Chapter 14
Paradigm Revived? Concluding Sketches of an Emerging Research Agenda

Jonas Toubøl and Anders Sevelsted

Abstract The concluding chapter of the book points to research agendas that have emerged from the contributions to the volume on movements and morality. It does not sum up each contribution, since an introduction to concepts, methods, and applications can be found in the introductory Chap. 1. Instead, the chapter identifies six lacunae in social movement studies that have become apparent in the pages of the book. A first lacuna is related to the bias in focus on left-wing groups, a second on the causal effects of morality, a third foundational lacuna pertains to the relationship between social science and moral philosophy, a fourth to how we perceive of morality and time, a fifth to the global diffusion of moral claims, and finally a sixth lacuna relates to reflections on the dilemma of universal moral claims versus particular identities and situations.

Keywords Causality of morality · Moral philosophy · Morality and time · Claim diffusion · Universalism and the local

This book set out to explore the link between morality and social movements in order to better understand the political struggles of our time that shape who we are and who we will become, struggles that encompass climate change, democracy and authoritarianism, and gender and reproductive rights, to name a few of the most pressing. Initially, we asked if morality constitutes a lost paradigm in social movement studies and argued that the role of morality in movements was once at the

J. Toubøl (✉)
Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark
e-mail: jt@soc.ku.dk

A. Sevelsted
Department of Management, Politics, and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Frederiksberg, Denmark

School of Social Work, Lund University, Lund, Sweden
e-mail: ase.mpp@cbs.dk

center of attention for researchers but that this is no longer the case—even though moral claims-making is at the center of movement activism.

We thus found that it was necessary to reestablish and reinvigorate a research agenda focused on movements and morality. Consequently, the aim of the book became twofold. The aims of the book were first to offer empirical contributions on contemporary moral foundations of civic struggles and second to explore and develop approaches to studying morality in movements—theoretically, methodologically, and empirically—in order to set a new research agenda. Importantly, the intention of the book was not to define morality in any definitive sense but to explore the "semantic field" around morality: ethics, universalism, principled beliefs, ideals, values etc., and how this could translate into a research agenda for social scientists interested in social movements and similar forms of civic action.

The second introductory chapter set out the research agenda in more detail by analytically ordering the aspects of morality pertinent to the study of movements into the now familiar three dimensions: *selves in interaction*, *rationalization and justification*, and *culture and tradition*. As we stress, these dimensions should only be considered analytical tools to order our common exploration of the themes of the book, not distinct empirical phenomena. As we have already introduced the individual chapters and their results in the introduction, and since the aim of this book has been explorative, we will end it not by reiterating its contents, but by pointing to dilemmas and underdeveloped issues that have emerged across the contributions. If we are to revive the paradigm of morality in movements, these lacunae may help point to future agendas within the paradigm.

The first lacuna relates to the type of movements that the research field addresses. As McAdam points out in Chap. 3, movement scholars tend to favor studies of movements with which they sympathize. While the apparently enigmatic "Trump voter" has recently become the center of attention for a host of sociological books, it remains a fact that backlash and conservative movements, such as the anti-gender movements that Svatoňová (Chap. 11) and Kalm and Meeuwisse (Chap. 13) portray in this book, are understudied. Well-organized conservative evangelical anti-gender groups, backed by wealthy and influential donors, are no longer the US American phenomena they used to be. In Europe as well, such groups are increasingly affluent and intra- and supranationally organized (Datta, 2021; Graff and Korolczuk, 2021). Authoritarian leaders and religious establishments organize "astroturf movements," while popular nationalist and religious-conservative movements are on the rise almost everywhere around the globe. It is highly important to understand how conservative groups organize, network, and are funded, but it is similarly important to better understand the cultural form and content that such groups use to mobilize. Social movement scholars have a clear role in providing a deeper understanding of the morality involved in these types of movements, such as the sense of lost privilege in the family, private, and public spheres as demonstrated in this volume. Movement scholars can show how backlash is not simply a matter of demographics but also a matter of mobilizing around a common moral vision. In Chap. 3, Alexander points to cultural processes of "pollution," mainly as a way for dominant groups to exclude minorities, but it is a small step to see how, for instance, "aggrieved

entitlement" (Kalm and Meeuwisse) leads to the pollution of certain cultural opponents as folk devils (Svatoňová).

Second, the causal effects of morality need to be addressed. It is necessary not only to describe different types of morality and their role in mobilization processes but also to point to their effects on mobilization. In this volume, at least three authors have come up with innovative ways of pointing to the effects of morality in movements. Analyzing Chinese social media data, Jun shows how the moral dimension in online emotional expressions promoted the generation and expression of activists' emotions (Chap. 12). Fernández G. G as well as Toubøl and Gundelach (Chaps. 4 and 5) go a step further by also showing how types of moral commitment relate to patterns of differential participation, providing plausible hypotheses about morality's causal role in mobilizations. Causality is important for research internal purposes, i.e., to get out of the culturalist quagmire described in the introduction, where morality encompasses both culture and emotions, but the relationship between the two and their respective places in the mobilization process remain foggy. In a similar vein, Krarup tests the French pragmatist theory of justification and finds that it comes up short in terms of explaining civic engagement in local urban greenspaces (Chap. 7). The field is in need of more elaborated studies such as those that are presented in this volume. Moreover, studies of morality in movements are important for classical purposes in social movement research such as frame extension and frame bridging but also for "existential" purposes to borrow McAdam's phrase: that morality and ideals matter in the first place.

Third, there is a continuous need to rethink the relation of movement studies to moral philosophy. From Weber and Marx to Foucault and Habermas, the tension between facts and norms has been ever-present in social sciences—and not least in those fields concerned with social movements, popular uprisings, and collective action. In this volume, the relationship has been thematized in at least three different—and contradicting—ways. First, in Chap. 6, Passy and Monsch insist that the question of morality be left to moral philosophers: morality is a minefield for sociologists who lack the analytical tools to judge what is moral and what not. What social scientists *may* study are the historically varying cultural expressions of morality and how these enter into contentious action around politicized issues. Second, Kalm and Meeuwisse (Chap. 13) take another stance on the question, as they base their analysis of anti-gender movements in Honneth's explicitly normative theory of modernity as based on three meta-values: love, equality, and achievement. This is a radically different approach that uses the inherent normative measuring sticks of modernity as a way to see how movements' claims and discourses "measure up to" the values of modernity. A third approach is adopted by Wathne in Chap. 8. Inspired by post-structuralism and postcolonial studies, she posits that social movement scholars neither should "leave morality to moral philosophers" nor prematurely enforce normative measuring sticks on the subjects they study. Instead, scholars should be attentive to the moral philosophies developed by movement participants themselves; as also explored by Nielsen in Chap. 9, all movements develop a prefigurative cognitive praxis, a practical and moral vision of how what the future ought to look like, and it is merely the job of scholars to act as midwives in order to assist movements in giving birth to their visions.

It has been the explicit aim of this volume to be exploratory in terms of moral philosophical foundations. The breadth of approaches has opened a discussion that needs more careful examination: How can movement scholars become more explicit about the normative foundations that they build on?

The discussion of moral philosophy opens a fourth avenue of foundational questions related to the issue of the relationship between morality and time. Social movements in their modern form owe much of their existence to the so-called *Sattelzeit* or "saddle period" (Koselleck, 2011)—roughly the 100 years around the French revolution. Here, a new sense of time and historicity broke through an orientation towards the future rather than a static present, a sense that society was changeable. This changed conception of time continues to inform modern society, not least social movements. In chap. 10, Sevelsted shows how in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century a clear division existed between progressives and conservatives: those that wanted to expand rights and those that wanted to halt the expansion of rights. In most Western countries, there was a wide consensus around the positions of progressive and conservative. Self- and other-definitions would be congruent. Today, a more muddied picture emerges. While some are content to be designated conservative, many seek to frame their own position as the progressive position. This in turn raises the question of how movement scholars should characterize such groups. In Chap. 13, Kalm and Meeuwisse indirectly raise this issue in relation to countermovements, as they problematize the tendency to analyze conservative movements as backlash movements, as reactions to the success of other movements. The question is, however, if we can or should go beyond the temporal labeling of movements. We continue to think of movements in terms of progressive or conservative, forward looking or backlashing, without having a developed understanding of time. Do we in fact understand time as teleologically moving toward a set goal? Are the concepts of progressive and conservative adequate? Even more radically, as Nina Eliasoph asks in Chap. 3, what does it mean for a movement like (parts of) the climate movement to cease believing in a future?

Fifth, the question of supranational or global morality in movements seems to be ripe for a reexamination. This volume has plenty of contributions that point to the trans-local character of moral claims and their channels of diffusion. As already mentioned, the anti-gender movement and similar conservative movements are increasingly connecting and organizing across national boundaries. As Jun (Chap. 12) and Svatoňová (Chap. 11) show, in each of their national contexts, social media are ideal channels for spreading emotionally laden moral outbursts through emoticons or visual material. Climate activism (Chap. 6) is obviously borderless in its various moral visions and demands. It does also seem that the global confrontation between authoritarianism and democracy, as well as nationalists and refugee solidarity activists (e.g., Chaps. 4–6), enables disparate struggles to be connected anew.

In Chap. 3, both Doug McAdam and Jeffrey Alexander discuss morality in relation to diffusion processes and the prospect of a global public sphere. McAdam points out that we are witnessing a global cycle of protest. The global effects of climate change and its consequences reach into all spheres of life and interact with other conflicts and issues around distribution of resources, refugees, and migration.

The result is a global diffusion of movements as well as a simultaneous emergence of movements reacting to these developments. At the same time, Alexander does not foresee the formation of a global civil sphere in the near future that could constitute the moral foundation of a global dialogue around the solution to these challenges.

The issue of global mobilization raises a final challenge to the student of morality in movements, namely, how to tackle dilemmas of moral universalism and particularism. In Chap. 9, Nielsen addresses this question in an exemplary fashion in her ethnography of student activists who balance universal moral imperatives against an everyday virtue ethics. Fernández G. G. (Chap. 4) also points to how universal value claims, as well as particular moral commitments to activist groups, play a role in mobilization processes in favor of the rights of refugees. Similar dilemmas will confront activists and movements that advocate global solutions rooted in the moral notion of the primacy of our shared humanity. Such notions appear to be on the defense against the continued mobilization of conservative movements rooted in moral notions of the primacy of membership of ethnic, regional, religious, and nationalist groups. Paraphrasing Alexander, there is a need to "translate" universal categories to particular situations and identities, if such moral visions are to survive and thrive.

References

Datta, N. (2021). *Tip of the iceberg: Religious extremist funders against human rights for sexuality and reproductive health in Europe 2009–2018*. European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

Graff, A., & Korolczuk, E. (2021). *Anti-gender politics in the populist moment. Routledge studies in gender, sexuality and politics*. Routledge.

Koselleck, R. (2011). Basic concepts in history: A historical dictionary of political and social language in Germany. *Contributions to the History of Concepts, 6*(1), 1–37. Translated by Michaela Richter.