

Sociological Considerations On Sentiments And Emotions

Thoughts On Possibilities Of A New Sociological Approach

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In order to fully understand human actions, decisions and behaviors, particularly from the perspective of social, economic and political study disciplines, it is important to incorporate the whole spectrum of human characterization. Rationalization processes in the history of Social Sciences have done away with the concepts of Feelings, emotions and sensations. Many social interactions, economic decisions, political activities, and in general almost all human actions, require logical thought, but also emotional and sentimental considerations. Feelings and emotions have been considered as object of study by mainly psychology and psychiatry, but have been avoided in Sociology, Economical and Political Sciences, without a clear reason. In this paper I try to consider how their study inclusion will benefit all Social Sciences, particularly Sociology and Social Economy.

1. Introduction

Human actions are taken under a variable combination of logical thought, emotional and sentimental considerations, prior knowledge, creativity, constrictions, rules, likes and dislikes, and many more elements. But for most social sciences human actions are seen under the light of logical thought alone.

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Feelings, emotions and sensations have a big impact in our day to day decision making, and shape a big part of our lives. People choose, behave, select, coordinate, and generally act, moved by a complex web of mental and sentimental elements that it is not quite clear and defined. In most social sciences, particularly the case of Sociology, the rationalization forces that have been partly (but not totally) shaping society since the industrial revolution were considered as the only (or central) valid elements for study (Kremer-Marietti, 1983). For Adam Smith, most economic actions are mainly ruled by the market forces, and these by the laws of supply and demand (Smith, 1776). To Auguste Comte, there was something logical and mathematically explainable about society, which made it a field of study comparable in its epistemic dimension to physics (Comte, 1865; Kremer-Marietti, 1972). Although Smith had a keen interest on human sentiments (but from the perspectives of Ethics and Moral philosophy), Comte did not consider them as important, and from there on, until today, human feelings, sensations and emotions have not had a big impact in the general course of most social sciences (except psychology), particularly in Sociology (Smith, 1790; Macareño, 2006).

In the works of the classics and in general theory and practice until now, there has been a small redoubt for the sociological study of emotions, sensations and sentiments. For example, the '*affective action*' indicated and presented by Weber in his works (Camic et.al., 2005), the '*collective effervescence*' of Durkheim (Morrison, 2006), the '*feeling of alienation or social humiliation*' of Marx (McLellan, 1973) treat the subject, but not giving it all the depth and importance it merits, particularly as a definitions of the social world in its totality.

Feelings and emotions such as love, hatred, pain, compassion, anger, loneliness, hypocrisy, depression, desperation, uncertainty, and as many as we can mention, are all social phenomena, both as cause and also as effect within the world of social actions and facts, but have been so far mainly treated by psychology (Janet, 1997). There are actions in which the powers that be treat with coercion on people, which is studied in sociology extensively, for example under the social theory of power (Muller, 2002), social conflict theory (Coser, 1961) and social transformation theory (Audrey, 2005), for example, but the feelings of defenselessness, of humiliation, of anger and depression, of lack of social value and all other emotive and sentimental reactions that have a social impact in the struggle between haves and have-nots, or powerful and defenseless, for example social protests, labor

unionism, political elections, etc., have not received the same treatment (Farinetti, 1999). Social protest, social movements and economic-politic actions and reactions are usually seen as reason-based motivated, and the emotive and sentimental part is usually left aside.

2. Sentiments And Emotions In Social Research

What are emotions, and what are sentiments, or feelings?

According to David Myers, emotions are “the complex psycho-physiological experience of an individual’s state of mind as interacting with biochemical (internal) and environmental (external) influences. In humans, emotions fundamentally involve physiological arousal, expressive behaviors and conscious experience” (Myers, 2004).

Sentiments, or feelings, can be described as the “a state of consciousness resulting from emotions, sentiments and/ or desires” (Van den Boss, 2006), but I would further this definition including that they conform a structural part of the person, of its behaviors, institutions, and of the social fabric as well. If emotions can be considered to be mind states that are responsive or expressive from the interiority of the individual, sentiments or feelings are social tools through which people relate, interrelate and interact and affect others, themselves, and society in general.

To feel or not to feel, that seems to be a question out of place: we are humans because, among many things, we are able to feel, and to think in many ways: rationally, emotionally, sentimentally, irrationally, creatively, and in many possible combinations of them. Human thought is not inherently logical or mathematically deductable, at least not all the time (Hawkins, 2004). People think in a logical way whenever there is a need, an obligation and/or a possibility for such manner of thought, but feelings and emotions and sensations are all the time around us, so even in the most arid and cold setting possible, where only reason and logical coordination seem to exist, our emotive, feeling side will most likely burst forth, jumping, altering any logical mental organization, therefore setting in its own creative, mixed atmosphere, its fluid and changing environment, and its flexibility. We are a moving web of reasoning, logical and abstract, together with creativity, emotionality, sentimentality and high degree of irrationality. All of these factors

together make up our intelligence; human beings are not just “logical” or “emotive” (Minsky, 1987). We humans are a mix-up of all these factors that through our human intelligence we coordinate in infinite possible manners. We are not logical devices which can choose only one out of two states, right or wrong, white or black, true or false. We have the capability, of course, to choose one of the two extremes, but also in between them, in any combination, we can choose not to choose, we can choose the two extremes at the same time, we can choose the continuous range between these extremes, among these extremes, and we can also choose between even more possibilities than we may think of. Our mind is capable of innumerable mental operations that are partly or not logical, our mind is flexible enough to create its own intellectual/ intelligence tools in order to understand, shape and visualize the universe around us. Our *weltanschauung* is logical and emotional, rational and irrational in equal measures.

I think that in order to have the whole picture, therefore, a new approach that takes into consideration emotions, feelings and sensations in equal measure as much as other already studied subjects in Sociology should be epistemologically embedded in the sociology theory and practice fabric. The main problem arises on how to consider these elements that are very difficult to be quantified. There are two options. One is to develop a scale for measuring emotions, feelings, and sensations, and make them quantifiable, as it has been tried in other realms, particularly in Robotics and Affective Computing (Nakagawa, 1999; Frijda, 1994) and Artificial Intelligence research (Minsky, 2006). The other would consist of introducing a new epistemological way of understanding and processing emotions and sentiments that is not quantifiable but rather seen in their own dimension, that is to say, using creativity and emotions and sentiments together with rational thinking, rather than just the structural scientific method.

3. Sociological Considerations

Sentiments and emotions have a social role. Social scientists that have done some studies of the field (Goffman, 1981; Darnton, 1985; Becker, 1963) agree that they are a way of showing the inner, personal side, as a way of expressing one’s needs and perceptions; feelings and emotions provide a way of labeling, of adjectivization of the world around, as quality/characterization descriptors (Garcia Costoya, 2003). I partially agree with this view; certainly, we tend to express through our sensations,

our emotions and feelings what goes inside of our minds or what we feel (rather than think) about a certain situation, thing, person, etc. The general theory goes that people let their feelings and emotions roam about and explore the world, but then subject them to logical thinking and structured knowledge in order to have an organized, unified picture (Giddens, 1996). This logical organization presents the communicable (substances and objects, much as nouns and verbs would behave), and the feelings and emotions perform as labels, which only add a secondary information (Grau, 2003).

At this point, I do not agree completely. Knowledge of the world arises of many different manners, and both logical thinking and emotions and sentiments play equally important roles (Gonzalez Martin, 2003). The socialization process is not just a rationalizing process. Giddens contends that the modernization forces have taken place as rationalizing forces, and that the labor of the sociologist is to rationally observe and interpret the logical laws of society (Giddens, 1990). This is close to Comte's positivistic thinking, which stressed that social progress was a rational endeavor (Kremer-Marietti, 1972). Ever since, sociological theory put aside non-rational human elements, or considered them very secondary. Society's rules and laws are considered, mostly, as logical, or better, logically discernible (Giddens, 1995). Feelings and emotions and sensations have not had much place in sociological theory, not as epistemological elements to work with, but at best as characterizations of society (Giddens, 1996).

4. Methodological Problems And Proposals

4.1. Quantifiable Methodology

As we have seen above, emotions and sentiments and sensations are quite difficult to quantify. The main reason is that they are personal, and that there is not a definitive rule on what should we feel or not, or even if there were such rules (Garcia Martin, 2003), they are still personal. We can communicate our personal, individual states of what we feel, and this can be understood by others. Feelings and emotions are thus socialized. Through communication we establish a bridge by which we allow others a glimpse of our inner world. However, how others interpret or feel is our inner world is also matter of personal feelings and emotions. The communicative process is quite complex due to the deep private, personal

experience they demand. For this reason also, aside from those mentioned before, feelings and emotions are regarded as pertaining to the realm of psychology. Yet, feelings and emotions do impregnate any human actions, any social interactions. They do have a tremendous role in society (Arregui, 2003).

It is possible to try to quantify emotions and sentiments by creating scales, ranging from the non existence of the feeling or emotion in question (for example, “0”), to their full feeling, on top (for example, “100”). This can be achieved by either consensus among social scientists (which is difficult, because the personal feelings and emotions of each researcher will inevitably affect the ‘numerical perception’ of what constitutes “*no-feeling*” to “*full-feeling*”, an scoring that may be considered absolutely subjective) or leaving it as a quantifiable element through inquiry, for example, in social surveys, in which each respondent may judge the scale and give a personal score between the range indicated. I personally tried this approach in another paper (Muñoz Roussy, 2010) presented in this same journal.

4.2. Other Possibilities

Another option is, as I mentioned above, to re-create the social theory, employing not just logical, ‘hard-science’ approaches (i.e., social science scientific method), but also emotional/sensation approaches. In this respect, psychology and social psychology provide a great example of how different currents can be combined to create a ‘super (or meta)-discipline’ that let professionals and researcher with even opposing visions to work together, at least coordinate general lines of action, in order to achieve the betterment and/or advancement of the discipline.

The problem of the study of emotions and feelings is that they are difficult to subject to the rigid norms of logics. There are no clear-cut ‘true’ or ‘false’, ‘white’ or ‘black’. Using the color analogy, sentiments and emotions may range from all the gray color spectrum, or even to the whole color spectrum, going beyond the dualistic ‘white’ and ‘black’. The logical reasoning collides with this multi-variable/ multi-value/ multi-meaning set. Just to classify emotions and feelings demands a ‘position’ or ‘standing’ on what they are and how to arrange them, and this position or standing would be relative to the emotions and sentiments it pretends to classify. So classifications became relative, or at best, discussable.

We cannot give orders to the heart and oblige it to behave logically. We cannot send our own emotions to follow the instructions of our words, as they would like some pseudo-religious moralists, or would the puritanical moralism of the “politically correct” (Menghi, 1994). So then, should we leave out the analysis of emotions and sentiments? This is the path taken by the cult to rationality envisioned by Descartes and theorized by Weber, Durkheim and Marx. A division between logical thought, on one side, and feelings and emotions, on the other, is the logical corollary of the Cartesian dualism, which tore apart mind and heart (Menghi, 1994).

But if emotions precede our own words, and our own logical thought, how can we forget to treat them? There is a crucial task for a social science theory, which would be different from what we know, that has to dissolve the paradox of the heart that precedes mind that tries to deny heart, the spoken/speaking circle, inside which, against which and through which we live, love, hate, communicate and socialize. All of this has, of course, ethical and political implications, as well as scientific, that is to say, from the viewpoint of economic, politic and social perspectives. The persistence in our time of dualistic perceptual habits that separate heart and mind, body and spirit, emotion/ sentiment and cognition, is a permanent source of suffering, transgressions and violence.

This division into two separate, disjunctive worlds leaves us understanding just half of the social phenomena. We are logical and illogical, reasonable and emotional. There is no dualism, but just a single humanity, a single society, not a logical one on one side, that deserves to be studied, and an emotional one on the other side that is left in obscurity. The perverse effects of this dualistic assumption about our lives, our sentiments and passions, about our daily habits, about our choices, academic, politic, economic, scientific, social, etcetera, lack of a perceptive epistemic systematization that help us understand not just emotions and feelings, but the whole social complexity. Nevertheless, both micro-interactions in daily, as well as macro-social interactions, constrains us in the separation between mind and heart. We talk of ‘genius’ or ‘ordinary people’, ‘art’ and ‘utility’, ‘logical’ or ‘crazy’, dividing people, their actions, and institutions. The modernity discourse talks of ‘biological’ elements that are modified by ‘culture’, dividing them into two separate categories (Giddens, 1991).

From the epistemic perspective this works fine, but the truth is that both biological determinants and cultural ones coexist simultaneously and simultaneously should be explained, not as different and intolerable antagonists. Anyway, the problem of culture, and its core within social sciences, is that culture has been purely as logical, rationalizing, and not interpreted in its sentimental aspects, or if there has been such an attempt, the division has been made as two different spheres, one intimate that incorporates the emotional and sentimental components, and a public sphere, that has no relation with them (Habermas, 1989). Feelings and sentiments occupy important places in both spheres, and are as social phenomena as they are also biological. The divide between two has left many social sciences unconcerned with the emotional aspects of social interaction.

Our hearts move and evolve independently of our reasons, most of the time. Although we may talk of an 'emotional intelligence', our capabilities of governing sentiments and emotions are limited. The emotions and sentiments, through which we are conscious of, are never conscious. The awareness of our sentiments and emotions make us realize that we can never be aware of them. We just get the awareness of their impregnating, generative, interactive, social nature. However, insofar as we follow the course of dualistic Cartesian awareness of 'emotions/sentiments' and 'reasons/thought', we will not be able to understand the deep essence of what makes move our 'hearts', and our 'heads' (Girard, 1978). Reasoning about reason is a course of thought that has been with us for centuries, particularly since the development of Greek philosophy, i.e. we are accustomed to this logical approach, and feel it is the only possible course of social science methodology (Giddens, 1990).

I believe that to 'feel' our sentiments and emotions and emotionally/sentimentally 'elaborate' about them has not been pursued in the same line. The clear-cut division persistent in social sciences particularly since the XIX century, between these two realms, 'logical' and 'non-logical', has made us think emotions and sentiments are out of the common social science scientific process. Probably, because through the rationalizing process, particularly that of modernity, has made us believe emotions and sentiments have to be either ignored, or controlled, at minimum, or eliminated, at maximum (Giddens, 1991). But again, sentiments and emotions have their own paths, so therefore further understanding of their contributions to our daily lives, and how they affect all the courses of actions we

take, particularly since any human action mostly has a social influence, is vital to resolve this *'dualistic'* problem. People buy products because they need them, but also, because they *'feel'* they want them, because they *'feel happy'* with those things, because they want to *'satisfy a particular sentiment'*, because they *'feel the emotion'* of buying something in particular, independently of 'material' needs. Studies of *'shopaholics' behavior'* have addressed the emotional nature of the compulsive buying disorder, from the perspective of addiction (buying compulsion) research, rather than from the analysis of the emotional and sentimental components of demand in common consumers (Black, 2001). There are not just 'logical reasons' for consumers and anyone in the world of retail business can attest this. Emotions and sentiments play important, and even fundamental, roles, in the chain of economic and commercial endeavors and supply and demand interactions, even if we try to deny this. It is commonly said that consumers have their own reasons or thoughts, and that the best way to succeed in business is to catch their 'hearts', rather than their 'minds'. That is to say, to understand the emotional and sentimental social and psychological interactions of consumers and their consumption actions. We can, similarly, try to understand the emotional and sentimental reasons people have to do whatever they do, for example in politics, in sports, in science, in arts, etc.

Inside of us there is the image of the other, of those around us. Before any interaction, we have emotions and sentiments about others from this image within us, and internal processes determine not just our logical thinking towards social interaction, but also emotional and sentimental (Bateson, 1972). The methodological problem of a theory that tries to include logical definitions in an ever changing system of meanings such as it arises from our own emotions and feelings body. We feel differently according to different situations, even if those situations are very similar, because sentiments and emotions are not logical and structured, they are variable in time and dependent of conditions, of knowledge, of sensations, and of many other elements and circumstances that are not logically discernible. A new social theory of sentiments and emotions must also provide for an overcoming of net logical divisions and classifications, and allow for a more flexible, sophisticated method that relies not only in *'understanding'* (that is to say, *'logically'*), but also in *'feeling'*, emotionally and sentimentally. In order to achieve for this new theory, that has different epistemological means of interaction with the particularly flexible, non-rational nature of emotions and sentiments, I propose to

refine and change much of social science methodology and social theory as it has been done till present, with a more 'feeling'-natured and intelligent one. Finally, by '*social theory*' I mean that emotions and sentiments have a fundamental role in communications, events, dynamic processes that occur inside the body or the individual psyche, but at the same time within the interactive context of not just communications, but any social actions at large, that is to say, forming and informing society, economy, and politics.

5. Conclusion

The inclusion of the study and theoretical comprehension of emotions, feelings and sensations into the world of Social Sciences, particularly in Sociology, but also in Economy and Political Science, will benefit their theories in breath and scope, and will be more precise from the perspective of holding the entirety of social phenomena within theoretical (and also practical) reach. Modeling, quantification, formulation, definition and research/survey of sentiments and emotions will allow the researcher new tools through which comprehend more broadly and in deeper scope any social, economic and politic phenomena. Here I propose the reader that sociologists, economists, political scientists, management researchers and any other social scientists develop epistemic search programs of what sentiments, emotions and sensations would constitute as research objects within the general scopes of their disciplines, incorporating the resulting cognitive tools within the fabric of theory and professional practice.

Social sciences have done away with these non-rational social phenomena, but it is time to incorporate them in a globalizing world that is changing not just the general aspects of society, businesses, commerce, communications, international trade, technology, but also the inner aspects of every person, and of their sentiments, feelings and sensations. As both Bauman and Giddens have said, we are living in a 'liquid period', in an era in which uncertainty is growing in many social, economic and political aspects (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991). Therefore, a comprehension of the inner world as a social phenomenon will introduce in the theoretical and practice framework an element that will help clarify doubts about society in general, and about personal behavior within society, allowing for more precise modeling, explanations and predictions of social, economic and political facts.

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