3 Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research

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The Enlightenment produced the ethics of rationalism. Presuming the subject-object dualism, the Enlightenment tradition built an ethics of absolutes as one of its grandest achievements. Ethical principles were identified as syllogisms and prescriptivist in character. Given this context, getting straight on ethics in qualitative research is not an internal matter only. Putting ethics and politics together is the right move conceptually, but it engages a major agenda beyond adjustments in qualitative theory and methods. The overall issue is the Enlightenment mind and its progeny.

The Enlightenment's dichotomy between freedom and morality fostered a tradition of value-free social science and, out of this tradition, a means-ends utilitarianism. Unless this intellectual history is understood, contemporary ethics will define itself in modernist terms, accepting the demise of absolutes and finding relativism the only alternative.

Qualitative research has made an interpretive turn away from scientific modernity, and an ethics of being qualifies as a legitimate alternative to an Enlightenment ethics of rationalism. In the ethics of being, research is not a description of a functional social order but the disclosure of human communities as a normative ideal. Justice as the moral axis of human existence is grounded in the intrinsic worthiness of *Homo sapiens* and not first of all in legal mechanisms of conferral. Only when the Enlightenment's epistemology is contradicted will there be conceptual space for a moral-political order that is gender inclusive, pluralistic, and multicultural.

Ethics of Rationalism

The Enlightenment mind clustered around an extraordinary dichotomy. Intellectual historians usually summarize this split in terms of subject-object, fact-value, or material-spiritual dualisms. All three of these are legitimate interpretations of the cosmology inherited from Galileo Galilei, René Descartes, and Isaac Newton. None of them puts the Enlightenment into its sharpest focus, however. Its deepest root was a pervasive autonomy. The cult of human personality prevailed in all its freedom. Human beings were declared a law unto themselves, set loose from every faith that claimed their

allegiance. Proudly self-conscious of human autonomy, the 18th-century mind saw nature as an arena of limitless possibilities in which human sovereignty is master over the natural order. Release from nature spawned autonomous individuals, who considered themselves independent of any authority. The freedom motif was the deepest driving force, first released by the Renaissance and achieving maturity during the Enlightenment.

Obviously, one can reach autonomy by starting with the subject-object dualism. In constructing the Enlightenment worldview, the prestige of natural science played a key role in setting people free. Achievements in mathematics, physics, and astronomy allowed humans to dominate nature, which formerly had dominated them. Science provided unmistakable evidence that by applying reason to nature and human beings in fairly obvious ways, people could live progressively happier lives. Crime and insanity, for example, no longer needed repressive theological explanations but were deemed capable of mundane empirical solutions.

Likewise, one can get to the autonomous self by casting the question in terms of a radical discontinuity between hard facts and subjective values. The Enlightenment pushed values to the fringe through its disjunction between knowledge of what is and what ought to be. And Enlightenment materialism in all its forms isolated reason from faith, knowledge from belief. As Robert Hooke insisted three centuries ago, when he helped found London's Royal Society, "This Society will eschew any discussion of religion, rhetoric, morals, and politics." With factuality gaining a stranglehold on the Enlightenment mind, those regions of human interest that implied oughts, constraints, and imperatives ceased to appear. Certainly those who see the Enlightenment as separating facts and values have identified a cardinal difficulty. Likewise, the realm of the spirit can easily dissolve into mystery and intuition. If the spiritual world contains no binding force, it is surrendered to speculation by the divines, many of whom accepted the Enlightenment belief that their pursuit was ephemeral.

But the Enlightenment's autonomy doctrine created the greatest mischief. Individual self-determination stands as the centerpiece, bequeathing to us the universal problem of integrating human freedom with moral order. In struggling with the complexities and conundrums of this relationship, the Enlightenment, in effect, refused to sacrifice personal freedom. Even though the problem had a particular urgency in the 18th century, Enlightenment thinkers did not resolve it but categorically insisted on autonomy. Given the despotic political regimes and oppressive ecclesiastical systems of the period, such an uncompromising stance for freedom at this juncture is

understandable. The Enlightenment began and ended with the assumption that human liberty ought to be cut away from the moral order, never integrated meaningfully with it (cf. Taylor, 2007, chap. 10).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the most outspoken advocate of this radical freedom. He gave intellectual substance to free self-determination of the human personality as the highest good. Rousseau is a complicated figure. He refused to be co-opted by Descartes's rationalism, Newton's mechanistic cosmology, or John Locke's egoistic selves. He was not content merely to isolate and sacralize freedom either, at least not in his *Discourse on Inequality* or in the *Social Contract*, where he answered Thomas Hobbes.

Rousseau represented the romantic wing of the Enlightenment, revolting against its rationalism. He won a wide following well into the 19th century for advocating immanent and emergent values rather than transcendent and given ones. While admitting that humans were finite and limited, he nonetheless promoted a freedom of breathtaking scope—not just disengagement from God or the church but freedom from culture and from any authority. Autonomy became the core of the human being and the center of the universe. Rousseau's understanding of equality, social systems, axiology, and language was anchored in it. He recognized the consequences more astutely than those comfortable with a shrunken negative freedom. The only solution that he found tolerable was a noble human nature that enjoyed freedom beneficently and therefore, one could presume, lived compatibly in some vague sense with a moral order.

Subjective Experimentalism

Typically, debates over the character of the social sciences revolve around the theory and methodology of the natural sciences. However, the argument here is not how they resemble natural science but their inscription into the dominant Enlightenment worldview. In political theory, the liberal state as it developed in 17th- and 18th-century Europe left citizens free to lead their own lives without obeisance to the church or the feudal order. Psychology, sociology, and economics—known as the human or moral sciences in the 18th and 19th centuries—were conceived as "liberal arts" that opened minds and freed the imagination. As the social sciences and liberal state emerged and overlapped historically, Enlightenment thinkers in Europe advocated the "facts, skills, and techniques" of experimental reasoning to support the state and citizenry (Root, 1993, pp. 14–15).

Consistent with the presumed priority of individual liberty over the moral

order, the basic institutions of society were designed to ensure "neutrality between different conceptions of the good" (Root, 1993, p. 12). The state was prohibited "from requiring or even encouraging citizens to subscribe to one religious tradition, form of family life, or manner of personal or artistic expression over another" (Root, 1993, p. 12). Given the historical circumstances in which shared conceptions of the good were no longer broad and deeply entrenched, taking sides on moral issues and insisting on social ideals were considered counterproductive. Value neutrality appeared to be the logical alternative "for a society whose members practiced many religions, pursued many different occupations, and identified with many different customs and traditions" (Root, 1993, p. 11). The theory and practice of mainstream social science reflect liberal Enlightenment philosophy, as do education, science, and politics. Only a reintegration of autonomy and the moral order provides an alternative paradigm for the social sciences today.

Mill's Philosophy of Social Science

In John Stuart Mill, the supremacy of autonomous subjectivity is the foundational principle. On this principle, Mill established the foundations of inductive inquiry for social science and with Locke the rationale for the liberal state. Mill's subject-object dichotomy becomes for him a dualism of means and ends: "Neutrality is necessary in order to promote autonomy…. A person cannot be forced to be good, and the state should not dictate the kind of life a citizen should lead; it would be better for citizens to choose badly than for them to be forced by the state to choose well" (Root, 1993, pp. 12–13). Planning our lives according to our own ideas and purposes is sine qua non for autonomous beings in Mill's *On Liberty* (1859/1978): "The free development of individuality is one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress" (p. 50; see also Copleston, 1966, p. 303, note 32). This neutrality, based on the supremacy of individual autonomy, is also the axis of Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1861/1957) and of his *A System of Logic* (1843/1893). For Mill, "the principle of utility demands that the individual should enjoy full liberty, except the liberty to harm others" (Copleston, 1966, p. 54). In addition to bringing classical utilitarianism to its maximum development and establishing with Locke the liberal state, Mill delineated the logic of inductive inquiry as social scientific method. In terms of the principles of empiricism, he perfected the inductive techniques of Francis Bacon as a problem-solving strategy to replace Aristotelian deductive logic.

According to Mill, syllogisms contribute nothing new to human knowledge. If we conclude that because "all men are mortal," the Duke of Wellington is

mortal because he is a man, then the conclusion and the premise are equivalent and nothing new is learned (see Mill, 1843/1893, II.3.2, p. 140). The crucial issue is not reordering the conceptual world but discriminating genuine knowledge from superstition. In the pursuit of truth, generalizing and synthesizing are necessary to advance inductively from the known to the unknown. Mill seeks to establish this function of logic as inference from the known, rather than certifying the rules for formal consistency in reasoning (Mill, 1843/1893, III). Scientific certitude can be approximated when induction is followed rigorously, with propositions empirically derived and the material of all our knowledge provided by experience.1 For the physical sciences, Mill establishes four modes of experimental inquiry: agreement, disagreement, residues, and the principle of concomitant variations (Mill, 1843/1893, III.8, pp. 278–288). He considers them the only possible methods of proof for experimentation, as long as one presumes the realist position that nature is structured by uniformities.2

In Book 6 of *A System of Logic*, "On the Logic of the Moral Sciences," Mill (1843/1893) develops an inductive experimentalism as the scientific method for studying "the various phenomena which constitute social life" (VI.6.1, p. 606). Although he conceived of social science as explaining human behavior in terms of causal laws, he warned against the fatalism of a determinist predictability. "Social laws are hypothetical, and statistically-based generalizations that by their very nature admit of exceptions" (Copleston, 1966, p. 101; see also Mill, 1843/1893, VI.5.1, p. 596). Empirically confirmed instrumental knowledge about human behavior has greater predictive power when it deals with collective masses than when it concerns individual agents.

Mill's positivism is obvious in all phases of his work on experimental inquiry.3 He defined matter as the "permanent possibility of sensation" (Mill, 1865b, p. 198) as Auguste Comte did in his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830). In these terms, Mill believed that nothing else can be said about the metaphysical.4 Social research is amoral, speaking to questions of means only. Ends are outside its purview. Through explicit methods of induction and verification, Mill established a theory of knowledge in empirical terms. Truth is not something in itself but "depends on the past history and habits of our own minds" (Mill, 1843/1893, II, Vol. 6, p. 181). Methods for investigating society must be rigorously limited to the benefits of various courses of action. With David Hume and Comte, Mill insisted that metaphysical substances are not real; only the facts of sense phenomena exist. There are no essences or ultimate reality behind sensations; therefore, Mill (1865a, 1865b) and Comte (1848/1910) contended that social science should be limited to factual data as

the source of public policy and social practice. For both, this is the only kind of knowledge that yields practical benefits (Mill, 1865b, p. 242); as a matter of fact, society's beneficence is contingent on such scientific knowledge (p. 241).5

Like his consequentialist ethics, Mill's philosophy of social science is built on a dualism of means and ends. Citizens and politicians are responsible for articulating ends in a free society and science for providing the know-how to achieve them. Science is amoral, speaking to questions of means but with no wherewithal or authority to dictate ends. Methods in the social sciences must be disinterested regarding substance and content. Protocols for practicing liberal science "should be prescriptive, but not morally or politically prescriptive and should direct against bad science but not bad conduct" (Root, 1993, p. 129). Research cannot be judged right or wrong, only true or false. "Science is political only in its applications" (Root, 1993, p. 213). Given his democratic liberalism, Mill advocates neutrality "out of concern for the autonomy of the individuals or groups" social science seeks to serve. It should "treat them as thinking, willing, active beings who bear responsibility for their choices and are free to choose" their own conception of the good life by majority rule (Root, 1993, p. 19).

Value Neutrality in Max Weber

Max Weber's value-freedom/value-relevance distinction produces a social science that unconditionally separates empirical facts from politics. He appeals to the rationality of scientific evidence and interpretive logic for knowledge that is morally neutral. Autonomous subjectivity enables us to exclude value judgments from research, short of positivism but attractive to 21st-century social science. When 21st-century mainstream social scientists contend that ethics is not their business, they typically invoke Max Weber's essays written between 1904 and 1917. Given Weber's importance methodologically and theoretically for sociology and economics, his distinction between political judgments and scientific neutrality is given canonical status.

Weber distinguishes between value freedom and value relevance. He recognizes that in the discovery phase, "personal, cultural, moral, or political values cannot be eliminated; … what social scientists choose to investigate … they choose on the basis of the values" they expect their research to advance (Root, 1993, p. 33). But he insists that social science be value free in the presentation phase. Findings ought not to express any judgments of a moral or political character. Professors should hang up their values along with their

coats as they enter their lecture halls.

"An attitude of moral indifference," Weber (1904/1949) writes, "has no connection with scientific objectivity" (p. 60). His meaning is clear from the value-freedom/value-relevance distinction. For the social sciences to be purposeful and rational, they must serve the "values of relevance."

> The problems of the social sciences are selected by the value relevance of the phenomena treated…. The expression "relevance to values" refers simply to the philosophical interpretation of that specifically scientific "interest" which determines the selection of a given subject matter and problems of empirical analysis. (Weber, 1917/1949, pp. 21–22)
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> In the social sciences the stimulus to the posing of scientific problems is in actuality always given by practical "questions." Hence, the very recognition of the existence of a scientific problem coincides personally with the possession of specifically oriented motives and values….
>
> Without the investigator's evaluative ideas, there would be no principle of selection of subject matter and no meaningful knowledge of the concrete reality. Without the investigator's conviction regarding the significance of particular cultural facts, every attempt to analyze concrete reality is absolutely meaningless. (Weber, 1904/1949, pp. 61, 82)

Whereas the natural sciences, in Weber's (1904/1949, p. 72) view, seek general laws that govern all empirical phenomena, the social sciences study those realities that our values consider significant. While the natural world itself indicates what reality to investigate, the infinite possibilities of the social world are ordered in terms of "the cultural values with which we approach reality" (1904/1949, p. 78).6 However, even though value relevance directs the social sciences, as with the natural sciences, Weber considers the former value free. The subject matter in natural science makes value judgments unnecessary, and social scientists by a conscious decision can exclude judgments of "desirability or undesirability" from their publications and lectures (Weber, 1904/1949, p. 52). "What is really at issue is the intrinsically simple demand that the investigator and teacher should keep unconditionally separate the establishment of empirical facts … and his own political evaluations" (Weber, 1917/1949, p. 11).

Weber's opposition to value judgments in the social sciences was driven by

practical circumstances (Brunn, 2007). Academic freedom for the universities of Prussia was more likely if professors limited their professional work to scientific know-how. With university hiring controlled by political officials, only if the faculty refrained from policy commitments and criticism would officials relinquish their control.

> Few of the offices in government or industry in Germany were held by people who were well trained to solve questions of means. Weber thought that the best way to increase the power and economic prosperity of Germany was to train a new managerial class learned about means and silent about ends. The mission of the university, on Weber's view, should be to offer such training.7 (Root, 1993, p. 41; see also Weber, 1973, pp. 4–8)

Weber's practical argument for value freedom and his apparent limitation of it to the reporting phase have made his version of value neutrality attractive to 21st-century social science. He is not a positivist like Comte or a thoroughgoing empiricist in the tradition of Mill. He disavowed the positivist's overwrought disjunction between discovery and justification and developed no systematic epistemology comparable to Mill's. His nationalism was partisan compared to Mill's liberal political philosophy. Nevertheless, Weber's value neutrality reflects Enlightenment autonomy in a fundamentally similar fashion. In the process of maintaining his distinction between value relevance and value freedom, he separates facts from values and means from ends. He appeals to empirical evidence and logical reasoning rooted in human rationality. "The validity of a practical imperative as a norm," he writes, "and the truth-value of an empirical proposition are absolutely heterogeneous in character" (Weber, 1904/1949, p. 52). "A systematically correct scientific proof in the social sciences" may not be completely attainable, but that is most likely "due to faulty data," not because it is conceptually impossible (1904/1949, p. 58). For Weber, like Mill, empirical science deals with questions of means, and his warning against inculcating political and moral values presumes a means-ends dichotomy (see Weber, 1917/1949, pp. 18–19; 1904/1949, p. 52; cf. Lassman, 2004).

As Michael Root (1993) concludes, "John Stuart Mill's call for neutrality in the social sciences is based on his belief" that the language of science "takes cognizance of a phenomenon and endeavors to discover its laws." Max Weber likewise "takes it for granted that there can be a language of science—a collection of truths—that excludes all value-judgments, rules, or directions for

conduct" (p. 205). In both cases, scientific knowledge exists for its own sake as morally neutral. For both, neutrality is desirable "because questions of value are not rationally resolvable" and neutrality in the social sciences is presumed to contribute "to political and personal autonomy" (p. 229). In Weber's argument for value relevance in social science, he did not contradict the larger Enlightenment ideal of scientific neutrality between competing conceptions of the good.

Modernity's Subject-Object Dichotomy

As the progeny of the Enlightenment mind, modernity has dominated the Western worldview. In modernity's neoliberal form, it organizes the globe North and South, developed world and developing, with industrial nation-states preeminent.

Ethical rationalism has been the prevailing paradigm in Western communication ethics. This is the unilateral model carried forward by Rene Descartes (1596–1690), the architect of Enlightenment thought. Descartes insisted on the noncontingency of starting points, with their context considered irrelevant. His *Meditations II* (1641/1993) presumed clear and distinct ideas, objective and neutral. Imagine the conditions under which *Meditations II* was written. The Thirty Years War in Europe brought social chaos everywhere. The Spanish were ravaging the French provinces and even threatening Paris. But Descartes was in a room in Belgium on a respite, isolated literally from actual events. His behavior reflects his thinking. His *Discourse on Method* (1637/1960) elaborates this objectivist notion in more detail. Genuine knowledge is built up in linear fashion, with pure mathematics the least touched by circumstances. The equation two plus two equals four is lucid and testable, and all other forms of knowledge are ephemeral. The split between facts and values that characterizes instrumentalism was bequeathed to the Western mind as science gained a stranglehold on truth.

The deontological rationalism of Immanuel Kant is a notable form of such absolutism. As the 18th century heated up around Cartesian rationality, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was schooled in Descartes, mathematics, and Newtonian science. In his early years as lecturer in Königsberg, he taught logic, physics, and mathematics. In 1755, his first major book, *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven,* explained the structure of the universe exclusively in terms of Newtonian cosmology. What is called the Kant-Laplace theory of the origin of the universe is based on it. Newton's cosmology meant that absolutes were unquestioned.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1788/1997) and *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785/1998), Kant assimilated ethics into this Cartesian logic. Moral absolutes are identified in the rational way syllogisms are divided into valid and invalid. He demanded that moral laws be universally applicable and free from inner contradiction. Society was presumed to have a fundamental moral structure embedded in human nature as basic as atoms in physics, with the moral law the analog of the unchanging laws of gravity. The truth of all legitimate claims about moral obligations is settled by formally examining their logical structure. Moral understanding is prescriptivist and absolutist. In this context-free rationality, moral principles are derived from the essential structure of disembodied reason. In this mathematical version of universals, linear abstractions are laid out like the arcs of longitude and latitude over the globe. The moral being of this tradition is not a universal person as it supposed but a rational individual defined by a particular time and place. Nietzsche opposed moral absolutism of this secular kind, based as it is on the rationality inherent in human beings and on the structure of the universe itself.

The absolutist ethics of modernism is rooted in Kant's categorical imperatives and Cartesian essentialism, both of which are sustained by the constitutive rationality of Enlightenment subjectivism. Moral obligations are considered identical for all thinking subjects, every nation, all epochs, and every culture. Moral absolutism is a normative ethical theory that certain actions are absolutely right or wrong, regardless of the context or consequences or intentions behind them. There are principles that ought never to be violated. Lying, for instance, is immoral even if its purpose is a social good.

Crisis of Modernity

The Enlightenment produced modernity's formidable juggernaut of politics, economics, and culture, but modernity is now in turmoil, falling into historic disrepute. The heart and soul of modernity is Mill's autonomous self, essentially purposeless and detached from the social context. Multimillions now seek a more satisfying worldview. Modernity's self-possessed and self-sufficient subjects as their own ends leave moral issues strident and unresolved, with moral debate in politics reduced to a rhetorical persuasion of indignation and protest. Discussion is interminable. Modernist culture of individual rights, consumer culture, and empire politics are now considered oppressive around the globe and increasingly in its modernist homelands too. Muslims search for an alternative modern identity to counter the uprootedness and emptiness of Western modernity. The world influence of modernity's

icon nation, the United States, is in transparent decline and its Eurocentric originators static.

Modernity is an industrial and scientific world rather than agrarian, the home of free-market capitalism. Bureaucratic mentality is a characteristic feature—impersonal hierarchies and division of labor marked by regular method and machinic culture. An ethos enamored of tools and satisfied with means rather than ends. Modernity is defined by neutrality and reason. Modernity since Descartes's revolutionary doubt transformed the concept of certainty from God to subjective thought. Religious belief is antiquated. Modernity's crisis is best understood as the disenchantment of the world. Kierkegaard's irony, alienation, and meaninglessness are one precise version of it and Hannah Arendt's amorality of bureaucratic reason a second. Modernity—secularism, scientific experimentalism instead of divine revelation. Modernist culture: individual rights, utilitarian ethics, and hedonism. With no generally agreed-upon definitions of human dignity, the value of human life is debatable rather than stable. As with the British Empire before it, modernity in seeking to rule the globe is now falling short, losing both its inspiration and its honor.

Philosophical Relativism

In ethics, philosophical relativism has destroyed the intellectual credibility of the modernist paradigm. Moral principles are presumed to have no objective application independent of the societies in which they are constituted. To get our thinking straight on it for global media ethics, we need to work out of its intellectual history. David Hume in the 18th century and Friedrich Nietzsche in the 19th century established the conceptual categories that continue to dominate our thinking.8

The Enlightenment idea of a common morality known to all rational beings had its detractors. For example, David Hume, as a British empiricist, insisted that humans know only what they experience directly. In opposition to rationalist ethics, he argued that desire rather than cognition governed human behavior, and morality is therefore based on emotion rather than abstract principles. Moral rules are rooted in feelings of approval and disapproval. Such sentiments as praise and blame are motivating, but cold abstractions are not (Hume, 1751/1975). From his ethical writings in Book 3 of his *Treatise of Human Nature* ("Of Morals") (1739/2000) and Book 2 ("Of the Passions") of his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1748/1998), this typical quotation shows how Hume limits the role of reason in morality: "Morals excite passions and produce or prevent actions. Reason itself is utterly impotent to this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not

conclusions of our reason" (1739/2000, 3.1, 1.6). Hume limited reason's territory. Facts are needed in concrete situations and the social impact of our behavior needs to be calculated, but reason cannot judge whether something is virtuous or malevolent.

While Hume initiated in modern terms the longstanding philosophical struggle over ethical relativism, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) made it inescapable. Nietzsche advocated a total rejection of moral values. Since there is no answer beyond natural reality to the "why" of human existence, we face the demise of moral interpretation altogether. In his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche insisted that "only as aesthetic phenomena are life and the world justified" (1872/1967, pp. 5, 24). He announced a philosophy outside the traditional categories of good and evil, one that considers morality to be a world of deception, that is, a nomenclature of "semblance, delusion, error, interpretation" (1872/1967, pp. 22–23; see also Nietzsche, 1887/1967, 1886/1966). In a world where God has died and everything lacks meaning, morality is a fool's paradise (Taylor, 2007, chap. 11).

In contrast to the traditional belief that ethics was essential for social order, Nietzsche argued that moral values had become useless. His *Will to Power* presented a nihilism that means "the end of the moral interpretation of the world" (1880/1967, pp. 1–2). Nietzsche put ethics permanently on the defensive. In questioning God's existence and with it the validity of moral commands, Nietzsche turned to aesthetic values that needed no supernatural sanction. "One can speak of beauty without implying that anything ought to be beautiful or that anybody ought to create the beautiful" (Nietzsche, 1883–1885/1968, p. 130).

One hundred years later, in summarizing the postmodern argument against ethics, Zygmunt Bauman explicitly uses Nietzsche's perspective: Ethics in postmodern times has been replaced by aesthetics (1993, pp. 178–179). In more general terms, today's understanding of ethical relativism lives in the Nietzschean tradition. The right and valid are only known in local space and in native languages. Judgments of right and wrong are defined by the internal criteria of their adherents. Moral propositions are considered to have no validity outside their indigenous home. Defending an abstract good is no longer considered beneficent but seen as imperialism over the moral judgments of diverse communities. The concept of norms itself has eroded. The Enlightenment's metaphysical certitude has been replaced by philosophical relativism. In contrast to the traditional belief that ethics was essential for social order, Nietzsche announced a philosophy beyond good and evil where moral values had become useless. His *Will to Power* presented a

nihilism that means “the end of the moral interpretation of the world.”9

Antirealist Naturalism

The naturalism that has emerged in modernity is fundamentally at odds with the political ethics of being. The rationalism and individual accountability of modernism have produced an ethics of rules and prescriptions. The ethics of modernity is voluntaristic in that the moral life becomes a reality only by virtue of the decision and will of individual agents. Naturalism turns away from modernity’s systematic ethics to emotions, intuition, desires, and preferences. Ethics is considered a natural activity of humans, explained and justified by natural concepts, phenomena, and causes. For naturalism, why should we consider facts different from values? Ethics needs an empirical foundation rather than the speculation of theology and philosophy.

For more than a century, since G. E. Moore, it has been considered a fallacy to derive ought from is. Naturalism claims to eliminate that fallacy by denying the distinction. Some versions of naturalism are compatible with moral realism (cf. Nussbaum, 1993). But for the antirealist options, what might be thought of as extrinsic moral imperatives guiding human action are best understood in terms of vital human needs for safety, security, a sense of belonging, friendship, and reciprocity (cf. Christians & Ward, 2014). Humans desire, interpret situations, and formulate courses of action in given circumstances, all of which are involved in what we typically call moral reasoning.

In its scientific version, naturalism understands itself in terms of Werner Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle. Scientific knowledge is precise, but that precision is confined within a toleration of uncertainty. Heisenberg’s insight is that the electron as a particle yields only limited information; its speed and position are confined by Max Planck’s quantum, the basic element of matter. Pursuing knowledge means accepting uncertainty. Human knowledge is an unending adventure at the edge of uncertainty. Insisting on finality leads to arrogance and dogma based on ignorance. If the human condition is defined by limitedness, we can be agnostic about the moral order.

Antirealist naturalism is philosophical relativism in its extremity. In relativism, moral principles have no objective meaning independent of the cultures in which they are constituted, with Nietzsche’s version contradicting modernity. Naturalism of the antirealist sort lives on the Nietzschean tradition in questioning God’s existence and with it the validity of moral commands. But in addition, such naturalism denies the validity of modernity’s intellectual

apparatus. It speaks against both the metaphysical order and the scientific order. In a world weary of conflict and supremacy, removing the contentious language of morality is seen as healing to the nations (cf. Boylan, 2014).

Ethics of Being

This intellectual history makes it obvious that we need a totally different ethics for interpretive studies today instead of the ethics of individuated reason, which has been incorporated into the social sciences. Even though the history of ideas clarified the weaknesses and error of the ethics of reason, applied ethics in the 21st century often invokes its features. We tend to use uncritically components of the ethics of reason when dealing with complicated situations—claiming that virtue and consequences and humane prescriptions continue to be relevant. We are typically trapped in the relativism of modernity, concluding from the realist-antirealist debate that moral realism is antiquated (cf. Christians & Ward, 2014). Values clarification is routinely adopted because modernity has isolated values into the descriptive, nonnormative domain. While eschewing absolute, we usually reduce ethics to a proceduralist and formalist enterprise.

Utilitarianism is modernity's representative ethics. Utilitarian theory replaces metaphysical distinctions with the calculation of empirical quantities, reflecting the inductive processes Mill delineated in his *System of Logic.* Utilitarianism favors specific actions or policies based on evidence. It follows the procedural demand that if "the happiness of each agent counts for one … the right course of action should be what satisfies all, or the largest number possible" (Taylor, 1982, p. 131). Autonomous reason is the arbiter of moral disputes. Utilitarianism appealingly offers "the prospect of exact calculation of policy through rational choice theory" (Taylor, 1982, p. 143). "It portrays all moral issues as discrete problems amenable to largely technical solutions" (Euben, 1981, p. 117). However, in light of the criticism of modernity outlined above, this kind of exactness represents "a semblance of validity" by leaving out whatever cannot be calculated (Taylor, 1982, p. 143). "Ethical and political thinking in consequentialist terms legislate[s] intrinsic valuing out of existence" (Taylor, 1982, p. 144). The exteriority of ethics is seen to guarantee the value neutrality of experimental procedures.

In modernist social science, codes of ethics for professional and academic associations are the conventional format for moral principles. Institutional review boards (IRBs) embody the utilitarian agenda in terms of scope, assumptions, and procedural guidelines. Organized in scientistic terms, codes

of ethics and IRBs represent a version of Alfred North Whitehead's fallacy of misplaced concreteness. The moral domain becomes equivalent to the epistemological. The unspecified abstract is said to have existence in the rigorous concrete. Sets of methodological operations become normative, and this confusion of categories is both illogical and banal. In IRBs, what is considered value-neutral science is accountable to ethical standards through rational procedures controlled by value-neutral academic institutions in the service of an impartial government (see National Research Council, 2014). Ongoing refinements of regulatory processes ostensibly protect human subjects in this era of "dramatic alterations in the research landscape"; however, given the interlocking functions of social science, the academy, and the state that Mill first identified and promoted, IRBs are homogeneous closed systems that protect their institutional home rather than their research population.10

Underneath the pros and cons of administering a responsible social science, the structural deficiencies in its epistemology have become transparent (Mantzavinos, 2009). Defending neutral codifications is now rightly critiqued as intellectual imperialism over the moral judgments of diverse communities. We need another kind of ethical principle. Instead of a commitment to essentialist sanctums of discrete individuals as morality's home, we ought to construct a research ethics on totally different grounds. And the retheorizing of theory must be done henceforth without the luxury of a noncontingent foundation from which to begin. Following the legacy of existentialism since Heidegger, ethical principles are to be historically embedded rather than formulated as objectivist absolutes. The ethics of being situates normed phenomena within culture and history (cf. Doris & Stitch, 2005). The new theory of research ethics developed here turns the ethics of rationalism on its head. It contradicts the absolutist foundations on which the Western canon is based. Moral values are situated in human existence rather than anchored in a Newtonian cosmology.

This is a substantive ethics in which the central questions are simultaneously sociopolitical and moral in nature. If research ethics is to be done on a grander scale than heretofore, it must be grounded in a body of stimulating concepts by which to orient the discourse. Given the inadequacies of the individualist utilitarianism that has dominated applied ethics historically and its weaknesses as guidelines for research in complicated situations, it is imperative that we start over conceptually. Instead of an ethics of rationality rooted in the Enlightenment's understanding of humans as rational beings, there is an anti- or non-Enlightenment tradition called the ethics of being.

The ethics of being is ontological in contrast to modernity's morality constrained within epistemology. Ontology, the situated being, denies the subject-object dualism, although it is fundamentally anthrocentric. The ethics of being is committed to the ontological-linguistic definition of the human species. It draws its ideas from this tradition rather than from the categories and concepts of the Enlightenment mind. Human beings are the one living species constituted by language. The symbolic realm is intrinsic to the human species and opens up for it a dimension of reality not accessible to other species (Cassirer, 1953–1955, 1996). Humans are dialogic agents within a language community.

In Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1989) terms, language is the medium of our historical existence. Our lingual orientation is a primordial givenness that we cannot reduce to anything simpler or more immediate. Theory is embedded in life and is borne along by it. In this alternative, our theorizing seeks to disclose the fundamental conditions of our mode of existence. He calls this broad inquiry "ontological," or it could be called "the ethics of being." Rather than reducing human beings to thinking machines or a biological mass, language situates our beingness in a world already meaningful upon our entering it. Communicative bonds convey value judgments about social well-being. Therefore, morality must be seen in communal terms. The rational calculation and impartial reflection of the Enlightenment mind are replaced with an account of human interactions that teach us the good in everyday life.

Community as a Normative Ideal

The referent in the ethics of being are human communities as a normative ideal. By contrast, in modernity, the fact-value and individual-society dualisms are embedded in the subject-object dichotomy, and therefore functional social orders constitute the research domain.

In this counter-Enlightenment ontology, personhood is not fashioned in a vacuum. People are born into a sociocultural universe where values and meaning are either presumed or negotiated. Social systems precede their human occupants and endure after them. Therefore, morally appropriate action intends community. Contrary to a Lockean dualism between individuals and society, people know themselves primarily as beings-in-relation. Rather than merely acknowledging the social nature of the self while presuming a dualism of two orders, the ethics of being interlocks personal autonomy with communal well-being. Morally appropriate action intends community. Common moral values are intrinsic to a community's ongoing existence and identity. Moral agents need a context of social commitments

and communal values for assessing what is valuable. What is worth preserving as a good cannot be determined in isolation; it can only be ascertained within specific social situations where human identity is nurtured. The public sphere is conceived as a mosaic of particular communities, a pluralism of ethnic identities and worldviews intersecting to form a social bond. The substantive understandings of the good that drive the problems reflect the conceptions of the community rather than the expertise of researchers.11

At its roots, community is what Daniel Bell (2010) calls a "normative ideal." People's lives are bound up with the good of the community in which their identity is established. This excludes such contingent attachments as credit card memberships that do not define and condition one's well-being *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985, p. 335). Communities understood as "those attachments one values" is a global idea, applicable to people groups worldwide where communal forms of human life are seen as multiplying diversity.

The research ethics of being is rooted in "community, shared governance … and neighborliness." Given its cooperative mutuality, it serves "the community in which it is carried out, rather than the community of knowledge producers and policymakers" (Lincoln, 1995, pp. 280–287). It finds its genius in the maxim that "persons are arbitrators of their own presence in the world" (Denzin, 1989, p. 81; cf. Denzin, 2014). Researchers and subjects are understood to be "co-participants in a common moral project." Ethnographic inquiry is "characterized by shared ownership of the research project, community-based analyses, an emancipatory, dialectical, and transformative commitment" to social action (Denzin, 2009, p. 158; cf. Denzin, 1997, 2014). This collaborative research model "makes the researcher responsible not to a removed discipline (or institution), but to those he or she studies." It aligns the ethics of research "with a politics of resistance, hope and freedom" (Denzin, 2003, p. 258).

Community as a moral good is ontologically distinct from the atomism of the Enlightenment and provides the axis around which the ethics of being revolves. The various concepts, histories, and problematics of *communitas* are only dialects of the same language—pluralities that feed from and into one another, held together by a body of similar ideas contra utilitarian functionalism. *Communitas* as a philosophical concept yields an ethics and politics of research that is centered on restorative justice and stretches across the continents. In this formulation, research ethics is accountable to the widely shared common good that orients the civil society in which they

operate and by which they are given meaning. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “The moral arc of the universe is long and it bends toward justice.”

Restorative Justice

Justice means giving everyone their appropriate due. The justified as the right and proper is a substantive common good. The concept of justice-as-intrinsic-worthiness that anchors the ethics of being is a radical alternative to the right-order justice of modernity. Justice as right order has dominated modernity from Locke to Rawls’s *Theory of Justice* and his *The Law of Peoples* and Habermas’s *The Postnational Constellations* and also his *Moralbewusstsein und Handeln.* Retributive and distributive justice is the framework of modernists’ democratic liberalism. Justice as right order is typically procedural, justice considered done when members of a society receive from its institutions the goods to which they have a right (cf. Christians, 2015b).

For the ethics of being, justice is restorative. Receiving one’s due arises from our intrinsic worthiness; it is not a privilege for which one has gratitude. Just practices are not conferred and maintained as entities of a particular sort but are inherent. Our worth as humans is sufficient for the rights we are owed. The universal generalization that the torture of innocent humans is unjust arises from humanity’s intrinsic value, not because right order has been established in criminal law (Wolterstorff, 2008, p. 37). Intrinsic worth as the core of the common good is ontologically prior to mechanisms of conferral. And this idea of inherent worthiness of all human beings can best be called restorative justice. Human worthiness is recognized as nonnegotiable, and where it has been violated or lost, we are under moral obligation to restore it. The ethics of being contributes a substantive common good, centered on restorative justice. Naturalism, by contrast, has no concept of the common good, other than a thin proceduralism said to free humans from arbitrary externs. The empty freedom of sheer choice without the intervention of authority is considered humanity’s distinctiveness. Qualitative research ought to base its rationale and mission on this alternative understanding, that is, on restorative justice. Restorative justice reintegrates ethics and politics by making justice as inherent worth the defining norm.

The Western intellectual tradition has been preoccupied with the conception of justice as right order. Justice is understood to be present when a society’s members receive from their institutions the goods to which they have a right. For example, Plato’s version of justice, developed principally in the *Republic*, is a right-order account. Plato delineated a social order that is “founded and built up on the right lines, and is good in the complete sense of the word”

(Wolterstorff, 2008, p. 27). He considers it obvious that such a social order will exhibit justice. In a just society, there will be rights conferred on members of the social order by the legislation, the social practices, and the speech acts of human beings. For the right-order theorist, every right is conferred by institutions. This juristic understanding of rights became "part of the medieval *jus commune,* the common law of Europe that would in turn inform the polemical works of William of Ockham and the writings of the early modern philosophers and theologians—figures as diverse and seminal in their own right as John Locke and John Calvin" (qtd. in Wolterstorff, 2008, p. 52). Procedural justice requires due process and by definition concerns the fairness of decisions of administrative mechanics. Principles and procedures for justice are the outcome of rational choice. When rights and resources are distributed and appropriate actions are taken to rectify wrongs, justice is done.

Rawls's *Theory of Justice* has dominated the formal terms and categories of procedural justice in Western democracies since its publication in 1971. What constitutes a just outcome is the procedure itself. For the principles of justice to be fair, they must be developed in a situation that is itself fair. Rawls articulates principles of justice without asserting goals or making justice dependent on those goals. For Rawls's democratic liberalism, humans are presumed to be free, rational, and equal. Michael Sandel (1998) challenges the individualistic biases of Rawls's theory. He disputes Rawls's theory of justice as depending on a notion of the choosing self that is unsubstantiated. In Sandel's critique, Rawls's limited view of the self does not account for important aspects of community life and self-knowledge. Habermas's (1990) *Moralbewusstsein und kommunikatives Handeln* also develops a procedural model of public discourse, presenting with Rawls a right-order theory of justice.

In his essay *The Law of Peoples* (2001), Rawls argues for mutual respect and "common sympathies" for human rights, just war principles, and economic assistance to burdened nations. But these transnational conceptions are to be organized around territorial states (cf. Nussbaum, 2006, chap. 1). Habermas, like Rawls, insists that rights are meaningless apart from their constitutional venues. While recognizing that nationalism has played a positive role in struggles for liberation and democracy, Habermas concludes that a preoccupation with nationality has typically justified illiberal forms of nationalism that suppress dissident minority groups and other subnationalities. While advocating the idea that nations represent stable units of collective agency, he concedes that this stability is being discredited by the multicultural migrations set in motion by globalization. Despite these complexities, Habermas views international justice as an extension of domestic justice; in

his view, relationships of mutual dependency presume something like a basic structure that needs the rectification of distributive justice.

Justice as right order is the standard formulation in the social sciences, and it defines the character of professional codes of ethics and IRBs. However, a different definition is necessary for working out a credible global justice as the norm for qualitative research internationally. Theories of the right-order kind have generally centered on advanced, industrial societies. Working on justice in terms that include young and developing democracies, and authoritarian systems also, moves us away from the right-order formulation (cf. Rioba, 2012, chaps. 1–7). When the ethics of being is understood in radical terms, social science theory and methodology are freed from debates over the wrong issues and distractions along the margin. The ethics of being establishes an agenda for the ethics and politics of qualitative research around the fundamental issue of social justice.

Conclusion

As Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue, the issues in social science ultimately must be engaged at the worldview level. “Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (p. 105). The conventional view, with its extrinsic ethics, gives us a truncated and unsophisticated paradigm that needs to be ontologically transformed. This historical overview of theory and practice points to the need for an entirely new model of research ethics in which human action and conceptions of the good are interactive.

When rooted in a positivist or postpositivist worldview, explanations of social life are considered incompatible with the renderings offered by the participants themselves. In problematics, lingual form, and content, research production presumes greater mastery and clearer illumination than the nonexperts who are the targeted beneficiaries.12 Protecting and promoting individual autonomy has been the philosophical rationale for value neutrality since its origins in Mill. But the incoherence in that view of social science is now transparent. By limiting the active involvement of rational beings or judging their self-understanding to be false, empiricist models contradict the ideal of rational beings who “choose between competing conceptions of the good” and make choices “deserving of respect” (Root, 1993, p. 198). The verification standards of an instrumentalist system “take away what neutrality

aims to protect: a community of free and equal rational beings legislating their own principles of conduct" (Root, 1993, p. 198). The social ontology of the ethics of being escapes this contradiction by reintegrating human life with the moral order.

Freed from neutrality and a superficial instrumentalism, the ethics of being participates in the revolutionary social science advocated by Cannella and Lincoln (2009):

> Research conceptualizations, purposes, and practices would be grounded in critical ethical challenges to social (therefore science) systems, supports for egalitarian struggle, and revolutionary ethical awareness and activism from within the context of community. Research would be relational (often as related to community) and grounded within critique of systems, egalitarian struggle, and revolutionary ethics. (p. 68)

In this form, the positivist paradigm is turned upside down intellectually, and qualitative research advances social justice and is grounded in hope (Denzin & Giardina, 2009, pp. 41–42).

Notes

1. Although committed to what he called "the logic of the moral sciences" in delineating the canons or methods for induction, Mill shared with natural science a belief in the uniformity of nature and the presumption that all phenomena are subject to cause-and-effect relationships. His five principles of induction reflect a Newtonian cosmology.

2. Utilitarianism in John Stuart Mill was essentially an amalgamation of Jeremy Bentham's greatest happiness principle, David Hume's empirical philosophy and concept of utility as a moral good, and Comte's positivist tenets that things-in-themselves cannot be known and knowledge is restricted to sensations. In his influential *A System of Logic*, Mill (1843/1893) is typically characterized as combining the principles of French positivism (as developed by Comte) and British empiricism into a single system.

3. For an elaboration of the complexities in positivism—including reference to its Millian connections—see Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 19–28).

4. Mill's realism is most explicitly developed in his *Examination of Sir*

William Hamilton's Philosophy (1865b). Our belief in a common external world, in his view, is rooted in the fact that our sensations of physical reality "belong as much to other human or sentient beings as to ourselves" (p. 196; see also Copleston, 1966, p. 306, note 97).

5. Mill (1873/1969) specifically credits Comte for his use of the inverse deductive or historical method: "This was an idea entirely new to me when I found it in Comte; and but for him I might not soon (if ever) have arrived at it" (p. 126). Mill explicitly follows Comte in distinguishing social statics and social dynamics. He published two essays on Comte's influence in the *Westminster Review,* which were reprinted as *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (Mill, 1865a; see also Mill, 1873/1969, p. 165).

6. Émile Durkheim is more explicit and direct about causality in both the natural and the social worlds. While he argues for sociological over psychological causes of behavior and did not believe intention could cause action, he unequivocally sees the task of social science as discovering the causal links between social facts and personal behavior (see, e.g., Durkheim, 1966, pp. 44, 297–306).

7. As one example of the abuse Weber resisted, Root (1993, pp. 41–42) refers to the appointment of Ludwig Bernhard to a professorship of economics at the University of Berlin. Although he had no academic credentials, the Ministry of Education gave Bernhard this position without a faculty vote (see Weber, 1973, pp. 4–30). In Shils's (1949) terms, "A mass of particular, concrete concerns underlies [his 1917] essay—his recurrent effort to penetrate to the postulates of economic theory, his ethical passion for academic freedom, his fervent nationalist political convictions, and his own perpetual demand for intellectual integrity" (p. v).

8. For a review and analysis of the literature on philosophical relativism, see Christians (2013).

9. My summary of moral relativism's challenge to media ethics ought to be elaborated in the insightful terms of Cook's (1999) *Morality and Cultural Differences.*

10. See Christians (2011) for an elaboration of utilitarian ethics as commensurate with modernist social science, as well as utilitarianism's foundation for codes of ethics and the National Research Council's IRBs.

11. The intellectual history of the communitarian concept and its relevance for the social sciences are elaborated in Christians (2015a). The theory and

practice of feminist communitarianism, developed into a feminist communitarian research model, is outlined in Christians (2011).

12. Given the nature of positivist inquiry, Jennings and Callahan (1983) conclude that only a short list of ethical questions is considered, and these questions "tend to merge with the canons of professional scientific methodology…. Intellectual honesty, the suppression of personal bias, careful collection and accurate reporting of data, and candid admission of the limits of the scientific reliability of empirical studies—these were essentially the only questions that could arise. And, since these ethical responsibilities are not particularly controversial (at least in principle), it is not surprising that during this period [the 1960s] neither those concerned with ethics nor social scientists devoted much time to analyzing or discussing them" (p. 6).

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