



Transcendentalism, social embeddedness, and the problem of individuality

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ABSTRACT

It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that the notion of ecological and social embeddedness is one of the most exploited philosophical ideas these days, both in the academia and beyond. The most troublesome about the overall trend is that many proponents of the idea of social embeddedness simplistically consider selfhood as a form of aberration which merely provides vindication for inequality and violence. In this paper, instead of attacking the problem of the individual versus the collective head-on, I approach it by way of a critique of Stephen Turner's repudiation of transcendental collectivism (Turner, 1994; Turner, 2010). According to Turner, transcendental entities, such as tacit knowledge, presuppositions, or traditions, should be altogether removed from explanatory schemata in the social sciences. I believe that Turner's razor cuts too deep and the rejection of implicit framing is at best premature. Against the background of the identified shortcomings of Turner's model of interactive learning, I track the interrelations between social development and the development of the self with an eye to showing that the relationship between individual selves and social reality is an extremely complex and multifactorial matter which we cannot hope to navigate without a proper transcendental frame. The frame is what mediates the relationship between the individual and the collective.

KEYWORDS

normativity; social embeddedness; transcendentalism; social development; psychological development; imitation learning

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INTRODUCTION

It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that the notion of ecological and social embeddedness is one of the most exploited philosophical notions these days, both in the academia and beyond.¹ The atomistic conception of society put forth by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, whose core assumptions are perfectly encapsulated by Voltaire's famous metaphor of a random movement of gas particles, has over time given way to a social ontology based on all kinds of, be it discursive or prelinguistic, "always-already's" (transcendentals), which are deemed to lie behind and below conscious intentions and pursuits. As is usually the case, however, the revolution which has overthrown the rational, fully autonomous agent, who was bound to tame the forces of nature and tradition by means of theory and technology, has at once enlarged and skewed our vision. What I find most troublesome about the overall trend is the concomitant tendency to deconstruct, and ultimately destruct, rather than to adapt and modify, the concepts of self-hood, self-regulation, and self-organization. More often than not, the latter are simplistically considered by the advocates of social transcendentalism as a form of aberration which does nothing else except providing vindication for inequality and violence.

It goes without saying that the problem of the individual vis-à-vis the collective is too long-standing, broad, and profound to be thoroughly addressed in single a contribution.² Therefore, instead of attacking the problem head-on, I decided to adopt a roundabout tactic and to approach it by way of a critique of Stephen Turner's repudiation of transcendental collectivism (Turner, 1994; Turner, 2010). According to Turner, resorting to transcendental entities to explain or make sense of social phenomena inevitably bogs us down in a collectivist metaphysic which is theoretically bogus, methodologically sloppy, and all too ready to sacrifice individuality on the altar of illusionary or coercively enforced social unity. His solution to the presumed transcendentalist trap is radical and calls for no less than an elimination of collective entities from explanatory schemata in the social sciences.

In a nutshell, I believe that Turner's razor cuts too deep and that the utter rejection of implicit framing is at best premature. I break down Turner's own methodological position to reveal tensions inherent in it. Against the background of the identified shortcomings, I track the interrelations between social development and the development of the self with an eye to showing

¹ For the relevant discussions, see, e.g.: in the philosophy of the social sciences: Hume, 2009; Dilthey, 2002; Rickert, 1962; Winch, 2003; Brandom, 1994; Brandom, 1999; Brandom, 2000; in the philosophy of science: Lakatos, 1970; Kitcher, 1993; Laudan, 1984; Rouse, 1996; in political philosophy: Mouffe, 1993; in economic theory: Polanyi, 1968.

² For a courageous attempt to defend selfhood against the onslaught of deconstructionism, see Sorabji, 2006.

that the relationship between individuality and a social reality in which it is embedded is an extremely complex and multifactorial matter that we cannot hope to navigate without a proper transcendental frame which mediates the relationship between the individual and the collective and does not amount to another causal factor. Ultimately, I hope to lay foundations for a framework that permits to account for the individual and the social as two sides of the same coin, none of which is morally and theoretically superior to the other. I also suggest the way in which our susceptibility to implicit, symbolic violence can be conceptualised.

TURNER'S CRITIQUE OF COLLECTIVISM IN (PHILOSOPHY) OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Turner formulates an essential requirement for a valid social theory to fulfil: it must be able to account for both stability and spatiotemporal diversification of social practices. Meanwhile, social theorists of transcendentalist provenience tend to be very nonchalant about causality and simply resort to what Turner considers to be “odd theoretical devices” (Turner, 2010: 150), such as shared tacit knowledge, presuppositions, practices, or traditions, to account for social cohesion. More specifically, according to Turner, transcendental accounts perforce generate two symmetrical problems: the “downloading” and “uploading” problems. The downloading problem has to do with the fact that collective entities are treated as quasi-objects, and the sets of such objects as closed systems. If that is so, then there must be some causal mechanism whereby these systems exert causal influence on human conduct and ensure both sameness and specificity of possession and transmission of content. According to transcendentalists, the causal factors at play do not come in the form of conscious mental intentions, but rather operate at the level of subconscious, and socially conditioned, predispositions (hence the emphasis on the implicit). As Turner points out, however, what is presupposed is not necessarily what is believed, and hence presuppositions do not possess, on their own, any motivational force, and by the same token are devoid of regulatory and explanatory power. It is entirely possible that the same behavior will ensue despite some differences at the level of presuppositions (Turner, 1994: 16, 31, 58); conversely, it might be the case that two people who share a set of presuppositions will respond differently to similar challenges. Turner writes:

Despite the impressive evidentiary base of these enterprises, they still leave open the possibility that the “presuppositions” they claim are “shared” are not psychological possessions of those who are supposed to be sharing them (Turner, 1994: 12).

Note also that there is often a considerable discrepancy — performative contradiction — between what people claim to be doing (their normative self-image) and what they are willing to do when offered an incentive (their actual conduct). This may suggest something quite contrary to what transcendentalists propose, namely, that what for a social scientist may appear as shared regulatory principles is nothing other than selfish urges covered by a fig leaf of social convention. All in all, a social theory cannot be treated seriously unless it attempts to show “a mental trace that persists between manifestations” (Turner, 1994: 16), or, to put it another way, to explain the complex relationship between intentions, motivations, and behaviors.

Relatedly, Turner points out that collectivism is unable to explain specificity of content, that is, the mechanism whereby beliefs and behaviors find their way to the right category of members of a community (Turner, 1994: 63). In other words, social theory must be able to explain why and how tacit presuppositions diversify lifeworlds, engendering the diversity we observe.

Conversely, some theories of social normativity — Turner discusses this in connection with Pierre Bourdieu (Turner, 2010: 48; Bourdieu, 1998) — postulate some sort of reciprocity between the individual and the collective, but again, fail to specify the causal mechanism involved in the process of revision of social norms (Turner, 2007; Turner, 2010).

SOCIALITY AND IMITATION LEARNING

As far as the constructive part of his position is concerned, it is Turner’s belief that although people of different cultural backgrounds may differ profoundly when it comes to habits (thinking habits included), no such thing as transcendental frame, in the form of mental or conceptual closure, is necessary to explain the differences. Social practices vary because their members are confronted with different challenges in the course of learning processes (Turner, 2007; Turner, 2018). Since, however, there is always a possibility to acquire new habits via imitation, people are essentially capable of coming to an understanding and of mutually coordinating each other’s actions. The model with which Turner attempts to replace transcendental collectivism is, by his own admission, “unshamedly relativistic” (Turner, 1994: 37) in the sense of being concerned with the role of individual learning histories in the process of enculturation, cultural transmission, and social interaction in general.

Simply put, on Turner’s account, learning by imitation is the primary causal factor in the social world, whereas every change is a form of relearning. Since Turner’s goal is to dispense with everything that is shared between people and focus entirely on the individual and his environment, his conception of learning is essentially behavioristic.

For example, in discussion with Omar Lizardo's proposal to the effect that mirror neurons explain the operational principles behind Bourdieu's habitus (Lizardo, 2007), Turner emphatically asserts that mirror neurons are nothing more than instruments for learning and should not be interpreted as space-holders for any intrinsic, cross-individual action schemas (Turner, 2007). This, however, may imply that learning is fully contingent on what one is exposed to in the course of social encounters. Isn't the exposition by any chance restricted by some individual propensities that predate the learning processes, or is this learning automatic to the point of being non-selective? The latter would be at odds with Turner's proposition that we can selectively approach others' behaviors and are able to understand them without taking over their modes of conduct. He insists, after all, that thanks to empathy, which is a form of simulation which does entail full identification, we are able to reconstruct, assess, and explain others' viewpoints by means of what he refers to as Good-Bad Theories (Turner, 2010).

Further, if we assume that the selectivity can be explained by the fact that previous learning renders one lenient toward certain types of future learnings and thereby limits available alternatives, then the phenomenon of extinction resistance must be taken into account. Extinction resistance entails that re-learning takes considerable effort for which there must be a strong motivation and an underlying trigger. In a word, a mere exposure to new patterns of behaviors may in certain contexts explain superficial compliance to certain social norms driven by self-interest or fear of retribution, but not the acquisition of new forms of being which these norms potentially represent.

Simply put, Turner's conception suffers from several shortcomings, most important of which is that it renders learning processes contingent upon random environmental and social influences and leaves motivations behind learning and relearning unexplained. It does not account for selectivity of imitation learning, that is, for the fact that most people do not imitate anyone they happen to run into. Nor does it not explore at full length the way in the inertia produced by habit accumulation can be overcome to permit re-learning.

All the difficulties stem from the fact that Turner attempts to explain imitation by means of an essentially behavioristic, Skinnerian theory of learning, without giving due consideration to intrinsic features and needs of individuals which motivate and shape learning processes. The aversion toward metaphysics and transcendentalism leads him to ignore the fact that imitation is based on projective identification, which presupposes some form of sharing and similarity. As seminal research studies show, for example, that facial imitation in infants depends on a creation of a rough internal image of the behavior to imitate, which supplies the child with standards by means of which he or she can assess their own progress (Meltzoff & Moore, 1997). Feedback mechanisms at play can be understood only in the context of such a framing, idealizing projection.

So, although we are not born with a set of fully formed, shared schemas built into our neural system that the encounters simply activate, it would be just as erroneous to claim that the process of imitation learning can launch without there being any shared manifold, to use Vittorio Gallese's expression (Gallese, 2003), always-already present. We project these inchoate patterns onto the world, permitting them to manifest and become developed and concretized in the form of specific motor schemas (Whiten, Horner, & Marshall-Pescini, 2005). Simply put, I cannot imitate anyone unless I identify this person as an alternative and, in a relevant respect better, version of myself. This image is always counterfactual to a lesser or larger degree and is somehow embedded in everyone's psyche from very early on. What Turner seems to share with those whom he criticizes is the implicit assumption that every man is a *tabula rasa* to be molded by either random encounters or top-down social influences.

THE SUBJECTIVE WORLD AND SOCIAL WORLDS

The discussion thus far has shown that transcendental accounts of the social world end up submerging the individual in overpowering extra-individual structures. The only reality to which we have immediate access — our experiences, needs, and desires — are devalued as a mere product of the operation of these hypothetical and uncontrollable forces. Although the majority of these accounts are motivated by emancipatory interest, the real emancipation appears to ultimately be an illusion in that once one manages to free oneself from one schema one quickly falls prey to another. In a word, transcendental collectivism engenders both epistemological difficulties and rises ethical questions concerning human freedom and responsibility. It also generates the socialization problem: transcendentalist accounts imply that there must be some watershed (Stevens, 2002: 13; see also Turner, 2010) which separates pre-rational forms of being and lay practices from normatively regulated, rational ones. Social development, however, is a continuous process and incipient forms of consciousness and cognitive faculties can be found already in toddlers, who are yet to be "socialized" (Reddy, 2007). Such a demarcation project is therefore very unlikely to succeed.

To eliminate these difficulties, or at least reduce their severity, it is advisable to lessen the amount of abstraction typically involved in transcendentalist considerations by taking stock of the fact that individuals' contacts with social norms as represented by cultural artifacts and institutions is mediated by more basic interpersonal relationships and associated communicative needs. That is to say that human lifeworld comprises at least three interrelated, if autonomous, domains (or worlds), each of which represents simultaneously (1) intrinsic instincts, needs, and agendas, which reflect both our shared ancestral

past and our individual predispositions, (2) milieus of interactions where these instincts can be expressed, and (3) associated categories of external influences, triggers, and schemas to follow.

Let us then try to identify critical moments in developmental processes to see how the individual and social components thereof interpenetrate.

Temperament is the first causal factor to consider when examining psychosocial development. The concept of temperament denotes innate dispositions, such as levels of arousal, sensory sensitivity, inhibition versus the propensity for novelty seeking (Bates & Wachs, 1994; Millon *et al.*, 2004: 2). These sets of dispositions mediate each person's interactions with the environment from an early age. Temperament itself may be a function of causal influences prior to birth, like genetics, epigenetics, as well as all the contingencies pertaining to the prenatal stage of development, but from the moment a person is born, it can nonetheless be seen as a stable frame and the primary filter for social influences.

Infants are not passive recipients of parental instructions. In fact, they are bent on eliciting specific kinds of parental responses and tend to influence parenting styles (Ayoub *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, parental responses to the idiosyncrasies of their children's behaviors can skew the developmental trajectory. For instance, a parent of a timid child can reinforce this trait by being overprotective and denying the child access to more challenging experiences. Parents can also develop a stereotypical view of their children, thus making it difficult for the children to broadcast and develop non-dominant traits (Millon *et al.*, 2004: 107).

On a higher, cultural plane, similar processes take place. We may refer to them as a stereotypization of archetypes. It consists in certain predispositions — usually statistically dominant ones — becoming rigidified into norms, taboos, and dogmas which reflect an evolutionary stage of the culture rather than universal laws and values as such. This process is often, mistakenly in my opinion, explained in social-constructivist terms, whereas what we have to do with here is culture in its role of selector, suppressor, and amplifier — and not strictly speaking, a producer — of certain tendencies.

All in all, our personal identity is a resultant of unconscious or semi-conscious tendencies, conscious intentions and desires, and the limitations imposed by others as to what is allowed to be enacted in different types of circumstances.

Attachment theory offers another important perspective on the concurrence of psychological and social development (Bowlby, 1982; Schore, 2001; Stevens, 2002; Schore & Schore, 2008; Coan, 2008). The attachment system is a goal-corrected mechanism that allows the child to develop strong relationships with their caretakers. Ultimately, however, the system serves the function of affording an implicit intersubjective frame for all future interpersonal interactions, within both the natural and social worlds. In a word,

attachment experiences are “imprinted in an internal working model that encodes strategies of affect regulation that act at implicit nonconscious levels” (Schore & Schore, 2008: 12).

More specifically, the attachment system makes it possible to negotiate proximity versus distance, or, to put it another way, to modulate a dialectic between engagement and disengagement. Absent serious disruptions, infant systematically learns how to deal with a growing distance from the caregiver by modulating stress responses, and thereby becomes able to create and maintain at once stable and flexible boundaries between himself and another (Tronick, 1989). In a word, children create an adaptable, ideal frame around them, a field with an ever-expanding radius.

According to Judith Schore and Allan N. Schore, “attachment intersubjectivity allows psychic structure to be built and shaped into a unique human being” (Schore & Schore, 2008: 17). If the attachment has developed properly, a person’s psychological well-being is not likely to depend on a constant supply of acceptance, reassurance, and encouragement from other people (Kohut & Wolf, 1978). On the other hand, a healthy sense of agency and self-sufficiency is associated with openness to different points of view. Paradoxical though it may sound, attachment mechanisms promote the capacity for emotional detachment, or self-differentiation (Bowen & Kern, 1988). The crux of the matter is that only a person with a strong sense of personal uniqueness can recognize, acknowledge, and appreciate the uniqueness in others.

A sense of personal autonomy is therefore a precondition for social competence. A person whose autonomy has been consistently violated tends to be over-responsive to social cues and implied criticisms (avoidant personality; Mil-lon *et al.*, 2004: 187–22). In contrast, a person who has not been taught to self-regulate, is unlikely to develop self-organization, which in turn makes him or her disrespectful of other people’s boundaries (antisocial personality disorder).

The development of attachment rests on mirroring, which plays a critical stabilizing function and confers a sense of reality upon the child. Skillful caregivers modulate children’s responses by reflecting the latter’s emotional states back to them in such a way to, depending on the situation, either increase or decrease arousal. What is essential is hence that a caregiver’s responses be close in range to, but not fully convergent with, what the child experiences. Put another way, what the caregiver broadcasts to the child is a model of self-organization the child is yet to realize. For this form of learning process to be successful, the child must be able to discern in the caregiver’s display a viable and desirable alternative to what is presently happening to him or her. In general, mirroring represents our intrinsic longing for an order we are yet to obtain.

That “socialization” does not come down neither calculated conformity or implicit conditioning is also highlighted by psychodynamic and Jungian approaches, which explain social learning by the process of projective

identification. Central to this school of thought are the concepts of ego, super-ego and ego ideal (Crame, 2006). The latter two, however, are no longer conceived as a superstructure erected upon the ego but rather as a means for social learning and self-regulation. The ego on its part is understood as a system of functions (affect regulation, executive control, etc.) that transform drives and instincts into behaviors that are at once personally meaningful and fulfilling and socially acceptable. Superego and ego ideals are the mechanisms which participate in the formation and maintenance of the ego.

Social development can be reconstructed in terms of maturation of the mechanisms of projective identification. Primary identification (introjection) is a process in which the child internalizes parental expectations and as such is closely tied to the emergence of the sense of object permanence. Since the child at this stage is fully dependent upon a caregiver, he or she must find a way so as to prevent permanent loss of a parent who cannot be always present. Children achieve that by internalizing and enacting whole packages of patterns of behavior displayed by caretakers.

What that means is that at this level child acts out of “concern for her parents” reaction, and not based “on a sense of meeting her own internal standards” (Crame, 2006: 96). Primary identification creates a sort of parent-in-proxy that children can carry around with them in the absence of the real parent. But in trying to retain an absent parent, the child steadily increases the distance between herself and the caregiver, which is to say that the process of internal transformation in the direction of unique individuality is already underway at this stage. According to Phebe Crame,

this process, in which attributes of the mother are taken over and become part of the child's own ego, not only results in the differentiation of the self from the (m) other, but also preserves the (m)other, both emotionally and cognitively within the self (Crame, 2006:106).

In other words, primary identification, just like all other forms of imitation learning, reflects the human need to establish flexible boundaries, which are a precondition for self-sufficiency and psychological stability. Following Georg H. Mead, we can say that during early social learning the child learns to become their own parents (Mead, 1972: 369).

During preschool years, the child internalizes parental traits and modes of conduct more deeply, whereby a superego is constructed. This time, however, he or she does it in order to suppress undesired behaviors, that is, those behaviors that potentially lead to an emotional or cognitive disintegration. The process culminates in tertiary identification, when a child turns to look for role models and associated forms of behavior among peers, film stars, or fictional characters with the view to developing their intrinsic ego ideals.

Although both superego and ego ideal serve the function of self-regulation, there is an important difference between the two. The former plays primarily a suppressive role. The latter, in turn, is associated with genuine aspirations and a refinement of inchoate internal standards, whereby bootstrapping becomes possible. Superego is built upon whatever happens to be available; it is used indiscriminately whenever one's boundaries are at risk of being punctured. Ego ideals, in contrast, involve much more selectivity when it comes to the objects for imitation. They mark an entry point to a wider social order and provide the ultimate filters for social influences.

It is imperative to emphasize at this juncture that although traditionally ego ideal was conceived as an outgrowth of superego, the current understanding compels us to approach ego ideals from a two-fold perspective. At every stage of development, the ego ideal is represented by a specific personas, prototypes or role models which determine one's self-image and outer expression. But even though each ego ideal is always experienced through the lens of a prototype, and in that sense is culture-dependent, the very process is driven by an internal motivation to become independent and unique, which is to say that it is an expression of the inherent sense of self (Kohut, 1977). It is primarily this internal impulse for individuation that pushes the individual in certain directions and makes him or her gravitate toward specific persons and situations. Simply put, the content of superegos and ego ideals is largely determined socio-culturally, but the circumstances under which the defenses are typically activated, as well as the way the internalized schemas are enacted, are not.

As mentioned, although superego reflects one's immediate social influences, its primary function is to develop independence and sense of agency rather than simply ensure social conformity. Violations of its edicts are typically associated with guilt (Crame, 2006: 101) which reflects the child's growing sense of personal powers he or she is yet to learn to use properly. Over time, superegos are expected to naturally give way to ego ideals. When parenting practices are suboptimal, however, the mode of operation of superego fails to subside, producing defensive reaction like response formation, characteristic of compulsive-obsessive personality style or disorder (Millon *et al.*, 2004: 223–249), which makes the person persist in the mode of impulse control.

The goal behind ego ideals, in turn, is to allow an individual to create a stable, if differentiated, internal structure which enables one to respond flexibly and adaptively to ever-changing conditions and requirements instead of being overwhelmed by them. Since the demands of ego ideal can never be satisfied, it motivates a person to explore ever new ways of being. If the child's development is halted at this stage, he or she remains exposed to unfiltered social influences and may develop a false sense of identity (Miller, 1981).

Shame and self-deprecation are most typical responses to the violations of ego ideals. In people with avoidant personality style or disorder, for example,

ego ideal has not achieved a proper structural and functional independence from superego, and therefore does not operate as a source of inspiration and motivation but rather takes the form of a harsh internal critic, which produces a tendency for self-policing and considerably limits spontaneity of social engagements.

Apart from insufficient mirroring, the process of the development of ego ideals may be hindered by a short supply of role models, or low initiative when it comes to actively seeking these, which can be a reflection of temperamental predispositions aggravated by sub-optimal parenting styles and other early social influences. As a rule, the more firmly is the ego ideal anchored in a sense of self, the more flexible it is in terms of available means of expression, and the lesser is the risk of rigidity and susceptibility to non-constructive social influences. As Erich Neumann once pointed out, “the creativity of consciousness may be jeopardized by religious or political totalitarianism, for any authoritarian fixation of the canon leads to sterility of consciousness” (Neumann, 2007: loc. 295).

On a more general note, there is an apparent paradox involved in identifications. Essentially, we imitate others in order to be more like ourselves. Projective identification enables us to extract from others that which is particularly relevant for our own development and growth. Conversely, social understanding is based on projective generalization, which entails that we understand another only to the degree that we understand ourselves as internally differentiated beings.

What this means to say is that there is a direct correlation between self-awareness and the ability to acknowledge and appreciate otherness within and without. The individual is not simply a product of the social, nor is it the case that the social is an aggregate. Rather, the social and individual interpenetrate; the structure of one is reflected in the structure of another. Consequently, socialization should not be seen simply as a transition from subjectivity to intersubjectivity, but rather as a process of channeling of internal impulses through the medium of social interactions, whereby unique, irreplaceable individualities are molded, and communities and societies become enriched.

HABITS, DEFENSES, AND IMPLICIT VIOLENCE

The concept of implicit, symbolic violence is an offshoot of Marxist conception of ideology, to which we may refer as implicit interest theory. The latter was formulated as an alternative to rational choice theory, which prevailed in 18th–19th century and posited that social power dynamic rests on the will of individual subjects. In other words, rational choice theory is a product of the model of a free agent whose interests are entirely transparent to him and who

pursues his goals with the help of preconceived strategies. According to implicit interest theory, in contrast, interests are formed below the level of conscious willing. It is basically a system of interactions itself that determines the power dynamic and distributes the roles, the main demarcation line running between oppressors and the oppressed.

Opening pages of Michel Foucault's *Archeology of knowledge*, spell the idea quite nicely: we are not dealing with something dwelling in the depths, operating in mysterious ways and exerting influence from a distance, but rather, with something shallow, immediate, and obvious to the point of being unquestionable (Foucault, 1971: 3 ff.). In this view, one is not aware of one's own entanglement in the system, one only performs the assigned roles (Butler, 2007), which entails that neither the oppressor nor the oppressed may be aware of the role they are playing.

Both rational choice theory and implicit interest theory seem to me quite clearly lopsided, which means that the opposition between them is merely apparent. Commonsensically, it is obvious that individuals are neither fully aware nor totally unaware and in charge of that which drives them. It is hard not to disagree with Turner that the proponents of implicit conception of interest fail to explain the nature of implicit interests and the effective mechanism underlying it. Even more importantly, this conception comes across as annoyingly elitist. It is no longer simply claimed that there are no universal standards of assessment, but essentially that all preferences are a result of conditioning. The social critic is someone who miraculously has a privileged cognitive access to that which for others is but a knee-jerk reaction.

The question we are facing is hence this: How to remedy these shortcomings without sacrificing the most valuable insights of implicit interest theory?

Jürgen Habermas's conception of covert strategic action (Habermas, 1998), itself inspired by implicit interest theory, points, I believe, in the right direction. According to Habermas, our susceptibility to strategic actions is but a flip side of our being contributors to the creation of the social order. This complicity of ours can be readily explained by defense systems, which play a central role in the construction and maintenance of less-than-optimal social structures and attitudes.

Development and maturation, as we have seen, consist in creating semi-permeable boundaries which give each of us a unique shape and provide protective barriers against intrusion and disintegration. Our early interactions with caretakers afford the first opportunity to develop thought and action schemas which become coagulated into habits and provide scaffolding for conventional norms. Subsequently, appropriate settings and incentives for further development and self-expression are more actively sought or created.

Progressive differentiation into self and other is an essential part of the process. As Neumann puts it,

The experience of “being different,” which is the primary fact of nascent ego consciousness and which occurs in the dawnlight of discrimination, divides the world into subject and object; orientation in time and space succeeds man’s vague existence in the dim mists of prehistory and constitutes his early history (Neumann, 2007: 109).

The progressive differentiation of the self explains the fact that in the course of maturation, identifications become ever more nuanced and selective, and take the form of “transmuting internalizations” (Kohut, 1977).

Speech is an important turning point in the developmental process in that it allows us to externalize, and thereby objectify, the content of our experiences (Fernyhough, 2009), whereby dependence on direct mirroring in the process of self-understanding and self-regulation lessens. Each artifact, that is, is an expression of our achievements and longings and reflects these back to us, prompting accommodation of the whole structure.

When examining defense responses, it is essential to differentiate between survival instincts, which protect our physical boundaries, from an instinct for self-preservation in a certain form, which entails social recognition. If exaggerated in response to particularly adverse life-conditions, the instinct to defend oneself against immediate threats to physical existence and livelihood tends to override higher order, cultural and spiritual needs; their satisfaction is at best postponed or abridged. Simply put, pure survival attitudes are detrimental to cultural and social development for they block creative endeavors and lock a person in a solipsistic or tribal frame of mind.

Culturally oriented and informed instincts, on their part, can lead to rigid identifications which tend to suppress individuality and at the same time promote egotism or narcissism. Social interactions become venues for an expression of purely egotistic drives that are not creatively elaborated. In that case, social dimension of existence does not cease to be relevant, quite the contrary; what at a normative level appears as an asocial attitude only reveals one’s inherent dependence on perceptions and opinions of others.

Other-Structures, as Gilles Deleuze calls these mechanisms (Deleuze, 1994), are a natural result of the need to establish boundaries within which the expression of different instincts becomes possible. But there is an inherent risk involved in the process: although these structures are meant to permit channeling of internal impulses, they often end up perpetuating themselves, which is to say that instead of serving certain purposes and values by securing an internal space within which one can adjust the existing schemas and models to best suit given circumstances, they become geared toward a preservation and reproduction of specific modes of conduct and self-expression. Ideally, a person comes to this world with a unique blend of predispositions and potential abilities, through which social and cultural influences are filtered, giving rise to novel variants of the human life-form for others to get inspired by and further

elaborate. But things hardly ever look so rosy. In response to signals of threat to our well-being or social status we can easily overdo it when it comes to the use of ego defenses, not unlike the way in which the immune system produces allergic reactions or autoimmune responses.

What this entails is that the core of the problem of implicit violence lies in the defense systems as such. Since defenses ultimately guard our sense of identity, we become easily entangled in them, to the point of being unable to distinguish between an ideal and the variety of its possible manifestations. We get caught up in a system of rigid, and for this reason, false, identities, which affect us in a manner reminiscent of supernatural.

CONCLUSIONS

Both transcendental-collectivist accounts of the relationship between the individual and the collective and Stephen Turner's detranscendentalized conception of social learning are based on the same fallacy, namely, on the assumption that each person is a *tabula rasa* shaped by external circumstances. The third way would be to frame the relationship between the individual and the collective in terms of a complex interplay between the subjective world and different strata of the social world, using two sets of preconditions, of which one can be referred to as material or empirical and the other as ideal, formal, or transcendental. Whereas the former represent that which befalls us and happens to be available to us at specific junctures of our lives (genetic make-ups, environmental factors, family and culture we were born into), the latter points to a purposefulness which cannot be explained by availability alone and which stands behind our aspirations and selectivity of responses to social stimuli.

On the view put forward, individual is neither external with respect to the natural and social world, and pitted against them, nor is he or she fully submerged in the world. On the formal-transcendental level, the social and the individual are understood as dimensions of a general frame of reference which permits an infinite variety of possible realizations (Apel, 1984; Apel, 1998). From an empirical point of view, in turn, the various strata of the social world are construed as systems of externalizations which are products of interactions between subjects who are always-already part of the world, as well as between the individuals and extant artifacts themselves.

When discussing social learning and interaction, we need to pay close attention to the distinction between normal and abnormal ways of responding to social influences. Both testify to the importance of transcendental conditions behind social reality, but show us additionally that depending on the specifics of developmental processes an activation of these shared ideal structures can

yield different results.³ Similarly, a given set of norms can be perceived as either constructive or oppressive depending on whether one has had an opportunity to process the pertinent content. In sum, although individuals often find themselves overwhelmed by social forces, this situation is neither a transcendental necessity nor an empirical inevitability, and instead challenges us to try to maintain balance between self-preservation and creativity by controlling factors which contribute to the formation of rigid defenses and make one susceptible to implicit, symbolic violence.

In other words, the form of transcendentalism defended in this paper by no means prohibits the attempts to reconstruct patterns of implicit principles operative in a society and to detect tensions inherent in them. Nonetheless, since (extreme cases aside) what it does imply that what is potentially most problematic on both psychological and social levels is not so much the content of norms as one's orientation towards them, this account presents the social scientist and policy maker with a much more urgent task of identifying the most sensitive junctures of social interactions, points at which things tend to go awry, potentially spawning psycho-social pathologies.

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³ The concept of morphic and morphogenetic fields, and formative as opposed to mechanistic causation, as advanced by Rupert Sheldrake (Sheldrake, 2002), would be very useful in further analysing the interaction between individual predisposition and systemic influences as an interaction between two types of fields.

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