On the Other Side of Values[1]

John Levi Martin and Alessandra Lembo
University of Chicago

The concept of values is currently enjoying renewed interest in sociology; indeed, many claim that it must be treated as central to any theory of action. As introduced to American sociology from Europe by Parsons, it was transformed from a condition of possibility into an intrinsic element of the action system that could link abstract cultural imperatives to patterns of concrete behavior. When Parsons's system dissolved, the notion of values fractured, some scholars treating values as abstract imperatives and others as behavior patterns, but they foundered on issues of the separation of validity and existence. Subtracting the notion of validity from values returns us to the concept of interests, dyadic relations between actors and objects characterized by intention, attention, and extension—in other words, investment of self. This notion of interests lacks the explanatory instability characteristic of that of values. Recasting discussions of values in terms of interests can clarify issues central to our discipline.

> [Values,] that unfortunate child of misery of our science.
> –Max Weber, *Social Science and Social Policy*

"Values have spent decades languishing in the sociological shadows," wrote Andrew Miles (2015, p. 700) in a recent lead *American Sociological Review* article, "but the time has come to bring them back out into the sunlight of renewed scholarly attention." Similarly, Patterson (2014, p. 2) criticizes the

field for the "untenable ditching, with the bathwater of the Parsonian past, of foundational concepts such as values and norms," a hasty act that "has brought ridicule to the discipline" (Patterson 2015, p. 31). Further, while "values" and "morality" are dissociable concepts, theories of action that dispense with values (such as that of Pierre Bourdieu [e.g., (1972) 1977]) seem to fail to recognize our commitment to transcendent, moral, *shoulds* (Lamont 1992, pp. 4, 180). Given that morality looms large in our self-understandings, in our social life, and in wider intellectual discourse, it appears that denying the importance of values strains credibility. Despite a long line of critiques, it seems that even if the concept of values is flawed, it is one that we cannot do without (Hitlin and Vaisey 2013).

Further, those who *do* admit values into our models of action consider them remarkably useful explanatory devices. They can guide behavior (Hechter et al. 1999) and motivate action (Hitlin and Piliavin 2004, p. 380); they are invoked in a wide variety of issues including women's participation in politics (Paxton and Kunovich 2003, p. 88), voting behavior (Barnea and Schwartz 1998), medical treatment decisions (Hechter et al. 1999), adolescent sexual behavior (Victor, Miles, and Vaisey 2015), national conflicts (Baker 2005), economic development (Harrison and Huntington 2000), educational attainment (Vaisey 2010), and moral boundary making (Lamont 1992). An account of a human motivational system without values would seem like *Hamlet* without the Danish prince (for a review, see Wuthnow [2008]).

Yet this concept of "values"—with "values" as an abstract plural noun—is a relatively recent one; for the first 2,200 or so years of the Western philosophy of action, it seemed quite easy to do without it! A term almost certainly imported into moral philosophy from economics, it was then used by social thinkers who wanted to oppose the utilitarianism of their sister science. Furthermore, the particular version of values that we now have is not even the form that was first imported, but is a greatly abstracted version that was reimported in the mid-20th century, enjoying a brief position of theoretical dominance before the breakdown of the Parsonian system. Despite the loss of the theoretical framework that once gave the term coherence, many sociologists have maintained a conviction that there *are* values, even though our discipline has contradictory notions of what these are. It may be that the concept has long outlived its utility. In this article, we reconsider the concept of values and propose its displacement by another.

We first briefly review the current state of values research, demonstrating a deep incoherence coming from sociologists theorizing values as abstract, shared, and legitimate principles of motivation (what we *should* do), but

supporting this with data on concrete, individually variable, and nonlegitimate behavioral-response profiles (what we *would* do). Given that the concept of values was originally formulated to solve this very opposition between the realms of the *ought* and *is* that we see within current sociological writing, we ask how the version of values that sociologists currently employ retains this antinomy. We demonstrate that Talcott Parsons, claiming to be importing the conception of values used in Germany, actually reshaped a concept already widely in use in sociological theory. He rejected the dominant notion that values were best understood as a way of holding down the second pole of the nature/culture distinction, and instead he aligned them with the distinction between disinterest and interest.

This new conception of values, Parsons understood, could play an integral role in the legitimation of the stratification order associated with modernity—one in which professionals held a new form of authority justified by the combination of their expert knowledge and their selfless orientation to the welfare of the client. This required transforming the sociological notion of values into one pertaining to abstract beliefs, for only these could support a differentiated modern society.

We then argue that this sort of legitimation is closely connected to practices of reasons-giving that are strongly associated with modernization, especially the rise of educated professional classes—the very sorts of roles that Parsons used as the crucial evidence for his newfound alliance of values with "disinterest." We then demonstrate that this has led to major conceptual weaknesses in sociology, weaknesses that involve an asymmetry in our analyses, where we tend to be too credulous when it comes to those respondents or informants familiar with proper accounting practices and too critical of those who are not.

We propose that the sociological theory of action cannot be righted so long as we accept Parsons's attempt to ban "interest" as something shameful. Instead, we find that current work in cognition suggests that there is a fundamental commonality between two modes of orientation that we often assume to be different, namely "*having* an interest in" and "*taking* an interest in." Both involve an extension of the self that leads to a dyadic connection whereby we develop a relation of concern or caring to some of the objects around us. We demonstrate that such a reformulation avoids the insoluble problems that values research repeatedly generates.

THE STATE OF VALUES

The Great Chain of Being

When sociologists make reference to the central place of values in any serious examination of action, they are referring to a particular conception of

54

values, one that was mainly developed by Talcott Parsons. To give the broadest overview of this conception (we will need to look more closely at certain specifics below), Parsons initially developed a scheme in which the most fundamental form of the integration of social systems came from shared culture, most importantly, values. These values were the "topmost controlling components" of the social system in that they were highly abstract and required progressive concretization if they were to shape institutional action (Parsons 1967, p. 142). Such concretization was achieved via both structural organization in the social sphere and introjection as personality. In other words, if we push to the side complexities caused by social change and the presence of troublesome malcontents, we can say that the theory assumed a connection between these abstract imperatives—the things we *should* do—and the patterns of concrete behavior in situations—the things we *do* do.

It is worth explicitly distinguishing this conception from those that involve the examination of valuation and/or evaluation. Many sociologists (e.g., Stark 2009, 2015), concerned with some of the problems with the idea of values to which we will point, have renounced the goal of hypostatizing values and, returning to Dewey (1939), restrict themselves to studying processes of valuation (for a recent review, see Lamont [2012]; also see Espeland 1998, 2001). What objects or actions do people think are good, and how do they establish orders of such goods? Such theorists uncover formal similarities of process (most importantly, commensuration) across substantive domains. Interestingly, such research has very little overlap with work focusing on *values*, our concern here (and even farther are neo-Aristotelian approaches that employ the notion of *Good*); but while these other approaches lack the core problem that we will criticize in the notion of values, they also do not contain the solution to this problem.

This is because what is distinctive about the notion of values, as it assumed an important place in 20th-century sociology, was that it moved from the relatively well-accepted (if theoretically central) notion that human beings place values on things in their world—a vision in which the only entities of interest are the humans and the objects—to the notion that something else existed besides, something abstract, generative, obscure, and rich: the values themselves, as hypostasized plural noun. It is one thing to say that, say, an apple has value, or even that its value is increased by being picked off of a tree. It is another to say that the apple picker's actions must be explained by recourse to values. It was no mere manner of speaking, one whose implications could be disavowed by the speaker, that led theorists to actually explain the actions and sentiments of concrete individuals by recourse to the existence of these abstract, largely intangible, values. Indeed, it was key to the development of a coherent functional theory of society, one

whereby individual actions were coordinated by shared culture and one in which (at least as a very crude but telling first approximation) we could trust that people *did* do what they *ought*.

Those who continue to use the term *values*, however, now accept that we cannot derive on a priori grounds that people *will* do as they *ought* to do—that they will act in accord with the values they claim to hold (e.g., Swidler 1986, p. 280; Epstein 1989). We ask people about values and get statements; we observe what they do and find that their actions seem to "violate" their stated values (Lamont and Small 2008, p. 95). Consider an example from Gunnar Myrdal's work, which provided the most influential empirical source for thinking about the role of values in 20th-century America. Myrdal talked to Southern landowners who were, he believed, quite earnest in their emphasis on how important the value of honesty was to them. But at the same time, they would brag about their success in cheating blacks (Myrdal [1944] 1962, p. 247; see also Du Bois [1935] 2014, p. 111). Even though they thought they *should* be honest, it seemed that when given the opportunity, they *would* not be.

We will consider some attempts to salvage the idea that such values have binding force below; what is central is that all theorists recognized that this sort of slippage could not be dismissed or explained away but rather required the establishment of a bifurcation. Thus Patterson (2014, p. 12) cautions that we must "take account of the distinction between espoused values and values in use or experiential values, the former referring to what people consciously and usually publicly espouse, the latter to what automatically drives their behavior." But what happens when we allow for such a distinction? We briefly examine the resulting products of such a partition.

Elevation of the *Shoulds*

We begin by considering work on these espoused values. These were originally assumed to simply *be* values, as researchers had believed that they could examine values by studying what different people accepted as *shoulds*, whether via agreement or by rankings (e.g., Rokeach 1973; see also Williams 1956, p. 25). The finding of the weak relationship between such responses and predictions regarding particular action led those studying *shoulds* to increasingly put stress on the inherent abstractness of values— their height above the hurly-burly of everyday action. These *shoulds* are, to take the language of Hitlin and Piliavin (2004, p. 361), further "up" in an evaluative hierarchy. For this reason, we call this response to the problem of the so-called values-behavior mismatch by the term "elevation." In this perspective, values can well be used to *justify* actions taken, but, contrary to the optimism of Parsons's original account, it is rather difficult to

know how to deduce from them very specific instructions for action in any particular situation.[2]

For example, Longest, Hitlin, and Vaisey (2013, p. 1500) argue that values are meaning-generating ideas that, to some extent, motivate our action as "guiding principles." In Hitlin's (2008, p. 20) felicitous words, they are "bright lights." They lack any compulsory force but still contribute something to action in a perhaps somewhat obscure way. Since values cannot *directly* be reached, at best we find their evidence in the ordering of action across situations. But this cross-situational stability will be far from perfect, since situations have their own imperatives that may outweigh those of values (Milgram 1974).

It is for this reason that many theorists are not at all surprised by the low degree of predictive power of abstract value choices. Given the strength of certain situational norms, a value-behavior mismatch is to be expected (Bardi and Schwartz 2003). Even without the trumping of values by situational imperatives, we might expect a value-behavior mismatch if values are in conflict with one another. If this is the case, then values are, to some degree, a zero-sum game, and one cannot "match" one's behavior with one value without "mismatching" with another. And indeed, Patterson (2015, p. 52) argues that the "primary values of mainstream America" that are "cognitively available to all Americans . . . do not form a harmonious whole, by any means" (also see Baker 2005). But if following one value means violating another, values are in the same structural position as folk proverbs: "He who hesitates is lost"; "Look before you leap." Someone determined to argue that such proverbs guide our behavior has a wealth of material to use to fit any case . . . so long as one only counts the positive associations.

The same problem arises in another attempt initially made to explain the failure of *shoulds* to predict *woulds*, which was to argue that the system was kept intact—and systematic—via both segregation and compartmentalization of values (see, e.g., Rokeach 1968, p. 117). Thus the value of honesty might be "switched on" when one comes to members of the in-group and "switched off" when one deals with the out-group. This might well be true, but there is no reason to think that this compartmentalization is restricted to the simple case of two consensually defined groups. Myrdal's whites who valued honesty but cheated blacks might also claim that certain other persons, while technically in the class "white," were still not deserving of being treated with full honesty. We find ourselves unable to define the supposedly

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[2] Myrdal himself proposed that actors try to present the more specific valuations as derivations from more general ones. Yet at best, our actions are trade-offs between different principles, and so the values to which we appeal to justify our actions are opportunistic: "They are the 'good' reasons rather than the 'true' reasons" (Myrdal 1962, p. 1028, also see p. lxxiii).

transcendent principle without reference to the concrete employments that we had hoped to derive from it.

If espoused values do not actually regularly guide the actions of those who hold them, they might still be used in attempts to convince others—"even if I don't, you *should*." Values, in other words, might indicate unusually important ways of making convincing appeals to others. If so, we might imagine that values researchers would have been interested in when and in what conditions people make such appeals. As far as we can tell, this has not been the case, most probably because the use of values in such explicit terms is, again, as far as we can tell, vanishingly rare. People can choose *which* value to pick, when researchers *require* them to, but it should not be surprising that the results have low predictive power if they also have low ecological validity (Cicourel 2007)—that is, if there is little in the way of action, even verbal action, outside of the interview situation to which the responses correspond (LaPiere 1934). It may be true that actors espouse (embrace) these values when they are asked to, but it is unclear who asks them to do this, other than values researchers.

Given that there is no evidence that the abstracted form of values either guided the behavior of those who purported to hold them or were used to make claims on others, values researchers increasingly put their faith in the assumption that a human organism must be oriented by some principles and these should be the proper referent of the term "values." However, as we shall see, this response was, in a way, *too* successful.

Submergence of the *Woulds*

As we recall, Patterson (2014, p. 12) insisted that we must distinguish between the "espoused values" that might not be realized in action and the "experiential values" that "automatically drive [peoples'] behavior." While one can appreciate the desire of values researchers to grapple with the disjuncture between values and behavior, this response is a *petitio principii*—one in effect *defines* behavior as something caused by values. While we allow tautologies (such as "revealed preferences") when they are a means to the generation of nontrivial predictions, we cannot be pleased with an innovation that merely insulates the claimed relevance of values against the disproof coming from the failure of people to live up to their espoused values. In such a case, values then appear to be an unfalsifiable and nonparsimonious duplication of entities.[3] And it is such a duplication of entities that

[3] We see just this in Patterson's (2015, p. 66) work. When a study shows that "youth who associated with a positive peer group espousing mainstream values were most likely to be socially and educationally competent and to have the least [*sic*] behavioral problems," this is cited as evidence of the importance of values for behavior. But when such differences

58

characterizes this second approach, which we term "submergence," in which values are put in the deepest core of the individual.

There is, to be sure, more to this approach than a definitional rescue of the concept of values. The essence of this line of research has been the attempt to study individual differences in values, and we need to consider the mechanics here carefully, as this empirical work is used to bolster the claim that values drive behavior. (We cannot dispense with such an investigation of actual practice and rely on researchers' *theoretical* statements about values, since these turn out not to correspond closely with the work carried out.) While those interested in the more elevated *shoulds* tend to assume that values are *shared* within some group or subgroups, those investigating the *woulds* aim to determine *types* of persons.

Current empirical contributions in this tradition (Hitlin 2003; Miles 2015) use social-psychological measures of values, most commonly, Shalom Schwartz's typology (Schwartz et al. 2012). (A similar transition from a focus on morality to a focus on obdurate personality traits is also found in Vaisey [2009].) In Schwartz's approach, each respondent is asked to rank in importance certain subvalues (e.g., "freedom," "an exciting life," "pleasure," "ambition," "wealth," "national security," "obedient," "humble," "forgiving," and "world at peace"). From a large number of ratings of these terms, the importance of what are taken to be umbrella values is computed: Self-Direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, Security, Conformity, Tradition, Benevolence, and Universalism. (Thus rating "freedom" highly contributes to one's score on Self-Direction, rating "an exciting life" highly contributes to one's score on Stimulation, and so on for all the examples, respectively.)

One will notice that although this is clearly a small slice of all possible umbrella terms that could be composed, and that although it neglects even more "base" desires (there is no Fat dimension tapped by preferences for bacon, cheese, and chorizo), we have clearly moved a bit lower than previous approaches. The scales may gain increased predictive validity for answering questions about why one person *would* do one thing as opposed to another, but at the cost of having core value dimensions lacking any capacity to persuade others as to the rightness of a course of action. Further, actors can consider it unobjectionable that others differ from themselves in their subjective sense of the importance of hedonism or security. Such equanimity would not be expected for those who do not value the more elevated bright lights of, say, equality and honesty.

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in value patterns are not found—or are actually found in the *wrong direction* (e.g., Fosse 2015, pp. 148–49, 154, 157)—they are dismissed as irrelevant to behavior: "Survey and ethnographic data also indicate that most proletarian black youth know and espouse mainstream *injunctive* norms" (Patterson 2015, p. 69).

59

Upon reflection, it is far from clear as to why we would consider Schwartz's terms *values*. If we define "value" to mean "anything that leads you to do the sorts of things you tend to do," saying that "people have values" then rules out only consistently random behavior and renders "value" a theoretical term not worth much attention. By this standard, a leech that moves towards skin and a rock that rolls downhill also betray values. Although Schwartz had originally attempted to use certain abstractions as his stimuli for measurement, he actually found that it was possible in most cases to replace this measuring system with the Portrait Values Questionnaire, which requires merely that the respondent compare him-/herself with an imaginary alter.[4] It hard to think that rejecting the null hypothesis of no relation between being-the-sort-of-person-who-does-*X* and doing-*X* can be interpreted as strong evidence of the role of values in the human motivational system (Miles 2015).

In other words, an alternate, and more parsimonious, interpretation is that such instruments merely measure one part of what we more generally call *personality*: stable potentialities for responses across a matrix of situations. Certainly, psychologists (e.g., Funder 1997) have defined personality in such a way that it subsumes what are here differentiated as values (also see Triandis and Eunkook 2002). Attempting to solve this difficulty by turning it into a strength, and declaring the relation between values and personality to be a *necessary* one—such as by claiming that we can infer values from behavior (Patterson 2015, p. 32)—is simply to attempt to use one part of personality to make the same predictions that psychologists would claim require information on the *whole* personality (as well as the situation; here see esp. Mischel 1968).

The problem is not so much that the definition of a value as "that which generates behavior" is tautological, but that it competes with other tautological faculties defined as that-which-leads-us-to-do-*X*. This leads to odd confusions in which all sorts of well-understood aspects of personality, most importantly, habits and desires, are repackaged as values. For example, although Fosse (2015) found that the "disconnected" black youth had *more* mainstream (espoused) values than the connected, he did find something that fit his hypothesis: the disconnected black youth were twice as likely to agree with the statement "I'm a person who likes to take risks" (Fosse 2015, p. 152). Using the above logic, Fosse interpreted this as a value difference.

One last incoherence in values research comes from the fact that this approach accepts pleasure and wealth as values. As we will see, the post-Parsonian

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[4] It is worth noting that the impressive findings of Vaisey (2009), demonstrating the high predictive power of certain closed-choice questions for behavior believed to be related to morality, came from respondents' capacity to recognize themselves in a set of types—to pick themselves out of a lineup, in Vaisey's wonderful metaphor.

60

interest in values was bound up with an argument *against* utilitarianism or so-called vulgar economism. Thus we find researchers (e.g., Vaisey and Miles 2014), in good faith, conceiving of values as connected to morality—the conventional opposition to narrow economic self-interest—yet supporting this with data that count narrow economic self-interest as evidence of values! It allows us to casually make reference to values as if they were an *integrative* force, something that is the paradigm of sharedness, when using data on interpersonal *differences*.

The reason for this incoherence is that with the submergence approach, rather than values being what we *ought* to do, they appear to just be what we *do* do. In contrast, the elevation approach retains the assumption that values have *some* sort of obligatory nature (at least within some bounds, to some persons, at some times) but accepts that we are more likely than not to be disappointed if we expect to see this translated to effective shaping of behavior. The two forms of values, elevation and submergence, then, translate into the fundamental opposition between the realms of the *ought* and the *is*, respectively. It is fascinating to discover, then, that the notion of *values* was developed in 19th-century philosophy precisely as that which was supposed to *join* these two realms.

THE RISE OF VALUES

The *Is* and the *Ought*

Intellectual historians agree that this idea of values was born in mid-19th-century German philosophy. (Here we briefly sketch the way in which this notion was imported into sociology; a fuller version is given in Martin and Lembo [forthcoming][5]; sources on the history of the concept include Werkmeister [1970] Galewicz [1990]; Hügli [2004]; Steinbrenner [2005]). The impetus was a dissatisfaction with the Idealist systems (such as Hegel's), which had seemed to join the *is* and the *ought*, but only by making claims about nature and history that were grandiose and implausible. The "return to Kant" involved, among other things, an increased acceptance that the realms of the *is* and the *ought* were not easily blended (see Rose 1981; Beiser 2014). The most successful system for some time was introduced by the remarkable Hermann Lotze, who recast the opposition between *is* and *ought* as one between (on the one hand) material objects that could exist and (on the other hand), quasi-Platonic Ideas, mental constructs that possessed validity, even though they did not exist.

Given this opposition between existence and validity, Lotze proposed that they could be joined in the realm of values, that is, that which ought to exist (Lotze [1856–64] 1885, 2:327). This notion of values was enormously

[5] Martin and Lembo (forthcoming) is available from the authors.

successful, in large part because it helped organize the increasing German interest in describing societal differentiation in terms of cultural spheres. Rather than this differentiation being understood in functional terms, as in French and British economic and social thought, this differentiation was, first and foremost, a phenomenon regarding the perfection of different cultural spheres—for example, the scientific, the economic, the aesthetic, the religious, the sociopolitical (Lotze [1856–64] 1885)—spheres that might be rooted in the human spirit in the same way that leaves and buds are implicit in the seed of a plant. Although the term was taken from political economy (Steinbrenner 2005, pp. 590, 601; see also Meinong 1894, p. 5; 1912–13, p. 2), it was increasingly closely associated with the sphere of culture and with specifically cultural analyses (as opposed to natural-scientific ones).

This understanding of values became characteristic of what is known as the Southwest school of German philosophy—the circle that influenced Max Weber (e.g., Windelband [1914] 1921, p. 208). In particular, there were three versions of the use of values that became important for the social sciences in the United States. The first was that of Georg Simmel, who started from the fundamental division between *nature* and *culture* as objects of study (e.g., [1907] 1978, p. 59), one accepted by most neo-Kantians as producing two different families of sciences, the natural/physical sciences and the human/cultural sciences.

This vision was the first to influence American sociological thinking on values, in particular through the extremely well-regarded work of W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki on *The Polish Peasant*. Their influential definition of a value was an object that had, in addition to its brute existence, "a meaning with regard to which it is or may be an object of activity" (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918, 1:21). What should strike us as surprising is how concrete a value was: these were things in the world, and what made them different from objects was simply that they were brought under the umbrella of cultural meaning as opposed to natural indifference (Znaniecki 1934, pp. 34, 41, 80, 84, 93, 155; also see Cooley 1918, p. 284; Faris 1928, p. 278).

But there were two other approaches from which sociologists could draw. One was that of Eduard Spranger, who was interested in interindividual differences in what he called "forms of life," which paralleled recognized institutional realms. Thus there is the economic sphere, but also an "economic type" of man (Spranger 1914, p. 433; [1921] 1928, p. 250; 1925, p. 280). This approach was influential in American social psychology, becoming the theoretical basis for measuring instruments that were used to typecast respondents (Allport and Vernon 1931). It is this approach that is the origin of the Schwartz scale discussed earlier (Cieciuch, Schwartz, and Davidov 2015).

The other theory came from Spranger's intellectual opponent, Max Weber. In his general approach to values, Weber relied on terminology from his friend, Heinrich Rickert (esp. [1929] 1986) to discuss the relation of values

62

to concept formation in the human sciences. But Weber also gave an influential formulation of the relation of values to cultural differentiation (see Burger 1976; Oakes 1988; Bruun 2007). Here Weber ([1915] 1946) accepted the premise of value differentiation but rejected the notion that there was some sort of possible harmonization. The process of Western modernization involved the increasing clarification, and separation, of the cultural values and their increasing identification with institutional spheres. The increased differentiation of these values meant that there was less and less of a capacity for a "wholeness" of life and more and more unavoidable conflict (antinomy) between those following the different values. You serve one God and offend the others (Weber [1919] 1946, p. 151).

Weber's use of *values*, however, was inconsistent: there was a wide gulf between his use of the term when it came to his epistemology and his use for his theory of social change. Regarding the latter, Weber might speak of "cultural values" (e.g., [1920–21] 1976), implying that their definitions were shared across persons in some place and time. Rickert had argued that the human scientist was necessarily oriented to these cultural values in the process of concept formation. But Weber, although relying on Rickert's language to discuss his epistemology, emphasized that the values that guide the researcher are fundamentally individual and bereft of any transcendent quality. It is simply that Weber could find no other word to describe this sort of orientation.[6]

Given that Talcott Parsons's great claim to fame was to be an importer of Weber's work to the United States, it might be surprising to realize that Parsons's entire approach to values was antithetical to that of Weber (Camic 2005, p. 253). Weber, more than anyone else, returned to the core economic idea of competing ends and argued for their fundamental incommensurability. But fascinatingly, when brought into the United States by Talcott Parsons, Weber's approach to values was claimed to solve the very problem that, to Weber, values *were*.

THE AMERICAN REVALUATION

Parsons's Project

Talcott Parsons had studied in Germany with members of the Southwest school (Camic 2005, esp. p. 260n14), and yet his work was a dedicated

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[6] This is literally true. Max had written to his wife (April 10, 1902) that he had been reading Rickert, which he thought excellent—"apart from the terminology ('value')" (Weber 2012, p. 374); within a few months, he was to attempt to fix this problem. In a recently discovered and translated set of notes marked "Rickert's values," Weber (2012, p. 413) writes, "As a test, one can try *whenever* R[ickert] speaks of 'values', to replace that term by '___'." He never filled in the blank.

attempt to erase what was distinctive about its approach, one that turned on the division between the natural and human sciences. Instead, Parsons's use of the idea of values had more in common with that in anthropology than in the sociology of his day. There, the notion of values was primarily used to support arguments about cultural relativism (see, e.g., Malinowski 1922, p. 25; Benedict [1934] 1959, p. 246). Parsons claimed that what was distinctive to German sociology was "the specific role of 'values'," which implies a similar form of relativism (Parsons [1932] 1991, pp. 191–92). Each set of values appears as "a closed, complete whole"—quite the contrary of the focus on competing values we have seen in Weber, whose thought Parsons claimed to be transmitting!

Even more, Parsons attempted to downplay the centrality of interests for Weber's approach to action (Pope, Cohen, and Hazelrigg 1975). Parsons (1991 [1935], p. 62) insisted that Weber had highlighted an overlooked class of phenomena: "'objective,' 'selfless' devotion to worldly tasks, which is 'disinterested.'" Since Weber often equated values and interests (see, e.g., 2012, pp. 413–14), we cannot explain Parsons's choice here as stemming from his role as faithful transmitter of received wisdom. Instead, we must put this recasting of values in the context of Parsons's project.

Parsons's project, as he himself (1975, p. 666; also see 1977, p. 132) later emphasized, was to structure the theoretical relations between sociological theory and economics (Camic 1987, pp. 428–29). His initial (e.g., 1935b, p. 299) perspective took a rather simple form: on one side, egoism, and on the other side, altruism. The vision became somewhat more sophisticated in his first major work, *The Structure of Social Action* (first published in 1937; a second edition was published in 1949; for a discussion see Martin and Lembo [forthcoming]). But this only made the nature of the great divide between the two all the clearer: sociology was to economics as disinterest was to interest (see Camic 1989, pp. 50, 76; Cohen, Hazelrigg, and Pope 1975, pp. 235–36; Warner 1978, pp. 1338–39).

Here Parsons implausibly claimed that the scholars from whom he drew were all united in pointing to the importance of this disinterest (e.g., [1949] 1968, p. 661 on Weber, p. 414 on Durkheim, p. 164 on Marshall, p. 657 on Tönnies, and p. 107 on Pareto).[7] His opponents, in contrast, including Marx, were lumped together as utilitarians who had a theory of interests. Could such a partition be established, it would chart out a region for sociological investigations that was out of the reach of economic analysis.

In sum, Parsons constructed an opposition that was not quite the same as the opposition of egoism and altruism that both Durkheim and Alfred

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[7] "The most striking feature of recent sociological thought has been a slow, and even as yet not frequently clear, realization of the concrete importance of the principal factor lying to the other side of the economic, the 'value' factor" (Parsons 1935a, p. 663).

64

Marshall employed, for altruism was, as both noted, very often inspired by emotions like love or enthusiasm. Such feelings did not fit the particularly modern conception that Parsons was developing, one that pitted self-interest against disinterest. Against all odds, Parsons enjoyed a remarkable degree of success in this effort to remold sociologists' understanding of the terrain of previous theory. Of course, few of us are Parsonians today, and it may reasonably be objected that this history, however curious, is irrelevant for our current understanding of values. But that is not so. Parsons had changed the fundamental understanding of what a "value" was, such that even when sociologists largely abandoned his system, they retained this radically new—and deeply problematic—understanding of the nature of values.

Abstraction and Elevation

Before Parsons's work, the dominant sociological approach to values in the United States, where it differed from the anthropological, was basically a Simmelian one, turning on the opposition between the indifference of nature and the meaningfulness of culture. Parsons had managed to shift the fundamental distinction to one between *interest* and *disinterest*. To do this, however, he had to make an even more fundamental change. As we recall, to earlier sociologists, values had been concrete—objects or persons that one cared about (e.g., Juliet to Romeo).

But with Parsons's work, values became abstract (e.g., Miles 2015, pp. 680–81). While of course we cannot hold Parsons solely responsible for this (there was some movement in this direction already, and Parsons's *Structure* only became extremely influential after the Second World War), his work was the single most important factor in persuading sociologists not only to make values more abstract, but to make them both *shared* and *cognitive* (cf. Barbalet 2012, p. 412).[8] Let us take these points in order. For Thomas and Znaniecki, values were termed *social* because they inhabited the realm of meaning, of culture, as opposed to nature—*not* because they were necessarily shared (Znaniecki 1927, pp. 578–79; also p. 552). But this sharedness became increasingly defined as an inherent aspect of values (e.g., Williams 1956, p. 375). This is all the more odd because it directly contradicted the premises of the Spranger/Weber traditions of looking at *differences* in values. The resolution that was reached, most importantly with the revival of this tradition in the 1960s and 1970s in the work of Milton Rokeach, was that all persons shared the same basic set of values, and

[8] Here we concentrate on Parsons's earlier system, which is more relevant for the interpretation of action. However, his later functionalist system (e.g., 1977) did not undo the equation of *values* and *disinterest*. Indeed, the bass fiddle of Parsons's AGIL quartet, the subsystem of pattern-maintenance that corresponded to cultural values, occupied its structural position by virtue of its Universalism and Neutrality (as well as Quality and Diffuseness)—thus *codifying* the nature of *all* cultural values as disinterested!

differed only in the relative weight placed on each. But this resolution relied on the second change that Parsons introduced: the transformation of values from concrete objects to abstract beliefs.

"A *value*," wrote Rokeach (1973, p. 5), "is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence." Not only was a value now a *belief*, but the state it referred to was to have "a transcendental quality to it, guiding actions, attitudes, judgments and comparisons across specific objects and situations and beyond immediate goals to more ultimate goals" (p. 18; also see Williams 1956, p. 374). This conviction that values must be beliefs is retained by the current leading force in this tradition, Schwartz (e.g., 1992), who similarly defined value components as *beliefs* that *motivate action* to goals, but *transcend specific situations* by serving as *criteria* ordered by *importance* (also see Hitlin 2006, p. 26). Thus those whose actual theoretical parentage is different—more in line with Spranger's notion that these were "ways of living"—still follow the Parsonians in defining these values as propositional beliefs, not as sentiments or habits.

This attempt to define values as a species of beliefs led to no end of difficulties for values theorists. Consider the most famous commonly recycled definition of values, one taken from a contribution to Parsons's project, namely that a value is a "conception of the desirable" (Kluckhohn 1954, p. 395). Taken literally, someone who has a persistent hankering for raw, human flesh to eat, and knows it, is acting according to values when he grabs and devours one of his neighbors. Given that we already have a word for this—*desires*—it is unclear what is added by calling these *values*. Moreover, it is such a model of action that Parsons found anarchic and horrific, one rooting all in the disorganized passions of the actor.

Our immediate response is to attempt to follow Parsons and make desires an individual characteristic (perhaps psychological/biological) and values "shared or collective" (Patterson 2015, p. 31). But given that the positive evaluation of pizza is probably no less widespread than is, say, that of equal rights, this would seem to require that we accept pizza—or, more technically, our belief that pizza is good—as an excellent example of a value.

Kluckhohn recognized that sharedness was not enough to distinguish a value from a desire, and so he went on to argue that actually, "a value is *not* just a preference but is a preference which is felt and/or considered to be justified." In other words, values are, at bare minimum, *subjectively valid*—we must believe that we could justify them. By claiming to follow Kluckhohn, but only citing the first part of his definition (as they do),[9] values

[9] A JSTOR search for sociologists using Kluckhohn's name and the phrase "conceptions of the desirable" since 1990 (i.e., Kriesi 1990; Sacchi 1998; Johnson 2001; Hitlin 2003;

researchers obscure the inherent connection of their terms to this sense of subjective validity. But note that this subjective validity is then a second-order abstraction. The value is not the flesh that we might wish to eat, nor even the *conception* that we would like to eat the flesh. It only becomes a value when we have a conception of the conception, a consideration of the justifiability of the conception. We go on to argue that, strange as it might seem, it is this complex roundabout reliance on justifiability that explains why, since Parsons, we have abstracted values from the concrete.

GIVING REASONS

Stratification and Abstraction

Why did values become abstract? While making this point with the degree of support appropriate goes beyond the bounds of this paper (although see Martin and Lembo, forthcoming), we think it is notable that theorists who addressed this issue head-on emphasized the importance of the abstraction of values in producing consensus regarding legitimate domination. Interests, Rokeach (1973, p. 22) noted, could never serve as "generalized plans for conflict resolution." Values were the sorts of things that, if they *did* exist as abstractions, would solve the problems that Parsons had insisted threatened society—problems of order. Parsons made clear that he was sure not only that they *did* exist, but that they *had* to, because without consensus on values, we could never agree on how other *persons* should be valued—and why some of them should enjoy better lives than others (see [c. 1939] 2010, pp. 114–15, 128, 153; [1940] 1949, p. 167); 1977, p. 327). And the more differentiated the society, the more *abstract* these legitimating principles had to be (Parsons 1977, p. 307).

Of course, simply because this conception of values *could* be taken to legitimize stratification in no way demonstrates that this is *why* Parsons formulated this more abstract conception of values. However, a closer look at the context of Parsons's work demonstrates that this vision of values was inseparable from a very specific attempt to justify a certain type of social relationship, and that this has left sociology with a deeply flawed theory of action.

In what was widely understood as *the* pivotal postwar contribution on American values (see Rose 1999, pp. 80, 82), Robin M. Williams Jr. noted that it was no accident that evidence of the importance of values might only come from in-depth interviews: "For it is in explanations and reasons that we often discover the significant value predicates that uncover the normative regularities behind seemingly varied actions" (Williams 1956, p. 380).

Hitlin and Piliavin 2004; Wuthnow 2008; Vaisey 2009, 2010; Bühlmann, Elcheroth, and Tettamanti 2010) does not produce a single scholar noting the validity qualification.

In other words, "values" appear when people give explanations and reasons for their actions or positions. This fit the folk psychology of the mid-20th century—namely, that these reasons had previously been lurking in the mind, waiting for the right occasion to generate an action. Of course, even at the time, this sort of theory of action, one that posits that we first determine our desired end states, and then search for means to these ends, was being challenged, and since then, it has grown ever less plausible with advances in cognitive science (see Whitford 2002; Turner 2018). For Parsons, however, it was a fundamental axiom that people "assign subjective motives to their action." So, "if asked why they do a given thing," they "reply with reference to a 'motive,'" such that their linguistic responses "manifest" the underlying sentiments and motives behind their actions (Parsons [1949] 1968, p. 26). Were this really a fact, explaining action would be far easier than it is.

For, as C. Wright Mills (1940) pointed out long ago, the evidence for motives arises *after* acts, and in the social interaction of questioning, sometimes in response to challenge. What we take as a motive might be some sort of impulse to action that preceded the action, but we cannot be confident in any particular case, because, Mills said, we know that in different settings, different vocabularies of motive are considered appropriate. Therefore, the same action can be justified by recourse to one motive in one situation and another motive in another situation. But the hypostatization of some of these reasons-givings as values requires that we ignore this social psychological finding and treat interviews as if they were X-rays of the brain.

If we attempt to treat the process of giving reasons for actions as a sociological phenomenon, we find that, rather than being a universal practice, it is closely connected with the rise of Western modernity (cf. MacIntyre 1981, p. 66).[10] The freeing of the common citizenry from automatic obedience to tradition and authority that accompanied the cluster of developments that we call "modernization" also brought the burden of having compelling accounts linking one's action to both one's own internal direction and to consensually recognized principles. The starkness of this change is wonderfully shown in Collier's (1997) work on a Spanish village she had first studied in the 1960s. Returning there in the 1980s after modernization set in, Collier finds that rather than explain their actions with a shrug, recourse to tradition, and the helpless lot of mortals—as she had found a generation before—the young adults now feel it necessary to be able to account for any action as a conscious decision made according to internal principles. As Sica (1988) notes, the rationalist culture requires that we have accessible a "principle of sufficient reason," just as citizens of a police state need their papers handy.

[10] In Sica's (1988, p. 254) wonderful words, "The human animal has only recently discovered the process called giving just reasons, [and] many of its kind do not practice it very well yet."

68

We can justify action by recourse to a local norm, but when there is no norm, or when we have violated a norm, we must appeal to a higher court of more abstract, supervening principles. Values, we propose, are the virtual entities that arise in the coordination of such claims.[11] Further, unlike many other virtual entities used in such accounting ("tradition," "the Good," etc.), they allow for a limited sort of pluralism: all those who have *some* values are entitled to a form of basic dignity, even if their values are not *our* values. However, once we understand values as a form of self-accounting—an ethnomethod, something people do—we become aware of a dark side: they are a way that some, and not others, are able to claim legitimacy for their desires.

Cultivation and Valuation

Just as many Americans can casually assume that values must be an inherent part of the human personality system (despite the notion being less than 200 years old), so too has it been common for Westerners to assume that a sense of "oughtness" is an intrinsic component of all moral systems. While cultural anthropological evidence strongly forces us away from such a conception (Turner 2010), it remains the case that modern Westerners connect morality, rightness, and oughtness. Values were one way of attempting to reformulate this conception to fit a differentiated world. Weber's use of the idea of values, as Goldman (1988, 1992) in particular has emphasized, was bound up with his belief that the only chance for a modern actor to have a meaningful life, while also facing the facts of the rationalized world, was a leap of conviction, a willful decision to dedicate oneself to a certain "cause" or "object" [*Sache*]. One in effect chose from a limited list of goals and made one's choice a *should*.

Weber of course recognized that the "object" that one served was really one thrown out from one's self into objectivity, and what one served was only in a certain sense outside one's self—but he believed that such extrojection was necessary given the residues of the Puritan character structure in modern human beings. ("The idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the *ghost of dead religious beliefs*," in Parsons's graceful and free translation [1920–21] 1976, p. 182].)

Weber, so in love with this character structure, never looked behind the falsity of this way of thinking. But the elevation of the goals of some persons to the position of transcendent *shoulds* is equivalent to allowing them to grade their own exams rather than being queried by Saint Peter.[12] But it

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[11] Indeed, in his pivotal first work, Lotze ([1856–64] 1885, 1:667) made precisely this point.

[12] Simmel ([1918] 2010) took this idea even further, attempting to formulate an ethics whereby one's own nature could be treated as ethically binding on one—when one acted in accordance with one's nature, one was following a law. This marvelous good fortune is

is this promise of being able to transmute one's *own* desires into imperatives that gives the idea of values its hold on us. What should give us pause is that it appears that this wonderful bit of alchemy, far from being a universal part of the human subjectivity, is specifically a skill of the contemporary middle class.

Studies of class differences in child-rearing find that middle-class parents give a great deal of attention to explicating reasons, including those behind their own actions (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989, pp. 25, 104; Lareau 2003, pp. 110, 116, 154). This strategy of depersonalization and intellectualization has the side-effect of leading their children to have greater facility in manipulating abstractions (Bernstein 1971), sometimes to the irritation of their parents, "as children of all ages repeatedly seek to reason with their parents" (Lareau 2003, p. 111). Other studies find not only that middle-class children are more trained in explanations-givings (see Cicourel 1981) but that higher levels of formal education boost the capacity for "giving just reasons" (Kuhn 1991). Given such a class gradient in practices of justification, it is hardly surprising that the key flashpoint for discussions of values has been the perennial question of to what extent the poor carry some guilt for their own condition (Swidler 1986). Anyone attempting to provide a justification is likely to be at a disadvantage if she is forced to employ as elements only pieces chosen by others, which is the case for the respondent confronting a survey item. This task becomes even more formidable when the style of justification is one that is taken from a particular class culture.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that part of our folk theory of values is that the same terms that are used for justification when it comes to our own past action can also be used to inspire others for future action as motivations. We cannot speak to the accuracy of this assumption, and we need not establish that such inspiration never occurs, although we find it fascinating that there are, so far as we know, no studies investigating the use of values as means of persuasion in everyday discourse (while there *are* studies of the use of values to *justify* positions; e.g., Kristiansen and Zanna 1994).[13] If, indeed, values must be taken seriously because of their force in processes of argumentation, it would seem most surprising that the theories of the structure of such argumentation (most importantly, Rips 1998) have *no* place for such maneuvers in their typology and instead only examine

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akin to that of the apocryphal American Methodist, whose "calling" to leave his family and wander preaching the word conveniently arrived whenever it was time to bring the grain in.

[13] Feldman and Zaller's (1992) study, often cited as demonstrating that Americans appeal to values to justify positions, actually only demonstrates that social scientists can transmute statements that are more parsimoniously interpreted as claims of putative fact (e.g., "anyone in America can get ahead") into values (Individualism).

70

justifications of one's *own* actions or claims (and not attempts to persuade another to change his or her mind). However, whether they are used only in the process of justification, or also in the process of elicitation, or only actually in surveys, values are a phenomenon that, empirically, seem to emerge from a particular social relation but have, without empirical warrant, been imputed as an intraindividual cognitive element. Further, the social relation they involve, one of successful argumentative justification, is one that social scientists—and their natural allies—are prone to dominate. One might think that the history of studies of poverty, which often turned on a fetishization in which social relations (such as exploitation) were ignored and recast as attributes of individuals (such as low motivation) that then could "explain" the state of the subaltern, would have alerted us to the danger of this slippage in the case of values.

In sum, the notion of values makes sense to us because it fits modern ethnomethods of justification via abstractions, but thereby implicitly requires false assumptions about the way that humans work, retrojecting post hoc justifications in time and treating them as if they were robust and identifiable elements of actors' cognitive processes.[14] Our argument that the shift to the abstract conception of values, one that we have seen was connected in Parsons's terms with a reorientation of the core theoretical structures of sociology around an opposition of interest/disinterest, is connected to modern practices of self-accounting, as well as to legitimations of stratification, may seem, even if intriguing, impossible to support. However, a closer look at Parsons's main concerns when he developed his theories demonstrates both of these points.

PARSONS, VALUES, AND THE PROFESSIONS

Professions and Modernization

In developing this theory, Parsons continually went back to the nature of the professions, which, he thought, expressed something distinctive about modernization (Wenzel 1990; Gerhardt 1998, p. 142; 2002; Martin and Lembo, forthcoming). As Parsons (1977, pp. 41–42; also [1970b], p. 354; Parsons and Smelser 1956, p. 33) later recalled, "The professional orientation was, as I initially put it, 'disinterested' . . . in the sense in which the physician professes [n.b.] to be above all concerned with the welfare of the patient" (for early examples, see [1934] 1991, pp. 47–48; [1939] 1949, p. 186). The disinterest of the professions, Parsons believed, was an existence proof of the falsity of any view of action that turned on interests, as professionals used their superior

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[14] As Luhmann (2000, pp. 181, 183) has argued, it seems a "terminological accident" that we make the distinction between values and interests: "The bifurcation [*Doppelung*] values/ interests is an extremely artificial, evolutionarily improbable arrangement, that we cannot impute to any premodern society."

bargaining position in a specifically *disinterested* way, demonstrating the power of norms over conduct. At the same time, the disinterest of the professionals, combined with their superior knowledge, demonstrated that at least here, there was a form of incontestably legitimate authority (Parsons 1977, p. 342).

Treating professionals as the existence proof of disinterest required that sociologists accept professionals' claims to be disinterested—to enter the profession only to serve others—at face value. We need not doubt that such accounts may be popular among professionals. Indeed, this would explain why researchers (Walkerdine 1988, pp. 139, 148; Walkerdine and Lucey 1989, pp. 90–91) found middle-class four-year-olds to be deeply puzzled by the relations among work, money, and goods. Their working-class age mates, in contrast, well understood the relations among work, money, goods, and necessity. This acceptance of the self-serving professions of the professionals was not shared by previous American sociologists (see, e.g., Cooley 1918, p. 335) or by Parsons's own sources (Marshall [1890] 1961, p. 568).

This theoretical imperative to accept accountings as valid data was, then, a surprising about-face for American sociology. But this enforced naiveté became increasingly common in sociology. Even if Parsons did not single-handedly revise American sociologists' theory of the action system in such a way as to confuse rationalizations and motivations, he certainly not only was the apogee of such a tendency, but he gave us the vocabulary to make such analytic distortions extremely difficult to uncover. The tendency of sociologists to treat the self-explanations of professionals—or, later, whomever they identified with—at face value became a serious interpretive bias (Kurzman 1991).[15] By building into the theory of action a form of self-accounting in which the professionals excelled—a way of explaining actions by recourse to functions and abstractions, as opposed to concrete norms—the postwar sociologists who followed the general Parsonian approach found it difficult to distinguish justifications made *after* action from whatever cognitions might have come *before* it. By accepting as their core moral orientation a distinction between values and interests, collective and individual, altruistic and egoistic, and, even more, mapping this onto the distinction between themselves and their negative reference group, economists, sociologists have hampered any efforts to develop a plausible theory of action. We go on to sketch how such a theory, unencumbered by the need to grant disinterest to friends and to snatch it away from enemies, might look.

[15] Kurzman's wonderful study of sociologists-in-action argues that they choose which values to appeal to depending on their analytic interests, and their degree of social distance to their subjects.

72

FROM VALUES TO INTERESTS

A Small Change

We saw that values became central to American sociology largely because sociologists were inspired by philosophical notions that were then influencing German sociologists. Yet when Albion Small went to Germany, a generation before Parsons, what he brought back as his intellectual booty was not the notion of *values*, but that of *interests*. Like Parsons, Small began with the critique that previous social thinkers had substituted *Homo oeconomicus* for the "real man" (Small 1905, p. 42; this discussion was reprinted in Park and Burgess's famous text [1921] 1924, pp. 454–58). But how to formulate an alternative? "In the beginning," wrote Small (p. 196), "were interests." If can we understand these interests, "we have the open sesame to all the secrets that sociology is likely to detect for a long while to come" (pp. 281–82), for interests are to social science as atoms are to physics. "Interests are the stuff that men are made of" (p. 426).

Interests were key because they bring us to the central issue of how actors understand their situation, what they are trying to do, and what means are available to them (Small 1905, pp. 637, 641). To go further, Small relied in large part on the work of Gustav Ratzenhofer,[16] who, Small believed, not only had provided the best understanding of the history of the notion of interests but also had the best available scheme with which to organize human institutions, one "in terms of the interests that are the irreducible elements of association" (p. 621, 431–32; also see Small 1916, p. 818). And here Small managed to use *interests* to come up with basically the same list of spheres that Spranger and Weber attributed to the organization of values, and that were to reappear as "orders of worth" in Boltanski and Thénevot ([1991] 2006; see Small 1905, pp. 20, 104–5, 197–98, 329, 379, 435; cf. 1916, p. 799). Thus Small saw the actor as fundamentally motivated by the pursuit of interest, and the key to understanding social dynamics was "stating the actual conflict of interests in present society" (Small 1905, p. 373; see also pp. 365, 367–68). But it is not just that the story of human history is the story of the *interpersonal* conflict of interests (pp. 203, 205, 240, 248); there is also an *intrapersonal* "struggle of each distinct interest to express itself in the individual" (pp. 471–72; see also p. 521).

Small's approach is not without flaws. Most important, Small made what seemed at the time an innocuous assumption: that it is unproblematic to

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[16] Simmel also relied on the conception of interests to define the *content* of sociation; Simmel reviewed one of Ratzenhofer's works but may not have read the work that Small discusses (Swedberg 2005, p. 57). Ratzenhofer was no simplistic, commonsensical, fuddy-duddy—he had a somewhat mystical understanding of all reality as different degrees of organization of some primordial force, a not uncommon view in the 19th century (1898, pp. 24–27).

determine the objective interests of actors. Debates about the "*real* interests" of the working class should have forced upon all of us a recognition that no theory can rely on such an imputation. If an objective interest is that which would maximize some X at some unspecified time (and the choice of time horizon is consequential!), then only an omniscient being can determine these "objective interests." Social life is a multiplayer game in which it is impossible to, by surveying the board, determine the best moves for any side. Thus when we speak of interests, we mean interests in a consistently *phenomenological* sense, one that emphasizes the continuity between "having an interest" and "taking an interest." That is, we here speak only of the experience of interest to which an actor would attest (one might say "subjective" were this not freighted with the misleading connotations of being opposed to "objective," or *true*, interests). Instead of attempting to oppose ideal values to material interests as two classes of motives, and arguing for the importance of the second, we propose that there is a single phenomenon of relation-to-an-object.

This understanding of a fundamental unity of these two meanings of *interest*, having an interest in and taking an interest in, may initially seem foreign to sociologists, but it is the conception that underlay Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.[17] Smith ([1759] 1997, 1:1) famously began this work, "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it." Thus Smith rejected the claims of both those (like Francis Hutcheson) who declared that virtue consisted in "pure and disinterested benevolence alone" and those (like Bernard Mandeville) who insisted that this was impossible, for humans were moved *only* by self-interest (Smith [1759] 1997, vol. 2, pp. 155, 157, 165). Instead, Smith conceived of us as creatures with a natural tendency to be more interested in the things closest to us; were we to arrange the world in a set of concentric circles, with self in the middle, children and spouse next, then parents and siblings, then friends and neighbors, then coreligionists and compatriots, and so on, we would find our interest tending to decrease (Smith [1759] 1997, 2:37–38, 2:140).

In particular, Smith noted our tendency to *be* extremely interested in the things in which we are invested and in which we *have* an interest ([1759] 1997, 1:109). Thus he cautioned reserve in discussing topics such as "of our own friends, our own studies, our own professions. All these are objects which we cannot expect should interest our companions in the same degree in which they interest us" (1:38). Yet there are other cases in which all persons are likely to respond similarly, given that certain situations *call out* one's

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[17] We are grateful to a reviewer for pointing to the importance of Smith's work for our argument.

interest—we see evidence of this in our reaction to fictional portrayals, where "our joy for the deliverance of those heroes of tragedy or romance who interest us, is as sincere as our grief for their distress" (1:3; also 1:36). When this interest is evoked by, for example, someone's cry for help, "it interests us in his fortune, and . . . forces us almost involuntarily to fly to his assistance" (1:43).

Thus, while Smith also used interests in the sense of that which benefits us, speaking of situations in which persons have interests "directly opposite" ([1759] 1997, 1:19, 1:48; also 1:58), he joined this with a vision of us becoming interested in others because of our innate human capacity to take the role of others (for him, via the imagination). The notion of a phenomenological consistency between the two meanings of "interested" thus has a noble parentage. But it also, we go on to show, fits robust evidence on patterns of human cognition. It is for this reason that we believe that sociology can profit by rejecting the notion of values, established by Parsons as a scarecrow to drive away the specter of interested action, and return to that of interests.

A Return to Earlier Conceptions of Values?

We demonstrated that between the wars, American sociology had a notion of values that was concrete, and free from the paradoxes of the current conception. Why, then, should we turn to the notion of interests, instead of returning to this earlier version of values? The reason is that although this conception of values was a concrete one, the very way that the concreteness was established contained a paradox. On the one hand, a value was unlike a mere natural object in that it made reference to human wants and desires. On the other hand, the nature of this reference was underspecified, such that two different persons could value the object differently. It was for this reason that Thomas and Znaniecki (1918, 1:22) also formulated their notion of an *attitude*, which is "the individual counterpart of the social value." If two persons, A and B, could have different reactions (say, R and $\sim R$) to the same value X, it is because they have different attitudes (P and Q; p. 45).

For this reason, Thomas and Znaniecki (1918, 1:45, 1:58) insisted on triadic analyses with an almost Peircean fervor: we always need the "*tertium quid*—the attitude upon which the interest must act in order to produce" the effect (p. 59). "The law can be binding only if the third missing term is inserted, namely, an attitude of the subject which we can express approximately" (p. 60; again, p. 61). But we believe that this tertium quid is not inherently necessary and only arose because of an incomplete humanizing of the value. That is, the object-as-value was distinguished from the natural object as being valued by "someone," but only when we consider the specific persons who had a relation to the object could we know the nature of

this valuation. This led to an unnecessary duplication of entities, and an awkward social psychology. It is not, however, easy to transform this triadic conception to a more parsimonious dyad without losing what distinguishes values from interests. For interests, as we go on to show, have previously been understood as a dyadic phenomenon in contrast to values, which are transdyadic.

Values and Interests

What is the relation between the concepts *interest* and *value*? The hypostatization of values as a set of virtual (if abstract) existences deliberately plucked them out of the cognitive relation that a human might have with a concrete object. Values were then reattached not to a particular human-object or human-human *dyad*, but, more ambitiously, to a vast set of relations. Value, as Marx ([1867] 1906; also see Simmel [1907] 1978, p. 69) famously argued, must ultimately refer not merely to relations of preferability between commodities, but to the whole set of relations between buyers and sellers, employers and employees, employees and their families, and so on. Interest is also a relation, but it is a much simpler one: it is dyadic, a relation of a human to an object. As Sahlins (1981, p. 68) points out, interest is *personal* in a way that value is not. "An interest in something is the difference it makes for someone." The *value* of a five franc piece may be due to the web of exchanges a la Marx, but "this general and abstract social sense is not the value of five francs *to me*."[18]

The assumed transphenomenal nature of values supported the strange confusions we have seen above, in which values were assumed without second thought to be *more* "shared" than interests, even as investigators focused on *differences* between individuals' values. If we were not to attempt to root values in such a larger relational context, they would indeed collapse back into subjective (which is not to say asocial) valuations. But such a collapse would allow us to cut what are, for value theorists, Gordian knots. For example, Hitlin and Piliavin (2004) argue that the value that sex expresses is love; sex, they declare, is not a value, but love *is*. Dewey's (1929, pp. 2, 112, 394, 396) perspective suggests that neither sex nor love is the sort of thing that might bear this value, while another *person*—the object, say, of sexual/romantic desire/love—can indeed be valuable.

Such an emendation, however, would leave us with a concept that is, as Sahlins said, closer to what is commonly meant by interests, and we suggest that if we replace the term *values* with *interests*, Dewey's core insights—as

[18] Here Sahlins builds on Saussure's ([1915] 1959, pp. 113ff) way of treating the value of a sign as something established only vis-à-vis other signs, one that explicitly draws on economic logic.

76

well as those of Joas (2000)—are only clarified. This, of course, may seem to be exactly what we in sociology were trying to get *away* from; as we have seen, theorists embraced *values* in order to demonstrate the incompleteness of *Homo oeconomicus*. But in the past, sociologists have taken *interest* in a particularly narrow way, meaning only egotistic economic interests (Spillman and Strand 2013). This narrowing was originally considered a welcome property. Parsons was not alone in thinking the passions too "random" to allow for the emergence of order. As Hirschman (1977) beautifully showed, in the century after Hobbes, European thinkers shifted from these passions to a focus on interests, which emphasized the predictability, as opposed to randomness, of such ends, precisely by narrowing the actor's orientation to issues having to do with wealth (also see Gunn 1968; Hirschman 1986; the central sociological treatment is Swedberg [2005]).

Given that *interests* became associated with sociologists' negative reference group, economists, and their narrowly constructed version of the rational actor, the opposition of interests (selfish) to values (moral) became a fundamental binary opposition a la Lévi-Strauss in the social thinker's mind.[19] (For an important treatment, see Habermas [1968] 1971, esp. p. 311; for an important critique, Chong [1996].) Interests, in this light, have been taken as indicative of a selfish orientation to the world, as opposed to one motivated by values. The tendency to push all our vices into *interests* and our virtues into *values* has attached a stigma to interests, just as was previously the case with "passions"; indeed, speaking frankly of one's interests can, in certain settings, be equivalent to "wrecking" a validity claim, in Goffmanian terms. That is, if we ask someone why he takes a certain position, and he points to his own interests, we are likely to think him somewhat duplicitous, and playing a deeper game. "It is *we* who are to look for the interests," we think. "*He* is supposed to *justify* his position!"

Sociologists have accepted this rhetorical difference as indicative of an actual psychological distinction between action orientations. But as Dewey ([1916] 1966, p. 350; also pp. 125, 139) argued, this opposition of interest and value is based on a false psychology. Both the irritating egoists, who attempt to demonstrate that those claiming to act on the basis of duties *really* are self-interested, and their opponents, who claim that humans are capable

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[19] Thus Lamont (1992, pp. 184–85) argued that Bourdieu tended to think that it is only the losers who make a virtue of necessity who are "moral" (that is, that values are the children of *ressentiment*); "He presumes that people stress moral values *only* with the goal of improving their positions. He argues that all apparently disinterested acts, including the consumption of culture and the display of moral character traits, are in reality 'interested' because they are ultimately oriented toward the maximization of one's social position" [emphasis in original]). Indeed, her reading is justified: see Bourdieu's ([1988] 1998) negative answer to the question "Is a Disinterested Act Possible?"

of acting *without* interest, are equally wrong. Both ignore the fact that our social bonds with others take the form of interests (see Calhoun 2012, p. 305).

Further, there is nothing inherent in the quasi-Kantian model of the actor that lies at the heart of the sociological vision (Rose 1981)[20] that requires the existence of these "values," for the neo-Kantian value theorists were creatively misremembering Kant as organizing his own system around values (see, e.g., Brentano [1876–94] 1973, p. 6) when in fact, Kant's architecture was oriented around the powers of the mind and their respective *interests*.[21] Even more, although Parsons attempted to use Weber's work on values to *oppose* interests, Weber himself saw the two notions as closely connected, and in some cases, inseparable (Martin and Lembo, forthcoming).

Finally, the notion of "interests" better expresses the fundamental continuity between aspects of the relationship to the object that we tend to interpret as about *evaluation* and those that we see as turning on *engrossment*. In other words, we argue that our conception of interest must encompass the notion of "interesting" as an adjective, a quality, *of* things. As William James (1890, p. 417) noted, some things are more interesting than others, and are so to practically all sentient beings. We (and other primates) are likely to be interested in things that move, that have eyes, that are illuminated, that are changing, that are novel, and that appear dangerous (Corbetta and Shulman 2002; Fiske and Taylor 2013). Indeed, human infants are born finding faces and voices captivating (Flavell 1999). What is key in all cases is that there is something about the object that (as Sahlins said) brings the involvement of the ego. Anything that brings the self into relations may be a generator of interest: even if the beauty of a butterfly does not give us an interest in, say, capturing it, still, we may find it interesting.

It is, however, not that one can simply relabel all cases that were previously covered by the term *values* with that of *interests* and get analytic leverage thereby. If our argument is correct, the term *value* confounded the very real relation of appreciation and care that humans have with some of the things, and some of the people, around them with the altogether different question of how, in conversation, those with facility in bandying about abstractions might *justify* their positions. It did this by reifying the product of the particular social relation of justification and treating it as a part of each individual's mental makeup. If we wish to extricate ourselves from this sort

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[20] This is one that treats the actor as a fusion of an intellect that provides the forms used to organize perception and a free will equivalent to pure reason.

[21] "To every power of the mind one can attribute an *interest* [Interesse], i.e., a principle that contains the condition under which alone the power's exercise is furthered" (Kant [1788] 1995, p. 427; [1788] 2002, p. 152; also [1790] 1987, pp. 163–67). Our point is not that we can build on Kant's understanding of interest here, but simply to highlight how strong the grip of values-thinking was among the neo-Kantians.

78

of enforced gullibility, we need to reverse the motion, and root what are taken as individual attributes, that is, interests, in dynamic relations.

Quality and Investment

Let us return to the dyadic nature of interest. To say that interest emerges from an interaction of self and object (e.g., Hidi and Renninger 2006) is to say that it is a *quality*. A quality is a *potential* to induce a kind of experience in a certain type of being (see Peirce [1875–1910] 1955, pp. 85–86; Dewey 1929, p. 336). Just as a flower may not appear red to a dog the way it does to most humans, nor can humans see the polarization of its light as can a bee, the very objectivity of these qualities is relative to the presence of a particular form of experiencer. Just as for a song to have the quality of being "stirring" means that it has the quality to stir a particular type of person, a circularity that is not vicious, as it is amenable to empirical exploration, to say that something is "interesting" is to make the same sort of claim about an interaction. Following psychologists (Hidi and Renninger 2006, p. 113; Ainley 2010, p. 613; also see Cohen 2015, p. 89), we may propose a continuum in the nature of interest. At one pole we have what is sometimes called "situational" interest (in which the attribution of interestingness has primarily to do with the characteristics of the event or appearing object). At the other we have what is sometimes called "individual" interest (in which the attribution has more to do with the dispositions of the individual in question). Some things grab our attention—they orient us to themselves and have the capacity to "attract" (a metaphorical magnetism that Catton [1959] saw as the heart of value). Other things require our utmost attention if we are not to lose sight of them. But in either case, what results is an entrainment. This relationship defines the continuum, only with a sort of priority changing, just as ballroom dance always involves a couple, but who leads at any time may change. How do we develop such relationships with objects? The term that best describes this dynamic is *investment*.

Again, we may associate this term with a very narrow economic act, but this is a relatively late use of the word (becoming common in the 18th century). Here we mean something more like the extension of the self. To elucidate the connection between investment and the self, we should consider the most magisterial recent attempt to carry through a quasi-economic analysis of social action, namely Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory*. Coleman (1990, pp. 132–33) had attempted to keep his system analytically tractable by defining the value of any resource possessed by an actor as reciprocal to "the interests of other actors in those resources." Thus arise exchanges—if A has something B is interested in, and vice versa, values are created that facilitate an exchange. Coleman's selfish actors attempt to use such exchanges to accomplish their goals, but, as they run into coordination and enforcement

problems familiar to us all, they erect more and more social scaffolding, transforming themselves from the sorts who would thrive in Hobbes's state of nature to just the type of quiet Americans that Parsons had hoped for.

Coleman demonstrates, for one, that enlightened egoists might all consent to the imposition of coercive rules to discourage free riding. But he also recognized that actors do something that *cannot* be explained in this way: they may choose to make another happy at a cost to themselves (1990, p. 504). Coleman does not retreat to the facile tautological claim that this must involve a second-order metahappiness. Instead, he argues that "some of these deviations from rationality appear to result because the organization of the self is more complex than is assumed for the unitary actor in rational-choice theory" (p. 505). In particular, he distinguishes between the *acting* self and the *object* self—the self that the actor attempts to benefit.

When we make this distinction, we find that "it is possible to conceive of the (object) self in such a way that events affecting others in the vicinity *do* in fact happen to oneself, that is, to the expanded self" (Coleman 1990, p. 517). To explain this remarkable change, Coleman bid us consider the parallel for corporate actors: just as one corporation can invest in another, one person can invest in another person (p. 518; also see Schilder [1935] 1950, pp. 281–82; Espeland 2001, p. 1839). In doing so, the person extends an aspect of his or her self into another. Coleman's reasoning is psychologically astute; studies demonstrate that when we include other persons in our sense of self, we begin to treat whatever happens to them as if it were happening to us (Aron et al. 2013, p. 102), even to the point of using attribution processes that tend to be associated with first-person accounts (Jones and Nisbett 1971).

While we follow others in allowing a continuum from the more individual to the more situational interests, we believe that the comparison to the notion of *quality* correctly indicates that the phenomenon always emerges from the fusion of the natures of the object and of the subject—it is the presence of the stirring song in the situation, coupled with the sort of person who is stirred by this song, that generates a response. On the one hand, this response may be to judge the work stirring, but on the other hand, it is a response of interest. Technically, this class of responses is generally called "aesthetic" (Dewey 1929, pp. 87, 96), and we suggest that sociological theory needs to grapple with the relation of interest in such terms.[22]

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[22] There is a widespread belief that this is intrinsically contradictory, for Kant is remembered as putting forward a notion of beauty as inherently "disinterested." But this is not quite accurate. Kant's ([1790] 1987, p. 52) argument was that our engagement with a work of artistic beauty must be free from interest [*uninteressiert*] because only then is it truly free. If we were hungry, our desire that a still life be real would interfere with our judgment of its beauty. Thus a pure aesthetic response requires that we do not have a stake in the existence of the object portrayed in the art work. But Kant ([1790] 1987, p. 167) emphasized that this does not hold for our experience of beauty in nature, which is far more

80

The notion that our interest can be aroused by beauty also applies to aesthetic response. As Nehamas (2007, p. 73) says, "Like beautiful people, beautiful works spark the urgent need to approach, the same pressing feeling that they have more to offer, the same burning desire to understand what that is." What is key is that, given the sort of person one is, there is something that can awaken interest, and pull one in, increasing investment and thereby deepening interest—or extinguishing it when one has exhausted the potential of the object to deliver new experience. This may seem like a fanciful story that is oriented to the experience of an onlooker in a museum. But investment, as we illustrate below, is an empirically demonstrable process.

Making Things Interesting

We have seen that although some things are (to almost all) inherently interesting, we can also become interested in something via investment. This is certainly not a new idea, but we wish to consider it from a very specific perspective, one raised by Coleman—namely, that of the extension of the self. Discussions of the self easily go astray, as the term is often used casually to be interchangeable with *mind*, *consciousness*, *identity*, or *person*. Unfortunately, we cannot clarify usage by turning to the work of cognitive scientists, as most contemporary writers speak of a number of different selves and few employ the same divisions (e.g., Gillihan and Farah 2005; also see Quinn 2006). Here we use the term *self* in the most restricted way possible: to denote the bundle of cognitive processes that allow a human organism to treat itself in ways similar to how it treats things in the environment. In Metzinger's (2003) terms, the self is a model that the organism has of itself, one "anchored" in certain subrepresentational capacities, most important for us, a feeling of "ownership" (Longo et al. 2008; Metzinger 2009, p. 77). We can consider the coverage of these processes that undergird the phenomenological feeling of ownership—that is, the set of referents to which they are applied—the *extension* of the self.

Let us begin with the simplest sort of self-extension: to invest one's self into one's physical body—to wear it like clothes (Schilder [1935] 1950, pp. 57,

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relevant to the case of social action. Here Kant points out that while the free employment of certain faculties may not be based on interest, it can still give rise to one, and "reason must take an interest in any manifestation in nature of a harmony . . . and hence the mind cannot mediate about the beauty of *nature* without at the same time finding its interest aroused." If the fruit *does* exist, and is beautiful as well as nourishing, this tells us something (something quite pleasant) about the harmonious relation of our subjectivity to the objects in the world. For example, perhaps we should love the world (and its creator) more. Of course, Kant's notion of interest here is a more conventional one than ours; our point is merely that there is no a priori reason to think that aesthetic response, understood as qualitative experience, is one that is not amenable to analysis in terms of interest.

137, 203; see also Cheng et al. 2010). This is so common an experience for most of us that it seems unquestionably a priori. Certain neurological conditions, however, can lead to the withdrawal of the sense of self from one part of the body (usually on the left side; Kinsbourne 1995, p. 206). Patients with such disorders will earnestly deny that the hand they see coming out of their wrist is actually theirs (see, e.g., Metzinger 2003, p. 434). They may constantly turn to the right, losing interest in their left side (Schilder [1935] 1950, pp. 30–31). The patient's potential reliance on a more fundamental sense of not occupying his body outweighs the visual evidence; and contrarily, such reliance can lead people to occupy other objects as if they were part of their body.

The latter phenomenon has been most impressively demonstrated in Ramachandran's (see Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1999) success in solving phantom limb disorders by helping patients move their body self-image into prostheses, but it also happens with tools. A sightless man with a cane may feel his self extending to the tip of the instrument (Lotze [1856–64] 1885, 1:589; Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1962, p. 139); a subject in a laboratory can easily be fooled into extending her self-image into a false hand; in "enfacement," subjects come to incorporate an unfamiliar face into their own face representation (Sforza et al. 2010); monkeys taught to use tools seem to incorporate them into their body schema (Iriki, Yamazaki, and Sakuru 2010, p. 616). In all of these cases, the bounds of the "body system" are modified as previously external objects are incorporated into the animal's (human or otherwise) object self (see Mangalam and Fragaszy 2016). Indeed, in some cases, such as what is called "mirror-touch synesthesia," a sufferer extends herself into another (seen) person and experiences the physical interactions she sees the alter undergo (Ward and Banissy 2015, p. 123). Thus, there is no doubt that the object self can be physically under- or overextended, if we take the physical body as our reference point.

Similar forms of extension happen with our emotional self-processes (Belk 1988). A parent may find it more upsetting to see her child's blood emerge from a wound than her own but have an attenuated relation to the blood of an unrelated child. Just as Coleman said, she has invested some of her self into the other. We invest not only in other persons, but also in animals, and in some cases, dolls, robots, or other versions of our selves like avatars (Cerulo 2009), and indeed in other objects, and use the same mental processes on our possessions as on our selves (James 1890, p. 291; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Rochberg-Halton 1984, p. 335; also see Simmel [1908] 1950, p. 322). Overall, it seems to be a characteristic of the human self-model that it has an indeterminacy concerning its boundaries, and a perfect mapping to a single physical organism is an exception, not the rule (Bloch [2007] 2015, p. 288). Thus being "self-ish" is to have a set of interested relations with interesting things. With this understanding of investment

processes, we now able to specify how sociologists should—and should not—employ the concept of *interests*.

Selves in Tension

Drawing on both cognitive science and educational psychology, we may say that interests bring together three characteristic relations of the self to the world, which we can call *intention*, *attention*, and *extension*. By *intention*, we mean in the technical/scholastic sense resuscitated by Franz Brentano (e.g., [1889] 1969): an intentional characteristic of the mind is one that makes a necessary reference to an "external" (even if wholly notional) object (it hence has a dyadic nature—and raises difficult but unavoidable complexities given that the notional object of our action folds in our own orientation). More prosaically, "interest is always directed at certain contents or objects" (Krapp 2002, p. 387; see also Hidi 2006).[23]

Second, it is common to see interest as "a psychological state in which *attention* is focused on a particular object or event" (Ainley 2010, p. 612, italics ours). Interest at the extreme involves "being engaged, engrossed, or entirely taken up with some activity" (Dewey 1913, p. 160; see also Hidi and Renninger 2006, p. 112). Such attentive engagement changes the phenomenological characteristics of the object in question. At a neural level, this occurs because attended stimuli trigger larger neural responses than do unattended stimuli (Hillyard, Vogel, and Luck 1998; also see Woodman and Luck 1999; Tanaka and Curran 2001; see also Schroeder et al. 2010). In contrast, we tend to have "blindness" to, or slowed prefrontal cortical processing of, non-attended stimuli (for a primate study, see Everling et al. 2002, p. 671). As a result, things we are interested in (and attend to) appear more significant—for example, a face we are attending to will seem more attractive than an unattended one (Carrasco, Ling, and Reed 2004) and attended colors will appear more saturated than unattended ones (Fuller and Carrasco 2006).

This leads to the third, and most specifically social, relation: interests involve an extension of self, as discussed above. Most important, these three relations of intention, attention, and extension are mutually reinforcing. Attention leads to a stronger intentional relation, thereby facilitating extension, and we begin the investment process with objects that capture our attention (Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks 2003, p. 94). Indeed, even the transient, situationally interesting event draws in a bit of the self via attention. A human

[23] This means that we would not use the term in constructions such as "he has an interest in being/becoming X," where X is some state (e.g., wealthy, healthy). While this is a reasonable formulation for the accounting of the actions of others, it lacks, we suggest, a phenomenological correlate in the experience of the actor herself.

turns her eyes so that the image of a visually interesting event strikes the fovea; or she cocks her head to push the right ear forward for a sonically interesting event. Events that happen to an object that engrosses us, even temporarily, may feel like they happen, to an attenuated degree, to ourselves.

Reciprocally, extension facilitates attention and intention. We see objects as more attractive (Belk 1988; Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1991; Beggan 1992; Kim and Johnson 2012) and remember them better (Cunningham et al. 2008) when we believe we own them; we process objects that have become associated with ourselves faster than other objects (Feys 1991; Sui, He, and Humphreys 2012; see also Bargh 1982). In all these cases, the cognitive processes that are typically used on the self are applied to physically external objects. And what is more, brain areas implicated in the processing of self-relevant information are activated when owned objects are imagined (Kim and Johnson 2012), implying an ownership-induced fusion of the object and one's sense of self (Turk et al. 2011*a*, p. 3657; also Turk et al. 2011*b*, p. 3730).

In sum, the concept of interest is phenomenologically plausible and theoretically unproblematic. We go on to demonstrate that it also leads to helpful restatements of problems that, when phrased in terms of values, have led sociologists into fruitless battles.

Interest and Boredom

Let us take an example of work (Vaisey 2010) that is seen by others (e.g., Shelby 2015, p. 502) as supporting the new "culture of poverty" thesis, namely that many of the poor diverge from mainstream beliefs and values and that this "negatively impacts their life prospects." Vaisey noted that there has been a tendency for those paying attention to the role of culture in stratification processes to emphasize its cognitive aspects over the more explosive issue of values (Vaisey 2010, p. 79) and set out to investigate the latter using data containing information on teenagers' educational aspirations (in contrast to their expectations).

Vaisey's main findings are robust, but here we wish to question the assumption that responses to a question on aspirations measure "values" (also see Bourdieu [1974] 2014, p. 237; Strand and Lizardo 2017, pp. 188–89). Why would one not aspire to go very far in school? For one, because school is not very interesting (remember trigonometry?). This is not always true, but true often enough. On the other hand, school is a means to success for many people, which would give them an interest in it. And interest itself is motivational, compelling exploration and task persistence (e.g., Hidi 2006). Not surprisingly, students who report being interested in a school text are likely to engage for longer periods with it than those who report feeling bored (Pekrun 2000). This persistence, in turn, facilitates the deepening of interest by keeping students in contact with the content long enough to develop

84

facility (Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff 2002; also see Becker et al. [1961] 1977, pp. 417–18).

But this cycle of interest is less likely to begin for those who do not see the material as having relevance for their lives (Ainley and Ainley 2011, p. 11).[24] As Thomas and Znaniecki (1918, 5:338) wrote, explaining the tendency of young Polish women to get pregnant and drop out of school, "School, which to her mind does not lead anywhere, is not a means to any definite end"; when it comes to family, children are "the only important genuine interest" (cf. Edin and Kefalas 2005). And, indeed, such indifferent students may be correct to see school material as irrelevant; school is not a means to success for those who exit at the bottom, and not all can be above average. As educators (e.g., Leonard and Weitz 1971; Ainley et al. 2002; Baron and Downey 2007) have emphasized, it is not simply that children succeed at things they enjoy doing; they tend to enjoy where they succeed and suffer where they are likely to fail. Thus school, uninteresting enough already, becomes far less interesting for those who are less likely to profit from it and who are more likely to receive discouraging evaluation (Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks 2003).

Further, we must beware of assuming that, since we (or so we assume) know others' interests (apparently, better than they themselves), we can reject an explanation grounded in *their* conception of their interests. (That is, *we* teachers think that they *should* stay in school and work harder.) A recipe for success that might work for one individual, so long as others maintain their previous habits, cannot unproblematically be recommended to all (Lieberson 1985). When all pursue education, for example, they may find themselves right back where they started.

Consider another example: value theorists point not only to a surprising lack of interest in education for its own sake among some young, middle-class black men but also to seemingly irrational (and antibourgeois) spending patterns (e.g., Patterson 2015, p. 59). The low rate of savings of African-Americans—and their failure to establish wealth via homeownership (Brimmer 1988, p. 152; Keister 2000, p. 100)—may tempt an explanation via "values," specifically a preference for short-term gratification over long-term savings, even if these only are mediators between previous structural discrimination and current behavior.

Careful interview studies (Taplin-Kaguru 2016), however, find that black respondents may be wholly committed to what they call "the American dream" of homeownership, but quite aware that whatever strategy they pursue, there

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[24] It is notable that interventions aimed at boosting academic achievement among students who do not display interest for school material seek to promote "involvement"; it is thought that activities directly linking material to students' everyday lives, or tapping into existing interests, cultivate scholastic interest (Linnenbrink and Pintrich 2002).

is a good chance that they, unlike most white buyers, will be forced to buy high and sell low. Indeed, given the repeated history of bureaucratic machinations to deny African-Americans any return on their savings, from the fiasco of the Freedman's bank onward, it would be premature to make claims about principles and values regarding matters that may simply be about principal and interest. More generally, we find that indemonstrable assumptions of the validity of the investigator's perspective, whether deontological or ontological—assumptions difficult to avoid in research based on an investigation of implicit justifications—easily lead to the generation of spurious findings. By sidestepping this issue, the concept of interests, we go on to show, is free from the problems that we saw inherent in the notion of values.

Interests and the Problems of Values

First, consider the problem of the value-behavior mismatch. There is no evidence of a corresponding paradox regarding a slippage between verbally expressed interests and behavior. (We have already been clear that we categorically reject the notion of "objective" interests to be ascribed by the researcher to the subject.) Of course, sometimes someone simply *isn't* interested in something that she usually *is* interested in. This is a curious, but nonparadoxical, situation. Nor does the fact that actors may do things that they come to regret indicate that we should refrain from using the term "interested" to describe their action. A high degree of interest is compatible with a low degree of foresight; while this may be practically problematic for an actor, it is in no way theoretically problematic.

Second, we do not find interests competing with institutional structures to explain the transsituational regularity in action in the way that Stanley Milgram forced a face-off between values and situational pressures, to the chagrin of the former. Indeed, we often find that interests are *conditional* on particular institutional configurations. Absent a particular economic system, and a political one behind that, no one has an "interest" in accumulating any particular currency. Even more subtly, institutional configurations have the capacity to make certain actions, states, or objects "interesting" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 88; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 117). This sort of institutional generation of interestingness is what Bourdieu called a *libido*. For example, absent the particular institutional configuration of an artworld, few people would have an interest in, say, putting their signature on a found urinal, and others would be unlikely to find this an interesting exhibition. But in the proper context, the object, like Australian *churinga* (Durkheim [1912] 1995), will captivate.

Further, the fact that the institution has the capacity to interest some and not others is not at all problematic, as is (for most of us) Weber's polytheistic vision of incommensurable value commitments, even within the same

86

sociocultural setting. In contrast, it appears to be quite difficult to explain how very different spheres of values can all claim to be nonarbitrary and equally legitimate without making extremely strong assumptions, such as those of Friedland (2013), who posits an Aristotelian substance underlying each realm.

Bourdieu's answer was that we must develop that capacity to be interested in some goal in the same way that we might cultivate a taste. The extrojection of the sense of self into an object that Bourdieu ([1988] 1998, p. 76) identifies with the libido—a process known to the Freudians as "cathexis"[25]—turns on the development of that sort of duality that gives quality to an object. It is precisely by becoming one sort of person as opposed to another that we develop the capacity to be interested. Thus what appeared, from the perspective of values theory, to be two competing hypotheses to explain transsituational consistency (institutions and personality) here appear as a nonproblematic fusion: our capacity to be interested in institutional landscapes.

Even more, because the notion of interests does not implicitly oppose the *ought* to the *is*, there is no paradox coming from the fact that interests may be bound up with the sort of person one is. Indeed, as Dewey argued, to *be* a person *is* to have interests—it is to be engaged and to extend our personality into objects. Finally, there is no need to make a partition among those aspects of personality, here understood as a set of interest profiles, that are inborn, those that arise through primary socialization, and those that are later developments, or a partition that segregates one part of the personality from the rest. For the process of developing a personality, as Dewey argued, is inseparable from the process of developing and extending our interested relation to the world.[26]

In sum, as we have seen, the current sociological configuration of the idea of *values* is an abstracted, universalized, and idealized form of the specific social relations common in the modern West in which participants are required to disavow interested behavior. Sociologists have committed themselves to an ontology in which such disavowals must be believed, because of an impoverished view of interests and an association of interest-based action with both immoral behavior and with the loathed enemy of economism (if not economics). To support this ontology, sociologists must make the

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[25] This term was provided by Freud's somewhat toney translators, James and Alice Strachey, as a rendering of *Besetzung*, most literally, "occupation" or "filling." But Freud himself, as Gay (1988, p. 465) notes, had (in a letter in English to Ernest Jones) made clear his preference for a different English equivalent—*interest*.

[26] It is for this reason that we think that core of the approach of Joas (2000) to the genesis of values may be compatible with our critique; while we do not disguise the difference between Joas's goals and our own, it is not clear to us that a derivation of a dialectic between right and goodness among interdependent and socialized persons must employ the notion of "values" and not that of "interests."

claim that all human beings have, as a part of their mental makeup, a latent form of those abstractions that modern educated Westerners use when hard-pressed to justify their actions, even though the historical and cross-cultural evidence leads us to doubt this. In contrast, the notion of interests begins with the actual concrete objects that actors face and allows for the well-established process of self-investment.

CONCLUSION: A WORLD WITHOUT VALUES?

It might seem that we have given a great deal of attention to what is only an issue of terminology. But think how crucial it was for physics to distinguish momentum from force! As long as a single term was used for both, it was impossible to begin mathematizing dynamics (see Westfall 1971). So, too, we think that sociology has been hampered in understanding how human action relates to social patterns because of our attachment to the idea that valuation has to do with "values," akin to an assumption that spirituality implies the existence of spirits. The struggles of researchers to speak coherently about the relationship of the subjectivity of disempowered actors to stratification systems—a topic currently returning to center stage—demonstrates the relevance of clarification here.

Thus there is the possibility of real theoretical advance merely by banishing one problematic concept from our lexicon. However, some may fear that such banishment would leave us unable to understand the processes whereby moral suasion is successfully employed, processes that, even if rare, may be of the greatest significance to sociologists. We find this doubtful—not because we doubt that such moral enlistment is possible, but because we doubt that it has to do with what are generally called "values." We note that what seems to be in English-speaking societies (see Wierzbicka 2006, pp. 141–67) the single most effective principle that could be used for such persuasion, namely the idea of "fairness," has (to the best of our knowledge) never been included in a sociological value inventory. The vague sense of "humanity," perhaps the best example of a successful abstraction used in European moral claims making, also does not fit the sociological conception of values.

We also emphasize that we are not claiming that values are *merely* interests, and that we should unveil the interests behind them. This repugnant view of interests only arises, like the view of humans as wholly tarnished by original sin, when we make an unjustifiable partition and attempt to evacuate all that we prize from reality into a putative heaven.[27] As Dewey has

[27] Further, we should not assume that a vision of the human actor that has no place for values implies an animalistic, egoistic, and indeed antisocial or immoral sort of being. Although it goes beyond the bounds of this paper, we note that importance of recent work that suggests that we are able to find most of what we want in an ethical orientation without the notion of values (see, esp., Brownstein and Madva 2012).

88

argued, this stigmatization of interests has had dreadful consequences for our social psychology, holding out a disinterested life as the ideal for all to aspire to. A life without interests is a life without love and one not worth living; if we wish to call it worthless—valueless—we are not wrong. The problem with the current understanding of values is that it confuses this issue of treasuring some things with the altogether different practice of justifying conduct via abstractions (see, esp., Mills 1940). Not only are such accounts, at least within broad sociotemporal constraints, situationally and strategically labile, in that the same action may be justified differently depending on our interlocutors, but they are a derivative, if not epiphenomenal, concern. More fundamental than these accounts are the material and social-psychological intertwinings that, as Tarde ([1898] 1969) as well as Small emphasized, arise from our nonindependent fates and our mutual susceptibility.

But susceptibility is not passivity. When interests replaced passions as key motivational elements in social theory, it was for the wrong reason. The idea of "passions" was suspect, as it seemed to imply the wild, the irrational, and the unordered. But the problem with "passions" is a different one: it is an egocentric and antisociological formulation, one that makes the classic attribution theory error of seeing the self as wholly buffeted from without (passive). Instead, as we have seen, what is fundamental to social life is the extension of the self, and not its control by external impulses or its narrative justification. If we are to develop a theory of action, we must do justice to the fundamentally transfusive nature of life and build out from there.

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