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French sociological pragmatism: Inheritor and innovator in the American pragmatic and sociological phenomenological traditions

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Abstract

Philosophical pragmatism has seen a revival within the sociological discourse. We bring three strands of this approach into direct dialogue with one another. Anglophone and German scholars have brought pragmatists such as George Herbert Mead back to the forefront of our understandings of social action. In a parallel development, scholars such as Alfred Schütz incorporated Husserlian phenomenology with American pragmatism, reinforcing a specific micro-interactionist model. In Francophone sociology, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot challenged the hegemonic structuralist approach in the 1980s by developing their own pragmatic framework. In this synthetic review, we illustrate why this recent French pragmatic sociology adds interesting cultural, sociological, and psychological dimensions to the American pragmatic and to phenomenological lineages. We then show how these innovations provide a richer understanding of the interaction between individuals and institutions and a way to understand something American pragmatists and phenomenological sociologists often struggle to engage with: social conflict.

Keywords

Conflict, culture, economies of worth, justification, phenomenology, pragmatism, sociology of critique

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Introduction

In the wake of the declining faith in positivistic sociological theory, scholars have taken an interest in alternatives. Notable among these alternatives is sociological pragmatism. Indeed, scholars have increasingly utilized pragmatic theory in discussions regarding social mechanisms (Gross, 2009), social movements and the emotions associated with them (Barbarena et al., 2014; Emirbayer and Goldberg, 2005; Gahr and Young, 2014), culture (Alexander, 2004), theories of action (Joas, 1996), and belief (Strand and Lizardo, 2015), among other topics. We welcome this shift in sociological discourse and look forward to further developments in this approach.

However, a major contribution to pragmatic theory seems conspicuously absent. Generally speaking, American pragmatists have neglected the French contribution to pragmatism's broader development, despite previous attempts to popularize the paradigm (Eulriet, 2008). This is curious since French pragmatic sociology's landmark book, *On Justification* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006 [1991]), has been discussed extensively in European journals, such as the *European Journal of Social Theory* (Benatouïl, 1999; Blok, 2013; Blokker, 2011; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999; Guggenheim and Potthast, 2011; Jagd, 2011; Paulsen Hansen, 2014; Silber, 2003). This is not to say that American scholars have not engaged with the theory at all. However, the English literatures' engagement has largely been limited to the fields of culture (Heinich, 2012; Lamont and Thévenot, 2000), economics (Biggart and Beamish, 2003; Stark, 2009), and organizations (Denis et al., 2007; Messner et al., 2008, Patriotta et al., 2011).

Scholars have recently debated whether the French sociological framework is indeed pragmatic in the American sense. We believe that this is because, in part, French pragmatic sociology's intellectual architecture is not made explicitly clear. We are sympathetic with authors like Louis Quéré and Cédric Terzi (2014), especially in regard to Boltanski's neglect of theories of practice in his late pragmatic approach, exemplified by *On Critique*. However, as we will illustrate, we ultimately agree with Tanja Bogusz (2014) in that the general French pragmatic framework, at least in the Boltanskian vein, is rooted in a general pragmatist approach.

Our belief in the unity of the two approaches is rooted in a social-psychological reading of the two paradigms. Quéré and Terzi (2014: 98) focus on Dewey's theory of practice, which is admittedly difficult to integrate with the French pragmatic theory of justification. Doing so neglects other American pragmatists, such as George Herbert Mead, whose pragmatism is more social-psychological in nature. We show how the French school synthesizes key elements of this American pragmatic tradition with phenomenology, which has existed in parallel but has remained at the margins of the discipline (Collins, 1994: 269–272; Lewis, 1976). French pragmatic sociology is an inheritor of both of these traditions, successfully uniting philosophical reflections on the self–other relationship and the analysis of socio-cultural contexts, something that both phenomenology and American pragmatism struggled to do. This synthesis provides a model for addressing two consistent shortcomings of American pragmatism and phenomenology: a reliance on micro-sociology that inadequately addresses the roles of institutions and the inability to effectively address conflict resolution

regarding different understandings of how the world should operate (Athens, 2002, 2007; Boltanski, 2009; Hunt, 1991). **AQ: 1**

The general argument of this article is that French pragmatic sociology allows scholars to synthesize two concepts that emphasize an agentic approach to studying social life from classical sociological theory, helping bring these concepts back to the forefront of contemporary sociological discussion. First is Mead's concept of the Generalized Other (hereafter referred to as GO), which shows how one can take the point of view of the other within a culturally coherent common social group. The second is Schütz and Scheler's framework of how the self can perceive the world through the same kind of *intentional* glance as others through common cultural beliefs (Etzrodt, 2008). This synthesis helps us understand how individual actors consciously use collective thoughts shared by their communities to communicate, debate, and negotiate about how to understand social contexts.

This article is divided into four sections. The first half outlines the past developments of pragmatism and sociological phenomenology in detail because we develop the social-psychological and phenomenological dimensions of French pragmatism. This somewhat unorthodox approach necessitates a clear illustration and justification of this way of understanding the paradigm. We first outline the general development of the American philosophical pragmatic tradition by focusing on one of its founders: George Herbert Mead. We then outline how Alfred Schütz and Max Scheler sociologized phenomenology, providing insights that American pragmatism left inadequately addressed. The final half of the article highlights how the French pragmatic tradition fits within this development of classical theory, as well as how it helps this broader micro-sociological paradigm move beyond its limitations. We illustrate how the French critique of strong positivism and desire to focus on how people understand the world, undivorced from their lived experience, are foundational parallels with American pragmatism and phenomenological sociology. We then illustrate how French pragmatic sociology, in reversing the traditional French focus on institutions' and culture's unconscious influence on individuals, better highlights the interplay between interactions/institutions and better incorporates the regularity/normality of conflicting understandings in everyday life than classical pragmatism and sociological phenomenology.

American pragmatism and the other

American philosophical pragmatism has a long, rich tradition, one which requires separate books and manuscripts to discuss in depth. While Bogusz, Terzi, and Quéré focus on William James and John Dewey to engage with Boltanski's approach, we focus on George Herbert Mead. Mead's theories on social psychology and the development of the social self have had a remarkable impact on the sociological discourse, particularly through his influence on symbolic interactionism and pragmatic theories of action (Blumer, 1969; Côté, 2016; Joas, 1996; Schubert, 2006). As such, we must include his perspective if we are to decide whether French sociological pragmatism is part of the broader pragmatic corpus derived from the American tradition.

Mead's process of self-development, and the way it changes thinking, was the foundation for his broader theory of social action. Mead argues that the self develops in two distinct stages. First, one develops his or her own views and interests, incorporating others' perspectives only to the extent that the other is necessary for the self's goals. Second is the accommodation of one's own views and interests with those of the GO. This is not simply taking into account broader society's views as distinct from one's own: one's self is not complete until he or she has *incorporated* other's views into his or her own. This social integration is possible due to the feeling of sympathy that spontaneously emerges from an individual once he or she understands how others see himself or herself. It is at this very moment that an "individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs," that is, the GO (Mead, 1934: 138). One cannot be a fully functioning member of society until he or she understands the values and intents of the general populace and incorporates those views into one's own (Mead, 1934: 152–164).

Mead's focus on social psychology and understanding social cognition heavily influenced his understanding of broader social structures and how groups of actors work as a collectivity. He understood social institutions as the common response by all community members to a particular situation. These institutions shaped social action, but did not dictate it: bound only by common symbols used for communication, individuals are free to creatively act, as long as they can effectively communicate and navigate the social world. If people are fully integrated within the social world, they are able to understand the thoughts of the GO and adjust their actions accordingly, creating a harmonious society (Athens, 2007: 28–30; Mead, 1934: 260–267, 321–326).

Two examples illustrate how the self-GO relationship maintains larger social institutions. First, economic exchange depends on one's ability to

identify yourself not simply in the particular matter of exchange, but find out what he [the other] wants and why he wants it, what will be the conditions of payment, the particular character of the goods desired, and so on. You have to identify yourself with him more and more.

(Mead, 1934: 298)

Without this ability to understand the GO, the broader economy would collapse as trade would not be possible. Second, Mead extends this conceptualization of this relationship between the self and the GO toward culture, particularly democratic culture. Democracy is an ideal representation of a political institution representing the self-GO relationship: "[...] democracy [...] is an attitude which depends upon the type of self which goes with the universal relations of brotherhood, however that be reached" (Mead, 1934: 286). Within a functioning democracy, individuals are free to develop themselves and exhibit autonomy. However, this autonomy is not wholly free of others. An individual has a common general understanding of how his or her fellow citizens understand the world, what they value, and so on. In other words, subscribers to democratic culture have a

broad understanding of the GO and keep this in mind in their daily and political actions (Mead, 1934: 286–289).

Ideally, no conflict would occur due to regular communication among individuals:

The ideal of human society is one which does bring people so closely together in their interrelationships, so fully develops the necessary system of communication, that the individuals who exercise their now peculiar functions can take the attitude of those whom they affect.

(Mead, 1934: 327)

However, people cannot always effectively communicate or navigate the social world. Mead believed that ethical problems arise when individuals encounter situations where they cannot easily adapt or adjust their thoughts or actions. In these situations, hostility or self-superiority comes to the forefront of the individuals' minds, making integration difficult. Because the self comes at the expense of the community in this situation, conflict ensues, and it can only be resolved when the self is reintegrated into the community, that is, when it shares a common understanding with the GO (Mead, 1934: 319–321). This dysfunctional approach to conflict also applies when groups distinguish themselves from a broader community of groups, allowing anti-social feelings to arise from a sense of self-preservation. This can be alleviated by reunifying these groups, a process that includes practices such as reconstructing the GO to include a wider variety of views or by uniting disparate groups against a common threat (Mead, 1934: 303–311).

This understanding of conflict highlights Mead's general assumption of unified cultural understandings. Within his broader model, larger institutions are constructed based on roles and the expectations that come alongside those roles. However, as Charles Horton Cooley noted, many values that we hold are inherited with the institutions we receive (Schubert, 2006). However, if many people have fundamentally different understandings of the purpose of institutions, then how can we effectively reconstruct the GO? Mead's theory is limited by his general social-psychological approach, which often extrapolates the experiences of the individual to the collective; it is unable to account for the utilization of cultural constructs outside of those created for specific and explicit purposes. It is also limited by considering conflict as pathological in a normal, peaceful social situation. Conflict is not considered as a common way of building interactions in social life, but as a disease that momentarily excludes an individual from the coherent GO.

John Dewey takes an improved approach to conflict. Much like Mead, Dewey argues that self-reintegration is best completed through a continual process of communication. Unlike Mead, Dewey did not treat conflict as a residual category that would only arise when the self becomes estranged from the GO. He understood that communities would generally be composed of a great number of individuals, all of whom would have their own ideas of how to act and what values were important. To integrate these into a Great Community, there had to be a regular dialogue between them all (Dewey, 1981: 620–643). However, as Cornel West (1989: 101–106) notes, this view was quite optimistic, relying on an argument that largely only works within homogeneous communities lacking major divisions. Divisions may be omnipresent, but small ones do not threaten group

cohesiveness. Significant, intractable divisions, based on fundamentally different outlooks, values, and understandings, make it more difficult to create a singular community outlook. In many ways, this argument foreshadows the main focus of French pragmatic sociology: how communities use communicative action to create shared understandings to justify action. However, Dewey's comments are still rooted in the fundamental assumption that conflict within communicative action is not consubstantial to social life, but an ever-present social ill to be continually remedied.

Generally speaking, the fact that pragmatism considers community as something that must be basically defined by its homogeneity and unity continues to influence more contemporary authors. The pragmatist theory of action and how it incorporates social structures were further developed within the broader symbolic interactionist tradition (Blumer, 1969; Lewis, 1976; Schubert, 2006). Herbert Blumer emphasized a key aspect of Mead's theory, one that would go on to be critically inspirational for contemporary pragmatic scholars such as Hans Joas (1996, 1997: 13–14; see also Habermas' (1984, 1987) concept of communicative rationality). Collective action and social structures are the result of individuals aligning their actions through their imaginations of how others would act and responding accordingly (Blumer, 1969: 78–89). People's actions are not strictly determined by social structures: social structures are a result of *individuals* using their agency to coordinate their actions. They purposefully act in concert, guided by shared aims, thereby reducing conflict; actions are not prescribed by outside forces.

Although he doesn't explicitly use a pragmatic model derived from the American tradition, Jeffrey Alexander's (2004) discussion of the role of ritual illustrates the continued reliance on unity with the GO as a driving force in pragmatic theory. Ritual helps unify individuals with a GO through performance, drawing on commonly held cultural understandings beyond language to help illustrate the authenticity of individuals' communications; disjuncture with this GO disrupts communication and understanding. More recently, Holdsworth and Morgan's (2007) re-exploration of the Meadian GO illustrates the continued debate about the way the concept is used when exploring conflict and judgment. They note that while who is part of the GO shifts, people regularly seem to refer to one single GO in speech, and one's distance from this singular collective understanding is used to make judgments about the self or others. Once again, we can see that the pragmatic model generally emphasizes a sort of unity with the GO as a central theme in understanding conflict; discrepancy is disruptive, or perhaps frowned upon.

Mead's *oeuvre* left much to be desired in regard to social conflict as a whole, leaving the problems of domination, power, deception, and manipulation largely undiscussed (Athens, 2002; Hunt, 1991). This prompted Lonnie Athens (2007) to propose a counterpart to Meadian symbolic interactionism: radical interactionism. Whereas Mead emphasizes sociability as the foundation for society, Athens builds a symbolic interactionist model where domination takes center place. He highlights how Mead neglected the role that hierarchy and power play in coordinating people's understandings – often, unconsciously, producing an idealized, egalitarian, but incorrect, understanding of the social world. His model is a welcome addition, but maintains the assumption of the need for a unified understanding of the social world. As we will see later, French pragmatists agree that hierarchy and power play pivotal roles in the social world, but differ in the requirement for unity in understandings for a functioning social world. They see conflict as

inherent in the social world, not a pathological problem that must perpetually be ameliorated. What happens when they do not see the world as the GO, perhaps not even wanting to act in concert?

Phenomenology and the question of the other

While sociology incorporated Mead's theories into their corpus, he never offered concrete ways to *observe* the social-psychological mechanics of his theory in action. He does not explain how a person actively shares meanings, thoughts, or general understandings of the world with the GO (Etzrodt, 2008: 170–171; Schütz, 1962a: 18–19). How can one understand that he or she has the same perception as the GO? Mead's brilliance is limited by his behaviorism, relying on outside observation. Identical behaviors can have very different significations to scientists and their subjects (Schütz, 1962b: 209–210). Phenomenology partially solves pragmatism's problem of how to understand the influence of the GO on the mind of the self.

Schütz turns to Husserl to help him penetrate the relationship between the individual and his consciousness that Mead left unaddressed. He focuses on the phenomenological concept of intentionality, that is, the various peculiar fashions through which the self perceives the world. Husserl (1977 [1949]) uses intentionality aimed at a house to illustrate this concept:

The house-perception means a house – more precisely, as this individual – and means it in the fashion peculiar to perception; a house-memory, in the fashion peculiar to memory; a house-phantasy in the fashion peculiar to phantasy. A predicative judging about a house, which perhaps is “there” perceptually, means it in just the fashion peculiar to judging; a / valuing that supervenes means it in yet another fashion; and so forth. Conscious processes are also called *intentional*; but then the word intentionality signifies nothing else than this universal fundamental property of consciousness: to be consciousness of something; as a *cogito*, to be bear within itself its *cogitatum*.

(p. 33)

Because consciousness always apprehends objects of the world according to a specific, peculiar fashion (perception, phantasy, memory, imagination, etc.), consciousness constitutes the unity of objects in the living world. Consciousness can be supported by different intentional states of mind (peculiar fashions), but it is the only center of the subject.

The non-social, solipsistic starting point of this theory is one reason why scholars dismiss Husserl's relevance to sociology. Objects of the world are only thinkable since they appear constituted in (and presented to) self-consciousness. The constitution of the meaning of objects is here attributed to the self who “must be fixed as the only possible center of the world” (Marion, 1991: 191; our translation). It is an approach that is “first of all monadic, and then intermonadic” (Husserl, (1994 [1949]: 156). Aware of Husserlian solipsistic subjectivism, Schütz remained convinced that Husserl's description of how consciousness gives sense and meanings to the world complemented Mead's behaviorism. One needed only to make this relationship between observation and consciousness

something eminently social, but not strictly deterministic. Schütz (1962c) achieves this by focusing on culture:

Our everyday world is, from the outset, an intersubjective world of culture. It is intersubjective because we live in it as men among other men, bound to them through common influence and work, understanding others and being an object of understanding for others.

(p. 133)

The naïvely living person

Automatically has in hand, so to speak, the meaningful complexes which are valid for him. From things, inherited and learned, from the manifold sedimentations of tradition, habituality, and his own previous constitutions of meaning, which can be retained and reactivated, his store of experience of his life-world is built up as a closed meaningful complex [...]. One can always reactivate the process which has built up the sediments of meaning, and one can explain the intentionalities of the perspectives of relevance and the horizons of interest [...]. To accomplish this on the level of mundane intersubjectivity is the task of the mundane cultural sciences. **[AQ: 2]**

(1962c: 136)

I understand others and can identify with them through a common background of culturally built significations used to perceive the world with the same peculiar fashion of consciousness, the same states of mind. I give meaning to my experiences through these shared meanings. Key here is that meanings are not subjectively constituted through individual peculiar fashions: some have been intersubjectively constituted before me. Traditions, habits, and other sedimentations of past meanings give specific colors to my perceptions. These shared understandings facilitate sharing my perceptions with others by minimizing debates over meaning. For example, I can remember my childhood house with the same emotion as a friend who remembers his own because we share the same representation of “my childhood house” in a society where the nuclear family is valid and historically dominant.

Like Mead, Schütz (1962c) explains that one’s understanding of the social world is based on understandings of others’ interpretations:

I posit meaningful acts in the expectation that Others will interpret them meaningfully, and my schema of positing is oriented with respect to the others’ schema of interpretation. [...] Thus on these reciprocal acts of positing meaning and of interpretation of meaning, my social world of mundane intersubjectivity is built; it is also the social world of Others, and all other social and cultural phenomena are founded upon it.

(p. 135)

To understand these acts, their intersubjective meanings, and the way we perceive them is the work of social science.

Schütz's phenomenology fails to develop into a real phenomenological sociology. Like Husserl, he always returns to the subject. He describes the way one gives meaning to cultural sedimentations and habits, but never the translation between the world of culture and the self. He contents himself with repeating Husserl's subjective examples. The individual he talks about is one that "perceives, sees, smells, etc.," any kind of intentional act of consciousness systematized into a grid for sociological reading, and any collective dimensions of what it could mean "to touch, to see or to smell" are studied. He talks about complex cultural meanings used by the subject to perceive, imagine, and judge, but largely leaves the collectivities undefined.

Max Scheler offers a solution to this problem by emphasizing the social notion of intentional states (peculiar fashions) of consciousness (or mind). Unlike Husserl and Schütz, Scheler focused on how one's experiences are mediated by the Other, providing

philosophical answers to such fundamental sociological questions as the problem of intersubjectivity (how can I have access to the mind of others?), interaction (how can we coordinate our actions and intentionally act together?) and the constitution of society (how are our interactions mediated by and institutionalized into a common world.

(Vandenberghe, 2008: 18)

He does this through the sociological interpretation of intentionality (Scheler, 1980 [1926], 1982 [1919]).¹ Scheler shifts from Husserl's and Schütz's notion of subjective intentionality and individual state of mind to a collective disposition toward the world, such that "depending on the nature of a specific attitude of consciousness, things around us appear in a specific light" (Frings, 1997: 169). Intentional states of mind "appear as characteristics, respective forces of the environment: for they are supra-individual: a collective spirit and collective living of the present" (Scheler, 1982 [1919]: 623; our translation). These are not fixed cognitive categories, but naturalizing states of mind contingent on changing historical realities:

A theophantic mind-set dominated the age of mythology according to which earthly things and events bespoke the divine. The celestial bodies, the seasons, animals, mountains and oceans appeared according to a mind-set that attributed their existence to divine. By contrast in our time it is difficult for a capitalist to imagine, for example, the fury of Zeus manifested in a thunderbolt [...]. In the capitalist mind-set, things and entities of the world are experienced under aspects of profitability, capitalization and usefulness that pervade our technological civilization.

(Frings, 1997: 173)

We no longer rely on individualistic categories to describe our relations to the world, but something social and cultural, for example, the capitalist state of mind. The change is radical in phenomenology. Rather than a material order, Scheler understands "this mysterious specter of the so-called capital" as the way of seeing the world which lets all objects come to be understood in terms of the social values related to appropriation: "I claim that the 'commodity' is everything [...] that is recognized, seen, interpreted through this mode of valuing and impulsive structure like through a particular lens" (Scheler, 1982 [1919]: 619; our translation).

Scheler tries to show that capitalism is not only an economic exchange model useful to create a communicative interaction, as Mead intimated. Instead, economic exchange was a modern way of apprehending all the objects of the world, seeing things as profit sources. For the capitalist state of mind, everything is potentially a source of capitalization: commodities, atoms, a human voice, Eros, art. “Things themselves are looking at man regarding their ability of capitalisation. They ask him the same claim: ‘see the profit that you can take over me’” (Frings, 1988: 356). Modern man became *homo capitalisticus*, declining each kind of intentional perspective of his conscious with the peculiar fashion of profit and utility (Scheler, 1982 [1919]: 632). His or her state of mind presents the world as a market where things can either be appropriated or do not exist. This view disregards whether things should be seen with other social intentional peculiar fashions, for example, real emotion from nineteenth-century art or passionless faith from religious objects. We can say that the states of mind in action and justification are specific attitudes (acts) of consciousness in the life-world.

This innovation helps solidify the link between phenomenology and pragmatism, particularly that of Mead. According to Mead (1934),

The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs.

(p. 138)

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]: 60–61) utilize this passage to highlight how this understanding of the GO, like a collective phenomenological approach, relies on the interaction between monadic individuals, other social actors, and, most importantly, meaning systems constructed to mediate between them. Collective or cultural meanings shape intentional states of mind and help the self integrate with the GO. For the first time, culture and society have a real place within both phenomenology and pragmatism.

Like Schütz and American pragmatists such as Mead, Scheler does not provide any empirical or concrete description of collective states of mind, except the very general category of “capitalism” or “Greek mythos.” Moreover he never explains whether conflict over meanings derived from collective states of mind can arise between people with different perceptions or significations. We live in a peaceful social world, historically built by agreed-upon habits and traditions. In order to practice sociology, however, one must, at one moment or another, refer to a typology that enables comprehensive discussions regarding individuals’ understandings that converge *or diverge*, depending on whether or not they have the “same natural attitude of consciousness.” We believe that French pragmatic sociology offers one way to think about this topic.

Pragmatic sociology: A French declination of pragmatism and phenomenology

French pragmatic sociology has many different labels: sociology of disputes, justification theory, sociology of ordinary critique (Thévenot, 2014, 2016). Its naissance was

rooted in part due to a desire to construct a critical sociology that challenged the hegemonic Bourdieuan structuralism in 1980s French sociology (Benatouïl, 1999, Boltanski, 2011 [2009], Frère, 2004). It has continuously grown in popularity in sociological laboratories in the Francophone academic field, in part due to the success of *On Justification* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006 [1991]). Despite this success, French pragmatic sociology only attracted heightened interest within the Anglophone academy following the translation and Boltanski and Chiapello's (2007) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

Boltanski (2011 [2009], 2012) recognizes that his sociology has borrowed heavily from American pragmatism, ethnomethodology, and phenomenology (pp. 24–25, pp. 340–341). Echoing American pragmatists and Schütz, he and Thévenot critique social sciences' disregard for common sense, equating positivistic science with truth. They argue that “in every day life, [...] like scientists, ordinary people never stop suspecting, wondering, and submitting the world to tests” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006 [1991]: 54). There exist some situations where “actors exhibit their action and unfold it verbally. On such occasions, they seek to generalize and to constitute facts by means of language, and as they do so they use language in a way that approaches that of sciences” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006 [1991]: 356). **[AQ: 3]**

This is why justifications from the common sense of ordinary people must be taken seriously by sociologists. They translate states of mind that act like scientific inquiries. This has significant implications for how social scientists approach their subjects of study, as they no longer monopolize the legitimizing theory producing/testing mind-set. As Boltanski (2012 [1990]) explains,

To begin, we have to give up the idea that we can have the last word by producing – and imposing on actors – more powerful reports than the ones they themselves are able to produce; in other words, we have to abandon the way classical sociology has conceptualized the asymmetry between researchers and actors [...]. Instead of defining agents by means of stable attributes (i.e. habitus, predispositions, etc.), endowing them with interests and tendencies that are inscribed in the body and capable of generating objective unconscious intentions, and then assigning itself the task of explaining the actions of these agents when they encounter external obstacles, (our) sociology shows how actors develop discourses about these actions, how they shape their action into a plot.

(pp. 28–30)

This emphasis on the agency and intentionality is partially why Bogusz (2014: 130, 146) argues that the Boltanskian and Thévenotian model fits within the American pragmatic framework.

The double space usually opposing the “deep reality of the sociologist” and the “illusion of common sense” is not valid in pragmatic sociology in general and in its metaphysics of the polity, which we describe below, in particular:

I take the actors' arguments as they come, without subjecting them to my own critique; I simply confront them with models (the polities) that are themselves the product of an effort to describe the common competence explicitly and systematically. [...] Renouncing any claim to an analytical capacity that would be radically different from the actor's, on the basis of which we

could explain the actor's behavior in his place and better than he could do it himself, we are making the sacrifice of our understanding [...]. When we give up the possibility of presenting our own version and of having the last word, we reject engaging in an activity that the actor does not have to renounce.

(Boltanski 2012 [1990]: 35)

The influences of micro-interactionism within American pragmatism and phenomenology become apparent here. Schütz saw common sense as a kind of cultural background that provides concepts and significations to individuals in the life-world. He does not idealize behavioristic science: "thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men, living their daily life within their social world" (Schütz, 1962d: 59). This is why Schütz refers to their conceptual constructions as "second-degree constructions." He shows how sociologists could benefit from paying more attention to everyday life. Any knowledge of the world, "in common-sense thinking as well as in science, involves mental construct syntheses, generalizations, formalizations, idealizations specific to the respective level of thought organization" (Schütz, 1962d: 58). But common sense precedes science. The thing – as it is perceived in the "natural attitude" which we adopt in the life-world – precedes scientific conceptualization.

The pragmatist conception of science echoes this sentiment. For example, William James (1978 [1907]) argued that hypotheses originating from common sense do not hold a lesser value of truth than their scientific equivalents:

Our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent time. They form one great stage of equilibrium in the human mind's development, the stage of common sense. Other stages grafted themselves upon this stage, but have never succeeded in displacing it.

(pp. 83–84)

Common sense refers to the fact that an individual is likely to use certain intellectual forms or categories of thought and that these can be extremely useful in daily life. Common sense organizes the life-world through a series of concepts that originate from experience and that combine and order themselves according to each situation. Everywhere in practical life, "the common-sense *denkmittel* are uniformly victorious" (James, 1978 [1907]: 88).

In both traditions, there are no pure facts: facts are selected and interpreted according to some relevant aspects for us, reflecting a particular mind-set or intentionality. Schütz (1962a: 5) explains that James' statements resonate with Deweyian pragmatism: "our whole knowledge of the world, in common-sense as well as in scientific thinking, involves constructs, i.e., a set of abstractions, generalizations, formalizations, idealizations specific to the respective level of thought organization." This thought can be located on the level of science or on the level of the states of mind we encounter in daily life, when we argue about how the lived situation must be understood.

Paralleling James, Dewey, and Schütz's suggestions to abstract intellectual forms of thought used by people every day, French pragmatists encourage us to clarify the states of mind that people utilize when they act and justify their actions. In the immediate moment, people often only superficially consider the moral values that they use to justify the whats and whys of action (Boltanski, 2012 [1990]: 31). French pragmatic sociologists emphasize the possibility of studying action through people's mental schemata, their cognitive mind-sets, in the dynamics of their perception to things:

The way in which this sociology breaks down the action thus attempts to parallel what is observed in acting individuals in a situation. [...] What is aimed at is not what the world is "objectively" (or scientifically) but the world as it is perceived through the ordinary sense [the intentional peculiar fashions of consciousness], the way the world is seen by the acting individuals in a situation during a course of action and how people in a situation conform to that world or question it.

(Corcuff, 2001: 109–110; authors' translation)

The sociologist must climb the argumentative chain until he or she finds statements with a degree of generalization acceptable to the actors. These categories, labeled as common goods because of their social origin, are necessary to understand what is at stake in a social interaction.

In our phenomenological reading, common goods can be understood as values representing states of mind shared by people, peculiar fashions of consciousness, GOs, or moral communities. These moral communities are culturally and historically built, embedded within common sense, providing a framework through which individuals can evaluate their life-world. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]) allow us to go beyond Schütz's stunted analysis. There are six notable moral communities, called polities, which can describe people's states of mind: merchant, domestic, industrial, civic, inspired, and opinion. Boltanski and Thévenot derived their polities from occidental political philosophies. We are no longer dealing with simple subjective intentional relationships of perception, imagination, value judgments, and so on, but with general cultural registers, mind-sets, and ways to be in the world, similar to Scheler's capitalist state of mind. Through seminal texts, philosophers modeled general registers of justifications that represent dominant schemas, systematized states of mind which are utilized to generate justifications derived from common goods. Each polity slowly transformed into a common sense usable without reference to their original sources. Thus, a cultural history of Western Europe illustrates that a slow process of institutionalization incorporated these intentional mind-sets, available for use in argumentation, in socializing structures like social organizations. These different mind-sets, different GOs, form the foundation of our everyday life debates and conflicts. These mind-sets, represented by polities, are summarized in Table 1.

To help understand this table, we'll briefly break down the first polity concept listed: the civic polity. This concept is illustrated by Rousseau's argument about the general interest in *The Social Contract*. This is a polity in which people self-represent and justify their actions by arguing to a GO perspective derived from whether their point of view

Table 1. Boltanski and Thévenot's six polities of justification.

Polities/mind-sets/states of mind/attitudes of consciousness/ peculiar fashions of consciousness/GOs	Common goods of justification/ representation	Representative philosophical work of ideal polity
Civic	general interest, citizenship	Jean-Jacques Rousseau's <i>The Social Contract</i>
Industrial Domestic	Productivity; efficiency Care; familial relationships	Henri de Saint-Simon's <i>L'Industrie</i> Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet's <i>Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scriptures</i>
Opinion Inspired	Fame; popularity Anti-materialism; creativity	Thomas Hobbes' <i>Leviathan</i> Saint Augustine's <i>The City of God</i>
Merchant	Interest; greed	Adam Smith's <i>The Wealth of Nations</i>

GO: Generalized Other.

benefits the common good of the general interest; worthiness is speaking in the name of the collectivity. One thus justifies one's intentions by arguing that one has received a mandate, been elected, sworn by oath, and so on – in short, that the collectivity has granted one the right to speak in its name for the common good, not only for oneself.

A polity is thus a sort of justification kit that individuals consciously mobilize – a mind-set from which one can draw arguments (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006 [1991]: 69). When individuals argue in a specific polity, they intentionally direct their arguments toward the common good inherent to the polity they chose, giving a specific meaning to reality. As David Stark (2009) noted, polities are about what counts in understanding reality:

Each of us confronts this question on daily basis. Faced with decisions involving incommensurable frameworks – work versus family life, career opportunities versus loyalty to friends or attachment to a locality, vacations versus investments for retirement, and so on – we ask ourselves what really counts. What is valuable, and by what measures?

(p. 6)

We continuously appeal to different common goods based on the specific contexts of our daily lives.

Although the notion of common goods insists on explanatory elements that *resemble* social structures, it should not be understood as external structures that become internalized as social norms. A state of mind is neither externally guaranteed nor stabilized through unconscious naturalization (cf. Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]). It is a sense-making device, rendering a situation intelligible and meaningful to the common sense through organizing facts according to the moral communities, the GOs, one belongs to. The common good is the general intentional state of mind through which an actor sees the world.

Justifications do not rationalize reality, but are constitutive of reality (Fligstein, 2006). How cultural dispositions and common goods are articulated is at the heart of a representation of the world. They are mobilized consciously by people in a rational way even if they don't use the technical vocabulary of the scientist, paralleling American pragmatist and phenomenological paradigms.

By allowing one to make the object of inquiry intentionally conscious, French pragmatic sociology emphasizes actors' capacities to recognize and reflect upon the multiple values or common goods that co-exist with and co-construct social reality. The justification framework highlights the role of values (common goods) in the sociological study of action. Justification is the way of speaking influenced by these constructions inherited from some philosophical frameworks, embodied within their culture, which lie at the heart of how people make judgments about the world and/or what they are doing. **This is why French pragmatic sociology has attracted attention as a "micro-sociology with a macro-cultural thrust" (Silber, 2003: 428). It has the heuristic power to illuminate the meaning given by an individual to a situation retaining the importance of the broader cultural context.**

Individuals use their rationality and understanding of different mind-sets and situational contexts to justify their actions to others:

We are in position to understand the actions of persons when [...] we have grasped the constraints that they have had to take into account, in the situation in which they found themselves, in order to make their critiques or their judgments acceptable for others.

(Boltanski, 2012 [1990]: 33)

Actors attempt to convince others that their actions are justifiable vis-à-vis the state of mind in which they act, in turn based on a specific understanding of common a GO or mind-set. Social life includes opposition, exchange, or disputes between people who try to convince others that the situation must be perceived through his or her intentional state of mind (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006 [1991]: 74–80).

Two abstract examples illustrate how actors utilize multiple GOs (polities/fashions of consciousness) to navigate everyday disputes. First, disputes can take place within a single polity: individuals disagree on who best represents the same GO. Consider, for example, the case of an employee about to be fired for lack of productivity. The employee could appeal to an industrial GO, noting the critical importance of his or her experience. Both experience and productivity represent the same value within the industrial fashion of consciousness: efficiency. To move beyond the conflict, the boss and employee must decide whose understanding of efficiency is most useful in this scenario. Second, individuals can disagree about which polity to appeal to in order to move beyond a dispute. Keeping our example in mind, the employee may appeal to another GO, for example, a domestic one, by asking what would become of his or her family if he or she were fired. Importantly, we must keep in mind that these disputes are not rational vis-à-vis rational choice theory: the employee's argument derives from his experiences in the domestic state of mind and the emotions derived from them, not from a cold calculation created to win an argument.

Individuals can switch to another normative argument when they realize they are likely to lose the dispute in a given polity whose argumentative logic plays against them. Importantly, in either scenario, the conflict does not have to be resolved peacefully: the boss can dismiss the appeals of the employee, resolving the dispute by flexing their power and rejecting any attempt to unify understandings. Conflict then is resolved not by negotiation and aligning the self with a newly agreed-upon GO, but by fiat.

Like Mead's self-GO relationship, French pragmatists argue that we can (or not) share a common state of mind with others, giving the same collective meanings to objects and to events because we share (or not) the same understanding of the situation. Actions and justifications are *coordinated* according to the same common understanding. But while the concept of moral communities resembles Mead's self-GO relationship and the definition of the phenomenological intentional collective mind-set, the role of conflict in French pragmatism differs. The declared aim of this approach is to build a sociological system able to represent conflict and disputes in social life, a struggle for classical American pragmatism and phenomenology. Indeed, the social world is not as peaceful as Mead or Schütz suppose.

New frontiers in sociological pragmatism: Interactions/institutions and conflict

With the broader lineage between American pragmatism, phenomenology, and French pragmatism made explicit, the innovations introduced by French pragmatists are easier to see. Here we focus on two main contributions to this broader history: a clearer understanding of the relationship between interactions and institutions, the micro and the macro, and the normalization of conflict as a central factor within social life (Boltanski, 2011 [2009]: chapter 3). While neither is unique in sociological analysis, more classical pragmatic approaches often had trouble reconciling the two. In their system, the Francophone pragmatists have offered a way forward, not only innovating in regard to pragmatic theory but also helping to bring this general approach into dialogue with other dominant sociological paradigms.

First is the interplay between interaction and institutions. As noted above, classical pragmatists like Mead assume that broader social institutions are largely derived from the extrapolation of the micro-interactive experience. For example, markets and democracy are merely the manifestation of the broader self-GO relationship in different social spheres. As Ilana Silber (2003) notes, however, French pragmatism more closely resembles variants of repertoire theory, where actors' disputes are embedded within broader cultural understandings. People are not bound to negotiate between a singular GO understanding and the self. Instead, they use interactions as a starting point during a period of indeterminacy, which regularly occurs whenever there is a conflict in understandings. Actors acknowledge that there exist different GOs and, within their interactions, can change them like lenses until they find a GO that helps them in moments where it becomes unclear how we should understand what is happening. In other words, institutions are not just derived from negotiations of individuals balancing the relatively stable self-GO relationship: the self-GO relationship is inherently unstable, and individuals constantly negotiate with one another and themselves about how to understand

a situation, using inherited cultural understandings that affect their ability to play with, and negotiate, meaning.

Importantly, these interactions illustrate that actors are not bound by these broader macro-forces and understandings, fitting with the pragmatic and phenomenological heritage. During interactions, actors modify and innovate within and beyond these macro-cultural understandings to fit their complex lives. Individuals want to establish some permanence in this ever-changing experience, choosing what is valuable. The world is filled with beings who can ignore, reject, re-characterize, or integrate into the institutional social order (Boltanski, 2011: 58). Institutional realities consist of various elements extracted from the life-world, instituted by actors via categorization, characterization, and totalization.

These modifications of the macro go on to influence later interactions, establishing a regular recursive dynamic whereby people regularly readjust their individual mind-sets and their various cultural understandings in the life-world, their GOs, based on what works in a given situation. Institutions derived from these processes, thus, do not represent a self-GO interaction, but are composed of multiple GOs, fluidly transposed and modified by selves in an effort to fit past understandings with present contexts or to use present contexts to change instituted meanings of instituted apparatus.

Agency is, thus, at the center of this approach, unlike structural accounts. French pragmatism walks the fine line between the micro-interactions of classical pragmatism and the more common structuralism associated with French sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu. French pragmatists focus on micro-interactions, but larger social structures, represented by polities, are never eliminated from the analysis. They draw attention to alternative desires and understandings, testing the sturdiness of social structures. What emerges here is a new paradigm, departing from consciousness reified by fields, social classes, or established order. The sociologist does not *grant* but helps actors *realize* their agency. Part of the study of interaction is examining how people play with broader understandings, modifying them as they negotiate in the social world. It is this broader wellspring which people draw from in their everyday life. We must recognize people's creative use of these resources, as they do not always use them in their prescribed manner. Thus, this approach not only helps illustrate the delicate balance between an emphasis on respondents' specific contexts but also incorporates the broader cultural one in which people are embedded.

This brings us to perhaps French pragmatism's strongest contribution to the evolution of the broader pragmatic framework: the regularity of conflict. When actors are not bound by a singular GO, indeed are even cognizant of these different fashions of consciousness, it is no longer dysfunctional if their view differs from others. Each GO (or polity) offers a potential window into the mind of others, other modalities of thought – fashions of consciousness. Only by being flexible in their attempts to understand themselves and others can people work forward when conflict arises.

This paradigm actually goes further than the axiom that conflict and justification are not anomalies that need to be alleviated: they are in actuality the norm. Within the broader polity model proposed by Boltanski and Thévenot, there always exists a multitude of understandings, fashions of consciousness, and GOs in whom individuals are in constant dialogue with. As each polity is essentially a representation of one particular form of consciousness, with its own particular logic of justification, conflict is not seen as a break

with a GO or broader society that needs repair. Instead, we experience conflict every day, and only by regularly engaging with debate and finding areas of agreement, however temporary, is society maintained. This contrasts with a Meadian understanding, where agreement via the GO is the norm: here, GOs, and the broader social order, only exist through concerted efforts of individuals who constantly strive to reduce the inevitable waxing of conflict in our everyday lives.

At first glance, this perspective seems similar to more contemporary American pragmatists such as Richard Rorty. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, he argued that a liberal utopia would be one where people could freely engage with one another, arguing about right and wrong based on the specific contingencies of contemporary contexts, all in an effort to avoid cruelty. Like the French pragmatists, then, he illustrates the centrality of conflict and justification in social life, based on the incommensurability of self-development and solidarity, and the contingency of the contemporary language/beliefs/experiences in influencing how we argue, what we agree on, and how we define the communities we belong to. In his final chapter, he argued that we must focus more on constructing what we have in common, to expand our understanding of what “we” means as much as possible, in order to reduce the suffering, cruelty, and conflict associated with how we treat the Other. In a Meadian language, we must try to construct the GO as large as possible to understand one another and better unify our thoughts and actions, even if we recognize that there are deviations within this GO (Rorty, 1989: xiii–xvi, 44–69, 189–198). However, French pragmatists make no requirement for unity. They agree that conflict is inevitable, but note that this need not be a problem. We should instead focus on how people periodically piece together unity within a social system that is always in flux; always up for negotiation and argumentation/justification.

This willingness to accept disagreement is one of the reasons why Quéré and Terzi believe that the French approach is not pragmatic in the American sense of the word. In their view, American pragmatism highlights “situations that are not characterized by the clash of meanings and interpretations. On the contrary, situation are integrative and unifying. In fact, their dynamics are totalizing” (Quéré and Terzi, 2014: 99). Their focus on American pragmatists’ emphasis on action illustrates this point: if social situations were radically uncertain, action would be impossible as actors would never know what others will do (Quéré and Terzi, 2014: 110–111).

What we illustrate here is that it is precisely this emphasis on conflict, not unity, that helps French pragmatism move the broader pragmatic (and phenomenological) paradigm forward. The previous overemphasis on unity obscured the ways that conflict and justification illustrate the agency that American pragmatism champions. Only during conflict and disputes can we clearly see individuals’ attempts to intentionally perceive an others’ state of mind. American pragmatists and phenomenological sociologists developed a powerful paradigm to understand how people intentionally act in concert when they understand the world in similar ways; French pragmatists extend this paradigm by providing a framework to understand how they consciously overcome moments of disagreement. Without this emphasis on conflict, pragmatists were not only missing a significant portion of social life, but they have also neglected one of the best moments to highlight and illustrate people’s intentionality and agency in amending their understandings of the social world.

Conclusion

The central goal of this article was to facilitate further engagement between American and French pragmatic scholars. We did this by highlighting how French pragmatic sociology is embedded in an intellectual tradition that privileges the study of actors in indeterminate social situations and takes the reflexivity and capacities of people's common sense seriously. In this sense, it is part of the micro-sociological legacy of American pragmatism and phenomenology, which seek to identify the frames of common sense in order to comprehend how people make sense of their everyday life in rational and scientific ways.

French pragmatic sociology focuses on how states of mind (intentional peculiar fashions or GOs), underpinning basic frames, are instantiated in social life by a broader culture and political philosophies (Lamont and Thévenot, 2000) and are often in opposition to each other. Ultimately, this innovation in pragmatic theory highlights that there is neither a unified understanding of the social world, nor is conflict pathological; it is assumed to be the normal state of the world. It is possible to peacefully share a specific state of mind with other community members, but argumentative conflicts between individuals who operate in different polities/communities in a specific situation are also consubstantial to social life.

French pragmatism, thus, helps address the shortcomings of both American pragmatism and phenomenology. First, it creates a more realistic model for the relationship between interactions and institutions. Keeping institutions' reliance on interactions a foundation, French pragmatists better incorporate the inheritance of understandings from culture than a classical Meadian approach. What is considered as instituted can be re-instituted or changed by disputes/argumentations in the life-world. Second, actors are no longer assumed to live with is an agreed-upon collective understanding of the world in peace. Different perspectives, different GOs, are the norm. This school of thought offers a way to measure and observe how actors work to align their general understandings of others' perspectives through justification and debate. This normalization of conflict, dispute, and disagreement has important implications for the study of power. French pragmatism's acceptance of non-peaceful outcomes resonates with Athens' (2007) radical interactionism. In this paradigm, people have more power than others, both within and between collective understandings, and they are able to exercise this power against those with whom they disagree, effectively excluding them from an accepted concord with a GO and its associated community. The French inherited the legacy of American pragmatism and phenomenology and made them better able to realistically describe the social world.

French pragmatic sociology illustrates that social life is possible because we can recognize that the self and other are able to share the same representation of the world, the same "state of mind" akin to Mead's GO. But French pragmatic sociology pluralizes the GO. Human beings do not live in a peaceful social world where communication always allows them to find a common point of view. Our culture includes states of mind which are often in conflict. French pragmatic sociology makes Mead's democratic theory more realistic, less utopian. Democracy is conflict, opposition in itself. We do not have to dream about a better state: it is the better one – a space to argue and to oppose each other.

We do not need to develop the communicative system so completely that we fully understand and meld our thoughts with the Other. Conflict does not need to be resolved to allow the self to be reintegrated in the community: community is plural and rests on states of mind which can be shared, or not.

French pragmatic sociology allows us to understand a society in which there are different GOs, believing in different common goods, collective and cultural dispositions that can be oppositional. The intentional state of mind, the polity, or the GO that people mobilize to understand a situation won't necessarily find the best communicative way to convince the community who prioritizes a different common good. Each dispute can temporarily be closed, but the common goods that were so many categories to justify one position in it remain available for new conflicts and argumentations. In this way, ordinary people rationalize their world and their argumentations as the scientist rationalizes his own. The classical epistemological break held by sociologists from Durkheim (2008 [1912]) to Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 13–32) is closed, and post-positivist sociology finds a consistent alternative: the pragmatic sociological framework, starting with classical American approaches and, when integrated with phenomenological sociology, continued by Francophone scholars.

Note

1. Max Scheler is the first author who sought to explicitly integrate phenomenology and sociology, although Schütz is repeatedly, but mistakenly, credited for having done so (Wolff, 1978).

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