June 2013

A Mile In My Shoes: A Prolegomenon for an Empathic Sociology

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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Abstract

The main purpose of this work is to undermine the fact-value distinction as it is presented in the work of Max Weber, and also to provide an outline for an empathic sociology that can replace public sociology by shifting the focus of sociological research from the public sphere to abject material suffering. To do this I will be providing a critical explication of Weber's methodological writings. I will also construct a notion of empathy using contemporary research in social psychology, as well as the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre. I will then use this notion to argue that empathic sociology is based upon principles that allow for a research method focussed on social change that is not susceptible to the limitations of the fact-value distinction.

Keywords: Max Weber, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Pierre Bourdieu, empathy, social psychology, public sociology, phenomenology, social suffering.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The tremendous successes that the natural sciences have enjoyed during the twentieth century were the consequence of the usefulness of their results; science does not simply tell us how the natural world works, but also allows us to figure out what we can *do* with such knowledge. If science had not provided us with such astounding technical facility, it is unlikely that it would have infiltrated the world of human practice to the extent that it has, or that it would have gained such authority over that practice. In short, its success is the result of its utility. As a self-proclaimed "social science," sociology has often not followed suit; if a sociologist happens to meet someone other than a colleague or student who actually knows what sociology is, it is even more unlikely that he will be able to tell you what it is good for. This is because, during the early stages of the development of sociology as a discipline, many sociologists were in agreement that sociology should be exclusively concerned with the question of how the social world works, as well as the discovery of its underlying causes and the explication of its laws. The question of what society should look like was deemed a separate question, one that was not within the purview of sociology. This meant that the role of the sociologist did not extend beyond the collection of social data and the intellectual task of making that data intelligible to an academic community. Any application of research findings to social problems was said to be a job for activists, social workers or policy-makers; the normative task of the progressive reconstruction of society was not the sociologist's responsibility as a scientist.

Max Weber was largely responsible for the popularization of this segregation; it is explicitly called for in several of his most well-known essays and lectures (see Weber

1949; 1958). Weber was responsible for introducing what has come to be known as the "fact-value distinction" to sociology, and also developed a notion of *Verstehen*, or "understanding" as a method by which the sociologist can grasp the intentions and motivations of social actors. The fact-value distinction was posed as a logical problem, a claim that sociologists must not confuse descriptive statements with value judgements, defined as both "practical evaluations of the unsatisfactory or satisfactory nature of phenomena subject to our influence," and as those evaluations "regarding the desirability or undesirability of social facts from ethical, cultural or other points of view" (1949a: 1). Simply put, the sociologist can make claims as to what is based on verifiable evidence, but cannot make claims as to how things ought to exist in society, since it is impossible to verify such claims. As for *Verstehen*, what Weber calls "emotionally empathic" understanding is meant to be used in a rational manner; empathy is seen strictly as a means to understanding the other's behaviours, not as a phenomenon that might potentially form bonds between individuals. Weber's methods are thus meant to keep the sociologist not just from passing judgement on the socio-economic conditions of the research subject's life, but also to keep him from intervening in that life.

During the twentieth century, a number of thinkers sought to oppose Weber's view that sociologists could not be involved in engendering progressive social change in society through their research. One particularly well-known group of such thinkers are the Frankfurt School critical theorists. For the early critical theorist Max Horkheimer, the "social totality" possesses a "two-sided character" that is characterized by the human world of "will and reason" on the one hand, a world that is the product of the conscious and directed work of cooperative individuals. On the other hand, society is also

"comparable to nonhuman natural processes, to pure mechanisms, because cultural forms which are supported by war and oppression are not the creations of a unified, self-conscious will. That world is not their own but the world of capital" (Horkheimer 2012 [1937]: 430). Only those who possess a "critical attitude" towards the society of which they are a part are consciously aware of this dialectical tension. Horkheimer argues that most sociologists do not possess such an attitude; in their roles as scientists they see society as "extrinsic" to themselves, while as citizens they show an active interest in the issues and problems of society. However, these two roles are not unified in practice, and it is one of the tasks of critical thinking to overcome this separation: "Critical thinking…is motivated…by the effort…to transcend the tension and to abolish the opposition between the individual's purposefulness, spontaneity, and rationality, and those work-process relationships on which society is built. Critical thought has a concept of man as in conflict with himself until this opposition is removed" (431). There is thus a distinct difference between the kind of sociology that Horkheimer advocates and the more "traditional" approach to sociology of the "scientific specialist" advocated by Weber:

> However many valid analogies there may be between these different intellectual endeavours, there is nonetheless a decisive difference when it comes to the relation of subject and object…The object with which the scientific specialist deals is not affected at all by his own theory. Subject and object are kept strictly apart…the observer as such can affect no change in the object. A consciously critical attitude, however, is part of the development of society: the construing of the course of history as the necessary product of an economic mechanism simultaneously contains both a protest against this order of things, a protest generated by the order itself, and the idea of self-determination for the

human race, that is the idea of a state of affairs in which man's actions no longer flow

from a mechanism but from his own decision…If we think of the object of the theory in

separation from the theory, we falsify it and fall into quietism or conformism. Every part

of the theory presupposes the critique of the existing order and the struggle against it

along the lines determined by the theory itself (436).

Critical theorists are therefore in opposition to the "quietism" of the Weberian researcher who sees it as her role to abstain from intervention in the state of affairs of the object under study. They instead advocate a critical approach to research that is seen as part of a gradual transformation of society that changes it from a society ruled by the dictates of capital to one of "self-determination" in which individuals can decide the fate of their own society in a collective, democratic fashion. Sociological research thus has an emancipatory role, not simply one in which it must act as a vehicle of understanding. This role is driven by the "single existential judgement" that, without intervention in the progression of capitalism, society will drive itself "into a new barbarism" (435).

The later critical theorist Jürgen Habermas created his own brand of critical theory. Like the earlier critical theorists, Habermas insisted that purely objective, unadulterated scientific knowledge was impossible to obtain. In one of his earlier works he identifies three cognitive areas, each with a specific motive that generates knowledge. He called one such area "emancipatory knowledge," which he argued includes criticism and utopian thinking (1972). He thought that philosophy played a major role for the social sciences because it has the capacity to construct ethical claims and introduce normative considerations into the practice of science (Calhoun et al. 2007: 359). Habermas's own such contribution to the social sciences was what he called

"communicative rationality." The concept is based in a universalist moral framework dependent upon a "universal pragmatics," the central claim of which is that all speech acts performed by individuals have an inherent *telos* or end, that being the goal of mutual understanding (1979). Habermas unites this idea with his conception of an ideal, modern public sphere that facilitates a kind of democratic mediation between groups in a technocratic society whose unhindered growth threatens to usurp various cultural traditions.

The sociologist C. Wright Mills also wished to create an approach to sociological research that bridged the separation between the researcher and the research subject in sociological research. He uses the notion of the sociological imagination to describe the intellectual capacity whereby the social researcher can connect the larger structural transformations of a society to the problems of individuals in their everyday lives: "It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two. Back of its use there is always the urge and the need to know the social and historical meaning of the individual in the society and in the period in which he has his quality and his being" (2000 [1959]: 7). This is what Mills calls the connection between "history and biography," which is the "task and promise" of the sociological imagination. Mills believed that by conducting research in accordance with this "imagination," sociologists could equip the public with the tools for understanding the social and political sources of their personal problems, which would in turn transform the political indifference of publics "into involvement with public issues" (5). For Mills, alienation, political domination, and the "international anarchy" of global politics are both public and private

issues that need to be addressed by the sociologist (13). This makes it "the social scientist's foremost political and intellectual task…to make clear the elements of contemporary uneasiness and indifference." This is the "central demand" made on the sociologist by other professionals and intellectuals. Mills makes it clear that he believes that the social sciences need to adapt "to the cultural tasks of our time," that they have implications for cultural and political life (17). Mills therefore wants to see the discipline of sociology enter public affairs, to address the concerns of all individuals within society: "I believe that what may be called classic social analysis is a definable and usable set of traditions; that its essential feature is the concern with historical social structures; and that its problems are of direct relevance to urgent public issues and insistent human troubles" (21). There is clearly a public involvement of the sociologist that Mills is characterizing in his notion of the sociological imagination.

The twentieth century thus gave rise to a number of thinkers who insisted that the discipline of sociology possessed a role beyond simply creating an understanding of the social world. They also insisted upon the normative use of sociology, that as a science it possessed the capacity and thus the responsibility to use its knowledge to address the many problems of society and change it for the better. Such a task could not be carried out in a detached manner, something that these thinkers understood. It instead required an active engagement with those individuals and groups that the sociologist sought to understand, a dialogical presence in their lives as equals attempting to understand and to find solutions to common human problems.

The beginning of the twenty-first century has seen the development of a new trend in sociological thought that seeks to involve the sociologist with the amelioration of

public problems. This trend has been termed "public sociology." The sociologist Patricia Mooney Nickel (2012: 3) identifies two streams of public sociology that currently exist in the United States, one headed by Ben Agger (2000/2007), the other by Michael Burawoy (2004a, 2004b; 2005a, 2005b; 2006; 2007a, 2007b; 2009a, 2009b). Agger sums up his approach in the following passage:

> A sociology is public if it embraces Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, which merges theory and practice, and if it recognizes that method doesn't solve all intellectual problems but is merely one form of rhetoric (discourse) among many. A public sociology must want to change the world, and it must recognize that it is already changing the world by intervening in it. Finally, a public sociology addresses itself to various publics, to which it doesn't condescend but that it seeks to mobilize (270).

For Agger, sociology is meant to be "a mode of writing" that reveals that the perspectives of all "objective" sociological research are ultimately subjective in character. Sociologists should therefore engage in "self-translation" with a public in mind, and seek to address major public issues. According to Nickel, Agger's aim is not to preserve the discipline of sociology *per se*, but rather to transform sociological discourse. As she explains:

> The key point to take from Agger is that, although public intellectuality is important, public discourse depends on more than intellectuals speaking authoritatively in public; the conditions for public discourse must be cultivated through public writing that challenges the value-neutrality[1] of knowledge, which is to say that it recognizes that it is one portrayal among many. This mode of intellectuality requires that sociologists reveal in dialogue with the public that the production of

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[1] Based on Nickel's reading of Agger, he seems to be using the terms "objectivity" and "value-neutrality" interchangeably, referring to the general process by which many sociologists seek to extract any traces of subjective bias from the presentation of their research. For the purposes of this essay, we will elaborate on the Weberian understanding of these terms in chapter one.

knowledge involves individual passions about its reception; we cannot help but infuse the knowledge that we produce with our own purpose…Although my account might be empirically accurate, it remains the outcome of my value-laden choice of what to portray as important. Revealing this fact leaves open a space for my readers to contest my framing and thus instigates knowledge (Nickel 2012: 4).

Nickel is here obviously emphasizing the point made by Agger that knowledge is always ultimately value-laden, meaning that it is saturated with the intentions, motivations and biases of the researcher. For Agger, this is an epistemological reality from which it is impossible to escape; the positivistic, "purist" ideal of a form of knowledge purged of all subjective proclivities is one that can no longer be seriously entertained. Nickel claims that it is on this point that Agger bases his conception of public sociology. Agger argues that the individual researcher must accept that his research is value-laden, a condition that is essential for a public discourse on sociological research in which the public is capable of critiquing and contesting the claims of the sociologist. The public must therefore be informed of this aspect of research, since only then can they be properly equipped with the tools necessary in order to participate in a discussion about social issues that are directly relevant to their lives.The key to a public sociology then, for Agger, is for public sociology to generate a space in which the public can participate in the critique of social knowledge in order to extract results that have the potential to have a productive application judged as appropriate to contemporary social issues.

Michael Burawoy's approach to public sociology is perhaps more well-known than Agger's. On the surface, his idea of a public sociology is very similar in intent to Agger's. The key difference is that he seeks to preserve "traditional" sociology while at the same time carving out a space for a sociology that is resolutely and uncontroversially

public. He centers this argument around his notion of a "sociological division of labour," which categorizes what he sees as four distinct types of sociology that are mutually beneficial to one another in their respective aims. They arise from the interaction of the production of two different types of knowledge that are essentially aimed at two different types of audiences. Thus we have the production of both "instrumental" and "reflexive" knowledge for either an "academic" or an "extra-academic" audience. The first type of sociology is "professional" sociology, which produces instrumental knowledge that is meant for an academic audience. Professional sociology is meant to carry out "multiple research programs" and ultimately provides the knowledge base for all of the other types of sociology (2007: 32-33). It could therefore be considered synonymous with "traditional" sociology, since it preserves all forms of existing research methods so that any of them might be used in any way that is necessary for a given research purpose. Burawoy's second type of sociology is "policy" sociology, which like professional sociology produces instrumental knowledge, but is intended for application in an extra-academic setting. It is "sociology in the service of a goal defined by a client." It is essentially meant to provide solutions to problems that have been presented to the sociologist, or to legitimate solutions that have already been reached by any of the parties involved. This can involve anything from testimony in court to investigating the causes of poverty or terrorism for the government. It is thus similar to the profession of consulting, and is therefore enacted within a bureaucratic setting. Burawoy's third type of sociology is termed "critical" sociology, and is meant to provide "critical" knowledge intended for an academic audience. It is the task of this type of sociology to examine the foundations of the research programs of professional sociology, thus acting as a sort of critical and

self-conscious vanguard to the discipline. It is described by Burawoy as the "conscience" of professional sociology, "promoting new research programs built on alternative foundations." Burawoy sees critical sociology as addressing two major questions, namely "sociology for whom?" (who are we addressing in our research?) and "sociology for what?" (should we be concerned with the ends of society, or only with the means to reach those ends?). It can therefore also be seen as a kind of bridge between professional and the final and fourth type of sociology, which is public sociology. This is a sociology concerned with producing reflexive knowledge for an extra-academic audience. Burawoy claims that the "core activity" of public sociology is "the dialogue between sociologists and their publics" (36). Burawoy describes it much like a political discussion, since values are not automatically shared by both sides. The ultimate goal is simply to establish a conversation, to enrich public debate on moral and political issues by informing them with sociological theory and research. The claim is made by Burawoy that, as distinctive to the other social sciences, sociology's specific contribution lies in its relation to civil society, and therefore in its defence of human interests against the encroachment of states and markets (2004a).

It is therefore evident that, although there are many superficial similarities between Agger's and Burawoy's respective approaches to the development of a public sociology, there are also many subtle differences. Burawoy's approach can be seen as much more diplomatic in character, since he attempts to establish a position for every form of sociology without necessarily being critical of any of them. He therefore harbours a place for professional and public sociology, implicitly claiming that it's possible for them to "just be friends" without admitting that it is a political disjuncture

between advocates of professional versus those of public sociology that give rise to the problematic of a public sociology to begin with. We therefore cannot realistically say that we can recognize them within a framework that sees them as mutually beneficial, since it is the epistemological and methodological fissures between the two that have sustained only a formal cohesion between the advocates of both. It seems as though Agger would recognize this, since he begins from a fundamentally different epistemological standpoint that does not attempt to reconcile the differences between meta-sociological standpoints. It is this standpoint that gives Agger a much more egalitarian approach, since it insists on the reality of "knowledge sharing" between academia and publics, and allows both groups to critique these respective knowledges. Burawoy, although with the best of intentions, stays within the safety of an elitist enclosure where the sociologist "informs" the public and establishes an unequal dialogue. The intentions of these public sociologies are similar, but there is still much contention as to what exactly constitutes its foundations.

It is clear that there exists a long tradition of thinkers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who have sought to oppose the Weberian separation between the researcher and the object of study, understood in the sense that the researcher cannot obtain clear, intelligible data about the social phenomena under study if he possesses a vested interest in improving the research subject's quality of life by altering the social conditions that affect him. My own thesis is also meant to oppose Weber's claims. Before I present my thesis, however, I would like to provide a brief summary of an area of research on "social suffering," as my own thesis is intended to be a contribution to this literature.

Social Suffering

"Social suffering" is a topic of sociological research that was established in and has grown since the 1990s (Kleinman 1995, 1996; Kleinman et al. 1997; Bourdieu et al. 1999; Frank 2001; Morgan and Wilkinson 2001; Wilkinson 2005, 2012). The research on social suffering that currently exists can be topically divided into four subgroups (Wilkinson 2005). First, social suffering appears as a focus of study in medical anthropology. According to Wilkinson, the ultimate goal of research in this area is to account for the sociocultural elements of the experience of pain. This literature generally appears as a critique of biomedical accounts of pain that are interpreted within a Cartesian framework, one that ignores the social contexts and cultural meanings that characterize experiences of pain. It is generally argued here that the diagnostic language of medicine must incorporate the lived experience of suffering in order to gain a fuller medical understanding of bodily pain. Second, there has been an attempt to give formal expression to suffering using ethnography. This is largely a political endeavour, as it is thought that by designating the cultural consequences of suffering, a larger place can be carved out for it as a matter of public concern. It is also thought that this public acknowledgement might engender a sense of justice and a chance to heal for those who have actually experienced abject suffering. Thirdly, for the same political reasons that ethnographers have begun to document instances of social suffering, researchers have also begun to study the role of mass media in the development of moral consciousness and humanitarian incentives. The results have led researchers to believe that the media has not properly conveyed the cultural meanings attached to instances of human suffering, and has allowed people to easily turn their backs to the suffering of others.

There is as of yet no consensus as to what alternative would take the place of this phenomenon, however there is widespread agreement that the media has been largely responsible for creating and sustaining a cultural politics of compassion which has the potential to be understood and pursued further. Finally, their exists an ever-growing literature on sociological studies of the Holocaust. With the exception of the writings of the German political philosopher Hannah Arendt, there exist virtually no studies of the Holocaust in the first twenty years following the war. It is only recently that a growing number of social scientists have sought to confront the difficulties involved in understanding such a phenomenon. By making more explicit the quality of suffering undergone by victims of such atrocities, it is the hope of these scholars that we can invent new modes of representation that address the insufficiencies of our current categories in allowing us to understand what such events reveal about the human moral condition.

As can be derived from this account of the literature on social suffering, these four separate "streams" of literature share several goals in common. One is to study "the actual quality of the *lived experience* of suffering," as well as what this experience actually *does* to people (Wilkinson 2005). It is argued that previous accounts of such research have left out the "human significance" of such events, and although we have more information than ever before on catastrophic social realities like poverty and war, the actual experience of these events has not been well documented. It is also thought that engagement in such research will give rise to issues that will allow scholars to reappraise "the moral and political value of contemporary social science." It is also hoped that research in this area can be used to inform policy decisions, as they can provide a deeper understanding of some of the consequences of certain policy choices. It therefore

immediately becomes evident that the aims of public sociology and the study of social suffering share a number of characteristics in common. Whereas public sociology seeks to establish a legitimate area of scholarship that studies social problems with the aim of ameliorating them by altering the socioeconomic conditions that allow for their reproduction, the study of social suffering is at least aimed at generating a discussion of such a project, and at the very least seeks to inform policy-making and implementation in a way that will reshape it. As mentioned above, the ethnographic enterprise concerned with social suffering is not only conducted on behalf of the injustices faced by the subjects of study, but is also conducted with the aim of opening a space for a critical dialogue on the issues that arise through our encounters with the grim and often disturbing realities of those for whom abject suffering is a part of everyday reality. It is much for the same reasons that critical studies of the mass media have been conducted since, as a key purveyor of ideologies that work in the interests of capital, there is much opportunity for ideologies to circulate that misinform or at least work to keep westerners ignorant of the conditions that mass markets create that leave individuals in a state of suffering. It is evident, then, that both conceptions of public sociology and studies of social suffering seek not only to open up a space for debate about the relationship between the discipline and wider publics, but so too is it evident that both consider the role of sociology in conducting research that intervenes in areas in which it is clear that social change is needed.

Public sociology and research on social suffering possess common goals, but nonetheless I am biased towards the projects outlined in the literature on social suffering. The issue that I take with public sociology is that it seeks to create a public sphere in a

society that is often monstrously inequitable. It is therefore unclear as to how such a sphere could smoothly operate amongst individuals who possess vastly different amounts of both economic and cultural capital. Furthermore, if the sum of all sociological endeavours was constituted by the activity of a public sphere, then it is unclear as to how the science that we call sociology would not be reduced to the orchestration of a political arena, an activity which is in no way scientific, and does not yield useful information about society with utilitarian applications. At least for now, a functioning public sphere seems grossly unrealizable, though my work here is done with the intention of contributing to the creation of such a situation.

Facts, Values and Understanding in Sociology

My primary intention in this essay is to contribute to the tradition that understands sociology as a force for the progressive reconstruction of society by constructing an outline for what I call "empathic sociology." This intention is founded on the assumption that abject material suffering[2] should be the initial focus of a progressive sociology, because it is a universal existential condition that all humans seek to avoid yet, paradoxically, all forms of capitalism produce and sustain. Furthermore, this kind of extreme suffering prevents individuals from having meaningful, productive lives, and leaves them politically paralyzed, unable even to marginally affect the conditions that reproduce their position. Sociology should therefore be concerned with the question of how it is that the varying structures of social formations produce and sustain the socioeconomic conditions that allow abject material suffering to exist. Since suffering is

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[2] We define "abject material suffering" as any undesired physical, psychological or emotional states of an individual brought about by the inability to sufficiently acquire the basic means to life, including physical sustenance, clothing, shelter, required medical treatment, etc.

the object of empathy, I will argue that empathy is both a *motivation* and a *method of understanding* for sociological research. In addition, I will argue that sociological research that is based on empathy does not conduct research based on preconceived value judgements, but on the desire to alleviate the suffering of another based on a purely emotional phenomenon, the *feeling for* and/or the *feeling with* another. This will be argued against the background of Weber's writings on the fact-value distinction and on *Verstehen*, as empathic sociology both borrows from and is critical of Weber's views on these matters. My thesis can thus concisely be read as follows: *The social-psychological phenomenon of empathy can be used as both the motivation and the method for a type of sociological research that seeks to make sociology truly scientific by granting it a practical purpose, that of uncovering the causes of abject material suffering with an aim to altering the conditions that engender those causes.*

The essay will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will be concerned with providing a full explication of Weber's discussion of the fact-value distinction, and of his method of *Verstehen*. Our exegesis of the fact-value distinction seeks to illustrate to the reader Weber's notion of 'value judgement', and the way in which he uses this definition to both positively and negatively circumscribe the role of the sociologist. This will be followed by an exegesis of *Verstehen* to illustrate Weber's conception of the role of empathy in sociological research. Both of these discussions together provide the critical foundations of our claims in chapter three.

In chapter two we will be concerned with constructing a coherent notion of empathy, as there currently exist many different definitions of this phenomenon in the existing academic literature. Using research from contemporary psychology combined

with notions from the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, we will outline the essential characteristics of empathy. Our logic in selecting phenomenology as our methodology is that, since it is a tradition that is often concerned with uncovering the essences of human phenomena conceptually, phenomenological notions are often complimentary to the phenomena of psychological research in that they are able to clearly express their fundamental features. It therefore provides us with the appropriate descriptive and conceptual tools in which to frame our thesis.

In the third and final chapter, using the notion of empathy developed in chapter two, we will present our main arguments in defence of an empathic sociology. They will be framed as a response to Weber that uses the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's method of understanding as a guide for our own development of the foundations for an empathic sociology.

Chapter 1: The Fact/Value Distinction and Weber's Moral Relativism

Weber provides an account in his work of the fact-value distinction and its relation to sociological research. He also provides his own account of *Verstehen*. Both accounts stress the importance of the sociologist remaining separate from any kind of involvement in the real lives of the research subjects. This chapter will provide a brief history of both the fact-value distinction and *Verstehen* and European social thought, as well as a critical commentary on both in relation to my thesis.

The Fact/Value Distinction: A Brief History

According to the philosopher Hilary Putnam (2002: 14), the history of what has come to be known as the fact-value distinction begins with the thought of the philosopher David Hume. The distinction was foreshadowed by what has come to be known as "Hume's Law," the claim that one cannot infer an "ought" from an "is," an "it is" statement from an "it should be so" statement. Hume's conclusion is a consequence of the epistemological distinction he makes between "matters of fact" and "relations of ideas." For Hume, concepts are "ideas" that can only represent "matters of fact" via resemblance (including any of the senses, not simply sight). Ideas, however, can also involve "sentiments" (emotions), which Hume argued are the basis of all of our ethical claims, our claims about right and wrong action. Since emotions do not have observable properties that can be "pictured" in our minds, then they are merely owing to "the particular structure and fabric" of our minds, or put more simply, they constitute purely subjective experiences. The field of ethics as a philosophical area of inquiry is therefore never about "matters of fact." This does not, however, preclude the possibility of ethical "wisdom." This is because Hume shared what Putnam aptly calls "the comfortable

eighteenth-century assumption" that all well-educated and cultivated individuals who have thought carefully about ethical matters from an "impartial" standpoint would all end up sharing the same appropriate "sentiments" of approval and disapproval in the same circumstances, unless they possess some sort of intrinsic personal flaw that prevents them from doing so, whatever that might be. It goes without saying that Hume, like many of the pre-Enlightenment thinkers, invested his faith in a structurally homogeneous faculty of reason to bring him to sound moral conclusions in ethical deliberation.

Following Hume, the fact/value distinction became known as such during the first half of the twentieth century for the logical positivists, a group of philosophers who, among other ambitions that were never realized, attempted to transform the discipline of philosophy itself into the loyal vanguard of the natural sciences. As part of this ambition, the positivists took the fact-value distinction to a new extreme. They did so by reducing all putative judgements to three general types: analytic, synthetic (borrowing this distinction from Kant), and those that include all of our ethical, aesthetic, and metaphysical judgements, which were all considered to be "cognitively meaningless." Analytic statements are those that are true by their very definition, or *a priori* ("true on the basis of the [logical] rules alone"). For example, "the bachelor is unmarried" is a token example of what the positivists classified as a "true analytic statement." Synthetic statements are those that are empirically verifiable. As for cognitively meaningless statements, the positivists agreed that ethical statements cannot be factual not only because they are unverifiable (a statement with which Hume would have agreed), but also because they cannot be said to be true or false on the basis of the rules of the language in which they are stated. They therefore "do not possess a certain logical characteristic

common to all proper scientific statements" (i.e. verifiability), and are thus always already considered to be "logically invalid" by their very form and content. The positivists therefore generally agreed that the field of ethics should be expelled from the domain of science and philosophy altogether.

According to Putnam, the positivist definition of a fact became problematic almost as soon as it was argued in light of the scientific discoveries of the twentieth century. There are a number of examples that illustrate this. Bacteria, which are not observable in the logical positivist sense, but only by aid of microscope, were known to exist. The internal structure of the atom (electrons, protons, neutrons, positrons, mesons, etc.) was rapidly being discovered, not to mention relativity theory and quantum mechanics. The definition of a fact as merely a "sense impression" was becoming increasingly untenable. But the positivists were persistent. In his work entitled *Foundations of Logic and Mathematics* (1938), the philosopher Rudolf Carnap attempted to revise the positivists' "criteria of significance" by abandoning the original requirements that a meaningful factual predicate must either be an observation predicate or "reduced to" observation predicates. He wrote that as long as a theoretical system "as a whole" enables us to predict our experiences more successfully than we could without them, then certain "abstract terms" can be accepted as "empirically meaningful." It turned out that this posed a host of problems, and there are very few philosophers or scientists who now subscribe to the verificationist criteria of intelligibility of the kind that Carnap proposed.

Weber's Disenchantment: Facts, Values and Moral Relativism in Sociology

The place of the fact-value distinction as an issue in sociology has its own history, but the the most thorough and emphatic proclaimant of the distinction's essential role in sociological research is still Max Weber. In his methodological essays entitled "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics" (1949a), and " 'Objectivity' in the Social Sciences'" (1949b), Weber emphasizes the importance of keeping what he calls "value judgements" out of sociological research. He defines value judgements as "practical evaluations of the unsatisfactory or satisfactory nature of phenomena subject to our influence," and again as those evaluations "regarding the desirability or undesirability of social facts from ethical, cultural or other points of view" (1949a: 1). Weber's definition therefore includes both practical judgements and judgements about social facts from different points of view. He articulates his position very clearly:

> What is really at issue is the intrinsically simple demand that the investigator…should keep unconditionally separate the establishment of empirical facts (including the "value-oriented" conduct of the empirical individual whom he is investigating) and *his* [sic.] own practical evaluations, i.e., his evaluation of these facts as satisfactory or unsatisfactory…These two things are logically different and to deal with them as though they were the same represents a confusion of entirely heterogeneous problems[3] (11).

It is quite clear that the Humean fact-value distinction is embedded in this methodological statement. Weber is essentially arguing that the sociologist should avoid

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[3] By "problems," Weber means, for example, the difference between the question "why do the concrete events in question occur thus and so and not otherwise?", versus "from which standpoints may those situations be satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

making value judgements of any kind in relation to the social phenomenon under study. This is because, for Weber, empirical judgements and value judgements represent two different types of judgement - empirical judgements describe the social world as it is observed, whereas value judgements pinpoint those aspects of the social world that are perceived by the individual to be "desirable or undesirable." Weber further asserts that "any attempt to treat these logically different types of proposition as identical only reduces the value of each of them." It is clear then that, for Weber, the fact-value distinction helps characterize the conduct of research that is foundational to the sociologist; the distinction becomes a maxim, a fundamental imperative (one that is itself a value judgement by Weber's own definition) shared by social scientists that prevents the researcher from being led astray from the path to "acceptable" scientific data. Weber thus exorcizes the contemplation of the pragmatic "use-value" from the mind of the inquirer, as if this kind of contemplation used as a guide to research could only lead him to a life of epistemic condemnation, rendering his data "impure." It does not occur to Weber that this exorcism might leave the researcher lost, gathering information without purpose and with no application.

In addition to his discussion of the importance of the fact-value distinction to the researcher, Weber provides arguments against a "science of ethics," an idea prevalent in Weber's time which suggested that the application of the scientific method to human conduct could uncover "objective" moral laws, universal precepts that could be tested in order to determine whether or not the actions they prescribed yielded desirable results. Weber explicitly states that he is "most emphatically opposed to the view that a realistic 'science of ethics,' i.e., the analysis of the influence which the ethical evaluations of a

group of people have on their other conditions of life and of the influences which the latter, in their turn, exert on the former, can produce an 'ethics' which will be able to say anything about what *should* happen" (1949a: 13). Weber later elaborates this position:

> [T]he scientific treatment of value-judgements may not only understand and empathically analyze (*nacherleben*) the desired ends and the ideals which underlie them; it can only "judge" them critically. This criticism…can be no more than a formal logical judgement of historically given value-judgements and ideas, a testing of the ideals according to the postulate of the internal *consistency* of the desired end. It can…aid the acting willing person in attaining self-clarification concerning the final axioms from which his desired ends are derived. It can assist him in becoming aware of the ultimate standards of value which he does not make explicit to himself or, which he must presuppose in order to be logical. The elevation of these ultimate standards, which are manifested in concrete value-judgements, to the level of explicitness is the utmost that the scientific treatment of value-judgements can do without entering into the realm of speculation. As to whether the person expressing these value-judgements *should* adhere to these ultimate standards is his personal affair; it involves will and conscience, not empirical knowledge. An empirical science cannot tell anyone what he *should* do – but rather what he *can* do – and under certain circumstances – what he wishes to do (54).

In other words, a "science of ethics" is only capable of revealing the "desired ends" that compel us to make the value judgements that we do. Once these desired ends are elucidated, we can then isolate and clarify the precepts from which these ends were derived, and evaluate their internal consistency and logical coherence. Beyond this, Weber argues, there is nothing else that a science of ethics can provide for us; it is incapable of telling us which axioms we should choose in order to guide our actions.

After articulating this position, Weber attempts to provide consolation to the reader by claiming that a method of empirical observation that only yields an "understanding explanation" (his term for the kind of understanding used to comprehend ethical systems) is not something regrettable. For one thing, he says, we can only discern "the really decisive motives of human actions" by leaving out our own value judgements, since otherwise these motives would be distorted and therefore yield a misinformed understanding of the phenomena under observation. In addition, a politically neutral approach to research allows the inquirer to understand "really divergent evaluations" from one's own. For Weber, the emotional distance that is fundamental to this kind of approach enables researchers to fully understand what another person is thinking and feeling, and therefore enables them to clearly take up a position toward what the other is saying. This further allows one to isolate "unbridgeably divergent ultimate evaluations." Weber stresses that this does not necessarily entail a passive attitude toward these values, but can lead to an "awareness of the issues and reasons which prevent agreement," an awareness that cannot itself engender the formulation of normative principles. Weber therefore stresses that all an empirical discipline can demonstrate are the means to, and the competition of specific evaluations – as well as their anticipated consequences - within a particular context. He further adds that what we choose to value in certain contexts of action are entirely matters of "choice and compromise," and cannot provide us with unequivocal conclusions as to which precepts should ultimately guide our conduct: "The social sciences, which are strictly empirical sciences, are the least fitted to presume to save the individual the difficulty of making a choice, and they should therefore not create the impression that they can do so."

It is also important for us to consider here a famous passage from " 'Objectivity' in the Social Sciences," which Weber begins by reiterating the same discussion that was articulated in the previous essay:

> It is simply naïve to believe…that it is possible to establish and to demonstrate as scientifically valid a 'principle' for practical social science from which the norms for the solution of practical problems can be unambiguously derived. However much the social sciences need the discussion of practical problems in terms of fundamental principles, i.e., the reduction of unreflective value-judgements to the premises from which they are logically derived…the creation of a lowest common denominator for our problems in the form of generally valid ultimate value-judgements cannot be its task or in general the task of any empirical science. Such a thing would not only be impracticable; it would be entirely meaningless as well…The fate of an epoch which has eaten of the tree of knowledge is that it must know that we cannot learn the *meaning* of the world from the results of its analysis, be it ever so perfect; it must rather be in a position to create this meaning itself. It must recognize that general views of life and the universe can never be the products of increasing empirical knowledge, and that the highest ideals, which move us most forcefully, are always formed only in the struggle with other ideals which are just as sacred to others as ours are to us (1949b: 56-57).

Weber's notion of disenchantment, one that pervades much of his work, is implicated in this passage. Using a biblical reference to the "tree of knowledge" in the Garden of Eden, Weber likens the discovery of empirical knowledge to a kind of "Fall from Grace," a sort of loss of innocence whereby, in uncovering the impersonal, morally indifferent mechanics of a godless, Galilean universe, one at the same time strips the anthropocentric cosmos of the meaning it formerly possessed. This theme of disenchantment is a well-

known one in Weber's work, and this passage undoubtedly conjures a nostalgia for an idealized pre-industrial Europe in which the meaning of life was still inscribed in a sacred universe that had not yet been emptied of personal direction and purpose by the rationalization of a bureaucratically centralized social order. Weber uncovers the unbridgeable disjuncture between empirical analysis and normative prescription, and paves the way for a moral relativism that is grounded in nothing but the anchors of cultural transmission, leaving it anyone's guess as to where humanity's collective moral compass should be directed.

Although there is much that we could say at this point about the epistemological assumptions that underlie Weber's work, it would be most beneficial for us here to explicate the ethical position that is realized in his methodological writings – provided that we are specifically discussing value judgements made from an ethical standpoint. On the one hand, Weber articulates an ontological position in which values are essentially culturally transmitted beliefs that motivate individual actions. This in turn leads to the epistemological assertion that value judgements can be isolated, circumscribed and clarified like any other social data, and can therefore constitute facts in and of themselves. On the other hand, although moral beliefs might be "real" in and of themselves, i.e., they are really believed by particular individuals, the "rightness" or "wrongness" of the actions to which the beliefs refer cannot be empirically verified. This is because, for Weber, beliefs about right and wrong are culturally arbitrary constructions, and therefore cannot be anchored in the material, observable, "objective" world. This is why Weber so adamantly defends the claim that science can do nothing to uncover "objective" moral beliefs; if an individual consults the observable world in order

to uncover what is right and wrong, this world will only reciprocate silence: "[T]o *judge* the *validity* of…values is a matter of *faith*" (55). It can therefore justifiably be said that Weber himself admits to being a moral relativist. In this sense moral beliefs are relative to cultural conditioning and do not have any absolute basis outside of this conditioning. We initiate certain actions because they reflect how it is that we were taught to behave, but there exists no absolute source of justification that can tell us without a doubt which actions are right and which are wrong – we only designate actions as right or wrong because we are made to *believe* that they are one or the other through cultural transmission. For Weber, God is effectively dead – the disenchanted universe leaves it to us to decide how we should and should not act, how we should treat one other. As for what to do about this, Weber, provides us with no answer. He simply makes it clear that the social scientist cannot address the matter of values because the signs of rightness and wrongness are no longer inscribed in the world.

Weber and 'Verstehen'

Verstehen, or "understanding," has a long history that, at least for our purposes here, begins with the social theorist Wilhelm Dilthey and the distinction between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften,* the natural sciences and the human sciences. According to William Outhwaite, Dilthey distinguished the two not by their mode of operation but by their content: "In contrast to the natural sciences there arise the human sciences because we are obliged to endow human and animal organisms with mental activity" (Dilthey quoted in Outhwaite 1986: 25). According to Outhwaite, Dilthey's work has commonly been considered to have been done in two periods that

each takes a different approach to hermeneutics, an earlier "individualistic and psychologistic" period, and a later period defined by a distinctly Hegelian method (26). We will focus here on the earlier approach, as this is mainly what informs Weber's own notion of understanding.

The emphasis of Dilthey's earlier psychologistic approach to the human sciences was on the empathetic penetration or reconstruction of other people's mental processes. Dilthey argues that we have access to this psychological reality through the visible, bodily expressions of the other: "We call understanding that process whereby out of sensually given expressions of mental life the latter comes to be known." It is this communicative and interpretive process that is central to the human sciences, what makes them unique from the natural sciences: "As in the natural sciences all law-like knowledge is only possible by means of what can be measured and counted in experiments and in the rules implied thereby, so in the *Geisteswissenschaften* every abstract proposition is verifiable only by means of its relation to active mental life as this is given in lived experience and understanding (Dilthey quoted in Outhwaite 1986: 27). Dilthey often likened this method to a "descriptive psychology." For him it was not a matter of establishing causal regularities in people's behaviour, but of reliving the "inner experience" of their thoughts and emotions. For Dilthey, we do this, at least in part, by transferring an analogue of our own experiences to other individuals. Dilthey wanted to believe that such a process was complimentary to causal explanation since it could be based on comparison and generalization, and could thus legitimately be considered a science proper. According to Outhwaite, however, Dilthey never came close to completing this methodology, and so his purported method of understanding never

became programmatic; it was never made clear as to what sort of "descriptive psychology" one was to actually pursue, what its epistemological standards and prescripts were to be (Outhwaite 1986: 26-29).

Heinrich Rickert, another major German thinker of the time who was to have a great influence on Weber was, like Dilthey, also concerned with the distinction between the natural and the human sciences. Unlike Dilthey's interpretive approach, however, Rickert thought that what he called the "cultural sciences" (*Kulturwissenschaften*) "should conform to an existing epistemology and logic" (Outhwaite 1986: 38). The difference was that, unlike Dilthey, he thought the distinction was simply one of method rather than of content; what distinguished the latter from the former was that the cultural sciences were "individualizing" rather than generalizing, and involved meanings and "reference to values." Rickert thus distinguishes "value-reference" from actual evaluation, where the former includes the role of the social scientist in outlining the moral significance of the phenomenon under study (we saw Weber make a similar distinction earlier in his discussion of facts and values). As Rickert himself says, "The science of history must…avoid making practical judgements on its objects and evaluating them as good or bad, but it can never lose from sight the relations of the objects to values in general, since it would then be unable to separate historically important from historically unimportant processes in empirical reality" (Rickert quoted in Outhwaite 1986: 40). Rickert did not consider *Verstehen* to be an important concept, but he did regard *Nacherleben*, the imaginative "reliving" of the experiences of historical agents, as useful for "filling out" already formulated historical concepts. But overall, "reliving" such experiences for Rickert was simply impossible, since it is the meaning of an

individual's action that we are able to understand, not their mental activity. This view is clearly outlined in a passage from Rickert's *Science and History* (1899):

> The word 'understanding' is very ambiguous, and the concept that it denotes therefore requires precise definition. The crucial question in drawing the distinction between the cultural and the natural sciences is what the *opposite* of understanding is conceived to be. We must distinguish it from perceiving and in so doing conceive the latter idea so broadly that the entire world accessible to the senses…will be considered as the object of perception. But even then, in the interest of logical clarity we cannot rest content with the acts of the *subject* who does the understanding. On the contrary, from the methodological point of view it is the *objects* which are understood that are essential. If the entire world of phenomena directly accessible to the senses is designated as the object of perception, then only non-sensorial *meanings* or *complexes of meaning* remain as objects of understanding, if the world is to retain any precise signification (Rickert quoted in Outhwaite 1986: 41).

What Rickert implies here is that meanings or "complexes of meaning" are inseparable from objects of perception, and therefore we cannot logically make a distinction between perception and understanding, as they are essentially both part of the same act. Since no objects are given to us except in perception, then we are left with nothing to understand except these objects, making the understanding of one's inner experience impossible. It is therefore clear that Rickert does not follow the psychologistic notion of *Verstehen* in the work of Dilthey, since for him the notion can only remain dubious and therefore lacking utility as a methodological device.

In his preface to *Economy and Society* (1958), Weber gives due credit to both the sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel and Rickert, as well as the German

existentialist Karl Jaspers, for providing much of the substance of his own notion of *Verstehen*, which, as is well-known, is central to Weber's outline of an interpretive sociology. As Weber asserts in the opening line of *Economy*, "Sociology…is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences" (1958: 3). As understanding is thus the indispensable vehicle of interpretation, so is meaning the central object of sociological inquiry: "[F]or sociology in the present sense…the object of cognition is the subjective meaning-complex of action" (13). Or, as Weber later expresses it: "[S]ubjective understanding is the specific characteristic of sociological knowledge" (15). If sociology is concerned with the interpretive understanding of the meaning of social action, why then is it "subjective" for Weber? As Parsons explains in an endnote, "subjective" refers to "subjective states of mind and the meanings which can be imputed as intended by an actor…or of symbolic systems which are ultimately referable to such states of mind" (57). However, as Weber himself notes, meaning can also be attributable to a plurality of actors, and it can also refer "to the theoretically conceived *pure type* of subjective meaning attributed to the hypothetical actor or actors in a given situation" (4). In other words, meanings can also be attributed to group behaviour, and thus also as ideal types of meaning that are attributed to social actors in order to make sense of their behaviours. Therefore, sociology for Weber is essentially the interpretation of the meanings of social behaviours.

As noted above, *Verstehen* is the word that Weber uses to designate the active grasping or comprehension of the subjective meanings of the behaviours of social actors. Weber makes the claim that there exist two types of understanding, what he calls "direct

observational" and "explanatory" understanding respectively (1968: 8). Both of these types can further be classified either as "rational" or "emotionally empathic." There is thus both a rational and "irrational" basis for understanding. For Weber, rational understanding deals with purposes, or teleological interpretations of social action, while the latter deals with the emotional expression of actors. Weber describes direct observational understanding as that by which we immediately grasp the practical meaning of another's action(s). He does not, however, make it clear how the researcher is supposed to become empathic without forming any kind of emotional attachment with the research subject. He simply implies that the subject's emotions can be interpreted clearly and directly, without any further consequences. He uses the example of a person who reaches for a knob to shut a door, or someone who points a gun at an animal. These are "rational" examples of direct observational understanding, since the reading of emotions are not involved in interpreting the actions. This kind of understanding is instead experienced "irrationally" when I experience the direct understanding of an emotional reaction such as "an outbreak of anger as manifested by facial expressions, exclamations or irrational movements" (5).

Weber's second type of understanding - explanatory understanding - occurs when we understand the meaning of a social actor's actions via her motives. This is only possible, Weber asserts, when we place the social actions in question in a more "intelligible and inclusive" context of meaning. In other words, we understand one's motives through a broader comprehension of the situation in which one is situated. Again, such actions can be understood either rationally or irrationally. We might understand the chopping of wood or the aiming of a gun in a rational and motivational

sense if we know that the woodchopper is working for a wage or is chopping a supply of firewood for her own use or recreation, or that the individual aiming the gun has been commanded to shoot as a member of a firing squad or is fighting an enemy. On the other hand, we might understand "irrational" motives in these scenarios if we know that the woodchopper is working off a fit of rage, or if we know that the individual wielding the gun is aiming to shoot someone out of revenge (1968: 8-9). Therefore, in all of the above cases, "the particular act has been placed in a tangible sequence of motivation, the understanding of which can be treated as an explanation of the actual course of behaviour" (9).

Weber's account of *Verstehen* fails to account for the fact that feelings of affection or impulses to help would likely stem from the use of empathy in sociological research. It is Weber's firm assertion that such phenomena must be excluded from scientific discourse in the name of a higher *epistemic* value judgement that postulates that such emotional "epiphenomena" will likely distort research results. Becoming the Weberian scientific subject, then, involves a kind of exclusion of certain phenomena of conscious empathic experience, a self-censoring, inwardly directed suppression of all emotions and impulses that, as we will argue later, has made empathy a socially useful phenomenon. The irony of this attempt to preserve the very scientificity of sociological research by Weber is that it leaves the researcher impotent in any practical sense, unable to anticipate the utility of his research, which is what gives scientific practice its prestige to begin with. For sociological research, empathy needs to be more than simply the interpretation of another's emotions. It needs to also be able to understand social actors as products of the larger social frameworks in which they exist, and it needs to be able to

motivate practical action towards those in order for sociology to be able to possess any kind of practical facility. Empathy can be used for these purposes because it allows one to remain as objective as possible and still be able to clearly understand the operation of the social world and be of practical use to society. In order to explain this further we first need to construe an appropriate conception of empathy.

Chapter 2: Empathy

In order to defend our argument we first require a unified account of empathy. I have decided to use phenomenological concepts in the construction of this account because a) the philosophical tradition of phenomenology was, depending on the thinker, and for different purposes, often concerned with descriptive psychology, and b) occupied by the study of essences. The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in the opening to his *Phenomenology of Perception* (2009[1945]) writes: "Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example." Using the work of both the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, we are here concerned with outlining a kind of "essence" of empathy, a description of its most fundamental characteristics. In reality, this essence is of course tentative; like most concepts, it could potentially be elaborated or altered at any time with the presentation of new research. Our account will also be supported with contemporary research in psychology. This account will, however, provide us with a fundamental characterization of empathy by which we will be able to overcome the obstacle to meaningful research that was planted by Weber in the form of the fact-value distinction, and his notion of empathic understanding.

Empathy: A Preliminary Working Definition

We could not very well proceed without having some basic idea of what empathy is. The problem is, there is no agreed upon definition among psychologists as to which phenomena actually constitute empathy. The psychologist C. Daniel Batson (2009) distinguishes eight different phenomena that have been called empathy by psychologists

in the past. These include: knowing another person's internal state, adopting the posture of another, coming to feel as another feels, projecting oneself into another's situation, imagining how another is thinking and feeling, imagining how one would think and feel in another's place, feeling distress at witnessing another's suffering, and feeling *for* another who is suffering. Our own notion of empathy will at least touch upon all of these definitions in one way or another, but here it is important to distinguish between two different meanings that one can extract from "Batson's Eight": feeling as another feels, a feeling *with*, and feeling distress at the sight of another's suffering, or a feeling *for*. This distinction has often been referred to as the difference between empathy and sympathy (Wispé 1986; Gordon 1995). Since the existing research is far too preliminary at this point to be able to tell, with any degree of probability, which factors will evoke which phenomenon, we will follow Preston & de Waal (2002) and place both under the category of empathy. Our preliminary working definition is stated as follows: *Empathy is a social relation whereby one comes to feel as another feels, or becomes distressed by the suffering of another.*

The Evolution of Empathy

To begin, we would like to put forward the claim that empathy is a product of our evolutionary history, which makes it innate and thus genetically-based. This presupposes that empathy is a "trait" that was selected at some point during the course of human evolution because it ultimately maximized individual/group reproductive success[4]. In an evolutionary context this is not an unreasonable claim. Goubert et al. (2009) have aptly

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[4] As we will see shortly, we do not want to characterize empathy as a trait, but primarily as a relation. However, the latter term means nothing if there exist no things that can relate. Therefore, we will also refer to empathy as a "predisposition," characterizing it as both a predisposition and a relation.

pointed out that empathy for the pain of others is an essential aspect of both personal and group survival, as it directs attention to the experiences of others when they confront physical danger and pain. In order to protect oneself or provide care for others, knowing others' feelings, thoughts, and behavioural reactions in the context of what is happening to them may be crucial in deciding one's course of action. Empathy thus facilitates appropriate responses to one's environment such as, for example, ducking away from an attacker and responding to the cries of an infant[5]. Preston and de Waal (2002) have called such behaviours the "keystone" of reproductive success; they are evolutionarily advantageous because they allow individuals to spend more time on other activities that promote reproductive success, such as feeding and finding mates.

Preston and de Waal have also theoretically situated empathy in an evolutionary context by asserting its necessity within the parent-child relationship, since this relationship is largely based on the ability of individuals to be affected by the emotional state of others; infants are emotionally affected by the state of their mothers, and mothers are emotionally affected by the state of their offspring. In the case of the infant, it is thought that the continuous and coordinated emotional and physical contact between the mother and infant influence the ability of the infant to regulate his emotions, which in turn determines the future emotional competence of the individual (Tronick 1989; Ungerer 1990; Field 1994; Jones et al. 1998). In the case of the parent, interactional views of development have suggested that the infant directs the mother's behaviour as much as the mother directs the infant's. For example, smiling and crying by the infant are thought to modify the affective and behavioural responses of their caregivers, since these

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[5] The authors claim that the evolutionary importance of detecting and responding to danger is evident in the general design of the nervous system because response circuits dedicated to the perception of negative emotions, especially fear, have been much easier to locate in the brain relative to positive ones.

behaviours signal the infants' internal states, which in turn provides the impetus for affection and action in others (Wiesenfeld & Klorman 1978). What all of this points to in the evolutionary sense is that emotional contagion often guides the parent-offspring relationship, increasing the "success" of both individuals; if a similar emotion is elicited in the parent as in the infant, then tailored care is much more likely. Proper care increases viability of the offspring and therefore also the reproductive success of the parent. Fulfilling the needs of the offspring also assuages the arousal of the caregiver and offsets the unwanted attention from group members and predators caused by an individual displaying distress (Preston & de Waal 2002).

It is evident from these hypotheses that empathy has a place in evolutionary theory. This would implicate that empathy is an *innate predisposition*, a capacity that we are born with as part of our genetic heritage that allows us to have a particular type of relationship with others like us. Hence a new working definition is in order: Empathy is *an innate predisposition that manifests itself as a social relation whereby one comes to feel as another feels, or becomes distressed by the suffering of another.* This definition implies, in the most literal sense, that empathy is an *embodied* phenomenon, a *biological* predisposition that exists as part of the individual's genetic architecture prior to any cultural conditioning.

Since we are using contemporary social-psychological research as the starting point for our notion of empathy, one might think it appropriate to frame our notion using a symbolic interactionist framework using the thought of George Herbert Mead. In *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), Mead clearly spells out a notion of what he calls "sympathy" that corresponds with what many today would think of as empathy:

> Sympathy comes…in the arousing in one's self of the attitude of the individual whom one is assisting, the taking the attitude of the other when one is assisting the other…[I]n an attitude which is sympathetic we imply that our attitude calls out in ourselves the attitude of the person we are assisting. We feel with him and we are able so to feel ourselves into the other because we have, by our own attitude, aroused in ourselves of the person whom we are assisting (299).

Mead's account of sympathy contains many of the elements that will constitute our account of empathy; when one experiences it as a feeling *with* the other, one will often emotionally and/or cognitively adopt the perspective of the other. My justification for using a phenomenologically based account is that we want to understand empathy as an *embodied* phenomenon since suffering is its primary object, and we understand suffering to be a primarily *physical* phenomenon since, even though it has important emotional and cognitive dimensions, its object in our case are the physical, emotional, and psychological conditions brought about by material deprivations such as the inability to acquire proper bodily sustenance, clothing and shelter. Furthermore, phenomenology stems from a much older philosophical tradition that is better equipped to grasp the essence of phenomena generally. Since Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology allows us to grasp these elements in his conceptual framework, we will use a phenomenological account of empathy as opposed to a symbolic interactionist one.

The Social World: Phenomenological Foundations

For Merleau-Ponty, the natural world and the social world are two different "dimensions" of the same world (2009 [1945]: 421). This world is *primordial* − it is

immediately and intuitively present to me at all times through the senses. Therefore, as the social world is constituted by the existence of myself and the primordial presence of others, then their existence is irrefutable. As the philosopher Mary Rose Barral has put it, "It is indeed Merleau-Ponty's method to present the fruit of his investigation and reflections without attempting to prove anything. He sees the "de facto" intersubjective relations which exist among men…and describes these relations as they occur before him" (1984: 216). This notion of the primordial presence of the other is an aspect that runs throughout all of Merleau-Ponty's work. He often has the tendency to make the claim that the other "just is," that he exists for himself in the same way that I am a consciousness for myself, without needing to demonstrate or "prove" that he exists. For example, in "The Philosopher and His Shadow" (1964) he writes the following: "I know unquestionably that that man over there *sees*, that my sensible world is also his, because *I am present at his seeing,* it *is visible* in his eyes' grasp of the scene." He then depicts this "gleam" in the other's eye as a kind of sign of the certainty of his existence: "Suddenly a gleam appeared a little bit below and out in front of its eyes; its glance is raised and comes to fasten on the very things that I am seeing…I say that there is a man there and not a mannequin, as I see that the table is there and not a perspective or an appearance of the table" (1964: 169). This description resurfaces in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968):

> [S]uddenly there breaks forth the evidence that yonder also, minute by minute, life is being lived: somewhere behind those eyes, behind those gestures, or rather before them, or again about them, coming from I know not what double ground of space, another private world shows through, through the fabric of my own, and for a moment I live in it; I am no more than the respondent for the interpellation that is made to me. To be sure, the

least recovery of attention persuades me that this other who invades me is made only of my own substance… (1968: 10).

So if for Merleau-Ponty the other is always already incontrovertibly given to me in existence, what are the conditions of possibility of our existence? For Merleau-Ponty there are a number of basic conditions of human social life. Perhaps the most fundamental is what he calls *intercorporeity*. This is the term that Merleau-Ponty uses to connote the brute sensibility of the world that we all share, a universal foundation of human existence as social beings: "My two hands 'coexist' or are 'compresent' because they are one single body's hands. The other person appears through an extension of that compresence; he and I are like organs of one single intercorporeality…What I perceive to begin with is a different 'sensibility' (*Empfindbarkeit*), and only subsequently a different man and a different thought" (1964b: 168). Merleau-Ponty tries to describe intercorporeality at some length:

> The fact is that sensible being, which is announced to me in my most strictly private life, summons up within that life all other corporeality. It is the being which reaches me in my most secret parts, but which I also reach in its brute or untamed state, in an absolute of presence which holds the secret of the world, others, and what is true (171).

This dimension of being is arguably even more primordial than that which can be circumscribed as "the social," since it is the fundamental condition of possibility of the social: "If the other person is to exist for me, he must do so to begin with in an order beneath the order of thought. On this level, his existence for me is possible…" (170).

Therefore, for Merleau-Ponty, even more fundamental than the dimension of the social is sensibility itself, the primary stratum of existence that constitutes us as social beings.

In addition to the basic physical world of which we are both inextricably a part, we also share, and recognize that we share, an *analogous structure.* This denotes the fact that the body of the other appears to me as having a structure like my own, and therefore is a form of behaviour like myself. Even though I cannot experience the other's consciousness in the way that I experience my own, to a certain extent his consciousness is expressed "on the outside" by his body. Because I can express my own consciousness in a similar fashion – that is, because I am "in" a body that is able to express meaning through language and gesture - there exists a direct and immediate relationship between us in which we can communicate by interpreting one another's words and gestures. This relationship presupposed that we each have a *body schema*, a "knowledge" that each of us intrinsically possesses of how to move our bodies in different ways without a conscious, step-by-step direction, as well as the bodily attunement that we have to our physical surroundings. For Merleau-Ponty we essentially *are* our bodies; they contain a proprioceptivity and tactility that we largely do not facilitate at the level of conscious representation: "Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and the object…which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my 'symbolic' or objectifying function'" (2009 [1945]: 162). The body schema is thus an "immediately given invariant whereby the different motor tasks are instantaneously transferable." It is the body schema coupled with our sensory apparatus that essentially makes us "bodies-in-the-world," so many

"open systems" that are correlative with the world, not analytically separated and distinct from it.

Let us here briefly review the concepts that Merleau-Ponty puts forward as the foundations of the social world. The fact of other beings like us who exist in the world is *primordial*, meaning that it is always already immediately given. This is made possible in part through *intercorporeity*, the fundamental physical plane of existence by which we are all constituted. We are recognizable to each other since our bodies are *analogous structures*, each possessing a *body schema* that allows us to navigate the immediate perceptible world. As we will see shortly, these are the foundations of *mimicry*, which is in turn foundational to our notion of embodied empathy.

Mimicry

As we so often fancy ourselves to be autonomous beings, we often find it difficult to fathom that we were, at the very beginning of our lives, entirely co-dependent. What allows us to survive is the fact that at birth, just as we become physically attuned to our environments, so too do we become attuned to the others like us who exist within those environments. We are fundamentally social creatures before we can call ourselves independent, a fact that Merleau-Ponty recognized: "Our relationship to the social is, like our relationship to the world, deeper than any express perception or any judgement," that "which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification" (2009 [1945]: 421). But what conditions allow us to be fundamentally social? It would appear that, starting from birth, our bodies are "open" to one another in the sense that any bodily phenomena whatsoever can act as a means of communication to another body. The

totality of this phenomenon is manifested through *mimicry*, the capacity to reflect another's movements in one's own that each of us possesses, a phenomenon that necessarily signals the fully communicable correspondence of individual body schemas, the recognition of one another's shared and fully transposable locomotive self-samenesses that can each be instantaneously summoned and manipulated for the other. Merleau-Ponty provides a descriptive passage of this phenomenon reflected in a young infant:

A baby of fifteen months opens its mouth if I playfully take one of its fingers between my teeth and pretend to bite it…The fact is that its own mouth and teeth, as it feels them from the inside, are immediately, for it, an apparatus to bite with, and my jaw, as the baby sees it from the outside, is immediately, for it, capapble of the same intentions. 'Biting' has immediately, for it, an intersubjective significance. It perceives its intentions in its body, and my body with its own, and thereby my intentions in its own body (2009 [1945]: 410).

Although the infant that Merleau-Ponty describes is fifteen months old, more recent research would suggest that the ability of humans to mimic one another might be innate. In 1977, the psychologist Andrew Meltzoff had a study published entitled 'Imitation of Facial and Manual Gestures by Human Neonates'. In the study, six infants between twelve and twenty-one days old were each shown a number of facial and hand gestures in sequence. Each infant was videotaped, and each tape was shown to an observer who had to guess which expression the infant was emulating. The results showed that in most cases the observer guessed the expression that the experimenter was

trying to make the infant mimick, suggesting that the infant was in fact mimicking the gestures correctly. Meltzoff considered his study to be significant in that it suggested that mimicry was an innate mechanism, whereas previous studies such as those by the psychologist Jean Piaget suggested that newborn infants lacked the perceptual-cognitive sophistication required for such actions, and could only develop these capacities after roughly eight to twelve months.

If the human potential to mimic is innate, this would presuppose the claim that infants have the ability to recognize other people, regardless of age, as analogous structures, a recognition that improves with age, as evinced by the fact that behaviours that we observed in others growing up are internalized by us as they are learned over time. The most important implication of mimicry for us to consider here is that our bodies are always already attuned to each other; they can communicate with one another through their mutual recognition. When I perceive the gestures of another, I am capable of instantaneously either replicating those gestures, or I can respond to them with reciprocal gestures. This is not something that I do with any conscious effort; as if attached by invisible strings, the parts of another's body correspond with the same parts of my own, their possibilities for movement correspond with my possibilities, because each of our bodies already recognizes itself in the other. Although I do not necessarily see my own movement, I already "know" how the structures of our bodies correspond. This bodily correspondence that Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes is, as we will see shortly, is the primary condition of possibility for empathy.

Embodied Empathy: Emotional Contagion Vs. the Perception-Action Model

If there exists the primordial recognition of one's own body in another's, the question then arises as to how one could come to enter into the relation of empathy with another. There are two competing answers to this question that currently exist. One is the theory of *emotional contagion* put forth by the psychologist Elaine Hatfield and her colleagues, while the other is the *perception-action model* of empathy put forth by the psychologist Stephanie Preston and the primatologist Frans de Waal. We will here provide an account of these theories as they have been developed in recent literature.

Hatfield and her colleagues (1994; 2009) have put forth the hypothesis that people possess the ability to "feel themselves into" another's emotions, resulting in a kind of emotional "sharing," or contagion. Although emotional contagion is a complex process that entails many different neurological and psychological phenomena, a description of it can be broken down into three essential propositions or stages. The first stage is mimicry, the ability that people have to automatically and continuously synchronize their movements with the facial expressions, voices, postures, movements, and instrumental behaviours of others. The second stage is "feedback," in which people's emotional experience is affected, moment to moment, by the activation of and/or feedback from facial, vocal, postural, and movement mimicry[6]. Hatfield claims that, theoretically speaking, emotional experience can be influenced by the central nervous system that commands mimicry, the afferent feedback from such facial, verbal, or postural mimicry, or conscious self-perception processes, wherein individuals make inferences about their

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[6] The philosopher Robert Gordon has echoed this idea with his notion of 'facial empathy': "It is known that motor activity, especially the movement of facial muscles, can drive the emotions. Even when we voluntarily contract specific facial muscles or produce vowel sounds that force the contraction of these muscles, we tend to bring on the emotion that characteristically produces a corresponding facial expression" (1995: 729).

own emotional states on the basis of their own expressive behaviour. The third stage is contagion. Hatfield claims that, as a consequence of mimicry and feedback, people tend, from moment to moment, to "catch" the emotions of others. Hatfield's theory of emotional contagion has of course not gone unchallenged, however two studies that were meant to test Hatfield's hypothesis both found that there existed much evidence to support it (see Wild et al. 2001; 2003).

Preston and de Waal are skeptical of the emotional contagion theory because it is not evolutionarily beneficial for an individual to have to go through the process of mimicking an individual every time that we witness her expressing emotion; this would certainly be a far less efficient form of empathy. This is not to say that we do not automatically mimic to a certain extent in specific situations. But one would think that there would exist a more efficient way to, at other times, experience emotions similar to those of others. The model of empathy that Preston and de Waal put forth is referred to as the perception-action model, or the PAM (2002). The key difference between their model and Hatfield's theory is that, rather than focussing on mimicked motor activity, the authors focus on mimicked neural representations. They define empathy as "any process where the attended perception of the object's state generates a state in the subject that is more applicable to the object's state or situation than to the subject's own prior state or situation" (2002: 4) PAM is a "process model" since empathy is a "superordinate" category that includes "all subclasses of phenomena that share the same mechanism," and are therefore not entirely separable. For the authors this means that all forms of empathy involve some level of emotional contagion and personal distress, and help is never entirely for the sake of the object. The PAM of empathy specifically states that "attended

perception of the object's state automatically activates the subject's representations of the state, situation, and object, and that activations of these representations automatically primes or generates the associated autonomic (motor) and somatic (emotional) responses." Therefore, according to this model, perceptions of others' emotional expressions in different situations automatically leads one to match the other's emotional state because perception and action rely on some of the same neural circuitry. As a result of the matched neural representations, which do not need to produce matched motor activity, one comes to feel some of what the other feels, and therefore understands the other's internal state.

We thus have two different accounts of embodied empathy. Hatfield's theory of emotional contagion suggests empathy is felt for another through the mimicry of their bodily expressions, whereas Preston and de Waal suggest that it is felt simply through the perception of the other's bodily state. The difference is not, however, a matter of major importance for us here. What concerns us is *how* empathy takes place, how it is that we can come to feel what another feels, or how we can come to feel distress at the sight of one who is suffering. We found that the other is primordially given to us in the world as one who is "like me" in the sense that his body is constituted by a general structure that is analogous to my own in that it possesses the same essential components. The result of this is that our bodies are synchronous – we can both emulate each other and reciprocate one another, as if I was mirrored in the other. This is possible because we each have the ability locate the movements of another on our own bodies instantaneously via perception. What this ultimately means is that the emotional states that we associate with bodily gestures, movements and expressions *are one* with those expressions; there is no

emotion/body dualism. Anything that we feel has a physical manifestation. Therefore, if I can perceive another and mimic that other, or at the very least "read" the other's "body language," it follows that in doing so I can "re-experience" that other's emotions of which their facial expressions and gestures are the manifestation. Our analogous body structures, because they correspond to one another in all of their parts, and because they are subject to the same corporeal conditions, can therefore convey to one another the expressions that shape them – if I contort my face in a grimace of pain, the pain is experienced by you as a behaviour with a meaning rather than as a sensation. You identify it as essentially as an expression of the body, an expression that you can in turn identify and mimic. Empathy is thus an *embodied* phenomenon; I feel your emotion either because I can mimic the expression that that emotion essentially *is*, or I can feel distress because I understand the meaning that your expression conveys.

Cognitive Empathy

So far we have looked at empathy as an intercorporeal phenomenon whereby bodies are inextricably bound to one another, and can thus construct a sense of one another's "inner" lives through perception and mimicry. But as many of us can infer simply from daily living, it is not simply by way of the body that we come to interpret and re-experience the thoughts and feelings of the other, or express sympathy for her. Another way we do this is by means of the imagination. The type of empathy that utilizes the imagination as a medium of understanding is often referred to as *cognitive* empathy or "perspective-taking." Unfortunately there exists no recent research that attempts to conceptualize the dynamics of cognitive empathy (see for example Batson 2009). In

order to do this, then, we will use phenomenological tools to conceptualize not only the essential character of the imagination itself, but also of cognitive empathy. Let us then provide a brief summary of the imagination from a phenomenological standpoint.

The Imaginary

Jean-Paul Sartre, in a work entitled *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (2004 [1940]) presented a theory of the imagination that was influenced by the philosopher and psychologist Franz Brentano. The latter defined imagination as such: "Phantasy presentations are nonintuitional or *inauthentic presentations* which approximate to intuitional presentations…The border is admittedly blurred" (Brentano, quoted in Bernet et al. 1993). Thus Brentano sets up the distinction between the "inauthentic" simulacra that appear before us in our minds versus the "authentic" perceptions of objects in the material world that appear before us through the senses. This essential distinction, as we shall see, underlies Sartre's characteriztion of the imagination.

In his phenomenological analysis, Sartre presents four characteristics of the imagination that he believes constitute its essence: the image as a consciousness, quasi-observation, the image as a nothingness, and spontaneity. The "image as a consciousness" is Sartre's contention that the act of imagining an object is an actual consciousness of that object, although of a different kind than the consciousness of an object that we perceive in front of us in the world. "Quasi-observation" denotes the fact that, although we are "observing" an object "in our minds," this is clearly an observation of a different type. The difference for Sartre is that, when we perceive an object in the

world, the richness of that perception "overflows" us, meaning that we can constantly scrutinize objects so as to discover more and more about them. In the imagination, however, there is always a certain poverty to the object; we can only present to ourselves what we already know about it; it does not reveal to us any novel characteristics, but simply those that we have stored in memory. Third, there is the image as a "nothingness," which simply denotes the fact that there is a fundamental unreality to anything that I imagine; if I posit a table in my mind, the table is of course not really sensorily present to me, but merely a representation in my mind. Finally, there is spontaneity, which denotes the fact that, whereas perceptual consciousness is passive, "an imaging consciousness gives itself to itself as an imaging consciousness…a spontaneity that produces and conserves the object as imaged." It "appears to itself as creative, but without positing as object this creative character." In other words, unlike things in the perceived external world, I can present whatever objects I want whenever I want to myself in my imagination. We will see shortly how Sartre's fundamental characteristics of the imagination act as the basis for our characterization of cognitive empathy.

First-Person/Third-Person: The Essence of Cognitive Empathy

In his work entitled *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1776), the eighteenth-century economist Adam Smith made this point regarding empathy: "Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can inform of any conception of what are his sensations" (1976 [1776]: 9). Although we are in agreement with this basic point, we

would here like to add that the imagination formulates such a conception either from a first-person or a third-person standpoint – either we imagine a scenario as it plays out before us, or we imagine it as if we ourselves were the "protagonists" of the scenario. In order to provide a full account of the character of cognitive empathy, let us here "imagine" two scenarios to highlight what we will postulate as the essential characteristics of cognitive empathy.

One evening you receive a phone call. It is a close friend of yours who tells you that her mother has just passed away. She is crying softly. As stated above, we can imagine this event from a first-person or from a third-person perspective. If you imagine it from a first-person perspective you feel saddened, because your own mother is still alive and in good health and, since you are fairly close to her, you know that you would be deeply shaken by her loss. If you then attribute that feeling of sadness to your friend, and imagine it to be of a far greater magnitude than what you felt simply from imagining your own mother's death (because her mother has just died *in reality*), then you immediately begin to feel sad *for* your friend. You can also experience sadness for your friend if you imagine her situation from a third-person perspective – you picture her sitting in her house, shoulders slumped and hair dishevelled as she cries into the phone. As she describes how she found out about her mother's death you can imagine what she describes to you. Now, it is clear that all of Sartre's fundamental characteristics of the imagination apply to this scenario, regardless of which perspective one takes. In the first-person scenario in which you imagine your own mother dying, the scenario plays out in your mind in the same way that you would watch a film, as an "image-consciousness." The scenario is "quasi-observed" since it does not possess a richness of perception that

transcends you, but only contains what you give it. It is a "nothingness" in the sense that you are aware that what you quasi-observe in your mind is not a real situation happening right in front of you; it is composed of images in your mind. Finally, there is a certain "spontaneity" to your perspective – you can imagine your mother's funeral in different ways, and you can imagine your friend sitting in her kitchen or in her living room. In short, you are in control of the way in which you imagine the scenario.

In addition to Sartre's characteristics of the imagination, we would here like to present two characteristics that we believe to be fundamental to cognitive empathy. One is that your perspective is not only quasi-observed, but also *quasi-real* - although the scenario that you imagine is not a real event in and of itself, it is used to *simulate* a real event and the real emotional experiences of the individual who is experiencing the actual event. This leads us to our second point, which is that the events that you simulate in your mind are *interpretive* in nature; since one cannot *directly* experience another's emotions except through embodied empathy, one can attempt to understand what one might feel by simulating his emotions. Therefore, in essence, cognitive empathy is both quasi-real in the sense that it aims to simulate a real event using an imaginative one of one's own making, and interpretive in the sense that it is an attempt to understand the emotional experiences of another.

This brings us to our second scenario. A friend of yours recently fell off her roof and dislocated her shoulder while painting an upper section of her house, and was immediately taken to a hospital. Though you were not there to witness the accident yourself, after she tells you about it, it is not difficult to imagine. We need not here go through all of the essential aspects of the imagination that we used in the previous

example. The reason that we here want to use this second example is to highlight the fact that imagined situations can also be interpreted using the body schema, which implies that both embodied and cognitive empathy are fundamentally intertwined. This is because, regardless of whether or not I imagine my friend falling off her roof from a first-person or a third-person perspective, I can still "feel" her dislocate her shoulder, even if I do not actually know what it feels like from first-hand experience to dislocate my shoulder. However, my body schema allows me to *simulate* this process by giving me a sensation in my shoulder. This is not to say that this sensation will even come close to resembling the pain that my friend experiences, but it allows me to interpret and thus understand what she went through so that I will respond to her by showing compassion for her situation.

We will here summarize what has been said in order to provide a final and clear account of what we understand by the notion of cognitive empathy. The latter is a process by which I attempt to interpret and thus understand the situation of another by simulating his experience using my imaginative capacity from either a first-person or a third-person perspective. Rather than mimicking or actually perceiving an individual in emotional distress or pain, I simulate the situation that the other is in by imagining it based on an account of the situation that is given to me verbally. What is imagined is always both interpretive and quasi-real. It is interpretive because, by simulating the experience for myself, I attempt to understand what it would have felt like to be in a certain situation, or why it would have felt a certain way. Since I cannot immediately perceive the situation, all that I can try to do in order to obtain a grasp of the other's internal state is imagine either what the situation is like or what it would have been like to have been in that

situation. It is quasi-real because, although I know that what takes place "in my mind's eye" is not real itself, it is a simulation, a crude copy of a real situation that I create in order to try to obtain an understanding of another individual's experience. We also saw that the body schema is somehow associated with cognitive empathy, because I can experience bodily sensations simply by imagining things. In short then, cognitive empathy is essentially interpretive, simulational, and cognitively intertwined with the body schema.

The Empathic Response

In this section we will present our notion of the "empathic response," an impulse to action based on the perceived internal states of others that I will argue is a central component of empathy itself. Our notion of empathic response is modelled after the Israeli philosopher and educator Khen Lampert's notion of "radical compassion." In his book *Traditions of Compassion* (2005), Lampert describes the "spontaneous aspect" of compassion. He writes:

> [C]ompassion…manifests itself as an impulse…[It] appears spontaneously, similar to the appearance of what we call 'instinct'. That is, it appears automatically, completely unconnected to conscious will or desire, within a short, even infinitesimal, period of time, in the framework of the encounter with the distress of the other. Even in retrospect, no conscious discursive process can be discerned as preceding the appearance of compassion, nor the activation of the imagination (160-161).

In the section above on embodied empathy, we saw a similar phenomenon with Preston and de Waal's PAM, the description of which stated that the "activation" of the

representation of an action automatically "primes or generates" certain autonomic responses. The psychologist Liesbet Goubert and colleagues (Goubert et al. 2005; 2009) have also done studies to indicate that concern or sympathy often elicit the inclination towards caregiving. She calls such inclinations "automatic empathic responses." She says that immediate pain expressions, such as screaming, crying, facial displays of pain, etc., are the kinds of behaviours that tend to elicit automatic empathic responses in observers. It would seem that people tend to respond automatically to the displays of pain of others – they inductively use the other's behaviour to draw inferences about the internal experiences of others. These nonverbal expressions of pain tend to be particularly potent.

It would be inaccurate to provide an account of empathy as a relation without including empathic responses as part of this definition. Empathy would never have been selected if it did not elicit behaviours in others that were beneficial to individuals and groups. We therefore argue that helping behaviours are themselves part of empathy as a relation.

Empathy: A Phenomenological Account

We began this chapter by asserting that empathy is an innate predisposition that manifests itself as a social relation whereby one comes to feel as another feels, or becomes distressed by the suffering of another. This defined empathy as a *biological* predisposition that exists as part of the individual's genetic architecture prior to any cultural conditioning. What was lacking in this definition was an account of exactly *how* empathy is made possible in our own daily experience, as well as a descriptive account of empathy as a relation between individuals. We will here elaborate on these two points.

Empathy is made possible by a number of factors, but the two most important conditions are what Merleau-Ponty calls intercorporeity, our existence as individuals on a shared physical plane of existence, and our bodies as analogous structures on this corporeal plane, our primordial attunement to one another's bodies through mutual *self-recognition*, or the correspondence of the same essential bodily components. What we called "embodied empathy" and "cognitive empathy" were not separate types of empathy, but two different expressions of what are essentially the same relation, that in which one feels *for* another, and/or feels *with* them; embodied empathy is manifested through the direct perception and/or mimicry of another's body, whereas cognitive empathy is an indirect manifestation of the empathic relation whereby I simulate a real event in my own imagination. Both of these manifestations of empathy are ultimately rooted in the body – even when I imagine an event, I can still feel certain bodily sensations as if I am living an event in direct experience. We could also distinguish these two forms of empathy by identifying what initiates them; on the one hand, the empathic relation is initiated via direct perception, whereas on the other hand it is initiated by a simulation of direct perception. We finally discussed the empathic response, an impulse to action for the purpose of alleviating the suffering of the other. Empathy as a relation, then, is not just a feeling or a series of feelings, but is a feeling that initiates action for the ultimate cause of group cohesion. Empathy in this very narrow, instrumental sense could simply be defined as a feeling that initiates action.

Having characterized empathy in a very general sense in terms of its origin and its everyday character, our sketch of empathy still seems somewhat scarce, as if we have landed just shy of its essence. Although we are intrinsically always already connected to

one another as members of a social species, as Merleau-Ponty has described in a stylistically pleasing, illuminating language, the fact remains that we are autonomous beings in the sense that we cannot essentially *be* anyone but ourselves – we are always within the confines of our own perspective, we experience the world from our own single standpoint. If another pricks her finger with a pin, no matter if I see it directly or if I try to imagine what it felt like, the fact remains that my own finger was not pricked with a pin. I can never step into the other's world as I exist in my own; I am always on the "other" side of her existence, seeing her in a way that she can never see herself throughout her entire life. Empathy is like a doorway that I can never step through. I can see the other standing in a room that she has made for herself, I can make out the outlines of certain things and get an idea of what it might be like to stand in that room. But I can never actually step over into it and see things from where she does – I am forever outside of this room, standing in my own knowing that no one will ever be there beside me seeing what I see. But empathy alleviates this quasi-solipsistic condition of existence; it allows me to *cross over*, at least to a certain extent, into the other's perspective. It is an emotional fusion of horizons. It allows us to take part in each other's inner lives, albeit in a mediated way. It is a relation that momentarily allows separate individuals' inner lives to "touch," each by contaminating the other emotionally and thus summoning one individual to the aid of another. Empathy offers us an escape from our autonomy and provides us with a way of *being together* as opposed to being beside one another. This is what we would refer to as the essence of empathy.

Chapter 3: Empathy, Values and Sociology

As I mentioned in my introduction, the ultimate aim of my thesis is twofold. First, it is my aim to circumvent a "value-free" approach to sociology whereby one can make use of empathy in sociological research both as a motivational tool and as a method of understanding in order to conduct research on behalf of the research subject in order to alleviate suffering and improve his quality of life; our version of *Verstehen* undermines Weber's understanding of social science, since ours clearly possesses utility. Second, the demonstration of this argument will simultaneously posit the foundation of an empathic sociology that focusses on alleviating the conditions of abject material suffering. We will return to this last point at the conclusion of this chapter. I will here present three central claims against Weber, that "empathy is not a value-judgement," "empathy enhances understanding," and that there is a certain "universalism" inherent in the process of empathy.

Empathy is Not a Value Judgement

The first claim made by Weber that we isolated goes as follows: in the logical sense, statements of fact and value judgements represent two distinct categories. Science is concerned with the former but not with the latter because values are arbitrarily grounded in history and culture and therefore ultimately unverifiable. What this means is that the "value-axioms" that Weber discusses are inherited by individuals who grow up within the context of a certain cultural tradition. Because these value axioms are inhereted in the context of a particular time and place, they do not possess an absolute character, and so they are not "true" in the way that a statement of fact can be true.

Furthermore, because they are "should" claims, they do not refer to anything that exists in the present, and can therefore not be verified by observation. We respond to Weber's claim with the proposition that *empathy is not a value judgement*. It is an evolutionarily given, biologically rooted predisposition that manifests itself as a relation and as a response to the suffering of others. It is therefore the manifestation of a biological imperative, not a cultural one, since it alerts us to the suffering of the other and allows us to understand the physical and emotional condition of the other in order to facilitate group life. The question of verification becomes irrelevant in the case of empathy because it exists prior to the "should" question in the form of an innate, pre-given imperative. For the same reason it cannot be said that empathy is a relation that is formed in the interests of a certain political agenda because, in its unfettered simplicitly and directness, it provides the empathic individual with the impulse to come to the aid of another. Therefore, because empathy itself is not a value judgement but is instead the manifestation of a pre-given biological imperative, it can be used to motivate the researcher without the intrusion of value judgements in the research process.

This is not to say that one could not formulate a value judgement based on an empathic response. This is certainly possible. If I say to myself "I should help that person" who I see in distress, this is irrevocably a value judgement. But to say that empathy is the product of values that we already possess is to put the cart before the horse; we have seen in our analysis of empathy that the behavioural predispositions upon which it is based are present at birth. It is therefore much more plausible to suggest that empathy is a predisposition that exists prior to the influence of cultural values, than it is to suggest that it is itself a cultural value. In addition, we do not want to deny the claim

that values infringe upon the empathic process. Goubert (2005; 2009) and Preston and de Waal (2002), for example, both suggest in their research that there are a number of factors that can prevent empathic responses to individuals who are in distress. Most of these have to do with our capacity to reason. As we saw with Preston and de Waal, most empathic responses are fairly immediate and automatic. However, as we age, we often start to "think our way out of" empathic responses by considering other factors within a given situation that prevent us from fulfilling them. It is therefore certain that value-judgements can impede empathic responses, or convert the individual's propensity to empathy into something entirely different. There is thus much that can get in the way of someone manifesting an act of "pure" empathy for someone else.

Let us here recapitulate: empathy is the manifestation of a biological imperative, one that we are born with and that we end up cultivating or suppressing based on the cultural context in which we are raised. It compels us to form a relationship with the other by which we come to their aid, because empathy allows us to "share" in the suffering of the other. Unlike value axioms, the impulse toward the empathic response exists prior to the abstract level of ought statements as a biological imperative. It is a propensity that, if properly utilized, could act as the motivating force behind an empathic sociology that seeks to emancipate individuals from the conditions of abject material suffering. It is not a value judgement that obscures our vision, but rather an impulse that compels us to reconstruct society without the researcher having to compromise her scientific integrity.

Empathy Enhances Understanding

We here want to respond to Weber's second claim, that one should keep a personal distance between himself and the subejct of study. His account of empathic understanding implies that the researcher should somehow be able to use empathy to come to an emotional understanding of the research subject's experience, a feat that would, in reality, inevitably create emotional linkages between the researcher and the research subject. Weber implicitly asks the sociologist to forego such ties, and any inclinations one might have to come to the aid of the other during the research process in the name of the higher epistemic value of value-neutrality. Bourdieu challenges Weber with an account of understanding that encourages such inclinations while at the same time remains scientific by accounting for the suffering of individuals with the larger social structures of which they are a part. Bourdieu's notion of understanding would be central to the empathic sociology that we here wish to engender, because it uses empathy as a mode of understanding by which the sociologist can isolate the causes of material suffering.

In 1999, Bourdieu published a book that was co-authored by several of his colleagues entitled *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society.* The work is comprised of a number of different qualitative "case studies" that investigate the phenomenon of what Bourdieu calls "positional suffering," or "ordinary" suffering, the kind that arises from the struggles and tensions inherent in one's own social position. In order to accomplish this, he calls for a method that works with multiple perspectives, one that corresponds to a multiplicity of coexisting and competing points of view in the

world. He wishes to put forth a method that will objectivize its subjects, one that will not reduce the individual under observation to "a specimen in a display case" (1999: 2).

As a deliberate reference to Weber and the *Verstehen* tradition in early twentieth century German sociology, Bourdieu calls this method "understanding," which is essentially an interview process in which one immerses oneself in the "story" of the interviewee. He claims that understanding as a method in sociology requires "taking people as they are" (1999: 1) In order to do this one must have the "theoretical instruments" that allow people to see human lives as necessary through a search for the causes and reasons that they have for being what they are. According to Bourdieu, the researcher must therefore adopt a perspective that as closely as possible resembles the subject's own without becoming a subject of their worldview, which Bourdieu suggests is impossible anyway. In order not to exert a form of symbolic violence on the individuals under study, Bourdieu suggests that understanding should be thought of as a form of "active and methodical listening." This method "combines a total availability to the person being questioned, submission to the singularity of a particular life history – which can lead, by a kind of more or less controlled imitation, to adopting the interviewee's language, views, feelings, and thoughts – with methodical construction, founded on the knowledge of the objective conditions common to an entire social category" (609). In other words, if one already possesses a knowledge of the conditions under which a particular social group is living, one can then seek to comprehend the suffering of the individuals living under these conditions by an empathic adoption of the perspective of the interviewee. Bourdieu argues that the only way to do this is "to impart to interviewees at the greatest social remove a feeling that they may legitimately be themselves, if they

know how to show these individuals…they are capable of *mentally putting themselves in their place*" (613). It is through this method that the researcher can attempt "to situate oneself in the place the interviewees occupy in the social space in order to understand them as *necessarily what they are…"* This means to grasp the social conditions of which individuals are the product, to possess an understanding of "the circumstances of life and the social mechanisms that affect the entire category to which any individual belongs…" Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of such a method, insisting that not even the most extensive knowledge of a subject can bring about a true understanding of it "if it were not accompanied both by an attentiveness to others and a self-abnegation and openness rarely encountered in everyday life." He stresses that the interview should be understood as a "spiritual exercise" that involves a "forgetfulness of self" through which one can immerse oneself in the life of the interviewee as it is presented to the researcher. We could thus characterize Bourdieu's notion of understanding as a kind of empathic conversation with the individual possessed by an "intellectual love" that allows one to fully accept the individual as she is.

The method of understanding that Bourdieu outlines here could be regarded as a variant of Weber's notion of empathic understanding taken to its extreme, having the researcher immerse himself to the greatest possible extent in the research subject's perspective. Instead of maintaining an emotional distance to clearly see the motivations of the subject, one instead experiences those emotions as much as possible as part of a full narrative of the individual's life which they can then attach to their understanding of the larger social mechanisms that influence that individual's life in order to understand how those structures determine individual lives. Bourdieu thus adds a new layer to

Weber's approach that combines the latter's subjectivist method of studying individual motivations with an objective understanding of the larger social structures that shape the research subject's life. The notion of empathy that we outlined in the previous chapter could facilitate such an understanding in many different ways. Our perceptions of the interviewee's body might allow us to understand the sources of his suffering through embodied empathy. As we would have to imagine many of the stories that he would tell us during an interview, cognitive empathy would be essential in understanding his experience. Our impulse to alleviate the suffering of the research subject would compel us to uncover the causes of the suffering that determine the context of his life. We already know that Weber would be opposed to this last aspect of empathy as part of a sociological method. Although Bourdieu would not necessarily be opposed to it, he does mention that his method of understanding is focussed on what he calls "ordinary suffering." He understands that his method might be criticized for taking the research focus away from "real" suffering, what we are calling abject material suffering. But he argues that using the latter as the sole measure of all suffering "keeps us from *seeing* and understanding a whole side of the suffering characteristic of a social order which, although it has undoubtedly reduced poverty overall…has also multiplied the social spaces…and set up the conditions for an unprecedented development of all kinds of ordinary suffering." As sociologists, one must represent those places in the world where this type of suffering exists. In light of this difference, I would be tempted to modify Bourdieu's method and use the knowledge one already has of the subject, as well as the narrative of the informant, to isolate the ultimate causes that engender the suffering of that individual. The researcher thus essentially works in the interests of those who

experience abject material suffering by attempting to isolate the ultimate causes of that suffering. The researcher then does not simply exploit empathy in order to gain understanding, but uses empathy as well as the relationships he has formed to fuel his quest to uncover the conditions of abject suffering. In response to Weber, then, we can ultimately conclude that empathic research by which one develops an intimate relationship with the subject can yield far more useful results than research done within a Weberian framework in which the researcher, in the interest of value-neutrality, would ultimately be forced to ignore any compulsion one might have to come to the aid of another. Bourdieu's method of understanding does not necessarily force one to quell such a compulsion, and it provides a much more useful framework in which to understand the suffering of the individual, since it could potentially link one to the causes of that suffering. Therefore, a variant of Bourdieu's method would be indispensable for an empathic sociology.

Empathy is *Universal*

We here argue that empathy is a universal embodied imperative, a biologically rooted impulse that is inscribed within the body schema prior to the abstraction of language; it is a pregiven predisposition that manifests itself as a relation in which one is oriented to the suffering of the other. This can be evinced by the fact that individual body schemas are always fundamentally open to communication with one another; they are the vehicles of a primordial language of which suffering is a part. It therefore corresponds to what is universal to all of us, the essentially *corporeal* language of the expression of bodily pleasure and pain. It is also an interpretive predisposition in that it allows the individual to try to grasp the internal states of another in order to understand that other so

that one might be compelled to help her. Using empathy one does not act because she is compelled to act at the behest of an ingrained value, but because she is compelled to act by an automatic inclination to the aid of the other. Given the evidence that has been collected, we can say in evolutionary terms empathy was selected because it greatly enhanced the chances of group survival. Although empathy is interpretive and thus prone to mistakes, it nonetheless yielded enough results to make it complimentary to reproductive success, otherwise we would not understand it to be a universal phenomenon. Empathy is the product of a universal imperative, a prosocial impulse that has allowed usto survive as a group species. Prior to any cultural suggestion, it signals to us as individuals, at the corporeal level, that we ought to come to the aid of the other in order to alleviate her suffering.

In order to clearly restate our position, we here wish to put forth the claim that empathy is itself the manifestation of a universal embodied imperative, which is revealed by the fact that its object is what is common to all of us and what all of us seek to avoid – bodily and emotional suffering. There exist certain cultures that might accept or even encourage suffering in certain contexts, however this is always as a means to an end, a pathway to the attainment of what is perceived as a specific virtue within a specific cultural context. There is no one who wishes to starve for its own sake, who wishes to die of thirst or suffocation, who wants to exist amongst his fellow humans naked and without shelter and with the indignity and disrespect that this status brings; it is inconceivable that someone would wish any of this upon themselves, would desire the sum of these conditions *for their own sake*. The call to alleviate human suffering by altering the conditions of abject poverty is therefore a response to a wish that is common to us all,

which is to live in relative material comfort. We can therefore not justifiably say that the empathic response to alleviate suffering is a value judgement that infringes upon the objectivity of science and therefore does not yield "true knowledge" of the social order. We will now finalize our argument in the context of sociological research.

The purpose of this chapter was to articulate our thesis by responding to three arguments made by Weber argued about the relationship between facts and values in the social sciences. In this final section of the chapter, I want to clearly reiterate these arguments and articulate their response to Weber's fact-value problem, as well as their relevance to sociological research in general.

First, in response to Weber's claim that we cannot make value judgements in social science, we pointed to the fact that empathy is not a value judgement. What this ultimately means is that empathy is not a culturally transmitted value axiom that makes the claim that we ought to try, as often as possible, to alleviate the suffering of others for its own sake. We argued that empathy is a natural propensity to come to the aid of the other who is in distress, a propensity that can be either culturally suppressed or encouraged to different degrees in different situations. Ultimately, however, empathy as a predisposition is something that is given to us at birth by our very biology; as part of a "survival instinct" possessed by an intrinsically social, cooperative species, empathy summons us to respond to another's suffering on its own, without being learned. The relevance of this argument in response to Weber is that, as Weber supposes, not all moral actions are the products of value judgements. This is relevant to sociological research because it brings to light a phenomenon that had never previously been considered as constitutive of human morality, at least not in the context of sociological research. The

latter has thus not only failed to account for this by assuming a groundless moral relativism in the study of human morality, but in doing so it has also failed to account for the phenomena that might affect the researcher in his research; value judgements are not the only things of moral relevance that we need to consider when conducting social research. Human morality is evidently much more complex than Weber presented to us as.

In chapter two we argued that empathy is an interpretive capacity in that it allows us to at least attempt to gain an understanding of the subjective experience of another. In this chapter we used the work of Bourdieu to expand this idea within a sociological context. We saw that Bourdieu essentially argues, in a very deliberate elaboration of Weber's notion of understanding, that the researcher should empathically share in the recounted experience of the research subject, which of course involves an emotional closeness to that subject. Whereas the goal for Weber is to attend to the question of *why* individuals conduct certain behaviours, Bourdieu is ultimately seeking to link the behaviour and the suffering of others with the larger social structures that they are a part of, in order to answer the question of *why people are who they are*. The ultimate purpose of discussing Bourdieu was to juxtapose his method with Weber's more modest claim that the researcher should maintain some personal and emotional distance from the subject in order to clearly understand his behaviour. Bourdieu's method suggests a personal and emotional *closeness* to the subject, which presents empathy as an invaluable interpretive device which can aid in understanding how the social structures of which they are a part shape the individuals within them. We also argued that, at the same time that Bourdieu's method could be used to understand the relationship between an

individual's social position and the social forces that shape it, so too could such a process be used to uncover the conditions of that individual's suffering. Empathy therefore not only motivates us to come to the aid of the subject, but so too does it allow us to understand it with an eye to changing it.

Finally, we put forth the claim that empathy is an embodied universal imperative which "states" that all should be free from the bodily and the social suffering that is the consequence of abject material poverty. The reason for making this claim, we said, is that empathy is an innate response to human suffering that exists prior to values at the level of universal human corporeality. There thus exists a primordial "language of the body" or "language of suffering" that stems ultimately from the intersubjective nature of the body schema, and can thus act as a signal to others that they are in need of aid, which subsequently activates empathy as a response in others. We again juxtaposed this with Weber's moral relativism since empathy, as an embodied imperative that responds to the suffering of others prior to making value judgements, takes place on a level that "equalizes" us, as we are all subject to the same physical conditions. There thus exists no one who could reasonably make the claim that they would want to impose that kind of suffering and the conditions that perpetuate it upon themselves. Since we are all subject to the same physical conditions, and we cannot wish the conditions of abject suffering upon ourselves, then it follows that we cannot reasonably excuse its imposition upon anyone else, as they are the same as us in that they are living human bodies. Empathy therefore undermines Weber's moral relativism because it reveals an embodied or "biological" imperative intrinsic to living human bodies which cannot be said to be relative to a cultural value system. It is rather universally grounded in our biology, and so

this makes it possible to include empathy within the purview of sociological research, since as we saw empathy can not only motivate research but also enhance understanding. We thus "overcome" the limitations of the fact value distinction.

Conclusion

In an empathic sociology, empathy would ultimately have two purposes. One is that it would act as the motivation for using research in order to progressively reconstruct society. As a researcher of abject poverty, one would witness the destitution of individuals on a regular basis. Assuming that one is empathetic toward these individuals, that is, provided that one *felt for* and/or *felt with* these individuals, it follows that one would be compelled to help them, to try to relieve the conditions that greatly hamper their quality of life. As one might notice, empathy is not a value judgement, although it could be the emotional basis for one. It is a compulsion that arises from an openness between two individuals whereby one experiences an emotion similar to the one that the research subject is experiencing, or experiences undesirable emotions as a result of seeing an individual in such a condition. One thus seeks to rid one's self of this emotion by coming to the aid of the other. Empathy is therefore the motivation for conducting research that seeks to uncover the causes of abject material suffering with the aim of altering those conditions. It motivates the researcher because it allows one to experience another's suffering as one's own, and therefore becomes motivated to relieve that suffering. This is not a value judgement – it is a compulsion that comes out of an emotional state that involves the result of perceiving another's suffering.

On the other hand, empathy can also be a form of understanding. As we saw with Bourdieu, empathy can be invaluable in understanding the other's experience. If one fully understands the other's experience, if one can effectively "be" another, then, coupled with a knowledge of the society in which one lives, one could hypothetically isolate the causes that initially led to that individual's suffering. If one can find the causes of

suffering, then one can theoretically develop strategies with which to alter the conditions of those causes. Therefore, just as empathy can be the motivation behind conducting useful research, so too can it be used to provide an understanding of abject material suffering and its causes, an understanding that provides sociology with the utility that it so often lacks. Such is the foundation of an empathic sociology.

For reasons that I think are obvious, this research can also be regarded as a contribution to the literature on social suffering. What is central to this literature in a practical sense is the intention for research to inform social policy. It would certainly be part of the aim of an empathic sociology to do this as well. I think that empathic sociology is also a kind of public sociology, since it works in the service of publics that are all members of a marginalized group of individuals who are often unable to help themselves, or find immense obstacles when they try to do so. A sociology of this kind would not be "public" in the same way that Agger or Burawoy would like it to be public. It is public in the sense that sociologists would work in the service of certain publics, attempting to alter the material conditions of life for those who are unable to do so without aid. I am therefore critical of public sociology in its current form because it advocates the impossible dream of a public sphere; those who have been imprisoned in the shackles of abject material suffering presumably do not possess the means by which to engage in public debate, or even to clearly understand the issues to begin with. Although individuals may be equal in their potential to discuss public issues, society has deprived them of the means to exercise such a potential. In my mind, it is far more important that we alter the conditions of the society that we currently have before we try to get marginalized groups to participate in political discussions. Their voices are, after

all, just as human as anyone else's, but they are not necessarily equipped to formulate cogent opinions and project them in an understandable way. It is the role of the empathic sociologist to advocate a form of society in which we all possess the means to grasp and to discuss the issues that affect all of us.

It should be understood that my intention in writing this is not to try to dodge the "problem" of values in social scientific research. Even in the model of sociological research that I put forth, there will still be value judgements entering the field of research, perhaps even on a regular basis. This is inevitable – Agger certainly accepts this inevitability. What needs to be understood and accepted by all researchers engaged in social research of any kind is that Weber's model for a "valueless" social science is not only outdated, but it was fundamentally incorrect to begin with. It begins with the assumption that the natural sciences, in order to be what one could legitimately call a science, do not make value judgements, an assumption that is fundamentally false and is made based on a misunderstanding of the scientific method. It further disregards the distinction between "basic" and "applied" research, as well as the fact that both types of research are central to the natural sciences; if basic research did not have applied research, the pursuit of knowledge would be a completely useless one, and applied research without basic research would not have nearly the amount of knowledge at their disposal that they currently do. Both types of research are saturated with and directed by different types of value judgements, and to say otherwise is to admit of being in a state of active self-delusion. There can no longer be any doubt that value-judgements are central both to the natural and the social sciences. The question has become one of how it is that we best manage them in particular contexts.

All of this being said, I do not want to suggest that I am completely unsympathetic to sustaining what might be called a more traditional kind of sociology. As I have already said, basic research is central to any scientific endeavour, and it is this kind of research to which the long tradition of various sociological methods are invaluable. I think what the main fear is on this side of the debate is that sociology will be reduced to a kind of politics, in which case it could no longer be called a scientific endeavour. I think there is some truth to this, which is why I do not subscribe to the views of either Agger or Burawoy on this point. In relation to Agger's viewpoint, I am not sure if I agree with the contention that all forms of knowledge are equally legitimate or illegitimate, making the sociologist one who is "among equals" when attending to public issues. I am also not sure that I agree with Burawoy's opposing claim (although implicit) that the sociologist holds a kind of special, elite position in such affairs. In Agger's case, the sociologist becomes another citizen among many with a particular perspective, and in Burawoy's case he becomes a kind of mediator who holds privileged information that may or may not hold solutions to problems of public significance. In both of these hypothetical instances, the sociologist has stepped outside of the university framework and has entered the realm of politics (in the public as opposed to the institutional sense of the word). This leads one to ask why the sociologist cannot simply engage in this kind of activity outside of or in addition to one's own career.

The intent behind the solution that I have offered here is similar to that of Burawoy in that it is essentially diplomatic in nature; rather than constructing a "division of labour" in which each sociologist, regardless of what "camp" she is in, can hold a place that is mutually beneficial to every other, I sought to present a way to overcome

Weber's value problem in a way that would not give rise to political contention. My strategy was to posit an imperative grounded at the level of our shared human biology that was therefore incontestable, and could not be said to be culturally arbitrary. If such an imperative exists (which I of course believe it does), then one can attend to a kind of public sociology without having to sacrifice the integrity of the scientific method by perceiving the data that they collect through the lens of their own value judgements. In addition, an empathic sociology attends to what is arguably one of the most fundamental problems of a society, that being poverty. If the natural sciences are validated by the technologies that they allow us to create in order to live longer, healthier and more pleasurable lives, then sociology must be validated by the societies that it allows us to create for the same reasons, if it is to be considered useful for humanity. Such validation must begin with the pursuit of acting to eliminate the kind of abject suffering that prevents people from living lives beyond the struggle to make ends meet, and strips them of their ability to participate in public life as citizens of a democracy, and of the dignity that is supposed to come with simply being human. There exist no other issues as fundamental as this one, since its effects manifest themselves at the most basic level of the body, and point to needs that must be satisfied before any other aspects of life can be attended to. Sociological research has the capacity to conduct research that seeks to alleviate such conditions, and to prevent it from doing so based on a false pretense of scientificity would be as hypocritical as it would be unjust.

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