

Andrej Findor “Morality in Prejudice: A Group-Centred Approach to Moral Judgment” (habilitation thesis)

Opponent review:
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Morality, especially the study of moral judgement, constitutes a growing field of social research interconnecting sociology and psychology. The habilitation thesis, written by Andrej Findor, is grounded on a detailed knowledge of those areas of actual social science that might be relevant in understanding morality. The focus is largely on the variety of approaches to moral judgement, with less attention to historical and sociological, generally theoretical modes of explanation dealing with the relationship of moral judgement to ethnocentric prejudices. This focus is still fully appropriate, since it seeks relevance in contemporary, empirically grounded psychological and sociological works, especially in view of the fact that the core of the habilitation thesis is formed by three empirical studies. The thesis is well written and organised with skill.

In the first part of the thesis, the author sifts through a large number of conceptual issues, dealing competently with significant controversies and arguments in the field: opposing models of impression formation claiming that stereotypes persist despite contradictory information respective that stereotypes have a limited power facing individuating information, concerns related to what is the relevant unit of analysis in case of researching moral judgements, the productive tension between explanations stressing personal dispositions versus the situational factors of behaviour, and many other constructive considerations. In this way the first part of the thesis offers a useful introduction to the following three empirical studies of morality. All these three empirical research studies follow the lead of the conceptual introduction's complex framework without turning to be simplistic on the ground of methodological requirements. The analysis that is offered seems repetitive, nevertheless the succeeding studies enlarge on the previous ones, refining both methodological procedures as well as explanative findings.

The author makes a significant intellectual contribution to the sociological and psychological study of morality by developing the group-centred approach to moral judgment. The empirical evidence gathered in this thesis is worthy of attention beside its theoretical implication also for the reason that it offers an advanced understanding of the judgmental bias against the members of the Roma minority in our Central European societies. Perhaps as the contemporary presence of xenophobic movements all over Europe demonstrates, the deepening of our understanding of the social and psychological mechanisms of judgmental bias against Others has a wide social as well as scientific urgency.

In my opinion the main strength of this thesis is its inherent intervention into social theory. From this perspective the author appears to be making two main claims: (i) First, the often made distinction in social theory between moral reasoning and moral intuition is fundamentally

mistaken. Thus instead of engaging himself in the competition between theoretical models accentuating cognition in contrast to emotions or contrariwise, he promotes a synthesis of these interpretations. (ii) Second, while the author's group-centred approach to moral judgment is conceived as an add-on to recently settled person-centred and act-based perspectives, nevertheless this move problematises the deep-rooted primacy of the individualist point of view on morality. From this point of view individuals are the elementary units both of critical interpretations as well as that of moral judgments. Groups and collectivities should, from this individualist point of view, not be treated as fundamental analytical as well as practical concepts. In this thesis developed group-centred approach to moral judgment hopefully will inspire theoretical debates and further empirical studies which will take seriously group-based bias and discrimination. We need to understand the phenomena of group-based bias instead of just morally blaming it as a manifestation of tribal instincts.

Brno, 10.02.2018

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Staw' with a stylized flourish at the end.