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NORMATIVITY AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

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Terminological Distinctions

Historians, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, legal theorists and philosophers unanimously share the idea that human practices—even the production of knowledge, i.e., science—are regulated by a system of norms, a normative regime or what has more recently been called “normativity.” Normativity, or “oughtness,” is the set of norms to which an action should conform in order to be recognized as legitimate and, therefore, to be effective within a social group. Considered objectively—as they are studied today by sociology and history—norms are tied to customs, traditions, laws or institutions. Considered subjectively—according to the perspective of expression—norms are pragmatic entities or practical representations, since they are the output of prescriptive speech acts.¹ Since they do not describe how the world is, but prescribe how the world should be, they cannot be declared true or false: they deal with the category of possibility and not of existence.² Norms are thus propositions, concepts, i.e., purely abstract entities. While propositions are the conceptual contents of descriptive sentences, norms are the conceptual contents of prescriptive sentences.

Social psychologists have often used a distinction between injunctive norms, concerning the behaviors most agents theoretically approve or disapprove, without necessarily conforming to, and descriptive norms, which are the ones to which the agents practically conform to. Norms can be constitutive, when they institute a practice that did not exist before, such as the rules of a game, or else they can be regulative or deontic, when they limit an already existing practice, as in the case of most norms. They can be informal or formal—as when they are written, such as laws, codes and regulations. Finally, some norms, which give the power to create other norms, are called power-conferring norms or norms of competence.³

Two forms of social control guarantee the efficacy of norms: one is internal (primary or informal), operating through socialization of the new members of a social group,⁴ and the other external (secondary or formal), operating through sanction of the already existing members. Deviance, a broader concept than the one of delinquency, is the nonconformity to a set of norms; it can be tolerated or sanctioned. The sanction can be positive, when an

action conforming to a norm is rewarded, and therefore encouraged, or negative, in the form of a punishment, when an action deviates from the norm and must be discouraged. Behavioral psychology studied experimentally the effects of the sanctioning through the notion of operant conditioning, a process through which behavior is modified by reinforcement or punishment.⁵ Norms running counter to the dominant normative regime may, nonetheless, be transmitted and maintained within small subgroups of society, which is often the case of what goes under the name of “counterculture.”⁶

Except for rare cases, such as incest prohibition (whose universality has, nonetheless, been extensively debated⁷), everyone agrees that there is no universal norm regulating human behavior. Each society is singularized by a particular set of norms, and, inside the same social formation, different groups don't share the same set of norms. This is the cause of conflicts and negotiations. If norms are always plural, and relative to their context of emergence, then it means that norms cannot be naturalized, i.e., treated as laws of nature. Since there is no universal norm, the human and social sciences agree that the different ideas of justice must be considered as the effect and not as the cause of the different norms, which should then be studied *a posteriori*.

Following sections depict the origin and the development of the term “norm” and the constellation of terms associated with it, such as anomaly, anomie, normality and abnormality; the reflections on norms inside philosophy, sociology, ethnology and history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United Kingdom and the United States, in France, in Germany and in Austro-Hungary; the recent developments of these reflections; finally, the scientific and ethical norms of practice of the disciplines related to intellectual history and the sociology of knowledge.

Etymology

The notion of norm⁸ comes from the late Latin *norma* and is believed to be a translation from the Greek, *gnomon*, γνώμων. The term was used to designate the try square used by carpenters and geometers, formed with two perpendicular pieces of wood or iron. *Norma* slowly came to designate a model, a law or a set of rules and this semantic mutation followed the one of the term *ruler* and *rule*. The term “norm” imposed itself as a key theoretical concept only during the late nineteenth century, while the term “normativity” spread only after WW2 as a translation of the German term *Normativität*, which had been broadly used by the legal theorist Hans Kelsen (1881–1973) in his *Pure Theory of Law (Reine Rechtslehre, 1934, 1967)*.⁹ The term “normativity” acquired new importance in the Anglophone world during the last 30 years, partly because of the philosophical debates concerning the normative aspects of reason provoked by the work of Donald Davidson (1917–2003),¹⁰ which involved authors such as Robert Brandom (1950–) and John McDowell (1942–), partly because of Judith Butler (1956–) re-reading of some twentieth-century French philosophers who treated the problems of norms, and especially Michel Foucault (1924–1986).¹¹

Four further terms are tied to that of “norm”: *normal* and *normality*, *abnormal*, *anomie* and *anomaly*. The term “normal” appeared at the very end of the eighteenth century in France, while “normality” at the end of the 1820s. Both terms progressively gained importance during the long nineteenth century, first inside medical discourses, then inside the social and human sciences, and, finally, they started being used in everyday language. These two terms came to designate the dominant or statistically more frequently adopted norms. *Anomaly* comes from the Latin *anomalía*, a translation of the Greek ἀνωμαλία (*anōmalía*), which

meant unevenness, and it ended up indicating an irregularity; *anomy*, without law, comes from *nomos*, which designated both what results from the act of distributing a territory, and the law governing this territory; until the nineteenth century, *anomaly* was a substantive with no corresponding adjective, and *abnormal*, the negation of normality, was an adjective without any corresponding substantive; this linguistic situation provoked the amalgam of the terms *abnormal* and *anomalous*. “Abnormal” is a normative term, indicating the result of a choice diverging from a given norm, while “anomaly” is a descriptive term, indicating a fact—but the conflation of the two terms formed “abnormal” into a descriptive term.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century in Europe, and then in the rest of the world, the success of the natural sciences, the progressive standardization of human practices and behaviors, and the broader process of colonialism and globalization led many knowledge-producers to attempt to naturalize biological norms, and, in some cases, social norms as well. The effect of this process was the progressive affirmation of the notion of normality, which transitioned from medicine and biology to psychology, sociology and anthropology and, finally, entered in everyday language. This process started with the work of the French physician Victor Broussais (1772–1838), who, in 1828, in *De l'irritation et de la folie* [*On Irritation and Madness*] introduced a quantitative conception of the relation between pathology and health, designating the latter as “normal state,” namely as the most frequent norm or norms of behavior of a living being in a certain environment. Two years later, in 1830, in his *Cours de philosophie positive* [*Lectures on Positive Philosophy*], Auguste Comte (1798–1857) extended, through an analogy, this idea to the study of social phenomena: starting from the normal state of society, Comte thought one would be able to locate its pathologies. Comte used as well another analogy that would haunt the human and social sciences, the one between the development of a living being and humanity: both would grow and pass from the stage of childhood to the one of adolescence and, finally, to maturity. Because of the influence of the theory of evolution—especially in the form proposed by Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), who reformulated the “recapitulation theory”¹²—the behavior of so-called “primitive” humans started being compared to the one of children. In Britain, this analogy appears in the work of Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and it was extensively used by social anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917); in France, it appears in the work of Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893) and Théodule Ribot (1823–1891). With the development of psychology, the analogy was often extended to the insane, as in the case of Charles Blondel (1876–1939), who, nonetheless, believed that there was a difference of *structure* in the thought and behavior of both the “primitive” and “mad” men. In 1947, in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1947), Lévi-Strauss criticized these analogies once and for all.

During the long nineteenth century, in Europe, the growing usage of the terms “normal” and “normality” are signs of the process of standardization and, as an effect, in certain cases, of the long attempt of naturalizing the norms, an attempt which would take a further step during the twentieth century and would result in the emergence of the concept of “normality.”¹³ Nonetheless, this effort found several antagonists in philosophy, sociology and history.

Nineteenth-Century German and French Philosophies

The theoretical articulation between ethical norms, concerning human behavior, epistemological norms, concerning knowledge, and aesthetic norms, concerning perception, started being systematized at the end of the eighteenth century, following the movement

of secularization, the reform of medieval universities and the birth of nation states. During the Middle Ages, what guaranteed the legitimacy and universality of a dominant set of norms was the overarching theological framework formalized in the texts constituting the canon, namely the Scholastic texts. In the late early modern period in Europe, the terms nature, natural law and natural right aimed in part to establish a new basis for a universal set of norms. At the turn of the nineteenth century, with the emergence of the European nation states and the reform of medieval universities, the guarantee for the universality of norms started being conceived as subjective, embedded in the allegedly universal and transcendental mental structure common to all men. This structure was analyzed by a group of knowledge-producers, who negotiated between the Church and the State and started being called “philosophers.”

Though he never used this term as a key theoretical notion, the reflection on normativity had been marked by the figure of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). The broad usage of the German *Norm* can be tracked only back to the second part of the nineteenth century, after the decline of German absolute idealism and in coincidence with the controversy on materialism (*Materialismusstreit*). Hermann Lotze (1817–1881) contributed the most to its diffusion. He attempted to limit the conquering influence of the naturalist paradigm in order to find a place for the human subject as the source of values guiding human behavior, cognition and perception; by doing so, he established key distinctions between validity and existence, norms and facts. That’s the reason why Lotze is often considered as “the grandfather of the concept of normativity,”¹⁴ though he never used the term.

After Lotze, we owe especially to the German neo-Kantians—starting from his pupil, Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915), and then through Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936), Emil Lask (1875–1915) and Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945)—a vast literature concerning the logic presiding the articulation of values and ideas, judgments of reality and value judgments, the descriptive and the prescriptive orders, scientific norms and ethical norms, both considered under in their epistemic generality (object of epistemology, or *Erkenntnistheorie*) and in their disciplinary particularity (object of the theory of science, or *Wissenschaftstheorie*).¹⁵

Windelband was as well the first author to define philosophy as the “knowledge of norms,” neatly separating (transcendental) philosophy from the sciences of nature. As of the lecture *What is Philosophy?* (1882), he developed the notion of “normal consciousness” or *Normalbewußtsein*, an allegedly universal transcendental consciousness, productive of norms regulating reason, will and perception. While science deals with facts, philosophy would study the mind’s normative power, guided by different values (*Werten*) structuring the three areas of science (*Wissenschaft*), ethics and aesthetics. Thanks to the neo-Kantians, at the end of the nineteenth century, the terms *norm*, *normativity*, *value* and *axiology*, namely the study of value (from Greek ἀξία, *axia*, value, and -λογία, -logia), acquired broad usage in the German-speaking areas of Europe. While at the turn of the century the first and third terms are used already in other European areas, it is only during the 1930s on that the second and fourth would spread in the rest of the world.

In order to protect the peculiar role of the epistemological diplomats and “normalizers” of the norms proper to the regional sciences, and the existing onto-encyclopedic hierarchy, the German philosophers had to contain the influence of new groups of knowledge-producers trained in medicine and especially those influenced by the theory of evolution. These scientists aimed at naturalizing and relativizing the allegedly transcendental and universal grounds guaranteeing the norms’ validity.

During the long nineteenth century, differently from the cultural areas dominated by an empiricist tradition, such as the United Kingdom and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Germany with the neo-Kantians, and in France with the spiritualist school of Victor Cousin (1792–1867),¹⁶ and, then, in the Kant-inspired tradition of philosophers such as Jules Lachelier (1832–1918), Emile Boutroux (1845–1921) and Léon Brunschvicg (1869–1944),¹⁷ the philosophers defended the idea of an universal transcendental ground insuring the universality of a fundamental group of norms. They opposed all attempts made in order to treat norms as simple results of a series of contingent, intertwined, biological, psychological and socio-historical processes.¹⁸ Stigmatizing these approaches as “biologism,” “psychologism” and “historicism,” they denounced them as “determinist,” “materialist” or “relativist.”¹⁹

History and Social Theory in Germany

A series of authors, generally described as “historicist,”²⁰ influenced the emergence of history as a discipline, and played a particularly important role in plowing the grounds of what would be the approach to norms proper to intellectual history and sociology of knowledge. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) rejected some forms of universalism and accused them of detaching (allegedly) universal norms from concrete historical forms of life and their local norms, a term that, nonetheless, he never used. The term *Historismus* appeared later, in the work of the Romantics, and only received a precise meaning in Friedrich Schlegel’s (1772–1829) *Fragments about Poetry and Literature* (1797). This approach would later develop in the works of the German idealists and in Karl Marx’s (1818–1887) and Friedrich Engels’ (1820–1895) historical materialism.²¹

Starting from the 1830s, with the professionalization of history as an independent science (*Wissenschaft*), a group of knowledge-producers started criticizing the approach of the first historicists. Though they were not contesting the existence of a universal history, historians such as Leopold Ranke (1795–1886), Johann Gustav Droysen (1808–1884) and Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) rejected the generalist vision of human temporality of their idealist predecessors, claiming that historical patterns were not supposed to be deduced *a priori*. Instead, they generalized, starting from collections of particular facts, individual national histories that had to be the object of source criticism. They objected to the idea of history as an art or a form of literature, and promoted it as a peculiar science, irreducible to the natural sciences. That is clear in the case of *Kulturgeschichte* introduced by Karl Gotthard Lamprecht (1856–1915).

Starting from 1860, some of the inheritors of Ranke’s school ended up engaging in the *Methodenstreit*, a dispute concerning the method to be adopted in the humanities; this dispute would quickly involve the philosophers, who had to deal with the temporality influencing or determining the allegedly universal and transcendental foundation of norms. The debate intensified in 1883, with the publication of *Untersuchungen über das Methode der socialwissenschaften und der politischen Ökonomie insbesondere* [*Investigations into the Method of the Social Sciences, with Special Reference to Economics*] by the Austrian economist Carl Menger (1840–1921). Menger claimed that it was possible to explain subjective behaviors, therefore normativity, through induction, generalization and the formulation of mathematized laws. This approach was rejected by the German historical school of economy, strongly influenced by historicism. Authors such as Karl G. A. Knies (1821–1898),

Gustav Schmoller (1838–1917) and Wilhelm G. F. Roscher (1817–1894) stressed the historical variability of human behaviors and their irreducibility to positive laws.

This debate too involved the philosophers. In the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), inspired by Friedrich Schleiermacher's (1768–1834) works on hermeneutics, depicted man as a fundamentally temporal being.²² All the sciences addressing the non-physiological part of man—such as history, philology or linguistics—should use a peculiar historical method, he argued, different from the one of the natural sciences. This method, “understanding” or “comprehension” (*Verstehen*), was to take into account the historicity of both the object (namely human phenomena) and the research subject. Dilthey opposed the peculiarity of the human sciences, the sciences of the mind, *Geisteswissenschaften*, as compared to the sciences of nature, *Naturwissenschaften*.

For almost half a century, the debate about the demarcation between the different sciences, and the methods they should use, would engage other philosophers, especially the neo-Kantians. Windelband divided the sciences between the ideographic, dealing with the unique elements relative to human phenomena, and the nomothetic, providing general laws, while his pupil Heinrich Rickert, developed, in *Science and History: a Critique of Positivist Epistemology* (1899), a thoroughgoing perspective on the subject.²³

The German and French philosophers—all influenced by transcendental philosophy—shared a broader defensive agenda. First, they aimed at defending the history of philosophy as an independent discipline since it was dealing with transcendental values, problems or ideas, irreducible to the context; by doing that they wanted to defend philosophy from its possible absorption into psychology, sociology and history, areas that philosophy had to supervise. Second, the philosophers aimed at defending the specificity of the temporality of human phenomena, marked by history; therefore, they wanted to keep under control psychology, sociology and history.²⁴

Until the 1930s at least, philosophers criticized historical materialism, i.e., Marxism, which they treated as a simple materialism, an attempt, as Rickert claimed in *Science and History*, to transform all history into economic history and then to transform the latter into a natural science. Just like the nineteenth-century French philosophers, most post-Kantian German philosophers opposed emerging social theories,²⁵ such as Spencer's social evolutionism and German *Völkerpsychologie* (or “ethno-psychology”). These threads aimed at explaining the norms of behavior of a population starting from its biological heritage and environment of life. *Völkerpsychologie*, initially inspired by the romantic notion of national spirit (*Volksgeist*), was first forged by the philologist Hermann Steinthal (1823–1899), the philosopher Moritz Lazarus (1824–1903) and the historian Karl Gotthard Lamprecht (1856–1915) in their journal *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* (1859). This current took a more polemical and original turn in the work of the physiologist and psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), who claimed to isolate patterns able to explain the development of a certain population. The idea of normality, imported from medicine into psychology, then into *Völkerpsychologie*, implied the idea of an existence of “pathological” social formations as opposed to the “normal” ones. Therefore, it implied a possible naturalization of the norms. In the *Methodenlehre*, the second volume of his *Logik* (1883), echoing Windelband, Wundt postulated the existence of a “normal human consciousness,” surreptitiously based on the European.²⁶

These debates influenced the emergence of German social and legal theories. Trained inside a neo-Kantian context, authors like Werner Sombart (1863–1941), Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and Max Weber (1864–1920) tried to resist this attempt of naturalizing the

norms.²⁷ In *Economy and Society* (1921), Weber distinguished two fundamental types of social ordering that influence social cohesion. While *normative* ordering is achieved when there is a high probability that a significant number of actors orient their behavior according to the same norms, *authority* is achieved when a significant number of actors consider the commands of certain actors as binding. Some years later, in *Pure Theory of Law*, Kelsen focused on the study of legal norms. To create a legal science (*Rechtswissenschaft*), he defined it as a “science of norms” (*Normenwissenschaft*) aimed at studying the hierarchy of laws or legal normativity. Famously, legal normativity was based on a basic norm (*Grundnorm*) starting from which all other norms are ordered. Differently than other legal theorists, Kelsen excluded justice from the science of norms, since he considered justice as an “irrational ideal” that cannot be the object of a positive science.

French History and the Birth of Sociology

In France, the first claims for history’s scientific respectability dealt with its objects, the “events,” a series of singular facts that the historian had to connect following their causal ties. This attempt was evident in the work of Charles Seignobos (1854–1942) and Paul Lacombe (1834–1919), pupils of the pioneers Numa Fustel de Coulanges (1830–1889) and Ernest Lavisse (1842–1922). Just as, in Germany, where Ranke’s school did not directly threaten the neo-Kantians, “factual history” or “history of events” (*histoire événementielle*) did not go against the foundations of spiritualist philosophy, even in its neo-Kantian version, since it was not contesting the ideas of a universal source of the norms, rooted in the human mind. Nonetheless, the philosopher violently rejected the influence of the naturalistic paradigm on the practice of the historians, opposing to authors such as Ernest Renan (1823–1892) and Hippolyte Taine, who tried to understand the norms following an *a posteriori* approach, involving the three variables of race, moment and environment.²⁸

As in Germany, the situation took another turn with the birth of sociology,²⁹ with the works of Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) and his collaborators and sympathizers, especially Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939) and Marcel Mauss (1872–1950). Inspired by German neo-Kantianism and *Völkerpsychologie*, Durkheim enlarged the juridical sense of the word “norm” and applied it to customs and manners proper to a certain society. Inscribed in what he called a “collective consciousness,” norms were meant to be studied starting from the sanctions.³⁰ In his seminal *Ethics and Moral Science* (1903), one of the first French books where the term “normative” was widely used, Lévy-Bruhl opposed the idea, shared among the philosophers, that customs (*mœurs*) had to be understood by referring them to universal transcendental values. Customs have to be observed and norms have to be induced, given that they are the contingent result of interactions between social groups and their environment. In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) and especially in *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim popularized in sociology the concept of *anomie*, coined by Jean-Marie Guyau (1854–1888) in *The Non-Religion of the Future* (1886). Anomie was conceived as the condition in which society provides little moral guidance to an individual, causing the breakdown of social bonds between her and the community. This situation can progress into a dysfunctional ability to integrate within normative situations of the social world. Finally, in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) and in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), Durkheim followed Comte in using a medical analogy speaking of normal and pathological social formations. The latter are tied to a crisis, which can cause a situation of anomia. Durkheim stressed that the of “normal” and “pathological” were used

analogically and while he strongly opposed to any naturalization of norms, defending the autonomy of sociology. On the opposite, other authors, especially the ones influenced by racial anthropology, a discipline launched in 1859 in France by Paul Broca (1824–1888), tried to naturalize the norms. Durkheim stigmatized especially the influence of Charles Letourneau (1831–1902), Broca's successor at the *Société Française d'Anthropologie*, on the intellectual enterprise of René Worms (1869–1926), who had launched *Revue Internationale de Sociologie* in 1893 and published the book *Organisme et société* (1896).³¹

Durkheim and Mauss (in their seminal essay "Primitive Forms of Classification," 1903), and Lévy-Bruhl (in *Primitive Mentality*, 1923), opposed as well to the work of British anthropologists such as James George Frazer (1854–1941) and Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), who asserted that the norms of behavior of non-European, so-called "primitive" societies could be considered as "less evolved" and related to forms of consciousness proper to children or insane.³²

Mauss developed as well the notion of "techniques of the body," defined as "human norms of human dressing," namely embodied norms, apparent in postures and ways of behaving. Starting from 1945, Mauss student André Leroi-Gourhan (1911–1986) in *Milieu et techniques* [*Environment and technologies*] developed this approach taking into account the production of technical objects as the result of normative choices made by a social group.³³ These sociological approaches to normativity influenced the transformation of history, at least since François Simiand (1873–1935) and Henri Berr (1863–1954), but especially in the *Annales* school.³⁴ Lucien Febvre (1878–1956) and Marc Bloch (1886–1944) opposed "factual history" and focused instead on the *longue durée* and on stable socio-economic structures. The *Annales* historians broadly used the notion of *mentality* in order to describe the ways in which people of a given time thought, acted and perceived, something broader, though including the notion of normativity.

Anglo-American Anthropology and Sociology

As in France, the often-disavowed ethnocentric endeavor of the social sciences in the study of norms, based on the application of medical and biological (evolutionary) models in the study of cultural phenomena, has been criticized by many American anthropologists and sociologists. Though the concept of "norm" did not play a central role in the writings, Franz Boas (1858–1942), who preferred the one of "culture," the German-born American anthropologist, did play an important role in underlining that there was no process toward continuously "higher" social forms and that culture developed historically through the interactions of groups of people and the diffusion of ideas. Originally formed in Germany by Wundt, Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942), the founder of functionalism, attacked, since *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), the idea according to which non-European societies were disorganized or less developed: the concept of "social function" was precisely a way to criticize this prejudice. This criticism was followed by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955). A decade later, Ruth Benedict (1887–1948), in the founding paper "Anthropology and the Abnormal" (1934), asserted that what is often called "normality" is culturally defined. Considering the phenomena of trance, homosexuality and catalepsy in different cultures, she asserted that what is considered "normal" is always relative to a certain social formation and culture.

The study of norms played an important role inside structural functionalism, the sociological approach according to which society is a system whose parts work together in order

to promote stability. Influenced by Weber and Durkheim, Talcott Parsons (1902–1979) developed a theory of action based on the methodological principle of voluntary action. From *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) onward, he argued that a social system is the result of actions carried out by the individuals, limited by a set of constraining norms, and able to create new ones. According to Parsons, there is never a perfect accord between concrete behaviors and the existing norms, although social control, namely socialization and positive and negative sanction, aims at attaining a better equilibrium.

Robert K. Merton (1910–2003)³⁵ would partially use this approach in order to develop a theory of deviance. With his foundational article “Social Structure and Anomie” (1938), Merton reformulated his own theory of anomie, that he called “normalness” or absence of normality as well. Normalness is defined as the acute disjunction between the cultural norms and the socially structured capacities of agents to act in accord with them. Merton claimed to show a direct relation between crime rates and individuals’ lack of integration to dominant social norms. He added four other notions related to the one of anomie: *conformity*, the capacity of attaining goals by socially accepted means, *innovation*, the capacity of attaining those goals in unaccepted ways, *ritualism*, the acceptance of the means but forfeit of the goals, and *retreatism*, the rejection of both the means and the goals. Innovation and ritualism are the pure cases of anomie, since in both cases, there is a contradiction or a discontinuity between goals and means. “Mass Communication, Popular Taste, and Organized Social Action” (1948), written with Paul Lazarsfeld (1901–1976), a paper that became a canonical text in media studies, tries to understand the success of “mass medias” as accomplishing the function of “enforcement of social norms.”

This study of deviance was developed by Howard Samuel Becker (1928–) using an approach, symbolic interactionism, which departed from the one used by Merton and Parsons. Just like Durkheim, he abandoned any normative judgment on the examined acts and just placed them in their proper normative context. In *Outsiders* (1963), he proposed the labeling theory, according to which deviance is a social construction used to persuade the public to fear and criminalize certain groups. In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), another major figure of symbolic interactionism, Erving Goffman (1922–1982), played his own important role in the development of a theory of deviance. When their identities do not conform to the approved norms, in order to protect them and to avoid being discredited, social groups manage impressions of themselves mainly through concealment. Stigma is a negative classification that emerges out of the interactions and exchanges between individuals or groups, whereby one has the power to classify the other as the possessor of what are socially undesirable attributes or behaviors. Even if this theory did not aim at naturalizing the norms, Goffman referred to the non-stigmatized people as “normals” or “normal persons.”

Anglo-American sociology and sociological history of scientific norms puts as well its roots in functionalism: in *Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth-Century England* (1936), following Weber’s famous thesis about a link between the Protestant work ethic and the capitalist economy, Merton argued for a similar positive correlation between the rise of Pietism and early experimental science. In “The Normative Structure of Science” (1942), he further elaborated a theory of scientific norms guided by ideals, which is often abbreviated to the acronym “CUDOS.” Four features would characterize scientific normativity: “communism” (common ownership of scientific discoveries), “universalism” (claims to truth are evaluated in terms of universal or impersonal criteria), “disinterestedness” (scientists are rewarded for acting in ways that outwardly appear to be selfless) and “organized

skepticism” (all ideas must be tested and are subject to rigorous, structured community scrutiny). Merton underlined that the social system of science often works in contradiction with the ethos of science.

Even if Merton believed in the universality and progressivity of knowledge, his work opened the path for a different sociology of scientific norms. The work of Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996) broke completely with the one of his predecessors. Though not directly addressing the problem of norms, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1962), he introduced the idea of a revolutionary science which he contrasted to the *normal* one, underlining that the normativity of a certain practice of knowledge-production is subject to change and there is nothing such as a normal science in the absolute. This approach to science, implying an intertwining of the cognitive and the social in order to understand the production of scientific knowledge, had influenced the “Strong program” in sociology of science and especially the work of David Bloor (1942–) and Barry Barnes (1943–).

Critical Developments

As discussed already, the history of the study of norms had been accompanied by many criticisms; these criticisms had been developed across the humanities during the last 70 years. A first critique is addressed at the explicit or implicit attempts done at naturalizing the norms and at transforming the statistically more frequent norm in a “normality.” A second critique deals with the importance of anomalies: by focusing on dominant norms, certain normative regimes are neglected or explicitly refused or excluded, leading to problems which are not only epistemological, but also ethical and political. A third criticism deals with objectivity: the study of the norms is presented as neutral, while, in reality, it is always norm-laden. A fourth critique addresses to the notion of norm itself, as it implies an approach of human phenomena postulating the reflexivity of the agents, who are considered able to decide to conform or not conform to a norm, considered as pre-existent.

- 1 The philosopher Georges Canguilhem (1925–1995) played a leading role in denouncing the conflation between the statically induced frequency of a certain set of norms and its alleged “normality.” In *The Normal and the Pathological* (1943), for the first time, Canguilhem discussed the attempt of naturalizing the norms—from early nineteenth-century medicine until the birth of psychology and sociology.³⁶ Partly influenced by a Kantian approach, Canguilhem pointed to the epistemological fallacy behind this attempt: even biological “abnormalities” cannot be treated as “facts,” insofar as they are the result of a set of norms “chosen” by all the organisms, including humans. Organisms are characterized by their power to create new norms according to their own environment of life. In so doing, Canguilhem extended the usage of the term “norm” outside the “moral sciences,” and marked a difference between the life-sciences and the rest of the natural sciences. The work of Canguilhem opened the path for the development of “historical epistemology,” an approach to the development of science independent from the one of the sociology of science.³⁷
- 2 Partly following the path of Canguilhem, the philosopher Michel Foucault (1924–1984), since the late 1960s, but especially in the lectures given at the Collège de France during the 1970s, developed an original theory of norms that he used to analyze minorities and countercultures. He introduced the notion of “*normation*” to designate the type of disciplinary normalization, which, starting from the production of a norm, ends in the

division between the normal and the abnormal. Independently from Foucault, the work of Carlo Ginzburg (1937–), and of “micro-history,” while not addressing any critique to the study of the dominant norms, nor to the adoption of an approach on the long duration, focused on study-cases of anomalies (see *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive*, 2012). The attention addressed to social anomalies and subordinate histories is frequent in the sociological and historical studies produced by authors belonging to feminist and queer theory, or to post/decolonial and to critical race theory. They all criticized the way in which cultural and sexual norms proper to colonizers and to heterosexual males had surreptitiously been imposed as “normal.” Inspired by Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, the literary theorist Michael Warner introduced the term “heteronormativity” in order to designate the belief that heterosexuality is the “normal mode of sexual orientation.” A heteronormative view therefore involves alignment of biological sex, sexuality, gender identity and gender roles and often provokes heterosexism and homophobia. He would develop this theory in *The Trouble with Normal* (1999). Almost at the same time, Judith Butler developed similar reflections in books like *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *Gender Trouble* (2006). Following Edward Said, many decolonial theorists had denounced the act of “othering” cultures, namely labeling as different to distinguish them from the dominant norm. Finally, authors like Charles Mills (see, for instance, his *Black Rights/White Wrongs*, 2017) analyzed and criticized “white normativity,” namely the epistemic principle using the European, and then Euro-American reference group as the “constitutive norm.”

- 3 Thus, a long tradition underlined that all the humanities—aka sciences of culture, “sciences of the spirit” (*Geisteswissenschaften*) or the human and social sciences—had to be *neatly* distinguished from the sciences of nature since they implied a circuit of interpretation involving the researcher and its object. According to this tradition, the humanities could not avoid being normative. This debate took an acute form during the 1920s in the debates around what had been translated as axiological “neutrality” (*Werturteilsfreie Wissenschaft*).³⁸ Through the concept of ideology, Marxist authors targeted historical and sociological writing as normative insofar as related to the interests of a certain social class. Behind the pretension of objectivity, historians hid an agenda aiming at promoting or even “inventing” a national tradition.³⁹ At the same time, Marxism, which, as shown, did not give a great importance to the concept of norm, through the concept of dialectics, wanted to keep together political commitment and the pretension for objectivity. During the interwar and post-war periods, the pretension for objectivity and axiological neutrality was partly imposed on the European social and historical sciences by North American philanthropic foundations precisely as a way to oppose Marxism and to transform these sciences as expert knowledge for government.⁴⁰ On the opposite, the different forms of “textualism,” both historical semantics and the “linguist turn,”⁴¹ had sometimes been criticized for running the risk of abandoning the engagement with objectivity.⁴²

The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) and of his school constitutes a synthesis, as well as a reaction to the long tradition of sociological and historical analyses of norms and deviances. Even if Bourdieu had used the term “norm,” in the *Logic of Practice* (1980), he underlined to what point this was a problematic concept. Criticizing both structuralism and structuro-functionalism, he claimed that the term could lead the researcher to transform the observed regularities into laws that the social agents would follow. According to Bourdieu,

agents cannot be considered to be “aware” of the normative regimes in which they are immersed, as these were pre-existing systems orienting their action.⁴³ The sociologist was more interested into the gap between the enounced norm and the real practices and underlined to what extent the definition of the social norms is the result of conflicts at the end of which some groups end up imposing their own ones. In *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (2001), which expands an article originally published in 1975,⁴⁴ Bourdieu came to directly confront Anglophone sociology of science, from Merton until the strong program. While criticizing the idea that objectivity and truth were simple “socio-cultural norms” or simple “conventions,” Bourdieu also objected to the relativism of the strong program and stepped back from his early criticism of Merton.

The Scientific Normativity Proper to the SHS

The sub-disciplines of sociology of knowledge and intellectual history, as practices of knowledge-production, depend as well on a set of norms implicitly shared by a community of peers. During the long nineteenth century, with the process of disciplinarization, the formation of the interconnected national fields and subfields, and the creation of a transnational space of circulation of symbolic goods, the norms proper to the communities formed by groups of specialized knowledge-producers got progressively fixed, although they were still subject to changes according to a complex and polemical dynamics.

The normativity proper to the different sciences depends on national history,⁴⁵ on the particular role of the knowledge-producers of a certain discipline inside the organization of the State, and on the importance that a national tradition had in a transnational space organized according to the logic of center-periphery. Often, a scientific community belonging to another national tradition or to another discipline does not accept a normativity presiding over a certain scientific community or a certain discipline at a certain point in time and space. Nonetheless, a bigger set of norms, a broader academic normativity, rules and overarches the totality of the disciplines.⁴⁶

The area of “intellectual history” can be considered as the outcome of the interaction between three main disciplines: philosophy, sociology and history, which interacted and often blended during the long nineteenth century.⁴⁷ As stated before, philosophy progressively took the form of a practice of knowledge-production aiming at isolating allegedly universal structures with the aim of organizing and supervising the other disciplines and promoting values and forms of thinking compatible with the ideology of the different State apparatus. Therefore, history of philosophy, an essential element of philosophy itself, had to reject the most radical forms of contextualization. This resulted in a form of history of human knowledge, aiming at isolating universal problems, concepts or ideas by analyzing a small corpus of texts. That had been the case with the first—French and German—histories of philosophy, but also with the subfields of the “history of problems” (*Problemgeschichte*⁴⁸), the “history of concepts” (*Begriffgeschichte*⁴⁹) and the “history of ideas” of Arthur Lovejoy (1873–1962). Of course, “context”—in the broader sense—was present in variable doses in history of philosophy, but was never used to explain the structure and content of the “ideas” or “concepts” taken into account.

The case of history as a discipline was quite different, in that as a form of knowledge-production, it was involved in the construction of national “identity” useful to the field of power. Since its disciplinarization, in the four academic spaces of France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Britain, history focused on the interaction between scientific, artistic,

juridical and religious aspects of certain areas, involving documents that the historians of philosophy were used to discard as irrelevant.

Sociology's scientific normativity followed from its own disciplinary history—which included a dependence on other types of knowledge, not only philosophy, and especially neo-Kantian, in the case of both Durkheim and Weber, but also statistics, which was considered valuable for the State policies and was aimed at governing populations effectively. In France, this model of the organization of research was in part imported from Germany: the Durkheimians, the historians gathered around Henri Berr and, finally, the *Annales* school aimed at holistic organization university inspired by the Humboldtian model, which also inspired the Ecole Pratique d'Hautes Etudes more broadly.

Even though the movement toward globalization promoted the emergence of transnational norms for the production of knowledge on the human phenomena, namely standards, the particular path taken by these disciplines over the last two centuries still results in conflicting disciplinary and national contexts, often concealed under the illusion of a trans/inter/disciplinary and trans/inter/national dialogue. This context pointed to the massive problem of epistemological unity and its disciplinary conditions of possibility, a problem present since the second part of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰

Notes

- 1 John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).
- 2 Christoph Möllers, *The Possibility of Norms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020).
- 3 Geoffrey Brennan, Lina Eriksson, Robert E. Goodin and Nicholas Southwood, *Explaining Norms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 4 Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (London: The Free Press 1985).
- 5 Frederic Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior* (New York: Macmillan 1953).
- 6 John Milton Yinger, *Countercultures* (New York: Free Press 1982).
- 7 The incest prohibition is still considered by some anthropologists as a universal norm taking different forms. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Translated by James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1969).
- 8 Hasso Hofmann and Wolfgang H. Schrader, "Norm." In Karlfried Grunder (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. VI (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), 906–920.
- 9 Hans Kelsen, *Pure Theory of Law*. Translation by Max Knight (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).
- 10 Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
- 11 See, for instance, Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1997).
- 12 According to the theory, the development of the embryo of an animal (ontogeny) goes through stages resembling or representing successive adult stages in the evolution of the animal's remote ancestors (phylogeny). Haeckel made famous this theory, that he resumed in the formula: "Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny."
- 13 Peter Cryle and Elisabeth Stevens, *Normality: A Critical Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
- 14 Fredrick C. Beiser, *Late German Idealism: Trendelenburg and Lotze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 229.
- 15 Fredrick C. Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism, 1796–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 16 See an J Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self. Politics and Psyche in France, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

- 17 Jean Louis-Fabiani, *Les Philosophes de la République* (Paris: Minuit, 1988).
- 18 This situation differed from those proper to Austria-Hungary and the United Kingdom.
- 19 Martin Kusch, Katherina Kinzel, Johannes Steizinger and Niels Wildschut (ed.), *The Emergence of Relativism* (London: Springer 2019).
- 20 Frederick C. Beiser, *German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 21 Marx and Engels never used the concept of “norm.” Nonetheless, the terms “normal” and “abnormal” are used extensively in *The Capital*.
- 22 See, for instance, Rudolf A. Makkreel. *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- 23 Heinrich Rickert, *Science and History: A Critique of Positivist Epistemology*. Translated by George Reisman (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1962).
- 24 Marc Joly, *La révolution sociologique* (Paris: La Découverte 2017).
- 25 Johan Heilbron, *The Rise of Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity 1997).
- 26 Egbert Klautke, *The Mind of the Nation: Volkerpsychologie in Germany, 1851–1955* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).
- 27 Frédéric Vandenberghe, *A Philosophical History of German Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2013).
- 28 Johannes Feichtinger, Franz L. Fillafer and Jan Surman (eds.), *The Worlds of Positivism: A Global Intellectual History, 1770–1930* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
- 29 Johan Heilbron, *French Sociology* (Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press 2015).
- 30 Gisèle Sapiro, “Normes.” In Gisèle Sapiro (ed.), *Dictionnaire International Bourdieu* (CNRS: Paris 2020), 603–604.
- 31 Laurent Mucchielli, “La critique durkheimienne de l’anthropologie raciale dans le contexte de l’affaire Dreyfus.” In Laurent Mucchielli (ed.), *Mythes et histoire des sciences humaines* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004), 161–198. Johan Heilbron, *French Sociology* (Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press, 2015).
- 32 Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Finn Sivert, *History of Anthropology* (London: Pluto Books, 2001).
- 33 Stefanos Geroulanos, *Transparency in Postwar France* (New York: Stanford University Press, 2017), 82.
- 34 Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929–1989* (London: Polity Press, 1990).
- 35 For this aspect, see the contributions to this book by Kapil Raj (Chapter 11) and by Tristan Lepelier and Mohamed Amine Brahim (Chapter 6).
- 36 Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*. Translated by Carolyn R. Fawcett (New York: Zone Books, 1996). For another, more recent, version of this genealogy, see Peter Cryle and Elisabeth Stevens, *Normality*.
- 37 See, for instance, Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *On Historicizing Epistemology. An Essay* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) and Yves Gingras, “Naming without Necessity: On the Genealogy and Uses of the Label ‘Historical Epistemology,’” *Revue de Synthèse*, 131, no 3, (2010): 439–454.
- 38 Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis, IN/Cambridge, MA: Hackett Books, 2004).
- 39 Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 40 Michael Pollack, “La planification des sciences sociales,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 2, no. 2–3 (1976): 105–121.
- 41 Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
- 42 See, for instance, Carlo Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces. True, False, Fictive*. Translated by Anne C. Tedeschi and John Tedeschi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
- 43 Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- 44 Pierre Bourdieu, “La spécificité du champ scientifique et les conditions sociales du progrès de la raison,” *Sociologie et Sociétés*, 7 (1975): 91–118.
- 45 Johan Heilbron, “Qu’est-ce qu’une tradition nationale en sciences sociales?,” in *Revue d’histoire des sciences humaines*, 18, no. 1 (2008): 3–16. Johan Heilbron, Laurent Jeanpierre, Nicolas

- Guilhot, "Vers une histoire transnationale des sciences sociales," *Sociétés contemporaines*, 73, no. 1 (2009): 121–145.
- 46 Gisèle Sapiro (ed.), *L'espace intellectuel en Europe* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009); Yves Gingras, "Les formes spécifiques de l'internationalité du champ scientifique," in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 141–142, no. 1–2 (2002): 31–45.
- 47 For an introduction, see Richard Whatmore, *What Is Intellectual History?* (London: Polity, 2015).
- 48 Leo Catana, "Philosophical Problems in the History of Philosophy: What Are They?." In *Philosophy and Its History: New Essays on the Methods and Aims of Research in the History of Philosophy*, Mogens Lærke, Justin E. H. Smith and Eric Schliesser (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 115–133; Giuseppe Bianco, "The Misadventures of the 'Problem' in 'Philosophy,'" *Angelaki*, 23, no.1 (2018): 8–30.
- 49 Ernst Müller & Falko Schmieder, *Begriffsgeschichte und historische Semantik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp 2016).
- 50 For a recent dialogue, see Pierre Bourdieu and Roger Chartier, *The Sociologist and the Historian*. Translated by David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).