Chapter 3
Bringing Morality Back in: Three Interviews

Jeffrey Alexander, Nina Eliasoph, Doug McAdam, Anders Sevelsted, and Jonas Toubøl

Abstract This chapter presents three interviews with three influential voices in the field of social movement and civil society studies, namely, those of Doug McAdam, Jeffrey Alexander, and Nina Eliasoph. They all share their perspectives on social movements' role in society's moral development, the role of morality internally in social movements, and the role of morality for social science as a practice. In addition, they each discuss the moral foundations and implications of three global contentious struggles: Doug McAdam discusses the background and implications of the 2021 riot at Capitol Hill as related to a global right-wing backlash protest cycle. Jeffrey Alexander discusses the cultural and moral significance of the #MeeToo movement and how it demonstrates the potentials of a global civil sphere. Finally, Nina Eliasoph discusses how the climate crisis presents itself as unimaginable in the sense that it will change everyone's way of life so profoundly that we cannot imagine what the future may be like and suggests that prefigurative communities is one way activists can approach such a political issue.

J. Alexander
Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA
e-mail: jeffrey.alexander@yale.edu

N. Eliasoph
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA
e-mail: eliasoph@usc.edu

D. McAdam
Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, USA
e-mail: mcadam@stanford.edu

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

In this chapter, we present three interviews with distinguished scholars related to the field of social movements. The three authors were keynote speakers at the Movements and Morality conference at Copenhagen Business School in May 2019 that kick-started the Movements and Morality project. They each represent a different position on the theme at hand. They each provide us with their unique perspectives of the relationship between movements and morality.

Doug McAdam is a Professor of Sociology at Stanford University and an established scholar within the field of social movements. A pioneer of the field, he possesses a unique position from which to comment on past and current developments in movement scholarship. Nina Eliasoph is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Southern California. Eliasoph has broken new ground in the study of activism and voluntarism through her ethnographic work and theoretical contributions to the field. This particular approach offers a novel and singular outlook on the central theme of this volume. Jeffrey C. Alexander is a Professor of Sociology at Yale University. He has established himself, through his seminal work on the civil sphere, as one of the fields' foremost proponents of an approach to social movements, and their role in a society rooted in cultural sociology where morality figures prominently.

The three interviews were conducted following similar semi-structured interview guides. This approach means that each scholar has been asked to present their take on the relationship between movements and society's morality, the role of morality in internal movement processes, current movements and morality, and how morality enters into the researcher's own academic and public practice. Clearly, the three scholars converge on some issues, while they have different stances on others. They all agree that morality—in some form or other—is at the center of movement activity.

Doug McAdam: Morality and Social Movement Studies

Movements in Society's Moral Development

DMcA: I see movement as politics by other means, primarily for groups whose interests are routinely organized outside channels of institutionalized politics. This form of politics tends to be practiced by those who do not have a lot of other options for pressing their interests against more privileged members and groups in society. This also implies that I tend to see movements and institutionalized forms of politics

as mutually constitutive; that is, they powerfully shape the origins and development of the other.

However, if we turn to the academic field of social movement studies, this view of movements as actors in a wider field of politics is not always emphasized. Over the last 40 years, the field has gotten progressively narrower and "movement-centric," as Hilary Boudet and I put it in our book (McAdam & Boudet, 2012). When born 50 years ago, the field was in dialogue with political science, political economy, and political sociology, but as the field has grown larger, it has become more insular and movement-focused. Today, movements and movement dynamics are at the center of the field, emphasizing mobilization and recruitment and so forth, but less emphasis on the relationship between movements and other actors and the broader dynamics of social change in society.

JT: Does this movement-centric tendency in the field also explain the lack of focus on movements' relation to morality?

DMcA: Yes, we have a sense that morality is central to social and cultural dynamics, but the field of social movement studies certainly does not directly engage with that concept. There are these broader social and cultural developments—moral development, if you will—at which various fields do look. They appear relevant to social movements, which, at least implicitly, claim to be highly moral enterprises. However, social movement scholarship tends to hold questions regarding morality at arm's length.

So the question you ask in this volume is, given that the field has marginalized the concept of morality, how do we reclaim it profitably? I think it is a tough question, but here is why I think it is an important question.

Is morality about nurture or nature? We tend to think of it as all about nurture. That is, individuals are socialized in families, religious institutions, movements, and so on to hold certain moral views. Obviously, the social production of morality is an important process worthy of study by social movement scholars. But I think we err if we think that nature is unrelated to morality. There are two issues here; the first is very simple. There is almost certainly a genetic basis for certain qualities related to morality. Think of empathy. I would argue that a capacity for empathy is central to moral development. Some of this can be learned through socialization, but individuals seem to be born with very different capacities for empathy.

Then there is a much more complicated second issue related to what I think of as *the existential function of the social*. Anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* have been around for roughly 200,000 years, but it was not until 50,000 years ago that culturally modern humans appeared in the archeological records. There must have been some significant genetic change around 50,000 years ago in the species that made us the kind of voracious, meaning-making, symbolizing species that we are.

Essentially up until 50,000 years ago, the function of the social, or the group, was survival, as it is for any primate. But at that point, the group takes on another function, the existential function. The species appears to develop not only the capacity but also the need to fashion meaningful answers to threatening existential questions: "Are we alone? Why do we die? What does my life mean?" The existential function of the social now competes with survival as central to the lifeways of humans. So,

for instance, for the first time in the archeological record, we start to see elaborate ritual burials that archeologists estimate would have taken hundreds of hours of work to prepare, hours that could have gone into crucially important survival activities such as hunting.

To me, this capacity and need for meaning-making is the evolutionary foundation for the social construction of morality and our capacity for moral development. The implication is that we as scholars need to honor the central existential meaning-making function of the social. With respect to social science, we do a really poor job at that.

Morality in Movements

DMcA: Within social movements, we see these efforts to produce and fashion shared moral perspectives and values that motivate movement activity, but we don't really study these processes very much, nor do we have many concepts or theories that help us get at the social construction of morality and its motivating force in movements.

I do think Melucci's concept of collective identity is important. If you have participated in a social movement, you tend to have had these experiences where you really feel you are a part of something much larger than you: that your life has meaning through your participation in this moral collective. In those moments, you sort of banish these troubling existential questions because you say, "of course I am not alone. I am part of this movement. Is it important? Of course, it is important. We are saving the world!"

So is focusing on the shared understandings that movements fashion, not just collective identity, but motives for acting in the world. Movements are powerful, meaning-making collectives, and that is a big part of what they offer their followers. So here you also encounter rational choice theories saying it is all about interest—I am not saying for a minute that interests don't matter, but those are socially constructed too. We have to understand that movements are not just about objective interest. They are about groups fashioning shared moral perspectives that valorize the lives of their members.

Framing has gotten a lot of play in the literature, but to me, framing implies strategizing. You are thinking about how you can best sell your program, which implies that you are already well integrated into a mature movement where people are debating what it is they are doing. Much more fundamental meaning-making processes must precede framing. The concept of framing really doesn't help us understand these logically prior processes of grievance construction and consciousness-raising.

Similarly, for the concept of "moral shock." That sounds like a powerful concept and one that is clearly related to morality. I think there is something to moral shocks—I have certainly experienced them—but when you really dig into Jasper's work, emotions become the principal driver of moral shocks, and conceptions of

morality are largely a byproduct of emotion. Emotion does play a role in movements, but the moral shock argument does not do justice to morality as a powerful source in its own right, apart from emotion.

JT: If I get you right, you suggest that we should step a little back from simple mechanisms like the moral shock or framing and take a look at the ongoing interaction and meaning-making processes among the rank and file members of the movements?

DMcA: Yes, I think we need much richer, nuanced, qualitative research on these kinds of meaning-making settings and dynamics. Ziad W. Munson's (2009) book *The Making of Pro-life Activists* I find it pretty powerful. The focus of that book is on the group-level processes by which individuals came to be pro-life activists. His data suggests that these processes change people's moral understandings of an issue. They come to share a collective view of the issue of abortion that powerfully motivates their actions, both as a group and as individuals. I think we need more of that within movement studies.

But I disagree with Munson, who says that peoples' predispositions—values, attitudes, moral commitments—are largely irrelevant to movement recruitment. To me, it is equally important that we understand how people are powerfully acted on in families, schools, religious institutions, neighborhoods, and what have you and come to movements with strong *prior* moral views and attitudes. I think the role of predispositions has been marginalized in the field. We think of people as being recruited through a structure of network ties. I do not dispute that networks matter— I have studied them myself—but we are wrong if we think that if you just know someone in a movement, you invariably join the movement, and then the movement acts upon you in the way Munson describes. We are much more complicated than that, and we come to movements with lots of prior socialization that shapes our disposition toward activism.

JT: I want to ask you about the other side of the equation: the output side. How do movements impact society's morality?

DMcA: Clearly, movements are both products of larger social/moral processes and a powerful generative force of new moral understandings, too. The best example in my life is animal rights. I had never thought about the issue of animal rights before, but over time the movement has profoundly reshaped my ethics in relation to all sorts of activities in society. That's what movements are capable of doing. All religions, as far as I can tell, started out as movements and are great examples of how movements powerfully have transformed millions of peoples' views of themselves and moral issues. But, again, movements are not the only force in that regard. For instance, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the USA, there were a series of religious revivals that swept across New England, New York, and into Ohio. The goal of these revivals was to bring the moral force of religion back to society. Out of these religious revivals came a whole host of movements, including the abolitionist movement, the temperance movement, women's suffrage movement, etc. So movements are both born out of larger processes of moral development, if you will, but on their own, they can have profound effects upstream changing people's moral views of issues.

Contemporary Struggles: The Riot at Capitol Hill

DMcA: I see the Capitol Hill insurrection[1] as a continuation of three critically important political trends that Karina Kloos and I wrote about in *Deeply Divided* (McAdam & Kloos, 2014). First, there was a profound shift in the racial geography of American politics that started back in the 1960s but is still very much with us today. Prior to the 1960s, white, racial conservatives were loyal to the Democratic Party, which was rooted in the southern USA. The Republicans were more liberal on matters of race and civil rights. This all shifted in the 1960s when two Democratic presidents, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, pushed for civil rights reforms that angered the white south and racial conservatives around the country. As a result, racial conservatives began to align with the Republican Party, which for more than 50 years has moved steadily to the right and embraced an ever more extreme politics of racial exclusion. Today, it is really race, immigration, and ethnicity that define the party. Trump is only the most recent and most extreme product of this view of the USA. He, like all his Republican predecessors going back to Richard Nixon, depicts the USA as made up of two Americas: there is one hardworking, deserving, and overwhelmingly white America, and then there is a large number of undeserving Americans—immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities, etc.—who are dependent on the federal government.

Second, there has been a growing power of the extreme movement wings of the two parties. That has been true at least since the 1970s, and the Republican Party is now hostage to its extreme movement wing, which is why Trump is in control of the party. The third trend is a steady erosion of democratic institutions and practices since the rise of the Tea Party in 2008–2009. All three trends are clearly reflected in the Capitol Hill riot.

That is my best understanding of where we are and how we got here. To this point, I've said nothing about morality per se. I have no doubt, though, that the Capitol Hill rioters see themselves as highly moral actors trying to "stop the steal" of the election. Their feeling of moral superiority is rooted in the aforementioned view of "two Americas." At the core of this narrative is a very strong moral claim that all these undeserving Americans out there are lazy and have chosen to depend on the government instead of getting a job. By contrast, the rioters are the deserving Americans, who pay their taxes, take care of their own, and came together on January 6 to save democracy. One of the important implications of the "existential function of the social" is that people are never more sure of who they are than when they are at war with some "other." During peak periods of conflict, the line between

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[1] On January 6, 2021, the US Congress was in a joint session to verify the election of President Joe Biden who would succeed President Donald Trump a few weeks later. The same day, supporters of President Trump had gathered in the mall to protest the election that they claimed had been unfair and fraudulent. The protest developed into a violent insurrection when supporters of President Trump attacked and invaded the Congress building, interrupting the session and forcing members of Congress and the vice president to evacuate. The event has been characterized as an unprecedented attack on democracy in the USA.

moral "us" and evil "them" is very clear in the minds of combatants. The stark us/them divide imbues one's life with a clear sense of identity, meaning, and purpose. Consider the insurrectionists: This may well be the high moment of their life. Here they are banding together with other patriots to "stop the steal of the election" from their president "who loves them very much." In existential terms, this is heady stuff.

A Global Right-Wing Backlash Protest Cycle?

JT: Can we talk of a global mobilization cycle of conservative backlash movements, or is it coincidental that we see all these movements?

DMcA: I think we can. Movements cluster in time and space. That has always been true historically, which underscores the importance of diffusion processes. I think these right-wing movements are drawing from each other and are inspired by earlier right-wing movements, so they are not independent from each other but reflect the importance of diffusion to movements.

That said, I think we are now looking at powerful historical trends that are going to be with us for a long time: global warming, record-breaking refugee and immigrant flows, and right-wing reactions to these flows and global warming in general. I think these are such global drivers that we ought to expect to see movements responding to these larger historical forces and not simply arising as a result of diffusion processes.

JT: Getting back to the existential function of the social. Do these historical trends create a feeling of insecurity which makes it easier for strong, authoritarian figures to get followers by presenting narratives that place people in a moral position justifying their privileges?

DMcA: Yes, that is how I see it. You would love to imagine a global response rooted in empathy, where people say, "we face this existential crisis and have to come together and recognize that global warming is starting to dislocate a large number of people, and we need to provide for them, and you can be part of this great moral crusade." But from a meaning and membership perspective, the right-wing response is probably more attractive to more people, especially when it is tied to gloom and doom: "Do you want us to embrace all these people? They are going to overwhelm our society. We can't do that. We are deserving; they are not." I believe this helps explain why we have seen an upsurge in right-wing movements in generally privileged countries. As things get worse and worse in terms of global warming and refugee flows, I fear that the lines of conflict will be drawn much more rigidly with disastrous consequences, not just for disadvantaged groups and refugees but for the planet as well.

The Social Scientist as an Observer of and Participant in Politics

DMcA: I am a true believer Weberian. I always bought his line that scholars should allow their values and moral commitments free reign to pick research topics. This was one of the things that drew me to the social sciences because it would allow me to act as a public intellectual and relate my findings and the findings of others to the things that I cared about. So I always felt that my values had free reign in picking and shaping my research agenda, as well as in the way I acted in the world as a public intellectual.

But in the process of carrying out research, as Weber said, you essentially have to interpose systematic methods between your values and your work. As social scientists, we claim to know things about social life. But there are lots of other practitioners out there who also make "truth claims" about social life: documentary filmmakers, journalists, novelists, etc. As social scientists, our only comparative advantage relative to these other groups is our embrace of systematic research methods. What differentiates us from these other practitioners, according to Weber, is this commitment to systematic methods.

Unfortunately, there is a lot of shoddy social science that doesn't conform to this ideal. Instead, the researcher interprets the findings the way she/he does and draws conclusions that conform to their political commitments and values. Work like this isn't just bad science. It serves to undermine the legitimacy of the social sciences more generally.

My commitment to systematic methods has a pragmatic basis as well. It's what makes research personally exciting and challenging. If all I had done over the last 40 years were expressed "truths" that I already knew, it would have been bored a long time ago. What is exciting about systematic research is that you can be proven wrong—and believe me, I have been proven wrong lots of times in my research. This means it is a much more exciting, open-ended enterprise than if I were to say, "here are my political values, now I am going to write a paper that expresses them, and I will work some data in there." That seems profoundly boring to me, as well as corrosive of the integrity of the social sciences.

I also believe that the reason we have way more research on progressive social movements than right-wing movements is because the moral commitments of the scholars who are drawn to the field are overwhelmingly aligned with progressive movements. So they are much more interested in studying progressive and left-wing movements. As a consequence, we know comparatively little about right-wing movement dynamics.

There is one other way in which I think the political commitments of movement scholars may distort our understanding of movements. I think that the tendency, I mentioned before, a narrow movement-centric approach in the field betrays a commitment to the idea that movements are a powerful, agentic force in society. If you just focus your attention on movements, you will generate data that confirms the cosmic importance of movements. It reminds me of Ptolemy's earth-centered view of the cosmos, which seriously exaggerated the significance of earth. Essentially,

we've done this with the study of social movements. By locating them at the analytic center of the field, we tend to exaggerate their significance and downplay the causal force of other actors. I think our research strategy should seek to embed movements in broader fields of actors so that we can actually get a sense of whether movements matter relative to other change agents and processes in the world.

Jeffrey C. Alexander: Morality and the Civil Sphere

Movements in Society

AS: In your book *The Civil Sphere*, you argue that social movements should be viewed as "translations of civil societies" that mediate between societal norms and particular identities and interests. Could you expand on how you see the role of movements in wider society?

JA: Before answering this question, I just want to say that there are social movements and cultural movements. Social movements are cultural, yes, but there are also movements of morality—of changing morality—that are not "social movements" as these are currently understood. I do not think we have really studied such "cultural movements." In my book, *The Civil Sphere* (Alexander, 2006), for example, I talk about a very significant change in attitudes toward Jews in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that decreased anti-semitism and allowed Jews out of the ghettoes they were confined in. Then there occurred a backlash, most vividly represented in Western Europe by the Dreyfus affair and, later, by the events leading up to the Holocaust. There then occurred a sharp reaction to the Holocaust. This cultural trauma process had the effect of sharply undermining of anti-semitism for about 80% of people in the Western world. That is one of the most dramatic changes in the history of Western civilization. The Western society had been deeply anti-semitic during its long history as a Christian formation. My point is that this centuries-long upheaval in social morality was not the effect of a social movement, Jewish or not; it was a cultural movement that needs to be studied in its own terms (though, of course, socially and historically contextualized). Sociologists should, in other words, not only (the cultural dimensions) of social movements but also of cultural movements, which at the moment are mainly left to cultural and intellectual historians.

But getting back to your question, a strong critical feeling animated my approach to social movements in *The Civil Sphere* and after all the way up to my work on the 2011 Egyptian uprising (Alexander, 2011) and the MeToo movement. I felt (and feel) that social scientists study social movements too much in terms of instrumental ideas, e.g., resource mobilization, insisting too narrowly that social movements simply aim to require resources and power. Having participated in movements myself as a younger person, I felt that this was simply not true, and I wanted to present a systematic alternative to that understanding.

To do that, I theorized the idea that there is a "society" that exists as a moral entity over and above the distributions of unequal power and other valued resources. There are many moral dimensions, or themes, in "society," but the theme that I wanted to identify was democratic morality, which I describe as embodied in a civil sphere: an inclusive, solidaristic, and very idealized—almost utopian—community membership which is regulated by the idea that we are all in this together, that we have obligations to other people, that we need to be treated as autonomous people that still have a sense of mutual obligation. Naïve and idealistic as that may seem, my argument is that this idealized conception of a moral society, a civil sphere, really does exist and that every person in society is aware or sensitive to it even though it is only very partially realized in institutional terms.

At the same time, I would like to argue—and this takes me very far away from Durkheim and Parsons, who were certainly inspirations—that the morality that motivates and regulates the civil sphere is binary. It is composed of both a sacred and a profane side. The values that define the civil sphere—autonomy, equality, incorporation, rationality, openness, and criticalness—are tightly connected to their opposites. Therefore, the construction of this ideal moral community has always been accompanied by exclusion. This is the irony of "actually existing" civil spheres, the tragic paradox of morality. The paradoxical combination of the promise of inclusion with the reality of exclusion is a structural contradiction of every civil sphere, and it is what generates social movements.

Social movements can be thought of as being triggered by specific and particular issues that occur in different spheres in society, coming from experiences of mistreatment, exclusion, and domination. Such experiences of pollution permeate the lifeworlds of all sorts of groups, whether based on class, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, or sex. What all these groups have in common is not only a similar sort of structural position but a shared form of cultural stigma—they have been defined as anti-civil by the core group of the established civil sphere.

Why is this important? Because I believe that social movements fight against domination by arguing that they are moral people and they are human beings. They should be able to perform their own morality in terms of the positive side of the civil/anti-civil binaries. Many of the struggles of social movements aim to *pollute*—as anti-civil—those who are oppressing, dominating, and excluding them. They, therefore, throw into a sharp light the malevolence and anti-democratic qualities of these practices, which of course, the core group does not think is fair to them, feeling that they themselves are "good people." The drama of social movements is this performative process of polluting those who oppress them and trying to gain legitimacy by ennobling the movement, its leaders, and its members as true heroes of the civil sphere, who deserve justice and deserve to be incorporated fully into the civil sphere.

Let us take a white-collar worker in a firm, a woman in a family, a student in a university, or a racial group that is dominated at a particular historical moment. A movement starts by thematizing and problematizing such domination in terms of the overarching promises of the civil sphere. Your challenge, then, is not just to fight against the boss—and this is where I really disagree with resource-centered local

theories. No, we have a civil sphere, compromised as it may be (and the premise of my work is that actually existing civil spheres are very compromised indeed). At any given historical moment, civil spheres are filled with cracks and exclusions, and these structures of strain and compromise are what dynamize social action.

The challenge, then, of workers or a dominated racial group is to reach above the people that oppress them and make their voices heard and their cause known in the civil sphere. They do that by *translation*. They translate this particular problem, let's say raising the minimum wage, by not just saying "I'm being paid too little" or "everybody deserves this" but by saying "American citizens shouldn't be treated this way. We have the same rights as you do." By projecting narratives and images, by creating social performances about injustice and salvation, a particular problem is translated into a general problem. I mean, white people are not subject to racism, so how did the civil rights movement create such intense feelings of solidarity with black people among Northern Whites? Feminism is not just a movement for the empowerment of women. It is a movement to get men to identify with the condition of gender domination. It does not work unless there is some identification. So, translation is very important.

When this process works, it allows there to be *civil repair*. I have used "civil repair" to describe the process that addresses the compromised narrowing of actually existing civil spheres. Civil repair is when the civil sphere is enlarged, and outgroups and excluded groups are incorporated, to one degree or another. I want to propose civil repair as a better way of looking at positive social change than, let's say, class struggle or "progress" or "emancipation" or even "empowerment." Repair points to the existence of a civil sphere, and also to the consciousness of people who are engaged, to the fact that they are concerned with society, not just with themselves.

So why is repair endemic and never-ending? Because the civil sphere can be perfected, but it can never be perfect. The idealized morality of a civil sphere—because it is relatively autonomous from social institutions—has the power to provoke dissatisfaction. That is why we keep seeing social movements that we never thought would come about. The disability movement or even contemporary feminism is absolutely fascinating from that perspective.

Movement Internal Moral Processes

AS: Let us turn to movement internal processes. In *The Civil Sphere*, you write about the "instrumentalization" of the cultural approach. You argue against the "classical model" of social movements but stress that we need to think more consequentially about the history and the institutions in which movements are embedded. Could you elaborate?

JA: The beauty and problems of a well-developed sociological discipline are the creation of new subfields that become specialized and carve out a chunk of social life and concentrate on developing a theory about it. That is usually very productive. It gives us tremendous knowledge about some segment of society. But there's also

a downside to this specialization. We lose touch with the macro-sociological under-standing of the broad society—or simply that we make assumptions about that soci-ety that are not brought into the work of that specialization.

In *The Civil Sphere*, I developed a critique of several social movement approaches. As I said earlier, I am very critical of instrumentalized or materialistic approaches—of any approach to social action that does not include the moral, the symbolic, and the solidaristic. I understand historically why these approaches developed as a cri-tique of functionalism and collective behavior theory, but it was a correction that overcorrected itself.

I see framing theory as something positive, a critical development out of pragma-tism and interactionism that provided an alternative to resource mobilization and even political opportunity theory. But it's not enough: We also need to bring in an understanding of the broader society within which framing occurs—the citizen-audience, the news media, the public opinion, and the legal and electoral orders. In other words, a movement is not a matter only of internal mobilization.

Current Issues: #MeToo

AS: In your work, you have recurrently dealt with issues related to reproductive and sexual rights. In *The Civil Sphere*, you analyze the historical development of wom-en's role in the public sphere as a process involving "civil repair," compromise, the tension between the particular spheres of home and motherhood, and the universal-ist spheres of public life. You take up similar issues in your recent book, *What Makes a Social Crisis?*, where you describe the MeToo movement as being trig-gered by a process of "societalization." Looking around the globe, the MeToo movement seems to have effectively "polluted" some behaviors related to sexual relations—at least for now and in some countries. How do you see the state of the symbolic struggle over gender and sexuality around the world at the moment?

JA: The global struggle related to gender issues raises the question: Is there a global civil sphere? In the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War and the bipolar world, people like Anthony Giddens, Mary Kaldor, and David Held were optimistic about the prospect of global civil society. In the decades since, what we've had to learn the hard way—again—is that an effective civil sphere only exists at the level of the nation-state, though it is partially realized at the regional, not global, level in the EU. Globally, there is no civil sphere because there is no enforceable global law, globe-spanning journalistic media, globe-spanning political parties, or elections.

That said, there does exist a global civil sphere in the moral sense, to some sig-nificant degree. There is the circulation of opinions, schemas, and ideas. News media watch each other and pick up on each other's stories. I am fascinated by the MeToo movement's reverberations throughout the globe. It starts in the USA against the moral backdrop of four decades of feminism. MeToo attacked the most intimate and covered-up domains of the anti-civil domination of men over women, respond-ing to what happened to women after feminist civil repair had allowed them to enter

the workplace. MeToo is about workplace sexual harassment, which was not an issue until feminism changed society enough to allow women to hold important jobs.

The explosive pollution against male sexual harassment represents *societaliza-tion* (Alexander, 2019a). What was so fascinating is that it emerged in the USA a year after the most misogynist president in modern American history had assumed office. The "boom" of MeToo resounded so powerfully in the civil sphere that it was not, for the most part, experienced or defined as a partisan issue. Conservatives couldn't say, "Sexual harassment, it's fine." MeToo roiled conservative groups, pro-gressive groups, black as well as white, Christian and Jewish groups, and gay and heterosexual relations. There was a backlash against MeToo, of course, which has defined itself in terms of legality. MeToo exerted a moral force, not a legal one, and it triggered cultural punishment and institutional exclusion without, for the most part, evidence that constituted proof in a court of law. This shows the dramaturgical and moral nature of the entire movement: Once again, women's voices were insist-ing on being heard.

After it exploded in the USA, MeToo did not fully "societalize" in any other national society. It had, rather, significant effects that were highly uneven and are continuing to unspool. In France, for instance, MeToo created not reform, at first, but a tremendous backlash that seemed organized by almost the whole French wom-en's movement. It's only in the last 2 years that younger French women have begun to embrace MeToo and to make their experience of male oppression finally heard. That MeToo has roiled gender relations, not only in Western but also in southern and eastern societies, demonstrates there is a global civil sphere in terms of cultural expectations and moral opinion. Social movements—because they are symbolic and moral—can produce narratives of injustice that enter national societies outside those in which they first emerged, often without an effective movement ever having actually been there. The women's movement in India exists, but it is far less power-ful than in Western Europe and North America, but MeToo is continuing to have a significant impact there.

Moral Philosophy and Social Science

AS: You mention at the beginning of *The Civil Sphere* that democracy is under-girded by certain binary structures, codes that divide the world into civil and uncivil motives, relations, and institutions. You similarly put an emphasis on justice as the guiding principle of your book. Would you say that social scientists, scholars that study social movements, are—or should be—guided by similar norms: justice, quality, inclusiveness, truthfulness, rationality, criticism, deliberation?

JA: Ever since my first, four-volume book in 1982–1983 (Alexander, 2014), I have been very critical of scientism and positivism, and I have continued to publish occasionally on this theme, for instance, arguing that humanities should be as much a source for our theory and methods as are the natural sciences (Alexander, 2019b).

I believe that there is a vast difference between the human and the natural sciences and that sociology is a moral science.

I wanted to make explicit in *The Civil Sphere* that my theorizing rested upon a moral foundation of radical universalism. I suggested, for example, that civil sphere theory (CST) is compatible with John Rawls' notions about the original position and veil of ignorance (Rawls, 1971). If we assume the original position, as Rawls suggests, I believe that we would "invent" the civil sphere, both the discourse of civil society and the institutions of communication and regulation. Yet, even while CST links with Rawls, it also connects with Michael Walzer's critique of Rawls (Walzer, 2010), which insists on historically specific and sphere-specific values about justice. Reading through *The Civil Sphere* and the many later investigations that have elaborated and revised CST, one will find long-running dialogues with various themes in moral philosophy (see Kiviso & Sciortino, n.d.).

That said, I want to stress that, in my view, there is a world of difference between empirically oriented theory and moral philosophy. While sociological theory rests upon a moral and political foundation—and we need to openly acknowledge this— we must also recognize how different the effort is to understand and explain the complexity of empirical processes. That is *our* contribution as sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists—the social sciences.

I want to defend sociological theory as an important enterprise that sits in between empiricism and moral philosophy. Moral philosophers are, of course, social forces in their own right. They are intellectuals who bring the force of the civil sphere in its ideal form to bear as a critique on what is going on in society. But they don't conceptually explain empirical social processes. My ambition with CST is to provide a general and systematic sociological theory of democracy and its challenges. Social movement theorizing, generally considered, is a wonderful example of such morally motivated but empirically oriented sociological theorizing. We cannot substitute normative for empirical argument. Social evil exists, whether we like it or not, and our obligation as sociologists is not only to criticize such evil but to empirically explain it. That is what our contribution can be.

Nina Eliasoph: The Morality of Scene Styles

Movements in Society

JT and AS: You have a long-standing interest in different types of organizing civic life. Especially, you have focused on the "patterned ways in which actors coordinate civic action in a setting" or the different scene styles that are involved when civically engaged actors address different stakeholders or audiences. While you prefer to show these ambiguities at the level of interaction, perhaps you could tell us how you see such civic action in wider society?

NE: There are a lot of good ways of thinking about collective morality, but one that sometimes gets left out is the way that people can collectively reproduce or transform it into everyday interaction. So in my work, I've listened for how people manage to address—or suppress—moral and political issues that could potentially arise in ordinary conversation.

So I do ethnography to hear how issues that I would consider "potentially political" enter and exit conversations. This means listening for a lot of silence and finding the reasons behind it. For example, a group of high schoolers' parents would meet every month to help the school, mainly by raising funds. In meetings, however, they never talked about "political" issues, like why there was no state funding to fix the roof of the school library that had caved in or why that library had pretty much nothing in it but old magazines from the 1970s. They noticed the lack of funding and the roof but only talked about them outside of meetings. Inside meetings, they would focus lavish, detailed attention on things like how to transport 100 cans of soda for a school-wide event or how to roast many hot dogs and sausages at a time for fundraisers. The volunteers did not want to talk about anything that they felt would undermine the group's "can-do spirit." So, to keep their group together, they had to avoid political issues that they themselves could easily talk about in other contexts outside of group meetings. The problem with avoiding talking about politics in civic groups is that it empties out one of the main reasons we are supposed to love them: They are supposed to connect personal issues with political, moral questions about the common good.

Disconnecting personal morality from the common good, in turn, creates a whole set of dilemmas because when groups disconnect them, the blame for problems ends up landing on individuals and individuals' morals. The youth volunteer groups I studied in *Making Volunteers* (Eliasoph, 2011) were trying to raise teens out of poverty in a racist society, through a homework club and by getting the teens to do volunteer projects. But the organizers couldn't bring themselves to talk about the immense class inequality and racism that caused the kids' problems in the first place. They figured that that would be discouraging—to say, "the chances that a person like you escapes poverty are really, really low." But kids heard the adult organizers talk about that when the adults were writing grants for funding as a "prevention program for at-risk youth." In a way, it was consoling to know that if you don't have a place to study and keep getting kicked out of apartments for lack of rent, and can't afford health care, and English is your second language, that it's not just all your fault that you're not doing well in school. The adult organizers mostly tried to encourage kids to just try harder rather than help them understand the roots of their problems.

This everyday, ongoing, constant interpretation of general moral concepts is a necessary complement to the kind of morality that Jeff Alexander talks about. It is in these everyday, under-the-radar interactions that the big codes of civil society get interpreted and made useable. In everyday use, the meanings of the big codes get made, reproduced, or rearranged, the same way that words take on meaning in constant, steady, everyday patterns of interaction.

So words can change meaning through constant patterns of use. An example of this patterned change in words' meanings comes from corporate speak. Words like "transformative," "visionary," "family," "community," "innovative," "flexibility," and "passion" mean, obviously, "we are trying to extract profit from you." You need approaches that focus on the codes when they are frozen solid and when they are liquid that flows in patterns in currents. You need both.

JT and AS: How do you see the role of movements in relation to moral development? Are movements causing change, or are they a product of change or simply a symptom of moral struggles and developments?

NE: Oh, goodness, I'm not sure I can even separate "moral" from "political" at all! In any complex, diverse society, we don't have the kind of totally shared, culturally and religiously rooted, long-lived morality that EP Thompson described in his wonderful article, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd" (Thompson, 1971). For us, it's much more do-it-yourself. That's why Jane Addams' idea of actively looking for situations that give a feeling of "perplexity" is so good. She worked with immigrants in Chicago at the beginning of the 1900s. She realized that her sense of morals (she was a person from an elite background) was totally different from theirs and that the most basic, ur-moral act was to immerse yourself in someone else's way of life so that you could understand their morals from within. This doesn't mean it's just "all relative." That is why you also need a concept of more long-standing "codes" that stabilize morality for an era.

The kinds of moral problems that are worst are the most invisible, structured into everyday life, and taken for granted. Yes, of course, any individual might do immoral things, but whether or not their immoral sentiments gain any power depends on the individual's whole entourage and the everyday structural conditions that make it hard to be moral. A play or sociological study that portrayed white slave owners would show how hard it was for them to resist the system of slavery; a play about Americans who destroy the planet and eat food that was grown on stolen lands would show how utterly normal and nearly inescapable it is. That would be the "structural" moment. The play or study would also show how the slave-owners or planet-destroyers made it all feel normal and inevitable in everyday interaction.

The Role of Morality Within Movements

JT and AS: If we turn to internal movement processes, what are the most interesting roles of morality? How it shapes collective identity, how it enters into scene styles, framing processes, or how it contributes to recruitment and participation?

NE: I don't much like the term "collective identity" because even within one social movement, people speak and act and even feel differently in different contexts. You talk like a "mom who cares only about her kids" in one context but a "leftist critic of social structure" in another context. This finely tuned capacity to switch styles isn't usually strategic—it's more like what Bourdieu called "second nature," having "a feel for the game." I wouldn't call it an "identity" if part of what

that means is a feel for how to switch ways of acting, sounding, being from one context to the next. I guess you could call it "identity" since all identities involve a lot of context-switching. But it would be misleading because when most people think of "identity," they think of something that stays sort of the same and is coherent, from one situation to the next (even if we've known that that's not the case, since maybe Freud).

Obviously, I like the concept of scene styles; I helped make it up (Eliasoph, 1998, 2011; Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014)! I like it because it helps you think about how people in any one social movement have to know exactly how to do that switching that I just described. You have to know, at the moment that you're giving low-income youth volunteers an award for their volunteer work, that you shouldn't call the teen volunteers "needy youth" even though they know they are needy and they joke about it among themselves all the time. The teens' adult leader and the teens themselves were furious to hear them being called "needy youth" at that moment. When you're giving them the award for being terrific volunteers, mentioning their neediness makes it sound like you're giving them charity and that they didn't work hard to deserve the award.

The way the concept of "framing" gets used, it treats action as much too strategic, as if activists know *which* "public" they aim to convince, as if they know *how* that public thinks, and as if that public even *has* coherent political ideas. Since the 1960s, when Philip Converse and others wrote about just how incoherent Americans' political ideas were, it should be obvious that no one knows. So, it's much more interesting to ask how activists arrive at one image of "the public" rather than another and how they create and "discover" new publics as they go. That was John Dewey's and Jane Addams' idea: publics are made, not born. Activism is about constructing publics that don't yet exist.

As to the role of morality in relation to recruitment and participation, I don't think you can tell what causes a large number of people to join a movement. I've been an activist since the 1970s, and it's been our main puzzle since we would walk neighborhoods wheat-pasting flyers to telephone poles and dropping off piles of leaflets at bookstores. What worked 5 years ago won't work today; what worked in a city or country that has strong unions, strong political parties, religions, ethnic affiliations, racial divisions, huge class or caste divisions, a strong welfare state, or any number of other internal differences won't work in some other country. As soon as you grasp causality in one moment, in one movement, in one city, enough to make it useful, the causes slip through your fingers in the next historical moment, in the next movement. Even if you could tell "what worked" in the past, the new "media environment" has made the work of publicizing a whole different activity from what it was a few years ago. There are too many moving parts.

From this answer and the answer to the previous question, I guess it's clear that I don't think that establishing causality, in general, for complex collective action like social movements, revolutions, economic development, and other complex concatenations is possible. Even if you could, how would you tell what even constitutes "participation?" If someone is working as a professional social worker to combat sexual violence, for example, are they an "activist?" It depends on how they and

their fellow social workers define their work. If you were in an Aztec Dance Club in high school and then became a Latino activist in college, you might redefine the dance club, retrospectively, as "Latino activism," even though, at the time, you just were doing it for fun. So, retroactively, was the club "activism" caused future activism? No, that is not right. It depends on activists' definitions of what counts as activism.

Current Moral Struggles and the Role of Movements

JT and AS: Your own work started out focusing on the way that explicit politics was avoided as a subject in local organizing. In *The Politics of Volunteering*, you point to the micro-foundations of political activism—how volunteering that is at first non-contentious can, in turn, lead to political activism. While the examples in this book are from the disability rights movement, the anti-domestic violence, and Occupy, could you extrapolate some of these findings to understand what is going on in climate activism such as Fridays for Future and Climate Justice?

NE: I have two thoughts about climate activism: One is that even though it could look as if climate change would bring politics into every aspect of everyday life, people have an amazing capacity to avoid talking about political issues that really trouble them. There's a terrifying study of Norwegian farmers, done in the 1990s by Kari Norgaard, who found that everything was obviously different for them. But they managed to save their psyches by not talking about it as "climate change" in everyday conversation. Instead, they just focused on logistics: when to plant what and how to rearrange holidays to account for the lack of snow (Norgaard, 2011).

The other is that climate change is so impossible to wrap your head around that no one can keep living with the knowledge that everything will be totally different in 10 years. But we keep living, anyway. To do anything today, a group has to share an imagined seemingly eternal future and take it for granted as a kind of unquestioned "temporal landscape" (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). This temporal landscape relates to shorter-term futures, ranging from the most immediate everyday interactions (about things like how to be polite, how to make requests, how to interrupt, and how much to talk) to narratives that make the interactions seem to be going somewhere.

With the climate crisis, the temporal landscape was pulled out from under our feet. It's similar to the potential total collapse of procedural democracy in the USA and some other seemingly stable democracies, and with the pandemic that keeps making it impossible to make plans for 2 weeks from now, and that only portends future pandemics. But the climate crisis is more unimaginable than anyone or another nation's collapse or even the destruction of whole civilizations or genocides of the past. With the climate crisis, it's not just that millions of people could die or that some ways of life could disappear. It's that everyone's current way of life will disappear. It's like the story of *Children of Men*, the novel by PD James that Alfonso Cuarón made into the film, in which no children will ever be born again (a similar

premise is the basis of a novel by Louise Erdrich, *The Last Home of the Future Living God*—it's a plot that's in the cultural air lately). On the surface of it, activism is about planning the future. As part of my current research, I am asking how activists work together toward any near-term or long-term future vision when we know that the future will be completely unlike anything we've ever experienced before?

One way of working toward an unknowable future is through "prefigurative communities," "being the change you want to see," living as if the better world is already here. But with climate change, what would that mean? Living the way the poorest of the world's poor live? Not requiring any inputs that are currently produced in unsustainable ways? Everyone would have to leave some cities altogether (if they don't have enough water to support their current population). Even if, in principle, many foods can be produced sustainably, they usually aren't. Establishing a prefigurative community could actually even end up hampering the goal of slowing down climate change. Vegetarianism is, in the USA, seen as snobby by most people. In India, it can map onto an ultra-right-wing, "Hinduist," anti-Muslim agenda. Bike paths and green spaces lead to gentrification in places like Mexico City, with huge class disparities. Conversely, in my current study, I'm seeing that seemingly non-prefigurative electoral politics campaigns like the Bernie Sanders campaign bring really diverse people together across vast social divisions.

In other words, morality is always situational. The situation includes "social structure (whatever we mean by it)." Making beautiful green spaces can be good in a city that doesn't have a big gentrification problem but bad in a city that does have one. This is why I still have nightmares about not having understood Kant.

The Role of Morality in Social Science

JT and AS: In a recent review[2] of sociological ethnographic works on the rural white Trump voters, you write, "Sociologists! We forgot to do half of our job! We forgot to offer a vision of a good society. Without that, the fierce competition looks like the only game in town. In this game, there will inevitably be losers." Could you expand on how you see the role of morality in guiding social scientists?

NE: Here, in the USA, a really far-off, crazy utopian vision would be good universal health care, parental leave (most Americans don't get any, paid or unpaid), free or affordable daycare (ours costs about $15,000 a year or more), free university education, good public schools, public transit, and vacation. In other words, what exists in Denmark, Finland, and a dozen other countries. This vision would be better than what we have, even though it's "remedial" (a "remedial class" in elementary school is one you have to take if you flunked the class the first time). We flunked. We are still flunking, though possibly a little closer to passing than we were before the pandemic.

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[2] https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/543/docs/Contexts_Scorn_Wars.pdf

Till a few months ago, a few months into the pandemic, most American sociologists weren't even focused on the remedial vision! We focused on that and climate change a little. But we were mainly focused on letting everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc., get ahead: an important goal, of course, but once we got there, then what? The question is not on the shared "map" of the future. Would it be better if the one-tenth of 1% of Americans who control more wealth than the bottom 90% were more racially diverse? Not much.

So, many Americans, including people of color, assume that getting ahead at other people's expense is the only way to have a decent life. This is a disaster for any moral, political vision! Nancy Fraser puts it well when she says that the choice shouldn't be between this neoliberal feminism (or neoliberal race politics) that is all about getting ahead in a fight to the death and right-wing populism. Right-wing populism at least addresses the real poverty and hardness of life in a society with no social rights. We professors who only focus on making it possible for more African Americans to get ahead (while leaving other African Americans behind, according to "merit," such as health and cleverness? That's one part no one ever mentions!) are antagonizing people who suspect that they would not get ahead no matter what and who really, really resent people who get ahead enough to get vacations and health care (as Katherine Cramer shows in her book, *The Politics of Resentment*) (Cramer, 2016). While we're working on increasing racial equality, we should also be making it clear that it's not a trade-off: All Americans can get health care and a vacation.

In a strange way, it is working toward an attainable vision that has given us something to hope for. Climate change is a much more "demoralizing" problem because no one has a vision for how to live well in whatever world it will create. Demoralize originally meant "to take someone's morals away," but it makes sense that it now only means "to discourage." Morality and hope are twins.

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