

Connection Sociology to Moral Philosophy in the Post-Secularity Framework

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The melancholy science ... relates to a realm which has counted, since time immemorial, as the authentic one of philosophy, but which has, since its transformation into method, fallen prey to intellectual disrespect, sententious caprice and in the end forgetfulness: the teaching of the good life. What philosophy once called life, has turned into the sphere of the private and then merely of consumption, which is dragged along as an addendum of the material production-process, without autonomy and without its own substance (Adorno, 2006, 13).

Many argue there is a crisis of the social sciences in general and sociology in particular. The French journal of the MAUSS (*Revue du MAUSS semestrielle*) released a special issue last year (2020) that addressed this crisis. Our previous work (Hanafi and Arvanitis 2016) proposed to situate this crisis in the working conditions specific to these disciplines, notably with respect to the commodification of knowledge production and the breaking of the virtuous cycle between research, university, and society. Other researchers have developed similar arguments about the transformation of knowledge into a fictitious commodity (e.g. Burawoy 2010). One of the consequences of this crisis is the abandonment by the social sciences, like other sciences, of any consistent engagement with civil society and social movements. Knowledge is certainly produced, but no use is made of it (Hanafi 2018). In this article, I situate this crisis more in the realm of epistemology. On this issue, many works today focus on the hegemonic epistemologies of the North and denounce universalism as a Eurocentric project, to the point of calling for the development of alternative epistemologies, specific to the South (de Sousa Santos 2014). This article will not, however, focus on this issue, important as it is.

Instead, it proposes to identify one of the sources of the crisis of the social sciences in their weak connection to each other in general and, more specifically, between sociology and moral philosophy. It is by renewing these connections that we can hope to correct the positivist tendency of these disciplines and propose explicit methods, normative presuppositions, and forms of engagement. This approach is dear to some researchers, such as Frédéric Vandenberghe. While reviewing some of his main ideas, I will then emphasize the need to fill a symptomatic gap in contemporary thought by underlining the importance, within our modernity, of religion and religiosity as one of the sources of ethics and its influence on the social. While it has come under strong criticism and despite the valuable scholarship addressing “post-secularity,” the secularization paradigm remains very influential, and not only in the West (Gauthier 2020). I will argue here, with a focus on the Arab world, that the prejudicial position of some social scientists hinders our understanding of the contribution of religious actors within social movements and prevents us from appreciating how social actors forge their normative position in everyday life.

Before I am accused of overstating the importance of morality, let me define what I mean by the term. Whether it is social morality (respecting laws, norms, obligations, rules, etc.) or personal ethics (adopting certain values or virtues), morality is best understood not as a fixed set of values, but

rather, in Bourdieu's words, as 'structured and structuring structures.' Morality and ethics thus presuppose agency and reflexivity, but also otherness (alterity). In the words of Shai Dromi and Eva Illouz (2010), morality is a set of repertoires of justification, not iron-clad rules about "ought's". Morality is only a subsystem of the cultural system, which is itself only a subsystem among the other subsystems of society, such as economy, law, science, etc. (Vandenberghe, 2020). It is not, therefore, a superstructure that is "overdetermined" by the power relations between groups struggling for or against hegemony. On the contrary, it is necessary to hypothesize an "analytical independence" and a "relative autonomy" of morality, on the model of the theory of culture developed by Jeffrey Alexander (1990).

Sociology and moral philosophy: taking ethics seriously

As part of their professionalization in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sociology and the social sciences in general underwent a process of disenchantment. For John Brewer, 'disenchantment within 20th-century social science was manifested in three particular ways: a methodological emphasis on objectivity that separated the personal from professional practice and restricted practitioners' ethical commitments; a theoretical concern with cultural relativism that encouraged a moral disregard for evil, harm, suffering and injustice as morally absolute categories; and a value orientation that favoured technocratic and scientific mentality over moral sensibility' (Brewer 2019: 615). The social sciences here describe and criticize the social life, but do not aim to intellectually construct a framework for society (Dubet, 2020).

Yet, over the past two decades, there has been a growing literature on the importance of morality, manifesting what Brewer has called a re-enchantment or cognitive revolution in the social sciences. Clearly, certain structural and material conditions have contributed to the reawakening of moral sensitivity and, consequently, renewed, even if only partially, the conceptual field of these sciences. This is why, in my opinion, the process of re-enchantment is still in its infancy.

In order to better amplify this process, Vandenberghe (2018) proposes to connect sociology to a new practical and moral philosophy. This constitutes a new development within the Convivialist International founded by the leader of this French anti-utilitarian movement, Alain Caillé (2008). This school of thought has published a first and, more recently, a second manifesto (Convivialist International 2020), co-signed by nearly 300 intellectuals from all disciplines and 33 countries. It sets out five principles: the principle of common naturalness, common humanity, common sociality, legitimate individuation, and creative opposition (opposing without killing each other). Caillé (2008) has long reminded us of the importance of the gift and the gift paradigm, putting forward the anti-utilitarian hypothesis that the desire of human beings to be valued as givers means that our relationships are not based on interest alone, but also on pleasure, moral duty, and spontaneity. Here, giving only makes sense when it is understood as a means, a performer, and a symbol of public and/or private recognition. (Lazzeri and Caillé 2015)

Like anti-utilitarian sociology, which refuses to reduce Man to the figure of *Homo economicus*, some communitarian liberals defend comparable arguments. Thus, the American sociologist Amitai Etzioni (2017) has developed a critique of Abraham Maslow's famous pyramid. Establishing a hierarchy of basic human needs and analyzing how people seek to maximize their happiness by consuming goods, Maslow showed that once basic needs are met, these "economic creatures" will seek to meet "higher needs" (self-esteem and self-actualization). However, according to Etzioni, Maslow's theory is still

completely egocentric insofar as it considers that the esteem that a person seeks is primarily aimed at satisfying his or her own psychological well-being, and that self-actualization only makes sense... for oneself. For Etzioni, the social sciences, which consider people as moral creatures, should take inspiration from a more "traditional" view of human nature. The latter has three characteristics: first, it considers that people are capable of distinguishing between right and wrong; second, this does not impede them from constantly erring; and third, they are assumed to be engaged in a perpetual struggle, an arm-wrestling match, between the brighter and darker sides of their nature. Thus, according to him, certain social sciences are blind to an essential element of human nature and good society. They contribute very little to the understanding of the forces that make individuals more or less moral. They seem to be unwittingly overlooking the moral struggle that runs through everyone's life and is a defining characteristic of human nature. While other social sciences help to enrich our understanding of this moral struggle, they have nonetheless, in the process, undermined the very foundations of moral judgments. (Etzioni 2017, 519)

Understanding the moral struggle calls for increased collaboration between social and moral philosophy and the social sciences, which for Vandenberghe (2018) is the only way to understand the ultimate moral aim, which Paul Ricoeur formulates as follows: "The aim of a good life with and for others in just institutions," i.e., an ethic of love, hospitality, care, and solicitude with and for others within the framework of institutions that ensure and reinforce social justice and democracy. This position does not imply ignoring the historical, social, and cultural preconditions of the good life and assuming that the Aristotelian good life is possible without the appropriate structures that social welfare can provide.

From this perspective, the question of otherness becomes a central issue. Critical realism, which influences many sociologists today such as Margaret Archer, makes a valuable contribution in this respect. Roy Bhaskar has proposed a critique of the Cartesian ego that defines people as subjects in opposition to a world of objects, of which other subjects. Conversely, he suggests approaching the ontology of persons in line with the notion of *ubuntu*, a term found in certain Southern African languages and which is roughly translated as "I am because you are" (Bhaskar 2020). Other philosophers of deconstruction similarly offer ethical orientations and normative justifications, from Derrida's formal "other" to Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas's phenomenology of the "Other," understood as that human face that calls for infinite responsibility. As Levinas formulates it, in a simple and astute way: "before Cogito, there is hello!".

All these conceptions of otherness based on the 'good life with and for others,' however, under-theorize evil. This aporia has taken on crucial importance since Hannah Arendt's conceptualization of the 'banality of evil.' Arendt ([1961] 2006) saw Eichmann as an ordinary, rather inconsistent bureaucrat who, in her words, was 'neither perverse nor sadistic,' but 'terribly normal.' He acted for no other reason than to diligently advance his career in the Nazi bureaucracy. Eichmann was not an amoral monster; he did bad things without bad intentions. The same could be said of many Syrians and Yemenis who have recently seen their well-intentioned uprisings turn into brutal civil wars. Evil, whether banal or radical, is central to the work of some social scientists, especially those sensitive to identity politics. They will thus spend much of their time cursing evil, whether it is the enemy nation or the colonial power. Such is the case of the Hezbollah in Lebanon, which concentrates all its efforts against Israeli colonial policy (evil) without giving itself time to reflect on how to build a good life with other Lebanese. In 'Some Questions of Moral Philosophy' (1994), Arendt did not hesitate to go against Kantian and Socratic moral philosophies, as these have not stood the test of time. The Holocaust was the moment when the thread of this tradition was broken. Arendt refers in particular to Churchill's statement: 'Few things that I have been led to believe are permanent and vital have

lasted. All the things I was certain, or was taught to be certain they were impossible, have happened' (Arendt 1994, 740). In a similar vein, Theodor Adorno, in his critique of the Enlightenment, also perceived this rupture and presence of Evil in our lives, and argued that the experience of our encounter with others as unique and vulnerable individuals has been replaced by an impersonal and external appeal to supposedly universal laws and norms (Bernstein 2001). Critical theorists thus provide a valuable mediation between moral philosophy and social sciences, so much that they temper the positivist tendency of the latter by injecting more literary and philosophical considerations.

What are then the implications of the connection between moral philosophy and social sciences? They are of two kinds. Let us distinguish these implications in terms of the global understanding of social phenomena and method. In terms of our understanding of the social, we must analyze social conflicts with respect to their material stakes, but also as a moral struggle. Actors are torn between moral sensitivity and enervation (insensitivity), seeking the good life while trivializing evil. But in late modernity, these parallel processes take place without there being a Hegelian synthesis that is able to overcome the tensions. They are permanent tensions.

To give an example from the sociology of migration, the best concept to reflect these dilemmas is that of 'suffering at a distance' proposed by Luc Boltanski (1999). Some people commit to donating to refugees while refusing to allow their country/location/community to take them in when they are at their border. For Rishi Naidoo (2008), the fear of difference is fueled by the fear that "different" people will dilute a supposedly stable British identity. However, recognizing the "other" as the same as "us" disrupts this fantasy of wholeness in a much deeper way. The most threatening "other" is the one that goes unnoticed among us. The way in which social actors formalize their ethical position is thus very different from the Kantian conception of the ethical subject. For Kant, such a subject should act selflessly, bracketing his or her inclinations and thus rising above his or her fickle and biased desires to recognize the universal truth that transcends the immediate context of experience. If I help a refugee, for Kant, it must be guided by a commitment to honor the moral law rather than by the concrete reality of the refugee's specific experience of suffering. But the decision I make is far more complex. It must take into account context and consequences, and combine my ethics of conviction with my ethics of responsibility, as Max Weber (2008) would say.

Paying attention to the moral struggle reveals how our late modernity has emphasized formal legality rather than more subtle moral judgments. In this legalistic approach, human rights have become a tool for both the weak and the powerful. In some cases, rights brandished as weapons – to use the title of Clifford Bob's great book (2019) – and camouflage strategies designed to cover up ulterior motives further marginalize religious minorities (when, for example, blasphemy, a legitimate right, becomes a duty), and deprive vulnerable populations of social services (denial of public schooling for veiled students in France and Quebec).

The role of sociology is not only to show the complexity of these experiences and the forms of power that underlie them, but also to influence them by first stripping them of any prejudices that might undermine the sense of common humanity, by advocating for this humanity, and by engaging in action in this sense. Indeed, social scientific research is not only influenced by the social context, it also has an impact on it.

Thus, it becomes essential to link moral philosophy to the social sciences in order to understand and analyze the characteristics of our late modernity. As Vandenberghe writes, we need 'a minimal morality (*minima moralia*), a moral baseline that sets forth the fundamental principles (universalism, pluralism, and individualism) and fundamental procedures (democracy, dialogue, and discussion)

that allow for the formulation of the most basic rules of a reasonably [rather than rationally] ordered society that makes social life possible' (Vandenberghe, 2020, 13). In the pluralistic and polarized societies we now live in, where local and national communities are weakened by global forces, there is no longer a consensus on any version of the good life. Irish philosopher Maeve Cooke (2007) is right to insist on the autonomy (self-determination) of the ethical person, even when they appear to follow a moral code imposed by a community or religion. Morality is the "laws of freedom," which are not based necessity but obligations. The search for the good life is therefore important, but its scope is limited and restricted to personal life. In this sense, with the advent of modernity and the discovery of the principle of subjectivity, the just takes priority over the good (Vandenberghe 2018). The Ricœurian conception of justice and fairness should then be conceived as a corrective tool to be used to adapt legal and moral rules to concrete human needs and to the multiplicity of moral dilemmas. All this should be the subject of sociological investigation.

In terms of method, this connection between moral philosophy and social science should facilitate the analysis of principles, norms, and values from the performative perspective of actors in social life, while deploying the dialectic of structure and agency (what Vandenberghe calls a 'theoretical approach to action'). Researchers are thus invited by critical realism to mobilize the "rationality of judgment" that allows them to distinguish between competing interpretations of empirical evidence, to evaluate and compare the heuristic strength of different theoretical explanations, and, finally, to select the theories that most accurately represent the "realm of reality," given the present state of our knowledge (Hu, 2018). This requires both meta-epistemic reflexivity and ethical responsibility (moral, social, and political) on the part of the cognitive agents involved. As an example, in studying psychological assessments conducted on asylum seekers following their alleged torture, Patel and Pilgrim (2018) dismiss both the positivist assumption that evaluators can adopt a value-neutral perspective and the relativist position of social constructivism for which, because the evaluators cannot avoid resorting to values, must renounce any claim to objectivity. This makes it possible to escape both the relativistic excesses of postmodernism and the reductive instrumentalism of positivism.

Religion as ethics: understanding secularism

Reconnecting the threads between moral philosophy and the social sciences cannot be achieved without a serious reflection on the role of religion in the constitution of ethics and the social. A major research program of the International Panel on Social Progress (Davie and Ammerman 2018) suggests that religion and religiosity can just as easily foster social progress and resistance to colonization and tyranny as they can unleash violent forces, encourage conservatism and sectarianism, and sustain forms of social and political oppression. In other words, the same religion can play different roles in different contexts. For example, many members of Pentecostal Churches in Brazil who voted for leftist leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (about 100 deputies in the 2016 parliament belong to these Churches) cast votes for extreme-rightist Jair Bolsonaro in 2019.

Yet, a large portion of social sciences have focused mainly on the negative role of religion. As concerns the Arab world, one can add a specific problem: the virulence of the conflicts between elites is such that most social scientific research is insensitive to norms and values as they manifest themselves in the practices of social actors. Thus, fundamentally, the problem is reduced to a polarization between universalists and cultural relativists/particularists/contextualists, or between (i)liberal leftists and (ii)liberal religious actors.

I will give an example of this dangerous polarization in the formation of elites by underlining two aspects: the interpretation of secularism reduced to a one-model-fits-all universalist concept and the conception of religious activism by certain social sciences.

The universalist conception of secularism as a single model

I am not unaware of how reluctant postcolonial scholars are to use the concept of universalism, primarily because of its problematic history (Hanafi 2019). Still, I consider that there can be no science nor any global understanding of our world without the recognition of the universality of certain concepts (e.g. social class, democracy, citizenship) and values (e.g. human rights, gender equality). If we want to be both universalist and contextualist, how can we reconcile the local and the universal? The universal dimension of a concept rests on three conditions. The first is that it results from a quasi-cultural consensus and not from the generalization or universalization of values rooted in the Euro-American context. Second, a universal concept is not a teleological concept, but the result of a historical experience (Rosanvallon 2008) that acquires its normativity as a result of an inherently open-ended collective historical learning process. Third, its universality has meaning and scope only as an imaginary. This is why a universal concept must be sufficiently general and flexible.

For example, is democracy universal? It is, but not as a model to be exported (Guénard 2016), nor as a concept with a telos. Democracy refers to a historical experience that goes back to the French Revolution of 1789, to the 1980s in Latin America, to the 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe, and finally to the 2010s in some Arab countries. In this sense, it is the result of a collective historical learning process. What is universal is an *imaginary* desire for democracy, the traces of which can be found, for example, in the slogans chanted by Arab demonstrators demanding freedom, justice, and dignity. What we are witnessing today is not the crisis of the universality of concepts such as democracy or social inequality, but a crisis of *imagination*: how to transform the imaginary of democracy into a model that can be realized in a given context? This normative universalism is therefore flexible and open, and does not exclude the existence of what Armando Salvatore calls 'different patterns of civility' (2016).

Another relevant example is that of secularism (*laïcité*). In this context, religion is often understood as a separate social sphere. François Gauthier (2020) is one to refuse to see society as differentiated into separate compartments, one of them being religion. The spheres of religion, culture, politics, economy, and the social are traversed by common logics that allow a given society to be encompassed (or "embedded") in its totality, in accordance with the theorizations of Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi. As a result of an absolutist and exclusive distinction between religion and "the secular," many social scientists, often those linked to the left, have understood secularism as a single model (mainly the French model) that should be identically reproduced. This positivist paradigm considers religion as a system diametrically opposed to rationality, a minor sub-phenomenon or superstructure that will be superseded by the development of the industrial economic structure and the scientific culture associated with it, as if religion were necessarily to be shelved sooner or later as an antiquity. According to this paradigm, secularism is defined as a process of privatization of religion, now confined to the private sphere. The irreducible contradiction between the sacred and the secular, as well as the presence of a clerical class, have thus been projected from the Christian context onto the Islamic one (Asad 2003; Hermassi 2012). All this has led many scholars to lose touch with the substance of religion and personal religious experience. As a result, they have proven unable to recognize the coexistence of the sacred and the secular in the era of multiple modernities,

within the paradigm of pluralism (Berger 2014), or within a more realistic understanding of the process of separation of religion and state (Cipriani 2017) that invalidates many scholars' assumptions about the inevitable decline of religion in modernity.

In the Arab world, the problem also manifests itself in other types of work. Some social scientists and theologians in this region of the world refuse to accept that changing patterns of religiosity are induced by local contexts and not by the "Western invasion" of the Muslim world. This binary reasoning has also affected some sociologists who identify the West with materialism and rationalism, as opposed to an Arab world characterized by simple indigenous knowledge based on revelation.

The new framework of the relationship between religion and state in a post-secular society has remained at the doorstep of the Arab world. One does not find any theorization of the need for an agreement or of a certain permeability between what has been dissociated for so long: religion and state, ethics and politics, religious and secular arguments in the public sphere. As Armando Salvatore (2016) writes, the post-secular era is generally associated with a plurality of views and practices that results not from the negation of secularism, but rather from the rise of a fairly broad reflexivity on issues concerning secularism and secularization. Many do not understand secularism as a process that only makes sense in its context, as Azmi Bishara (2013) has shown. All this is not without consequences and may explain the waves of counter-revolution at the time of the Arab Spring, but also the positions of Western countries towards the new democratic and secular processes in some countries like Tunisia and Egypt.

Religious activism: Is it a conspiracy?

Political conflicts in the Middle East are triggered by the persistence of strong polarizations within societies: the huge gap between social classes in economic terms, but also the incessant conflicts between elites unable to talk to each other. One of the main items of contention is the dichotomy between secularism and religion.

The two opposing camps within the elite adopt different behaviors. Before tackling the particular case of the Arab world, it is necessary to recall in what terms Gilles Deleuze characterized the perception of the world by the liberal left (and with it, by most social scientists): it is, in his words, a form of perception that starts from the most distant and moves towards the closest. It is from such a perspective that social inequalities, for example, have been understood as a vast global phenomenon of exploitation, the nature of whose relations are rooted in imperialism and colonialism. For this reason, most social scientists call for an examination of the existence and structures of imperialism and colonialism in order to address the suffering of the (abstractly defined) social classes involved. In contrast, some identity politics movements (e.g., some Islamic, right-wing, and conservative movements) believe that these relations begin with the nearest and then move to the farthest. They believe in community work, family, and neighborhood relationships. For example, Trump's supporters believe in his ability to address the social inequities faced by the left-behind communities of rural white Americans. Similarly, in Lebanon, religious organizations are currently the most responsive NGOs, taking on families who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 related lockdown. For other identity politics movements (around ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.), their struggles may vary considerably depending on the context, but they are most often rooted in community struggles, "armed" as they are with the universalist doctrine of Human Rights. Yet, as Richard Rorty (1999)

pointed out, this “cultural left,” while defending a pluralist agenda, gives only a minor place to the struggle for class justice.

While the Arab uprisings have shown some positive cognitive developments, the social sciences have had little impact in pushing for change or rationalizing the debate. I attribute this to a particularly strong anti-clericalism that conceives of secularism as a single universalist model (and not as an imaginary). Here is another case where certain groups on the left waste a lot of time cursing “evil,” identified here with religious groups, even going so far as to ally themselves with the military and authoritarian governments, thereby abandoning the tasks necessary to realizing the aim of “leading a good life with and for others.”

We are indeed living in a period of revolutions where political civil rights are supplanting (but not replacing) ideology. Many countries are showing the importance of certain Islamic movements, particularly in their ability to ally with other opposition groups (Bayat 2013). In the midst of an internal transformation, some of these movements have launched slogans that go far beyond the simplistic slogan “Islam is the solution” to advocate freedom, democracy, and a range of concrete demands – similarly as other opposition parties. Thus, we have entered an era of post-Islamism, in the sense of the affirmation of a new form of reflexive Islamism characterized in particular by the fact that the leaders of these movements manifest their desire for pluralism and respect for freedom of expression. This reflexivity has made possible the emergence of a new revolutionary language and political symbols that refer to democracy, social justice, and dignity rather than religious slogans.

Several members of the Muslim Brotherhood and *al-Nahda* declared they were in favor neither of a Western secular state nor of a religious one. The use of the notion of civil state (*dawla madaneyya*) is again a self-referencing exercise which raises a problem in terms that are not yet determined. In spite of the blurring of terminology and the declarations of some Islamic leaders, there is no reason for scholars to consider the new position of the Muslim Brotherhood as a smokescreen for a long-term objective of establishing an Islamic state governed by the strict application of *Sharia* (Islamic law). These neo-Islamic movements, which Assef Bayat (2013) calls the “post-Islamists” (e.g., the Renaissance Movement: *al-Nahda* in Tunisia or the Justice and Development Party in Morocco), go beyond some of the characteristics attached to Islamist movements, and have called for replacing *Sharia* with the nation as the basis of legitimacy. The difference with classical Islamism is in the way social actors who believe in Islam as a moral system enter the political arena through participation, not contestation (Brown 2012). It also lies in the way post-Islamists conduct discussions and debates in the public sphere using arguments inspired by Islamic values while also using other legal and sociological arguments.

If some classical Islamic movements have turned to, or are turning to, neo-Islamism, it is by advocating a politics that has tamed their rigid ideology and thus become more realistic. However, this transformation is not automatic. Khalil al-Anani (2018) has identified the intellectual and structural obstacles that led to the crisis of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the difficulties they faced in dissociating the defense of religion (*da'wah*) from politics.

Mohamad Bamyeh (2019) recently published a very important book in which he points out how the left often distorts the meaning of Islamic activism. He argues that the Islamic movement has allowed its members to choose between different options using an attitude of ‘discerning wordliness’ or what Bamyeh calls a *participatory ethic*. Its most obvious effect is to create spaces or opportunities for daily social participation in local, national, or global life in ways that are personally experienced. Here, Bamyeh rightly draws some comparisons with secular elites who often privilege episodic democratic participation, while Islamists implement everyday participation in diverse and concrete

forms, depending on local needs and capacities – from building neighborhood schools to helping with housing and marriage, encouraging charitable giving, helping each other, becoming politically engaged as an activist, and in some cases even as a campaigner. However, there is nothing exceptional about these practices. As has been observed in other parts of the world, for example with Christian democracy and social democracy in Europe, Bamyeh argues that Islam as a discourse underlying these social movements has nurtured ordinary social conservatism and has been able to politically mobilize different forms of religiosity. His analysis of Islamic social movements is particularly valuable for cutting through the ‘activist conspiracy’ thesis according to which ‘local people are duped into supporting an unrooted movement that has helped them for ulterior motives.’ Bamyeh is lucid when he states that ‘there is simply no evidence to support the conspiracy-paternalistic theory of Islamic activism in general.’ (Bamyeh 2019, 41)

In light of the above, while many social scientists (and journalists) keep using the term “political Islam,” it is losing its meaning, as it does not recognize the foundational differences between classical Islamism and neo-Islamism. It is a stereotyping generalization that does not account for the heterogeneity of Islamic political thought, from the moderate to the extremist, from Islamic movements to official Islam. The term “political Islam” is often used to deride a movement and to suggest that all of their trajectories are the same – composed of people ranging from Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood, to al-Qaeda, and ISIS. It is worth noting that among those who employ the term political Islam are the “guardians” of official Islam, i.e. the authoritarian politicians who consider that the Islam to which they adhere is essentially apolitical. Incidentally, placing their opponents under this banner is a way for these ruling authorities to dismiss the opposition and deny them political legitimacy. In the Gulf monarchies, for example, any oppositional figure is de facto viewed as being part of the Muslim Brotherhood (this is how Khashoggi's murder was justified in some political statements and popular tweets in Saudi Arabia), and therefore considered a “terrorist.” Alas! the French president Emmanuel Macron has also, on more than one occasion, announced that he would ban political Islam in France.

Lebanese philosopher Karim Sadek (2012) has analyzed Tunisia’s *al-Nahda* leader Rachid al-Ghannouchi's liberal-leaning thought and policy in the light of Axel Honneth’s (1996) theory of recognition. What Ghannouchi is asking for is the recognition of Islamic identity in the public sphere and the recognition of the importance of certain religious texts, interpreted through *ijtihad* (innovation) and the concept of *maslaha* (interest). Similarly, some of the most important reformists in the Arab world today are figures from these neo-Islamic movements, including Sheikh Ahmad al-Raysuni and Dr. Saadeddine Othmani. Al-Raysuni is currently president of the World Union of Muslim Scholars, and his innovative influence transcends Morocco (al-Raysuni, 1997). He was the head of the Movement of Unity and Reform (MUR), which is known for its criticism of the 2011 Constitution, which states, problematically so in his view, that the King of Morocco has a religious function (as the Commander of the Believers). Saadeddine Othmani meanwhile sits as the prime minister of the Moroccan government since 2017. Othmani was the first to clearly theorize the distinction between politics and religion without separating them, and proposed to differentiate between religious advocacy (*da’wah*) and political reasoning.

This being said, I am not unaware of the sensitivity we in the social sciences have with respect to the ambiguous and conservative social thinking of many religious movements. However, we cannot remain blind to the way in which they evolve and how their followers formalize their judgments, evaluations, and justifications in their daily lives, beyond the polarities of strict religious reasoning and the universalist model of secularism.

Maeve Cooke (2005) has proposed a valuable approach for confronting the tensions between the secular and the religious in a way that allows the embrace of pluralism and the recognition of others (whether religious, non-religious, or a-religious). It mobilizes the concepts of authoritarian and non-authoritarian public reasons for this purpose. Cooke (2006) argues that the problem with religious positions is not that they appeal to a single, unshared framework, as Habermas would say, making these positions authoritarian and dogmatic in their formulation. Rather, if non-authoritarian arguments are formulated by religious actors, adopting positions that are open to argument, then these arguments can be translated into the public sphere without jeopardizing the freedoms necessary for the existence of democracy. A different measure for non-authoritarianism could be the attempt to integrate secular and religious knowledge in a single framework, in which both sets of knowledge are understood in light of one another. Cooke argues that there are assumptions that govern the debate about these tensions, including that:

historical time is progressive as opposed to cyclical; that political authority is neither divinely ordained, nor naturally given nor historically determined but a matter of co-operation among human beings for their mutual benefit; that there are no authoritative standards independent of *history* and *socio-cultural context* that could adjudicate rival claims to validity, especially in the areas of science, law, politics, morality and art; that human knowledge is contestable, in the sense of [being] open to revision on the basis of good reasons; and that human beings are essentially equal by virtue of capacities such as reason or moral judgement, and are entitled to respect on grounds of such capacities (Cooke, 2005, 380; emphasis added).

Once those assumptions are laid out, Cooke states that considerations of “context” and “history” are what fundamentally distinguish authoritarian claims from non-authoritarian claims (2007). She also provides more specification regarding what authoritarian practical reasoning is and highlights two interrelated elements. The first is that, when knowledge is restricted, its access is reserved to a privileged group of people and thereby removed from the influences of *history and context*. Second, authoritarian practical reasoning occurs when conceptions of justification isolate the validity of propositions and norms from the reasoning of the same human subjects that they claim to be valid for.

The attempt of religious people to reconcile their worldview (and their justifications) with the findings of science is an example of this. Cooke's theorization thus allows believers to maintain the certainty they find in faith (which is often the subject of innovation – *ijtihad*), and to engage in a public dialogue in which secular and religious languages are integrated into a single worldview. This is one of the findings of my recent study on gender equality and the formation of non-authoritarian reasoning in the inheritance debate in Tunisia (Hanafi and Tomeh 2019).

The great challenge of our modernity is to combine law and virtue, as the latter requires constant argumentation. Because religion is one of the crucibles of human virtues, it is necessarily involved in these discussions, as in its task of enforcing morality through various rituals. The post-secular society should thus encourage non-authoritarian practical reasoning and allow for deliberation among those who share different worldviews/ideologies, ensuring that the line between criticism and incitement to hatred is not crossed.

Conclusion

In contrast to Nietzsche's "gay science." I introduced this article by quoting Adorno's "melancholic science." Indeed, social sciences and philosophy do not aim at eudemonia (the good life and human flourishing). They do not seek Aristotle's "*magna moralia*," but simply a "*minima moralia*." It is in this spirit that this article has attempted to show that if, historically, moral philosophy and positivist social sciences have divorced, we must now, in our time of late modernity and acute moral sensitivity, unite them anew. Instead of shying away from the moral debate, we need to grasp it in all its complexity as a moral struggle by giving it a collectivist dimension while also understanding it on a personal level.

Methodologically, we need to analyze principles, norms, and values from the perspective of the performance of social actors, as proposed by Vandenberghe (2018). In order to develop moral sociology and anthropology as a practical philosophy, we must overcome the separation between philosophy and science, the transcendent and the empirical, the normative and the descriptive within a renewed moral sociology. This plea should also be read as a call to promote interdisciplinarity, to fight disciplinary compartmentalization, and thus rethinking the boundaries of sociology and social sciences.

If the ethical turn in sociology is already here, it is necessary to reinforce it by proposing explicit normative methods, presuppositions, and commitments. As far as commitments are concerned, these should not be limited to the respect of our personal moral commitments, but should be open to an active commitment to civil society and social movements.

Finally, we must stop beating around the bush and face the thorny question of religion. Renewing the links between moral philosophy and the social sciences requires sustained attention to the role of religion as one of the sources of ethics. Religion is important not only as a defender of certain virtues, but also as a force for learning through ritual. Conceived on such a basis, an adjusted post-secular secular system will be more tolerant of the non-authoritarian presence of religion in the public sphere, and will forge more contextual models that advance our quest for social justice, democracy, and active citizenship.

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