Sociology Rediscovering Ethics

Stephen Turner

Gorski tells us that the fact-value distinction is dead, that we know what human flourishing is and therefore relativism is wrong, and concludes that sociologists ought to throw off their self-imposed shackles and get into the business of telling other people how to live their lives, but only after sociologists listen to other people who are already in this business, especially from ethics and religion. In one sense this advice is misdirected, because, as I shall explain briefly below, sociologists have long been concerned with exactly the thing he suggests they should be concerned with, flourishing, eudaemonia or happiness, and continue to produce research on the topic in several subfields of the discipline. Morever, there have been many attempts to do exactly what he is recommending. The results, however, including my own attempt with Mark Wardell in the 1980s,[1] have not been especially successful. In this comment I will try to point out some of the philosophical obstacles to this kind of work. The sociological obstacles are also serious: the intellectual cultures of ethics and sociology are so radically divergent that dialog is virtually impossible. Nevertheless, there is no reason to give up. In this respect I agree with Gorksi. My dissenting point will be a simple one: there is are multiple relations of fit between sociological ideas and ethical theories, not just the one he describes, and some ethical theory is in outright conflict with normal social science.

What has been tried? Attempts by sociologists to do exactly what Gorski is advocating would include, a generation ago, Derek Philips' attempt, in *Toward a Just Social Order,*[2] to derive something from Alan Gewirth's account of the ethics of agency; Habermas's discourse ethics, which is a form of Kantian constructionism (meaning that it involves the results that ideal speakers or thinkers would arrive at), and more recently Oxford sociologist Stein Ringen's *What is Democracy For?,*[3] which also embraces Aristotle and flourishing. Moreover, there are philosophers who have a more or less sociological rather than moral realist approach. Gorski mentions two, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre. These thinkers might provide a better opening for common discussion with sociologists, and indeed this is already happening with Habermas and Taylor under the religion program of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC).[4] One might add Phillip Pettit, whose idea of common knowledge resembles Durkheim's collective conscience.[5] Pettit is non-relativistically against domination, but leaves the determination of what that is to mean in a particular state up to common knowledge, i.e., the culture, of the citizens of that state. These are not exactly negligible figures, and their ideas have had public influence: Pettit's ideas have been taken up by the Spanish government; Ringen's by the Norwegians.

Surveying this mass of writing will not be my concern here. The real interest of Gorski's article lies elsewhere, with the problem of the relation between social theory and sociology and various hard meta-ethical claims, and specifically with a subset of these claims. Among the various writers Gorksi mentions, there is a prominent group of ethicists who are

---

[1] Wardell, Mark and Stephen Turner. 1986. *Sociological theory in transition*. London: Allen and Unwin.

[2] Philips, Derek L. 1986. *Toward a just social order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

S. Turner (✉)
Department of Philosophy FAO 226, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620, USA
e-mail: turner@usf.edu

[3] Ringen, Stein. 2007. *What is Democracy for? On freedom and moral government*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[4] Cf. VanAntwerpen, Jonathan. 2010. *Varieties of secularism in a secular age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2011. *The power of religion in the public sphere*. New York: Columbia University Press. http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/author/vanantwerpen/

[5] Pettit, Philip. 1997. *Republicanism: a theory of freedom and government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

"moral realists" (and beyond them Kantians of various kinds, notably constructionists, a term with a quite different meaning than its sociological one). The questions raised by moral realism (and these forms of Kantianism) are novel and interesting for social theory, and perhaps for sociology, because of the radical nature of their claims about motivation and the explanation of human action. Moral realism in some of its most prominent forms, to be brief about it, is a competitor to sociological explanation and attempts to explain things that sociologists traditionally thought they explained.[6] There is a strong, outright conflict between these claims and conventional social science and psychology.

I think the claims of many of these authors are irretrievably confused when they are not false, and pernicious when they reinforce moral dogmatism, which is their main rhetorical function. But my concern here will not be with consequences. Instead it will be with the ways in which these claims conflict with, and assert superiority, over normal social science explanation. But before coming to this topic, it will be worthwhile to review some of the methodological issues in the social science literature itself over the problem of the relation between subjective and objective facts, especially in the case of happiness.

Gorski's State of the Field Account

If I may rather brutally reconstruct it, Gorksi's argument is this: we have entered a new era in which ethical truth of some sort is readily available, because philosophers and religionists have finally figured it out. This implies that the fact value distinction is dead, because we can now treat at least some things in ethics as fact-like. "Flourishing" is such a known good. It is found in a "middle kingdom of moral facts, situated somewhere between the realms of fact and value, an independent territory, containing discoverable truths about the good life and the good society." It follows that moral relativism is wrong. We now also know that science is not value-free, because it involves conflicting cognitive values. And because non-cognitive values enter into our choices of research topics, what we know is influenced by values even if we keep values out of our actual claims. It follows that Weber's scruples about mixing factual and valuative claims are obsolete.

Gorski cites various writers in ethics who hold to one or another of the many (and conflicting) accounts of moral realism, and points also to eudaimonianism, which is something else entirely, as well as to the Sen-Nussbaum idea of capabilities from development ethics. Do these citations, and others he might have made as representing current ethics, support the idea of such a middle kingdom and the idea that the fact value distinction is dead? And what exactly is in this middle kingdom, and how does it get discovered?

Answering this question is more difficult than one might think. Begin with the question of what sort of consensus, however contested, exists. First it is necessary to distinguish ethics from meta-ethics. Meta-ethical theories or theories about the nature of morality are highly diverse, and conflict wildly. But the tradition of analytic philosophy is to test such theories against our ethical intuitions. So the aim of all of these accounts is to come up with (or explain the fact that people accept) more or less the same ethical conclusions. Virtue theories, deontological or obligation theories, and consequentialist theories explain the same thing: conventional morality. Moreover, there are reasons why they mostly converge: after all, a pattern of behavior that was obligatory but systematically hurt others would soon be seen to be bad and to be altered, and the virtue of the people who pursued it questioned. Good results, for example the benefits of courteous driving, would come to be seen as obligatory. These basic senses of what is right and good tend to be stable and congeal into intuitions, which in turn can be used to "test" ethical theories by asking whether the claims made by the ethical theory, the "analysis" it provides, actually fits the intuitions. There are, however, marginal differences in the range of intuitions that are explained by different meta-ethical approaches, and this is the basis for preferring one meta-ethical account over another. This is why cases such as the Trolley problem[7] are so important for ethics: they are the relatively rare cases in which there are clear conflicts between intuitions, and one set of intuitions is explained by one metaethical theory and the other by a different one.

In short, in this cozy world of ethical theory (as distinct from applied ethics) there is no big conflict over first order ethical questions. But this is only because these are the rules of the game of meta-ethics: the one with the best match to our intuitions wins. However, not every ethical account plays by these rules. MacIntyre, for example, does not: instead he problematizes conventional liberal morality. Other ethical or at least philosophical positions are also in outright conflict with conventional norms. One example is the kind of philosophy that promotes "authenticity." Authenticity demands something different than the fulfillment of conventional obligations or having the politically correct attitudes, and indeed is normally set against them. Applied ethics is a different story as well. Our

---

[6] I leave the issue of theology for others, but note that the influential work on *Theology and Social Theory* by John Milbank also claims that Christian sociology is a competitor to "secular" sociology, and derides the kind of theology that "has sought to borrow from elsewhere a fundamental account of society." Milbank, John. [1990] 2006. *Theology and Social Theory: beyond secular reason*, 2nd edn. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, p. 382.

[7] cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trolley_problem; http://people.howstuffworks.com/trolley-problem.htm

intuitions about abortion, for example, radically conflict: it is a human life, but the consequences of birth may be bad for everyone involved. Here is where convoluted arguments and religious ideology prosper, and disagreements seem insoluble.

Leave aside the fact that "our" intuitions are the intuitions of comfortable, mostly secular westerners in academic positions. If one obliterates a few differences at the first-order level, and ignores ethical accounts that don't buy this standard for evaluating ethical theories, one could indeed say that there is something like a consensus about the requirements of ethics, with a lot of people outside the consensus. One could even detect something like a much more modest mini-consensus on the meta-ethical level, on something like "moral realism." Forms of moral realism do indeed make claims to the effect that there are moral facts, and all of them reject the characterization of the moral sphere in terms of "values" that are grounded solely in the individual decisionistic acts of valuation of individuals—the picture we inherit from Weber. So Gorski is right to think there is something different here, and that there is a conflict between moral realism and Weber. But what the conflict implies is not clear. The fact value distinction is perhaps the place one needs to begin.

Start with a contradiction. Gorski mentions the idea that science or scientific theories fulfill cognitive values, and that these sometimes conflict. He cites this as evidence of the inseparability of fact and value. But this claim actually creates a problem for him: it assumes that the conflicts between cognitive values are not "factually" decidable, and also assumes that value questions are different in kind from factual ones, however much values enter into science. The use of the concept of cognitive values in theory choice in science observes the same distinction: values are not empirical facts. And here the emphasis of the literature goes against Gorski's general point: cognitive values conflict and have to be chosen between on non-factual grounds rather than converge into some sort of quasi-factual valuative truth.

This fits with thinkers in ethics as well, where the literature reproduces the fact value distinction in all but name. Ethical theorists are insistent that ethical questions cannot be settled by reference to "natural" facts. So they also insist on a distinction. They even say that a separate epistemology is needed to establish normative truths.[8] One should thus not be misled by the discussion of the term "fact": whatever sorts of facts ethical facts are, they are taken to be different in kind from the facts of sociology, even and indeed especially by the people who think they are very hard facts.

There is a big reason for the fact value distinction within ethics itself: G. E. Moore's open question argument. There are many interpretations of this argument, but the basic claim is this. If we say that something natural—a source of pleasure, for

example—is good, we mean that it feels good; there is always an open question as to whether it is really good. If we present (factual) evidence that people think a particular kind of pleasure is good, it can still be asked whether they are right, and whether this is just a subjective feeling. This bears directly on the utility of the most interesting recent findings on neuroscience and morality. Fehr and Gächter have shown that people experience pleasure by punishing free-riders.[9] This explains an important mystery about morality: from a pure rational choice perspective, for the individual, expending the effort to punish free riders is not commensurate with the benefits, so it is irrational. But people do it. If punishing is itself a source of pleasure, the empirical mystery is solved. This, then, is a real mechanism for enforcing norms operating in the real world. But one can ask, á la Moore, whether it is really good to punish free riders. No ordinary fact, either about game-theoretic rationality or our neurophysiology, can answer that question.

Empirical Eudaemonism

Moore's argument opens up a breach between the facts of morality, which presumably would answer this question, and the actual operative facts of moral life, that is to say what people really do, really are motivated by, and so forth. The open question argument removes questions about the good from any consideration that could be settled by ordinary facts, and reaffirms the distinction between ethical "facts," if there are such things, and ordinary facts. The open question argument thus creates an unbridgeable divide right in the heart of the middle kingdom Gorski describes, and places the ethical on the non-empirical side of this gap. Nothing about subjective happiness, subjective flourishing, and so forth, can possibly answer the question of whether it is really good.

Eudaimonism and the capabilities approach seem to finesse this problem, however. The capabilities approach doesn't answer the question of what one should do with one's capabilities, other than preserve them, so it makes no claims about Moore's question. It leaves the choice of ends to the people who are being made capable. Happiness and flourishing, on the other hand, seem to be good by definition, and therefore no conflict with empirical facts is possible.

One problem with this happy solution is that if one asks people about happiness, they give quite different answers than this account would, if it were an empirical theory along the lines of Ringen's.[10] Ringen compares countries using an index of his own devising, representing his ideas of the good life and the good society. But is he right? Contrast his results, which

[8] Copp, David. 1990. "Normativity and the very idea of moral epistemology." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* XXIX: 189–210.

[9] Fehr, Ernst and Simon Gächter. 2000. "Cooperation and punishment in public goods experiments." *The American Economic Review*, 90(4): 980–94.

[10] Ringen, Stein. 2007. *What is Democracy for?*

rate Scandinavia high and everyone else low, with a recent Gallup survey comparing countries. It found that seven of the ten happiest were in Latin America, and the list included poor countries with little in the way of Sen-Nussbaum capabilities. Why are they so happy? The traits that correlated most were these: being well rested; being treated with respect; smiling; laughing a lot; learning new things; and feelings of enjoyment on a daily basis. The countries that reported the highest rates of "yes" answers to these questions were Panama and Paraguay, with an 85 % positive rate each. El Salvador and Venezuela were next, followed by Trinidad and Tobago, Thailand, Guatemala, the Philippines, Ecuador and Costa Rica.[11]

What does one say about this? That these people are not really happy, or flourishing? That their subjective experience does not matter? That they are afflicted with false consciousness and would be better off listening to Mahler by night and pushing government paperwork around by day? This seems absurd, at least for an ethics that purports to be about flourishing and happiness. In short, the trick of making happiness and flourishing good by definition means that one has left the specification of these terms to some other kind of consideration. "Objective" specifications of these things, such as Ringen's attempt to tell us the conditions of flourishing, turn out to be ideological or cultural, or merely expressions of personal taste. One can of course give up on objectivity and accept that the natural facts of people's subjective experience are decisive. But this is to give up on moral realism and more generally on the idea that ethics can be a guide of some sort.

Subjective and Objective

Yet there is more to the story. Gorski alludes to the fact that psychologists don't have a problem giving advice, but says nothing about the long-running literature on human happiness, which is nicely summarized in recent work by Eric Angner.[12] This literature includes a lot of sociology: the literature on marital happiness was a central part of prewar sociology, for example,[13] and various forms of this kind of life satisfaction research have continued to the present. Gerontologists made assessing well-being a centerpiece of the field, producing a plethora of measures, conceptualizations, and so forth. The concept was largely taken over by the mental health literature, which derived from a variety of sources, but which contained a large sociological component. But there were direct attempts as well. As Angner explains the history, Hornell Hart, a professor of sociology at Duke University, constructed operational definitions of happiness in his *Chart for Happiness*,[14] and asked the eudamonian question social scientifically: "One of the basic purposes of mankind is to be happy. Can recent advances in scientific thinking tell us more and more effectively what to do in order to be happy, and in order to help make our fellow human beings happy?".[15] Angner summarizes the motives behind this literature thus: "The main impetus behind measures of happiness and satisfaction appears to have been a moral impulse to understand and improve society, specifically, an ambition to identify the causal antecedents of happiness in order to build a happier, and therefore better, society."[16]

The contributors to this vast literature were not crippled by Weberian scruples. They were attempting to construct objective measures that corresponded to the kinds of value-constituted facts about the social world we are interested in explaining. This *is* the Weberian recipe: valuative concepts and interests are the starting points and both motivate and serve to conceptually order the material; but the explanations and descriptions are objective, and the "scientific" conclusions do not go beyond these objective facts. Doing this research requires no novel range of discoverable objective or quasi-objective moral facts. It simply requires utilizing our audiences' and subjects' subjective ideas about what is good.

What is wrong with this approach? The answer of the moral realists would go something like this: all this research can do is deal with subjective feelings. Moral truths are hard realities of their own. They are accessible in a totally different way: reflection on our intuitions. If we leave the answer at this, we simply have two different problems that are unrelated to one another: the non-empirical facts of moral truth and the empirical facts of subjective happiness. But moral realism in its most aggressive form does not leave things at this. Moral realism claims that the truth of moral realism is an explanatory necessity: that there are real non-normative facts that can only be explained by the existence of normative realities or forces of a particular type.

This is not a claim that is taken seriously or even addressed by empirical researchers. It depends on tricky circular arguments of various kinds (but mostly involving supposed explanatory necessities) which I have discussed at length elsewhere.[17] But the issues can be more simply seen in a parallel problem in the current psychological literature on "moral error" and moral judgment. The moral realist would pounce on this usage and say that the term "moral error" presupposes moral truth, so that appealing to moral truth is an explanatory necessity in the study of moral error, and moral error is a real

[11] Clifton, Jon. 2012. "Latin Americans most positive in the world. Singaporeans are the least positive worldwide." *Gallup World* December 19, 2012.
  http://www.gallup.com/poll/159254/latin-americans-positive-world.aspx
[12] Angner, E. 2011. "The evolution of eupathics: The historical roots of subjective measures of wellbeing." *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 1(1): 4–41. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=799166
[13] Burgess, E. W. and Cottrell L. S. 1939. *Predicting success or failure in marriage*. New York, Prentice-Hall.

[14] Hart, Hornell. 1940. *Chart for happiness*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
[15] Hart, *Chart for happiness,* 1940: 16.
[16] Angner, "The evolution of eupathics," 2011: 21.
[17] Turner, Stephen. 2010. *Explaining the normative*. Oxford: Polity Press.

fact, not just a normative claim. There is a typical argument in ethics to the effect that one cannot have a counterfeit coin without there being a real one, and that therefore to acknowledge moral error is to acknowledge moral truth.[18]

This claim is specious, but specious in a way that is common to these arguments: it conflates moral error as an objective concept with moral error from a point of view, such as the point of view of the person making the error. Empirical work on this problem does not require, and is not helped by, claims about objective moral standards. The point is nicely made by the psychologists Pizzaro and Uhlmann, commenting on work by Cass Sunstein.

> We do not wish to debate the virtues and vices of any normative moral theory—this is a task best left to philosophers. However, we do question the necessity of positing a normative framework for understanding the psychology of moral judgment. Does a good theory of moral judgment require an objectively "right" set of moral criteria with which to compare lay judgments? Perhaps not. We believe that the research reviewed by Sunstein is extremely informative without the additional claim that individuals are making mistakes. For example, knowing and predicting the conditions under which individuals rigidly adhere to principles despite consequences is important for any successful moral theory. So the fact that individuals are willing to accept a (slightly) increased risk of dying in order to punish a betrayal is quite provocative—but does it add more value to claim that this is an error?[19]

Subjective error and the subjects' own standards do all the explanatory work.[20] The extra explanatory work that the claim of explanatory necessity made by moral realists or normativists depends on is a product of description: describing something as "error" as such rather than the empirically equivalent "error" from the point of view of lay judgments.

Moral Realism and Motivation

Moral realism comes in various forms, but the bottom line—and traditional problem[21]—has been the question of how these supposed objects or properties (or whatever they are—

accounts vary on this as well) interact with the causal or human world. Moral realism is not merely the belief that there are moral truths. It is the belief that they refer to something real. Moreover, the belief in moral realism normally involves the claim that the moral realities in question are explanatory necessities—that, contrary to the argument of Pizzaro and Uhlmann, there is something true in the empirical world that cannot be true unless there are the relevant moral realities.

There are many solutions to this problem, none of which are appealing to both sides of this discussion. One solution, from the naturalistic side, is to treat the "realism" as an illusion: Michael Ruse has suggested that moral realism is a product of evolution: "human beings function better if they are deceived by their genes into thinking that there is a disinterested objective morality binding upon them, which all should obey,"[22] and as he said later, that "Substantive morality stays in place as an effective illusion because we think that it is no illusion but the real thing."[23] Ruse thought this error was important to holding societies together, so this kind of error had an evolutionary point. The major recent text in ethics is Derek Parfit's *On What Matters*.[24] Parfit thinks that these forms of moral realism rest on an error: conflating motivation with moral truth. His view is that moral truths are just true. They don't need to be motivational forces, any more than an empirical truth is. For him, there are moral facts, but they are causally and motivationally inert. What influences action is belief in the facts, not the facts themselves.

Parfit's is a radical position. The usual arguments for normativism, when normativists get around to considering the problem of explaining action at all, do involve motivation, and reject this idea that moral truths are motivationally inert. This is the link to the empirical world. Current Kantians say things like this

> . . . the normativity of obligation is, among other things, a psychological force. Let me give this phenomenon a name, borrowed from Immanuel Kant. Since normativity is a form of necessity, Kant calls its operation within us—its manifestation as a psychological force—necessitation.[25]

The religious roots of this idea are evident. Paul writes to the Corinthians that anything good that they do is done with the aid of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, in short, is a causal force in the world, without which some things would not happen. This gets slightly secularized in Kant: the idea of duty arising from the rational moral law is also the incentive to act.

[18] Cf. Strawson, P. F. ([1962] 1982) "Freedom and resentment. Reprinted in Gary Watson, ed., *Free Will*, Cambridge: Oxford University Press, pp. 59–80.
[19] Pizzaro, D.A. and Uhlmann, E. 2005. "Do normative standards advance our understanding of moral judgment?" [commentary] *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 28: 558.
[20] See Pizzaro, D.A. and Uhlmann, E. 2005, "Do normative standards advance our understanding of moral judgment?".
[21] Beiser, Frederick C. 2009. "Normativity in neo-Kantianism: its rise and fall." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17(1): 9–27.
[22] Ruse, Michael and Wilson, Edward O. 1986. "Moral philosophy as applied science." *Philosophy*, 61(236): 173–192, 179.
[23] Ruse, Michael. 2010. *Science and spirituality: making room for faith in the age of science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 310.
[24] Parfit, Derek. 2011. *On what matters*, 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[25] Kant, Immanuel [1797] 1991. *The metaphysics of morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 06: 219.

This leaves out the Holy Spirit, but leaves the mystery of how all this arising and incentivizing works. Needless to say, this sort of claim runs directly into the claims of psychology and social science, which never invoke such forces, nor do they think they need to. The standard account of intentional action in psychology makes do with belief in norms, as does the conventional belief-desire model of action explanation. Sociologists are content with saying that people believe things, and act accordingly, As Mauss's famous formulation put it, the task of sociology is to see what people believe and who believes it. For sociology in the Maussian sense, goodness is irrelevant: beliefs about goodness do the work of explaining action, and beliefs can be explained without resorting to claims about the intrinsic correctness of the belief.

The arguments take various forms. One involves action explanation itself, where the issue is this: does "agent y believes x is good" explain everything about agent y's behavior that "x is good" explains? Elaborate arguments are given in support of the idea that "x is good" explains something more than "y believes x is good" and that "x is good" constitutes a sufficient explanation such that inquiring into how y came to believe x is good adds nothing and is a unneeded distraction from the correct "x is good" explanation.[26] Needless to say, these anti-sociological not to say anti-intellectual arguments are not found in social and behavioral science.

The problems with the "real" in moral realism, come down to this: the reason we can treat moral things—obligations, for example (and this is the usual example)—as "real" is that we "feel" them as real. There are of course explicit obligations, written into contracts, laws, and so forth. But feelings of obligation, such as the obligation to return an invitation after being invited to dinner, are tacit, and although they can be articulated in etiquette books, what makes them binding or real is the tacit feeling that the etiquette book articulates, not the rule in the book itself. This tacit sense provides the motivation for calling obligations or other moral demands "real." But this produces another problem. If there is something here other than a subjective psychological fact about feeling, a "real" obligation behind the feeling, so to speak, how does the real thing interact with good old causal reality? Do people bump up against these real things? Are they stopped or propelled by them?[27]

The idea that moral reality took the form of motivation seemed like an answer—the only answer—to these questions. People give moral reasons; reasons are simultaneously explanations, justifications, and motivators. So moral "reality" could sneak into explanation, into "the real," under the guise of "good reasons" for action. One would then argue that good reasons were sufficient to explain the actions they justified; that no further explanation was needed, or that they were themselves a force. Motivation thus tells you what a moral reality has to be—a cause that is dependent on no prior causes, a prime mover unmoved. These accounts have the bonus that our motivations are in some sense internal, and therefore available to reflection, which allows for the thought that we can establish universal facts about morality and the nature of normative truth merely by reflecting on our own motivations. And this bonus is difficult to give up: it provides the ethical theorist with a ground for ethical claims. In short, the motivation account solved a problem in ethics at the price of conflicting with ordinary social science explanations of action and belief.

Of course there are multiple conflicting varieties of moral realism or, more broadly, what I call normativism. What is common to them is the idea that they are describing facts or moral truths that have motivational force of some sort. As one might expect, there are numerous strange variations on these motivational ideas in the philosophical literature. One is that semantics provide motivational force.[28] Searle used to invoke collective intentionality, which he claimed to be based on special neuronal capacities.[29] Searle now claims that intrinsic neuronal conditions of satisfaction for representations provide this force.[30] The strangeness comes from the same source: these are attempts to simultaneously explain ordinary facts and normative facts about validity.

The issues with these claims divide into two groups: one set of claims of motivation involve universal forces or facts; the other involves local ones, for example those which arise from the semantics of a particular language, for example, or a particular social group with an ethical scheme to which people are committed and which secures its validity or bindingness from this commitment. The "local" accounts are a kind of pseudo-sociology. The "universal" accounts are a kind of pseudo-psychology or cognitive science. But with these accounts some useful dialog with cognitive science has begun. Perhaps the same could happen with social science.

[26] Cf. Raz, Joseph (2009) "Reasons: explanatory and normative. In Constantine Sandis (ed.) *New essays on the explanation of action*, New York: Palgrave/McMillan, pp. 184–202, 184.

[27] These are of course familiar Durkheimian questions as well. Cf. Turner, Stephen. 1993. *Emile Durkheim: sociologist and moralist*, London: Routledge; Turner, Stephen and Bertha, Carlos. 2005. "The socratic Durkheim," In Terry Godlove (ed.) *Teaching Durkheim*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 171–85. But the Durkheimian answer to Kant is found in Marcel Mauss's 1967, *The gift: forms of function and exchange in archaic societies*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, as I show in *Explaining the normative,* 2010: 59–63, 140.

[28] Wedgewood, Ralph. 2007. *The nature of the normative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[29] Searle, John. 1990. "Collective intentionality and action." In P. Cohen, J. Morgan, and M. Pollack (eds.) *Intentions in communication*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 402; Searle, John. 1995. *The construction of social reality.* New York: The Free Press, p. 407; Turner, Stephen. 2002. *Brains/Practices/Relativism*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 40–41, 46–47.

[30] Searle, John. 2010. *Making the social world: the structure of human civilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

What Can Sociology and Ethics Say to Each Other?

Does moral realism provide the sort of nearly achieved consensus on ethics that sociologists can engage with as though it contained almost-facts? It is difficult to see what sort of engagement this would be: the basic idea of moral realism is that moral facts are real and that they have a role in the actual world of motivation. Sociologists already think that there are norms and values that explain people's behavior. Even rational choice/game theoretic philosophers of norms rely on the sociological definitions.[31] The major difference between them and moral realists is that moral realists think that (some) norms have a quality of rightness that in itself explains something about motivation.

There is a huge gap here, and there is a conflict between explanations. There is no prospect of closing the gap in some cases, such as the Kantianism of the formulation from Korsgaard quoted earlier. The same is true of many other forms of normativism: they are attempts to explain social science facts by occult means, or by fictions such as contractarianism, by pseudo-sociological theories or by bad theories. Naive functionalism makes frequent appearances in these arguments, for example in James Rachels famous discussions of relativism.[32] But the very fact that these arguments are offered in the first place is intriguing: very few forms of ethical argument can work without making factual and explanatory claims that resemble those of social theory and sociology. And in many cases the gap can be closed.

One case is surprising: even among the Kantians, it is possible to close the gap. David Velleman offers a "kinda-Kantian" account in which humans seek intelligibility or mutual intelligibility.[33] This is only "kinda" Kantian because it substitutes a weak but psychologically plausible motivator for the strong but psychologically implausible motivator of reason itself. Better yet, intelligibility can be taken to be simultaneously psychological and normative. This approach to human interaction would be congenial to, if not the same as, the kind of depiction of human sense-making one finds in Erving Goffman, or even some forms of ethnomethodology.[34]

Velleman's case is suggestive: there is a whole range of possible relations between ethical theory and sociology, from a close fit and mutual enrichment to stark opposition. One model, closely related to this one, is found in Derek Phillips and in Stein Ringen[35]: find an ethical doctrine one likes and apply it with the help of sociological knowledge about such things as income distributions, but without any hope of talking back to the original doctrine. This one-directional relation, it should be noted, is all that is allowed by much of ethical theory. Kantian dogmatism, for example, which purports to generate moral truth out of the resources of reason itself, has no use for empirical knowledge except in applying "reason."

Another model would be the one represented by Taylor and MacIntyre[36]: these are themselves exercises in social theory that attempt to explain moral ideas. So is Richard Joyce's recent, important, *The Myth of Morality*.[37] Utilitarianism and rational-choice approaches have a close affinity if they are not the same. Yet another model is represented by Heidegger and existentialism: to attend the empirical facts of the world, *das Man* or the ordinary social person in Heidegger, in order to transcend their limitations. One could go on at length with this list: various meta-ethical doctrines, such as virtue theory, expressivisms of various kinds, and so forth, match up with or conflict with different social theories or sociological approaches.

The classic figures of social theory can also each be identified with an ethical theory that more or less closely fits their social theory. Marx followed a tradition of Saint-Simonianism that historicized ethics, but his notions of species-being and disalienation fit with the kind of critique and rejection of conventional morality found in "authenticity" thinking. Durkheim's dualism between the social and individual consciousness is genetically linked to the idea that normativity is rooted in collective intentions through Durkheim's successor and follower Bouglé.[38] MacIntyre described Weber as an emotivist: today he might say he was an expressivist. Weber's follower Jaspers was an existentialist, and this fits Weber as well. And there are overt conflicts. Spencer divided sociology from ethics when he argued that intuitions, the evidential base for ethical theory, evolved.

This much is true about Gorski's argument. There is something to say, sometimes, between ethics and sociology. With the exception of dogmatic Kantians and religious dogmatists, ethical theory has to connect to empirical reality, either through claims about human nature or in other ways, such as

[31] Bicchieri, Christina. [1993] 1996. *Rationality and coordination* 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Bicchieri, Christina. 2006. *The grammar of society: the nature and dynamics of social norms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[32] Rachels, James. 1999. "The challenge of cultural relativism." In *The elements of moral philosophy*, 3rd edn. NY: Random House, pp. 20–36; Rachels, James. 1986. "Morality is not relative." In *The elements of moral philosophy*, 1st edn., New York: McGraw Hill, pp. 451–60.

[33] Velleman, J. David. 2009. *How we get along*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[34] Cf. O'Neill, John. 1974. *Making sense together: an introduction to wild sociology*. New York: Harper & Row.

[35] Philips, Derek L. 1986. *Toward a just social order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Ringen, Stein. 2007. *What is democracy for? on freedom and moral government*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[36] Taylor, Charles. 2004. *Modern social imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004; MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1981. *After virtue*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

[37] Joyce, Richard. 2001. *The myth of morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[38] Bouglé, C. 1926. *The evolution of values: studies in sociology with special applications to teaching*, trans. Helen Sellars. New York: Henry Holt& Company

through claims about intuitions, or simply because for such things as happiness, too much distance from subjective experience is absurd, or because the extended notion of "reason" on which Kantian ethics trades has to bear some resemblance to the way people actually reason. Sometimes the connections are more close, so much so that ethical writers are indistinguishable from sociologists. But the sheer diversity of views in ethics as well as in social theory means that there is no simple meeting ground. The fact that sociologists have retreated from theorizing the normative since the days of Talcott Parsons perhaps means that they have little new to add. But the classical writings, especially those rooted in the rebellion of social scientists against Kantianism, for example in Mauss's *The Gift*, still have relevance. If Gorski's programmatic statement helps to revive interest in these issues, it will have done a great service.

Stephen Turner is Distinguished University Professor in Philosophy at the University of South Florida. His books include the standard history of American Sociology, *The Impossible Science*, with Jon Turner, *The Social Theory of Practices* 1994, and many articles and chapters and several books on Weber, including two with Regis Factor, *Max Weber and the Dispute Over Reason and Value: A Study in Philosophy, Ethics, and Politics*, 1984.and *Max Weber: The Lawyer as Social Thinker*, 1994. His most recent book is *Explaining the Normative*, 2010.