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Research Article

A critical humanist intervention: agency, structure and values

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Abstract. The main aim of the article is to suggest what and how a contemporary and revised version of humanism, inflected with critical realism and Marxism, can contribute to sociology. I mainly focus on two areas in which sociology is often lacking today: theorizing the relationship between structure and agency, and deciding what to do with moral evaluations in sociological analyses. I submit that the solution for both lies in trying finally to transcend the traditionally hostile and mutually exclusive paradigms of "humanist" or "cultural" Marxism on the one hand and "anti-humanist" or "scientific" Marxism on the other. This allows us to carefully re-establish the agency of human subjects and the moral dimension, both of which were and continue to be dismissed by anti-humanist or post-humanist social science, without neglecting the objective and causally relevant existence of social structures at the same time.

Keyword: Marxism, Humanism, Anti-humanism, Subject, Structure.

A. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Marxism and its signature insistence on the importance of class have declined markedly in various fields of the humanities and social sciences, especially fields that deal with the important issues of culture (Eley 2005; Chibber 2006). . This is not to say that Marxism has been completely absent from, say, cultural sociology and cultural studies. In fact, the influence of a certain type of Marxism, the infamous anti-humanist Marxism that arises from the disintegration of the Althusserian school, is largely based on a particular interpretation of Antonio Gramsci and takes as its main inspiration the radical theses of Jacques Lacan, Michael. Foucault or Jacques Derrida, has been very palpable especially in cultural studies (for example, Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Hall 1996).1 Such Marxism or, more appropriately, post-Marxism has contributed to the broad "posthuman orthodoxy that still prevails in the humanities". and social sciences" (Chernilo 2016: 310) and has been well received due to this enduring orthodoxy. As Daniel Chernilo (Ibid.) puts it in a recent review of the literature: "From Lévi-Strauss to Latour, passing through Althusser, Foucault and Luhmman, the critique of humanism remains an important trope that also resonates with the various motifs of positions feminist, postcolonial, neo-Marxist, transhumanist and animal rights". It is therefore surprising and refreshing that we are today, in the context of the complete minimization of class and the prominence of anti-humanism (or post-humanism), hearing increasingly explicit calls to sociology in general and to cultural sociology in particular to re-exploring how a revised or critical humanism and, more specifically, humanist Marxism can contribute to contemporary debates (for example, Chernilo 2016; Durkin 2014; Maher 2016; Porpora 2015; Sayer 2011;

Stevenson 2016; Marxist Point of View, Brereton 2011; Smith 2010). This humanism or humanist Marxism, which is certainly not uncritically embraced, is said to be useful, especially in relation to the most pressing questions posed by today's truly global (and crisis-ridden) capitalism, the place and functioning of the culture that it partly shapes, and the ever-present, albeit weak , resistance that it inevitably provokes.

However, when discussing the potential Marxism in general or humanist Marxism in particular for contemporary sociology, it is hard not to be immediately reminded of the decades-long debates within Marxism over whether it should be concerned with facts or epistemic values. realism or conventionalism, "rigorous" scientific explanation or ethical criticism, objective laws of motion or subjective experiences and consciousness, structure or agency, etc. In fact, the “two Marxisms” that Alvin Gouldner (1980) spoke of go back to Karl Marx himself, at least if one is willing to be a bit exegetically selective (on this, see the excellent paper by Creaven 2015). It might seem, therefore, that this would be a fruitless repetition of an old debate that has stalled, a debate between the “cultural” or “humanist” Marxism of Georg Lukacs or EP Thompson on the one hand, and the “scientific” one, The “anti-humanist” Marxism of Louis Althusser or Göran Therborn on the other. If this were true, the effort would almost certainly be pointless.

The issue is even more complicated because the cards of Marxism were shuffled in the 1980s. Two influential new versions of Marxism emerged from the Althusserian era of doom: Rational Choice Marxism (RCM) and the aforementioned post-Marxism. Both were descendants of the Althusserian project, albeit in radically different ways. As a notable representative of RCM states:

[RCM] has inherited the mantle of Althusserian structuralism. But it is not the lineal descendant of Althusserianism, as it seems to have developed out of a general reaction against the Althusserian legacy, rather than a critical engagement with it. I take post-[Marxism] to be precisely the lineal descendant of Althusser, at least as far as the characteristic set of problems associated with the concept of ideology is concerned. (Carling, 1986: 55)

These two do not fit neatly within the traditional division between "cultural" and "scientific" Marxism. For example, post-Marxists (such as Laclau and Mouffe) definitely embraced and even radicalized Althusser's "scientific" anti-humanism. They discarded, as Althusser did, all supposedly "pre-scientific" ideological references to universal human nature or essence (i.e., people's fundamental needs and capacities), their lived experiences or consciousness, and similar anthropological or psychobiological characteristics not determined by human beings. entirely due to social factors. However, in stark contrast to Althusser, they also removed from their anti-humanist Marxism any notion of objective “laws of motion”, the primacy of economics, epistemic objectivity, the distinction between extra-discursive and discursive, etc. On the contrary, RCM theorists (such as Alan Carling, Adam Przeworski, John Roemer or Jon Elster) made a great effort to position themselves as objective and rigorous scientists who use the latest social-scientific techniques, such as game theoretical models. , psychological. experiments, statistics, etc. However, they emphasized, at the same time, the need to embrace methodological individualism in the face of Althusserian holism, and to recognize the fact that there is a common human nature. They also developed or tried to develop, in contrast to the apparently scientific Althusserianism, sophisticated moral charges of capitalism.

The aim of this article is to suggest that there is the possibility of building a kind of "unitary" or, as I prefer, "critical-humanist" Marxism that combines the best insights of all the various prominent currents mentioned above, while rejecting the claims that have not withstood academic scrutiny. I will mainly deal with two dimensions of the proposed renovation: how to close the gap between the objective and the subjective or structure and subject, and how to take scientific note of apparently extra-scientific value judgments.

B. METHOD

This research is qualitative in nature with a literature review method. Data was collected using various techniques, including observation, documentation studies focus group discussion (Creswell, 2010). The data is then analyzed in order to be able to reach a conclusion of the research results related to this investigation.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structure and subject: a tortured relationship

When sociologists consider the relationship between individual persons and society at large, at least two mutually exclusive but equally attractive thought processes are usually at work. One is to reduce everything social to the individual, both explanatory and ontologically. Such methodological individualism is attractive because it seems, prima facie, absurd that social structures such as classes, states, or the economy really exist, that is, have their own causal powers over and above those of their parts. The only reasonable assumption seems to be that only living individuals possess causal powers; therefore, any talk of social structures is at best merely heuristic (eg, Collins 1981: 988; Elster 1985: 4). "Class" or "the state" are terms for groups of people whose individual interactions are the product of those very people, that's all. So, strictly speaking, classes or the state do not exist, at least not as anything other than causally inert aggregations of individuals. Methodological holism is the other traditional form of sociological thinking about the relationship between individuals and society. He insists that social structures definitely exist, that is, they have causal powers of their own, and that, in any case, it is people who are causally inert or nearly so; The behavior of people is determined by the push and pull of structures (for example, Althusser and Balibar 1970: 181). This perspective seems much more ambitious than the first or even mystical. How can unobservable supra-individual social entities exist and be causally active? Its appeal, however, lies in the intuitive notion that most of what and how people do it in a society is heavily influenced by impersonal forces beyond their control (such as , the differential distribution of authority and allocative resources).

Many authors have pointed out the flaws of these two approaches; therefore I will not indulge. I will only point out that during the last decades many sociologists have constantly expressed the need to go beyond methodological individualism and holism. Some have also invested a lot of effort in devising an alternative approach to the problem. There is, for example, the theory of structuring by Anthony Giddens or the sociology of habitus and the field by Pierre Bourdieu. These are complex theories with many extremely useful ideas, as well as some pitfalls; they can hardly be adequately addressed in a short article like this. However, I think we can safely say that these are not the most appropriate critical tools to be used as a means of infusing certain lost or discarded humanist insights into contemporary "posthuman" sociology, since the theories of Giddens and Bourdieu are they. themselves contributors to this orthodoxy. As Douglas Porpora recently stated:

Bourdieusian perspectives (reflexive sociology, structuration theory, and practice theory) are not anti-humanist in the sense of French post-structuralism, but sometimes classify themselves as post-humanist, equally dismissing the conscious intentionality of the human actor. Practice and habitus are in place. (Porpora 2015: 23).

bring the subject back

If (a critical reworking of) humanist Marxism has something to contribute to contemporary sociology, in regards to the relationship between structure and subject, it is just what theories like Giddens and Bourdieu tend to lack, not to mention the of Althusser. The first of these characteristics is what Porpora calls the "conscious intentionality of the human actor" and, we should add, the related human abilities for reflexivity and the formation of new experiences. In short, we should reinstate the notion that people are relatively autonomous selves, self-conscious irreducible agents with causal powers of their own. The anti-

humanists have eliminated all of this, and the various "post-humanists" have not really reinstated the notion. People are considered to be guided mainly or even exclusively by unconscious dispositions (habitus), rules and routines. There is little sense that people are active and deliberate agents who themselves make their own relatively autonomous contributions to social causal production. Take Laclau and Mouffe, for example. They have been very vocal about the need to avoid Althusser's structural determinism; however, they themselves have reduced people to mere "'subject positions' within a discursive structure" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 115). They go on to state that human subjects "are not even… endowed with powers that make an experience possible" (Ibid.). 3 This is not a notion of subject that grants it a relative causal autonomy.

Giddens and Bourdieu, of course, would have none of this anti-humanist discursive reductionism, but they do argue that human intentionality and reflexivity often take a backseat in determining everyday social actions; unconscious routine and habitus take over instead. For Giddens (1984: 6) "[m]uch of our daily behavior is not directly motivated", and although the subjects are "knowers" (that is, they are not Althusserian dupes), their knowledge consists of nothing more than what company deals. This means that in the theory of structuring "routine rules are… those that causally explain why actors behave as they do" (Porpora 1997: 251). Bourdieu's view is not so different. For him, habitus or, more precisely, "spontaneity without conscience or will" (Bourdieu 1990: 56) is what mainly, if not exclusively, guides human behavior; this spontaneity itself is the product of social structures called fields. Humanist discourse on intentions, reasons, interests, reflexivity, and conscious choice, however deeply situated in and influenced by social contexts, is too reminiscent of seemingly discredited rational choice theory (Bourdieu 1988). This is a mistake. We can and should appreciate the power of unconscious routine and habitus in determining people's actions without discounting the (causal) importance of agents' intentionality, reflexivity, and reasoning. Even Bourdieu himself admits this at certain points (eg, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 115; Bourdieu et al. 1999). (For critical accounts of Giddens, see Archer 1995; Craib 1992; Creaven 2001; Cruickshank 2003; for nuanced criticism of Bourdieu see Archer 2010; Elder-Vass 2010b; Sayer 1999; Sayer 2010.)

Before moving on to the second humanist characteristic, I will argue that I should note and address a possible objection to my claim that antihumanists and posthumanists often downplay agency. For example, it could be argued that there are some contemporary post-structuralists, such as Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2007), who are heavily influenced by Laclau, Foucault, and other anti-humanists, who have recognized this problem and tried to resolve it. remedy it. This is what Glynos and Howarth (2007: 79) say:

We begin by accepting that social agents always find themselves "thrown" into a system of significant practices, an immersion that shapes their identity and structures their practices. However, we also add the critical rider that these structures are ontologically incomplete. In fact, it is in the "space" or "gap" of social structures, as they become visible in moments of crisis and dislocation, that a political subject can emerge through particular "acts of identification."

So here we have "social agents" shaped by "a system of significant practices", i. my. structures, but not wholly determined by them. How is this space for human agency possible? Although critical of the traditional humanist and hermeneutic accounts of the subject, since they "overemphasize the creativity of the individual in facing dilemmas", Glynos and Howarth (2007: 77) commit to a vision that is not so different from the one promoted in this article. article. article. They assert that subjects are not simply the result of power, discourse, or other social forces by noting that people have a "capacity 'to start something new,'" a capacity to form "dislocating experiences…to identify again and thus act differently" (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 79). Later, they undermine this claim somewhat by saying that the psychology of agents is not (even partially?) "A function of 'internal' states (beliefs, attitudes, predispositions, etc.)" and that

"internal mental processes " are (totally ?) “Socially constructed” (Ibid .: 98). They also incline towards the problematic Bourdieusian position when they emphasize that what people do are "largely repetitive activities that do not usually involve a strong notion of self-conscious reflexivity," activities "that have been inscribed on our bodies and ingrained in our human selves." ". -dispositions of man” (Ibid.: 104; italics added). Still, they repeatedly assert that human agents are nonetheless inherently creative and never simply determined by their socially embedded habitual responses. There is, therefore, an “inherent contingency that inhabits the social system”, which can never be “banished once and for all” (Ibid .: 104-105).

Taking this into account, it must be accepted that there are theories that affirm that anti-humanism is its ancestor, but that also argue, at least in part, against its theoretical excesses. This trend can be found in the works of some of the posthuman feminists and also of the so-called "new materialists" (eg Coole and Frost 2010; Braidotti 2013). My aim is not to discuss any of that, I just wish to add that agency creativity and relative causal autonomy must be substantiated with the help of cognitive and neuroscientific accounts (for a comprehensive review see Bunge 2010; compare Kaidesoja 2013) and thus , , with extensive, though not exclusive, references to human neurophysiology and biocultural evolution. If agency creativity is not so entrenched, two things can happen instead. First, one can try to make it more opaque, speculative and non-scientific, for example by constructing a strong "axiom...of 'ontology of lack', which is a negative ontology based on the radical contingency of social relations" (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 14). Second, because such a basis does not locate intentionality and reflexivity in the human brain, it can also lead to an even more opaque posthumanist ontological schema, such as Jane Bennett's "enchanted materialism" or "actor-network theory." by Bruno Latour. Here, any meaningful distinction between the intentional agency of humans and the much less exclusive unintentional agency of nonconscious matter collapses. I suggest that both movements do more to undermine rather than prop up a serious effort to re-emphasize human agency; a critical humanist perspective seems more appropriate.

So far the first humanist characteristic that I find useful. The second feature that we must renew is the universalist notion that there are certain capacities (and needs) that all human agents possess. One of those capacities is the aforementioned capacity for conscious intentionality and reasoned decision-making. This ability should not be seen as a gift from society, as structurationists argue (Archer 2000); they, contrary to anti-humanists, usually at least grant it existence even if they minimize its contribution to the action. Instead, it should be seen as a universal part of humanity, a part of human nature. Undoubtedly, this humanist discourse is frowned upon due to its "essentialist" connotations. Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 153), for example, insist that "the anthropological assumption of 'human nature'" is an "essentialist perspective" that must be rejected, and they are far from the only one (for example, Burr 2003). But there are good reasons, both empirical and conceptual, why such layoffs are misplaced (see Archer 2000; Bloch 2005; Chibber 2013; Creaven 2001; Elder-Vass 2012; Nussbaum 1992; Porpora 2015; Sayer 2011; Smith 2010). . First, it is not clear how a sociological theory is possible without some form of essentialism in general. Can we really analyze, let's say, the existing social system if we don't think that there are certain essential and fundamental characteristics that make it capitalist and not, for example, feudal? If no social event, process, system, or mechanism is determined in at least some fundamental respects, as essentialism suggests, how could we theorize, categorize, and compare anything? Second, essentialism about human nature in particular does not necessarily imply, as Laclau and Mouffe suggest, that there are no differences between individuals. There can be, and indeed are, great differences between people, but this is not inconsistent with insisting that there is nonetheless a small core of characteristics that are universal and transhistorical, e.g. the need for material well-being, the need for dignity and autonomy or the capacity for rational reflection. As Sayer (2011: 104) emphasizes:

Describing the essential properties of an object... doesn't mean we can't recognize that it also has other properties that can vary, perhaps significantly. Similarly, making claims about particular human capabilities does not mean that they all manifest equally or in the same way everywhere...

Essentialism and universalism are not the same as homogeneity. Essentialism and universalism recognize the difference both in terms of what exists and how what exists manifests itself. To give an example of the former, people who share the same basic capacity for self-determination can have many other very different capacities at the same time: some people can jump high, some can't, some can sing, some can't. To give an example of the latter, people can satisfy their common need for food by eating a wide variety of foods, prepared in a variety of ways. The things that people can eat, and the ways in which they can prepare them for consumption, in order to satisfy their need for food, are obviously not infinite, but neither are they uniform. Marx's (1990: 759) distinction between "human nature in general" and "historically modified human nature in each epoch" is very useful here. The first refers to the general and transhistorical needs and capacities that people have in common, such as the need for food or shelter and the need for personal autonomy, while the second refers to how these needs and capacities are expressed in a given moment. and specific place. in History.

Again, it could be said that some post-Marxists have recently retracted their previous outright rejection of all universal claims. In fact, as Geoff Boucher (2008: 233) observes, “the main theorists of post-Marxism have discovered that without universality there can be no resistance to domination”. And in fact Laclau (2007: 26, 48) explicitly distances himself from any “appeal to pure particularism” and “a politics of pure difference”. It is not possible, he notes, "to get rid of any kind of universal principle altogether" because even the mere "assertion of one's own particularity requires the appeal of something that transcends it" (Ibid.). More importantly, once we reject any kind of universal principle, it is no longer possible, Laclau acknowledges, to defend universal human rights. This recognition is commendable. Yet Laclau still seems to me, because of his poststructuralist skepticism of human nature, essences, and the like, uncomfortable with universality. For example, he writes about “relative universality” and emphasizes that his notion of universality “is very different from the universality that results from an underlying essence” (Laclau 2007: 54-55), so I maintain. But as I have noted above, the category of essences need not be problematic, especially if we draw on contemporary concepts developed by essentialist scientists in its development, for example, Richard Boyd's concept of cluster types of homeostatic properties (Boyd 1991). ; Boyd 1999; see also Devitt 2008).

Reconcile structure and subject through the emergency

How does this critical return to (Marxist) humanism not collapse into the individualism, voluntarism, subjectivism of the old? 4 In other words, aren't we repeating the same Enlightenment mistakes that made humanism so vulnerable to today's posthuman orthodoxy? I claim that we can avoid the collapse in traditional humanism if we make use of the ontological notion of emergence.5 Appreciation of emergence allows us to introduce objective, unconscious, and structural determinations of human actions without reducing the latter to the former. The notion of emergence is the idea that some things “may have properties or capacities that their parts do not” (Elder-Vass 2010b: 5). The most common example of an emergency is that of water, H2O. Water has certain causal powers that both hydrogen and oxygen lack. Only when these two elements are combined, arranged in a certain way, does the causal power to extinguish a fire arise. Before, hydrogen and oxygen only fueled the fires. “Similarly, water freezes at zero degrees Celsius, but both hydrogen and oxygen would be gases at this temperature. Water, then, has emergent properties." (Elder-Vass 2010b: 5)

If we use the idea of emergence in the social sphere, we can go beyond individualism and holism. Instead of individuals making all the causal contributions to social dynamics or social structures doing all the work, both can be seen as operative. In this case, social structures must be seen as ontologically

irreducible, causally active relations between individuals or, more precisely, between positions in which individuals are placed. These relationships, e.g. For example, the class relationship between a capitalist and a worker or between a feudal lord and a peasant community, cannot exist or exert influence without its constituent parts, that is, human individuals, but they possess causal powers over and above those possessed by This parts. In this way we preserve both the subjective and the objective sociological domain. We have structures and subjects, objective positions and subjective experiences, background conditions and action.

Before continuing, it is worth making two more observations about the nature of structures as relations. In the first place, the structures understood as relations between social positions must not be equated merely with rules or shared resources. Relations, in fact, generally involve constitutive rules and resources, but are not exhausted by them. Let me give a Marxist example. It's not just because some people own certain resources privately, e.g. Eg the means of production, which possess and can exercise certain structural powers, e.g. eg the power to shoot or explode. The most important sociological fact is that some people own the means of production and that, for this very reason, most people do not. This differential distribution of resources, an irreducibly relational fact, explains the (possible) occurrence of economic exploitation today. The relational fact that propertyless workers find themselves in an objectively vulnerable economic position vis-à-vis capitalists explains the phenomenon of widespread extraction of surplus labor that takes place in the production process. I mention this partly because of the prevailing tendency in sociology to combine structural relations with rules and resources (as such) and partly because of a particular critique of the Marxist treatment of structures. We can take Alexander Wendt's critique as a good example of both. He challenges the Marxist discourse of structures as material or non-ideational by asserting that the relations of production that Marxists often talk about are not, in fact, anything of the sort. On the contrary, for him they are:

completely ideational phenomena, namely institutions and rules, which are ultimately shared ideas, which constitute property and exchange relations, who works for whom, class powers and interests, etc. The fact that production relations are ideational means that capitalism is primarily a cultural form, not a material one, and as such the "material base" of Marxism is actually full of ideas. (Wendt 1999: 94–5)

I say more about this below, but it should already be apparent from the above discussion that such a judgment is at least misleading, if not wrong. Social structures as relationships are not mere rules, that is, shared ideas. They involve them, no doubt, and they also involve resources. But, however, they encompass more than just that.

Second, and very closely related, we should, as Porpora insists (ironically, in the very article on which Wendt explicitly draws), make a distinction between two types of social relations: “ideological” and “material” (Porpora 1993). 2015). This distinction goes back to Vladimir Lenin, who designated all those social relations “that depend on concepts” as ideological, and all those that “are external and not equally dependent on concepts” as material (Porpora, 2015: 102). An example of the former is marriage, while the capitalist-worker relationship is one of many examples of the latter. The difference between marriage and the capitalist-worker relationship is that people cannot get married without understanding what they are doing, whereas they can be exploited without their realizing it and without anyone conceptualizing it. Counter this by saying, as Wendt implies, that economic exploitation is actually an "ideological" relationship, not a "material" one because it is backed by legal property rules, which are definitely ideational or concept-dependent in a direct and strong way. , It will not. It won't work because exploitation is not the same as legal rules. Instead, it is an objective and non-ideational emergent property of such rules (Porpora 2015: 104). Moreover, in the final analysis it is not even the formal possession of resources by capitalists, and the consequent legal exclusion of non-owners from access to them, that fundamentally underlies economic exploitation, but rather their effective possession. and dispossession of

non-owners. This fact could continue to exist even in cases of legal change. Capitalists could, given their effective possession of resources and the effective dispossession of resources by workers, muster the necessary repressive force to maintain such a differential distribution even in the absence of a legal system stipulating private property. This is not a very stable social state, especially not in the long term, but it is certainly possible.

To illustrate the proposed reconciliation between structure and subject, let us now take a closer look at class relations in capitalism. Why do capitalists compete in the market by maximizing profit? Why do workers look for work and even offer themselves to exploitative employment? Why do you compete with your coworkers for jobs? I suggest that it is not because they are somehow unconsciously forced to follow social rules or their habitus, nor because they are transhistorically and individually configured to act in a capitalist way.

It is by virtue of the reciprocal influence on their behavior both of the objective structural relationships in which they are embedded and of the needs, interests and capacities that they possess as members of the human species. Let's move on to the capitalists first. They are placed in competitive market relationships with other capitalists so that if they do not maximize profits they face the possibility of going bankrupt or being taken over by competitors. Simply put, if they don't act in the usual capitalist way, they risk depriving themselves of their need for material well-being and autonomy. Workers, in the same way, seek employment, even sweatshop employment, mainly because they know, or soon find out, what would happen otherwise. Given their objective location in the web of class relations, that is, given that they do not own property and do not have direct access to non- market means of subsistence, they would risk leaving their most fundamental human needs unsatisfied by refusing to do so. seek employment (or not compete with other workers). So, in the case of capitalists and workers, it is both their structural location and their individual needs together with conscious choice that produce the common competitive capitalist behavior that we often observe in capitalism. The connection between structure and subject runs through the categories of objective relationships, interests, subjective experiences, intentionality and, finally, motivated action (see, for more on this, Archer 1995; Creaven 2001; 2015; Porpora 1989).

(The same case, mutatis mutandis, can be made for pre-capitalist class societies. Robert Brenner's (1985: 236-242) notion of "political accumulation" carried out by pre-capitalist overlords, and the related notion of "security comes first "The production carried out by pre-capitalist peasants elegantly houses structure and subject, objective class relations and subjective, consciously motivated actions. It is precisely by virtue of human needs that these pre-capitalist actors have and by virtue of feudal class relations between them (that is, the relations within the manorial class and the relations between lords and peasants) that endemic warfare, geopolitical expansion, monarchical centralization, extra-economic exploitation and unspecialized, that is to say, diversified, agricultural production generally prevailed. , which exhibited Malthusian characteristics).

This might seem like a return to structuralism and holism. Am I suggesting that social structures force people to act in certain ways? No. First, because people have the natural capacity for conscious intentionality, reflexivity, and choice, they can always and everywhere refuse to act in ways that their structural locations indicate. Second, even when people choose to follow the structurally "prescribed" path, they do not do so solely because of structural forces, nor is it a mystery why they do what they do. As I have said, structures simply put people in certain life situations, which they then tend to live consciously, and which carry certain opportunity costs (broadly defined, not economistically) that are also often perceived. Since they are located in different places within social relationships, people are objectively faced with different opportunities, strategies, and ways of satisfying their human needs and interests. Workers, being in the position of workers and being human persons, will face serious difficulties if they do not get a job. It will be difficult for them to even survive, let alone live. Capitalists, by virtue of being

in the position of capitalists and by virtue of being human persons, will face serious difficulties if they do not maximize profits. They will lose their comfortable class situation, which gives them a lot of material well-being, autonomy, etc., and they will join the ranks of the workers. People, for the most part, choose to act in ways that are broadly compatible with their structural location, not because they are somehow forced to, not because they are nothing more than Althusserian Träger, but simply because it is too costly not to. After all, it is for this reason (and because the appropriate means are generally lacking) that structural change is not an easy task and does not happen most of the time. And it is for this reason that capitalists and workers everywhere, regardless of their specific culture, fight for profit, compete with each other, and look for work.

Scientific explanation or ethical criticism?

There is a tendency, both within and without Marxism, to place "hard" science in a zero-sum relationship with "humanistic" ethics. A related, though distinct, dilemma with value judgments was present in the works of Marx himself. He denounced value judgments as bourgeois ideology and, at the same time, accused capitalist exploitation of all forms of immorality and degradation (Geras 1985; 1992). In sociology more generally, it is perhaps Max Weber who is most famous for his insistence that social science proper should not be concerned with making value judgments. He says:

Suppose Tolstoy arises in you once again and asks: "Who, if not science, will answer the question: so what will we do and how will we arrange our lives?" Or, to put it in the language we've been using here: “Which of the warrior gods will we serve? Or will we be serving a completely different one, and who could that be? "In that case, we must answer: only a prophet or a savior (Weber 2004: 27-28)

And again:

Only on the assumption of belief in the validity of values is the attempt to embrace value judgments significant. However, judging the validity of such values is a matter of faith. Perhaps it is a task for the speculative interpretation of life and the universe in search of its meaning. But it certainly does not fall within the realm of an empirical science in the sense that it should be practiced here. (Weber 1949: 55) .

If this is true, some problems arise. First, how can humanist Marxism contribute to the scientific project of contemporary sociology, if it carries with it all kinds of explicit and implicit moral claims? On the one hand, humanist Marxism is full of moral condemnations of capitalist exploitation, neoliberal structural reforms, or the oppression of women and minorities. He claims that all this degrades, mutilates and suffocates human life, so it should be eliminated. On the other hand, it incessantly promotes progressive practices and ideas that apparently contribute to the good life, that is, to human flourishing. If sociology is to be a value-free Weberian science, it cannot be contaminated by such judgments. Second, though, how attractive is it really to strive to rid sociology (whether Marxist-inspired or not) of its value judgments today, in the midst of the biggest capitalist crisis since the Great Depression and the rise of far-right populist forces? in Europe and USA? There is so much human suffering in the world, and it seems simply insidious to claim that sociology should be neutral about it, either by refusing to take a position on it, or by affirming the Weberian view that sociologists' moral views (on, perhaps, violence against refugees) are a matter of faith. Should we not, as Stevenson (2016: 5) says, now more than ever “put moral issues at the center of the [sociological] argument and not on the periphery”? I suggest that we address these issues by briefly examining how wide the gap between facts and values that Weber alludes to really is.

To begin with, it should be obvious that such a gap or distinction actually exists. There is no going back to strong moral realism or ethical naturalism (Elder-Vass 2010) which strives to derive values directly from facts or which collapses any distinction between them. In this, David Hume was right. Therefore, we must begin any moral argument not from questions of fact, but from moral or ethical premises. One of those premises is that human flourishing is good while human suffering is bad, or that we should value all

human beings. There can be no fundamental and concrete justification for this premise. However, if we take this into account, and it seems quite unreasonable not to, we can, in the next step of the argument, incorporate the facts. If it is true, as I argued in the previous section, that human persons are not simply social constructs, determined from top to bottom by various social forces, such as discourse, ideology, structures, etc., then various needs and capacities exist. universal. and interests that all people share simply by virtue of being human. Every person has, as a consequence of their bodily and brain biology, a need for material well-being (ie shelter, food and water, absence of chronic pain, etc.) or a need for autonomy and dignity, identity and recognition. This is true regardless of the particular culture into which a person is inserted.

Of course, the ways in which these needs are expressed vary from culture to culture and are manifold. But because some human needs are universal, and because they are not simply the completely malleable product of the sociocultural context in which an individual lives, there is the possibility that certain contexts or, more precisely, certain sociocultural practices, may conflict. with the basic needs of the people. Not every form of sociocultural expression is adequate or equally adequate for human flourishing, although many are. To give the most obvious example, people cannot survive on a diet of sand or a diet of 200 kilocalories of potatoes per day. No culture can change that, even if it tries. Going beyond mere survival, people can definitely survive while being denied their human need for autonomy, if they are kept as slaves (as long as they have food and similar basic necessities), but they cannot thrive as such slaves, which are , for example, kept in cramped cages for most of the day. Their autonomy, dignity, capacity for creativity, etc. are being totally or almost completely denied in such a context. The same goes for less extreme, but still absolutely deplorable examples, such as the oppression and bodily mutilation of women and minorities, the exploitation of workers, human trafficking, violence against refugees, etc.

All of these practices thwart fundamental human needs and capacities and, in doing so, promote suffering and stifle human flourishing.

It is difficult to reach general agreement on a detailed list of what constitute the fundamental human needs and capabilities that must be respected everywhere. It is even more difficult to move from such moral considerations to action necessary to ameliorate existing human suffering defined as the denial of basic humanity. But the point here is simply that humanistic moral considerations (in sociology and elsewhere) need not be totally extra-scientific, unconcerned with the facts. They do not have a zero-sum relationship with scientific concerns. This is important because it gives moral criticism a stronger justification. Moral criticism is not mere opinion or faith, which can be immediately dismissed:

The capabilities approach is important not only because it shows how discourse ethics can proceed from very basic value claims like "valuing all humans" to more substantive moral claims, but also because these are moral claims with which we can measure the real social world. When organizations, institutions, policies, and people fail to provide or protect these core capabilities, we have reason to criticize them. (Elder-Vass 2010a: 55)

Closing the gap between facts and values in the indicated way is, as Reha Kadakal (2013: 592) puts it, “an undertaking [that is] far behind sociology as a discipline” (see also Gorski, 2013). It offers us two things. First, it allows us to sidestep Weber's (2004: 21) popular argument that "every time an academic presents his own value judgment, full understanding of the facts comes to an end." In fact, the opposite seems to be true. For example, when Marx analyzes the capitalist-worker relationship in Volume 1 of Capital and identifies it as nothing less than an exploitative relationship involving theft, despotism, and bodily mutilation, this should be seen as enriching our "understanding of the facts." ". , without diminishing it. It would be an imperfect and incomplete understanding of the facts if, in the event that the capitalist-worker relationship really is exploitative and has the supposed effects on the human body and psyche, we leave this "moral fact" aside. Second, bridging the gap between facts and values in the way I have suggested

allows us to avoid the impasse of moral relativism (either within or between cultures). Such relativism postulates, in the words of one of its representatives, that "there are no universal standards based on objectivity to judge good and evil" at least between different cultures (Feinberg 2011: 517). This is rarely so explicitly advocated, but it is hard to see how moral relativism is not necessarily implicit in any theory that embraces the radical discontinuity between facts and values and denies the existence of cross-cultural human nature. If there is no connection between facts and values, then Weber is right and we only have faith when it comes to morality. And even if a connection is admitted, moral relativism is still possible if people are simply the product of their specific cultural locations. If there are no fundamental and universal human needs and capabilities, and instead people are simply what their cultures make them to be, then any cultural practice is legitimate (as long as it is the one that constructed the individual in question). Society and culture cannot harm people if they coincide completely, that is, if the latter are perfect copies of the former.

D. CONCLUSION

The “human post-orthodoxy that still prevails in the humanities and social sciences” (Chernilo 2016: 310) must engage with a critical Marxist humanism, which offers the possibility of resolving many dilemmas that plague the disciplines in question. In this article I have suggested how he does it with respect to the tortured relationship between society and individual, structure and subject or objective and subjective, as well as the relationship between facts and values.

As regards the first task, I have argued that connecting objective (structures) with subjective (subjects) nonreductively requires us to investigate the causal chain between objective relational positions, interests, subjective experiences, and motivations. people's actions. This causal chain is not a one-way street nor does it operate in a positivistic and deterministic manner. As Marx (1978: 595) affirms, people, not structures, “make their own history”. However, he still maintains that “they don't do it as they please; they do not do so in circumstances of their own choosing.” This means that it is both the structures (as objective relations) and the needy and self-aware subjects that contribute to the causal production in society. Neither reducible to the other, nor reducible to a third thing, for example practice, habitus or rules. As regards the second task, bridging the gap between facts and values with the help of a rich and non-reductive concept of human nature (such as that offered by Nussbaum 1992 or Sayer 2011) promises to simultaneously counter both "positivist scientism" as well as "the discourses of cultural and moral relativism" (Kadakal 2013: 592). This is not naive moral realism or strong ethical naturalism that strives to derive values strictly and directly from states of affairs. It is a weak and highly qualified ethical naturalism (Sayer 2005; Elder-Vass 2010a) that starts from irreducible moral premises, for example, the premise that we should value all humans and that we should promote human flourishing. Only then does it become facts, that is, facts about what really constitutes human flourishing.

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