Civic Sociology

A Case for Conscious Normativity: Or How Ethics Literacy Can Benefit Sociology Students and Their Teachers

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We argue that sociology students and their teachers could benefit from cultivating literacy in normative ethics, as well as from developing a thoughtful approach to ethical values and principles, an intellectual virtue that we label "conscious normativity." The benefits of ethics literacy and conscious normativity include a deeper appreciation for the centrality of normative evaluations in social life, a renewed connection with many of the intellectual and ethical traditions that underpin sociology and society, and an enhanced ability to navigate the discipline's inescapable plurality and to develop an informed position on the doctrine of value neutrality. We outline some ways in which students and their teachers could enhance their ethics literacy, focusing on the many points of contact between sociological practice and ethical reflection. The article concludes by considering the meaning of our argument for sociology's relationship to ethics, highlighting the cycles of critique that become accessible to consciously normative sociologists.

INTRODUCTION

> "…every moral philosophy has some particular sociology as its counterpart."
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> —Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*

In this article, we invite sociologists and their students to engage with normative ethics. The diverse traditions of normative ethics formulate principles guiding good and right actions, assess the moral consequences of decisions, and cultivate character in pursuit of virtue. In asking how one ought to act, normative ethics embraces considerations of judgment, principles of justice, virtues that allow us to flourish, and, ultimately, questions of the good life and the good society.

On some accounts, ethical considerations stand right at the core of sociology's aspirations and raison d'être (e.g., Addams [1902] 1964; Bellah [1983] 2006). But many social thinkers disagree, imagining instead that there is an unbridgeable gap between "what is" (the realm of sociology) and "what ought to be" (the realm of ethics). The question of whether moral knowledge overlaps with the sensible, empirical realm has proven to be both sociologically and philosophically interesting, partially because its answers have profound and divided implications for our disciplinary prac-

tices. Albert Hirschman ([1980] 2013) describes a "durable tension" in the history of social science, where the impulse to explain is both a part of and apart from the impulse to judge social life and to reason ethically about it.[1]

In order to constructively address this tension and to contribute to conversations about the new/old approaches to sociology that *Civic Sociology* seeks to foster, we argue for ethics literacy within the discipline. To sharpen the lens of sociological perception and to fill out the completeness of sociological training, the sociological imagination must maintain an active engagement with normative inquiry. Accordingly, we invite aspiring sociologists and their teachers to be open to learning about normative ethics and to cultivate "conscious normativity," a thoughtful approach to norms, principles, and values.

In general, we follow Vandenberghe (2017, 410) in using "norms, principles and values" as a shorthand for "normative propositions of all sorts." The basis or merit of these propositions is not settled by pithy definitions, but we are willing to commit to a sort of pluralism that takes ethics literacy as a diverse and ongoing practice. Ethics literacy, as we understand it, is a form of "developmental expertise" (Poole and Chick 2016, 2), a process of cultivation rather than a credential to be carried around.

Civic Sociology invites normative arguments in an effort to rekindle an old form of sociology that did not see a divide

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1 In his introductory notes to Hirschman's essay (Hirschman [1980] 2013, 331), Jeremy Adelman tells us that Hirschman "was critical of efforts to make it all about morality or all about science and objectivity," of "dividing the heart and the mind." He dreamed of overcoming this divide, an aspiration that we share. We thank Andreas Hess for having drawn our attention to Hirschman's work.

between describing the social world and thinking about it in normative terms. And yet, in the eyes of many colleagues, a call for conscious normativity seems to exceed the breadth of appropriate sociological practice. There is a logic to methodological and disciplinary boundaries that appeals to the way that most people understand expertise. Boundaries facilitate focus, and focus improves performance. Electricians learn to wire light switches without learning how to install plumbing, and they do a better job of their work by keeping the wires out of the water. Perhaps sociologists are also involved in a bounded professional practice.

To answer concerns about the divisions of intellectual labor in our discipline, the first part of the article revisits a wider conversation regarding the place of normative judgments in sociological inquiry. We follow Andrew Abbott in characterizing sociology as a pluralistic discipline, where normative proposals to redefine sociology coexist with defenses of axiological neutrality. Our claim is that ethics literacy and conscious normativity are generative regardless of the stance we take. In the second part of the article, we articulate some of the benefits of ethics literacy and conscious normativity. The third part of the article explores strategies for learning about ethics. The article concludes with a reflection on how ethics literacy could give rise to richer cycles of critique within the discipline.

In elaborating our argument, we take inspiration and build on the work of a diverse group of scholars. Collectively, these scholars lament the divide between philosophy and the social sciences with special attention given to the gap between ethics and social inquiry. The insight that they share is that ethics and social science research are two sides of the same coin. Part of this literature partakes of what could be termed "normative turns" in the social sciences: from moral anthropology (Fassin 2012, 2014; Laidlaw 2002) to the capabilities approach in economics (Nussbaum 2003, 2011; Sen 2001); from Marcel Mauss ([1950] 1990) and the anti-utilitarian movement in the social sciences (M.A.U.S.S.)[2] to emancipatory social science (Wright 2013); and from care researchers (Lynch, Lyons, and Cantillon 2007; Folbre 2001) to critical realism.[3] It also includes the work of sociologically minded philosophies such as the ethics of care (Tronto 1993; Held 2006), pragmatism (Dewey and Tufts [1932] 1981), virtue ethics (MacIntyre 1985), and liberation philosophy (Dussel 1998, 2016; see also Alcoff and Mendieta 2000; Mills 2018). At the same time, we develop this normative argument from our own ethical interests and commitments, which we briefly outline in an appendix. We use examples mostly from US and British sociology. Ethical concerns do and should vary across national sociological literatures, but accounting for the full breadth

of this variation is beyond the scope of this article.

1. ON THE NEED FOR ETHICS LITERACY

1.1 A PLURALISTIC DISCIPLINE

Sociology is pluralistic: the nature of the discipline is fundamentally contested. Unlike economics, where "heterodox" distinguishes the fringe, sociology lacks a shared foundational description of the nature of either social systems or individual agents. This characterization applies to social research more generally:

> The many sociologists who deny that sociology is a science have not persuaded their scientific colleagues that sociology is humanistic. Conversely, for every sociologist who thinks causal analysis important there is another who pursues narrative explanations. For every sociologist who believes in objective knowledge, another denies it. For every reflective interpretivist there is a rigorous positivist. (Abbott 2010, 6)

It is therefore not surprising to find that calls to enhance the discipline's engagement with normative reasoning coexist with complaints that the discipline is moving too far in the direction of normative engagement (e.g., Hammersley 2017). Far from considering this a problem, we see sociology's pluralism as a source of strength and a wellspring of creativity.[4] The tension between different priorities motivates "cycles of critique" rather than a gridlock of inaction, allowing different stances toward social research to illuminate each others' blind spots in a continuous dialogue (Abbott 2004, 60 and ff.).

Ethnographic explanations can be tested with experimental data, but these experimental approaches are subjected to their own critical processes through historical research, which can in turn be interrogated using computer simulations, which can in turn be challenged through ethnography. The cycles of critique that emerge from the confrontation and dialogue between these different approaches to sociology are one of the things that keep the discipline moving (Abbott 2004).

1.2 AN UNEVEN PLAYING FIELD

Despite the potential value of sociology's pluralism, the sociological playing field is not even. We are not alone in observing that the discipline remains lopsided in ways that do not favor normative engagement: the "discipline's positivist apparatus is far more developed than its normative one" (Abbott 2016, 290). This imbalance is particularly

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2 See, for example, *La Revue du M.A.U.S.S.* (Mouvement anti-utilitariste dans les sciences sociales): http://www.revuedumauss.com and http://www.journaldumauss.net. See also recent anthropological work influenced by Mauss (e.g., Graeber [2011] 2014).

3 For a critical realist take on ethics, see, for example, the *Journal of Critical Realism*'s vol. 18 (2019), which offers a special issue on normativity: https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/yjcr20/18/3?nav=tocList.

4 Sociology's epistemological diversity is further complicated by actual sociological practice. As a reviewer commented, one could examine the ways in which sociologists deal with normativity within the different contexts where they operate, and in the different roles they adopt as part of their practice (as researchers, authors, mentors, teachers, and colleagues). For example, while ethnographers are typically expected to engage in ethical reflexivity, more quantitative-oriented approaches still tend to silence normative questions. The empirical study of these practices lies beyond the scope of this article.

striking when we consider the history of sociological inquiry and observe, with Bellah and colleagues ([1985] 1996, 298), the lingering legacy of "an older conception of social science, one in which the boundary between social science and philosophy was still open." Whether we understand projects that engage with moral concerns as taking novel "normative turns"[5] or as "bringing back in" (Abbott 2010, 16) normative ideas, the place of ethics in sociology is currently under consideration.

For many classic social writers, such as Tocqueville, ethical concerns and social inquiry were part of a unified whole, a "synoptic view, at once philosophical, historical, and sociological" (Bellah et al. [1985] 1996, 298). At odds with this sociological holism was a new movement for the discipline's professionalization (Bellah et al. [1985] 1996; Burawoy 2005).[6] There is no single reason why normative concepts were set aside. Some were lost in the course of conscious efforts to create a science of society that looks as much like the natural sciences as possible. Others fell victim to political calculations and the related search for disciplinary legitimacy. Gorski describes the abandonment of moral principles by the founders of modern sociology as a "strategic trade-off" and suggests that the result was a "thin morality" (2017a, 100; see also Lynch, Lyons, and Cantillon 2007; and Warfield Rawls 2017).

As the ethical component of social inquiry thinned out, a new discourse emerged to celebrate the loss. Rather than viewing moral engagement as an asset and source of understanding, the orthodoxy of axiological neutrality viewed moral engagement as an encumbrance. A direct implication of this view was a remapping of ideas. The "fact-value distinction underwrites a clear division of labor between descriptive and normative analysis" (Gorski 2017b, 439). Many sociologists became convinced that the big questions in social life could be restricted to the former type of analysis.

Advocates of the normative turn challenge two aspects of axiological neutrality.[7] At a conceptual level, they question the dichotomies that the doctrine entails. Some philosophers and social thinkers have been particularly critical of the fact/value dichotomy (e.g., MacIntyre 1985; Putnam 2002; see also Warfield Rawls 2017) without which axiological neutrality is difficult to articulate. As Putnam writes, "the picture of our language in which nothing can be *both* a fact *and* value-laden is wholly inadequate... an enormous amount of our descriptive vocabulary is and has to be 'entangled'" (Putnam 2002, 61-62; italics in the original). Thick ethical concepts such as "cruel" or "brave," which "simultaneously describe and evaluate an object" (Abend 2011, 162; 2019), are a good illustration of this point.

On a practical level, normative advocates call for the development of a new or renewed sociology, a reformulation of (at least parts of) sociological practice along normative lines (e.g., Abbott 2016; Bellah [1983] 2006; Gorski 2017b; Flyvbjerg 2001; Warfield Rawls 2017; Sayer 2017; Vandenberghe 2017; Wright 2013). Although we sympathize with this set of arguments, we also recognize adherents of axiological neutrality who have good reason to sustain that approach (Betta and Swedberg 2017). In the end, we cannot condone abandoning either side of this debate, and we believe that sociology is enriched by the conscientious use of many different ideas and approaches, some that embrace moral vocabularies and others that abjure them.

1.3 ON THE NEED FOR ETHICS LITERACY

Even when their views vis-à-vis value neutrality stand in opposition, scholars from different persuasions seem to agree that there is room for improving sociologists' ethical literacy.

For example, in defending axiological neutrality, Betta and Swedberg (2017, 454) note that "students are not getting a good education in what value freedom means" and that we lack empirical studies about how researchers actually understand and go about using the doctrine of value freedom. This is a pity since, as Betta and Swedberg write, each generation needs to make sense of the doctrine of axiological neutrality and the questions behind it.[8] Likewise, Vandenberghe (2017, 407) declares: "While most would probably agree that sociology entails a normative project, grounded in a slightly nostalgic liberal-communitarian worldview, few would actually be willing to spell out that project and launch a philosophical inquiry into its normative foundations."[9]

Across the axiological neutrality spectrum, we believe that the great majority of sociologists could benefit from cultivating *ethics literacy*, as well as a thoughtful approach to norms, principles, and values that we term *conscious normativity*.[10] In our account, both ethics literacy and conscious normativity can reinforce one another in a virtuous cycle: conscious normativity may facilitate the cultivation of

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5 The term "normative turns" can be taken here as something that happens through time and history, but also as an epistemological move within the sociological map where cycles of critique take place. Interestingly, we can witness normative turns in neighboring disciplines, such as anthropology (Fassin 2012, 2014; Fluehr-Lobban 2012; Laidlaw 2002) and economics (e.g., Sen 2001; Sedlacek 2011).

6 The separation of social research from ethics mirrors the separation of modern ethical thinking from what MacIntyre (1985) calls "the classical tradition." It is also directly connected with what, citing Bhaskar (1998), Sayer terms a double "attempted expulsion": of "values from social scientific reason" and of "*reason from values*" (Sayer 2017, 470; italics in the original). Accordingly, depending on where we stand, it can be told as a story of liberation or as a story of alienation and loss (MacIntyre 1985).

7 We refer our readers here to a 2017 thematic issue from the *Canadian Review of Sociology / Revue canadienne de sociologie* with the title "Value Neutrality or Axiological Engagement."

8 Similarly, Gorski (2017a, 99) writes that "Apart from Marxism, post-functionalist sociology finds itself quite bereft of a moral vocabulary, and graduate training in the field often serves as kind of moral un-education, in which students are taught to transform their moral convictions into researchable problems (a good thing) before sloughing them off altogether (a bad thing)."

9 Admittedly, mapping the actual degree of sociologists' ethical literacy would require an empirical examination. For the sake of argument, we are happy to accept the diagnosis offered by this group of scholars, who speak from experience.

ethics literacy, while an enhanced ethics literacy may give conscious normativity substantive content. Taking the perspective of the normative turn, in the following section we argue that ethics literacy within sociology has multiple benefits, even for those who advocate some version of axiological neutrality.

2. BENEFITS OF ETHICS LITERACY AND CONSCIOUS NORMATIVITY

The merits of engagement with normativity include an enhanced ability to participate in important debates by establishing a fluency with normative concepts, an ability to unpack and reconsider normative concepts for improved understanding, an ability to connect with the past of sociological inquiry, and a sense of common purpose that joins sociology with normative projects in other social scientific and humanistic disciplines.

2.1 NORMATIVE FLUENCY

Seeking to denude our work of norms, principles, and values results in theory-practice contradictions,[11] cognitive dissonance,[12] and an inability to appreciate important aspects of sociology's heritage (Sayer 2011; Abbott 2016). The practice of avoiding moral discussions may also cloud our moral reflexivity, obscuring the social world that the discipline purports to study. Even if we take the pursuit of truth as the singular goal of sociological inquiry, we may still be disappointed by the results of a discipline that is stripped of moral understanding. Social facts are often difficult to understand without participating in the value system in which these facts are embedded. Indeed, as thick ethical concepts illustrate, describing the social world sometimes requires that we engage in normative evaluations (Abend 2011, 2019; Putnam 2002; Sayer 2011).

In cultivating ethics literacy and conscious normativity, sociologists may come to recognize that "facts are value-laden" as much as "values are fact-laden" (Gorski 2017b, 424). They may come to see evaluations not only as an *unavoidable* part of social research but also as *desirable*. To be sure, evaluations are fallible and can potentially distort inquiry, but fallibility is not a reason to forsake normative engagement. Instead, fallibility forces us to distinguish between the legitimate and illegitimate "use of value judgements in science" (Anderson 2004, 2019).

Absent the legitimate uses of value judgments, guidance and understanding of the social world may be lost. For example, feminist values have led to important insights that would have been hard to realize in their absence (Anderson 2004). In other words, conscious normativity and ethics literacy could allow sociologists to see that norms, principles, and values are within "the scope of reason" (Sayer 2011, 11). We can, and should, reason about our evaluations in order to distinguish the "valued" from the "valuable," as John Dewey taught (Putnam 2002, 103).[13] The risk of an unthinking moral discourse is even more serious when we realize that social science is already full of normative claims and value commitments (Gorski 2017b), many of which are not adequately interrogated. A sociology that is unable to engage intelligently with normative questions will pay the price of mindlessly traversing the many ethical dilemmas that are a fundamental feature of social interaction, group life, and language. Without attention to these features, we may also be less able to think responsibly about our work. We may be less astute in observing the mistreatment of human subjects and the misapplication of statistical methods, and we are likely to be much less able to discuss our own normative foundations and aspirations (Vandenberghe 2017, 407).

Ethics literacy can counteract these effects, helping students to formulate their own informed approach to the ethics of their work and to articulate and respond to "normative claims about, within, regarding, and motivating sociological work."[14]

2.2 UNPACKING, JUSTIFYING, AND RECONSTRUCTING ENCODED NORMATIVE CONCEPTS

Regardless of the level of normative engagement that sociologists decide to adopt, enhanced ethics literacy would help both aspiring and practicing sociologists. It would allow them to conceptualize their ethical intuitions ("inequality is wrong") in much the same way as mainstream sociology helps people to conceptualize and make sense of their sociological intuitions ("inequality has increased [and

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10 Drawing on the language of virtue ethics, we could think of conscious normativity and ethics literacy in terms of "virtues." "Virtue" could be understood here in the general sense of "an advantage or a good thing" and/or in the Aristotelian sense of an "excellence that makes anything an outstanding specimen of its kind, especially well fitted to its ends" (Sachs 2002, 212). In our sense, conscious normativity is an epistemic virtue: the virtue of being judicious about the way we approach ethical concerns within social research.

11 As Sayer (2011, 13) writes: "As social scientific spectators, we tend to talk about behaviour in terms of what explains it, usually by reference to existing circumstances and meanings, but as participants, we tend to justify what we do, and implicitly invite others to accept or reject our justification."

12 Evading engagement with ethical questions can leave sociologists trapped in a state of cognitive dissonance: aspiring to make a difference in the world (as sociologists often do), we also see ourselves as fact finders who should not judge the social world we describe. Needless to say, these impulses work at cross-purposes, driving sociologists to imagine and seek a better world while forbidding a conversation about how to decide whether or why a given outcome is preferable to another.

13 This runs counter to the common view that, as Putnam writes (2002, 145), "facts are objective and values are subjective and 'never the twain shall meet.'" Ethical literacy could aid in the task of questioning this type of dichotomy (see also Fuchs 2017).

14 We thank an anonymous reviewer for capturing with this phrase the breadth of this range of moral insights that apply to our field.

this is a source of concern]"). It would also help sociologists to uncover their own encoded normative concepts. The benefits of this process of normative decoding can be appreciated if we consider how Amartya Sen and others have sought to blend ethical and economic reasoning.[15] When the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded Sen its prize in economic sciences in 1998, it praised this aspect of his work: "By combining tools from economics and philosophy, he has restored an ethical dimension to the discussion of vital economic problems" ("The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 1998" n.d.). Apparently, that committee saw no essential contradiction between the advancement of economics as a science and the need to think carefully and explicitly about ethics. On the contrary, they found that Sen's normative turn helped to illuminate aspects of reality that were obscured by alternative approaches.

Much the same could be argued for sociology, where moral concepts are also encoded. Unpacking, justifying, and reconstructing these concepts could help sociologists to question and strengthen their own ethical stances. For instance, diversity, inclusivity, self-definition, and community solidarity are all valued in different ways as objects of study and also as positive values. Other things being equal, many sociologists believe that a more inclusive society is a better society, and that is part of the reason why they study inclusivity. An enhanced ethics literacy would help us to recognize, as a profession, the extent to which we share common encoded moral notions.

This process of decoding and reconsidering may lead to a new moral lexicon, but it need not lead to a lockstep moral code. If anything, we believe that being forthcoming with moral reasons combats dogmatism through criticism and debate.[16] Each of the valued concepts listed above has limits, a range over which it has positive value and a point at which its value atrophies as it comes to disrupt other valued elements of social life. Sociologists do not need to be-

come moral philosophers in order to recognize and manage the role that their work plays in a wider moral system.

For instance, choosing between rival definitions of a sociological concept often entails ethical and political judgment. When we adopt rival notions of "imperialism" or define extrajudicial violence against minorities differently in one country than in another, normativity plays an explanatory role. Moral and political language can help to characterize the shape of these choices and to choose carefully. It follows that even something as basic as defining an object of investigation requires the exercise of practical judgment or *phronesis* (Caelo 2019).[17]

2.3 CONNECTING WITH THE PAST (AND THE PRESENT)

An enhanced ethics literacy could also help students to connect with the discipline's normative roots and history of normative engagement, as well as with its normative branches. Many pioneers of social science did not see a need to cordon off their more normative concerns from their efforts to explain social life; they did not see a gap between "is" and "ought." Indeed, in "the early years of the Chicago School, no invidious distinctions were made between the applied, activist sociology by Jane Addams and the Hull House residents and the academic research of the first generation of University of Chicago sociologists" (Benson et al. 2017, 39).[18]

Likewise, the oeuvre of many of sociology's founding figures appears in a different light when read from a perspective informed by ethical reflection. Marx's *Das Kapital* reveals itself, at least in part, as a work of ethics (Dussel 1990, Chapter 10.4); Durkheim's scholarship as building on the tradition of virtue ethics (Gorski 2017a); and Max Weber's work as reflecting an ethical project deeply concerned with conviction, responsibility, and the ethics of office.[19] Ethics literacy could help sociologists, even those inclined to defend value neutrality (Betta and Swedberg 2017; Black 2013; Hammersley 2017), to make sense of this legacy and to ex-

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15 "Like sociology, economics emerged from a morally sensitive body of scholarship, from which it then took distance under the pretence of scientific neutrality. From Adam Smith until John Maynard Keynes economics was widely understood to be a moral science.... During the twentieth century, however, the centrality of neoclassical economics came to marginalize the ethical dimension of economics" (Van Staveren and Peil 2009, xvi).

16 This is not to say that we are not all dogmatic to some extent, as important philosophical and sociological literatures teach us, from Berger and Luckmann ([1966] 1967) to Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999). What ethics literacy can bring is an enhanced ability to be reflective about what we take for granted.

17 In the context of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Sachs (2002, 209) defines practical judgment as "the active condition by which someone discerned the right means to the right end in particular circumstances." For Aristotle, "ethical choices can never be deductions from any rules, principles, or general duties, but always require a weighing of particular circumstances and balancing of conflicting principles [...]" (Sachs 2002, 210). Interestingly, Sachs (2002, 209) remarks that "the intellectual virtue of practical judgment and the whole of virtue of character are mutually dependent and must develop together, since the right end is apparently only to someone of good character, while the formation of good character requires the repeated choice of the right action, which is impossible without practical judgment [...]." We thank Gabriel Abend for having drawn our attention to Caelo's work.

18 The work of figures such as Henry Mayhew and Jane Addams, Wilkinson (2014, 95) points out, "calls for a deeply ethical conception of sociology; and further, the promotion of social research both as a moral praxis and as a form of care giving."

19 As Kim (2017, 2.2) writes, "Weber's ethical project can be described as a search for a non-arbitrary form of freedom (his Kantian side) in what he perceived as an increasingly post-metaphysical world (his Nietzschean side). According to Paul Honigsheim, his pupil and distant cousin, Weber's ethic is that of 'tragedy' and 'nevertheless' [...]. This deep tension between the Kantian moral imperatives and a Nietzschean diagnosis of the modern cultural world is apparently what gives such a darkly tragic and agnostic shade to Weber's ethical worldview." Kim also notes that ethics and epistemology "deeply informed his [Weber's] thoughts to an extent still under-appreciated," though "his main preoccupation lay elsewhere."

plore the reasons why many of these moral ideals and aspirations were cast aside in the course of the discipline's professionalization.

For the same reason, a firmer grasp of sociology's normative roots and history of normative engagement could help sociologists to connect more deeply with current normative streams of research, such as feminism, critical theory, and sociology as public philosophy. And it is only through a more active engagement with these normative currents that sociologists can meaningfully contribute to the task of shaping an "ethics of and for modernity" (Nielsen and Habermas 1990, 95), an open-ended project that necessarily requires a dialogue between ethics and sociohistorical research. The dialogue is especially important not only because social conditions shape our morals (as the sociology of morality tells us), but also because new social circumstances demand new approaches to ethical life, as Addams observed in her quest for a social ethics apt for democratic life in the America of her time (Scott [1902] 1964).

Because we deploy normative concepts within a cultural context at a certain point in time, ethics literacy and the intellectual virtue we term "conscious normativity" require the development of a further intellectual virtue: "the virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one" (MacIntyre 1985, 223).[20] The development of this virtue is not a minor addition to sociologists' ability to orient themselves within their own field. "An adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present. Living traditions, just because they continue a not-yet-completed narrative, confront a future whose determinate and determinable character, so far as it possesses any, derives from the past" (MacIntyre 1985, 223). Absent the virtue of historical contextualism, the sociological project loses an important capacity for both action and reflection.

In expanding our sense of the discipline's past and present possibilities, ethics literacy and conscious normativity can strengthen our sense of professional identity, not least by allowing us to place our own personal stories within the traditions with which they engage (MacIntyre 1985; Bellah et al. [1985] 1996). On a good day, ethics literacy could give sociologists a language to enter into conversations with their students, colleagues, and predecessors about important matters such as "the meaning and value of our common life" (Bellah et al. [1985] 1996, 303). By the same token,

ethics literacy would help the dialogue between professional, critical, public—and now civic—forms of sociology (Burawoy 2005).[21]

2.4 ETHICS AS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY BRIDGE AND SOME RISKS

Fostering ethics literacy among sociology students would have benefits well beyond the discipline. For one thing, it would be good news for the fields of normative ethics and meta-ethics,[22] fields that are often out of touch with the social contexts where real ethical problems unfold (Sayer 2011; see also Vandenberghe 2017, 413; and MacIntyre 1985, 265-266). Sociologists would also have much to contribute to debates about the role of community in ethical life. For example, one could imagine a dialogue between community studies (Crow 2018) and philosophical understandings of ethical communities (Moore 1992). But if ethics literacy can help sociology to connect with philosophy, it can also help to build bridges with economics, anthropology, and other humanistic disciplines that find value in values. In short, some degree of ethics literacy can offer much to those interested in the practice of sociology.

There are also risks. For example, one could imagine someone who is morally articulate yet acts in ways that contradict basic ethical standards (the sociopath or clever Nazi problem). Or someone who, after taking an ethics course, becomes sanctimonious and overconfident in their (often his) own judgments; or someone who embraces ethics yet neglects politics (Fassin 2014, 433). Speaking in the language of liberation philosophy, we might also worry that sociologists will confound the morality of any given lifeworld/system with (critical) ethical practice (see Dussel 2016). Consider an extreme example: in a slaveholding society, someone may aspire to live an ethical life by excelling in the virtues of slaveholder groups, while at the same time failing to realize, let alone criticize and combat, the evils of slavery. It is worth noting in passing that the "racial science" of the slaveholding era is condemned on both moral and scientific grounds and that it is often hard to disentangle these judgments.

The risk of uncritical moral presentism is of particular relevance within the world system's core, where past and present abuses of power and atrocities committed against less powerful "Others" can too easily become invisible.[23] However, we believe that the benefits of ethics literacy out-

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20 Bellah and colleagues define "tradition" in the following way: "A tradition is a pattern of understandings and evaluations that a community has worked out over time. Tradition is an inherent dimension of all human action. There is no way of getting outside of tradition altogether, though we may criticize one tradition from the point of view of another. [...] Tradition is often an ongoing reasoned argument about the good of the community or institution whose identity it defines" (Bellah et al. [1985] 1996, 335-336).

21 As Burawoy (2005, 280) writes, "Professional and policy sociology should recognize their enlightened interest in flourishing critical and public sociologies. However disruptive in the short term, in the long term instrumental knowledge cannot thrive without challenges from reflexive knowledges, that is from the renewal and redirection of the values that underpin their research, values that are drawn from and recharged by the wider society."

22 Social research has much to contribute to illuminating our understanding of the social process through which we acquire ethical sensibilities, both at the level of psychogenesis and sociogenesis (Sayer 2011, 148 and ff.).

23 This point applies to any social group that has ever committed injustices against less powerful Others, regardless of their position within the world system.

weigh these risks by a considerable margin. In the following section, we outline some ways in which ethics literacy could be cultivated.

3. HOW SOCIOLOGY STUDENTS AND THEIR TEACHERS CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT ETHICS

If we grant that students can benefit from explicit engagement with normative claims and that ethics literacy and conscious normativity can help them to grow as scholars and perhaps even as individuals, we still face the difficult question of how best to enhance ethics literacy.

It is likely that embedding normative content in the sociological curriculum will require iterative development, collaboration, reflection, and dialogue. After all, learning and pedagogy are necessarily context dependent (Healey and Healey 2018). The advice that we provide in this section seeks to make use of the field of sociology and its classrooms as moral contexts. We make no attempt to recommend one philosophical canon for the discipline over another, except where the ties between fields have already been encoded in the foundations of the discipline.

It is interesting to note that some philosophers doubt the feasibility of classroom-taught ethics, which tends to be decontextualized and nondevelopmental. A dominant mode of this critique emerges from an Aristotelian standpoint. For Aristotle, acquiring virtue is a process of learning by doing, a process that takes many years (see Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*; MacIntyre 1985). This tradition would advise us not to ask too much from compartmentalized ethics courses. Indeed, it would advise us *against* relying on such courses if we are interested in addressing questions of character formation (Bellah [2004] 2006). In contrast, other traditions dovetail rather well with the types of deliberation that are already practiced within classrooms. Traditions that see principles as foundational to ethics and view rational deliberation as essential to the identification of such principles are readily adapted to seminars, lecture halls, and online discussions.

To reiterate a core aspect of our approach, ethics literacy is a process of continuous learning. We do not learn ethics and become ethical the way that someone learns to tie their shoes. We participate in ethics as a mode of inquiry and are (sometimes) transformed by those discussions. As such, we emphasize *learning* rather than *teaching*, while recognizing that there exist a variety of ways of learning: some formal and others informal, some individual and others collective.[24] The emphasis on learning is all the more important when we acknowledge the way that ethics "combines elements of knowledge with elements of identity" (Hafferty and Franks 1994, 867). Identities are learned and reformed, but it is not obvious that they can (or should) be taught.[25] For this same reason, we recognize the importance of what scholars such as Hafferty and Franks (1994) have called the "hidden curriculum"—the normative commitments, cultures, habits, and ways of being that are acquired as part of becoming a member of any given learning community, as opposed to what is explicitly codified in the "formal curriculum" (see O'Donnell 2014, 6).[26]

3.1 ETHICS IN ONE COURSE OR IN MOST COURSES?

Both formal and informal opportunities to engage in the normative life of our profession can play an important role in ethics literacy. Identity-based and virtue-based accounts of ethics are particularly dependent on the informal sphere of practice. Still, higher education relies heavily on the classroom to discipline its disciplines. There is a sense in which the sum of the discipline that each university respects can be transcribed from the way that the discipline is laid down in syllabi, readings, assignments, and tests.

There is a risk that ethics courses provide a diluted and sanitized form of ethics literacy that is less meaningful than informal professional interactions. And yet both of the authors of this article attest to our own transformative classroom experiences that helped to shape the way that we developed as students, scholars, and citizens.

Ethics courses tend to fall into two broad categories. Courses in *philosophical ethics* focus on historical or contemporary approaches to ethical theory. These courses generally introduce students to concepts like deontology or rights-based approaches to ethics; to consequentialism, especially in the form of utilitarianism; to theories of virtue; and to a range of alternatives like feminist ethics, liberation philosophy, theories of justice, and the ethics of care. Some courses in this vein focus on special topics or contemporary issues, while others attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the history of moral philosophy.

Practical ethics is a second form of ethics pedagogy that focuses on applications. These courses aim to support students' moral development, often within the scope of a par-

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24 In a previous version of the article, we asked how best to teach ethics. This raised some difficult questions, not least among them whether ethics can be taught at all, and if so, how.

25 As in medicine, embedding ethical education within existing structures has many advantages—e.g., avoiding more course requirements (Hafferty and Franks 1994). If the comparison with medicine appears somewhat arbitrary, we should remember that it was still common in the first half of the twentieth century to see social science as "analogous to medical science" (Conant 1947, cit. Turner and Factor 1984, 181).

26 Hafferty and Franks "asserted that in addition to what was formally being taught in the classroom and at the bedside, [medical] students were being shaped by a multitude of other learning opportunities taking place in the hallways, the on-call rooms, and the cafeteria, and even by the architecture and layout of the school itself" (O'Donnell 2014, 1). Since what goes for medical students goes to some extent for other professions as well, it would be worth thinking about how to create organizational cultures, learning spaces, and atmospheres that promote ethics literacy within sociology. As O'Donnell (2014, 11) notes, conversations about the "hidden curriculum" intersect with many classic themes in sociology and anthropology. We hope that future studies on teaching and learning can help develop more sociological approaches to learning about ethics.

ticular profession. Courses in practical ethics often stoke the flames of moral commitment that students have in their professions. This objective may take precedence over general, historical, and philosophical training. Instead, practical ethics tends to invoke specific vocabularies and to scaffold students in gaining confidence to articulate and act upon moral motives. Professional ethics courses in law, business, and medicine are prototypical examples. Some of these courses focus narrowly on applications of explicit and codified rules. A course in accounting ethics, for example, is likely to emphasize the spirit and the letter of accounting standards, but the same course may not mention broader social issues like multinational corporations' aggressive tax planning and the access to basic welfare denied to developing economies as a consequence.

Neither philosophical nor practical ethics is an obvious fit with the sociological curriculum. Philosophical ethics often sets out to establish moral truths as universals, truths that many sociologists believe to be products of social life. Whether this makes them any less true is an interesting philosophical question, but it may prove difficult to teach students in the first sense to suspend moral judgment to improve observational fidelity while also encouraging them to become more discerning and conclusive in their own moral judgments. Rather than trying to avoid this discontinuity, we suggest that it be afforded a central place in the class discussion. Perhaps talking and thinking about ethics is merely a form of code switching to adapt to a different mode of cultural exchange. Or perhaps students will wish to use each lens to examine the other, asking about the social context of philosophers and about the philosophical context of sociologists.

While these difficulties can be disclosed and discussed, raising issues is not the same as working through them. In contrast with the pedagogies of practical ethics, sociology careers often lack clear and bounded occupational roles. Graduates of sociology programs go into diverse fields including human resource management, politics, law, social work, criminal justice, and community planning. These fields lack the coherence that would be necessary to develop an applied set of cases to follow the standard model of professional ethics education.

At the level of curriculum structures, some universities offer philosophy modules (including ethics) to sociology students, but it may be that sociologists need to go outside their departments or schools to take ethics courses.[27] A whole class on normative literacy for sociologists could be a rich and rewarding experience for both students and instructors, but where this kind of experimentation is not feasible, instructors can also integrate ethics literacy strategies into existing curricular structures. Normative discussions can be cultivated around numerous sociological themes. In the next section, we note a few contexts within and beyond the classroom where there is a special resonance between classic sociological discussions and ethics.

3.2 FRUITFUL CONTEXTS FOR NORMATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Some areas of sociology share thematic elements with areas of study in normative philosophy. As such, the opportunities for ethics literacy are especially rich when gender studies scholars engage with the ethics of care, when social problems scholars engage with theories of justice, or when world systems theorists read liberation philosophy.[28] For instance, students might read Habermas's discourse ethics together with his sociological theory; discuss the ethics of care alongside social research on care; or reflect on the extent to which "social problems literacy" (Lowry 2016) requires ethical literacy as well. This would illustrate how sociological and ethical reflection have often developed in tandem and how sociology and moral philosophy are often two sides of the same coin (MacIntyre 1985).

The history of sociology provides another point of connection with moral philosophy. There is much to gain from engaging with Max Weber's "ethical project" (Kim 2017) or with his writings about the ethics of conviction, the ethics of responsibility, and the ethics of office (on this later point, see Du Gay 2008). The same could be said about Marx's writings and the extent to which they are somehow oblivious to ethics (Vandenberghe 2017) or contain an implicit ethics (e.g., Dussel 1990, § 10.4; 2016, § 9.4). Through sociology's unique history, scholars can explore the tension between sociology and philosophical ethics, as well as the ways that sociologists have bypassed the divide between description and prescription.

Theory courses could reflect on how "every moral theory is ... a theory of the self" (Wolfe 1989, 212) and how this leads to important normative views about social institutions.[29] Approaches to observing social life may also provide vocabularies or process descriptions that are important to normative thought. For instance, microsociology allows us to see ourselves as rule-making beings who are able to produce our own morality (Wolfe 1989). The same goes for concept formation, a process for which ethical and political reflection are of central importance (Caelo 2019). Even where course topics are less specifically engaged with normative discussions, there are key opportunities to address normative concerns. In methods courses, students might be asked to delineate, beyond considerations around research ethics, legitimate and illegitimate applications of values in the research process (Anderson 2004, 2019). Teachers might en-

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27 Our premise here is that sociology programs tend to engage with ethics at many levels, from research ethics to prescriptive policy analysis, yet the formal analysis of ethical methods and frameworks is rarely found in classrooms. As far as ethics is present in the curriculum, it tends to reflect understandings of ethics common to professional sociology (e.g., research ethics).

28 For an outline of approaches to ethics particularly germane to sociology, see Sayer 2011, appendix.

29 "When human agents are viewed as self-interested utility maximizers, we can be fairly certain that the theory's initial assumptions about the self will lead to certain moral positions—such as a belief in freedom of choice. Similarly, when individuals are viewed as inherently aggressive or short-sighted, a defense of governmental authority is likely to follow" (Wolfe 1989, 212).

courage students who are learning about and practicing ethnographic observation to not only practice recording field notes and analyzing them but also explain how they have matured in the process. This kind of identity question is methods neutral and can be applied across contexts.

As Wolfe (1989, 211) explains, "a sociological approach to morality... is not to tell people what they ought to do in situations of moral complexity, but rather to help individuals discover and apply for themselves the moral rules they already, as social beings, possess."[30] By engaging with students' implicit knowledge of ethics, sociologists can support students' development in important and broad ways.[31]

While historical and topical areas are deeply engaged with ethics, some approaches involve normative judgments in a more conceptual way. Consider, for example, how comparative methods are enriched by the study of comparative ethical systems (Baggini 2018), which could be taught alongside the sociology and anthropology of morality, religion, and knowledge. While engaging in comparisons between different Western and non-Western traditions of moral philosophy, students could be invited to consider the way that they are involved in some perspectives and detached from others (Elias 1956). Students could thus begin to approach ethics from a variety of perspectives, while also recognizing that thinking about ethics as a tool is not the same as identifying with and drawing upon a moral system. If this can be done cross-culturally, the approach has the added advantage of breaking from the Eurocentric bias that affects much of contemporary academic philosophy (Baggini 2018; Dussel 1998; Garfield and Van Norden 2016).[32]

Discussing normative questions within the classroom can thus be a natural part of teaching about sociological inquiry.[33] Doing so demands careful analysis and the consideration of multiple competing viewpoints. It also demands an account of what is possible and what is desirable. True, these accounts could be dogmatic, handed down as prescribed positions with inflexible standards of conduct, but far better for them to be developed with openness and an acknowledged fallibility that leaves room for debate. Understanding normative uncertainty can support optimism rather than despair by fostering confidence in one's ability to navigate normative questions via informed reflection and deliberation (Anderson 2004; Sayer 2011).

3.3 BEYOND THE CLASSROOM AND BACK

The many possibilities to embed ethics education within existing curricula should not blind us to more ambitious options that may take students outside the classroom but closer to sociology's civic roots. Partnerships between universities, schools, and communities come to mind as examples of initiatives that allow for a dialogue between experiential and theoretical knowledge (Lynch 1999). Along with practices such as service learning, active learning, and experiential learning (e.g., Harris, Harris, and Fondren 2015; Mobley 2007; Peterson, Witt, and Huntington 2015), direct engagement offers promising avenues for cultivating moral growth, care, and virtue.[34] Engagement also constitutes an opportunity for realizing universities' civic potential as hubs for social change, thus continuing a tradition that, stretching from Bacon and Franklin to Dewey and Addams, puts knowledge at the center of social transformation for the benefit of humanity (Benson et al. 2017).[35]

To emphasize civic engagement and action research is to highlight the importance of social movements, churches, political parties, and civic organizations as potential ethical communities (Moore 1992). Communities can also get ethics wrong in ways that divide and exclude, but there is also much to be learned from their moral mistakes, provided that students have the moral maturity to think deeply about the morally problematic sides of solidarity.

3.4 CHARACTER FORMATION

Is sociology itself an ethical project? From an ethics-as-identity perspective, students and their teachers can reflect upon the ways in which a sociological undertaking is also a normative one. In asking this question, students can inquire more deeply about the nature of sociological inquiry and how this project may differ from other professions like medicine and law. Students can ask, "What is sociology for?" and "For whom do we theorize about social life?" The answers may be tied to specific and observable professional activities, but they are also related to the motivations that students have for being who they are, studying what they study, and bonding with those scholars and writers whose work they value.

As students and scholars develop a more purposive description of the sociological enterprise, they may change

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30 For all its brilliance, Wolfe's account remains tied to a conception of ethics as rules, which is only one possible approach to this field.

31 We thank Ingrid Holme for this suggestion.

32 At the same time, seeking to criticize and overcome Eurocentrism in and through sociology is challenging. As one reviewer commented, "How can sociology as a discipline—very much rooted in Eurocentric notions of modernity—serve as a space for such reckoning[?]" If approached constructively, this challenge could give plenty of food for thought for classroom discussions.

33 Making normative ethics a more explicit component of sociological training need not involve lecturing students about morality. It certainly does not demand that teachers become "prophets" (Weber [1917] 1978, 72). Nevertheless, we believe that the prophetic tradition of social critique, which has inspired thinkers and movements as diverse as Marx and liberation theology/philosophy (see Dussel 1993, chapter 6), deserves a place within classrooms.

34 The idea of learning ethics by doing is central here, which is, of course, a key insight from philosophical traditions stretching from India, China, and Japan to Aristotle and the pragmatists (Baggini 2018, 19-24).

35 Likewise, it would be fitting if the cultivation of ethics literacy took place through emancipatory pedagogies, such as the pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire [1968] 2018), with its call for dialogue in solidarity in a common quest to become more human.

the way that they see themselves within it. For these realizations to bear fruit at the level of identity, students must exceed the common sociological view of morality as convention to engage with the reality of morality as lived ethical praxis (Sayer 2011). While identities are always being formed and transformed, a self-conscious program of identity development may have a better chance of helping students to cultivate their own moral character (Wolfe 1989). For this reason, it may be helpful to focus identity discussions on the discipline itself or on the careers and activities that are partially sustained through sociological insight.

The kind of development that concerns us here is not concluded when students receive their diplomas. Indeed, some of the development work that we are proposing needs to be undertaken across the sociological career. As we look to civic organizations as sites of moral community, we might look to our own discipline and its social structures as a moral community that is a site of character formation. Doing so may help us to understand and celebrate the virtues that make us better sociologists and caring citizens more generally (Bellah [2004] 2006; Lynch, Lyons, and Cantillon 2007).[36] Indeed, alongside the ethics of care, a form of virtue ethics would be particularly relevant for sociologists and sociology. Our discipline has much to contribute to understanding the social conditions that foster or corrode character formation. The realization that moral growth and character formation are vital elements for social researchers can open the doors to a revelatory journey that is both individual and collective. On this journey, we can have as companions the voices of the many ethical traditions of humanity (Baggini 2018), be they expressed in philosophical writings, myth, literature, or art, all of which are powerful ways to engage in moral reflection (Nussbaum 1997; Hamington and Rosenow 2019).

Against methodological and disciplinary tribalism, we are calling for an intellectual holism that celebrates the important moral components shared across the human experience, including the care that we show through our research. One benefit of this holism is a reintegration of disparate humanistic and social science disciplines. Alain Caillé (2007, 285-286) proposes a curricular approach and career path unifying specialized disciplines like sociology and economics with moral and political philosophy to train students "who consider that what they have in common with the other disciplines is more important than what belongs to them alone." By doing so, he hopes to "overcome the kinds of blindness inherent in specialization without giving up the benefits of the division of intellectual labour."[37]

Andrew Sayer (2011, 14) argues in a similar vein that many contemporary questions need to be answered with a

"post-disciplinary" style of thinking. The project of enhancing ethics literacy in sociology is one instance of a "post-disciplinary" social science, which overlaps in key respects with pre-disciplinary forms of social research.

Whatever means we choose for the cultivation of ethics literacy and moral growth, this learning process should not become a source of alienation and should instead seek what Harmut Rosa (2016) has called "resonance," a way of making our relationship to the world feel more alive and meaningful.

4. FROM ETHICS LITERACY TO CYCLES OF CRITIQUE

In this final section, we revisit the wider conversation about the place of normative reasoning within sociology to reflect on the implications of our argument. We began with a statement about sociology's plurality, and we conclude with an equally diverse range of approaches to ethical reasoning and "ethical being" (Sayer 2011, 14). Different approaches require varying degrees of commitment to ethical reasoning and moral development. Seeking to impose one orientation would be akin to trying to reduce the game of rock-paper-scissors to one of its moves. As with sociology's plurality, rather than imagining these approaches as different camps forever talking past one another, a more fruitful approach is to arrange them in a cyclical fashion, thus allowing for cycles of critique to ensue (Abbott 2004).

Adopting a cyclical view attunes us to the strengths and weaknesses of different forms of inquiry, regardless of their position within the involvement/detachment continuum. It allows us to appreciate defenses of axiological neutrality (Betta and Swedberg 2017), as well as suggestions for developing a normative branch of sociology (Abbott 2016).[38] It opens up space to employ normative insight in order to recognize suffering and flourishing as shared features of social interaction that might otherwise be inaccessible to sociological observation (Sayer 2011, 2017). A cyclical view makes room, too, for Gorski's (2017b, 442) "critical social science" to "explicitly and systematically analyze and critique the relationship between normative and descriptive claims." At the same time, it accommodates efforts to align sociology to practical reason and care (Flyvbjerg 2001; Wilkinson 2014; Wilkinson and Kleinman 2016), as well as proposals to rekindle forms of sociology as moral philosophy and vice versa (Vandenberghe 2017, 2018; see also Bellah [1983] 2006).

Cycles of critique allow us to embrace pluralism as a source of creativity rather than as a reason for despair. Con

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36 Lynch, Lyons, and Cantillon (2007, 14) speak of *carer citizens*.

37 This is a perspective that recognizes the underlying unity of the human condition and the need to think reflexively and historically about this unity, a project that, as Ingold (2018) reminds us, goes back to at least Marcel Mauss.

38 Hammersley (2017) argues that "there are fundamental problems with any notion of normative sociology," which would need to be addressed for this subdiscipline to take off. We believe that these problems are not insurmountable. For example, normative sociology has been imagined in analogy with law (Shaver and Stains 1971, cited in Hammersley 2017). As Hammersley observes, this raises the question of who will pay for the work of sociologists-cum-lawyers to represent different groups in society. Could this approach risk giving those social groups with more resources a better ability to gain a sociological voice? Ethics literacy would be useful to address these and other related difficulties.

Civic Sociology

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necting the discipline's normative plurality in this form expands the grid of possible places where sociologists can move, "the space of possible inquiry" available to them (Abbott 2010, 30). For instance, a cycle of critique involving ethnography versus historical inquiry versus mathematical modeling can run in parallel to a normative cycle of critique encompassing virtue ethics versus deontology versus the ethics of care. Both of these cycles could enrich and challenge one another. As we face judgments about where to move in this expanded landscape, conscious normativity becomes all the more useful in choosing the level of involvement or detachment that any given situation requires.[39]

The openness that we prescribe within sociology can also establish a pattern for connections across disciplines. If the relationship between normative engagement and scientific aspirations has been a "durable tension" within the social sciences (Hirschman [1980] 2013, 331), this tension could be made more fruitful through ethics literacy and conscious normativity.[40] It is worth noting that Hirschman called for a social science that would somehow overcome the divide between heart and mind. We would like to think that the argument presented in this article is part of the wider conversation that may one day lead us away from this and other similar dichotomies.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Against the background of *Civic Sociology*'s launch, we have argued that there is room and need for improving ethics literacy in sociology. Ethics literacy would give sociology students tools to articulate and refine their moral intuitions, to enter into deeper conversations with their own disciplinary tradition, and to make sense of the moral and ethical dilemmas they are bound to encounter in their professional practice. Although normative tools could be particularly helpful for students interested in public, critical, and civic forms of sociology, colleagues more inclined to develop a professional form of sociology could benefit as well. After all, sociologists govern universities, decide what to teach, supervise dissertations, frame social problems, evaluate students, and participate in public life. A thoughtful approach to normativity will serve them better in these situations than normative muteness.

Because the normative and the descriptive are often inherently intertwined, an education in ethics may turn out to be as important as an education in research methods. In our view, sociologists should not have to shy away from making evaluative judgments in order to remain within the field of professionalism. On the contrary, as the civic and caring forms of sociological engagement develop, some proficiency in normative reasoning becomes a requirement for aspiring sociologists. To be sure, not every social researcher is inclined to engage in prescription. Just as we choose our methods and relationships with society, we also choose our normative orientations toward the societies in which we live and work. But it does not follow that these normative components should be shielded from critique and disagreement. On the contrary, we believe that engagement with normativity enriches the discipline's cycles of critique. Our ability to make sense of questions of justice, the good life, and the good society hangs in the balance.

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39 Clearly, different circumstances call for different levels of involvement and detachment (see Candea et al. 2015; Laidlaw 2015). Indeed, as Norbert Elias (1956) has argued, part of the promise of social research involves generating more detached and autonomous accounts of social life, accounts that would prove difficult to come up with if we focused only on urgent social problems. In this way, sociologists can help to decrease the "fantasy content" of our collective social ideologies and self-perceptions and to "stand back and look at the course of events calmly like more detached observers" (Elias 1956, 233). Elias hoped that a more detached and autonomous social science could contribute to greater human control of social forces.

40 This tension, as well as the variety of stands regarding normative questions, reflects, perhaps, the "interstitial" nature of the discipline—its standing and moving "in the gap between facts and values" (Abbott 2010, 7). But then what if there is no gap between facts and values, but more of a continuum? Or, perhaps instead of a continuum, what we may have is a "fractal distinction" (Abbott 2010, 14)—that is, distinctions that replicate within themselves the very distinctions from which they originated. One implication would be that reflection about norms, principles, and values is somehow inescapable, even for those who would like to side with facts in order to escape values. And further, what if the whole language that divides the world into facts and values is misleading, as advocates of moral engagement have argued (Putnam 2002; Davydova and Sharrock 2003; MacIntyre 1985)? Although these questions lie beyond the scope of this article, we believe that they deserve future reflection, for which reflection some degree of ethics literacy could be helpful.

encouraged us to imagine different forms of ethically engaged sociology. Enrique Dussel's philosophy has been a towering source of learning and inspiration. Our heartfelt thanks to all of them.

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

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APPENDIX: OUR NORMATIVE STANDPOINT

RF draws inspiration and insights from liberation philosophy, the ethics of care, virtue ethics, and Buddhist thought. He has also learned a lot about business ethics from RB. Although RF finds Western ethical theories impressive enough, he is committed to exploring ethical thinking beyond Eurocentrism. RB was trained in both sociology and business ethics and received a joint PhD in these disciplines. RB draws insight from an eclectic range of ancient and modern philosophers as only a pragmatist can.