Chapter 1
Introduction: Movements and Morality

Anders Sevelsted and Jonas Toubøl

Abstract The introductory chapter argues why there is a need for a book on movements and morality and how this volume meets this need. It introduces the twofold purpose of the book: insights into the moral foundations of current civic struggles and political conflicts and developing theoretical, empirical, and methodological approaches to studying morality in movements. Then a review of the development of the field of social movement research reveals how morality is treated fragmentarily, which leads to a discussion of the terminological tempest of morality and an introduction of the three moral dimensions that structure the book: *selves in interaction*, *rationalization and justification*, and *culture and tradition*. The contributions to the volume are introduced according to these three dimensions, and a final section points to the methodological creativity and diversity that characterizes the volume, attesting to the fruitfulness of a research agenda centered on movements and morality.

Keywords Social movements · Morality

Around the globe, social movements are appealing to moral principles as they engage in contentious struggles related to three sets of global crises concerning the (1) ecological system and climate changes, (2) global and local economic injustices, and (3) democracy and human rights. Climate justice activists appeal to humanity's moral duty to save its own as well as the planet's future. At the same time, the struggle for fair distribution of resources between the Global South and Global

A. Sevelsted
Department of Management, Politics, and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Frederiksberg, Denmark

School of Social Work, Lund University, Lund, Sweden
e-mail: ase.mpp@cbs.dk

J. Toubøl (✉)
Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark
e-mail: jt@soc.ku.dk

North intensifies, faced with the unequal distribution of threats from climate changes and global pandemics like COVID-19. Moral dilemmas over property and distribution continue to drive contention and mobilization around the economic system regulation, targeting the morally corrupt and greedy financiers responsible for the 2008 crash of the financial markets and the politicians unwilling to implement necessary regulation. With increasing intensity, we witness clashes between pro- and anti-abortion activists in Argentina, Poland, the USA, and elsewhere, struggling over the definition of human life and women's rights to their bodies. Pro-democratic protesters in places like Myanmar, Belarus, Hong Kong, and Russia demand political rights based on the modern ideal of the moral integrity of the human individual. Similarly, the fundamental moral principle of the sacredness of human individuals informs pro-immigrant and refugee rights activists' struggle alongside refugees on migration routes to safe-havens. Here, nationalist and xenophobic anti-immigrant movements base their claims on strongly held moral convictions about society's dependence on the integrity of the nation. Recently, moral outrage over lost privileges based in racial and colonial hierarchies and white nationalism fueled the January 2021 Capitol Hill insurrection, directly attacking the world's oldest existing democracy.

Despite the diversity of issues, these movements all question society's moral and ethical foundations, whether it be the justice and fairness of our economic system, our democratic institutions and basic human rights, or our relation to and place in nature. Despite very different constituencies, their participants are all partly driven by moral and ethical concerns related to the future of our societies. In most cases, activists do not merely protest but envision and practice new moral principles in anticipation of what they see as necessary changes in our lifestyle and society's institutions in order to overcome the challenges posed by the threefold set of crises confronting humanity and the globe. This is true for current social movements as well as for movements of the past; students of social movements generally agree that social movements are both prisms of society's value conflicts, and, in their capacity as formulators of new moral visions, they also constitute central actors in the development of the society's moral order (McAdam, 1988; Alexander, 2006; Joas, 2013). Thus, in order to grasp the political struggles of our time and history, which have shaped who we are and who we will become, we must study the link between morality and social movements.

This book aims to do just that. It presents a collection of contributions that all investigate how morality and movements are related. The purpose is twofold. On the one hand, the individual contributions offer valuable and timely insights into the moral foundations of current civic struggles and political conflicts. Thus, it offers commentary and analyses of current events. On the other hand, it explores and develops theoretical, empirical, and methodological approaches to studying and specifying the phenomenon and concept of morality in movements. In that respect, it also constitutes an academic and scientific contribution setting out a new research agenda.

Finally, the contributions in the volume also exemplify the tension between facts and norms that continue to irritate the social sciences productively. All of social science, but especially students of social movements, must be acutely aware of the

challenge of double hermeneutics and of being in society while describing society as if from the outside. Scholars may work from the epistemological stance that values merely enter into research processes to guide researchers in their choice of topic or as a research subject (Weber, 1949a [1904], Weber, 1949b [1917]); they may believe that the purpose of social science is inherently emancipatory (Habermas, 1968); or, more radically, they may hold that all knowledge production is inescapably interested and value-laden (Foucault, 1998). Nonetheless, the tension between facts and values, description and judgment, remains inescapable and continues to provoke new answers (Gorski, 2013). This contribution aims not to explicate or provide answers to these epistemological questions but to take the fact/value tension as a precondition that is present in each chapter's theory, operationalization, and methods, in which the reader will encounter all of the aforementioned epistemological stances. Similarly, the tension is productively present across the different chapters as they deal with movements traditionally thought of in terms of "progressive" or "reactionary."

Morality in the Movement Literature

All movements and activists must mobilize moral outcry over injustices, and they must master the delicate act of fueling moral indignation while not falling into radicalization and marginalization on the one hand or becoming mainstream on the other, if they are to persist and optimize influence on the development of societies' moral order (Olesen, 2018; Della Porta, 2018; Giugni, 1998; Gamson, 1975). In doing this, they frame their claims as morally superior and justifiable toward their constituency and other political actors (Snow et al., 1986). At the same time, internally, meaning-making helps create, sustain, and negotiate collective identities, providing common moral ground that may motivate protest (Melucci, 1989; Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Lichterman & Dasgupta, 2020) as well as political altruism and solidarity activism on behalf of individuals who are perceived as victims according to the moral order of the group's culture (Tilly, 2001; Giugni & Passy, 2001; Passy, 2013). In light of its centrality in these processes, it is odd that the concept of morality rarely figures centrally in contemporary scholarship on movements. It is hardly ever treated systematically. This is not only odd from the perspective of its centrality to the processes summarized above and the initial list of morally invested social movements and struggles dominating contemporary politics on the streets as well as inside the houses of parliaments but also in light of where the field of social movement studies came from.

When the field of social movement studies emerged during the 1970s and 1980s, different tendencies dominated on each side of the Atlantic. On both sides, the view of social movements and extra-institutional protest and politics as something irrational was sharply rejected. However, in the US tradition, the question of values and morality was more or less abandoned to begin with, and, to the extent that it has since been dealt with, it has mainly been in its capacity for explaining mobilization processes in the form of framing (Gamson, 1975; Snow et al., 1986), narratives

(Polletta, 1998; Ganz, 2009), and cultural factors (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995; Flam & King, 2005). In Europe, the new social movement tradition generalized and reformulated the Marxist view of social movements as the central actor in societal conflict. Thus, the movement would both emerge as the result of conflicts and tensions in the society's moral order (Touraine, 1974; Habermas, 1975; Habermas, 1984a; Habermas, 1984b) and formulate the moral identities and principles of the new order in the making (Melucci, 1989). However, for various reasons not central to the argument in this chapter, the program of the new social movement tradition was largely abandoned by the following generations.

With a few notable exceptions that we shall treat in more detail in the second chapter of this volume, in the contemporary field of social movement studies, morality is treated fragmentarily. When theorized, it is often in an auxiliary form not ascribing it a clear role as a cause, outcome, or consequence of social movement activity. Thus, the field seems to have lost something important, which has recently been decried by observers with whom we agree (McAdam & Boudet, 2012; Walder, 2009; Tilly, 1998). This volume aims to explore and rediscover the centrality of morality to social movements and bring the concept back into the conversation.

Morality: A Terminological Tempest

To social scientists who crave stable conceptual paradigms, moral philosophical concepts can seem to create a terminological tempest. Terms like norms, values, morals, ethics, etc. are often used interchangeably or at least with fuzzy boundaries, even in the field of sociology of morality (Abend, 2008; Hitlin 2010; Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010). In this volume, we use morality as a hypernym or umbrella term for the plethora of concepts that denote *what we ought to do*. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* tells us that "the morality of people and their ethics amount to the same thing" (Blackburn, 2016). Etymologically, one could argue that the only difference between the two is that one is derived from Ancient Greek and the other from Latin. Among social scientists, there has been a tradition of reserving the concept of *morality* for institutionalized prescriptions for behavior (in law or norms), while *ethics* is reserved for everyday practices and subjective reflections on morality (Habermas 1984). *Norms* and *values* constitute a much-used distinction in the social sciences where norm refers to "a rule for behavior, or a definite pattern of behavior, departure from which renders a person liable to some kind of censure" (Blackburn, 2016), i.e., an external societal regulation of behavior. Recognizing something as valuable is "to be inclined to advance it as a consideration in influencing choice and guiding oneself and others" (Blackburn, 2016). Thus, values often refer to the subjective dimension of morality. *Legitimacy*, the beliefs on which the conviction that a political system should be obeyed rests (Weber, 1964), is another central dimension of morality in the social sciences. As we will see in Chap. 2, social movement theorists have used a number of concepts that denote some aspect of morality: *collective identity* (in-group self-perception), *scene styles* (patterned behaviors in

settings), *political altruism* (disinterested concern for the welfare of others), *frames* (interpretive orientations that organize experience and guide action), and *moral shocks* (an emotional process that encourages participation).

All of these concepts have varying and overlapping meanings. In this volume, each author will define their own concepts, but, as a point of departure, we develop three dimensions of morality intended to capture crucial aspects of morality. They also serve to structure the book (see Chap. 2): *selves in interaction* originates in Hume's conceptualization of morality as socially mediated experiences of sympathy. It concerns questions about how moral ideas motivate action, individual- or group-level interpretation, and meaning-making, how moral agents act creatively to change norms of society, or how individual and collective selves change their moral outlooks as part of a process of mobilization. *Rationalization and justification* stems from Kant's interpretation of moral duty as acting in accordance with a universal law. This dimension addresses the Enlightenment tradition of social research, and its critics, and covers issues of framing, dialogue and negotiation of principles, and justification and valuation practices in movements. Conversely, *culture and tradition* is derived from Hegel's notion that ethical life is dependent on recognition by a community. It focuses on how emotions, narratives, and everyday moral routines inform and underlie collective action. Movements may emerge from what is seen as a breach of culturally established norms and similarly work to change traditional ways of interpreting issues.

Conceptualizing Morality in Movements in Three Dimensions

The contributions in this book all demonstrate the continued relevance of morality to all aspects of social movements, the spanning internal negotiations over strategy and identity, the process of mobilization, as well as the historical impact of movements and their relation to moral battles of their time.

The book is divided into three parts according to the three dimensions of morality as well as an introductory part that expands on the themes laid out in this introduction. The second chapter of the introductory part "Paradigm Lost? Three Central Dimensions of Morality to the Study of Social Movements" by Sevelsted and Toubøl argues that, while the concept of morality is only treated in a fragmented way in the field of social movement studies, there is a rich heritage in moral philosophy, classical sociology, as well as classical movement research that may inspire present-day researchers. The authors undertake a review and critique of the field and conduct a genealogy in order to trace and tease out the three dimensions of morality introduced in the present chapter.

In the following chapter, three seminal scholars in the field of social movements, representing distinct approaches to movements and civic action—Jeffrey Alexander, Nina Eliasoph, and Doug McAdam—offer their reflections on the role of morality in the study of movements and civil society as well as its relevance to understanding current movements and protest events. They share the volume's diagnosis of the

state of social movement research as they regret the lack of focus on morality. Social movement researchers have been right to reject earlier interpretations of collective action as dysfunctional, deviant, and irrational behavior rooted in emotion. However, they have overcompensated and veered off in a structural and rationalist direction that has left questions of emotions, culture, and indeed morality as auxiliary. One main reason for this state of affairs, as pointed out by McAdam, is the fact that the field of movement studies has become increasingly specialized and thus isolated from the broader question of societal moral change. Where morality *is* treated in the study of movements, it is done with a focus on formal structures and mechanisms rather than content and processes. Moreover, morality tends to become reified, and the morality in question is often poorly defined.

In the *selves in interaction* part of the book, the heritage from Hume is felt in the way the authors conceptualize how morality enters into processes of interpretation and meaning-making, creative action, and processes of mobilization and how morality may emerge in and shape collective creative processes based on experiences of the other, of exhilaration or degradation—themes that clearly could inspire movement research agendas.

Advancing a novel relational understanding of values' relationship to action, Eva Fernández G. G. (Chap. 4) investigates how universalistic value orientations as well as normative and relational orientations of care fuel political solidarity with refugees, showing the positive combined effect of universalistic value orientations and generalized moral commitments favoring refugee solidarity activism. Jonas Toubøl and Peter Gundelach (Chap. 5) explore the moral development of the activist selves by analyzing how values are activated in contexts of activism, implying interaction with political institutions and resulting in the activists developing new attitudes of trust in political institutions and political views of immigration policies. Finally, revealing the workings of the activist mind, Gian-Andrea Monsch and Florence Passy (Chap. 6) investigate how cultural toolkits at the individuals' disposal enable them to perform political altruism and environmental action. Central to the process is the synchronization of minds through conversation, creating a shared moral understanding of a better way to live together.

The conclusion is clear: at the aggregate level, it is shown how commitment to universalist values and embeddedness in generalized norms had a causal effect for individuals' proclivity for engagement in the refugee and climate movements; morality is a driver of mobilizations and activism, but, through forms of interaction in distinct situational social movements contexts, they also shape their participants' moral perspectives, values, and moral mindsets.

In the next section, processes of *rationalization and justification* of morality are explored in three original contributions. The Enlightenment tradition is felt in the authors' use of concepts such as framing, principles, justification processes, and valuation practices. While the Enlightenment tradition emphasizes the role of rational dialogue in social movements, at the same time, it continues to struggle with its "internal opposition" of post-colonial and -structuralist scholars who continuously point to the dark side of the Enlightenment heritage. Where the first section focused on how interactional processes and social contexts, in ways that the actors are not

necessarily aware of, influence their moral mindsets, in this section focus shifts toward how social movement and civil society actors deliberately work on developing and justifying their political rationales. The Kantian heritage is operationalized by the contributors by testing the French pragmatist concept of justificatory regimes, focusing on prefigurative practices as central to movements' espoused or enacted political philosophies, ethical practices that balance deontology, and virtue ethics in counter publics that nag and haunt dominant moralities, as well as through the concept of moral elites that integrate a movement's beliefs and values.

Bringing into social movement studies the scholarship on justification by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, Troels Krarup (Chap. 7) aims to reinvigorate the focus on morality in social movement studies by assessing its analytical usefulness in relation to civic engagements in local urban greenspaces. Sophia Wathne (Chap. 8) offers an ambitious theoretical argument that advances the critical tradition by arguing that prefigurative social movements should not only be studied as objects but also be considered creative sites of formulating and practicing normative political theory. In her study cognate to Wathne's agenda, Gritt B. Nielsen (Chap. 9) through detailed ethnography shows how student activism works as a site for exploration and formulation of profound moral and ethical dilemmas, organized around how to conceive of and engage with others across differences. She argues that micro-level negotiations of moral dilemmas are intrinsic to democratic deliberation because they raise questions of how to balance inclusion and exclusion, as well as the promotion of universal moral positions and a sensitivity to particular and locally embedded experiences and values. Finally, Anders Sevelsted (Chap. 10) uses social network analyses to study how the moral elite of the historical Danish temperance movement played a central role in framing the values of, and beliefs related to, the definition of alcoholism, which in turn would diffuse through the movement and society.

The contributions make clear that while some forms of environmental activism do not seem to conform to theoretical predictions about justification regimes, across time and space, activists and movement elites alike do justify their endeavors by invoking moral principles. Foreshadowing Alexander's remarks in Chap. 3, these principles negotiate particularist and universalist principles, as student activists balance identity politics with deontological claims of universal equality and temperance leaders adapt scientific belief frames into value frames from the Enlightenment tradition or traditional and revivalist Christianity.

The third dimension of morality, *culture and tradition*, is then investigated in four contributions. Based on a philosophical lineage originating with Hegel, the authors show how emotions, narratives, and everyday moral routines may inform collective action through symbolic performances and breach of culturally established norms and inherited cultural schemas. In this section, the legacy from Hegel is conceptualized most explicitly as recognition and specifically misrecognition in relation to meta-values that provide a ground for movements' claims-making and evolution. Furthermore, morality in movements is conceptualized through the rebellious and disciplinary moral aspects of humor as well as moral panics and the politically contextual moral dimensions of emotions.

Specifically, Eva Svatoňová (Chap. 11) conducts a fascinating study of the use of humor in far-right movements' communication of their moral beliefs and evaluations, employing visual analysis of internet memes. Staying online, Jun Liu (Chap. 12) breaks new ground as he investigates the use of emotions in moral communication and political participation on Weibo in relation to environmental disasters in China. He shows how a deliberative appropriation and management of moral dimensions in a repressive regime have shaped emotional expressions into different roles than in democratically governed societies. Finally, Sara Kalm and Anna Meeuwisse (Chap. 13) make a highly original contribution by adapting Axel Honneth's theory of recognition to a theoretical framework, enabling us to study the moral dimension of countermovements and applying it to the case of the antifeminist movements through the last century.

The contributions show how reactionary countermovements invoke the meta-values of love, equality, and achievement in order to argue their case. Movements, however, are not characterized simply by rational deliberation. As is shown in the volume, emotions, humor, and visual aesthetics embedded in certain inherited narratives are similarly central to mobilizing and claims-making. Pointing out folk devils and portraying them, as well as societal elites, humorously is a long-standing tradition in repressive societies and continues to be applied by the so-called anti-gender movements and other right-wing movements. In authoritarian contexts, moral content in social media is shown to be particularly effective in generating emotional expressions online among activists.

In the final concluding chapter, a research agenda is sketched by pointing to six lacunae in social movement literature that the present volume uncovers: a bias in focus on left-wing groups, the causal effects of morality, the relationship between social science and moral philosophy, morality and time, global diffusion of moral claims, and universalism and particularism.

Methods and Methodologies in the Study of Morality in Movements

The contributors to this volume each demonstrate a high degree of creativity in their conceptualizations, methodological approaches, and analyses of their empirical phenomena. Studying a very diverse set of phenomena and problems with an equally diverse set of theories from very different traditions, the volume is an invitation for researchers across disciplines in social science and the humanities to join the effort of investigating morality in movements.

Methodologically, the contributions show that the research agenda on movements and morality is operationalizable in innovative research designs. Interestingly, the first interactionist section of the book is the section that applies quantitative research methods the most in the contributions by Eva Fernández G.G., Jonas Toubøl and Peter Gundelach, and Florence Passy and Gian-Andrea Monsch (Chaps.

4–6). Here, the creative designs allow for tests of not only individuals and groups' value dispositions but also their embeddedness in contexts of group norms, movement practices, and movement internal processes of meaning-making. The section on rationalization and justification (Chaps. 7–10) offers innovative solutions to methodological problems such as how we can operationalize survey questions for theories that hold that justifications take place in local settings where actors negotiate and weigh costs against principles. Many of the contributions apply a mixed-methods design in their studies; for instance, Anders Sevelsted who describes the moral elites of movements by combining social network analysis and qualitative interpretive methods, since moral elites are characterized by both their position in a network, their organizational and educational credentials, and their prolificness in public discourse (Chap. 10). Similarly, Troels Krarup combines survey and interview data in interesting ways to show how seemingly disparate movement groups in fact form a common moral voicing community with shared understandings of their cause (Chap. 7). Qualitative methods such as fieldwork and textual analysis are also applied. Sara Kalm and Ana Meeuwisse's chapter on (mis)recognition and claims-making show how such methods can help uncover the societal meta-values to which countermovements appeal (Chap. 13). Gritt B. Nielsen uses fieldwork to show how student activists seek to balance deontological and virtue ethical claims in emerging counter publics (Chap. 9). Studying visual material and social media activity—in the case of Eva Svatoňová memes on social media (Chap. 11) and in the case of Jun Liu online emotional discourse (Chap. 12)—is another way for scholars to show how certain cultural types are used in movements with specific illocutionary implications.

Whether the paradigm of morality in movements will be revived, only time will tell, but the contributions in this book demonstrates how it can be researched using a wide selection of methods and theoretical approaches. It thus shows the relevance to all traditions and specializations in social movement studies of bringing morality back in.

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