

Occasional paper New Series



**Moral Sociology.
The Alternative to Value Freedom**

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About the Author

Prof Frederic Vandenberghe, is a research professor in Sociology at the Institute of Social and Political Studies, State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil since 2007. In his own words, Prof Vandenberghe has lived 'in a suitcase' for almost 20 years, visiting different universities in the western hemisphere (e.g. University of Manchester, Yale University, UCLA, to name a few), before calling Brazil, home. During these long sojourn(s), he dealt with mainly one foundational question: how philosophy can be understood by posing sociological questions, and how sociology can be understood by raising philosophical questions. Beginning this intellectual journey Prof. Vandenberghe first looked into the intricacies of the notion of "reification", through the lens of metacritique, for his doctoral dissertation "*A Philosophical History of German Sociology. Alienation and Reification*" was published in French in 2 volumes, (translated in English by Routledge in 2009). Prof. Vandenberghe has published a book on the sociology of George Simmel (in French), a book on posthumanism and biocapitalism (in French) and, more recently, he has also gathered some of his main articles on critical realism, internal conversations, collective subjectivities, Bourdieu and biotechnology in *What's Critical about Critical Realism? Essays in Reconstructive Social Theory* (Routledge, 2014). Taking forward Roy Bhaskar's notion of 'transcendental realism' and the 'philosophy of meta-reality', Prof Vandenberghe suggests that it is time for giving more importance to heart over stomach and an open hand over fist, while theorizing the social philosophy. He is currently writing a book (in French) on the new trends in world sociology and gathering materials for a book (in Portuguese) on the sociology of the soul.

More information can be found on his personal webpage: <http://frederic.iesp.uerj.br>

Moral Sociology: The Alternative to Value Freedomⁱ

"A moral philosophy characteristically presupposes a sociology"

Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue*, p. 23.

"Social scientists are moral philosophers in disguise"

Alan Wolfe: *Whose Keeper? Social Science and Moral Obligation*, p. 23

While a good deal of contemporary sociology is political and moralizing, moral sociology as such remains largely underdeveloped. Recently, there has been a resurgent interest in moral sociology with concerted attempts to institutionalize it as a specialized subfield of inquiry, both in mainland Europe (centered around the work of Honneth, Boltanski and Thévenot) and in the Anglo-Saxon world (influenced by the work of communitarians like MacIntyre, Taylor and Walzer or by the critical realism of Bhaskar and Archer).ⁱⁱ Unlike the sociology of religion, the sociology of knowledge or the sociology of arts, moral sociology does not have a real tradition. The founding fathers had, of course, a strong interest in morality and ethicsⁱⁱⁱ. To the extent that there's a canon, Émile Durkheim would be its prime figure (even though he didn't finish his book *La morale*). Max Weber and his paradoxical defense of axiological neutrality would come second, even if it undermines ethics. Marx doesn't have any specific texts on ethics as such and it is not even clear if there's space in Marxism for a morality that is not subservient to politics. After all, as Marx (1969: 229) declared, "communists do not preach any morality at all". With his *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*, Georg Simmel (1991) has two volumes on ethics, but they are not very sociological and deconstruct most of its basic concepts. Following the Second World War, more than any one else, Talcott Parsons has continued the Durkheimian tradition and underscored the moral dimension of social life. With the downfall of structural functionalism in the 1960's, moral sociology went into hibernation as well.^{iv} Pierre Bourdieu certainly has a sociology of morality, but no moral sociology. Like everything else, he explains morality sociologically, but does not leave much space for independent moral reflection. As a counter position, there's Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action and discourse ethics, but most sociologists would consider him a philosopher anyway.

One could easily make the case that the “founding fathers” of our discipline, not just Marx, Weber and Durkheim, but also Parsons and Bourdieu, who, unlike us, were deeply steeped in philosophy and knew their classics, were fully aware of the moral dimensions of moral life, as well as of the normative presuppositions and implications of the new discipline. In spite of their declaration to the contrary, they knew only too well that the sociology they proposed was situated in a long tradition and taking explicit sides: Marx tried to combine Aristoteles, Kant and Hegel in a revolutionary philosophy of history, Durkheim was knowingly fusing Aristotle and Kant into his science of morals, whereas Weber, brushing aside 2000 years of moral philosophy with a slight of hand, was sociologising with a hammer. Parsons for his part rejected utilitarian consequentialism and sought, through a synthesis of Kant and Christian ethics, to restore a common system of ultimate ends. In spite of his subscription to practical reason and in order not to be too closely associated to a Marxian theory of justice, Bourdieu described himself as a Pascalian. In any case, without reference to their classics, I surmise, our classics cannot be properly understood.

To develop a moral sociology worthy of its name, one has, however, first to break down the disciplinary barrier between sociology and philosophy and overcome the reticence and resistance of professional, critical and public sociologists to engage into some constructive “border thinking”.^v While most would probably agree that sociology entails a normative project, grounded in a slightly nostalgic liberal-communitarian worldview, few would actually be willing to spell out that project and launch a philosophical inquiry into its normative foundations.^{vi} Laying the groundwork and testing foundations, they would say, are best left to philosophers, engineers and builders. It is not the work of social scientists. Similarly, while most would be sympathetic to the idea that the sociology of morals is itself relatively inseparable from a normative position, they would not want to hear that to properly understand those normative positions, they have to know the classical tradition of moral philosophy and follow the debates in contemporary moral philosophy too.

In this article, I want to make an attempt to reconnect sociology to moral philosophy and moral philosophy to sociology. The thesis I want to defend is that *sociology continues by other means the venerable tradition of practical and moral philosophy*. Like its forebears, it stands and falls with a defense of “practical wisdom” (Aristotle)

and “practical reason” (Kant). If I want to break the solution of continuity, it is not because I think that sociology has little to offer, but because I am convinced, like Chernilo (2013: 2), that one can “*do more and better social theory*” (his italics) if one allows oneself to engage philosophical issues at the boundary of sociology. One should definitely not leave the philosophical questions of our discipline to professional philosophers. With some notable exceptions - which can be counted on one hand: Habermas, Honneth, Ricoeur, Taylor and MacIntyre -, they know little about sociology and don't really care about it. Otherwise, they'd probably not develop their normative visions like castles in the air. Rather, one should give oneself the freedom to explore in all modesty the philosophical foundations of sociology and “do metatheory”, not so much to indulge in the delicacies of erudition and scholarship, but as a propedeutics to solid theory construction and empirical research in the normative dimensions of the social world.

What is Moral Sociology?

Moral sociology is not a special sociology, like the sociology of sports or the sociology of administration for example. It does not refer to “a sector of social life”, but to a “perspective on social life” that uncovers and reveals “ethics where it crops up while remaining hidden” (Isambert, Ladrière and Terrenoire, 1978). As such, it is an integral part of a general sociology that seeks to systematically interrelate social structures, culture and practices into a unified theoretical framework that gives a coherent answer to the three fundamental questions of social theory: What is social action? How is the social order possible? What are the conditions of social change? (Vandenberghe, 2013: 12-37). More akin in that respect to cultural sociology and its defense of the “relative independence of culture” (Alexander, 1990: 1-30), *moral sociology* is a general perspective that unearths the moral dimension of social life and argues that principles, norms and values are not just regulative, but constitutive, and that they are constitutive not just of a certain domain of actions, but of social life as such. That does not mean that all actions are *per definitionem* moral actions (most of our economic actions are neither moral nor immoral, our sex life is no longer judged in moral terms either, etc.), but, rather, that morals, mores and ethics are invariably implicated in action, order and social change.

Every action, no matter how rational or emotional, routine or strategic, is surrounded by a normative horizon that provides the principles, ends and values that define and direct it. Similarly, institutions, no matter how systemic, have an ideal foundation that shapes their organization and their goals, and is instrumental in the coordination of the actions of its members. Even financial markets are embedded in a moral economy and it is thanks to this moral infrastructure that its excesses can be judged and criticized. If social change is possible, it is also because the normative structures that undergird the institutions, taken singly or jointly, vary over time. If social change is necessary, it is among other reasons because yesterday's ideal interests enter in conflict with today's material interests or *vice versa*. When actors esteem that the existing social systems, institutions and practices are not only in conflict with their material interests, but that they also betray their moral promises and undermine their existential aspirations for a good life, social change is imminent.

By analogy with Jeffrey Alexander's (2003: 11-26) famous distinction between a sociology of culture and a cultural sociology, we can make a distinction between a sociology of morals and a moral sociology. While the former takes moralities as something that has to be explained by social factors (moralities as "dependent variable"), the latter investigates how morality produces, constitutes and regulates actions, institutions and social structures (morality as "independent variable").^{vii} For sure, the language of dependent and independent variables is reductive and not really appropriate for the analysis of the generalized interdependence and mutual constitution of moral and social life. As if we had to choose between a simple alternative: "To explain moral facts by society or social facts by morality?" (Pharo, 2004a:45).

It is nevertheless useful to distinguish two rival strands within the sociological tradition that investigates the role of morality and ethics in social life.^{viii} In the first strand, with antecedents that go back to the modern Masters of suspicion (Machiavelli, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche), we find authors like Weber, Elias, Adorno, Althusser, Foucault, and Bourdieu in the materialist, structuralist, deconstructivist and critical tradition who consider ethics an epiphenomenon – and sometimes even a mask - of deeper lying interests and power struggles. As Bourdieu (1994: 147-167) pointedly asked: "Who has an interest in being or in appearing without interests?" (*désintéressé*)?"

In the other strand, with antecedents that go back to the Prophets of transfiguration (Augustine, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel), we encounter authors in the idealist, rationalist, pragmatist and hermeneutic tradition like Durkheim, Mauss, Weber, Mead, Parsons, Habermas, Honneth and Boltanski. Weber figures in both lists. Depending on what one reads (*Science as a Vocation* or *The Protestant Ethic*) and also how one reads him, he can either appear as a rather stern Nietzschean with existentialist leanings or as a sophisticated Neo-Kantian in the humanist tradition.^{ix} Weber is indeed a shifter, but, at the end of the day, everything depends on what one does with his passionate call for axiological neutrality. Later, I will argue most strongly against that position, which I consider a serious impediment to any moral sociology.

As morality is part of culture, moral sociology is, by definition, a cultural sociology. Like culture, morality is a relatively autonomous guiding system for action. What distinguishes morality from culture is its intrinsic relation to normative standards of evaluation, judgment and justification in terms of "understandings about what is right and wrong, good and bad, worthy and unworthy, just and unjust" (Smith, 2003: 8). As a set of normative understandings that provide evaluative standards (principles, values and norms) by which actions (one's own and those of others) can be judged, morality is part of a collectively shared cultural order that is institutionalized in structured social practices.^x As such, it exists "outside of people" (*id.*). As these cultural understandings are learned and internalized in and through processes of socialization, morality also exists "inside of people" (*ibid.*) as a set of standards of correct behavior that define, orient and regulate their actions from within. Those standards can be reflexively formulated, semi-consciously followed or dimly felt, but not articulated, as is the case with "moral sentiments" (like compassion, pride, resentment, etc.).

Following Bourdieu's (1977) famous *détournement* of Spinoza's distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, we could say with the Durkheim-Weberian tradition of moral sociology that morality is a "structuring structure" that discloses the world as a valuable one and with the Webero-Marxist tradition of the sociology of morality that it is a "structured structure" that expresses relations of force and contributes to the reproduction of society as a system of domination. While the connection with culture assures that morality is conceived of as a collective guiding system that structures and regulates actions from within in accordance with some

standards, its relation to social structures, material interests and relations of production suggests that the invocation of the common good and the general interest that characterizes moral life is rooted in particular forms of life and expresses, through strategies of universalization and idealization, the interests and ideals of particular groups and carrier-strata (classes, estates, nations, etc.). From the point of view of the sociology of morality, moral positions can and have to be explained in terms of social positions within the social structure and of its corresponding discourses. In this respect, the sociology of morals can be considered a formalization of folk sociology: "They would say/do that, wouldn't they?" (Sayer, 2005: 6). For a cultural sociology that seeks to maintain the connection between the practices and social change, the question is how principles, norms and values can be at the same time a condition and a consequence of social action. To resolve the conundrum, I suggest, a reference to normativity and morality is necessary.

Descriptive Ethics

Philosophers esteem that the sociological reduction of morality to a set of *mores*, customs and manners that are socially, culturally and historically variable evacuates moral judgment altogether.^{xi} With its suggestion that morality always comes in the plural, sociology introduces a good dose of relativism and skepticism into the moral debate. Pascal's exclamation comes to mind: "A meridian decides the truth. [...] A strange justice that is bounded by a river! Truth on this side of the Pyrenees, error on the other side" (Pascal, 1954: § 294). For moral philosophers, who search for evaluative criteria that are ideally universal and hold for any conceivable moral community, talk about multiple moralities is necessarily problematic. With Steven Lukes, we can imagine that they want to ask the sociologists of moralities a basic meta-ethical question: "What is diversity of morals a diversity of?" (Lukes, 2013: 558). To properly answer that question without subterfuges, meta-ethical criteria that make the qualification of any given act as a moral, an immoral or a morally indifferent one possible, have to be formulated.

While this reflection on the nature of ethical properties of moral judgments (What makes a judgment moral?) is definitely a philosophical one, one can make it more sociological by opening the question to the actors themselves. To the extent that the actors themselves reflect on the criteria they use to justify their own behavior or criticize

that of others, every actor may well be considered a philosopher. There's, indeed, no reason why one should rule out a sociology of philosophy or, better, of lay philosophers in ordinary situations of action that are submitted to the imperative of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2000). In everyday life, actors evaluate, judge, criticize others all the time. Once one starts paying attention to the role of philosophical arguments in ordinary situations of action, one will discover that actors are endowed with a 'critical sense' and that they continuously use moral language to denounce injustices of all sorts. "It is enough to pay attention to hear the incessant rumour that bears testimony to the indignation, to the pain and also to the inquietude triggered by the sentiment of injustice that manifests the capacity of persons to put into work their sense of equity" (Boltanski, 1990: 130).

Sociologist do the same, not so much as sociologists, however – the dogma of ethical neutrality forbids them from taking a stand – but as actors. A reflexive sociology, in which the sociologist observes and describes, explains and understands the normative arguments of ordinary actors, including his or her own, is not only a necessary part of "epistemological vigilance" (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1973: 94-106); it also allows one to see that sociology encounters the moral position both as a "resource" (the moral presuppositions of sociology) and as a "topic" in its own right (the moral positions of the actors themselves). Morality is always there both as an unquestioned and continuously reaffirmed moral background (sociology as a modern liberal-communitarian enterprise) and as a moral horizon (the normative worldviews that inspire and motivate the actors). Provided that the denomination does not preclude the investigation of the interconnections between both, one could call the first the professional morality of sociology, the second its lay morality. With sociological concepts circling in and out of the life-world into academia, and back, both are profoundly intertwined. The "double hermeneutics" is indeed so profound and the "institutional reflexivity so intense that it is hard to say where one begins and the other ends (Giddens, 1981: 1-17).

Moral philosophers live in an ideal and perfect world where judgments are always fully articulated and people behave rationally and morally. What they are concerned about are purely normative, conceptual and historical-philosophical issues: What are the criteria of morality? How does the sense of justice operate? Can one be a cognitivist in

ethics? How can one justify a certain norm? What is the relation between virtues and values, values and norms or values and moral sentiments? Does justice have priority over the good? How should one behave in a given situation? What does Aristotle mean by phronesis? Is Hegel's critique of Kant justified? What is Rawls's original position and how does it compare to Habermas's ideal speech situation? Can critique be transcendent or does it always have to be immanent? To sociologists, who are no longer trained in moral philosophy, those philosophical discussions often seem airy, technical, even pointless.

From a sociological perspective, philosophers are perfectionists. They deal with ideal actors in ideal worlds, not with real worlds and messy situations. They are above all concerned with normative issues and the examples of everyday life they refer to or even invent (especially if they are schooled in the analytic tradition) show they do not care too much about description or explanation. Sociologists for their part eschew enumerations of virtues, articulations of the good, and elaborations of the just. Rather, they focus on the negative and the bad (racism, sexism, colonialism), denounce injustices (inequality and exploitation) and uncover social pathologies (alienation, disenchantment and anomie), leaving the explicit justification of their critiques, norms and utopias to philosophers (Benhabib, 1986). And in any case, aren't we all against exploitation, rape and murder?

To make the transition from moral philosophy to moral sociology as a form of "moral inquiry" (Bellah, 1983) one needs to bring philosophy back into the real world and investigate empirically how actors reason, think, evaluate, justify and act morally in ordinary situations of action. This transition from the normative to the empirical is only possible if one does not oppose philosophy to sociology, but, rather, integrates them into something like a "descriptive ethics" (along the lines perhaps of "descriptive metaphysics"). This endeavor would be at the intersection of ethics (because it implies philosophical discussions about "the good" and "the just" and knowledge of the tradition of moral philosophy too) and sociology (because it describes, understands and explains the moral sense of persons in real situations of action).

What is needed is a fine articulation between i) descriptive and prescriptive, ii) external and internal, iii) observer and actor positions:

(i) From this dialogical perspective, one needs, first, to study the normative prescriptions of philosophers in order to better describe the normative dimension of social life. Through the ages, philosophers have developed complex languages and elaborate visions of the good and the just in well ordered societies (MacIntyre, 1966; Taylor, 1989; see also last section of this article). Sociologists should study those philosophical systems as moral repertoires that are part of Western culture.^{xii} Varying a well-known phrase of Paul Ricoeur— "to explain more to understand better" (Ricoeur, 1986: 22)-, we could say that the point of this detour via philosophy is to prescribe more in order to describe better, and also, conversely, to describe more in order to prescribe better and ground one's judgments in the critical sense of the actors.

(ii) Next, one also needs to overcome the opposition between an internal understanding of moral acts (internalism) and an external observation of moral facts (externalism). As a matter of fact, externalism presupposes internalism, observation presupposes understanding, understanding presupposes judgment: "We only understand a speech act if we know what makes it acceptable. [...] Understanding of the grounds (of action) implies *eo ipso* an evaluation" (Habermas: 1981, I: 168-169). This is the case, because, as sociological semanticists (Pharo, 2004: 48-84), neo-Wittgensteinians (Louch, 1966: 50-60) and ethnomethodologists (Jayyussi, 1991: 227-251) have underscored over and over again, before one can observe and register moral facts, one needs to be able to recognize them, which presupposes at least some kind of a "normative criteriology". Without recognition of morality, without implicit judgment and evaluation of social facts, there's no cognition of moral facts either. The normative is in the descriptive and the descriptive is in the normative. The *quaestio facti* cannot be separated from the *quaestio iuris*. For descriptive ethics, objective, non evaluative, neutral methods are, therefore, not a real option.

(iii) Finally and relatedly, one also has to join the first person perspective of the normative philosopher with the third person perspective of the sociological observer. Philosophers take a performative perspective and seek to rationally ground their judgments through moral argumentation, deliberation and justification. They often speak in their own name, but through sustained moral argument with real or imaginary interlocutors, they ascend from the perspective of the first person to the universal perspective of an imaginary judge (Kant's tribunal of reason) who incorporates the

perspective of humanity as such. Sociological observers usually avoid judging their subjects. Instead of critically evaluating their positions from a moral point of view, they try to understand them and explain their behavior by reference to their community and its moral discourse. In good Weberian fashion, they do it by making explicit the particular moral universe of the native community. To explain, explicate and understand the moral positions of the subjects, without judging them, is what participant observation commends and demands.

Through a fusion of the position of the philosopher (and remember, with Gramsci (1975: 326) that “every man is a philosopher”) and the position of the sociologist, we can arrive at an explicitly normative hermeneutics of “participant evaluation” in which the sociologist has to judge the evaluations of the ones s/he observes in order to understand them better, they and their moral universe. Once one has thus articulated philosophy and sociology into a “moral ethnography” (sic), one can also attack the Weberian dogma of axiological neutrality (Weber, 1988a, b) and propose a normative sociology that is neither relativist nor decisionist, but does full justice to the normative conceptions and intuitions of the actors themselves.

Against Axiological Neutrality

If one wants to develop moral sociology as a “moral inquiry” that explains, explicates and describes the actor’s moral sense, one has first of all to remove a huge stumbling block: *Wertfreiheit* – and ask oneself if Weber’s defense of axiological neutrality is really axiologically neutral. I know it is part of the sociological *doxa* that one should not insert one’s own subjective evaluation into the object one studies. Research should be objective and neutral, not partial and partisan. For sure, when one is teaching, one should abstain from evaluation and refrain from indoctrination and not behave like a “publicly remunerated petty prophet in the lecture-room” (Weber, 1988c: 580). Even a Marxist should be able to teach Spencer, Pareto or Weber to his students without irony, depletives and invectives. But what appears at first as a reasonable position represents, in fact, if one approaches it as an ethical doctrine, a rather extreme position within the history of moral philosophy. One does not have to go as far as Leo Strauss (1953: 35-80) and accuse Weber of “nihilism” (be it “noble nihilism”), but that his defense of neutrality is far from neutral is evident to anyone with some knowledge of the history of

ethics and moral philosophy. Weber’s plea for *Wertfreiheit*, which Talcott Parsons judiciously translated as “freedom to judge”, is inseparable from Nietzsche’s wholesale denunciation of ethics as resentment in disguise. Neutrality is, therefore, not what it seems, but, rather, its opposite: irrationalism, relativism, decisionism (Vandenbergh, 2005). Neither a consensual position, nor a common sense one, it’s a rather polemical position that introduces conflict and tensions among colleagues and detracts from their professional commitment to modern liberal-communitarian values.^{xiii}

But before I get to a refutation of a battery of dualisms (fact/value; is/ought; objective/subjective; positive/normative) associated with *Wertfreiheit*, I must first praise Weber’s scientific practice as a classic historian and sociologist who demonstrates, like perhaps no other has done since, the constitutive role of ideas, values and beliefs in the course of universal history. If *The Protestant Ethic* is a classic, it is not so much because of its main thesis – which has been contested by historians ever since it was first published in 1904 (Fischhoff, 1944)– but because as a prime work in the tradition of the German *Geisteswissenschaften*, it has become our finest example of interpretative sociology. His reconstruction of the ethos (or moral habitus) of the early Protestant entrepreneurs and its determinant role not only in the rise of Northern capitalism, but also, more generally, in the emergence of Western rationalism, makes it a paradigmatic exemplar of and for moral sociology.

As always with Weber, the problem is not in what he does, which is exemplary, but in what he says about what he does. Between the theory and the practice, there is a significant tension and, quite often, even a blatant “T/P inconsistency” that can be dialectically resolved if one sticks to the practices and develops the theory that is immanent to them.^{xiv} It has often been remarked that Weber prescribes methodological individualism in the opening chapter of *Economy and Society*, but that in the substantive chapters of the same book, he practices a form of structuralism that is not that far removed from the accounts one finds in Marxist historiography. Similarly, on a methodological level, idealtypes (*Idealtypen*), as they are commonly constructed and used by comparative historians, are just fine; yet, the epistemological justification that Weber gives is problematic. Methodologically robust, the method of idealtypes is epistemologically weak. It smacks of nominalism and conventionalism, and forgets to reconnect the categories of the analyst to the categories of the actors themselves – as if

the analyst could impose his or her categories at will, analyzing, for instance, the social life of a restaurant as a theater play, even if the actors are thinking that they are doing something else. The use of irony, sarcasm and satire of such a Goffmanian analysis is not only epistemologically problematic, but also, perhaps, morally (though I'd definitely would not want to police texts for their moral correctness).

If we move from epistemology to ethics, from Weber's analytics of idealtypes (*démarche idéal-typique*) to what, following Alain Caillé (forthcoming: ch. 12), we could call his dialectics of "idealist-types" (*démarche idéaliste-typique*), which confronts the values a society professes with the ones it institutionalizes, we find a similar split between theory and practice, but now in the form of a theory-axiological inconsistency. Here as well the defense of value neutrality makes sense at a practical level (a pacifist sociologist should be able to teach a course on violence, an atheist should be able to do research on the Calvinist ethos in the Northern countries, etc.), but it can hardly be sustained reflexively and philosophically without incurring performative contradictions and self-referential paradoxes. Once again, there's a disconnect, but this time between the values of the actors (who judge all the time) and those of the analyst (who refrains from judging, because s/he is a relativist and/or a decisionist). The disconnection between lay and professional morality is part of a dualistic and disjunctive approach that does not integrate, but opposes facts to values.

The problem with this fact/value distinction, and the cascade of dualisms that derives from it: "is/ought, reason/emotion, science/ideology, science/ethics, positive/normative, objectivity/subjectivity" (Sayer, 2011: 30)– is a double one: It leads not only to an "expulsion of values from science", but also, though less noticed, to an "expulsion of science or reason from values" (Sayer, 2011: 28; 2005: 214).^{xv} If moral sociology, as an explicit continuation of moral philosophy by other means, is to be possible as a field of descriptive ethics, it has to actively deconstruct the oppositions and reconnect science to values and values to reason. The expulsion of values from science through axiological cleansing is ill-conceived from the very beginning. Science is anything, but value-free. By this I do not mean that science is a "free-for-all", but with (i) critical theory, (ii) phenomenology and (iii) ordinary language philosophy, I want to argue that science, perception and description are shot through with values.

(i) As an exercise in reflexive critical sociology, I want, first, to point out with *critical theorists* (like Horkheimer, Marcuse and Habermas) that the value-free conception of science is itself one of the central planks of the "scientist" worldview of traditional theory ("science as ideology") and that this interventionist, pragmatic and instrumentalist conception of knowledge ("science as technology and ideology") is typically Western and typically modern, even if it by now has become universal. The separation of science and common sense - *science et conscience*, to speak like Edgar Morin – marks an epoch and a civilization. The systematic application of science and technology modifies the ethical substance of the life-world and destroys traditional values. By cloaking the "domination" of nature and the concomitant destruction of traditional values in the neutral language of science and technology, "which has to be recognized by a Chinese as correct" (Weber, 1988a: 155), the positivist can disguise his techno-logical vision of the world as a universal one. "In affirming that he only seeks the truth for its own sake, the scientist is therefore not so much lying as pledging allegiance to the flag of truth, while saying nothing about the country for which it stands" (Gouldner, 1973; 65).

(ii) With *phenomenologists* (like Husserl, Heidegger and Scheler), we can show, moreover, that the "extraction" of values from the "natural worldview" and the imposition of a "naturalist worldview" to substitute it, can hardly be considered neutral. The conjunction of naturalism and positivism that characterizes the scientific worldview dehumanizes the world and strips it of its *Eigenvalues*. When Weber implores the scientist not to impose his or her own values on the world, he forgets that the constitution of the world is always and already an axiological affair. His demand to remove values from science is contingent on, and comes after, his own removal of values from the life-world! Before we even perceive the world, we value it, and it is because we value it, that we can perceive it. There is no perception (*Wahrnehmung*) without valuation (*Wertnehmung*) or, to shift from Max Scheler (1980) to Axel Honneth (2005), no cognition (*Erkennung*) without recognition (*Anerkennung*) of principles, norms and values.

(iii) With *neo-Wittgensteinian philosophers* (like Winch and Louch) and *ethnomethodologists* (like Garfinkel, Jayyusi and Rawls), we could, finally, easily make the case that scientific facts are not only "theory-laden", but also "value-laden". The

description and the valuation of facts are not two distinct operations, but they merge into each other. Values are not just regulative, they are constitutive of the very fact that is observed and described. When we describe an action as an action of a certain sort (e.g. a promise, a threat) or when we use “thick concepts” and say that it is performed “poorly” or “successfully”, we do not first describe and then judge, but it is by judging them that we describe and identify them as actions of a certain sort, namely as “performances”, that is as “actions which can only be identified as appropriate, felicitous, or successful” (Louch, 1966: 233). These are value-judgments, to be sure, but they are also descriptive. Moreover, in certain morally-loaded cases, a neutral description of events is not only immoral, but also descriptively inadequate. Consider the famous example of Isaiah Berlin (quoted by Bhaskar, 1979: 75) and compare the following account of what happened in Nazi Germany: “Thousands died in the Nazi concentration camps” and “Thousands were systematically exterminated in the Nazi concentration camps”. While both statements are true, the last and most evaluative is also the best and most adequate. The problem with Weber’s demoralizing position is that it does not allow one to call things and events by their name.

The doctrine of value-neutrality does not only imply the expulsion of science from values, but also, to quote Andrew Sayer (2011: 30) once again, the “expulsion of values from reason”. For Weber, values are merely subjective and arbitrary; they cannot be defended in an objective and impartial way. One can impose one’s values and one’s worldview by force, ruse and persuasion, but not by practical reason, rational argumentation, reference to natural law, moral sentiments, sense of justice or a mix of these. With the death of God, all moral systems of the past (theological, teleological, deontological, consequentialist, etc.) have been crucified as well. For our stern scientist, values are like colours and tastes. One likes them or not, but one cannot argue that green is nicer than blue (as I think it is) or that rice is better than *feijão* (actually, combined they are better). One can rationally argue about means, but never about ends. Ends or like Gods, Demons and football teams— they have to be chosen.

There’s no need here to rehearse Weber’s well known pathetic statements about the “polytheism of values” and the “eternal fights between the Gods”. Any sociologist is supposed to know by now the relevant quotes from *Science as a Vocation* (Weber, 1988c) or the objectivity article (Weber, 1988a) and if they have some knowledge of

philosophy, they won’t have any difficulties to connect Weber’s heroic, manly and lonely stand on values to Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* and his flippant appeal to the Overman in the *Zarathustra*.

For Weber, any appeal to practical reason, moral justification and normative foundation is suspicious. The struggle between the Gods cannot be moderated by Man. The idea that values can actually coexist, that relativism can be overcome or tempered, that the diversity of values and value system can be accommodated in a pluralist and multiculturalist framework, that the clash of values, like the clash of civilizations, is not inevitable, that even in modernity, there are some basic principles (like pluralism) that are universally valid, that agonism and antagonism are not the only possibilities, that we should search for unity at a higher level of abstraction, that the search for an ‘overlapping consensus’ between encompassing doctrines should be encouraged, that peace, not struggle should be the final word, none of these positions are seriously entertained by Weber. If he’s so tortured and bedevilled, at the end of the day, it is, no doubt, because he has trapped himself in a radical, extreme and unsustainable position.

Like the man himself, his work is full of tensions, antinomies and paradoxes. One of the paradoxes of Weber’s work is that the reader remembers exactly those passages where he takes an explicit stand and affirms his values. Without his moral judgments his work would definitely be more boring – as boring and soporific, perhaps, as some of his more encyclopedic entries in *Economy and Society*. Another, more perverse paradox is that Weber does not really mean what he says. He does plead for a neutral science, but, deep down, he’s against it. A grey, bureaucratic science would only contribute to the “petrification of the spirit” he deplores and place one more bar in the iron-cage. If he makes prophesies, it is because he wants them to be refuted. His self-refuting anti-prophetic prophesies are part of a “heuristics of fear”. The last paradox is that by arguing against the intermingling of fact and values, Weber himself commits the “naturalistic fallacy” and gets trapped into one more performative contradiction.^{xvi} Against “Hume’s law”, according to which one cannot derive ought from is, values from facts, imperatives from descriptions, the naturalistic fallacy he uses as the premise of an argument itself commits the fallacy. Instead of getting continuously trapped in the strings of theory/practice, theory/theory and practice/practice inconsistencies, would it not be better to shelve value neutrality? Not to transform moral sociology into political partisanship, for sure, but to develop a better, more consistent and less tortured moral

sociology. To do moral sociology better not by arbitrarily disconnecting it from, but by actively reconnecting it to, its origins in practical and moral philosophy.

Practical Philosophy

In *La sociologie comme philosophie politique et réciproquement*, from which I derived the title of my own article, Philip Chanial (2011) pleads for the development of a general social theory that would “retotalize” and “renormatize” the social sciences.^{xvii} To counter the fragmentation and Balkanization of the social sciences into a myriad of specialized disciplines, he pleads for a new synthesis of sociology with moral and political philosophy.^{xviii} In the lineage of Marcel Mauss and also in cooperation with Alain Caillé, with whom he edits the *Revue du MAUSS*, he launches a strong critique of utilitarianism in its different variants (from classical political economy to contemporary rational choice).^{xix} As a paradigmatic alternative to the hegemony of economic approaches in the social sciences, he proposes a Maussian anthropology of the gift, which he recodes as a political sociology of associations and enhances it with significant borrowings from contemporary moral and political philosophy (Dewey, Habermas, Honneth, Ricoeur among others). The result is a “normative anthropology that would have the trappings of science” (Caillé, *apud* Chanial, 2011: 12). It aims to “revive the two categorical imperatives of the sociological investigation of the Ancients: to grasp, against every form of reductionism, Man in his unity; to interrogate the ends that we collectively want to assign to social life and, thus, to judge socio-historical forms of interhuman relations and types of humanity – *Menschentum* as Weber would say” (id., 13).

I fully subscribe to this project of a normative anthropology and political sociology, but to properly ground it, I reckon we do not only need to rethink sociology as a moral philosophy (and *vice versa*), but also as a practical philosophy (and *vice versa*). The two are related, but to the extent that moral philosophy presupposes an actor who deliberates and evaluates, practical philosophy comes first. By *practical philosophy*, I want to refer to the whole gamut of normative disciplines (especially philosophical ethics, politics, and law, but also psychology, economics, anthropology and sociology) that consciously continue the Aristotelian, Kantian and Hegelian traditions of moral philosophy and

investigate how the validity of norms of human action (What should we do?) and the determination of ends (How should we live?) can be rationally grounded and find their social instantiation in collectively shared principles, norms and values.

If we define practical philosophy, generically understood, as the totality of human disciplines that investigate practices, with Aristotle, as teleologically oriented actions that imply the simultaneous rational determination of means and ends (*phronesis*); with Kant, as deontologically motivated actions that follow maxims that satisfy the condition of objectivity, universality and freedom (*praktische Vernunft*) and, with Hegel, as axiological principles that find their actualization in social institutions and practices (*Sittlichkeit*), we can include economics, sociology and anthropology within its remit and conceive of the “social sciences as practical reason” (Bellah, 1982).^{xx} As practical philosophy is neither theory (*theoria*), nor art (*techne*), but practical knowledge (*praxis*), i.e. knowledge that is directly involved in the rational determination and execution of a course of action within a situation of uncertainty and within a context of justification, every theory of society that is grounded in a conception social action that does not exclude the determination of ends and does not reduce action to instrumental or strategic action, can be considered as a formalization of common knowledge and, therefore, as a form of practical sociology.^{xxi}

The internal connection between practical knowledge and the execution of action that characterizes the object of the praxeological disciplines implies that action has the following features: reflexivity, intentionality, normativity and humanity. Reflexivity or the capacity of the subject to consider him- or herself as an object in thought (internal conversations); intentionality, or the teleological implication of reflection as a moment in the constitution of the act as an act of a certain type; normativity or the justification of the act through reference to evaluative discourses (“accounts”) that motivate (“motives”) and direct (“ends”) it, and humanity or the vital relation (Dilthey’s *Wirkungszusammenhang*) between part and whole that connects the individual to the larger community (ideally and counterfactually the largest community which is identical to the ‘universe of discourse’) of which s/he’s a living part— together, those four references involved in the constitution of social actions as moral actions give a dynamic quality to the practices.

Thanks to practical knowledge and practical reason, the connection between social action, order and change guarantees that the dialectics between agency and structure, freedom and constraint, never comes to a standstill. "Practical reason, says Ricoeur (1986: 285), is the whole of measures taken by individuals and institutions to preserve or to restore the mutual dialectics between freedom and institutions without which there is no meaningful action". To impress the dynamic impact of practical knowledge, I can now conclude and redefine practical philosophy as the totality of disciplines that investigate everything that can be changed by means of transformative actions and practices and practical sociology as the humanist investigation and application of reflexive, intentional, normative social actions that aim to transform the self, culture, and society.^{xxii}

In accordance with this morphogenetic perspective on the transformation of self, culture and society at large (Vandenberghe, 2014: 67-84), we can now ask a fundamental anthropological question and ground Chanial's normative anthropology in some distinctive human capabilities: "What kind of animals are human beings? How can we describe their peculiar characteristics in a way that might improve, or at least enlarge, our understanding of human social action and institutions" (Smith, 2003: 3).

The question of human nature is no doubt a difficult one – it is indeed, as Charles Taylor (1988: vii) astutely observed, both "terribly necessary" and "unbearably problematic". To avoid the traps of essentialism (speciesism, anthropocentrism, logocentrism, etc.), I propose to define the human being as a being who is, by nature, a cultural being, endowed with an inbuilt capacity for continuous self-transformation. In accordance with Aristotle's classic definition of the human as a being endowed with speech and a capacity to reason (*zoon echon logon*, translated by the Romans as *animal rationale*), I'd like to stress the constitutive and transformative powers of culture, language and practice and suggest that, together, they form the ontological triad of the Spirit (*Geist*), which distinguishes the natural world from the human world. By stressing the constitutive powers of the Spirit, I do not want to deny that the natural world is a human world and that the human world is also a natural world (see Morin, 2008 on this). My argument is, rather, that if one wants to understand what makes the human world a human world, and by implication the human sciences human sciences, one cannot ignore the multiple inter- and intrarelations between culture, language and

practices that constitute human beings, who, as practical subjects, constitute, thanks to the mediation of culture and language, and, thanks to the symbolic practices, continuously transform the self, culture and society that makes them human.

If I allow myself this elementary digression, it is because I want to conceive of the social sciences as human sciences and the human sciences as moral sciences. *Geisteswissenschaften*, literally sciences of the Spirit, is how in 1847 Schiel translated John Stuart Mill's moral sciences into German.^{xxiii} Mill's *Logic of the Moral Sciences* became *Logik der Geisteswissenschaften*. As it moved from England (Mill) via Paris (Comte) to Berlin (Dilthey), the term lost all the naturalist, positivist, empiricist, utilitarian and individualist qualities that the younger Mill had given to it. In the hands of the Germans, who revitalized the human sciences through injection of a good dose of speculative idealism, the *Geisteswissenschaften* became increasingly associated with opposite features: humanism, historicism, idealism, hermeneutics and holism are distinctive of the German moral, historical and cultural sciences. While the notion of *Geist* has the advantage of maintaining its connection with a social-historical understanding of culture, broadly understood, as the totality of objectifications of human experience (Dilthey's *Erlebnis*) in a transpersonal sphere of common significations, valuations and expressions, it also contains the risk of a contamination with an idealist speculative philosophy of history that finds its culmination in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. To divert the risk and divest the *Geisteswissenschaften* from their heavy metaphysical ballast, one has to eliminate Hegelian and Marxist macro-teleology of History altogether and limit oneself to the micro-teleologies of the multiple histories of transformative social action.

By means of such a self-limitation, the *Geisteswissenschaften* renounce the gospel of the Absolute Spirit and rejoin the neo-Kantian movement of the *Kulturwissenschaften* of Dilthey, Simmel, Weber and, closer to us, Cassirer, Gadamer, Ricoeur and Habermas. The perspective of the social sciences as cultural, moral and practical sciences that have followed the collapse of absolute idealism (1831-1933) and historical materialism (1842-1989) is that of "post-Hegelian neo-Kantianism", to borrow a counterintuitive but brilliant category of Paul Ricoeur (1986: 279 and 305).^{xxiv}

For a social theory that remains indebted to the tradition of the *Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften* and self-consciously continues it as moral and practical philosophy, sociology becomes the science of the Objective Spirit, that is of the totality of vital expressions, normative understandings and cultural significations of human beings, from language, religion and science to political, artistic and economic works, which can be understood as sedimentations of collective intentionalities into autonomous cultural formations. Being at the same time expressions of organized social groups and autonomous cultural whole that follow their own logic, the formations of the Objective Spirit are properly social and logical, hence, socio-logical (Dilthey, 1979: 135-136).

In the French tradition, we find the same idea, but under a different name. For Durkheim, Mauss and Fauconnet, sociology is "the science of institutions, of their genesis and functioning" (Durkheim, 1987: xxii). With Mauss and Fauconnet, but no doubt also with Marx and Weber, we can understand institutions as "instituted wholes of acts and ideas that individuals find before them and that impose themselves more or less on them" (Mauss and Fauconnet, 1969: 17). As expression and sedimentation of "collective habits" (id., 10), they embody "the spirit" of collectives (ibid.) and orient the practices by prescribing "collective ways of thinking, feeling and acting" that are in conformity with the common values of the collective and its members.^{xxv} To the extent that institutions are above all made of social representations – "institutions only exist in representations" (id.) – they should not be conceived of as inert forces, but as active symbolic forms that represent society to its members and mediate its formative influence to them by structuring their practices from within. Against Durkheim, we should therefore insist that individuals do not confront institutions "from without"; rather, with Mauss, we should underscore that institutions live within people and that institutions only live because there are people who activate and animate them in the pursuit of ordinary life.^{xxvi} Institutions are the living junction between the individuals and society and, as such, they represent the outside within (intimate alterity). "In this sense, one could say that sociology is a psychology" (id., 26). The constitutive linkage between representations (both collective and individual) and practices (both individual and collective) is what keeps the dialectics alive. Underneath of the representations there are practices; within practices, there are representations, and underneath of both we find the experience of life itself.

To establish the continuity between moral sociology, the human-cultural sciences and the tradition of practical philosophy, I will now make a "praxeological turn" and conceive of institutions as normative sets of habitual, rule-governed social practices that produce (reproduce and transform) society in accordance with the principles, values and norms of collectively shared forms of life.^{xxvii} As sets of collective habits that prescribe and proscribe social practices as morally right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust, institutions cannot exist without cultural conceptions of the social order or without certain self-understandings that are at once human, cultural and personal. "There's always a pre-theoretical understanding of what is going on among the members of society, which is formulated in the descriptions of self and other which are involved in the institutions and practices of society. A society is among other things a set of institutions and practices, and these cannot exist and be carried on without certain self-understandings" (Taylor, 1985, II: 93). Cultural understandings of society and of the self are mutually implicated in, and constituted by, regular practices that connect the self to society and the individual to humanity as part to whole. Mediated by symbolic representations of society concerning what is just ("just for all") and what is good ("good for me"), practices are both social and individual, collective and personal, universal and particular and also, as practices gear into the outer world, spiritual and material. If normative conceptions of self and society are causally efficacious, it is because they regulate from within the teleological actions of individuals by representing them from without symbolic representations of the good life and the good society.

The Good Life With and for Others in Just Institutions

In this final section, I want to argue that our contemporary moral horizon is constituted by a variety of strands and strata of moral philosophy that are inherited from the past, yet propose scripts of possible lives in the future that are still active in the present. It is "as if every time a stratum came to be added to the one that precedes it, and that progresses in the direction of an increasing differentiation and synthesis" (Dilthey, 1979: 169). To make my case, I will offer a rather quick overview of the history of moral philosophy within the Western tradition (due to incompetence, I will have to forfeit any discussion about non-Western moral philosophies). Given that I am looking for materials that can help me to furbish a positive anthropology in the anti-utilitarian tradition, this overview will necessarily be selective, not to say partial.^{xxviii} In any case, I

will argue that our current moral intuitions consist of a mixture of classical teleological conceptions of eudemonia (the “good life”), Judeo-Christian ethics of love, care and solicitude (“with and for others”) and modern deontological conceptions of justice (“in just institutions”). Drawing once again on Paul Ricoeur’s incredible talent to compact complex materials into a mnemonic phrase, I will characterize our moral horizon in terms of a “*visée* of the good life with and for others in just institutions” (Ricoeur, 1990: 199-236, here p. 202).^{xxix} To unpack that phrase and show what Weber consciously eliminated from his purview, I will look at Aristotle’s eudemonian ethics (*phronesis*), Augustine’s conception of love (*agape*) and the Scottish Enlightenment secular conception of benevolence (sympathy), Kant’s categorical imperative and Hegel’s system of morals (*Sittlichkeit*).

“*The good life*”: The idea that the social sciences continue the tradition of practical and moral philosophy as a normative anthropology and sociology may be unseasonable, but as Bellah usefully reminds us, not so long ago, “most of what we now call the social sciences was actually taught, so far as it was taught at all, under the headings of moral philosophy” (Bellah et al., 1985: 299). This was possible, because, until Nietzsche and Weber declared ends and values off limits, it was thought that social science not only submits the means, but also the ends themselves, to a rational reflection. Although it is no longer common to treat Plato and Aristotle as early sociologists, a return to the Ancients is worth the while, not for the sake of mere erudition, however, but as philosophical prolegomenon to moral sociology.

Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* is really a theory of action that reflexively articulates practices to a life project that is regulated by moral character (*hexis*) and practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and aims at the realization of a virtuous, good and happy life: Being good by doing well. Practical knowledge intervenes in this life project not as *episteme* (science or theoretical knowledge), nor as *techne* (art or technical know-how), but precisely as a rational deliberation about the relation between ends and means that directs the practices towards its final end: happiness or *eudemonia*.

For Aristotle, happiness is not transitory, but permanent; it is not a state, but a practice that implies a successful merger of moral virtue (*hexis*) and intellectual virtue (*phronesis*) in a way of life – “But we must add: in a complete life, for one swallow does not make a summer...” (1098a, 10-15). Virtues, like courage, moderation,

generosity and justice, are not given by nature, however, but acquired through exercise and training. It is by doing the right thing with the right motive in the right way, without excess and without deficit, that one becomes virtuous, that virtue becomes an ingrained disposition and sediments in a state of character. Moral excellence as a state of character is the result of virtuous practices – “for we are ourselves somehow partly responsible for our state of character” (1114b 20-25) – but it is also a condition, because we become virtuous through habit. It is through cultivation of the moral virtues by practice, by continuously doing good and acting well, and by exercising the intellectual virtue of prudence, by deliberating well about the right ends and the means of action for the sake of becoming good that, eventually, when all is said and done, the person will be good and virtuous and, therefore, happy.

Unlike the Ancients, we, moderns, no longer believe in the existence of a cosmic order that sustains our quest for the good and beautiful life. Of necessity, we’ve become pluralists; by default, we’ve become (almost) post-metaphysical and relinquished comprehensive doctrines. We no longer think that there’s only one right course of action that leads to the good life. That does not mean that we’re nihilists and that all choices are arbitrary. Only that we can not impose our particular conception of the good life and the good society on everybody without courting paternalism or authoritarianism. The emergence of neo-Aristotelianism and the debate concerning virtues, internal goods and excellence in the writings of Arendt, Gadamer, MacIntyre, Spaemann and Nussbaum show, though, that the idea of human flourishing has not lost its appeal. What remains of *phronesis* in post-metaphysical times in pluralist societies with competing comprehensive worldviews is a narrative and normative conception of identity as an unending quest for authenticity (Ferrara, 1994).

“*With and for the others*”: In Aristotle, the good life is not a solitary one. “For without friends, no one would choose to live” (1155a 5-10). Man is indeed a political animal and friendship (*philia*) is a virtue too. Thanks to the presence of the other, subjectivity turns into intersubjectivity and the question of identity opens up to difference and alterity. In Augustine, the other becomes the Other. Those who search happiness in this life and in themselves will not find it, however. Love and life are systematically devalued. What counts is faith. The true believer is only a pilgrim on earth journeying on to eternal life in the City of God. “The final end or supreme good of this city is either

peace in eternal life, or eternal life in peace" (Augustine, 1971b: XIX, 11). Human life is a trial. The peace we find down here is only a "solace of our misery" (id., XIX, 27). The only real love is love of God, for God and in God. At best, the love we feel for our neighbor is love of the divine and the eternal in Man, whom He created; at worst, it is concupiscence and sin.

Unlike his ancient forebears, who valued *philia* and *eros*, Augustine only loves and values what God loves. Although scholars of the Bible and the Torah will, no doubt, be able to indicate genuine justifications and descriptions of neighbourly love (*caritas*, *agape*) in Judeo-Christian theology, I have the impression that one will almost always find the fraternal element enshrined and nested in the paternal element which commands the ascent of the soul and the openness towards the other too.^{xxx} What one gets from the religious tradition, however, and especially from Augustine, is the emphasis on inwardness and intimacy, reflection and meditation. In his *Confessions*, a prose-poem of love addressed to God, the turn inwards leads upwards. "You are more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element within me. [...] What is inward is superior" (Augustine, 1971a: III.vii.11 and X.vi 9). For the Bishop of Hippo, the internal conversation is not a conversation with others. It is not communication but communion. Similarly, it is not a conversation, but a conversion into God.

To find investigations of intersubjectivity that extend the classic treatments of friendship of Aristotle, Cicero and the Stoics and that are not mediated by the Other, I will now turn to the Scottish Enlightenment, incidentally one of the most neglected ancestor traditions of sociology, and to its analysis of benevolence. In the proto-sociology of Hutcheson and Ferguson, but above all in Hume and Adam Smith, one can find systematic explanations of human sociality and rich empirical investigations of civil society that foreground the role of moral sentiments, like sympathy, compassion, care, tact and other tender feelings that capture well our current intuitions about what it means to be with and for the others. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith develops a theory of society that is not grounded in action nor in passion, but in observation of one's self and the others. His basic idea, which influenced Charles Horton Cooley, Georg Herbert Mead and of which one can still find echoes in John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*, is that an action becomes moral when the actors decenter their gaze so as to watch, see and judge themselves through the eyes of others. The

desire to love, to be loveable, to please and to become what one approves of instigates the subject to become oneself thanks to the other. The opening up to the other in thought, but also in action, is the distinctive mark of sympathy. By judging oneself as one would like to be judged by others, thus through the detour of a benevolent other (the so-called "impartial observer"), one becomes moral and virtuous: "No action can properly be called virtuous, which is not accompanied with the sentiment of self-approbation" (Smith, 1976: III, 6-13). Thanks to the mechanism of sentimental decentering, one can better understand what motivates actors to go out of themselves to care about or communicate with others.

It may be somewhat surprising to look for a foundation of anti-utilitarianism in Adam Smith, the founder of classical economics. But the idea that self-interest and the market presuppose the interest for others that are proper to civil society where men and women encounter each other to talk to and communicate with each other is one of the guiding ideas not only of the Scottish Enlightenment, but also of the French and German traditions in sociology. Understood as moral science, sociology investigates the moral preconditions of market and exchange – the "pre-contractual basis of contract", as Durkheim (1986: 177-209) says in one of the foundational texts of sociology – and develops the idea that human interdependence and the moral ties of civil society sustain the market and the state. Underneath of society (*Gesellschaft*), there's community (*Gemeinschaft*). Underneath of exchange, we find the gift. Underneath of self-interest and power, there's reciprocity and generosity. With the morality of reciprocity, we are touching "one of the human rocks on which our societies are built" (Mauss, 1989: 148). Social life among anonymous citizens is only possible because of the moral ties that bind the members of society with and for each other into a community of solidarity. Contra Hobbes, but with the Scottish Enlightenment, we can, thus, conceive of morality as constitutive of community and constitute sociology as an anti-utilitarian moral philosophy that grounds the common good in sympathy, reciprocity and sociability.

In just institutions: The moral *visée* of leading a good life with and for the others cannot be limited to the small community of fellows, but from the self via the others, it has to expand its reach and tend towards universality. Thanks to the encounter with the others who are part of a community of reciprocity and solidarity, the teleological ethics of authenticity and self-realization with and for others finds its logical extension in a

deontological ethics of autonomy and self-determination. Through inclusion of the anonymous other – the “faceless citizen” - the fraternal ties of the community get loosened, but also extended in a society that guarantees, at least in principle, freedom and equality and, therefore, justice, to all. Following the intentional arc of morality that connects the life projects of the individual to the life of the community and beyond, we thus arrive at the idea of a well ordered society with just institutions without social exclusion.

In Kant's moral philosophy, one finds the most rigorous formulation of the deontological or imperative vision of the just that characterizes modern morality. For Kant, morality has nothing to do with the search for happiness, nor with utility or moral sentiments, but everything with the subordination of the will to a law that is universally valid. One acts morally when one acts out of duty, both towards oneself and towards the others, and “out of respect for the law” (*aus Achtung fürs Gesetz* -Kant, 1983: BA14). Kant's criterion of universality is a formal and procedural one. It does not say what an actor must do, but enjoins him or her to follow maxims (i.e. subjective rules of action) which are not subjective, but objective, not empirical but a priori and which one has to respect always and without exception. The first formulation of the categorical imperative: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction” (BA52) clearly indicates that an action is only moral when its justification passes the test of universality. While the first formulation characterizes the principle of morality, the second and the third formulations determine respectively its end and its destination. The second formulation: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end” (BA 67) is derived from the first formulation and connects universality to the humanity of the other and the dignity of each and every person. Changing the perspective from an actor who follows the law to one who legislates for all possible rational beings, the third formulation: “Every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends” (BA 76) relates universality to autonomy and the ideal of self-determination. Together, the three formulations of the categorical imperative introduce with force the principle (universality), the end (humanity) and the ideal (autonomy) of morality into the normative discourse of modernity.

In his critique of Kant, Hegel argued that Kantian morality presupposes social institutions that incorporate the idea of universality and social actors that put it into practice and thereby realize it. With an objective morality (*Sittlichkeit*) that is institutionalized and practiced, subjective morality (*Moralität*) remains powerless, abstract, unreal. Without Spirit, “the form that right takes on as duty and as law is experienced as dead and cold letter and as a fetter” (Hegel, 1970: 19). Even if the individuals are, in theory, recognized as authors of the law, they do not recognize themselves as such. Even if freedom is formally recognized as a principle, it is not lived and experienced as such. Without backing from social institutions like the family, civil society and the state that sustain moral norms and transform them into lived practices, without concrete customs that substantiate in practice the principles that reason prescribes, morality hangs in the air. It is only in when morality becomes habitual and practical that it becomes real. Three hundred years after Kant's practical philosophy and Hegel's philosophy of rights, the modern principles of universality, humanity and autonomy have found their realization and institutionalization in the defense of human rights. What was only a Declaration in 1789 (*Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*) has now become a concrete reality – to the point that when their rights are infringed and human beings are not recognized as human beings and citizens, they take to the streets to protest and claim their rights.

Now that we have discussed the individual, interpersonal and societal dimensions of morality as they are institutionalized in Western civilization, we can better understand the normative horizon that informs the transformative social practices of the present. Composed of multiple stands and strata of the past, the modern and post-modern horizon spans the whole distance that separates the ancient *maxima moralia* of human perfection from the current *minima moralia* of human rights. With their longing for authenticity, their feelings of sympathy and their discourses of human rights, contemporary actors aspire to be at the same time fully human, compassionately humane and idiosyncratically personal. Sociologically, these aspirations to transform oneself, the community one belongs to and the world at large can be recoded as normative scripts and read as personal practices. Reciprocally, one can also understand sociology as a script and practice that seeks to elucidate who we are as actors, what we are as society and where we want to go as humanity.

Conclusion

The philosophical assumptions that organize normative sociology as practical and moral philosophy are the outcome of a secular quest to investigate the principles, norms and values behind the constitution of society. As a protracted response to the whole utilitarian-atomistic-individualistic tradition that systematically deemphasizes the constitutive role that culture in general and morality in particular play in the structuration of self and society, the sociological tradition has continued, by its own means, in theoretically informed empirical research of social practices, the quest for a good, just and well ordered society of interacting and interrelated individuals who act together in concert to produce, reproduce or transform the social order they are part of. From Comte to Mauss and Boltanski, from Marx to Habermas and Honneth, from Hume to Mead and Parsons, the main traditions of generalising social theory have sought to recover the moral ground of social action, order and change. Through an explicit dialogue with Kant, Hegel, Marx and, oftentimes, also Nietzsche, through a creative fusion of social theory and moral philosophy, they have sought to recover parts of the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy that Hobbes, Bentham and Mill had rejected. Meanwhile, as Donald Levine (1995) has shown in his dialogical reconstruction of the national traditions of sociology, most of the assumptions that informed the Aristotelian philosophy were recovered one by one in post-Hobbesian social theory. Now that moral sociology is on the ascendant, perhaps, the time has come to take stock of our heritage and reformate social theory as a practice and a way of life. It is high time to relinquish false interpretations of our scientific practices. As if we could erase the ground we're standing on. By becoming conscious of the traditions we stand in and continue, who knows?, we can also change them and our self conceptions. By rethinking social theory as a collective practice, we thus return it to where it comes from: society, but now it is understood as a project of progressive humanization of its institutions and its practices.

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ⁱ This article is based on a trilogy of post-graduate courses I have taught at the Institute of Social and Political Studies (IESP-UERJ) in Rio de Janeiro: "Sociology as Practical Philosophy (and vice versa)" [2012]; "Sociology as Moral Philosophy (and vice versa)" [2013] and "Sociology as Political Philosophy (and vice versa)" [2014]. The article was commissioned by and published in Portuguese in the journal *Sociologias* of Porto Alegre. I have presented the first part of the text as a lecture to the department of sociology of the University of Hyderabad in October 2015. I am grateful to V. Janardhan, Purendra Prasad and Mark Lindley for their precious observations. Last but not least, I thank Aparna Rayaprol, the acting head of the department, for giving me the opportunity to publish this text as a Working Paper.

ⁱⁱ The recent publication of a *Handbook in Moral Sociology* (Hitlin and Vaisey, 2013) and *A Companion to Moral Anthropology* (Fassin, 2012) shows a concerted effort to bring back ethics into the fold of the social sciences.

ⁱⁱⁱ Like much of the literature, I use the terms morality and ethics interchangeably. While ethics has Greek origins, morals has Latin ones, with Aristotle's offering a bridge between both. In the *Nikomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 1979: 1103 a 17) ἔθος refers to habits, character, folkways, mores, hence morals, and has a more collective and social orientation; ἠθός (with a long e) to ethics, hence to morality, and has a personal and subjective dimension. In common usage, morality carries overtones of moralism, while ethics evokes personal deliberation and subjective responsibility. Hegel's distinction between abstract morality (*Moralität*) and concrete ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) overlaps with the former distinction, but does not correspond to it. Greek ethics is all about the cultivation of virtues and not about categorical imperatives and universal norms, which is an heritage of Stoicism, Christianity and Kantianism.

^{iv} There are so few publications on moral sociology in the second half of the twentieth century that they can easily be mentioned in a footnote. In France, there was Gurvitch, 1968; Isambert, Ladrière and Terrenoire, 1978; Isambert, 1982; Ladrière, 2001; in the USA, Haan, Bellah, Rabinow and Sullivan (1983) tried to revive normative inquiry, but to no avail. One had to wait for a renaissance in moral and political philosophy in the 1980's (Rawls, the debate between liberalism and communitarianism, etc.) before sociology would put morality back on its research agenda. For a state of the art of moral philosophy, see Canto-Sperber, 1996 (with 250 collaborators and 1700 pages, spread over 2 columns)

^v The resounding success of "public sociology" (see Burawoy, 2005 and the multiple books on the subject) suggests that it is easier to break down the boundary between academia and activism than that between sociology and philosophy.

^{vi} Sociology is born as a social philosophy, according to François Dubet (2009: 15) and, overstating his case, he adds, as "a theology of society" (id.: 8). While Comte undoubtedly saw himself as a high priest of society and conceived of sociology as a "sociolatry", this cannot be said of the other classics. This being granted, Dubet shows that sociologists are not just analysts of society, but their promoters too. Similarly, society is not only a social object to be investigated, it is also a moral and modern project that aims to bring into existence a society of individuals, based on the recognition of common values of equality, liberty and solidarity.

^{vii} The analogy could be extended to religion (and politics), but perhaps with a notable axiological difference: Whereas most sociologist of religion (or politics) would argue that a sociology of religion is not a religious (or political) sociology, moral sociologists would contend that moral sociology is tied to a normative position and would do their best to make it explicit. One should not, however, identify moral sociology to a moralising one, but to a normative-descriptive division of general sociology.

^{viii} Pharo (2004) makes a similar distinction, but organizes his traditions differently. He distinguishes socio-cultural theories of morality (Durkheim, Parsons, Bourdieu, Berger and Luckmann) from action theories (Weber, Garfinkel, Habermas and Boltanski). As I want to develop moral sociology as a

cultural sociology of action, I have no qualms to put Durkheim, Weber, Parsons, Garfinkel, Habermas and Boltanski in the same basket.

^{ix} For sympathetic readings of Max Weber that underplay the strong Nietzschean tenor in his work, see Schluchter, 1991, I: Part 2 and Sell, 2013.

^x "Norm, principles and values" is shorthand I use to refer to normative propositions of all sorts: principles, norms, imperatives, morals, manners, customs, maxims, rules, values, virtues, beliefs and even sentiments, etc. It would take an analytic philosopher and, therefore, a lifetime, to sort them out, spell them out and draw a complete map of their interrelations.

^{xi} "It was as though morality suddenly stood revealed in the original meaning of the word, as a set of mores, customs and manners, which could be exchanged for another set with hardly more trouble than it would take to change the table manners of an individual or a people" (Arendt, 1994: 740).

^{xii} Someone might object: "You could have submitted the Western canon to a post-colonial critique". If I emphasize Western culture, however, it is simply because I have insufficient knowledge of other cultures and their philosophical systems.

^{xiii} Nathalie Heinich's (2006) passionate plea for "a science of morals that would not be a moral sociology" continuously invokes Weber, but in a polemical vein, to attack her opponents in the field. The distinction between the values of the analyst and those of the actors is merely analytical and breaks down as soon one analyses the sociologist not as a scientist, but as an actor engaged in a scientific field of struggle.

^{xiv} For a dialectical investigation and resolution of Theory-Practice or T/P inconsistencies, see Bhaskar, 1993: chapter 2.

^{xv} In Weber, the double expulsion of values and their reduction to mere sentiments and affects goes together with an expulsion of emotions from reason and their consequent reduction to expressions of preference or attitude. Contra Weber and his fellow emotivists, Barbalet (2001:29-61) argues that emotions can be rational and demonstrates that the operation of instrumental reason presupposes the work of "background emotions" (like satisfaction in one's work, pride in one's skills, etc.).

^{xvi} A contradiction is performative when it occurs not between enunciations, but between the enunciation and the enunciator. Typical examples are: "I was on the boat, the boat sank, no one survived". Also: "I affirm in an axiologically neutral way that one has to be axiologically neutral".

^{xvii} With "Social Theory as Practice", Charles Taylor (1981, republished in 1985, II: 91-115) may have started a trend, but with no less than three titles, Bellah is the champion of the variations on the same theme. See his "Sociology as Moral Inquiry" (Haan et al., 1983), "Sociology as Practical Reason" (1983), "Sociology as Public Philosophy" (Bellah et al. 1985).

^{xviii} For a converging attempt that also includes the 'Studies' in the new synthesis, see Caillé and Vandenberghe, forthcoming.

^{xix} The MAUSS, a clever acronym for *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales*/Anti-Utilitarian Movement in the Social Sciences, gathers anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, philosophers and heterodox economists who have a common interest in the gift, feel inspired by Mauss's seminal text and publish in the *Revue du MAUSS*. Alain Caillé, the founder of the MAUSS, is also the main theorist of the gift-paradigm. Programmatic and synthetic statements can be found in Caillé, 2005, 2009 and his forthcoming book.

^{xx} For a good exploration of neo-Aristotelian, neo-Kantian and post-Hegelian ethics, see Honneth, 2000: 171-192. For those who would question the possible inclusion of economics within practical philosophy, let me just remind that up till the Scottish Enlightenment economics was part – in fact, a minor one – of ethics and politics. The historical connection to Aristoteles explains why some of its most basic concepts, starting with the name of the discipline itself, but also “goods” (!), refer to the rational organization of the household (*oikos*) in the context of the search for the “good life” of its master as a precondition to participation in the public sphere. What holds for economics, holds *a fortiori* for anthropology and sociology.

^{xxi} In the preface to the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant (1983: BA VI-VIII) explicitly distinguishes a rational and an empirical part of ethics. He calls the rational part “moral philosophy” and the empirical part “practical anthropology”, and argues that to develop a moral philosophy as a pure metaphysics of morals the former has to be completely purified from any reference to the empirical. My whole argument in this article has been exactly the opposite: to develop moral sociology and anthropology as a practical philosophy, we need to overcome the separation between philosophy and science, the transcendental and the empirical, the normative and the descriptive.

^{xxii} Humanistics, as promoted, taught and practiced at the Dutch University for Humanist Studies, is a normative, empirical and applied human science within the progressive post-secular humanist tradition. Resolutely interdisciplinary (social sciences and humanities), it proposes to study the human being from a double perspective that is at once existential (it deals with human process of meaning-giving) and social (it aims to contribute to the humanization of the world). For more information, go to www.uvh.nl and visit the institution in Utrecht.

^{xxiii} Today, the term is still largely used in Germany (by the DAAD, for example) as a generic term that regroups some 40 different disciplines, from the theology, philosophy and the arts via psychology and history to anthropology and sociology, under a single heading. In English, the term is not retranslated as moral sciences, but as humanities. While the term captures well the essential connection to *Bildung* and *Bildungshumanismus* of the liberal arts, the French *sciences de l'homme* offers more promises for the development of general social theory as normative anthropology with a practical and moral intent.

^{xxiv} Configurations of ideas and philosophical systems also have their biographies: they are born, thrive and enter into coma, which does not exclude that they may come back to life and have an afterlife as it were. *Le mort saisit le vif*. The dates I've chosen for absolute idealism coincide with Hegel's birth and Hitler's seizure of power; for historical materialism with the publication of Marx's text on censorship in the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and the collapse of “really existing socialism” in Central Europe. The death of Marxist philosophy of history predates the fall of the Berlin Wall, but since then, at least in the Northern hemisphere, it has lost every credibility and is definitely no longer the “insuperable horizon of our times”.

^{xxv} Cf. Parsons's *Prolegomena to a Theory of Social Institutions*: “The function of institutions is always the same – the regulation of action in such a way as to keep it in relative conformity with the ultimate common values and value-attitudes of the community” (Parsons, 1990: 331).

^{xxvi} For a good exploration of the differences between Durkheim and his nephew, see Caillé, 27-44, esp. 33-39.

^{xxvii} The “practice turn” within contemporary sciences is associated in philosophy with the work of Heidegger, Wittgenstein and American pragmatism, in sociology with the work of Garfinkel, Giddens and Bourdieu. For a very insightful discussion of the ontology of practices in contemporary social theory, see Reckwitz, 2002. Within the practice turn, there's a moral turn (Taylor, Honneth, Jaeggi, Stahl) and sometimes even a return to the Aristotelean theory of practice and prudence (MacIntyre, Chris Smith, Flyvbjerg).

^{xxviii} Indeed, I will systematically leave out the consequentialist tradition. For a more comprehensive overview of moral and political philosophy from an anti-utilitarian perspective, see Caillé, Lazzeri and Sennelart, 2001.

^{xxix} In Honneth's (2000:133-170) triptych, one finds a similar reconstruction of contemporary moral philosophy: 1) neo-Aristotelian and neo-Hegelian strands of communitarianism (MacIntyre, Walzer, Honneth); 2) neo-Kantian liberalism (Habermas, Rawls) and 3) post-modern ethics of care (Lyotard, Derrida, Levinas). In passing, I observe that Ricoeur's catchphrase leaves out the visée of a sustainable environment, which is nowadays increasingly recognized with anxiety by increasing fractions of the population as a precondition of human survival and, therefore, also of the good life in and with nature in an ecologically sustainable form of life.

^{xxx} Even if there's something divine in love, I want to think love as “pure love”, as love between two persons that is not mediated by the Third Person (cf. Vandenberghe, 2006). While I am convinced that post-Husserlian phenomenology offers the best descriptive entry to the question, most of the analyses of other-directed feelings (love, compassion, solicitude, etc.) in contemporary phenomenology I know of, have theological overtones. This is not only true for phenomenologists in the Christian tradition (Scheler, Ricoeur, Marion, Henry), but also and even more so for those in the Jewish tradition (Buber, Levinas, Derrida, Benny Lévy).