From Humanising to Politicizing Sociological Knowledge
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Marcus Morgan's "Humanising Sociological Knowledge" is an important contribution to the pragmatist approach in the philosophy of social sciences for, at least, three reasons.

First, it challenges the positivist perspective by bringing the human being back to the understanding of sociological knowledge. In so doing, he critically reviews Durkheim's foundational ideas about the social and sociology and suggests that there is a need to overcome the 'dislocated and impartial vantage-point from which the sociologist might discern "social facts"'.[1]

Second, he aptly dares to explore the criticisms raised by sceptics about the logical consequences of having a humanized notion of knowledge, that is, the risk of relativism. Relying on Rorty, William, James and Wittgenstein, Morgan sheds light of the possibility of maintaining the idea of 'truth' while freeing it from the essentialist view according to which it refers to the world as an empirical entity.

Third, the paper rightly argues that the search for truths in the realistic approach ends up being a blind alley. Though conceived, by early 20th century epistemologists, as the only valid quest of science (natural or social), this idea of truth hides, on the one hand, the always present subjectivity that surrounds any 'social fact' or social phenomena and, on the other, it also obscures the interest of science in questioning, critiquing and challenging accepted knowledge. Instead, truth is presented as a word that, in specific context, can be used, more or less successfully, within certain forms of life to relate to the world (not to describe or explain it). Because of these reasons, Morgan's article has called my attention and invited me think about some implications of his claims that I would like to develop in the following paragraphs.

Creativity and Science

In an interview in Italy, in 1992, Paul Feyerabend was asked to say a few words about his famous sentence ('anything goes') that got him his label of anarchist in the epistemological circles. Almost 20 years after his *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (1975), Feyerabend replied:

> *Tutto fa brodo*: it is true! The most surprising things lead to great discoveries! Those who think that new things can be found only by wandering along a precisely defined path are wrong. You cannot foresee what kind of silly move will lead you to a new insight or to a new discovery. The move is 'silly' only when compared with the general opinion of the time in which you live… So 'anything goes' means only 'don't restrict your imagination' because a very silly idea can lead to a solid result. Also, don't restrict your imagination by logic. Many fruitful

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[1] Morgan. Marcus. 2016 'Humanising Sociological Knowledge', *Social Epistemology*, DOI: 10.1080/ 02691728.2015.1119911, 2

theories, if examined with the magnifying glass of the logicians, are internally inconsistent… But inconsistency is deadly only if you have rigid concepts. But concepts are like putty—they can be shaped in many different ways. In sum, I would say that indeed 'anything goes'.[2]

What captivated me, from the very first time I read Feyerabend's theory of knowledge, when I was writing my BA thesis on hermeneutics and the hypothetic-deductive method, was his profound sense of creativity as the driving force of science that defied logical reasoning as the only way to produce knowledge. Then and now, the wide-range of sources of inspiration behind scientific discoveries and technological developments has made me think that imagination still remains as one factor that, though recognized, is largely underrated. Because, from my perspective, Feyerabend' passage is claiming for multiple sources of knowledge, or, in the Wittegensteinian tone of Morgan's article, for multiple forms of life recognized as legitimate discourses in which truth can finally be located. Morgan's article, especially in the last section, brings to the fore the relevance of creativity when it argues in favour of disrupting knowledge because 'part of sociology's value might lie in its ability to contribute to the project of moulding forms of critical "good sense" out of the uncritical forms of "common sense" that circulate throughout society'.[3]

If this call for a sociological idea of truth as situated in forms of life is useful, then sociology education has to be seen through new lenses. On the one hand, the very idea of canon, which still informs many, if not all, textbooks in the disciplines tends to overestimate some forms of life at the expenses of others. In this regard, humanizing sociological knowledge is recognizing a plurality of 'human' aspects, from the body and material environment to political and economic interests. Humanizing cannot be seen only as a way of breaking the monolithic, positivist approach to reality but rather as a way of problematizing how humans use knowledge and, very importantly, which uses are acknowledged as most legitimate. In this regard, Morgan's claims seems to polarize the notions of truth: the realistic view and the pragmatic view. Perhaps, within the latter, it is still necessary to recognize the variety of forms of life and their corresponding ideas of truth and see what the relationships between them actually are. Reflecting on objectivity (a notion clearly connected to truth), Harding has argued that

> some of these supposedly distinctive features [of science] do in fact characterize the practices of many knowers who are not permitted to sit next to scientists at their lab benches. After all, dogs, cats, and even my chickens practice induction and deduction! What about indigenous knowledge? It is often empirically reliable, yet it lacks features desired in modern Western science. Should it be permitted to count as "real" science? On the other hand, how can claims for creationism and intelligent design be disallowed as sciences if there are no firm definitional standards

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[2] Feyerabend, P. 2012 *The Tyranny of Science*, Cambridge: Polity, 130-131.
[3] Morgan. M. 2016 op. cit., 15.

for what should count as "real" science? What about Islamic science and Hindu science, both currently promoted by particular cultural groups? [4]

In this context, perhaps one of the few shortcomings of Morgan's text is a lack of reflection about the possible dialogue between forms of life, between different 'truths', between epistemic communities whose knowledge has actually affected their way of relating to the world. He states that 'in practical everyday life, in sociology and elsewhere, the use of the word "truth" usually functions perfectly well in achieving what it needs to, without the need for philosophical epistemologies, or analytic accounts of its meaning as a predicate we ascribe to certain statements we make'.[5] However, though he rightly recognizes the risk of a timeless truth by pointing to its authoritarianism, he does not seem to be sensitive to situations, in practical everyday life, in which those who use 'truth' in one way have to communicate with those who use it in a different—or contradictory—way. Put differently, the real challenge for a pragmatist theory of knowledge is not the human side of it, but the collective dimension of any human(ized) knowledge endeavour. Thus, humanizing is politicizing.

Challenging Sociology Education

Besides the canonical status of some theorists (or forms of life?), Morgan's piece challenges sociology education by highlighting the means-end relation that sustain any form of knowledge. To say that 'every way of representing social reality is *perfect*—for something' is to acknowledge that knowledge—and truth, I could add—is always a matter of producing some effect on someone, some group, or society at large. Knowing is a form of intervention. Morgan clearly states that humanized sociological knowledge, consequently, would be crucial to question scientific ideal of finding ultimate truths and 'uncritical common sense'. While I agree with his claim, I cannot find any indications as to how to implement this pragmatist view when doing research. Is it just a matter of researchers' attitudes towards their research projects? Is it a concern with not proposing empty generalizations and acknowledging (social, geographical, epistemic) boundaries for any knowledge claim? Is it a growing and legitimate interest in looking for 'the other'? Once again, Harding's words on objectivity can be illuminating here:

> At issue in the objectivity debates is more than who actively participates in making scientific decisions. At issue is also the question of whose agendas science does and should pursue. Whose hypotheses, concepts, preferred research designs, and preferred understandings of nature, social relations, and inquiry should be supported in multicultural democracies? And how does participation in such decision making, especially in public discussions, change both the participants and the styles of decision making? [6]

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[4] Harding. S. 2015 *Objectivity and Diversity. Another Logic of Scientific Research*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, xi.
[5] Morgan, M. 2016, op. cit., 11.
[6] Harding. S. 2015, xi.

It seems, from Morgan and Harding, that a pragmatist, humanized, objective knowledge (be it sociological or otherwise) needs to be open knowledge. Open to different notions of truths, open to different communities with diverse shared values and rules about producing and diffusing their knowledge, open to new methods (even though, as Feyerabend would put it, they have no logic behind), open to new interests (besides the ones of those who have tended to monopolize knowledge, from academics to corporations), open to new goals (from critiquing to recovering ancient practices), open to new agendas, and probably open to new institutions. Furthermore, Morgan's article forces us, the readers, to put science, and especially sociology, within the context of democracy, with its power to channel varied interests and its need for building consensus. It also invites us to think the social sciences of the multicultural world we are living in and to avoid the epistemological danger of dogmatic assertions based on realistic simplifications of such a world. Obviously, it is one thing to say it; it is another to live it.

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