "circle of recognition" constituted by our relationships. But at times when circumstances or inclinations push us in the direction of decisions that will not be recognized as moral by our existing circle we may well imagine an alternative circle, an alternative relationship in which our behavior *is* moral. We redefine the situation, as W.I. Thomas (1928) might say, but specifically by redefining the relationship in which we are making a decision. We imagine ourselves in a contractual relationship with a relative, and if the relative agrees to that fiction, she has effectively recognized us as the autonomous adult we want to be rather than the dependent child we fear we seem.

Imagined relationships may also be a way to move from emotional intuitions to moral principles. Imagined relationships are in this respect something like metaphors that help us to do the imaginative work of figuring out how to translate our dimly sensed feeling that something is right or wrong into the judgment that allows us to act (see Jasper, 2018 on emotions as imaginative and Harkness & Hitlin, 2014 on morality and emotions). This is because we associate relationships not only with certain norms and expectations but with distinctive feelings: parenthood with feelings of love and responsibility; a bargaining relationship with an emotionally cool assessment of costs and gains; a diplomatic relationship with a sensitivity to making commitments carefully. It may be that we have a feeling, and then connect it to a relationship in order to know what is required of us. That is, rather than thinking about what is right, we think about what we owe someone. Consider, in this respect, a Polish writer's account of two intellectuals asked to sign a petition against the authoritarian regime in power. Each man knew the danger of making his name public. One said, "I can't. I have a son." The other said, "I have to sign, because I have a son." "The two answers express old alternatives," the writer observed: "The preservation of one's existence; the legacy of honor" (Brandys, 1984: 152). While the first man thought of his more immediate needs and responsibilities—if he were to be imprisoned, he would not be able to care for his son—the second man thought about how he wanted his son to

remember him. He projected himself into the point of view of his son years later, looking back on his present self with pride or shame. Attaching the abstract demands of honor to his future son—his imagined son—made those demands as morally compelling as protecting his son.

Having to decide whether or not to sign a petition against an authoritarian regime at the risk of imprisonment is not a situation that anyone encounters in a daily way. Moral psychologist Joshua Greene (2017) suggests that although we make many moral decisions in everyday life in an automatic and intuitive way, we occasionally encounter moral questions that are novel, complicated, or otherwise unfamiliar. The moral heuristics on which we so easily rely the rest of the time (our "gut feelings") are not adequate in situations like these: our intuitions may well conflict. We judge, in moments like these, on the basis of something more than gut feeling and something less than rational deliberation (and see Luft, 2020 on the way situations, and moral judgments, may vary). Along those lines, I suggest that we may draw on relationships metaphorically when we have a vague feeling about something being right or wrong but have no obvious moral principle with which to articulate it, as the example of the White survey respondents who felt "close" to African Americans. Imagining that Black people were something like intimates yielded a moral judgment that was distinct from the operation of respondents' values, interests, or real relationships.

It makes sense that we invoke ties of family, friendship, and community to name moral obligations we feel strongly about. We have warmer feelings toward and feel more identified with and compelled by intimate groups like friends and family than by work groups or broad social categories like women or political progressives (see Graham et al., 2017 for a developmental view of those attachments). This explains why states and movements have long used familial metaphors to convince people to sacrifice for the nation: the "motherland," the "Founding Fathers," the "sons of the nation." Feminist solidarity was built on the notion of "sisterhood." But we also can imagine moral obligations to non-intimates; witness the debt settlement clients and the grandniece. Indeed, as I will suggest in the next section, priming less intimate relationships—a group of peers as opposed to a group of intimates—may make people *more* willing to sacrifice for the good of others.

3 Imagined Relationships and Sacrifice for the Cause

So far, I have argued that imagined relationships may supersede people's calculation of self-interest. Now I want to turn to occasions in which they may supersede the obligations of people's real relationships and may supersede people's professed moral values in motivating sacrifice for the good of others.

Scholars of social movements have sought to explain why people sometimes participate in social movements rather than "free ride" on the efforts of others. If they will benefit from the movement's success whether they participate or not, why expend the time and energy and court the risks that participation requires? (Olson, 1965) Movements rarely have the resources to offer people selective incentives for their participation, which was Mancur Olson's solution to the problem. Instead, movement scholars have identified *solidary* incentives that are provided by preexisting relationships (for reviews, see Passy & Monsch, 2014; Simpson & Willer, 2015). People join movements because people they like and respect and trust are already participating in the movement. Accordingly, protest is more likely in densely networked communities.

One can imagine, though, that in circumstances in which protest is likely to be met with violent repression, deep bonds of solidarity might discourage people from participating. One's family member, good friend, or minister might feel an obligation to prevent one from joining a movement that would put one and one's family at risk of arrest, eviction, firing, or assault. These were the circumstances in which

civil rights organizers worked in the Deep South in the early 1960s (Polletta, 2020). While in other areas of the South, Black clergymen played critical roles in recruiting participants to the movement (Morris, 1984), in rural areas of Mississippi and Southwest Georgia, ministers were often unwilling to become involved with the movement (Payne, 1995). They worried for their own livelihood, since many were employed part-time by whites, and they worried for the safety of their congregants. They counseled congregants against getting involved with the movement (Carson, 1981). Young Black civil rights organizers from Mississippi who tried to mobilize people in their own hometowns, for their part, often came up against a brick wall of opposition. Their adult family members tried to stop their efforts for fear of repercussion, and people they had known their whole lives seemed uninterested in or skeptical of their entreaties (Moses, 1962).

Organizers were more effective in towns where they were outsiders, the Mississippi project head concluded in one of the hundreds of field reports I read documenting the Voter Education Project's work in 1962 and 1963 (Polletta, 2020). In those towns, organizers were able to persuade some people to attend movement meetings, to try to register to vote, to demonstrate against segregated facilities, and to file suit for the denial of their voting rights. Why?

In part, because outsiders could claim relationships they did not actually have. Organizers said they had direct connections to the federal Justice Department and indeed, to President Kennedy, and that those offices would protect anyone who tried to vote. They said they were the local representatives of a South-wide movement that was counting on their efforts. Family members and close friends might have reason to question both of those claimed relationships.

In fact, the federal government ignored most of the organizers' entreaties and the movement was remote from small rural towns in the Deep South. But if they could not provide protection, organizers could provide the "circle of recognition" that Pizzorno describes. In conversations with the residents they canvassed, organizers talked about the material gains to be won through participation and talked about ideals of freedom and justice. But they also called on people's obligations as citizens, as Christians, and as parents. The government did not recognize Black southern residents as citizens, but organizers sought to convince those residents that "standing up" by way of protest was a sign of "first-class citizenship" as well as a means to it. The local minister sought to dissuade congregants from getting involved in dangerous activism, but organizers countered that being a Christian required participating. As parents, Southern Black residents should do whatever they could to protect their children. But the young civil rights organizers, bold and daring, also young and naïve, became something like children to residents. As one resident described the civil rights worker who came to town: "Well I thought he was a child, a young man that was trying to do a good part . . . he needed some help, he needed all our support" (Payne, 1995: 182). Organizers needed residents' help, but help that residents could give only by participating themselves. Of course, residents knew that organizers were not their children. The relationship was metaphorical, but the metaphor provided the language to name a moral obligation that competed with people's existing obligations. More generally, I argue that movement participation may require an allegiance to imagined others: to people who are more unified than any real group is ever likely to be (Polletta, 2020).

4 Imagined Relationships and National Identity

I want to take up another question that has vexed scholars and political actors. Allegiance to the nation has led people to make extraordinary sacrifices. It has also led them to make war on other nations and to draw narrow lines around who counts as a true citizen. The question is whether it is possible to have an inclusive and non-bellicose nationalism (Banting & Kymlicka, 2017). In this regard, scholars have long contrasted an exclusionary ethnic nationalism,

which is primordial and premised on something like kinship, with a more inclusionary civic nationalism, which is based on a respect for liberal values and institutions (Kohn, 1944). Scholars today recognize that no nation is characterized exclusively by one or the other. Still, insofar as civic nationalism is seen as normatively preferable, scholars have sought to account for why, in practice, it has seemed less emotionally mobilizing than ethnic nationalism. One answer is that civic nationalism does not make clear what makes any single liberal democratic nation different from all the others (Banting & Kymlicka, 2017). I want to suggest another answer. Where ethnic forms of nationalism imagine citizens as something like kin or close friends, civic forms imagine only a loose grouping of strangers who happen to share common political beliefs (Honohan, 2001). It is difficult to see how one could legitimately expect sacrifice from strangers. Ethnic nationalism is inherently exclusionary, premised as it is on primordial relationships of kinship. But civic nationalism seems to lack the kinds of imputed emotional bonds that might compel a willingness to sacrifice for the group.

I wonder, though, if there is an alternative. Is it possible to conceptualize allegiance to the nation in terms of familiar relationship schemas that are cooperative but that are not as exclusive as kinship or friendship? Consider, in this regard, two experiments. Shortly after the attacks of 9/11, Li and Brewer (2004) primed subjects to think about the bonds joining Americans in one of two ways. Some subjects read a statement that 9/11 had united Americans by reminding them of "what we have in common as Americans . . . the core essence of what it means to be American." Li and Brewer anticipated that the statement would prime a familiar view of groups as cohering around members' similar and fundamental attributes, attributes that endow the group with a timeless essence. For members of this kind of group, the authors hypothesized, differentiating the group from outsiders would be especially important. Other subjects read a statement that 9/11 had united Americans by giving them "a common purpose to fight terrorism in all of its forms and to work together." The authors anticipated that this statement would prime a different, but also familiar, view of groups cohering around members' efforts to solve a common problem or pursue a common purpose. Maintaining boundaries between the in-group and the out-group would be less important than ensuring that members of the group were able to cooperate effectively. When, after reading one of the two statements, subjects answered questions designed to measure their attachments to the nation and their views of minority groups, the authors found that in the first, essence-based group condition, higher levels of national identification were associated with cultural intolerance. In the purpose-based group condition, that was not the case. Thinking about the imagined community as bound by a common purpose led people to be more concerned with what group members needed in order to be able to work together. That is, the value of patriotism issued either in support for or opposition to inclusive policy depending on how people imagined that which joined them.

Another set of experiments focused not on boundaries within the nation, but on boundaries between nations. Powers (2018) sought to prime an understanding of the nation as characterized by peer relationships of equality rather than relationships of communal sharing. The latter, according to Fiske (1991), is characteristic of nations, albeit in an attenuated form. What would it mean, Powers asked, to think about our national identity instead in terms of equality-matching relationships? Powers had subjects imagine themselves as citizens of a fictional country that had suffered internal conflict in the past but no longer did. Some subjects read about current group relations characterized by communal norms of exchange, decision-making, and identification (with language such as citizens are "unified as a community" and "have similar values"). Other subjects read about current relations operating on the egalitarian norms of Fiske's equality-matching relationship (citizens "differ in many ways, but . . . generally think of one another as equals"). Asked subsequently how the country should respond to a three-part foreign

policy crisis, subjects in the equality-matching condition were significantly less likely to endorse a militaristic response. Interestingly, these subjects did not score lower on measures of national chauvinism. Rather, Powers speculates, they saw their country's superiority as lying in its egalitarian, peer-like relations rather than in its shared primordial past. In a second experiment in which the country was identified as the United States, Powers again found that priming equality-matching relationships diminished the bellicose dimensions of nationalism.

Note that both sets of experiments drew on understandings of solidarity that are familiar to Americans. We have ready referents for groups that are unified around members' common purposes rather than their sameness, and referents for egalitarian peer relationships as distinct from communal sharing ones. People may not call these relationships to mind immediately when they think of what binds co-nationals, but as these experiments suggest, they can do so pretty easily. And doing so leads them to endorse policies advancing inclusive national solidarity and policies that do not assume antagonism with other nations.

5 Conclusion

A sociological approach treats conceptions of morality as sustained by social processes rather than biological or evolutionary ones (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). The social processes on which I have focused here have to do with people's definition of the relationship they are in. Not only are different moral obligations attached to different relationships. People sometimes imagine relationships they do not actually have as a way to act morally in situations that are ambiguous or that pose a threat to their sense of moral self. That they can do so owes to the fact that relationships are both jointly fashioned and informed by cultural ideas about what a bond of this type looks like and requires. In their moral decision-making, people thus both *use* cultural ideas about relationships, often creatively (Swidler, 2001), and do so in a way that guides their moral action (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013).

This perspective raises a number of questions. Aside from better understanding the circumstances in which people rely on imagined relationships, we should investigate the consequences of their doing so. Elsewhere, I have suggested that people are constrained in their use of relationship schemas by the relative power of the parties with whom they are interacting as well as the cultural norms that make certain schemas available. They are also constrained by their investment in the integrity of relationship schemas. The latter may prevent them from modifying an actual relationship even when it is clear it is not serving them, for fear that it becomes too close to another relationship (Polletta, 2020). Finally, we need to know much more about the conditions in which national solidarity can be built on "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991) that are not intimate ones.

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Altruism, Morality, and the Morality of Altruism

Andrey Bykov

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the prospects for the sociology of altruism in the context of the relations between the notions of altruism and morality. For this purpose, I briefly discuss three problems that, I believe, are important for the sociological comprehension of altruism—namely, those of moral worth, moral boundaries, and impartiality. Ascribing moral worth to the acts of altruism is a plausible mechanism for a normative maintenance of unconditional helping, suggesting that human morality contains certain important layers beyond those explained by the evolutionary-utilitarian factors. The idea of moral boundaries denotes the social processes that restrict altruism to the people of particular backgrounds, groups, and identities. The impartiality of altruism, on the contrary, refers to the normative perspective that recognizes the interests of everyone affected by the action, and it arguably also plays an important part in making meaning of one's life. I suggest that elaborating on these issues would considerably advance the sociological studies of altruism.

Keywords

Altruism · Impartiality · Morality · Moral boundaries · Moral worth

1 Introduction

Altruism, a classical sociological concept and matter of interest, reappeared in the domain of our discipline after a notable neglect about a decade ago (Bykov, 2017). One can draw such conclusion based on the establishing of an ASA section on "Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity" in 2012, subsequent publishing of a special volume (Jeffries, 2014a), and some more recent attempts to conceptually advance the field (e.g., Mangone, 2022). Yet, despite these and other efforts, the sociology of altruism is still arguably far from full institutionalization, as the prospects for the sociological approach look rather vague, and field is largely dominated by cognitive and behavioral sciences (e.g., Calder et al., 2022; Conte et al., 2021). Therefore, to stimulate further progress in this area, it is needed to put forward some core problems and directions of research that point at sociologically relevant facets of altruism as a social and moral issue. In this chapter, I aim at suggesting certain ideas about how we could deepen the sociological understanding of altruism within the new sociology of morality (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013).

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V. Jeffries, initially proposing his vision of the field's future, suggested that one of the promising directions would be to focus on clarifying the links between "diverse and often interrelated phenomena" (Jeffries, 2014b, p. 6) of altruism, morality, and social solidarity—and I definitely concur. Yet here I leave aside the relations between the concept of altruism and those of solidarity, helping or prosocial behavior (for the latter, see Pfattheicher et al., 2022). Also, rather than analyzing the general theoretical connection between the notions of altruism and morality (but in no way questioning its essential character), in this chap. I concentrate on specifying the conceptual areas that are promising in terms of elaborating the research program of the sociology of altruism, focusing especially on the latter's moral compounds. Thus, in what follows, I discuss three important, and interrelated, problems associated with altruism—namely, moral worth, moral boundaries, and impartiality—and try to demonstrate the significance of these issues for advancing our comprehension of both moral and immoral actions. While the three, of course, by no means exhaust all the sociologically perspective visions of altruism, and my treatment of them is rather sketchy, I argue that they are particularly significant and insightful for further developing the theory of morality, and they also imply potential practical implications.

2 The Moral Worth of Altruism

Evolutionary and economic approaches to altruism, that is, actions that benefit others at the actor's cost, explain it in terms of utility one gains from such acts—be that increasing inclusive genetic fitness or a mere feeling of "warm glow" after doing something good (Bykov, 2017; Krebs, 2008). Indeed, many studies show that humans are no exception to the evolutionary logic of moral behavior, as we also tend to prefer close kin and friends as recipients of help compared to unrelated others (e.g., Burnstein et al., 1994). Even some unconditional acts of altruism, such as helping a stranger on the street or making anonymous donations to charity, can potentially be explained via indirect profit one gains by acting morally—referring, for instance, to the mechanisms of generalized reciprocity (Molm et al., 2007) or sustaining moral identity (Krettenauer, 2020). But is the "puzzle of altruism" ultimately solved by pointing at its genetic basis and egoistic motivation? Perhaps, it is not that simple. While some social psychologists and sociologists have attempted to either demonstrate that genuine altruism does exist and matter (Batson, 1991) or otherwise argue for its social and cultural complexity (e.g., by suggesting to link the studies of altruism to the social movements literature (Piliavin, 2009)), here I aim to illustrate how focusing on the moral worth of helping acts might advance the conceptual understanding of altruism.

The sociological perspective on altruism stresses its normative, as opposed to mere behavioral, character—helping actions are considered by people to be good and desirable or, to put it simply, are generally praised in society (Bykov, 2017). Yet, like other moral phenomena, people's evaluations of altruism are also context-sensitive, which means that certain conditions can influence one's ideas about who should be helped, in what way, and how morally worthy this act would be. To illustrate this potentially problematic character of the moral appraisals of altruism, I can give you two "facts" about me: (1) yesterday, I did not donate $1000 to a charity foundation, and (2) yesterday, I did not give $1000 to a good friend of mine who was in a desperate financial situation and was asking for help. Given that I actually had a free $1000, do these two "facts" equally characterize me as an (im)moral person or could there be any differences depending on, for instance, the recipients of help and my relations to them? It seems quite plausible that the normative evaluations of altruism might reflect both evolutionary-utilitarian (e.g., mechanisms of reciprocity) and deontological (e.g., unconditionally helping everyone in need) logics, so that there is a need to investigate their relations in particular social contexts and circumstances.

Some experiments show that, indeed, people appear to evaluate the moral worth of altruistic actions quite differently. McManus et al. (2020),

in a series of studies, comprehensively addressed the role of kinship in ascribing moral worth to the acts of helping. They found that, in situations when there is no direct choice between the possible recipients, people consider those who helped a stranger to be more morally good compared to those who helped a relative. Yet, in situations of direct choice, the pattern was reverse, as those who benefitted a stranger instead of a relative were judged to be less morally good than those who helped the latter. In a follow-up study (McManus et al., 2021), they also showed that, before the act of help (in "no choice" condition), their participants considered the vignette protagonists to be more obligated to help kin compared to a stranger; however, after the act of help, the participants attributed more moral goodness to those who helped a stranger compared to kin. In our own study (Deviatko & Bykov, 2022), we found a similar pattern in relation not only to kinship, but also to other evolutionary-utilitarian factors—namely, reciprocity and cost of help. Overall, people seem to value unconditional altruism (at least retrospectively and in certain contexts) by ascribing more moral worth to the actions that contradict the logic of inclusive fitness and reciprocity, which suggests that Durkheim's understanding of a moral act as transcending oneself and one's egoistic interests (Durkheim, 2010) is also reflected in lay normative evaluations. While this attribution of moral goodness can be also explained by the mechanisms of indirect or generalized exchange (e.g., the benefits of the reputation of being benevolent) (Curry et al., 2019), these intriguing results might stimulate further detailed research on the normative evaluations of altruism, and their relations to other cognitive and behavioral variables.

Furthermore, I believe that one more promising theme for the sociology of altruism in relation to its moral worth lies within the also-almost-forgotten in sociology (although see Abend, 2014) field of professional ethics. In one of their experiments, McManus et al. (2020) found that social roles matter for ascribing moral goodness to altruism: if a college professor, who is supposed to act based on the principle of universalism, chose to help a stranger instead of a relative, she was judged to be more morally good compared to the situation when the choice was the opposite. This finding suggests that Parsons, who famously stressed the link between professional status and normative expectations (Parsons, 1991), has been discredited by the sociologists of morality rather unfairly, but it also points at an interesting direction of future research. Although our societies and cultures changed dramatically since the middle of the twentieth century, certain professional roles (not only scholars and physicians, but also—and increasingly so—managers and businesspeople) are still associated with following "altruistic" ethical standards, so that the normative evaluations of professional/ corporate altruism, as well as the relations between moral and professional identities, deserve further investigation (see also Shadnam et al., 2021). Yet, unfortunately for Parsons, who believed that normative expectations and actual behavior might be considered nearly identical, in reality, people do not always act according to the highest moral ideals, which leads us to the problem of the boundaries of altruism.

3 The Moral Boundaries of Altruism

"Morality binds and blinds"—J. Haidt's (Haidt, 2013) famous formula sheds light not only on the phenomena of moralistic aggression and morally motivated conflicts but also clarifies why most people are not that altruistic, especially toward those belonging to outgroups. While there are, undoubtedly, outstanding moral exemplars, including people (and whole NGOs, see (Dromi, 2020)) who do their best to help those in need worldwide, the majority of us are very far from being equally benevolent to all other people, irrespective of their background and relations to us. As the social distance increases, people's desire to help others considerably goes down—which was noticed and experimentally demonstrated by many, including Sorokin (1967), who, however, was rather lamenting

about this fact than trying to propose an explanation.

Some classical social theorists, such as A. Smith (2002) and H. Spencer (1896), argued against compassion toward all those who suffer in the world, because this would just lead to pointless depression and anxiety. Obviously, our cognitive and emotional capacities for altruism are limited, so is our objective power to help distant others—hence, it is literally impossible to be excessively empathetic to their miseries while remaining sane. Yet, at some point these psychological traits and dispositions meet social processes of boundary-drawing (Simpson et al., 2017), which is also a sociologically interesting direction of research on the factors shaping our motivation to help some people, but not others.

The metaphor of "boundaries" received much attention from scholars interested in various facets of social differentiation, especially related to its symbolic forms and collective identities (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). In this vein, the concept of moral boundaries refers to the social virtues or character judgments, which give one a sense of moral worth as compared to others: "one draws moral boundaries when one feels superior to people who have low moral standards and are dishonest, or when one criticizes others for being selfish" (Lamont et al., 1996, p. 34). Yet, the idea of moral boundaries is also relevant not just to the perception of individual character, but to that of group identities, which constitutes an important direction of research within the sociology of morality.

Sociologists show that moral boundaries are being constantly (re)constructed by identifying against other groups and social categories, such as class, race, nationalities, and religions (e.g., Trappmann et al., 2021). Indeed, people seem to assess members of outgroups as less moral compared to those from the groups they identify with (Firat et al., 2018), and this sense of "being better than they" might have considerable consequences for altruistic actions. The "moral disengagement" (Bandura, 1999), thus, might manifest not only via the approval of explicitly harmful actions toward outgroup members, but simply by denying them due help, since they can be viewed as not deserving it because of their immoral nature. While anthropological evidence (Smith, 2016) and general psychological theories of morality (Haidt, 2013) suggest dehumanization to be a universal phenomenon, sociologists can contribute to understanding of its mechanisms in the case of modern societies by examining the role of cultural narratives, media framings, and political polarization in shaping people's ideas about who deserves help and who does not.

Altruism, thus, can be viewed not only as a decision to help a certain recipient at the donor's expense but also at the "expense" of not helping others. Of course, it is not that the actors always actually experience making such a choice (although they do experience it in some situations, for example, while choosing a charity from a list for making a donation), but the study of the social processes that influence our decisions to help particular people, groups, and organizations, while not others, needs further comprehension. The moral boundaries of altruism, like many other moral phenomena, are likely to be dynamic and context-sensitive, as varying framings, identities, and events might change one's ideas about who should be helped. Psychological experiments show that even explicit and transparent nudges can foster prosocial actions (e.g., Gråd et al., 2021), so sociologists of altruism can focus on whether such nudges can help overcome the social mechanisms of sustaining moral boundaries, especially beyond the experimental contexts and in the long run (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013).

4 The Impartiality of Altruism

So, if altruism, being largely based on the evolutionary-utilitarian mechanisms, is subject to multiple biases, both cognitive and social, can one really hope for genuine moral progress, as Comte, the author of the term, did? The debate about the possibility of genuine altruism that has been lasting for centuries will hardly end in the foreseeable future, but it is still worth considering the relations between the normative idea of altruism and that of impartiality, as both can be viewed

as oppositions to egocentric and ethnocentric perspectives, which favor individual or collective self-interests. This juxtaposition of altruism and impartiality can be fruitful for the sociology of morality, as it might considerably broaden both its conceptual and empirical research agenda.

Many psychologists, philosophers and social theorists—from Mead and Piaget to Rawls and Habermas—argued that moral development can be seen as a transition from ego/ ethno-centric perspective, which only recognizes the interests of oneself or one's own group (be that national, racial, political, or any other with which one identifies) to impartial perspective, which is able to account for the interests of everyone affected by the situation. This is why a genuinely moral act is usually associated with a true sacrifice of one's own interests and well-being, and this is probably why people attribute more moral worth to unconditional altruism. While the instances of "unreasonable" altruism, such as donating most of one's capital to charity, which exceed any social expectations (what Sorokin (1914) called "recommended acts," as opposed to "allowed-obligatory" ones), are relatively rare, they still indicate the unavoidable mystery of human morality, one that is arguably related to the essential problems of meaningful life. I suggest that linking altruism to the idea of impartiality allows for comprehending the tensions between self-regarding motivations and decentered understanding of the social world, which is important in terms of both the problems of internal meanings and external consequences of moral actions.

If, following Durkheim (2010), one sees moral act as a kind of transcending oneself, then genuinely impartial altruism is vital for both societal integration and individual meaning-making. Modern rationalism has drastic negative effects on one's sense of life meaningfulness: as Habermas (1984) argued, what once belonged to the domain of sacred and was thus unquestionable, in a disenchanted world of contemporary capitalism requires reaching an impartial agreement through what he called communicative action. From this perspective, altruism can be seen as a way to break with the doxic market society premises of living for oneself and realizing self-interests, and a path to what is sometimes conceptualized as a supreme stage of moral development (Gibbs, 2014). By deciding to engage in significant altruism, one can deliberately choose to act in accordance with the most advanced form of rational understanding of the social world, which recognizes the shared vulnerability of all human beings, regardless of their relations to the actor. So, the idea of altruism, thus understood, can be linked to the existential problems of values, a sense of living a meaningful life by adherence to impartial moral standards, which allow for rising above our ancestral instincts and tribalism.

Such a vision of altruism does not contradict the evolutionary-utilitarian models—rather, it stresses that it is more than that, and human morality cannot be fully accounted for by mere behavioral mechanisms of inclusive fitness and reciprocity. Altruism plays a significant part in meaning-making, which should be addressed not only by ethical and (normative) social theory, but also by empirical studies focusing on the role of motivation for altruism in the context of existential problems of life and the fact of human mortality. Yet, what is sociologically interesting is the role of institutions and organizations (Healy, 2004) in promoting impartial altruism, and various social processes associated with it. Making meaning of altruism is symbolic, and hence collective phenomenon, and sociology of morality should clarify how individual ideas of altruism are constructed through social interactions and acquisition of cultural elements.

Various social movements, NGO's, charity foundations, and social media provide examples of such joint activities, through which the meanings and meaningfulness of altruism are reproduced, as a combination of "external" normativity and "internal" sense of higher purpose. More conceptual and empirical work on such meso- and macro-level phenomena would add an important dimension to the understanding of altruism, seeing it not just as a product of our biological nature but as a significant component of living a meaningful life in a society of fellow human beings, one that is collectively constructed

and negotiated within multiple social, media, and organizational environments. While linking impartial altruism to the idea of meaningfulness needs specific sociological research, one can suppose that it can be especially problematic in the contemporary context of contested globalization and increased political and cultural divisions, both within and across societies. Is genuine impartiality possible in such conditions, and, if so, what social forms it could take? How impartial altruism is related to the collectively constructed moral meanings of life? Focusing on such issues would conceptually enrich the sociology of altruism by providing a more comprehensive picture of human morality than that of behavioral sciences.

5 Conclusion

Being an evolutionary product that we humans share with many other animals, altruism is also a part of complex moral and cultural systems, which begs for rather sociological than biological perspective. In this brief chapter, I suggested three promising areas for advancing the sociology of altruism—focusing on its moral worth, moral boundaries, and impartiality. I argued that elaborating on these three problems (among others) might help move the sociology of altruism forward by clarifying the social processes that make human altruism unique, setting it within larger contexts of morality and meaning-making. Whether or not one endorses the normative views of Comte and Sorokin, understanding moral behavior is still the first—and inevitable—step before cultivating more progressive altruistic practices. Yet, as the recent global turbulences show, we might need way more altruism as a response to the threatening social and political polarizations, so let us hope it will not be too late for our joint future on this beautiful planet.

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Prosocial Decision-Making by Groups and Individuals: A Social-Psychological Approach

Ashley Harrell

Abstract

Social-psychological approaches to the study of morality typically rely on the individual as the key unit of analysis, with less attention to morality as it is enacted in groups or larger social structures. Sociology, on the other hand, has long been concerned with collective morality. This chapter synthesizes recent cross-disciplinary work on one key question about the operation of morality in small groups: how do groups' morally-relevant decisions and behaviors differ from those of individuals acting alone? I focus on one morally-charged social behavior—prosocial behavior—and ask what situations and intergroup dynamics facilitate, or inhibit, prosocial behaviors made at the group versus individual level. While some prior work suggests that groups "behave badly," other research demonstrates that groups "do good," compared to their individual counterparts. I identify key moderators and contexts that might explain these conflicting results. This chapter concludes with a call for social psychologists to further expand beyond the domain of the individual decision-maker. After all, morally-relevant decision-making commonly operates in groups, and is critical in fostering social order.

Keywords

Social psychology · Prosocial behavior · Groups · Decision-making

The social-psychological perspective in sociology asks how contexts, groups, and social structures influence individuals—and how individuals, in turn, influence the structures in which they are embedded (Hegtvedt & Johnson, 2017; Rohall et al., 2021; Stolte et al., 2001; Thoits, 1995). Social-psychological approaches to the sociology of morality, then, are centered on individuals and groups as they act in morally-relevant situations (Hitlin, 2008, 2014). The dominant approach to the social psychology of morality tends to define moral thought, attitudes, and behaviors as that which *individuals* subjectively perceive to be right or wrong (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010; Monin & Jordan, 2009). And social psychologists studying morality typically rely on the individual as the key unit of analysis, with less attention to morality as it is enacted in groups or larger social structures (Ellemers, 2017; Leach et al., 2015).

Consider, for example, the host of social-psychological work that has sought to uncover the personality traits—compassion, empathy, agreeableness, and more—that motivate people to behave morally (Batson, 2011; Habashi et al.,

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2016; Hilbig et al., 2014). The situational determinants of morally-relevant behaviors were once a central concern among social psychologists. But this approach has more recently been de-emphasized in favor of individual-level questions about the existence of an "altruistic personality" that predicts behavior across situations (Piliavin & Charng, 1990; Thielmann et al., 2020). Another major stream of morality research in psychology has sought to understand how individual decision-makers reason over the classic "trolley problem" and other moral dilemmas (Cushman et al., 2006; Greene et al., 2001). And social-psychological work on moral convictions asserts that morality is in the eye of the beholder, centering on people's attitudes about what they subjectively experience as moral (for a review, see Skitka et al., 2021).

These and other lines of research have yielded rich insights into morality at the individual level. Yet collective and larger-scale phenomena are often missing from the puzzle. As a result, social-psychological approaches to morality have been criticized as examining the generic individual in a generic setting, leaving groups and the larger social context out entirely (Ellemers, 2017; Leach et al., 2015). Individual morality operates within and between groups: personal convictions about morality are shaped by, and differ across, the groups to which we belong (Ellemers, 2017; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010; Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). People are moral (or immoral) in their families, workplaces, communities, and cultures (Firat & McPherson, 2010; Leach et al., 2015). And moral judgments are determined not by individuals alone, but also by the social features of the situation (Luft, 2020).

Of course, sociology has been concerned with collective morality, enacted and expressed up to the societal level, since at least Durkheim ([1893] 1996, [1912] 2001). The sociological perspective often asks why groups of people have the moral views that they do, and considers the effect of these group-level views on behaviors, interactions, and institutions (Abend, 2008, 2014). This approach has the opportunity to answer increasing calls within psychology to address collective-level phenomena by engaging with sociologists (Oishi et al., 2009) for a broader social psychology of morality. In the remainder of this chapter, I apply a social-psychological perspective, drawing from a range of cross-disciplinary research, to synthesize recent work on one key question about the operation of morality in groups: *how do groups' morally-relevant decisions and behaviors differ from those of individuals acting alone*? To do so, I largely focus on one morally-charged social behavior—prosocial behavior. I ask what situations and intergroup dynamics facilitate, or inhibit, prosocial behaviors at the group versus individual level.

1 Prosocial Behavior in Groups and Individuals

Prosocial behaviors are typically defined as acts that provide benefits to one or more others; usually, they also entail a cost to the self (Penner et al., 2005; Piliavin, 2009; Simpson & Willer, 2008). Of course, prosocial behaviors are just one of many "ingredients" in social-psychological approaches to morality (Hitlin, 2014). But they are also critical. Indeed, morality is often conflated with related but distinct terms like "prosocial behavior" or "altruism"—especially in social psychology (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010; Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010; Piliavin & Charng, 1990; Weiss & Peres, 2014). Prosocial behaviors are, however, closely related to moral principles of harm and fairness (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). They are also typically supported by norms about what is right or wrong, and are central to fostering social order (Ellemers et al., 2019; Simpson & Willer, 2015). An array of prosocial behaviors—including generosity, cooperation, and trustworthiness—are therefore of clear moral relevance.

Even in sociology, the majority of research on prosocial behaviors has sought to understand what drives those behaviors at the individual level. That groups often organize and oversee joint prosocial behaviors, intended to provide benefits to third parties external to the group initiating them, has been of significantly less

concern in the literature (Callero et al., 1987; Eckstein, 2001; Healy, 2004). But understanding more about how groups make decisions to engage in prosocial behavior is critical. After all, many morally-relevant decisions, including decisions about prosocial behavior, are made within, and by, groups. At the dyadic level, married couples that donate to charity frequently report that they make the decision jointly (Andreoni et al., 2003). And groups—ranging from small work teams to large-scale organizations—often face social dilemmas where they are tasked with deciding as a unit whether and how much to cooperate with others (e.g., countries making decisions on how to combat climate change, communities managing and distributing natural resources), or behave trustworthily (e.g., corporations acting in a competitive market).

While the standard approach to the study of prosocial behaviors assumes the decision-maker is an individual (Callero et al., 1987; Eckstein, 2001; Harrell, 2021), some recent work has sought to understand whether—and to what extent—groups versus individuals alone make decisions to benefit others. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the work that does exist suggests that individual decisions about engaging in prosocial behavior differ from, and are not necessarily a good predictor of, group decisions (Charness & Sutter, 2012; Kugler et al., 2012). Just *how* they differ has remained a matter of debate. One stream of arguments and supporting evidence suggests that group decisions tend to be less other-regarding and more selfish, compared to individually-made decisions. Other work has shown that groups are *more* likely than individuals to engage in morally-relevant behaviors, including generosity and cooperation, toward a third party. The next sections review these conflicting theories and findings—beginning with arguments that groups "behave badly."

1.1 Groups Behaving Badly

There are several reasons to expect that group (versus individual) decision-making about prosocial behavior suppresses other-regarding decisions. First, note that those tasked with making decisions to benefit others jointly as a group must take into account the other group members' willingness to engage in prosocial behavior. After all, one of the key requirements of group decision-making entails aggregating individual preferences into a single group decision. Critically, the more decision-makers involved in a decision to benefit others, the greater the likelihood that any one decision-maker will prefer to engage in more selfish behavior. This "weak link" group member is especially likely to bring down the level of other-regarding behavior that might have otherwise occurred were decision-makers acting individually (De Oliveira et al., 2015; Marwell & Schmitt, 1972).

Still further, once a single group member vocalizes a preference for selfish behavior, the others may also be inclined to think that selfishness is acceptable, spreading social approval for self-regarding behavior. Groups can provide their members with the support to pursue their immediate self-interest at the expense of others; this same social support is not available to individual decision-makers (Kugler et al., 2012; Wildschut et al., 2002). In line with these arguments, prior work has shown that group decisions to provide benefits to a third party are driven especially by the group's relatively more selfish members, resulting in lower levels of helping than when decisions are made alone (Luhan et al., 2009).

Additionally, past work has demonstrated that people expect others to be guided by their own self-interest to a greater extent than they actually are (Miller, 1999; Miller & Ratner, 1998; Ratner & Miller, 2001). Thus, even if there is no "weak link" in the group—and the group is made up of members who are inclined to behave prosocially—this work suggests that each individual in the group might (incorrectly) expect the *other* decision-makers to prefer self-interested behavior. Via this alternative (and non-competing) route, collectives might come to relatively more self-interested group decisions because they expect, accurately or not, that it is in line with the others' preferences.

Finally, groups also encourage their members to recognize an outgroup—a "them" compared to

an "us," such that "our" needs become more important than "theirs" (Batson et al., 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In turn, group members can feel enabled to make morally questionable decisions that benefit the group, but that also entail harm or injustice to others or the larger community. Examples include deceit driven by group loyalty (Hildreth, 2018) and support for, or actual engagement in, harm toward outgroups (Tarrant et al., 2012; Weisel, 2015).

More generally, an array of prior work supports arguments that groups "behave badly," compared to individuals acting alone. This research has demonstrated that groups are more self-interested, less altruistic, more dishonest, less cooperative, and more competitive than individuals acting alone (Bornstein et al., 2004; Bornstein & Yaniv, 1998; Charness & Sutter, 2012; Insko et al., 1990; Kocher et al., 2018; Luhan et al., 2009; Wildschut et al., 2002).

1.2 Groups Doing Good

Yet there is additional theoretical rationale, and supporting evidence, that suggests the opposite argument: groups may be *more* likely to make other-regarding decisions to benefit a third party, compared to their individual counterparts. First, psychological work on motivation has demonstrated that people are more intrinsically motivated by tasks that they complete collaboratively than those they complete alone (Carr & Walton, 2014; Isaac et al., 1999). Relatedly, a rich theoretical tradition in sociology has shown that joint activities and the social interaction that comes with them produce an "emotional buzz" and higher task enjoyment (for a review, see Lawler et al., 2009). Importantly, intrinsic motivation and task enjoyment in turn have been shown to spark prosocial behaviors, including donations to charity (Proulx et al., 2022) and volunteer work (Bidee et al., 2013; Karr & Meijs, 2006). This suggests one indirect pathway by which collaborative decision-making may facilitate other-regarding behavior, compared to individuals making decisions alone.

Additionally, there is an increased level of social control when individuals are tasked with making a joint group decision. After all, each individual group member's preferences are, by necessity, more visible to the others when they must aggregate their preferences to arrive at a consensus. When asked to share one's own opinions about engaging in prosocial behavior, people may wish to avoid appearing selfish, and engage in relatively prosocial "talk" in a group setting. In turn, the group may ultimately make decisions that are more prosocial than those made by individuals, as they are bound to the higher levels of other-regarding behavior they have discussed (Harrell, 2021). These arguments are in line with the vast array of sociological and social-psychological work demonstrating that reputations promote prosocial behavior (for a review, see Simpson & Willer, 2015).

Prior work supports these arguments as well. Juxtaposed against research suggesting that relatively more selfish group members drive group decisions (Luhan et al., 2009) is work showing that group decisions are driven by relatively more *altruistic* members (Cason & Mui, 1997), who may feel more comfortable speaking up about their (prosocial) preferences in group settings. And dyads tasked with making a joint decision to behave generously toward a third party make more generous decisions than individuals acting alone, because they tend to act in line with the cooperative "talk" they engage in during group discussion (Harrell, 2021).

These findings support the notion that people prefer to appear, and present themselves to others, in ways that are socially desirable. And joint decision-making, because it is public to one's fellow decision-makers by necessity, may encourage people to modify their stated preferences and visible behaviors to appear more in line with prosocial norms. Others have demonstrated that groups behave at least as (Bischoff & Krauskopf, 2015; Cox & Stoddard, 2018; Kugler et al., 2007; Proulx et al., 2022) or more (Auerswald et al., 2018; Balafoutas et al., 2014; Müller & Tan, 2013) generous and trustworthily compared to their individual counterparts, and that contributions to collective

action are higher when decisions are made by groups rather than individuals (Christens et al., 2019).

1.3 When *Will Groups Do Good?*

What is driving these divergent findings? One potential explanation is a classic phenomenon in social psychology: group polarization. Work in this area has long shown that group decision-making is not simply an aggregate of individuals' decision-making. Instead, the average post-discussion group response tends to be in the same direction, but more extreme, than the average pre-discussion individual response (Friedkin, 1999; Isenberg, 1986; Lamm & Myers, 1978; Myers & Lamm, 1976). Group polarization is widely recognized as a fundamental group decision-making tendency (Eller & Frey, 2018; Isenberg, 1986; Moscovici & Doise, 1994). The effect holds across a range of different contexts, including various morally-relevant attitudes and behaviors: jury decisions about guilt and punishment (Bray & Noble, 1978; Kaplan, 1977; Myers & Kaplan, 1976), moral reasoning (Muehleman et al., 1985), the endorsement of racial prejudice (Myers & Bishop, 1970), attitudes about decriminalizing drug use (Van Swol Lyn, 2009), and more.

Following this logic, when groups are tasked with coming to a joint decision about engaging in prosocial behavior, the group decision will be relatively more self-regarding *or* relatively more other-regarding, compared to the aggregated preferences of the individual members. The direction of the group decision would be dependent on the initial predispositions of the group members, as they are intensified by group discussion. Those groups containing members who, on average, are initially inclined to engage in other-regarding behavior would be expected to make even more prosocial decisions following communication with a group, while those containing members initially inclined to be more self-interested would make more selfish ones.

Relatedly, groups often contain especially influential members, including designated group leaders. Prior work on cooperative decision-making in groups has shown that leaders' preferences for prosocial behavior have an outsized influence on their followers' own decisions to provide benefits to the group (Harrell, 2019; Harrell & Simpson, 2016). These findings could similarly be applied to groups tasked with making a joint decision to benefit a third party: leaders' tastes for selfish versus other-regarding behavior are likely to play an especially important role in determining the group's joint decision, making it more extreme in either direction. More generally, sociologists have long known that social status processes affect how groups make decisions, even in groups without formal leadership. Work under the umbrella of Status Characteristics Theory has demonstrated that status characteristics like gender, race, and social class determine who will have more opportunities to shape group discussion and influence others (for a review, see Berger & Webster Jr, 2018). High-status members' preferences for self-regarding or other-regarding behavior are likely to be key predictors of the group's final decision, compared to lower-status members.

Another relevant moderator may be the medium in which group discussions take place. An important requirement of coming to a joint group decision is the exchange of information and opinions among group members, in one way or another. Prior work in this area has been mixed in how group communication occurred during the decision-making process: some used face-to-face discussion, while others relied on computer-mediated communication. Critically, the latter can confer more anonymity and less reputational pressure among members, compared to the former. Prior work has discussed this cross-study difference in detail to explain conflicting results. Luhan et al. (2009) note that their study—where groups typically made more self-regarding decisions than individuals did—allowed only for anonymous computer-mediated discussion about the decision. They compare this to Cason and Mui's (1997) work showing that groups made more other-regarding decisions, which used face-to-face group discussion where group members were made identifiable (see also

Christens et al., 2019; Kocher & Sutter, 2007). It is important to note, however, that this issue only partially settles the matter. Other work supporting the "groups do good" argument involved anonymous computer-mediated discussion among members (Balafoutas et al., 2014; Harrell, 2021).

Of course, computer-mediated group discussion is not always anonymous. Members may be identified by name in text messages or on social media posts, or groups may interact via a video meeting platform like Zoom. But these virtual settings remain distinct from interacting "in real life." Physiological co-calibration—behaving in unison, matching vocal pitch and cadence, mimicking body language—can be hindered when group discussion is computer-mediated, rather than in person; co-calibration, in turn, affects moral processing and decision-making (see McCaffree, 2023, for more). More generally, an important avenue for future work is how different communication media affect team decision-making about morally-relevant behaviors. To my knowledge, prior work has not yet compared in-person to computer-mediated discussion, holding constant onymity, to examine whether (and to what extent) co-presence affects decisions. This is especially critical given the dramatic increase in online communication—including in the virtual workplace—in recent years.

Another important situational feature involves the form of prosocial behavior under study. The literature on individual versus group decisions to behave prosocially has examined separately, but not yet integrated, two theoretically distinct forms of prosocial behavior: settings of unilateral dependence versus interdependence. The former involves the transfer of benefits from one party with resources to another in need, as when a benefactor opts to volunteer time or donate money to a dependent other. The latter consists of settings where two or more parties work together toward a common goal that provides benefits for all involved, for example, decisions to cooperate or free-ride in a social dilemma (Penner et al., 2005).

When a group must make a joint decision to cooperate or not in a situation of interdependence (compared to unilateral dependence), they must consider not only what they should do, but also what the *other* party involved might be expected to do. This additional requirement for strategic thinking may encourage groups to engage in competitive, self-regarding behavior in settings of interdependence, for several reasons. Prior work demonstrates that groups are more competitive, preferring to win (and not to lose) over their opponents, compared to individuals (Insko et al., 1990; McCallum et al., 1985; Wildschut et al., 2002). Additionally, groups are trusted less than individuals (Insko & Schopler, 1998), and are less trusting (Kugler et al., 2007). Each of these findings—groups' enhanced preference to "win" and not be "suckered" by another decision-making party, groups' anticipation that they will not be trusted by the other party, and groups' reduced trust in the other party—are all factors that might encourage groups to make more self-regarding decisions compared to individuals, at least in settings of interdependence. On the other hand, they are significantly less relevant when making generous decisions to unilaterally benefit a dependent other.

These issues are further exacerbated given that virtually all experimental work on group versus individual decision-making in settings of interdependence (typically, the Prisoner's dilemma) is designed so that groups make decisions with other groups, and individuals make decisions with other individuals. This methodological decision makes sense: it allows the researcher to hold constant the costs and benefits of helping, and more closely approximates real-world settings, where people typically interact in settings of interdependence with other people, and groups (households, firms, countries) are typically involved in settings of interdependence with other groups. But the tradeoff is that it is currently unclear whether groups' (versus individuals') tendencies toward more selfish, competitive, and uncooperative behavior in these settings are due solely to increased selfishness among groups, or due to globally held perceptions of the *other* party's—that is, perceptions of groups' or individuals'—likelihood of being selfish, competitive, untrustworthy, and uncooperative. Integrating the literature on these varying forms

of prosocial behavior might reveal that settings of interdependence, but not of unilateral dependence, are those that bring out more self-regarding tendencies in group decisions—and that groups behave particularly badly when they are interacting with groups, but not when they are interacting with an individual.

Finally, I have already discussed one key mechanism driving groups to "do good": people prefer to appear generous, so group members deciding together face social pressure to behave morally in ways that individual decision-makers are not. But it is important to note that this argument hinges on a key scope condition and thus, another potential moderator. It takes as a starting point that norms for prosocial behavior exist, such that prosocial attitudes and behaviors yield reputational benefits, while self-interested attitudes and behaviors are reputationally harmful. But these norms are not universal. In groups, organizations, or larger societies where self-interest is widely viewed as an important moral value, other-regarding behavior would not be considered a moral action (Weiss & Peres, 2014). When norms for prosocial behavior do not exist, engaging in prosocial behavior—or communicating the preference to engage in prosocial behavior—may even be sanctioned for violating the norm (Herrmann et al., 2008; Irwin & Horne, 2013). In these settings, it is much more likely that groups will engage in more self-interested behaviors than individuals acting alone. Put differently, whether groups will "do good" hinges critically on existing norms that might encourage (or discourage) them to vocalize preferences for prosocial behavior.

2 Conclusion

The discussion above takes a social-psychological approach to groups' versus individuals' decisions to engage in one morally-relevant behavior—prosocial behavior. I have argued that prosocial behavior is well situated in the moral domain, but it is only one aspect of morality. And it is not the only aspect of morality that would benefit from a deeper understanding of how the group context and social features of the situation matter. For example, scholars of moral reasoning and judgment have similarly noted that prior work treats these phenomena as a product of the individual—reflecting individual worldviews, moral values, or levels of development (Garcia, 1996; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Some recent work has answered the call to explore how groups reason about morality, compared to individuals. For example, recent research shows that collective moral judgments made via group interaction are more utilitarian than individual moral judgments, including individual moral judgments made following communication with others (Curşeu et al., 2020; Keshmirian et al., 2022). More generally, it is clear that collective decisions, reasoning, and behaviors are both prevalent in our daily lives, *and* different from the decisions, reasoning, and behaviors of the individuals within them. I hope this review encourages future work in this area.

Specifically, this chapter has reviewed work that asks how groups versus individuals make decisions to forgo their immediate self-interest and provide valuable benefits to others. The key evidence is mixed, likely driven by several moderating factors, and there is more to be done. Much of the prior work in this area has been undertaken outside of sociology; I encourage sociologists to examine this critical issue further. Indeed, both psychologists (Oishi et al., 2009) and sociologists (Piliavin, 2009) have lamented that research from both "sides" is not in nearly enough dialogue with each other. Integrating the two has the potential to expand beyond the domain of the individual decision-maker, and to understand more about how morally-relevant decision-making operates in groups, fostering social order.

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Moral Decision-Making Processes in their Organizational, Institutional, and Historical Contexts

Jaime Kucinskas

Life now is so complicated, it's impossible for anyone to be good enough for the Good Place.. . .These days, just buying a tomato at a grocery store means that you are unwittingly supporting toxic pesticides, exploiting labor, contributing to global warming. Humans think that they're making one choice, but they're actually making dozens of choices they don't even know they're making!

Abstract

In this chapter, I draw upon my research and other existing research to identify how moral considerations are deeply influenced by the social contexts in which they are embedded. When you turn the lens from examining individual and dispositional forms of morality to focusing on how morality is situated for different people in everyday life across hierarchical, organizational and institutional fields, this theoretical shift provokes a number of important questions. First, the need to map out different moral landscapes, their particular affordances and blindspots, and how they contribute to a possibility of conscious or unconscious moral cognition and action is evident. Second, future research should consider the many unanswered and likely fruitful questions at the intersections of social morality, power, and inequality across institutional settings.

Keywords

Moral landscapes · Moral decision-making processes · Organizational morality · Political values · Moral hierarchy · Political culture

As Michael (played by Ted Danson), a character from the NBC sitcom, *The Good Place*, argues in explaining why no one can make it to the show's equivalent of heaven, morality in a global political and economic system is a complicated, if not impossible, endeavor. When is morality a choice? Under what conditions and for whom? Given the global problems humanity faces, such as staggering inequalities and climate change, and the sheer complexity of living under a global capitalistic system with more information available than a single person can process, moral decision-making seems daunting. And this does not even breach the complexities of enacting a variety of roles embedded across institutions, such as being a citizen, an employee, and/or a member of a family. Such roles' salience and likelihood of being enacted vary by institutional settings governed by their own logics and moral

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codes. In such complex social landscapes, is a concept of individual morality even possible?

Psychological scholarship, such as that of Jonathan Haidt, suggests that once learned from others, individual moral cognition involves "fast, automatic, and typically affect-laden processes in which an evaluative feeling of good-bad or like-dislike (about the actions or character of a person) appears in consciousness without any awareness of having gone through steps of search, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion" (Haidt, 2007: 998). Yet, Haidt's model works best for habitual, everyday moral and cognitive landscapes; intuitive moral judgments may be less accessible when social and cultural structures are in disarray or undergoing change (Luft, 2020: 4). Haidt's model has also been criticized for its "inattention to situational detail" (Luft, 2020:2).

Some moral philosophers instead raise the question of whether competing moralities, comfort, and personal meaningfulness embedded in larger social contexts should instead be the focus of attention. Roger Gottlieb (2019) argues that: "Morally, we are caught in a system we did not design, faced with unpleasant choices we would rather skip over, torn between wanting a little more ease and a nagging conscience that suggests that such ease is not worth the moral cost, and sometimes compelled to choose what we would think is the least bad of two distressing alternatives." (150). Todd May, another philosopher and an occasional advisor to *The Good Place*, similarly argues for what he calls a more "permissive," understanding of morality, which acknowledges that people pursue what makes their lives meaningful, and that in light of such obligations—for example, to one's health, family, work, or a hobby, it needs to be recognized that there are limits to what any one individual should reasonably be expected to do to aid others (2019: 16). For who is to say that helping aid someone else's happiness is more important than experiencing meaningfulness or happiness in one's own life? Such perspectives point to the need for contextualizing moral decision-making processes in interactional contexts, networks, and political frames and assume that people are sometimes able to make conscious moral choices (May, 2019).

Morality scholars across disciplinary fields exploring these questions surrounding the individual and social processes of moral decision-making can benefit from a sociological perspective deeply situated in the multi-level contexts and fields in which people abide. I argue in this chapter we should shift attention to the rich and variegated multi-institutional landscapes in which people live out their lives in order to make better sense of how particular social environments are *not only contexts of but also constitutive of moral decision-making*. As sociologists, building upon the work of canonical sociological thinkers like Mills (1959), field theory (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), and critical theories sensitive to power and racial and gendered inequalities (Collins, 1986; Luft, 2020), we are well positioned to offer innovative, rich explanations of moral reasoning in specific social contexts (see also Abend, 2010, 2013).

In his canonical book, *The Sociological Imagination* (Mills, 1959), C. Wright Mills begins by acknowledging the inherent challenge people face in living in a complex social world:

> Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling they are quite correct: What ordinary men are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live: their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighborhood; in other millieux, they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.
>
> Underlying this sense of being trapped are seemingly impersonal changes in the very structure of continent-wide societies.. . Yet men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction. The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and downs of the societies in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they take part. (3).

In explaining what a sociological imagination does, C. Wright Mills argued that, "in this Age of Fact, information often dominates their attention and overwhelms their capacities to assimilate it." (5) In this described context, which aptly describes our current context, Mills diagnosed that what people need, "is a quality of mind to help them use information and develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and what is happening within themselves": this he called the "sociological imagination." (5).

As part of a discipline focusing on the impact of social contexts on human understanding and action, the sociology of morality has much to contribute to these conversations about processes of moral cognition and action in everyday life across organizations, institutional fields, and countries (Abend, 2010). First, as sociologists, we conduct investigations into moral cognition, cultural resources, and behavior embedded in specific locations over time through ethnography (Chambliss, 1996; Summers-Effler, 2010; Viterna, 2013), longitudinal interviews (Kucinskas & Zylan, 2023), historical analysis (Abend, 2014), surveys (Vaisey, 2009), and other methods that can capture how particular social circumstances and changing features of certain contexts contribute to defining and shaping moral awareness and the likelihood of different kinds of moral action.

Second, a defining facet of a sociological perspective is its sensitivity to power (Luker, 2009). Drawing on critical theories of race, gender, sexuality, class, and institutional influence, sociologists can develop more sophisticated understandings of moral cognition and action under conditions with real social incentives and constraints. As Mills inquired with his sociological imagination:

> What varieties of men and women [and those who identify with non-binary genders] now prevail in this society and this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of 'human nature' are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for 'human nature' of each and every feature of the society we are examining? (Mills, 1959: 6–7).

To improve these efforts, the sociology of morality has to critically assess its own history, membership, and theories which have dominated scholarship in this area.

In what follows, I provide a few examples of *moral decision-making processes* socially situated and constituted in different organizational, institutional, and historical contexts from my own and others' work. These select cases provide insight on how moral fields and forces shape what actors see, and how they unconsciously and/or consciously understand the moral implications of their actions. Such a theoretical turn, I hope, will foster a shift from a focus on individualized morality or the social contexts which may trigger unconscious moral responses, to one which more deeply situates conceptualizations of morality as a dynamic process, punctuated by moments of unconscious action, periods of not knowing, and times of conscious deliberation in the course of interactions embedded in and in part constituted by powerful and hierarchical organizations and fields in which people live out their lives.

1 Interactional, Organizational, and Institutional Structures as the Building Blocks of Morality

Given how we live in a "society of organizations" (Perrow, 1991) and multi-institutional contexts (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), the way such organizational and institutional structures and cultures—or their absence—shape morality should be integral to sociological studies of morality.

1.1 Relational Work in Financial Decisions

I begin with an explanation of financial decision-making embedded in interactions in households

and communities. Frederick Wherry (2016) depicts a temporal process of moral decision-making in his theory of relational accounting involved in financial decision-making.[1] Building on Viviana Zelizer's (2012) explanation of the relational ways people earmark their household budgets, Wherry (2016) defines relational accounting "as the set of cultural and social processes used by individuals and households to organize, evaluate, justify and keep track of financial activities" (132). First, actors draw from "upstream" pre-existing codes and meaning systems from which they can identify possible "options and non-options and their sense of being possible for the person engaged in action" (Wherry, 2016: 131). These codes carry moral values which can contribute to an actor's motivation and the endurance of an action. Mid-stream, as actors navigate decisions, they understand their temporal context based on meaningful collective temporal distinctions (such as rites of passage like weddings or religious holidays like Christmas), and anticipate how their decisions may affect others. Downstream, people enact roles in particular settings to specific audiences and understand there are lasting consequences to their actions in terms of how they are viewed and their ongoing relationships. Drawing from Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory on the presentation of self and Alexander's (2004) social performance, Wherry describes how social actors draw on their knowledge of their role and audiences in certain situations and seek to act in alignment of others' expectations to maintain positive or neutral evaluations from others, which "hinge on whether the line she has taken 'matches' the kind of person her audience and other actors believe her to be (as well as the kinds of relationships her actions are tied to)" (2016: 146). These expectations and understandings of the situation are based on pre-existing group and societal level stories about the actor's role, her position in the scene, and that physical elements of the setting which jointly contribute to that actor and audiences' definition of the situation. Actions can also be sanctioned by third parties (Wherry, 2016).

Scholars' of relational work in economic decision-making begin to lay out a solid foundational theory of moral decision-making which is both constituted by cultural and social relations (Bitektine et al., 2020), as well as embedded in particular social contexts.

1.2 Professional Moral Problems and Conflicts Rather than Ethical Dilemmas

Next it is important to acknowledge how situations of power within organizations can enable or obviate moral decision-making processes. In his study of nurses' morality in *Beyond Caring* (1996), sociologist Dan Chambliss distinguishes between *ethical dilemmas* and *moral problems* or *conflicts*. Ethical dilemmas, as often studied by philosophers, psychologists, and medical ethics boards examine, under certain conditions, "What should be done?" (5) by actors in powerful positions making decisions based on certain conditions, organizational and legal guidelines and restrictions, and possible outcomes. This approach tends to treat moral decision-making as, in Mills' speak, an individual trouble.

Organizations, however, are largely run by "routines of life in a professional bureaucracy," (6) rather than intellectual deliberations. In such bureaucracies, moral decisions are made by professionals with appropriate jurisdiction over such decisions based on their roles. Chambliss concludes that in taking into account "a broader organizational awareness," one has to deal with "politics." (1996: 7) What "officially appears to be an ethics argument is actually a thinly disguised turf battle" (1996: 65) between different professional groups grounded in different role expectations, daily work and information, and professional moral codes. In the hospital, such moral problems arose between doctors, socialized and equipped to "cure," and nurses socialized and with professional tools and the patient relationships guiding them to "care" (65).

[1] See also Emirbayer and Mische (1998).

In organizations, many employees, such as nurses, may take it for granted that they do not have the power to make ethical or moral decisions on the biggest moral problems they face in their workplaces. What do subordinates in a bureaucracy do if they know what should be done but superiors or the organization dictate otherwise? What should nurses do if they believe, for example, that an elderly patient with long-standing and debilitating chronic illness should be left to die, rather than attempt to save their life through a painful procedure, but they have no power to influence that decision? Scholars might continue to explore the organizational situations in which employees become desensitized to such decisions and subject to behavioral routines and alternatively, organizational practices which might instead maintain a sensitivity to moral and ethical decision-making at work (Kudesia, 2019).

1.3 Parsing Moral Decision-Making During Unsettled Times

Paying closer attention to organizational and institutional contexts can reveal complex social landscapes shaping (1) the array of potentially competing, moral codes, logics, and repertoires operating in particular historical situations within and across groups, organizations, institutions, and nations; (2) who has awareness of potential moral problems and conflicts; (3) who feels moral responsibility based on their role-identities to react to them, and (4) who has the power and efficacy to address such problems. Thus, sociologists need to identify what features of a social landscape and individuals' positioning make particular moral problems and values salient to individuals in addition to focusing on individuals' moral cognition and processes of moral action.

For sociologists of morality, it may be particularly fruitful to compare not only settled but unsettled times (Swidler, 1986). Such comparisons can reveal both taken for granted norms, values, moral justifications, and structures as well as their disruption (Sewell Jr William, 2005). Sociologists of morality should turn their focus to how individuals cope with, morally/ethically make sense of, and respond to rapid institutional change or periods of decline. This is an especially opportune time to study rapid social change given the political, economic, health-related, and environmental challenges faced by individuals, organizations, and governments around the world.

Disruptions can provoke more conscious moral reasoning (Greene et al., 2004; Haidt, 2007; Luft, 2020) or changes in organizations' espoused values. At an individual level, times of uncertainty can upend people's ability to act habitually in ways they deem moral. As Philip Zimbardo (2007) hypothesizes:

> Situational power is most salient in novel settings, those in which people cannot call on previous guidelines for their new behaviorial options. In such situations, the usual reward structures are different and expectations are violated. Under such circumstances, personality variables have little predictive utility because they depend on estimations of imagined future interactions based on characteristic past reactions in familiar situations—but rarely in the new kind of situation encountered. (212).

Alternatively, key actors may strategically call upon particular values during unsettled times to legitimate and validate themselves, their organizations, or their institutions. As Gabriel Abend's impressive book, *the moral background* (2014), suggests, long-standing values embedded in the moral background of a particular organization or institution may be brought to the foreground when institutions are under threat, to legitimize such entities.

Federal Civil Servants' Responses to Democratic Decline under the Trump Administration (2017–2020).

Given the multiple, at times conflicting moral messages and norms that people face as they go about their lives, it is crucial to unpack the moral landscapes in which people are embedded at multiple levels and to not assume congruency across situational forces. Using my study of career federal civil servants' responses (2017–2020) to the Trump administration's leadership across the federal government as an example, I map below in

Fig. 1 the bureaucratic landscape of moral decision-making in which mid- and high-level bureaucrats were situated during a period of historic decline under an increasingly autocratic leader under conditions of emergent authoritarianism (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). I do so to model an alternative way of trying to understand moral decision-making. Rather than start with an individual, as sociologists, we should instead first look to the constitutive moral landscapes in which actors are a part.

As reports of his campaign and presidency suggest (Lewis, 2018; Kucinskas & Zylan, 2023), Donald J. Trump was an unusual American president. He railed against many of the core functions and attributes of the administrative state, including regulatory power, expertise, and evidence-based analysis throughout his campaign and presidency. Promising to "drain the swamp," he sought dramatic changes to policies concerning the environment, trade, foreign affairs, and criminal justice, and appointed several high-profile critics of federal agencies to head those very agencies. He also sought an unusually high degree of loyalty from career civil servants. Reports of retribution against those working in areas conflicting with the Trump agenda or seen as unloyal surfaced throughout his presidency (Kucinskas & Zylan, 2023). Consequently, from its inception, the leadership of the Trump administration raised the question of whether career civil servants would resist efforts to cut or alter the mission-based work of their agencies or adhere to leadership's political agenda and normative deviations in how they ran the government.

A comprehension of the bureaucratic contexts in which career federal civil servants work is critical to understanding their responses to this unusual administration. At the outset of the administration, some reporters and Trump loyalists were quick to report on the "deep state," or civil servant resistance from within to the Trump administration's agenda. However, such reports lacked context on civil servants' strong normative commitments to serial partisanship or non-partisanship (Heclo, 2002; Ingber, 2017), and to using their technocratic knowledge to serve superiors. As a result, such reports could easily lead to overstated public impressions of bureaucratic resistance.

It is important to recognize that the US government has a complex structure with a strong professional culture. Federal agencies are organizations embedded within other organizations, which are themselves multilayered and variegated. Some agencies are entirely based in Washington, D.C., while others have satellite offices around the country. Moreover, federal agencies are comprised of both career civil servants and political appointees; political appointees typically are replaced with the arrival of a new administration and may change within an administration, while career civil servants typically serve the government for longer periods crossing several administrations (Golden, 2000).

The US government operates as a Weberian legal-rational state with a professionalized bureaucracy, in which career civil servants are both protected and constrained by bureaucratic rules and structures (Weber 1921/1978). Career civil servants should exhibit a particular "neutrality of being *serially and equally partisan* by working in good faith during successive exchanges of partisan leaders. Loyalty to the office, not to the person or party, commands this" (Heclo, 2002: 692, emphasis added). Thus, career civil servants strive to be serially partisan, while adhering to professional norms calling for non-partisanship and valuing technical expertise. They must be sufficiently responsive to elected leadership and society, but protected and independent enough to resist informal, clientistic, or patrimonial practices which characterize some poorer functioning government agencies around the world (Bersch et al., 2012; Geddes, 1994). Civil service laws prohibit political retaliation, but career civil servants are subordinate to political appointees. Most federal employees are also prohibited by federal law[2] from engaging in political advocacy while working in an official capacity.

[2] U.S. Code § 7323 (the Hatch Act) prohibits certain partisan political activities by most federal employees.

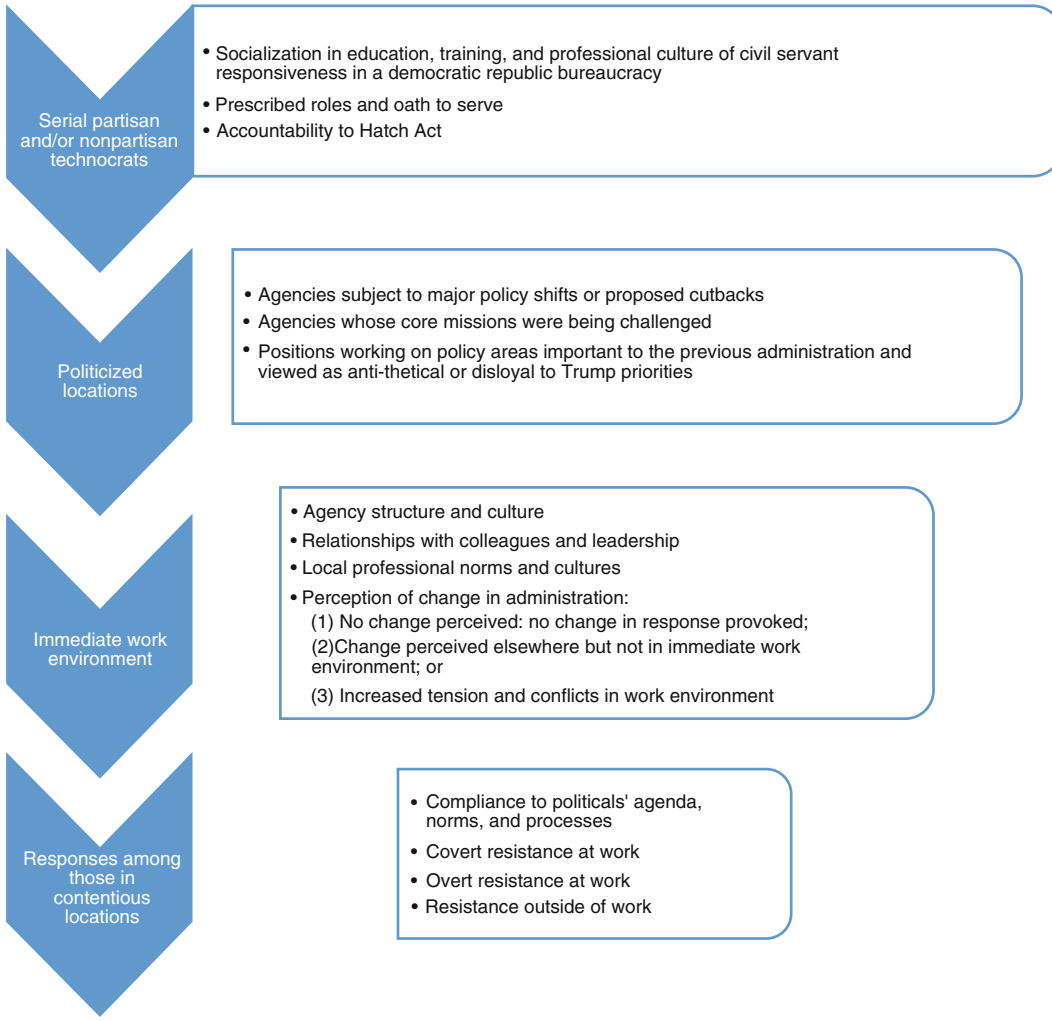


Fig. 1 Situated decision-making

These characteristics of the American federal government suggest that there are *multiple dimensions of loyalty* that influence the choices and behaviors of career bureaucrats experiencing what they perceive to be organizational decline (Kucinskas & Zylan, 2023). These dimensions of loyalty express institutional logics and norms which career civil servants have internalized as part of their professional identities (Bitektine et al., 2020). Their professional role-identities can be conceived as "actorhood models," which are "cultural and cognitive understandings that bestow individual and collective actors with roles, responsibilities, and behavior scripts" (Bitektine et al., 2020).

To help make sense of federal civil servants' responses to Trump administration leadership at work, Fig. 1 shows the constitutive institutional structures, logics, and repertoires which shaped how career bureaucrats understood changes in the government and their everyday experiences at work, and how they ultimately reacted at different points in time to signs of organizational decline.

First, as expected, all of the 66 centrist and progressive leaning career civil servants I interviewed during the Trump administration

expressed *commitments to serial partisanship and upholding norms of political neutrality* at work and serving new administrations as *technocratic experts*. Civil servants, in fact, may be hired to uphold these commitments of responsiveness to elected and appointed authority. As one civil servant Mary Turner disclosed, she was explicitly asked during her job interview "to provide an example of when I've had to work on something that didn't fit with my personal beliefs. My understanding is everyone in my office is asked a similar question, though theirs were more neutral along the lines of "can you work on something you don't agree with?" she told me.

Civil servants additionally mentioned legal structures which guided and circumscribed their work. They were aware of the Hatch Act, which limited political engagement while at work. Various civil servants referred their sworn oath to defend the Constitution repeatedly as well.[3] These conditions fostered a professional culture among civil servants which eschewed partisan bias and promoted risk-averse political neutrality and the importance of acting as dispassionate experts serving leadership.

Accordingly, when asked about their responses to new leadership in the Trump administration, a vast majority of participants mentioned how, as federal civil servants, they had been taught by supervisors and mentors to support changes wrought by elected and appointed leaders, irrespective of political party affiliation. Throughout the administration, they expressed a cautious "wait and see" attitude, seeking to give new appointed leaders a chance. Mid-level managers and senior executive service (SES) across agencies discussed actively trying to build relationships with appointed leaders with whom they worked.

Second, civil servants working in politicized locations were more likely to have firsthand knowledge of changes wrought by the Trump administration. As Katherine Bersh and her co-authors suggest (2012), career civil servants working in close proximity to appointed leaders are particularly likely to have political influence over their work.

Among the civil servants I spoke with, the likelihood of experiencing moral conflicts, and the intensity of such conflicts experienced, was largely affected by their position and location in the bureaucracy. Those in agencies where the Trump administration sought cuts or to undermine agency missions, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of State, or parts of the Department of Health and Human Services, were more likely to report experiencing moral conflict. In addition, career civil servants in high-ranking positions working directly with political appointees they viewed as incompetent, such as those appointees prizing loyalty to the president above other typical moral or ethical considerations, or those excluding career civil servants from decision-making processes, were more likely to experience tension and moral conflict in their everyday work. Those most likely to experience moral conflicts in my sample were professionals with expertise in particularly politicized areas, such as human and civil rights or climate change, which had been supported by the Obama administration and subject to reversals and sometimes seeming political retribution by the Trump administration.

Outside of the most politicized agencies and policy areas, many civil servants felt removed from the change in executive leadership and related reported signs of democratic decline (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), even as they read about it in the daily news. For example, those who worked in technology (such as GSA) and in science-based organizations (such as NSF, NIH and DOE), as well as some lower level civil servants reported there had not been much change in their work. This revealed how in studying

[3] U.S. Code §3331, the Oath of office states "An individual, except the President, elected or appointed to an office of honor or profit in the civil service or uniformed services, shall take the following oath: "I, AB, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God."

morality, investigating *what actors do not know* directly from their personal experience, is as important to consider, as what they know, the moral standards they revere, and their processes of moral deliberation and action.

Third, my longitudinal interviews revealed how powerful civil servants' immediate work environment was on their assessment of how the government was operating under the Trump administration. Their position in the bureaucracy shaped how civil servants interpreted and responded to the administration. Each agency had different cultures and structures. The State Department, for example, has structures and a culture which honor constructive criticism and dissent. The State Department and Agency for International Development (USAID) are unique in having an official dissent channel. The American Foreign Service Association honors "Constructive Dissent" through four awards for foreign service employees "who have demonstrated the intellectual courage to challenge the system from within, to question the status quo and take a stand, no matter the sensitivity of the issue or the consequences of their actions."[4]

Given this context, and the unusually contentious relationships between Trump appointees and civil servants at the agency, State Department employees working in Washington D.C. were particularly likely to push back against the administration's leadership.

By contrast, at the EPA, which was similarly threatened with cuts and an executive-led agenda which prioritized business and political relationships, which at times contrasted with the agency's official mission to preserve the environment and public health, many middle and high-level civil servants were seemed more reluctant to engage in resistant action. As a science-based, technocratic agency founded by Nixon, and with a history of competent leaders from both political parties, their agency norms were more risk-averse, and ostensibly politically neutral. Although when facing considerable budget cuts, some lower and mid-level staff at regional offices protested early in the administration with their union, such unrest declined over the course of the administration. Some employees reported engaging in subtle acts of covert resistance, but the tenor and degree of resistance paled in comparison to reports from some employees at the State Department.

Employees' direct chain of command and co-workers strongly influenced their likelihood of engaging in resistance to leadership. In assessing whether the administration had altered their work environment and everyday work, bureaucrats articulated their experiences in light of their professional expertise, norms, professional experience, agency mission, how their colleagues and supervisors perceived and talked about their work environment, whether their communication with colleagues had changed, and if there seemed to be more risks or uncertainties in conducting their everyday work.

As one civil servant, Ines Blackburn, who worked in a particularly politicized location said, "You are probably seeing the snapshots in time." In her experience, "It's not like a one, constant feeling. It often depends on who you happen to be reporting to at the time, what your experience is working in your job." Notably, given the rapid changes she experienced at work and the assault of standard democratic norms by appointed leadership in her agency, there were moments where she seemed to have lost ability to lucidly understand what was happening around her. While working under a particularly threatening appointee, she confided: "I'm kind of beginning to come to the conclusion I think a little bit later than most that this is just not an okay environment to work in." She reflected feeling torn and immobilized in this context, which was notably discrepant from her prior record of professional competence and accomplishment in her agency under the former administration:

> It is incredibly stressful and I also feel like I haven't done enough to bring to light the situation because I feel personally embattled, and he has talked about going after leaders and starting a campaign to target the leakers and I am personally concerned about

[4] "Constructive Dissent Awards." American Foreign Service Assocation, https://afsa.org/constructive-dissent-awards, Downloaded 5/23/22.

> being lumped in with the people that he thinks are leaking stuff. And I don't want his wrath, so my default has just been not to do anything that could even have a perception that would put me in this camp. You are probably the first person that I'm talking to in any sort of capacity beyond my friend group that would long-term memorialize the experience so far.

She continued to try to make sense of her experiences throughout the administration, seeing her experience differently depending on the position she was in. After leaving her first position under the administration and entering another with more supportive supervisors where she "felt more protected," Blackburn pursued formal grievance procedures by reaching out to the Office of the Inspector General. She reported feeling compelled to do so as a means of showing support for a colleague. Later, after the House of Representatives became majority Democratic, she also reported to a House oversight committee. Notably, she chose only to report through officially sanctioned reporting mechanisms, in part seeking to stay within the bounds of her role by using institutionally sanctioned forms of voice. Speaking to the press was "a line I drew for myself that I didn't want to cross," she said.

Even near the end of the administration, she remarked on having the sense that her story still was not fully written yet. In 2020, she reported: "I think I am still in the middle of it so it's hard to have the perspective right now. I know that it's been a very emotionally draining three years." She was not out of the temporal period of the Trump administration yet and her personal narrative could not be conclusively determined until the following election took place. She reflected:

> . . .probably if there's Democrat who wins, I'll say like oh, this is such the right decision that I stayed, like I'm here to help rebuild, all that suffering was so worth it. And then of course, if Trump wins again, I'll be like what a stupid decision that I stayed, I wasted four years of my life. So it's gonna be one or the other and we'll know in November.

As a scholar of moral decision-making, it is important to evaluate people's experiences and moral-sensemaking deeply situated in their immediate, interactional, organizational, and institutional contexts. As Blackburn depicts above, during times of rapid change, moral decision-making can be quite dynamic, incoherent, and subject to particular influence by local situational factors and constraints.

As shown in the last part of Fig. 1, under such circumstances, there was a limited array of behavioral repertoires through which civil servants responded to the leadership of the Trump administration. Some veteran federal civil servants and retirees explained these potential options to me at the outset of the Trump administration, as did other bureaucrats over the course of the administration. When moral conflicts arose between their competing loyalties and duties, career civil servants either complied with appointed leadership's preferred tact, engaged in covert resistance, engaged in voice or overt resistance, quit and/or or took their concerns outside of work, and participated in activism, community work, and political engagement there.

Among those caught in moral conflicts between their professional norms and obligations, different leaders' policy agendas, agency missions, and their own personal moral compasses, the majority of those who engaged in resistance did so in incredibly subtle and covert ways, such that they might be imperceptible to Trump appointees or even their own colleagues. A few civil servants suggested that such "resistance," ultimately mainly assuaged their own consciences, rather than resisted leadership agendas or behavior with which they disagreed.

The very rare career civil servants who engaged in acts of seeming moral courage, in which they engaged in risky acts of resistance at work, such as exercising voice based on their expertise or roles in conflict with appointees or by stretching their roles in accordance with their professional and personal values, only did so under certain conditions. One vocal civil rights lawyer, for example, began using voice more directly and regularly only after a top appointee came into office who protected her. Another human rights lawyer working in a unit with a particularly strong spirit of "entrepreneurialism and self-initiative" with strong relationships with his colleagues, leaked non-classified information

and told me: "I just will go out and pretend to be more important than I am," he said, "or just make the connections and use the connections that I have. . .to make things happen and do some of the work." He only acted this way, however, when his office lacked direct appointee oversight. After an appointee arrived, even after building a good working relationship with him, tension increased in his office, morale and camaraderie dropped, and his guilty conscience bothered him. Ultimately, he chose to leave his position.

Examining civil servants' moral conflict, decision-making, and actions under a presidency characterized by emergent authoritarianism and autocracy very clearly demonstrated how moral decision-making and action can be strongly influenced by the historical, institutional, and local contexts in which a bureaucrat in embedded, as well as their particular immediate circumstances at work. As Kucinskas and Zylan (2023) discuss, under such conditions, the scope of permissible voice shrinks, which can both stimulate moral rumination but limit what is viewed as feasible and appropriate behavior.

2 Raising Questions About Power and Morality Across Cultures and Stratified Groups

In addition to focusing on the moral landscapes in which actors are embedded, sociologists have long paid attention to how power operates directly. Power can be capitalized on in marshalling and utilizing resources for influence (Clark, 1973) as well as operate more subtly and diffusely through social structures, knowledge, normative influences, and subjective development (Foucault, 2001). Accordingly, sociologists of morality should compare how morality is considered and enacted by people across socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender, and other social locations, with greater or less access to power and its affordances.

While some research theorizes on how people's positions in hierarchies shape their perceptions and abilities for moral action, a great deal remains unknown and warrants more systematic investigation. Some scholars suggest that being situated in positions with the most privileges impede one's ability to raise questions about the unequal manner in which powerful social institutions operate and therefore hinder efforts to counteract them (e.g., Arendt, 1963, 1964; Farrell, 2020; Kucinskas, 2019). Studies of elites, such as Justin Farrell's *Billionaire Wilderness* (2020), suggest that those in higher positions of power can struggle to gain self-awareness of their own positionality and privileges, as well as lack information on the struggles of the economically disadvantaged in their communities. This, combined with elites' desires to continue acting in their own economic and social interests, even while trying to contribute to other moral social ends, can hinder their ability to engage in moral action that contributes to long-term solutions that benefit the greater good of all (see also Sherman, 2017). On the flip side, Farrell suggests that the least economically privileged may spend so much time trying to secure their material needs that it is challenging to both raise awareness and organize collectively to solve deep-seated economic and social problems. Such research points not only to the challenges elites face in being moral citizens but also the qualitatively different moral challenges that wealthy and poor people face.

My analysis of federal civil servants depicted above provides an alternative lens: I lean into analyzing those career civil servants in the highest levels of power and located in the most contentious areas, largely working in areas where they interact fairly regularly with presidential appointees, to ascertain how they make moral decisions in the course of their everyday work in the face of competing loyalties and moral/ethical directives. In such cases, I argue, their moral decision-making processes became more visible to themselves, and to others such as their family members and myself in the course of repeated conversations throughout the Trump presidency. As processes become more visible, actors can then reflect on them, come to new understandings, and either more affirmatively stand behind their paths of action or instead seek alternatives.

Others, such as black feminist Patricia Hill Collins (1986), speak to the power of being an outsider, the perspectives it affords, and how it can foster new understandings and moral sensitivities which can be utilized in building stronger collective decision-making and better institutions (see also Ganz, 2000). Sometimes such sensitivities and their attendant relational work are systematically undervalued and appreciated. Feminist scholar Joyce Fletcher (2001), for example, brings attention to how feminized relational work critical to organizational success is made invisible through patriarchal organizational structures and practices.

So *who* is predisposed to *what* kinds of moral action? The research discussed above provokes questions on how one's social locations shape what one perceives, the moral standards one seeks to uphold, how one's efforts are treated by other people, and ultimately one's potential for living up to such values. Scholars might inquire, perhaps controversially, who is more predisposed to moral action that might benefit the greater good of all people from a sociological perspective? Those occupying positions of power likely have the greatest ability to mobilize resources to address wicked social problems. Or are those farthest from social and institutional privileges more likely to be able to be moral, because they can see through the blindspots of the most privileged, the machinations of those in power, and how their decisions affect those outside of the corporate and state boardrooms in untold ways? In that vein then, is it harder to be moral in higher positions of power? Are those in higher or lower positions subject to more or less institutional moral and normative pressure and surveillance, or being subject to direct commands from superiors? When and where should we be talking about morality and when should we be talking about power and the possibility of choice? And who benefits from such different kinds of moral-decision making and behavior? Also, is it fair to apply the same standards of morality to those at the top or bottom of organizational hierarchies, or even those people located outside of such institutions? Or should different qualitative variants of morality be applied across levels and positions of power? These questions remain unanswered in the sociology of morality and provide direction for future scholars seeking to not only map out different moral landscapes but also social patterning and inequality across institutional settings.

In raising moral questions, as we go about our investigations, it is also important to turn a critical eye upon ourselves. As sociologists of morality, how does the makeup of our field, and who we are shape how we view and assess moral landscapes and power within and across social systems? For example, in drilling down into the history and makeup of our own field in the sociology of morality, how many black, Latina, or Indigenous people, women, or non-binary gendered people are being recognized and cited for their scholarship in this subfield? If it is mainly white men and women, what blindspots may be baked into the foundational work in the field and the nature of how we do and share our work? And in what ways should we be subject to moral scrutiny as we study and assess problems, but fail to act in collectively addressing them? What is our moral obligation to act upon our findings and contribute to raising awareness about or even helping to solve the problems we study?

2.1 Concluding Thoughts

When you turn the lens from examining individual and dispositional forms of morality to focusing on how morality is situated for different people in everyday life across hierarchical organizational and institutional fields, this theoretical shift raises a lot of important questions that remain unanswered. First, the need to map out different moral landscapes, and the affordances and blindspots of such settings, and how they contribute to a possibility of conscious or unconscious moral cognition and action is evident. Second, future research should consider the many unanswered and likely fruitful questions at the intersections of social morality, power, multi-institutional settings, and influences. How do different actors and groups of people navigate the many competing gendered, raced, and classed

moral logics and norms as they move about their everyday lives across institutions? Meta-analyses and comparative research should additionally examine broader patterns with regard to moral agency and forms of morality across groups and levels or intersecting axes of power.

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Examining Moral Decision-Making During Genocide: Rescue in the Case of 1994 Rwanda

Jamie D. Wise, Hollie Nyseth Nzitatira, and Nicole Fox

Abstract

In this chapter, we draw from the case study of rescue during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda to theorize moral decision-making in contexts of mass atrocity. We provide an overview of a core debate regarding the relative influence of internal motivations and external opportunities in shaping rescue behaviors. Recognizing that individuals often explain both rescue and perpetration during genocide in moral terms—and given that some people who rescued also committed violence—we suggest integrating emerging evidence from studies about rescue with existing knowledge regarding the perpetration of violence to develop more holistic models that account for the complexity of individual behavior during genocide. Based on this review, we suggest a starting point for a more comprehensive model to explain moral decision-making during genocide. We conclude by exploring some of the implications of this working model for contemporary atrocity prevention and transitional justice processes.

Keywords

Rescue · Genocide · Rwanda · Atrocity prevention · Moral Decision-Making

1 Introduction

On April 6, 1994, Rwanda was plunged into genocidal violence. While political elites orchestrated these atrocities, it was ordinary Hutu civilians who took up their calls to form killing groups and target their Tutsi neighbors and friends for extermination, purportedly in defense of their families and nation (see Des Forges, 1999; Fujii, 2009; Mamdani, 2001; McDoom, 2021; Straus, 2006). Country-wide, Hutu civilians were faced with choices of grave moral consequence: namely, how to respond to calls to participate in the violence or otherwise support it. While hundreds of thousands of Hutu chose to engage in the violence (Nyseth Nzitatira et al., 2022; Straus, 2004), some individuals risked their lives to rescue Tutsi. What accounts for their heroic actions? How does better understanding the dynamics of rescue illuminate processes of moral decision-making in the context of genocide?

To find out, we look to research on Rwandans like Pascal, a Hutu farmer who was 45 years old during the genocide. He chose to rescue several of his Tutsi friends and neighbors, even though he feared for his life. On why he took such a risk,

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Pascal said, "Every person has their own conscience. . . I was never influenced by any person to hate or kill. To me, people were the same. Particularly, the people I saved were [my] friends. I wasn't a special person, but I had no reason to kill."[1] In this explanation, Pascal highlights two of the major factors that scholars argue are central to explaining moral decision-making during genocide: motivation and opportunity. Pascal was motivated to help by his conscience and his belief in human equality despite ethnic divisions. However, Pascal also admits that he had the opportunity to rescue because he was not influenced to hate or kill, and because he already had close friendships with targeted individuals. Many other people who have rescued during genocide similarly point to some combination of motivations and opportunities to explain their actions.

While most studies of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda focus on what caused people to participate in atrocities, a growing body of work has sought to explain rescue behaviors. In this chapter, we primarily review research on acts of rescue in Rwanda as a case study of moral decision-making during genocide. We highlight key findings regarding what drives decisions to rescue, emphasizing the interplay between internal motivations and external opportunities. We grapple with the fact that both those who rescue and those who perpetrate genocide often justify their actions in moral terms. Recognizing this, as well as emerging evidence that some Hutu individuals perpetrated genocide while *also* attempting to save those being targeted (see Campbell, 2010; Fujii, 2009; Luft, 2015), we argue that theories of moral decision-making during genocide must account for both perpetration and rescue as possible outcomes of a moral agent's confrontation with a genocidal context (Monroe, 2012). As such, while we emphasize rescue acts, we also embrace the complex interplay between many different factors that may simultaneously influence an individual's decision-making process and lead to potentially divergent behaviors (Anderson, 2018; Williams, 2021).

2 Morality and Action During Genocide

Decisions in the context of genocide are often imbued with moral meanings. Here, we conceive of moral decision-making in the formal sense, as summarized by Hitlin and Vaisey (2013, p. 55): "It refers to understandings of good and bad, right and wrong, worthy and unworthy that vary between persons and between social groups." We invoke this definition in order to grapple with the fact that—during genocide—individuals often frame both decisions to perform heroic rescues *and* to commit horrific violence in moral terms, typically by referencing the norms or expectations of their social groups.

Most research focusing on moral decision-making and other micro-level dynamics of atrocity crimes[2] has been dedicated to understanding acts of perpetration, especially participation in killing and sexual and gender-based violence (e.g., Fujii, 2009; Hinton, 2005; Straus, 2006; Waller, 2007; Williams, 2021; Zraly & Nyirazinyoye, 2010). Indeed, despite prevailing assumptions that the people who commit genocide simply lack morals, many who perpetrate genocidal violence actually claim moral justifications for their actions, like the necessity to protect their loved ones or defend their community against perceived enemies (see Anderson, 2017; Anderson, 2018; Bryant et al., 2018). As Leader Maynard (2022, p. 100) observes, the ideological claims used to rationalize genocidal violence "are unquestionably moralized—appealing to, rather than disregarding, familiar moral values and principles about self-defense, justice, and duty." To begin any discussion on morality and decision-making during genocide then, one must acknowledge that there is often significant

[1] Pascal is a pseudonym. He was interviewed as part of a larger project on rescue in 1994 Rwanda by the authors. The interview methodology is detailed in Nyseth Brehm et al. (2021).

[2] "Atrocity crimes" are defined as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. For more, see Scheffer (2006).

debate within a genocidal context over what constitutes "good" moral behavior, and it is not self-evident that "good" or morally committed people will exclusively choose to rescue.

Other research on moral decision-making has focused on the forces that shape rescue behaviors (e.g., Casiro, 2006; Midlarsky et al., 2005; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Tec, 1986). It is perhaps unsurprising that this research has also uncovered many moral justifications constructed by individuals to describe their rescue efforts, as will be explored further throughout this chapter. In fact, explanations for why people rescue often have direct counterparts with regard to why people perpetrate atrocities. For example, early work on the "authoritarian personality" (Adorno et al., 1950) has been paralleled by the "altruistic personality" (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). The "banality of evil" (Arendt, 1963) has been countered with the "banality of good" (Casiro, 2006). Research on "ordinary" killers (e.g., Browning, 1992; Waller, 2007) has been juxtaposed with studies on "ordinary" heroes (e.g., Fogelman, 1994). These parallels suggest significant overlap between these two literatures, despite the fact that they focus on divergent behaviors.

Keeping such overlap in mind, we contend that, although scholars have generally conceived of studies of perpetration and of rescue as two distinct literatures defined by different research subjects and sample populations, there are striking parallels between them that render the dichotomy between the two increasingly untenable. Specifically, we argue that one central theoretical debate shared across these literatures centers on the relative role of *motivation* versus *opportunity* in influencing moral decision-making.[3] While each scholar defines terms somewhat differently, we conceive of *motivation* as the internal factors particular to the individual, like personality or beliefs, which shape decisions to act. Conversely, we use the term *opportunity* to encompass numerous external factors—such as social structures, relational ties, and economic circumstances—that either constrain or enable action. Put another way, this debate hinges on whether the moral identities, values, or commitments of individuals are determinative of actions during genocide, or whether the opportunities that arise throughout various situations during genocide instead have a stronger influence on behavior. This critical tension is reflected in both the literatures on rescue and perpetration during genocide, though we focus here on rescue, which has been comparatively undertheorized.

Additionally, while scholars of perpetration and rescue have generally assumed that the subjects of their inquiries would be mutually exclusive, researchers are increasingly observing that individuals do not fall precisely or consistently within the categories of "perpetrator" or "rescuer." Much of this work stems from the case of 1994 Rwanda, where many people engaged in both violence and rescue during a single episode of genocide, demonstrating the multi-faceted nature of action in atrocity contexts (e.g., Fujii, 2009; Jessee, 2022; Luft, 2015). Together, these insights suggest that there should not be one set of theories to explain who perpetrates and another set of theories to explain who rescues. Rather, these actions should be thought of on a spectrum of possible behaviors that individuals may engage in at any given moment during genocide.

Accordingly, this chapter reviews research on rescue in Rwanda to illustrate some of the factors influencing moral decision-making during genocide, framed through the debate between motivation vs. opportunity. First, we detail the view that motivation is principally important in moral decision-making, though we go beyond the

[3] Long-standing sociological debates similarly underscore tensions between agency (captured by motivation) and structure (captured by opportunity), and such discussions are likewise mirrored in research on what causes individuals to participate in violence. For example, micro-level investigations of participants in civil war have found some are motivated by beliefs (e.g., Wood, 2003), while others emphasize perceived opportunities (e.g., Collier et al., 2009). In much the same way, criminological theories of who engages in crime have either emphasized motivations or opportunities (see Cohen & Felson, 1979), and research on social movements has likewise engaged with this debate (Meyer, 2004).

role of innate personality characteristics by expounding on the influence of moral socialization. Second, we outline a major counterargument, which holds that opportunity strongly conditions or completely drives moral decision-making. We conclude by arguing that scholars need a holistic understanding of moral decision-making during genocide.

3 The Motivation Argument

One perspective on moral decision-making during genocide emphasizes that *motivation* leads individuals to choose to either seek out or take opportunities to engage in rescue behaviors. Motivation is generally believed to arise from personality characteristics possessed by the individual, such as compassion, courage, or love, that are either innate or learned socially over time. In the simplest terms, this view contends that individuals choose to help others primarily because they *want* to.

3.1 Motivation Arises from Personality

The motivation to engage in high-risk behaviors like rescue does not arise spontaneously or randomly; rather, many scholars have argued that rescue motivations arise from certain types of personalities. In their seminal work on rescue during the Holocaust, Oliner and Oliner (1988) proposed the concept of an "altruistic personality" to explain what differentiated rescuers from non-rescuers.[4] In their words: "Rescuers did not simply happen on opportunities to rescue; they actively created, sought, or recognized them where others did not. Their participation was not determined by circumstances but their own personal qualities" (Oliner & Oliner, 1988, p. 142). Specifically, the "altruistic personality" consists of habits of caring, a sense of universal moral obligation, and extensive attachments to others through relationships. Per this theory, those who have the "altruistic personality" are more likely to engage in rescue during genocide. In essence, individuals act altruistically because that is who they are—an altruistic person acts altruistically.[5]

Along this vein, several studies of those who have rescued in Rwanda emphasize the internal factors, like personality and beliefs, that shape moral action (e.g., Brown, 2018; Di Stefano, 2016; Rothbart & Cooley, 2016). For example, among a sample of those who rescued, Rothbart and Cooley (2016, p. 86) found that, "Most interviewees repeatedly stated that their decision to rescue was directly connected to their sense of self and sense of interconnectedness with Tutsis. The interviewees unanimously expressed a clear identification with being a good person or a good Christian, which in turn meant having a good heart." They thus suggest that many Hutu who risked their lives to save Tutsi were influenced by their own self-concepts and moral identities. Other Hutu who rescued Tutsi have cited beliefs in their shared humanity across ethnic lines, which equipped them to counteract divisive rhetoric and policies (see Brown, 2018; Di Stefano, 2016). While which specific characteristics (e.g., compassion, caring, altruism) and beliefs (e.g., religion, worldview) constitute the "rescuer" personality remain debated, these studies suggest that it is important to understand what individuals believe and what values they hold when it comes to deciding to risk their lives for others.

[4] Oliner and Oliner (1988) explored external factors and opportunities like knowledge about others' need for assistance, perceptions of risk, access to material resources, and the occasion of being asked for help, but found none to significantly differentiate rescuers from non-rescuers.

[5] Over the years, other researchers have sought to identify the internal characteristics that lead to rescue behavior, such as a "sense of self-worth so strongly [invested] in humane convictions and social obligations that they act against what they regard as unjust or immoral even though their actions may incur heavy personal costs" (Bandura, 1999, p. 195). Similarly, Monroe (2008) points to internal factors leading to rescue, including: an individual's sense of self as interconnected with humanity, an internal locus of control, and a worldview defined by concern for others and value for human life. Staub (2015) likewise explains rescue behaviors as emanating from individuals who have cultivated empathy, inclusive caring, and altruism as characteristics.

3.2 Personality as a Result of Moral Socialization

While internal factors like one's personality can be said to play an important role in moral decision-making, researchers must ask *where* these characteristics and moral commitments come from. Are they genetic predispositions that individuals were born with? Or are they learned over the life course? Theories that emphasize moral socialization suggest that an individual *becomes* the kind of person who rescues because they learned (usually before the onset of genocide) to value rescuing as a "good" or moral act. Oliner and Oliner (1988) suggest that rescuers internalize the "altruistic personality" over time as a result of parental teaching and role modeling, which creates a strong characteristic predisposition toward helping others. Similarly, scholars have found that Rwandans cite two primary sources of moral socialization that helped them cultivate a "rescuer" identity: role modeling from family members and religious teaching (see Brown, 2018; Di Stefano, 2016; Fox & Nyseth Brehm, 2018; Rothbart & Cooley, 2016).

First, many Rwandans who rescued in 1994 cited what they learned from their parents, grandparents, or other family members. Some recalled witnessing or hearing about their family members' rescue efforts during previous episodes of violence, which provided the basis for their own rescue actions during the genocide (see Brown, 2018; Di Stefano, 2016; Fox & Nyseth Brehm, 2018; Rothbart & Cooley, 2016). Others learned to value interethnic coexistence from family members who modeled tolerance in their teaching or everyday interactions, which may have served as a buffer against believing in or otherwise responding to calls to partake in genocide (see Brown, 2018; Fox & Nyseth Brehm, 2018; Rothbart & Cooley, 2016). Rwandans who rescued have also emphasized internalizing values of compassion, caring, and generosity from family members who—under non-genocidal conditions—helped people experiencing homelessness, hunger, or illness (see Di Stefano, 2016; Rothbart & Cooley, 2016). These findings point to the importance of social learning from family members in shaping the moral identities of those who would go on to rescue.

Second, many Rwandans who rescued in 1994 also pointed to religious beliefs as the source of their rescue actions. For example, some Rwandans referenced religious beliefs about the unity and equality of humanity, which directly contradicted singling out the Tutsi for destruction (see Fox & Nyseth Brehm, 2018; Rothbart & Cooley, 2016). Others acted on the belief that God would help them or provide them strength in rescuing people, which assisted in high-risk moral decision-making (see Brown, 2018; Fox & Nyseth Brehm, 2018; Fox, Wise, & Nyseth Brehm, 2021). Together, these studies point toward the important role of moral socialization in shaping the values and beliefs that provide individuals with the motive to rescue. Though such learning is often dependent on external circumstances—like the presence of parental role models or social relationships—some researchers suggest that it comes to influence action precisely because it is *internalized* within one's sense of identity, leading to the personal motivation to rescue others.[6]

4 The Opportunity Argument

The other dominant perspective on moral decision-making during genocide emphasizes that *opportunity* (broadly defined to include the presence of particular social structures and situational factors) determines the choice of whether or how to rescue. Some scholars argue that opportunity is necessary to link motivation to action, and thus chiefly determines the possibility for individuals to act on their pre-existing intentions to help others. Yet, other scholars eschew the role of motivation entirely, arguing that opportunity

[6] Notably, however, others argue that alternate ideologies which counter justifications for genocidal violence and/or inspire rescue need not be internalized but perhaps just presented to shape behavior (see, for instance, Leader Maynard, 2022).

itself is a sufficient driver of action. We address each of these perspectives in turn.

4.1 Opportunity Links Motivation to Action

As has been outlined above, individuals' internal personality traits, beliefs, and moral values can be intimately tied to *why* they feel a desire to help those who face persecution. However, simply having the desire to act does not alone constitute a decision. As such, some researchers have emphasized how those who rescued others had to have a motive to help *and* an opportunity to do so. As Burnet (2018, p. 216), writes, "To be a rescuer, a person needed the personal conviction or moral compass that impelled them to behave morally, but they also needed the opportunity and the skills and resources to make their actions successful." Put simply, not everyone who felt motivated to help others during the genocide chose to do so, and one must ask what differentiated the well-intentioned from those whose intentions led to heroic actions.[7] One argument is that the perception of opportunity in the moment of deciding how to rescue makes the difference. If motivated individuals perceive that they have the opportunity to successfully engage in rescue efforts, it may be more likely for them to do so.

Of course, many factors can influence perceptions of opportunity. In line with this, scholars of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda have identified a number of circumstances that affect one's opportunity (or at least their perceived opportunity) to engage in rescue acts. For example, it was often easier to rescue in areas where one was in close proximity to Tutsi who needed help, where one was close to international borders to assist in escapes, and where the physical environment was conducive to hiding individuals (see Burnet, 2018). Other situational factors that augmented Rwandans' abilities to rescue included access to social networks to facilitate coordinated rescue efforts, being asked to help, and having access to material wealth (see Fox & Nyseth Brehm, 2018; Luft, 2015). Further, while many scholars have considered religion as a source of motivation for rescue (e.g., Brown, 2018; Fox & Nyseth Brehm, 2018; Rothbart & Cooley, 2016), some have begun to explore how religion also facilitates opportunity to rescue. For example, Fox, Nyseth Brehm, and Gasasira (2021) found that religious beliefs created cognitive safety nets that enhanced individual willingness to take on risk, that religious practices (like not drinking alcohol) buffered some individuals from recruitment into killing groups, and that religious social networks often provided opportunities and resources to rescue (e.g., to hide people in churches).

Conversely, scholars have found that it was often harder to rescue in areas where the political support for the genocide was strong, where the onset of genocidal violence was early and intense, and where a history of intercommunal violence primed Hutu to be mobilized to participate (see Burnet, 2018). Additionally, Hutu were less likely to resist participation if local authorities had been visibly punished or killed for resisting the genocidal agenda (Luft, 2015). In such cases, would-be rescuers likely perceived limited opportunities to rescue and get away with it, which may have deterred such efforts. Together, these studies elucidate important external factors that shape the opportunity landscape and define the perceived possibilities for rescue behaviors during genocide.

4.2 Opportunity Drives Action Independent of Motivation

However, some scholars have suggested that focusing on internal motivations—even if they

[7] It is likely that some individuals, upon determining that rescue efforts would be too risky to themselves or that they would be likely to fail to save others, would ultimately decide not to rescue. Researchers should be curious as to whether there is a difference between those who choose to engage in high-risk rescue efforts no matter the cost (e.g., acting from pure motivation) and those who self-select to rescue only when the fear of negative sanctions is an insufficient deterrent (e.g., acting on motivation conditioned by opportunity).

stem from socialization—results in an underestimation of the role of external opportunities in shaping rescue behavior. Specifically, some scholars emphasize the existence of real social ties and relationships between Hutu and Tutsi (rather than abstract beliefs about tolerance or ethnic unity) as determinative of behavior during genocide (see Campbell, 2010; Luft, 2015). Certainly, relationships can also shape motivations through socialization (as addressed above), for example, by making someone more tolerant, loving, or compassionate toward members of another group and thereby more likely to rescue. However, one can also conceive of the presence of intergroup social ties as a situational factor that shapes perceptions of opportunity to rescue. For example, being friends with someone of the targeted group may increase the likelihood that that person would ask for help, creating a perceived opportunity for intervention that may not have occurred had the relationship not pre-existed the onset of genocide. Similarly, living in a place that is densely populated with targeted individuals or with a history of collaborative intercommunal relations might increase perceived opportunities to rescue, again, independent of motivation.

This view is perhaps most clearly articulated by Campbell (2010, p. 305), who writes that, "It is not the individual characteristics of killers or rescuers that account for their behavior—not their socialization, and not their motivations—but the relationships of those involved." Per this view, the individual's values and beliefs are irrelevant; it is only the physical and social proximity they have to persecuted individuals that matters. If someone is nearby, is a close friend or family member, and is perceived as like-minded or similar in some aspect to the rescuer, they are more likely to be rescued.[8] Campbell (2010, pp. 310–311) goes further to claim that individuals who engage in contradictory behaviors during genocide—for example, both rescuing and killing—do not have a change of "heart" when switching actions but simply encounter a different "social structure" which tilts their decision-making toward another outcome.

Echoing the importance of situational factors, Luft (2015) also found that a Hutu's geographic proximity to killers and prior relationships with Tutsi influenced their decision-making during the genocide. However, Luft's (2015) findings complicate Campbell's (2010) by illustrating how the influence of social ties between Hutu and Tutsi was mediated by the proximity of Hutu to extremists. For example, when directly threatened by another Hutu or lacking the resources to resist orders to kill (like money for bribes), Luft (2015) found that some Hutu were even willing to kill their Tutsi friends or loved ones. Though future research with a larger sample of those who perpetrated is necessary to determine how common this specific scenario was during the genocide, its occurrence illustrates the complexity of decision-making during genocide. Further, while the importance of interethnic social ties—and the precise mechanisms that link them to action—remain debated, this evidence points to the influence of situational factors on moral decision-making.

Further, scholars must—to some extent—take seriously claims among those who rescued when they assert that they had "no choice" in their actions.[9] Some who rescued have reported viewing their decisions in hindsight as automatic or predetermined, minimizing their agency in decision-making. Even certain studies that emphasize the role of internal factors on moral decision-making have documented participants' claims that they felt they had no choice in how

[8] Specifically, Campbell (2010, p. 304) theorizes that rescue is more likely when an individual shares "intimacy, functional interdependence, and cultural closeness" with persecuted individuals.

[9] Much research has found that those who perpetrate atrocities rely on a number of neutralization techniques to make their conduct appear morally acceptable or excusable, such as claiming that they had "no choice" (Alvarez, 1997; Anderson, 2017; Bryant et al., 2018; Sykes & Matza, 1957). Cohen (2001) notes that such techniques may actually facilitate the act itself, though they can also function after the act to protect someone from self-blame and blame by others.

they acted.[10] Elsewhere, we have found that some who rescued in Rwanda even denied responsibility for their actions during the genocide, such as by deferring to an external power like God (Fox, Wise, & Nyseth Brehm, 2021). Specifically, religious participants claimed that God helped them, that it was God's plan for them to rescue, and/or that God intervened and saved them. Fox, Wise, and Nyseth Brehm (2021, p. 1397) write, "Put simply, participants commonly expressed that they do not deserve recognition for their heroic actions of rescue but that such recognition belongs to God." In this way, these heroic individuals minimized their own agency, pointing instead to the importance of opportunity in the form of external influences—such as divine intervention—in determining their actions.

5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have drawn from the case study of rescue during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda to highlight the ongoing debate between motivation and opportunity as factors influencing moral decision-making in atrocity contexts. We argue that these insights should be connected to their counterparts in studies of perpetration, and that future research should develop and deploy holistic models that account for the complexity and fluidity of action during genocide. While some existing models attempt to integrate both motivation and opportunity to explain perpetration and/or rescue (e.g., Monroe, 2012; Williams, 2021), we challenge scholars in the subfield of the sociology of morality to continue to build more nuanced and comprehensive explanations of moral decision-making during genocide.

We also suggest that there is value in both sides of the debate, such that models of action must take seriously the interplay between motivation and opportunity, including the factors that shape both concurrently. Synthesizing the literature reviewed here, we propose the following as a model for understanding moral decision-making during genocide:

1. Begin with the individual, who holds a range of moral values as a result of their personality and moral socialization (e.g., religious teaching, parental role modeling).
2. As genocidal violence unfolds, the individual is confronted with a new context that necessitates a response. The opportunity landscape determines when and how the individual is confronted with various moral dilemmas (e.g., if they encounter someone who asks them to rescue, if they are in an area densely populated by targeted people, if they are recruited by killing groups).
3. The individual interprets what choices are available to them by relying on their existing moral convictions and commitments, which may motivate them to take a particular action, such as helping or harming others. As Monroe (2012) and others have found, some courses of action may not even be fathomable to the individual, giving the perception that they have "no choice."[11]
4. The individual may undertake an additional assessment of the new opportunity landscape created by the genocidal circumstances,

[10] For example, Oliner and Oliner (1988, p. 222) suggest about those who rescued during the Holocaust: "To a large extent, then, helping Jews was less a decision made at a critical juncture than a choice prefigured by an established character and way of life." In the Rwandan case, Rothbart and Cooley (2016, p. 87) found, "For these interviewees, their choice to help was not conceived of as an option—where they could decide to help or not—and instead was more of an irrefutable characteristic or expression of their sense of self and their relationship to Tutsis." Brown (2018, p. 78) similarly recounts about one of her participants, "When asked what prompted her to rescue, she asserted that her readiness to help was the only feasible response. From her deeply religious perspective, there was no choice to make."

[11] Monroe's (2012) theory stresses that, while individuals do make choices within genocidal contexts, their freedom to choose may be significantly constrained by their sense of identity. As Monroe (2012, p. 258) explains, "This theory itself proposes that our moral choices reflect our basic sense of who we are in relation to others. Identity constrains moral choice through setting the range of options we perceive as available, not just morally but cognitively. This distinction, for example, means we do not think of an option but reject it as ethically wrong; we do not think of that option at all."

including their available resources and the likelihood of their own survival, to determine whether to take a particular action (e.g., if they have access to a church or space to house rescued individuals safely, if they can bribe killing groups, if others have been punished for resistance creating a credible threat to their own lives).

5. This process repeats overtime, as the situation evolves and the individual is confronted with ongoing moral dilemmas and shifting opportunities through the duration of the genocide. Further, the individual's moral identity might be transformed during the genocide—primarily as a result of in-conflict socialization or experiences, including prior decisions to act (or not)—which could account for contradictory behaviors over time as motivations and perceived opportunities change.

The model described above balances considerations of both motivation and opportunity, expressing that an individual's moral decision-making is especially influenced by social learning and relationships both before and during genocidal violence.

If it is to be accepted as such, this model carries implications for considerations of violence prevention and accountability for mass atrocities. First, it indicates that the best time to shape one's moral consciousness and increase the likelihood to resist genocide is *before* the onset of violence. Since individuals rely on their existing moral values, habits, and characteristics to determine how to act, it follows that an emphasis on moral education would better prime individuals to make prosocial decisions, like rescue, during genocide. There is an important role for memorialization and genocide education to play in this regard as a preventative tool to educate generations on how to intervene in violence.

However, these efforts may only be effective to a certain extent, as the situational context of genocide can itself—sometimes rapidly—transform perceptions of morality, and the choices that are or appear acceptable. It is important to grapple with the reality that, during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, many of those who perpetrated violence reported believing that participating in the genocide was a morally "right" decision. Such individuals have neutralized their actions through a variety of techniques including appeals to higher loyalties, such as claiming that they were rightfully defending the country, protecting their own families, or fulfilling the duties defined by their social roles (see Anderson, 2017; Bryant et al., 2018).[12] Moral education may be limited in its capacity to prevent genocide, as those who are inclined to perpetrate violence may justify their perpetration in moral terms, rather than being challenged to desist. Consequently, broad efforts at moral education to socialize people to act altruistically should be paired with policy efforts (e.g., preventive diplomacy) to prevent the outbreak of genocide and thereby avoid creating the context that spurs moral justifications for violence. In cases where violence is already underway, counter-narratives that undermine genocidal ideologies using appeals to morality may have some effect on inspiring prosocial action or rescue (see Leader Maynard, 2022).

Second, simple attributions of responsibility are complicated by opportunity-based explanations and claims that individuals have "no choice" about how to act during genocide. In the traditional view of the "altruistic personality," where the emphasis is on internal motivations, attributions of responsibility seem quite clear—it is reasonable to hold individuals accountable for the kind of person they are and choose to be. However, can individuals be considered responsible for the circumstances in which they find themselves and the ways those circumstances consequently shape their behavior? Or can individuals be held accountable for choices that they did not think it was possible to make? These are not straightforward questions; however, a nuanced understanding of moral decision-making is central to devising any post-

[12] For more on how gendered norms and expectations shaped women's narratives of perpetration in Rwanda, see Brown (2018) and Jessee (2015), and for men, see Adler et al. (2008).

atrocity justice paradigm and, consequently, to contemporary genocide prevention.

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Part VI

Nature, Culture, and Morality

The Influence of the Nature-Culture Dualism on Morality

Jesse Callahan Bryant and Justin Farrell

Abstract

Nature and culture are perhaps the two most consistent moral categories in Western thought. And yet, despite their stability, what nature and culture represent within a given moral system varies widely. In this chapter, we argue that the nature-culture dualism ("NCD") has a fundamental impact on the moral imagination of different societies, and that this relationship has been underappreciated by sociology. To illustrate our argument, we trace the evolution of nature-culture dualism ("NCD") from Greek and Roman thought, through Medieval Christian thought, and into the Modern era, from which sociology emerged. We show how in each era different presuppositions are stabilized by metaphors that naturalize a particular nature-culture dualism and set of moral beliefs, first about how humans should treat nature, and second, about what type of society nature is telling humans to build. Moving forward, sociologists should pay closer attention to the nature-culture dualism, not only because it is analytically important but because moral imagination is impossible without it.

Keywords

Nature · Culture · Dualism · Historical sociology · Environment

1 Introduction

There is perhaps no more constitutive belief characteristic of Western social thought than that humans are somehow different from the rest of life. This belief, known as the nature-culture dualism ("NCD"), represents a deep ontological split, where "nature" constitutes the external nonhuman environment and "culture" constitutes the domain of human activities and artifacts. Reality, seemingly in two parts.

History provides us with a convenient story of linear change on the matter in suggesting that, despite our species emerging 300,000 years ago on the African continent, that form of migratory human was significantly more ecologically enmeshed in their local surroundings than we are today. We can think of the history of the West as a continuous shift from ecological to sociological networks as determining the life course of any given person—individuals have become de-ecologized and engulfed by the institutions of society. (Elias, 1978).

In the last few centuries B.C.E., two consciousnesses emerged—one social, and one natural—and between the two, an ontological chasm. While much has been written about the

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NCD, we argue that sociologists have mostly overlooked the significant *moral* implications of this change. Since the pre-Axial Age (Jaspers, 1948) nature has become a moral Other, thought of as separate from human power structures. Furthermore, while the basic ontological division of the NCD is durable over time, it has taken various forms since its inception in the Axial Age. We show that these different forms of the NCD—emerging in different places and periods of history—yield very different traditions of moral reasoning about the human and nonhuman worlds.

For example, although Greek animism, Christian deism, and Modern scientism all share a conviction that human and nonhuman nature are in some way different (i.e., uphold the dualism), these traditions' ideas about nature are different, and even sometimes incommensurate, and *thus can have very different moral implications for both society and ecology*. As such, these emergent moral philosophies—again, rooted in different ideas about nature—lead to very different societal practices, ranging from a society's exploitative use of natural resources to a society's subjugation of women (Merchant, 1980).

Ideas about nature interact with moral systems in both a *substantive* and *formal* way. As Hitlin and Vaisey note in their review, "the word moral is used in two distinct senses." Whereas moral may refer *substantively* to "universal standards of right and wrong linked to concerns about justice, fairness, and harm"; in its *formal* sense it refers "to understandings of good and bad, right and wrong, worthy and unworthy that vary between persons and between social groups." (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013) In other words, moral may refer substantively to a universal distinction between moral and immoral, or a parochial distinction between moral and amoral. As we will see, ideas of nature will affect both moral senses, substantive-universal—for instance, in reference to "human nature"—and formal-parochial—for instance, in reference again to the natural subjugation of women.

In this chapter, we sketch the main stages of moral-philosophical change while at the same time revealing the relative stability over time, wherein "nature" functions as a moral Other, imagined as separate human social structures. We will assess different forms of the NCD throughout Western history and their effects on the organization of moral thought, showing how the rupture between nature and culture impacts the moral life of societies—past, present, and future. Specifically, we will focus our attention on three major periods of Western thought: the Greek and Roman, the Christian Medieval, and the Modern Period. (Bell & Ashwood, 2015).

In his seminal *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society,* Raymond Williams provides a frame for the three analytic elements of the NCD with which we will proceed. (Williams, 1976) We will consider (i) *adjectival nature*, which is associated most with the inherent quality, mind, soul, property, or *how* something is; (ii) *verb nature*, which is associated most with origin, change, and teleology; and (iii) *noun nature*, which is associated most with body, matter, substance, materiality, or *what* something is. As Williams has pointed out, these three uses of the term "nature" have both different histories and triangulate different moral implications for social theorizing.

Colloquially, we might think of *adjectival nature* as "human nature"—as in, it's just human nature to eat meat!— *verb nature* as "natural forces"—as in, climate change is just a natural process—and noun nature as "nature"—as in, that tree over there is nature; in other words, the *essence* of the world, the *movement* of the world, and the *material* of the world. Which is to say, we must understand the NCD not as a clean ontological dichotomy but instead as an aggregation of a handful of philosophical presuppositions about how nature is, if at all, different from culture.

In each period, different *naturalizing metaphors* have arisen in order to stabilize the relationship between nature and culture across these three dimensions and their implications for moral social action. For instance, while for the Greeks nature was a living *organism*, for the Medieval Christians nature was a *machine*. While nature-as-organism implies one level of moral standing, nature-as-machine implies another. Importantly, the legacy of this dualism

is a distinct intellectual and moral history of thought about nature and society and should not be understood as encompassing a global history on the matter. For instance, the vast majority of contemporary indigenous peoples today do not share this clean binary. (Lynch & Veland, 2018).

We will move forward by analyzing how changes to the underlying philosophy and their stabilizing metaphors, like the ones above, affect moral reasoning of the deontological, consequentialist, and ontological reasoning or virtue ethics types. We chart the dualism-*specific properties* over time and how those properties have interacted with the moral and epistemological imagination of various communities. After covering historical ground, we will spend time in the Modern Industrial Period in which the field of sociology emerged.

As atmospheric carbon continues to rise above 400 ppm and Antarctic ice shelves fall into the ocean, there is a growing sense that we may be heading into a time when this long-standing gap between nature and society disappears. The *paradox of historicized nature*, according to Andreas Malm, is that "the more profoundly humans have shaped nature over their history, the more intensely nature comes to affect their lives" (Malm, 2018). Today, this diverse and pervasive intrusion of nature into society, often referred to by the watery symbolic catchall of "climate change," has poured fuel onto the fire of decades-long debates about the use of the ontological category "nature" in moral theorizing. While some like Bruno Latour (2007) and Yrjö Haila (2000) have argued for the rejection of nature entirely, saying that the NCD "ultimately harmful" and that it "should be [rejected]," we call here instead for increased attention.

For sociology generally and moral sociology in particular, the increasing intrusion of nature into society presents novel empirical and theoretical challenges left unresolved by classical sociology, which "[had] little to say about the environment and the environmental basis for society" (Barry, 2007). Though it is obvious, it often goes unrecognized that the only other thing shared by all societies outside of a social life is an ecological life. In what follows we address inescapable fact of human society and suggest that in much the same way moral judgments come hand in hand with sociality; they too come hand in hand with ecology. As the natural increasingly intrudes into the social, we argue that the nature of the relationship between these two moral realities demands more attention from sociologists of morality than it has previously received. This chapter is an attempt at just that.

2 The Greeks and Romans: Organism and Harmony

For the Greeks and Romans, there was less difference between the natural and the social than in the periods that follow. The closest distinction was only *adjectival*, meaning that "human nature" or humanness was somehow different from nonhuman nature or naturalness. With the Greeks, there was still a sense that the human and nonhuman worlds were made of the same material, were of the same origin, followed the same basic laws of change, and were bound for the same destiny. In fact, for the Greeks both nature and culture were thought of as similar types of *organisms* that were *cyclically* born, aged, died, and reborn. The moral imperative of the individual was to be in *harmony* with, rather than trying to improve upon, the unchanging cycles of growth and decay, whether they be ecological or sociological. And yet, over the centuries of antiquity an ontological chasm began to slowly open between nature and culture.

2.1 Early Greek Thought

In Sumerian, Mayan, and the earliest Greek mythology, there is no discernible difference between the natural and the social, and thus the questions above might not even be legible. According to the sociologist Michael Bell (2018), "nature before nature" was "an entangled vision of nature, supernature, and the human all matted together, rather than seeing nature as a

separate matter, worthy of a word that distinguishes it." Scholars pinpoint the emergence of the nature-culture dualism as an important Western moral binary to the first millennium B.C.E., though theories differ slightly.

John Stuart-Glennie's (1873) "Moral Revolution" (600 B.C.E.) and Karl Jaspers' (1948) "Axial Age" (800–300 B.C.E) both refer to the same cultural and cognitive periods of change which Eisenstadt (2012) has described as a period with an explosion of "second-order thinking"; Donald (1991) has characterized as the advent of a "theoretic attitude," and that Bellah (2005) has argued was a result of the proliferation of "graphic invention, external memory, and theory construction."

The same Ionian Period (700–500 B.C.E) that Bellah and Donald characterized as the birth of critical abstract thinking, Collingwood (1960), citing Aristotle, described as one in which philosophers were primarily concerned with developing theoretical answers to the question "What is nature?"

The nature in this case, however, was of specific and limited type. During the Greek period, the only reasonable dimension on which nature was clearly distinguished from culture was on the *adjectival* or essential dimension. For the early Greeks, "its original and, strictly, proper sense: when it refers not to a collection [of things] but a principle" or essential *property*. (Collingwood, 1960) The Greeks might contrast *humanness* with *treeness*, and over time these comparisons accumulated into a sort of macro-organizing binary between nature and culture. Collingwood citing Aristotle has noted, the NCD was immediately present during Ionian times in the distinction between the *artificial* or "the products of *skill* on the part of humans and other animals" and others which are *natural*, or "the contradictory of *artificial*, things that happen or exist of themselves and not because someone has made them or produced them" (Collingwood, 1960).

Collingwood (1960) notes that for Greeks those "*natural* things constitute a single *world of nature*," separate from the artificial. For the Greeks trees, rocks, and water all had their own nature, and these natures could be distinguished more broadly from the nature of humans, architecture, and boxing.

And yet in terms of *noun nature* and *verb nature* it is not clear a dualism can be drawn. Greek metaphysics suggested that humans and nonhumans shared a common material body (i.e., noun nature). For instance, Pythagoras taught that "all living creatures are related and have a common origin and natural ties," while Empedocles claimed that "In the past I have been a boy and a girl, a bush, a bird, and a silent water-dwelling fish." (Donald Hughes, 1980) According to Anaximander (b. 610 BCE) there was a shared material unity, "an eternal and unchanging substance, 'the boundless', out of these opposites [read: nature-culture] emerge." (Glacken, 1967) Thus, for many Greeks despite lacking the empirics of modern physics or evolutionary theory, there was no material dualism between nature and culture.

Further, if we were to ask to what extent do humans and nonhumans share a common origin, pattern of change, and destiny (i.e., verb nature), the answer would no doubt be that nature and culture share all three. For the Greeks, "the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both" was cyclical and degenerative, and applied to both ecosystems and societies. Individual humans, ecosystems, and civilizations all followed inescapable cycles of linear degeneration bookended by apocalypse and a subsequent regenerative Golden Age. (Glacken, 1967) (Fig. 1).

2.2 Nature-As-Organism

These metaphysics were naturalized by the *biological* or *organismic analogy*, wherein just like any biological organism, individual humans, ecosystems, and cultures alike are born, age, and die. All of nature was considered "not only a vast animal with a soul. . .but a rational animal with a mind of its own" with which we humans have a "a psychical and intellectual kinship." (Collingwood, 1960) From Anaximander through Plato "the origin of the universe is compared to the formation and birth of a living being"

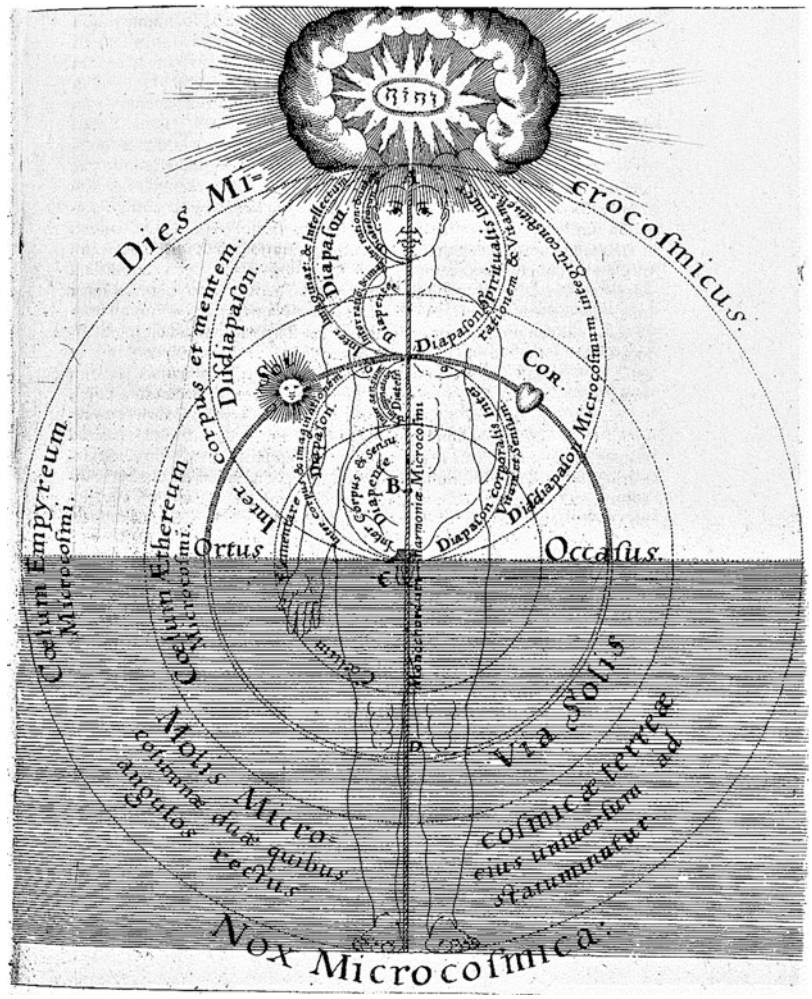


Fig. 1 Greek—Micro-Macrocosm. By Johann Theodor de BryFludd, RobertUtriusque cosmi historiaFaksimile-Ausgabe der Erstausgabe**.** Oppenheim/Frankfurt, 1617–1621—Robert Fludd, "Utrisque Cosmi", Band II, Oppenheim, 1619. Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11468304

(Glacken, 1967). The organism is often thought to be gendered female, and often depicted as a fertile organic Mother Earth to be inseminated. Philo the Jew wrote that "earth does not imitate women, but woman earth" (Glacken, 1967). There is, interestingly, little evidence of society subsequently being gendered male, which is reflective of the fuzziness of the NCD in Greece.

For the Greeks, the micro-organic nature of an individual human reflected the macro-organic nature of all of life. In this way the ontological, and thus moral chasm was narrower than in later periods. Within this organic universe, however, they did draw contrast between *natural* things that "exist of themselves" and *artificial* things that "someone has made…or produced," (Collingwood, 1960) and further that these differing natures were *fixed*.

2.3 Harmonic Analogy

Within an ontological outlook where both nature and society were seen as degenerating, cyclical organisms with fixed natures we find a moral logic codified as the *harmonic analogy*—that moral behavior is to act in accordance with one's essence. Due to the relative fuzziness of the NCD during this time, it was applied to both the natural and social realms. A tree is morally good insofar as it lives in accordance with its role as a tree, whereas a slave is morally good insofar

as it lives in accordance with their role as a slave. This sense partially resonates today with live moral debates about native and invasive species.

For the Greeks, "Human nature does not alter; it is fixed by Moira" (Bury, 1921). Moira was represented by a consortium of three goddesses who "kept things in their places, assigned to each its proper sphere and function, and drew a definite line, for instance, between men and gods [and nature]" (Bury, 1921). For the Greeks, one's essence (adjectival nature) was fixed at birth and it is harmony with that essence that constituted moral behavior. As scholars have pointed out, much of Greek moral thought demanded "a philosophy of resignation and to hinder the creation of an optimistic atmosphere of hope" (Bury, 1921). Thus, within the harmonic logic is a type of virtue ethics where a moral person is someone who behaves naturally, or in harmony with their *nature* assigned by Moira.

2.4 From Philosophy to Society

Another critical dimension is that for the Greeks the natural and supernatural had not yet been disentangled. Nature was seen as a larger manifestation of the human, but also as the domain of the gods. To destroy nature was to literally destroy the gods, and thus policy structures and coercive mechanisms emerged around their protection.

"*Temene*...were set aside, usually containing groves of trees and springs of water...[were] preserved in something like its natural state, modified usually only by the addition of an image of the god and perhaps a shrine or temple to protect it" (Donald Hughes, 1980). The violation of these groves carried with it stiff fines (Frazer, 1990). Here we see something in Greece approximating today's concept of "wilderness" where a consequentialist logic would conflate the destruction of nature to the violation of the gods and unify both moral and material landscapes.

Over time a moral binary emerged where nature became seen as *good* because it was the domain of the gods in which things lived in harmony with their essence, whereas society became seen as *bad* because it was where things lived in dissonance with their essence.

The first critic to weaponize this moral binary was the Sophist who claimed that the gluttony of the State had become out of harmony with human nature:

> In the fifth century BCE...Greek society at the time was experiencing fantastic growth in the power, size, and wealth of its city-states...Money and politics, not the gods and other lofty concerns, moved the world of everyday life...The overall point that the Sophists were making was that morality and the social order were based upon mere convention—nomos, to use the Greek word—not some principle external to human interests, such as god, justice, or what we have come to call science...For them, the Sophist message was comforting and hopeful: The social order is not preordained. (Bell, 2018)

In addition to attacking basic metaphysical commitments like the fixedness of Moira, they launched the first real strike using the concept of nature as a deontological moral force, separate from the conventions of culture:

> The Sophists radically transformed [nature], giving it a much wider meaning. The way something first came into the world, Sophists reasoned, must be how it was before it got manipulated by nomos: by human conventions and all the politics that shaped them. [Nature] was therefore truth, they contended, because it lay beyond the human and the social, beyond all our rhetoric, bias, materialist desire, and self-interest. Here at last was a concept that could be a source of moral guidance in a jealous world of wealth and power, they felt. In contrast to the vagaries of nomos, shaped by a changing political order, [nature] gave people a moral rock on which to stand, a rock that seemed to reach above the roiling seas of human interests. (Bell, 2018)

And thus, with the Greeks the nature-culture dualism emerges, and in particular the familiar moral dimensions of the dualism wherein nature are seen as a *moral Other*. The Sophists were making an accusation within the logic of virtue ethics. The Greek state, they said, had fallen out of harmony with its essential nature—it had become unnatural, and thus immoral.

In reorganizing nature into a moral Other from which deontological moral principles may be read, the Sophists positioned naturalists, early scientists, and most importantly *themselves* as arbiters not only of objective truth but thus of moral behavior. This moral logic appears still today as the *appeal to nature* rhetorical tactic (That which is natural is good./N is natural./ Therefore, N is good or right.) (Appeal to Nature, 2022), in social theory in the "reading-off" hypothesis ("we can both better describe or explain human society by applying the knowledge derived from the study of the nonhuman world, since we too are part of nature, a particular species.") (Barry, 2007), and permeates classical sociology from Herbert Spencer to Emile Durkheim.

For instance, Spencer saw nature, and thus human nature, as constituted by a network of competitive relationships between individuals each struggling toward a higher fitness. Any intervention in that struggle—say, government policy—that props up unfit individuals thus is interpreted as unnatural and thus immoral. (Spencer, 1916).

As Greek society aged, and Roman times emerged the basic moral kinship across the NCD began to fade. As materialism trade expanded so did the ontological chasm between the human and nonhuman. What Lucretius and Pythagoras believed—that a good society and good ecology are egalitarian one where "the sum of things is constantly renewed, all creatures live in symbiosis—gave way to the aristocratic mind of Aristotle who saw both nature and thus the good society as hierarchical and where 'there is one ultimate ruler, and each lower level is subordinate to the next higher level, as in an army' ". In stark contrast to earlier Greek periods, Aristotle "argue[d] not only for natural slavery, but also that plants exist 'for the sake of' animals and animals exists 'for the sake of' man' ". This basic moral reorientation of the NCD was a revolution and served as the scaffolding that built the Christian metaphysics that followed.

3 The Medieval Christians: The Great Chain of Being and Machines

If the Greek period was constituted primarily by a fuzzy line between culture, nature, and the gods therein, the Medieval Christian period was a reactive moral movement organized around the total opposite: that human and nonhuman life are and should be essentially, materially, and teleologically different. The fall of the Roman Empire was seen by many early Christians as a moral failure—it was evidence of earthly, materialist desires run amok. As a result, much of the basic moral architecture constructing the tensions between nature and culture were reorganized.

The two most important shifts in moral geometry from the Greeks to the Christians were the disentanglement of God from Nature and the subsequent flipped valence from Nature-as-good to Nature-as-bad. Both human and nonhuman nature were not to be harmonized with, but instead resisted. In its simplest form, earthly humans had two moral possibilities: to transcend nature or descend into it.

While we make these general claims, it is important to note that in the more than one thousand years between the fall of antiquity and the Enlightenment, Europe was highly heterogeneous in ecological, economic, and moral terms. And yet despite these differences, Christianity remained quite pervasive, and within it many of the moral contours of the nature-culture dualism were increasingly articulated through two stabilizing metaphors: the *Great Chain of Being* and eventually *nature-as-machine*.

3.1 The Great Chain of Being

The Great Chain of Being ("GCB") is the sense that humans are suspended in a hierarchical position *between* God and Nature. The origins of the GCB appear in Plato and pervade thought through Linneaus and still linger today. (Lovejoy, 2017) We can think of Aristotle's *Politics* noted above as a useful bridge between antiquity and

the recognizably hierarchical social morality of the Christian Medieval period characterized by a linear order with God at the top, followed by a handful of lesser deities, then Man, Animals, Plants, Metals, and Rocks. (Lovejoy, 2017).

For Christians, human nature was seen not only as separate from nonhuman nature, but a higher moral category. In other words, *human nature* was morally superior to *animal nature* which was indeed above *plant nature*. Thomas Aquinas explains this moral organization:

> As we observe. . .imperfect beings serve the needs of more noble beings; plants draw their nutrients from the earth, animals feed on plants, and these in turn serve man's use. We conclude, then, that lifeless beings exist for living beings, plants for animals, and the latter for man. . .The whole of material nature exists for man, inasmuch as he is a rational animal. . .We believe all corporeal things to have been made for man's sake. (Kinsley, 1996)

With Aquinas we see the GCB and nature-culture dualism playing out both in the adjectival dimension ("more noble beings") and material dimensions ("the whole material nature exists for man"). In direct contrast to the Greeks, there was no longer a shared common body between nature and society. And insofar as Christian theology is followed closely, humans do not share a common origin nor destiny with the rest of nonhuman life. Though it might seem obvious, there are no nonhuman saints in Christian theology.

In GCB thought, patriarchy is often enshrined with Men atop Women. Elsewhere, illustrations of the GCB identify sub-hierarchical relationships, with Lions appearing above Animals, Oaks and Roses appearing above Plants, and Gold appearing above Minerals. Here we see analogic thinking transcending the nature-culture dualism along the adjectival dimension, where the essence or nature of Lions, Oaks, and Gold takes on the essence or nature of a King. (Talebinejad & Dastjerdi, 2005) Though today its moral valence has mostly disappeared, the "chain" in the GCB still serves as the basic metaphor for the empirical study of energy flow in ecology; however, today we refer to it as the *food chain*.

Throughout the Christian Medieval period, human nature was seen as inherently immoral, always on the verge of being sucked down the great chain toward nonhuman nature. For St. Augustine, since nature represented a place of reproduction and renewal, the moral reciprocal must be godly: Christians must resist reproduction, and marriage was "not expedient except for those who do not have self-control". In contrast to the wilderness-as-good framework of the Greek *temene*, the opposite valence appears in the Medieval epic *Beowulf*, where the characters "take no delight in the works of nature but only in the works of men. . .the mead hall and its treasures are the antithesis of the somber world of nature" (Headley, 2020).

During the Medieval period, "Man's relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly, man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature" (White, 1967). To be wild, natural, beastly became something to be avoided; priests, rather than naturalists, became translators of the most societally important deontological moral scripts; and to destroy human life carried with it no moral consequence. As part-God part-nature, during the Medieval period humans sat at a moral crossroads (Fig. 2).

3.2 Nature-As-Machine

As the Medieval period progressed, the moral status of nonhuman nature continued to deteriorate and the ontological chasm between human and nonhuman nature continued to widen. The lingering animistic sense of nature-as-organism, as a "force that assures the continuing generation of like from like" (Herlihy, 1980), gave way to a sense that anything beneath humans on the GCB "is devoid both of intelligence and life." Collingwood (1960) describes this shift as "instead of being an organism, the natural world is a machine: a machine in the literal and proper sense of the word, an arrangement of bodily parts designed and put together and set going for a definite purpose by an intelligent mind outside itself" (Collingwood, 1960).



Fig. 2 Christian—Great Chain of Being. By Didacus Valades (Diego Valades)—Rhetorica Christiana, via Getty Research, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1688250

The naturalization of the metaphor of *nature-as-machine* followed the increasing presence of machines like wheelbarrows and windmills in common life during the latter half of Medieval times. (Collingwood, 1960) Not only did nonhuman life lose its moral status, but now its *life* altogether.

The loss of nature's moral status during the Medieval codified first by the GCB and later by the "death of nature" in the form of *nature-as-machine* paved the way for the use of naturalness as moral code for exploitable material. This applied first to the domination of nonhuman nature (Leiss, 1994), the ripples of which we continue to feel today (White, 1967), but also the domination of less godly and more "natural" societies and identities. For instance, in *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant (1980) tracks the simultaneous "death" of nature and the naturalization of patriarchy in the West:

> The image of an organic cosmos with a living female earth at its center gave way to a mechanistic world view in which nature was reconstructed as dead and passive, to be dominated and controlled by humans. (Merchant, 1980)

Curious about the ripples of the "death of nature" into today, Noel Sturgeon asked, "What are the effects of calling something *natural*?" in contemporary advertising. She found that "the representation of women as natural and nature as female is very common…closer to nature, the primitive, the animal, the body, and father from culture, the civilized, the human, and the mind" than men." We can think of John Berger's (1990) famous quip that in Modern art "Men act. Women appear." Sturgeon has shown that in contemporary advertising men are almost always portrayed as controlling nature, and when they are not, they are often of a marginalized race, lower class, or marginalized sexuality, and thus of a lesser moral status within our dominant hegemonic structure. (Sturgeon, 2009).

4 The Moderns: Natural Theory, Social Theory, and the Tree of Life

In the centuries following the Enlightenment the mechanistic Great Chain of Being was reborn into the Tree of Life, unchanging links in the chain were reanimated as evolving "species," and, even if it were not true in the purest sense of evolutionary thought, the human species began its progressive course out of constraint by natural law and toward an obscure non-heavenly, earthly utopia.

Throughout the Modern period, science would continually lay bare evidence suggesting humanity's common origin (verb nature) and material unity (noun nature) with nonhuman life. And given this evidence, the moral force of technology would progressively help in transcending the earthly hells of famine, disease, and boredom, continually providing evidence that humans must be different, somehow, than the rest of life (adjectival nature). What can be the most disarming about the Modern period is that like evolution itself, bad ideas go extinct, but the best—whether the horseshoe crab or the Greek *nature-as-organism* metaphor—are still with us. The most important change from Medieval to Modern for our purposes was the transformation of Christian heavenly teleology into the earthly utopian teleology of *progress* (Fig. 3).

4.1 The Precarious Moral "State of Nature"

One area where moral heterogeneity abounded around the nature-culture dualism was in *state of nature* debates, or "arguments about how the social order ought to be arranged, what the 'good society' is, and how political and social change should be viewed" in relation to a primitive past. (Barry, 2007) These debates emerged in response to encounters with societies in the New World and naturalized a progressive metaphysics that took for granted a primitive past from which European civilization had emerged. Thus, in these debates the culture was taken for granted to have increasingly emerged in historical time from a state of nature. For much of the Modern period social theory was the dramatization of culture's emergence from nature and followed the propositions that "there is a natural order, with a corresponding natural law; this natural order can be seen in the rest of nature; humans ought to [or ought not] follow this natural order" (Barry, 2007).

For Thomas Hobbes, the nature from which culture fought to differentiate itself was *bad*, immoral, "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short" (Hobbes & Missner, 2016) and thus a strong sovereign state was needed to avoid moral destitution. Hobbes' formulation of the nature-culture dualism took on a shape resonant with the Christian conception: both human and nonhuman nature is inherently bad, and the only way to manage this inescapable reality is with a strong church or strong state.

For John Locke, the nature-culture dualism was much less morally polarized and yet perhaps even more distinctly Modern. For Locke, nature was neither good nor bad, but *valueless*. Whereas Hobbes' nature was a horror show, Locke's

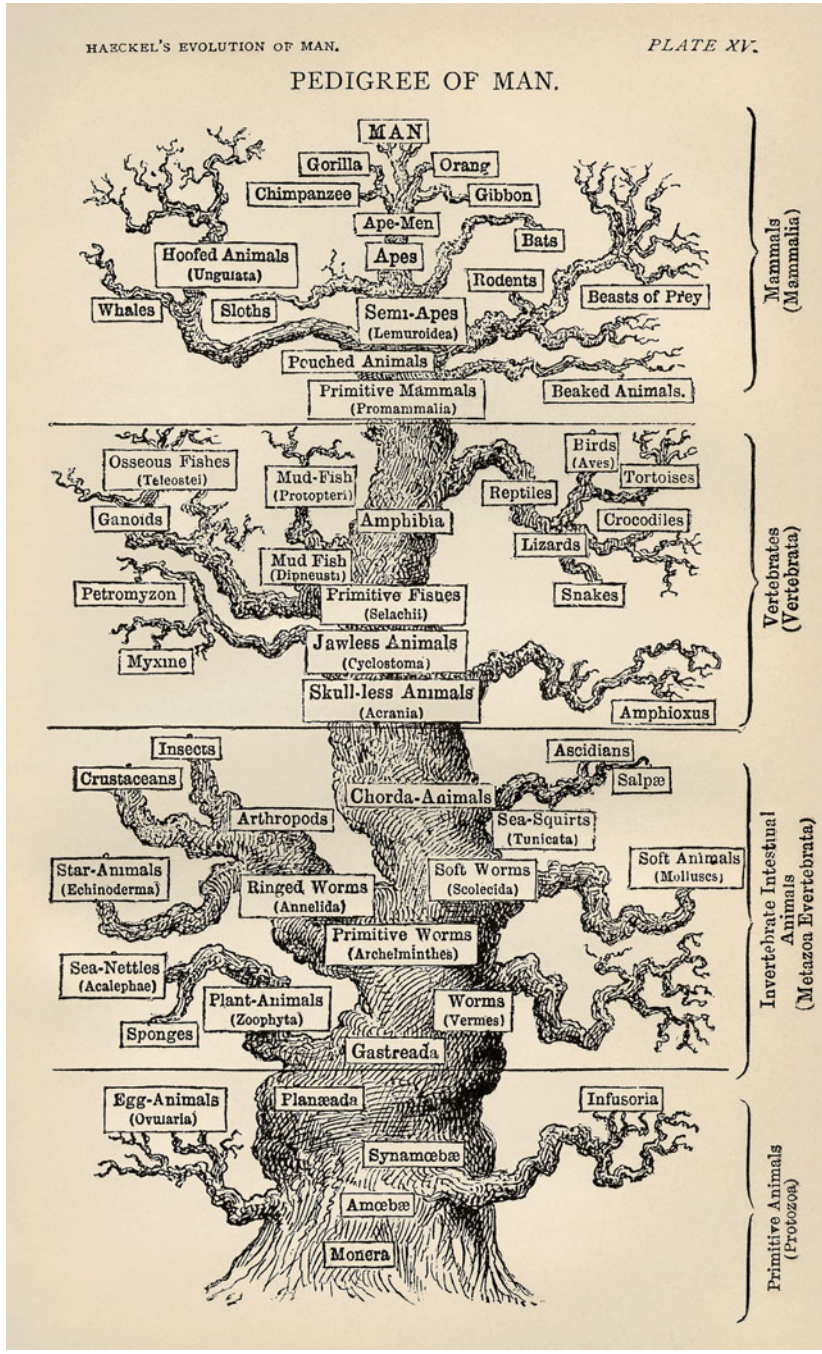


Fig. 3 Modern—Tree of Life. By Ernst Haeckel—First version from en.wikipedia; description page was here. Later versions derived from this scan, from the American Philosophical Society Museum, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2731459

nature was worthless, something to be made valuable by the productive hands of humans. Whereas Hobbes' state of nature argument pivoted largely around a moral imperative transcend a brutish

nature, Locke's pivoted around nature-as-machine and the moral imperative to "claim parts of the nonhuman environment as their own, private and exclusive property" (Locke, 1689) which was "the most productive way for humans to related to and use nature" (Hobbes & Missner, 2016). This attitude has in many ways continued as the dominant attitude toward nonhuman nature through today.

Further, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, pushed back against both Hobbes and Locke's assessments of nature as a nightmare and inherently worthless by famously offering a vision of the "noble savage" which implied a moral reversal of Hobbes' version of nature, instead arguing that human nature is inherently cooperative, and that "primitive societies like those of the indigenous Americans and Africans were the best for man" and that it "civilization, far from being a boon, is always accompanied by costs that are greater than the benefits" (Rousseau, 1991).

If the basic progressive narrative emerged with different flavors with Hobbes and Locke, we could think of Rousseau's flipped moral valence of naturalness as in some ways an early moral critique of Modernity.

4.2 Charles Darwin and Social Theory

About a century after Rousseau, Charles Darwin's (2003) *On the Origin of Species* was another watershed in the development of thinking around the nature-culture dualism, not only because it undermined the Christian story of Genesis, but perhaps more importantly that humans were no longer *like* animals but *were* animals. With Darwin, the Great Chain of Being finally was transfigured into the Tree of Life. The continuous tissue of wood served as a better metaphor for a Modern NCD with a shared origin and materiality of all life on earth. As expected, *Homo sapiens* was often depicted atop the tree, but importantly God had disappeared. With Darwin, the moral implication of the NCD again became contentious.

On one hand, Prince Peter Kropotkin (1902/2021) interpreted *On the Origin of Species* as evidence that human nature was "naturally cooperative and that if the 'artificial' institutions of the state and the capitalist organization of the economy were abolished, humans could enjoy a more harmonious, cooperative, and egalitarian social order" and on the other Herbert Spencer, father of Social Darwinism, who saw human nature as naturally competitive. (Spencer, 1916) Both saw state intervention as unnatural and thus immoral, however whereas Kropotkin thought classical liberalism would lead to integration, Spencer believed it would lead, thankfully, to the evolution of society by survival of the fittest.

For Ernst Haeckel, founder of scientific ecology, Darwin's discoveries were eminently social, but unlike Kropotkin and Spencer, Haeckel interpreted his findings as evidence of a need for a homogenous and integrated domestic politics and economy to make the national organism the most competitive possible in the international sphere. (Olsen, 1999) Haeckel's interpretation of Darwinism as implying social homogeneity within a natural national organism would later be adopted as the basic metaphysical foundation for Nazism.

But the *nation-as-organism* was an idea not unique to Haeckel but shared also by Spencer who saw society as a superorganism, and thus "subject to the same laws and patterns of development as any other organism" (Barry, 2007). This rehashing of the Greek organismic thinking where the dualism, at least along epistemological dimensions, is again fuzzy also underpins much of Emile Durkheim's theoretical work.

In Durkheim's *The Division of Labor* organismic developmental biology serves as the central metaphor for his formal theory. For instance, while he claims that integrative government regulation "plays a role in society analogous to that played by the nervous system in the organism," he admits that "biological terminology which, though *metaphorical*, is nonetheless useful" (Durkheim, 1893/2014). And yet if the early Durkheim claimed only analogy between nature and culture, the later Durkheim was more ambivalent:

> [W]e forget that even if society is a specific reality it is not an empire within an empire; it is a part of nature, and indeed its highest representation. The social realm is a natural realm which differs from the others only by a greater complexity. Now it is impossible that nature should differ radically from itself in the one case and the other in regard to that which is most essential. The fundamental relations that exist between things—just that which it is the function of the categories to express—cannot be essentially dissimilar in the different realms. . .That is why ideas which have been elaborated on the model of social things can aid us in thinking of another department of nature. (Durkheim, 1912/2008)

In a stark departure, Marx and Engels reflected the perspective of John Locke, that the nonhuman world should not be thought of as having moral standing, and that it was there to be dominated and used as fuel for social progress and revolution. If capitalism was based on the exploitation of nature, and thus the moral denigration of nature, classical Marxism was based on the hyper-exploitation and moral denigration of nature. (Soper, 1995) The revolution would come at all costs.

The Modern period is thus quite heterogeneous regarding the metaphysical presumptions constituting the NCD. While industrial society increasingly destroyed nonhuman life, perhaps the revolution neared, perhaps not. But throughout the Modern period science and technology remained tentatively wedded. Every day as science produced more evidence against human exceptionalism, technology repackaged that new knowledge into means of transcendence from a state of nature governed by natural law to a global moral utopia governed by universalist humanistic doctrine.

The Modern period then, when it comes to the basic contours of the NCD, is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Human nature is separate from nonhuman nature because we made it so. Despite a common origin, there was a vague sense that humans were going somewhere else. Perhaps it would be the Moon, perhaps Mars, perhaps virtual reality, but progressive metaphysics ensured everyone, including sociologists, that in that secular utopia we would not have to really think about the effects of hurricanes, infectious disease, and melancholy.

5 Conclusion

Throughout Western moral thought, the nature-culture dualism has remained the most basic frame for rendering sensible distinctions between good and bad thought and right and wrong behavior. In Greek thought, a good society was one that was in harmony with its nature, whereas a bad society was one that had fallen out of tune. In early Christian thought, a good society was one driven by godly transcendence, whereas a bad society was one with mere earthly concerns. In Modern thought, a good society was one that continually perfected nature, whereas a bad society was one that was still stuck in earthly imperfection (Table 1).

As sociologists think about the role of morality within societal dynamics, we believe the form of the NCD in any given time and space cannot be ignored. What is considered "society" cannot exist outside of a contrast with what is "natural." What is thought of as natural, and whether that natural is good or bad, will always remain our most constitutive moral circuit for triangulating what is right and what is wrong, whether in ecological or sociological action. In this way, we do not imagine this chapter as a detailed study of any of the given periods of interest, but instead as highlighting the contour of a line so constitutive of our moral social imagination that it has become almost unnoticeable.

Today, the broad set of societal problems referred to generally as "climate change" has poured fuel on the fire of decades-long debates that themselves generally are moral in nature, often pivoting around whether the NCD is good or "is ultimately harmful and should be [rejected]." (Haila, 2000) Instead, we see value in a renewed interest in the NCD and implications for future work in cultural and moral sociology. First, we see a renewed interest in the NCD as a vector for novel sociological hypothesizing. For instance, considering beliefs about natural-unnatural binaries may shine a light on otherwise

Table 1 Qualities of nature-culture dualism during different eras

Era	Greek and Roman	Medieval Christian	Modern
Noun Nature	Nondualistic	Dualistic	Nondualistic
Verb Nature	Nondualistic	Dualistic	Nondualistic
Adjective Nature	Dualistic	Dualistic	Dualistic
Naturalizing Metaphors	Organism, Moira	Machine, Great Chain of Being	History, Tree of Life
Moral Binaries	Harmony-Disharmony	Godly-Earthly	Natural-Unnatural
Teleology	Degenerative-Cyclical	Progressive-Heavenly	Progressive-Utopian

confusing left-right political coalitions like the anti-vaccination, conservation, and organic farming communities.

Second, as thousands of years of progressive technological dominance succumb to earthly forces like pandemic and sea-level rise, sociological theory will be untenable without considering ecology. Importantly, we believe considering ecology in culturally sociological terms does not necessarily mean buying whole cloth into one theory or another, whether that be New Materialism, Bruno Latour's (2007) Actor Network Theory (ANT) or Jane Bennett's (2010) theory of *actants*. Considering ecology merely means to recognize that perhaps the only thing shared by all societies outside of *socialness* is an ecological context, and thus by definition all societies must have moral ideas about the ontological category represented in this chapter by the floating signifier *nature*.

Sociology has operated forever by *naturalizing nature*. On one hand, keeping sociology focused on the social is helpful in delineating the discipline and focusing on a subset of causal mechanisms in our wonderfully complex material reality. But on the other hand, the nature we have discussed in this chapter is not necessarily material, but cultural and ideological. It is this ideological nature that allows us to generate moral binaries in the first place, nature that allows us to even imagine the moral implications of the "noble savage," of wilderness, of veganism, of Crossfit, of pollution, of equality, of shopping at Whole Foods, of competition, or of the Greek or American states not living up to expectations.

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Animals and Society

Robert Magneson Chiles and Catherine Mendel

Abstract

The sociology of morality's core concerns with social structure and power, sociohistorical context, and the impact of social identities and social practices on institutions (Hitlin and Vaisey, Handbook of the sociology of morality, Springer Science & Business Media, 2010; Annual Review of Sociology, 39:51–68, 2013) are broadly shared among sociologists who study animals and society. At the same time, we would also argue that acknowledging and grappling with the role of animals in society and in sociology is critical to any type of comprehensive sociology of morality. In this chapter, we articulate the mutual relevance of these fields by discussing the anthropocentric legacy in both sociology and anthropology, the emergence of alternative perspectives on animals and subsequent negative reactions, and recent developments in the animal study literatures.

Keywords

Sociology · Anthropology · Animal studies · Environmental studies · Anthropocentrism · Intersectionality

1 Introduction

The sociology of morality's core concerns with social structure and power, sociohistorical context, and the impact of social identities and social practices on institutions (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010, 2013) are broadly shared among sociologists who study animals and society. Animals cannot vote, lobby congress, or file lawsuits, so moral discourse has been critical to bringing animals' interests into the public and academic spheres. Moreover, the sociological conception of morality as "understandings of good and bad, right and wrong, worthy and unworthy that vary between persons and between social groups" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013:55) is particularly appropriate for an intellectual movement that actively questions the moral status of animals in society. At the same time, we would also argue that acknowledging and grappling with the role of animals in society and in sociology is critical to any type of comprehensive sociology of morality.

Humans have long used animals and animal products for political-economic value and cultural status, and modern societies effectively treat animals as "property" under the law. Throughout

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history and across many different types of cultures, these uses have been broadly justified by the ideology of anthropocentrism (Chiles and Fitzgerald, 2018). The anthropocentric legacy has continued to the present day, and the discipline of sociology is no exception. This is despite the fact that vertebrate animals experience pain and suffering in much the same way as humans, and countless animal species engage in highly complex forms of social behavior. As noted by Ward (2022: 5–6),

> Modern human society is a mix of culture and relationships, of law and conflict, and is composed of families, communities, cities, and nations. We might imagine that in this regard we stand distinct from other animals. Yet while our society is certainly different in character from theirs, in many ways it is not unique. Many social animals organize themselves in similar ways. Moreover, they were doing so for millions of years before we appeared.

In what follows, we discuss the anthropocentric legacy in both sociology and anthropology, the emergence of alternative perspectives on animals and subsequent negative reactions, and recent developments in the animal studies literatures.

2 The Anthropocentric Legacy

Anthropocentrism can be defined as "a set of attitudes which privilege human faculties, capacities and interests over those of nonhuman entities" (Hayward, cited in Boyd, 2017). Sax similarly defines anthropocentrism as a "tendency to vastly exaggerate human dominance, understanding, power, autonomy, unity, guilt, virtue, wickedness, and morality" (Sax, cited in Boyd, 2017). These definitions are important because they issue a word of caution against pre-assuming that humans are all-powerful and autonomous in their relationships with other animals. Anthropocentrism is reinforced and disseminated through the language that is used to speak about animals in both public and academic contexts, as our vocabularies about animals often ignore their interests, disavow their agency, and categorize them in accordance with their proximity to humans and human interests. Describing animals as "domestic" or "wild," for example, categorizes them in accordance with their proximity to humans. The colloquial use of the term "animal," while unavoidable for practical reasons, fallaciously implies that human beings are not animals.

Anthropocentrism is endemic in classical sociological thought. For example, "At the core of Durkheim's theory is his concept of the homo duplex, an inherent but tentative quality separating humans from all other animals. Durkheim uses the homo duplex as an ontological device, defining humanity as having the unique capacity to create and participate in the social" (Ross, 2017:18). Similarly, "Mead defined the unique social capacities of humans by denying these same capacities to nonhuman animals. Humans are conscious and can choose course of action, animals are not conscious and operate only on instinct; humans can communicate with symbols, and animals cannot; humans have language and create culture, animals have neither language nor culture; and animals live only the present while humans have a sense of both past and future" (Alger & Alger, 2003:69; cited by Ross, 2017:20). The anthropocentric legacy has also been reproduced and reinforced in sociology classrooms. In analyzing 30 introductory sociology textbooks, Alger and Alger (2003:69) found that "with few exceptions, the main function of the treatment of animals in these texts is to affirm the hard line that sociology has always drawn between humans and other species." Put bluntly, "sociology is a social product. Like any social endeavor, it reflects the values—good and bad—held by its creators. We exist in an anthropocentric society" (Ross, 2017:19).

Anthropology has also been deeply immersed in the anthropocentric ideology. In anthropology, the competing theories for animal domestication (niche construction theory and optimal foraging theory) both describe domestication as unidirectional feat of human exceptionalism as opposed to a dynamic and evolving processes of mutualism, competition, parasitism, and predation. Moreover, even when the latter processes are investigated, it is often assessed in a snapshot as

opposed to a larger collection of inter-species interactions. Anthropology's four distinct subdisciplines could conceivably be a strength in addressing animal–human relationships, but the siloing of ideas, perspectives, approaches, theories, and methodologies that underpin these subdisciplines have acted and continue to act more as a barrier to integration both within anthropology and to other fields. Most anthropologists are essentially only trained in one subdiscipline, and thus have biased views of their subdiscipline relative to others that often reiterate ideas of human exceptionalism and uniqueness (cultural and linguistic); natural sciences primacy over social sciences and humanities (biological anthropology), and; material goods/remains as interpreted by an outsider as superior to/more informative than oral histories or traditional knowledge (archeology).

Taylor (2012:37) aptly summarizes the historical treatment of animals in sociology, anthropology, and the broader social sciences as such:

> Animals have historically been studied in a particular way—as part of nature, as the embodied version of that which is opposite to human culture. As such the social sciences with their remit firmly being the 'social,' usually perceived as in opposition to the 'natural', have in large part ignored animals. Over the last two decades or so this has been subject to small, but concerted, challenge. The first wave of social science thinking about animals tended to be in keeping with this modernist—binaristic (that is, the idea of self contained categories such as human v animal; 'us' v 'them')— thinking and so studied animals from the point of view of their use to humans, i.e. anthropocentrically. Thus, animals were studied as objects wherein their only perceived importance was derived from their relationships with humans.

3 Alternative Perspectives on Animals

Societal attitudes toward animals began to slowly shift in the latter half of the twentieth century. Drawing inspiration from civil rights movement, the women's, environmental, and animal rights movements all joined in the call for a more fair and just society. In academia, these broader societal developments contributed to the cultural turn, the (re)emergence of Marxist and critical theories, and a burgeoning of new scholarship in science and technology studies, social constructionism, the sociology of knowledge, post-humanism, and environmental sociology, all of which contributed to the rise of animal studies in the 1990s and 2000s (Hobson-West, 2007).

Environmental sociology has not always been attentive to the needs and interests of animals for their own sake, but it has nonetheless played a critically important role in trailblazing a space for animal scholars to co-exist in the discipline. In what is now considered to be a touchstone in environmental sociology, Catton and Dunlap's (1978) "Environmental sociology: a new paradigm" critiqued mainstream sociology writ large as being anthropocentric, ignorant toward the role of human biology, 'exceptionalist' (i.e., placing culture above all other determinants of social outcomes), and biased in favor of progress and growth without limit. In contrast to this "Human Exceptionalist Paradigm," they favor the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP). In accordance with NEP, humans are de-privileged, interference with nature results in unintended consequences, and the world is finite. When it comes to animals, however, the NEP is arguably just as exceptionalist with respect to human privilege as HEP.

In articulating the relationship between animal studies, environmental sociology, and the sociology of knowledge, Taylor concurs with our assessment that a valuable space has been created: "Current attempts to re-think the boundaries between 'the social' and 'the natural' do exist. Most notably they can be found in Environmental Sociology (e.g., Lockie, 2004) or the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (e.g., Barnes et al., 1996) where such ideas are used to examine the distinction between humans and the environment or humans and inanimate objects respectively. Clearly, neither of these is applicable to the uniqueness of human-animal relationships per se but key ideas may well be borrowed from them" (Taylor, 2011:206).

The animal rights movement and sociological studies of animals, in contrast to the

environmental movement and mainstream environmental sociology, has been deeply centered around the concept of speciesism—the argument that it is just as arbitrary to deny inherent dignity to another being on the basis of species as it is to deny another's dignity on the basis of sex, race, nationality, or creed (Regan, 1983; Singer, 1990). The crux of the idea is based upon the notion of shared interests: while humans and animals may not share an equal interest in voting, for example, they arguably share an equal interest in avoiding pain and suffering.

4 Negative Reactions to Animal Studies

Despite the notable increase in non-anthropocentric approaches to animals in sociology, this work has continued to be largely excluded and marginalized from the mainstream of the discipline. Even with the formation of the Section on Animals in Society within the American Sociological Association, as noted by Kruse (2002), the subdiscipline continued to be derided. Indeed, sociologists who study animals in society "have met with resistance and apathy as much as sympathy and support" (Arluke, 2002:370).

The reasons for this continued marginalization include, but are not excluded to, the persistence of binary thinking (i.e., the animals are a part of nature and not society, and that animals are the opposite of human), the "4Ns"—the widespread ideology that eating meat and other animal products is "necessary, natural, normal, and nice" (Piazza et al., 2015:114), and a broader rejection of the justice commitments within the animals and sociology scholarship. Indeed, animals in society scholars have long faced the perception that they are theoretically unengaged and/or more interested in advocacy than research (Nibert, 2003; Peggs, 2013). Sociologists who study animals can thus relate to the observation that positivism and value neutrality have kept morality and justice at arm's length from the disciplinary mainstream (Dromi & Stabler, 2019). At the same time, many justice-oriented sociologists have rejected animal rights and veganism (and any scholarship associated with these movements) for distracting from the urgent needs of historically marginalized groups (Arluke, 2002).

Structural constraints have also discouraged non-anthropocentric scholarship on animals. For example, rural sociology has depended heavily upon research funding from USDA, a government agency that has been historically committed to advancing the interests of agribusiness. Accordingly, "reliance on such funding has constrained the focus and scope of much rural sociological research to topics that fit within whatever may be included in the then-current USDA agenda of priorities" (Krannich, 2008). Indeed, many rural sociologists risked their careers during the 1980s and the 1990s in advocating for agrifood reforms that went against the political–economic orientations of various land-grant universities (Constance, 2009).

5 Animals, Society, and Morality: Contemporary Perspectives

In response to these constraints and critiques, much of the contemporary work on animals and morality has acknowledged and addressed the "humans first" critique by making the shared interests of humans and animals more explicit (Irvine, 2008). These efforts have drawn heavily from ecofeminist, environmental justice, anti-capitalist, and intersectional perspectives (Adams, 2000; Peggs, 2013; Pellow, 2014). Some of the earliest work in the area of intersectionality and the interlocked oppression of humans and animals comes from Adams (2000), who argues that discourses of patriarchy simultaneously objectify both women as well as animals. For Adams, both animals and women become "absent referents": their meaning derives from their reference to something else, while their own (autonomous) individual identities are lost. Hence, animals and women are treated as nothing more than "meat." This type of work, in turn, has resulted in the outgrowth of "critical animal studies" from "mainstream" animal studies (Best, 2009).

Critical animal theory integrates Singer and Regan's concept of speciesism with Marxism, feminism, and other critical theories. It uses these literatures to examine how intra-human relationships operate vis-à-vis animals the way that they do, what types of people have taken oppositional stances toward the dominant understandings of animals and what the implications of those stances have involved, when in history the dominant and countervailing understandings of animals came to develop and how, and where different patterns regarding the status of animals can be found to exist across different cultures. Cudworth (2016), for example, notes that "species is constituted by and through 'human' hierarchies—ideas of animality and of 'nature' are vitally entangled in the constitution of 'race', gender, class and other 'human' differences with which critical sociologies have well established concern." As noted by Cudworth (2016: 244–246),

> Critical Animal Studies differentiates itself from Mainstream Animal Studies by its focus on a politics of animal liberation that is critical of the intersected and co-constituted qualities of oppression and promotes an 'interspecies alliance politics' (Best, 2006). Scholarly work in Critical Animal Studies is not disinterested, but clearly addresses an emancipatory agenda whereas Mainstream Animal Studies scholarship tends to be reformist and non-emancipatory… It is this focus on power and an identification with non-human animals as victims of forms of systemic human domination through which they are oppressed and exploited, that has led to the articulation of more critical approaches to the study of human-animal relations.

Harper (2010) broke further ground in the fields of critical animal studies and intersectionality by critiquing the animal rights movement as inattentive to white privilege and the racialized epistemologies of social space. She moreover questions whether or not vegan products can be designated as "cruelty free" when they involve blatant human exploitation (as with non-fair trade chocolate imports). Best (2009) similarly argues that while "veganism is a crucial and necessary step for total liberation... unless tied to alliance politics and a revolutionary social movement, veganism becomes just another bourgeois individualist consumerist and egoistic based outlook." Growing interest in the vegan community has resulted in the emergence of "vegan studies" as a distinctive subfield in its own right (Cherry, 2021). Here, Greenebaum (2018) has further investigated the critique of veganism as a primarily white-oriented movement by conducting in-depth interviews with vegans of color ($n = 27$). According to Greenebaum's (2018: 682) findings,

> Participants reveal[ed] three reasons why they believe people of color are resistant to veganism: it is linked with whiteness, affiliated with privilege, and deemed incompatible with ethnicity. To counteract the visible stigma of being associated with white veganism, vegans of color engage in a process of differentiation from white veganism and highlight how they do veganism differently. By challenging stereotypes, vegans of color also engage in a process of normalization to show people of color that anyone can be vegan.

Contemporary scholarship on animals in society has also been strongly influenced by symbolic interactionism (Irvine, 2008), and years of work in this area have generated increasingly complex approaches. These studies emphasize the negotiation and co-creation of meaning between and across species rather than emanating from exclusively from humans (Irvine, 2012). Here, several animal scholars looking to destabilize nature/society dichotomies and human-centric approaches have turned to actor network theory (Taylor, 2011, 2012; see also the discussion in Cudworth, 2016). Hartigan's (2021) work in multispecies ethnography nests a symbolic interactionist perspective within the intersection of ethology and ethnology. This type of approach can advance our understanding of both animal–human relationships while also examining how a shared system of knowing and creating is itself co-created. In short, "multispecies ethnographies expand the scope of interest of the field of human-animal relations by including a wide variety of organisms as active builders of shared worlds. At the same time, they support an analytical gain by shifting the line of demarcation between humans and animals, to focus on the encounter, the sharing and the crossing of these lives" (Segata & Lewgoy, 2016:30).

Symbolic interactionism can also inform intersectional standpoints, as "animals are not experienced in the same way by all groups" (Irvine, 2012:s134). These literatures also examine animal–animal interactions rather than just human–animal relationships and the human standpoint. One of the most remarkable examples for this type of interaction is the deep and abiding friendship that developed between a giant tortoise (Mzee) and a stranded baby hippopotamus (Owen) in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. The photo and story of their close relationship circulated widely across the world, and was later used to teach empathy and resilience to children (Mandel et al., 2006).

At the same time, it's important to be cognizant that high levels of interest in charismatic and social species can unintentionally result in negative bias toward species that are less photogenic. Here, the emerging fields of urban ecology and welfare biology have devoted much needed attention to the needs and interests of historically neglected species. Urban ecology, for example, has revised the wild/domestic dichotomy to include the terms urban avoider, urban utilizer/exploiter, and urban dweller/adapter. Working with this type of nuance in our scholarship is arguably needed now more than ever, as the majority of the world's population now lives in urban environments, these landscapes present specific niche is that animals occupy in close proximity to people, human populations are more likely to encounter animals in urban settings, and the increasing expansion of human settlements into animal habitats causes animal suffering, species extinction, and the spread of zoonotic diseases.

All of the aforementioned fields and literatures have shaped and influenced the authors' own work on animals in society. This includes, for example, the justice implications of alternative protein technologies for humans as well as animals, moral obligations to animals in the context of development affects, and the insights of indigenous knowledge with respect to human–animal relationships and interactions. To the latter point, without acknowledging and underscoring indigenous knowledge, kinship relationships with animals, and contemporary and indigenous scholarship, researchers implicitly place more emphasis on Western academic systems, Western ways of knowing, and the voices of Western academics, broadly defined.

6 Discussion: Beyond Sociology

> We will be less effective at reaching our colleagues in other fields if we do not engage with their research and frameworks. We must be at least as open to dialogue as we hope others will be.
> — Hitlin and Vaisey (2013:60)

Human relationships and social interactions are not just with other humans. Accordingly, any social science of humans that does not have room for—or speak to—the full spectrum of social beings who humans interact with is fundamentally missing a significant scope of our social and moral worlds. While not every framework and not every discipline will be relevant for answering every question, we would nonetheless like to conclude this chapter with a broad-based call for further integration between the social sciences and the natural sciences in both animal and morality studies. The animal behavior and ecology literatures, for example, can help to provide social scientists with supporting evidence of animal culture(s), while social scientists can help conservation and ecology scholars understand how humans are deeply embedded within "natural" landscapes and ecosystems.

When we listen to them, animals show us that there are many ways of knowing and many different perspectives on the world. When we embrace the plurality of knowledges produced by different disciplines, different communities, and even different species, we can better understand how societies of all stripes interact and intersect to inform each other. Understanding, in turn, can encourage a deeper sense of empathy.

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Part VII

Culture, Historical Sociology, and Morality

Culture, Morality, and the Matter of Facts

Matthew Norton

Abstract

Cultural sociologists of morality should not restrict themselves to a narrow focus on the ideal dimensions of moral systems, nor to aspects of moral orders best understood relativistically and from the perspective of social constructivism. Moral facts, in Durkheim's sense, are also an important focus. In particular, this chapter argues that cultural sociologists of morality should attend to relational moral facts, that is to say, facts about the relationships between moral systems as they are realized and made manifest in the social world. Such facts are important for constructing sociological explanations because the factual status of an observation can be significant for understanding the causal mechanisms through which it drives and is driven by dynamics in the social world. This chapter adopts this framework to examine the relationship between institutionalized slavery and the rule of law in the United States in the early to mid-nineteenth century, focusing on what it characterizes as the relational moral fact of the contradictory and irreconcilable positions of these moral systems on the question of private violence and the analytical implications of describing this relationship as a fact and not simply as a constructed moral meaning.

Keywords

Cultural sociology of morality · Relational moral facts · Durkheimian sociology · Sociological explanation · Rule of law · Institutionalized slavery

It would be easy for cultural sociologists of morality to settle for an easy and productive idealism: moral ideas clearly and robustly matter at the individual and collective level for understanding and explaining morality and moral action. Indeed, I take the prevalence of cultural sociologists in the revivification of the sociology of morality to point toward the obvious and powerful contribution that a focus on culture, understood broadly as social meaning, must make if we are to have an empirical sociological engagement with matters of moral judgment, justification, action, and speech (Alexander, 2008, 2018; Cohen & Dromi, 2018; Dromi, 2016). Moral ideas are no less important if our scope widens to consider the structured semiotics of "the moral background" (Abend, 2014) of different moral domains and frameworks in social life. By the same token, there is a thriving engagement with morality in other disciplines focused on narrowly behavioral, biological, and cognitive explanations that has proven valuable in sociology but that also presents cultural sociologists of morality with

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important work to do that is specifically oriented toward supplying a robust cultural counterpoint to these interdisciplinary discussions (Bykov, 2019). In short, there is much to say for working on the ideas and meanings that make up such an important aspect of the moral, and cultural sociologists have good methodological and theoretical tools for making these contributions.

This chapter, though, develops another angle from which cultural sociologists may approach the sociology of morality. They can do so by combining 1) structural analysis of meaning systems (Alexander & Smith, 2003); 2) a pragmatist focus on the ways in which meaning structures have concrete effects on social situations, circumstances, and systems through meaning-oriented social action and the interpretive character of human social experience (Norton, 2019); and 3) how these two observations plunge contingently constructed moral meanings systems into objective relationships with other moral systems. While moral systems may be best understood from a constructivist vantage point, this chapter argues that often we should conceptualize the relationships between moral orders not as constructed meanings, but as *facts*. This focus relates to the foundational question about the epistemological orientations of the sociology of morality posed by Abend in 2008: are there moral truths, and should the sociology of morality avoid value judgments (2008: 119–20)? Abend argues that many sociologists of morality do their work under the auspices of a descriptive relativist approach that brackets moral truth as an empirically accessible dimension of moral systems and avoids strong value commitments for analytical purposes. The presumption of this chapter is that the cultural sociology of morality can usefully contribute to our understanding of issues related to the first of these questions, not by directly investigating moral truth but by more clearly identifying when and how the analysis of constructed, arbitrary, and relativistic moral orders becomes an analysis if not of truth at least of fact. This matters for the reasons that Abend suggests: if we conceptualize moral truth or falsity as a characteristic of moral systems, we should expect it to have empirical consequences. While the sociology of morality typically does not attribute explanatory value to moral truth and moral falsehood (as, for instance, it does for moral justifications, the structure of moral discourses, or the institutions that buttress a particular moral order), it can be valuable if we identify moments of moral fact in our analyses to consider its specific explanatory and analytical significance. For instance, as I have argued elsewhere (Norton, 2018), if it is a fact (as distinct from a purely contingent and conventional meaning-construct) that attainders (the state power to formally assert guilt and punish without a judicial process) are more destabilizing to the rule of law than pardons (the state power to formally alleviate guilt and punishment without a judicial process), then the fact of that asymmetry is an important consideration in trying to explain why attainders have been universally eliminated from rule of law regimes while the pardon is a ubiquitous feature of the rule of law. Facts matter for explanations in specific ways because facts can operate partly or wholly through causal mechanisms that are different—though not preeminent—from the sorts of mechanisms that describe the causality of other aspects of social life like beliefs, performances, and interpretations. A focus on fact adds to the range of cultural sociological explanations of moral phenomena.

Specifically, this chapter describes the investigation of "relational moral facts" as a tool for sociologists of morality. Relational moral facts involve non-subjective, non-constructed, empirically investigable facts about the relationships between moral systems, concepts, institutions, or other structures. These moral systems are indeed themselves often best understood relativistically and from the perspective of social constructivism. But the *relationships* between constructed moral systems may not themselves be best understood as constructed but rather as factual circumstances of the realities of the relationships between moral orders as real constructs that exist in the social world.

The structural analysis of moral systems is one of the key techniques for identifying relational

moral facts. The analysis of relational moral facts is entirely consistent with such constructivist approaches to the sociology of morality, but adds to them a focus on relationships between constructed moral systems that exist regardless of what the adherents of these systems might say, think, or do. I could pronounce from the rooftops that a power by a legislature to impose punishments without the involvement of the judiciary is consistent with democracy and the rule of law so long as that power is legally authorized and the legislature is fairly elected, and I could even believe that very much. Neither pronouncement nor belief change the fact that an extrajudicial power of lawful punishment is a dagger at the heart of democracy and the rule of law, awaiting only the circumstance that will drive it in. In expanding the focus of constructivist approaches like structural analysis, the focus on relational moral facts provides another point of empirical purchase and thematizes a potentially important non-relativist dimension of constructed moral systems.

After discussing the idea of relational moral facts as it pertains to Durkheim's sociology of morality, the chapter examines two accounts of men who fled slavery in the American South, found that their peril continued in the North, and fled further to Canada. From these accounts and the social situations that they relate the chapter develops a basic structural analysis that supports the claim that contradiction is an empirically ascertainable relational moral fact (i.e., a fact about the relationship between moral systems that is amenable to empirical inquiry and evidence). This chapter focuses on developing this claim specifically by observing the way that private violence plays out in the concrete conflicts between institutionalized slavery and the rule of law in its examples. The contradiction of these moral concepts as they relate to claims about private violence, this chapter argues, mattered not (only) because of their subjective moral meanings but as the manifestation of contradiction as a *moral fact* about their relationship.

1 Durkheim, Facts, and Constructivist Theories of Culture

Durkheim has been a complicated figure in the return of the sociology of morality in the United States (Bykov, 2019). On the one hand, morality was a central concern of Durkheim's. Hall has argued that the sociology of morals is "what Durkheim thought he was doing"(Hall, 1993: 12) and it serves as a framework for understanding all of his most influential contributions to sociology. On the other hand, Durkheim's influence on the reinvigorated sociology of morality in the United States has been muted, reflecting aspects of his standing in contemporary social theory more generally. Durkheim is often taken—in a totemic sort of way—to represent a sociology focused on consensus and conservatism and on society as a unit of analysis. His theoretical framework is sometimes characterized as inimical to a sociology focused on struggle and change. His emphasis on common stocks of representations at the level of a society stands at odds with a contemporary emphasis on the pluralism and conflict that exists both within and between social groups. Particularly in the long post-Parsonian present of social theory, Durkheim is the classical theorist most likely to be characterized as out of step with the demands of current theory, and this goes for the sociology of morality as much as for the sociology of anything else (e.g., Latour, 2005; Schiermer, 2021; Smilde, 2012). This general sense of Durkheim as outmoded for present purposes is captured in Hitlin and Vaisey's programmatic call to rejoin the sociology of morality a decade ago: "A new approach to morality is emerging in sociology, one that is no longer wedded to the assumptions about universal internalization and unproblematic consensus that doomed functionalist theory. If the old sociology of morality was Durkheimian—seeing morality as a property of entire societies and binding its members together—then the new sociology of morality is more Weberian. Morality belongs more to cross-cutting groups and less to society as a whole" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013: 53).

Whatever the flaws and failings of his work for our present purposes, in Durkheim we have an early sociological thinker confronting some of the most basic questions of what a sociology of morality can do and should do, as well as a thinker who confronted dilemmas of theory and method raised by the attempt to create a social science of morality and that confront that enterprise still. It would be strange if there were not much to find in Durkheim for structuring and provoking contemporary considerations of these issues. One response to this state of affairs—though hardly the only one, (e.g., see Carls, 2022)—is to bracket these larger questions about structural features of Durkheimian thought and instead ask the smaller question of what we can usefully draw from Durkheim and his consistent focus on the possibility and practice of a social science of morality. For cultural sociologists, for example, reconciling Durkheim with present concerns is a project well underway. For instance, the emphasis on collective representations in Durkheim's later work has been a touchstone for important strands of contemporary cultural sociology (Alexander & Smith, 2003) and is a valuable concept for the cultural sociology of morality. Durkheimian ideas relating collective effervescence and ritual to solidarity and collective meaning have been similarly central to Collins' efforts to understand the micro-sociological dimensions of morality (Collins, 2004: 39–40).

Moral fact is another such concept of timely worth. In *Division of Labor in Society* Durkheim writes that his is "an attempt to treat the facts of the moral life according to the method of the positive sciences. . . . Moral facts are phenomena like others. . . . It must, then, be possible to observe them, describe them, classify them, and look for the laws explaining them" (Durkheim, 1960: 32). From the beginning of his career, Durkheim sought to develop his sociology as "a positive science of morality" (Abend, 2010; Durkheim, 1993), and the moral fact was the centerpiece of that incipient science. Durkheim viewed moral facts as a special category of social facts. The latter he understood as a heterogeneous category including laws, institutions, behavioral patterns, resource distributions, and physical circumstances among other things that shaped people's behavior through mechanisms that constrained and guided their individual volition as external circumstances. Taxation, for instance, is a social fact that individuals are forced to recognize by forces that extend beyond themselves and are generated through the actions of others, the shape and tenor of social circumstances, and the operations of institutions: social forces. With respect to a system of taxation, perhaps those forces include bureaucratized institutions, tax collectors, weapons, and people to wield them, beliefs, and informal social norms. They are facts of the world interpreted by social actors in the situations and circumstances where they occur but with a reality independent of any one person's individual experience or understanding. Today we might say that facts of this sort are socially constructed but a key part of the idea of social constructivism is that socially constructed facts operate on the world as facts that matter even when their origins are obscure or unknown. Facts of this sort are amenable to the kind of positive, empirical, observational scientific methods that Durkheim had in mind. In the *Rules of Sociological Method* Durkheim famously argues that we should "consider social facts as things" (Durkheim, 1982: 60). The same goes for moral facts, "moral things" (Durkheim, 1974: 57) that possess an objectivity that is not limited by individual or collective knowledge or comprehension. This focus is particularly helpful for cultural sociologists of morality because it emphasizes the contributions that an analysis focused on semiotics can make beyond idealism by examining social meaning as it circulates between people, the social and material world, our minds, and our forms of collective and meaning-oriented action. The "semiotic dimension of human social practice"(Sewell, 2005: 164) lies directly athwart these circulatory pathways and plays an important and analytically distinct role in the making and unmaking of moral ideation and moral fact. Importantly, these semiotic dynamics can also produce realities that transcend their initial context of meaning.

In a narrow sense moral facts are obviously of importance to the sociology of morality as an analytical endeavor. If a system of taxation is understood to bear on moral issues, for example, then the facts of rates, enforcement mechanisms, and class dimensions of tax incidence might all be judged important moral facts for sociological analysis. This chapter proposes that we can also fruitfully inquire into facts about moral systems that approach more closely to the questions of moral truth and subjectivity raised by Abend. Facts about relationships between moral systems, the sort of facts that are this chapter's focus, touch on aspects of morality often taken to fall under the veil of relativism, subjectivity, and arbitrary social construction. The premise of this chapter, though, is that the relationship between historically contingent, conventional, constructed moral orders is often better analyzed as a matter of social fact and not exclusively as a matter of constructed, conventional meaning. A key reason for thinking this way is the recognition of the power of constructed moral meaning systems to shape other aspects of the social world, from violence to the built environment to patterns of resource distribution and beyond. The contradiction between, on the one hand, institutionalized slavery's support for private, discretionary violence as an essential part of its vision of social order and, on the other hand, the rule of law principle demanding the control of private violence does not depend on what adherent of either position say, do, or believe; rather, it is a fact of their relationship because their ideas, claims, interpretations, social performances, and beliefs about how to organize people, courts, the law, rights, obligations, and violence are 1) contradictory and non-reconcilable; 2) claims about how to structure the physicality of the social world, its institutions, and the patterns of relationships within it; and 3) overlapping in that the social world of point two is the common site of their contradictory socio-moral claims. These moral orders entail claims about the world, and while the contradictory nature of those claims may not be obvious, and may require an analysis of moral meaning structures to make them more visible, that makes their relationship no less an objective, observable, fact. The next section develops this argument.

2 Slavery, Violence, and the Law

In order to examine the concept of relational facts as a focus of the cultural sociological analysis of moral systems, this section will relate the details of two situations drawn from *The Refugee or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*, a collection of accounts given in Canada by escapees from slavery in the United States. The first of these situations is short; it provides an orienting perspective on how we can conceptualize the moral systems involved in shaping the situations that escapees from slavery experienced. The second details a more complex encounter that captures an important structural dimension of the conflict between institutionalized slavery and the rule of law. This analysis depends on the logic of structural hermeneutic methods from cultural sociology that relate specific situations and occurrences to delineate broader cultural structures. Together these narratives provide evidence that slavery and the rule of law are contradictory and opposed moral structures and that this contradiction is an ascertainable moral fact about their relationship. This chapter discusses evidence of this broader point focused on the conceptual structure and pragmatic realization of these moral systems as they relate to private violence. The goal of this investigation is not to break new historiographical ground, but rather to approach a well-understood empirical tension between rule of law and institutionalized slavery from the vantage point of moral facts to see whether and how the factual aspects of this contradiction can be further specified.

In the early to mid-nineteenth century, the Canadian border with the United States demarcated two fundamentally different institutional orders. Slavery existed in the United States; in Canada it did not.[1] This made the Canadian

[1] The formal abolition of slavery in Canada came at the same time as its ends throughout the British Empire with the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 (3 & 4 William IV, c.73).

border fundamentally different from the borders between slave and non-slave states. [2] Escapees from slavery in the American South at this time would cross over into the Northern states where important circumstances of freedom and bondage were different but also where the threat of violence related to institutionalized slavery very much continued. Article Four, Section Two of the U.S. Constitution and the various federal and state fugitive slave acts ensured that aspects of slavery pervaded Northern states with webs of requirements and incentives to aid in the return of refugees to enslavement in the South. Importantly, this entailed an extension of the moral infrastructure justifying anti-Black violence in light of slave owners' property claims throughout the North as well as the South. Escapees' tales of their journeys through the North contain a wide range of experience, from duplicity, informing, and hostility to sympathy and logistical support for escape attempts. Throughout refugees' accounts runs the perpetual threat of private or state-facilitated violence and return. Crossing the Canadian border, on the other hand, recast refugees from slavery into a social and moral order where the structural positions "slave" and "escaped slave" and their specific vulnerabilities did not exist.

Always central to that vulnerability was this all-pervading webwork of threat and violence. James Adams, a resident of St. Catharines in southwestern Ontario, describes the final stages of his flight from slavery in Virginia (Adams, 1856). After an arduous journey involving numerous close shaves, lucky breaks, and double-crosses, Adams and his cousin Benjamin Harris boarded a schooner departing Cleveland for Buffalo. On the boat they met, "an Englishman whom we had often seen on a steamboat at the plantation. He knew us, and told us a reward of one hundred dollars was offered for each of us" (Adams, 1856: 27–28). Mere miles from freedom, Adams' and Harris' fates now rested on the whim of a White acquaintance as to whether to bring violence to bear on the escapees, independently or abetted by legal authorities. The Englishman preferred to have no part in it, though, defusing a last-minute catastrophe for the refugees. The schooner docked at Buffalo at 4 P.M. the next day. The captain walked Adams and Harris to the Black Rock Ferry and they then took the ferry the half mile across the Niagara River to Fort Erie. Like that, the structure of their vulnerability to the modes of violence specific to slavery had changed. Just the day before their encounter on the schooner through its potential articulation with private and institutionalized modes of violence had the possibility to plunge them back into an unfree life, incentivized to the tune of two-hundred dollars. But a half mile across a river, this looming interpretive threat and pivot of rule-based racialized power were simply gone. They crossed a river and the social and moral facts structuring their world changed.

Specifically what changed was that they were now in a social and territorial space where the rule of law had not been pinioned by the insistence and dependence of institutionalized slavery on fostering a ubiquitous public-private infrastructure of threat and violence unhindered by law, rights, or procedure. Part of what gives Adams' story its terror is the randomness of the threat, occurring without warning just miles from a more secure freedom in Canada. The White man that sees them and knows them had the power to enact private violence against Adams and Harris with the legally protected and financially incentivized goal of returning them to bondage in Virginia. This dynamic is at the heart of the analysis I offer here: institutionalized slavery dependence on an authorizing structure for private violence (including legally abetted private violence) and that dependence and associated demand extended to non-slave states, especially through the framework of constitutional and statutory provisions for the return of fugitives from slavery. This was not a peripheral dimension of institutionalized slavery in the United States. Private violence was one of the central elements of the system from its beginnings through to its curtailment and continued as white supremacy refashioned into Jim Crow. Furthermore, the centrality of private violence to U.S. slavery was both a matter

[2] As Scott writes in a different context, "the frontier underwrote popular freedom" (Scott, 2010: 4).

of practice and a core dimension of slavery as a moral-cultural system. The entire edifice of chattel slavery as both a moral and practical claim rested on the permissibility of private violence directed against enslaved Black Americans, from the tortures and punishments of overseers, masters, and household members to incidental violence in daily interactions to the gangs of slave catchers and the system of bounties incentivizing any and all to capture and return fleeing Black refugees from slavery. Indeed, the legal, political, logistical, and cultural demands of slavery were at the heart of the authoritarianism of ante- and post-bellum states in the U.S. South (Mickey, 2015) as well as of the legitimization and protection of bounty-hunting, slave catching, and kidnapping of slavery refugees in non-slave states.

That this is in conflict with the stirrings of the rule of law as a moral-political system present (but not dominant) in founding era documents and ante-bellum legal culture is from the vantage of the present obvious. But is this just a matter of new interpretations asserted anachronistically over the alternative view of contemporary adherents of slavery? The argument by way of moral facts is an argument against drawing the veil of arbitrary subjectivism too soon across these questions. Surely institutionalized slavery and the rule of law were constructed moral systems, but that need not signal the end of our pursuit of moral facts or their interest for creating sociological explanations (see Pugh, this volume). If the contradiction between the two systems is a moral fact, that seems germane to explaining and understanding the repeated conflicts between actors oriented toward the violent enforcement of slavery as a moral, economic, and racial order and actors oriented toward the furtherance of the rule of law as the proper framework for controlling violence. Though each system is socially constructed and at a certain level of analysis contingent in its specific forms, the relationship between them is a matter of social fact, and empirically ascertainable (with, as usual, the requirements for evidence subject to research community standards, disputation, and deliberation). Specifically: 1) understood as a cultural system, each is constructed in a way that puts the matter of private violence in a position of central structural importance with other aspects of the system dependent on it; 2) each system's claims over the moral standing of private violence and its vision of the social behaviors, institutions, norms, and incentives that follow from that standing are overlapping, that is, they reference the same situations and scenes of social action; 3) and they are in absolute contradiction with; 3a) institutionalized slavery dependent on the normalization of ubiquitous anti-Black violence and the protection of that infrastructure of violence in places that did not permit slavery and; 3b) the rule of law organized around the claim that violence needs to be regulated, controlled, and subordinated to legal adjudication and process and can only be justified in this context of law. This contradiction is not itself a subjective belief, a contingent moral position toward which the analyst must take a relativistic analytical stance, but an objective fact that shaped the actions and interpretations of people oriented toward these systems. This state of affairs is especially clear when we examine the ways that slavery, private violence, and the rule of law collided in "free" Northern States as they did in the case of Alexander Hemsley.

Alexander Hemsley, known then as Nathan Mead, escaped at some point in the 1820s from captivity under Isaac Baggs, a Maryland farmer. He settled in New Jersey, eventually marrying, having children, and then moving to Northampton in the early 1830s. As Hemsley later described the trouble that descended on him and his family: "At Northampton I remained unmolested until October, 1836: Then some four or five southerners, neither of whom had any legal claim upon me, having found out that I had escaped from bondage . . . bought me running, that is, they paid some small sum for a title to me, so as to make a spec[ulation] out of poor me" (Hemsley, 1856: 34). In the dark of a Saturday morning in October of 1836, the speculators surrounded Hemsley's house accompanied by an officer of the town. Hemsley relates what happened next: "Just as I opened the door that morning, an officer of the town followed the door

right in, put his hand on me, and said, "You are my prisoner!" The officer seized Hemsley at the behest of the slave catchers in accordance with a writ issued by a judge of the Court of Common Pleas of New Jersey ordering that Hemsley be brought before the court to adjudicate the claims of the slave catchers that he was their property. The slavers then swarmed Hemsley and chained him, and they transported him to Mount Holly where a judge told him that were he proved to be a runaway slave, "I might be sure that I would be sent back" (Hemsley, 1856: 35).

The violence here is distinctive in its form. First, it is driven by private actors. The speculators had loitered around Hemsley's property for three days, their would-be prize within easy reach, but only physically seized him after the constable had announced the words "you are my prisoner!" that made Hemsley a prisoner on the basis of a legal warrant. This timing meant that under New Jersey law they were aiding in the lawful seizure of a prisoner rather than conducting an illegal kidnapping. But it is important not to get the meaning structure of this circumstance mixed up. The image of the officer of the town making Hemsley a prisoner in a formal sense and then the private speculators swarming in to physically seize and subdue Hemsley is telling. What it reflects is the cooptation of state power to support the infrastructure of violence that scaffolded institutional slavery. By securing a warrant the speculators were not simply comporting their actions to the law. Rather, they were using a legal procedure that put New Jersey legal and law enforcement resources at the service of private bounty-hunting. Consider the further details of the scene as related by Hemsley. As he was being taken away Hemsley's employer came on the scene and echoed this analysis of cooptation. The employer berated the constable, "for being in so low business as to be arresting slaves for slave-hunters. 'Poor business!' said he." Hemsley himself was acutely aware of the real driving hand in the situation, recruiting his employer as a witness. Hemsley relates: "I told him [the employer] I was afraid they were going to smuggle me off, without taking me before the judge." Even in a purely physical sense the dominant role of the speculators in the capture was clear: "They put me in a carriage, handcuffed, between two armed men of the party" and thus brought Hemsley before the judge. This was less a situation of the law curtailing private violence than of practitioners of private violence suborning the law and then using the apparatus of the state to abet what was essentially private violence (Hemsley, 1856: 35).

That the speculators were in a position to engage in this state-abetted private violence in New Jersey provides further evidence of the ongoing conflict between slavery and its infrastructure of violence and nascent rule of law moves to constrain and regulate that violence. In 1826 Maryland sent a delegation to the legislatures of Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey in a bid to weaken what from the perspective of the Maryland legislature were unacceptable degrees of legal interference by neighboring states in the scenarios of dispersed, arbitrary, and lawless violence through which Maryland slavers sought to bring back runaways from slavery. State Senator Ezekiel Chambers of Maryland led the delegation, bearing a letter of introduction from the President of the Maryland Senate that reads in part: "These Gentlemen have been deputed by the General Assembly of Maryland to confer with the Legislature of New Jersey and with the Legislatures of the States of Delaware and Pennsylvania upon the measures best calculated to prevent the absconding of slaves from Maryland and to facilitate their recovery by their owners."[3] The delegation knew that there were limits to what they could achieve. While they could not reasonably expect to succeed in advocating for a lawless private freedom

[3] Letter from William R. Stuart, President of Maryland Senate, to the President of New Jersey Senate. Mrs. Ford K. Brown Collection MSA SC 247: Materials Accumulated by Ezekiel F. Chambers, Judge from 1834 to 1851. Available at http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5400/sc5496/034600/034613/images/njsenate_letter.pdf, accessed October 15, 2022. For a summary Maryland archival holdings on the Hemsley case and its background see http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5400/sc5496/051200/051248/html/051248bio.html, accessed October 15, 2022.

of violent action against suspected runaway slaves, [4] they convinced the Delaware and New Jersey legislatures to pass similar amendments to their fugitive slave acts, though the Delaware version was more permissive of violence than the New Jersey version. Pennsylvania similarly amended their fugitive slave law in 1826 following a visit by the same Maryland delegation but did so in a way that reflects a stronger influence of rule of law (and abolitionist) concerns regarding process and the control of unlawful violence, with an especially strong emphasis on preventing the kidnapping of free people of color in Pennsylvania (Leslie, 1952). In New Jersey and Delaware Maryland's initiative led to adjusted legal frameworks where bounty-hunters, speculators, slave owners, and others in pursuit of alleged runaways could easily obtain a warrant that would require state officials to assist in capturing their target. Delaware's 1826 "Act relating to fugitives from labour" asserts that "when a person held to labour or service in any of the United States . . . under the laws thereof, shall escape into this State, the person to whom such labour or service is due, his or her agent or attorney is hereby authorized to apply to any judge or justice of any court of record, or to any justice of the peace or to any burgess of a Borough or Town corporate, who on such application, supported by oath or affirmation . . . that said fugitive hath escaped from his or her service . . . shall grant his warrant, under his hand and seal and directed to any sheriff or constable, authorizing and empowering said sheriff or constable to seize and arrest the said fugitive . . ." Following such arrest both the Delaware and the similar 1826 New Jersey supplement to their fugitive slave law[5] required only a summary hearing. Delaware's version offered little protection, requiring only that the official who issued the warrant be satisfied with the proof offered. New Jersey at least contemplated a jury trial to ascertain the status of the captive.

The broader effect of both of these legal changes was twofold. First, they provided a mechanism for putting the apparatus of the state at the disposal of the speculators and slave masters to enforce a property right as defined in a different state. Second, they sought to weaken the procedural safeguards that obstructed private violence (and obstructed the cooptation of public violence by private actors with minimal safeguards) and thus obstructed the violent seizure of refugees from slavery. This latter motive reflects the dependence of institutionalized slavery on networks of threat and violence that extended beyond the state and through the fabric of society, even through the incentivization of otherwise uninvolved people to participate in capture or informing, to reinforce the ownership of one person by another as a social fact as well as to reinforce white supremacy more generally. It also reflects the fundamental contradiction between the core rule of law claims that violence must be controlled by state officials who themselves must be subordinated to legal limits on the use of violence and legal procedures for determining its applicability on a case-by-case basis. Slavery, in contrast, sought a free-hand for Whites to deploy procedureless violence against people categorically defined on the basis of race as legitimate targets of violence and who thus had constrained recourse to individual adjudication, procedure, or the presumption of rights. Both principles were present in New Jersey, Delaware, and

[4] However, the decision in the landmark fugitive slave case decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1842, *Prigg* vs. *Pennsylvania*, involved a question about the 1826 law that the Pennsylvania legislature passed in response to the same Maryland delegation. Pennsylvania's law was more protective of the rights of accused fugitives from slavery than New Jersey's 1826 supplement to its fugitive slave law, and far more protective than Delaware's. The decision contains a brief encapsulation of this maximal view of a private freedom of violent action possessed by slave owners. The Court writes: "Upon this ground, we have not the slightest hesitation in holding that, under and in virtue of the Constitution, the owner of a slave is clothed with entire authority, in every State in the Union, to seize and recapture his slave whenever he can do it without any breach of the peace or any illegal violence. In this sense and to this extent, this clause of the Constitution may properly be said to execute itself, and to require no aid from legislation, state or national" (*Prigg* vs. *Pennsylvania,* 41 U.S. 613 (1842).

[5] "A Supplement to an Act Entitled 'An Act Concerning Slaves,'" 1826.

Pennsylvania during 1826 as the Maryland delegation sought to curtail the perceived threat of increasing (if from a position of weakness) influence of rule of law ideas in adjudicating questions of alleged fugitives from slavery.

Hemsley's fate initially turned on the outcome of this skirmish between the opposed moral orders of institutionalized slavery and rule of law. The circuit court judge who issued the warrant for Hemsley's arrest heard the evidence of the speculators against Hemsley. He was, as Hemsley later put it, "a Virginia born man . . . like the handle of a jug, all on one side, and that side against me" (Hemsley, 1856: 35–36) and found against Hemsley in the court of common pleas, clearing the way for the speculators to once again seize and forcibly bring Hemsley back to Maryland. To this point the legal changes of 1826 in New Jersey that had been passed at Maryland's urging operated as anticipated. While maintaining a veneer of state adjudication, their practical consequence was to put state law enforcement resources at the disposal of the private speculators and to allow the judge the speculators had picked to issue the warrant to put the mark of New Jersey legal process on what was in all other respects a kidnapping pursuant to a legal status defined by Maryland.[6]

The predictable outcome of this biased legal process had not eluded Hemsley's lawyers. When the Court of Common Pleas judge found against Hemsley, one of his lawyers dramatically whipped out a writ of habeas corpus that his legal team had obtained by undertaking a secret forty-mile ride to the New Jersey Superior Court in Trenton, securing Hemsley a second hearing there. The sheriff transported Hemsley to Trenton, pistols at the ready against the persistent threat that the armed slavers would attempt to short-circuit the legal process underway in New Jersey by forcibly seizing Hemsley and absconding with him to Maryland. The following day Hemsley appeared before Chief Justice Joseph C. Hornblower. Hornblower's decision is a striking attack not on slavery as such but on the ways that the advocates for institutionalized slavery have sought to deform the procedural protection through which the rule of law purports to regulate and control violence. This is why he focuses so closely on the legal *process* that both the federal Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 and New Jersey's Supplement of 1826 propose for answering the fundamental question of who is a slave, who decides, and how violence can be authorized and deployed in New Jersey against those who are slaves *somewhere else*. In these questions the fact of the contradictory relationship between slavery's private violence and the rule of law presumption to restrict private violence (and to provide procedural protections against public violence) created a constant site of conflict. It was in furtherance of the moral vision of violence espoused by the rule of law that Hornblower freed Hemsley.

Hornblower's decision was couched in the specifics of New Jersey law and the details of Hemsley's case. It also speaks directly to the contradictions between on the one hand slavery's dependence on an infrastructure supporting ubiquitous, lawless anti-Black, private and publicly-abetted private violence and on the other the rule of law concept of the law-based control of violence. His decision first considers the interpretive procedures for determining whether a person ought to be turned over by law to those who claim a property interest in her or him. He finds that the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1793—providing broad latitude for petitioners to select the court where their case will be heard, multiple ways to provide evidence for their claims, and empowering individual magistrates and judges hearing this evidence to issue certificates that were the sole document necessary to legally transport people to the South as slaves, with no opportunity for review or appeal—to be "a summary and dangerous proceeding, [that] affords but little protection or security to the free colored man, who may be falsely claimed as a fugitive from

[6] This state of affairs turned on both the 1826 supplement to New Jersey's fugitive slave law discussed above and also to the federal Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 and the U.S. Constitution's fugitive slave clause.

labor, or whose identity may be mistaken."[7] Hornblower's objection, here and throughout the decision, is not to the idea of returning refugees to enslavement in another state, a principle enshrined in Article IV, Section 2 of the Constitution requiring that people held to labor in one state that escaped to another be returned. Rather, it is about how a specific individual's relationship to the categorical boundary between slave and free, and thus the degree of protection from slavery-related private violence, should be determined by law and not assumed on the categorical basis of race.[8] Hornblower's point is that the demands for socially dispersed and as-lawless-as-possible violence to enforce ownership claims on other people that are a necessary entailment of the core moral vision of institutional slavery had warped the legal processes of New Jersey and turned them, from the perspective of rule of law ideas about due process and lawful adjudication of specific cases, into a sham. Here is how he puts the matter:

> To my mind, a very grave and important question arises. . . . is the law of this state a constitutional one? It authorizes the seizure, and transfer out of this state, of persons residing here, under the protection of our laws, claiming to be, and who in fact may be, free-born native inhabitants, the owners of property, and the fathers of families, upon a summary hearing before a single judge, without the intervention of a jury, and without appeal! Can such be a constitutional law? Neither the prisoner at the bar, nor the most wretched and obscure individual in the state, whether young or old, bond or free, can be deprived of his liberty or his property, or be subjected to any forfeitures, pains or penalties, without a trial by jury in the due course of law. If the prisoner at the bar, instead of being arrested as a slave, had been sued for forty shillings, it could not have been recovered of him, but by a verdict of a jury. If a man had come from another state and laid claim to any chattel in the possession of the prisoner, he could not have taken it from him, but by due course of law. And yet, by this act, a man may be compelled to join issue before a single judge—a judge of his adversary's own choosing, and in a summary way, not according to the course of common law—an issue, it may be, more awful, more agonizing to his soul, than one involving his *life* and *death*—an issue, on decision of which hangs that tremendous question, whether he is to be separated forcibly, and for ever, from his wife and children, or be permitted to enjoy with them the liberty he inherited, and the property he has earned. Whether he is to be dragged in chains to a distant land, and doomed to perpetual slavery, or continue to breathe the air and enjoy the blessings of freedom. . . . These are questions of fact, upon proof or failure of proof of which, depend results of deep and affecting interest to the individual.[9]

Hornblower's argument reflects a keen awareness that the great coordinated social forces that make slavery a reality turn on an interpretive pivot—as he puts it, "whether slave or not slave"—and on its relationship to violence. His core claim is that this classification question must be answered lawfully and through the protecting institutions of legal procedure and not in an arbitrary, private, and lawless way. To the claim that Hemsley *had* been seized lawfully, and the certificate allowing the slave catchers to forcibly remove him to Maryland had also been issued lawfully, Hemsley challenged the notion that these procedures were anything more than a pretext, which is indeed what the Maryland delegation had wanted in advocating for passage of the 1826 law in New Jersey. The upshot of Hornblower's finding was to require that the determination of the status of alleged fugitives from slavery in New Jersey would require the protection of a jury verdict, with too much at stake for the accused as well as for all free Black citizens of the state to hang on the summary judgment of a hand-picked judge.

The structural contradiction and the threat it posed to Black refugees from slavery in Northern states remained however, a fact of the relationship between these two moral constructs and their advocates. So long as slavery in any state

[7] Hornblower, Joseph C. 1836. *Opinion of Chief Justice Hornblower on the Fugitive Slave Law*. New Jersey. p. 4.

[8] This very issue had just come before Hornblower and the N.J. Superior Court. In that case the court ruled against the interpretation that people of color could be assumed on a prima facie basis to be bound to slave labor and thus required to prove that they were free, instead requiring the opposite assumption and placing the burden of proof on the slave catchers (Gigantino, 2014: 419).

[9] Hornblower, Joseph C. 1836. *Opinion of Chief Justice Hornblower on the Fugitive Slave Law*. New Jersey. p. 5–6.

persisted as an actionable authorization for private violence in purportedly "non-slave states," then the protections (and even the protections in principle) of the rule of law against private violence would always be in question, always hampered by an institutionalized and contradictory principle of moral and legal order. These moral claims were overlapping and contradictory, a fact that helped to drive the actions of legislators, slave catchers, abolitionists, free Black Americans, and refugees from slavery.

Hemsley was immediately and keenly aware of the threat he faced in this situation. Freed from jail he now had to fear kidnapping by the slave catchers who still hunted him and sought to return him across the Maryland border. Though this would have been an outright lawless act of private violence, the conflict between the rule of law claims to control violence and the institutionalized slavery demands for the normalization of private violence against enslaved Black people created an environment of ambiguity where lawless violence could operate. In the case of the speculators after Hemsley, even without the color of law, had they got him across the Maryland border there would have been no legal recourse and no recrimination offered. Living in this space shaped by the persistent contradiction between law and private violence that made it in practical terms a space of risk and danger, Hemsley fled north. In New York he met his wife and children, and as soon as they were able they took a boat from Rochester to Toronto. "When I reached English territory," Hemsley says, "I had a comfort in the law, that my shackles were struck off, and that a man was a man by law . . . [I] made up my mind that salt and potatoes in Canada, were better than pound-cake and chickens in a state of suspense and anxiety in the United States"(Hemsley, 1856: 38–39). In New Jersey, the law protected Hemsley only because a judge engaged in the conflict between the rule of law and institutionalized slavery as it related to private and state-abetted private violence made it do so. That experience of relief on crossing the border is a common theme in the narratives of other refugees from American slavery. This is because the persistence of institutional slavery within which private violence was a central, pervasive moral requirement had a position of strong institutional and legal advantage when its claims came up against ideas of process, impartial adjudication, and the control of violence that are central to the rule of law as a moral system.

3 Cultural Structures and Relational Facts

Hemsley's account is powerfully shaped by the conflict between the rule of law morality of proceduralism and the control of violence on the one hand and the hunger for maximally unrestrained anti-Black private violence in support of institutionalized slavery on the other. Both of those positions exist within their own cultural and moral structures as moral constructs, subject to all of the usual forces of contingency and the social construction of meanings and social objects. Both institutionalized slavery as it existed in the ante-bellum United States and the incipient rule of law ideas perhaps could have been constructed differently and with different constellations of meaning. But social construction is just as "fateful" (Sewell, 2005: 6–8) as any other mode of collective action. If we take these constructs as real social objects, for they are, then it can be conceptually and methodologically valuable to adopt the Durkheimian perspective that we should think of them as things. And institutionalized slavery and the rule of law are social, moral things that make contradictory claims over private violence. From this perspective of relational moral fact, the recurring centrality of private violence as a point of conflict between proponents of slavery and proponents of the rule of law in the preceding examples is recast as a factual contradiction that mechanically produced recurring conflict and precluded any accommodation, not as a constructed moral meaning but as a fact about the relationship between these constructed systems of moral meaning. These examples are just two poignant and instructive moments from a far broader struggle within which the theme of conflict between

slavery and rule of law continually recurs. Slave catchers plied northern states, hunting for prey and paydays, the underground railroad sought means of escape, the doctrine of extraterrioriality found in claims over escapees from slavery a point of intense conflict, the landmark Supreme Court case Prigg vs. Pennsylvania in 1842 invalidated a Pennsylvania law precluding the return of Black Pennsylvanians to enslavement in southern states, the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 was supplanted by the draconian Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, further entrenching authoritarian anti-Black violence throughout the United States. These themes echo too throughout the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow, transmuting with circumstances but maintaining a recognizable structure of contradiction over the disposition of violence (Mickey, 2015).

Now, why is all of this argument by way of fact helpful? Would it not be sufficient to simply note that institutionalized slavery and the rule of law contradict? Abend's observations on objective moral truth again become relevant here, though we should remember that the question of objective moral fact is not identical. "What would be the consequences of assuming that there cannot be truth in ethics . . . if it turned out that there can be . . . ?", Abend writes, "First, we would have not asked the most accurate research question. Second, we would have missed an important causal factor . . . It is difficult to estimate how much of the variance of the dependent variable would be explained by this independent variable, but it is clear that it should be able to account for some of it" (2008: 111). What we can take from this observation is that for cultural and historical sociologists of morality a focus on relational moral facts opens up an important pathway for sociological analysis and explanation involving the role of the moral in the social world. The implication of Abend's point is that facticity is itself a mechanism, and possibly one of great significance. In the case of slavery and the rule of law, if the relational moral fact that their projects related to private violence are core, contradictory, and overlapping, becomes an important factor to consider in explaining the continual conflicts between these moral projects during this period of U.S. history. Partisans in these struggles were not only pursuing this conflict on the basis of symbolism, belief, or political analysis and opportunity, but also because the contradictory claims by these moral orders regarding the disposition of bodies, institutions, violence, money, the law were a matter of fact. Argument by way of facts is useful for the sociology of morality as it is in other areas of sociological inquiry and it is valuable to expand the scope of the type of facts we can look for, the ways we can look for them, and our repertoires for incorporating them into explanations.

Proponents of institutionalized slavery constantly sought to undermine the rule of law as it related to Black Americans throughout the United States. They constantly sought to extend the tendrils of an infrastructure of permissible anti-Black violence in ways that circumvented legal protections or that co-opted legal and law enforcement resources to serve as further tools of violence in support of the institution. On the other hand, those committed to the rule of law often found themselves in circumstances like the judge, Hornblower, where abolitionist positions were predictably correlated with the rule of law not because of some elective affinity but because of the fact of the conflict with institutionalized slavery over the control or unleashing of private violence. It was a relational fact, and not an arbitrary, relativistic, or constructed belief that the private violence that underwrote slavery impaired the rule of law in Northern states. It was unescapable that for judges and legislators, questions of slavery and its refugees were questions that cut to the heart of what the law would be.

There is a further way that considering this as a moral fact, a relationship between things that transcends the specific knowledge or interpretive frameworks of individuals, matters analytically. For it suggests that these two moral orders could not be made to co-exist. Of course, this view is somewhat modulated; they were constructed through contingent histories and that history had not ended. The remaking of moral constructs and systems is always possible. But such a reconstruction would have involved fundamental shifts given the centrality of the question of violence

to each of the systems. Without a vast web of permission for private violence slavery could not persist; excising its claim to control violence through procedure, statute, and adjudication of specific cases would make the rule of law unrecognizable, and to a present-day view unworthy of the name. The theoretical and conceptual argument presented here suggests that the struggle between these moral orders, as dramatically reflected in cases like Hemsley's, was not a moral struggle of choice. It was a result of the fact of irreconcilable claims over the same terrain of social life.

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Historical Sociology of Morality

Stefan Bargheer

Abstract

Morality is a core research topic in historical sociology. Scholarship in this field follows two main approaches, comparative-historical analysis and processual analysis. While comparative-historical analysis studies the past by employing a research design that aims to detect causal regularities, processual analysis is focused on tracing contingent historical trajectories that comprise both path dependencies and turning points. Within historical sociology, this choice of approach is commonly discussed as a methodological issue. The choice of method does, however, also influence what substantive research question scholars put into the foreground of their work. Comparative-historical research focuses on notions of universality; the processual approach pays most attention to questions of origins. These foci also shape normative debates that surround historical research on morality. In addition to outlining these methodological and normative debates, this chapter addresses issues of data availability that likewise influence the choice of historical research methods.

Keywords

Historical sociology of morality · Comparative-historical sociology · Processual sociology · Value neutrality · Normative force of the factual

1 Studying Morality Historically

Historical research has contributed main insights to the sociology of morality, not least because of its classical precedents. The work of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim that informs much of the sociology of morality up until the present was based on historical data and analysis. Yet historical research on morality in sociology and related social sciences does not follow one unified approach. This chapter focuses on the differences between the two most prevalent ways in which historical research in sociology approaches the study of morality—a comparative-historical approach and a processual approach. While comparative-historical analysis studies the past by employing a research design that aims to detect causal regularities, processual analysis is focused on tracing contingent historical trajectories that comprise both path dependencies and turning points.

The choice of approach influences what substantive research question scholars put into the foreground of their work. Few social scientists study history for history's sake. In most cases,

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historical research is embedded in larger theoretical projects for which historical data play very specific roles. This chapter outlines the difference between comparative-historical and processual approaches to the historical sociology of morality. Comparative-historical research focuses on notions of universality, that is, it studies the past as a strategy to make the empirical sample representative and facilitate general causal explanations of social life. The processual approach, by contrast, pays most attention to questions of origins, that is, the historical turning points and subsequent trajectories that created present-day social conditions, independent of the question whether the insights thus derived are generalizable across cases. While many of the more specific research practices are quite similar (e.g., the use of archival documents), these different aims, as well as different theoretical assumption about temporality to which they are tied, make these two approaches distinct. Instead of providing a review of the entire field, this chapter uses key illustrations that highlight the differences in approach and their consequences.

Before moving to a discussion of the methodological arguments about historical research on morality and the substantive assumptions that guide them, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the more pragmatic or logistic reasons that motivate sociologists to study morality historically (see Krause, 2021 for the often not systematically discussed issue of data availability as a reason for case selection). Data that deal with moral issues are often of a highly sensitive nature, which has an impact on their availability. Public records such as court proceedings and job evaluations that contain sensitive data are subject to an embargo period. Private records such as correspondence and diaries are likewise, in most cases, kept under lock and not available during the lifetime of the person who produced them. Data of this kind become available only after a substantial period of time, that is, once the people and issues they address have become history.

In consequence, one frequently only has the choice to study records of this kind either as historical data or not to study them at all. For reasons of simple opportunity, historical data might just be the right choice. This observation flies in the face of the preconception that data about the past are scarce and difficult to get hold of, while present-day data are abundant and easy to access. The highly personal, that is, confidential, nature of many moral issues often leads to the opposite situation. As Taylor (1985) points out, moral values are not simple preferences, but preferences about preferences. They do not merely capture what actors desire and want to do, but what actors consider justified to be desired and think they should do. As such, morality pertains to our sense of self, turning it into a sensitive and thus potentially confidential issue, no matter what its substantive content. In short, historical research can be the preferred choice of inquiry because "old data" allow researchers to study topics that "new data" often do not.

Yet for how long does the choice of historical data simply reflect only logistical issues, and when does it also start to reflect substantive changes in the fabric of social life in which these data were produced? The question of data availability quickly morphs into a question of substance the further one moves back in time. Gay's (1984) influential study of nineteenth-century sexual morality, for instance, made systematic use of diaries, love letters, etc., as sources of data. These records do, however, not represent a neutral form of data, but reflect changing practices of self-introspection, which are themselves tied to moral perceptions of sexuality. From the Freudian perspective employed by Gay, they represent a turn inward as a consequence of the social repression of sexual desires in the Victorian age. The fact that we no longer write diaries, love letters, etc., like the Victorians did, is itself a reflection of changing mores. The data produced in this period are more accessible than contemporary data, but what we access is not automatically generalizable. In this specific example, there are good reasons to assume that it is peculiar to the historical period in which it was produced. The two different approaches to the historical sociology of morality, which I will now turn to, concern these exact questions about what we can learn about morality by going back in time.

2 Two Approaches to the Historical Sociology of Morality

Historical sociologists provide different answers to the question of what is gained by studying morality historically. These answers are not unique to the study of morality but resonate with more general answers to the question of why sociologists, who are, after all, mostly interested in the present, should pay attention to the past. Sewell (2005) has influentially captured the different answers to this question with a threefold classification of teleological, experimental, and eventful models of temporality.

Experimental temporality treats historical processes as unchanging and gathers historical data following the logic of random sampling in variable-based inquiry. It considers causal factors as inherent properties of variables, independent of their interaction with other variables, and independent of their order of appearance over time. According to Sewell, experimental temporality rests on the assumption that there is "a uniformity of causal laws across time and a causal independence of every sequence of occurrences from previous and subsequent occurrences" (Sewell, 2005: 100).

Whereas experimental temporality emphasizes uniformity of causal mechanisms and independence of events, eventful temporality focuses on the heterogeneity of causal mechanisms (things work differently at different points in time due to different contextual factors, i.e., the combination of causal factors and their interaction) and their sequentiality (the causal dependence of later events on earlier events, with events defined as the relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transform structures). The eventful conception of temporality assumes that "social relations are characterized by path dependency, temporally heterogeneous causalities, and global contingency" (Sewell, 2005: 102).

Teleological temporality, by contrast to both experimental and eventful temporality, assumes that history is moving toward some fixed endpoint or telos. The teleological type, as described by Sewell, can easily be found to inform nineteenth- and early twentieth-century notions of moral progress, such as William E. H. Lecky's argument on the ever-expanding circle of moral inclusion outlined in his *History of European Morals* (1869). Teleological assumptions also carried weight throughout the twentieth century in Marxist analysis and its ideological competitor, modernization theory. Within the contemporary sociology of morality, such teleological models have lost much of their resonance, and for this reason I will omit them from this analysis. Contemporary examples of (sometimes more explicit, sometimes more implicit) teleological arguments on the history morality, such as Singer's (1981) *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology* or Pinker's (2011) *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined*, have received much popular attention but remain marginal to sociological debates.

While influential, Sewell's classification has not remained without criticism, revisions, and proposals of alternatives. Martin (2018), for instance, holds that experimental and eventful temporality are, in crucial respects, identical, making the latter appear as more of a subtype of the former rather than a distinct model of its own, while Hirschman (2021) takes the opposite line of argument and describes a fourth model of temporality that can be found in historical research but has not been addressed by Sewell. Ermakoff (2019), by contrast, uses different criteria than Sewell to classify historical research and arrives at a different threefold classification, albeit with some overlaps. All these elaborations have their validity, since there is no single right way to cut a cake—the way we categorize reflects what criteria we consider worth highlighting. I will use Sewell's classification since it uses criteria that speak to the question not only of how but also of why social scientists study the past. As I will show in the subsequent section, the answer to the latter question resonates closely with two different forms of normative entanglement of historical research.

It should also be noted that the vocabularies used to address these differences in approach vary between authors. Sociologists who cling to what

Sewell describes as experimental temporality refer to their mode of inquiry as comparative-historical sociology (e.g., Mahoney, 2004; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003), while sociologists who favor the eventful approach tend to refer to it as processual sociology (e.g., Abbott, 2016). Comparative-historical sociology self-identified as a distinct research method when it was established in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Processual sociology self-identified as an alternative approach and frequently entailed an explicit critique of the underlying assumptions of comparative-historical sociology. The term comparative and historical sociology (without the hyphen) is currently used as an umbrella term that covers both approaches, and also provides the name of a section of the American Sociological Association that aims to represent all sociologists working with historical data, regardless of the approach that they employ (for an overview of the development of this subfield see Bargheer, forthcoming). For the purpose of recognizability, I will use the terminology that historical sociologists themselves are prone to use to describe their work and refer to the model of experimental temporality as the comparative-historical approach and the model of eventful temporality as the processual approach. It should be noted, however, that despite these differences, many scholars do not explicitly identify an approach and simply call their work historical sociology.

2.1 The Comparative-Historical Approach

The comparative-historical approach commonly relies on a number of cases that are compared in order to detect causal regularities, in this case the causal factors that make for either the change or stability of moral values. Comparative-historical studies can also follow a purely descriptive aim to demonstrate either the contingency or universality of moral values. The assumption that the past is an independent case can be captured by the slogan that the past is a foreign country. In this case, studying history, that is, societies of the past, is simply a strategy to make the sample representative.

The work of Ostrom (1990) on common-pool resource institutions provides an influential example of a comparative-historical research design that has the aim to detect causal regularities, in her case the universal preconditions for the solution of the problem of collective action in the distribution of natural resources, also known as the tragedy of the commons. While many societies fail to attain cooperation and avoid tragedy, the preconditions for successful cooperation are everywhere the same. Drawing on a pool close to 5000 cases, Ostrom identified eight "design principles" of stable local common-pool resource management, including clearly defined group boundaries, effective monitoring, graduated sanctions, and mechanisms for conflict resolution. These conditions are found to be the same throughout all of human history and across the entire globe, with the history of the oldest institution examined exceeding 1000 years.

Comparative-historical research has also been used to discern causal regularities in value change. Inglehart (Inglehart, 1977, 1997) has distinguished between material and postmaterial values to trace value change among more than 40 societies. Inglehart argues that the experience of economic security during people's formative years causes them to take their material security for granted and instead place greater importance on non-material goals such as self-expression and autonomy. Such postmaterial values are shown to gradually increase in industrial societies through the process of intergenerational replacement. In Inglehart's model, material and postmaterial values exist within every society, turning historical inquiry into the task of identifying which of these values prevails. Strictly speaking, history does not change morality in the sense that it produces previously non-existing moral values; history only changes the relative distribution of a universal set of moral values. From the point of view of this comparative-historical research design, a study of the emergence of values based on historically contingent events, as favored by the processual approach, would make no sense.

Studies of value change are not restricted to such as design. On the example of changes in business ethics from mid-nineteenth to early twentieth-century America, Abend (2011, 2014) has shown that moral values do not only differ in content, but also in form, which he addresses as moral background. Contrary to "thin" conceptions of morality that tell us which moral values somebody is for or against, "thick" conceptions of morality, which form our moral backgrounds, address the question of which moral concepts exist in a society, what moral arguments can be made, and which objects can be morally evaluated at all. Since they are capturing differences of kind rather than of degree, moral backgrounds can be incommensurable.

Prominent examples of comparative-historical studies that deal with incommensurable ways of making moral judgments involve the distinction between shame cultures and guilt cultures (Stewart, 1994). While in a guilt culture social control is maintained through internalized feelings of guilt for certain behaviors, shame cultures enforce control through the anticipation of the shame (or honor) a specific behavior will produce if observed by others. The historical significance of this distinction first introduced by cultural anthropologists was formulated within the framework of mid twentieth-century modernization theory, in which guilt cultures stood for modern societies and shame cultures for traditional societies and the backward regions of modern societies, such as the American South (Berger, 1970; Wyatt-Brown, 1982). With the demise of modernization theory, the distinction between shame cultures and guilt cultures likewise lost influence. The work of Abend is a way to bring the question of the possible incommensurability of frameworks of moral judgments back into focus without carrying over the baggage of modernization theory to which it was once tied.

2.2 The Processual Approach

The purpose of studying the history of morality from the point of view of the processual approach differs from that of the comparative-historical approach. For the processual approach, the reason for studying history is not to show similarities and/or differences between past and present morality in order to detect causal regularities, but to trace the causes of present-day morality back to their point of emergence in the past. Past and present are not conceived as two independent cases, which forms the underlying assumption or the comparative-historical approach, but as one and the same case, since the present is seen as causally connected to the past. The slogan that the past is a foreign country makes no sense for the processual model.

This temporal continuity of past and present is captured by the notion of path dependency (Mahoney, 2000). Path dependency is a concept referring to processes by which past decisions constrain later events or decisions. Temporality, that is, history, matters because past events both open up and constrain the possibilities of future developments. Outcomes produced under past conditions can persist long after those conditions change. The stock example is the introduction of the QWERTY layout in typewriters that was designed to prevent jamming and is still used in computer keyboards, although it no longer carries any mechanical advantage but simply happens to be the design a majority of users is accustomed to. If path dependency in this form is at work, present-day social conditions do not provide an explanation for the development of present-day social phenomena, since their causes may no longer be at work in the present.

Turning points are the junctures in time when the direction of such path dependencies changes (Abbott, 1997). The existence of turning points (or events, in Sewell's terminology) is also the reason why the trajectory of different cases can diverge, providing material for comparative-historical analysis. For a processual analysis, however, the reason for studying the past remains the aim to better understand the present, that is, scholars are not looking at the past and the present in order to study two cases comparatively, but to study one case over time. Processual studies are first and foremost longitudinal studies, also known as studies of the longue durée, not comparative-historical studies.

A particularly prominent line of research within this framework is the study of the religious origins of contemporary secular institutions. Gorski (2003), for instance, has shown that protestant and pietist religious ethics provided the underpinning for the discipline that was at the root of the emergence of the modern state, Kahl (2005) demonstrated how distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor, which have their origin in sixteenth-century religious teachings about salvation, explain the outlook of contemporary welfare states, and Dromi (2020) traces how the orthodox Calvinists who set up the Red Cross created an institutional model that informs the humanitarian aid sector up to the present day. Here, the appearance of new religious ideas are the contingent events or turning points that caused the rise of institutions, which endure even though they are no longer justified in religious terms. To understand present-day moral institutions, we thus have to look at the past.

The processual approach is, however, not restricted to Weberian arguments about the force of religious ideas. Arguments of this kind can also follow a Marxist key and focus on social structure and class interest. Esping-Andersen (1990), for instance, has shown that the emergence of different types of welfare state regimes was contingent on differences in class composition and in the formation of class coalitions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Once established, welfare states transformed the class composition of society and altered attitudes toward welfare, which allowed welfare states to maintain their institutional structure independent of the political coalitions that initially gave rise to them. Present-day attitudes toward the welfare state are thus a poor guide to the question how welfare state institutions emerged, since these attitudes are the product of institutions that were created by very different forces.

With the insight that the causes that brought a social phenomenon into being can differ from the causes that sustain it comes the insight that contemporary moral phenomena do not all spring from the same source. Different moral values can come into being in different periods of time and have distinct trajectories. The outcome can be a plurality of values that do not form a coherent whole but remain either unconnected or even enter into conflict with each other, a state of affairs commonly addressed as value pluralism (Stocker, 1989). A discourse on values that postulates a shared essence of contemporary morality then takes the form of a post-hoc justification that obscures the actual plurality of origins. My work on the divergent historical origins and trajectories of what is popularly known as "environmental values" or "conservation ethic" provides an example of how misleading such an essentializing post-hoc terminology can be (Bargheer, 2018a, 2018b).

The distinction between these two approaches to the historical sociology of morality is analytical. Many studies do not neatly fit under one rubric or the other. In practice, they may constitute aspects of analysis that researchers draw on to varying degrees in the same research project. Many processual studies, for instance, focus on historical turning points to account for present-day outcomes without subjecting the period between past and present to empirical analysis. They may also compare multiple cases to trace different path dependencies, which, taken together, makes them look similar to comparative-historical studies. Conversely, many comparative-historical studies have substantial similarities to processual studies if they aim to account for present-day outcomes by comparing structural forces at work in the past. A difference between such studies can be found in the interpretation of the data, rather than the research design: processual studies evoke path dependency as an explanation for the continuity between past and present, while comparative-historical studies attribute such continuity to the identity of circumstances.

3 The Normative Force of the Factual: Moral Universals and Origin Stories

These differences in method and interpretation of data are intimately tied to questions of purpose. Scholars working on morality often make a

distinction between a sociology of morality that is a strictly descriptive, that is, empirical, endeavor and a sociology of morality that also engages in prescriptive, that is, normative, arguments. At stake is the question of value neutrality, that is, the fact-value distinction (Gorski, 2013). While many, if not most, sociologists a century ago treated moral values as matters of objective fact (a position known as moral realism), the majority of contemporary sociologists treat them as subjective and thus as not open to scientific validation (a position known as moral or ethical relativism) (Abend, 2008; McCaffree, 2019). Proponents of a value-neutral sociology of morality argue that "ought" (i.e., prescriptive statements) cannot be derived from "is" (i.e., descriptive statements), while advocates of a realist position argue the other way around that supposedly value-neutral scholarship frequently makes implicit normative arguments, at times not only without acknowledging, but also without recognizing it.

A well-documented example of such an implicit normative argument derives from the history of statistics. Historians of science have shown that the boundary between normative notions of the normal or typical (as opposed to the pathological) and statistical notions of the normal (as measured by the statistical average) is fluent—the two meanings did in fact emerge in conjunction with each other in the nineteenth century. As Hacking (1990) observes, normality has this double meaning as both a descriptive and a prescriptive category, forming what he calls a bridge between "is" and "ought." "One can, then, use the word 'normal' to say how things are, but also to say how they ought to be. The magic of the word is that we can use it to do both things at once" (Hacking, 1990: 163). Through this double meaning, the normal statistical distribution morphs into a normative distribution, and the statistical average turns into a morally contested site. Nineteenth-century interpretations of statistical data on suicide, crime, marriage and divorce, and sexuality are the recurring examples, with the work of Emile Durkheim as a central case. The interpretation of these data provides an example of what Georg Jellinek referred to as "the normative force of the factual" (Jellinek, 1900; Ladavac et al., 2019), that is, a normative weight derived from an empirical fact that operates in the absence of any explicit argument that normative values can be derived from empirical facts.

Instead of taking a position in the debate on the question whether a value-neutral science is possible (and desirable), I would like to make the empirical argument that the normative implications of historical analysis—whether explicit or implicit—differ between the comparative-historical and the processual approach. The crucial point to make in extension of Jellinek is that peculiar kinds of empirical analysis carry equally peculiar normative connotations. Accordingly, it is not the category of "normality" so central to statistical analysis that stands in the foreground when it comes to historical analysis. In the context of the comparative-historical approach, it is instead the notion of "universality;" in the context of the processual approach, it is the notion of "originality" that carries most normative weight. Each of the two approaches exists, moreover, in an affirmative and a dismantling mode.

The issue of universality that is tied to the comparative-historical approach is the more obvious of the two. From a strictly methodological point of view, similarity, that is, universality, is as good a research finding as difference, that is, contingency or relativity. Yet empirical research findings are rarely discussed from the point of view of this logical equivalence, and arguably only few researchers would be prepared to consider them equally good research results (despite the fact that comparative-historical sociologists refer to John Stuart Mill's method of difference and/or agreement, that is, similarity, to make their methodological arguments). Demonstrating the fixity of a specific normative arrangement across time endows it with an air of naturalness and inevitability. Comparative-historical analysis then fills the space that arguments about human nature once occupied. Conversely, the empirical insight that social arrangements change over time deprives them of their naturalness and inevitability. It is probably no accident that the expression "ethical relativity" was made popular by a

comparative-historical sociologist, Edward Westermarck (1932), who used the it as a book title (Lukes, 2008).

Historical research on gift exchange (Mauss [1925] 2000) provides an example of the prescriptive implications of descriptive research on morality. One of the most influential examples of gift exchange is the Potlatch ritual. As Bracken (1997) has shown, nineteenth-century anthropologists viewed the potlatch ritual practiced by some of the First Nations of the Pacific Northwest as economically irrational and wasteful, giving rise to its prohibition by colonial administrators. The potlatch as gift exchange was identified with primitive culture and juxtaposed to the presumably economically rational market exchange of civilized societies. To the extent that the practice was acknowledged to exist in so-called civilized societies, this acknowledgment was connected to a criticism of contemporary society. In the work of Veblen ([1899] 2001) on the leisure class, for instance, an analogy between the potlatch ritual and practices of conspicuous consumption in contemporary American society was used as a moral indictment of the latter and argued to undermine a more desirable instinct of workmanship. Contemporary social scientists, by contrast, almost unanimously reject the identification of gift exchange with primitive culture. Clemens (2020), for instance, has shown on the example of the development of the American welfare state that contemporary regimes of market exchange not only co-exist with, they are also enabled by practices of gift exchange (see also Lainer-Vos on the interaction between market exchange and gift exchange, Lainer-Vos, 2013a, 2013b). The assessment of the practice of gift exchange as existing in past and present societies alike is sometimes explicitly tied to its endorsement as economically beneficial and morally desirable. Axelrod (1984), for instance, argues that the norm of reciprocity underlying gift exchange, addressed by him as the tit-for-tat rule, is a moral universal that enables cooperation and is thus indispensable for a functioning society.

In the context of the processual approach, a different set of normative connotations is at stake. Here it is the notion of originality that looms large. Historical research into the origins or foundation of a moral phenomenon can be dismantling or demystifying, robbing contemporary arrangements of their moral authority, or it can be an affirmation of contemporary arrangements. The descriptive language of events or turning points provides the morally neutral terminology to articulate these origin stories, yet the debates that surround these historical turning points walk the twilight between descriptive and prescriptive argument. If the historical origins of contemporary practices, institutions, cultural symbols, etc., were just turning points in the descriptive sense, they would not be equally contested, that is, repeatedly studied. Historical origin stories are so powerful in either lending moral authority to the present or depriving it of such that historical scholarship rarely manages to escape dealing with its normative implications.

The contrasting analyses of Cheah (2006) and Joas (2013) of the development of human rights capture the difference between a dismantling and an affirmative version of historical origin stories well. While Cheah argues in a Foucaultian key that the origin of the modern regime of human rights is tied to the global diffusion of neoliberal economic policies to which human rights provide a softer face, Joas builds on Charles Taylor to formulate an affirmative genealogy which aims to show that human rights are a reaction to the traumatic historical experiences of colonialism, racism, and genocide. Both authors trace the emergence of human rights to contingent events that happened in the past, yet the historical account of Cheah is intended to challenge the authority of present-day human rights, while Joas aims to strengthen it. The difference between the two normative projects is not to be found in a focus on the question of the universality or relativity of human rights as in the context of the comparative-historical approach, but in the question whether the causal forces at work at the origin of the phenomenon resonate with contemporary moral expectations or contradict them.

These prescriptive connotations surrounding universals and origins are far less often recognized and discussed than the closely related

methodological issues. The normative force of the factual, as Jellinek called it, is likewise not captured by current debates between moral realists and moral relativists, since the epistemological question whether it is possible to derive an "ought" from an "is" is not what is at stake in this case. More research would be needed to tease out how common this connection between scientific fact gathering and engagement in normative debates really is. The foregoing assessment only highlights the existence of a correlation between the methodological approach to the analysis of historical data and the style of normative argument. Yet correlation is not the same as causality. Is it the methodological approach that willy-nilly carries normative implications, or is it, by contrast, scholars' normative horizon that influences their choice of approach? In current debates, value judgments in science are often depicted as deviations from strict methodological rules. Given how widespread the intervention of fact-based social science into normative debates is, it is, however, well possible that it is this very normative involvement which shapes researchers' choice of scientific method in the first place.

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History of the Present: Assessing Morality Across Temporalities

Cresa Pugh

Abstract

History is not simply an assemblage of past events, but rather a presence that is lingering, active, and influential in the present, particularly in the lives of those who have not traditionally been the authors of the historical record. For centuries social scientists have considered the question of moral relativism and historical presentism in efforts to construct accurate and just historiography. Historical and recent discourses around the (i)legitimacy of presentism reveal our anxiety about asserting judgments of morality on the past. Drawing on a case study of cultural artifact restitution, I consider how sociologists of morality might engage with debates around moral truth and value freedom, and how adopting a Du Boisian paradigm might enrich our conceptual and ethical approaches to this question. While restitution advocates argue that such action would be a step toward healing wounds of the past and restoring relations between communities with historic grievances, critics often contend that the past is behind us and that we should not be beholden to repairing the actions of their predecessors. I suggest that a primary mechanism through which history is "falsified" is this emphasis on the pastness of history. In this chapter, I offer a way of grounding our moral subjectivities around moments of historical rupture across time in an effort to construct more just histories of the present.

Keywords

Presentism · Historiography · Moral relativism · Restitution · Du Bois

In August 2022, the American Historical Association (AHA) temporarily suspended its Twitter account due to a deluge of abusive discourse by conservative trolls, including white nationalist leader Richard Spender who joined the debate. The impetus for the backlash was a letter published by AHA president James Sweet in which he criticized the discipline for its increasingly "presentist" orientation—both in terms of the time periods of study scholars are pursuing and his belief that contemporary identity politics, particularly those around the memorialization of slavery, are influencing how historians remember and reconstruct the past, leading to the production of bad history. "Doing history with integrity requires us to interpret elements of the past not through the optics of the present but within the worlds of our historical actors," Sweet (2022) argued forcefully in his letter which drew swift and sharp criticism from scholars within the discipline who found his message to be tone-deaf and insensitive to scholars whose work centers

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minoritized populations and to the communities themselves—critiques which, in turn, drew the contempt of white nationalists online. Sweet's critics argued that history is and always has been inherently political and responsive to the needs of groups living at the margins, and that a recognition that the past matters today is central to the work of historians.

One issue that critics were particularly responsive to was Sweet's assertation that history should not be used as a heuristic to articulate an imagined future, but as a method of studying change over time. In a response letter, Malcolm Foley (2022) argued that history is not just about studying change, but also studying the things that remain the same: "When we note that oppressive and exploitative conditions continue, a state of affairs that we only become aware of when we investigate the lives of the exploited and oppressed, we must ask the question, Why do those conditions persist as long as they do?" Priya Satia, in the same post, similarly noted that continuity and loss always accompany change over time. What these criticisms point to is the idea that history is not simply an assemblage of past events, but rather a presence that is lingering, active, and influential in the present, particularly in the lives of those who have not traditionally been the authors of the historical record.

The divide between what we might call presentism and historicism is not new to the discipline of history, a fact which Sweet alludes to in his letter. In 2002, then ASA president Lynn Hunt published a scathing critique of the "moral complacency and self-congratulation" encouraged by what she considered to be presentist historical research, which she suggested was becoming an increasingly concerning issue for the field (Hunt, 2002). Hunt's critique spawned what has become two decades and counting of debate in history about the uses of presentism in the field.

Traditionalists such as Gordon Wood who tended to side with Hunt have argued that those who he refers to as "cultural historians"—deconstructionists concerned with issues related to race and gender, as he understands them—have "an instrumentalist view of history and see themselves essentially as cultural critics who wish to manipulate the past for the sake of the present" (Wood, 2009: 4). Such viewpoints prompted a range of critical responses by many historians who would perhaps be reluctant to self-identify as presentist as more radical scholars may, but nevertheless saw the value in a presentist perspective, or at the very least reclaiming the concept of presentism from the bins of history. In 2019, David Armitage penned what appeared to be a delayed though pointed response to Hunt's essay entitled "In Defense of Presentism" in which he attempts to salvage the many varieties of presentism, arguing that some may indeed be useful for historians (Armitage, 2019).

History is of course not the only discipline that has struggled with the problem of presentism and weighing moral judgments alongside the constraints of modernity. Philosophers and anthropologists, among others, have long been beset by the question of normative relativism versus absolute universalism in the interpretation and application of moral judgment across cultural contexts and temporal frames. [1] In our own discipline of sociology, there has been renewed interest—as evidenced, in part, by the publication of this current volume—in the question of morality in ways that are useful for helping us interpret the past. Baker's (2005) work on America's crisis of values considers the abstract categories of moral absolutism and relativism and how they help us make sense of historical change in the moral fabric of the nation. Others have examined historical processes of change in moral culture and the mechanisms through which moral meanings evolve over time or remain fixed (Haidt & Graham, 2009; Hunter, 2000; Lakoff, 2002; Zelizer, 1994). As Hitlin and Vaisey have argued, "Moral meanings are changeable but by no means ephemeral." (2013, 59). Citing the work of Hacking (2002) and Somers (1995), Abend (2010) invites historical sociologists, in

[1] See Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others. American Anthropologist, 104(3), 783–790 and Edgerton, R.B. (1992) Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmonies. New York: Free Press.

particular, to consider how what he has termed "thick" moral concepts, and their associated practices and institutions have evolved given the heterogeneity of their emergence across different societies and cultures.

Abend (2008) has characterized more recent work on morality within the field as falling either within the orthodox "Weberian paradigm," which understands moral judgments to have no objective truth and sociology as values free, or the "Durkheimian paradigm," which embraces moral truth and rejects value freedom. Such perspectives align with debates on presentism, with traditionalist thinking being largely consistent with the Weberian paradigm—that it is the job of the historian to reconstruct a set of truths, but not interpret or judge them with contemporary moral frames. "Presentist" thought, on the other hand, is more aligned with the Durkheimian paradigm in its argument that history is socially contingent, that there are moral realities that exist irrespective of time period, and that it is the work of the historian to place this record in the context of the contemporary value landscape. While morality has various meanings within sociology and the social sciences more generally, I find useful for the question of presentism Smith's (2003) conceptualization of the term as how society makes judgments about behaviors and collective goals as worthy.

In their Annual Review paper on the evolution of the sociology of morality, Hitlin and Vaisey also characterize the field using the "founding fathers" paradigm: "If the old sociology of morality was Durkheimian [. . .] then the new sociology of morality is more Weberian," they argue (2013, 53). Yet the contributions of Du Bois—a discipline founder whose legacy has long been overlooked but has increasingly been the subject of institutional recovery (Morris, 2015)—to the study of morality and its implications for understanding social change over time are rarely mentioned in these conversations. Luft and Rosenberg's (Forthcoming) work on moral theorizing from the margins acknowledges this elision of Du Bois within the field of sociology of morality and makes among the first attempts at correcting this issue through a thorough analysis of how moral reasoning is embedded in his work.

Du Bois perhaps most famously contended with the question of morality and our understanding of the past in "The Propaganda of History," the final chapter of *Black Reconstruction*, in which he argues that American historians had diminished and falsified the nation's historical record on slavery, the Civil War, and Black contributions to Reconstruction in an effort to minimize the shame associated with these events, resulting in a sanitized, even pleasant, historiography of the period. Beyond the harm such omissions create for Black society, Du Bois's primary concern in the chapter is the implications such a form of erasure has for history as a scientific discipline characterized by what he believes should be an "accuracy and faithfulness of detail which will allow its use as a measuring rod and guidepost for the future of nations" (Du Bois, 1935, 714). Standards of ethics and interpretation, he argues, must therefore be central to the process of constructing postbellum historiography in order to salvage it from devolving into white egoistic propaganda.

Specifically Du Bois notes that Americans both from the South and North knew and were outspoken about the fact that slavery was "morally wrong" even in the eighteenth century, yet early twentieth-century historians whitewashed its horrors, portraying the peculiar institution impartially in such a way that "nothing right or wrong was involved" (ibid, 714). To portray slavery in such a manner, he suggests, is unhistorical, cheap, and devoid of sociological knowledge, evidence that the disciplines have given way to desire or romance rather than fact. He then clarifies the role of the historian from that of other non-scientific thinkers:

> What we [historians] have got to know, so far as possible, are the things that actually happened in the world. Then with that much clear and open to every reader, the philosopher and prophet has a chance to interpret these facts; but the historian has no right, posing as scientist to conceal or distort facts. (ibid, 722).

To Du Bois, there exists an objective historical record marked by Truth waiting to be revealed by those engaging in proper scientific analysis, and those who dispute or misrepresent this Truth to satisfy their own contemporary moralistic framing are engaging not in historical production, but processes of mythmaking. In Sweet's letter he advocates for assessing historical events in the context of the values and mores of that historical period as opposed to the current one, similarly suggesting that there is a level of contemporary objectivity one can hold when analyzing the past. Those concerned with surfacing the experiences of marginalized voices—including those who were critical of Sweet's letter—acknowledge the messiness of historiographic reconstruction and largely resist empiricist notions of history as an objective practice. Yet Du Bois' analysis of those in power coopting the historical record to align with their contemporary moral worldviews provides a useful framework through which to examine the ethics of how we understand and remember the past. As such, his critique of conventional narratives of slavery, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction era may help us deal with the problem of presentism.

What the discourses around the (i)legitimacy of presentism reveal is our anxiety about asserting judgments of morality on the past. In recent years, an issue that has illuminated the ethical dimensions of debates about historicization has been the question of reparations. While advocates of reparations seeking justice for survivors and descendants of slavery and colonization tend to argue that the process would be a step toward healing wounds of the past and restoring relations between communities with historic grievances, critics often contend that the past is behind us and that we should not be beholden to repairing the actions of their predecessors regardless of the nature or severity of the offense. In this chapter, I suggest that a primary mechanism through which history is "falsified," in Du Boisian terms, is this emphasis on the pastness of history.

Gregory Alexander has argued that there are two types of reparation claims—one that is present-focused which intends "to correct an *ongoing* injustice whose origin lies in the past" (Alexander, 2014, 877) and the other that is historically focused and "views the justification of entitlements from a historical perspective rather than on the basis of present- and future-minded arguments" (ibid, 878). The question of reparations provides a unique vantage point from which to examine the durability and relativism of a society's moral commitments across time. While reparations may take many forms—from economic compensation on the nation-state and institutional levels to political reparations such as affirmative action policy—in this chapter, I consider a particular form of reparative claimsmaking that has, in recent years, become a dominant mode of repair for justice-seeking communities in the post-imperial Global South: cultural artifact restitution. [2] Specifically, I ask what scholars of restitution—and reparations and claimsmaking addressing issues of inequality more generally—can learn about moral relativism of historical events from current debates about historiography in the social sciences. I also consider how sociologists of morality might engage with these debates around moral truth and value freedom, and how adopting a Du Boisian paradigm might enrich our conceptual and ethical approaches to this question. Ultimately my goal in this chapter is to offer a way of grounding our moral subjectivities around moments of historical rupture across time in an effort to construct more just histories of the present.

1 Restitution and Historical Presentism

For centuries, the global looting of cultural artifacts against the will of nations has been a relatively common occurrence as part of colonial occupation, archeological exploration, and the

[2] In recent years, there has also been increasing attention to the treatment and restitution of archives. See Alshaibi, Wisam. 2019. "Weaponizing Iraq's Archives." Middle East Report. Vol 291; Luft, Aliza. "How Do You Repair A Broken World? Conflict(ing) Archives after the Holocaust." Qualitative Sociology. 43:317–343; Subotic, Jelena. "Ethics of Archival Research in Conflict Studies" (Forthcoming).

pursuit of spoils of war following conquest. Among the most infamous cases of cultural patrimony plunder include the stripping of the Parthenon marbles from the Acropolis of Athens in 1801, the removal of the Rosetta Stone from Egypt in 1799, and the looting of the bronzes of the Benin Kingdom (modern day Nigeria) in 1897, a case which I will explore in greater detail throughout this chapter. Today the British Museum holds the Parthenon marbles, Rosetta Stone, and Benin bronzes in its collection, but in recent years the legitimacy and ethics of their retention in the museum have been called into question by members of the source communities, politicians, and activists, who have increasingly called for their return to their countries of origin—a process known as restitution. With the exception of cultural heritage looted by Nazi Germany during the Second World War which has largely since been repatriated to survivors and descendants of the Holocaust, national museums have historically been resistant to the idea of returning objects in their galleries and storerooms and have, instead, sought to protect the integrity of their collections. Notably, sociologist Fiona Greenland (2016, 2021) has written extensively on the ways in which states manage antiquities removed from other nations to control interactions between the parties in a process she refers to as "artifactual relations."

In 2002, a group of 18 European and North American museums signed a statement known as the "Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums" seeking to affirm their status as the rightful arbiters of world heritage in the face of mounting criticism that such institutions are increasingly symbols of heritage appropriation and violent imperial plunder. The statement, in part, read: "Objects acquired in earlier times must be viewed in light of different sensitivities and values, reflective of that earlier era. The objects and monumental works that were installed decades and even centuries ago in museums throughout Europe and America were acquired under conditions that are not comparable with current ones" (Heritage Museum, 2004). The argument here is that museums and the public should refrain from reading events of the past through the lens of contemporary understandings and standards of morality. In other words, one must avoid the error of presentism by objectively evaluating historical events based on the terms of the period in which they occurred.

Debates about restitution largely fall along this divide of how to properly interpret and treat the past, the moment at which the objects were looted from their places of origin. William St. Clair has lamented the struggle between the two perspectives: on one side is "the scholarly, scientific archaeology of the Enlightenment that makes a genuine effort to understand the material remains of the past" and on the other are "the imputed meanings invented and advocated by various appropriators to meet the perceived political and ideological needs of a changing present" (St. Clair, 2006: 96). Retentionists, or those seeking to retain looted objects in their collection, like St. Clair have largely adopted a historicist interpretation, arguing that events in the past must be assessed with the ethical standards of the time of removal in mind. "It seems reasonable to argue that the moral quality of an action should be judged by the ethical standards applicable at the time and place of the action," says law professor John Merryman, who insists that our understanding of the interpretation of historical events must not be tainted by our contemporary moral viewpoints (Merryman, 2006: 12). A primary rationale for this argument by retentionists is rooted in Merryman's principle of *essential propinquity*, which argues that modern cultures claiming cultural objects must be the same as the culture of origin that produced the object and that the object must still be actively employed for the cultural purposes for which it was produced in order for it to be considered eligible for restitution (ibid: 154).

Restitution claims for the Parthenon marbles and a host of Egyptian artifacts have largely been dismissed on these grounds that the claiming nations are not able to prove cultural continuity with the communities that made the works nor do they possess significant spiritual, ceremonial or communal value for members of the nation today. At the height of debates about the marbles in the late 1990s, one London art critic asked, "Who

were these Greeks, early in the nineteenth century, and who are they now? They are not the Greeks of the ancient pre-Christian city societies that still capture the imaginations of all educated, romantic, oppressed and hopeful people who dream of democracy" (St. Clair, 2006: 89). Another British journalist placed a finer, more racialized point on this belief in the discontinuity between ancient and contemporary Greek culture, the arguing that modern Greeks are "some short-legged, hairy-bottomed foreigners, who have nothing whatever to do with the Ancient Athenians but who happen to occupy the space, benign descended from Turkish invaders over the centuries" (ibid: 89). Merryman himself made similar claims, suggesting that "modern Greeks relate differently to the Parthenon Marbles and to the Classical culture in which they were created and employed" arguing quite simply, "that culture is dead" (Merryman, 2006: 104). Comparable arguments have been made about the Egyptian case, such as archeologist Stephen Urice's claims that the infamous bust of Nefertiti held in Berlin's ethnological museum should not be eligible for repatriation as Egyptians have claimed due to its perceived lack of cultural value for contemporary Egyptians. "The bust holds absolutely no place in current Egyptian religious practice and no appreciable use in developing or maintaining current Egyptian national identity," Urice forcefully argued (2006: 165).

For retentionists, a community's inability to prove its cultural affiliation to an object and affirm its enduring significance to their contemporary practices implies a lack of temporal durability of cultural identity that allows for the displacement of moral obligation to only the historical actors of a bygone culture, leaving those who believe themselves to be modern descendants of the community with no rightful claims to ownership. Such a view I argue represents a new historicist perspective on restitution which relegates earlier instances of violence to a past which cannot be visited upon through a frame of moral contemporaneity.

Restitutionists, on the other hand, argue that history is not so easily relegated to a temporal space which lies behind us but is instead history of the present, which continues to bear upon us in the present moment. Many who advocate for the return of plundered material heritage to source communities do so on the basis of a sense of enduring cultural dispossession, a need to tend to ruptures in collective memory between the current and earlier generations, and a desire to hold and narrate a communal history on one's own terms through patrimony. Archeologist and curator Dan Hicks has argued that museums have a duty to acknowledge the persistence of harm created in the retention of stolen heritage:

> We can't write colonial history on its own terms. We must not relativise our modern values in order to justify past acts, when those acts are unfinished. To pretend that the violence is over is the technique used, for example, by museums, galleries, salesrooms and private collections in North America that hold looted Benin objects when they claim that they were acquired legally at the most recent transaction, and so no question of restitution should arise. (Hicks, 2020: 215).

Hicks' argument is a presentist one: that past instances of violence and theft must undergo ethical scrutiny in the present because that is indeed where they continue to live as long as indigenous communities remain estranged from their artifacts warehoused in the West as "art." While new historicists often argue that the classic presentist error is to relativize historic acts in order to adhere to contemporary moral standards, Hicks turns this idea on its head by decrying the historicist tendency to relativize current mores to rationalize dark moments in our past. A 2000 report by the British Parliament on the return and illicit trade of cultural property referred to this "volitional amnesia" characteristic of the art world which has deliberately chosen to forget about the violent histories which allowed for the constitution of their collections in order to distance themselves from past injustices and moral obligations (Besterman, 2014: 23).

While retentionists tend to adopt Merryman's historicist conception of essential propinquity in their understanding of the importance of cultural continuity and object relevance within restitution debates, restitutionists think of culture as more of an inalienable property which cannot be lost or

destroyed even across long spans of time. Ingold (2000) has argued that Western understandings of indigeneity as framed in terms of linear descent from a specific population in a specific place may be inconsistent or in tension with the ways in which indigenous groups understand their own sense of identity as that being rooted in the lived experiences within their environment. In other words, Western retentionist notions of lineal descent rely much more heavily on ethnic or racial continuity across generations which is likely to shift considerably over centuries of migration, thereby allowing retentionists to claim that no such continuity exists and to refute contemporary groups' claims to ancient heritage. On the other hand, a community considers themselves to be descendants of an ancestral tradition if cultural experiences such as ritual, ceremonial, spiritual practice were shared between lineal groups. As such, restitutionist views on object repatriation tend to be more aligned with presentist understandings of temporality in their belief in the impact of imperial looting and its reverberations across successive cultural generations.

In his paper about land reparations for indigenous communities, Alexander homes in on the notion that restitution and repatriation are less concerned with mending or healing the past as they are invested in correcting "an *ongoing* injustice whose origin lies in the past" (Alexander, 2014: 877). He refers to this present- and forward-looking perspective as one rooted in distributive justice aimed at altering future circumstances, while historically focused interventions rooted in the framework of restorative justice, on the other hand, seek to justify entitlements from a backward-looking perspective. Forms of distributive justice acknowledge that while we cannot undo the past and are unable to return to the status quo ante, restitution attends to present circumstances of victimhood rooted in the ongoing effects of past injustices and seeks to improve the claimants' lives in the future by counteracting these enduring injustices in the present. Advocates for restitution of the Parthenon marbles have, in recent years, shifted their campaign from a restorative to a distributive approach given arguments about the cultural discontinuity between contemporary and ancient Greeks and the belief that a present-/forward-looking claim would obviate these critiques and allow a focus on the enduring harm which exists in the contemporary moment.[3] The contemporary Greek argument for restitution "makes no claim for ownership. It avoids all questions about legality and past rights and wrongs. [...] Instead, it considers what is best from the perspective of our generation," argues William St. Clair about the futurity of contemporary Greek claims (St. Clair, 2006: 96). He continues, "The argument was that whatever one might think about whether the Elgin Marbles belong *to* Greece, they belong *in* Greece. The new Greek position has made it unnecessary to reargue the ownership issue here" (ibid: 100). Whereas earlier claims focused on who had been rightly entitled to the marbles based on historic circumstances and disputes over the legality of their removal, more recent claims which are presentist in nature emphasize where the marbles belong today and who should benefit most from their presence in light of the durability of harm their dispossession has created for modern Greek identity.

While the study of restitution and reparations is often dominated by debates about the legal interpretation of property claims, this chapter is more concerned with the moral and ethical considerations of justice seeking. The remainder of this chapter will examine what the case of the Benin bronzes and debates about presentism and historicism can help us understand about the uses of contemporary moral critique on the aftershocks of historic violence. I conclude with a reflection

[3] Restorative justice emerged as a critique of, and response to, the brutality and violence of conventional retributive criminal justice structures and as an alternative means of pursuing public safety. For a discussion of reparative forms of justice—including distributive, procedural, corrective, and compensatory—beyond the context of artifact restitution see Cohen, R. (2001). "Provocations of Restorative Justice." Social Justice Research, Vol. 14, No. 2; Walker, M. U. (2006). "Restorative Justice and Reparations." Journal of Social Philosophy, Vol. 37, No. 3, (Fall 2006): 377–395; Wenzel, M., Okimoto, T.G., Feather, N.T. et al. Retributive and Restorative Justice. Law and Human Behavior 32, 375–389 (2008).

on the impact such a present-/forward-looking perspective may have for the possibilities of coexistence for communities that have been historically alienated from one another through forces of imperial hegemony.

2 The Durability of Benin's Culture

When the Benin bronzes were looted from the Kingdom of Benin in 1897 by British forces seeking to expand their sphere of influence during the Scramble for Africa, they were removed not from a museum or public display, but from the royal palace, many stripped from sacred altars in the chamber of the oba (king). These objects were not display pieces intended for public consumption, but sacred cultural and spiritual objects used in ceremonial rituals within the royal court. Indeed many community members believed the artifacts were the material embodiments of living ancestors, referring to them as exiled members of the diaspora once they were relocated to Western museums. It was only in their transition to these new contexts did these objects become commoditized as "art" within the Western market context, thereby surrendering their ancestor status.

The Edo, or those native to Benin, began calling for the return of their patrimony almost immediately after the looting, but serious campaigns for restitution did not begin in earnest until the mid-twentieth century upon Benin's incorporation into Nigeria and the latter's establishment as a self-governed state. Arguments for the repatriation were, and continue to be, rooted in the durability of Edo culture and the sustained importance of the looted artifacts for the cultural practices and considerations of a living culture. Let us return for a moment to Merryman's concept of essential propinquity which uses these very criteria as its basis—cultural continuity between past and present generations and the active use of the objects by the contemporary culture. There are a number of ways in which the Edo and their allies draw a through line from the past to the present in their restitution claims. They argue that they are morally and ethically entitled to ownership and possession of the objects not on account of the past violence which alienated them from their heritage, but due to the enduring harm the continued estrangement continues to enact upon the contemporary community. "The spiritual and cultural importance of these objects to the people of Benin was not wiped out by their being forcibly removed from Benin. They remain part of the living culture of Benin and their absence laves a vacuum within that culture," argued one restitution advocate.[4] In other words, Edo claims for restitution rely upon a presentist notion that a contemporary framework of morality must be applied to past events given that those events continue to reproduce various forms of harm in the present.

In the mid-1990s Bernie Grant, a Member of Britain's Parliament hailing originally from former British colony Guyana, advocated for the return of the bronzes in British museums. Grant's campaign frequently used this argument of the impact on modern Edo culture as the basis for their claims. In a 1996 letter from Peter Murphy, an historical interpreter of Grant's, he argued, "This is not a matter of digging up old historical grudges but a living matter of importance to people today. The Benin treasures can only be seen as artefacts of aesthetic or anthropological interest in a museum here; in Benin they are part of a living culture with meanings and relevance which are denied in exile."[5] During that time the British Foreign Secretary, hearing of Grant's demands, "promised that if it could be shown that people were still suffering the ill-effects of slavery and colonization, then he would give his support to the campaign for reparations."[6] In response, Grant penned a letter to the Secretary detailing

[4] Bernie Grant Archives, BG/ARM/4/6 (2237). Letter from Peter Murphy to Bernie Grant, London, July 1994. Consulted on 12 June 2019.

[5] Bernie Grant Archives, BG/ARM/4/6 (2216). Letter from Peter Murphy to Bernie Grant, London, August 1994. Consulted on 12 June 2019.

[6] Bernie Grant Archives, BG/ARM/4/6 (2212). Report from Secretary to Bernie Grant, London, June 1994. Consulted on 12 June 2019.

how the Benin community continued to be affected by the invasion and looting. Grant, in essence, had been asked to prove how the absence of the bronzes to the individuals of Benin created a sense of cultural alienation and how their repatriation would be used by the community to restore those severed bonds.

In his letter to the Secretary, Grant emphasized the importance of the altars within the compounds of the oba's palace as evidence of the continuity of Benin cultural practice from the ancient world to the present. Prior to 1897, the oba's palace boasted thirteen compounds, each of which was dedicated to one of the thirteen prior obas of Benin and contained bronzes heads representing each oba. Historically and through the present, the altars have served as settings for important rites of divine kingship in Benin and were used to express continuity between the living oba and his predecessors. As Grant argued, "The Bronzes and Ivories are religious objects which play a part in the process of communication between the living and the dead and are therefore more than mere works of art or historical objects."[7] Far from being eroded once they were forcibly removed from Benin, the spiritual and cultural importance of the objects remains strong given that they continue to be part of Benin's living culture. The bronze heads of the oba that are today warehoused in galleries from the British Museum to the Harvard Art Museums are not simply testaments to violent histories of imperial conquest, but are evidence of disruptions in ancestral communication and cultural practice communities today are experiencing as a result of their estrangement from their patrimony.

Yet there have been efforts to undermine the temporal endurance of the Benin community's cultural practices by relegating their engagement with their artifacts to an historical time period. William St. Clair has noted that "These objects... were central to the beliefs and rituals of the court of Benin for hundreds of years," acknowledging the importance of the bronzes to the Edo in the past while failing to extend the acknowledgment of their uses to the present living community (St. Clair, 2006: 74). In addition, while many of the artifacts looted in 1897 were removed from the royal court, their influence extended far beyond that space, holding significance for the wider Edo community by linking each member of the society to their ancestors. Acknowledging both the temporal durability of these customs and rites and their significance for the larger body politic means also acknowledging the ways in which the original force of violence continues to be enacted upon the present-day Edo community through the non-consensual retention of their heritage in museums.

Dan Hicks likewise describes how the Benin bronzes in his collection at the Pitt Rivers reproduce the violence of their capture: "Each morning, this morning for instance, as these museums are unlocked, the alarms turned off, the lights switched on, the doors opened to the public, to tourists and to school groups, this loss and violence is repeated once again," Hicks recalls (Hicks, 2020: 218). He argues that their sustained presence in Western museums "continually instantiates that violence anew" as a way articulating the durability the initial harm of the colonial invasion in 1897 has across temporalities which arrives in the present in the form of a museum display. Hicks refers to the ten thousand Benin artifacts looted in 1897 as "ten thousand unfinished events" to express this sense that the violence under which they were looted remains an ongoing process which binds together the thirteenth-century Edo people who produced the objects to the nineteenth-century Edo people who witnessed the violence of their removal to the Edo people today who must live in the aftermath of their plunder. For the Benin bronzes in Western museums this means that the violence of 1897 is likewise unfinished given its effects in the present, with the only hope for the termination of the violence being the restitution of the artifacts.

Restitution is a process meant to deliver justice to a community that has experienced harm as a result of theft through the restoration of that which was forcibly removed. The Sarr Savoy report argues, "The act of restitution attempts to

[7] Bernie Grant Archives, BG/ARM/4/6 (2236). Report from Bernie Grant to Secretary, London, June 1994. Consulted on 12 June 2019.

put things back in order, into proper harmony. To openly speak of restitution is to speak of justice, or a re-balancing, recognition, of restoration and reparation" (Sarr & Savoy, 2001: 29). Yet Gregory Alexander contends that it is a chimera to believe that it is possible to restore matters to their original status when the harm was first perpetrated. "There is no true reversion to the status quo ante, for irreversible changes of circumstances have occurred since the time of initial appropriation," he asserts (Alexander, 2014: 893). Indeed, even if each of the ten thousand looted Benin bronzes was returned to the royal palace, the conditions under which they were returned would vastly differ from the original conditions of their removal in ways that would substantively impact their re-assimilation into Edo culture.

From a material perspective, many of the artifacts were severely damaged during the invasion, removal, and transfer to the West, and in the 125 years since their forcible relocation the passage of time has also changed their composition through natural processes of erosion. Preservation and conversation efforts aimed at countering this progression would necessarily also contribute to a material change in the objects themselves. In addition, while the artifacts remain a vital component of the living culture of Benin, the ways in which they are incorporated into the community's cultural practices will have inevitably shifted over the last century. The space that the artifacts would be repatriated to have also undergone significant change: the original royal palace was burned to the ground in 1897 and a new royal palace was built in its place, and construction is currently underway on the construction of the new Edo Museum of West African Art which will soon house repatriated Benin artifacts. Lastly, the political context in which the objects will be returned would also be considerably different—the region which then inhabited the Benin Kingdom and now Edo state has transitioned from a monarchy, to a British-run colonial territory, to an independent military junta controlled federal state, to a democratic state led by an elected governor. In short, restitution is a symbolic and material acknowledgement of harms perpetrated and an attempt to restore property to its rightful owners, but is by no means a process which intends to return the objects and the community to their original circumstance given these differences in materiality and spatial, cultural, and political contexts. As long as Benin culture, in all its rupture, transmutation and cosmopolitan development over several centuries endures and the community remains alienated from their material heritage, the past is the present and our moral judgement must reflect this reality.

2.1 The Future of the Past

"History, whether tragic or glorious, lies forever behind us. We stand on its shoulders and direct our gaze to what lies ahead," wrote the directors of the museums which hosted a 2008 multinational exhibition of Benin bronzes (Plankensteiner et al., 2007: 11). This sentiment that "what's past is past"—that because we cannot change the course of history we must focus our attention on the future—has largely become the predominant mode of thinking for retentionists and historicists alike. Yet the ability to simply move on from the past is but a privilege, given that some communities are not just haunted by the legacies of the past, but continue to relive the original moment of violence each day anew through unfinished acts, while the realities of this history are systemically whitewashed by museums.

Du Bois warns us of the dangers of reinterpreting and falsifying the past for the sake of present and future concerns: "We fell under the leadership of those who would compromise with truth in the past in order to make peace in the present and guide policy in the future" (1935, 727). While some traditionalists may argue that cultural heritage restitution represents a form of presentism given that as a practice it centers the concerns of contemporary generations, in this paper I have attempted to subvert this idea through a reframing of the temporality of historic memory and violence. Relegating history exclusively to the past compromises its truth. Yet confronting the present-ness and ongoing nature

of historic acts of violence invites a new relational ethic which opens up reparative possibilities for the future. What sets historians apart from historical sociologists is our insistence on not simply narrating the past, but reconstructing the historical record in a way that helps us make sense of the present social world and address present political concerns—exactly what Sweet admonishes historians for doing. Neither philosophers nor prophets, historical sociologists have the opportunity, if not responsibility, to bring the past forward by considering the moral substance of history, thereby enabling us to address the violence that those at the margins continue to experience in the contemporary moment and which we seek to disrupt in the future.

Nearly 90 years after the publication of *Black Reconstruction*, historians have been once again beset by the question of how to narrativize the place of slavery in American history following Sweet's critiques of black Atlantic historiography. Yet Du Bois shows us that the work of history, and social science more generally, is not a dichotomous struggle over positivist truth versus identity-based moral judgment, but should indeed contain the multitudes of both perspectives as well as the spaces in between: "As a student of science, I want to be fair, objective and judicial; to let no searing of the memory by intolerable insult and cruelty make me fail to sympathize with human frailties and contradiction, in the eternal paradox of good and evil" (1935, 725). Despite Du Bois's commitment to the idea of objectivity in the scientific study of the social world and its history, he insists on the presence of moral certainty across time and the importance of not abandoning our current values in our quest for unearthing past reality. Sociologists of morality, as such, may benefit from this approach to studying history as we work through renewed debates over moral truth and value freedom. Yet perhaps more importantly, such an engagement with Du Bois also reminds us that incorporating the work of theorists from the margins into our practice not only expands our analytic capabilities, but also our humanity in how we engage in this work.

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Social Justice as a Field

Michael Strand

Abstract

This chapter proposes a field theory approach to morality and offers analysis of contemporary social justice as a moral field. Unlike moral formalism or moral background theory, moral field theory provides the sociology of morality a way of theorizing morality as objective while avoiding the philosophical tangle of realism and relativism. Moral field theory puts the onus on the construction of objective possibilities for moral belief and action, as moral fields emerge from an accumulated history and are produced and reproduced by socially constructive (orienting) loops between expectations and chances. As a field, morality is not subjective, neither is it conventionally group-based or directed by solidarity concerns; this allows it to assume a variety of forms capable of creating their own distinctive common sense. Moral field theory provides a framework that can account for morality as sui generis and thus it offers an at least partial affirmation of the intuition that history ("the arc of the moral universe") can *bend* toward justice.

Keywords

Field theory · Morality · Social Justice · Probabilism · Objectivity

1 Introduction: The Peculiar History of Moral Reason

The philosopher Bernard Williams (1985) once called morality a "peculiar institution," a phrase he borrows from the historiography of enslavement. The analogy, if we are to believe Williams, is not as stretched as it might seem. Morality consists of "special obligations" that remain obligatory even when justification or deliberation can offer them no support. Morality implies that because you *ought* to do something you also *can* do it. Moral obligations do not change with our preferences not to be subject to them. "Morality makes people think," Williams continues, "that without its very special obligation, there is only inclination; without its utter voluntariness, there is only force; without its ultimately pure justice, there is no justice" (195–96). *Peculiarly*, then, morality makes us believe that if it were absent, the world would be a perilous place indeed: at best dictated by dumb luck, at worst by violent force. The "peculiar institution" of morality, then, is "a particular development of the ethical . . . it peculiarly emphasizes certain ethical notions rather than others, developing in particular a special notion of obligation" (Williams, 1985: 6).

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For a morality critic like Williams, morality appears distinctly impractical. The demands it places on us ask too much of us. Morality can ask us to invest in peculiar kinds of stakes and take unusual risks. It consists of a potential to exercise power even alone and presumably unentangled with anyone else—to *test* us in other words. Yet, the traits that Williams finds puzzling or even dangerous about morality are, arguably, the same traits that allow morality to have its greatest societal and historical influence. In his critique, Williams unwittingly previews many of the telltale signs of morality that assumes the form of a *field* (Strand, 2015).

The question of any field's social existence ultimately comes down to the existence of non-random orientations. A field is not purely objective, in which case it can exist without any meaningful orientation; yet, it is also not purely subjective, in which case it would be made possible entirely by that orientation. The modality of a field is, instead, located somewhere between objectivity and subjectivity, between pure necessity and pure contingency. In Pierre Bourdieu's (1973) terms, a field consists of "objective potentialities immediately contained in the present, things to be done or not to be done, to be said or not said, which, as opposed to the future as 'absolute possibility' … has an urgency and a claim to existence excluding all deliberation" (64; see also Martin, 2003: 7). Fields have been conceived as sites of "objective relations," but, as Bourdieu suggests here, this obscures a more dynamic understanding of sites of "*objective potentialities*" (a phrase he draws from Max Weber; see Strand & Lizardo, 2022). Social relations simply refer to the most probable options or position-takings in a field that arise from the contest, by mutually oriented actors, to define and shape the field's objective potential.[1]

So what kinds of potential does a field objectively create? In Bourdieu's version of field theory, the answer centers on the appearance of a new form of capital as a distinct way of creating and evaluating worth. In any form, capital will involve a history of dispossession and an imperative to grow and accumulate. It is no different with moral capital. It allows for the grounds of expertise and specialized status. Yet a moral field can arise whenever practices are made the subject of struggle and tested according to their "ultimate," inherent value, which implies that all fields contain moral capital alongside economic and cultural dimensions. Like cultural capital, moral capital can serve to generate subjectivities that appear inherently "moral." We can find glimpses of a similar idea in Weber as he claims that "good fortune wants to be 'legitimate' fortune" (Weber, 1978/1921–22: 491). The successful or fortunate are not satisfied with what they have. As they accumulate economic and/or cultural capital, they may still lack moral capital. They may still *need* to pass a moral test. The protestant ethic appears as a religious appropriation of moral capital: a kind of moral capital that tests for distinctions of good and evil on the basis of a specifically religious prediction. A specifically moral field, by contrast, requires an additional, reflexive orientation toward morality itself, which increases with each differentiation specific to the field. Like economic capital, moral capital must accumulate, in this case by accumulating more situations and histories within its evaluation, testing them by the field's increasingly distinct criteria. An accumulation of moral capital coincides with a moral field as it resolves more contradictions and comes to be increasingly organized by what we might call morality *sui generis* ("of its own kind"). Here we see the institution of increasingly selective tests, or a selective test environment, in which whatever is accumulated by the field carries its distinct imprimatur and the potential to be different than it is. If we want a recipe for how a "new value" comes into the world, or the birth of a distinct "source of normativity," we might very well start here. Morality is not dependent on a field, importantly, and neither does morality need

[1] Bourdieu (1983: 315) takes Michel Foucault to task on this point. Foucault's focus on "discourse" is relational but "refuses to consider the field of *prises the position* in itself and for itself" or the fact that relations are consequential only as they shape more or less probable action ("position-takings"). Only a field theory can explain that.

a field to be socially significant. Yet, when fielded, morality carries the same unique markers as we can see with all newly emancipated fields: new capital, a new elite, and a new range of social action.

Moral fields are empirically available (and recordable) as historically and relationally formed beliefs that tend to group together and concern some claim on what is right and good that we can see is independent of group-level conventions. These beliefs stand apart from morality rooted in sympathy for consociates or norms (Tomasello, 2016: 129) or historically developed conventions that arise from sharing a living space (or being in a wider social space) and the appearance of distinct institutional demands (Douglas 1986). A moral field, by contrast, finds morality in its own representation rather than in the thing represented. As a field, morality becomes "post-conventional" as modes of perception and judgement potentially available to anyone, moving fluidly between groups, situations, and contexts. A moral field, likewise, rests on dispossession: specifically, the dispossession of those who would form moral beliefs for reasons the field would not find adequate. Yet, this dispossession gives a moral field its potential to broadly orient social change just as it does the potential to create symbolic violence in the expectation that certain moral beliefs *should* be shared by all others, even though the same conditions for believing are not universally accessible. Those who should believe will perceive barriers when instead of morality they find delegates speaking on its behalf, who may appear (socially, spatially, culturally) distant from their concerns, and who may refuse to acknowledge those concerns.

Rather than perform a functionary role, then, like group cohesion or restitution and repair, fielded morality creates moral importance and worth *sui generis* as more an end in itself as opposed to a means. As morality sui generis, a fielded morality must attempt something ambitious: namely, access to a universalist cognition, to formulate adequate reasons to believe that are, in principle at least, affected by nothing that would make them prohibitive for anyone trying to conceive them for themselves. This creates an occupational role for theorists and a capital stake in theory itself, the practical logic of the competition being one of "criss-crossing censorship" to reach purportedly purer, less corrupted sources of belief and to establish an orthodoxy on these grounds (Bourdieu, 1991).

Efforts to dictate the direction of a moral field typically occurs in these ways among an elite, whose attempts to define moral belief are tested by factors that impact the whole field. Further from the center of the field, morality sui generis mostly requires repetition and recurrence (not reinvention), which often means the field is condensed at this periphery to just a few practical tests, judgments, or phrases. These ways of asserting distinction though the initiation of tests, or "critical moments" of potential transformation, demonstrate the possibilities of a field and how they stand out against the implementation of other, competing possibilities (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006: 136ff). For instance, we can evaluate a situation according to a social justice criteria like "representation" linked to race, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation, as opposed to a purely economic criteria, like profit potential.

When social actors can expect their moral judgment and test (voiced, for instance, as a moral denunciation, project, or proposal) will find corresponding expectations in others, we can identify a *constructing loop*. This is what maintains the field's objective potential. The range of this loop might be bigger or smaller, its universe more or less diverse, and for those oriented to a moral field, its possibilities are both constraining and enabling. Those possibilities are objective, however, and do not rise or fall on subjective inputs like consensus or agreement. This is why an orientation to the field can mimic rule-following. While they could apply everywhere, moral fields are subject to boundary-making, especially nation-state borders. Potentially unlimited, moral beliefs can appear relative to the spatial and institutional range in which the field can command an orientation.

Like any field, moral fields create divisions of interest and importance through a condition of relative autonomy, a mark of distinction in comparison specifically with the moral conventions of

groups. Justice, for instance, may coincide entirely with the interests of a ruling class (however defined), yet a relatively autonomous social justice field will mediate those judgments, making it possible to contradict a ruling class interest (Krause, 2018a). With greater relative autonomy, moral fields can legitimize action as more distinctively *in the name of* morality in contrast to, say, profit, political power, knowledge, or technical efficiency (etc.). Changes in a moral field can ramify and affect all social action that it mediates.

On these grounds, moral field theory is distinguishable not only from institutionalism but from two contemporary competitors in the sociology of morality—moral formalism and moral background theory—and their commitments to more subjectivist and objectivist analysis (respectively). Moral formalism, for example, also finds all social situations and conditions to be potentially morally significant, particularly if as tests of the integrity of an actor's "intersituational identity." Moral significance, in this case, is apparent *subjectively* (Tavory, 2011). A moral field will reduce the chances a "moral situation" needs to be experienced subjectively *as* moral by giving situations an objective moral significance, with the capacity to make morality matter regardless of whether it is significant on any subjectively-defined terms.

Meanwhile, a moral field might be analytically specified as a "moral background" (Abend, 2014) of taken-for-granted precepts, concepts, and frameworks that construct a "public moral normativity" in a given time and place. In contrast to a field approach, however, moral background theory attempts to conceptualize a kind of conventional morality, the unreflexive possession of a group, typically at the scale of both large and diffuse populations. This contrasts with the post-conventional emphasis of a moral field, which segments morality not by group but rather by range of expectation (this is what makes moral fields "abstract"). A moral field is therefore less static and *objectivist* than a moral background, as a field accounts for the production of moral belief in a kind of contested foreground, making "the undiscussed" more noticeable. Moral fields could arise within larger moral backgrounds; we might also hypothesize that moral backgrounds are extinct moral fields, their debates long since passed, leaving only a congealed outcome.

Like these approaches in the sociology of morality, moral field theory is constructionist rather than normative: it does not argue what morality should be or make recommendations about how moral belief should be made (*pace* a "public sphere" argument; Habermas, 1988/1962). Yet, this does not mean that a field theory advocates moral relativism or realism. A realist holds that moral progress can occur by countering illusions of superstition, prejudice, and unquestioned custom in order to be made *true* (or false) by something in the world (or by a condition of absolute freedom). A relativist holds that moral beliefs are of necessarily limited range: relative to the practices and sociocultural circumstances of believers. We cannot, for example, confidently claim universal morality or immorality because we cannot identify sufficient uniformity in practices. These are broad simplifications to be sure, but a field approach stands apart from both relativism and realism and tries to clear the philosophical tangle by shifting the debate toward moral objectivity and conceptualizing moral objectivity as an *empirical* question. Morality is relative to a field's possibilities, yet those possibilities have an objective status with a potential not limited by preferred inputs like practices or truth.

For Durkheim (1984/1893), a moral order that doubles as social order must generate sufficient amounts of solidarity. A moral field is not bound by the same requirement, and so it has bearing on social change that happens potentially *because* of morality rather than something that morality secondarily fulfills, like social solidarity (Cohen, 1997). That fielded morality can transcend group segmentations and immediate solidarity needs is evidenced by the many forms (or topics) the objective possibilities of a field can assume and for persons to become *interested* in, i.e. morality as philosophy, state policy, esthetic or poetic expression, means of payment, knowledge claims, careers, occupations, (etc.). A field can initiate social change, then, through the broad

diffusion of its distinct possibilities, specifically by constructing more and more chances to be moral, to be perceived as moral, and to do moral action.

In what follows, I will argue that social justice is a moral field. I sketch the structure of the field and trace a genealogy of social justice around the three key positions of redistribution, representation, and recognition. The overall task is to explain "the way [a] competence for justice that can be attested in [a] society has taken shape," focused primarily on the contemporary USA (Boltanski, 2012: 39). As a method, field theory analyzes this competence by showing how positions in the field, recognizable for those seeking to realize specific interests in or through the field, are not eternal or inevitable but arise from an accumulated history.

From the perspective of field theory, social justice is distinguishable from both legal and divine justice and humanitarianism. Social justice also remains in large part bound by nation-state borders despite its global potential (Fraser, 2008). Mediation by the field makes an orientation to a situation, a social interaction, an object, a form of suffering, a statistic, a social relation (etc.) as *unjust* more or less likely and expected, thus expanding or contracting objective possibilities for moral action. Forms of judgment, modes of denunciation, proposed solutions, and moral projects, all become objectively probable or improbable. The field is the site of contests over this objective potential and thus over the moral capital of social justice: what it means, where it applies, and what can be expected of it.

2 Genesis of the Field

To trace the genesis of a social justice field is to write morality as history ("genealogy") by following resonant bits of *nomos ("custom")* as they form over time to shape the recognizable novelty and distinction of social justice. The challenge is to do this without making social justice static and unchangeable, as if in the future it will not be different. To give morality history is to orient toward and interpret the same objective possibility that constitutes it. The task is internal to the project. There is no "power of consecration" for collective beliefs outside of the cultural form itself. A genealogy cannot solidify what it describes, and sacrifice its dynamism, because it remains a possibility, a real potential. For the genealogy of social justice, differentiation has had to occur along two separate fronts: from religion and from law. The presence of social justice in a religious field (especially in a Catholic tradition) is distinctive from its presence as a field of its own. Since the medieval decline of "ordeals" (e.g., trial by water, fire, combat), a legal field obtained a monopoly on justice, featuring codified and procedural applications by experts and assigning responsibility to criminal acts (Foucault, 1971–72/2019; Kamali, 2019). A legal field often dictates how "valid" denunciations of injustice are made, and more generally how individuals are interpellated as de facto subjects of justice.

Seventeenth century jurists like Pufendorf and Grotius had been accused of claiming that law was not founded on divinity but instead on an ambiguous need for "sociality." Furthermore (and contra Hobbes), the goal of law was to preserve and enhance "sociality" rather than self-preservation (Moyn, 2010: chap. 1). All were participants in settling justice following the catastrophic Thirty Years War in which a fragmentation of justice for Catholics and Protestants precipitated the dissolution of an "abstract machinery for justice" and meant there "was no obvious alternative to violence" (Sutherland, 1992: 603; Wilson, 2009: 216). Writing over a hundred years after the war, William Blackstone (1765–1770/1916: 1492–93) would specify "social justice" as both participant in law but irreducible to it, reflecting the English legal tradition of "equity" as justice *without* law and with a marked absence of divine flavor when "society" prevails instead.

If the Westphalian system of states augured in a period of relative stasis following the collapse of divinely rooted law, specifically by trading it for a territorial coding, this returned in the context of "the Revolutionary Atlantic," in which social justice became increasingly distinct from religion

and law in its contest with *ancien regimes*. Saint-Just proposed "revolutionary justice" in the trial of King Louis XVI at the height of the French Revolution (Walzer, 1993), while a little while later the free Black man José Antonio Aponte was tried by a colonial judiciary for planning rebellions of enslaved people. In his own defense, Aponte put forward the claim that the colonial judiciary in Cuba no longer appropriated justice when he himself embodied "historic" justice (Childs, 2006). "Total revolution" more generally would appeal to the condemnation of social institutions, rather than inherent evil, as the main impediment to the full realization of human freedom, envisioning a total transformation of the "sub-political sphere of social interaction" including, but not limited to, political revolution (Yack, 1986: 10). The resulting controversy would inspire a reactionary fascination with tradition and generate partisan self-descriptions, in some sense remaining in place to the present day, distinguishable most of all by the presence or absence of *critique* (Boltanski, 2002).

The criticism that religion could not relieve worldly suffering but serve instead as, in Marx's (1970/1843) words, "a haven from a heartless world" would come to mark a test of religion that would shape social justice as a secular moral capital. So too would the young Marx's (1978/1843, 63) articulation, and repurposing of a phrase from the Abbé Sieyès *What is the Third Estate?*, of a revolutionary agent that can legitimately claim "I am nothing but I should be everything" serve as a touchstone for theoretical and practical efforts at accumulating moral capital by centering specific groups (the Combahee River Collective would later repurpose the phrase in a still different iteration). In this sense, Marx hints at two materializations of justice from the period following the Atlantic revolts that further distinguish social justice from divine and legal justice. First, divine justice played a role in anti-slavery campaigns, as evidenced by a figure like John Brown, but just as easily it was used to support slavery's continuation (Blackburn, 1990). The presence of anti-slavery law secured a denunciation of slavery as objectively possible, but the law could not suppress slavery unilaterally (Du Bois, 1998/1935; Williams, 1994/1944). Both legal and religious justice, thus, could be tried by social justice as irreducible, appearing increasingly *distinct* in its revelation of the limited, contradictory, and hypocritical promises of both law and religion. Second, the workhouse test, as documented by Polanyi (2001: 86–87), attempted to secure an objective judgment on whether poverty was just, giving it a primarily *moral*, as opposed to religious or legal, classification.

The nineteenth century iteration of social justice would assume a class focus, based on the appropriation of the equity spirit, a materialist philosophy, and total revolution by the nineteenth century socialism (Stedman Jones, 2004). This would produce an extensive vocabulary of exploitation, class, poverty, and inequality in its particular expiation of white male workers. Welfare states of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries marked a further materialization of the field in the form of protections against economic tests that made old age, unemployment, and sickness into "unjust outcomes" (Beveridge, 1942: 28). The language of social justice during this period revolved around "relations between classes" and, more generally, of the "social question." A labor-centric version of social justice in this mold is found in the International Labor Organization's 1944 Constitution, and its argument that "lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice" (Supiot, 2012: 148).

By the post-war period, then, social justice had been configured around *redistribution*, as materialized and institutionalized by welfare states (and actually existing socialisms), with political parties, public policies, and occupations structured accordingly. But the racial exclusions of the "affirmative" welfare programs that appeared in the wake of World War II, particularly in the USA (Katznelson, 2005), and embedded in the distinction given to wage-labor, the "white male breadwinner," and the Westphalian state, would generate a reorganization of the field's potential that would materialize in Civil Rights, the New Left, and further beyond.

The first known appearance of "affirmative action" comes in the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, where it was designed to

recompense union members who had been discriminated against by employers, though similar engagement along "race-conscious" lines extend back to the Freedmen's Bureau Acts as part of Reconstruction following the US Civil War, and their premature end after 1877 (Du Bois, 1998/1935: chap. 14; Jones, 1993: 349). When the Kennedy administration codified affirmative action in 1961, this retained a "color-blind" orientation, as did the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and later executive orders by the Johnson administration (Skrentny, 1996: 7).

In one of the ironies of the social justice field, Richard Nixon would use affirmative action to scramble left and right constituencies by favoring antidiscriminationism focused on racial proportionality, marking a consequential political molding of the social justice field and *representation* as a type of moral capital. The so-called Philadelphia Plan "[required] that federally aided construction contractors submit a hiring schedule that within five years would produce a workforce that approximated the minority demographics of the metropolitan region." The plan appealed to Nixon's Machiavellian position-taking in the American political field, as he sought to "drive a wedge between two traditional Democratic constituencies, organized labor and Black civil rights" (Graham, 1996: 95–96; see also Skrentny, 1996: chap. 7). The Nixon Administration would also expand affirmative action policy to include gender alongside the racial categories specified in the 1970 order. In all cases, the Labor Department made proportionality the test to prove compliance with affirmative action (Anderson, 2004: 133ff).

Reduced enforcement with the Reagan administration meant that corporate "diversity management" has since enacted affirmative action by devising various proofs of compliance (Dobbin & Kavlev, 2021). Meanwhile, the consequential *Bakke vs. California* US Supreme Court decision in 1978 gave "diversity" its prevalent meaning in university settings, leaving admission offices in an equivalent position (Berrey, 2014). Diversity, however, is critiqued from a position-taking that recoups the original link between affirmative action and structural change: "By giving members of that subordinated group a greater share of the prized positions of society, we improve the relative position of that group and, in so doing, make a small but determined contribution to eliminating the caste structure. The social ordering of racial groups is altered" (Fiss, 1997: 37). This presents a test to the premise of equal opportunity tied to redistribution and the "white male breadwinner" as most likely to translate the socially instituted potentials of the field. By shifting away from a "white-centering diversity logic" (Mayorga, 2019), additional position-takings in the field avoid a hegemony critique of the legal field, reforging a connection despite earlier arguments in the social justice field that legal forms are corruptible through their connection to "carcerality" (Bernstein, 2017).

Second-wave feminism (beginning in the early 1970s) is the most critical position-taking in the social justice field over the last 50 years, because it objectively changes the possibilities that constitute the field and, therefore, the prevailing expectations of social action oriented to social justice (Fraser, 2008). Exemplary is the Combahee River Collective statement of 1977 and its emphasis on specific oppressions embodied by Black women: "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessarily be the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (1978: 22–23). Elizabeth Armstrong (2002), meanwhile, documents competing logics in "gay and lesbian movements" in San Francisco between interest, redistribution, and identity, with the latter becoming more prominent after 1972. This did not signify a newfound interest in social justice. It signified a change to the field highlighted by second-wave feminism and epitomized in key events like Stonewall, "1968," and the emergence of nationalist and identity-oriented movements among Indigenous groups and peoples of color that presented modes of social injustice essentially unrecognizable to the field that had been established up to this point. The cumulative effect would be to render the social justice field *more* autonomous, or freed from outside influences, after its test of society had been politically appropriated and

given the comparatively narrow form as social welfare policy and antidiscriminationism.

By breaking with an antidiscriminationist focus, intersectionality would spearhead a further shift as theoretical tool that made moral capital, and more generally what social justice means, focus on the *recognition* of difference. The legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991; see also Butler, 2000) critiqued antidiscriminationism (and antiracist and feminist discourses) for ignoring discriminations that appear specifically at the intersection of "Black" and "woman." More generally, Crenshaw (1991: 1273) identifies a schism in the moral and political articulation of the claims "I am Black" and "I am a person who happens to be Black."" The dismissal of an imposed category, even if rooted in historic injury (Brown, 1993), as "contingent, circumstantial and nondeterminant" now marks a point of tension in the field, revolving around the question of recognition, not of nominal identities but of social communities (Collins, 2010). The sui generis moral appeal is for "policies that make members of disadvantaged groups comparatively more 'worthy' to their constituents in an effort to compensate for the lesser consideration they receive from the society at large or to curb the implicit 'privilege' still enjoyed by socially dominant groups" (Fourcade, 2016: 181).

The relative prevalence of positions in the field cannot be removed from material factors that serve to condition their objective possibility and the likelihood of result should a position be taken in the denunciation of injustice. The Ford Foundation shaped the material circumstances of both Black studies and Women's studies in the American university context during the post-Civil Rights era (Chamberlain & Bernstein, 1992; Rojas, 2007). Meanwhile, the growing link from the 1960s to present between social justice, academia and the US Democratic Party has further institutionalized relationships between social justice prerogatives and the codes of bureaucracy and political party (Watkins, 2018: 24).

Representation, *recognition*, and *redistribution* thus become major points of symbolic struggle as position-takings afforded by the field and its post-sixties possibilities. Given the role of theory in the field, differences between them can be marked by points of fracture that arise when we transform these positions into different conceptions of just social order: (1) unlike redistribution, representation and recognition are suspicious of commensuration and do not seek to eliminate an identity, (2) recognition can tend toward an open grounds of recognizable difference, while representation can tend to revolve around identity categories, often via mediation by "state categories" (Monk, 2022); (3) this provokes the dilemma of whether, as a question of moral capital, class difference should be recognized or represented in the same manner as other difference (racial, gender, sexual orientation). In the background for each of these points is (4) the question of whether all injustice is a mode of class injustice, or more generally how class injustice, as a historical marker in the field given its anticapitalist precedent, should be understood in relation to injustice in more dimensions. A present tension, inherited from this history, asks whether enacting justice without a redistributive aspect (whether along class lines or otherwise) can still constitute social justice (Reed, 2020).

3 Structure of the Field

This accumulated history precedes social action oriented to the field. Even without knowledge of it, any specific interest in social justice will mobilize this entire history in order to act, denounce, propose, argue, or express their concern and care about the specific suffering the field accumulates and claims to address. But what are those specific interests? And what, more specifically, is the structure of the social justice field at present?

Social justice is not criminal justice, and neither is it humanitarianism or human rights. It constitutes different objective possibilities and is "saturated" by a different history (Martin, 2003). Disparity, for example, becomes a key indicator for social justice, because it stabilizes what the field has historically prepared us to recognize. This makes it possible to demarcate a social justice issue as distinct from a criminal justice

issue (and make criminal justice a social justice issue). The latter only finds individuals as part of its trials, as it likewise trades in the rubric of responsibility (Lasagnerie, 2018). Social justice puts a far larger subject matter on trial (particularly policing itself), on the scale of groups, histories, and entire social orders. That it involves tests at all, and therefore allows for uncertainty of worth and responsibility, makes social justice different from humanitarianism, which tends to, instead, maintain basic human worth without uncertainty and without recognizing social difference, including the difference of nation-state borders (Dromi, 2020).

At present, social justice tends to scale nationally, making it like criminal justice but unlike humanitarianism's global scale. Despite persistent efforts to scale globally, social justice depends on specific categories that operate most effectively within nation-state boundaries (as opposed to human rights). The field is tightly linked to sovereign power and the political field, as capital in the field tends to correlate with those positions that can secure political authorization and transfer their position into policy or ally with a position-taking in a nationally bound political field in competitions over constituencies. Capital in the social justice field is largely applied and practical, even while it remains firmly linked to theory and social science. The lack of effective application mediums that scale globally alter its composition through an arbitrary nationalism, even if position-takings in the field have global potential. By contrast, humanitarianism dominates the global space in large part because of a practical apparatus (NGOs) that transcends local political fields (Krause, 2018b).

The social justice field lacks the formalization (at least so far) and proceduralism of the legal field. Yet with more degree-granting programs in "social justice" at US universities, social justice is increasingly organized around its own codes, rules, and terminologies, providing the grounds for a specialized expertise. Institutional recognition yields a formalized curriculum, knowledge specialization, and a credentialing system. The development and expansion of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) offices as part of educational institutions (Kwak et al., 2018), and diversity management and human resource departments in corporations provides additional recognition, job markets, and an institutional venue from which social justice can be formalized, requiring new experts to manage, teach, consult, and speak for it. Importantly, such departments are often separate from legal departments and do not require a legal credentialization, even though, in the US university context, they operate under the auspices of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) whose jurisdiction is monopolized by the legal field. Nevertheless, particularly in the non-profit sector, and even in the humanitarian sector (with organizations like CARE), "social justice jobs" find increasing designation as such.

Only because capital, or a control on the future, has accumulated do authorities develop who can exercise power over the capital that others claim to have. Redistribution, representation, and recognition refer to the different varieties of moral capital available in the field that can be converted into denunciations, moral projects, and even occupations (Dahl et al., 2004; Fraser, 2008). Each position features a criticism of the other, along with refracting the meaning of key moral categories of liberal discourse, like "merit" and "desert." They are also linked to categories like "white supremacy," "heteronormativity," and "decolonization," of both theoretical and political resonance, that introduce tests of objects (syllabi, clothing, technology) and habits (dress codes, interaction styles, modes of speech). Part of their conceptual network encompasses social scientific categories like "structure," "culture," and "identity." More generally, this network finds extension in statistics and the measurement of probabilities, as an objective referent, often used for demonstrative purposes to show disparities. Social structure and social identity, which mediation by the field has since come to mark, are brought within social justice's distinct axiology (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). This signifies a dual position-taking in a political field, but one prepared and motivated by prior extensions of justice. Structure and identity do not remain of silent appraisal; in becoming

extensions of justice they become anything but chance. We therefore cannot have a lack of scruple about them, which invites a wider gaze onto socializing work in venues (like education) that transmit these appraisals in ways that potentially restitute existing social relations, engaging in an explicit or more often implicit devaluation of them.

All these links condense into the moral, social-scientific, and juridical ideals of social justice as found in claimsmaking, issue-generation and strategy. But more than "relatively autonomous" categories or cultural assumptions, they are probable tokens of resonance within the "peculiar doxa" (common sense) of the social justice field, based on learning its objective possibilities and honing expectations accordingly (Mayrl, 2013: 304). In the proliferation of "justices" (e.g., racial justice, gender justice, queer justice, reproductive justice, environmental justice), language and categories made available by the field's accumulated history, and marked by the social position of its users, find an expanding universe of possibilities. The familiarity of this should not now obscure how these positions emerged as the initial taking of *improbable* positions, in particular waged against what had become a hierarchized corps, who controlled both the means and meaning of social justice, in post-war welfare states.

4 Moral Agency in the Field

Social justice tries to situate a moral judgment in what are otherwise distributions and arrangements that, in relation to the field, are ordered by different expectations. Social justice retains its own moral immanence in such situations. Its potentials are its own even if this does not make them effective on its own. Spaces become contested and counter-hegemonic when they must hold together through mediation by the field, changing the rules and consensus that prevails, of "social contracts" made and forgotten, whose invisibility (and seeming inviolability) simply prevents orders from breaking down. Social justice changes expectations by recasting the "benign," "neutral," or purely "practical" toward skewed probabilities, persistent disparities, and social inequities.

Despite many accommodations made by the field, moral agents can always make a judgment; they can denunciate this or that situation as unjust and find matching expectations in others. Who does the denunciation matters in relation to the field's objective possibilities, in addition to what they denunciate and how. Each element of the sequence, each point of focus and tactic, can change, though the change is not random. The *who*, *what*, and *how* of typical denunciations change as the factors that dictate their objective possibility change. So too does the *why* of a denunciation, which arises as an answer to the question: what project does it serve within the field?

A denunciation can be a call to attention, a plea, an insistence, a performance, and a demand for action. The denunciation of injustice must have illocutionary effects to draw its possibility into existence (Houston & Pulido, 2002). The field makes it likely that denunciations will work by anticipating the expectations of others. The loop can sustain a given mode of denunciation, even for many years. It is not guaranteed to occur or stick around, however, and neither is the denunciation entirely random, a total gamble, of which nothing can be expected. Rather, the field, and its myriad constituting elements, signal only the objective existence of the possibility or potential that judging this or that to be unjust will find matching expectations in public.

Statistics are commonly used for the purposes of denunciation, to reveal disparities in outcomes and how these could not have happened by chance. Filmmaking and photography, particularly with a documentary focus but not limited to this, appeal to evidence of sight and sound to deliver categories of vision and division from the field. Brought into the field, these tools are given new significance. Social scientific concepts like culture, identity, and structure are likewise applied to reform the meaning of justice, creating new tests and projected arrangements, new standards with which to denunciate and recommend. Such applications are not tests of social theory, as in a standard social science model,

but create new trials with which to assign responsibility, construct moral scales and definitions of worth, and representations of a social order as an unjustifiable moral order.

This logic of trial-making can also serve as a point of symbolic competition in a social justice field. What activists sometimes decry as "Oppression Olympics" indicates a contest of more or less "important" issues and identities, which in turn disputes the meaning of social justice itself (Davis & Martinez, 1998: 298). Universalization can occur as a contest of identities most subject to injustice, most marginalized, most excluded, or whose "sufferings are universal" in Marx's words. Crenshaw (1989: 167) makes an analogous point referencing the nineteenth century Black scholar-activist Julia Cooper: "If ... efforts instead began with addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged and with restructuring and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are singularly disadvantaged would also benefit . . . The goal of this activity should be to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups for whom it can be said: 'When they enter, we all enter.'"

The major agents in the social justice field include *the theorist*, *the activist,* and *the organizer*. A theorist is not typically situated only within the social justice field. They trade the capital available here to take positions in other fields and also transfer field-specific capital from other fields into the social justice field. This can also involve a dual reference between fields outside of social justice and their concerns (*illusio*) and those that mark the social justice field. For instance, in the call for prison and policing abolition, prominent theorists participate simultaneously in the social justice field and in different knowledge fields, respectively (law, geography, Women's and Gender Studies, Black Studies), the dual reference lending a distinct quality to their work (Alexander, 2006; Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2017). As in the legal field, theorists provide upstream legitimacy to actions and beliefs downstream that may seem arbitrary without this symbolic legitimacy. Competition among theorists matters more directly in the social justice field than it does in a legal field, however, which also means the objective possibility of social justice can acquire a theoretical aspect that can stand noticeably in contrast to unthought practical assumptions. This is evident in broad diffusions of linguistic capital, words to use (e.g., preferred pronouns, identity categories, terms and acronyms of recognition and alliance), how and when to use them, often not based on being taught explicit rules (which would mimic the study of law) but as tacitly acquired expectations and anticipations. Objective possibilities attach to these words as what we might call nomadic instruments of the field with the potential to be transposed across situations.

Importantly, this division of labor means that whether actions are outward- or inward-facing in relation to the field, specific judgments can be *separated* from the persons making them, rendering them less vulnerable to the arbitrariness that would come if those judgments were merely subjective, or treated as unfielded moral interpretations. The imprimatur of theory can depersonalize the judgment and action in not being directly attributable to an individual but more like the actualization of an objective potential. Unlike a juridical logic, social justice does not typically take individuals as a priori. More typically, social justice discourse involves second-order categories, including those (race, gender, class, sexual orientation) given approval by state categorization (Monk, 2022) and those reflecting designations more specific to the field (often to capture a specific state of minoritization and/or marginalization). These are not otherworldly in the manner of religious classification (e.g., "the saved" versus "the damned" as different salvation potentials and after-life fates). The social justice field uses moral classifications, instead, to approach the world from a stance of fact-making: tracking commonalities, patterns, tensions, and more specifically disparities, as demonstrable on the grounds of actuality.

An *activist* often has facility with field-derived terminologies and strategies, of distinctions and differences, and forms of rebuttal, thus turning theory into practice. Their modes of action generally include a social movement repertoire. Activists tend to be local in a territorial sense,

and locally responsive to social justice issues of potential global reach. Their occupation is typically not in a social justice career. Nevertheless, a social justice field can inspire a full commitment, such that it motivates a transformative lifestyle, with moral tests shaping the potential of many actions and decisions. This commitment passes a logic of trial by demonstrating concern about social issues while overcoming suspicion about the *arbitrariness* of one's concern, combining this with an aversion to pure sentiment as might be connoted by charity. As the social justice field became more expert in its materialization as the welfare state, the post-sixties pivot challenged its production of knowledge (Agar, 2008). In a more contemporary sense, then, "bad faith" can prevail among activists around suspicion about commitment, particularly when knowledge of issues is remote and pedagogical (*about* the issue) for some, while it is directly gained through lived experience, for others.

The *organizer* serves as the most direct link between the social justice field and social movements as a fundamental, extra-legal and political tool at the disposal of the field's projects. Organizers are involved in changing, adapting, and applying social movement repertoires in ways that align with field-oriented categorizations, which are themselves distillations of theoretical knowledge. This often involves phrases (e.g., "Black Lives Matter") that center a specific category and enable inclusion or universalization on the basis of that category. Thus, the organizer occupies a position between theorist and activist, operates on broader territorial scales than the activist, can have an occupational involvement in the field, and negotiates between theory and practice as a tension inherited from the history of the field and its structure (Trudeau, 2021).

The focus of organizers centers on devising strategies that often galvanize around specific events, and prove to be *event-making*, particularly to symbolically center a category of person and an associated injustice. When looped into media fields, and the broader attention economy, particularly on the user-generated content platforms of social media, this can propel events quickly ("virally") into networked consciousness, though in this form social justice does not present itself as ideological in the commonly understood sense (Carney, 2016; Tufecki, 2017). Neither, however, is it (or these tactics) prefigurative.

The tension of theory and practice common to social justice praxis is presented here as a structural tension between theorists, activists and organizers, which translates further into other tensions in the relations between these three social justice agents. As the organizer makes events, tensions may arise with activists in the transformation of the particular and local (unfolding in tragic circumstances) into a social justice issue. When theorists shape field potentials more, a hermeneutics of suspicion or a sense of vulnerability, particularly about knowledge and its sources, can become a principal mechanism for accumulating moral capital. When organizers have precedence in the field, organization and institution-building occurs, often coinciding with the creation of occupational and career stakes in the field, typically involved with altering existing organizational forms as found in corporations or educational institutions. When activists have more prominence, the protest and all its attendant vulnerabilities and embodied risks become the prevailing route to the field's capital.

5 Conclusion

To tell whether morality is a field, "peculiarity" might be a good metric, as reflected in the distinct effects of which Williams told us at the start. This corresponds to a moral field's distinct *test*. The division of mental and manual labor remains integral to the structure of social justice as a field, just as it does any field. Hence, the form social justice takes varies for social actors depending on their relation to its inner limits. The theorist stands in firmest grasp of explicit codes, as the most prevalent of these (representation, recognition, redistribution) correspond to positions in the field and their distinctive tests. The activist and organizer are more distantly situated from the center. For

them, the field is more like a mediator than an intermediary, as they engage in application, citation, and event-making. These different types of moral agency find themselves arrayed around the objective possibility of social justice; alongside them, social justice jobs might indicate a growing solidification of the field in its present configuration. That configuration features a shared orientation toward the objective possibility of a world where all can participate and none will suffer; a world free of inequalities and inequities. Such orientations mediate moral concerns that the field does not create, as if they never appeared before, but gives expression to, brings recognition of, and makes meaningful. The field, as a site of specialized production and circulation, dispossesses "laypersons of the instruments of symbolic production" (Bourdieu, 1979: 81) to express those concerns. But therein lies its power, its history and world-making capacity.

Social justice affects social change not primarily as a symbolic system of meaning or as the illocutionary force of a performance, but as all fields do: by creating a space of objective chances or potentials that shape expectations and, distinctively, can turn action into *social* action by giving it a significance recognizable to others as the achievement of specific interests, with certain justifiable motivations, as part of a project that has duration over time. Suppose we agree with philosophers like Cohen (1997) that the injustice of human enslavement explains its demise in specific cases, and more generally, the very fact that enslavement is immoral accounts for the instability of all social formations that depend on it (see also Moore, 1978). This is only a potential, however, not a guarantee. Perhaps we can imagine many situations that bear an inherent immorality, but may not be made a site of struggle, with a particular interest in that, capable of generating its own moral capital, as in a field, or perhaps they are, but it is not a moral field. Moral field theory can bring attention to these variations, which in the sociology of morality, we might call a mid-range, mesolevel, and middling term kind of focus.

The social justice field does not emerge as "moral development" (Habermas, 1979), as part of history only as a kind of irreversible forward momentum, of stages and progress we might say, which raises an important point. I have suggested that a social justice field is capable of bending "the arc of the moral university" or "history" toward justice, but what does this mean? I want to take the Reverend Theodore Parker (who uttered words along these lines in 1852) and Martin Luther King Jr (who famously restated them) literally: history would otherwise go along an its inscrutable and brutal course, and the events that contain a moral potential do not contain morality sui generis (as we must be place there). The potential force of a field (a "vector" in classical field theory; Martin, 2003) can *bend* this history. We can be very material about this claim. A social justice field bends history by accumulating events and giving them a direction, by allowing history to be affected by an orientation, specifically by arranging history around an objective possibility, making history about that objective possibility and inspiring an accumulation of moral capital. The irony is that the field itself appears as the result of events, rather than by design, that draw attention to justice in this particular mold, as a site of various forms of contest, including a reflexive contest over the symbolic power of its meaning. Williams calls this a "vindicatory genealogy," which recovers its object as history but does not reconstitute it as contingent and disputable. To model social justice, as I have attempted here, as a field is not to render it in such a way as to embolden its enemies, or draw suspicion about it as a particular product of history. It is to vindicate its existence, *keep* it existing and existing better. Our orientations to social justice, however they are expressed, are not our own. And we could not have those orientations should we have to rely on established powers like the economically wealthy, the religiously justified, and the politically powerful, as opposed to a moral field. As Douglas (1986: 124) puts it, questions of justice cannot be answered by "private ratiocination," but neither are they ever answered inside a power vacuum. Within a field, the answers are mediated by what will probably meet the approval of, or at least be reflected in, the collective contest over the meaning of social justice,

particularly among those with the most worth according to the field. To argue for moral field theory, we cannot say that resonance—of claims, denunciations, proposals—is a matter of truth or problem-solving. When something is fielded, its resonance is a looping expectation: the chances created by the field meet with expected chances (anticipation, prediction). Fraser (2008) calls out the potential for hegemony in the social justice field; as it lends moral capital to some injustice, it renders other injustice silent by reducing its chances of being symbolic. Using this analysis to assist such a counter-hegemonic strategy is how moral field theory can justify itself in terms conducive to the field.

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Part VIII

Class, Inequality, and Morality

What Sort of Social Inequality Matters for Democracy? Relations and Distributions

Zachary R. Wehrwein and Christopher Winship

Abstract

Although sociologists and political philosophers have shared intellectual agendas, rarely do the insights of the two fields intersect. Sociologists develop empirical explanations of social inequalities, but few develop explicit social theories of how to ameliorate those injustices. Philosophers, especially those in the tradition of contemporary political liberalism, develop theories of distributional injustices, but often without an accompanying theory of the society, as if one could be an architect without considering any insights from civil engineering. In this paper, we exegete a political philosophical tradition ("relational egalitarianism") and a social theoretical tradition ("relational sociology"). These two traditions provide a common intellectual terrain for sociologists and political theorists as each tradition recognizes the importance of non-hierarchical social relationships for just democratic societies. Through two brief case studies (one of a failed unionization campaign and the other a successful policing program), we show why theories of justice are consequential for empirical investigations and why theories of society are both necessary to develop prescriptions for just social structures.

Keywords

Egalitarianism · Relational sociology · Democracy · Pragmatism · Inequalit

1 Introduction

Nearly half a century ago, James Coleman lamented in the *American Journal of Sociology* that despite their common intellectual inheritance, "sociology and moral philosophy have remained wholly apart, with no interchange of ideas (Coleman, 1974, 739)." Following this observation, he undertakes an extended critique of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, noting that the work clearly draws from the toolkits of economists (distributional efficiency and optimality) and political theory (social contract constitutionalism), but conspicuously absent are sociological concerns: whether there are ethical limits to the centralized Weberian bureaucracy necessary to administer redistribution; whether Rawls' conception of equality of opportunity implies forms of social homogenization inconsistent with personalist liberalism; and consistent with later communitarian critiques of Rawls (e.g., MacIntyre, 2013; Sandel, 1982; Taylor, 1989). Coleman is frustrated by the asociological character of the "original

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[1] The original position is meant to derive only one principle in a *Theory of Justice*, but it is also certainly the most famous portion of TOJ (see Rawls, 2001, pp. 120–130). Rawls imagines a group of rational (that is, responsive to

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position."[1] As Coleman summarizes, "it is not at all clear that a theory of justice should be developed independently from a general theory of society (Coleman, 1974, 756)."

As Forrester (2019) documents, Rawls' influence came to be nearly hegemonic, both in felicitous derivatives and the communitarian alternatives who were defined by the shadow he cast. While she argues that Rawls' intellectual trajectory was shaped by post-war sociologists, especially David Riesman and Nathan Glazer, his fundamental social ontology never strayed from contractual individualism. The *qualities* of social relations within a just society are not necessarily morally consequential for a strict political liberal, as the social ontology of individualist contractarianism principally concerns itself with the relation between the state and citizen (and not between citizens themselves).

Rawls' (ironic) influence in American sociology is arguably evident in the core intellectual agenda of the field: estimating and uncovering distributional inequalities—one can find this work in ethnographies to audit studies to demographic studies.[2] Rawls argued that social inequality is justifiable if it is ultimately consequentially beneficial for the lesser-off. Similarly, the motivation for many sociological projects is to identify "non-rational" forms of inequality—those which have no societal benefits. We have in mind here perhaps the modal regression published in the *American Sociological Review*: human capital measures "control" for meritocratic inequality and non-zero coefficients on measures of race, gender, or class background are the quantities of interest as they are indicative of "non-rational" inequality.

As Abbott (2016, 236–238) notes there are a multitude of limitations to this approach, but more importantly when American sociologists investigate these *inequalities*, we are obviously interested in *injustices*. Consistent with Coleman's lament, however, rarely do sociologists consider the implicit moral counterfactual in any depth: is a just society one in which we would always find coefficients near zero for these social groupings? Would this be sufficient? Does it follow then that a just society be one in which inequality (perhaps even gross inequality) existed, but it was entirely explicable in terms of meritocratic differences (c.f. Young, 1958)?

We suspect that most sociologists would reject the above hypotheticals, but this does not skirt the questions of justice we often confront in our empirical work. Hence, the agenda of this paper: we argue that sociologists should explicitly develop social theories, not just empirical analyses, consequential for theories of justice. Analogous to the subfield mechanism design in economics, sociologists should theorize feasible just social democratic. Framing this agenda, we argue that many kinds of social inequalities cannot be redistributed but instead must be relationally reorganized. Interpersonal respect and recognition are features of relationships, not persons, and we therefore argue that a tax-and-transfer system to "redistribute" these morally significant inequalities is not possible. A program for sociology is thus to contribute to a dialog with philosophy on how social institutions and the relations they structure could actually realize principles of justice.

Coleman argued that sociology never undertook the above agenda as it suffers from pretensions to be a "value free" science. This Weberian (Weber 1917; Shils 1980) hangover persists today in that while sociologists certainly often engage in normatively driven work, rarely

reasons) actors who are (1) committed to developing principles of justice and (2) exist behind a "veil of ignorance" in which they have no knowledge of what positions they will hold in society. Rawls argues that under such epistemological conditions, those actors would choose to adopt a principle that social inequalities are only justified if they benefit the least well-off. From a minimal sociological standpoint, however, there are no "natural" social inequalities and thus it is not at all clear what "units" of social life these "veiled" actors are redistributing. One might think, for instance, that in some societies, redistributing wealth is important, while in others, it might be more important to redistribute honorific status, but neither of those resources exists prior to a given society.

[2] In the past 20 years of ASA meetings, only two have not had explicit themes of social inequality. Abbott (2016, 236–) discusses the rise of "inequality" related papers in the *American Journal of Sociology*, particularly post-1960s.

do we consider at any length our underlying moral ontology.[3] Instead, sociologists engage in social critique by empirically uncovering injustices. However, critique—even the "relentless critique of everything existing"—is rarely sufficient. As Prasad (2018; see also Prasad, 2020) cogently puts it, sociologists can misconstrue *consequences* with *causes*, that is, the *what* and the *why*.[4] In particular, she argues that sociologists are often interested in "victims" but not "villains," though often only through understanding the villains can one understand the production of injustice.[5] If American sociology's project is to marshal its constructivist epistemology for aims of justice—consistent with Du Bois' conception of American sociology's task (Du Bois, 1904; Itzigsohn & Brown, 2020; Morris, 2015)—then this task must wrestle explicitly with normative implications.

To develop the above arguments, we discuss (non-exhaustively) a moral theory often denoted "relational egalitarianism" (RE) and its social theoretical implications with a focus on relational sociology (RS). For moral theorists in this tradition, the prevalence of non-hierarchical social relations is a necessary condition of social justice, not just a relative equal distribution of certain goods. To be clear: this concern is largely orthogonal to the so-called Inequality of What debate in which moral philosophers debated what kinds of *goods* need to be redistributed (e.g., utility, income, capabilities) (c.f. Cohen, 1990; Sen, 1979). Furthermore, we are not interested in the supposed conflict between equality of opportunity and outcome.[6] Our interest is rather the social ontological conditions of justice.

RE and RS both take social relations to be of fundamental importance: in the case RE as the preconditions of a justice society and in the case of RS as the fundamental units of the social fabric. Furthermore, they share a common intellectual ancestor in the American Pragmatism of Peirce, James, and Dewey. Three key Pragmatist ideas interconnect RE and RS: (1) that the pursuit of truth involves experimentation; (2) truth is provisionally determined at the level of the community; (3) and most importantly, that democracy is necessary both because it is just, but also because it provides the necessary epistemological structure for (1) and (2) to effectively work. For RE, these principles provide a general theory for why a well-functioning democracy is a necessary for a just society. For RS, and sociology more generally, Pragmatism raises the question of what types of institutional and organizational structures and related processes are needed to underpin such a society. Consequently, these intellectual agendas should work in tandem to develop a framework for how philosophers and social scientists working together can contribute to social progress.

In the next section we provide a short critical review of Rawlsian distributional justice. We then discuss the basic premises of RE. To illustrate these premises empirically, we explicate Reich and Bearman's (2018) analysis of a failed unionization campaign of Walmart stores in the mid-2010s and Winship's (2022) analysis of community policing relations in Boston. The subsequent section discusses the potential intellectual synergies between RE and RS. We then examine how the classical Pragmatism of Peirce, James, and Dewey contributes to RE and establishes a research agenda for RS. We then

[3] See Wehrwein & Winship (unpublished) for an extended discussion of how moral ontology is consequential for historical and sociological explanation.

[4] One could likewise characterize this point through Haslanger (2012)'s critique of a self-undermining social constructivist "debunking project": a singular focus on revealing that a particular social form is not a natural kind can work to ironically to reify and essentialize social categories.

[5] For instance, studies of private equity or management consulting firms would be crucial to understanding contemporary dynamics of American labor relations. However, consistent with Prasad's victims and villains dichotomy, economically oppressed communities are the subjects of most sociological research.

[6] As Fishkin (2014) and many others have pointed out: outcomes necessarily engender opportunities in subsequent generations and often the point of establishing equality of outcomes is to create a baseline set of opportunities for future cohorts of individuals (as is the case for Rawls).

conclude with a summary of the arguments in the paper.

2 The Self-Undermining Social Ontology of Rawlsian Distributional "Social" Justice

One distinctive feature of Rawlsian "political" liberalism is what Jaeggi (2018) characterizes as an "ethical agnosticism" to specific forms of life (though for others, this is also the most compelling feature of the tradition, a commitment to neutrality). Following MacIntyre (2013) and Weber (1917) before him, Jaeggi argues that in the absence of a shared conception of the good life, rationalization, commodification, and anomie fill this void.

Chris Arnade, a photographer who spent several years chronicling what he terms "back row" America vividly illustrates Jaeggi's concern. He describes a reality in which local community life (in both rural and urban America) has been obliterated,

> [an] obsession with economic growth empowered massive corporations that filled many communities with franchises and big-box stores, crushing the downtowns that had once had small locally owned shops and restaurants. The economy grew, but gone were the local community, the labor union, and lifetime jobs for those without a college degree. While our front row neighborhoods filed with bespoke and artisanal stores, those left behind, literally and figuratively, were left to cope with the new landscape we had created. ... the back row is now left living in a banal world of hyper efficient fast-food franchises, strip malls, discount stores, and government buildings with flickering fluorescent lights and dreary-colored walls festooned with rules. They are left with a world where their sense of home and family and community won't get them anywhere, won't pay the bills (Arnade, 2019, pp. 46).

Arnade's approach is a humble one, letting his subjects speak on their own terms. The "theoretical" contribution of the book, aptly titled *Dignity*, is the moral centrality of social recognition and community.

Elizabeth Anderson (1999) influentially argued that egalitarians who only consider the distributional aspects of inequality are actually legitimizing deeply reactionary politics through a shared social ontology with the political right. For those nominally on the liberal left, accumulation of wealth is a function of the good fortunate of having been born with the right opportunities, just as those on the right (e.g., Nozick, 1974) would generally argue that hard work or natural talents (and perhaps some luck) results in just deserts. These two nominally disparate positions share the same basic premise: outcomes are correlated with a given individual's attributes—the debate is only the relative contributions of luck and talent.[7]

The centrality of a person's attributes—luck and talent—and thus argues Anderson, their worth by the standards of a meritocracy society, consequentially "raises private disdain to the status of officially recognized truth (Anderson, 1999, p. 306)." The political institutions which follow from these premises are "some of the worst aspects of capitalism and socialism,"—that is, "the mean-spirited, contemptuous, parochial vision of a society that represents human diversity hierarchically, moralistically contrasting the responsible and irresponsible, the innately superior and the innately inferior... (Anderson, 1999, p. 308)." Nominally egalitarian welfare redistribution can thus be done in such a way that institutionalizes social differences rather than obviate them. Thus, such redistribution does not necessarily address the social recognition of the disadvantaged.

The fundamental issue here is that is a social theoretical failure is that Rawls and others in the distributionalist egalitarian tradition have a "starting gate" account of individual outcomes—unequal outcomes are just so long as each individual begins at the same starting position. Rawls combines this account with what he characterizes as a pluralism—though it is debated among political philosophers how pluralistic he actually is

[7] Again, one can think of debate instantiated in the regression-statistical-significance-race between "talent" human capital variables and "luck" variables of various social categories of as instantiated in the error term (Jencks, 1972).

(c.f. Mills, 2017). Given that each individual should be empowered to realize their particular conception of the good life, the state should be maximally neutral to such conceptions. According to Anderson, this position becomes problematic when categories of worth are enshrined by the state. Centralized state redistribution cannot be substantively neutral to different conceptions of the good life because the design of the state itself elevates some categories of persons as more worthy because those persons are redistributed from to those who are deemed of less worth. This necessarily undermines the egalitarian project, both in its actual realization and in the calculus of the social contract. Anderson puts this point vividly and it is worth quoting in full:

> Suppose [welfare] checks arrived in the mail along with a letter signed by the State Equality Board explaining the reasons for their compensation. Imagine what these letters would say. 'To the disabled: Your defective native endowments or current disabilities, alas, make your life less worth living than the lives of normal people. To compensate for this misfortune, we, the able ones, will give you extra resources, enough to make the worth of living your life good enough that at least one person out there thinks it is comparable to someone else's life. To the stupid and untalented: Unfortunately, other people don't value what little you have to offer in the system of production. Your talents are too meager to command much market value. Because of the misfortune that you were born so poorly endowed with talents, we productive ones will make it up to you: we'll let you share in the bounty of what we have produced with our vastly superior and highly valued abilities. To the ugly and socially awkward: How sad that you are so re-pulsive to people around you that no one wants to be your friend or lifetime companion. We won't make it up to you by being your friend or your marriage partner—we have our own freedom of association to exercise—but you can console yourself in your miserable loneliness by consuming these material goods that we, the beautiful and charming ones, will provide. And who knows? Maybe you won't be such a loser in love once potential dates see how rich you are.[8]

Inasmuch as redistributive institutions are attached to conceptions of worth, this vision of justice "... gives us the cramped vision of the Poor Laws, where unfortunates breathe words of supplication... (Anderson, 1999, 308)." While there are numerous other critiques of the Rawlsian tradition, here we have highlighted two that are notable for their sociological dimension: the quietism with respect to the texture of society and two, the impoverished "ideal" of a social hierarchy defined by the state. One can thus readily see the limits of developing a theory of justice absent a theory of social life.

There are certainly approaches to inequality utilized by sociologists which readily recognize this self-undermining conception of (distributional) justice. One could, for instance, point to the work of neo-Marxists (Olin Wright, 2015), varieties of social theorists who are explicitly influenced by Weber's tripartite conception of class (Bourdieu, 1987; Tilly, 1999), anti-racist social thought (Du Bois, 1935; Mills, 1999), and feminist scholars (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Young, 2011) who are particularly attentive to relational dimensions of inequality (between management and worker; between Black and white persons; between husband and wife). Unfortunately, while these works are certainly widely cited, the dominant tendency within social stratification research is to emphasize distributional differences.[9]

3 Relational Egalitarianism (RE)

Anderson (1999) concludes her critique of distributional justice with an account of what she terms "democratic equality" which "integrates principles of distribution with the expressive demands of equal respect." Notably her conception of equality is defined foremost by social

[8] Jack (2019) provides a real-life example. Undergraduates on financial aid complained to the administration at a particular college that they could not afford the price of tickets for many campus events. The administration agreed to provide free tickets. To get the free tickets, however, students had to stand in a special line separate from their peers.

[9] For such a critique, see Olin Wright (2015, 7–13)—and indeed his career-length engagement with class analysis and the distinction he makes between "gradational" and "relational" conceptions of inequality.

relations: "democratic equality regards two people as equal when each accepts the obligation to justify their actions by principles acceptable to the other, and in which they take mutual consultation, reciprocation, and recognition for granted (Anderson, 1999, 313)." Ten years later, Anderson (2010) summarizes what she takes to be the three key differences between "luck" and "relational" egalitarianism: one, there is the obvious difference in desideratum: a relatively equal distribution of a good or a particular form of relations. Second, as previously noted, Rawls considered social inequality to be just when it is the product of chance or hard work, but for Anderson, inequality is unjust when it produces hierarchies of domination. Third, Anderson argues that these two traditions differ in their conception of the role of moral principles relative to social agents: (put crudely) are principles of justice realized by data from aggregate tax returns or in the lived experience of agents and institutions?

Rondel (2018) articulates a helpful vocabulary to distinguish these dimensions of justice. Distributional egalitarians are primarily concerned with a "vertical" axis of inequality, that is, relations between the state and citizen, while the "horizontal" axis of inequality concerns relations between citizens. Rondel notes that this distinction is not entirely neat, most social movements fighting for greater equality have had demands in both dimensions, and indeed, his project (articulating a "Pragmatist egalitarianism") is precisely a reconciliation. It is nonetheless analytically useful to work with this crude separation as a clarificatory exercise.

As aspects of American society have become more nominally meritocratic, these two dimensions of injustice sharpen: Jack (2019), for instance, documents what he terms the "privileged poor" experience—students from low-income backgrounds who receive scholarships to attend privileged private boarding schools. These students are in a unique position of partially experiencing the cultural life of the 1%, systematic exclusion from that same culture, and realities of economic injustice. These contradictory experiences are not necessarily new in American life. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois (1940 [1986], 581) reflects, "I was in Harvard but not of it." He was warmly embraced by some faculty, notably William James, but he also recalls numerous degradations—some of his more racist classmates occasionally even refused to sit next to him in class.[10]

Relational egalitarians thus argue that even if one lived in a society with a generous welfare state, if one's social life is characterized by forms of cruelty and authority, then social justice has not been achieved. For relational egalitarians, ameliorating distributional differences (again, of whatever good or metric) is a first step toward the true aim of a society whose texture is fundamentally devoid of cruelty. Such a conception of justice is by definition premised on a "general theory of society" and thus represents a promising direction in which sociology and moral philosophy can more productively "interchange ideas." In particular, relational equality has several distinctive social theoretical implications which in turn necessitate prescriptive theories of social reorganization, not just redistribution. We illustrate these insights with a brief discussions of a recent failed unionization campaign and community policing in Boston.

4 It's Not (Just) About the Money: The Failure to Unionize Walmart

Reich and Bearman (2018)'s *Working for Respect* is a mixed methods study of a failed unionization effort of Walmart. While Reich and Bearman

[10] An excerpt from Du Bois (1940 [1986], 579–580): "In general, I asked nothing of Harvard but the tutelage of teachers and the freedom of the library. I was quite voluntarily and willingly outside of its social life. I knew nothing of and cared nothing for fraternities and clubs. Most of those who dominated the Harvard life of my day were unknow to me even by name. I asked no fellowship of my fellow students. I found friends and most interesting and inspiring friends among the colored folk of Boston surrounding places. . . . So that of the general social intercourse on the campus I consciously missed nothing. Some white students made themselves known to me and a few, a very few, became life-long friends."

(hereafter R & B) did not set out to contribute to moral theory (rather insights for the American labor movement), their insights are nonetheless informative of the kinds of social relations which relational egalitarians believe to be necessary for justice.

Economic domination is indeed an omnipresent feature of the domination of Walmart workers. Workers are often in precarious situations as Walmart may be one of the few employers left in their community. Walmart management extensively monitors employee interactions and uses collective punishments to discipline workers (for instance, taking a sick day can impact everyone else's bonuses).[11] High turnover rates and these practices mean that the opportunities to openly "talk union" are incredibly rare. Walmart also chronically underpays their workers and encourages workers to use welfare programs to effectively subsidize the firm. Depending on the state, those welfare programs may also have work requirements. Thus, not only is there no safety net to fall back on, rather there is only a hard a concrete floor waiting for any worker who stands up to management.

What R & B are attentive to is that the realities of distributional differences are often experienced relationally. Workers experience the above degradations by managers but also may take pride in their work and develop relationships between each other and regular customers. R & B met workers who fastidiously organizes shelves and displays, others who feel recognized for their work as cakemakers or butchers (103–105), and other workers who invest their time studying particular products (e.g., televisions) in order to be a better salesperson (99).

These workers are not victims of "false consciousness" or ignorant of their mistreatment. R & B interview an astute baker who essentially articulates a version of the labor theory of value in their conversation: she understands that Walmart effectively pays "their costs" for her in the first hour of her shift and the next eight hours are profit based on the price of the cakes she sells. Yet, she also mentions that regular customers compliment her work and that she takes pride particularly in the birthday cakes she prepares for kids.

This situation is both consistent and inconsistent with the recent work of Chibber (2022) who attempts to reassert a Marxian class reductionist account of capitalism. Chibber is right that workers to emphasize the fundamental power dynamics of the employer–employee relationship, but it is a mistake to not be attentive to the other social dimensions of work. As R & B note, "for the typical American worker, the labor market is an abstraction, a weather pattern. Getting mad at Walmart for its low wages when low wages are everywhere is like getting mad at the rain (104)." Certainly one must begin with these workers' lack of political and economic power, but in order to explain what work life is like, one has to take seriously what these workers have to say: that a job is not just a job, but also a place within a network.[12] These workers certainly need union representation, but as R & B's book stresses, this union campaign failed precisely because it did not respect the multifaceted social nature of work and union campaigners did not take workers' self-understandings seriously. Relational egalitarianism precisely draws our attention not just to vertical, but also horizontal dimensions of respect.

5 Community Policing in Boston

A second example to illustrate another principle of relational egalitarianism: the centrality of community involvement in the development of institutions. Over the decades, multiple cities have adopted "community policing" as a means of improving relations between police

[11] Furthermore, as Reich and Berman document, Walmart will preemptively fire workers they believe to be aggrieved, fire workers with health complications as the experience of being denied healthcare by the Walmart plan can be radicalizing, and fire workers who seek worker's compensation for injuries they have sustained.

[12] It is not an accident that Chibber's theoretical restatement of Marxist first principles contains essentially no empirical labor history.

departments and the minority communities that they serve. Many different people are credited with parenting community police and what is meant by community policing varies widely (Cordner, 2014). The U.S. Department of Justice, for instance, stated in a 2009 report that community policing involves "partnerships," "organizational transformation," and "problem solving," but few specifics are mentioned.

Many police departments claim to have community policing programs because of the associated political capital (Cordner, 2014). In some cases, this has meant no more than an increase in police on foot in high crime neighborhoods. In other cases, police departments convene regular meetings in which residents identify problems in their neighborhood, some related to crime and others not and demand that police fix the situation. Often, this later model has not proven long-lasting (e.g., see Fung, 2009). In Boston, however, a specific community policing model has endured for nearly 25 years. Why is this the case?

The genesis of the Boston model is distinctive. In the early 1990s, the Boston Police Department and Boston's Black ministerial community tolerated each other at best and hated each other at worst. The police had gone through number of embarrassing episodes and scandals, the most horrific of which was the bungling the murder case of Carol Stuart, a white woman who had been murdered by her husband; the police nonetheless believed the racist lie made by her husband that a Black man had randomly attacked them. The BPD subsequently swept the city with indiscriminate "stop and frisk" actions and charged an innocent man of the crime, until the husband's brother revealed the truth (Locy, 1991a–1991d).

Boston's Black ministerial community also faced challenges. In May of 1992, a conflict between rival gang members erupted in Boston's large Morning Star Church. Mayhem ensued as parishioners ran for the doors. There were multiple attempted stabbings. To work to quell the violence breaking out in both their communities and churches, a group of Black inner-city ministers took this message seriously formed what was known as the Ten Point Coalition. For both groups their established habits in Dewey's sense no longer worked. New ways of working were needed.

The incident that precipitated the partnership between the ministers and the Boston Police Department occurred in 1995. Paul McLaughlin, an Assistant District General, was murdered by Jeffrey Bly who McLaughlin was set to try for a third violent felony. The BPD and the Ten Point Coalition recognized, as stated by one of ministers, that though "[McLaughlin's] killing needed to be aggressively investigated, there would be no open season on young black men (Winship, 2022)." The Carol Stuart fiasco would not be repeated. Boston's police department and Black ministers subsequently developed a long-standing partnership, though neither group could have predicted that this would occur (Winship, 2022).

What is unusual if not unique about the Boston model is the direct involvement of the community in policing operations. This is manifest in several ways. Key ministers will talk with the Police Commissioner about immediate problems, sometimes on a daily basis. The local DAs office, police, and ministers will discuss what the recommended outcome should be for an individual indicted for a crime.

Most impressively, since 1998, the Youth Violence Task Force—a collaborative association comprised of both community members and representatives from the Boston Police Department, the Massachusetts Transit Police, and a representative of the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office—has meet every week.[13] The meetings include a host of individuals representing dozens of government and social service organizations. There is no legal mandate for any of these organizations to send representatives. These meetings, however, are known as the place that police, nonprofit workers, and the community more generally, can effectively organize their responses to problems facing the city.

[13] Suffolk County includes the cities of Boston, Chelsea, Revere, and Winthrop.

The meetings are run by a group of clergy—not the police. The purpose of the meetings is to discuss general policy issues as well as specific incidents. The meetings start with police giving reports about recent criminal activity. Often this evolves into a discussion of how to deal with a particular crime ridden location or pattern of offenses. The Task Force often recommends restorative and non-punitive measures, including, for instance, intervening with adolescents in ways so that they do not acquire criminal records. In true democratic fashion, meetings are characterized by boisterous cross-talk and lively participation.

Why has the Boston Police Community partnership been so durable? First, from the onset, there was a recognition between the BPD and the ministers of their mutual dependence. On a broad level, many community leaders believe that the police are necessary for safety. In turn, the police recognize that they need the support of the community to be effective. Key to this is what Winship and Berrien (2002) call an "umbrella of legitimacy": the community indicates when police are acting responsibly and in the interests of the community, but warranted criticism is allowed to publicly "rain down" when they don't. Second, many of the same persons have been participating in these weekly meetings for years with the consequence there are strong relationships of familiarity and trust. Before each meeting, participants often hug and exchange pleasantries. During the meetings there is often warm joking and informal conversation (Winship, 2022). Third, and perhaps most importantly, a shared moral language has developed: "the goal is to keep the next kid from getting killed"; "some gang members are first such a danger to themselves, but second to their community that they need a prison ministry" (Winship, 2022, p. 324). Such a shared moral language is not a product of any one individual member or a centralized dicta, but rather has emerged from organic human-to-human relationships which have been the foundation of this partnership.

6 Relational Egalitarianism (RE) and Relational Sociology (RS)

Rondel (2018, 26–29) notes that RE has been defined to a degree by what it is against rather than providing a concrete blueprint of a just society. This is not an accident. As Lippert-Rasmussen (2018, 171–181) notes, there is an extensive heterogeneity of social relations that might be considered just. Anderson has variously characterized her position as a generalized opposition to cruelty, to domination, to hierarchy, and to status differences. This then raises the question that sociologist should address: "What are the feasible social structures that would satisfy these criteria and would they be desirable in other respects?"

Sociologists are well aware of the immense varieties of social structures which could conceivably realize Anderson's principles both in desirable and undesirable ways. For instance, Gould (2003) studies non-hierarchical social relations which produce extremely undesirable ends: using the nineteenth century Corsican gentry as a case study (Napoleons everywhere) for a generalized social theory of interpersonal violence, he argues that it is relative equality, specifically ambiguity in social rank, which increases the likelihood of a violent duel to resolve a conflict. One can likewise think of forms of hierarchy which produce desirable outcomes such as professional apprenticeships or fields involving clear technical competencies (e.g. the training of surgeons or editors).

So, what specific feasible institutional arrangements and their resulting relations should be considered just? The intellectual intersection between RE and RS is where we precisely believe that sociologists and moral philosophers can productively address this question. Relationally-oriented moral theorists have correctly identified real weaknesses in conceiving of justice in largely distributional terms, but such work also requires positive social theories which explicitly theorize just democratic institutional arrangements and analyze possible empirical instantiations. Three

interrelated insights germane to relational sociology seem particularly pertinent to this task.

First, what do relational sociologists mean by personhood "residing" within relations? Consider the numerous works of fiction whose drama revolves around a particular person moving from one status position to another (many of the works of Henry James, Dumas' *Count of Monte Cristo*, Twain's *Prince and the Pauper*, Mozart's *Marriage of Fiagro*, and so on). Some of the drama arises from the fact that status is a property of the relations around a given social role, not the actual person within that role. These novels are foremost celebrated for the rich inner lives of individual characters and those characters' inner conflicts are frequently a function of the character's failures to perform the requite Goffmanian dramatology of their prescribed social roles. Previously mentioned relational stratification theories (Bourdieu, 1987; Tilly, 1999; Wright, 2015; Young, 2011), despite their differences in empirical subject matter, share the ontological intuition that the "ladder" of hierarchy should not be taken for granted. One reason for this is their shared recognition that the status of some is a consequence of their domination of the others and domination by others: one defines the other. For the neo-Marxist, this is a function of a relation of economic exploitation. For feminist cultural theorist, it is a function that "womanness" is defined under patriarchy by the powerful role afforded to men (c.f. Chu, 2019). For the pragmatist, this goes back to Mead who argued that the self emerges interactionally (Joas, 1997; Mead, 1934).

The second relational sociology insight is that the value of social status is, in a sense by definition, not only a function of scarcity, but beyond that: the poverty of others. "Textbook" economic theory tells us that this is true of most goods: rarity begets value. However, social status is unique in how it is defined relative to others' absence of higher status—not just the scarcity of the good in the abstract. For instance, we could live in a world in which the state mandated and greatly expanded athletic programs such that a wide majority of the population would be fit. This would redistribute the "good" of athleticism, but the social status of particularly gifted athletes would likely increase, not be redistributed. Michele Lamont (1992; Lamont & Molnár, 2002) has written extensively on the Bourdieusian "boundary work" performed to maintain class positions. These cultural differences do not reside *within* the men she interviewed, but rather *between* the higher and lower status positions. The higher status men, both in the USA and France, define themselves in opposition to their perception of the rest of the population (as harder working and is having better esthetic tastes, respectfully).

Third, social status "cashes out" in interactions. To "spend" social status is to be on the receiving end or have the social license to engage in certain behaviors. Here it is meaningful to distinguish between two modes of this: freely given recognition and what Rorty (1999) artfully refers to as "causal social sadism." Social actors require intersubjective recognition that their projects and principles have validity—the good life cannot be lived in isolation. For instance, Jaeggi (2018) repeatedly uses the example of an artist who neither seeks to be ignored for their talents nor wishes to make art simply to be popular. Rather their talents thrive by virtue of others attending the gallery opening and appreciating the art. This perhaps trivial example illustrates what a long-line of Hegelians have argued: social recognition is freely given affirmation that is necessary for social actors to live enriched lives.[14]

These three insights from relational sociology—status resides within the position, not the person; status is by definition valuable as a function of other's poverty; status "cashes out" in interactions, either in the form of forced or freely given recognition—implying first that the RE project must be minimally two pronged: a reduction in the kinds of relations which systematically exclude and an expansion of relationships that foster forms of recognition. Second, these insights suggest that relational equality cannot

[14] Rondel (2018, 106; 122) characterizes the early Dewey as clearly indebted to Hegel and likewise both Honneth and Jaeggi explicitly describe their vision of an egalitarian society as an experimentalist Deweyan democracy.

be redistributed, but rather requires social reorganization—a tax-and-transfer system will not work. Lamont's 2018 ASA Presidential Address discusses at length the growing gaps in status and recognition that have accompanied growing economic inequalities. She argues, however, that these "[recognition] gaps can be closed through the social process of destigmatization (Lamont, 2018, 423)."[15] Lamont argues that insights from cultural sociology and social psychology identify several strategies which destigmatize differences. She contends that improving cultural framing of different groups and providing support for public institutions which facilitate integration would narrow these gaps. This, however, is a psychological treatment of what are actually sociological problems.

7 Pragmatism: The Common Ancestor

Unsurprisingly, relational egalitarianism, with its focus on relational justice, and relationship sociology, with its emphasis on relations as constituting the fabric, are kindred spirits (e.g., Emirbayer, 1997; Erikson, 2013). The connection, however, is deeper in that they share a common intellectual ancestor: American Pragmatism and its commitment to democracy as essential to social progress and a just way of life. Perhaps uniquely, Pragmatism sees democracy not only as relationally defined, but as essentially an epistemological project. This is the foundation of the distinctly Pragmatist theory of truth.

For our purposes, the Pragmatist theory of truth is best characterized as preceding from two propositions, one from Peirce (1878 [1974]) and one from James (1907, Haack 1976): (respectfully) what is true is true by virtue of its utility and what is true will be true in the long-run, to the point of the "end of inquiry." That is to say, "Truth" is not a category external to human affairs—a standard germane to a priori Pure Reason, but rather is always evident in the practical consequences for a given community (James, 1907 [1977]). Consequentially, abstractions that do not "cash out," as James put it, are simply not of interest. For James "There can *be* no difference anywhere that doesn't *make* a difference elsewhere—no difference in abstract truth that doesn't express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in conduct... (James, 1907)." James likewise describes truth as "expedient in the long run and on the whole of the course" which follows from the realities of experience "boiling over and making us correct our present formulas (James, 1907 [1977], 312)." What James means by this is that reality always bites back. James is widely misunderstood for offering a personalist or subjectivist account of truth: one is free to believe whatever one wishes if it is somehow helpful for one's own endeavors. This is not his view at all: rather, he argues that what is true has to interact with reality, has to be stable in the long-run.

James' insight is a fundamental anti-Cartesian doubt intuition: there is no ego outside experience. We are instead always stuck, so to speak, in reality. From his early works on religion to his denunciations of empire (Livingston, 2016), what is consistent for James is a conceptualization of ideas as not discrete entities residing within our minds or as abstractions in a separate ethereal plane, but rather as real tools that constantly flow back and forth with the world. Conception and perception are not distinct psychological processes. Thus, to put it pithily: Pragmatism conceives of epistemology as a process, not as a property. The *processes* of inquiry, experimentation, and importantly democratic deliberation replace the *property* of capital-t Truth. James thus builds on the foundational claim of Pragmatism from Peirce (and certainly his most cited sentence), "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object (Peirce, 1878 [1974])."

[15] Consistent with our earlier characterization of American stratification research, Lamont continues, "Among social scientists, we have yet to develop a systematic empirically-based understanding of recognition (or destigmatization) processes that would match the depth of accumulated knowledge about the distribution of resources (Lamont, 2018, 423)."

Pragmatism is a species of a correspondence theory of truth, but it is an *interactional* theory. We test our ideas in practice and those practices—in the long-run—are the final say on what is true, small "t". What is the nature of this interaction?

For Dewey (Dewey 1910a, 1910b), knowledge is acquired through experimentation, both at the individual and societal level. He believed that the model of how scientific knowledge progressed was applicable far more generally. It is through reasoned experimentation—learning by doing—that individuals and societies changed their ways. Dewey argued that experimentation was important when our habits, what we today mean by routines, no longer worked. It was then that creative thinking and experimentation happened as we looked for new ways to live our lives (Dewey, 1922, 1927, 1938).

For Pragmatists, what characterizes democracy is a kind of social life in which it is possible for society to experiment and transform extant social structures.[16] A necessary condition for this is relational equality in such that democratic participation is possible for all. (Anderson, 1995, 2006, 2016; Dewey, 1937, 1938; Putnam & Putnam, 2017) The widest possible participation of citizens ensures that the institutions that develop are responsive to the varied needs of the community. It is through interactions with others that citizens also acquire knowledge of each other's needs and form the kinds of collaborative relationships discussed in the above Boston policing case. Dewey, although often mischaracterized as a proponent of scientism or technocracy, in fact rejects "benevolent despots" who are disconnected from the communities that they aim to serve. By failing to work within the community, such top-down solutions are often deaf to their needs and also fail to empower citizens to realize those institutions (Dewey & Tufts, 1932, p. 347). Thus, the crucial processes of intelligent inquiry by the community are identification and deliberation involving all. Hilary Putnam summarizes this Deweyan insight thusly, "a community which wants to know what is right and good—should organize itself in accordance with democratic standards and ideals, not only because they are good in themselves (and they are), but because they are the prerequisites for the application of intelligence to the inquiry . . . Hierarchy stunts the intellectual growth of the oppressed, and forces the privileged to construct rationalizations to justify their position (Putnam, 1994, 175)."[17] Hierarchy—by dint of enforcing dicta—distorts democratic corrective measures.

Critics of Deweyan Pragmatism are broadly correct that Dewey himself does not explicate the precise institutional structure of the democratic society he has in mind (c.f. Diggins, 1998). This is precisely where we see sociological contributions, building on the classical work of Lipset et al. (1977) on union democracy or by contemporary Du Boisians on inequalities embedded into nominally race-neutral organizations. The goal here, however, is that to provide idealized structures as is so often done in political theory, but rather to examine the properties and consequences of viable institutional structures.

Pragmatists' instinctive social ontology is one of relations, not persons. The exercise of freedom is democratic citizenship such that ordinary persons have the means through which to shape the social world. One can thus readily see the connection of relational equalitarianism to relational sociology. Emirbayer and Mische (1998)'s account of agency, for instance, draws directly from Dewey: although individuals exist within particular sets of ties, those relations are not static. When the social world shifts, this in turn forces individuals to reconceptualize their social position and act creatively intersubjectively. Erikson (2013)'s review of recent relational sociology

[16] A contemporary self-identified Deweyan, the legal theorist Roberto Unger, characterizes Dewey's view as "utopianism without blueprints." It is utopian in the sense that it envisions a radically more egalitarian world, but it is not a singular set of prescriptions of how that world should be constituted.

[17] This last point is completely consistent with Piketty (2021)'s history of inequality and ideology: gross inequalities stunt innovation and social change partially because intellectual resources are continuously wasted to justify obscene privileges.

includes an eloquent discussion of White's (2008) account of culture in networks: all meaning-making is relational embedded in interactions in the sense that each conversation is an act of translation from one perspective to another.[18] Misunderstanding and misrecognition is precisely the breakdown of this process. Everyday instances of social sadism afforded by patterns of racism or misogyny thus have an epistemological injustice dimension: these interactions undermine democracy and capacities for inquiry. As we see it, one useful contribution of sociological research would be to develop positive accounts of the organizations and institutions that foster democratic citizenship and by extension, further inquiry into the solving of practical problems. The aim of such inquiry could be to expand the range of institutions which incubate reciprocated egalitarian ties and limit the scope of hierarchies of domination.

8 Conclusion

This paper has sought to convince readers that there is a specific and special opportunity for sociologists to contribute to the theorizing and analysis of what would make for a more just world. In particular, we have argued that this potential exists in the nexus between relational equalitarianism (RE) and relational sociology (RS). The goal here is not just unveil and critique existing institutional structures, as is common in so much sociological scholarship, but to put forth positive models. Just as some economists contribute to the design of markets and some political scientists contribute to the design of constitutional orders, we have argued that sociologists could likewise develop theories of just social institutions.

We advanced three interlinked claims: one, sociologists engage in normatively laden work but do not go far enough in exploring their normative commitments. Second, we then argued that the "vertical" approach to the analysis of injustice has several distinct faults: it does not adequately critique interpersonal relations of domination and hierarchy which undermine social justice. A society that had a relatively egalitarian distribution of resources but was defined by systematic cruelties would be a grossly unjust society. Third, if one takes on the basic premises of relational sociology, then justice is a function not just of attributes of persons, but ties between them. This means that these relationships must be reorganized. There is no tax-and-transfer solution to the problem of recognition.

We briefly illustrated this argument with two empirical examples (a failed union campaign and a successful community policing project). In both cases, networks and shared moral commitments drove their relative failure or success. Such projects point toward how philosophy and sociology could better interchange ideas, particularly in focusing on how developing just social relations are necessary to realize the abstract moral principles ideal theorists tend to construct. In pursing this agenda, the discipline would address Coleman's lament that sociology and philosophy have engaged in so little dialog. More importantly, it is through this agenda that sociology could help discover what a marginally more just social world would look like.

[18] This view is completely consistent with James' account of "base" psychological processes in that he refers to conceptions of reality and perceptions of reality as two legs that cannot help but walk together.

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In the Company of Elites: Some Practical and Moral Dilemmas of Studying Up

Patrick Inglis

Abstract

The chapter outlines the ways in which restricted access to exclusive people and spaces impacts the way ethnographers relate to elites and ultimately how they grapple with questions of morality in their fieldwork. Given the challenges of gaining and maintaining open communication with elites, ethnographers generally avoid confrontation or debate and instead resolve to let elites speak freely and without interruption, even when they draw on self-serving tropes that assert moral superiority. Whereas ethnographers set aside judgments when elites expound on matters of class differences between them and others, they exhibit strong reactions to incidents of racism and gender oppression that appear in the field. The chapter explains this divergent response as a function of ethnographers' personal experiences of marginalization in conducting research and in other aspects of their lives as well as reported findings from women and ethnic minorities who live, work, and study in spaces that historically favor ethnically or culturally dominant men. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how ethnographers of elites might incorporate complementary interviews and fieldwork with family, friends, and intimates as well as service workers who retain contact with existing and aspiring elites but who do not have access to the same spaces. When possible, sustained study of cross-class interactions developed alongside in-depth analysis of elites themselves can enhance understanding of what motivates elites.

Keywords

Elites · Wealth · Poverty · Inequality · Ethnography · Qualitative methods

Since the financial crisis of 2007–2008, social scientists have shifted their approach to wealth and inequality. While studies of poor and working-class people and communities remain the norm, there is now heightened interest in social, political, and economic elites who produce and sustain extreme levels of inequality (Piketty, 2014). Ethnographers have provided a notable contribution, in this regard. Interviews and participant observation give insight into the activities and strategies that elites use to demonstrate wealth and power, whether through education (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Khan, 2012; Rivera, 2015), financial services and wealth management (Harrington, 2016; Hoang, 2022; Tobias Neely, 2022), or leisure (Cousin & Chauvin, 2013; Mears, 2020). This renewed emphasis on elites is not limited to US or European contexts, either, or the thought and action of white males,

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as in earlier eras, when studies of that sort dominated the field (Domhoff, 2006; Mills, 2002 [1956]; Veblen, 2007 [1899]). This new era of elites research covers a range of settings and actors, including day traders in Tokyo (Miyazaki, 2013), businessmen in Chengdu (Osburg, 2013), golfers in Mexico City (Cerón-Anaya, 2019), housewives in New Delhi (Bhandari, 2019), Nigerian families in London (Ayling, 2019), and women lawyers in Mumbai (Ballakrishnen, 2022).

While the geography and diversity of elites studies has expanded, it is less clear where ethnographers stand on moral questions of right and wrong, even as some implore social scientists to make it a more primary focus of their research (Gilbert & Sklair, 2018; Hay & Muller, 2012). Most register dismay at the great chasm between rich and poor, and nearly all favor a more just and equitable distribution of wealth. Yet, the way ethnographers grapple with morality can appear opaque next to older studies by Mills or Domhoff, for instance, who made no bones about their distaste for elites. The contrast with studies of poverty and inequality is more obvious still. Consider Carol Stack's *All Our Kin* (1974), Philippe Bourgois's *In Search of Respect* (2003), Jane Collins and Victoria Mayers's *Both Hands Tied* (2010), Matthew Desmond's *Evicted* (2016), and Randol Contreras's *The Stick-Up Kids* (2012), among others. The aim is to humanize poor and working-class people, while calling out the role of oppressive institutions and regimes that limit freedom and choice. Whether or not ethnographers who focus on the lower reaches of society meet these expectations is a matter of debate, and a very public one, at that, with reputations and careers on the line, as events in the recent past indicate.[1]

A different, somewhat more puzzling moral code seems to inform studies of elites. Ethnographers of elites, as a practice, present interviews or vignettes where they appear to sit quietly listening as wealthy and powerful interlocutors expound on the bases of their supposedly hard-earned privileges, no matter the support offered by the "bank of mum and dad" or other advantages of race or gender (Friedman & Laurison, 2019), or grouse about the less-deserving masses who lack merit and discipline but nevertheless demand hand-outs from the state (Sherman, 2017). Whatever elites say about themselves, it seems as though few, if any, ethnographers want to take them to task—confrontation of any kind is rare and generally avoided (Gusterson, 1997; Ortner, 2010). There is also the tendency for ethnographers to recuse themselves from meetings or settings where quasi-legal conversations and activities may unfold, as if guided by an ethic to "see no evil," even as evidence of bad, if not quite evil, intentions abound.

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the way ethnographers address the moral as well as the analytical and practical problems that elites represent. I am particularly interested in how access influences data collection and subsequent interpretation and analysis. Conducting fieldwork on elites is a uniquely different proposition than carrying out research on poor and working-class people—it is also uniquely different from writing about them in the abstract, as did Mills (Aronowitz, 2014). In the first section, I discuss how the possibility that elites may close off communication imposes discipline on researchers that impacts the questions they ask and what they report (Chancer, 2020; Ostrander, 1993; Sieber, 1989). Next, I explore how ethnographers

[1] Three moments come to mind. One is the occasion of Loïc Wacquant's (2002) scathing review of three books on poverty and working-class struggle penned by Elijah Anderson (1999), Mitchell Duneier (1999), and Katherine Newman (1999), as well as the equally withering responses of each author that appeared in the same pages as the original review. The second is the arrival of Matthew Desmond's *Evicted* (2017), which won a Pulitzer Prize, a rare feat for a sociologist, but which also garnered condemnation from other social scientists who charged Desmond with not seeing through the logic of his own argument and calling for a more robust attack on capitalism (Burawoy, 2017). Last, I refer to the publication of Alice Goffman's *On the Run* (2014), in which the author appears to fall in with her research subjects. Law professor Steven Lubet (2018), among others, accused Goffman of failing to engage critically with her research subjects, as well as fabricating events.

approach elites under these conditions. Most avoid assigning normative judgments to persons, which would fit many standard approaches to morality, and instead find it much more useful to think of elites as occupying specific sectors of the economy or inhabiting certain social worlds that require deeper analysis, which would satisfy a second common definition (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). Rather than directly confront elites on the unfair class advantages they have accrued, ethnographers tend to emphasize perceptions of wealth and power alongside studies of taste and culture (Bruno & Salle, 2020; O'Brien & Ianni, 2022; Sherman, 2017).

While ethnographers develop mostly judgment-free analyses of the way elites draw and defend class boundaries, they would seem to take another tack when they encounter expressions of racial and gender animus. Efforts to shine a light on racism and gender oppression reflect, in part, ethnographers' experiences of being dismissed or unfairly treated in the course of their fieldwork, as well as their commitments to social justice. The passion and urgency that ethnographers bring to issues of race and gender inequities, as I show in a penultimate section, give rise to some of the most critical and revealing insights into elites available today. I use the conclusion to think through the analytical and methodological implications of identifying clear judgment of bias and discrimination, while reserving judgment when elites speak casually on class differences, and whether or not these instincts might converge in service of a more consistent treatment of morality within elites research.

1 Setting the Stage for Elites Research: The (Unwritten) Rules of Engagement

The number of published studies on different elites and the worlds they make suggest that the problem of access is not nearly the problem that many in the field have made it (Gusterson, 1997; Nader, 1972; Sieber, 1989). Ethnographers, clearly, find a way.[2] Then again, access is not sufficiently compelling on its own. The challenge is making something of it and pressing elites to say anything meaningful (Galliher, 1980). Ethnographers of elites invariably test out different tactics to elicit information, practicing a "cooperative posture" (Hoffman, 1980), "hanging out" (Nair, 2021), or otherwise obfuscating the true intentions of their research (Ostrander, 1993). Whatever tactic they employ, it can quickly become apparent as to who, in fact, is in charge: elites themselves. This realization—whether ethnographers come to it in the moment or anticipate it in advance—sets the practical as well as moral limits of investigation and shapes the interpretation and analysis that follows.

Brooke Harrington (2016), for example, talks about the "open hostility" demonstrated by some of the wealth managers she was studying when early findings were published. At the end of an interview in the British Virgin Islands, one suggested that she "should be thrown off the island" (ibid., 24). It was a figurative gesture, she concluded, but it was still startling, especially given that she had by then earned a certificate in wealth management training and proven her bonafides. Ethnographers who study Latin American elites write of conducting fieldwork in settings where those who issue threats have a track record of fulfilling the promise (Villarreal, 2021). Other times, however, elites can be less direct, if still intimidating, as Rosita Armytage (2018), who studies Pakistani elites, learned, when one of her informants made clear that there was nothing she could do or say that would hurt him. Rather than an invitation to disclose whatever she wanted about this man, she took it to mean the reverse—there was nothing that she should disclose, and so Armytage, like

[2] Prior advantages, and not a little social and cultural capital, likely help the cause, as does the right pedigree (Chancer, 2020). Knowing the right people within academic networks helps, too, in the way of opening doors and seeking out lucrative grants and other opportunities to share work in high-status venues, as a quick read of back cover blurbs and lengthy acknowledgements sections tracing a very specific, and very elite, intellectual lineage demonstrates.

most ethnographers of elites, opted to give him a pseudonym and erase all identifying characteristics. Elisabeth Schimpfössl (2018) makes a similar choice, for similar reasons. Many of the Russian oligarchs-turned-bourgeoisie she interviews in Moscow, London, Paris, and New York insist that she use their real names, and in some cases, she obliges. In others, though, she decides on pseudonyms, and in still others, she avoids fake names and fictionalized characteristics and settings altogether, because, as she writes, "Some of the material produced could have potentially caused upset" (ibid., 17). Schimpfössl does not indicate what upset, in particular, or whether and how this may affect her, specifically, but she imposes a form of "self-censorship," all the same.

Even those occasions where elites would seem eager to welcome ethnographers into the fold pose certain risks. As John Osburg (2013) delves deeper into the nefarious dealings of Chengdu's new elite, for example, he is invited to become part of a key informant's "xiongdi," or informal network, in which various misdeeds are perpetrated on behalf of the leader. Osburg politely declines, telling the man that he is both "unwilling and unable" to perform the requisite tasks associated with this entanglement. Kimberly Kay Hoang (2022) arrives at the same conclusion while tracking the complicated webs of wealth accumulation and tax evasion that link investors, bankers, lawyers, and various fixers in "spider capitalism." Though initially she had access to one of the big "spiders" atop an expansive network that hides wealth in sometimes legal, sometimes illegal activities, she is quickly passed on to a subordinate. Later, as she moves through this world and wins the trust of several subordinates, she finds herself invited to sit in on meetings in which deals are being made and potential crimes are being committed, all part of "playing in the gray," as she calls it. Like Osburg, she refuses the offer and closes down that part of her research, partly due to her own misgivings, but also in consultation with her university's legal team.

The practical and moral dilemmas that ethnographers of elites encounter are similar in degree, if not in kind, compared to those who study poor and working-class people, and yet the decisions they make and the responses they engender could not be more different. Ethnographers who study "down" rarely hesitate to observe illegal activities, whether it is Sudhir Venkatesh (2008) playing "gang leader for a day," Philippe Bourgois (1998) following dealers and users into crack houses, Mitchell Duneier (1999) watching homeless men hock stolen merchandise and harass women on the street, or Alice Goffman (2014) going for a "ride along" with the purpose of finding and possibly killing a presumed enemy of one of her informants. Sociology, moreover, routinely celebrates it when ethnographers demonstrate such daring, particularly when "cowboy ethnographers" (read: men) are the ones who take these risks (Chancer & Jacobsen, 2016; Wynn, 2022), and when it is mostly powerless people who accompany them on a journey into those gray areas between legal and not-so-legal activities in poor neighborhoods and communities. The discipline would seem to have less appetite for those researchers who would compromise relationships with powerful people whose tangled webs extend deep into the academy. Hoang acknowledges as much when she factors in the multi-billion-dollar endowment at her university and the people, money, and legal team attached to it as she decides the scope of her investigation.

Hoang's comments are only the latest contribution to a larger conversation about the potential conflict between academic and disciplinary aspirations and norms and the ethical dimensions of studying up (Galliher, 1980; Khan, 2012; Nader, 1972; Sieber, 1989). While no one is advocating breaking the law, there are those who would push ethnographers to consider whether and how studies of elites might better serve civil society and the wider public. Joseph Conti and Moira O'Neil (2007), for example, find utility in feminist epistemologies of scientific inquiry that would call on researchers to critically engage the power imbalance that often frames interactions with elites. The authors draw on interviews with lawyers at the World Trade Organization who advance development projects that

compromise the stability of weak member states to make the point. Against standard guidelines that would compel a more objective stance on the part of researchers, they document the enormous power vested in these individuals. The more confrontational approach they adopt in light of these facts, as they argue, is not only more prudent, but it is also more ethical, given what the broader society stands to learn.

Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2015), meanwhile, advocates a "radically un/ethical position" that would have scholars distinguish between the courtesies and benefits of the doubt that they would give to the poor who are at a structural disadvantage compared to elites who are in a position of influence and power. In making the case, he reflects on an annual hazing ritual involving male adolescents that he witnessed in fieldwork at an elite boarding school in the northeastern USA. He had originally assented to the administration's demand that he strike these observations in a subsequent book (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009), as it would put the school in a bad light. Ten years later, though, and in apparent violation of whatever agreement he signed, Gaztambide-Fernández returns to his notes and publishes details of the original encounter (minus the names of the institution and the students involved) to highlight how privilege is cultivated and a sense of moral superiority achieved in these spaces. Clearly, he is no longer willing to play along with elites interested in fabricating a more genial and market-friendly story about themselves. He urges other scholars to drop similar pretenses in order to advance the cause of social justice in society.

While the approach Gaztambide-Fernández suggests has some keen followers (Cerón-Anaya, 2019; Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012), others, including Karen Lillie and Pere Ayling (2021), reject the proposition that ethnographers renege on commitments of fair and due process in the course of elites research. Drawing on their own separate studies, they argue that researchers must engage rather than avoid the necessary tensions between upholding values of social justice and respecting the autonomy of informants. Ayling, as she admits, in her study of wealthy Nigerian parents and their efforts to win admission to top boarding schools in London, demonstrated a willingness to "play the game," using her Nigerian background to win the affection of parents, even if it meant signaling agreement with views on race and class that she abhorred. Lillie, similarly, refused to contradict administration and students at a boarding school in Switzerland who were insulted by the insinuation that they might be elite. The difference between their approach and that of Gaztambide-Fernández, they write, is the way they perceive elites "first and foremost as humans with *rights* rather than mere objects of research" (ibid., 898, emphasis in original).

Lillie and Ayling tap into a common impulse. Only those who never really know elites except in a superficial sense, say, in film, television, and social media, for example, could ever think elites are strictly "villains," as Monica Prasad (2021) explains, or, conversely, that poor people are always "victims." People become a lot more complicated—more human, that is—the more we spend time with them. Both Gaztambide-Fernández and Lillie and Ayling would seem to agree on this point. They would also seem to agree that elites are individuals embedded within larger systems and institutions that influence thought and action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). It is just that Gaztambide-Fernández refuses to see elites apart from the capitalist class structure that produces them—not even for a moment, as in the case of adolescents at a boarding school.

2 Elites Explain Themselves, and Ethnographers Listen

Even if other ethnographers would accept the fundamental insight of Gaztambide-Fernández's "radically un/ethical position," few would seem to organize their research along such lines. Most set aside judging anyone good or bad altogether, and instead talk of good and bad systems and structures, though in sections of articles and books that stand apart from the presentation of ethnographic data. Karen Ho (2009), for instance, tells a nuanced and sophisticated story of how oil

crises, rising inflation, and increased global competition in the 1970s transformed the business of Wall Street in ways that empowered shareholders at the expense of ordinary people. Harrington (2016) and Hoang (2022) take the story of global capitalism further with their exploration of the many complicated schemes that elites and teams of legal and political experts develop to hide and, ultimately, grow their wealth in secret. While all three put the worlds of business and finance under a microscope, rarely is anyone they interview pinned down on specifics, and almost no one comes across as good or bad—mainly, they come across as doing their job. What goes unsaid is that arguing who or what is to blame in the case of potentially corrupt or quasi-legal behavior and demanding specifics would only compromise access. For others, though, calling out elites, naming names, and boxing them into a corner, even if that were possible, would only obscure what we might learn about elites and what motivates them (Sherman, 2017).

When elites are left to talk, they say some fairly predictable things. Most elites, it turns out, though particularly owners and associated professionals, simultaneously accept and reject personal responsibility for anything untoward that happens in the global economy. They are both deserving of status and money by dint of merit, discipline, and hard work, and at the same time, they are but cogs performing ordinary tasks within a larger system they do not control (Lamont, 1994). This way of thinking provides a means by which individuals of wealth and privilege can present themselves as deserving of advantages, while helping maintain the appearance of moral selves committed to justice and fairness in a supremely unjust world. They believe themselves to be uniquely special; the power and money they control only reinforce that assumption, in echoes of Max Weber's (2002 [1902]) insights on the same observed phenomenon among European Protestants. What is striking is the high consistency in the way this ideology is deployed across race and gender lines, not to mention different geographies and cultures (Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Krozer, 2020; Lamont, 1994). Non-white, non-male salaried professional workers and managers do not espouse radically different views or agendas than their white male peers, which suggests that the structure of wealth and power can sustain the integration of diverse peoples and bodies, so long as individuals fulfill their obligations to the firm (Tobias Neely, 2022). Becoming elite, if one is not already elite, requires just this sort of agreement. Even progressive-minded individuals only take their proposals for social change so far. They see many faults in the way that society functions, and yet benefit from it, too, and rather nicely, without ever really confronting actual structures of poverty and inequality (McGoey, 2021).

As Rachel Sherman (2017) shows in her study of New York elites, most dismiss the social and economic distinction that the category implies, and instead think of themselves as middle class, despite all evidence to the contrary. This effort to hide or dismiss wealth is perhaps the clearest evidence Sherman finds that elites know that the wealth they hold represents a kind of injustice given all the problems of the world. The challenge, then, is to take what some may perceive as illegitimate and make it otherwise. As Sherman writes, "The fact that some people have much more than others comes to be taken for granted as long as those who benefit *inhabit* their privilege appropriately" (ibid., 25, emphasis in original). The people Sherman meets have struggles of their own, payments to make, debts to manage, and only so much money in hand. They are not *that* rich, some say. And it is not just that others have more money than them, but that others are more selfish than them, maybe not as useful to society, and perhaps not as thoughtful about their money, in general. Sherman labels this an "upward orientation" to privilege, and those who espouse it see themselves not only as deserving of wealth, but also morally superior and righteous because of it. Another orientation is downward, Sherman says, where elites recognize their privileges relative to others and do what they can to mitigate this discomfort, for instance, contributing to local charities, volunteering, or participating in protests. Elites who perceive their wealth in these ways are more accepting of others and appear to have more diverse networks

of friends and colleagues. Sherman does not see these as strict black and white orientations, however. Most elites, even if they have a strong preference to one or the other, tend to embody aspects of both.

The script that elites reveal in their conversations with Sherman, and which is evident in most other studies of elites, is often the culmination of a much more complex process that begins in the home. Upper-class parents tend to give their children the space, time, and resources to pursue their own interests (Lareau, 2011). These advantages find further reinforcement in an education system that rewards the kinds of independent thought and advocacy that middle- and upper-middle-class children practice (Calarco, 2018). Private tutoring, standardized exam preparation, and participation in extracurricular activities perfectly complement the selection criteria that university admissions officers use to fill enrollments with prospective graduates who will eventually bring back money and prestige to campus in a self-reinforcing loop of privilege and wealth (Stevens, 2007). A similar process plays out in the labor market, as Lauren Rivera (2015) shows, where elite students land elite jobs primarily on account of their pedigree.

But it is inside the boarding school where ethnographers find the most ideal site to study the early steps of elite reproduction and an emerging ethos of privilege and entitlement. Gaztambide-Fernández (2009), in his own study of one such boarding school he calls Weston, shows how physical space reflects social hierarchies that over time become normalized. What happens inside classrooms further impresses upon students who among them is worthy of recognition—students at the school also practice distinguishing themselves from others beyond the school's cloistered grounds, even seeing something virtuous about themselves in making out the difference. Gaztambide-Fernández, for example, encounters Emily who imagines those who work at McDonald's as "failures" (ibid., 195) compared to herself and other Westonians. For Emily and her peers, however, there is a certain responsibility to the failures. This notion provides justification for such an institution and the inequality it represents and produces, Gaztambide-Fernández writes, "where 'the best of the best' are prepared to fulfill some civic duty, perhaps to oversee those who are excluded from the Weston bubble" (ibid., 204).

It is very much the same at St. Paul's, as Shamus Khan (2012) finds out, or, as it happens, rediscovers. A former student at St. Paul's, he returns to study how a school this elite and exclusive effectively adapts in a new gilded age of extreme inequality. Like Gaztambide-Fernández, Khan shows how mundane activities, such as regular chapel service, where students are obligated to sit in rows that designate their position in the school hierarchy, or learning how to eat, how to dress, and how to engage upperclassmen, teaches students to accept, and expect, their privileges and entitlements as a matter of course. "These experiences convey to the students a sense that it was not the work of their ancestors nor is it the inheritance of wealth-new or old-to which they owe their position," writes Khan. "Instead, they are paying their own way at the school through hard work and the slow cultivation of necessary experiences" (ibid., 97). In the classroom, students learn to be "cultural omnivores," just as capable of discerning the finer elements of Beowulf as enjoying the simple pleasures of more popular cultural artifacts, like *Jaws* or the latest rap songs. Over time, they come to embody an "ease of privilege," as well as the absolute certainty that they are essential to society.

This way of thinking in elite schools is not reserved, however, for upper-class boys in the northeastern USA. Meghan Chidsey (2020) also finds evidence of the phenomenon in all-girls private schools in India, where lessons in "women's empowerment" ultimately translate as encouragement to already-elite girls to abide by the strictures of neoliberal feminism and pursue professional careers in lucrative sectors of the global economy. Pere Ayling (2019), furthermore, shows how Nigerian parents are expertly tuned to the potential benefits that elite schools in London may bring to them and their children, as well as how they might leverage race and nationality to win admission. They know that being

black and foreign is a plus for these elite schools and they work to position their children as "exceptions to the rule" that Nigerian children are not smart or talented. Beyond claims of minority status, parents compel themselves and their children to internalize necessary transformations, for example, acquiring a refined accent, all while retaining, paradoxically, their identity as Nigerian. This is not done on behalf of the race, Ayling notes, but instead reflects parents' capacity to match their own status ambitions with elite institutions' efforts to combine "exclusivity and minority status" (ibid., 99) amid calls to diversify elites, more generally.

3 Standing Up to Bias and Discrimination

While the language and rhetoric that elites borrow to justify their advantages often reads the same in different geographies and cultures, ethnographers are keenly aware that not everyone comes by it in quite the same way. Women and racial and ethnic minorities continue to make inroads within elite institutions and networks, as many ethnographers note (Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Jack, 2019; Khan, 2012). Access and inclusion, however, are not the same feeling a true sense of home or place of comfort. For sure, it is a different kind of injustice than not having an actual home, a job, a meal, and still, it is an injustice, all the same. Among ethnographers of elites who encounter regular displays of bias and discrimination, it evokes a strong reaction, indeed, partly, though not entirely, because some ethnographers experience it firsthand upon entering the field and live it in their daily lives as researchers and ordinary citizens. The mix of personal experience and critical analysis helps to reveal the moral gaps and ambiguities in the self-satisfying narratives of merit, discipline, and hard work trumpeted by most elites (Cousin et al., 2018; Savage & Nichols, 2018).

3.1 Women in the Field, Women at Work

No matter the education, class, or professional status they hold, for example, women ethnographers endure certain travails that few men in the field encounter (Hanson & Richards, 2019). These risks are all the more real when the men they meet flaunt their power in specifically gendered ways—the Russian oligarchs in Schimpfössl's (2018) study delay meetings until night-time and then put off talk of serious things until first knowing her age and if she was single. Armytage (2018) recounts a time when a wealthy Pakistani invited her to travel on a business trip with him to Dubai, implying an exchange of information for romantic engagement, which she refused. Armytage talks about "role flexibility." In one moment, she is the female confidante to the elite women she meets, and in another, she is the single foreign women in need of male expertise. While all this helps to gain access and information, it is emotionally taxing; women ethnographers must always remain vigilant. Hoang (2022), for instance, shares the story of an evening meeting between male business partners that turned unexpectedly intimate with the appearance of several sex workers. The men assumed that Hoang would participate, or at least stay and observe the proceedings. She decided to leave, though not without being told that she would miss out on important details of financial deals and other events.

Ashley Mears (2020) deals with many of the same issues in her study of promoters who cater to the very rich in exclusive bars and nightclubs around the world. Her defense against intimate intrusions and abuse, she surmises, was her age (early 30s at the time of fieldwork, and thus, in her estimation, less desirable, as compared to the late teens and early-20s women she meets at the clubs), as well as her repeated efforts to remind people in the field of her husband and children. These efforts afforded her the space and time to document how other women in these clubs are treated as "bargaining chips" (ibid., 28), merely used by men to confirm their existing status or, as

with others whose status is less certain, to "level the playing field" (ibid., 118). "Those girls deemed pretty enough to be at the center of the most exclusive parties in the world were still outsiders," Mears writes, "always adjacent to the real power concentrated in men's hands" (ibid., 147). Mears, like Hoang, perceives the beauty and sex work of certain women as instrumental to reinforcing status among elites, generally.

For elite women earning good salaries and holding down positions that grant them a modicum of professional autonomy does not guarantee them respect, either. Megan Tobias Neely (2022) interviews women working in hedge funds on Wall Street who report differential treatment and the inability to move up corporate ladders, not only on the basis of explicit forms of gender discrimination, such as sexual assault or harassment, but also implicit forms, as when they are left out of important meetings and social events that men use to build connections and establish more certain career paths. These forms of exclusion, which appear across society, are naturalized in the space of financial firms, with real costs to women. "Gender-essentialist beliefs are rampant on Wall Street," Tobias Neely writes, "where client investors hew to the idea that men are naturally more emboldened and savvy risk-takers than women" (ibid., 20). Though the women hedge fund managers she interviews evince the same appetite for risk, they are effectively "hedged out," in Tobias Neely's words, and find it much more difficult to raise capital, as a result; obligations to children and families also adds pressure, as Tobias Neely asserts, and as other studies confirm (Budig & England, 2001). Karen Ho (2009), in her study of salaried professional workers on Wall Street, recorded some of the same biases, even among those women who put in 100-plus-hour weeks, outperforming and outworking many men in similar positions—the more they worked, Ho found, the more susceptible they were to being labeled out of touch and out of their depth.

In contrast to these standard and unfortunately predictable accounts of gender-based discrimination in the workplace, Swethaa Ballakrishnen (2022) provides an important counterweight, if also some hope that change is possible. The study demonstrates how elite law firms based in Mumbai but with an international reach unwittingly create spaces for highly educated women in a society otherwise opposed to their social and economic success. The women are beneficiaries of what Ballakrishnen calls an "accidental feminism," which results from the unlikely combination of a-political, a-gendered rhetorics in home law firms with expectations of gender equity harbored by global clients. It matters not what corporations abroad actually intend with statements promoting women's empowerment, or what Indian society may or may not permit women to attempt or achieve. Rather, the goal of the study is to reveal the cracks and fault lines within existing capitalist structures and to highlight what these particular women in the study make of them by way of advocating for themselves and others.

3.2 Challenging the Color Line

Ethnographers of elites also mine personal experiences with race as a means of producing knowledge. Hugo Cerón-Anaya (2019), for example, who grew up in a family on the threshold between working-class and lower-middle-class status in Mexico City, emphasizes lines of demarcation that he had rarely crossed prior to conducting his golf club research. Inside the clubs, he smiles and bears it as people use racist slurs to describe others who live in poorer sections around the golf courses. He is also confused for the help at times on the basis of his skin color. While these forms of bias and discrimination impact what Cerón-Anaya can see and do, as well as who he can meet and for how long—for instance, he admits that he was unable to gain access to the two wealthiest, most exclusive clubs in the city—his reflections on these experiences help discern how elites maintain distance from the rest of society. A reverse set of dynamics play out for Osburg (2013), who studies informal social and financial networks among elites in Chengdu, China, and yet also provide him with useful information. As a white

American fluent in Chinese he is granted a kind of access that is not available to Cerón-Anaya. He is invited into meetings, even asked if he wants to participate in business dealings, and as a result has a privileged view of elite interactions. Patricia Banks (2019) gains access to elite Black spaces, mainly, she admits, on account of her academic pedigree combined with her identity as a Black woman.

Joint reflections on the ethnographic process reveal yet more about the way that social background informs what researchers see and how they interpret results. As part of the methodological appendix to their book on class in the U.K., Sam Friedman and Daniel Laurison (2019) admit to different starting points in the research process. Friedman, for his part, reflects on his upbringing in a privileged middle-class home, while Laurison talks about his experience growing up in working-class conditions and embracing his identity as a transgender man. It is evident in the research design and analytical take-aways how these positions impacted access and what was observed. The pair find it particularly challenging to disentangle factors of class and ethnicity in determining the fortunes of those whom they meet. As they write: "People from Indian, Chinese, and Mixed, Multiple or Other racial-ethnic backgrounds are more likely to have had parents in professional or managerial occupations than white people in the UK, while Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people are far less likely than white people to have come from privileged origins" (ibid., 42). Class barriers persist throughout the society, they note, and yet, "Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people in the UK are under-represented in top jobs even when we compare them to those from similar class origins and/or with similar levels of education" (ibid., 44). Appearing sufficiently "polished" in ways that mask their working-class origins is also challenging. "They start from a clear disadvantage," Friedman and Laurison write, "and are often unsettled by a lingering anxiety that they are making 'mistakes' in their execution of dominant behavioural codes" (ibid., 132).

As in Friedman and Laurison's study, Anthony Jack (2019) also presents upwardly mobile Black and Latino students at an elite American liberal arts college in largely sympathetic terms that he hopes will motivate larger policy shifts toward greater equity and inclusion in higher education. Jack distinguishes between the "privileged poor," who have had prior experience in elite spaces in high school and earlier, and the "doubly disadvantaged," for whom this specific university is the first sustained exposure to elites. The privileged poor among these students project confidence which, in turn, impacts all other facets of their time in university. Camille Charles et al. (2022) affirm Jack's findings with their mixed methods study of the "new Black elite" as represented on American university campuses. Along with Jack, they find a heterogeneous experience to match the diversity of Black students on the basis of dark or light skin, gender and sexuality, national origins, language, and religion. Even for the most advantaged among them, however, there is the constant presence of poverty in their lives that reflects a certain tension that other students may not experience. For both the privileged poor and the doubly disadvantaged that Jack follows, time at an elite university brings additional lessons about being elite that may be difficult to square with their personal investment of hard work and discipline. Academic performance, while necessary, is not sufficient to break into the elite, as many of them find.

Across three countries—India, France, and the USA—Jules Naudet (2018) finds additional evidence of a tension between aspiring elites and origin families and communities that appear in the studies of race, class, and social mobility by Jack and Charles et al. "To be *grounded* is not only to be anchored in moral values," Naudent writes, "it is also to be capable of accepting one's difference, not denying it, and seeking to establish strong links between one's background of origin and the attained group" (ibid., 174, emphasis in original). For some, this tension is "transitional," merely a passing feeling, which gives way to a sense of being "chosen" (ibid., 210). Not all those on the track of upward mobility arrive at that moment, however, as Naudet observes, and as Friedman and Laurison confirm in a discussion of ways that individuals

"self-eliminate." But those who make it, while they may feel nagging obligations to families and communities, nevertheless, over time, embody their new class position and the privilege and entitlement that comes with it.

4 Limits, Implications, and Future Steps

Sharing conversations and taking notes in fancy restaurants, golf clubs, corner offices, private jets, and other exclusive spaces—ethnographers of elites are not exactly slumming it. Yet, the work is very serious, indeed, and carries great responsibility, as well, particularly when wealthy and powerful people are the principal focus. For this reason, the work can also stir resentments, and not a little ambivalence. Mears, in her study of the VIP party circuit, captures the sentiment well. Sitting poolside the morning after an all-night party in Miami, she recalls "thinking about my own weird tangle of enjoying access to this exclusive world of the rich and the beautiful, while also being repulsed by it" (2020, xv). That repulsion keeps some away—"icky," is how one colleague who studies poverty described the thought of studying up, and why he avoids it. Mears, though, like other ethnographers of elites cited here and many others besides, ultimately finds a deeper purpose, even a moral obligation, in the tension this ambivalence produces. That the rich live as they do, while so many go without, does not feel right to many, if not all, ethnographers who take up this work. Something can and should be done about it. One step, among many steps in that direction, as ethnographers of elites announce, is to engage people on the very subject of their wealth and power in the hopes that this will give greater insight into the motivations that produce and perpetuate inequality.

Almost immediately, though, ethnographers run up against certain challenges in the field that make the task all the more difficult to achieve, and which narrow the strategies they might undertake in search of answers. Elites do not give interviews—they hold court, as Alice Krozer remarks,[3] and ethnographers, in turn, listen, and often to great effect, as I have documented here. These circumstances, though, and the pressure this entails, can also make it difficult to test what elites say against what they do, which some see as a guiding principle of qualitative research (Jerolmack & Khan, 2010). In lieu of a conclusion, I want to ponder, in brief, some of the limits to letting elites speak freely that can (though certainly not always) undermine the greater goals that ethnographers, including Mears, Krozer, and others, lay down for themselves, as well as how and why we might complement this strategy by stepping outside the bounds of inquiry that elites set for those who study them.

In many instances, ethnographers only have the word of elites, and not only in the case of what elites think about poverty and inequality, but also in terms of how they make their money, where that money goes, and what harm (or good) it does. Some ethnographers, for instance, while they develop analyses alongside in-depth participant observation inside leading financial institutions and wealth management organizations do not always find themselves where the action is, but instead outside the door, notebook and recorder in hand, either because they are not welcome anyplace else or, as in Osburg's (2013) and Hoang's (2022) cases, they have declined the invitation. Others who study matters of leisure, culture, and taste rely on strategies of participant observation alongside standard interviews, and yet the spaces in which this research is conducted often feature performances that necessarily make it difficult to separate what is real from what is manufactured among similarly powerful, if not always exactly like-minded, people. Whether in the office or at home or in the club, when elites speak well or ill of poor and working-class people or anyone else outside their orbit, or, as is often the case, deign to speak in sometimes patronizing ways about the responsibility they feel to lift others and help society, ethnographers do not always have enough information to judge their statements as

[3] Personal correspondence (December 7, 2022).

being true or false. Some will say that is not the purpose of studying up, and there is a certain logic to the argument—knowing what elites think, whether or not it bears on actual events or behaviors, brings us some way toward confronting wealth and power (Khan, 2014; Sherman, 2017). It is also reasonable to think that efforts at understanding elites can only be enhanced if ethnographers were better able to distinguish who elites are from how they want to be perceived.

Studies that center the experience of women and ethnic minorities within elite spaces already accomplish much of what I am proposing—in many ways, in fact, I would only want that we do more of what makes these studies stand out, which is to provide a necessary check on what powerful people and institutions say about themselves, and thereby develop an even stronger understanding of elites' motives. That check comes in the way of documenting what elites and the institutions they run say about commitments to racial justice and gender equity and testing these mission statements against what individuals from historically disadvantaged groups experience based on interactions among supposedly progressive elites in these spaces.

Yet, there are limits to this approach, as well. The experience of friction or tension conveyed in moments where ethnographers track the way racism and misogyny impacts informants often reflects but one vantage point. Here, the issue is not whether reported incidents and the emotions attached to them are true or false, but how to interpret experiences within the broader array of injustices that appear in society. We need not equivocate on the cruel and dehumanizing machinations of racism or misogyny that someone endures in the elite university, the Wall Street firm, or the club to consider the question. Several studies feature comments that all but beg for deeper engagement with the issue. A good example is the Black man who admits to Naudet (2018) that he feels guilt and shame about the quality of his education and the size of his salary when he considers the violence and insecurity in his community back home, but who also feels no desire to overthrow or even confront the old order that these wider injustices represent. The women in Tobias Neely's (2022) study who appear as cutthroat and singular-minded as the men who sit in the same high rise office towers pursuing similar profit-maximizing strategies that benefit firms above all other social or civic considerations are another example. Same with the wealthy housewives in studies by Bhandari (2019), Glucksberg (2018), and Sherman (2017) who feel neglected by husbands and families and who still enforce strict regimens on the working-class women they either manage or employ. There are also Ayling's (2019) Nigerian parents who feel compelled to adapt to the strictures of whiteness in order to secure their children seats in posh schools in London, but who nevertheless have an opportunity that millions of other aspiring parents stuck in poor neighborhoods and communities in Nigeria must envy.

The point is not that ethnographers need to contemplate a hierarchy of moral suffering when studying up, or to countenance the moral relativism that such an effort might imply. Elites feel what they feel, and those feelings have realities all of their own. It is only to consider what further insights we might gain if we were to actively pursue observations and interviews with individuals who inhabit spaces apart from elites. This may mean engaging with poor and working-class people who perform service roles at the side of elites, say, driving cars, pruning lawns, cleaning toilets, guarding entryways, or carrying golf bags (Inglis, 2019; Kang, 2010; Ray & Qayum, 2009). It could also mean speaking to friends, family, and other close intimates of actual or aspiring elites, in order that we might trace out the wider impact these elites have upon others in society. What is important is the juxtaposition of classes, maybe not always, or ever, in the same spaces, but perhaps in the same study, as difficult or challenging as that may turn out to be in practice. Incorporating perspectives and interactions that lie just beyond the venues that ethnographers of elites traditionally explore would only sharpen our understanding of wealth and power, if also deepen our own moral purpose and clarity.

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Morality, Inequality, and the Power of Categories

Lyn Spillman

Abstract

Sociological contributions to empirical understanding of morality may focus on properties of actors and actions, such as their commitments to different moral foundations, or else on the "moral background" (Abend The moral background: An inquiry into the history of business ethics. Princeton University Press, 2014) of taken-for-granted categorical presuppositions about others and about fields of action. In this paper, I draw on cultural sociology to argue that, compared to a focus on actors' dispositions, focusing on issues of cultural categorization is more important for understanding inequality and power. To illustrate, I draw on recent sociological studies of ethnic and racial stigma, economic justice, and human rights.

Keywords

Morality · Inequality · Power · Categories · Personal culture

Should the sociology of morality contribute to a sociological understanding of inequality and domination? If so, how?

Intuitively, these may seem puzzling questions. We are typically critical of inequality and domination, and if they are bad, it seems clear that morality must be somehow relevant. But there is also strong reason to be doubtful about any such connection. A thought experiment can illustrate the reason for these doubts.

Assume, for a moment, that everybody does the right thing all the time—even that every actor and action is altruistic.[1] If everyone does the right thing all the time, will inequality and domination fade from society? Such an outcome is unlikely, and certainly not necessary. Following moral precepts could equally well sustain terrible inequalities and deep domination. Think of dying for one's country in the course of a costly battle that your side wins. Altruism helps kill many people and imposes new forms of domination on the losers. There are many more routine illustrations too. For instance, it is easy to imagine that investment advisors prosecuted for fraud understand their shady dealings as virtuous self-reliance, or all for the betterment of their company, their families, and maybe even their clients. And we can imagine that an executive filing fraudulent emissions reports might have acted altruistically to protect his company and his employees. Of course, actors' various propensities to do the right thing by others is not unimportant: it matters, for example, whether

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[1] Of course, to imagine that everyone does the right thing all the time is a Durkheimian impossibility, since deviance defines morality, but I set that aside here for the sake of the thought experiment.

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some police offers are chronically more violent in encounters with Black men than others. But the fact remains that even if, *per impossibile*, everyone did the right thing all the time, inequality and domination would continue.

This thought experiment suggests that whether or not actions, intentions, and dispositions are moral, immoral, or non-moral (habitual, for example) is not particularly relevant to social ills like inequality and domination.

However, not all sociology of morality is focused on dispositions to act. That is why I argue here in favor of a particular type of sociology of morality. As Hitlin and Vaisey say in their overview of the subfield, morality "...encompasses any way that individuals or social groups understand which behaviors are better than others, which goals are the most worthy, and what people should believe, feel, and do..." (2013, 55). Importantly, they show that sociologists look at two sorts of questions—not only questions about the ways morality affects action, but also questions about where morality comes from.

So I argue here that sociological contributions to empirical understanding of connections between morality and inequality are more productive when we investigate the genealogy of moral categories than when we investigate properties of actors and action. What is sociologically important about the connection between morality and inequality is the genealogy of what Abend (2014) calls "the moral background"—especially the taken-for-granted cultural categories which define others and define fields of action, how those categories change, and how they stay the same. In contrast, and as my thought experiment suggests, if we focus on properties of actors and action, investigations of morality may shed light on everyday life, but they remain closed off from what we understand as large scale social ills like inequality.

To make this argument, I first situate the sociology of morality in terms of the broader sociology of culture, because lessons learned about cultural processes considered more broadly shed light on specific arguments about morality. I then stipulate how I understand "inequality" and "power," showing how much they are currently understood by sociologists as founded on cultural categories. I build on this foundation to examine different varieties of arguments about the effects of morality on action, and different varieties of arguments about where morality comes from, in terms of what they offer for understanding inequality and power. Finally, I offer three extended illustrations drawn from recent sociological research that show the limitations of a focus on action, and the strengths of a focus on cultural genealogy, for understanding morality and inequality.

1 The Sociology of Morality as Cultural Sociology

From a sociological perspective, questions about morality are questions about understanding and evaluation. In contrast to investigation of psychological processes underpinning the general possibility of understanding and evaluation, the sociology of morality highlights the particular ways in which different societies and social groups understand and evaluate objects and actions, and individuals' longer-term strategies of action oriented to moral meanings (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013, 55; 2010).[2] In contrast to other sociologists, sociologists of morality emphasize that human nature is inherently moral and evaluative, and sociologists would be missing something big if they bracketed questions of evaluation (Calhoun, 1991; Smith, 2003; Hitlin, 2008, 198–199). For example, Smith (2003) argues that moral orders based on shared narratives are constitutive of human personhood and human action.

Such investigations of socially-situated understanding and evaluation can be considered a branch of cultural investigation—of "processes of meaning-making" (Spillman, 2020). Indeed, some leading studies in the sociology of morality

[2] For considerations of how "moral communities" mediate the relation between justice and morality from the (social) psychological point of view, see Hegtvedt and Scheuerman (2010).

originated in cultural sociology (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013, 58–59; Lamont, 2013, vi–vii), and some theoretical developments in cultural sociology have also been influential, such as the dual-process model of cognition and action (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013 61; Ignatow, 2009; Lizardo et al., 2016; Vaisey, 2009). However, the influence of cultural sociology on the sociology of morality has not been systematic or explicit. Sociologists of morality are sometimes concerned to avoid the stigma of over-emphasizing value consensus (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013, 61; Smith, 2003, 30)—as indeed cultural sociologists had been in the 1980s and 1990s (Spillman, 1995).

Yet, as I outline next, current understandings of both inequality and power are founded on cultural mechanisms. I then go on to specify some of the ways in which the central questions of the sociology of morality that Hitlin and Vaisey identify can be understood in more depth by drawing on the variety of tools and perspectives available in the broader field of cultural sociology. From this perspective, the sociology of morality is a particular application of a broader cultural sociology. This broader perspective is especially important for connecting morality with inequality and power.

2 Inequality and Power

A necessary condition of human inequality relies on the capacity to categorize: "inequality is rooted in the human proclivity to think in categorical terms" (Massey, 2008, iv). Categorization is an essential cognitive process, and not all categorization generates inequality (Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Zerubavel, 1997). However, "durable inequality" relies on categories, boundary work, and persistent stigmatization and "much of what appears to be individual to individual inequality actually results from categorically organized differences" (Tilly, 1996, 73). Common forms of inequality and stigmatization are generated in categorical evaluations.

How do categories become durable inequalities? As Massey (2008, 5–6) summarizes: "all stratification processes boil down to a combination of two simple but powerful mechanisms; the allocation of people to social categories, and the institutionalization of practices that allocate resources unequally across these categories..." The mechanisms through which categories generate inequality in resource allocation are relational processes that may vary. Tilly (1996) theorizes four fundamental mechanisms: exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. These are collective, organizational processes rather than individual processes: according to Tilly, they "operate in the domains of collective experience and social interaction" (24) rather than individual belief. Notably, subordinate as well as dominant groups may participate in sustaining durable inequality, such as by opportunity hoarding. And because categorical inequalities may be generated for "relational" goods such as status recognition as well as "autonomous" goods such as wealth (25), these mechanisms may generate inequalities of "recognition" as well as "redistribution" (Lamont, 2018; see also Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

Ridgeway (2014) further theorizes the impact of categories on inequality, in ways which may be independent of power and resources. She shows how "status acts as an *independent* force in the making of inequality" (1) and is based on "widely shared beliefs about the categories or "types" of people that are ranked by society." (3). Status categories affect implicit interactional assumptions, preferences about association, and resistance to challenge, and "through [micro] social encounters that repeat over and over again in the organizations that distribute resources and power, the effects of these processes accumulate" (12).

Of course, whereas categorization is a necessary general condition of inequality, the particular cultural forms of consequential categories, and the particular ways that mechanisms of inequality may function, do vary historically, and political conditions influence their implementation. So, for example, Massey (2008) shows how categorization, exploitation, and opportunity hoarding help explain the history of American racial, class, and gender inequalities over the twentieth century, and Ridgeway also focuses on these inequalities, although she intends her argument to apply "to social 'actors' more broadly," (2014: 13, n.1)

including collective and organizational actors. Tilly (1996) offers an extensive set of illustrations drawn from different historical periods and a wider range of categorical distinctions. Moreover, as Monk (2022) has recently argued, generic, state-stabilized categories like race and gender operate in complex ways in practice, given population heterogeneity, varying interactional cues, and intersectionality. The connection of categories to inequality is complex and should not be treated superficially. Nevertheless, despite the complexities of historical practice, categorization remains fundamental to inequality.

What about power? The power involved in sustaining or challenging social outcomes like durable inequalities may take several forms (Reed, 2013a). First, the categorization necessary to inequality is a matter of discursive power: relatively anonymous, conventional, and diffuse. Second, the mechanisms generating inequality on the basis of (potentially neutral) categorization involve relational power. Outcomes such as inequality are explained in terms of "a certain structure of social relations" (Reed, 2013a, 194)—such as, for Tilly (1996) and Massey (2008), exploitation and opportunity hoarding. According to Reed, discursive and relational power may also be sustained in situated interaction by performance: but when "situated action itself has outsized impact on social convention, structural arrangements, discursive formations and so on" (207), performance becomes a different sort of power, performative power. So performative power may be particularly important for changes in the form and extent of durable inequality.

3 Inequality, Power, and the Effects of Morality on Action

Sociologists of morality argue that morality is an intrinsic element of human nature that implicit and embodied moral intuitions influence action more than explicit moral reasoning and that moral identities influence individual strategies of action over time. (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013; Smith, 2003). These arguments focus on cultural properties of individuals (Vaisey & Miles, 2014) and interactional situations, and the relation between culture and action. For example, Stets and Carter explain individual variation in moral behavior in terms of the interplay between identities internal to the individual in relation to "definitions of moral meanings embedded in a situation" (2012, 137).

Cultural sociologists have developed extensive analyses of three important processes through which culture might affect action: through individual dispositions, or habitus, expressed in longer-term strategies of action; through norms embedded in interaction subcultures or scenes; or through larger scale social performance (Spillman, 2020). We can expect, then, that morality should affect action in at least these ways, too.

What can we learn about the connections between morality, power, and inequality by pursuing questions about the effects of morality on action? Notably, empirical findings in all three streams of research tend to show more about powerful ways that taken-for-granted inequalities are sustained through discursive and relational power than how they emerge and change.

Actors' Dispositions First, individual dispositions undergirding longer-term strategies of action may be oriented to sustaining existing inequalities. For example, individual dispositions to action encapsulated in the habitus express and promote taken-for-granted relational advantages associated with class. From this perspective, even expressions of disinterest that go along with many challenges to domination and inequality are suspect, because they are more instrumentally rational than value-rational. And even when they are articulated, subordinate challenges to domination and inequality are necessarily inhibited by symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1984, 1998; Ignatow, 2009; Thompson, 1990, 157–162).[3]

[3] As Thompson summarizes (1990, 157–162), whereas dominant actors in a field of interaction may typically adopt distinction, derision, and condescension as forms of symbolic valuation, actors in intermediate positions

Interactional Subcultures Second, interactional subcultures and scenes establish norms about sustaining or challenging domination and inequalities to which individuals generally conform, regardless of their particular dispositions. Interactional subcultures establish taken-for-granted boundaries, bonds, and group norms (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003). These necessarily shape the possibilities and limits for the ways morality influences action. Indeed, research along these lines has shown that group and scene styles can directly undermine well-intentioned efforts to offer remedies to established inequality (Eliasoph, 2011; Lichterman, 2005).[4]

Larger Scale Performance Third, larger scale performances sustain or challenge existing domination and inequalities. Many performances are "parasitical dramatization of [existing] relational and discursive power" (Reed, 2013a, 208; see also Alexander 2004, 2010; Mast, 2013; 2013a). Performative power may also challenge taken-for-granted inequalities (e.g. Ku, 2019; Reed, 2013b).

Overall, apart from the possibility of collective performative challenge, most theories of culture in action (pitched at different levels of analysis) suggest that moral dispositions or moral claims-making in groups are most important for the ways they sustain domination and inequality, imposing unintended or inadvertent constraints on change. Whether or not individual or group action is intended to support, challenge, or simply bracket domination and inequality, it is more likely to sustain existing inequalities than undermine them.

This is because the fundamental condition for inequality is the diffuse discursive power of categories, and because important, mostly unrecognized mechanisms of relational power sustain categorical inequalities. Much of cultural sociology suggests that these discursive and relational powers are intransigent to most action, however altruistic, and to most interactional challenges.

Interactional challenges to categorical inequality are not only costly (Ridgeway, 2014); they are also commonly misunderstood or hard to understand (Spillman, 1995).

4 Inequality, Power, and Where Morality Comes From

What can we learn about the connections between morality, inequality, and power by pursuing questions about where morality comes from? Sociologists of morality pursue at least two distinct lines of investigation based on cultural sociology to address this question. They analyze varieties of moral classification as cultural forms rather than "natural kinds" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013, 60), and they examine historical sources of moral variation across and within specific groups and social fields.[5] These lines of research challenge psychologically reductionist or "thin" specification of moral categories, and a-historical and universal claims about moral dispositions.

Categories as Cultural Forms Since, as Tilly, Ridgeway, and Massey argued, categorization is the fundamental condition of inequality, cultural sociologists' extensive investigation of processes of categorization are central to understanding the connections between morality, inequality, and power. Several different streams of cultural sociology analyze processes of categorization and evaluation. Research on how symbolic boundaries create categories explores directly the operation of categories underpinning

will adopt moderation, pretension, or devaluation as strategies of symbolic valuation, and actors in subordinate positions will use strategies of practicality, respectful resignation, or rejection. Any dispositions regarding moral foundations will be filtered through these various possible stances in relation to position in the field.

[4] On situational influences more generally, see Luft (2020). She also proposes going beyond the dispositional to the situational to fully understand moral action and emphasizes how differential categorization of people affects individual moral judgement.

[5] Kiley and Vaisey's (2020) finding that attitudinal change in personal culture is rare also suggests that a focus on the historical articulation of cultural forms is important for understanding morality and inequality.

inequality and the resulting experience of stigma (Lamont, 2012; Lamont et al., 2014, 2016). Research on more complex schemas, or frames, "templates for understanding common social settings and problems" (Spillman, 2020, 32–33) shows how these may often be highly moralized (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1991]), as are fundamental schemas characterizing gender, immigration, and health (e.g. Benson, 2013; Blair-Loy, 2003; Saguy & Riley, 2005). Cultural evaluation based on categorization which may become evident in exploitation, opportunity hoarding, and so on becomes explicit and rationalized in processes of commensuration, such as in the ranking of colleges (Espeland & Stevens, 1998).

Other cultural forms also help analyze links between morality, power, and inequality. Importantly, structured cultural forms—binary codes—are fundamental to categorization and stigmatization. Just as in Durkheim's theory of sacred and profane, they articulate positive and negative evaluation along many different possible dimensions, such as in the "democratic/anti-democratic code" (Alexander & Smith, 1993), or "authentic/unnatural" (Weber et al., 2008). [Notably, Tilly also bases his theory of categorization on such binary oppositions, or "the institutionalization of categorical pairs" (1996: 8, 62–73)]. Binary codes may be the routine and taken-for-granted condition of inequalities, but they may also be mobilized to empower challenges to inequality.

So when sociologists of morality investigate questions about where morality comes from they often draw directly or indirectly on research in cultural sociology which analyzes cultural forms. This connection is crucial for questions about morality, power, and inequality because, as Tilly argued, categorization is a fundamental pre-condition of inequality. Categories carry with them discursive power to justify inequalities, and, more rarely, to challenge them.

Historical Articulation of Cultural Forms Another way of answering questions about where morality comes from is to investigate more-or-less contingent historical processes which help explain the formation of and challenge to specific forms of inequality. That is, how do particular categorizations emerge and how are they connected to mechanisms of durable inequality such as exploitation? In some circumstances, structural relations between actors in fields may generate particular labels supporting inequality, and cultural sociologists have offered numerous case studies of the dynamics of inequality in social fields (e.g., Benson, 2013; Bourdieu, 1991, 2005; Buchholz, 2018; Savelsberg, 2015).

Another, broader stream of cultural sociology investigates emergence, reproduction, and change in cultural categories by attending to their specific historical articulation in ways that function in society more broadly, outside of or across specific fields (and thus be available for what Tilly calls mechanisms of emulation and adaptation in different fields). For example, Steensland (2010) discusses the impact of government and social policy generally on moral classifications. Zelizer (1983) and Chan (2012) examine moral claims in insurance markets; Strand (2015) traces morality and social policy reform in Victorian Britain; Skotnicki (2017) investigates the history of moral critiques in consumer markets; and Fishman (2019; Fishman & Lizardo, 2013) examines the emergence of moralized variation in economic policy. So whether considered within fields or from broader historical perspectives, cultural sociologists may address questions about where morality comes from and how it relates to durable inequality with specific attention to historical process and contingency, as well as, as above, with a closer analysis of cultural forms of categorization (cf. Spillman & Strand, 2013).

Overall, then, when sociologists of morality pursue questions about how morality influences action, they can examine processes by which existing inequalities and power relations are *sustained* in individual dispositions, in group interactional processes, and in performance. When they investigate questions about where morality comes from, they pursue questions about cultural categories and their historical

articulation. They can examine the *emergence and change* of the categorical foundations of inequality in discursive power, and the emergence and change of mechanisms sustaining inequality in relational power. Analysis of cultural categories and historical articulation also illuminates processes like the active creation of moralized categories to justify inequalities (such as in colonial encounters with native peoples), or the slow naturalization and reification of previously moralized categories as simple realities [such as in the emergence of the category of "the economy" over the twentieth century (Suttles, 2010)].

I suggest, then, that analysis of "where morality comes from" is necessary to understand the foundations of discursive and relational power in any given case. Consequential relations of durable inequality transcend any given set of actions or interactions. They are constituted in the persistent, diffuse discursive power of categories and categorical oppositions. As I have argued elsewhere, these form "discursive fields" which set the limits of routine, meaningful action because they form presuppositions for "felicity's condition" and avoiding "manifestations of strangeness" (Goffman, 1983, 27) or meaninglessness (Spillman, 1995; cf. Lichterman & Dasgupta, 2020; Malczewski, 2019; Wuthnow, 1989). For this reason, sociologists interested in morality and inequality should take more interest in where morality comes from—the categories and mechanisms involved—than in the influence of morality on action. If we want to understand how morality sustains or undermines inequality and power, we should focus on cultural categories in the long term, more than properties of actors and actions.[6]

This suggestion can be illustrated using three topics central to sociology's concern with inequality and power. The examples below draw on recent studies of ethnic and racial stigma, of economic justice, and of human rights.[7] I suggest that sociologists show that inequality and domination happen in all these critical realms regardless of actors' propensities—and could likely remain entrenched even if everyone was actively altruistic. Second, I show that the possibilities and limitations of moral action are shaped by widespread and long-lasting cultural categories influencing how moral action is grounded and how the objects of moral action are understood.

5 Ethnoracial Stigma

I start with a classic example of how racial and class stigma affects life chances. Compare and contrast the following excerpts from two recent studies of young American drug dealers. First, from Waverly Duck's important ethnography, *No Way Out: Precarious Living in the Shadow of Poverty and Drug-Dealing*,

> . . .the experiences of youths like Jonathan reveal an interaction order of drug dealing on Lyford Street that sweeps up most boys and young men who live there. The sense they learn to make of daily life in this space, which is necessary to navigate the street safely, inexorably draws them into drug dealing. ... unfortunately, the criminal justice system does not recognize the social order that exists in places like Lyford Street as a force that shapes young men's options or take it into account as a mitigating factor when they are charged with drug offenses. These ordered practices are by definition illegal, and once brought under the gaze of law enforcement agencies, they are sanctioned as though the participants had the same choices available to middle-class youths (2015, 48–49).

[6] This argument suggests that popular dual process models for analyzing individuals' moral learning, remembering, thinking, and acting (Lizardo et al., 2016) are of only limited relevance to questions about morality and inequality. As Luft has also argued, such models "neglect the crucial mediating role of social perception," especially the importance of categorization and classification of people, often associated with subconscious evaluation. She concludes that sociologists should examine how individuals' moral judgements are " determined by three factors: (1) the action itself, (2) the situation in which the action is performed, and (3) the people involved in the interaction..." Luft thus bridges approaches based on dual process models, and the implication of the argument here, that analysis of morality and inequality can bracket any concern with individual-level judgment to focus on analyzing categories (2020, 2, 11).

[7] For a similar argument and analysis of the intransigence of categorical inequalities to actors' dispositions regarding gender, see Karazi-Presler (2021).

But what about those middle-class youth with choices? Are they punished more fairly because they have more options and choices? Here are Scott Jacques and Richard Wright from *Code of the Suburb: Inside the World of Young Middle-Class Drug Dealers:*

> Suburbanites, by contrast, have far less contact with the police... twenty-eight of the dealers in our study *never* experienced any drug dealing-related legal trouble .... while all of the suburban sellers were worried, if only a little, about getting caught by the police, they reasoned that this was unlikely to actually happen to them—and they were right. ... the police in Peachville displayed little interest in pro-active drug control. We never heard of anyone's home being raided by the cops. There was no obvious hot-spot policing and there were certainly no street sweeps (2015, 150).

As sociologists—and citizens—we recognize this as a chronic story of contemporary inequality and power (e.g., Clair, 2020, 15). But how does morality matter here?

First, how much do actors' moral dispositions affect these outcomes? The comparison suggests that inequality and power differentials would exist even if we assume everyone was enacting, by their own lights, a moral identity. The urban boys, the suburban boys, the Lyford Street police, and the Peachville police could all be trying to do the right thing. And that assumption is fairly plausible (though perhaps least plausible for the suburban boys, for whom, unlike the resource-poor urban boys, drug-dealing was mostly a matter of demonstrating cool.) More broadly, though, understanding more about moral dispositions and practices is not going to provide much understanding of the power inequality and power differentials this comparison highlights. We could hold moral dispositions and practices constant, and the power differentials and inequality would persist. Morality at the level of actors' dispositions is not very illuminating here.

Rather, we need to turn to questions about how the possibilities and limits of moral action in each setting are shaped by widespread and long-lasting cultural categories. Of course, there is a substantial body of sociological knowledge about the complicated history of racial formation and urban/suburban segregation in the USA. That is important. But here I want to draw attention to Lamont's sustained investigation of how different groups think of—and respond to—different cultural boundaries, including moral boundaries.

Lamont analyzes in depth how moral boundaries are drawn, and the different meanings they take on for different groups. She offers an enormous amount of information and insight into what she calls in her latest book "the phenomenology of social exclusion." Stigmatization and responses to stigmatization are "ethnoracial boundary making shaped by historical processes" (Lamont et al., 2016, 276). (For example, the authors find that "while confrontation is highly legitimized in the Unites States by civil rights narratives and by more frequently enforced anti-discrimination laws, in Brazil respondents are less readily exposed to repertoires of black disadvantage...on the other hand, [Black] Brazilians see class and race as deeply intertwined…" [2016, 277–780].)

She explores at length two influences on moral boundaries in different contexts. First, different cultural repertoires contain different grounds for evaluation, and second, "groupness," which is "a mix of identification and group boundaries" (2016, 279), also influences moral boundaries and stigmatization. As the co-authors argue, we need to understand "how various dimensions of groupness emerge, are institutionalized, and are sustained historically" (2016, 280).

Most of this cross-national research is pitched at a much broader level than the different settings we saw above—Lyford Street and Peachville, urban and suburban. But the points about cultural repertoires and groupness shaping the possibilities of moral action still apply. When it comes to examining morality, inequality, and power, sociologists will learn more by examining how moral action is grounded in historically constituted and diffuse categorical and relational power, than by probing morality as a property of actors and actions—their dispositions, their interactional subcultures, or their collective performance.

6 Economic Justice

The next sociological "morality tale" is related to economic justice. Again, of course, a deep sociological tradition has explored attitudes to economic inequality, as well as class identification—or lack thereof—and obviously this topic has recently re-emerged on the top of the public agenda too.

But here I turn to Nancy Di Tomaso's exemplary and important interview study of working class and middle-class whites in New Jersey, Ohio, and Tennessee. A lot of this research could speak to the last morality tale, too—one of her central arguments is that racial inequality is reproduced without explicit racism because whites—even most liberals—fail to recognize the benefits of their own opportunity hoarding and social capital. But there is a lot more to this research, including a new look at attitudes to economic justice and an extended investigation of the consequences of these attitudes for electoral changes and policy implementation. Here, I focus on what she finds about attitudes to economic justice.

Regardless of class or political leanings, Di Tomaso's respondents did not differ much in their accounts of why people are rich:

> ...most respondents said that people are rich because of their personal qualities, personal drive and risk-taking and initiative. While a fairly large proportion across all of the groups also said that people are rich because of inheritance, many who gave this response minimized its importance by saying that people who are not talented will usually lose the money they inherit.... they believed that continuing to be rich also relies on initiative, effort, and talent (DiTomaso, 2013, 121–123).

Of course, this individualized perspective also applied to the poor:

> . . .correspondingly, the interviewees had very unfavorable views of the poor. . . the most prevalent response from both conservatives and liberals was that the poor have attitudes that keep them from getting ahead in life. . .liberal interviewees were somewhat more likely to talk about poor schools and prejudice with regard to why people were poor, but there was a fair amount of overlap with conservatives in the way liberals framed their explanations of poverty (DiTomaso, 2013, 123, 125)

So, economic justice is a matter of individual merit. Of course, this is not a counter-intuitive finding about attitudes to economic inequality in the USA. But the great contribution of DiTomaso's book is the detailed evidence she documents of how the same respondents hoarded opportunities in their social networks, yet dissociated from these advantages:

> ....in a pretty consistent pattern, the interviewees often obtained jobs with higher pay and better benefits with the help of family or friends... for "good" jobs... job-seekers endeavored to draw on social resources that would give them an inside edge and help protect them from market competition... (53)... the interviewees told life stories that suggested that they not only hoarded opportunities but also drew from the opportunities that others hoarded on their behalf...

Yet,

> they were not aware ... of the extent to which the opportunity hoarding in their own lives was neither benign nor a reflection of just the way things are. They did not see how the advantages they enjoyed might constitute disadvantages for those who are not part of the same networks or part of the same communities... (2013, 64)

They also "denied explicitly that networks or connections or social resources had had much effect in their lives..." (130). Even those interviewees who took a more critical view of resource distribution in general did not recognize relative privilege in their own stories.

Again, actors' moral dispositions and actions seem irrelevant to the inequality and power differentials in economic injustice. We can presume that the people Di Tomaso interviews "do what they are supposed to do," work hard, help their friends and family, etc. Not only does doing the right thing not help economic justice, but it can also actively support unjust outcomes. What matters here is not actors' predispositions to virtue, or not, but how virtue is defined. We need to turn to questions about how the possibilities and limits of moral action are shaped by widespread and long-lasting cultural categories and relational mechanisms.

Strand (2015) has offered a new perspective on these long-lasting cultural categories in his work on the emergence of a field of moral discourse about social justice in the nineteenth century. He shows that this was not a simple consequence of liberalism and offers instead a specific genealogy of the field dynamics of its emergence. But the specific field dynamics here are less important than his argument about the contemporary relevance of the historical story he has to tell.

Strand argues that

> a moral way of evaluating poverty and inequality developed slowly over the course of the 19th century ... social justice beliefs emerged during this time through the genesis of moral universalism as a distinct mode of experience. ...several recognizable moral beliefs appeared in the process, including "equality of opportunity," "equality of reward," "character" and "effort," "ability" and "duty" as forms of merit (among others)...treating moral beliefs as historical and relational entities that are situated and dated by the conditions marking their appearance in a field... lends the sociology of morality ...a critical moral reflexivity.... (2015. 537)

and spells out how

> an engagement with the past reveals and articulates more than is available in the present... [we can] disclose and articulate "more" about these all too familiar statements.... "equality of opportunity," "equality of reward/outcome," "service," "merit," "effort," "talent," than appears in their common usage (Strand, 2016, 253).

For example, one position in this nineteenth century field—adopted by those who were disposed to see both causes and solutions to poverty as entirely non-individual—favored equality of reward—"which alone satisfies the demands of justice"—as one proponent said—because individual merit and ability was understood intergenerationally. This meant that my comparative privilege relies on what my ancestors might have done to those who are now underprivileged. As Di Tomaso shows, this position is residual in the USA—though not necessarily elsewhere. But the history shows possibilities that are more or less unsayable—or at least a little crazy—in everyday life now—thus offering a new position for developing a critical moral reflexivity. I would argue that this has very little to do with individual moral dispositions, interactional subcultures, or collective performance, and everything to do with a sociology of morality focusing on moral categories and their histories.

7 Human Rights

A final illustration broadens the focus to human rights. For this "morality tale," I draw on Joachim Savelsberg's *Representing Mass Violence: Conflicting Responses to Human Rights Violations in Darfur* (2015). For this topic, perhaps because of its social distance, analysis does not even start out at the level of actors' moral dispositions and practices.[8] Rather, Savelsberg investigates different frameworks of moral evaluation adopted by those who work to challenge human rights violations. Critics in different social locations impose different sorts of moral evaluation.

International organizations, human rights organizations, and the international criminal court:

> produced representations within the crime frame... [although] mindful of the social and political conditions of the conflict, [they] relegated such insights to a "background"... the logic of criminal law attributes mass violence to a small number of individuals (2015, 267).

But other fields had "sharply competing definitions of the situation in the besieged region of Sudan" (269). For example, groups involved in humanitarian aid "differed significantly from those of the human rights field" and

> highlight those aspects of suffering that can best be addressed by aid programs...humanitarian narratives treat the government of Sudan cautiously.. they emphasize long-term conditions such as the desertification of the Sahel zone and long-standing center-periphery conflicts, and soft-pedal government actions that are immediate precursors, and likely conditions, of violence. The humanitarian catastrophe frame is privileged over the crime frame, and actors shy away from the genocide label (2015, 269).

[8] Of course, any social distance of Western analysts from the subjective experience of perpetrators of genocide is itself a recent historical formation, considering colonialism and empire formation.

And "narratives of the mass violence in Darfur generated in the diplomatic field ... focus even more than the humanitarian aid field, on long-term and structural causes of conflicts. [. . .They] tend to avoid naming responsible actors, using the crime frame, or applying the genocide label..." (2015, 271–272).

Here, of course, a sociology of morality focuses primarily on the categories with which inequality and power are understood. What about morality as a property of actors and actions, the more social-psychological thread of the sociology of morality? Even the criminal-legal frame, which emphasizes criminal acts, mostly brackets actors' moral dispositions. Perhaps, with genocide, the moral grounding of the action seems obviously irrelevant (even though it does not take much of a stretch to imagine genocidal actors doing what they perceive as a good thing, when we consider the founders of new nations confronting native peoples.)

And while we might assume that the human rights lawyers, the humanitarian activists, and the diplomats all working on Darfur think of themselves as altruistic, one important implication of Savelsberg's field analysis is that the way they express that altruism is very much influenced by the interests sparked by their field position.

We might go a step further and explore why these fields are constituted as they are. For instance, Dromi (2016) accounts for the origins of humanitarianism as permanent, independent, and neutral by investigating how it was inspired in the nineteenth century by actors "transcendent Christian morality." Digging deeper into those origins shows more about the complicated emergence of new possibilities for moral action, beyond actors' propensities, and, just as Strand does for economic justice, provides more of a sense of lost alternatives to sustain "critical moral reflexivity."

8 Conclusion

So I am arguing here that we need to focus primarily on cultural categories and relational mechanisms to understand connections between morality, inequality, and power. Although the sociology of morality can include both investigation of moral categories and investigation of actors and action, I have suggested that the former is more important than the latter for issues of inequality and power. I have developed the basic intuition that even virtuous acts may sustain power and inequality by canvassing three examples—concerned with racial stigma, economic justice, and human rights—drawn from the core of sociological concern with inequality and power.

In some ways, my focus on cultural categories here is sociological common sense. But that common sense is often challenged by calls for a focus on the actor and on pragmatic action. While I think that a focus on the actor can tell us a lot about everyday morality, I do not think it gets us very far in thinking about how morality relates to power and inequality.

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Part IX

Morality, Civic Culture, and the State

Civic Morality: Democracy and Social Good

Patricia Snell Herzog

Abstract

This chapter reviews the concept of civic morality and its role in democracy. The first section defines civic morality, including what it is as well as what it is not. Simply stated, civic morality is the belief that one should engage in efforts to promote social and public goods along with actions intended to promote the well being of others beyond the self. These are neither solely personal individual beliefs that are not publicly shared nor government prescribed public acts. Second, the chapter explains why civic morality matters. Importance includes its role in fostering a social lubricant to collective action, trust in people and social institutions, and democratic participation. The third section summarizes major approaches to the study of civic morality. Interdisciplinary studies are best categorized across the levels of their units of analysis: micro, meso, and macro. Key takeaways are offered based on the findings of existing studies about the relationship of civic morality and other important social phenomena. Reviewed findings are related to philanthropy and generosity, generational changes and youth, socioeconomic inequalities, religiosity and culture, and social norms.

Keywords

Civil society · Philanthropy · Youth · Inequality · Religiosity · Social norms

1 What Is Civic Morality?

Civic morality is the belief that engaging in social life is good, coupled with acting in ways that are intended to benefit others beyond the self and ultimately to promote public goods. Halman and Gelissen (2019: 525) distinguish civic morality from personal morality by describing civic morality as having to do with activities such as public law compliance, respect for public order, and obedience to norms and rules. Civic morality is often expressed through engaging in voluntary actions and participating in nonprofit organizations.

A clarifying device when seeking to understand an abstract concept is to focus on what it is not. Examples of non-civic morality extend to opposite ends of the individual-to-society spectrum. At the societal level, non-civic matters are those directly structured by the state, formal rules and regulations implemented by governments with geopolitical authority over a locality. At the individual level, non-civic matters are those which are held deeply personally, intrinsically,

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and privately and are not shared publicly. Between these poles lies civic morality, which concerns the intersection between public and private: individuals valuing engaging with others to create collective identity and actions.

2 Why Does Civic Morality Matter?

Civic morality is the expression of personal duty to participate in the informal processes of democracy, and this activity gels together the formal activities in for-profit exchanges and public regulations. Voluntary commitments by individuals foster a culture in which democratic ideals can be expressed, debated, and evolved in collective action. Dekker and Van den Broek (1998: 12) stated that: "a flourishing civil society has been argued to enhance social cohesion and to foster political democracy." One outcome of civic morality is a generalized trust in people: the idea that others, even strangers, can typically be trusted (Glanville et al., 2013). This is the opposite of misanthropy: the belief that other people generally cause harm and are untrustworthy (Sulek, 2010). Trust in other people and in social institutions is a basic ingredient for democracy (Diani et al., 2022). Moreover, trust is viewed as a social lubricant that stimulates solidarity and democracy (Xu, 2022). It is challenging to have broad and authentic engagement with democratic processes if individuals do not trust each other or society, and conversely, it may be that some programs designed to increase participation in civic life actually unintentionally foster distrust (Hanson, 2018). Thus, trust is a key ingredient in civic morality.

3 How Is Civic Morality Studied?

Civic morality is studied across a range of topics. This section of the chapter summarizes examples of existing studies on civic morality as it intersects with these five sets of topics: (1) philanthropy and generosity; (2) generational changes and youth; (3) socioeconomic resources and inequality; (4) religiosity and culture; and (5) social norms.

Philanthropy and Generosity The study of philanthropy and generosity is an interdisciplinary endeavor that draws on scholarship from a range of disciplines with the purpose of combining knowledge from diverse approaches to advance an integrative synthesis of civic morality (Herzog, 2019). One definition is: "Generosity is giving good things to others freely and abundantly. Generous behaviors are intended to enhance the well-being of others. However, *the giver can benefit*, which distinguishes generosity from 'pure' altruism. Generosity can be actualized through various forms of giving: 'Giving comes in different forms. It's not always in money.'" (Herzog & Price, 2016: 2). Moreover, "generosity focuses on the motivations, actions, orientations, and inclinations to do good for others" (Herzog, 2019: 23; Herzog & Price, 2016).

With this understanding of generosity, a traditional definition of philanthropy as "voluntary action for public good" (Freeman, 2020; Payton & Moody, 2008) shares in common an emphasis on *voluntary* actions. Yet, philanthropy is a contested concept, meaning that definitions of what it is and why it matters are necessarily arguable, and the debate over its meaning is itself a fruitful civic exercise (Daly, 2012). Generally, philanthropy concerns the more formal and organizational activities, whereas generosity concerns the actions of everyday people, some of which track through organizations and some of which do not. Generous and philanthropic activities occur across a range of macro, meso, and micro levels (Barman, 2017).

Understanding civic morality across these levels includes studies at the micro-level regarding individual trust in others and social capital. For example, Beyerlein and Vaisey (2013) found that the moral world views that people hold shape their propensity to be civically engaged. At the meso-level, civic morality can be studied as the vibrancy of associational life and the prevalence of civil society organizations. Additionally, meso-level studies can focus on social network dynamics shaping group affiliation and political

mobilization (e.g., Siegel, 2011; Thye et al., 2011). At the macro-level, civic morality can be studied as transparency in government activities, civil service engagement, and levels of corruption versus accountability. For example, the CIVICUS Monitor (2020) investigates the state of civil society by recording authoritarianism and its resistances in social movements and protests designed to support broader participation in the decision-making of nation-state policies. Additional cross-national studies investigate the cultural values relating to civil society engagement that people hold across countries (EVS, 2022; WVS, 2022).

Civic morality can be expressed through generous and philanthropic actions, which range from informal behaviors—such as cooperation, reciprocity, and helping—to formal engagements—such as charitable giving, volunteering, and political action. To understand the findings generated from the interdisciplinary study of these topics, it is helpful to categorize results by their unit of analysis. For example, micro-level studies focus on individual motivations toward and orientations to civic morality. Meso-level studies focus on the size, scope, and strength of civic associations and civil society organizations. At the macro-level, civic morality is understood within its social institutional contexts: the economy, governance, and culture.

Generational Changes and Youth The culture of civic morality evolves over time and can differ across contexts. As a result, younger generations do not necessarily express their civic morality within the same mores, norms, and accepted engagement activities of prior generations. Yet, civic morality is also malleable within life course development and can be shaped by intentional efforts to build trust and teach young people about civic expressions, such as youth philanthropy. Dalton and Welzel (2014) found that civic culture is transforming around the world. Citizens are less likely to engage in allegiance culture based on loyalty to civil society and more likely to engage in assertive civic engagement. Assertive civil society confronts elite political leaders with grassroots demands that are designed to hold governments accountable to citizens. These generational changes in the culture surrounding engaging in civil society influence the kinds of activities that young people are attracted to as an expression of their civic morality (Snell, 2010; Wray-Lake et al., 2010).

Additionally, levels of social trust and engagement are malleable, with youth generally being more likely to engage in civic life as they age and their moral values develop (Flanagan & Stout, 2010; Herzog et al., 2016). That said, there is also an increased struggle among younger generations to express their moral values, including articulating why people should engage in civic activities (Smith et al., 2011; Smith & Snell, 2009). One important intervention into this overall trend across generations is youth philanthropy programs. Youth philanthropy initiatives are designed to engage young people in giving, grantmaking, and volunteering and in the process to facilitate opportunities to exercise and enhance civic skills (Falk & Nissan, 2007).

Socioeconomic Resources and Inequality Civic morality is shaped by spatial inequality and the degree of advantage or deprivation embedded within local communities. The time and resources that people invest into their communities are an indication of the degree to which they aim to philanthropically improve the well being of their local context. Yet, the US landscape contains high levels of socioeconomic inequality, which map spatially. Spatial inequality refers to relative deprivation in time and resource investment in communities that are embedded in physical locations (Lobao et al., 2007). Gough et al. (2006) argued that space is important to study in the social sciences, insofar as space is the structural, material, and economic basis for social inequalities and social exclusions. In this context, it is important to understand civic morality as situated within spatial inequalities.

Neighborhood disparities result in differential abilities to invest resources back into civic spaces. The complexity of social life involves a mutual

causality in which neighborhood contexts shape civic action, and in turn collective action can transform resource mobilization within neighborhoods. On one side of the equation, Gottdiener and Hutchison (2011) found that investment in places is not equal across contexts. Embedded spatial inequalities become what many scholars refer to as "contextual effects," because the bundled nature of associated disadvantages structured into spatial contexts reifies these social forces as durable and powerful life influencers (e.g., Booth & Crouter, 2001; Brooks-Gunn et al., 2000; Grannis, 2009; Lobao et al., 2007; Sampson et al., 2002; Gottdiener, 1985; Wilson & Taub, 2007). Disadvantaged neighborhoods are viewed as having a host of deleterious life and social outcomes, dampening capacity to express civic morality.

However, neighborhood context is not determinative. On the other side of the equation, people can change their social environments through collective action. Community involvement is a key mechanism by which individuals can respond to spatially stratified contexts, and thereby moderate the effects of disadvantaged neighborhoods (Eckstein, 2001; Hull et al., 2008; Rotolo et al., 2010; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001; Swaroop & Morenoff, 2006; Wilson, 2000). Thus, it is equally important to focus on the role of social change mechanisms (e.g., Bekkers, 2007). Neighborhood involvement is an expression of civic morality that indicates the extent to which residents invest time and resources by engaging in philanthropic acts that are directed toward improving their local community contexts.

Scholars of neighborhood context also investigate the role of subjective experience of context, analyzing perceptions of neighborhoods (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Roosa et al., 2009). While objective conditions of local communities can affect perceptions of neighborhoods, subjective evaluations are not determined by objective conditions alone (Bass & Lambert, 2004; Canache, 1996; Dahl et al., 2010; Herrenkohl et al., 2002; Lee et al., 1994; Mowbray et al., 2007; Roosa et al., 2009). People can feel defeated, marginalized, and excluded as a result of cumulative disadvantages. Yet, people can also be motivated to act in response to relative deprivation and a sense that coming together in civic life is necessary to foster changes within the social and built environment. Thus, understanding civic morality in a robust and deep way is aided by attending to the avenues through which collective action is facilitated within spatial contexts. Individuals do not engage in civic life in a vacuum, nor as atomic particles floating in space. Rather, people are within contexts that more or less invite or inhibit their civic morality.

This approach to understanding civic morality is situated within a rich lineage of classical social theories that identify complex social and psychological processes occurring in relation to spatial context. For example, Georg Simmel was influential in theorizing the conflictual and ambiguous perceptions that people can hold in modern and urban living (Simmel, 1950; Simmel & Levine, 1961; Tonkiss, 2005; Zieleniec, 2007). To Simmel, spatial context was important to study because of the complex interaction between objective conditions of reality and subjective experiences. From a Simmellian approach, studying spatial context entails investigating whether people perceive themselves to be connected to, in cohesion with, or disconnected, different or set apart from localized others. In this vein, neighborhood perceived cohesion, also known as a sense of community, is a civic morality relevant concept that has received considerable attention in existing studies (e.g., Brown et al., 2003; Flaherty & Brown, 2010; Mulvaney-Day et al., 2007; Plybon et al., 2003; Rajulton et al., 2007; Sampson et al., 1997). As with contextual effects generally, the extent of perceived community cohesion is associated with a range of social outcomes, including participating in collective-oriented behaviors (Wilkinson, 2007). Neighborhood cohesion has been identified as an important mechanism by which poor neighborhoods, residential instability, and ethnic diversity affect life outcomes (Abada et al., 2007; Browning et al., 2006). From these studies, civic morality is understood to be profoundly spatially situated,

and the objective deprivation of contexts interacts with agentic perceptions and collective actions.

Religiosity and Culture Civic morality is contextualized within distinct cultural contexts, including the religious beliefs that motivate people to be engaged in activities to benefit others. Alternatively, civic atrocities and restrictions on liberty are also related to highly institutionalized versions of religion and strife between divergent religious identities. Civic morality has a consistently strong relationship with religious beliefs and attendance. In comparing civic values and actions across cultures, the most consistently predictive differentiator is religiosity (Goodwin et al., 2020).

Religious beliefs and networks of belonging undergird the micro-foundations explaining why some people engage in charitable giving and others do not (Kılınç & Warner, 2015). This research found that Catholics living in majority Catholic countries can be activated to give based on priming religious texts that invite participants to think about their duty to a higher power. Alternatively, the research found that Muslims living in nation-states with institutionalized Islam already had such a high level of duty to Allah and engagement in charitable giving practices, that religious primes did not further maximize propensity to donate. Additionally, volunteering consistently relates to religious beliefs and frequency of religious attendance. For example, in a study on human capital, social capital, and religious capital, Forbes and Zampelli (2014) found the greater the extent of religious participation, the more likely a person was to volunteer.

The study of religiosity and civic morality is burgeoning, and there are hundreds of investigations into the relationship between religious beliefs and participation with inclinations to engage in generous and prosocial activities (Herzog, King, et al., 2020; Herzog, Strohmeier, et al., 2020). Yet, attention to these topics remains culturally biased, with the majority of studies having collected data within Northern American and Western European contexts. More research is needed to understand the relationships between religiosity and civic morality in under-studied world cultures. Nevertheless, these comprehensive reviews of existing research find that studies in Africa, Asia, and throughout Latin America indicate that religious cultures and spiritual practices profoundly shape civic orientations to promote social good. Yet, these reviews also find that religious strife can alternatively be a source of antisocial activities, including infringements on liberty, fears of religious out-groups, such as Islamophobia, violence, and wars.

Social Norms Civic morality is additionally contextualized within social norms. Norms are "the expectations generally held by members of a social group that people will behave in a certain way" (Staub, 1972:131). Norms communicate assumptions about what behaviors are acceptable in specific situations as decided and agreed upon among group members (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), which are then sustained through group endorsement or condemnation as means of optimizing actions (Elster, 1989). Norms are "group-level evaluations of behavior" that are "fundamental to social life," can "maintain social order, discouraging antisocial behavior and acting as 'soft guardrails' necessary for democracy," and which "catalyze positive social change, discouraging harmful behaviors such as violence and encouraging constructive behaviors such as those that improve health. But norms can also cause destructive behavior, maintain inequalities, and exacerbate social conflict" (Horne & Mollborn, 2020: 468).

Norms are not individual values or attitudes but rather are a group-level phenomenon: a norm exists when people have expectations that others will evaluate a behavior as desirable or not. Many people consider civil society as pertaining to formal laws and policy regulations, many of which are enforced through imprisonment or other formal sanctions. Equally, if not sometimes more important, are the informal social norms that are codified in groups and can also be involuntary regulators of individual behavior. These "unwritten rules" of behavior can govern acceptance within groups and thus be powerful shapers of

morals (Horne & Mollborn, 2020). Participation in groups forms expectations of what is considered normal (Simpson & Willer, 2015). Rewards and sanctions span a robust range between formal and informal approaches. In this context, social norms condition civic morality. The expectations people have for what a good life looks like, how to engage in groups, and the extent to which people act on behalf of others are all embedded within networks of affiliation. Norms are a representation of cultural backgrounds, and yet norms are also malleable and evolving within new group contexts.

Simpson and Willer (2015) extended theories of understanding civic morality beyond altruism theories by identifying three social aspects of norms: rules, reputations, and relations. Rules are most clearly evident when violated, and participants in a group let others know the expectations by rewarding desired behavior or punishing undesired behavior. Formal sanctions include punishment, such as imprisonment. Informal sanctions can be subtle and include nonverbal disapproval signaling. For example, if it is a norm to silence cell phones while watching a movie, then movie-goers can respond to distracting use of cell phones with eye rolls or scoffing sounds, which is intended to signal violation of civic morals and urge silencing of distracting devices. Second, reputations are the collection of expectations accrued in groups over time. A person can have the reputation of being civically moral by being kind and trustworthy to others, or a person can have a reputation of being civically repugnant: recurrently irresponsible, difficult, or free riding on the efforts of others. Third, relations are the channels through which norms are formed, communicated, and altered. Social networks contextualize civic morality.

Specifically, here are seven social norms that are relevant to civic morality and expressions of generosity. *Norm of Giving*—people should give for no other reason than the value of giving (Leeds, 1963). *Norm of Social Responsibility*—people should support reliant others (Berkowitz & Daniels, 1964). *Norm of Reciprocity*—people should reciprocate favors, affection, goods, and services (Homans & Merton, 1961). *Norm of Indebtedness*—people should be obligated to repay for received benefit (Greenberg, 1980). *Norm of Social Comparison*—people should want to be similar in abilities, traits, attitudes, praise, inclusiveness, likability to others within salient reference groups (Festinger, 1954). *Norm of Conformity*—people should yearn for status (prestige, esteem, popularity, acceptance) and thus seek to conform to the standards of higher-status people or groups (Banerjee, 1992; Bernheim, 1994). *Norm of Distribution*—people should distribute help, not concentrate it (Sharps & Schroeder, 2019). Social norms evolve within group dynamics, and van Teunenbroek et al. (2020) reviewed how social information influences norms. Additionally, the study of norms intersects with broader attention to cultural values, beliefs, and morality (see, for example, Goodwin et al., 2020).

4 Conclusion

Civic morality is a multi-faceted and complex social phenomenon. Studies investigate this topic across levels, with micro-level investigations focusing on individual motivations to engage in promoting civic goods, meso-level inquiries attending to the vitality of civic associations, and macro-level findings highlighting the role of social institutions in shaping the contours of what is allowable and desirable in civic governance. Exploring society through the lens of civic morality facilitates a wide scope, including attending to topics such as philanthropy and generosity, generational changes and youth, socioeconomic resources and inequality, religiosity and culture, and social norms. What all these investigations share in common is a prioritizing of the space between, on the one hand, the hyper-individualized private worlds that people hold inside themselves and, on the other hand, the highly institutionalized public spaces regulated by economic exchange and geopolitical governance. Between these poles is civic morality and the voluntary activities in which

citizens engage in collective efforts to promote social and public goods.

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Bridging the Sociologies of Morality and Migration: The Moral Underpinnings of Borders, Policies, and Immigrants

Hajar Yazdiha

Abstract

This chapter extends a bridge between the sociology of morality and the sociology of migration. A sociology of the morality of migration examines both the moral underpinnings that shape our analytic conceptions of borders, policies, and immigrants, *and* the social constructions of morality that shape immigration debates. I lay out three conceptual domains that would benefit from an integrated theory of morality and migration: the morality of borders, the morality of immigration policy, and the morality of immigrants. I conclude by offering directions for future studies in three realms: (1) examining structures, resources, and power as constitutive of the moral constructs of migration; (2) analyzing socio-historically patterned complexes of meaning and how they matter for processes and consequences of migration; and (3) examining how moral judgment, action, and discourse are evoked in the day-to-day lives of migrants and their stakeholders.

Keywords

Migration · Immigrants · Morality · Borders · Policies · Politics

In June 2018, protestors across the USA joined to oppose the separations of immigrant families at the US/Mexico border. Under the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" border policy, babies as young as 4 months old would be separated from their mothers and fathers, some never to be reunited again (Dickerson & Heisler, 2019). Media coverage of the family separations depicted heartbreaking images of wailing babies torn from their mothers' desperate clutches by immigration enforcement officers, young children crying themselves to sleep in detention camps, stories of unimaginable and irreparable trauma (Famulari, 2020; Yazdiha, 2022). Now, activists had formed wide-reaching coalitions to fight the atrocity, from seasoned immigrant rights organizers to the American Association of Pediatrics to grassroots groups of mothers (Flaccus & Taxin, 2018). The diverse coalition joined under the moniker, "Keep Families Together," their varied interests bridged under a shared conviction: separating families was immoral. The right-wing opposition argued that not only was the border policy critical for maintaining the authority of American law, but it was also essential for the preservation of a "morally pure" white Christian nation.

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Yet, these moral contests were not new, and they harkened to a deeper and more enduring social reality: moral schemas—the "internalized knowledge about the appropriateness and inappropriateness of the expressions and behavior of oneself and others" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010)—shaped social constructions of migration and immigrants themselves. Philosophers and legal scholars have long investigated the morality of immigration through concepts like human rights, fairness, and sovereignty. In many ways, the questions scholars pose about the relationship between history and individuals, nation-states and non-citizens, are sociological questions that examine the relationship between power, structure, and agency.

In this chapter, I bring these scholarly traditions together to argue that there is much to be learned by bridging the sociology of morality with the sociology of migration. A sociology of the morality of migration examines both the moral underpinnings that shape our analytic conceptions of borders, policies, and immigrants, *and* the social constructions of morality that shape immigration debates. First, I lay out three conceptual domains that would benefit from an integrated theory of morality and migration: the morality of borders, the morality of immigration policy, and the morality of immigrants. Then, I offer some directions for future studies in extending this integrated theory to the ever-expanding landscape of migration politics in a globalized world.

1 The Morality of Migration Across Borders

Immanuel Kant once wrote that the moral claim to seek peaceful respite in another land is a "universal right of hospitality" belonging to every human sharing the earth with other humans (Kant, 1795). At its most philosophical level, the moral question of migration—its flows, its politics, its diasporic identities—is a question of borders. What does it mean to delineate arbitrary geographic limits and imbue them with such immense material and symbolic power that their very transgression can result in violence and death?

Yet, moralization over migration most often plays out through debates about borders, their flexibility, and their enforcement. In his foundational 1987 argument for open borders, Joseph Carens draws on three political theories—Rawlsian, Nozickean, and utilitarian—to draw out the moral meanings that they share. He writes, "Each of these theories begins with some kind of assumption about the equal moral worth of individuals. In one way or another, each treats the individual as prior to the community. These foundations provide little basis for drawing fundamental distinctions between citizens and aliens who seek to become citizens. The fact that all three theories converge upon the same basic result with regard to immigration despite their significant differences in other areas strengthens the case for open borders," (Carens, 1987). A moral rationale for open borders understands that no human chooses to be born on one side of a border over another. Yet, border policies imply choice and responsibility, punishing those who dare transgress the borders they did not choose.

Another moral argument takes a decidedly sociological stance in understanding migration across borders as a product of socio-historical processes and governmentality. Through this lens, a nation has a moral obligation to allow movement across borders when they have a relationship to the push factors that drew migrants away from their homeland. From wars to drug trades, economic devastation to deindustrialization, the nations who have benefited from the exploitation of others are deemed morally responsible for taking in their citizens. Further, through these socio-historical processes, the land itself becomes imbued with moral meanings, what scholars call "moral geographies" which Lawrence Taylor defines as "the product of a cultural process which may involve political and economic systems, institutions and/or individuals, and may be, in varying degrees, conscious or not," (Taylor, 2010). These moral geographies are constituted by a collective ascription of moral valences and symbolic meanings to landscapes and places, meanings that can be

contested and that may expand or contract over time with shifting political-cultural contexts. It is from these attributions of meaning that "imagined communities" emerge, defining the moral meaning of an "us" within the bounds of the border as compared to a "them" across the border and beyond (Alexander, 2013; Anderson, 1991).

In the 1990s, scholars were observing the forces of globalization, of imagined communities mired in deepening conflicts, and specifically the invocation of American national identity as morally superior in these geopolitics. From this landscape, the philosophy of cosmopolitanism emerged to challenge the moral foundations of borders (Beck & Sznaider, 2006; Naseem & Hyslop-Margison, 2006; Scheffler, 1999). Stemming from Martha Nussbaum's 1994 essay, "Patriotism and Cosmpolitanism," this tradition argues for a conception of cosmopolitan, "global citizenship." Through a cosmopolitan education, Nussbaum argued that citizens would come to understand their mutuality across differences and borders, inspiring global moral obligations and international cooperation (Nussbaum, 1994). As critics like Immanuel Wallerstein would go on to argue, despite its good moral intentions, such a philosophy must contend with the realities of power, neoliberalism, and conflict where the deep inequalities of race and class would render moral equivalence an artifice (Wallerstein, 1996). Wallerstein argues that the notion of cosmopolitanism itself, its seeming embrace of diversity and multiculturalism, is hardly universal and would have different consequences for differentially positioned groups: "Those who are strong—strong politically, economically, socially—have the option of aggressive hostility toward the weak or magnanimous comprehension of 'difference'. In either case, they remain privileged. Those who are weak, or at least weaker, will only overcome disadvantage if they insist on the principles of group equality. To do this effectively, they may have to stimulate group consciousness—nationalism, ethnic assertiveness." (Wallerstein, 1996: 122).

Similarly contending with the moral foundations of borders, as dynamic social-constructions by the nation-state that may expand for some groups and contract for others, the act of border *transgression* too takes on moral meanings. As Luis Cabrera writes of unauthorized immigrants, their "deviant" transgression of borders is not merely a product of the immoral enforcement of immoral borders. Their transgression is its own moral action, an act of civil disobedience and resistance (Cabrera, 2010). These subversive transgressions are well illustrated through Jason De León's research on the thousands of migrants who work to enter the USA from Mexico on foot through the dangerous Sonoran Desert. As De León documents, migrants are actively engaged in forms of identity construction, obfuscation, and contestation as they challenge the moral meanings that borders violently attribute to them (De León, 2015). Material culture—physical objects like dark clothing, water bottles, cosmetics, paperwork—become critical tools on which migrants' capacity to cross and resist borders depends (De León, 2012). As De León and collaborators write, "concepts of citizenship, sovereignty, and materiality are key to understanding how migrants both resist and succumb to the power of the state to exclude them," (De León et al., 2015).

Migration scholars have long theorized the dimensions and mechanisms of "contexts of reception," the alternately hostile or welcoming places that receive migrants and determine their life courses. By making sense of the moral foundations of borders themselves, assumptions about the given-quality of contexts of reception can be thrown into question. If a rigid context of reception is a priori an arbitrary and immoral construction, how does this reframe the way we analyze migrants' movements across borders, their actions and "modes of incorporation"? Through the lens proposed by Cabrera in which border transgression is akin to civil disobedience, might this approach help us better understand migrants as active agents, even moral entrepreneurs in their own right?

2 The Morality of Immigration Law and Policy

A second domain of scholarship considers not only the morality of borders but also the morality of the laws, policies, and systems we attach to patrol them and their meanings. These policies include everything from the power allocated to border control to regulate immigrant bodies to the configurations of citizenship and incorporation regimes that determine both categorization of migrants and the extent to which migrants will be included in the imagined community of the nation (Hing, 2006; Schuck, 2008; Vink & Bauböck, 2013).

Migration scholars have examined immigration policies and their consequences through a wide range of interconnected social-structural domains: national, regional, and local contexts from both sending and receiving countries and their legal, economic, and cultural infrastructures (Brubaker, 1994; Cabrera, 2010; Favell, 2016; Joppke, 1999); the street-level bureaucracies with which immigrants will interact (Armenta & Alvarez, 2017; de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2022; Mascia, 2021); the various publics that send and receive immigrants (and their attitudes) and the extent to which these publics are competitors or allies (Dahab & Omori, 2019; Gheorghiu et al., 2022; Perea, 1997). Studies examine the configurations and constellations of these domains that shape the reception of immigrants and how they compare across countries with varied socio-historical relationships to cultural pluralism (Bauböck, 2010; Kivisto & Faist, 2009; Vink & Bauböck, 2013).

To bridge the sociology of morality with migration studies is to evaluate the moral schemas on which these policies—and their political-cultural contexts—are based. As legal scholar Peter Shuck writes, debates that contend with migration policy, in effect evaluating benefit or detriment through the morality of policy, largely fall into two types: deontological and instrumental-consequentialist. Deontological arguments understand moral conduct as "action that is right in itself" where what is "right" is defined in terms of a priori principles or values, like human dignity, equality, and flourishing. On the other hand, instrumental-consequentialist arguments understand morality in terms of real-world effects, like economic production or health care (Schuck, 2008). For migration scholars, consequentialist arguments often take place through the domains of demography, economy, and assimilation.

Most often, a consequentialist stance *reveals* the deontological stance, meaning the way we think about the consequences tells us how we are thinking about the larger moral theory. As Seyla Benhabib famously asked, "What responsibilities do we bear toward those who knock on our doors?" (Benhabib, 2020). Benhabib argues that examining the moral and ethical foundations of these legal systems is essential to understanding the consequences that result from them. She points out that moral and legal systems are constructed in problematic opposition: a human right to move across borders for asylum or refuge, as stipulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and Article 21 of the same declaration which understands the will of the people as the basis of governmental authority, even if this means control over borders and the delineation of citizens versus residents or aliens. Moral arguments like Benhabib's understand a shared human right to the earth and movement about it.

As a result, it behooves scholars to examine the moral rationales behind these common questions of immigration policy and the political cultures that shape them. What does a nation's proclaimed commitment to multiculturalism mean if its policies suggest otherwise (Bloemraad, 2007; Castles, 1995; Favell, 2016)? How do different nations and different publics determine the "right" amount of cultural pluralism and diversity? How do they deploy these cultural values not only in expressive forms but also in institutional ones? As Carly Schall finds in her analysis of Swedish diversity discourses, "values, both contextually-dependent ethical values and universal moral values, rather than being "prior" to politics, arise out of the intersection of pragmatic, ethical and moral discourses,"

(Schall, 2022). Examining laws and policies not only as structures but also as cultural objects constituted by systems of meaning helps reveal the ambiguities of migration policy (Mezey, 2001; Sarat & Kearns, 2009; Sewell, 1992). Migration policy enables the necessity of migrant bodies as labor under racial capitalism, but it also obscures immigrants' necessity to reproduce their societal exclusion and disposability (Coutin, 2016; Golash-Boza, 2015; Hallett, 2014).

At an even more granular level, scholars can examine the moral foundations of policies that categorize immigrants and their claims. What are the meanings, for example, that underly the social construction of legal categories of "immigrants" versus "refugees" or the forms of liminal legality that render migrants illegible to the state (Menjívar, 2006; Menjívar et al., 2022; Roth, 2019)? When a receiving country like the USA is responsible for both push and pull factors, for the contingent socio-historical moments that resulted in migrants leaving their homes, to what extent do these categories and the rights afforded to them rest on moral foundations? For example, legal scholars show that a human-rights defense of immigration often rests on the moral claim that US foreign policy created the persecutory environment that migrants are fleeing (Schuck, 2008). Didier Fassin shows that in France, asylum seekers were increasingly deemed illegal immigrants, stripped of their moral worth to legitimize deportation unless they could provide medical evidence for a humanitarian defense, "to requalify them as victims deserving sympathy," (Fassin, 2005). Similarly, "family-based" immigration policies have rested on the moral claim that families belong together, a pro-family moral claim that similarly undergirded resistance against the Trump administration's family separation policies (Nguyen, 2018).

The legal delineation of sanctuary policies, asylum, and the politics of refuge also rest on moral justifications (Collingwood & O'Brien, 2019; Fassin, 2011; Villazor, 2008; Wilcox, 2019). Initially, "sanctuary" in the US context referred to the efforts by churches and locales to provide safe harbors and assistance to migrants seeking asylum, invoking their moral obligations to those in need. Though contemporary forms of sanctuary extend to a range of public and private spaces for unauthorized immigrants, the meanings of sanctuary have been deeply politicized, troubling its moral foundations (Collingwood & O'Brien, 2019; Yukich, 2013b). Even for churches, spaces constituted by codes of morality and shepherded by moral leaders, anti-immigrant groups have invoked morality to argue that by violating the law and harboring unauthorized immigrants, these sanctuaries are deeply *immoral* constructs (Delgado, 2021). As Rose Villazor argues, understanding these complex dynamics and why they matter for sanctuary policy requires examining the discourses of sanctuary and how they change over time and context (Villazor, 2008). To this end, Ava Ayers analyzes states and localities' rationales for changing sanctuary policies over time, specifically the changing moral content of these justifications. She finds that governments' moral claims for sanctuary policies often exclude any mention of moral obligation to immigrants themselves, drawing to light the implications of seemingly pro-immigrant policies without pro-immigrant rationales (Ayers, 2021).

Perhaps most prevalent in studies of migration policy is analyses of policies around unauthorized immigration. In his book, *Immigration Outside the Law*, Hiroshi Motomura examines the meanings underlying three central debates about unauthorized migration: (1) what unlawful presence *means*; (2) how state and local contexts matter for unauthorized migration; and (3) how unauthorized migrants integrate into American society (Motomura, 2014). As Emily Ryo argues about these debates, they ultimately rest on moral foundations. Moral judgments shape who counts as "illegal" under the law, how the state should deal with them, and the extent to which they ought to be incorporated in the populace (Ryo, 2014). Through this approach, publics are contending not only with their moral evaluations of the policies themselves but also their effects. What will it say about not only the moral character of the nation but also the moral character of the individual, their identity, *who they are*, if state policies welcome or reject the migrants in

question? Studies of the rise of Trumpism and white Christian nationalism in the USA show how political debates about immigration and its policies are embedded in these "deep stories" of the moral identity of a fundamentally white Christian nation (Hochschild, 2016; Martí, 2019; Whitehead & Perry, 2020). Through this moral framework where Christianity and American nationalism are mutually constitutive, nonwhite, non-Christian immigrants—ethnoracial others—pose a perceived threat to the larger moral character of the imagined community, where xenophobic attitudes are not only about immigrants themselves but rather the nation's perceived moral character (Baker et al., 2020).

3 The Morality of Immigrants

A third arena of scholarship examines moral questions of migration through the subjects of migration: the immigrants themselves. To what extent are *immigrants* moral? How do moral schemas distribute moral value across *categories* of migrants—e.g., citizens, legal residents, the undocumented—and *groups* of immigrants—e.g., White and non-White, Christian, and Muslim? Where moral meanings are embedded in borders and the contexts they circumscribe, their laws and policies, moral meanings are similarly attributed to immigrants and the moral foundations of their character.

Good character has been a requirement of US citizenship since 1790, an abstract determination applied unevenly using testimonials to the immigrant's "proper" behavior (Rhode, 2018). On the flip side, immoral character or, in legalese, "crimes of moral turpitude" have been used as grounds for expelling immigrants, not only preventing naturalization but also justifying deportation. Expansive acts including gambling, writing bad checks, adultery, and inebriation have been characterized as crimes of moral turpitude (Kanstroom & Lykes, 2015). Didier Fassin and Estelle D'Halluin similarly write of the migrant's body as a material site upon which moral worth rests in the capacity to make evident physical and psychic harms, to produce the corresponding medical certificates, to become morally legible for asylum (Fassin & D'Halluin, 2005).

Migration scholars have shown that the moral meanings attributed to types of immigrants are used to justify unequal treatment, uneven rights, and even state violence against particular migrants, even within a shared legal category (Abrego, 2011; García, 2019; Lachica Buenavista, 2018). "Model immigrants" are socially constructed as morally-upstanding members of society, hardworking and high-achieving, socially-obedient and lawful, as assimilating patriots who are "grateful to be here," (Gerken, 2013; Yukich, 2013a). More importantly, model immigrants are socially constructed in relationship to other "unassimilable" nonwhite immigrants and Black Americans where moral worth is attributed to the capacity to blend in, to acquiesce silently (Feagin & Cobas, 2008; Gans, 2007; Haller et al., 2011; Treitler, 2013). Yet, "blending in" is a near-impossible feat for nonwhite immigrants and those who seek to hold America to its multicultural promise, who dare to proudly retain their ethnoracial cultures and identity markers (Beaman, 2016; Karam, 2019; Rumbaut, 2008).

Abigail Andrews' analysis of immigration enforcement against undocumented immigrants shows how even within a shared legal status as undocumented, advocates work to distinguish "good" immigrants from "bad" immigrants. Deploying moral claims, immigrants identified by the state and advocates as "good"—hardworking, family-oriented, morally-upstanding—will work to distinguish themselves from "other" immigrants to secure state protection and inclusion (Andrews, 2018). Similar dynamics emerge as documented immigrants work to distinguish themselves from undocumented immigrants to avoid the political and cultural stigmas of immigrant identity as immoral, impure threats to the collective (Hackl, 2022; Mamdani, 2005; Nicholls, 2014).

These uses of moral justifications to draw symbolic boundaries between immigrant groups, to seek state recognition, rights, and resources by differentiating one group for another, are also deeply racialized in the USA (Abrajano & Hajnal,

2017; Brown & Jones, 2015; Jiménez & Horowitz, 2013). Moral value is distributed unequally between ethnoracial and religious groups (Byng, 2013; Hill, 2008; Omi & Winant, 1994). In the past decade, a wealth of scholarship at the intersection of race and immigration has shown how systems of racism shape how immigrants are triangulated into different racial groups, imbued with varied moral attributions, and their according levels of social status and treatment (Aranda, 2017; Sáenz & Douglas, 2015; Treitler, 2013).

For example, while East Asian immigrants are held up as morally-righteous model minorities in the economic sphere, they are simultaneously culturally-ostracized as "forever foreigners" threats to the racial "purity" of the white Christian nation (Kim, 1999; Lee & Kye, 2016; Xu & Lee, 2013). Similarly, Muslim immigrants are culturally homogenized as morally-suspect threats, evidenced in President Trump's 2017 executive order linking religion, nationality, and moral character to ban citizens of seven majority-Muslim countries from entering the USA (Shams, 2015). The original executive order gave preference to refugee claims by Christians and other religious minorities in these countries under the premise that it was the Muslims who were prone to immoral terrorist inclinations (Kessler, 2021; Thrush, 2017).

The unequal attribution of moral worth, of deservingness, among immigrant categories and groups, has been well-demonstrated by migration scholars. A sociology of morality helps us examine these phenomena through the moral economy that shape them. In matters of migration, moral economies refers to the "values and social norms orienting moral judgement by the majority, and guiding the determination of legal frameworks," (Ambrosini, 2022). Moral economies are shaped by the systems of power that imbue different groups with different levels of status, morality, value that determine the extent to which the group ought to be respected and protected (Lamont & Fournier, 1992; Tronto, 2020). Two migrants may very well enact the same "immoral" behavior, but the perceived morality of the act will vary by the ascribed identity of the group. These embedded cultural meanings are often invoked in what is known as "dog whistle politics," or "the politics of disgust," the racially-coded appeals that politicians use to generate perceptions of immigrant threat (Hancock, 2004; Haney-Lopez, 2014; Perea, 1997).

Moral panics will further activate these meanings and motivate action to manage constructed migrant threats, whether the moral panic of Mexican migrants as "rapists and drug dealers," "caravans" of Central American migrants "descending upon the border" or Muslim Americans as homegrown terrorists lying in wait (Erjavec, 2003; Morgan, 2016; Tosh, 2019). Competing moral economies mean different meanings will be invoked, different attributions of moral worth contested, as publics evaluate immigrant groups' deservingness and subsequent treatment. The active preservation of these moral economies will be used in the service of dehumanizing immigrants, rationalizing anti-immigrant policies and attitudes (Hing, 2006). Where migration scholarship has a long tradition of demonstrating these dynamics, the sociology of morality can add an analysis of the moral systems that pattern these processes of categorizing and identifying immigrants and how they shape public attitudes, collective action, and political culture.

4 Future Directions

Drawing the sociology of morality together with the sociology of migration illuminates a number of generative areas for future study that can help better explain the complex dynamics of contemporary migration flows and their politics. Building on Steven Hitlin and Stephen Vaisey's call to build a sociology of morality (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010), I highlight three areas where both the sociologies of morality and migration can benefit from cross-pollination: (1) examining structures, resources, and power as constitutive of the moral constructs of migration; (2) analyzing socio-historically patterned complexes of meaning and how they matter for processes and consequences of migration; and (3) examining how moral

judgment, action, and discourse are evoked in the day-to-day lives of migrants and their stakeholders.

First, one of the great strengths of the sociology of migration is understanding the way structures, resources, and power matter for migration processes. The sociology of migration lays out the interconnected global systems that shape who migrates, how, when, why, and the consequences that result. From the interconnection of economic systems—including at the micro-level with transnational remittances (Abrego, 2009; Carling, 2014; Castañeda, 2013)—to the interconnection of new technologies that surveil borders internationally and share detailed information about migrants between nations, migration is all the more a global system (Kalhan, 2014; Martinez-Aranda, 2022). With the conceptual tools of the sociology of morality, we could examine how the global dynamics of migration are connected to global moral systems, for example competing frameworks of global justice or human rights.

Where the sociology of migration shows how structures and resources matter for how migration plays out, sociologists of morality might adapt conceptual tools like "contexts of reception," "citizenship regimes," "remittances," and "liminal legality" to think about the ways structures and resources enable and constrain moral geographies and moral economies. How do the same resources that make possible migrants' capacity to imagine a "good life" (Sayer, 2005) shape their capacity to act, to create these pathways for themselves? How do material and cultural resources matter for migrants' capacity to embody the moral requirements of "good character" embedded in immigration policies, to gain access and inclusion in the institutions critical to their societal incorporation?

Similarly, sociologists of migration could interrogate the moral justifications underlying the structures they have long studied. How are immigration and citizenship policies, modes of enforcement, the varied forms of liminal legality made legitimate through institutionalized moral structures? Scholars may also examine the moral dilemmas that emerge in contentious politics as nations face paradoxical commitments to human rights globally and commit atrocities against migrants at home. Where are the sites of moral malleability within these structures and what do they reveal about the nation-state and its structures of inclusion and exclusion? How do these moral structures shift and evolve with political opportunities and threats over time, as for example in the advent of rising nativism and right-wing authoritarianism that views nonwhite migrants as impure pollutants to the nation?

Second, scholars could analyze the sociohistorical complexes of moral meaning that constitute both sending and receiving cultures. As migration scholars show, these cultural systems are deeply interconnected, including the exchange of cultural goods, practices, norms, and languages (Kabeer, 2005; Liu, 2015; Shohat & Alsultany, 2013), where migration is never a unidirectional or fixed process. Concepts like "acculturation," "incorporation," "symbolic ethnicity," "diaspora," and "transnationalism" could be connected to the conceptual frameworks of morality to examine how moral meanings pattern the way multiple cultures are negotiated and integrated in processes of migration and how intergroup solidarities are forged or wedged.

The complexities of these intercultural processes are also a rich area of study where a sociology of migration lends insight into just how moral schemas may compete and generate dilemmas for immigrants and their children over generations (Levitt & Waters, 2002; Maghbouleh, 2017; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Where scholars of migration have well-developed conceptual tools for comparing national cultures and legal regimes, a sociology of morality might help add a dimension of analysis in examining how varied cultures and commitments to multiculturalism are buttressed by varied moral systems. How and why do hybridized moral schemas emerge during migration, and under what conditions does one moral schema prevail over another? Similarly, migration scholars have shown that immigrants often forge alliances with native-born groups by identifying sites of commonality, whether through "cultural bridging," "religious bridging," or "religio-ethnic cultural

expansion," (Braunstein et al., 2014; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo et al., 2004; Landolt & Goldring, 2009). How do moral systems from varied cultures map on to one another and highlight domains of potential bridging and solidarity?

And what of the relationship between the system of moral meanings and the nation that institutionalizes it? Mathias Risse points out that a moral conception of immigration must, at the most basic level, understand moral obligations as not limited to members of the nation-state but also the visitors knocking at its door (Risse, 2008). If there is no moral obligation to those beyond borders, it becomes clear who counts as fully human. When is morality a philosophy, a set of guiding principles that shapes social action, and when is it a strategic tool, an instrumental invocation for political maneuvering? Scholars of migration may pick up on these arguments to examine the competing moral logics and discourses that undergird debates about immigration. How are moral obligations distributed, and under what conditions are they activated? Where do we find inconsistencies in the application of morality and what can this tell us about the distribution of moral worth in a society?

A third promising avenue for integrated scholarship examines how moral judgment, action, and discourse emerges in the daily lives of immigrants and their stakeholders and how it matters. Where an examination of moral systems can reveal the contradictions of and within the nation-state, how too do these moral contradictions shape immigrants themselves, their life courses, their perceptions and emotions, even their health? As Seyla Benhabib writes, the "migrant's body has become the symbolic site upon which such contradictions are enacted,"(Benhabib, 2012). Studies show how state and cultural violence against immigrants generates spillover effects where, for example, immigrants can experience vicarious trauma merely through media coverage of family separations and deportations. This trauma "gets under the skin" where affected immigrants will experience everything from diminished mental health and higher rates of anxiety and depression to lower birth weights and heart disease (Harrigan et al., 2017; Martinez et al., 2015; Perreira & Pedroza, 2019; Torche & Sirois, 2019). Drawing together the sociology of morality with migration scholarship could help make sense of the contexts, situations, and interactions through which these moral meanings become salient and consequential (Hitlin, 2008; Luft, 2020; Turowetz & Maynard, 2010). Where migration scholars show how social locations shape migrants' life courses—across intersections including race and ethnicity, class, and gender—a sociology of morality could help make sense of how these social locations experience unequal levels of moral attribution and how this moral value shapes their day-to-day experience (Álvarez-López, 2019; Lamont et al., 2016; Sayer, 2005).

Further, where migration scholars show how cultural embeddedness matters for how migrants "read" their interactions with others, the way they define their identities relative to other groups, and the extent to which they interpret events as discriminatory or not (Maxwell, 2008; Ward & Geeraert, 2016; Yazdiha, 2018), research could examine how acculturation into moral schemas patterns these perceptions. Just as social identity is a dialectic process negotiating the relationship between social-structural ascription and one's own perception of who they are, so too do moral economies require migrants to negotiate the moral schemas and worth they are attributed by society with the moral schemas and worth they hold within themselves. The varied agents of socialization—families, schools, media—are all the more complex for migrants who possess multiple cultural toolboxes and lenses for making sense of their lives.

In many ways, a situational perspective to understanding the sociology of morality "in the wild" is a natural bridge to the sociology of migration's growing commitment to "subject-centered" analyses (Marrow, 2013; Ryo, 2017; Yazdiha, 2021; Zhou et al., 2008). Through this approach, immigrants are not unwitting pawns in a structural game, moved about helplessly by nation-states, policies, and powerful groups. Instead, immigrants' own subjectivities, their feelings, thoughts, and actions are focalized to

show that amid unimaginable trauma, dispossession, and loss, immigrants find meaning and purpose in their lives. Amid constraining structures, disconcerting policies, and fickle public attitudes, immigrants make choices, they find community, they dream. To bring a subject-centered approach to this integration of scholarship is to understand immigrants as having perhaps the most valuable of sociological perspectives: that which has seen and experienced and moved about the artificial construction of borders and the cultures they contain. To center immigrants in these studies is to recognize their full humanity, itself a moral act.

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Cultural Threat and Market Failure: Moral Decline Narratives on the Religious Right and Left

Jack Delehanty

Abstract

This chapter argues that religiopolitical movements on the right—Christian Nationalism—and left—Prophetic Progressivism—remain central to US politics because they deploy moral decline narratives that are rooted in religious symbols but appeal outside religious communities. On the right, a cultural threat narrative built on a white Christian epistemology casts nonwhite and non-Christian persons, ideas, and institutions as morally dubious outsiders and uses the threat they purportedly pose to justify increasingly aggressive policy initiatives and authoritarian moves. On the left, a market failure narrative links Social Gospel and civic republican traditions, fostering linking Black Church movements steeped in the Civil Rights Movement's legacy with other organizing sectors. The continuing appeal of Christian Nationalism and Prophetic Progressivism demonstrates how religious ideas and practices blend with raced, gendered, and classed social narratives to create powerful moral narratives that can animate political action even as religious adherence declines overall.

Keywords

Christian Nationalism · Progressive religion · Cultural threat · Market failure

1 Introduction

Religious affiliation and attendance are continuing their long decline in the USA (Pew Research Center, 2019), but religion's political importance shows no signs of abating. White evangelicals voted as a bloc for Donald Trump in 2016 and 2020 (Gorski & Perry, 2022; Whitehead, Perry, et al., 2018), and affinity for white Christian nationalism associates strongly with myriad conservative policy preferences and cultural attitudes (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). Even ostensibly secular conservative principles have religious ideas at their core. Economic libertarianism strategically exploits conservative Christian assumptions about hard work and independence to stigmatize poverty, justify racial disparities, and build support for privatization and welfare state reductions (Kruse, 2016; Martí, 2020a); reciprocally, influential conservative religious leaders promote a prosperity gospel theology which holds that economic fortunes reflect moral worthiness. Linking economic and cultural conservative projects, religious symbols provide a common cultural core—a vision of traditional, white-dominated, capitalistic

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America—that rallies conservatives, whether they attend church, believe in the divine, or not.

Religion matters on the left, too, where assumptions about a "secular left" obscure religious heterogeneity among liberals (Smith, 2022) and mask religion's roles in fueling movements and supplying cultural glue for holding coalitions together. Black churches' voter turnout is an essential part of Democrats' electoral strategy (Edwards & Oyakawa, 2022). Faith-based lobbying groups and funders have been catalysts for healthcare reform, marriage equality, voting rights, immigrant advocacy, and consumer protections (Jenkins, 2020). At the state and local levels, faith-based community organizations and other religious coalitions are key players in criminal justice reform, worker protections, financial reforms, environmental measures, and other matters (Stout, 2010; Wood & Fulton, 2015). In diverse coalition settings, shared religious practices like interfaith prayers and other rituals are a key way movement leaders can foster trust and solidarity across race and class difference (Braunstein et al., 2014; Delehanty, 2023). Religion may be harder to see in progressive politics than conservatism, but if one looks, it's there.

Why does religion still matter in politics to this degree when fewer people are religious? In this chapter, I argue that this puzzle requires attention to the moral claims underlying religiopolitical movements—claims which extend far beyond the scope of religious institutions and beliefs to enliven deeper moral and political sentiments that people need not be religious to feel. Though many analyses of current U.S. social and political life minimize religion's importance, especially on the left, I argue that important movements on the right and left alike retain religious roots and continue to strategically deploy religious meanings, even as they unmoor from traditional religious institutions and beliefs. These movements are Christian Nationalism (CN) and Prophetic Progressivism (PP)—my loose term for a field of social actors from multiple faith traditions, including Judaism, Black and White Protestantism, and Catholicism, among others, who use faith precepts to inspire activism for social justice.[1] Though these movements could scarcely be more distinct in their political agendas, demographic makeups, and organizing styles, both are driven by moral decline narratives that are based on religious precepts that appeal outside religious constituencies, keeping religious ideas and the leaders espousing them at the core of the movement communities that drive political discourse and social change. These decline narratives have religious roots, but in each, religion's role is contingent on its intersection with raced, gendered, and classed assumptions about social life that people—including nonreligious people—use to locate themselves historically and culturally within a diverse, contested, and unequal social context (Yukich & Edgell, 2020). Of course, CN and PP have different, conflicting, even irreconcilable understandings of what moral decline means in contemporary US society, and adherents of each would recoil at the suggestion of even a conceptual equivalence. Yet the central role that religious ideas play in each movement, and the bridges they can build outward to nonreligious allies, is evidence that even as organized religion recedes, concerns about the nation's moral trajectory continue to animate claims making across in the political spectrum.

Christian Nationalism and Prophetic Progressivism, while arguably the most influential infusions of religion into contemporary US politics, are not centrally organized movements. Within each, diverse people and organizations use different strategies to advance different goals. I use the labels CN and PP to identify these broad constellations of movements as sociologically significant political forces, not to suggest that people within either would necessarily accept these labels or recognize one another as

[1] Prophetic Progressivism is a necessarily imprecise term, because religious activity on the political left is defined more by its diversity than by any unifying strand. Moreover, many faith-inspired actors engaged in social activity that others might call progressive would reject that term themselves, given its political and cultural connotations. Acknowledging these challenges, I believe the term is useful for conceptualizing the broad, shifting field of actors using faith as the basis for reforms concerned with democratic empowerment and racial and economic equity.

co-participants in the same movement. I also do not mean to suggest that Christian Nationalism and Prophetic Progressivism are the only religiopolitical movements that matter, or that they capture all the different ways people can approach religion and politics. Simply put, I use these categories as ideal-typical representations, admittedly imprecise, but useful nonetheless, of the central thrusts of religious conservatism and religious progressivism in the USA today.

2 Christian Nationalism

Christian Nationalism is "a pervasive set of beliefs and ideals that merge American and Christian group memberships—along with their histories and futures" (Whitehead, Perry, et al., 2018: 148). Beyond attitudes about how contemporary society should look and feel, CN provides a mythic view of America as having been founded by and for Christians, and not others. This worldview depicts the country as specially chosen by God, constantly under threat, and needing strong leadership to protect it and to remind its inhabitants of the benefits and responsibilities that a fused American-Christian identity confers (Gorski & Perry, 2022). Many Christian nationalists see Donald Trump as just such a leader, and embrace his "Make America Great Again" message as a national spiritual mission, not just a political slogan. The mission involves prioritizing the cultural and political power of white Christians, along with any others willing to advocate for their primacy, even when such a project conflicts with core values like equality, democracy, and pluralism. Making America Great Again therefore involves restoring Christianity—as interpreted and expressed by white conservative Christians—to the privileged social and cultural status that Christian Nationalists (largely inaccurately) believe it held at the nation's founding (Gorski, 2017).

Long a topic of discussion in history, political philosophy, and theoretical sociology, Christian nationalism reemerged as a major empirical research focus in the mid-2010s (Perry & Whitehead, 2015a, 2015b; Whitehead & Perry, 2015). Exploring the cultural underpinnings of religiopolitical attitudes, Perry and Whitehead showed that CN is distinct from evangelicalism itself—there are evangelicals who are not Christian Nationalists, and there are Christian Nationalists who are not evangelicals. CN, therefore, is best understood not as a religious identity but as a religiopolitical worldview that locates social authority in Christian *heritage* rather than Christian *doctrine* or *belief*; CN is predicated on embracing white Christians' goals and interests as the defining principles for social order rather than belief in specific Christian precepts.

Across a wave of studies beginning around 2015, Whitehead, Perry, and colleagues showed that regardless of their personal religious beliefs, frequency of service attendance or prayer, or denominational identity, people who embraced CN were likely to oppose interracial and same-sex marriage, transracial adoption, and other social practices that transgressed conservative norms (Perry & Whitehead, 2015a, 2015b; Whitehead & Perry, 2015). This initial wave of empirical CN studies kept race in the analytical background, but Trump's strong white evangelical support quickly forced race to the center of the conversation. Since Trump could not possibly appeal on the basis of *personal* religious virtue, attention turned to his power agenda as the basis of his white evangelical support. While he pledged to restore power to Christians in the public sphere, it was clear that he meant *white* Christians specifically. White Christian nationalism was the defining element of Trumpism (Edgell, 2017), associating strongly with support for conservative dogmas like opposition to gun control, support for police, and opposition to Black Lives Matter (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). Very quickly, the scholarly conversation turned to discussing Christian Nationalism as a white racial project (Gorski & Perry, 2022; Martí, 2020a; Yukich & Edgell, 2020).

CN's racial meanings don't mean that white people are its only adherents, however. In fact, significant and likely growing numbers of Latinx, Black, and Asian Americans embrace CN (Martí, 2022; McDaniel et al., 2018; Wong, 2018). As Marti observes, "the desire for being a 'good

Christian' in Latinx communities—a self-reliant, hard-working, 'trust the system' and 'trust God' Christian" (2022: 2)—aligns some Latinx Protestants' political interests with CN. Latinx Protestants may not embrace CN explicitly in large numbers, but the moral framework underlying their concepts of good citizenship dovetails with an economic and cultural agenda whose primary public carriers are Christian Nationalists. This agenda functionally merged with the Religious Right through religious conservatives' involvement in deregulation and privatization in the 1980s and 1990s (Kruse, 2016; Martí, 2020b), and the affinity persists today. Similarly, McDaniel et. al. suggest that a similar fusion of cultural, economic, and religious conservatism promotes adherence to prosperity gospel theology among Black Protestants, undercutting many Black Christians' support for government programs and initiatives intended to rectify racial disparities in income, wealth, educational attainment, and other outcomes. CN is certainly a white-driven movement with mostly white adherents, but it is by no means an exclusively white movement, and its influence on electoral politics will likely continue to grow as Republicans seek support among communities of color (Martí, 2022; Wong, 2018).

Though contemporary CN descends from previous conservative movements, including the Religious Right of the 1980s–2000s, it is notably less sectarian than its ancestors. The apocalyptic theology underlying CN has been present in American Christianity since the late 1600s, but it only emerged as the central force animating Christian conservatism in the early twentieth century (Gorski, 2017), a time when minimizing Catholic influence was evangelicals' chief concern (Wilde, 2019; Wuthnow, 1988). As recently as the mid-2000s, conservative evangelicals worked to suppress Catholicism's public voice (Evans, 2006). Today, conservative Catholics eagerly affirm CN, and as the fervent evangelical support for Supreme Court justices Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Barrett attests, conservative evangelicals will eagerly support Catholic influence when they believe it will enhance their power (Jones, 2016). The doctrinal flexibility also extends outside traditional organized religion. Evidence abounds that people don't need to attend church, or even have strong personal religious identities, to affirm and even embrace CN (Braunstein & Taylor, 2017; Delehanty et al., 2019). The right's strong support for Trump and other nonreligious conservative leaders suggests that the embrace is mutual. A leader's personal religiosity is irrelevant if they are willing to champion CN publicly, and nonreligious conservatives eagerly embrace CN because they recognize its power for advancing conservative economic goals.

The hypothesis that CN has supplanted evangelical identity as the driving force in conservative politics finds support in survey-based work by Whitehead, Perry, and colleagues, who show that Christian nationalism accounts for most or even all of evangelical identity's apparent influence on conservative attitudes (Perry et al., 2019; Whitehead & Perry, 2020; Whitehead, Schnabel, et al., 2018). When CN is accounted for, evangelicalism itself has little to no relationship with conservatism or with prejudicial social attitudes (Stewart et al., 2018). Other research has found that significant numbers of nonevangelicals embrace core precepts of CN (Delehanty et al., 2019), and CN's effects on Trump support and opposition to immigration are stronger among people who don't attend church than among people who do (Stroope, Froese, et al., 2021; Stroope, Rackin, et al., 2021). CN may have sectarian religious roots, but its contemporary appeal extends far beyond churches, and its contemporary ambassadors (Whitehead & Perry, 2020) include plenty of Catholics, nonreligious people, and conservative Black and Latinx Americans alongside white evangelicals. More than a political expression of religious sentiments, CN is a racialized ethnonationalist movement that upholds whiteness and Christianity as the pillars of American identity and restricts full membership in the national community to those who affirm these pillars, whether or not they are white or Christians themselves.

2.1 Moral Decline in Christian Nationalism: Cultural Threat

What drives this surprisingly diverse and nonsectarian CN coalition? Research points to perceived moral decline, a constant trope in American conservatism. As Phil Gorski explains (2022), the twentieth century was characterized by a strengthening alliance among advocates of moral traditionalism, free market fundamentalism, white supremacy, and military, economic, and cultural American imperialism—groups which had been loosely tied, if at all, prior to the first world war. As military conflicts abroad and cultural flashpoints at home drew stark lines between competing worldviews—communism versus capitalism (and later Islam versus Judeo-Christianity), "family values" versus women's liberation—the binary, good-versus-evil worldview at the core of white evangelical culture became more compatible than ever before with other conservative projects. Opportunities grew for white evangelicals to augment their power by aligning with free market and military enthusiasts; yet infusing secular conservatism with religious meanings (and voters) also required anchoring religious projects to political carriers, opening pathways for demagogic, questionably moral figures like Trump to establish religious support as long as they promised to deliver power. What developed was a tight coupling between religious and other conservative nationalisms that perceived threats to any "core American value," from laissez-faire economics to traditional family structures, as an affront to conservative Christians' religious freedoms (Smith, 1998). The contemporary version of this worldview involves a cycle in which media, cultural elites, and government are perceived to team up to promulgate and institutionalize nontraditional—and in Christian nationalists' view, immoral—social phenomena that upend previously dominant hierarchies based on religion, sexuality, race, and gender. The cycle begins with media sources, academics, and popular culture "normalizing" acceptance for LGBTQ + people, "attacking" white identity by illuminating historical and contemporary examples of systemic racism, "erasing" the distinction between male and female, "polluting" the nation's heritage by embracing immigration, and otherwise interrogating white conservative Christian social assumptions. In turn, governments enact policy, and institutions promote norms, which in Christian nationalists' view impede their ability to enact a godly lifestyle free of judgment from cultural others (Dreher, 2020). CN as a political ideology is based on the feeling of being caught between these closing-in walls, constrained by rules and norms that make it a cultural misdeed to uphold "traditional" moral values that recognize whiteness, capitalism, traditional gender norms, and heterosexuality as the pillars of national culture. In short, Christian Nationalists feel that their core culture is under threat.

This sense of cultural threat is at the core of the moral decline that Christian Nationalists believe the country is undergoing. Christian Nationalists believe the USA was founded by and for white Christians and should be governed by and for white Christians today. In their view, certain nonwhite and non-Christian people can become members of the national community, but their membership is always contingent on adherence to strict criteria for cultural citizenship, especially "individualistic and voluntaristic notions of the good religious (and democratic) subject" (Braunstein, 2017a). When members of outgroups—whether white Christians who fail to live a sufficiently "Biblical" lifestyle, or racial and/or religious others—fail to conform to Christian Nationalist visions, and especially when they form movements such as Black Lives Matter to advance their interests, they are cast as threats to the "real" Americans who "deserve" to inhabit the country and decide how it should be run (Edgell et al., 2016). When society permits a high degree of influence by outgroup members and their movements, Christian Nationalists believe their ability to govern themselves as they choose is threatened and society's moral character dissolves.

By depicting government and media as the weapons of morally dubious outsiders, Christian

Nationalists create a permission structure to target increasingly broad sectors of civil society for cleansing "reforms," as well as an incentive structure for conservative elites to marshal CN-rooted sentiments for increasingly aggressive authoritarian power plays.

The recent panic around critical race theory is an example. Against the backdrop of an idealized American history that fuses racial and religious belonging (Braunstein, 2021), Christian Nationalists abhor alternative histories that highlight race as an axis of social and economic power. Images of cities being "burned," "pillaged," and "massacred" by protesters in the wake of George Floyd's murder in 2020, disseminated on Fox News and Facebook, provided all the justification needed to proclaim that "wokeness had gone too far." Public schools, long a target for religious conservatives, were a natural target for the outrage. Why were so many nonwhite people angry? Not because they had legitimate fears and grievances, but because public education—already seen as suspicious by Christian nationalists for being too focused on diversity and undermining traditional values—had fed them a steady diet of critical race theory and other damaging ideologies. Arguing that parents, and not "leftist" teachers, should be "in control" of what their kids learn, conservatives harnessed the moral decline narrative circulating within CN to suggest that public institutions, especially schools and universities, had been commandeered by immoral interceders and must be reclaimed by vigilant, morally upstanding parents.

What is most noteworthy about this is the way astute political entrepreneurs on the right have been able to make the CN moral decline narrative into a broader conservative rallying cry. The critical race theory panic is just one example of a broader phenomenon in which Christian-inspired—but not Christian-exclusive—moral concerns entrench symbolic boundaries which in turn legitimize political extremism. By infusing the conservative sphere with a convincing moral decline narrative rooted in concerns about traditional values' replacement by secular, "woke" leftism, CN makes every policy debate into a moral struggle that pits "real" Americans against intruding others, with the "real" Americans defined not by race and/or religion alone, but by their willingness to adopt and advocate for white-normative, Christian-rooted but ultimately non-sectarian discourses of national history and identity, and vehemently shun those who refuse.

The CN narrative aligns the concerns of devout evangelical Christians with other conservatives who may care little for theology or the Bible, but are deeply concerned with protecting what they see as their own country from the host of ills and intruders that have set its perceived decline in motion. That this "protection" often involves depriving target populations of economic and cultural resources and consolidating wealth and power among affluent, mostly white, Americans further cements the alliance between economic and religious conservatives. As several researchers have remarked, Christian influence here serves the crucial function of disguising the authoritarian, white supremacist, and "pseudo-fascist" (Whitehead & Perry, 2020) impulses at the core of the modern conservative movement. Banning books, criminalizing medical care for trans people, and even overturning elections becomes justifiable, even necessary, when the country's very moral fiber is at stake (Gorski & Perry, 2022). These policy changes advance Christian Nationalists' power goals while maintaining a veneer of non-sectarian Americanness that appeals to nonreligious conservatives.

3 Prophetic Progressivism

Despite a widespread misperception that the left is secular, an array of faith-based progressive movements operate in US politics and civic life, often developing action frames and rhetorical strains that infuse the broader progressive sphere. Some of these religious movements are rooted in particular religious traditions, including Jewish Renewal, the Black Church social reform tradition, the Protestant Social Gospel, and Catholic Social Teaching. Others are interfaith. Some are spearheaded by pastors, bishops, and other

ecclesiastical authorities, while others operate wholly or partly outside other formal religious institutions. Some are racially and ethnically homogeneous; others are internally diverse. There is no unified strand of progressive religious activism in the USA (Braunstein et al., 2017). Instead, there are multiple, often overlapping progressive movements that draw on religious symbols and practices in various ways to fuel their work on different issues.

Without dismissing the diversity among these movements, for present purposes it is useful to group them together under the label *Prophetic Progressivism.* This umbrella term refers not to a specific group of people or organizations but a field of social actors who use faith precepts to inspire activism for social justice. In labeling their work "prophetic," I follow Gorski (2017), who explains that the prophetic tradition draws on sacred texts from the Hebrew and Christian bibles that emphasize humans' responsibilities to care for one another. These doctrines assert that one cannot have a strong relationship with God without also working to ensure dignity and prosperity for other people, especially the marginalized. Since this prophetic tradition conceptualizes the social world as a network of relationships where people must build the institutions that will mutually benefit and protect all, actors embedded within it don't see top-down approaches like charity or volunteering as effective long-term solutions to social problems, nor do they see voting and making donations as sufficient civic engagement to bring about change. Instead, they aim to use democratic processes to address the social conditions that allow glaring inequalities to develop, persist, and deepen. This means holding government and corporate leaders accountable, often through contentious action.

In all its forms, Prophetic Progressivism involves maintaining rhetorical distance from both religious conservatism and secular liberalism. "Progressive" is a loaded term, and not all people or groups that I include in this category would embrace it (Braunstein et al., 2017). They do, however, take pains to distinguish their use of religious ideas from that of the Religious Right and Christian nationalists (Krull, 2020), and their political activity from that of purely secular actors. To distinguish themselves from religious conservatives, prophetic progressives emphasize inclusivity as a core value (Braunstein, 2017b; Krull, 2020), make conscious efforts to bring together religious communities with different racial and ethnic makeups (Wood & Fulton, 2015), and center theological references to equity and social justice in their religious practices (Barnes, 2005; Becker, 1998; Yukich, 2013). To preserve distance from secular activists, they include religious practices like prayers and songs in their public demonstrations (Jenkins, 2020), invoke the religious roots of previous social movements like Abolition and Civil Rights (Edwards & Oyakawa, 2022), and invite participants to develop personal narratives about how their faith impels activism (Oyakawa, 2015). Prophetic progressive actors try to thread a narrow needle, making their work appealing to secular progressive allies while also retaining enough religious aura to satisfy religious adherents and claim moral legitimacy in the public sphere.

Though many PP groups are internally homogeneous, the field as a whole is much more racially and ethnically diverse than CN, and this can undercut its political efficacy. Whereas white-coded visions of American heritage and culture provide a unifying focus for CN, Prophetic Progressives must balance a host of distinct, often conflicting goals and priorities. Edwards and Oyakawa (2022), for instance, explain that faith-based community organizations (FBCOs) can struggle to attract Black Church leaders because while they sincerely pursue racial equity, they often depend on resources from white-dominated congregations and funders, making them seem unaccountable to Black communities. At the same time, multiracial organizations' increasing adoption of racial justice frames can put off white people who prefer to avoid discussing race explicitly out of fear that it is "too political" or "too controversial" (Delehanty, 2016; Fulton et al., 2019). A host of other cultural challenges explained in research by Lichterman and Williams (2017), Geraty (2017), and Krull (2020) impede effective political organizing among liberal-leaning white suburban

congregations. Even in organizations that manage to streamline diverse constituent groups into cohesive political action, the cultural work required to develop and preserve collective identity is substantial (Delehanty & Oyakawa, 2018) and can divert resources from more direct strategic work.

In sum, while it would be an overstatement to proclaim a "resurgent" religious left (Baker & Martí, 2020), there is a robust Prophetic Progressive field using religious precepts to support contentious political activity in support of progressive goals, particularly racial and socioeconomic equity. PP is less influential than Christian Nationalism in national politics, but it nonetheless constitutes an important part of the broader left whose constituents have made numerous contributions to progressive policy goals and which plays a significant role in framing the larger progressive agenda. And like CN, PP is driven by moral decline concerns that are often expressed in religious language, but are not tethered to any specific religious setting or identity.

3.1 Moral Decline in Prophetic Progressivism: Market Failure

Across their diverse goals and strategies, Prophetic Progressives frame their projects as attempts to stem a moral decline brought about by what they see as society's overreliance on markets to meet basic needs and ensure equal opportunity. In contrast to the CN assumption that individuals who make good choices will prosper, the PP framework observes that markets, along with governments that have become their clients instead of their regulators, have consistently privileged a select few at the expense of the many. Rather than rewarding individual virtue and moral worthiness, prophetic progressives argue that markets create material hierarchies and generate accompanying ideologies based on race, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, and more to legitimate them. Thus, besides failing to provide equal access to public goods like housing, health care, and education, markets also create underclasses that can be exploited for profit and blamed for crises. In the PP view, markets' tightening grip on humans' access to dignity, prosperity, and opportunity constitutes a moral decline that requires remedial action.

The market failure moral decline narrative now animates much of the progressive sphere, but it has religious roots. Its role in social movements dates to the late nineteenth century, when civil religious language infused populist efforts to balance individual liberty and the common good (Williams, 1999). The same ideas were still animating the left in the postwar era, when student movements, Black Church leaders, and urban community organizers began coordinating in response to the continued impoverishment of Black communities and the accelerating decline of urban neighborhoods. By the 1960s, affiliates of the campus-based, progressive Protestant Christian Faith-and-Life Center, founded at the University of Texas at Austin in 1952, were coordinating sit-ins in response to on-campus discrimination against Black students and mistreatment of Black communities in broader society (Gahr & Young, 2017). Their work, strongly situated in the progressive theology of the Civil Rights Movement, helped develop both the network infrastructure and ideological foundation of the new left.

In following years, early leaders in the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a network of FBCOs, traced the problems facing urban communities to discriminatory banking, real estate, energy, and environmental practices by corporations operating without sufficient government oversight (DeSlippe, 2019). As manufacturing jobs declined, tax bases diminished, public services receded, and poverty deepened, campus-based movement leaders, organizers in the IAF, and other faith-based organizing networks joined Black Church leaders in identifying urban, especially Black, families as the victims rather than the causes of these changes and demanding that government and corporate leaders reinvest in local communities.

Social Gospel-inspired analysis, drawing on the theology of Civil Rights leaders and their doctrinal ancestors, provided much of the moral

backing for these critiques of market failures. Leaders compared the conditions facing Black communities in decaying cities to the Israelites' exile: free from slavery, but far from the promised land (DeSlippe, 2019), and more generally drew on the theological thrust of the Civil Rights Movement and the liberation theologies emerging from Latin America (Stout, 2010). Yet powerful as this religious language was for stirring urban pastors and their congregations to action, civic republican frames were equally important for attracting coalition partners, foundation funding, and broader recognition as legitimate political actors (Williams & Demerath, 1991). A rhetoric of "citizen power" (Gecan, 2004) ran through FBCOs' late twentieth-century campaigns, emphasizing how political structures had undermined civic responsibility and community efficacy, with political leaders responsive to monied interests instead of everyday people (Hart, 2001; Wood, 2002). Civic empowerment was a similar theme in Black Church discourse, as ecumenical Black Church movements proffered frames of civic nationhood to "critique larger national narratives about the promise of America" (McRoberts, 2020: 42). The confluence of these Social Gospel and civic republican strains facilitated multiracial cooperation and religious partnerships with nonreligious allies (Frost, 2001; Swarts, 2008).

The same narrative underpins today's PP activity, as faith leaders working in different movement traditions respond to deepening racial and socioeconomic inequalities by highlighting markets' failures to ensure prosperity. A clear example is the rhetoric of Rev. Dr. William Barber III, the North Carolina pastor whose Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina blossomed into the Poor People's Campaign, which Barber chairs alongside the Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis. Employing a Social Gospel framework that centers class inequality and decries markets' failure to ensure the shared dignity and prosperity their reading of the Gospel impels, Barber and Theoharis depict individualism, capitalism, and religious nationalism as elements of a "false moral narrative" designed to uphold profits at the expense of everyday people. Their rallies link climate disaster, low wages, racism, mistreatment of immigrants, and political authoritarianism as mutual consequences of market fundamentalism, arguing that such conditions are a violation of the sacred covenant between God and his people (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016).

Yet while the Poor People's Campaign's most visible leaders are pastors, the movement as a whole aspires to reach far outside religious circles, with class as a particular focus. Emphasizing—in public settings, anyway—the civic republican more than the Social Gospel roots of social justice theology, Barber and his partners have become extremely active in the labor movement, training and funding local groups working on minimum wage issues throughout the mid to late 2010s, and now regularly appearing on picket lines and amplifying calls for unionization at Amazon, Starbucks, and other large employers. The Poor People's Campaign brands itself "A National Call for Moral Revival." Its promotional materials frequently mention King, but rarely include any specific religious details. The absence of explicitly religious language in its rhetoric signals the degree to which Barber and Theoharis see their movement as a religiously *inspired*, but not religiously *exclusive*, social change project. As Barber argues in his 2016 book, *The Third Reconstruction*, he and other leaders in this space believe the market failure moral decline narrative can bring together religious and secular movement communities. More than a religious movement, Moral Mondays represents a "fusion politics" that relies on moral framing to connect the struggles of impoverished minorities and working class members across racial and other boundaries (Sinclair-Chapman & Targ, 2019).

Elsewhere in the PP sphere, Black Church leaders and FBCOs also point to market failures as the causes of problems like mass incarceration, predatory lending, unemployment, and poor wages and benefits. Though the Black Church has conservative as well as progressive political-theological strains (McDaniel, 2019), recent research draws attention to the ways many Black Christians embody faith through contentious activism that draws attention to profit-

seeking as the root cause of Black communities' suffering (Allen, 2019; Jenkins, 2020). And when charismatic Black Church leaders embrace Civil Rights-inspired activism, which typically involves substantial critiques of profit-driven systems and policies, they often find success in mobilizing broader leadership networks for activism on systemic social issues (Edwards & Oyakawa, 2022).

The market failure moral decline narrative also runs through FBCOs' work on economic and racial issues. Recent research (Delehanty, 2023) explains how FBCO leaders depict criminal justice and economic issues as two sides of the same coin, pointing out how systematic underinvestment in rural areas by governments and corporations creates a jobs void that private prison operators cynically exploit as they lobby to open new facilities. When rural areas are poor, private prison companies generate support for new prisons by talking up the jobs they would provide to struggling regions. Communities of color pay the price in the form of higher incarceration rates fueled by contracts requiring states to fill a certain number of prison beds. FBCO leaders expend great efforts to explain these structural dynamics to members of local congregations and mobilize them in response to the "poverty profiteering" that private prisons engage in. But like Barber and Theoharis, they also increasingly use frames like this—rooted in religious symbols and ideas, but couched in secular-friendly rhetoric—as bridges to nonreligious movement communities.

Though the practical, symbolic, ideological, and strategic characteristics of Prophetic Progressive organizations vary widely, their collective embrace of market failure as a rhetorical theme constitutes a moral decline narrative that has already yielded important religious-secular partnerships and has the potential to support additional collaboration in the future (Braunstein, 2018). Collectively, PP actors assert that markets have failed to ensure basic human needs that are impelled by sacred texts as well as secular epistemologies. By focusing on markets' inability to uphold cherished values like equality, liberty, and fair reward for hard work, this narrative not only gives voice to a specific moral critique of capitalism, rooted in confluence of Social Gospel and civic republican ideals, but also holds the potential—as yet unrealized, yet meaningful nonetheless—to provide a strong moral grounding for the broader progressive left.

4 Conclusion

This essay has argued that competing moral decline narratives animate conservative and progressive religiopolitical movements in the contemporary USA. Though radically different in their religious roots and contemporary political implications, the cultural threat and market failure narratives are parallel in that they both diffused outward from religious ideas institutions and ideas in the mid-twentieth century and now occupy central positions in the broader political right and left, respectively. This pattern demonstrates the degree to which moral concerns continue to animate political discourse despite declining religious adherence and substantial, perhaps irreconcilable disagreement over what constitutes a moral society.

These movements also offer important insights for scholars examining the current and future roles of religious ideas, communities, and traditions in social and political life. It is no coincidence that the moral decline narratives at the heart of both CN and PP are linked to broader racial and gender projects; it is possible, even likely, that such narratives' appeal outside their core religious constituencies depends on how they nestle into broader conflicts around race, ethnicity, and gender. Evidence from other parts of the world—Solidarity in Poland (Casanova, 1994), liberation movements in Latin America (Smith, 1996), and Civil Rights in the US (Morris 1984) on the progressive side; the AKP Party in Turkey (Karakaya, 2018) and other twenty-first century authoritarian-populist movements on the right—certainly indicates that religiously-rooted moral worldviews may be most likely to escape their confessional confines and generate broader appeal when paired with broader gender, racial, and ethnic projects at times of apparent social

crisis. Other research has shown how conservative religious groups have found success by framing their advocacy for a return to restrictive gender roles and practices within a broader discourse of "women's right to choose" (Bernstein, 2010; Ghodsee, 2007), marshaling western support for women's autonomy to reinforce women's right to embrace traditional, fundamentalist practices. These are but a few examples of an apparent pattern in which religious claims provide cultural and institutional backing for racial, ethnic, and gender-focused political projects. It is important that scholars of religion and social movements heed this dynamic attentively in future research.

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Morality and Civil Society

Bin Xu

Abstract

Morality is central to the theories and practices of civil society but remains a controversial point for critics who question the boundary between the normative and the empirical. In this chapter, I argue that the sociology of morality can serve as descriptive ethics to provide empirical ground for dialogs between sociology and philosophy. This chapter first briefly reviews the main themes related to morality in civil society theories, primarily civic virtue and the common good and then discusses how the sociology of morality informs or could inform theoretical debates from an empirical perspective.

Keywords

Civil society · Morality · Descriptive ethics · Civic virtue · Common good

"Civil society" testifies to the appeal and conundrum of the sociology of morality. On the one hand, the concept of "civil society" would not have existed if it did not connotate an ideal of both a good society and corresponding good citizens. The practices associated with "civil society" apparently are inspired by some moral ideas. A disbeliever should just open any book that surveys the history of the concept of "civil society" to see how thinkers from the Scottish Enlightenment to the contemporary revival of this concept prioritize its importance for building a moral foundation for democracy, a citadel against tyranny, and a school to nurture virtues of civility (Ehrenberg, 2017). Sociological studies have demonstrated that the moral dimension of civil society is real and can be empirically identified.

Nevertheless, the moral dimension of civil society has been viewed as its Achilles heel. The arrow shot at it has been critics' claim that "it is too normative!" Charles Tilly once asserted that the concepts of civil society and the public sphere, its sub-concept, are "morally admirable but analytically useless" (cited in Emirbayer & Sheller, 1999). This somewhat cynical judgment represents a prevalent suspicion from the dominant epistemological perspective in contemporary social sciences that the empirical and the normative should be separate and that social sciences deal with the empirical only. This epistemological separation is in stark contrast to the concept's entanglement with some significant historical processes since the second half of the twentieth century, in which "civil society" has simultaneously used as a rallying cry in struggles for democracy under state socialism and authoritarianism (Cohen & Arato, 1992), a "go-to" term in international organizations' documents about solving global social problems (Kaldor, 2003), and an ideal against which many critics lament

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about the decline of civic engagement and the rise of rampant individualism in established democracies (Putnam, 2000). All these add more troubles to the already troubled concept. It takes only a couple of steps for critics to walk from a recognition of the concept's moral-political entanglement to a condemnation of its Western-centrism, historical teleology, and so on.[1]

A temporary way out of this chaos, as adopted by many scholars, is to ditch the concept of "civil society" and use more concrete or less controversial ones such as "non-governmental organizations" or "the third sector." When applied in empirical studies, this conceptual response tends to focus on the organizational and structural dimensions of civil society and pays little attention to the moral aspect. This conceptual minimalism may mitigate some attacks by hiding the weak point. Whether this strategy works remains unknown. What is known, however, is that it misses too many things intrinsic to civil society, that is, people's motives, ideas, interpretations, and norms related to a good society and good citizens. As I have argued elsewhere, neglecting these does not make the scholarship on civil society better but makes it incomplete (Xu, 2022).

The sociology of morality may help us gain a new perspective on civil society. In this chapter, I start with the postulate that the sociology of morality is *descriptive ethics*, a form of knowledge about how people think and act morally in their social life and how social, economic, and political conditions shape their moral ideas and actions (Hämäläinen, 2016). In this sense, the sociology of morality helps moral philosophers ground their *normative ethics* in an empirical, systematic, and comparative examination of real-world moral ideas and practices rather than only resorting to personal reflections, thought experiments, philosophical treatises, and literary works. Descriptive ethics also allows sociologists to be more assertive in drawing a clear but not rigid boundary between empirical research and normative theories. In other words, sociologists *empirically* study moral ideas and practices, without which some parts of society do not exist. Such empirical work, in turn, is not hindered by the sometimes-artificial disciplinary borders between political theory and sociology; rather, it enables sociologists to use their empirical work to join the dialogs about fundamental normative issues.

From this perspective, the moral sociology of civil society mainly focuses on how people realize their moral ideas in their associational life and discourses in public spheres. Thus, its central subject is what Andrew Sayer terms "lay morality," "ideas and feelings regarding how people should behave, particularly with respect to others, in relation to their well-being," including moral sentiments, norms of interactions, and discourses revolving around moral principles (Sayer, 2010). This chapter first briefly reviews the main themes related to morality in civil society theories, mostly civic virtue and the common good, and then discusses how the sociology of morality informs or could inform such theoretical debates from an empirical perspective.

1 Civic Virtue and the Common Good

A moral issue central to civil society theories is: What are the characteristics of a member of civil society as a moral-political community? In political theory, this question has been discussed under the term "*civic virtue*." A related question, which has often been discussed under the term the "*common good*," is: What is the common good of civil society?

There have been three major approaches to the issue. The first approach, *classical republicanism*, postulates that a political community hinges on members who pursue the common good over their private interests through demonstrating some traits, such as courage, solidarity,

[1] Another type of critique, albeit less influential, comes from the opposite direction, communitarian social philosophy. For example, Amitai Etzioni (1996) argues that civil society, or what he terms "civic society," defines social order only in terms of procedures and intermediary institutions, limited to political arena, and devoid of substantive values. Thus, the civil society concept is unable to provide a better understanding of human societies as moral communities.

responsibility, and so on, through their engagement in the public affairs of the community and cooperation with others (Lovett, 2014). In other words, a good society relies on good, public-spirited citizens. Classical republicanism can date back to Greek philosophy and various other political philosophical traditions around the world. It focuses on individuals' moral characters, especially their duty and responsibility, and remains the dominant approach to the issue of civic virtue.

This classical republicanism unsurprisingly has been challenged by the second approach, *liberalism*. Liberalism emphasizes that the common good of a political-moral community relies on autonomous individuals whose rights are well-protected and who are able to govern and develop themselves to the full flowering of individuality (Macedo, 1991). To pursue and improve the common good, therefore, a civil society needs to design institutions that can nurture such autonomous individuals and protect their rights.

The two approaches, however, are not incompatible. Some combinations, for example, *republican liberalism*, postulate that individual rights should be one of the key values in a good society and that individuals have the moral duty to maintain the institutions that protect the right against arbitrary rule or domination. The reason for this compatibility is that members of a society are interdependent on each other rather than entirely separate or completely dependent (Dagger, 1997).

The third approach, the *deliberative democracy* theory, transcends the right–duty dichotomy and stresses the virtues of reasonable, deliberating citizens in participating in public deliberation and decision-making (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). The goal of such deliberation and collective decision-making is to solve the moral conflicts among people with different values and views, and thus reciprocity and equality in communications are the essence (Habermas, 1989).

All three approaches among them have been represented in different authors' writings in the intellectual history of civil society (Ehrenberg, 2017). For example, the Scottish Enlightenment moralists, who were responsible for the modern term "civil society," exemplified both republicanism and liberalism. They defined civil society as an autonomous realm with individuals who could own properties and exchange on the market. But Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson also emphasized that humans' moral sentiments, especially the fellow feelings, enabled them to live together in a "civilized" (which was the connotation of "civil" in their writings) moral community. This early thesis of civil society interestingly resembled the modern "republican liberalism" in its fundamental anchor in individual rights and its stress on individuals' moral interdependence.

Alexis de Tocqueville, in contrast, represents a typical republicanism (Tocqueville, 2004 [1840]). A central theme in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is how to mitigate the harm of individualism when a society's trend of democracy makes everyone equal but also isolated: "Thus, not only does democracy cause each man to forget his [*sic*] forebears, but it makes it difficult for him to see his offspring and cuts him off from his contemporaries. Again and again it leads him back to himself and threatens ultimately to imprison him altogether in the loneliness of his own heart" (p. 587). Note that, unlike modern scholars, Tocqueville used "democracy" and "equality" interchangeably to refer to a state of social life rather than a political system. The solution, which Tocqueville believed he found in America, was vibrant associational life, which protected liberty and nurtured civic virtues. As he famously observed, "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all minds are constantly joining together in groups" (p. 595). This active participation in civic life generated impacts on individuals' virtues: "Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart expands, and the human spirit develops only through the reciprocal action of human beings on one another" (p. 598). Thus, associations are "free schools of democracy," where people learn key virtues, such as the "art of association."

In the modern revival of the "civil society" concept, the liberal and republican theories of civic virtue took different paths and sometimes intertwined with each other. In the Central and Eastern European civil societies that survived and

flourished under Communism, "civil society" functioned mostly as a term that represented a space for individuals to pursue their rights. This liberal version of civic virtue, however, also had its republican side. For example, in Poland, the pursuit of rights was strengthened by the solidarity among intellectuals, workers, and Catholics as a morality community (Kennedy, 2002; Ost, 1990). In the reemergence of the concept of "civil society" in the USA, especially in Putnam's work on "social capital," the republican version of civic virtue was self-evident: a community with citizens who actively participate in public affairs becomes the social basis for a healthy democracy, whereas isolated individuals and declining associational life indicate the decline of democracy (Putnam, 2000). The deliberative democratic version of civic virtue also remains the key idea in various theories and practices informed and inspired by Habermas's concept of the "public sphere" and some critical theories of civil society (Calhoun, 1992; Wright, 2010).

Contemporary sociological studies draw on questions and insights about morality and civil society from political theories but distinguish themselves by being devoted to an empirical agenda. While those studies often substantiate scholars' normative views, they show the complexity of moral issues in real-world civil societies and demonstrate the gap between the ideal and the real.

2 Civic Virtue in Civic Engagement

Civic engagement, defined as citizens' participation in public affairs, hinges on individuals' civic virtue. Empirical research on civic virtue in civic engagement can date back to Tocqueville, but its modern literature started in *Civic Culture*, a classic by Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba (Almond & Verba, 1963). The authors explicitly state that their study is concerned with "what the Greeks called civic virtue and its consequences for the effectiveness and stability of the democratic polity; and with the kind of community life, social organization, and upbringing of children that fosters civic virtue" (Almond & Verba, 1963). For them, civic virtue consists of citizens' cognition and attitude that internalize the political system in varying degrees and their active social and political participation, which sustains a democratic polity. Their civic republicanism, however, does not distort their empirical observation that citizens in democratic states—in their studies, the USA, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Mexico—rarely live up to the ideal civic virtue: many of them take a more passive role in political participation; they are more interested in the benefits that their political systems may bring to them than what they can do for their democracies. This gap, as Almond and Verba argue, is intrinsic in a democratic system and sometimes could be useful because the variation in citizens' activeness "keeps political elites in check, without checking them so tightly as to make them ineffective" (p. 483).

The importance of *Civic Culture* should be understood against its historical background. In the 1950s, when the study was conducted, various scholars struggled to explain the horrifying atrocities in two world wars, the rise of Fascism and Nazism within democracies, and the consolidated Communism. Liberalism, which had seriously gone awry, took the blame because many believed that such liberalism produced atomistic individuals and became fertile soil for totalitarianism (Arendt, 1968). Following the same thinking pattern that individuals and polity mutually sustain but from the opposite perspective, Theodor W. Adorno et al.'s psychoanalytical work *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) can be read as the "evil twin" of *Civic Culture*, especially in its emphasis on individuals' oversocialization of conventions and norms represented in their superegos. *Civic Culture*, in contrast, expresses cautious optimism about democracy. It confirms the value and benefits of citizens' participation and thus adheres to the republican ideal of civic virtue, although it does recognize the variations and contradictions in their participation.

The assumption about individual internalization, however, was seriously challenged by new perspectives in the 1970s and 1980s that

emphasized the agency of individuals in responding to social and cultural structures. A representative view is the "toolkit" or "repertoire" theory that emphasizes individuals can pick and choose from available cultural "tools" to understand and justify their actions (Swidler, 1986). Following this perspective, a new theory suggests that people may use various languages—including individualism—to talk about their participation in civil society. In other words, it is important to make a distinction between civic virtue as words and civic virtue as actions, two aspects that may not always be consistent with each other. It is likely that people use individualism to talk about the common good of their community.

Robert Bellah and his associates' neo-classic *Habits of the Heart* was among the studies that took this new perspective. The book empirically describes a seemingly paradoxical phenomenon: the idea of "enlightened self-interest" is used by many Americans to understand their contributions to their communities (Bellah et al., 2008 [1985]). For example, in the vocabulary of "town fathers" in New England towns, such enlightened self-interest attempts to achieve the "harmony" between self-interest and the common good: "the public good is thus defined in terms of the long-range ability of individuals each to get what they have paid for, no more and no less. One's contributions to the community—in time and taxes—is not thought of as a duty but as a voluntary investment" (p. 174). Metropolitan Americans, in contrast, tend to have a fragmented view of "community," which consists of people who share their own lifestyles and interests. Their contributions to the community, therefore, are viewed as more a self-interested voluntary action than a moral duty (pp. 179–191).

Nevertheless, Bellah's empirical description of this paradox has not led to its justification; instead, it has led to his diagnosis of American society's problems and his unambiguous proposal of civic and biblical republicanism as the solution to the problems. In his preface to the 1996 edition of the book, he outlines the problems of individualism (p.xiv):

> American individualism, then, demands personal effort and stimulates great energy to achieve, yet it provides little encouragement for nurturance, taking a sink-or-swim approach to moral developments as well as to economic success. It admires toughness and strength and fears softness and weakness. It adulates winners while showing contempt for losers, a contempt that can descend with crushing weight on those considered, either by others or by themselves, to be moral or social failures.

To offset its destructive consequences, Bellah explicitly raises biblical republicanism, which is based on a community of common faith, more precisely, a "civil religion" for all (Bellah, 2005 [1967]), and civic republicanism, which is based on the idea that community with a common moral purpose hinges on members' responsibility for the welfare of their fellows. Both are based on the idea that a society consists of interdependent people rather than individuals. Bellah recognizes that even biblical and civic republicanism could sometimes encourage disengagement from public life. For example, a version of the biblical republicanism in the famous Calvinism in Weber's works uses worldly success as a sign of an individual's moral character. But for a Durkheimian scholar like Bellah, biblical and civic republicanism is still preferable to individualism.

Robert Wuthnow's *Acts of Compassion* shares with Bellah the same observation that Americans tend to use individualist language to talk about their compassion toward others and their volunteering activities (Wuthnow, 1991). For example, people who believe "I do whatever I want to do" also define volunteering as "what I want to do," and they may explain their motives for spending many hours each week doing volunteering work to help others as "to make myself happy." While Bellah laments people's use of individualistic language as a pathology that may pose a threat to America as a moral community, Wuthnow views such use as an inevitable struggle of Americans to find the right way to draw on the dominant individualism in the cultural repertoires to talk about their care about others. Similarly, Paul Lichterman also eschews what he terms the "seesaw" model of individual

versus community and argues that public commitments may be enacted in individualistic languages and actions (Lichterman, 1995). While these ideas are not entirely new, sociologists go further to ask empirical questions like "How is compassion culturally possible?" and "How do people use cultural repertoires prevailing in a society to talk about their engagement in public activities?" Note that the emphasis of the sociological studies is not on what human nature is or ought to be; rather, recognizing the wide existence of participation in civic life, they focus on how they culturally understand and justify their participation.

In contexts where the cultural repertoires are different from the USA, these questions remain central, though in different cultural expressions and practices. Contemporary China is a good case with a complex and dynamic cultural repertoire of civic virtue. There are at least four influential items in the repertoire. First, the enduring tradition of Chinese moral philosophies, especially Confucianism and Buddhism, remains important in many Chinese folk expressions about their moral duty to family and society. Second, modern Chinese nationalism defines the nation as the ultimate moral community. This item emerged in China's conflicts with colonial powers and has been exploited by the state as a supportive political culture for its legitimacy. Third, the Communist political culture emphasizes one's obligation to the party-state. The Communist political culture has been fading significantly in the post-Mao era but remains somewhat prevalent and important. It also converges with nationalism, particularly when the state depicts itself as the guardian of the nation. Fourth, individualism, in its both expressive and utilitarian forms, has become more influential, particularly among younger generations, as a result of China's increasingly close interactions with the outside world in the past 40 years. In their civic engagement, Chinese citizens mobilize different items and also have difficulties reconciling those items.

In my own work on volunteering after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake (Xu, 2017), I show that the volunteers who went to the earthquake zone used various cultural items to understand their extraordinary actions. Such items range from the Buddhist notion of "compassion," and national solidarity, to individualism. Many volunteers, unsurprisingly young professionals, resemble the American volunteers in Wuthnow's research, using individual fulfillment and satisfaction to understand their altruism. For example, a young businessman spent his business startup fund purchasing and donating baby diapers but justified his action as a business success rather than a loss because the amount of donation he mobilized was several times more than his own donation, which was his startup fund; he believed that this was apparently a "profitable transaction."

In this case of disaster volunteering and many other cases, however, many young Chinese volunteers demonstrate a visible disillusionment with the official political culture about civic virtue, which was believed to be too formalistic and insincere (Spires, 2018). Yet, when they tried to distance themselves from the official narratives, they found they had limited options and sometimes had to use ambiguous expressions, such as "following my heart," to talk about their engagement or simply shun questions about their motives (Ning & Palmer, 2020). Their difficulty in finding the right language also reflects the "moral ecology"—in Bellah's terms (Bellah et al., 2008 [1985])—of Chinese society. The aforementioned political cultures of civic virtue are unevenly developed. With the powerful state's sponsorship, the official political culture exploits nationalism to provide grand, dominant narratives about civic virtue and limits the opportunity for individualism—let alone liberalism—to grow. Even when individuals resist such grand narratives, they are left with relatively weaker alternative political cultures to make sense of their engagement.

In such contexts, citizens' expressions and practices of civic virtue are limited by the repressive regime, especially when citizens encounter an ethical-political dilemma about their civic engagement, that is, whether they should focus on reducing people's suffering or they should venture out of their comfort zone to address the root causes of their suffering. If they choose the latter, they themselves may suffer

from the political consequences due to the repressive regime's harassment and persecution. But if they choose the former, their sense of guilt and regret will keep gnawing at their conscience. The Sichuan earthquake volunteers studied in my book show this kind of dilemma (Xu, 2017). In the wake of the earthquake, thousands of students were found dead in their own schools, where buildings collapsed immediately. Even untrained eyes could see the conspicuous problems with the construction quality of the school buildings: rebars in the buildings were thin; sand mixed with concrete; in some buildings, there were no rebars or concrete at all. Some volunteers turned themselves into activists to investigate the school collapse issue but were expelled, detained, and even imprisoned by the authorities. Most volunteers, however, struggled to rationalize their silence and lack of action on the issue.

This type of apathy and ethical dilemma is also ubiquitous in democratic contexts, or, more precisely, in any context where political power and other power raise the costs of substantive actions to address social problems (Eliasoph, 1998, 2013). Engaged citizens, therefore, tend to flock to those activities that are safe, warm, and manageable, which can boost a "can-do spirit," rather than activism that may generate conflicts among people and even harm to their own life. They, however, can still be gratified with their contributions to society through those nonconflictual, "plug-in" activities.

In other cases, however, as Baiocchi's study shows, people use disavowal of politics as a way to engage even more in public activities that address problems and change societies in accordance with their "civic imagination," which is defined as "the ways in which people individually and collectively envision a better political, social, and civic environment, and work toward achieving that future" (Baiocchi, 2013). In this civic imagination, "politics" signifies something morally bad, corrupt, and self-interest-centered activities, whereas ordinary people's engagement represents ideal civic virtue. Thus, activists and volunteers claim, "I don't like to think of what I do as political," but what they do sometimes is obviously political and confrontational. In this sense, politics is profane, whereas the distinction between the profane (politics) and sacred (civic) gives people the cultural vocabulary to understand and justify their engagement.

2.1 The Common Good in Associational Life

If the term "civic engagement" indicates individuals' engagement in civil society, then "associational life" signifies the ways in which they engage, that is, through associations. Civic virtue in associational life means the "*common good*" of the community in which civic associations are functioning. Contemporary political and social theorists have been skeptical about the feasibility of generating and maintaining the common good by individuals with self-interests. They also worry about political manipulation of the common good. Thus, the mainstream political theory tends to lean toward the "adversary democracy," a model of democracy based on aggregating conflicting individual interests through open, competitive contestations, such as voting and election (Mansbridge, 2013).

For our purposes here, however, the key issue is not whether the common good is feasible but how people understand and pursue their common good in various ways in their associational life. The common good may occur at two different levels: the common good of the immediate association citizens join and the common good in the broader society. The first type of common good is represented in members' mutual trust and solidarity. An influential line of research, especially in Robert Putnam's work, uses "*social capital*", defined as "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000). Social capital, in this sense, signifies not only the scale and density of networks but also civic virtues, including attitudes and values of the individual members ("mores" in Tocqueville's terms) and norms of interaction such as trust and reciprocity. In fact, in multiple places, Putnam interprets social capital in the language of Tocqueville, for example: "Civil associations. . .reinforce the 'habits of the

heart' that are essential to stable and effective democratic institutions" (Putnam et al., 1993). Putnam, however, takes a step further and asserts that the common good in associations can be translated into a broader common good in the larger society. Thus, vibrant associational life provides a solid societal foundation for democracy, while declining associational life indicates and causes a crisis of democracy.

This argument makes an obviously ambitious leap between different analytical levels and thus provokes tremendous controversies. Many studies have shown that these two types of common good could be incongruous with each other. In some cases, the common good within an association, represented in solidarity among members and learning civic skills, can be a fertile soil for the association's exclusive, divisive goal. This phenomenon existed in various associations in different historical periods, including the rise of Fascism in the vibrant associational life in Italy (Riley, 2005), the Tea Party movement in the USA (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012), and even the Knight of Labor, a nineteenth-century labor organization (Gerteis, 2002). Put in another way, the common good in associations may lead to the "common bad" in broader society.

A micro-sociological explanation of this discrepancy between the two levels of common good is that groups tend to maintain their internal interaction order and thus develop their own norms of interaction (Fine, 2021). These norms are their "group styles"—interaction norms that define the civic virtue within the associations—which function as "filters" that screen out some civic virtues in the broader society (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003). Thus, an association can be internally tolerant, equal, and warm but externally pursues openly discriminatory and populist goals. The Tea Party movement demonstrates this kind of discrepancy in the coexistence of its anti-immigrant agenda and its internal solidarity and reasonable communication styles (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012). An opposite case can also be true. For example, some civic groups use self-centered narratives to justify their pursuit of the common good in the larger society, and other civic groups which pursue inclusiveness and equality develop discriminatory communication styles in their interactions to show they are "authentic" ordinary people (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003).

From the deliberative democracy perspective, the common good should be represented in equal, open, and inclusive deliberation that happens in the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). Various deliberation theories focus on different aspects of the common good, ranging from procedures of making decisions to pluralism and diversity in backgrounds (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Some sociological studies confirm the importance of deliberation and ordinary people's ability to conduct effective deliberation on public issues (Gamson, 1992). Others, however, have shown the empirical complexity in such pursuit of the common good. For example, in local conversations, which are Habermas's ideal discursive form, people tend to join conversations with people like them rather than across the political and social divides (Walsh, 2004). Consequently, this homophily leads to the amplification of their ideas rather than exposure to different opinions, as the deliberation theories expect.

This homophily is more than evident in the "echo chamber effect" in online discussions: participants in online discussions tend to talk to those people who hold similar opinions rather than those who hold different ones (Bail, 2021). Social media uses its commercialized algorithms to satisfy users' self-centered desires and exacerbates this homophily. Consequently, as Bail's study shows, some online users go as extreme as possible to attract attention. The prevalence of extremists in online platforms mutes and deters moderates who find such dialogs unconstructive and even deleterious to them. Even the effort of talking "across the aisle" may not lead to the intended effects of making people more tolerant and open-minded. Other scholars, however, provide a brighter picture. They argue that "moral reframing" could be a somewhat effective way to transcend the divide. Moral reframing is to frame a position that another person would not accept in a way consistent with the moral values this person holds (Feinberg &

Willer, 2019). For example, to persuade a conservative not to vote for Donald Trump in presidential elections, one needs to highlight his dodging draft as a sign of his lack of loyalty to the country.

Some deliberation theorists, however, believe that the concept of the common good risks falling into a trap of empirical naiveté. An obvious challenge to this concept is the question "How *common* is the common good?" As critics of Habermas point out, access to public deliberation is unequally distributed, and even the effort of bracketing such inequality in deliberation—*as if* all participants are equal—tends to ignore the fact that some people are precluded from the deliberation, either because they do not have resources to make it to the deliberation or because they are not allowed to enter (Fraser, 1992). Moreover, when the public sphere is fragmented by intervening power, such as a repressive state and the dominant market, people tend to form their own "counter-publics," which could hold up and strengthen different ideas and communication styles rather than the common good (Goldfarb, 2006; Warner, 2002).

2.2 Moral Dilemmas in Global Civil Society

Morality is even more central to global civil society. Before the term "global civil society" came into being, people had already participated in various kinds of activities to address issues with moral implications around the world. For example, the "British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society" (later renamed "Anti-Slavery International"), one of the first international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), was founded in the first half of the nineteenth century, while the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), an organization with nation-states as members, held its first convention in 1863. Both addressed serious moral issues: one about abolishing slavery, the other caring for the wounded in wars. The idea of the common good was expanded at the global level. For example, in a poem written by an abolitionist, the first meeting of the Anti-Slavery International in 1840 was described as a "holy gathering" (Maynard, 1960). The meeting and the organization had a clearly stated universal purpose:

> To teach the brotherhood of man
> To love and reverence one another,
> As sharers of a common blood,
> The children of a common God!

Such universalism gradually formed the "world culture" or the "cultural dimension of world society": "the cognitive and ontological models of reality that specify the nature, purposes, technology, sovereignty, control, and resources of nation-states and other actors" (Meyer et al., 1997). World culture is institutionalized into rules, ethics, and norms defined formally by international organizations' regulations and international laws. Its universality is evident in the isomorphism of organizations and states, which resemble each other in their structures and functions, and the prominence of INGOs, which are not elected or enforced by any political power.

Humanitarianism is one of the best cases to illustrate the importance of universal morality in global civil society. It starts with transcendental moral ideals, realizes the ideals in actions and organizations, and diffuses around the globe. It holds up the ideal of impartiality, neutrality, and independence, in other words, "above the fray." But the emergence, development, and prominence of this idealistic view are puzzling to people who adhere to the conventional wisdom that power and material interests rather than ideas shape the world. In the case of ICRC, this puzzle was even more conspicuous: an organization initiated by private citizens could get nation-states together to sign treaties about treating the wounded of both sides in a war. How could such an idealism be realized in a large-scale organization and spread globally amid carnage?

Shai M. Dromi provides an explanation based on a Weberian historical sociology of morality (Dromi, 2020). Many of the founders of the ICRC, including Henry Dunant, were Calvinists who belonged to the Réveil, a "revival" movement of Christianity in Switzerland and France.

There was an elective affinity between some doctrines of the Réveil and the ideals of the Red Cross, for example, active engagement in worldly activities to cure moral problems of the modern world. The Réveil's decentralizing organization style also helped its spread globally.

Nevertheless, humanitarianism contains some intrinsic moral tensions, which sometimes lead to moral dilemmas of life and death. For example, if an INGO which faithfully follows the principle of neutrality sees the apparent atrocity committed by one of the parties in a conflict, the organization faces a difficult challenge: to continue to do humanitarian work in a "neutral" way or to speak out about the atrocity and condemn the perpetrators? In the history of ICRC, such a serious challenge occurred in WWII, when the organization knew about the deportation and killing of Jews by the Nazis. Yet, the organization kept silent on it, and decades later justified its choice by saying that its neutrality enabled the organization to continue to stay and care for the wounded (Dromi, 2020). Such a dilemma was replayed in a different way in the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70). The ICRC first chose to act without the Nigerian government's permission but was attacked by the government's army. Consequently, the ICRC later did their work within the permission and even once ordered their doctors to leave Biafran villagers to the hands of the government's army. The result was a massacre of the villagers (Barnett, 2011). This appalling happening led to the split among humanitarian aid workers and the birth of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors Without Borders), whose founders were former Red Cross workers angry about the organization's passive stance. MSF takes a more rights-based, advocacy approach in humanitarian actions and does not avoid talking about ethical and political issues.

Global inequality also complicates the ethical issues in humanitarianism. Are humanitarian workers and INGOs simply "the left hand of empire" (Agier, 2010)? There is no easy answer to this question. On the one hand, humanitarianism does help reduce the suffering of the world, especially the part of the world afflicted with disasters, famines, wars, and diseases. Moral universalism—the common good at the global level—has been powerfully realized in institutions and actions. On the other hand, humanitarianism sometimes fails to address the root causes of suffering, although more and more organizations like MSF are beginning to realize and try to transcend this limit. Even if the organizations are aware of the limitations of their neutrality principle, their functions and roles in reducing inequality still risk being exaggerated. Sometimes, NGOs' intervention in non-Western countries may lead to somewhat unintended consequences. Haiti was such a case. Haiti demonstrates almost all the perils of colonialism and capitalism: transnational exploitation of cheap labor, foreign intervention in domestic politics, a weak state, and failed infrastructure. The country was also dubbed the "Republic of NGOs" because numerous NGOs bypassed the state to provide social services, which in turn weakened the state. In the wake of the 2010 earthquake, the strong presence of INGOs became a pathology: without a functioning government, the NGOs lacked effective coordination and governance. Consequently, despite the record-breaking donations from outside, people in Port-au-Prince still could not get supplies and died from lack of food and medical care (Dupuy, 2010; Edmonds, 2012).

3 Concluding Remarks

The term "civil society" gained prominence in social changes with significant and complex political-ethical implications and consequences. Moreover, it is one of the few concepts in sociology that have been discussed in political and moral philosophies. The sociology of morality as a form of descriptive ethics informs us about how people's moral ideas about a good society and good citizens are realized in real-world practices and how social circumstances condition their moral ideas. Such an empirical approach can potentially contribute to normative ethics in various ways. Admittedly, normative ethics about civil society will remain contested since scholars cherish different values about good societies and

good citizens. Needless to say, the moral sociology of civil society has yet to become a mature field of descriptive ethics as the psychology of moral development or positive psychology, which has produced findings widely used in normative ethics. Nevertheless, values are as much fact-laden as facts are value-laden (Gorski, 2013). As shown in the essay, many empirical researchers have the intention and ability to dialog with social and political theories. They have reached a consensus that the moral is not a liability for the sociology of civil society; rather, it is the very soul of the concept in its empirical inquiry.

What could the moral sociology of civil society contribute to the normative ethics of civil society? Sociology certainly produces evidence for different philosophical approaches to civil society, but the distribution of the evidence is uneven.

The empirical facts provided by the sociology of civil society predominantly eschew the original liberalism and the original republicanism. Instead, most studies today transcend the tendency to equate civil society with an amalgam of individuals with rights and the opposite one that sets a set of arbitrary core values for a moral community. They support either some combinations of liberalism and republicanism, with varying proportions and ways, or deliberative democracy in different forms around the world. More and more sociological studies emphasize that moral ideas about good society and good citizens are embedded in various social and political relations, exist at different levels of society, and change in different situations and actions.

This trend clearly keeps its distance from the view of "civil society" as an abstract, non-state entity in the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers' social imaginary and as a local community in Tocqueville's observation of America in the first half of the nineteenth century. Limited by the thinkers' scopes, their times, and the information they could acquire, the original normative ethics about civil society often run into trouble when it is uncritically and anachronistically applied to our complex, global world. For example, using a stereotypical New England moral community as a gold standard for civil society in an empirical study will end up finding no such communities or existing only in some idiosyncratic local places. This usually leads to a lament about societal and moral degradation. The opposite direction of thinking could also lead to a perception error. It has already become a cliché in sociology to attack some sort of "neo-Tocquevillianism," which, according to the critics, relies on a formula of association leading to democracy. Such sociological work becomes repetitive, bordering on setting up an ahistorical strawman because Tocqueville defined "democracy" in a way dramatically different from contemporary uses—in his view, democracy is a state of equality among citizens rather than an electoral system. In contrast, the moral sociology of civil society does not have a predefined normative stand but only functions as descriptive ethics that demonstrate the societal conditioning of moral ideas. It is a more realistic, multifaceted view of morality in civil society.

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Part X

Looking Ahead: New Frontiers in the Sociology of Morality

Understanding Morality in a Racialized Society

Candice C. Robinson and Michael L. Rosino

Abstract

In this chapter, we join the many active voices raising the issue of the absence of scholarship acknowledging the unique lived experiences of all racialized people and the ongoing impact of racial oppression. In doing so, we challenge previous engagement with the sociology of morality that does not include race, racism, and racialization in any form. Inadvertently, these previous works become ahistorical and falsely race-neutral theoretical and analytical approaches to morality. We suggest a new constellation of frameworks that incorporates racialized power dynamics and inequalities in moral orientations. To this end, we draw on each of our recent ethnographic studies to demonstrate the role of racialized forms of morality in civic and political organizations. To conclude, we argue for a sociology of morality that moves beyond a colorblind approach to grapple with the social realities of racialization and oppression as part of the social structure.

Keywords

Race · Racism · History of sociology · Theory · Morality

In the original introduction to the Handbook of the Sociology of Morality, Hitlin and Vaisey set an agenda for the sociological approach to the broad field of morality. They argue that it is unthinkable and implausible to separate the "moral" from the "social" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010: 3). In this chapter, we agree with this agenda setting that the moral, meaning "the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil, in relation to the actions, desires, or character of responsible human beings," (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010: 5), cannot be separated from the social (meaning the institutions, organizations, and individuals that comprise society). In extending this agenda for a sociology that contends with morality, we argue that the "social" cannot be separated from the racial. The initial edition of the Handbook does not profoundly explore racialization or the implications of racial inequality as a foundational aspect of contemporary society, nor does it engage with the ongoing implications of racial oppression for collective moral sentiments. In failing to do so, the Handbook's first edition inadvertently engages with ahistorical and falsely race-neutral theoretical and analytical approaches.

Over the last decade since the publication of the Handbook of Sociology of Morality,

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scholarship and advocacy have increasingly demonstrated the drawbacks and harms of separating any subfields of sociology from ongoing matters of racism and racial inequality within a racialized global society. Refusing to acknowledge and engage these essential social facts yields inaccurate, if not detrimental, assumptions about society and social life (Bonilla-Silva, 1999). This crucial intervention has been made evident by the current call-outs and call-ins of the discipline. Sociology is amid a reckoning with active voices raising the issue of the absence of scholarship acknowledging the unique lived experiences of all racialized people. Within this reckoning, a surge of scholarship has recognized the pervasiveness of Euro and White-centric research frames parallel to work that centers racialized social dynamics and the knowledge and experiences of people of color (e.g., Glenn, 2015; Golash-Boza, 2016; Hirschman, 2004; Maghbouleh, 2022; Winant, 2000; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Given this critical paradigm shift, we are excited about the invitation from this second Handbook of the Sociology of Morality to help build a new sociology of morality that incorporates a racial framework.

In this chapter, we reframe the constellation of frameworks used in the study of morality to center how racialized power dynamics and inequalities shape moral orientations. In other words, we seek to advance a sociology of morality that moves beyond an approach that avoids or ignores racialization (i.e. a colorblind approach). Instead, we use the chapter to grapple with the social realities of racialization and oppression as part of the social structure. Racialization is a sociopolitical process whereby racial meaning is ascribed to groups of people, social practices, and characteristics (Omi & Winant, 1986). As noted by Selod and Embrick (2013:647), it is a "theoretical tool scholars can use to understand the creation, maintenance, and changing nature of racial meanings and experiences." The related concept of racial oppression describes a process whereby "institutions and social systems distribute resources and rewards towards certain groups of people and away from others and influential people construct and enforce rules to the advantage of particular groups rather than others" (Rosino, 2021:14–15) to maintain racial inequality and white domination. We implore sociologists to consider how these interconnecting processes pervade the relationship between morality and society.

In pushing forward this more inclusive and nuanced approach to morality, we use this chapter to do the following: 1) provide a brief history on the movement toward the inclusion of quality scholarship on the sociology of race and ethnicity writ large; 2) assess the in/exclusion of racial matters in the *Handbook of the Sociology of Morality* first edition; 3) bring forth suggestions of what other morality scholars ought to take into their scholarship; and 4) conclude with some ways to operationalize racial dynamics in morality analyses. This final point will include direct examples from our research on the intersection of morality, race, social movements, and organizations. In discussing examples, we draw upon original ethnographic case studies that come from a combined 75 months of ethnographic observations across two sites of civic organizations and approximately 100 structured and semi-structured interviews. Throughout points three and four, we isolate dynamics at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of racialized morality and demonstrate their interactions and implications.

1 A Racialized Society

Linkages between racialized power dynamics and notions of morality are deeply intertwined into the fabric of modern societies. Ethnocentric and racialized notions of moral superiority and inferiority have been central to the twin systems of white supremacy and colonialism, which continue to shape our modern social world (Rosino, 2017). However, until recently, critical scholarship on race has been treated as an elective or niche topic for sociology rather than central in our understanding and approaches as researchers within this field. Puentes and Gougherty (2013:161) point out, for instance, that "the

topic of race is frequently ghettoized to a specific chapter within introductory sociology textbooks."

Further, there is a general tendency for the scholarship written by sociologists of color or about communities of color to be marginalized as ideologically driven, subjective, or ungeneralizable as opposed to an integral part of understanding our social world (Collins, 1991; Morris, 2015; Young, 2004). Leading up to what has been known as the "racial reckoning" of the Summer of 2020[1] and immediately after, recent ASA presidents Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2019), Mary Romero (2020), Aldon Morris (2022), and Menjívar (2023), and scholars such as Earl Wright II (Wright II, 2017; Wright II, 2020) have used their platforms to inspire a new generation to reassess the racialized history of sociology and rethink dominant theoretical and analytical approaches. In addition to these points, the voices of racially marginalized individuals are foundational to sociological research.

1.1 Racialized History of Sociology

In engaging with the above points about the broad field of sociology, we first turn to the canonical scholarship of early sociologists. For decades, the average Introduction to Sociology student learned the European origins of sociology through Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber and the American origins of sociology through Robert E. Park and the Chicago School, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Merton. All white men. Scholars such as Morris (2015) and Wright II (2017) have spurred a reexamination of the origins of the discipline and the influence of W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois, a Black scholar, sits within the time between European and presumed American origins of the discipline. He has been thoroughly canonized within Africana Studies and scholarship on the Black American experience. Yet, despite his early articulation of a holistic, systematic, innovative, and scientific approach to sociology, Du Bois and his scholarship have been primarily ignored as a scholar with findings for *society* writ large. Ironically, this exclusion reflects the very patterns of epistemology and influence that Du Bois (1903) would describe as the "color line."

Du Bois was the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard in History. In addition to his studies, he attended the German institution Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin, strengthening his interests in the field of sociology. Once back in the United States, Du Bois was tasked by the University of Pennsylvania to use his international training to develop a study to affirm for white leaders of Philadelphia that Black Philadelphians were the cause of any political strife (Du Bois, 1961). He instead explored the interests and experiences of Black people in the Seventh Ward of Philadelphia and, by proxy, the United States. This study includes an extensive multi-method positivist approach, including surveys, analysis of census data, and interviews. Published in 1899, *The Philadelphia Negro* is often credited as the first known American *scientific* sociological study. Despite this groundbreaking scholarship and the subsequent development of scholars at Atlanta University that predates the University of Chicago (Wright II, 2017), this study is not often found in core sociological courses of sociological methods or sociological theory. Despite this study outlining crucial dynamics of social life such as social class, religion, gender, crime, and organizations, to name a few, it has overwhelmingly been solely considered a book on the study of "race" because the population is Black Philadelphians.

The first American book published under the banner of sociology, Fitzhugh's 1854 *Sociology of the South* argued that whites were morally superior and defended chattel slavery on moral grounds. In contrast, the inherent question that Du Bois sought to examine about the Black American population in the nineteenth century was motivated by efforts at realizing a morally just society and countering the suggestion that Black Americans were marginalized or the cause of conflict because they were somehow morally

[1] With the rise of white supremacist rhetoric and following the death of George Floyd, many organizations and individuals began to reassess how they approach conversations around race and racism, explicitly highlighting anti-Blackness and anti-immigrant sentiments.

inferior. Du Bois' research sought to settle public debates around the moral worth, human capacities, and rightful place of Black Americans as Americans in US society in the aftermath of chattel slavery (Abbott, 2022; Muhammad, 2011). In this way, the origin of morality scholarship is not merely a question relevant to the analysis of European sociologists like Durkheim, Weber, or Bourdieu, who are often seen as theorists of *society writ large*, as suggested in the original Handbook of the Sociology of Morality. Given this, dominant sociological approaches to morality have been constrained by the history of sociology's racial discrimination and exclusion.

Parallel to the development of sociology through Du Bois is also the development of scholars Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Black women who also predate much of the sociological canonical work we emphasize. They also engage in questions about the morality of racial inequality and the moral harms of ongoing brutality to Black communities. In 1892s *A Voice from the South*, Cooper examined her experiences as a Black woman in the American South and highlighted the power of marginalized women to bring a moral conscience to the nation. At the same time, Wells-Barnett sought to chronicle the experiences of Black men murdered at the hands of the police with a deep need to acknowledge the immoral aspect of continuing to ignore the abuse and lack of justice. For instance, in her discussions of lynchings in the 1892 pamphlet *Southern Horrors*, she articulates the persistence of racialized moral panics and the moral hypocrisy of racist violence in American society. Cooper and Wells-Barnett's works serve as a foundation for the importance of observing interlocking oppressions to understanding inequality as well as the impact of the voices of Black women specifically in understanding society (Allen, 2021; Collins, 1986; Collins, 1989; Collins, 1991). These articulations suggest that a white frame of sociology in any subfield is incomplete without the voices of racially marginalized scholars (Ladner, 1998 (1973)).

This racially segregated history of sociology proceeded through the twentieth century. The first African American President of ASA, E Franklin Frazier, dedicated his Presidential Address to the very issue of race in America. Within his address, he acknowledged the presumed differences in assumed values between Black and White Americans and their implications for both interracial interactions and sociological research. His recognition of these points emphasized Sociology's presumptions that Black Americans essentially live immoral and deficit lives that date back to the origins of sociology (Frazier, 1949). Despite Frazier's plea for sociologists to take an approach that acknowledged the full lived experiences of Black people, a thread of scholarship followed that promoted narratives of Black pathology to explain racial inequality. Notably, this included the Moynihan report (1965). This report has been the center of blaming many Black communities for their experiences with poverty and inequality via assumed wicked and dysfunctional ways of life and family formation rather than structural inequities.

In 1968, Black sociologists more loudly called for their voices to be heard within ASA. In 1970, the Caucus of Black Sociologists (CBS) was formally organized under the leadership of James E. Blackwell. By the end of the 1970s, the caucus separated from ASA to create the Association of Black Sociologists (ABS) and their own journal (Reed & Taylor, 2018). The sociology of race and ethnicity became increasingly recognized as a legitimate subfield toward the end of the twentieth century, incorporating more racial and ethnic minorities in voice and scholarship, as well as the development of the ASA Section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities (SREM). Given this historical context, it is unsurprising that the first official ASA journal dedicated to race scholarship, Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, was not created until 2015 under the leadership of SREM (Brunsma et al., 2015).

As seen through this brief history, we are not the first to point out that the foundations of mainstream sociology (and thus its most influential early formulations of morality) were forged by dominant figures that failed to problematize chattel slavery, colonialism, expropriation, segregation, apartheid, and other systems of racial violence and exploitation. Accordingly, sociologists of morality must contend with the

reality that, even within sociology itself, notions of morality have been weaponized as a tool for white supremacy. At the same time, the "foundational forefathers," often cited in volumes on the sociology of morality, did not grapple with these basic social facts.

1.2 Key Racial Theoretical Approaches Within Sociology

In addition to the discussions above, sociologists in the last 50 years have increasingly sought to articulate the societal impacts of racialization and oppression through their scholarship. In response to such scholarship as *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), which suggested that integration helped to move Americans away from race-based inequalities, other scholars acknowledged the ways that the racialized social system continues to impact people's life chances and group experiences. In 1973, Ladner introduced the *Death of White Sociology* to challenge scholars who continued to be married to white sociological approaches that ignored the moral experiences of non-white people. Scholars like Steinberg (1981, 2007), Omi and Winant (1986), Mills (1997), Feagin (2000), Bonilla-Silva (2001, 2018), and Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008) have subsequently highlighted varied ways that racial dynamics continue to shape the social world via racial politics, racialized notions of cultural hierarchies, systemic racism, and racial ideology.

We opened with this assessment of sociology because the sociology of morality as a subfield within sociology has similarly suffered a lean into "colorblind" and "white logic" scholarship with "white methods" and analytical approaches (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Below, we further examine the impacts of this legacy on the first Handbook's attempt to lay the groundwork for the sociology of morality. Rather than rejecting these foundations as a whole, however, we seek to integrate the promising and relevant features of this groundwork with critical understandings of race and racism.

2 Understanding Morality: Assessment of the First Edition of the Sociology of Morality Handbook

The Sociology of Morality promises that it can transform questions of morality by considering their pragmatic elements and social contexts. In other words, these questions are not philosophical abstractions but empirical matters with profound societal implications. As the first edition of this Handbook demonstrates (notably, Powell, 2010), this subfield is well-positioned to answer the following types of questions:

- What is the relationship between morality and society?
- What is the relationship between morality and social groups and forms of social organization?
- What is the relationship between morality and individual people's actions in the social world?
- What is the role of moral judgments and sentiments in collective action, social conflict, and social change?

In building the original Handbook, Hitlin and Vaisey (2010:6) point out that the sociology of morality has been concerned with "(a) determining the proper relationship between innate moral capacities and the moral variation observed within and between societies (e.g., Hauser, 2006, Turner this volume); (b) empirically analyzing the contours of moral variation within and between societies; and (c) uncovering the social antecedents of particular moral frameworks and their social and behavioral consequences." In short, the field examines variations in the relationship between the concept of morality, social action, and structures.

The original Handbook follows what we briefly outlined above, following a white history of sociology that engages with stories from the perspectives of overwhelmingly white people and about white people in a way that presumes can be generalizable to all people regardless of race. By building a canon on the sociology of morality

formulated by Weber and Durkheim, the Handbook reifies the use of traditional foundational scholars without also incorporating the works of other scholars outlined above, nor the impact of their social positions on how they would view morality, despite acknowledging morality can be determined based on an individual's positions within society.

We live (and therefore engage in social and cultural practices around morality) in a racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Meghji, 2022). With this social reality in mind, we rephrase and reframe the questions above to account for the omnipresence of racial oppression and resistance. We must operationalize and theorize a new set of questions. The following are only some of these questions:

- Given the context of enduring racial inequity and domination, do we live in a moral society? Or more, presciently, what does a moral society look like?
- How are racial inequality and oppression rationalized on moral grounds by social actors?
- What is the moral set of actions to undertake for various actors in a racially unjust world?
- What role does notions of morality play in the struggle for racial justice and what are their implications?
- How are people's moral frameworks shaped by their positions in the racialized social system?

In this assessment, we appreciate that much of the work on the sociology of morality is discussed through structures, resources, and power. These general concepts are fruitful for examining racialization and racial oppression. In doing this, we must consider how the sociology of morality must contend with a macro-, meso-, and micro-understanding of our racialized society.

At the micro-level of society, "one's position in social space provides a vantage point from which allies and rivals, role models and cautionary tales, all play a role in shaping the salience of particular kinds of moral judgment over others" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010: 9). A complex interplay between racial inequities and identities, everyday social practices, and moral judgements lie at the heart of moral life in racialized societies. One crucial approach highlighting these elements is the racialized interaction order (Meghji, 2022; Rosino, 2017). Drawing on a host of historical case studies, Rosino (2017: 158) notes, "performances of self within social interactions predicated on cultural schemas of difference, moral worth, and group position have played a fundamental and foundational role in the establishment and temporal and spatial spread of racialized institutional and social structures." The racialized interaction order has subsequently been refined and demonstrated by scholars in a host of global and historical contexts (Kim, 2021; Meghji, 2019, 2022; Papadantonakis, 2019), yet its implications for the sociology of morality remain underdeveloped.

As Hitlin and Vasey (2010: 10) note, "at the macro level, not all groups or actors possess the same degree of power to promote their version of "good life" or "good society." They point to "historical shifts, government action, social movement advocacy, and other forms of contested collective action influence perceptions about right and wrong, good and bad" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010:10). This conception of power at the macro-level dovetails nicely with incorporating the interplay of racial domination, hegemonic morality, and ongoing matters of marginalization. The language and logics of morality have long been used to advance white supremacy. For instance, white elites have often fomented racialized moral panics to buttress systems of racial oppression and to consolidate power in the face of potential racial progress (Rosino, 2021). Examples of racialized moral panics abound, from the decades-long War on Drugs to the current backlash against the teaching of the so-called critical race theory in schools (Ray, 2022). As Huante and Rosino (2022), write,

> Moral panics emerge when a group, event, or person becomes seen as threatening the function and well-being of society. Racialized moral panics involve racial meanings and practices and correspond to racial interests. Moral panics are amplified

and directed by moral entrepreneurs—individuals who seek to advance a specific definition of the implicit threat and its implications. The consequences of moral panics, particularly on behalf of powerful groups, can reshape institutions and group relations. Moral entrepreneurs ultimately seek to influence social norms and laws.

Each of these moral panics has had its own "folk devils" (Cohen, 1972) that came to represent immorality and danger. Early works on moral panics, moral entrepreneurs, and folk devils, emphasized how they reflected group conflicts and reshaped and reaffirmed regulations and norms in society (Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1972). However, the crucial point here is that racialized moral panics are not simply matters of group interests clashing within the social construction of crime and deviance. They are active and consequential manifestations of dominant racialized notions of morality and their weaponization against communities of color.

Moreover, the racial ideologies that permeate our society and tend to rationalize the status quo also contain collective moral visions for society. They implicitly articulate the features of a moral society or a moral course of social action. These ideologies often hinge upon notions that it would be "wrong" to reallocate resources and opportunities in US society to remedy centuries of ongoing racial discrimination and subjugation (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Consider, for instance, the clarity with which Martin Luther King (1964, 1967), who incidentally held a degree in sociology, discussed the moral imperative to dismantle barriers to racial equality throughout his activism and writing. Now consider how this moral vision has been subsequently distorted in mainstream discourse into one in which ignoring the impacts of racial categorization is seen as the hallmark of a moral society (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). In short, sociologists must do more to understand that racialized power relations can shape dominant forms of moral reasoning. Significantly, these racialized forms of moral reasoning also shape our institutions, practices, and policies and the macro-structure of society itself.

In knitting the micro and macro-levels together, the "meso level is an essential medium through which racialization happens and racial structures evolve" (Meghji, 2022:97). We implore sociologists to consider the influence of racialized notions of morality within communities and organizations (Ray, 2019). For instance, the moral reasoning that people engage in as they navigate civic life and work toward collective goals has essential implications for the outcomes they produce and whether those outcomes uphold or challenge racial oppression. In this vein, we demonstrate these dynamics in our research on civic and political organizations later in this chapter.

So, in thinking about the racialization of morality, we must also think about how dominant forms of morality have been suffering from a colorblind approach and the logic of white supremacy. Sociological knowledge that explicitly concerns itself with morality is steeped in understandings that ignore the connections and many more that we proposed above. We argue that if scholars of all backgrounds, particularly scholars of morality, acknowledge their racialized positioning and engage in reflexivity, this scholarship is greatly improved.

3 Understanding Morality in a Racialized Society

3.1 Toward a Sociology of Racialized Morality

In moving forward with building a better and more holistic sociology of morality, we are encouraging the scholars within the original Sociology Morality Handbook and this new edition to rectify their understandings of our racialized society. The racial silence of the previous text on the social positions of its authors and the social mechanisms it examines speaks volumes. The first edition of the Handbook offers fragments that might be generative of valuable insights on morality in a racialized society but fails to center these matters in a meaningful way. When presented, practices and processes like racialization, racial ideology, racial identity formation, and racial discrimination are used as

illustrations of general social phenomena rather than the interplay of moral and racial dynamics. Rawls (2010:118), for instance, points to racialized identities as a way that morality is constituted in interactions:

> When I explored this idea with ethnically identified students in the US (international, Spanish, Swedish—not just Arab and Black) they responded that in most public encounters with those not in their category (as "other") they are not given a chance to "choose" their own presentation of self. The word "choose" is of course a problem here—as no one really has the experience of choosing an authentic self. But, what they describe is having thrust upon themselves a characterization of self that makes it impossible for them to act "normally." White students do not recognize this distinction. It does not happen to them. Only ethnically identified and international students feel they have been—type-cast on sight—and given no benefit of the doubt. They recognize that in the interaction whatever they do will be seen light of the stereotype—the working consensus is not extended to them in these interactions—however polite the interactions appear to be.

Additionally, Steensland acknowledges racialized notions of class and morality as a part of more extensive social processes of constructing boundaries. He notes that "The working poor—especially the white ethnics of the Northeast—actively distanced themselves from any government benefit that could be conceived as "welfare" (Rieder, 1985). This dynamic was very similar to the race-laden moral differentiation that Lamont observed three decades later among working-class whites" (Steensland, 2010: 446).

These themes are not examined as distinct lines of inquiry within the sociology of morality with their own nuances and contexts. However, these nuances and contexts matter for serious investigation. As we continue to lean into the work on understanding the racialization of individuals, we must also acknowledge other ways that racial inequity and racialization are vital pieces in organizations, cultural capital, civic engagement, social movements, and more (Bracey, 2016; Cartwright, 2022; Ray, 2019; Robinson, 2019).

In addition to how scholars can bring themselves to think about the racial implications of their social position and epistemology as they talk about morality, the next step would be to think about how to theoretically incorporate and methodologically operationalize new approaches to morality. Rather than simply "inserting race" on top of any given topic within the sociology of morality, what would be most beneficial would be to operationalize the impacts of racial inequity and racialization at the start. Here we talk about our contributions to this work and what they tell us.

Racialized forms of morality are shaped by the lived experiences of racial groups and the extent to which they develop an awareness of themselves as part of a racialized community. Marginalized racial group members often envision themselves as holding a linked fate and a distinct set of shared interests from the dominant social system (Dawson, 1995; Morris & Braine, 2001). Dominant or normative groups, in this case, whites, tend to see themselves as racially untethered individuals driven by an abstract sense of being a good person (Farough, 2004). This consciousness is not something essential or pre-social. It is shaped by racialized individuals' experiences, choices, and social position in the racial order. Moreover, it shapes the moral reasoning used in everyday life, particularly the moral motivations ascribed to political and civic engagement.

To further ground these observations, we draw parallels from our own ethnographic case studies of the participants of a national Black civil rights organization (Robinson) and a white-dominated grassroots political organization (Rosino). We must recognize how these moral orientations and forms of racial consciousness translate into racialized group relations at the micro- and meso-level. Drawing from Du Bois' work on double consciousness and studies of racial discrimination (e.g., Rawls, 2000), we see that racial conflict and domination have shaped the general moral orientations of White and Black Americans. Whites as a collective have had the cultural hegemony to define the dominant moral visions of our society, often in individualistic, power-blind, and ahistorical ways. As manifested in double consciousness, marginalized racial groups are aware

of and subject to this dominant moral vision but simultaneously develop distinctive and often more communitarian and racially literate moral visions within their own communities.

Here we think about morality through the intersections of the individual, organizational, and institutional levels. When thinking about the goals of an organization, specifically a political, civic, or social movement organization, it helps us to think about what morality may look like to participants in each context and the structure in which the organization exists. These organizations are often mission-driven and guided by moral visions of what makes for a good way of life, society, or community. For example, many of these organizations emphasize social equality in all its forms (race, class, and gender) as a fundamental moral goal to move toward. Furthermore, we must distinguish the position of moral leanings and the act of placing a value judgment on these moral leanings. Instead, we point out the need for a pragmatic accounting of racialized morality.

Consider the notion of saving the nation from moral peril. This concept is a powerful narrative device and framework for motivating collective action. Yet, a person or organization's moral drive is refracted through racialized sociopolitical understandings. One may be compelled to "save America" through the attempted right-wing coup on January 6 or to "save America" through Black Lives Matter Protests and resistance to racial oppression and state violence. Importantly, these are both morally driven projects with wildly different pragmatic implications for racial inequity in the United States. Here, we begin to think through how morality is racialized and how racialization contains moral frameworks.

For example, in Robinson's research built around her dataset on the National Urban League, she engages with how members of the Black Middle Class are impacted by their racialization. For example, when assessing why they may give back, a moral question, they emphasize the relationship to their racial identity through the concept of linked fate (see Dawson, 1995). Robinson's Black Middle-Class respondents feel a deep sense of moral responsibility to help other Black people that is directly tied to the white supremacist social structure that causes inequality. It is crucial to acknowledge the participants' unambiguous reference to their racial sense of self. It's also equally important to recognize the ways the Black community is bounded by the development of racial social structures that place them in these necessary moral positions in the first place (Robinson, 2021).

In the case of Rosino's work on white-dominated grassroots progressive political organizations, uniquely individualistic forms of morality acted as motivating forces for white participants. These organizations operate as white space. In white space, whites are often seen by each other as "normal" or "individuals" rather than as racialized beings, as in the case of Robinson's work above (Farough, 2004; Lewis, 2003). In work on an organization pseudonymously called the Grassroots Action Party (GAP), Rosino (2020, forthcoming) observes that White GAP members regularly described a simultaneous journey of self-discovery that led them to the organization as a means of actualizing their true selves or morals as a good progressive. Their participation in grassroots progressive politics was not motivated by a sense of community uplift but rather by a sense of self-actualization flowing from their own individual values.

In its public-facing materials, this organization holds the empowerment of racially oppressed communities as one of its core pillars of value and a key political goal. Yet, their participation itself was part of what made them feel like good people, regardless of its impacts on racialized communities that would most benefit from the progressive and redistributive policies they espoused. The satisfaction of personal goodness and self-discovery helped motivate sustained and meaningful participation. However, this approach to political organizing devalued and obscured conscious and intentional connection with or empowerment of communities of color as a strategy. These moral notions rendered it difficult to see anything other than expressing their own moral goodness as individual progressives and working to advance electoral goals as worthwhile. In doing so, it maintained the practices and

policies within their organization that resulted in the prolonged exclusion of people and communities of color in their regions. It held them as outside of the moral visions that tended to motivate the political activism of these communities.

Much of our participation in political and civic life is motivated, at least partially, by a quest to express our moral values. In the case of white-dominated progressive political organizations, this observation also connects to whites' tendency to use individualism to avoid the sense of *moral injury* that comes from participating in and benefiting from systems of racial oppression yet holding moral worldviews rooted in social justice. Whereas in the case of a longstanding civil rights organization, there is a tendency for collectivism and acknowledgment of linked fate.

In both scholarly projects, we acknowledge our positions to understand racial dynamics, engaging in positionality and reflexivity. We show how the moral interests of our research participants are bounded by their racial identities and positions. In both cases, paying attention to the racialized social system, the organizations in which individuals participate, and how individuals are impacted by their racialization augments what we can learn about the social and moral. The racialized life experiences and self-concepts of our respondents impact the motivations that they have to engage in civic engagement that they believe will produce a better world. In tandem with these analyses, our positionalities as a Black woman (Robinson) and a white man (Rosino) profoundly shaped our rapport with participants, our entry into these organizations, and our abilities to pick up on implied meanings and subtle patterns of interaction.

A crucial part of understanding this approach is that we are not being additive. In the case of Robinson's work, the scholarship overwhelmingly centers on the experiences of the Black Middle Class. In centering this population, her work takes into account in its theorization and analysis that Black people who are considered to have often "transcended" race are still trapped within this racialized social structure (macro), meaning that the organizations they engage with (meso) are often racialized organizations and that on the micro-level, the social and cultural capital that they engage in are also based on a racialized understanding of individual experiences (Robinson, 2020). In understanding this population and their interactions with others along race, class, and gender lines, this work can bring forth questions and answers about broader American society related to race and morality.

Pushing for scholars to pause and think about racialization and inequality reframes how we approach studying morality and how we understand and define it. It encourages us to take seriously the role that inequalities and resultant racialized particularities of experiences, resources, and opportunities play in sociological understandings of morality. The point here is not that there cannot be universalistic theoretical claims about morality but that those claims must grapple with and be inclusive of these particularities to adequately describe (and perhaps even transform) the role and influence of morality in the racialized social system.

4 Concluding Remarks

Here we have sought to intervene in the ongoing epistemological ignorance (Mills, 1997) around the role of racialization and racial inequality within the sociology of morality. Throughout this chapter, we have sought to reframe the underpinnings of the field by demonstrating that questions of morality have been foundational to the works of marginalized scholars of color as they contemplated life in a racialized society. Drawing on these insights, we thus derived a general agenda for how the sociology of race and ethnicity and the sociology of morality can engage in a mutually beneficial conversation to understand racialized notions of morality. Moreover, we demonstrated, via examples from our own ethnographic work, how racialized notions of morality can be operationalized and understood in the context of racialized political and civic organizations. For the Sociology of Morality to engage in more effective scholarship, the

subfield must face the various ways racialization and racial oppression impact all levels of social order—bringing the moral, social, and racial together.

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Leaving the Sequestered Byway: A Forward Look at Sociology's Morals and Practical Problem-Solving

Kaitlyn Quinn and Erik Schneiderhan

. . .if the latter day moral ideal is in reality that of a social morality, it is inevitable that those who desire it must be brought in contact with the moral experiences of the many in order to procure an adequate social motive.
—*Jane Addams (*Democracy and Social Ethics, 1902, p. 4–5)
If you have been given the extreme privilege of a first-world education and you choose not to do anything with that privilege that might help someone other than you, that too is a moral decision.
—*Monica Prasad (*Problem-Solving Sociology, 2021a, p. 103–4)

Abstract

In this chapter, we use the ideas and practices of Jane Addams and Monica Prasad's work on problem-solving to sketch a direction for sociologists to move forward with their work in the present day. We start with Addams's thinking on morality and social practice, situate it within a larger body of pragmatist social theory, link it to Prasad's work, and use all these ideas to consider practical ways of doing moral sociology to solve social problems and make an actual difference.

Keywords

Jane Addams · Pragmatism · Sociology of morality · Problem-solving

1 Introduction[1]

In simple terms, morality is concerned with questions about how we ought to live—how we are to navigate everyday conflicts and trade-offs and their impact on those around us. It is hard to imagine such navigation without a sense of the terrain. For many philosophers and ethical theorists, figuring out what to do follows from a set of rules or principles that help us distinguish right from wrong: whether that means the pursuit

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of the greatest good for the greatest number, cultivating virtuous intentions, seeking divine approval, or any number of other moral criteria. Pragmatists, however, reject these notions of morality as logically prior, fixed, complete, and directly applicable (LaFollette, 2000). Instead, morality is considered an emergent feature of experience—"practice is primary" for pragmatists (LaFollette, 2000, p. 400). Morality comes from doing (Bargheer, 2018; Gorski, 2022).

By pragmatism, we are referring to the distinctly American philosophical tradition that emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century and is commonly associated with scholars such as John Dewey, William James, W. E. B. Du Bois, Charles Peirce, and Jane Addams.[2] Simply put, pragmatism is a theory of action that also incorporates normative and evaluative dimensions. It emerged as a critique of the "disastrous division[s] between the ideal and the material, thinking and acting, theory and practice" (Emirbayer & Schneiderhan, 2013, p. 134). At its core, pragmatism is concerned with the impact of our thoughts on our actions: "what we think and what we do are inextricably intertwined" (Schneiderhan, 2011, p. 594).

Jane Addams, founder of Hull-House and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, illustrates what pragmatism looks like on the ground. Addams is perhaps the most effective *practical* sociologist in the history of sociology. Through her writing and her practice, she offers a way to think through the how and why of doing sociology. In this chapter, we use Addams as the foundation for thinking about morality and the practice of sociology. Simply put, Addams thought a lot about society, and did quite a bit to help those in her community. This is not a hand-wringing moment, in which we claim that "Sociology has lost its way" or "We are stuck in the ivory tower," after which we swoop in and use Addams to help correct our course. Rather, we see this chapter as an opportunity for reflection, when we ask, "What are we doing as sociologists and why are we doing it?"[3] To the extent that such reflection comes up short, Addams points us to answers, which we supplement by drawing on Monica Prasad's recent work on problem-solving.[4] In the rest of this chapter, we will briefly take up Addams's thinking on morality and social practice, situate it within a larger body of pragmatist social theory, link it to Prasad's work, and use all these ideas to consider practical ways of doing moral sociology to solve social problems rather than simply describing them. Our aim is to provide social researchers with increased resolve to see their research as an opportunity to make a difference in the social world. Providing solutions to real social problems holds the potential to ameliorate suffering and enable individuals to flourish. And make an actual difference.

2 Addams's Social Ethics

Jane Addams knew she wanted to help people when she invested her life's savings in creating a community space within Hull-House in late nineteenth-century Chicago. Her idea was to live in a house in a poor neighborhood and help people there. But she did not know how to do it. Her lack of understanding of the challenges faced by her new neighbors was due in large part to her social distance from them. She was a woman of means in a neighborhood of poor immigrants. She had little experience with manual labor and raising children. As a result, she made many mistakes along the way—sometimes by too quickly assuming that she already knew the problems facing her community and how best to fix them.

[2] For details on the pragmatist revival within sociology, see Gross et al. (2022).

[3] Burawoy (2005) suggests that answering these types of questions allows us to situate ourselves within the division of sociological labor. His 2004 presidential address contends that the discipline is divided among four ideal types of knowledge—professional, critical, policy, and public—that work collectively to generate puzzles, questions, and critiques of one another. Our commitments within this chapter largely position our perspective within the critical and public sociological traditions, which seek to weigh in on sociology's normative foundations and its public relevance, respectively.

[4] For another dialogue between Prasad and pragmatism, see Whitford (2022).

One notable example comes from her failed "Diet Kitchen" that attempted to offer nutritious, affordable meals and cooking classes to those in the neighborhood. Put bluntly, the Diet Kitchen never took off because "nobody liked the food" (Schneiderhan, 2011, p. 609). In starting this project, Addams and others involved did not think to ask community members what types of food they wanted to eat. Instead, they relied only on their own visions of what would be best for the neighborhood. In doing so, Addams and her collaborators crucially failed to consider that the palates of community members, many of whom had emigrated from countries across Europe, were different from their own. Failing to involve the community in the process ultimately undermined their intentions to help.

Yet, this initial failure is not the point we wish to highlight in this chapter. Instead, we find an important lesson in what happened next. Addams was determined, so she set about immersing herself in her new community, opening herself up to the experiences of those she sought to help. Her guiding principle was that of getting to know her neighbors, pursuing what she would later call "propinquity" in her lectures comprising *Democracy and Social Ethics*.[5] She started by making connections to those who were open-minded, mainly children, and learned about household needs first through them, and later their parents. In the process, Addams's focus shifted from her earlier highbrow and abstract notions of classical education to the provision of services important to the community: laundry facilities, childcare, nutritious and low-cost meals, and opportunities for social connection through various cause-oriented clubs. The failed Diet Kitchen, too, was replaced with a new coffee house that provided meals for local residents in a manner that was welcomed by the community (Brown, 2004).[6] Over time, Addams and her colleagues at Hull-House were able to help improve the lives of hundreds of community members, influence the way social provision was provided in Chicago, and ultimately change the terrain of social welfare by providing inspiration for the emerging profession of social work. These are results worthy of our attention.

But how did this come about? What was the impetus? Returning to Addams's quote at the opening of this chapter, she was "brought into contact with the moral experiences of the many" through her work at Hull-House. And this contact provided her with a "social motive." What she decided was worth doing emerged out of her social relations. It was not something primordial or ethereal. Her groundedness in her community provided her with a sense of "righteousness" or what she came to call social ethics. This sense of what to do, in Addams's mind, was something "which many men and women of every generation have hungered and thirsted, and without which life becomes meaningless" (1902, p. 1). Having a sense of ethics enables one to be a "conscious member of society" (1902, p. 65), aware of one's purpose. Gaining this consciousness is challenging, in large part because it is hard to know that you are headed down the right path until you have started the trip:

> For action is indeed the sole medium of expression for ethics. We continually forget that the sphere of morals is the sphere of action, that speculation in regard to morality is but observation and must remain in the sphere of intellectual comment, that a situation does not really become moral until we are confronted with the question of what shall be done in a concrete case, and are obliged to act upon our theory. (1902, p. 89)

Ethics and morality are interchangeable here and we do not think it fruitful to tease out the theoretical and philosophical nuances of any difference. Suffice to say, that Addams wrote, and also showed us through her work as a practical, pragmatist sociologist, that one cannot pursue a social morality or social ethics without action. The sociologist's purpose emerges out of engagement with the community, and through action the needs of the community are met.

[5] For more on Addams's notion of the *neighborly relation* and how it animated her settlement sociology, see Schneiderhan and Quinn (2022).

[6] See Schneiderhan (2011, 2015) for more detail on how Addams opened Hull-House and engaged with her community.

3 Pragmatism and the Sociology of Morality

What does this kind of pragmatist thinking have to offer the sociology of morality?[7] More specifically, how might an engagement with the pragmatist tradition through Addams and others enrich the distinctively sociological approach to morality outlined in this *Handbook*'s first edition (see: Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010)?

First, as Hitlin and Vaisey (2010) claim, the sociology of morality is oriented toward understanding the impact of social structures, resources, and power on morality. For pragmatists, these concerns are fundamental. Who we are and where we happen to land in the social order inform our moral thinking by conditioning the boundaries of what we see as the "good life" (Sayer, 2010). Experience is not only the foundation of knowledge, but also the basis of morality (Schneiderhan, 2011). Through her work at Hull-House, Addams came to believe that we have a moral obligation to "cast our experiences into a larger mold" such that our lives might be "animated by larger social aims" (1902, p. 6). Indeed, for Addams, "diversified human experience" and the resultant sympathies it engenders were "the foundation and guarantee of Democracy" (1902, p. 6).

Second, a sociological approach to morality is especially attuned to social and historical complexes of meaning and their patterns (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010). This focus is enhanced by pragmatism's attention to habits: the beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions (including moral ones) that we acquire, activate, and constantly attune through our experiences in the world. For Dewey, discussion of morality is impossible apart from an appreciation of habit (Gorski, 2022). Our habits are both adaptive and determinative of our experiences; they "generate and reinforce patterns. . .and this shapes our experience, including our perception, feelings, thoughts, and judgments" (Johnson, 2020, p. 265). Habits are not merely repeated behaviors, but containers of embodied meaning—they "carry the past into the present" (LaFollette, 2000, p. 402). Lizardo (2021) refers to such explanations as "causal-historical" given that habit requires us to "put the action in the broader context of personal history" (p. 395). This embodied history is expressed through our habits' inertia. Most of what we do occurs without much effort or deliberation, which can be tremendously helpful when it comes to the rhythms of daily life. Yet the inertia of our habits also places "limits [on] what we can see, feel, think, value, and do" (Johnson, 2020, p. 268). Scaled up, this has significant implications for both morality and broader social patterns, as individual habits exist as "links in forming the endless chain of humanity" (Dewey, 1922, p. 21).

Third, and finally, the sociology of morality seeks to understand how moral judgments, actions, and discourses are negotiated within real, or "ecologically valid" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013), scenarios rather than as mere thought experiments (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010). Pragmatism, too, is acutely focused on the stuff of real life. As Addams cautions, "moral concepts constantly tend to float away. . .unless they have a basis in the concrete relations of life" (1902, p. 25). The point being that we cannot meaningfully engage in moral deliberation apart from our own lives and practices.

Infusing the sociology of morality with pragmatist thought constellates around the practice animating this chapter's title: of leaving the sequestered byway. As Addams famously claimed:

> . . .a standard of social ethics is not attained by travelling a sequestered byway, but by mixing on the thronged and common road where all must turn out for one another, and at least see the size of one another's burdens. (1902, p. 6)

For Addams and other pragmatists, the skills and dispositions to act morally follow from experiencing the world in many manifestations, not mere contemplation or armchair theorizing. As Dewey (1922) argues, it is neither will nor cognition that determines present actions—moral or otherwise—but the force of habit that is

[7] For additional discussions on pragmatism and morality, see Bargheer (2018) and Gorski (2022).

grounded in our everyday practices. If this is true, how are we to cultivate positive social change? On its face, it may seem as if the inertia of habit dooms us to repeat past behaviors, judgments, and valuations, as well as the social arrangements that result. However, this is far from the case.

Dewey wrote extensively about the plasticity of habits. The contingencies of lived experience necessitate flexibility. It is impossible for our habits to perfectly accommodate every scenario we might be faced with. When our existing habits and routines are found wanting, we are forced to experiment—to "try something and see what happens" (Schneiderhan, 2011, p. 596). It is in these moments of what Addams called "perplexity"—when there is "something the matter" (Dewey, 1922, p. 220)—that we can develop new, and more intelligent, habits. As Johnson (2020) explains, the plasticity of habit invites "the possibility of critical ethical reflection as a means for transforming our lives" (p. 264).

A pragmatist approach to morality firmly resists moral stasis—there is no ultimate arrival point at which we can declare ourselves sufficiently "moral," but instead only a series of more and more vigorous moral tests (Addams, 1902).[8] Accordingly, we have an ethical obligation to seek out new "ways to organize ourselves, our values, and our relations with others" (Johnson, 2020, p. 265). This is what Dewey characterized as growth: the "continual process" of "perfecting, maturing, refining" our habits (1922, p. 181). We must keep engaging, experimenting, and learning in our work as sociologists. To the extent that we do this, pragmatists such as Dewey and Addams held that we would engender social growth and a more robust democracy.

Pragmatism asks us to consider and reconsider the obligations we have as sociologists whose careers are frequently organized around trying to understand social inequalities and human suffering. It asks us to bridge the chasm between the "is" and the "ought," between "facts" and "values" (Gorski, 2013, p. 543). What would it look like to envision a new way of orienting ourselves to our work and the people who inform it? What would it look like for us to satisfy a more vigorous moral test? In the next section, we explore one such possibility by mobilizing Monica Prasad's (2021a, 2021b) recent work on pragmatism as a kind of sociological problem-solving (for an alternative vision, see: Smith, 2014).

4 Problem-Solving Sociology

Prasad (2018, 2021a, p. 9) points us to the long tradition of sociologists from Addams to Mills to Burawoy whose work inspires us to "change the world as well as understand it" (see also: Burawoy, 2005; Feagin & Vera, 2008; Morris, 2017; Treviño, 2012; Watts, 2017). Reminiscent of how Addams's sociological work was grounded in the problems of her community, in her recent book, Prasad (2021a), drawing heavily on pragmatist theory, makes a compelling case for a sociology that is organized around problem-solving.[9] By grappling with real-world problems in our work, we invite the possibility of not only contributing to meaningful social change, but also developing better sociological theories. As Prasad (2021a, p. 5) writes: "Attempting to solve real-world problems can be a catalyst for breakthroughs in the basic understanding of society: posing new questions, suggesting new research paths, and demanding new methods, tools, frameworks, and concepts."

This was true in Addams's time too. Hull-House not only provided services to those in the neighborhood, but also it was a research center. Residents sought to bring about social change by gathering data on social problems, earning settlements like Hull-House the label "spearheads for reform" (Davis, 1984). The work and research

[8] This characterization also resonates with Gigerenzer's (2010) concept of *moral satisficing*. The argument here is that moral maximization—finding the "provably best course of action"—is likely impossible given that we cannot know "all alternatives, consequences, and probabilities. . .with certainty" (Gigerenzer, 2010, p. 529).

[9] For another take on pragmatism and problem-solving, see Tavory and Timmermans (2022).

accomplished at Hull-House featured centrally in the emerging discipline of sociology. In fact, Addams and others writing about their work and experiences at Hull-House contributed to the earliest volumes of the *American Journal of Sociology*. And this writing led to more work that tried to address the social challenges of the time. There are deep roots to Prasad's call for a sociology invested in problem-solving.

In recent decades, however, the normative commitments that galvanized the sociological discipline have been muted by a different scholarly habitus: one that is skeptical, hesitant to position-taking, and especially attuned to the unintended consequences of even the most well-meaning of actions (Prasad, 2021a). While not without their merits, these ways of thinking and being "lead to difficulties for anyone wanting to take practical action" (Prasad, 2021a, p. 7). If we are to move our work beyond careful (but unambitious) descriptions, we must be willing to go out on a limb, to take a stand about what social change could mean,[10] and, perhaps most frighteningly, to risk being completely wrong.

Herein lies the difference between a view of sociology as *solving* problems and that of providing *solutions* (Prasad, 2021a). This, too, has pragmatist roots. For pragmatists, action is an always unfolding alternation between where we want to go and what we learn along the way. Rather than neatly dividing means from ends, Dewey sees these concepts as separated only in time: "an end, or effect, soon becomes a means, or cause, for what follows" (Whitford, 2002, p. 337). When we encounter a problem, we move forward by pursuing particular lines of action we think will make a difference, make adjustments as we go, and develop new plans and goals in light of our experiences. Returning to the earlier example of Addams's failed Diet Kitchen we can see that although this effort was not particularly helpful, in taking this initial step she opened up the possibility of other more meaningful actions through a process of learning from failure and "the perplexity it engendered" (Schneiderhan, 2011, p. 609).

Prasad (2018, 2021a) advocates for a similar process within the discipline of sociology, encouraging revision to our conclusions in light of the challenges of actualizing change in real communities. With this in mind, sociologists do not (and, indeed, must not) bear the burden of producing the ultimate solution to complex social problems. As Dewey argued, there is no such thing as an *end-in-itself*, only a series of *ends-in-view* (Whitford, 2002). Accordingly, sociologists' role in actualizing social change becomes that of "analytically identifying the next step in the action agenda" (Prasad, 2021a, p. 19). When done collectively, the research and problem-solving of other scholars act as a continuous interrogation, comparison, and correction of the provisional solutions advanced by our own work (Prasad, 2018, 2021a). But how do we begin? In the next section we explore the crucial question of how we determine what the problems are, Prasad's answer, and a potential alternative.

5 Starting Points

A common approach to determining how to start centers the researcher. As Prasad describes, in many projects "the person doing the research decides what is a problem" (2021a, p. 31). While this is certainly what happens a lot of the time, we join others, especially those employing community-based or participatory research methods (e.g., Cahill, 2007; Johnson, 2017; Nelson et al., 1998; Stoecker, 2012), who think there is another way forward—by trying to figure out a problem *with* those who actually face the problem. We see this position as having practical, moral, and analytical implications for problem-solving sociology.

Practically speaking, clarifying the shape of social problems in dialogue with the communities experiencing these problems will often involve attempts to bridge social distances. The composition of academia tends to reflect and reproduce existing social hierarchies and inequalities (Nevin, 2019; Romero, 2017). The result is that

[10] For some examples, see Gottschalk (2015, pp. 258–82), Desmond (2016, pp. 293–314), and Bonilla-Silva (2019).

for many scholars, information about the most pressing social problems may not be readily available at their doorsteps.[11] Like Addams, we too may need to forge new connections and learn from different communities. But this is complex and difficult work. There are tremendous risks to communities when scholars arrive. Even the most well-intentioned efforts to cultivate social change carry possibilities of misunderstanding, erasure, shame, stigmatization, disappointment, and other forms of harm—as can be said of attempts to help others more broadly (Cohen et al., 2017; Quinn, 2020; Smith-Carrier, 2020). As a result, we see the question of how scholars choose to engage communities as, most fundamentally, a moral position.

Yet, even if we thoughtfully and responsibly engage with communities we cannot assume that we will readily find consensus about social problems that will neatly animate our research agendas. As Prasad explains, "communities may hold incorrect beliefs, there are subordinate and dissenting strands within any community, and different communities will identify different issues as problems" (2021a, p. 160). We do not see these difficulties as reasons to avoid engaging with communities, but instead as reflections of the multiplicative and contested nature of wicked problems themselves (Head, 2008).

Much of the sociological discipline is animated by problems that policy and planning scholars refer to as wicked: poverty, homelessness, financial crises, climate change, and crime to name a few examples (Quinn et al., 2022). Wicked problems are incredibly difficult to define, much less solve (Ritchey, 2013; Rittel & Webber, 1973). They are intimately connected with other social problems, such that efforts to address issues in one domain might cause unintended consequences, or new problems, in another. Amid all this complexity, it is entirely possible—desirable even—to find conflicting perspectives on what the "real" problems are and the nature of their imagined solutions. Instead of envisioning this lack of consensus as a barrier, we might instead see conflicting perspectives as different vantage points of dynamic, complex, and interconnected social problems.

Like Prasad, however, we also acknowledge that individuals and communities may hold "incorrect" notions of the problems they face and this can add challenges to our analyses. Scholars from Marx to Bourdieu to Mills have taught us to be cautious of how individuals, caught up in the welter of existence or duped by unseen influences, may misunderstand their situations. Sociology has a responsibility to help people understand and navigate their social worlds, but in the spirit of Addams, we would advocate for beginning this effort with community engagement—albeit with full awareness of the unequal power dynamics in these relationships and diverse risks of harm.[12] The challenge in our view is how to figure out a problem *with* those who actually face the problem. At the same time, the researcher must be cautious as one can be trapped by categories of analysis that are not fruitful, duped by the "spontaneous sociology" of respondents (Bourdieu et al., 1991). This seems nigh impossible, in part because sociology, for all its breadth, remains fairly siloed.

Stepping out of the sociology silo provides a broader view. In development studies, for example, there is a long tradition of working with local stakeholders to identify, understand, and address social problems. One notable technique is the *rapid rural appraisal* (RRA), what Gow (2018) calls "an iterative process, more akin to investigative journalism than conventional social science research for it is generally quicker and much more

[11] Yet, building on Prasad's (2021a) recommendation to study both the causes and the consequences of social problems, some scholars may already be well positioned to study those in power who act as "villains" in these stories.

[12] In many ways, these concerns about how best to describe and engage with social problems parallel earlier discussions in cultural anthropology concerning the "crisis of representation" (Marcus & Fisher, 1986). Central to these debates—and of particular relevance to this chapter—were questions about how (and if) researchers could mobilize ethnographic methods to provide full and valid descriptions of social realities within communities outside of their own (Marcus & Fisher, 1986).

intense." It typically involves a team of researchers and occurs, when possible, on location where the particular social problems appear to exist. Gow (2018) describes the process as a sort of "reconnaissance" that involves rigorous data collection and analysis that includes local stakeholders and involves "listening and learning." RRA is not a social scientific fantasy; it has been used on the ground by international aid agencies for decades with some success.[13] The point here is that sociology might consider looking to cognate disciplines like education, anthropology, social work, and development studies, in search of practices for involving stakeholders in identifying and solving problems. This is the spirit of what Addams and other sociologists of her time tried to do, and might help one to avoid the "researcher knows best" paternalism that is prevalent in sociology today.

As Prasad (2021b) cautions us, it is not enough to be a "mirror"—skepticism and humility must be combined with rational inquiry and the desire to improve society, and all of these qualities together serve as an engine for action. As Smith (2014) contends, sociology should ultimately be "a society-serving discipline that is commissioned by and accountable to the larger social orders that support it" (p. 186). This is inspirational and heady stuff. Nevertheless, as Prasad (2021a, p. 29) laments, "there is no widespread and self-conscious tradition of sociological problem-solving in the field today." We contend that the sociology of morality could be one such home for these conversations and commitments.

6 Moving Forward

So if we channel the ideas of Addams and Prasad, how can we move forward as sociologists and make a difference? Addams (1902, p. 9) provides a clue: "Our conceptions of morality, as all our other ideas, pass through a course of development; the difficulty comes in adjusting our conduct, which has become hardened into customs and habits, to these changing moral conceptions." In our view, adjusting our conduct as sociologists might include the following: (1) Cultivating a moral disposition as scholars; (2) Stepping over the disciplinary boundaries of sociology; and (3) Learning and practicing habits of community engagement. Our brief description of adjustments is just a start, but might help in softening those customs and habits Addams thought inhibited our ability to make meaningful differences in the social world.

The training most aspiring sociologists go through involves a rigorous combination of theory, methods, and deep engagement with specific literatures. We believe there is one key element missing: cultivating a moral compass. Although the foundations of our discipline were deeply entwined with questions of morality, such concerns have declined precipitously in the intervening years (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013, p. 52). In response, there are growing calls for renewed attention to the moral dispositions animating the sociological discipline. For instance, Gorski (2012) has suggested that sociology "bring the rigor of its methods on the study of human flourishing. . .so as to recover the good from the closet" (p. 100). Practically speaking, Gorski (2013) argues that cultivating a moral compass requires replacing commitments to scientific "neutrality" with open-mindedness: "good social scientists should strive to be aware of their ethical presuppositions and open to revising them in the light of evidence" (p. 553). Prasad, in her own efforts to change the way we think about doing sociology, has created a regular series of dissertation proposal workshops that attempt to instill in students a sense of what their work is about and why they are doing it. "What is the problem you are trying to solve?" students are asked. These workshops are effective and students come away invigorated, with a sense that their work might make a difference.

But this practice is not widespread and we think it starts too late in student training. We advocate developing student dispositions that lead to thinking in terms of solving problems from the start. This work could take place in

[13] See https://www.fao.org/3/w3241e/w3241e09.htm as a starting place for more information on RRA.

theory and methods classes, asking students to consider not just how to do their work, but why. Classes in specific areas of sociology could also highlight empirical work that successfully identifies and addresses social problems, rather than simply making micro-amendments to a given literature. Course assignments could harness the ideas of Addams, Prasad, and others, challenging students to think about the moral underpinnings (if any) of existing work in the discipline. Similarly, comprehensive exams could be structured to ask students to grapple with questions of morality as they synthesize and analyze bodies of work. The point here is to cultivate habits that urge us to question, in pragmatist fashion, "the difference that makes a difference" in our work.[14]

We are convinced that it is much harder to "make a difference" in our work if we remain siloed within sociology. The divisions within the social sciences that emerged in the twentieth century have had the effect of narrowing our focus. Addams and her contemporaries were not as delimited in their thinking, drawing from economics, sociology, philosophy, and literature to inform their work. Addams, for example, was heavily influenced by Tolstoy and even went so far as to visit him at his home (Schneiderhan, 2015). Durkheim drew inspiration from Aristotle's philosophy, mobilizing virtue ethics to envision sociology as a "moral science" (Gorski, 2012, p. 77). Gorski, too, advocates for engagement with moral and political philosophy in the scientific pursuit of "what it means to live well" (2013, p. 549). Practically speaking, this kind of broader engagement might be encouraged by asking students to take some classes *outside* sociology as part of their graduate training in sociology. This happens in some PhD programs, but could be expanded—the goal being to read the literature in other disciplines related to solving problems rather than reinvent the wheel.

Finally, Addams was both a practitioner and an academic, which is rare in today's world of hyperspecialization. To the extent that practitioners, i.e., those working on the ground to ameliorate social conditions and solve real problems, put their ideas into the public sphere, sociologists should engage with them. The goal here is to have more articulations between the ideas of academics and the work of practitioners. It might also be fruitful to look back at those like Addams who made a major impact on society during the early days of sociology—they saw the challenges of the Industrial Revolution and were able to think them through *and* operationalize their ideas, leading to significant social change.

Across these somewhat simple notions of how to move toward an increasingly moral sociological practice is the idea of dynamic and active community engagement. We are unlikely to make a difference as sociologists if we stay in our offices. Enacting a (more) moral sociology will, for many of us, require a reorientation of how we see ourselves and how we approach our research *with* others. This might begin with research design that is oriented toward problem-solving and anchored in relationships with those who experience these problems first hand. Fortunately, there are interdisciplinary scholars, practitioners, and activists already engaging in such work from whom we can learn from in this process. Indeed, a focus on praxis—the dynamic interplay of theory and practice, of reflection and action—from the community-based participatory research tradition (e.g., Freire, 1970; Wallerstein & Auerbach, 2004) has much to offer the moral dispositions we have sketched here. Above all, as sociologists we must remember that it is not a question of whether our work wades into moral terrain. Returning to Prasad's reminder in this chapter's opening quote, our failure to engage with the moral implications and responsibilities of our work is itself a moral decision—whether or not we choose to name it as so.

[14] This idea of making a difference, or the "cash value" of our work, comes from pragmatist William James (1907).

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